

# THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

For Projects Abroad Mongolia



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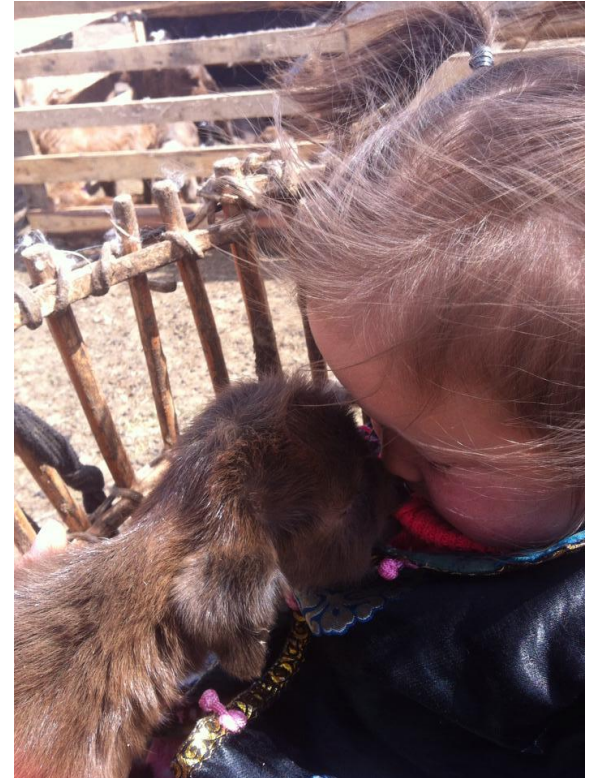
# Editor's Note

SAIN BAINA UU? Hello?

Welcome to the February edition of our newsletter for Projects Abroad Mongolia. This February issue will give you a further insight into our culture and is filled with project updates and volunteer stories to get a glimpse of what it is like to volunteer here in the "Land of Blue Sky"

Have a wonderful month,  
Projects Abroad Mongolia Team  
Send your stories, opinions, funny anecdotes and pictures or anything you want to share to Azaa.

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# VOLUNTEER STORIES

## Volunteer Story by Juhaku Okugawa from Japan

My name is JuhakuOkugawa and I am a 16-year old student at an international school in Japan. I had the honor to travel to Mongolia for a volunteering trip.

Traveling to Mongolia was a great experience for me. When I first arrived at the airport it was a struggle to communicate with anyone as no one spoke English. However, everyone seemed friendly in Mongolia. When I went to District 13 high school I was nervous because it was very different from the school that I go to.

I volunteered as a Physical Education (PE) teacher and was introduced to the teachers on my first day. Something I realize that was different from other schools is that students were excited to learn in Mongolia. They were almost like kindergarten students in a good way because everyone was eager to learn like how young children like to.



This taught me that learning is actually fun. It is easier said than done to enjoy learning but I knew it was possible after seeing high school students loving to learn. In PE, the students wanted to learn how to play volleyball. They asked me how to bump, set and spike.

A huge difference between students in Mongolia and students at my school is that girls and boys seem to work as one. During PE girls are not afraid to being physical and boys were not afraid of getting physical with girls. When I saw this I knew that the difference in gender roles were not as great in Mongolia because they are not influenced as much as we are by media. The girls were tough and the boys were too. If women are powerful in a society I believe the society has potential to grow. Now that I have been to Mongolia I know that it is a great place and it will grow in the future economically and socially. I was glad I was able to experience the education system of Mongolia because education is the fundamental method to growing a country. This lets me question about my learning attitudes in school and how everyone views education.

I am glad I was able to travel to Mongolia and I would like to thank Projects Abroad and the teachers at District 13 High School.



# Project Updates

Malaysian citizen 22 year old MengTeng from University of Adelaide in Adelaide, Australia, took part in our Teaching Sport Project for two weeks.

He works five days a week at the school # 13 from 10am to 5pm. His duties consist of preparing and teaching the physical education lessons including teaching new warm up techniques, games and other sport activities.

Although being in Mongolia for a short time only, Meng Teng enjoyed his time and loved his experience with these children.



# Volunteers in Action

**South Croydon resident Stefan DeVito travels to Mongolia to live with a Nomad family**

23 year-old Stefan DeVito from South Croydon, England, was drawn to Mongolia for two reasons. On the one hand, Mongolia is one of the few places where the nomadic life is still practiced. On the other hand, it is the biggest landlocked country in the world with huge open space and beautiful grassland.

"I actually first noticed Mongolia while watching a BBC documentary about the Kazak eagle hunters in western Mongolia. I was so amazed and told myself that I have to see it," explains Stefan.

To be fully immersed in the Mongolian way of life, Stefan decided to join the Nomad Project for three months. This, he hoped would give him enough time to explore Mongolia through meaningful travel.



Stefan lived with Mr. Purev and Mrs. Purevdorj, a Nomad family, in a 'ger' which is the Mongolian traditional dwelling 'yurt' near the village of Altanbulag in the Tuv Province. The village is located 200 kilometers away from Ulaanbaatar city. Far away from the big capital city, Stefan's only neighbors were the family of his host sister. Together, the two families keep about 400 goats and sheep, more than

ten cows and eight horses. Stefan enjoyed being involved in the daily routines of the Nomad's lifestyle such as helping out general herding work, helping with milking the cows by pulling away the baby cows when the mother cow is being milked, collecting fuel for fire which is dung from the animals, collecting ice and water for drinking, assembling and disassembling the 'gers' and excavating a hole to dig all the accumulated waste which is dung from the animals piling up in the pan and making it accommodative for the cows.

"Towards the end of my stay, I was responsible for two lambs as they couldn't go with the animals to the green pasture and were by themselves. I fed them, cleaned them up, and made sure they got water. I was also looking after the family dog, Polo. Many of the Mongolian dogs, Bankhars are not trained. I thought it would be better if Polo gets some training and future volunteers can continue this work" shared Stefan.

Living with his Nomadic host family challenged Stefan in several ways: he had no access to the internet, telephone, washing facilities or even a proper western style bathroom.

However, Stefan uses the time to learn about a culture different from his own and assured that his experience was one-of-a-kind: "As a volunteer, you definitely get more immersed in the Nomadic lifestyle than you would as a tourist. A tourist can say I visited a tourist 'ger' once, but I actually lived in a 'ger' on a day to day basis.

It's definitely the true way to experience the culture. Nomad people are very happy, nice, hardy, and easy going people. It's a slightly difficult life in certain ways, but peaceful and simple."

Stefan was impressed by the efficiency and precision his host family applied when setting up their home in different places:





"It is amazing to see that a family can fit everything they own on the back of a track including their house. It all fits very nicely, a bit like the computer game Tetris. The structure of the 'ger' is amazing. The design is circular, the entrance always facing south, the construction is very robust, and it's very warm when you're inside as a fire is going. It's very comfortable to live in. I'd like to have one maybe in UK." He also admired the hands-on approach his host family had: "The people have great engineering skills. When something is broken it is fixed. Even a shovel whose handle breaks - you can just find an old piece of 'ger' roofing, sharpen it, take the broken handle off, put the new one inside, and off you go digging again."

At the end of his project, Stefan said that he found the little things the most rewarding: when he was able to teach English and Rubik's cube skill to his host grand-daughter and helped the family to dig all the accumulated waste, dung from the animals, piling up in the cows' pan. "I felt a lot stronger and physically fit afterwards. I felt so helpful, because my host parents are quite old now and they do actually need some help around. It's not like you pretend to be working. It is real work," said Stefan.

Aside from his project, Stefan also had a chance to see other parts of Mongolia: He visited museums like Bogd Khan Palace Museum in Ulaanbaatar city, also known as Winter-palace, the only remaining residence of Bogd Khan, emperor of Mongolia, and travelled to Khuvsgul Lake and saw the reindeers in the northern part of Mongolia. At last, Stefan fulfilled his dream to witness the Kazakh eagle hunt, watching how the majestic eagle hunts the agile fox. This time he didn't watch it on a BBC documentary, sitting on his sofa in Croydon; this time, he witnessed the hunt, breathing the cold Mongolian air.

