

# ProjectsAbroad™

*Projects Abroad Mongolia Official Newsletter* *February 2013*



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## Journalism Project update by Stefani Thomsen

### Life and culture in Mongolia

This is an article I wrote for a newspaper in Mongolia, which also touch upon my experiences here.



The Mongolian way of life in Ulaanbaatar is modern as well as filled with a lot of traditions. Every Mongolian in the country are grandparents of Chingis Khan and proud to be living in the same customs and traditions of the times of the Great Empire. Despite urbanization, the traditions still live on. Even in cities such as Ulaanbaatar people still live in ger, a large felt tent that can be moved easily. Ulaanbaatar is one of the only places where you can see modern-skyscrapers placed next to gers. The traditional and modern life of the Mongolians in Ulaanbaatar has created a lively and mixed culture that offer the best of both worlds.

The history and life of most Mongolians is influenced by Tibetan Buddhism and it is believed that around 94 percents of all Mongolians are Buddhists. Tibetan Buddhism

and the Mongolian way of life are expressed through art, music and literature. In Ulaanbaatar there is a rich amount of museums, theaters and cultural houses where this is shown. But you do not need to pay to experience Mongolian culture. Just wandering the streets of Ulaanbaatar you will find a lot of cultural artifacts and come to learn the Mongolian people who is known to be one of the most friendly people in Asia.

### Main attractions

In Ulaanbaatar the main tourist attraction is Sukhbaatar Square and the center for most cultural experiences. Here, the government house is located with the famous statue of Chingis Khan, as wells as the red horse statue in the middle of the square overlooking the city. From Sukhbaatar Square there is not far to the museum of National History, the natural history museum, the Zanabazar Fine Arts Museum and the Choijin Lam Temple museum. Moreover, Ulaanbaatar is filled with a lot of interesting cultural houses and monasteries. One of the most interesting sights in Ulaanbaatar is the Gandan Monastery which is the largest and most significant monastery in Mongolia where Buddhist services continued to function even during the communist past. If feeling more adventurous, the winter palace of Bogd Kahn (emperor) in southern Ulaanbaatar is a trip worth taken. The complex consists of six temples that hold many of Bogd Kahn's possessions such as his throne and his ceremonial ger.



## Country side

If you wish to experience the life and culture of the Mongolians, a trip to the country side might be a solution where the option of visiting a nomadic family is possible. Other country experiences might be to visit the Gobi desert which is the fifth largest desert in the world or **Orkhon Khurkhree which is a** waterfall that flows down to the river Orkhon. If you want to know more about Mongolian tourist attractions visit [www.travelstreet.info/travel-mongolia.html](http://www.travelstreet.info/travel-mongolia.html).

## Tourist attractions in Ulaanbaatar

- Sukhbaatar Square
- Gandan Monastery
- Natural History Museum
- Museum of National History
- The Zanabazar Fine Arts Museum
- Bogd Khan Palace Museum
- Chojin Lama Monastery
- Zaisan Hill



## Volunteer Story by Erina Nakai from Japan



When I arrived at Chinggis Khaan Airport, I was so nervous to get outside and experience the coldness, approximately minus 30 degree. I was not ready to have so many new experiences I would have in Mongolia because I even did not know why I chose Mongolia for my internship, and I could not expect anything before arrival. On the other hand, I was also very curious and excited about this country which I barely know. I open a gate and I see the new ice world. Everywhere is snowing, and my face and all body were frozen. I even thought the winter in Mongolia is not for me because it was too cold. However, as I spend more time in Mongolia, I believed firmly that I made a right choice; having a real life experience in winter Mongolia is wonderful and something totally new to me.

As I arrived in Mongolia, my supervisor from project abroad took me to the house my host family is waiting. My family member is a mother and her son. They are very welcoming and friendly. Even though my host mother does not speak English, the ways she treats me make me feel happy enough without oral communications. This situation also encourages me to learn Mongolian. I enjoy using Mongolian greeting words such as “Sain baina”. I also remembered the word like “I” and “You” and “Thank You” in Mongolia. Most of the conversation with my host mother relied on gestures, but I really enjoyed it because there is a willingness to communicate and understand each other. In addition, my host brother who speaks English well took me some restaurants and bars with his Mongolian friends so I had so much fun to spend time with local people. I went to karaoke with them; I went to bar together.





After being together with them for a month, I found some cultural aspects of Mongolian; a friend of their friends is their friend. When people get together, they are happy to have someone's friends in that place and drink vodka for their new friendship. When they step someone's foot, they shake their hand for the forgiveness. I had experienced their culture as if I was a Mongolian and I could fully felt their big heart.

In addition to the real family and local experience, internship at Mongolian TV station also gave me so much great opportunities to enhance my academic and

future carriers. I had two weeks for an entertainment TV stations and I had two weeks for News stations. As I am a second year student majoring in journalism, it was my first time to have a real work experience at TV station, and I didn't have any experience in this field. Therefore, I was very nervous and I did not know what to expect. However, my nervousness and anxiety disappeared very soon after I started working there. All of my coworkers were very welcoming and trying to teach and show me as many things as possible about not only their job of TV stations but also culture and nature of Mongolia and very personal things. Even on my first day at work, they took me their recording for a quiz show.

Many of them cannot speak English so well, but they tried to explain about what they were doing. I also attend their recording of other quiz shows and interviews of different TV shows and news. At the office, I usually make questions for the quiz shows and write some scripts for their programs. However, to me, the most memorable experience I had at my work is a small trip with my coworkers for interviewing winners of their quiz shows; they took me to a different city called Baganuur. On the way to the city, I could talk with my coworkers about their passion and



opinion about producing TV programs, and the conversations with the journalists were precious and stimulating. In addition, during the work trip, I also see their kindness and friendliness. They took me some interesting places such as Chinggis Khan theme park and Ovoo (shamanistic cairn) on the way to get there. They willingly show me the famous and traditional things and places in Mongolia, and I was so impressed by their very warm hospitality.

From my one month experience in Mongolia, I was amazed by many different aspects of the culture and their humanity. I could see this country from many different points of view, and I could fully experience and enjoy this culture. As I am going to pursue career as a Journalist, it is very precious that I could have much broader view though the living experience in Mongolia. The internship also helps me to create more concrete images for my future career, and it also encourages me to work hard in my college to be a knowledgeable journalist. I am so glad that I made the decision to go to Mongolia, and I found the warmest hearts in the coldest capital city, which entertain me every day.

## “Nomadic Spirit” exhibits the art of modern Mongolia

The “UB Post”, Mongolia’s first independent english weekly newspaper, publishes the articles of Journalism Project volunteers through Projects Abroad Mongolia. Baptiste Cessieux, 25 year old from France, started his project at UB post a month ago and the article below is one of his articles that has already published on the newspaper.

By Baptiste Cessieux

This week, the “Nomadic Spirit in Ulaanbaatar” exhibition opened at the National Modern Art Gallery of Mongolia. A joint Mongolian and French exhibition, the theme is the nomadic spirit of Mongolians, and this exhibition attempts to portray, through a range of artistic works, the evolution of the Mongolian people and the disparities between the immense steppes and the unbridled urban development of Ulaanbaatar. The works of about 20 Mongolian and French artists are displayed, each presenting their vision of a modern Mongolia trying to protect its traditions. While Tim Desgraupes’s works concentrate on a “taxi driver” who led him into the hidden recesses of Ulaanbaatar, another artist, Come Doerflinger, took inspiration from the Mongolian steppes. Other artists presented a more symbolic vision of Mongolian tradition. Paintings by Mongolian artists such as “The Spirit



Maitre Rivers” by Gambatar are side by side with Rose Baque’s ceramic sculptures and projections of Dorian Francois’s pictures. This heterogeneous exhibit is connected by a large circle of sand, the symbol of life and movement, created by the artist Batzorig. Mathieu Gabarra, the French artist who organized the project and the designer of the sculpture of a wolf being embraced by a child, which decorates the exhibition’s flyers, explained his arrival into Ulaanbaatar without any money and why he decided to put on this exhibit. “This exhibition is a meeting between French and Mongolian artists. Mongols of nomadic tradition and nomadic expatriates have a lot in common.” It was a meeting with artists from the group “Blue Sun” which inspired Gabarra to organize the exhibition. The nomadic spirit is so important

for the Mongols, but is also present in every traveler coming through the country. “Blue Sun” was formed in 2002 by a few artists and over time has become the most active group of contemporary artists in Mongolia. Among others feats, in recent years they have organized several festivals in the middle of nowhere. These festivals attract both “land art” artists and contemporary artists. They build installations with materials found at the location. This collective has now begun to settle in a more long-lasting way by creating a real artist’s village. This project is in fact an attempt to bring Mongolian contemporary art to the attention of the rest of the world. The objective is to both welcome international artists and to give Mongolian contemporary art a distinct identity. The “Nomadic Spirit in Ulaanbaatar” exhibition opened on Monday, January 28. The opening ceremony began with speeches by the organizing team and a succession of performances in connection with the works of each artist. The exhibition will close its doors on Sunday February 3. Art enthusiasts therefore have just a few days remaining to see this remarkable exhibit and perhaps meet the artists, who are at the exhibition every day.





## Psychology Project Update By Dr. Vanessa Jones

Depression and Anxiety: Should we be worried?

By Dr Vanessa Jones,  
Clinical Psychologist

Sukh grew up in the countryside with his family. He was good at working with the animals and always helped with everything he could. Everyone thought he was a good son.

Then there were several bad winters. Lots of the animals died and the family had trouble making enough money to live. Sukh had to go to the city to find work to help his family to survive.

Sukh had never been to the city before. It was busy, noisy and the air was very bad. It was very different from his life in the countryside. He managed to find a job but he found it very difficult. Everyone did things differently and he didn't know what he was supposed to do. He got in trouble for being late and was always told he was doing things wrong. He worked very hard and for long hours, but still he got things wrong. He felt like he could never get it right.

He wished he was back in the countryside where he knew what to do and everyone liked him. He didn't have any friends in the city so he was lonely.

Sukh was worried he would lose his job. It was very important that he earned money to send back to his family. He felt he was letting them down.

Sukh worked so many hours he was always tired and found it difficult to sleep. He was always thinking about his family and how he was letting them down. He had no energy and didn't enjoy anything anymore. Sukh thought he deserved to feel bad because he was a bad person.

Sukh's story shows us how a successful and happy person can become depressed. Sukh's situation made his life very difficult. There were several bad winters, his family were struggling and they were relying on him to make it better. He had a lot of responsibility, which can be a source of stress.

Major changes in lifestyle and expectations can also cause stress, which can lead to anxiety and depression.

We may judge ourselves harshly if we feel we are failing. We may even think we deserve to feel stressed or sad. This means that we might not ask for help when we need it.

### Is depression a big problem in Mongolia?

People in Mongolia could be at risk of depression for many reasons.

In the countryside, difficult weather conditions mean people's bodies are always under stress. Farmers are dependent on good weather to keep their animals healthy and they are responsible for keeping their family and animals alive. Poor access to physical healthcare means people's bodies are put under more stress. Given these constant causes of stress, it is likely that many people in the countryside are at risk of depression. At the same time, the closeness of families and communities can protect against depression.

In the city, people also have difficult weather conditions as well as air pollution and heavy traffic, which cause stress. In some ways Mongolia is a greater risk because it has been so successful. Mongolia is developing rapidly so life is changing everyday. These changes from the traditional culture to city life mean people may find it difficult to know what is expected from them or how to be a "good Mongolian". These pressures could lead to a higher risk of depression.

### So what is depression?

If you were to ask people on the streets of Ulaanbaatar, what would they say? "Depression is when you feel really sad all the time and don't want to do anything". "Depression means you are a bad person." "Depression is when you have too much stress". What does depression mean to you?

Scientists know that depression is an illness. It changes the chemicals and hormones in your body and brain. Depression can make you feel tired, sleep badly, not want to eat, and have no interest in activities – even things you used to enjoy. Depression can cause aches, pains, a loss of energy and can make concentration difficult.

People with depression do not just feel sad or miserable. They find it difficult to feel happy, even when good things happen.



Depression changes the way people think, feel and behave. At its most severe, people with depression may think life is not worth living. There are 3,000 deaths every day, around the world from suicide. For every person who dies from suicide, there may be another twenty suicide attempts.

### **How do you get depression?**

Depression has many causes. Some come from your situation, some from your previous life experiences and some from your body. Stress is a big cause of depression. Our brains can only do so much at one time. If our brains are full from too much work, too many worries or from trying to get better from health problems, then we become very stressed.

If you are very stressed, you are more likely to get mental health problems. Depression is one of the most common mental health problems that people get when they are stressed.

In psychology, we understand that people's thoughts, feelings, body symptoms and behaviour are connected. For example, if you had the thought "I am not good at my job", you might feel sad or upset. If you feel upset, your body might feel shaky and you might have a headache. If you had these thoughts, feelings and body symptoms you might behave differently. You might decide not to go into work.

On the other hand, if you had the thought "I am excellent at my job", you might feel happy and excited, your body would feel light with lots of energy and you might decide to go into work early or stay late. These two examples show how our thoughts, feelings, body symptoms and behaviour are connected. Difficulties in any one of these areas will cause difficulties in the others. From this, we can understand how someone might get depression.

### **How do you treat depression?**

The good news is that depression can be very easy to treat. When people have mild depression like Sukh, the best treatment is psychological therapy. The therapist talks to the person to understand the situation, thoughts, feelings, body symptoms and behavior of the person with depression. For the patient, having someone to share their problem and who understands their feelings is a very helpful experience.

A therapist could help Sukh understand that it is normal to feel stressed when moving to a new city and starting a new job. They would understand that Sukh is finding it difficult because he does not have friends in the city. It is no wonder that Sukh is feeling stressed! The therapist would try to find out what is causing Sukh to think he is a bad person.

The therapist may help Sukh to see that he is doing the best he can, that he has always been helpful to his family in the past, and that he would make things better if he knew how.

Sukh may find it easier then to see that he is not a bad person, but that the situation he is in is very difficult. The therapist may also help Sukh think of ways to solve his problems. They may help him to think about what he can do differently at work or how he can make new friends in the city.

Understanding that it is normal to feel stressed in Sukh's situation, and knowing he is doing the best he can and that other people can see this, could be enough to stop Sukh from feeling depressed. When he starts to feel better, he is more likely to settle in and be able to find ways to do better at work.

### **Other treatment options**

If Sukh had been feeling depressed for many years, or if he has always believed that he was a bad son, he might have moderate or severe depression. He might stop going to work and find it difficult to get out of bed or leave the house.

Sukh's treatment options would still include psychological therapy. He might also be given antidepressant medicine. This would allow Sukh to feel better quickly but if he stopped taking the medication he would feel depressed again. The medication could help him to feel well enough to use the therapy. Therapy would help to treat the depression in the long term.

If you think you have depression or someone you know may be suffering from depression, speak to your general doctor. They should be able to help you to find a therapist to work through your problems.





## Five ways to keep depression away

**Spend Time with people:** Family, friends, colleagues or neighbours, at home, work, school or in your local community. Spending time with people allows us to feel connected to the world and less alone.

**Be active:** Go for a walk or run or just go outside. Exercise makes us feel good. If you find it hard on your own, talk to a friend, family member or work friend– help motivate each other.

**Eat well:** good food helps our bodies to work well and keep away the stress. Fruit and vegetables are very good for you.

**Notice things around you:** Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Thinking about your experiences will help you appreciate what is important to you.

**Keep learning:** Learning new things is fun, will make you more confident and lets you spend time with other people. For example, learn to play an instrument, how to cook your favourite food. Get creative: draw; write music or poetry; act; dance; paint; cook; knit... Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving.

**Give:** Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Doing things for others makes us feel good and benefits other as well.

If you have four or more of these symptoms most of the day, nearly every day for two weeks or more, then you should look for help:

Tiredness and loss of energy

Persistent sadness

Loss of self-confidence and self-esteem

Difficulty concentrating

Not being able to enjoy things that you usually like

Feelings of guilt or worthlessness

Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness

Sleeping problems – difficulties in getting to sleep or waking up much earlier than usual

Avoiding people, even your close friends

Finding it hard to do things at work or school

Loss of appetite

Loss of sex drive and/ or sexual problems

Physical aches and pains

Thinking about suicide and death

Self-harm

