

ProjectsAbroad™

Projects Abroad Mongolia Official Newsletter *September 2013*

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My Volunteer Story – Karen Nolan from UK

I've wanted to visit Mongolia for as long as I can remember. Maybe something I read, a programme I saw on TV, but however the seed was planted, something stuck. I've also wanted to do some long term volunteering for a while so when the opportunity arose I took the plunge and combined the two!

The views from the aircraft having given me an idea of this vast, empty country, I landed at Ulaanbaatar International Airport on a sunny June morning to be welcomed by the smiling face of Enkhee, one of the Projects Abroad staff. We drove into the centre of the city to meet my host family and see where I would be living for the next 3 months. I met my 'host mother' and the other members of the family, who immediately made me feel welcome and helped me to settle in to their apartment.

After a long sleep and a little bit of time to get used to my new surroundings, I had my induction of Ulaanbaatar (or UB as it's known to the locals!) and had the opportunity to learn some of the fascinating local customs:

- Don't put your bag on the floor as it's considered disrespectful to the things inside it
- If you accidentally kick someone's foot, the custom is to shake their hand and apologise..... always interesting on a crowded bus!

My placement was to be an English teacher in state school number 13, in the west side of the city, teaching children aged between 9 and 18. My first day was a little nerve wracking as I wasn't sure what sort of reception I would get from the students. As it turned out, my nerves were completely unnecessary as I was greeted with a classroom full of interested and enthusiastic faces. I also met my placement supervisor, Degi, who gave me great support and encouragement throughout my placement.

Although I had the chance to prepare some lessons in advance before arriving in Mongolia, it's difficult to do specific planning until you know exactly who you're going to be teaching. One of the main challenges is that there is a very mixed ability level within each class – some of the students are almost fluent and others have a much more basic knowledge and understanding of English. The hardest element is ensuring that the students with a higher level of knowledge aren't held back when you are helping the less confident members of the class. Having said that, somehow it all came together as the students understood the situation and helped each other.

I also taught a class of English teachers from School Number 13 and from some of the other schools in the area. This felt very productive because this way, it's possible to reach more students than just the ones who are in front of you in the classes. The teachers were very enthusiastic and I hope they will take some of the things they learned back to their classes.

I was also given the opportunity to take part in a different placement one day each week, which was teaching English to some of the staff in a Women and Children's Hospital in a district to the west of the city centre. I had two classes of two hours each, with doctors, scientists and engineers in the morning and nurses, midwives and administrators in the afternoon. As with the school, the students were of very mixed ability but again the classes came together and the students gained in confidence and improved their conversational ability, along with having some fun along the way!

One of the most rewarding parts of my time in Mongolia was seeing the students' progress and gain in knowledge and confidence. The lessons took place every day and some of the students attended for the two and a half months of my placement. It's a great feeling to know that you are helping the students to invest in their futures by learning English.

I was also lucky enough to be able to travel when my timetable permitted and made trips to the Gobi Desert, Kharkhorin, Erdenet and Terelj National Park, where I rode a horse for the first time in 20 years and found some muscles I didn't know I had! UB is an interesting city but to see the real Mongolia takes a bit of time and effort. Once you are out of the city, the 'roads' are basically dirt tracks but it's worth being bounced around a bit to see the other side of this beautiful country. Being in the countryside really reveals the true meaning of the phrase 'in the middle of nowhere'! Witnessing the nomadic lifestyle really makes you feel as though you are in another world and in another time.

I was also very lucky in that my trip coincided with the annual Naadam Festival which takes place in July. The build-up starts a couple of weeks in advance as Mongolians start to prepare for the event, which involves wrestling, archery and horse racing. Although known as the three 'manly sports,' it's great to see that women are included in the archery competition. I was lucky enough to get a ticket for a seat inside the stadium with some of the other volunteers and I can honestly say that it was one of the most spectacular and colourful events I have ever seen.

My 10 week placement went by all too quickly and it was time to say goodbye to the students, teachers and my host family, who had really made me feel as though I was part of the family.



It's hard to summarise my experience in a few lines, but my visit to Mongolia was one of the best things I have ever done. This is a stunning country with fascinating customs and some of the most hospitable people I have ever encountered. It's a country which is moving forward but at the same time refuses to let go of hundreds if not thousands of years of tradition. Spending two and a half months in Mongolia as a volunteer English teacher is an experience I will never forget. As well as gaining some new skills and an insight into this fascinating country, I have also made some lifelong friends.



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› Queen's University student gains worthwhile experience in journalism while volunteering in Mongolia

20-year-old Natasa Bansagi, a Political Studies major from Queen's University in Ontario, had wanted to work in Journalism as a TV reporter or an anchor. Having already gained a little understanding of journalism at university and at various television stations in Canada, Natasa wanted to gain more experience in a different country and culture. To do this, she embarked on a three month volunteer adventure with the Projects Abroad Journalism Project in Mongolia.

"My dream is to become a TV reporter or an anchor. I'd love to do my Master's in journalism as well. So, I decided to come to Mongolia and work at the NTV TV station."

Natasa was placed at NTV, one of the top five TV stations in Mongolia. Some

of her work included anchoring the weekly 10-minute English news show, interviewing people, reporting on stories and current events in Ulaanbaatar and helping with editing the segments and programs. "When I first heard that I was going to be anchoring the weekly English news program, which I was able to do eight times in total, I was so excited because, this is exactly what I wanted to do. I had heard that not only was it going to be shown on TV, but also on the website and on airlines. So, I was super excited about that and being able to do it in the studio was just a phenomenal experience."

During her three months' stay, Natasa was also able to work on a news story about the Mongolian nomadic lifestyle, where Natasa had the opportunity to visit a real nomadic family in the Zavkhan

Province. "It was so rewarding because I was able to work on it right from the beginning; from the planning stages up to the point where we went there with the crew. Afterwards, putting the program together, editing it, thinking about which clips to use, how to structure the program and sitting with the professional video editor as he changed and fixed things. Just seeing through its whole progression was an incredible."

"One of my supervisors said that working on programs is like looking after a baby. It progresses through all the different stages and you have to really care for him through each stage. I really saw that progression through for this nomadic life style program- The Destination Nomad" explains Natasa.

Natasa's volunteering experience has taught her a lot; such as working on technical issues, editing, putting news segments together and reporting. "I learned more about reporting which is exactly what I'd like to get into in future; how to present myself on camera in different circumstances. Through this internship, I really realized that TV journalism is not a 9-5 job. It can be, but it depends what you make of it. Working hard in the industry will get you far, as it gives you the chance to prove yourself to the colleagues you are working with. If you love what you do, you won't mind working long hours, even if that means 12-hour days."

At the end of her project, Natasa explained that the experience she gained with Projects Abroad Mongolia would help her with her job working at her university's local TV station: "I'm able to bring all these elements, all this information from professionals and all my new ideas into my work in the future. And I am very happy for that."

Aside from her work, she enjoyed staying with a Mongolian host family and experiencing, first hand, life in a new country, a new language and new people half way across the world. Other activities she participated in included spending time with the local staff at the NTV news station, traveling to the beautiful Mongolian countryside and participating in events organized by Projects Abroad.

After having spent three months in Mongolia, Natasa advises future volunteers: "It's really important to respect the culture and traditions. Realize and be aware that you are in a different country and that will enable you to really get far and gain a lot more experience. Because, showing that kind of attitude will allow those people you work with to respect you more and to maybe give you bigger tasks."

"All in all, I was really happy to be able to have this experience; the cultural and professional experience I have gained will help me in the future. It's been even more rewarding than I expected it to be. Incredible! And out of this world! It definitely made me grow as a person, as a journalist, and as a world traveler."



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26 NIGHTS AND 27 DAYS IN MONGOLIA by Frederique Talbot from France

First of all I have to explain what I was looking for when I decided to come to Mongolia. For me it was a good solution to link adventure and professional experience.

Choosing Projects Abroad gave me this possibility.

After hours and hours, flying over France and Russia, I was finally in Mongolia. An unknown country where people are famous for their hospitality. Here, all is different: the landscape, people and the language.

The Mongolia people have similarities with Russians and people from other countries like Kazakhstan. Moreover as Mongolia is close to China, the architecture is also inspired by Asian culture. When you land in this country it is a kind of mix between many different cultural Asian identities. Chinghis Khan Airport is like a mirage in the desert. No one can



imagine an international airport in the middle of nowhere. It was my first contact with this unknown country. After crossing a kind of door, the taxi driver just goes straight onto a wild road. So how surprised I was to discover people, just like any other in France, who go to work wearing a suit or jeans like ordinary people. Maybe I'm the one who looks strange!? I want to explain to you that like every tourist I bought the "Lonely Planet" about this dreamland. Mongolians are described with their traditional clothes just as if time has stopped. Except on the roads which are just hills, Mongolians are finally as modern as other developed countries. Nevertheless everything looks different. I just passed in front of the private national TV: NTV. It was my first contact with what would be my new place to work.

It wasn't far to my host family address.

When I was looking around me, I realized that I have done what I have been dreaming about for months and months: I was here in Mongolia. And suddenly my new house, near a stadium: "It was just here, Naadam took place here two weeks ago." Naadam is a great celebration in Mongolia. For 3 days you can see horseracing and many different traditional competitions in honour of the freedom of the country and the legendary Chinghis Khaan. Thanks to Lonely Planet I can also find this kind of information. I was a little bit disappointed to not have the possibility to watch this show but in front of myself I know that it wouldn't affect me a lot.

Discovering my new family was quite strange. I didn't know if I have to kiss the mother or just shake her hand. I was just here in front of her like an orphan who was discovering her future parents for the first time. Saule has something kind from her eyes: I couldn't explain it. This is the mother of my new Kazakhs family. She is a teacher who gives lessons to young child between 6 and 8. Her husband Arshabek is a doctor specialist in surgery. In France this kind of family is nearer to the high class than the lower one.

In Mongolia this couple can't travel abroad, they just have an ordinary car whereas the roads are not good at all. They just belong to the middle class with their four children. This is one of the warmest families I've ever met. Arshabek considered me like one of his daughters. I wanted to live just like an ordinary Mongolian and thanks to them I could do exactly that. At the beginning we tried to speak to each other about what we like. Here, the United States of America doesn't influence the youth. And the two preteen daughters don't like listening to music like Alicia Keys or Jay-Z. They just don't know them as incredible it can be appear. They both love Korean pop. Ayjarik the younger one loves Mongolian Hip-Pop but she has never heard about Drake or Kanye West. Kunshuak and her little sisters allowed me to understand who inspires the clothes of the young people in the street. There are too many South Korean girl-bands on the Korean music billboard.



In Mongolia 80% of people are Buddhist, 5% Muslims, 5% Christian and 10 % don't have any religion. My host family was Muslims Kazak. When I'm arrived it was Ramadan and they invite me to break the fast with them before going to a new mosque, which was inaugurated by the Turkish prime minister. I liked the way they give me the milk: always with the right hand. And you have to mark your respect to this tradition; it's very important, it's the proof of your politeness towards your host. Moreover I tried to learn some words. It wasn't easy because of the use of the throat and the tongue. So Europeans have many difficulties to catch up the pronunciation. May be that's why most of the expatriates give up the learning of this language.

My Kazakh family also invited me to share the meal after the circumcision of the elder boys. And the customs put emphasis on conviviality. Everyone was sitting on the floor around Mongolian and Kazakhs dishes. It was a great moment of cultural sharing. It was one of the best times of my trip.

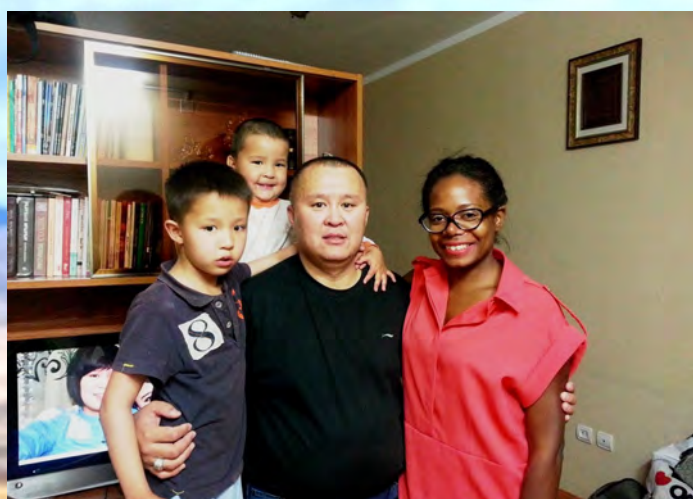
Working in Mongolia was a great challenge. I had to learn using my experience without doing the things in my way. First I met NTV team. It's a national private channel. Every week they brief the international news, which deals with Mongolian information. It's quite a hard situation to make on Sunday the brief of all the week. My co-worker and I had to pay attention about the evolution of information. We wrote all the leads during the week thanks to some articles picked from Infomongolia.com



The video-data guys are in charge of putting images on our word. The main difference with a French newsroom is that the editors look at the video data and explain what they want. I also had to be prepared to become an anchor woman for the first time. I was feeling pressure about this task because I wanted to give my best. Unfortunately after this stressful week the journalist, who speak English, were all on vacation. So I had to leave the newsroom and I started to work for Capital Guide magazine and also the “Mongolian Vogue” - “Goodali”.

This job permitted me to meet different expatriates who have business in that country. They all have in common the envy to stay in Mongolia. “Here I’m someone,” said the 73-year-old owner of Helmut Sacher’s pastry. They feel at home in this part of Asia even if most of the time they don’t speak Mongolian. There are so many opportunities for expatriates. I met Jeannette who is from Norway. She fell in love with Mongolia and her tourist guide a few years ago. Now she’s living in the steppes with her husband and their infant. Jeannette and her husband propose to tourists to live in the countryside and ride horses in the Mongolian countryside, for two days. I gave thanks to them that I could live without all the modern things that I use every day. It was so peaceful. It was my last Mongolian souvenirs.

This trip taught me to be patient and showed me how different the culture could be even if there is a western influence in this country. Mongolia is growing up. So it has to learn how to manage all its resources and how to dispatch it. Everything changes so quickly, maybe too fast. I hope Mongolia can keep for a long time its cultural identity, because it is what tourists like, and specially me!



Нийслэл guide 75

АЯЛАЛ+ AMPOAT

Марин Эстелл Тибержэйн,
Фредерик Талбот

Та хэзээ нэгэн цагт хувийн кофе шоп, ресторан, уушийн газартай болохыг мөрөөдөж байсан уу? Хэрэв тийм бол хэдий хүртэл санхүүгийн болон хүн хүчний асуудал, байршлаас болж энэ бүхнээ хойш тавьсаар байх юм бэ? Танаас юугаараа ч илүү биш, магадгүй жаахан зориг гаргасан байж мэдэх, ингэснийхээ ч хүчинд мөрөөдөлдөө хүрч чадсан хүмүүстэй Нийслэл guide таныг уулзуулахаар шийдлээ. Тэдний хувьд хэлний бэрхшээл ч асуудал биш байжээ!