

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

MONGOLIA



2012

A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION
FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS





A WELCOME LETTER

San ban oh Peace Corps Mongolia invitees!

The staff and current Volunteers of Peace Corps/Mongolia eagerly await your arrival to this fascinating land of blue sky, green steppe, rugged mountains, endless desert, and vast expanses of uninhabited land. Since you have chosen to join Peace Corps, you will find that Mongolia offers you a unique opportunity to serve others and to form lifelong friendships with Mongolians and other Volunteers in a physically challenging environment where your skills and commitment will be tested often.

We hope that this resource will help answer some of your questions and concerns about Mongolia itself, the Peace Corps program in Mongolia, and what you can do to prepare for your service here. It is by no means comprehensive, but we trust that it will offer you some useful information ahead of your arrival. We recommend that you share this book with your family as well.

We know your two-year commitment to the Peace Corps service was not made easily or casually. During pre-service training, we will stress the importance of making sure that this Peace Corps assignment is right for you, and we will make sure that we feel you are a good fit for the program as well. After making the final commitment at swearing-in, you will find it tested often and in many different ways throughout your two years of service. You will be challenged in every way imaginable; some days will be exhilarating and others frustrating. However, the experiences you will have, the cultural subtleties you will learn, and the deep friendships you form will shape the rest of your life.

In 2011, the Peace Corps celebrated 20 years of working in partnership to meet the needs requested by the government of Mongolia. We hosted a major event to recognize those 20 years and it was wonderful to have so many participating Mongolians who had been affected by a Volunteer teacher or a Volunteer who worked in their town's health facility or elsewhere. We heard many Mongolians reflect on how much it had touched their lives to have worked with a Volunteer and to have known them as individuals. You, too, will be someone who will be remembered for your time here long after your service ends. You will likely have Mongolian friends who become as close to you as your family in the U.S.

Please know that as you make the transition to becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer, all of us staff members are ready to support you. During pre-service training we will provide you with the basic skills for your assignment and your health and safety, while teaching you the basic language skills you will need at your site.

You are about to begin the most incredible two years of your life, which will go faster than you can imagine.

We look forward to meeting you soon and welcoming you to Mongolia.

Sincerely,

Darlene Grant
Country Director/Mongolia

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CORE EXPECTATIONS

FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

In working toward fulfilling the Peace Corps Mission of promoting world peace and friendship, as a trainee and Volunteer, you are expected to:

1. Prepare your personal and professional life to make a commitment to serve abroad for a full term of 27 months
2. Commit to improving the quality of life of the people with whom you live and work; and, in doing so, share your skills, adapt them, and learn new skills as needed
3. Serve where the Peace Corps asks you to go, under conditions of hardship, if necessary, and with the flexibility needed for effective service
4. Recognize that your successful and sustainable development work is based on the local trust and confidence you build by living in, and respectfully integrating yourself into, your host community and culture
5. Recognize that you are responsible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for your personal conduct and professional performance
6. Engage with host country partners in a spirit of cooperation, mutual learning, and respect
7. Work within the rules and regulations of the Peace Corps and the local and national laws of the country where you serve
8. Exercise judgment and personal responsibility to protect your health, safety, and well-being and that of others
9. Recognize that you will be perceived, in your host country and community, as a representative of the people, cultures, values, and traditions of the United States of America
10. Represent responsibly the people, cultures, values, and traditions of your host country and community to people in the United States both during and following your service

PEACE CORPS/MONGOLIA HISTORY AND PROGRAMS

History of the Peace Corps in Mongolia

The Peace Corps established its program in Mongolia at the invitation of the Mongolian government in 1991 and, since then, more than 900 Volunteers have served. The program began with teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) Volunteers and currently about 135 Volunteers are working in the fields of education, health, community economic development, and community youth development. All Peace Corps Volunteers in Mongolia are considered community development workers and, as such, support community service activities and such cross-sector initiatives as HIV/AIDS awareness and alcohol abuse awareness. Currently, Volunteers work in all 21 provinces throughout Mongolia.

The mission of Peace Corps/Mongolia Volunteers and staff is to provide community-based development assistance that addresses needs identified by Mongolian partners and to promote cross-cultural understanding between Americans and Mongolians. Peace Corps/Mongolia programs emphasize sustainable community development and capacity-building that relies on locally available resources.

History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Mongolia

During the next few years, Peace Corps/Mongolia will focus on English education, community health, and youth development. A brief overview of Peace Corps/Mongolia's projects follows:

- The **English education and community development project** builds the capacity of English teachers by teaching students studying to become English teachers, assisting in accessing English language resources, introducing promising education methods, and facilitating community development projects.
- Volunteers in the **community-based health project** assist with community health education, help update medical professionals and medical students with medical English knowledge, facilitate preventive health initiatives, and work with local teachers to educate secondary school students about healthy life skills.
- **Youth development** Volunteers increase the capacity of Mongolian youth to overcome challenging life circumstances and become young adults who contribute to improving the quality of life for themselves, their families, and their communities. Volunteers work with youth-focused nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), children's centers, schools, and civil society organizations to address major challenges confronting Mongolian youth today, such as education, life skills, employability, and leadership.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW: MONGOLIA AT A GLANCE

History

The history of Mongolia spans more than 500,000 years. Archaeological excavations throughout the country have revealed artifacts from the Stone and Bronze Ages. The prehistoric inhabitants of Mongolia are culturally linked to Central Asia, not China, in that they were nomadic herders, not settled cultivators. Mongolia today embraces the heartland of Chingiss Khan's empire, but it was the homeland of other nations long before the Mongols were first mentioned in the annals of the emperors of China.

Recent investigations support the hypothesis that the Mongols originated from the Huns (Hunnu in ancient Mongolian), nomads who created a state in the area of what is now called Mongolia in 200 B.C., and the first of many peoples to do so. (—**ᠬᠢᠨ**” translates as —**ᠬᠠᠨ**” and “nu” translates as —**ᠨᠠ**.”) Until its collapse in A.D. 98, the Hun state was the most powerful nomadic state in the sprawling Central Asian steppe and mountains. The Hsien-pi replaced the Huns as the ruling group in A.D. 95. Between 95 and 1125 A.D., a succession of nomadic, feudal tribes occupied and ruled the area: Sumbe, Toba, Nirun, Turkic, Uighur, Kirghiz, and Khitan.

In 1190, Temuujin, from the Esukhei tribe, took advantage of weak individual tribal territories and waged 35 battles against other tribes. By 1206, he had succeeded in uniting 81 tribes to form the Great Mongolian State, or Mongol Empire. His success in these battles led to his being named Chingiss Khan (universal ruler). The Mongol Empire of the 13th and 14th centuries was the largest land-area empire in history. At its greatest, it stretched from Korea to Hungary and included most of Asia, except for India and the southeast part of the continent. After Chingiss Khan's death in 1227, the Mongol Empire was divided into dominions, expanded into Russia and China, and ruled first by his sons and then by his grandson Kublai Khan (1260-1294) of Marco

Polo fame. After 1294, however, the Mongol Empire slowly disintegrated, beginning with the loss of China in 1368 to the rulers of the Ming dynasty.

In 1644, the Manchus, rulers of the Ching dynasty, conquered China and southern Mongolia (a territory later renamed Inner Mongolia) and the remainder of Outer Mongolia, consolidating the Mongol Empire under Manchu rule by 1691. The Manchus penalized the Mongolians for any act of insubordination, and their 220-year rule is considered the harshest period in Mongolian history. During this time, Mongolia became isolated from the outside world, the power of the Mongol Khans was destroyed, and Tibetan Buddhism was introduced.

The revolutionary sentiments in Russia and China at the beginning of the 20th century also existed in Mongolia. It declared itself an independent state in 1911 as the Manchu dynasty in China collapsed and the Manchus withdrew from Mongolia. Gegeen Javzandamba Hutakht was declared Bogd Khan, the secular and spiritual leader, and formed a new government. However, China and Russia refused to recognize it, so the Tripartite Agreement that established Outer Mongolia as a politically and territorially autonomous state remained unacknowledged until 1915, when Russia agreed to sign it.

In 1920, two small underground revolutionary groups joined forces to form the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) to defend the Mongolian nation (against China) and to protect the interests of Mongolian herdsman. Under the leadership of military commanders Sukhbaatar and Choibalsan and with the help of the "Red" Russians, the MPRP army defeated both "White" Russian and Chinese armies. On July 11, 1921 (commemorated today as People's Revolutionary Day), Mongolia proclaimed its independence again and became a constitutional monarchy with Javzandamba as the head of state. After he died in November 1924, the Mongolian People's Republic became the world's second communist state.

The emergence of a democratic movement in December

1989 brought swift and peaceful change to Mongolia as the government adopted a positive approach toward reform. The dramatic changes toward a free-market economy and fully democratic society began in 1990 and continue today. A new constitution, adopted in early 1992, changed the official name of the country to Mongolia.

Government

The government has an executive branch, a legislative branch (the Parliament is called the Great Khural), and a judicial branch, which includes a Supreme Court and a Constitutional Court.

The first presidential elections were held in spring 1993. The current head of state is President Ts. Elbegdorj, who was elected in May 2009. President Elbegdorj has been an active supporter of the work of the Peace Corps in Mongolia. The head of government is Prime Minister Sanjiiin Bayar, who was appointed in December 2007 by the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party.

Since Mongolia became democratic, the same MPRP party that was founded on communist ideals in 1920 and controlled the communist period has dominated the government. The elections of 1996 saw the Democratic Union come to power, but infighting quickly dissolved their coalition and the MPRP regained majority control in the following election and has held it since.

The last parliamentary election was held in summer 2012. In that election, MPRP won 44 seats, the Democratic Party (DP) won 26 seats, and the Civil Will Party and Civil Alliance Party won one seat each. There is also one independent and two disputed seats. Although the MPRP held a majority, they chose to form a coalition government with the DP.

Economy

Mongolia's private sector is the primary engine of growth for the economy. Since 1991, traditional trading patterns have changed,

with a large volume of imports from new sources entering Mongolian markets. Industries that developed during the central planning era have declined or disappeared altogether depending on their ability to export to foreign markets. A major transfer of assets from state ownership to private ownership has occurred, accompanied by a rise in large private businesses in mining, textiles, trade, banking, information technology, and other sectors. The distribution of goods and services and retail prices are now largely decontrolled, with the exception of the state-owned utility monopolies.

Mongolia suffered dramatic changes when its state-controlled economy disappeared and a large vacuum was left for provision of goods and services. Since then, however, they have made gigantic leaps into a free-market economy. In 2008, the Mongolian economy grew by a record 8.5 percent and for 2009, even during the global financial crisis, 3 percent growth was expected. Mongolia's main export products are copper, coal, zinc, and gold.

Mongolia joined the World Trade Organization in 1997 and has received significant foreign aid and assistance in recent years. In 2008, the international donor community (World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and Japanese and Australian governments) pledged more than \$165 million to Mongolia. The United States is the third largest donor. The Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact in Mongolia entered into force in September 2008, formally initiating the five-year timeline for project implementation in the areas of infrastructure development, education, health, and property rights projects. Mongolia's international debt is approximately \$1 billion.

In past years, the inflation rate increased up to 34 percent and in the first half of 2009 it was about 4 to 5 percent. Growing unemployment, the primary cause of poverty, remains the government's main concern. Extreme winters have highlighted the vulnerability of the rural economy and accelerated migration to

urban areas by people seeking better access to social services and employment opportunities. For instance, the population has almost doubled in the capital, Ulaanbaatar, over the past five years.

People and Culture

Mongolian and foreign scholars give different explanations for the ethnic name —Mngol.” Some think it was once the name of a single tribe. Others believe it comes from a geographical name that means the river Mon. Still others assert that Mongol should be pronounced —**mn**-gol,” with —**mn**” meaning correct, basic, or true and —**gl**” meaning pivot, center, or essence, combining to mean —**rne** essence.”

More than 20 ethnic groups make up the population, with ethnic Mongolians representing 95 percent. The remaining 5 percent are mostly Turkic people composed of Kazakhs and Tuvans. The largest group of ethnic Mongolians are the Khalkha Mongols, constituting about 70 percent of the population.

Mongolian is the main language of Mongolia, which is also spoken in Inner Mongolia and other parts of China, as well as in the Altai, Buryat, and Kalmyk Republics of the Russian Federation. Mongolian, along with the Turkic and Tungusic languages, forms the Altaic family of languages spoken by approximately 80 million people from Turkey to the Pacific.

Modern Mongolian, of which Khalkha (or Halh) is the most widely spoken dialect, is written in the Cyrillic alphabet. After experiments with Romanization in the 1930s, Mongolia adopted the Cyrillic alphabet at the end of World War II, replacing the vertical Uighur, or classical, script in which Mongolian had been written since Chingiss Khan’s time. Since the 1990s, there have been movements to return to Uighur; however, the Cyrillic alphabet better reflects spoken Mongolian and will likely be used for the foreseeable future.

Mongolia's religious roots can be traced to shamanism. Shamanism might be considered an unconventional religion because it has no founder from whom its teachings originate and there is no collection of sacred writings, such as sutras or a bible. Their belief is that individuals are chosen by spirits of the deceased to serve as mediums for otherworldly powers. Loose collections of shaman elders exist to guide newly chosen members and perform services to their communities. Although officially replaced by Tibetan Buddhism in the 14th century, shamanism continues to be practiced and used by people throughout Mongolia, predominantly by those living in the north and west.

Buddhism faced severe repression under the communist regime, and only one showcase monastery was allowed to remain open. In early 1990, Buddhism was again named Mongolia's official religion. Today, most Mongolians call themselves Buddhist, although the Kazakh minority living in the western part of the country practices Islam.

Mongolia observes the following official holidays: New Year's Day, Tsagaan Sar (the lunar New Year) in early to mid-February (three days), Mother's and Children's Day on June 1, Eriin Gurvan Naadam (Festival of the Three Manly Sports) in mid July, and Independence Day on November 26.

The three —manly” sports popular with the Mongols since ancient times are wrestling, horse racing, and archery. These three games make up the core program of the Naadam festival, which has been held annually since the 13th century. Earlier, Naadam was associated with religious ceremonies (worshiping the spirit of the mountains, the rocks, and the rivers); currently, it is a national holiday held to commemorate the Mongol People's Revolution in 1921.

Tsagaan Sar, the lunar New Year, is translated as —white month.” There are many opinions about the origin of this name. Some Mongolians believe that white symbolizes happiness and purity;

others believe that the name refers to the abundance of milk products. In any case, the holiday celebrates the passing of winter and beginning of spring.

Environment

Mongolia lies in Central Asia, with Russia to the north and China to the east, west, and south. Mongolia is also called Outer Mongolia, the name China's Ching dynasty gave to the area to distinguish it from Inner Mongolia, an autonomous region in northern China, and Buryat Mongolia in Russia. Mongolia occupies an area of about 1.57 million square kilometers, or 626,000 square miles (about the size of Alaska).

The current population is approximately 2.7 million, making Mongolia one of the most sparsely populated nations on Earth. Thirty-eight percent of the population is under 16 years old, and 4 percent is over 60 years old. Almost 60 percent of the population lives in urban areas (40 percent in Ulaanbaatar); the rest live in rural areas. Life in Mongolia is becoming more urbanized and sedentary, although nomadic life still predominates in the countryside. Ulaanbaatar has doubled in population over the past five years.

Mongolia is a land of contrasts: wild forests, alpine meadows, semi-deserts, vast plains, and snow-covered mountains. Mountains cover more than 40 percent of the country. The natural scenery in the northern section resembles that of eastern Siberia, while the southern section, which comprises two-thirds of the country's area, features the arid desert and semi-desert of Central Asia.

The Gobi Desert in southeastern Mongolia supports almost no vegetation and is sparsely populated. North and west of the Gobi, the landscape changes gradually to rugged mountains, with elevations of more than 3,962 meters (13,075 feet) above sea level. The highest peak in Mongolia is Nairamdal Uul at 4,373 meters (14,431 feet). There are small prairies and saltwater and

freshwater lakes throughout the country, but water is more abundant in the habitable north. The only navigable lake is Huvsgul. The country's longest rivers are the Selenge, Orkhon, Tuul, Hovd, Herlen, and Halhin Gol.

Mongolia has many places of breathtaking beauty. Mongolia is home to 136 mammal species, almost 400 species of birds, and 76 species of fish. The country is also known for its wolves, marmots, falcons, snow leopards, musk deer, and the rare Altai snow cock.

With an average of 260 sunny days per year, Mongolia is known as the “Land of Blue Sky.” Because it is so far inland, it has a continental climate with extreme temperatures and very low humidity.

Snow usually stays on the ground from October through April, although it seldom totals more than a few inches at a time. The summers are generally mild and pleasant. The temperature in Ulaanbaatar ranges from 27 degrees Celsius (17 degrees below zero Fahrenheit) in January to 18 C (64 F) in July. There have been recorded extremes of minus-48 C (minus-54 F) and 39 C (102 F). (Don't let these averages fool you; temperatures in the summers have reached the high 90s and low 100s and have fallen low enough for snow in June.) Annual precipitation averages 25.4 centimeters (10 inches) in Ulaanbaatar.

The average altitude of Mongolia is 1,580 meters (5,214 feet) above sea level. Ulaanbaatar's altitude is 1,351 meters (4,458 feet), which is about the same altitude as Denver.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps and Mongolia and to connect you to returned Volunteers and other invitees. Please keep in mind that although we try to make sure all these links are active and current, we cannot guarantee it. If you do not have access to the Internet, visit your local library. Libraries offer free Internet usage and often let you print information to take home.

A note of caution: As you surf the Internet, be aware that you may find bulletin boards and chat rooms in which people are free to express opinions about the Peace Corps based on their own experience, including comments by those who were unhappy with their choice to serve in the Peace Corps. These opinions are not those of the Peace Corps or the U.S. government, and we hope you will keep in mind that no two people experience their service in the same way.

General Information About Mongolia

www.countrywatch.com/

On this site, you can learn anything from what time it is in the capital of Mongolia to how to convert from the dollar to the Mongolian Tugrig. Just click on Mongolia and go from there.

www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations

Visit this site for general travel advice about almost any country in the world.

www.state.gov

The State Department's website issues background notes periodically about countries around the world. Find Mongolia and learn more about its social and political history. You can also go to the site's international travel section to check on conditions that may affect your safety.

www.psr.keele.ac.uk/official.htm

This includes links to all the official sites for governments worldwide.

www.geography.about.com/library/maps/blindex.htm

This online world atlas includes maps and geographical information, and each country page contains links to other sites, such as the Library of Congress, that contain comprehensive historical, social, and political background.

www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation/info.asp

This United Nations site allows you to search for statistical information for member states of the U.N.

www.worldinformation.com

This site provides an additional source of current and historical information about countries around the world.

**Connect With Returned Volunteers
and Other Invitees**

www.rpcv.org

This is the site of the National Peace Corps Association, made up of returned Volunteers. On this site you can find links to all the Web pages of the “Friends of” groups for most countries of service, comprised of former Volunteers who served in those countries. There are also regional groups that frequently get together for social events and local volunteer activities. Or go straight to the Friends of Mongolia site:

<http://www.friendsofmongolia.org>

www.PeaceCorpsWorldwide.org

This site is hosted by a group of returned Volunteer writers. It is a monthly online publication of essays and Volunteer accounts of their Peace Corps service.

Online Articles/Current News Sites About Mongolia

www.MongoliaToday.com

An online magazine started by two Mongolian journalists.

<http://ulaanbaatar.net/home/index.shtml>

A website that focuses on the capital city.

<http://www.mongolmessenger.mn>

The *Mongol Messenger* is one of two English language newspapers in Mongolia.

<http://ubpost.mongolnews.mn/main/index.php>

The *UB Post* is the other English language paper.

International Development Sites About Mongolia

www.un-mongolia.mn

This provides information about the work of the United Nations in Mongolia.

www.eurasianet.org/resource/mongolia/index.shtml

This is a site with links to a variety of resources.

Recommended Books

1. Goldstein, Melvyn C., and Cynthia M. Beall. *The Changing World of Mongolia's Nomads*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
2. Kohn, Michael. *Lonely Planet Mongolia*. Footscray, Victoria; London: Lonely Planet Publications, 2005.
3. Sanders, Alan J.H., and J. Bat-Ireedui. *Lonely Planet Mongolian Phrasebook*. Footscray, Victoria; London: Lonely Planet Publications, 1995.

4. Sarangerel, Odigan. *Riding Windhorses: A Journey Into the Heart of Mongolian Shamanism*. Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 2000.

5. Severin, Tim. *In Search of Genghis Khan: An Exhilarating Journey on Horseback across the Steppes of Mongolia*. N.Y.: Cooper Square Press, 2003.

6. Weatherford, Jack. *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World*. Crown Publishers, 2004.

Books About the History of the Peace Corps

1. Hoffman, Elizabeth Cobbs. *All You Need is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960s*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.
2. Rice, Gerald T. *The Bold Experiment: JFK's Peace Corps*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.
3. Stossel, Scott. *Sarge: The Life and Times of Sargent Shriver*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2004.
4. Meisler, Stanley. *When the World Calls: The Inside Story of the Peace Corps and its First 50 Years*. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 2011.

Books on the Volunteer Experience

1. Dirlam, Sharon. *Beyond Siberia: Two Years in a Forgotten Place*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: McSeas Books, 2004.
2. Casebolt, Marjorie DeMoss. *Margarita: A Guatemalan Peace Corps Experience*. Gig Harbor, Wash.: Red Apple Publishing, 2000.
3. Erdman, Sarah. *Nine Hills to Nambonkaha: Two Years in the Heart of an African Village*. New York, N.Y.: Picador, 2003.

4. Hessler, Peter. *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze*. New York, N.Y.: Perennial, 2001.
5. Kennedy, Geraldine ed. *From the Center of the Earth: Stories out of the Peace Corps*. Santa Monica, Calif.: Clover Park Press, 1991.
6. Thompsen, Moritz. *Living Poor: A Peace Corps Chronicle*. Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 1997 (reprint).

LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE

Communications

Mail

Mail to Mongolia generally takes two to four weeks to arrive, and some mail may never arrive. Occasionally, letters may arrive with clipped edges because someone has tried to see if any money was inside. Also, some boxes may be opened by customs officials to ensure nothing illegal is being shipped. Advise your family and friends to number their letters and to include the word “Airmail” on their envelopes.

Check with your local post office for information on weight and size limitations for packages. Packages sent by surface mail normally take two to three months. Volunteers have found that letters and packages have a better chance of arriving if correspondents do not use a variety of interesting stamps; write the address (with the exception of “Mongolia”) in the Cyrillic alphabet; use sturdy, well-taped boxes for packages (to discourage tampering); write “via China” on mail; and use padding for breakable items (including cassette and CD cases).

Mailing Address

Your address while you are in training is listed below in English and in the Cyrillic alphabet. Peace Corps staff members regularly bring trainees’ mail to the training site.

—Your Name,” PCT
Post Office Box 1036
Central Post Office
Ulaanbaatar 15141
Mongolia (via China)

—Your Name,” PCT
АНУ-ын Энх тайвны корпус
Төв Шуудан
Шуудангийн хайрцаг 1036,
Улаанбаатар-15141
Монгол улс
Mongolia (via China)

Be aware that you may incur customs charges on your personal mail, especially packages. How packages are labeled in the United States 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 emphasized and the luxury items are not.

Telephones

Long-distance calling to the U.S. from landlines is available from every *soum* (small city or town) throughout Mongolia. Prepaid phone cards can be purchased at telecom branches and from specified service agents. You can then make a call from any payphone by following the instructions on the phone cards.

Pre-paid international calling cards are now available in Ulaanbaatar and other cities and can be used when calling the U.S. from landlines in the capital. The cost for the call is very affordable if you buy the right card. Peace Corps/Mongolia can offer you advice on which cards are the best to purchase while in Ulaanbaatar.

Your host family during pre-service training may have a phone; if so, family and friends can call you directly there. (Note that the time in Mongolia is 12-13 hours later than Eastern Standard Time.) Some Volunteers call home using an Internet phone

service; the cost is generally whatever the charge is for the Internet connection.

Cellphone service is very common in Mongolia. After completing training and swearing-in as a Volunteer, you will receive a Peace Corps-issued cellphone. While trainees are not prohibited from purchasing a personal cellphone prior to swearing in, Peace Corps/Mongolia will not reimburse this cost. Many cellphones purchased in the U.S. will not work in Mongolia.

Computer, Internet, and Email Access

Although computers can be bought locally, they generally do not come with virus protection software or system software backup disks. If you bring your own computer, remember that the weather in Mongolia can be hard on LCD screens and electronic equipment may be damaged by power surges. You should also consider insuring your computer. Some host organizations provide limited access to computers, but they often contain contaminated files and may not have the necessary backup disks or software to fix a problem.

Internet connections are rare but increasing in smaller towns and communities. Most provincial centers now have access to the Internet, usually at the local post office or telecom center. In Ulaanbaatar, Internet cafes are plentiful, and the rates there—500 to 1,500 tugriks (\$.45 to \$1.40) per hour—are cheaper than elsewhere. Though connections can be unstable and frustratingly slow and power outages occur, it is still nice to communicate so quickly with family and friends.

Housing and Site Location

During pre-service training you will live with a host family.

During your two years of service, Volunteers live in small family compounds or in separate apartments, depending on what is available at their site. Most sites are located either in a provincial

town center (*aimag* in Mongolian) anywhere from 50 to almost 2,000 kilometers (31 to 1,240 miles) by road from the capital, or in provincial villages (*soums*) that are up to four hours by car from an aimag. A few Volunteers are assigned to Ulaanbaatar.

Increasingly, Volunteers in Mongolia live in either gers (yurts) or wooden houses, sharing a compound with a Mongolian family. Enhanced cultural interaction, improved language skills, and greater Volunteer safety have all resulted from this living arrangement. City Volunteers may live in apartments.

A ger is a round tent of about 20 feet in diameter, made of a wooden lattice covered with thick felt. The inside consists of one room with furniture around the circumference and a wood stove in the center.

Living Allowance and Money Management

U.S. dollars can be exchanged at various places in Ulaanbaatar, including hotels, the Trade and Development Bank, post offices, and legal money exchange facilities. Depending on the size of your community, you may be able to change money there as well. Many places will not exchange for U.S. dollars that are old and wrinkled; they like pristine bills. Also, the exchange rate is slightly lower for traveler's checks of any size or bills in denominations smaller than \$50.

There are two options for getting cash transferred from the United States. The cheapest and easiest is using an ATM machine. There are internationally connected ATMs around Ulaanbaatar. Some do not have local fees, but your U.S. bank may charge you to use them. While credit cards are of limited use in Mongolia, they are accepted by major hotels, restaurants, and shops in Ulaanbaatar and may come in handy when traveling outside the country.

Traveler's checks can be purchased at the Trade and Development Bank in Ulaanbaatar and cashed there for a 2 percent fee. Although few retail outfits in Mongolia will accept them, they are useful for travel in other countries in the region. Personal checks are not accepted in Mongolia.

Food and Diet

You are likely to spend roughly 60 percent of your living allowance on food, and you probably will not be able to maintain the lifestyle, including diet, to which you are accustomed in the United States. For one thing, it is difficult to find the wide variety of foods available in the United States. It is also important that you live at the same economic level as the people in your community.

Once a nation of nomadic herdsman, Mongolia is known as the Land of Five Animals—sheep, goats, cattle, horses, and camels. Traditionally, herdsman got everything they needed to survive from these animals. Today's diet still relies heavily on meat and dairy products. Fermented mare's milk is the traditional ceremonial drink.

The main meats are mutton and beef, but Mongolians also eat goat, horse, marmot, and camel. Some Mongolians buy a sheep carcass to put out on their balcony for the winter (a natural cold storage method). Mongolian chickens have been described as "very athletic" and are good for stewing, but now a lot of chicken is imported. Fish is sometimes sold at markets or door-to-door. A very limited variety of fresh fruits and vegetables appears in the markets, but these foods are not a major part of the local diet.

The traditional diet can be bland, monotonous, and high in fat and cholesterol, and it may be difficult to limit your fat intake while eating with your neighbors.

If you are a vegetarian, you may find it difficult to maintain your diet because of both limited food availability and cultural considerations. The Peace Corps living allowance, however, will enable you to buy some imported fresh and canned fruits and vegetables on visits to provincial centers, so a modest vegetarian diet is certainly possible, albeit difficult. Turning down food may offend Mongolians, who believe meat is necessary for survival in harsh climates, so a vegetarian will have to become good at explaining his or her —“strange” diet to Mongolians. If you are vegan we recommend you consider adjusting your dietary restrictions as plant protein can be impossible to find outside of major cities.

Transportation

Travel among cities by bus, van, or Russian-made jeep is mostly on unpaved roads. The price of rides, which depends on the price of the fuel supplied by Russia, has fluctuated greatly in recent years. Volunteers are prohibited from driving motorized vehicles in Mongolia or from riding on or operating motorcycles. Some cities are also served by train and expensive flights.

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 below zero Celsius (minus-40 Fahrenheit) with a wind chill factor of minus-55 C. While this may sound unbearable, Volunteers are given many strategies for —“beating” the cold from the Peace Corps training staff and their Mongolian neighbors. It is important to remember that millions of people, including Volunteers, live and thrive here in the winter. The winter is very sunny and usually windless.

Spring is sunny and extremely windy, and dust storms are

common. The temperature ranges from 10 C to 20 C (50 F to 68 F), but the wind makes it seem colder. Summer is sunny and breezy, with an average temperature in the low 20s (70s F), though it can get as hot as 35 C (96 F) on a regular basis. Autumn is short, with temperatures similar to those in the spring. 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.

Social Activities

Although Mongolia's traditionally nomadic herdsmen are now comfortable on both motorcycles and horses and many live in apartments rather than in gers, Mongolia has not lost its rich cultural heritage. The Mongolian people's hospitality endures, and most social life at Volunteer sites centers on visiting friends' homes rather than going out to bars and clubs.

Mongolians enjoy a wide variety of sports. Soccer, volleyball, basketball, table tennis, and the national sport of wrestling all take place during the summer. Hiking is also popular during the warmer months. Cross-country skiing, sledding, and ice-skating are popular pastimes in the winter.

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

It is very important that you dress professionally in work settings, where the appearance of the staff reflects on the office or school as a whole. You are also expected to dress professionally during training, which means no shorts or T-shirts, though clean jeans without rips are acceptable. You will need a more formal outfit for being sworn in as a Volunteer. All clothes should be clean at all times.

The main goal is to fit into Mongolian culture, in which professionals, especially teachers, dress well. Typical clothing for men includes slacks, a collared shirt with a sweater or jacket, a tie,

and dress shoes. Women tend to wear dresses or dressy slacks or skirts with blouse-and-sweater combinations and nice boots or high-heeled shoes.

Most Mongolians have only a few outfits for work and will not judge you negatively for wearing only a few yourself. You can wear the same outfits again and again and no one will care or notice.

Special notes:

- Professionals in Mongolia wear their hair in fairly conservative styles. Although you might see young men on the streets of Ulaanbaatar, Darkhan, or Erdenet with shoulder-length hair, long hair on men is rare in the professional environment. Male Volunteers should come to training with their hair conservatively cut and styled, not extending below the collar. After you have completed pre-service training, been at your post for three months, and have established your credibility, you might find that it is acceptable to wear a less conservative style.
- Body piercings are not common in professional settings. Peace Corps/Mongolia requires Volunteers to remove facial piercings (with the exception of earrings in women) throughout pre-service training and during the first four months of service. This allows Volunteers to establish a professional rapport with colleagues and counterparts.

Personal Safety

More detailed information about the Peace Corps' approach to safety is contained in the "Health Care and Safety" chapter, but it is an important issue and cannot be overemphasized. As stated in the *Volunteer Handbook*, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment (oftentimes alone), having a limited understanding of

local language and culture, and being perceived as well-off are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Many Volunteers experience varying degrees of unwanted attention and harassment. Petty thefts and burglaries are not uncommon, and incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although most Mongolia Volunteers complete their two years of service without incident. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help you reduce your risks and enhance your safety and security. These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Mongolia. Using these tools, you are expected to take responsibility for your safety and well-being.

Each staff member at the Peace Corps is committed to providing Volunteers with the support they need to successfully meet the challenges they will face to have a safe, healthy, and productive service. We encourage Volunteers and families to look at our safety and security information on the Peace Corps website at www.peacecorps.gov/safety.

Messages about Volunteer health and Volunteer safety are included. There is a section titled —*Safety and Security in Depth.*” Among topics addressed are the risks of serving as a Volunteer, posts’ safety support systems, and emergency planning and communications.

Rewards and Frustrations

Although the potential for job satisfaction in Mongolia is quite high, like all Volunteers, you will encounter frustrations. Because of financial or other challenges, some collaborating agencies do not always provide the support they may have promised. In addition, the pace of work and life is slower than what most Americans are accustomed to, and some people you work with may be hesitant to change practices and traditions that are centuries old. For these reasons, the Peace Corps experience of adapting to a new culture and environment is often described as a series of emotional peaks and valleys.

You will be given a high degree of responsibility and independence in your work—perhaps more than in any other job you have had or will have. You will often find yourself in situations that require an ability to motivate yourself and your co-workers with little guidance from supervisors. You might work for months without seeing any visible impact from, or without receiving feedback on, your work. Development is a slow process. Positive progress most often comes after the combined efforts of several Volunteers over the course of many years. You must possess the self-confidence, patience, and vision to continue working toward long-term goals without seeing immediate results.

To overcome these difficulties, you will need maturity, flexibility, open-mindedness, and resourcefulness. Mongolians are warm, friendly, and hospitable, and the Peace Corps staff, your co-workers, and fellow Volunteers will support you during times of challenge as well as in moments of success. Judging by the experience of former Volunteers, the peaks are well worth the difficult times, and most Volunteers leave Mongolia feeling they have gained much more than they sacrificed during their service. If you are able to make the commitment to integrate into your community and work hard, you will be a successful Volunteer.

PEACE CORPS TRAINING

Overview of Pre-Service Training

Pre-service training is the first event within a competency-based training program that continues throughout your 27 months of service in Mongolia. Pre-service training ensures that Volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively perform their jobs.

Pre-service training is conducted in Mongolia and directed by the Peace Corps with participation from representatives of Mongolian organizations, Volunteers, and Mongolian training staff. The length of pre-service training varies, usually ranging from 8-12 weeks, depending on the competencies required for the assignment. During training, we measure achievement of learning and determine if trainees have successfully achieved competencies, including language standards, for swearing in as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

As a trainee, you will play an active role in self-education. You will be asked to prepare for an experience in which you will often have to take the initiative and accept responsibility for decisions. The success of your learning will be enhanced by your own effort to take responsibility for your learning and through sharing experiences with others.

Peace Corps training is based on adult learning methods and often includes experiential —hands-on” applications, such as conducting a participatory community needs assessment, facilitating groups and practicum. Successful training results in competence in various technical, language, cross-cultural, health, and safety and security areas.

Successful sustainable development work is based on the local trust and confidence Volunteers build by living in, and respectfully integrating into, the Mongolian community and culture. Trainees are prepared for this through a “homestay” experience, which requires trainees to live with host families during pre-service training. Integration into the community not

only facilitates good working relationships, but it fosters language learning and cross-cultural acceptance and trust, which help ensure your health, safety, and security.

Ongoing Learning

You are expected to improve your knowledge and skills in the areas of technical, language, cross-cultural, diversity, health, and safety throughout your service as a Volunteer. Training staff provide learning objectives during the 27-month continuum to help guide Volunteers throughout service. The manner in which you do this may be formal, through tutoring or workshops organized by the host government or in-country staff, or informally, through conversations and reading. Your learning will continue after you become a Volunteer, formally and through in-service training opportunities, specialized language or technical workshops, and a close-of-service workshop to help you evaluate your service and prepare for your return to the United States.

Formal opportunities for ongoing learning in Mongolia may include the following:

1. Technical and language training
2. Project design and management training
3. Mid-service conference
4. Close-of-service conference

(Additionally, you will have the opportunity to assist with these training events for incoming Volunteers once you have been in-country for one year.)

The number, length, and design of these trainings are adapted to country-specific needs and conditions. The key to the Peace Corps training system is that learning events are competency-based, designed, implemented, and evaluated cooperatively by the Peace Corps staff and Volunteers.

Technical Training

Technical training will prepare you to work in Mongolia by building on the skills you already have and helping you develop new skills in a manner appropriate to the needs of the country. The Peace Corps staff, Mongolia experts, and current Volunteers will conduct the training program. Training places great emphasis on learning how to transfer the skills you have to the community in which you will serve as a Volunteer.

Technical training will include sessions on the general economic and political environment in Mongolia and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your technical sector's goals and will meet with the Mongolia agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them. You will be supported and evaluated throughout training to build the confidence and skills you need to undertake your project activities and be a productive member of your community.

Language Training

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will find that language skills are key to personal and professional satisfaction during your service. These skills are critical to your job performance, they help you integrate into your community, and they can ease your personal adaptation to the new surroundings. Therefore, language training is at the heart of the training program. You must successfully meet minimum language requirements to complete training and become a Volunteer. Mongolia language instructors teach formal language classes five days a week in small groups of four to five people.

Your language training will incorporate a community-based approach. In addition to classroom time, you will be given assignments to work on outside of the classroom and with your host family. The goal is to get you to a point of basic social communication skills so you can practice and develop language skills further once you are at your site. Prior to being sworn in as a Volunteer, you will work on strategies to continue language studies during your service.

Cross-Cultural Training

As part of your pre-service training, you will live with a Mongolian host family. This experience is designed to ease your transition to life at your site. Families go through an orientation conducted by Peace Corps staff to explain the purpose of pre-service training and to assist them in helping you adapt to living in Mongolia. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

Cross-cultural and community development training will help you improve your communication skills and understand your role as a facilitator of development. You will be exposed to topics such as community mobilization, conflict resolution, gender and development, nonformal and adult education strategies, and political structures.

Health Training

During pre-service training, you will be given basic medical training and information. You will be expected to practice preventive health care and to take responsibility for your own health by adhering to all medical policies. Trainees are required to attend all medical sessions. The topics include preventive health measures and minor and major medical issues that you might encounter while in Mongolia. Nutrition, mental health, setting up a safe living compound, and how to avoid HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are also covered.

Safety Training

During the safety training sessions, you will learn how to adopt a lifestyle that reduces your risks at home, at work, and during your travels. You will also learn appropriate, effective strategies for coping with unwanted attention and about your individual responsibility for promoting safety throughout your service.

Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service

In its commitment to institutionalize quality training, the Peace Corps has implemented a training system that provides Volunteers

with continual opportunities to examine their commitment to Peace Corps service while increasing their technical and cross-cultural skills. During service, there are usually three training events. The titles and objectives for those trainings are as follows:

- *In-service training: Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to upgrade their technical, language, and project development skills while sharing their experiences and reaffirming their commitment after having served for three to six months.*
- *Midterm conference (done in conjunction with technical sector in-service): Assists Volunteers in reviewing their first year, reassessing their personal and project objectives, and planning for their second year of service.*
- *Close-of-service conference: Prepares Volunteers for the future after Peace Corps service and reviews their respective projects and personal experiences.*

The number, length, and design of these trainings are adapted to country-specific needs and conditions. The key to the training system is that training events are integrated and interrelated, from the pre-departure orientation through the end of your service, and are planned, implemented, and evaluated cooperatively by the training staff, Peace Corps staff, and Volunteers.

YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN MONGOLIA

The Peace Corps' highest priority is maintaining the good health and safety of every Volunteer. Peace Corps medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative, approach to disease. The Peace Corps in Mongolia maintains a clinic with a full-time medical officer, who takes care of Volunteers' primary health care needs. Additional medical services, such as testing and basic treatment, are also available in Mongolia at local hospitals. If you become seriously ill, you will be transported either to an American-standard medical facility in the region or to the United States.

Health Issues in Mongolia

Health problems that commonly occur in the United States, such as colds, diarrhea, headaches, skin infections, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), emotional disorders, and alcohol abuse, may be more frequent or compounded by living in Mongolia. During pre-service training, the Peace Corps medical officer will provide you with guidelines on how to remain healthy in Mongolia.

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 larger urban areas like Ulaanbattar, Darkhan, and Erdenet); the relatively high altitude at which most Volunteers live (about 4,500 feet); refuse left on the ground that attracts flies and other pests; the extreme cold and low humidity in the winter, which help to spread respiratory illnesses; and diarrhea resulting from bacteria-contaminated water and fresh fruits and vegetables.

Behaviors and habits of Mongolians, such as smoking, alcohol abuse, and having sex with multiple partners, may also put Volunteers at risk.

Helping You Stay Healthy

The Peace Corps will provide you with all the necessary inoculations, medications, and information to stay healthy. Upon your arrival in Mongolia, you will receive a medical handbook. At the end of training, you will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first aid needs. The contents of the kit are listed later in this chapter.

During pre-service training, you will have access to basic medical supplies through the medical officer. However, you will be responsible for your own supply of prescription drugs and any other specific medical supplies you require, as the Peace Corps will not order these items during training. Please bring a three-month supply of any prescription drugs you use, since they may not be available here and it may take several months for shipments to arrive.

You will have physicals at midservice and at the end of your service. If you develop a serious medical problem during your service, the medical officer in Mongolia will consult with the Office of Medical Services in Washington, D.C. If it is determined that your condition cannot be treated in Mongolia, you may be sent out of the country for further evaluation and care.

Maintaining Your Health

As a Volunteer, you must accept considerable responsibility for your own health. Proper precautions will significantly reduce your risk of serious illness or injury. The adage –An ounce of prevention ...” becomes extremely important in areas where diagnostic and treatment facilities are not up to the standards of the United States. The most important of your responsibilities in Mongolia is to take the following preventive measures:

Many illnesses that afflict Volunteers worldwide are entirely preventable if proper food and water precautions are taken. These illnesses include food poisoning, parasitic infections, hepatitis A, dysentery, Guinea worms, tapeworms, and typhoid fever. Your

medical officer will discuss specific standards for water and food preparation in Mongolia during pre-service training.

Abstinence is the only certain choice for preventing infection with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. You are taking risks if you choose to be sexually active. To lessen risk, use a condom every time you have sex. Whether your partner is a host country citizen, a fellow Volunteer, or anyone else, do not assume this person is free of HIV/AIDS or other STDs. You will receive more information from the medical officer about this important issue.

Volunteers are expected to adhere to an effective means of birth control to prevent an unplanned pregnancy. Your medical officer can help you decide on the most appropriate method to suit your individual needs. Contraceptive methods are available without charge from the medical officer.

It is critical to your health that you promptly report to the medical office or other designated facility for scheduled immunizations, and that you let the medical officer know immediately of significant illnesses and injuries.

Women's Health Information

Pregnancy is treated in the same manner as other Volunteer health conditions that require medical attention but also have programmatic ramifications. The Peace Corps is responsible for determining the medical risk and the availability of appropriate medical care if the Volunteer remains in-country. Given the circumstances under which Volunteers live and work in Peace Corps countries, it is rare that the Peace Corps' medical and programmatic standards for continued service during pregnancy can be met.

If feminine hygiene products are not available for you to purchase on the local market, the Peace Corps medical officer in Mongolia will provide them. If you require a specific product, please bring a three-month supply with you.

Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

The Peace Corps medical officer will provide you with a kit that contains basic items necessary to prevent and treat illnesses that may occur during service. Kit items can be periodically restocked at the medical office.

Medical Kit Contents

Ace bandages

Adhesive tape

American Red Cross First Aid & Safety Handbook

Antacid tablets (Tums)

Antibiotic ointment (Bacitracin/Neomycin/Polymycin B)

Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner (Hibiclens)

Band-Aids

Butterfly closures

Calamine lotion

Cepacol lozenges

Condoms

Dental floss

Diphenhydramine HCL 25 mg (Benadryl)

Insect repellent stick (Cutter's)

Iodine tablets (for water purification)

Lip balm (Chapstick)

Oral rehydration salts

Oral thermometer (Fahrenheit)

Pseudoephedrine HCL 30 mg (Sudafed)

Robitussin-DM lozenges (for cough)

Scissors

Sterile gauze pads

Tetrahydrozoline eyedrops (Visine)

Tinactin (antifungal cream)

Tweezers

Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist

If there has been any change in your health—physical, mental, or dental—since you submitted your examination reports to the Peace Corps, you must immediately notify the Office of Medical Services. Failure to disclose new illnesses, injuries, allergies, or pregnancy can endanger your health and may jeopardize your eligibility to serve.

If your dental exam was done more than a year ago, or if your physical exam is more than two years old, contact the Office of Medical Services to find out whether you need to update your records. If your dentist or Peace Corps dental consultant has recommended that you undergo dental treatment or repair, you must complete that work and make sure your dentist sends requested confirmation reports or X-rays to the Office of Medical Services.

If you wish to avoid having duplicate vaccinations, contact your physician's office to obtain a copy of your immunization record and bring it to your pre-departure orientation. If you have any immunizations prior to Peace Corps service, the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for the cost. The Peace Corps will provide all the immunizations necessary for your overseas assignment, either at your pre-departure orientation or shortly after you arrive in Mongolia. You do not need to begin taking malaria medication prior to departure.

Bring a three-month supply of any prescription or over-the-counter medication you use on a regular basis, including birth control pills. Although the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for this three-month supply, it will order refills during your service. While awaiting shipment—which can take several months—you will be dependent on your own medication supply. The Peace Corps will not pay for herbal or nonprescribed medications, such

as St. John's wort, glucosamine, selenium, or antioxidant supplements.

You are encouraged to bring copies of medical prescriptions signed by your physician. This is not a requirement, but they might come in handy if you are questioned in transit about carrying a three-month supply of prescription drugs.

If you wear eyeglasses, bring two pairs with you—a pair and a spare. If a pair breaks, the Peace Corps will replace them, using the information your doctor in the United States provided on the eyeglasses form during your examination. The Peace Corps discourages you from using contact lenses during your service to reduce your risk of developing a serious infection or other eye disease. Most Peace Corps countries do not have appropriate water and sanitation to support eye care with the use of contact lenses. The Peace Corps will not supply or replace contact lenses or associated solutions unless an ophthalmologist has recommended their use for a specific medical condition and the Peace Corps' Office of Medical Services has given approval.

If you are eligible for Medicare, are over 50 years of age, or have a health condition that may restrict your future participation in health care plans, you may wish to consult an insurance specialist about unique coverage needs before your departure. The Peace Corps will provide all necessary health care from the time you leave for your pre-departure orientation until you complete your service. When you finish, you will be entitled to the post-service health care benefits described in the Peace Corps *Volunteer Handbook*. You may wish to consider keeping an existing health plan in effect during your service if you think age or pre-existing conditions might prevent you from re-enrolling in your current plan when you return home.

Safety and Security—Our Partnership

Serving as a Volunteer overseas entails certain safety and security risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment, a limited understanding of the local language and culture, and the perception of being a wealthy American are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Property theft and burglaries are not uncommon. Incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although almost all Volunteers complete their two years of service without serious personal safety problems.

Beyond knowing that Peace Corps approaches safety and security as a partnership with you, it might be helpful to see how this partnership works. Peace Corps has policies, procedures, and training in place to promote your safety. We depend on you to follow those policies and to put into practice what you have learned. An example of how this works in practice—in this case to help manage the risk of burglary—is:

- Peace Corps assesses the security environment where you will live and work
- Peace Corps inspects the house/apartment or ger where you will live according to established security criteria
- Peace Corp provides you with resources to take measures such as installing new locks
- Peace Corps ensures you are welcomed by host country authorities in your new community
- Peace Corps responds to security concerns that you raise
- You lock your doors and windows
- You adopt a lifestyle appropriate to the community where you live
- You get to know neighbors
- You decide if purchasing personal articles insurance is appropriate for you
- You don't change residences before being authorized by Peace Corps

- You communicate concerns that you have to Peace Corps staff

This *Welcome Book* contains sections on: Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle; Peace Corps Training; and Your Health Care and Safety that all include important safety and security information to help you understand this partnership. The Peace Corps makes every effort to give Volunteers the tools they need to function in the safest way possible, because working to maximize the safety and security of Volunteers is our highest priority. Not only do we provide you with training and tools to prepare for the unexpected, but we teach you to identify, reduce, and manage the risks you may encounter.

Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk

There are several factors that can heighten a Volunteer's risk, many of which are within the Volunteer's control. By far the most common crime that Volunteers experience is theft. Thefts often occur when Volunteers are away from their sites, in crowded locations (such as markets or on public transportation), and when leaving items unattended.

Before you depart for Mongolia there are several measures you can take to reduce your risk:

- Leave valuable objects in U.S.
- Leave copies of important documents and account numbers with someone you trust in the U.S.
- Purchase a hidden money pouch or "dummy" wallet as a decoy
- Purchase personal articles insurance

After you arrive in Mongolia, you will receive more detailed information about common crimes, factors that contribute to

Volunteer risk, and local strategies to reduce that risk. For example, Volunteers in Mongolia learn to:

- Choose safe routes and times for travel, and travel with someone trusted by the community whenever possible
- Make sure one's personal appearance is respectful of local customs
- Avoid high-crime areas
- Know the local language to get help in an emergency
- Make friends with local people who are respected in the community
- Limit alcohol consumption

As you can see from this list, you must be willing to work hard and adapt your lifestyle to minimize the potential for being a target for crime. As with anywhere in the world, crime does exist in Mongolia. You can reduce your risk by avoiding situations that place you at risk and by taking precautions. Crime at the village or town level is less frequent than in the large cities; people know each other and generally are less likely to steal from their neighbors. Tourist attractions in large towns are favorite worksites for pickpockets.

The following are other security concerns in Mongolia of which you should be aware:

Overall, crime in Mongolia is low. Theft and robbery remain the dominant crimes in the capital and provincial cities (*aimag* centers). As tourism grows, so does theft from tourists. Busy areas such as open markets, train stations, and public buses are the most common areas for theft. Robbery happens mostly at night on desolate, dark streets both in the capital and provincial centers. Livestock theft remains the dominant crime in the countryside.

Most criminal incidents against Volunteers are crimes of property, including theft, burglary, and to a lesser extent, robbery. Physical and sexual assaults have occurred, but thus far have been rare. The majority of these crimes occur in Ulaanbaatar, the capital. While harassment is a concern, it seldom leads to an actual crime as long as the Volunteer manages the situation based on his or her training.

Volunteers tend to attract a lot of attention both in large cities and at their sites, but they are more likely to receive negative attention in highly populated centers, and away from their support network—friends and colleagues—who look out for them. While stares and basic English greetings from children may be fairly common on the street, this behavior is simply an expression of the curiosity of Mongolians toward foreigners and their desire to practice their English.

Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime

You must be prepared to take on a large degree of responsibility for your own safety. You can make yourself less of a target, ensure that your home is secure, and develop relationships in your community that will make you an unlikely victim of crime. While the factors that contribute to your risk in Mongolia may be different, in many ways you can do what you would do if you moved to a new city anywhere: Be cautious, check things out, ask questions, learn about your neighborhood, know where the more risky locations are, use common sense, and be aware. You can reduce your vulnerability to crime by integrating into your community, learning the local language, acting responsibly, and abiding by Peace Corps policies and procedures. Serving safely and effectively in Mongolia will require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

Support from Staff

If a trainee or Volunteer is the victim of a safety incident, Peace Corps staff is prepared to provide support. All Peace Corps posts have procedures in place to respond to incidents of crime committed against Volunteers. The first priority for all posts in the aftermath of an incident is to ensure the Volunteer is safe and receiving medical treatment as needed. After assuring the safety of the Volunteer, Peace Corps staff response may include reassessing the Volunteer's worksite and housing arrangements and making any adjustments, as needed. In some cases, the nature of the incident may necessitate a site or housing transfer. Peace Corps staff will also assist Volunteers with preserving their rights to pursue legal sanctions against the perpetrators of the crime. It is very important that Volunteers report incidents as they occur, not only to protect their peer Volunteers, but also to preserve the future right to prosecute. Should Volunteers decide later in the process that they want to proceed with the prosecution of their assailant, this option may no longer exist if the evidence of the event has not been preserved at the time of the incident.

Crime Data for Mongolia

Crime data and statistics for Mongolia, which are updated yearly, are available at the following link:

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/countrydata/Mongolia>

Please take the time to review this important information.

Few Peace Corps Volunteers are victims of serious crimes and crimes that do occur overseas are investigated and prosecuted by local authorities through the local courts system. If you are the victim of a crime, you will decide if you wish to pursue prosecution. If you decide to prosecute, Peace Corps will be there to assist you. One of our tasks is to ensure you are fully informed of your options and understand how the local legal process works. Peace Corps will help you ensure your rights are protected to the fullest extent possible under the laws of the country.

If you are the victim of a serious crime, you will learn how to get to a safe location as quickly as possible and contact your Peace Corps office. It's important that you notify Peace Corps as soon as you can so Peace Corps can provide you with the help you need.

Volunteer Safety Support in Mongolia

The Peace Corps' approach to safety is a five-pronged plan to help you stay safe during your service and includes the following: information sharing, Volunteer training, site selection criteria, a detailed emergency action plan, and protocols for addressing

safety and security incidents. Mongolia's in-country safety program is outlined below.

The Peace Corps/Mongolia office will keep you informed of any issues that may impact Volunteer safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be provided in Volunteer newsletters and in memorandums from the country director. In the event of a critical situation or emergency, you will be contacted through the emergency communication network. An important component of the capacity of Peace Corps to keep you informed is your buy-in to the partnership concept with the Peace Corps staff. It is expected that you will do your part in ensuring that Peace Corps staff members are kept apprised of your movements in-country so they are able to inform you.

Volunteer training will include sessions on specific safety and security issues in Mongolia. This training will prepare you to adopt a culturally appropriate lifestyle and exercise judgment that promotes safety and reduces risk in your home, at work, and while traveling. Safety training is offered throughout service and is integrated into the language, cross-cultural aspects, health, and other components of training. You will be expected to successfully complete all training competencies in a variety of areas, including safety and security, as a condition of service.

Certain **site selection criteria** are used to determine safe housing for Volunteers before their arrival. The Peace Corps staff works closely with host communities and counterpart agencies to help prepare them for a Volunteer's arrival and to establish expectations of their respective roles in supporting the Volunteer. Each site is inspected before the Volunteer's arrival to ensure placement in appropriate, safe, and secure housing and worksites. Site selection is based, in part, on any relevant site history; access to medical, banking, postal, and other essential services; availability of communications, transportation, and markets; different housing options and living arrangements; and other Volunteer support needs.

You will also learn about Peace Corps/Mongolia's **detailed emergency action plan**, which is implemented in the event of civil or political unrest or a natural disaster. When you arrive at your site, you will complete and submit a site locator form with your address, contact information, and a map to your house. If there is a security threat, you will gather with other Volunteers in Mongolia at predetermined locations until the situation is resolved or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

Finally, in order for the Peace Corps to be fully responsive to the needs of Volunteers, it is imperative that Volunteers immediately report any security incident to the Peace Corps office. The Peace Corps has established **protocols for addressing safety and security incidents** in a timely and appropriate manner, and it collects and evaluates safety and security data to track trends and develop strategies to minimize risks to future Volunteers.

DIVERSITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES

In fulfilling its mandate to share the face of America with host countries, the Peace Corps is making special efforts to assure that all of America's richness is reflected in the Volunteer corps. More Americans of color are serving in today's Peace Corps than at any time in recent history. Differences in race, ethnic background, age, religion, and sexual orientation are expected and welcomed among our Volunteers. Part of the Peace Corps' mission is to help dispel any notion that Americans are all of one origin or race and to establish that each of us is as thoroughly American as the other despite our many differences.

Our diversity helps us accomplish that goal. In other ways, however, it poses challenges. In Mongolia, as in other Peace Corps host countries, Volunteers' behavior, lifestyle, background, and beliefs are judged in a cultural context very different from their own. Certain personal perspectives or characteristics

commonly accepted in the United States may be quite uncommon, unacceptable, or even repressed in Mongolia

Outside of Mongolia's capital, residents of rural communities have had relatively little direct exposure to other cultures, races, religions, and lifestyles. What people view as typical American behavior or norms may be a misconception, such as the belief that all Americans are rich and have blond hair and blue eyes. The people of Mongolia are justly known for their generous hospitality to foreigners; however, members of the community in which you will live may display a range of reactions to cultural differences that you present.

To ease the transition and adapt to life in Mongolia, you may need to make some temporary, yet fundamental compromises in how you present yourself as an American and as an individual. For example, female trainees and Volunteers may not be able to exercise the independence available to them in the United States; political discussions need to be handled with great care; and some of your personal beliefs may best remain undisclosed. You will need to develop techniques and personal strategies for coping with these and other limitations. The Peace Corps staff will lead diversity and sensitivity discussions during pre-service training and will be on call to provide support, but the challenge ultimately will be your own.

Overview of Diversity in Mongolia

The Peace Corps staff in Mongolia recognizes the adjustment issues that come with diversity and will endeavor to provide support and guidance. During pre-service training, several sessions will be held to discuss diversity and coping mechanisms. We look forward to having male and female Volunteers from a variety of races, ethnic groups, ages, religions, and sexual orientations, and hope that you will become part of a diverse group of Americans who take pride in supporting one another and demonstrating the richness of American culture.

What Might a Volunteer Face?

Possible Issues for Female Volunteers

A single woman living alone is against the cultural norm in Mongolia, and you may be asked often about why you are not married or why you are serving alone when your family is living in the United States. You may receive more unwanted and inappropriate attention from Mongolian men than what you are used to in the United States. Therefore, you may need to keep a low social profile and practice discretion in public. You may have to work harder than male Volunteers to gain the respect of host country colleagues in the workplace.

Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color

Volunteers of color in Mongolia often express frustration and annoyance at being asked where they are from. When they answer, for example, —African American,” “Asian American,” or —Mexican American,” some Mongolians react with surprise, suspicion, or disbelief. Chinese Americans may be regarded with suspicion because of Mongolians’ historically-based mistrust of China. Americans of Korean or Japanese descent may be mistaken for Chinese. You may feel isolated within your Volunteer group if there are no other Volunteers of the same ethnicity. Mongolians may call you by the names of famous people of color, such as Michael Jordan for African Americans or Jennifer Lopez for Latin Americans.

Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers

Respect comes with age in Mongolia. Younger Volunteers may have to work harder than their older colleagues at being accepted as professionals. On the other hand, older Volunteers may feel isolated within the Peace Corps community, as the majority of Volunteers are in their 20s. They may work or live with individuals who have little understanding of or respect for the lives and experiences of senior citizens and therefore cannot

provide needed personal support. Senior Volunteers may find that younger Volunteers look to them for advice and support. While some seniors find this a very enjoyable experience, others choose not to fill this role. Older trainees sometimes encounter a lack of attention to their needs for a particular learning environment, including timing and method of presentation. You may need to be assertive in developing an effective, individual approach to language learning.

Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers

Sexual mores in Mongolia are conservative, and Volunteers are expected to respect them. Many Mongolians believe that gay and lesbian relationships are wrong or that such relationships do not exist in their country. Some gay and lesbian Volunteers who have served in Mongolia report that they were not able to be open about their sexual orientation. Those who are open may be hassled in public places or in the workplace. You may serve for two years without meeting other gay, lesbian, or bisexual Volunteers and may sense a lack of support and understanding among your Volunteer group. Men may encounter machismo and be expected to join in talk of sexual conquests and dirty jokes.

In the past, gay and lesbian Volunteers have formed their own support group. You might find some helpful information at www.geocities.com/~lgbrpcv/, a website affiliated with the National Peace Corps Association.

Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

Propaganda or teaching about any religion other than Buddhism, Islam, and shamanism by foreign residents is prohibited in Mongolia outside the monasteries and churches of the respective religions. Volunteers who openly proselytize for a particular religion are in direct violation of Peace Corps policy. More confusing and difficult to deal with, however, are the seemingly

innocent things many Americans do, such as discussing major religious holidays like Easter and Christmas, which could be misconstrued by people who are sensitive about missionary activities. Volunteers who are not clear as to what constitutes religious proselytizing should consult with the country director.

You are, of course, free to exercise or express your personal religious beliefs in a way that does not impair your effectiveness as a Volunteer. Peace Corps/Mongolia interprets this to mean that you should not engage in any religious activity while at work.

Possible Issues for Volunteers with Disabilities

As part of the medical clearance process, the Peace Corps Office of Medical Services determined that you were physically and emotionally capable, with or without reasonable accommodations, to perform a full tour of Volunteer service in Mongolia without unreasonable risk of harm to yourself or interruption of service.

The Peace Corps/Mongolia staff will work with disabled Volunteers to make reasonable accommodations for them in training, housing, jobsites, or other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.

However, as a disabled Volunteer in Mongolia, you may find that you face a special set of challenges. In Mongolia, as in other parts of the world, some people may hold prejudices against individuals with disabilities and may discriminate against them. Also, there is very little of the infrastructure to accommodate individuals with disabilities that has been developed in the United States.

Possible Issues for Married Volunteers

In general, married Volunteers serving in Mongolia have fewer problems because they are able to support each other with cultural, lifestyle, and professional difficulties. However, a major challenge that married Volunteers face is in learning the local language. Because they can interact with each other and don't rely as much on Mongolians for socialization, they tend to practice their language less and, thus, may learn it more slowly.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Mongolia?

Most airlines have baggage size and weight limits and assess charges for transport of baggage that exceeds those limits. The Peace Corps has its own size and weight limits and will not pay the cost of transport for baggage that exceeds these limits. The Peace Corps' allowance is two checked pieces of luggage with combined dimensions of both pieces not to exceed 107 inches (length + width + height) and a carry-on bag with dimensions of no more than 45 inches. Checked baggage should not exceed 100 pounds total with a maximum weight of 50 pounds for any one bag.

Peace Corps Volunteers are not allowed to take pets, weapons, explosives, radio transmitters (shortwave radios are permitted), automobiles, or motorcycles to their overseas assignments. Do not pack flammable materials or liquids such as lighter fluid, cleaning solvents, hair spray, or aerosol containers. This is an important safety precaution.

What is the electric current in Mongolia?

It is 220-240 volts, 50 cycles. Outlets take European-style round pin plugs and, as a general rule, are not grounded. Most laptops auto-convert, but you should check the electrical info tags on the equipment you will bring. You may consider bringing a voltage converter (although you can buy them here) as well as a battery charger/adaptor and several rechargeable batteries for flashlights and other battery-operated equipment. Candles are a necessity and are available locally.

How much money should I bring?

Volunteers are expected to live at the same level as the people in their community. You will be given a settling-in allowance and a monthly living allowance, which should cover your expenses.

Volunteers often wish to bring additional money for vacation travel to other countries. Credit cards and traveler's checks are preferable to cash. If you choose to bring extra money, bring the amount that will suit your own travel plans and needs.

When can I take vacation and have people visit me?

Each Volunteer accrues two vacation days per month of service (excluding training). Leave may not be taken during training, the first three months of service, or the last three months of service, except in conjunction with an authorized emergency leave. Family and friends are welcome to visit you after pre-service training and the first three months of service as long as their stay does not interfere with your work. Extended stays at your site are not encouraged and may require permission from your country director. The Peace Corps is not able to provide your visitors with visa, medical, or travel assistance.

Will my belongings be covered by insurance?

The Peace Corps does not provide insurance coverage for personal effects; Volunteers are ultimately responsible for the safekeeping of their personal belongings. However, you can purchase personal property insurance before you leave. If you wish, you may contact your own insurance company; additionally, insurance application forms will be provided, and we encourage you to consider them carefully. Volunteers should not ship or take valuable items overseas. Jewelry, watches, radios, cameras, and expensive appliances are subject to loss, theft, and breakage, and in many places, satisfactory maintenance and repair services are not available.

Do I need an international driver's license? Volunteers in Mongolia do not need an international driver's license because they are prohibited from operating privately owned motorized vehicles. Most urban travel is by bus or taxi. Rural travel ranges from buses and minibuses to trucks, bicycles, and lots of walking. On very rare occasions, a Volunteer may be asked to drive a sponsor's vehicle, but this can occur only with prior written permission from the country director. Should this occur, the Volunteer may obtain a local driver's license. A U.S. driver's license will facilitate the process, so bring it with you just in case.

What should I bring as gifts for Country X friends and my host family?

This is not a requirement. A token of friendship is sufficient. Some gift suggestions include knickknacks for the house; pictures, books, or calendars of American scenes; souvenirs from your area; hard candies that will not melt or spoil; or photos to give away.

Where will my site assignment be when I finish training and how isolated will I be?

Peace Corps trainees are not assigned to individual sites until after they have completed pre-service training. This gives Peace Corps staff the opportunity to assess each trainee's technical and language skills prior to assigning sites, in addition to finalizing site selections with their ministry counterparts. If feasible, you may have the opportunity to provide input on your site preferences, including geographical location, distance from other Volunteers, and living conditions. However, keep in mind that many factors influence the site selection process and that the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you would ideally like to be.

Most Volunteers will live in aimag centers (provincial centers of 10,000 to 20,000 people) or soums (provincial villages of 1,000 to 10,000), and will generally be one to three hours from the nearest

fellow Volunteer. Some sites are as far as a 10- to 30-hour drive from the capital.

How can my family contact me in an emergency?
The Peace Corps' Office of Special Services provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, instruct your family to notify the Office of Special Services immediately if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member. During normal business hours, the number for the Office of Special Services is 800.424.8580; select option 2, then extension 1470. After normal business hours and on weekends and holidays, the Special Services duty officer can be reached at the above number. For non-emergency questions, your family can get information from your country desk staff at the Peace Corps by calling 800.424.8580.

Can I call home from Mongolia?
Yes, while international calls can be more involved in the smaller towns, the larger towns have international phone cards that can be purchased. Some Volunteers use Skype from their local Internet cafe, but the service can be inconsistent and slow. It is currently possible to SMS (text) to the U.S. from cellphones and many Volunteers use this system to arrange to have their family call them at their host family's residence, at their work agency after work hours, or the local public phone located at the post office.

Should I bring a cellular phone with me?
You do not need to bring a cell phone to Mongolia as Peace Corps will provide you with a cell phone upon completing pre-service training. Also, Mongolia uses certain cellular systems that are not always compatible with U.S. cell phones so your phone simply may not work here. If it is expensive it becomes just another item that may be lost, stolen, or broken.

Will there be email and Internet access?

The larger cities and towns have Internet access and even some of the smaller towns have gotten Internet through local banks. However, while Mongolia hopes to equip every town with Internet in the near future, many Volunteers do not yet have Internet at their sites. They may access Internet once a month or so during supply trips to a local large town/city.

Should I bring my computer?

We encourage invitees to bring their laptop as more and more towns get Internet access. Even if your site doesn't have Internet, a computer will still be useful to you in doing work for your agency, which may have old, very limited, or no computers; completing Peace Corps reports and articles; writing personal letters that you can quickly send via email once connected to Internet; sharing and listening to music; sharing photos; etc.

How do Volunteers deal with the pressure to drink on social occasions?

Some Volunteers choose not to drink and occasionally may have to put up with disapproval from Mongolians as a result. Some choose to drink only beer or wine, and others take just a sip or put a little on the tips of their fingers and do a ceremonial offering (you will learn more about this during training). Mongolians are usually respectful of these efforts and do not expect you to drink more. It is ultimately up to you to decide how to handle alcohol responsibly.

Are the heating systems as poor as some have said?

Yes, some are. Many Volunteers report being able to see their breath when teaching at schools in winter. Housing may not have good heating, either. Some solutions are to wear layers, to become

cozy with your Peace Corps-issued space heater, and to become a competent fire builder.

My friends and family keep telling me to pack toilet paper—is this necessary?

No. While most of the toilet paper in Mongolia is not quilted or soft, you do not need to pack any—all the toilet paper you need can be bought locally. You can even find wet wipes.

WELCOME LETTERS FROM MONGOLIA VOLUNTEERS

Dear Peace Corps Invitee,

Congratulations on your invitation to Mongolia! I think you (and I) are very lucky to have the opportunity to serve in Mongolia—it's a beautiful country with an amazing culture and people. I am thrilled I ended up there, and I hope you'll feel the same way.

I think most potential Mongolia PCVs have similar concerns: the weather, the language, and the food. Yes, the winter is very cold, the language is hard, and the food lacks the variety and flavors that we're used to in the U.S. *Zugeer* (don't worry)! I spent a lot of time worrying for nothing. These are all problems that you can deal with, and more easily than you'd imagine. With so many huge unknowns, it can seem overwhelming. Easier said than done, I know, but I suggest you take it one day at a time and trust that you will figure it out when the time comes.

These days, you can buy just about any spices or American food you're craving in the capital, and many of us develop impressive cooking skills while here. You'll get plenty of language training, and our Mongolian friends teach how to dress so that we're sweating in minus-40 winter weather. Trust me, it's not a problem!

It's so hard to picture life in Mongolia. I knew almost nothing about the country before I got my invitation. A lot of the information you get on the Internet or in books and movies can be hard to put into perspective. In my experience writing to my friends and family, it's just about impossible to describe Mongolia and life here, since it's so out of context for Americans. So, try to avoid any expectations or ideas of what you think it will be (again, easier said than done!). If you come here with patience and an

open mind, you'll be able to discover the wonders of Mongolia for yourself.

Mongolia is a huge country with incredible scenery and nature, and living conditions vary a lot depending on your site. Mongolia is, of course, home to the famous Gobi Desert, but there are also mountainous lake and forest regions, and huge expanses of open steppe. You could be placed in the capital city, a mid-sized provincial center, or a small town. You might live in a ger, a small house, or an apartment. Some of us have running water and showers, and others go to the local well and bathe in a bucket.

Some PCVs are the only foreigner in the small town, and others live in bigger sites with several sitemates. I was an English teacher in a provincial center (Arvaikheer, Uvurhangai) with other PCVs, and I lived in an apartment and then a ger. It was nice to have the running water and convenience of my apartment, but I loved my ger just as much. Getting water from the well is a pain and living in a ger is a lot of work, but chopping wood is a great stress reliever, and I liked the coziness of making a fire in my ger. Every site is different, and they all have their pros and cons.

The best thing about Mongolia is the people. Time and time again, I've been overwhelmed by the hospitality and generosity of Mongolians. I've felt so welcome and appreciated during my time as a Volunteer here, and I've made friends that I'm sure I'll keep forever.

Again, congratulations on your invitation to Mongolia! Enjoy your time in the U.S. with your friends and family, and get ready for an incredible experience as a PCV in Mongolia. Good luck and *bayartai* (goodbye)!

— Maureen Scanlin, TEFL – 2006-8

Hey New Mongolian PCV Invitee!

Congratulations on receiving this invitation to serve in the Peace Corps! You should be ready to experience an incredible adventure in an amazing country. I could not be more excited for you and the amazing time ahead of you!

You are bringing a unique perspective to your service and your adventures in this country will be unique as well. Mongolian PCVs live in houses, apartments, and gers, next to huge lakes, vast deserts, and open steppe, and in tiny villages, growing towns, and huge cities. Every Volunteer experience here is different, but also the same; serving in Mongolia is more incredible than you could ever imagine.

I know a lot of your questions right now revolve around winter coats, speaking a new language, eating different foods, and adjusting to a new culture, but after a few months you will look back, smile, and know that was the easy part. Here's the hard part: ask yourself who you want to become and realize that serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Mongolia will give you the space, the time, and the environment to become the kind of person you have always wanted to be. I promise you, the ways you will grow during your service will absolutely amaze you.

Think about some of the amazing goals you have always wanted to achieve and know that you can accomplish them here. Living in this country with your new Mongolian neighbors, co-workers, friends, and fellow Volunteers will positively change your life forever. Be patient, flexible, and open to experiencing tons of new things. The Peace Corps is one of the best places to be the change you wish to see in the world; it's one of the greatest jobs you will ever have and you get to write the job description. Get ready to have an incredible time.

— Travis Hellstrom, TEFL – 2008-11

Dear Peace Corps Invitee,

Welcome to the program! Let's get one thing out of the way: Stop worrying about the winter. Let me put it the way a current Volunteer put it to me: Mongolians have been living in Mongolia for hundreds of years and they know how to keep warm. They'll help you with whatever you need when you get here.

Next, with the time you've saved by not stressing about buying the hugest coat you can find, spend time with friends and family and eat all of your favorite foods before you leave the U.S. By two months into training, if you're anything like me, you'd give your left arm for some hot peppers or an avocado. Mongolian food is what the book says it is: mutton, fat, flour, and a few shavings of vegetables like cabbage and carrots. You'll adjust though, just remember to bring some spices or have them sent from the States after you get here.

I wish I could tell you about what it's like to be in a ger or a wooden house there, but I was a city Volunteer. My placement was in the capital, Ulaanbaatar. This means I was in a nice overheated apartment with hot running water. Countryside Volunteers dropped by on the weekends to shower and stock up on peanut butter and hot sauce. I lived on the edge of town, so transportation was my big adventure. Squeezing my six-foot body into a minivan with 19 people in it day after day gave me a new appreciation for the half-empty city buses of the U.S.

No matter what, you'll get a little bit of the countryside experience during pre-service training when you live with a Mongolian host family. My family saw me as one of their own from day one and I got in touch with them every week, more than I did with my real parents. Amid the reminders to wear warm clothes in the winter and to text message them before I went on vacation so they didn't worry when they couldn't reach me, I felt their love. One summer, my host brother and sister came to visit me in Ulaanbaatar, and I

got to return their hospitality, playing hostess to their first trip to the capital city.

On a final note, you may have heard this before, but the fewer expectations you have about Mongolia, the easier it will be to adjust here. If you have some concrete picture of exactly what you want it to be, it will be hard to realize your vision and you may end up disappointed. Just try to be open minded and ready for anything.

Good luck!

Cheers,

— Sunaree Marshall, CYD – 2006-8

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PACKING LIST

This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Mongolia and is based on their experience. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that each experience is individual. There is no perfect list! You obviously cannot bring everything on the list, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. You can always have things sent to you later. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have a 100-pound weight limit on baggage. And remember, you can get almost everything you need in Mongolia.

General Clothing

Note: Many Volunteers suggest packing very light. Basic clothing and toiletries can be bought here. Save room in your suitcase for music, pictures from home, games, and things that will make a big difference while being away from home for two years. Specialty items like quality long underwear and gloves make good sense to bring from home, but heavy jackets can be bought here for under \$30. Also, pack a separate bag of winter things or things you won't need during the 11 weeks of summer training. This bag will be stored at the Peace Corps office and you won't have access to it during summer training.

- One pair (tops and bottoms) of mid-weight long underwear (it is strongly recommended that you purchase these before coming to Mongolia)
- One pair (tops and bottoms) of heavy-weight long underwear (it is essential that you purchase these before coming to Mongolia)
- Winter coat or parka (available in Mongolia)
- Fall and spring coat or parka (available in Mongolia)
- Gloves or mittens (available in Mongolia, but if you have big hands, get some in the U.S.)
- Scarf (available in Mongolia)
- Stocking cap (available in Mongolia)
- A few (3-4) pairs of wool socks (available in Mongolia)
- A few (3-4) pairs of cotton socks (available in Mongolia)

- Sun hats (available in Mongolia)
- Two to three “professional” shirts to work in, including one for summer (available in Mongolia)
- Two to three pairs of nice pants for work, one light (available in Mongolia)
- One to two pullover sweaters (available in Mongolia)
- Two pairs of jeans (available in Mongolia, unless you are very tall)
- Five to six of your favorite T-shirts
- Sweatpants and sweatshirt (available in Mongolia)
- Two pairs of shorts (essential for summer and playing sports)
- One formal piece of clothing, such as a suit for males and a dress for women (available in Mongolia)

Note: It is very difficult for tall men and women to find clothing that fits them here. Peace Corps recommends purchasing these items while in the U.S. if you are over 6 feet tall.

For Women

- Bras and underwear (larger sizes are difficult to find and the quality may be lacking)
- Bathing suit

For Men

- Underwear (the quality of local underwear may be lacking)
- Swim trunks

Shoes

- Winter boots (available here)
- Hiking boots (not necessary, but the hiking is great here)
- Sneakers (especially if you like basketball or volleyball since there are plenty of opportunities to play these here)
- Sandals (outdoor flip-flops are not available in Mongolia)

- Dress shoes

Note: Men's shoes larger than size 10 and women's shoes larger than size 8 are difficult to find in Mongolia.

Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items

- Towel (you can find low-quality towels in Mongolia)

Note: Many products are available in Mongolia (e.g., Nivea hand cream, Pantene shampoo, Colgate toothpaste, nail polish, and ALL kinds of cosmetics), but if you are, for instance, a Clinique or Body Shop junkie, bring your own or have them sent.

Kitchen

- Leatherman or Swiss Army Knife
- Sturdy water bottle(s) (e.g., Nalgene)
- Plastic storage bags

**A Volunteer-compiled cookbook will be given to you at the end of pre-service training

Miscellaneous

- A small photo album of family and friends (a must-bring item)
- 220-volt converter (essential if you bring American appliances)
- Rechargeable batteries
- Camera*
- Flashlight*
- American board and card games
- Music*
- Solar shower
- Duct tape (highly recommended)
- Camping gear (if you like to camp)*
- Fishing gear (if you like to fish)*
- Backpack (useful for traveling in-country)
- Reading materials (much cheaper if sent using a postal M-bag; also, the Peace Corps has an extensive library)

- MP3 or iPod player
- Flash disk or thumb drive

*Available in the capital

Care Package items

These are good things for your friends and family to send you if they are looking for useful ideas:

- Hand and foot warmers (i.e., the charcoal kind that are activated when exposed to air)
- Your favorite magazines (double as English teaching resource once read)
- Children's books with songs/tapes
- Portable French press mug (if you like good coffee or loose tea)

Work Items for English Education

Volunteers

Chances are good that your school will not be able to provide you with many resources. Below are a few items that cannot be bought in-country but would be useful in the classroom.

- Colored construction paper
- Catalogs (the pictures are useful when teaching)
- Children's books, a picture dictionary, songs on tape, and a book about American holidays
- Erasers for chalkboards
- Index cards

Work Items for Health and Community and Youth Development Volunteers

What you need will depend on your experience in your field and the specific job you have. It is best to assess your situation when you get here and then have items sent from home.

PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

The following list consists of suggestions for you to consider as you prepare to live outside the United States for two years. Not all items will be relevant to everyone, and the list does not include everything you should make arrangements for.

Family

- Notify family that they can call the Peace Corps' Office of Special Services at any time if there is a critical illness or death of a family member (24-hour telephone number: 800.424.8580, extension 1470).
- Give the Peace Corps' *On the Home Front* handbook to family and friends.

Passport/Travel

- Forward to the Peace Corps travel office all paperwork for the Peace Corps passport and visas.
- Verify that your luggage meets the size and weight limits for international travel.
- Obtain a personal passport if you plan to travel after your service ends. (Your Peace Corps passport will expire three months after you finish your service, so if you plan to travel longer, you will need a regular passport.)

Medical/Health

- Complete any needed dental and medical work.
- If you wear glasses, bring two pairs.
- Arrange to bring a three-month supply of all medications (including birth control pills) you are currently taking.

Insurance

- Make arrangements to maintain life insurance coverage.
- Arrange to maintain supplemental health coverage while you are away. (Even though the Peace Corps is responsible for your health care during Peace Corps service overseas, it is advisable for people who have pre-existing conditions to arrange for the continuation of their supplemental health coverage. If there is a lapse in coverage, it is often difficult and expensive to be reinstated.)
- Arrange to continue Medicare coverage if applicable.

Personal Papers

- Bring a copy of your certificate of marriage or divorce.

Voting

- Register to vote in the state of your home of record. (Many state universities consider voting and payment of state taxes as evidence of residence in that state.)
- Obtain a voter registration card and take it with you overseas.
- Arrange to have an absentee ballot forwarded to you overseas.

Personal Effects

- Purchase personal property insurance to extend from the time you leave your home for service overseas until the time you complete your service and return to the United States.

Financial Management

- Keep a bank account in your name in the U.S.
- Obtain student loan deferment forms from the lender or loan service.

- Execute a Power of Attorney for the management of your property and business.
- Arrange for deductions from your readjustment allowance to pay alimony, child support, and other debts through the Office of Volunteer Financial Operations at 800.424.8580, extension 1770.
- Place all important papers—mortgages, deeds, stocks, and bonds—in a safe deposit box or with an attorney or other caretaker.

CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS

This list of numbers will help connect you with the appropriate office at Peace Corps headquarters to answer various questions. You can use the toll-free number and extension or dial directly using the local numbers provided. Be sure to leave the toll-free number and extensions with your family so they can contact you in the event of an emergency.

Peace Corps Headquarters

Toll-free Number: 1.800.424.8580, Press 2, then
Ext. # (see below)

Peace Corps' Mailing Address: Peace Corps
Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps
Headquarters
1111 20th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20526

For Questions About:	Staff	Toll-free Extension	Direct/ Local Number
Responding to an Invitation	Office of Placement EMA Region	Ext. 1856	202.692.1856
Programming or Country Information	Mongolia Desk	Ext. 2416	202.692.2416

For Questions About:	Staff	Toll-free Extension	Direct/ Local Number
Plane Tickets, Passports, Visas, or Other Travel Matters	Travel Officer (SATO Travel)	Ext. 1170	202.692.1170
Legal Clearance	Office of Placement	Ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Medical Clearance and Forms Processing (including dental)	Screening Nurse	Ext. 1500	202.692.1500
Medical Reimbursements	Handled by a Subcontractor		1.800.818.8772
Loan Deferments, Taxes, Readjustment Allowance Withdrawals, Power of Attorney	Volunteer Financial Operations	Ext. 1770	202.692.1770
Staging (Pre-departure Orientation) and Reporting Instructions	Office of Staging	Ext. 1865	202.692.1865
<i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks before departure. This information is not available sooner.</i>			
Family Emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas)	Office of Special Services	Ext. 1470 9-5 EST	202.692.1470