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Impressions of Mongolia

Karen Panum Thisted

I never knew how to picture Mongolia. Besides a vision of special white tents and relatively choppy men wrestling, I honestly did not know what to expect. The curiosity to see and experience this remote country was soon replaced by great satisfaction and happiness that I had come. Having travelled a few weeks in Russia, Mongolia was a big change – a nice one.

As Programme Advisor (in Denmark) for Projects Abroad, it is very useful to visit our destinations and get a visual impression and real understanding of the projects we offer along with a sense of the culture and the local people. This makes it much easier to convey the message to interested potential volunteers. This was my first visit to



a destination (besides Mexico and Peru, where I volunteered myself) so I was excited to experience and ready to inhale all impressions. I can only say that Mongolia by far exceeded my expectations.

Despite not having enough time to visit every single placement, I nevertheless had the chance to visit quite a few. Seeing how much volunteers can do for little children having had an unfair beginning in life in our Care projects, and experiencing how much volunteers can improve the English skills of students as well as host families and colleagues, made a big impression on me. These are of course only two examples. Moreover, I was taken aback when seeing how much volunteers learn in their projects, how much they can develop themselves personally, and how much their comprehension of a developing country can grow during their time in a project. A volunteer told me that her Journalism project had changed her life; that due to her placement she now knew that this should be her career. That sort of realisation and learning process is indeed mind-blowing.

Talking about life-changing opportunities, the Nomad project is noteworthy as this is a pure cultural experience. Immersing yourself 100% in

another culture with all that it involves is inevitably an amazing and unique experience. Having goat intestines served for breakfast, learning to enjoy fermented milk and dried yoghurt are only a few of the challenges that volunteers bravely face each day!

All projects and all time spent in Mongolia are permeated with the welcoming attitude of the Mongolian people - although they did laugh at my pathetic attempt to pronounce their difficult words - real tongue twisters, I tell you! And for leisure time activities, Mongolia is not lacking in options. The Gobi desert is a must I would say, but east, west and north of Ulaanbaatar are definitely also areas worth exploring whether it be on camel, horseback or in a car (keep in mind that the latter is, although more comfortable, more likely to have break downs on the way).



I will definitely do my best to tell Danes about the small population in the big country far to the East, where life has evolved so differently to back home.

I am sure this will not be my last visit to Mongolia!

By Cheuk Keun Li

Having spent two months in Mongolia through my Journalism project, and experiencing new culture, food, and people, my encounters have been beyond my expectations. My time at Education Channel TV as a cameraman has been exciting at times and constructive during non active duty. I was fortunate enough to travel much around Ulaanbaatar, with work, which enabled me to see many different places around the city.

My job, like many other professions, relies on teamwork, but due to the language barrier sometimes it was difficult to maintain an efficient flow of work. To overcome this problem both myself and my colleagues relied on body language. To some extent it was easy to carry out the request. My main priority is to capture the interviews and expositional shots.

During the two months, my duties have brought me closer to my colleagues. Working alongside them - we have laughed, shared long working hours and very bumpy transportation. In the end it was all fun. My lasting impression of them will always be the weekend trip with the whole Television crew in Terej National Park. There we had a weekend full of sports competitions, relaxation activities and parties. It was a real pleasure sharing these days with them all.

Outside of my placement, I have travelled with other Projects Abroad volunteers – sharing common goals, expectations and new experiences. I believe that those who shared with me the same adventures will remember the good times and the bad times alike. For me, the memory will be everlasting.

Projects Abroad organised activities have been really enjoyable. Seeing all the volunteers come together was exciting. From karaoke to evening meals to weekend trips; all have been delightful events. The staff have always been there and my own experience with them has been very understanding and respectful.

Last but not least, my experiences with my host family. Again they have been very nice and showed great care for my safety and constantly showing interest in my life in Mongolia. They showed me the Mongolian way of life, food and traditional practices. I will miss them very much.

By Christine Kang

In my second year of university, I vaguely knew I wanted to do something meaningful abroad, and two years later, I spent two months in Mongolia as a Medical volunteer. Like many students planning on going into Medicine, I wanted to help those living in developing countries – and what better way to make these aspirations more authentic than getting some firsthand experience? So, I spent some time going through various international volunteering programs, and finally came across Projects Abroad. It caught my attention, because it allowed students to essentially design their placement, thus giving more control and freedom. Also, it seemed to offer more hands-on work than some of the other programs, which consisted of just shadowing doctors.

I had been interested in Mongolia for some time, so when I realized that the medical placements were available in Mongolia, I was thrilled! I arrived in Ulaanbaatar not really knowing what to expect, but I couldn't wait to get started. But first, for my induction, I got a tour of the city from the desk officers. I also met other volunteers who were in Mongolia – there were many Medical volunteers from Canada, America, and UK, as well as volunteers in Journalism, Care, Business, and Veterinary Medicine. Having this extensive network of volunteers allowed me to feel very connected – not once did I feel that I was alone in Mongolia.



My first day of work at Shastin Third State Hospital consisted of observing two operations. This was a huge deal, since I had never seen a live operation before! I got into my scrubs, put my cap and mask on, and headed to the neurosurgery operation theatre. The sight of surgeons drilling holes into the patient's skull to expose the brain was a bit overwhelming at first, but I was more fascinated than anything. My supervisor explained that they were removing a tumour from the precentral gyrus area. The second operation was on a five-year-old boy with hydrocephalus - he needed an abdominal shunt surgery to drain excess cerebrospinal fluid from his brain cavity. During surgery, I manually ventilated patients, checked blood pressures, and attached ECG electrodes. The doctors were also kind enough to show me the MRI and CT

scans and explain what the problem was. Some other operations that I've observed at Shastin Hospital include discectomy, coronary bypass, and cataract surgery.

After two weeks at Shastin, I moved on to the Maternity House. A typical day would be going around the ward and taking blood pressures and heart rates of the women. This would usually take an hour or so. Then, I'd observe surgeries around the hospital all afternoon – I watched natural births, caesarean sections, hysterectomies, and abortions. I remember seeing my supervisor performing a caesarean section in about five minutes – another volunteer who was with me timed her! We were amazed at how efficient and quick she was. We were also fortunate enough to go on a trip with her and her family to Khenti, the hometown of Chinggis Khan, which was about a 4-hour-drive from Ulaanbaatar. We were stopped a couple of times by herds of goats and horses on the road, which was a refreshing change from the usual traffic! We took pictures in front of a staggering 40-meter high statue of Chinggis Khan, hiked up a mountain before sunrise to watch a Buddhist ceremony, and played card games with children – a nice break from the regular hospital routine!



The third hospital that I worked at was the Children's Hospital. In the mornings, I headed to the Endocrinology department and prepared infusions. Then, at around noon, I gave injections to children. I was very nervous the first time I held the needle in my hands – and the little boy seemed to be as well, for good reason – but I got the hang of it after a few times. In the afternoon, I went up to the Intensive Care Unit and helped out in any way I could. In particular, there was a baby boy who I will always remember. Due to cerebral palsy, he cannot move his body. And although you couldn't tell by looking at his beautiful eyes, he is blind. To make things worse, he has no family to take care of him. I went to see him every chance I got – I fed him, held him, and performed exercises on him to relax his muscles. I think it was while I was with him that I realized how much I loved being with babies, and it was through this experience that I am now considering studying paediatrics.

Mongolia has opened my eyes in so many ways – culturally, academically, and personally. I met an amazing group of people from all over the world, saw things that only third or fourth year medical students would see, and experienced a culture like none other. My two months in Mongolia was exciting and challenging, and I highly recommend anyone with an open heart to go and experience it.

Dear Javkhaa,

I was in Mongolia in 2006. I still think about this trip a lot. But because I have been travelling to many other places, I haven't been able to come to Mongolia again. The stay there was a great experience. Now I am finishing my BA graduation and then I will work in a travel agency. Having been abroad was very good for my career. I hope everyone is well and the office is successful.

Greetings, Laura

Dear Projects Abroad team,

I worked as a Projects Abroad volunteer in NTV television, news department, from 10th August to 7th September 2009.

I want to thank all the Projects Abroad employees for their support and professionalism before and during my project. Projects Abroad Mongolia is a really serious organization. Activities (Full induction, Traditional folk Concert, Terelj National Park, Bowling, Restaurant ...) were fun and interesting!

My host family (Mrs Bolormaa, Mr Batsukh, and their two daughters) were wonderful: both kind-hearted and friendly. They tried their best to make my journey as comfortable as possible. I miss them.

My placement was, for me, one of the best; it was such a great experience and a real opportunity to work with professional journalists, camera persons and editors. It was as interesting as it was rewarding. All the team were as friendly as possible. I miss them too!

I tried my best to work as seriously as possible and to make this project a real life experience, but the one thing I might regret is that it was so short. I hope coming back to Mongolia next year to continue discovering this wonderful country.

Thanks to you, Projects Abroad team, I have had one of the greatest experiences of my life. I will always remember it.

Thank you very much.

Yours faithfully,

Florent Hayet
TV Journalism volunteer
FRANCE

MONGOLIAN FOR BEGINNERS

Common words and sentences

In Cyrillic script	roman transcription	English translation
За	za [dza]	ok
Тийм	Tiim	yes
Үгүй	Ugui	no
Юу	Yu	what
Би	bi	I
Чи	chi	you (informal)
Би монгол хэл мэдэхгүй	bi mongol khel medekhgui	I don't speak Mongolian (I Mongolian language not know)
Юмгүй	yumgui	nothing
Би ойлгохгүй байна	bi oilgokhgui baina	I don 't understand

Sentences

In Cyrillic script	roman transcription	English translation
Энэ таны цаг уу?	ene tani tsag uu?	is this your watch?
Цаг	tsag	watch
уу?	уу?	[question particle]

Гэрлээ унтраа!	gerelee untraa!	put out/switch off the light!
Гэрлээ асаа!	gerelee asaa!	put on/switch on the light!
Гэрэл	gerel	light
Таны	tani	formal

Proverbs

In Cyrillic script	roman transcription	English translation
Бурхан өршөө бүүнтай айлын бэр болог	burkhan orshoo buyantai ailiin ber bol	God bless you and may you become a good daughter-in-law (when someone sneezes)
Мууранд тоглоом, хулганад үхэл	Muurand togloom, hulganad ukhel.	What is a joke for a cat will be death for a mouse.

Conversation

In Cyrillic script	roman transcription	English translation
- Сонин сайхан юу байна?	- Sonin (saikhan) yu baina?	- What 's new?
- Онц юмгүй тайван	- (Onts) yumgui taivan	- Nothing particular.
- Тайван сайхан байна	- Taivan (saikhan) baina.	- It is peaceful.

In short:

- Юу байна?	- Yu baina?	- What is?
- Юмгүй	- Yumgui.	- Nothing.