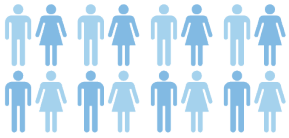


MONGOLIA

Mongolia, a landlocked nation bordered by China and Russia, is known for vast, rugged expanses and nomadic culture. Its capital, Ulaanbaatar, centers around Genghis Khan Square, named for the notorious founder of the 13th- and 14th-century Mongol Empire. It is home to about 40% of the country's population. Mongolia is the 18th largest country in the world by land mass and the world's second-largest landlocked country after Kazakhstan. It contains very little arable land, and much of its area is covered by grassy steppe, with mountains to the north and west and the Gobi Desert to the south. Horse culture is still an integral part of Mongolia, where around 40% of the country's workforce is nomadic, herding livestock in the extensive pasture lands. Vast quantities of untapped mineral wealth have made Mongolia a target for foreign investors which is transforming the country's tiny but fast-growing economy. Mongolian is the national language, and the national currency is the togrog.

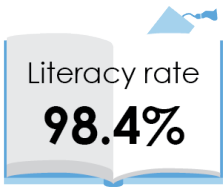


Population
3,330,208



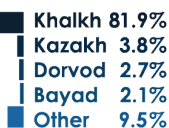
603,909 MI²

Slightly smaller than Alaska

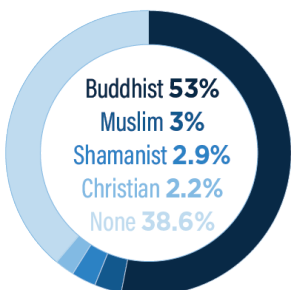


Literacy rate
98.4%

Ethnicities



Religions



FAMILY LIFE

A typical family is comprised of two parents and 2-4 children. Sometimes a grandparent may live in the same house, if the spouse has passed away. Relatives might or might not live in the same town, and most families have relatives living in the countryside. There is no social norm when it comes to eating meals together. Some families eat their meals separately and others try to eat together.

Belongings are considered one's own, but siblings do share some things, such as clothes and school supplies, and are expected to ask for permission first. There is little consideration of privacy, and people tend to prefer to spend time with others rather than alone.

Each member of the family is responsible for specific chores. In some homes, daughters clean the house, do laundry, but most teenage boys are also assigned household chores. Most teenagers are responsible for washing the dishes and tidying the house, and helping their parents when needed.

Parents are actively involved in their children's lives and are the ultimate decision makers regarding academic, extracurricular, and personal activities. Both parents usually work and often both are financially responsible for the family. In modern families, both parents tend to exert equal authority in household decisions, and discuss together how to raise their children and resolve any problems. In some households fathers are primarily responsible for financial matters or serious discipline issues.

Most teenagers receive a small amount of money from their parents for daily or weekly expenses at school or for snacks. Teenagers very rarely work. Whenever teenagers need money for school or social activities or to buy personal items, they ask their parents.

In the capital city, many families have a variety of pets including dogs, cats, turtles, hamsters, birds, and fish. In such families, pets are usually allowed anywhere inside the house. In the countryside, most families have dogs which are kept outside.

FRIENDSHIP

Teenagers mostly socialize in groups. It is acceptable for teenagers to have friends of the opposite sex and to meet either in a group or one-on-one. Teenagers make most of their friends through school, extracurricular activities, or in their neighborhood. Students outside the capital usually participate in activities together and socialize at school, whereas city students will attend different clubs together, go to the mall and watch movies, or spend time in coffee shops. Parents do not usually get involved in their children's social activities unless their children are spending too much time outside the home and not doing homework or chores.

Teenagers are expected to make eye contact when adults are speaking, to indicate they are listening, and to respect and obey their elders at all times. Direct communication about feelings or opinions is not

commonly practiced. Teenagers may keep quiet as a sign of respect, but if it is important and something they need to communicate, they will do so in a respectful manner. In general, people are not accustomed to having personal space when interacting with others. It is common to hold hands, sit or stand close together while talking, or show affection through physical contact. It is common for teenagers to lend and borrow money from each other and borrowed money is always expected to be paid back.

SCHOOL LIFE

High school students take 17 subjects throughout the school year. Math, Mongolian language, and foreign language classes usually meet every day and classes such as literature, history, technology, art, physical education, and others meet twice a week. Students move in groups with their classmates from class to class. Students are graded on exams, daily homework, class participation, and attendance. To maintain good grades, students must attend each class, turn in homework, and do well on oral, written, and multiple choice tests. All students study the same subjects in their respective grade and at the same level of difficulty. All students wear uniforms from Monday to Thursday, and on Fridays wear casual clothes that meet school dress code.

Teenagers are not responsible for packing their own lunch for school. There are often two shifts in schools. The morning shift classes end around 1pm and afternoon classes begin around 1:30 or 2, so students normally eat lunch after they return from school or before they go. Students usually receive snack money from their parents.

Fighting and bullying are not tolerated on school property and may have severe consequences. The perpetrator will be sent to the school director, parents and police will be involved, and the student may be expelled. Cheating is not allowed and students who are caught will be punished (usually by giving a failing grade) and their parents called.

The relationship between teachers and students is formal. Students are expected to show respect for teachers at all times. Boys and girls study together in the same classroom with the exception of technology classes, where boys are taught industrial arts and girls are taught home economics.

Few parents are in close contact with teachers, but are made aware of any behavioral or academic problems with their children. Each semester, there is a parent-teacher meeting at all schools where parents learn about their children's academic progress. Some parents speak with the class teacher more frequently to check on their children.

Most students take part in extracurricular, fee-based activities outside of school since public schools do not offer clubs. Most private schools offer different clubs, including science, drama, debate and others.

FOOD

In general, Mongolians love to eat meat (mutton and beef are most common), which is considered essential to survive the harsh winters. There are no dietary or religious restrictions, and fad diets are not popular. There are an increasing number of vegetarians, though their numbers are quite small. People who live in the countryside rarely eat vegetables on a daily basis, but when they do it tends to be carrots, potatoes, cabbage, and onions. People in the city are increasingly trying to include more vegetables in their meals.

RELIGION

More than half of the population practices Buddhism, and a third consider themselves non-religious. Buddhists usually visit their temple 2-3 times a year, and families do not always go together. Places of worship do not serve as community centers, and attending weekly religious services is rare.

PERSONAL CARE

It is common for teenagers in cities to shower every 1-2 days. In the countryside, where water must be heated, teenagers shower twice a week. If clothing looks clean, teenagers will wear the same clothes more than twice. In some families the mother or female children are responsible for doing the laundry and cleaning the bathroom; in others, every member is responsible for these chores. Most teenagers know how to use washing machines. All laundry is hung out to dry. Everyone has their own towels which are kept in the bathroom and used for two weeks on average. Teenagers iron their clothes. They usually change their clothes when they get home and wear sweatpants and sweatshirts around the house.



The Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. FLEX provides competitively selected secondary school students from 22 countries in Europe and Eurasia with the opportunity to spend the academic year in the U.S. living with a volunteer host family and attending a host high school. Begun in 1993, FLEX now has over 29,000 alumni.