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Director's note

Hi Everyone,

2011 was an amazing year for Projects Abroad Mongolia. We had record numbers of volunteers visiting us, who helped in various parts of the community. With the help of our volunteers, we have accomplished many things and achieved much for Mongolian underprivileged children.

In 2012, we are aiming to improve our operation even further. There is so much for volunteers to do in this warm-hearted, friendly land, and we hope for more volunteers to come to Mongolia and contribute their skills.

With warm regards,

OKO TOGTUUN
COUNTRY DIRECTOR
PROJECTS ABROAD MONGOLIA

Children's day

This day is in annual 1st of June. In Mongolia, Mother's and Children's Day, is a celebration and show appreciation for mothers and children all across the country. First this day was only children's day so now the day is changed to Mother and Children's day. Most children happy and to doing great works to Mom and local people parading and happy show performance for Kids voice (Dance, sing etc). All children look forward to becoming this



day. In all honesty, the celebrations focus far more on the children than the mothers. Families gather at the park in Ulaanbaatar, which become a veritable children's heaven. Families travel out of the city or visit places that children find enjoyable, such as the cinema or local toy shops. In some towns and villages there are presentations and speeches delivered in the main square, with local vendors selling traditional Mongolian foods. Mother's and Children's Day is an international celebration and is celebrated as a public holiday in Mongolia.

Source: **Mongolian Responsible Tourism Fund**

Destination of the Month

Khuvsgul lake

Khuvsgul Lake is located in the northwest of Mongolia near the border to Russia, at the foot of the eastern Sayan Mountains. It is 1,645 m above sea level, 136 km long and 262 m deep. It is the second-most voluminous freshwater lake in Asia, and holds almost 70% of Mongolia's fresh water and 0.4% of all the fresh water in the world.^[1] The town of Hatgal is at the southern end of the lake.

Its watershed is relatively small, and it only has small tributaries. It gets drained at the south end by the Egiin Gol, which connects to the Selenge and ultimately into Lake Baikal. In between, the water travels a distance of more than 1,000 km, and a height

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difference of 1,169 m, although the line-of-sight distance is only about 200 km. Its location in northern Mongolia helps form the southern border of the great Siberian taiga forest, of which the dominant tree is the Siberian Larch (*Larix sibirica*).

The lake is surrounded by several mountain ranges. The highest mountain is the



Bürenkhaan / Mönkh Saridag (3,492 m), which has its peak north of the lake exactly on the Russian-Mongolian border. The surface of the lake freezes over completely in winter. The ice cover gets strong enough to carry heavy trucks, so that transport routes were installed on its surface as shortcuts to the normal roads. However, this

practice is now forbidden, to prevent pollution of the lake from both oil leaks and trucks breaking through the ice. It is estimated that 30-40 cars have sunk into the lake over the years.

News

Projects Abroad sponsored children from one of our Care projects “Gerel” Orphanage Centre for 3D movie “Kung Fu Panda-2” in Tengis Cinema. There were 11 kids, 1 teacher and 2 volunteers (Annette and Chloe) who are working at that placement. It was supposed to be 12 kids but one went on an English course and we had one extra ticket. I called one street child who was just passing by. However the movie's story was not for the orphan children because Kung Fu Panda was finding his original parents which can make children sad, but they were very smart and took their 3-D glasses off when they didn't want to see what was happening on the screen. One volunteer, Annette, wrote on her blog that “The scariest thing wasn't the movie, though, but crossing the street, something we had to do on numerous occasions, with 11 children. We were only three adults accompanying them, and three adults have six hands, and six hands can't hold 11 children's hands ... Well, I actually held three children's hands, so maybe it is possible.”

Generally the activity made children happy because they like to get out from their orphanage house where they stay all day long.

Feature

Harry Kent, Programme Advisor of Projects Abroad UK office, has been visiting Mongolia for 2 months since 15, May. He joined Projects Abroad in 2006 when he spent 5 months working on our Conservation Project in Botswana. Before he had time to catch his breath he was whisked off to Ghana where he worked over the summer. Right now he is staying with us in Mongolia.

We are very happy to have him here because we are exchanging our experiences and showing our good work to him. His impression of Mongolia is very nice which he said “When I first started working overseas for Projects Abroad my friends joked that before I knew it I will be in Ulaanbaatar, sure enough 5 years later I set off for Mongolia not really knowing what to expect. I arrived in the country to the friendly faces of our in country team, hearty cuisine, and dramatic landscapes setting the scene to what will be a fascinating summer in UB”.



I am sure he will have a fascinating time in Mongolia.

Outreach

Children’s Day, Day of Dreams and Wishes

Every year Projects Abroad Mongolia organizes an outreach of “Children’s Day, Day of Dreams and Wishes” for developing and increasing the talents and activity of the children who are in need of care and help.

This outreach was organized this year at the end of May with 20 volunteers and over 50 Children from orphanages, underage labouring and the Address Identity Centre, including disabled children and children with poor and lowly backgrounds.

We all gathered early in the morning at the Projects Abroad Office and prepared balloons, presents and games.

Activities started at 11am with a children’s concert in front of State Children’s Centre, alongside games which volunteers had organized. There were not only games but also a drawing contest which volunteers organized. Finally we gave our presents to the kids.

Even though it was a very cold and windy day we warmed ourselves with our cheerful hearts. All volunteers happily participated in this outreach and said it was the happiest moment for them.

Jarasa Vikneswaran (Journalist), June 2011,

Gobi Desert Trip: Something to Never Forget. So we set out for a four day three night trip to the Gobi desert to live and experience nomadic life there, camping inside their gers and travelling between, by camel and by foot. Our means of transportation was a Russian van used for the military for hard surfaces I would like to think. During our ride from the airport to the mountains there was no road, we just followed a whole bunch of tracks in the sand.

It was a bumpy ride, but also fun. The first ger we arrived at after hours and hours of driving was near the sand dunes.

The next morning we were expected to camel ride to the sand dunes and have some fun. We unpacked in our assigned gers and got prepared to have some dinner. There was always the issue of the communication barrier, but that didn't stop us from having a good time. The ger family cooked us some great lunch and dinner and we played some traditional games like a brainteaser



game where you try to remove a locked item on a set of key rings hooked onto another metal stick. Before sleeping we played a round of cards and then went to bed. The next morning we woke up and had some milk tea. Mongolian Nomad love having milk tea, and lots of it. We were also served boorzog for breakfast. It is something like Mongolian doughnuts and it taste really good, and then we had bread and jam. Some of the animals we saw were a herd of sheep, goats, a Mongolian breed dog and, of course, camels. They would be making noises all day, from the night we came until it reached

morning. The sun rise and the sun set looked beautiful by the sand dunes. The travelling group woke up bright and early to view the sun rise and to take pictures. It was quite nice. After breakfast, one of the Nomads offered to teach us how to milk a goat, so that was pretty neat. Afterwards we helped separate the baby goats from the mother and father into their own dens. We were not ready to ride the huge camels to the sand dunes. The camels were not as hard as it seemed to be to get on. The Nomad walked us through the step by step process of getting on to the camel and what to do when you want it to stop, turn a certain direction or slow down when it is going too fast.

They were constantly getting thirsty on our way to the sand dunes and would stop half way through or in between to get some water from the small puddles or snack on some grass or leaves. Otherwise the ride to the sand dunes and back to the ger was quite a smooth pace. Their humps were interesting to touch, I learned that they like to store water for later and if they do run out and become real thirsty their humps become deflated. It was definitely worth riding to the Sand Dunes, we climbed as far as we could to the top of the dunes. The scenery from the top was truly

wonderful. After the day at the sand dunes, we headed back to the herder family's ger and had some dinner.

The people we stayed with that day were generous enough that we felt at home, this goes for the other two nights during our stay as well.

Afterwards we went and explored the city side near the Gobi desert for a little while and then on the third day we were ready to head back to Ulaanbaatar. The Gobi Desert trip was definitely a great contribution in exploring the territory, there is no reason I can find not to recommend it.

Practical information

GETTING TO ULAANBAATAR

Mongolia is an enormously large country with a very small transport infrastructure. Most travel still has to be done cross country by rugged jeeps. This is, of course, part of the charm of coming to Mongolia, discovering the virgin landscape of the country, but it can also make travelling from place to place arduous and time consuming. Arriving in Mongolia is possible by plane or by train, some people also like to come by motorbike, driving 2 C.V's or even on horseback. This blog contains all sorts of information concerning the various means of getting in and out of the country.

TAKING THE TRANS-MONGOLIAN TO ULAANBAATAR

Travelling by train to Mongolia is often a dream for many people and a reality for few. In many cases it is an adventure in itself which is well worth the experience. There are a number of options available to the traveller who takes the time to travel. The trains generally run between Moscow and Beijing. While all the trains leave Moscow and arrive in Irkutsk in Siberia there are then three options available; the first is to carry on with the Trans-Siberian and go on to Vladivostok, the second option is to take the trans-Manchurian which goes north of Mongolia to Siberia and then curves around to China without entering Mongolia ending up in Beijing. The third option is to take the trans-Mongolian which goes in a direct line Irkutsk – Ulaanbaatar – Beijing.

There are various classes of travel available on the train; first class is usually a comfortable 2 bed cabin, often with small washing facilities and maybe even a television if you are very lucky. In China the first class is known as "soft sleeper class". There then is a second class which consists of either 4 or 6 beds in a cabin, this is generally shared with a Chinese/Russian/Mongolian family and can provide for an amusing, if sometimes noisy and drunken, distraction. This class is known in China as "hard sleeper". The third class of travel is a large dormitory with approximately 46 beds in one compartment, this is taken by the locals and is often a very happening place and gives you a great insight into the life of the region you are travelling in. Do not expect to get any sleep or rest in this class but in return you will have amazing stories of gambling, corruption, deceit, drunken behaviour, violence, love, spontaneous demonstrations of joy and anger, in short, all the ingredients for undying friendships with the local smugglers, soldiers and peasants. This class is known in China as "hard seater".

IRKUTSK – ULAANBAATAR

The journey between Irkutsk and Ulaanbaatar is a stunning one. The train leaves Irkutsk in the afternoon and glides seemingly effortlessly around the abrupt cliffs of the Baikal Lake as the sun sets over it. This leg of the journey is accompanied by the many legends and tales surrounding the construction and

logistics of the most difficult few miles of the Trans Siberian express. At first the train was loaded at the village of Baikal on two enormous British made ships to be taken to the other side of the lake, but at the first try the ship sunk with its train, the second ship never left the harbour. After this first failure, tracks were laid over the ice in winter so that the train could cross the lake; sadly the first train to attempt the crossing rejoined the other one at the bottom of the lake. It then became obvious that the only way of doing it was to blast an impossible track along the edge of the lake. This resulted in one of the most breathtaking train journeys in the world. The journey takes about 1 day and 2 nights arriving in Ulaanbaatar early on the morning of the second day. It is, of course, possible to go the other way, Ulaanbaatar – Irkutsk. Please remember that all trains travelling in Russia travel at Moscow time, which is very different to the time in Siberia. This means that your ticket would say departure from Irkutsk at 10:20 but this is Moscow time, the real departure time would be at 16:20 Irkutsk time. This system has caused many travellers to miss their train, so beware and ask at the train station well in advance to confirm departure times and actual time zones. There is a slight wait at the border as passports are checked and the train's restaurant wagon is switched between the Russian one to the Mongolian one (the Mongolian one is considerably better).

ULAANBAATAR - BEIJING

The Beijing – Ulaanbaatar route is a bit more monotonous than the one described above but is nonetheless interesting. The train departs from Beijing in the afternoon and travels out of Beijing more or less following the path of the great wall. There is a stop on the way to admire the wall and then onwards towards Mongolia. Next morning the train crosses the wide expanses of the Gobi before reaching Ulaanbaatar later that same afternoon.

Please note that it can be extremely difficult to obtain train tickets in July and August as there are a limited amount of trains on the line and most tickets are booked long in advance by large tour groups. If you plan on using the train to Beijing or Ulaanbaatar book well in advance. A single way ticket to either one of those should cost no more than 200USD in 2nd class.

Flying to Mongolia

Travelling by air to Ulaanbaatar is generally considered as one of the most comfortable and fastest options available. The network of airlines and destinations is growing year after year with destinations such as London, Milan and Shanghai rumoured to be in planning. The airlines flying in and out of UB vary in quality and reliability with Aeroflot very much at the bottom end of the scale and with ANA or Korean Air offering excellent flights. Flights to Mongolia from Europe with Korean Air go via Seoul, and therefore take longer than the more standard Aeroflot Service which goes via Moscow, and the same applies the other way round. The International airport of Mongolia is the Chinggis Khan International Airport of Ulaanbaatar. The airport is often subject to strong winds and, while Mongolian pilots are renowned for being fearless and landing the plane in any conditions, other airlines will sometimes turn back to their original point instead.

UB – BEIJING

Air China and MIAT both fly regular flights between Beijing and Ulaanbaatar, the frequency of the flights depends very much on the season with more regular flights in summer than winter. There is generally a daily flight from one of the two airlines in summer and about three times each week in winter. The cost of a return ticket is generally around 500USD to 600USD and the flight time is approximately one and a half hours. This route is also useful to reach the rest of Asia as well as Europe and the USA as Beijing is a large international and regional hub.

UB – MOSCOW

Aeroflot flies between Moscow and Ulaanbaatar with flights two to three times a week depending

on the season. Aeroflot runs the old Tupolev planes on this route, comfort and safety do not seem to be priorities so a route which is generally best avoided. Price of a return ticket is around 500USD and the flight time is an impossibly long and stressful six and bit hours. It is possible to take a connecting flight to Europe from Moscow but the wait in Cheremtyevo Airport can be up to 12 hours long; the airport itself looks like it was built by prison contractors and has about as much charm as its draconian staff. This route is generally considered to be the last option reserved only for the terminally poor or the truly adventurous characters. Should this be your last resort the author would recommend spending the 10 hour wait trying to make a local employee smile without the exchange of monies or goods, so far this author has been unsuccessful.

UB – BERLIN

MIAT Airline (Mongolian National Airline) runs bi-weekly flights from Berlin to UB. The plane would often stopover in Moscow for refueling and a couple of hours rest before it carries on to UB. MIAT runs a fleet of modern Boeing and Airbus planes, has an efficient and polite service on board and comes warmly recommended by the author as a comfortable and cost effective flight. Return flights would generally cost around the 800USD mark and from Berlin there are connecting flights to the rest of Europe.

UB – SEOUL

Korean Air flies directly between Seoul and Ulaanbaatar. It is the preferred route between Europe and Mongolia for most of the executive expats based in UB as the flights are comfortable and the quality of service excellent. Flights between UB – Seoul – Europe do have the disadvantage of being longer than any other route as you fly back over Ulaanbaatar on your way from Seoul to Europe. There is also the added disadvantage that the connecting flights in Seoul can be around 9 hours apart but the airport hotel in the transit lounge is excellent. There are about 3 flights a week between Seoul and UB.

UB – TOKYO

There are weekly flights between Tokyo and Ulaanbaatar; this is operated by MIAT during most of the year but predominantly in summer while ANA sometimes fly during the summer months. Excellent quality and service can be expected on the ANA flights while the MIAT crew also provides for a pleasant journey. The cost can be expected to vary between 600USD and 800USD and the flight time is around two and a half hours.

UB – OSAKA

As with Tokyo but flights only operate in summer and generally by ANA. Flight is a little bit longer and slightly more expensive than Tokyo.

Staff Update: Sayo, one of our funniest supervisors

Sayo (Saruul Ganzorig) has been working with Projects Abroad Mongolia since May 2009. She started her work as a casual assistant and now she is one of the longest serving workers in our office.

Saruul was born in 1987 in Moscow, Russia and she is the oldest of three children. She lived there until 2002 and then moved to Mongolia with her family. Her hobby is singing which she does very well and also she likes to travel. One of her special abilities is that she can smile all day long; she is a very happy and nice person.

She likes to say: "I love to live with my friends and for friendship I don't consider any of their previous achievements. I love all those who feel comfortable with me and who make me feel comfortable with them".

Her daughter's birthday

By Annette

I was invited to little Emudjin's birthday party - she turned four. Emudjin is Sayo's daughter. We ate huge amounts of delicious food, all prepared by Sayo, including fresh Mongolian river fish, and caught by her father. This was the first time ever I had fish in Mongolia. Most Mongolians don't like fish at all, and it can be slightly risky to order it in restaurants (if it is on the menu at all). In this country of meat-eaters the conservation of fresh fish and its preparation are far from obvious things. But Sayo is the exception to the rule!!



Emudjin says that she wants to be a singer, and her lung capacity is promising.

Workshop Corner

By Signe Boye

Workshop at the National Center Against Violence in Mongolia - 23rd May 2011

We were really impressed by the workshop that Projects Abroad organized with the National Center Against Violence, we couldn't believe it was the first one! The location for the workshop was really nice, as we were placed in a meeting room where we got served tea and crackers.

We found the presentation of the National Center Against Violence excellent. The speaker was good at explaining the work that has already been done in Mongolian and the work that still remains. At the same time we could follow the power point presentation, which

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the speaker promised to send us by mail, and got facts or statistics from it. We were allowed to ask questions during the workshop which was a good way to start the debate about human rights and how this issue is managed in Mongolia. We were very surprised by all the obstacles the Mongolian organizations have to face and particularly the fact that it takes a long time for the Mongolian government to accept an evolution of the law. The workshop gave us a realistic but small picture of how the Mongolian system is working.

We are definitely going to join the next workshop and we advise any volunteer to do the same!

Departures in June

Projects Abroad Mongolia sends this thank you message for the volunteers who did their projects in Mongolia.

Social Media Links

Official Facebook Group!

Check out our Facebook group: [Projects Abroad Mongolia - The Official Group](#)! It is regularly updated with photos from Social events, news on the projects and the city of Ulaanbaatar.

Official Newsletter!

Read our monthly newsletter: [The Official Newsletter of Projects Abroad Mongolia!](#)

Official Country Blog!

See what is going on with Projects Abroad Mongolia! Read our [Country Blog](#).

