



# British School of Ulaanbaatar

## 6.11 – Living and Working in Mongolia

The British School of Ulaanbaatar (BSU) recognises its responsibilities as an employer of expatriates in Mongolia and, as such, provides information to assist colleagues in adapting and living here. Ulaanbaatar is the capital of Mongolia and is home to many Mongolians who have moved here from the countryside for enhanced employment opportunities and as such the city has a cosmopolitan, busy atmosphere. Many locals spend their summer weekends in the spectacular countryside or along the banks of the Tuul River, barbecuing or picnicking, whilst winter sees families retreat indoors and as such, most malls have entertainment sections designed for children while others enjoy winter sports. You will find a great deal of openness and friendship offered to throughout the city, particularly if you make the effort to learn a little introductory Mongolian.

### Administrative and Legal Matters

#### Visas: Arrivals and Departures

There are complex visa requirements for entering and exiting Mongolia. Your initial arrival is granted via a single-entry visa which you will be required to obtain from your local Mongolian embassy before travel if one exists, or on arrival if not. Foreign citizens who enter Mongolia to work require a multi entry visa and an Alien Card (Expatriate ID Residence Card) which is normally processed in the weeks after arrival, following medicals and other paperwork. Soon after arriving in Mongolia, resident foreigners' fingerprints are taken at the Immigration Department and linked to your visa and Alien Card. Fingerprints will be re-taken at exit in order to check that there are no outstanding legal issues.

On leaving Mongolia for the final time, you must ensure that all debts and fines are settled, and all vehicles, mobile telephones and any lines of credit must be transferred out of your name. Bank accounts must be closed. It is also prudent for you to apply for a police clearance certificate prior to leaving Mongolia, as these cannot be issued after residency has ended. The HR team at the School can assist with this if required, and BSU recommends this takes place to support safeguarding procedures in future employment.

#### Religion and Culture

Mongolia is a predominantly Buddhist country although a significant minority of the population follow ancient Shamanistic (Tengrist) beliefs. Other religions are fully tolerated and a number of churches, mosques and a Hindu temple are available for worship in Ulaanbaatar although you are advised not to proselytise. We are not currently aware of a synagogue in Ulaanbaatar although there is a small Jewish community who meet for worship.

Please be aware that the presence of swastikas as decorations is not viewed as offensive here and they do not have the same connotation as in Europe. There are no public dress codes but

women should ensure that their shoulders and knees are covered if entering a monastery. Sensitivity, respect and cultural awareness are required.

Homosexuality is tolerated in Mongolia and Ulaanbaatar has a small LGBTQ community. However, please be aware for your own protection that until recently homosexuality was both taboo and illegal and some people, particularly older individuals, may react negatively to obvious displays of affection between same-sex couples. Mongolia does not currently recognise same-sex marriage although cohabitation is permitted.

## **Legal Matters**

Tourism is an important part of the Mongolian economy and as such foreigners including resident expatriates are generally treated well. Nevertheless, please be aware that certain matters including possession of drugs, violence etc are taken very seriously. Neither BSU nor your Embassy are likely to be able to provide significant assistance in such circumstances beyond helping to find a lawyer and assisting with communications with your family. Please be aware that certain actions which may be considered acceptable in your home country such as getting close to international borders or photographing certain state installations etc are viewed as offences in Mongolia.

Ulaanbaatar is fairly safe city, but as with all large urban areas, pickpockets do operate in some areas and you should take the normal precautions and report to the police as soon as possible. Be particularly vigilant in the Black Market and the poorer locations of the city such as the Ger Districts.

It is illegal to work beyond the terms of your visa, and the School has contractual restrictions in place for staff working in competing organisations or roles. Please refer to [6.10 – Private Tuition Policy](#) for more details.

## **Driving**

Foreigners can drive a car in Mongolia using a fully valid UK or EU license together with an International Driving Permit for up to three months after the date of first entry into Mongolia. After this period drivers will need to obtain a Mongolian driving license, which BSU can assist with. It is mandatory to carry your driving license and vehicle ownership papers at all times when driving. Heavy fines are likely to be imposed if you are caught without the correct paperwork in your possession. Traffic and parking fines must be paid within a specified time-period.

## **Finance and Banking**

BSU has a relationship with XacBank, and all staff will be required to open an account into which salary will be paid into twice a month. Transferring money back to international or UK accounts will incur a charge which differs depending on the bank involved. Additional bank cards can be requested for dependent spouses. In families where both spouses are working, the Bank may require two separate accounts be opened.

We recommend that you download the E-Barimt app. All formal receipts in Mongolia come with a QR code at the bottom which can be scanned to the app and a percentage of each receipt will be credited to your E-Barimt account, this is then credited to your bank account on a

quarterly basis. A 'draw' also takes place each quarter with the prize being given on presentation of the winning 'receipt'. If you do not wish to avail yourself of the scheme, then please pass your receipts on to your Assistant Teacher or other local colleagues who will be grateful to receive them.

## **Personal Matters**

Ulaanbaatar is a cosmopolitan city in which most items are available for purchase. However, the range of items may be significantly reduced from what you may be used to in other postings. Please also be aware that 'large' and 'extra-large' clothing sizes may be significantly smaller than those in your home country which can pose a difficulty for taller and larger expatriates.

The cost of living in Mongolia is cheaper than many other common expatriate postings. However, Given Mongolia's location import costs can add significantly to the price of foreign sourced items and this is reflected in the price.

## **Medication and Medical Care**

You should bring a few months' supply of prescription medication with you. If you have complex medical or prescription needs, you may wish to have a letter from your prescribing doctor explaining the nature of the issue.

Not all branded medication is available for purchase in Mongolia and the School doctor can assist you in finding a suitable generic/local alternative. Simple medications such as painkillers are not available for sale in supermarkets but are available from pharmacies. Pharmacies in Ulaanbaatar are well stocked and many are open 24 hours. Vitamin supplements and herbal medications are generally available.

Private medical appointments with a range of specialists are available at both InterMed and GrandMed hospitals. Doctors at these hospitals often speak at least some English. However, if the matter is nuanced or complex you may wish to bring a local friend/colleague along as a translator.

## **Pollution**

A significant percentage of the population of Ulaanbaatar live in 'ger districts' where they do not have access to the city's heating system. Therefore, they use stoves to heat their gers over the winter months. This can cause heavy levels of pollution across the city. The government and city authorities have taken significant steps to reduce this by banning certain fuels but a noticeable level of pollution remains at times and may cause discomfort if severe. Many locals wear pollution-reducing face masks to help combat this problem and protect their airways. If you are asthmatic or otherwise sensitive to pollution you may wish to do the same.

## **Food**

Mongolian cuisine is heavily meat and dairy based; Mongolian meat is high quality, free range and tasty, but it often has a higher fat-content than expatriates are used to in their home countries. Muslim expatriates can find halal meat on sale in some supermarkets, but you may

wish to speak to the butcher on duty as it is sometimes found on display next to pork products. Items other than meat are not routinely labelled 'halal'. Kosher food is not generally available.

A full range of vegetables and fruit can be purchased from supermarkets and farmers markets. You may wish to disinfect fruit and vegetables which are to be eaten uncooked or unpeeled.

Vegetarians and Vegans will be able to cater for their diet at home but may struggle in some restaurants, particularly outside Ulaanbaatar. Gluten free products are available in the supermarkets.

Much of the imported food is sourced from Russia, Korea and Germany so if you have favourite foods, it may be useful to learn the terms in those languages as well as in Mongolian. Home favourites (e.g., marmite, branded sauces, certain biscuits etc) can be hard to find and if these are an important part of your diet you may wish to bring some with you.

As with most capital cities, Ulaanbaatar has a vibrant restaurant scene with many world cuisines catered for. If you have allergies you may wish to ask a local colleague to translate a list of what you need to avoid which can be handed over to the waiter to ensure they understand your needs.

You can order food for delivery using the Songo or TokTok apps.

### **Potable Water**

Tap water in Ulaanbaatar is safe to drink and cook with, however, the pipes delivering the water may not be clean. All school apartments are fitted with a filter for drinking water.

Some people with a sensitive system may struggle in the first few weeks in Ulaanbaatar as you adjust to the new environment. Probiotic tablets can assist with this. If you struggle with tablets probiotic drinks and yoghurts can be purchased in shops.

Bottled water is readily available and cheap to purchase, you are recommended to check that the seal is intact, and the bottle has not been refilled before drinking.

If you are travelling in the countryside and do not have enough safe water with you there are often wells in local settlements although you may wish to use a personal filter or sterilising tablets. It is also possible to drink from wild sources (rivers and fresh lakes) if you have a filter with you. In such situations, try to observe where animals drink from and fill your bottles upstream from the trampled or muddy areas.

### **Alcohol**

Alcohol is freely available in both shops and restaurants. The exception to this is that sale is banned on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of every month (private consumption at home is permitted). Sales of alcohol may also be banned on other days by way of government decree. Such bans will be notified in the local newspapers and on Facebook.

### **Clothing**

Clothing is available for purchase in Ulaanbaatar and can also be stitched to order. However, the range particularly for western branded stores, is limited and western suits in particular can be hard to find and expensive to purchase off the peg. You may wish to bring enough formal

work clothing for your first year with you. Clothing for older children (10-14) can be difficult to find if they are not yet able to wear adult clothes so you may wish to purchase items before travelling.

Winter and outdoor clothing is readily available in Ulaanbaatar. Popular brands include North Face, Jack Wolfskin, Columbia and Snowimage. However, as mentioned above, the import costs for such items can mean it is cheaper to purchase them elsewhere. If you do choose to purchase winter equipment at home, please make sure that it can cope with temperatures of below -30°C otherwise you may need to purchase additional items here.

### **Sports Equipment**

Many Mongolians enjoy activities in the beautiful and spectacular countryside. As such, sports and camping equipment is readily available in Ulaanbaatar.

### **Books**

There are a number of book shops in Ulaanbaatar which carry a limited range of English language books (very few other foreign language books are available). You may wish to bring an e-book reader with you.

### **Cosmetics and Toiletries**

Cosmetics and Toiletries are available in Ulaanbaatar. However, if you have a favourite brand from home you may wish to bring this with you.

### **Household Items**

BSU provides staff who live in School accommodation with basic household equipment including kitchen equipment, towels and bedding. Household items are readily available for purchase in Ulaanbaatar but if you have favourite items you may wish to bring them with you.

Internet and a television cable subscription are provided but you may wish to purchase an Apple TV, Fire Stick or equivalent to enable you to watch streaming services without connecting a laptop.

### **Internet Shopping**

Retailers such as Amazon do deliver to Mongolia (Amazon US is quicker than UK) and there are many local equivalents. It is recommended that any foreign purchases are sent by courier or tracked and signed for delivery. Delivery times can be lengthy.

### **Utilities**

Mongolia operates a 220V, European/Russian 2 pin system. If you are relocating from the North or South America, you will need to replace equipment or bring voltage transformers with you. If you are relocating from elsewhere you may wish to bring a plug converter with you for the first day. However, multiway plug boards are readily available in local shops.

Power cuts do happen from time to time but rarely last long. You may wish to keep a torch in your apartment for such an eventuality.

Hot and cold water is provided as a utility and centrally distributed. Hot water is turned off centrally in UB for two weeks of the year during the summer whilst cleaning and maintenance takes place.

### **Getting Around**

BSU can help you to obtain a local driving licence (see above). If you do not wish to drive yourself you can get an official taxi (the app UB Cab is helpful), alternatively you can flag down an informal 'gypsy' cab which is akin to paid hitchhiking but quite common in the region.

Traffic in Ulaanbaatar is often congested, slow and can appear somewhat 'chaotic' to the uninitiated. You should allow at least an hour to get from the School to the centre of town in rush hour and sometimes up to two. Accidents are not uncommon but rarely serious due to the slow speed of traffic. If you are involved in an accident, you must not leave the scene and are required to wait for the police to attend.