



## STAFF ORIENTATION HANDBOOK

***'To educate global citizens in pursuit of personal excellence in an ever evolving community to become lifelong learners'***

**Address:** Post Office Box 80, Branch-30, Naadamchidiin Road 50,  
4th khoroo, Khan-Uul District, Ulaanbaatar-17081, Mongolia

**Tel:** (976) 70047788

**E-mail:** [admission@britishschool.edu.mn](mailto:admission@britishschool.edu.mn), [general@britishschool.edu.mn](mailto:general@britishschool.edu.mn)

**Website:** [www.britishschool.edu.mn](http://www.britishschool.edu.mn)



## **WELCOME**

Congratulations on your appointment and welcome to the British School of Ulaanbaatar.

To help you with the transition and preparation of your arrival in Ulaanbaatar we would like to help you by providing with some useful information, pointers and suggestions.

A good starter for you would be to try and get the “Lonely Planet Guide to Mongolia” or check the list of websites. Both Joanna Lumley and Kate Humble have made documentaries about Mongolia and these can be found on YouTube. You can also gather information from the Mongolian Embassies and the Internet so that you may orientate yourself a bit with Ulaanbaatar and Mongolia.

**School Admin Team**

## Visa Requirements & Residency Permits:

Teachers who have signed an employment contract and have accepted a position with BSU must have a valid work permit and HG type of single entry visa in order to work and enter the country. These permits are approved by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Mongolian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Mongolian Ministry of Education. BSU will handle all of the paperwork for newly hired teachers. The procedure is as follows:

1. Teachers are to submit all documents listed below to BSU in Mongolia for processing. These documents can all be scanned and sent electronically to: [recruitment@britishschool.edu.mn](mailto:recruitment@britishschool.edu.mn)

### **Please ensure that you have the following documents to send to BSU:**

1. Photocopy of page one of your passport showing your photo, date of birth and passport number (**your passport must be valid for at least 1 year**)
  2. Marriage certificates if you are married and bringing your spouse with you
  3. Photocopies of your university degree(s), diploma(s), and teaching certificate
  4. Certificate of HIV test (issued within the last 3 months)
  5. Letter from doctor stating you are fit to work
  6. Police/Criminal reference check (issued within the past 12 months)
2. The Mongolian Immigration Office will notify BSU as soon as all documents have been approved and will confirm that a Visa Permission Code has been issued to the appropriate Mongolian Embassy (not Consulate) nearest to you. After that, BSU will forward to you the Visa Permission Code that was issued by the Mongolian Immigration Office and ask to visit that Embassy to apply for an HG type SINGLE ENTRY visa. Please retain your receipt for HG type visa payment and submit it to the BSU Finance office for reimbursement after your arrival in the country. The school does not reimburse transport or accommodation costs for visa collection.
  3. The school will arrange a MULTIPLE ENTRY visa once you arrive in Mongolia.
  4. Please inform the school if you intend to come to Mongolia with your family. The school does not pay for spousal or children's visas but they will assist in acquiring the appropriate visas.
  5. Once you have arrived in Mongolia BSU will help you to register with immigration, who will issue you with an "Alien Card". This card is required when leaving or re-entering the country and is a recognised form of identification within Mongolia.

6. Please note a medical check-up (consisting of a chest X-Ray and blood work) will be required by the local health clinic shortly after your arrival in order to obtain the work permit. The school will arrange this.

**For information about Mongolian Embassies worldwide, please visit**

**[http://www.discovermongolia.mn/mongolian\\_embassies.html](http://www.discovermongolia.mn/mongolian_embassies.html)**

**For the Mongolian Embassy in London, please visit**

**[www.embassyofmongolia.co.uk](http://www.embassyofmongolia.co.uk)**

#### **PLEASE ENSURE YOU HAVE THE FOLLOWING**

- Photographs; minimum of 8 (you will require more passport photographs once you arrive in Mongolia in order to register with banks, immigration, etc. and it is easier to bring these with you)
- Cash to pay for the Visas - these prices vary from country to country so it would be best to contact the appropriate Embassy beforehand to confirm the cost and the opening times
- A copy of your passport and air ticket is required
- Use the school telephone/e-mail as your contact information in Mongolia
- Please keep all receipts as reference of payment, this will help with reimbursements

#### **Things to know about BSU ...**

##### **School Day**

8.15 am – 3.05 pm for students

3.10 pm – 4.10 pm Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday for ECAs

8.00 am – 4.30 pm for teachers

##### **Calendar**

(See the School Calendar on the School Website for more details)

##### **Dress Code**

This is a private school with an emphasis on high academic and personal expectations where we

promote excellent student behaviour and respectability. Students are required to wear school uniforms. Staff are expected to be smartly and professionally attired. A dress code policy is in place and the school has a conservative environment. Visible body piercing, extreme haircuts and tattoos are not acceptable. Long hair on men is rare in the professional environment in Mongolia.

## **Communication**

### ***Mail***

Mail to Mongolia generally takes two to four weeks to arrive. Advise your family and friends to number their letters and to include the word "Airmail" on their envelopes. Packages sent by surface mail normally take one to two months. If you are sending new items to Mongolia, make sure you remove all tags and new stickers from the item as you may be taxed on brand new items coming into Mongolia.

### ***Mailing Address***

Your address is listed below in English and in the Cyrillic alphabet. The School driver regularly brings teachers' mail to the school.

#### ***Your Name,***

**British School of Ulaanbaatar  
PO Box 80, Branch 30  
Naadamchidiin Road 50,  
4<sup>th</sup> Khoroo, Khan-Uul District  
Ulaanbaatar 17081  
Mongolia**

**Улаанбаатарын Бритиш Дунд Сургууль  
Хан-Уул дүүрэг, 4-р хороо, Наадамчидын зам 50,  
Улаанбаатар хот, Монгол Улс -17081**

Please give this address to friends and family (giving them pre-printed labels may be a good idea). Be aware that you may incur customs charges on your mail, especially packages. How packages are labelled by the sender can influence these charges. For example, if someone sends you a package containing both printed matter and "luxury" items such as music cassettes, the customs charges calculated by the post office in Mongolia will generally be less if the printed matter is emphasised and the luxury items are not.

Sending packages, post cards and letters home is not difficult. We will advise you where the Post Offices are, along with other companies such as DHL.

### ***Telephones***

Long-distance calling to abroad is available throughout Mongolia. Note that the time in Mongolia is 8 hours ahead of GMT. The international dialing code for Mongolia is +976. Cell phones can be purchased cheaply and Mongolian SIM cards are readily available. Mongolian mobile phone networks are 3G/4G, so smart phones can be used to access the internet around UB. You can also

use prepaid phone cards that can be purchased at telecom branches and specified service agents. You can then make a call from any pay phone by following the instructions on the phone cards. Using these cards is usually the least expensive way to make international calls. Many teachers will use the Internet to make international phone calls, using programs such as SKYPE, Viber or MSN Messenger.

### ***Internet and E-mail Access***

The school and teachers' apartments have Wi-Fi access. Teachers can also access personal e-mail after school in the staff room/computer labs. During periods of high usage the connection/downloading process may be slow. Please check your school Gmail and pigeon hole in the staff room daily for messages. The whiteboard in the staff room is also useful for communicating with other staff or to make announcements regarding social events, special needs, etc.

### ***School Facilities & Resources***

The school has 41 classrooms, 1 science labs, 2 computer rooms, a library, cafeteria, drama room, dance room, music room, staff room, sports hall, swimming pool with changing rooms, administrative offices, as well as conference and meeting rooms.

### ***School Year***

The school year runs from September to June with a break at Christmas and Easter. As the academic year currently finishes early in June, the Easter break is normally one week. This may change in the future due to external examinations. The October and February half term holidays are up to one week. The February half term is attached to the Mongolian festival of Tsagaan Sar which is a lunar holiday. For this reason the dates are flexible. Please check the school calendar for next year's dates. As the temperature is very low during the winter in Mongolia most staff choose to travel abroad during the Christmas and two shorter breaks, either back to their home country or to Thailand, Korea or China, all of which are connected to UB by regular flights.

### ***What to Bring With You***

This list has been compiled by foreigners working/living in Mongolia and is based on their experience. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that experience is individual. There is no perfect list! You obviously cannot bring everything we mention, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. You can always have things sent to you later. Aeroflot has a bag allocation of 23 kg and Turkish Airlines offers 30 kg. You can find most things in Ulaanbaatar, given enough time and patience so think carefully about those essential items you will need during your first few months.

The hard water in Mongolia can be harsh on your clothing, so make sure that whatever you bring can stand up to this treatment. A wide variety of clothes are available here. If you have a hard time finding your size in Europe or North America, it will be harder here (though it is becoming

easier). Very warm, Mongolian-made winter clothes can be purchased in Ulaanbaatar. Walking is the best way to get around the city, and the terrain here is rather rugged, so durable footwear is of importance. For those not used to living in such a cold climate, you can find good quality winter clothes online at reasonable prices.

Ulaanbaatar's shopping district is developing rapidly and there is a Next, BHS, Clark's Shoes, several small shops selling IKEA products and a number of designer outlets.

### ***Winter Clothing***

Winter coat (down jackets are a popular choice), thick jumpers or hooded tops, thermal underwear, weatherproof gloves – Arctic quality for the coldest times, scarf/snood/balaclava, wool hat (to cover ears), thermal or ski socks, durable shoes or boots/snow boots (Sorel) for walking in snow and slush. Good quality winter clothing, such as Shearling, fur and leather coats, fur lined boots and yak wool socks are available in Mongolia.

Mongolia is one of the world's largest producers of cashmere with its showrooms piled high with cardigans, dresses, scarves, hats and pashminas and it can claim to be the fibre's fashion capital. The quality of Mongolian cashmere is excellent and its price very competitive compared to other producer countries.

### ***Other Clothing***

Professional clothes for school, sports clothes (including swimwear), a formal outfit for functions such as Christmas parties (Mongolians take some formal occasions very seriously so you should be prepared to dress accordingly), plus whatever you would normally wear at home or in warmer weather! If your country has a national dress then this could be useful for international days (or if you get homesick).

### ***Kitchen***

Specialty foods or brands you cannot live without (Marmite is hard to find). Staff apartments will have a microwave, kettle and coffee maker, other specialised kitchen equipment can be bought in UB.

### ***Miscellaneous***

220-volt converter (essential for North American appliances – but generally Mongolian sockets/multi-socket extension leads will generally be able to take plugs from all over the world), games (e.g. Scrabble, Uno, Pass the Pigs, playing cards), bed linen for a double bed and if you can fit them in – pillows, however, BHS has reduced the problem of bedding to a large extent.

### ***Work Items for teaching***

Below are a few items that cannot be bought in-country but would be useful in class.

- Music—Mongolians love to sing and it will help you teach English
- Maps, posters and pictures to decorate your classroom

- Catalogues/magazines (the pictures are useful when teaching)
- Portable resources

## **Travel Advice**

Traveling to Mongolia can be a long journey. Planning your flight over will help to alleviate some of the transition and jetlag that follows.

- expect anywhere between 15 and 25 hours of travel from the UK depending on the route
- set your watch at destination time
- drink lots of water or juice - the air conditioning dehydrates you
- bring reading material, music and film downloads for the plane and airport waiting – not all planes have screens (Aeroflot)
- check out Priority Pass [www.prioritypass.com](http://www.prioritypass.com) – if you subscribe, you have access to airport lounges which is helpful on long stopovers.

## **Arrival in Ulaanbaatar**

Most flights arrive in UB in the early morning or late evening. When you arrive for the first time you will be picked up by a school driver with one member of administration and taken to the school residential block. The administration will arrange for basic groceries to be in your refrigerator when you arrive. Providing you have forwarded a copy of your flight and baggage receipts, the money will be available on arrival. It is advisable to bring additional cash as the first few weeks of going out and exploring will make the cost of living a bit more expensive (dollars or pounds can be easily exchanged at good rates). The current staff members (Mongolian and international) will be keen to help out, so do not be afraid to ask questions!

## **Accommodation**

A 4-story block attached to the school building provides accommodation for the teachers. There is a mixture of one-bedroom and two-bedroom furnished apartments with fitted kitchens. Every apartment has Wi-Fi access and cable TV that has some English speaking channels. There is a communal laundry room on each floor. The apartment building is monitored by security staff.

BSU will bear the cost of the teacher's housing expenses as follows: heating, internet service, security and common area cleaning expenses. The teachers will pay the cost of water, cable TV electricity and maintenance (currently around 70 GBP a month).





***Apartment Furnishings***

### **1-bed apartments for singles/couples**

***Bedroom:*** Double/twin bed, night table, chest of drawers, wardrobe.

***Living room:*** Couch, coffee table, armchair, TV base unit with drawers and shelves, widescreen TV.

***Kitchen/dining room:*** Dining table with 4 chairs, refrigerator, oven, microwave, kettle and kitchen storage & counter.

***Bathrooms:*** Shower cubicle, toilet, sink, mirror, radiator and hanging rack.

***Entrance hall:*** Coat closet, mirror.

### **2-bed apartments for families**

As above, plus an extra double bedroom with ensuite.

## **Living in Ulaanbaatar**

### ***Food and Diet***

There is a growing variety of imported products to be found at markets in Ulaanbaatar. Fresh fruits and vegetables appear in the markets regularly, although there is less variety than many international staff may be used to. Fresh fruit and vegetables are seasonal. Potatoes, cabbages, turnips, cucumbers, peppers, tomatoes, onions, garlic, carrots, and tangerines are available most of the year in Ulaanbaatar. More exotic vegetables are usually quite expensive and can be purchased at just a few locations in the city. The main sources of meat are mutton and beef, but chicken, fish, and pork are also available at markets and in supermarkets. There are 2 good butchers (Australian and American).

### ***Personal Safety***

As a foreigner living and travelling in an unfamiliar environment, having a limited understanding of the local language and culture, and being perceived as being well-off are some of the factors that can put you at risk. The school is a safe place to live and work but, at the same time, you are expected to take responsibility for your safety and well-being, by being aware of your surroundings and using common sense when travelling, by avoiding isolated and ger areas, and avoiding travelling alone and late at night.

### ***Restaurants***

If cooking is not your thing, Ulaanbaatar is filled with excellent restaurants offering American, Greek, Irish, Turkish, Korean, Indian, Thai, Chinese food and more (as well as traditional Mongolian food)! Remember your best sources on where to eat out are your co-workers. There is also a delivery company operating via an app on your phone. There are over 30 restaurants listed with takeout menus.

If you are a vegetarian or vegan please be aware that you will find a limited choice of restaurants. There are some restaurants specifically catering for vegetarians and vegans and more restaurants are beginning to include vegetarian options.

### ***Salary, Taxes and Banking***

After you arrive in Ulaanbaatar, accounts will be set up for you at the **Xac Bank** (pronounced Khas bank) and you will be given an ATM card with a pin code. Your salary will be deposited into your local account each month and you can withdraw money either at the bank or from any ATM machine. Please note that you can withdraw only Tugruks from the ATM machines. You can also withdraw money using foreign ATM cards at different banks around the city. The school will assist you in opening your Xac Bank account, but you will need to fill out an application form and provide a photocopy of your passport.

Teachers are taxed at the rate of 10%. You can request a tax certificate from the school accountant which you can use when filing your tax returns in your home country.

US dollars can be exchanged at various places in Ulaanbaatar, including hotels, banks, post offices, and legal money exchange facilities. Credit cards are not widely accepted in Mongolia, however they are accepted by major hotels and shops as well as some supermarkets and many restaurants, and may come in handy when travelling outside the country or shopping on-line. Personal cheques are not accepted in Mongolia.

### ***Sending Money to Foreign Countries***

Sending money to other countries is quite easy. Xac and Khan Bank both operate online banking. It is easy to set up and there are colleagues in school who can help you. Bring with you the name of your bank, the address, the **SWIFT code and IBAN account number**.

### ***Where to shop***

One of the most pleasant surprises here in Ulaanbaatar is that you can find most of the comforts of home, if you know where to look!

### ***Food***

E Mart opened in 2016 and is excellent. Nomin, Mercury, Sansar and Good Price are supermarket chains but there are many more small family run supermarkets all over UB. The best place for good quality and selection for buying fruits and vegetables are E Mart and Mercury (near the State Circus). For fresh meat the Mercury indoor market and the American and Australian

butchers are good. For fresh bread there are many outlets. There is a good bakery in Hunnu Mall and there is a good selection in Mini Del Ger.

### ***Clothing***

Sky department store is good and the Black market has to be visited. Some western brands can now be found in the centre.

### ***Household Supplies***

The large department stores all have quite good quality household supplies (irons, toasters, drying racks), however, the cheapest place is the Black Market or Sunday Plaza indoor Market. It is best to go with someone who knows the market, as it is huge and can be overwhelming. You can buy almost anything there! But beware of pickpockets.

### ***Viva City***

This is a housing and shopping development opposite the school. It has several small supermarkets, restaurants and clothing outlets. It is very convenient and you will be able to find most of the necessities here without having to travel into the city centre.

### ***Hunnu Mall***

Just in front of Viva City. It contains several designer outdoor activities shops including Jack Wolfskin, a food hall, ice rink, go-karting and a cinema.

### ***Sansar Supermarket***

Opened in 2015 and is about half a mile away – easy walking distance.

## **Social Activities**

Mongolians are famous for their outstanding hospitality and extremely friendly and sociable nature. UB is full of karaoke bars, which is the number one choice for night-time entertainment. They enjoy a wide variety of sports. Basketball, table tennis, volleyball, rugby, football and the national sport of wrestling all take place during the summer. Hiking is also popular during the warmer months. Cross-country skiing (and downhill skiing using a rope tow), sledding, and ice-skating are popular pastimes in the winter. There are lots of bars and nightclubs in UB and the locals tend to dress up for a night out, so make sure you bring some nice clothes if you are planning on experiencing the nightlife of UB.

## **Expats community**

The following websites include information for foreigners living, working in and passing through Mongolia. [www.mongolexpat.com](http://www.mongolexpat.com), [www.ubexpat.info](http://www.ubexpat.info) and [facebook.com/groups/mongolexpat/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/mongolexpat/)

## **Transportation**

Transportation is easy and inexpensive in Ulaanbaatar, but due to the speed at which Mongolia's

economy (and urban population) is growing the road networks in and out of the city are becoming more congested. This means that traffic jams are frequent and lengthy, whether using public or private transport.

### **Buses/Taxis/Private Taxis**

The bus stop is just outside school and they pass about every 10 minutes. Bus numbers change so be careful to jump on the right bus. The cost to the centre is 500MNT (about 16p). Be aware that buses are usually crowded and you should keep your bags to the front of you.

Transport to and from locations in Ulaanbaatar can be arranged from various taxi companies. The school is about 7km from the city centre, on the south-western edge of the urban area. International staff tend to use Help Taxis (99652371) or Best Taxis (99716747) as they speak English. Taxi firms will usually charge between 10,000 and 15,000Tg for a one-way trip to or from the school. Keep plenty of small bills handy, as taxi drivers rarely have change. Taxi drivers can be helpful in finding stores and addresses until you get familiar with the city. The local staff can also assist you with booking a taxi.

In addition to regular taxis, when you are in the city you can often flag down just about any car for a ride. It is very common and no more risky than taking a marked taxi – particularly if you are not travelling alone. The going rate is 1000MNT per km, and bear in mind that quite often the driver will only have a vague idea of what they think the journey is worth – which means that whatever you initially offer them they are likely to accept.

### **Trains & Planes**

Domestic travel includes planes and trains. The Trans-Mongolian Railway connects northern Mongolia with the south. Trains are clean and comfortable, and offer a choice between a hard (second-class) seat and a sleeper cabin (sleeper cabins cost very little more than second class but are considerably more comfortable). They are not equipped with restaurant cars. The line linking Moscow and Beijing via Ulaanbaatar provides a shorter route between Russia and China than the older line through Manchuria. As trains operate on time and are reliable, they are the most convenient way to travel in-country.

Book flights abroad for Christmas well in advance.

Most nationalities will require Visas to visit China or Russia and these should be organised well in advance.

## Mongolia in General

### Helpful sayings in Mongolian for:

Hello	Sembenoo	Good	Sain
Goodbye	Bayirtai	Bad	Moo
Thank you	Bayirlaa	Yes	Teem/Teen
Sorry/Excuse me	Ootchlarai	No	Ugwi
How much?	Hid ve? (If it refers to price)		

### Culture

The Mongolian way of life is nomadic and intimately connected with the ways of animals. Despite urbanisation, the traditions of the steppes live on. Even in the cities, most Mongolians continue to live in a ger, a large, white felt tent that can be moved easily and has a universal layout: the door always faces south; towards the back and a little to the west is the place of honour set aside for guests; the back of the ger, the khoimor, is the place for elders and most treasured possessions; and on the back wall is the family altar, with Buddhist images, family photos and suitcases. Get a local to explain the dozens of traditional, religious and superstitious rules and customs associated with gers.

Mongolians have always taken wholeheartedly to Tibetan Buddhism and the links between Mongolia and Tibet are old and deep. Once in a lifetime, every devout Buddhist Mongolian tries to reach the holy city of Lhasa; the Tibetans in turn have relied on various Mongolian tribes to sustain their power. In Mongolia at the time of the communist takeover in 1921, there were 110,000 lamas (monks) living in about 700 monasteries. Beginning in the 1930s, thousands of monks were arrested, sent to Siberian labour camps and never heard from again. Monasteries were closed and ransacked and all religious worship and ceremonies outlawed. Not until 1990 was freedom of religion restored. Since then, there has been a phenomenal revival of Buddhism (and other religions). Monasteries have reopened, and even some ex-Communist Party officials have become lamas. Monasteries and temples (süm) always have Tibetan names. There is a significant minority of Sunni Muslims in the far western regions of Mongolia, most of whom are ethnic Kazaks.

Mongolia's paintings, music and literature are dominated by Tibetan Buddhism and nomadism. Tsam dances are performed to exorcise evil spirits and are influenced by nomadism and Shamanism. Outlawed during communism, they're beginning to be performed again. Traditional music involves a wide range of instruments and singing styles. In Mongolian khoomi singing, carefully trained male voices produce harmonic overtones from deep in the throat, releasing several notes at once. Traditional music and dance performances aren't complete without a touch of contortionism, an ancient Mongolian tradition.

Mongolian, the official language, is a member of the Ural-Altaic family of languages, which includes Finnish, Turkish, Kazak, Uzbek and Korean. Since 1944, the Russian Cyrillic alphabet has

been used to write Mongolian. The country has produced a huge literature, almost none of which is known to speakers of European languages. Only recently have scholars translated the most important text of all - Mongol-un Niguchan Tobchiyan (The Secret History of the Mongols) - which celebrates Mongolia's days of greatness.

An old Mongolian saying goes something like: 'Breakfast, keep for yourself; lunch, share with your friends; dinner, give to your enemies'. The biggest and most important meals for Mongolians are breakfast and lunch, which will usually consist of boiled mutton with lots of fat and flour and maybe some dairy products or rice. The Kazaks in western Mongolia add variety to their diet with horse meat. The Mongolians are big tea drinkers and the classic drink is suutei tsai (milk tea). Men who refuse to drink arkhi (vodka) are considered wimps, while herders make their own unique home brew airag, which is fermented horse's milk with an alcoholic content of about 3%. Many Mongolians distil it further to produce shimiin arkhi, which boosts the alcohol content to around 12%.

### ***People***

Archaeological finds suggest that primitive man appeared in what is now Mongolia 300,000 to 350,000 years ago and recent investigations suggest that Mongols take their origin from the Huns (or Hunnu) that lived in Central Asian Countries many years ago. The term 'Mongol' only gained prominence in the early 13th Century with the emergence of the Mongolian ethnic unit and the formation of a single state. The word 'Mongol' has two suggested meanings. The first is a geographical name 'Mon gol' which means the river Mon. The second suggestion is that it should be pronounced 'Mun gol', interpreting 'Mun' as correct, basic or true and 'gol' as pivot, centre or essence. The combination would then be 'true essence'.

The development of the present ethnic composition has gone through several historical stages. The formation and disintegration of numerous military tribal alliances of ancient nomads and their mass migrations over vast expanses of the Euro-Asian steppes resulted in the emergence of the Mongolian Nationality which consists 86% of Khalkh-Mongol tribes. The population of Mongolia consists of twenty ethnic groups although there are few differences in language. Only the Kazakhs speak in their mother tongue. Kazakhs, Derbets, Buryats and other national minorities are concentrated where they have always lived.

The 2016 population of Mongolia was estimated to be 3.1 million. Approximately 67% of the population is urbanised, 41% in Ulaanbaatar.

### ***Music and Singing***

Music is an important part of Mongolian culture. This is particularly the case in the countryside as families and friends will sing and play music together as a past time. A visitor to a countryside ger will often be coaxed into a song. Mongolians sing to their animals, sing about the environment, sing about nomadic lifestyles and sing about their patriotism.

Khoomi singing is a traditional form of song which comes from deep in the throat. Well trained

voices are able to produce a whole range of sounds at once. The different combinations of sounds are said to represent the different landscapes within Mongolia. Urtyn Duu or Long Songs are another form of vocal music, so called because of their length. Some famous singers have been able to memorise 20,000 verses. Most of the songs relate to stories about love or the countryside and are apparently best sung on horseback galloping across the steppe.

The most traditional of instruments is the morin huur or horse head fiddle. With two strings made from horse hair and a carved horse's head, it is most often used to accompany singing. Legend suggests the sounds produced are similar to those of the nomad's animals. The other instrument most often played is the Yatga (similar to a sitar). Music is often played at traditional and religious gatherings such as weddings.

### ***Cultural Tips***

You are almost inevitably going to want to visit the beautiful countryside, where you will encounter its residents. Things move slowly here and the standards of living you are used to are not the same. Part of Mongolia's charm is its ancient customs and traditions. If you can learn and respect them before you step into the countryside, then you may get a more welcome reception. You may also become a small part in helping to preserve these traditions for future visitors.

### **Don't**

- let a post or fence come between you if you are walking with Mongolians
- whistle inside a ger or house belonging to a Mongolian
- let your feet point in the direction of the altar (which will be in the north side) when sitting in a ger
- let people walk over your outstretched legs
- tread on the threshold of the ger when you walk over it
- lean against a support column furniture or wall of the ger, stamp out a fire or put water or any rubbish on it; fire is sacred
- walk in front of an older person
- turn your back to the altar and religious objects at the back of the ger
- touch other people's hats
- have long conversations in your own language in front of hosts who don't understand it
- point a knife in the direction of anyone
- pass anything to a Mongolian with just two fingers
- take food from a plate with your left hand
- wave your sleeve (as it is a mark of protest) or extend the little finger of your right hand (as this is a sign of disrespect)
- put your bag or books on the ground, it is a sign of disrespect

## **Do**

- keep your hat on when entering a ger, if you are wearing one, but lift it as a sign of greeting
- receive things with the right hand or both hands, and ensure that your sleeves are rolled down
- ensure you remove your gloves when shaking hands (if you are wearing them)
- walk round inside the ger in a clockwise direction
- receive food, a gift or anything similar from a Mongolian with both hands or with the right hand supported at the wrist or elbow
- take at least a sip or nibble of the delicacies offered pick up things with an open hand, with your palm facing upwards
- grab the hand of a Mongolian if you have accidentally kicked their feet
- sit with your feet underneath you or cross-legged
- leave a small gift, other than money, for your hosts

## ***The Ger***

The Mongolian Ger is ideally suited to the country's extremes of climate and the people's nomadic way of life. It is a multipurpose dwelling that can be easily collapsed, transported to another place and put up again fully preserving its original shape. Being constantly on the move with herds of animals or being on military campaigns compelled Mongols to build gers on carts. Old books contain pictures of such gers, temporary abodes in which families of three or four could spend the night or find shelter. After some time the use of carts stopped because they were clumsy and the gers could not be hauled over long distances as there was the danger of getting stuck in the mud somewhere or tipping over.

## **The Capital City**

Ulaanbaatar is the capital of Mongolia. There are approximately 1.2 million people living in the city, which represents almost half of the population of the entire country. The main language is Mongolian while some people also speak English and other foreign languages. Within the past five years, English has been adopted as Mongolia's official second language, and is increasingly being spoken, mainly by younger people. Mongolia is rapidly becoming westernised, and in some ways Ulaanbaatar is becoming a cosmopolitan city.

## **Geography and Climate**

Probably the first thing you were told about Mongolia was that it is very cold. This is true. But rather than try to anticipate the various weather patterns of the country, it is better to prepare for the worst-case scenario, which is - 40 degrees Celsius with a wind chill factor of -55 degrees Celsius.

Spring is sunny and extremely windy, and dust storms are common. The temperature ranges from



10 to 20 degrees Celsius (50F to 68 F), but the wind makes it seem colder. Summer is sunny, warm, and breezy, with an average temperature in the low 20s (70s F), though it can get as hot as 30 degrees (86 F). Autumn is short, with temperatures similar to those in spring. The rainy season takes place in August and/or September. The sun shines almost every day in Mongolia, even in winter, and the glare from the snow can be intense, so sunglasses are a necessity.

### **Health Issues in Mongolia**

Certain environmental factors in Mongolia may raise the risk or exacerbate some ailments such as colds and coughs.

Local conditions that may affect your health include air pollution caused by burning coal, wood, and dung in *ger* fires and by fossil fuel-burning power plants (especially in Ulaanbaatar); the relatively high altitude (about 1300 metres); the extreme cold and low humidity in the winter, which help to spread respiratory illnesses.

The best medicine is always preparation. As you begin your planning, packing and dreaming of coming to Mongolia, make sure that you also include on your “checklist of things to do before you leave”, a trip to a doctor, dentist and optometrist if you wear eyeglasses or contacts.

Most medication can be bought over the counter at pharmacies and is very reasonably priced, although it is easier to bring certain items, such as the contraceptive pill, from your home country.

### **Pre-Departure Preparation**

If you take any sort of prescription medications, get a year prescription written and filled. Bring all your medications with you. Do not send any in the mail or expect to find the brand that you use here in UB. Remember to also bring your medications with you in your carry-on luggage, have them well-labelled and keep the doctor’s prescription order with you in case you are asked to show it at customs.

Make sure you have checked the NHS website for routine vaccinations and ensure your boosters are up to date. Thanks to Mongolia’s colder climate, many of the tropical diseases are not prevalent here. However this is an area of the world with high to moderate risks of typhoid fever, travellers’ diarrhoea, rabies, hepatitis A and influenza, so talk to your doctor or public health travel clinic about getting vaccinations for these illnesses. Some of these vaccinations can only be done in special travel clinics or public health units, so talk to your doctor about where to get these. Since it can take several weeks for an immunisation to protect you against a disease, you should consult a travel health clinic or your family physician 6 to 8 weeks before your trip in order to allow enough time for the vaccines or immunising agent to take effect.

## **Dentist**

It is never fun to have dental problems while traveling so get your cleaning, check-up and any needed dental work done before you come. Most dental care products such as good toothpastes, toothbrushes and floss (mainly waxed) can be found here.

## **Optometrist**

If you wear glasses or contacts or are having problems with your eyes, get an eye examination before you come. If you wear contact lenses make sure that you bring with you enough of your favourite contact solution and enough pairs of contact to last you for the year.

Mongolia is very dry and often windy so some people who wear contact lenses here may have difficulties. Bring glasses with you as well. Glasses can be purchased here and so bringing your prescription from home is also a good idea.

It is sunny almost all year in Mongolia so you should bring a good pair of UV treated sunglasses.

## **Travel to Other Countries**

If you have plans to travel to other countries during your stay in Mongolia, you may want to get vaccinations or precautionary medications for some of these regions as well. You can find more information on the World Health Organisation website [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)

## **Health Insurance & Medical Care**

While there are many doctors and health care facilities here, the standard of medical care is low compared to western standards. If any major accident or illness occurs, you will most likely be evacuated to Beijing or another city with a high level of medical services. All teachers are given health care coverage. This insurance covers emergency evacuations, doctor visits and hospitalisation throughout the world. There is a \$200 deductible that must be paid by the insured person before the insurance company starts paying benefits. Once you sign up, you will be issued an insurance package and card. In order to receive benefits, you must call or e-mail for pre-approval before you visit the doctor or hospital. Several of these hospitals have some western physicians available. Remember that many doctors and hospitals will expect payment in cash, regardless of medical insurance. Check with HR as they will have details about the medical insurance.

## **The Final Word**

We have tried to cover most things but if there is something you would like to know and we have not mentioned, please ask.