

Peoples of Mongolia



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Cover

Girl with Sweets

Dadal Sum, 2007

Foreword

Early on the morning of the 19th of August 2006, Gek and I along with 9 other VSO volunteers, landed at Ulaanbaatar's Chinggis Khaan International Airport (now known as Buyant Ukhaa International Airport) to begin our two winters' stay in Mongolia. To mark the 15th anniversary of our arrival, this exhibition of miniature photographs brings together a selection of portraits of Mongolia's peoples captured during our stay in the county.

The people of Mongolia can be divided into two groups, one living Ulaanbaatar (UB) and those who don't, including the nomads, roughly in the proportion of 1 to 1. This gives the capital a density of around 330/km², whilst the rest of the country is 1 person per km². To put this into context, Wales which is mainly rural, has 150/km² with almost the same population, but only 16% of whom live in Cardiff, the capital.

The portraits included here are displayed to reflect this divide. On the left, behind the portraits, is a photograph taken of the River Onon in Khentii Aimag and the central image was taken at the Eagle Festival in the Terelj National Park. On the righthand wall, the façade of Mongolia's Parliament in Sukhbaatar Square in UB.

Ulaanbaatar



New Parliament Front, UB - 2007



Dad and Daughter

Ulaanbaatar, 2007

I got the feeling that Mongolian men are, in the main very comfortable with children, with noticeably more of them happy to take on a caring role than I was used to in the UK.

Although his chap does seem to be looking for mummy!

Beriga

Ulaanbaatar, 2006

In the final week of our VSO orientation programme, we had the opportunity to stay with a Mongolian family for a few days. I was fortunate enough to be allocated a 'home stay' with Shuree and Khass together with 2-year-old Beriga. They all made me feel very welcome with Shuree showing me around UB whilst Khass was at work in the family's foundry in the Ger District. My new friends spoke perfect English, both having spent time working overseas, Shuree as an air hostess and Khass as a boxer in London's East End.





Botu

Ulaanbaatar, 2006

This photograph was cut from one I took in October, on our first visit to one of UB's art galleries. Six months later we met this young lady at Gek's 'Fusion' exhibition, put on to raise funds for the Lotus Children Centre. She recognised herself in the photograph we had on display there. Botu is also an artist, having just returned to UB from studying abroad.

Family

Ulaanbaatar, 2007

Another example of a guy comfortable with a baby. The other interesting aspect of this image is the absence of traditional Mongolian attire. More western youth style of the noughties.





Lotus Children

Ulaanbaatar, 2006

Founded in 1995 by Australian Ananda Kalika (Didi), the Lotus Children Centre provides security and care for the city's street and other vulnerable children, at one stage 150 of them, including abandoned babies. This image was taken on our first visit to the Centre when it was located in Yarmag, a ger district on the outskirts of UB. Gek later joined the Centre for her VSO placement, raising funds for, overseeing the creation of and teaching the kids in, a new craft centre.

Mother and Daughter

Ulaanbaatar, 2007

More traditional attire for mother and daughter. Well, I am assuming they are so related. The daughter's look says it all. This demonstrates the beauty you can find in a random click; don't you think?





Traveller

Ulaanbaatar, 2007

And another one. This young man was walking across Sukhbaatar Square, the focal point of the capital, after the State Store. A guess he is an army guy coming on leave and celebrating his arrival in the city with a cigarette.

Wedding Couple

Ulaanbaatar, 2007

Another long shot taken across Sukhbaatar Square, a wedding couple dressed in traditional dells. Not sure if he was crying? Very unlikely. Bit of a puzzle here.



Mongolia



River Onon, Khentii Aimag – 2007



Terelj National Park - 2008



Culture Academic

Steppes, 2006

As part of the orientation week, we visited a ger on the steppes in the company of a culture expert from UB University, whose name I cannot unfortunately remember. He explained the local etiquette when entering a ger - don't stand on the door sill and proceed in a clockwise direction once inside. He also told us that gers were always built with the door facing south, which is how the model in the gallery is positioned.

Kids at Play

Steppes, 2006

The ger was home to these two lovely kids. They didn't seem at all fazed by our sudden appearance. Regretfully I missed a photo opportunity when the young girl demonstrated her horse-riding skills. Of course, being an engineer, I couldn't not join them on the floor to play with the Lego.





Naadam Festival

Dadal, 2007

The Naadam is an annual summer event, showcasing the “Three Games of Men” which are Mongolian wrestling, horse racing and archery. We were fortunate enough to be at the Dadal Soum event in Khentii Province, the home of the Buryat people with their distinctive local dress and customs.

Naadam Festival

Dadal, 2007

Dadal Soum is one of two places that could have been the birth place of Genghis Khan, although he himself was not a Buryat, who can also be found north of the Mongolian-Russian border.





Naadam Festival

Dadal, 2007

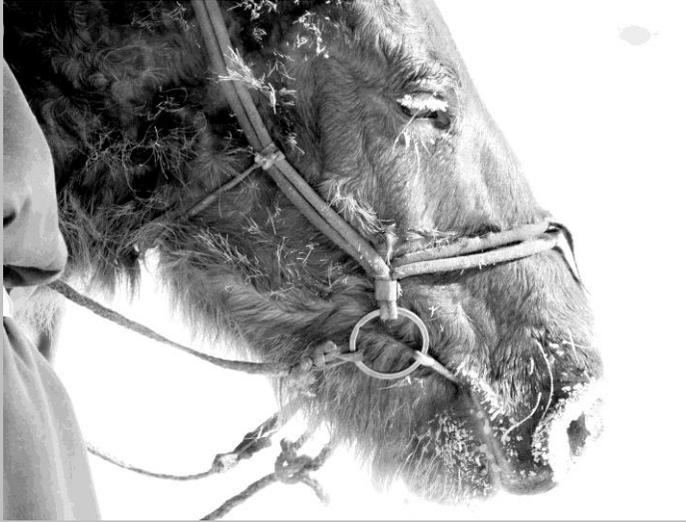
This young lady was very curious about this rather strange looking chap sat near her in the viewing stands. A very confident young lady. Not many Europeans ventured this far from UB at the time. But after a very short assessment, she decided that I was OK and offered me one of her sweets. Very welcome I felt.

Naadam Festival

Dadal, 2007

Naadam horse racing is not for the faint hearted. This young lad had just finished a 20+ km cross country race, bare backed. All the jockeys were as young as he, not more than 12 years old. The horses arrived looking relatively fresh, unlike the riders who all looked exhausted. Even the winner was too tired to celebrate his achievement.





The Mongolian Horse

Terelj, 2008

There are reported to be more than 3 million horses in the country. One for every man, woman and child. They live outside all year round, coping with temperatures from over 30⁰ C in summer down to -40⁰ C in winter. Different regions of the county have horses with different characteristics. Dadal horses are the fastest with Darkhad being the strongest. The later can carry more than their own weight. This chap was snapped at the winter Eagle Festival in Terelj.

The Horse Man

Terelj, 2008

The Golden Eagle Festive is an annual event held in the eastern aimag of Bayan-Ogii where the Kazakh hunters use the birds to catch red foxes and hares. Prizes are awarded here for “speed, agility and accuracy as well as the best traditional Kazakh dress.”





Fun Ride

Terelj, 2008

We were very fortunate to see the hunters with their eagles in Terelj National Park at the beginning of February, just to the west of UB, some 1,800 km from their home 'land'. The trip had taken the riders, eagles and horses 4 days to make the journey. Some of the hunters offered youngsters a ride, here with the young girl taking the reins.

Hunter

Terelj, 2008

The hunting is done from horse back during the winter months when the prey is more easily seen against the white snow-covered landscape. The female eagles are trained from very young but are returned to the wild again after 4 to 10 years, when they are still of breeding age.

This hunter and his eagle were much photographed and would have won the best traditional dress prize if there had been one, I am sure.



Acknowledgements

We much appreciated the hospitality of all the people we met in Mongolia, always a warm welcome and helping hand when needed.

Thank you for visiting the Gek Contemporary.

Hope to see you again soon.