

ProjectsAbroad™

Projects Abroad Mongolia Official Newsletter

March 2013

- Volunteer Story by Richard Tran *Page 2-4*
- Camel Polo under the eyes of Chinggis Khan by Baptiste Cessieux *Page 4-5*
- Care Volunteer Ellie Fields's Story *Page 5-6*
- My Experience by Law & Human Rights project volunteer Arthad Kurlekar *Page 7*



My Trip to Mongolia

By Richard Tran from Australia

Mongolia, before I left people would ask me “why are you going to Mongolia Richard, Mongolia!?” I’d tell them that it was an exotic country and culture, with a long and awesome history, beautiful mountains and plains and snow (which for an Australian is something extremely special), what I didn’t tell them is that I really wanted to ride a horse though the country side and pretend I was an awesome adventurer (yes, I did do this and it was great, maybe not for the horse but I had a great time). Mongolia is all of these things and so much more. So please let me take a moment to tell you about my time in Mongolia.

I caught my first sight of snow as I was flying to Ulaanbaatar from Beijing. For someone from the sun-blessed country snow is something you only see in movies or on TV so it was pretty amazing to see it for real. The first thing that hit me when I walked out of the airport was the cold, I arrived at the end of winter (beginning of March) so the worst had past but it was still a chilly minus 19 degrees-Celsius in the middle of the day and I was not dressed in sufficiently warm clothing (I had greatly underestimated how cold it would be in Mongolia so I spent the first month walking around in 3 pairs of pants, and 3 jackets just to stay alive). The second thing that hit me as we drove from the airport to Ulaanbaatar was how beautiful and ‘not so beautiful’ the country was, driving along you’d see the snow covered mountains in the distance, the clear blue sky (it isn’t called the land of the blue sky for nothing) and ‘pristine’ country side, it was breathtaking. But also in the distance you could see the blanket of smog hanging over the city and as



you got closer the piles of debris and litter from construction and development. Mining has injected a lot of money into the Mongolian economy and the growth that stems from international investment is evident everywhere, construction is going on all day (and night), new roads are being paved but you can also see the toll it’s taking on the environment (Ulaanbaatar has one of the highest levels of air pollution in the world). All of this is propelling Mongolia into the 21st century, improving the standard of living, creating jobs and new opportunities but I really hope that it’s eventually kept in check before too much damage is done.

My host family

Anyway back on track, arriving at my host family I was greeted warmly with a bowl of dumplings in milk soup. In my host family I have a grandma (who is tiny and adorable), a mum (who, like my own mum is always trying to get me to eat) and two host brothers (23 and 28). During the two months I’ve stayed with them I’ve been made to feel at home, “just another one of the family,” the host grandma even calls me her third grandson. I’ll spend evenings in the kitchen with the mum and grandma making *buuz* (mutton dumplings, a staple of pretty much every meal), my English to Mongolian phrasebook on my lap trying to make conversation, my *buuz* always look more like lumpy balls than dumplings, they find it hilarious but they taste the same in the end.

Other nights I might help the younger host brother practice his English or go with him and his friends to a PC café and play games (Mongolian guys are crazy for DOTA and counter strike). I don't think I would have gotten as much from my stay here if I had just stayed in a hotel or a guesthouse, just staying with a family and having those day to day interactions really gives you a greater understanding and appreciation of the Mongolian culture and way of life. Just a few things which I thought would be fun to share, one evening upon seeing I was laid up in bed sick (the result of a picnic in -25 degree weather, next to a frozen river, not the best idea) my host mother rushed off to get me some 'medicine,' which turned out to be a bottle of vodka and traditional herbs. Through pantomime and hard gestures she instructed me to take a shot of the herb and vodka cocktail every three hours and by the next morning I would be right as rain (I did take the first shot as she was watching but I chose to forgo this particular treatment)

My project

During my time here I've been working in a kindergarten complex which deals with children with disabilities (it's technically a kindergarten but the kids range from infants to 6-7 year olds). It's been a tremendously fun and rewarding time, my experience with kids had been limited to babysitting and the occasional summer camp so I knew I enjoyed working with children but my



knowledge was by no means extensive. In a typical day I'd play with the kids; most of which involves picking them up, throwing them around, letting them beat me up and being a human jungle gym pretty much, we also do arts and crafts, cooking lessons (the kids have a great time, they get to make and eat tasty treats and so do I) and music classes (I do my best to sing along to Mongolian nursery rhymes but it doesn't go so well). Each day the kids are fed lunch, many of them cannot feed themselves due to their disabilities so I've perfected a set of child feeding techniques; the aero plane, the choo choo train and the ever popular bumble bee. After that I help the kids clean up (changing nappies, helping them go to the toilet, which is incidentally how I discovered that quite a few of the little boys were in fact little girls...), then its nap time for the kids and for me (I think every work place should have a mandatory nap time). After that it's more fun and games until it's time to go home. So far I've been spit on, thrown up on, peed on but luckily not pooped on but it's been fun, wouldn't have wanted the experience

to be any different. That's just a typical day but each day is by no means typical, every day brings new experiences, new challenges new opportunities to see what you're capable of and I think that's one of the best things about being a volunteer.

I have a lot more stories to tell and my story in Mongolia is by no means finished but I think that'll be enough to satisfy the editor. Remember to keep your eyes and mind open because you'll never know where you'll end up, who you'll meet or what you'll find yourself doing.

Camel polo under the eyes of Chinggis Khan

By BAPTISTE CESSIEUX

From March 9 to 10, the Bactrian Camel Polo Tournament happened 40 meters under the watchful eyes of Chinggis Khaan. Throughout the event, he was definitely the only one who had the best view.



This event is usually organized in the Gobi Desert, and people from Ulaanbaatar can only watch it on TV or read about it in newspapers. But once a year, since 2007, they have had the chance to see it live at the Chinggis Khaan Statue Complex in Tsonjin Boldog near Ulaanbaatar. The festival featured camel polo games and a contest to select the best-looking camel. A fair and exhibition of camel wool and dairy products were open at the venue. Different cultural performances as well as a traditional costumes show were also presented.

A lot of teams participated in the camel polo competition, and they came from the provinces of Ovorkhangai, Bayanhongor, Dundgobi, and Dornogobi. There was even a team from Inner Mongolia. From 10am during these two days, polo players participated in competitions that followed one after the other. More than 120 camels were ridden by the different teams. Each team included five or more riders and their camels. Two teams confront each other in an epic match to score the most goals. In the case of a draw, the winning team is determined by which one made the most impressive shot. This event was concluded with a grand camel race with all of the camels present, followed by the giving of awards in different categories. In fact, the Camel Polo Festival has a total prize fund of 20 million MNT and participants were given money to spend for their and their camels' transportation expenses. The conservation of the Bactrian Camel race is actually the real objective of this competition. This sport was introduced to the public to save these camels



which were nearly extinct a few years ago. Indeed, the International Union for Conservation of Nature lists the wild Bactrian Camel as “critically endangered.” In sixty years, the Bactrian Camel population fell from 900,000 to only 256,000 in 2004. Their commercial value declined dramatically so herders no longer found any advantage to breed them. In 2002, a member of Parliament, T.Oyunbaatar, was aware of this critical situation. His love for camels and polo motivated him to start the “Mongolian Camel Polo Association.” His son, who took the presidency of this organization a few years ago, stated, “Camel polo is quite a new sport in Mongolia

and efforts are being made to develop this sport and promote the Mongolian camel in many other foreign countries.”

This action has given the Government of Mongolia the opportunity to do research on this species, how to protect them, and how to promote camel products. Various NGOs have also been helping the government in this regard. And such efforts are paying off. Since 2004, the number of Bactrian camels has slightly increased to more than 300,000.

All in all, this competition was a great opportunity for Ulaanbaatar residents to watch a great countryside tradition. If you miss it, the desert is 500 kilometers away... Or you can wait one more year for the next Camel Polo Festival.

British gap year student Ellie Fields gains a unique experience volunteering with disabled children in Mongolia

Nineteen-year-old Ellie Fields from Dorset, England, wanted to work with children somewhere completely different from home and somewhere that she will probably not have the opportunity to visit again. After having already worked with disabled children, Ellie decided to come to Mongolia with Projects Abroad to volunteer during her gap year.

Ellie was placed at the *Kindergarten and Nursing Complex for Disabled Children #10*, a home for children suffering from a range of disabilities. Ellie took great initiative by starting English lessons and organizing ballet classes. “We would just put music on and fly around like birds and spin around the room. It was really nice to see they were having fun. Of course we didn’t do real ballet, but it was so impressive to see how much they enjoyed it and how happy they were when they participated in my class even though they were hindered by their disabilities - whether it be that they couldn’t walk or had trouble speaking.” explains Ellie.

“The most rewarding thing for me was every time I walked into the classroom, they recognized me and ran over to me saying my name! There was also a little boy who was in a wheelchair who had a speech impairment; he learnt how to ‘hi five’ and every time I saw him he gave me a ‘hi five’ and it became a kind of handshake for us. All those little things have been such valuable experiences for me and I felt really involved in their routine.”



In England, the facilities for disabled children are quite different compared to Mongolia; “Everything is very clean and they have lots of toys and computers and anything else they need. In Mongolia, they do a lot with what they have and make really nice things in their art classes and the children are always happy even though they have very little.”



At the end of her project, Ellie said that she had found the little things the most rewarding: when the children came out and gave her hugs or wanted to play with her or just to say thank you for something she had done for them. Teaching the kids ballet was the most memorable experience for her and she will always remember the times when they used to sit and laugh together when everyone was a little tired after dance class!

After having spent one month in Mongolia, Ellie advises future volunteers that “You have to be aware that everything is really different and you have to be open

minded all the time especially with the children. You have to think of new things to do and have new ideas all the time because children can get bored very quickly, so just do the best you can!”

“I have learnt so much through having to adapt to a different language, food and culture and have found that getting involved as much as possible has been the best way to overcome the initial culture shock. I really believe that this experience will help me in so many different ways in the future”.



My Experience

By Arthad Kurlekar (Law & Human rights Project volunteer)



My internship experience here is the first time theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom at my University was going to be tested. On the first day here I was introduced to the Head of the International Law Department Soyolmaa. She very kindly accepted me as an intern and so began a new experience of practical application of my theoretical knowledge.

I was assigned work in Comparative Contract Law. Munkhtuya (the researcher whose intern I was) initially gave me summarization work. I took articles published around the world and summarized and analyzed them. At first I was unsure of the purpose of the exercise and thus was slow. Gradually as I understood the nature of work; I got adapted to doing more work in lesser time.

I found the work culture at the National Legal Institute very different and nice from most other academic institutions. At this institute I found everybody very friendly and co-operative to one another. Though there were some researchers fluent with English I had some problem communicating with those who were not so proficient, my negligible knowledge of Mongolian was the reason. But everybody was patient with me and tried to explain unclear elements as hard as they could until I understood them.

Moreover, though contracts is not one of my most favorite subjects, my interest in Comparative Law and constant support provided by Munkhtuya and Soyolmaa (my supervisor), who helped me a lot. In the later part of my internship I had a slightly difficult task: taking a holistic approach to the issue of e-contracts and making my own analysis of the various recommendations. The principles of Common Law taught by my professor and the reference material provided by Munkhtuya came to good use in this task.

Overall my time at the Institute taught me a lot, refined my research skills and made me apply the various doctrines of common law learnt in class to make a comparative analysis. I had come with an expectation and hope to learn new things. My experience here far exceeded my expectation. I am very grateful to Soyolmaa for giving me this opportunity and Munkhtuya for providing constant guidance and support throughout my time here.