

My Journey in Mongolia

Before I start, thank you to anyone and everyone who helped me get here today and assist in me going on this extraordinary adventure. This is a recount of what I did during my expedition.

I have spent a year fundraising doing many events, that many people helped me with. For example, I did a sponsored swim, many Mongolia badge pack evenings (with brownies and guides) and a coffee morning with my neighbours to name but a few.

Now after a long year of planning I have finally completed the trip to the strange country of Mongolia. I began my journey on Saturday 27th July, at Heathrow airport and after a sad goodbye to my family we were off.

Fun Fact
A lot of Mongolian Cuisine is meat based making it quite difficult for vegetarians!



The adventure begins...

We began by boarding my first long haul flight. It was a very large plane going 2,4,2, across, much larger than one I had ever been on before! We were seated in the rows of 4 and we all had TVs, my wish had come true! It was all going great and the food was ok until 4 and a half hours in when I broke my TV!!!! Oops, I really didn't mean to and 2 others from our group also broke theirs!

10 hours later, from when we had taken off, we arrived at the Beijing airport. It was a very pretty airport however not much to do and with an 8-hour gap between the first and second plane we quickly got bored. Many card games and diary entries later we got on our second plane to Mongolia. This plane was only small and was only going to be a two-hour flight. However, I fell asleep as soon as we sat down and slept for most of it, I even missed the safety brief!

Fun Fact
in Mongolia the horse to person ratio is 13:1

Then in Mongolia we headed out of the Chinggis Khan airport (Chinggis also known as Genghis) where we met our guides (two volunteers to help with translation), who then took us to the guesthouse where we would be staying.

The guesthouse was amazing, and we were in rooms of 4. We would also be swapping around every three weeks so we could be with different people. Even the bathrooms were incredible, and the shower could be converted into a steam room or even a sauna!!!! It was nothing to what we expected!

My first impressions of Mongolia were that even in summer there was still a lot of pollution which was clear as we went past large industries on our way to the guesthouse, however inside the city it seems like a different place with more buildings and more technology and living conditions. Although there is lots of technology you could tell the difference between Mongolia and here from what I believed was where majority of the population lived.



Week one...

Our very first day we were introduced to the project and our itinerary which would include us caring for and teaching children from the age of 2-15 at both a centre and a school. We would also be getting the chance to renovate the centre we were at later on during the trip. The centre we would be visiting has the intention of helping single mothers, by looking after their children so they could go out and work. Later that day we also had a chance to meet our new Mongolian peers which was a great way to help break the ice before the sessions throughout the next couple of weeks. It was then back to the guesthouse for lots of planning 😞 which we had no idea we were supposed to do.

Throughout the rest of the week I spent my mornings in the child smile centre. They had two groups that we were to educate/play with. These were 2-5-year olds and 6+. Each of our activities with them we had planned as a group the night before and from crafts to lessons

we managed to fill the time. The child smile centre has been built up over time, it began as a single room. It now has another, and a second story has also been made on top. Another key part to the place which shall always be remembered (not in a good way) is the toilet. A small shack surrounding a deep pit with two planks of wood over it. (I luckily never needed to use it, thank goodness!)

I spent the first week with the 2-5-year olds, 6 girls and 1 boy, whom were adorable and even though I wasn't supposed to have favourites I certainly did!) We did head shoulders knees and toes and ring a ring a roses which were definitely loved and to keep them, and us 😊, entertained we did lots of crafts including paper chain finger printing which we used to decorate the room. Not many of them had disabilities like we were told, or very obvious ones anyway but one of them, who was two, had a heart deficiency. They were great fun and I'm sure they enjoyed it to.

In the afternoons we taught at a school, called school 40 (they label their schools with numbers), our intention; to help them improve their English. We were split into two groups and each group was given a small class to teach. We chose many topics to teach them, from time to body parts, making it fun with games like 'Fruit Salad' and 'What's the Time Mr Wolf'. We also did two on one conversations so we would go around and sit down with two of them and ask them questions so they could practice speaking and we could learn more about them and they could learn more about us, I was petrified however it got easier as we went further into the week as we got to know them more.



Pictures of me during my first week with the children of both the school (top photo) and the child smile (other two photos).

Week one over... now for the weekend...

It was then the weekend, our first two days of sightseeing. Saturday morning, we were picked up and taken to the Gur district where we would visit and see the owner of the Child Smile's home. She had bought some land and had two Gers where her and her 7 children live. It was interesting to see the way they live as they had a large TV and working electricity however, they don't have a toilet as sanitary isn't considered as important.



We also went to the international intellect museum where we saw a man's giant collection of puzzles covering a whole 5 floors! I didn't even know there were enough puzzles to cover one!! After lunch we went up the Zaison memorial and as it is up the top of Zaison hill we got the most mesmerising views of the city. To finish off we also went to the Bogd Khan Winter Palace. It was a very eventful day!

Sunday was great fun as we spent it with some of the girl scouts of Mongolia. It was very interesting to find out the difference in the number of members as in England we have half a million members however in Mongolia they only have 2000. With the guides we went to the International Children's Complex and taught each other our different ways and played many games. Sunday was a good day where we met many good friends.



That evening we also got the opportunity to visit a karaoke bar where we were given a private room. It was hilarious and from singing our hearts out to cheering each other on we all had a great time. (We were also all deaf by the end of it 😊)

Week two... and I'm already fed up of meat!

The second week came around fast. My morning group had swapped with the others, so we were now with the 6+ instead of the 2-5s enabling us to teach the older children a bit like in the afternoons at school. Like our school sessions we covered different topics however as we had more time to fill, we played even more games as well as singing many songs. We also created a new game called word man, which is the same as hangman, but we didn't know anything about capital punishment and we didn't want someone going 'Hey, that's how my Uncle died'!!!! But it was all okay and most of our sessions ran smoothly and the kids enjoyed themselves.

In the afternoons we were still with the school children however we also swapped groups as apparently one group didn't listen as much. But we found them okay and by swapping groups we also didn't have to plan as much as the other group had covered different





topics, yay. At the end of the week however we had to say goodbye as it was our last day 😞, it was sad to say goodbye however you could tell we had made a difference as their English was so much better.

Week two done... the weekend awaits!

On our next weekend we went to the Terelij National park. We went to many attractions like the Genghis Khan statue and a Buddhist temple where we took amazing photographs and selfies. I even got a selfie with Genghis Khan after walking up the statue to where you can see amazing views. We also visited Turtle rock where we rock climbed up the side to see a small cave inside. We then spent that night inside Gers (also known as yurts) which was a fun experience a bit like glamping I had also held an eagle earlier that day and ridden a camel (not a very comfortable experience, especially for my nose) as I was only going to be there once, and I didn't want to miss out on the experience.

The next day we woke up at 5 o'clock!!! We saw sunrise and walked up a steep hill to see the views before heading back to the city in our little red bus. When we were back in the city, we took a trip to the biggest souvenir shop in Ulaanbaatar, a whole floor of gifts!!!! It was great and I spent lots of money before heading back to finish planning for the rest of the week.

Final Week...

It was then the last week. Our mornings continued to be sessions in the child smile centre where I was again with the 2-5s, yippee! We did many more crafts including masks which were my personal favourite and the kids enjoyed them to.

In the afternoons we were also at the child smile where we helped them do renovation. We were there to help them fill in cracks and slop watered down cement onto the walls. The room we were renovating was upstairs, which would be used as a place for the single mothers I mentioned earlier, to work. We had great fun doing this and even though we didn't do much, and we didn't do it for very long I believe we helped them towards their incredible goal.



Fun Fact
in England we say
Genghis Khan, in
Mongolia they
say Chinggis.

On our very last Friday we said our goodbyes to the child smile centre which were quite teary and full of gifts for both us and them. I had the honour of giving the owner some toys we had bought for the 2-5s and it was amazing to see the look on her face and the pleasure she had had from us being there.

Friday afternoon we had our photo in Mongolian dress which was hilarious. I was on a stall in the back row and we were all struggling not to fall off. We also went to the supermarket for any final souvenirs/sweets and then of course we had to

pack. Packing was sad to do as after three weeks of making friends and exploring this new country it was hard to believe that we were going to leave.

The next morning, we left for the airport with some stowaways we had found the night before NITS! (Our parents were not impressed when we got home!) We then spent a day of travelling with no broken TVs 😊. However, for some reason the guy doing passport control in Beijing airport didn't really like me as apparently, I don't look like my passport. At Heathrow I was met by my family, my sister holding a giant welcome home banner, (she loves me really!). It was definitely an amazing experience.

Since I've been back my family have said I have non-stopped spoken about my adventure and keep comparing it to many of the things we have here, and I have also *apparently* found a smile whilst I was there which I supposedly never had 😊!

I really enjoyed the experience and I would definitely like to go to Mongolia again. I also believe I have gained many qualities out of the experience as well, for example being more confident when speaking publicly and being able to present what I have done. It's also a great conversation starter. I really enjoyed it and am extremely thankful for anyone who helped make it happen.

THANK YOU!!!

