Mongolia

Location

The nation of Mongolia is located in Asia and covers 604,245 sq miles of land, which would be equal to half of Europe. Mongolia is ranked as the seventh largest country in Asia for its territory. Mongolia lies in 41° 35’ N Latitude and between 87° 44’ and 119° 56’ E. It is in both the northern and eastern hemispheres. Its total borderline is 8161.8 km long, 3485 km of which is with Russia and 4676.8 km is with China. It's positioned in central Asia, and bordered by the Russian Federation in the north, and China in the south.

Geography

Mongolia resides on a high mountainous plateau some 1,580 meters above sea level. From the Gobi Desert areas of the south, Mongolia rises into a grass-covered and generally treeless plain accented by three mountain ranges. The Gobi Desert occupies more than 400,200 sq. km of South Mongolia. The highest point 14,350 ft. (4,374 m) is found in the rugged Altay Mountains of the west. Mountains make up 42.5 percent of the territory. Overall, the country has an average elevation near 5,183 ft., (1,580 m). The lowest point is Hoh Nuur the Great Eastern Plains are 1,699 ft. (518 m).

Hovsgol Nuur, one of Asia's largest freshwater lakes, is located on its border with the Russian Federation. In addition, the northern reaches of the country are full with meandering rivers, over 4,000 small lakes, marshes and glaciers. West and north Mongolia both experience frequent earthquakes, though volcanoes here are considered extinct.
Climate

Mongolia is known as the “Land of Blue Sky”. Winter months are from October to April, during January and February temperatures drop to -22° F (-30°C). The winter months are long and cold. These sub-arctic winters are normal, as snow can be seen in the Gobi desert as late as April and some lakes remain frozen until June. Spring lasts from May through June, at this time you can expect dust storms. There’s a short rainy season from mid-July to September, but showers tend to be brief and gentle. Because of the high altitude, evenings are cool even in summer and summers tend to be short.

History

Archeological digs have uncovered human remains in the Gobi and other regions of Mongolia dating back nearly 500,000 years. Mongols were nomadic herders. They tamed horses, yaks, and camels. The Chinese first recorded the name ‘Mongol’ during the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD). In 1911, China’s dynasty crumbled. The Mongols quickly saw their opportunity and independence from China was declared on December 1, 1911. On 26 November 1924, the Mongolian People’s Republic was declared and Mongolia became the world’s second communist country.

In 1937, a reign of terror was launched against the monasteries, and thousands of monks were executed. It’s believed that by 1939 some 27,000 people had been executed; three per cent of Mongolia's population at the time. In the early 1980s, Mongolia came under the leadership of Jambyn Batmonkh. Mongolia joined the World Trade Organization in 1997 but membership didn't make much
of an immediate dent in the country's wide scale poverty and famine. Foreign aid, including low-interest loans from the United Nations in 2001 and a massive annulment of Russian debt in 2004, relieved some of their economic burden.

**Important Dates**

Important dates for Mongolia are January 1- New Year’s Day, Mid February – Mongolian New Year (Tsagaan Sar), June 1- Mother and Children’s Day, July 11,12, 13- National Day and Naadam Festival. The Naadam festival, celebrated each summer, organized many centuries ago as a test of courage, strength, daring horsemanship and marksmanship, all necessary for nomadic people and warriors. November 26- Independence Day. Fishing Season-The best time of year to fish in Mongolia is from May 15-June or late August, Sept., October and early November.

**Population**

The population of Mongolia in July 2001 was approximately 2,654,999. The estimated population in 2050 is expected to double to 4,181,249. For Mongolians the life expectancy is 62.14 for a male and 66.5 for a female (2001 est.). Presently, children and youth under 35 make up 70 percent of the population and the average age is 21 years. Out of 2.7 million people, about half live in cities and towns, while the remaining 47 percent still live a nomadic lifestyle.

The Mongolian populations, which still live a nomad lifestyle, reside in homes called Gers. These round, squat tents are ideal for the nomads way of life, for they are easily collapsed and moved. They are made from quick drying felt which can withstand harsh winds, rain and snow. They are always put up so that the door is facing south towards the Sun.
**Currency**

*The official currency of Mongolia is the Tugrik (Tug). 1 tugrik (Tug) equals 100 mongos. The current (‘06) exchange rate is 1.00 US dollars = 1,223.00 Mongolian tugriks. The purchasing power of the tugrik is about 5 tugrik: a piece of candy, 10 tugrik: a couple pieces of candy, 100 tugrik: a ride across town on a bus in Ulaanbaatar, 500 tugrik: a meal at a guanz, or small cafe that sells buuz, which are steamed meat dumplings, and 10,000 tugrik: lodging at a tourist hostel in Ulaanbaatar.*

**Education**

In Mongolia, elementary education is universal and mostly free. The country boasts one of the highest literacy rates (97.8 per cent) in the world. Mongolia’s literacy rate is fairly high 97% total, 98% male, 97.5% female (2000). Back in the mid 70’s, Mongolia was even awarded a UNESCO Golden Medal for successes in educating the population. Presently more than 500,000 pupils attend 660 secondary schools and another 140,000 students attend 198 state and private Universities and colleges.

**Language**

The official language of Mongolia is Khalkha Mongol 90%, Turkic, and Russian (1999). The language is characterized by their history and culture linked to horses. Horse references are found in terms of welcoming someone, such as “have you ridden well” or “ride in peace”. The word for "poor" is formed from the verb "to go on foot". They also have a very distinct vocabulary to describe the color of
their horses. Unlike us in the West, they do not name their horses, they are distinguished by their color. Despite the number of horses in the country, there doesn’t seem to be any confusion as to which horse is being referred to.

**Religion**

The religions of Mongolia are Tibetan Buddhism, Muslim, Shamanism, and Christian. Tibetan Buddhist is the most popular religion with 96% while Muslim is practiced primarily in the southwest, Shamanism, and Christian makes up for 4% of the population.

**Agriculture**

With the dry climatic conditions in Mongolia, the development of grazing lands are highly productive and hardy for grazing by livestock. Extensive livestock production accounts for some 88 percent agricultural of gross agricultural output. The livestock sector is based on a nomadic system centered around 32.8 million animals (1998). Some of these nomadic animals include sheep, goats, and cattle. However, human activities have led to increasing soil erosion not only in cultivated but also in pasture, which have created one of Mongolia’s most serious environmental problems.

Presently, cereal production is totally dependent on adequate rainfall. With the short length of the growing season, agricultural output is based solely on rain for production of spring wheat during the frost-free months of May to September. Barley and potatoes are also grown, along with forage crops. The cereal sector, contributes the remaining 12 percent of gross agricultural output from an area of 3.2 million acres.
**Trade**

The Congress of the US decided in 1999 to make Mongolia’s normal trade relations status permanent and in July of the same year the President of the US made a decision to include Mongolia in the Trade Preferential System. Thus, Mongolia received most favorable conditions for expansion of its trade relations with the US and there are no quota limits for the Mongolian products to export into the US market.

There are 79 American and US-Mongolian joint companies in wool and cashmere processing, oil exploration, mining and sewing areas operating today in Mongolia. In 1999, trade with the USA occupied 8.9% of the total trade turnover of Mongolia. Trade with the US amounted to $162.965 million in 2003. Mongolian exports to the US increased rapidly and amounted to $140.017 million in 2003.

**Food**

Mongolia is known as the land of five animals, sheep, goats, cattle, horses, and camels. The main meat served is mutton. They also have buuz, which is like a meatball twisted Hershey Kiss style into a ravioli type pasta, that is steamed. Khushuur or fried meat pie is very popular in Mongolia and quite simple to cook, as it requires only meat, flour, and onions.

Butter, yogurt, cheese and milk can be found anywhere. Locally produced milk and cream are not pasteurized, and must be boiled before drinking. They have snacks made from dried milk curds called aaruul. There are some major crops grown in different parts of the country, such as wheat, and a limited variety of vegetables do appear in the markets fairly regularly. While vegetables are usually available, either locally or imported, they still are not popular in the diet.

In the countryside, the most common tea is a salty milk tea. Airag is fermented horses milk that has an alcohol content of about 3%. Many Mongolians distil it further to produce shimiin arkhi and get it
up to 12% alchol. With the Russian influences also comes their love of vodka. There is a big social pressure to drink, especially on men.

Landmarks

There are numerous sites to visit and tour while in Mongolia. The capital of Mongolia is Ulaanbaatar. The capital is home to some impressive museums and a wide selection of restaurants. It is also a great place to pick up some quality cashmere. The Khongoryn Elsor Singing Dunes are some of the largest sand dunes in Mongolia, 180 kilometers long and up to 800 meters high. A climb to the top gives amazing views across the dunes and the surrounding desert. On the northern edge of the dunes lies the Khongoryn River, which provides an oasis rich in plantation and supplies drinking water for wildlife in the region.

Gandantegchinlen Khiid (Gandan for short) is the largest and most important monastery in Mongolia. The monastery's main attraction is the magnificent white Migjid Janraisig Temple, which houses a 25m high, 20-ton statue. It is a working monastery with ceremonies every morning and 150 monks in residence.

Bayanzag Flaming Cliffs is one of the most famous palaeontological sites in the world. Roy Chapman Andrews discovered the world's first nest of dinosaur eggs here in 1922. During his groundbreaking expedition, the team unearthed over 100 dinosaurs and discovered the earliest known mammal skulls.

In the 1990's, the world's most primitive horse, the Takhi (Przewalski's Horse) was reintroduced into Khustai Nuruu National Park after thirty years of extinction in the wild. You can also see the Przewalski’s horse at “The Wilds” located in Cumberland, OH. Their shape and color is very distinct from other horses and they tend to have zebra-like stripes at the base of their tails. These are just a few of the many sites to see while in Mongolia.

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