

Friends of Mongolia

Newsletter

Jan-Mar 2023



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FOM Mission

Friends of Mongolia (FOM) is organized and operated exclusively for charitable, educational, and developmental purposes. Our mission is to develop partnerships with the people of Mongolia in furtherance of cultural exchange and human development. In fulfillment of this mission, our membership and fundraising supports the core programs, listed below, that contribute to the future of Mongolia.

Jan-Feb 23 Update

The FOM Executive Committee (ExCom) had an exceptionally busy three months, and we are delighted to give you the updates on our progress. If anyone wants clarification or more information about a specific topic mentioned below, please feel free to contact us.

Education: Since the onboarding of a Scholarship Program Manager and Coordinator, our Education component of FOM is experiencing a structural revamping. We are providing monthly training and social events for our scholarship students and developing a strategy to attract more donors to this pillar, enabling us to support more students from across the country. We've also recently received formal confirmation from the Allentown West Rotary Club to support our newest initiative, the 21/21 Program. Please see the next page for an introduction to this initiative.

Community Development: We recently announced that our community development grant program is open for applicants until 15 April. As a team, we decided that this season's theme will highlight the important contributions of Mongolian youth in the countryside. We want to provide financial support for a youth-designed, youth-led initiative that will assist their community. If you know of an organization, or team of young people eager to serve their countryside community, please share our announcement with them (via facebook, or our website's news link).

Community Outreach: As many of you have seen, or attended in person, we hosted our first in-person Tsagaan Sar since Covid-19. We were overwhelmed with the number of attendees and are delighted to begin strategizing for an even bigger and better event for next year. Also, FOM assisted students from Georgetown's Foreign Service program connect with the Mongolian Embassy in D.C. We have more opportunities in the future to strengthen community relations. Check them out at the end of the newsletter.



21/21 Initiative

Friends of Mongolia (FOM) has over 15 years' experience promoting, screening, and disbursing scholarships to Mongolian students from the countryside, based on merit and needs. In 2022, FOM received over 240 applications for 5 positions. With inflation at unprecedented levels... we are eager to provide more support for Mongolian families.

Details

Objective: Locate 21 service (such as Rotary/Lions) clubs in the US to partner with FOM in providing a full-tuition scholarship to a student from every province in Mongolia by the 2025-2026 academic year.



We need our Membership Community's help in attracting clubs and organizations to this cause. FOM Leadership is prepared to serve as the centralizing hub for all communications, translations, and financial transfers in order to support the students and their relationship with the sponsoring organization.

This is a unique opportunity to get your local community involved in improving the quality of life for others, while strengthening grassroots relations between members of our two nations. Please feel free to contact codirector.usa@friendsofmongolia.org for more details about how to get involved.



Peace Corps Experiences

Daniel Lindbergh Lang

For Tsagaan Sar 2023, I fulfilled a goal from four years ago. I returned at last to the host family with whom I stayed when I first arrived in Mongolia. Besides allowing me to reminisce, the journey helped me to more fully appreciate where I serve now.

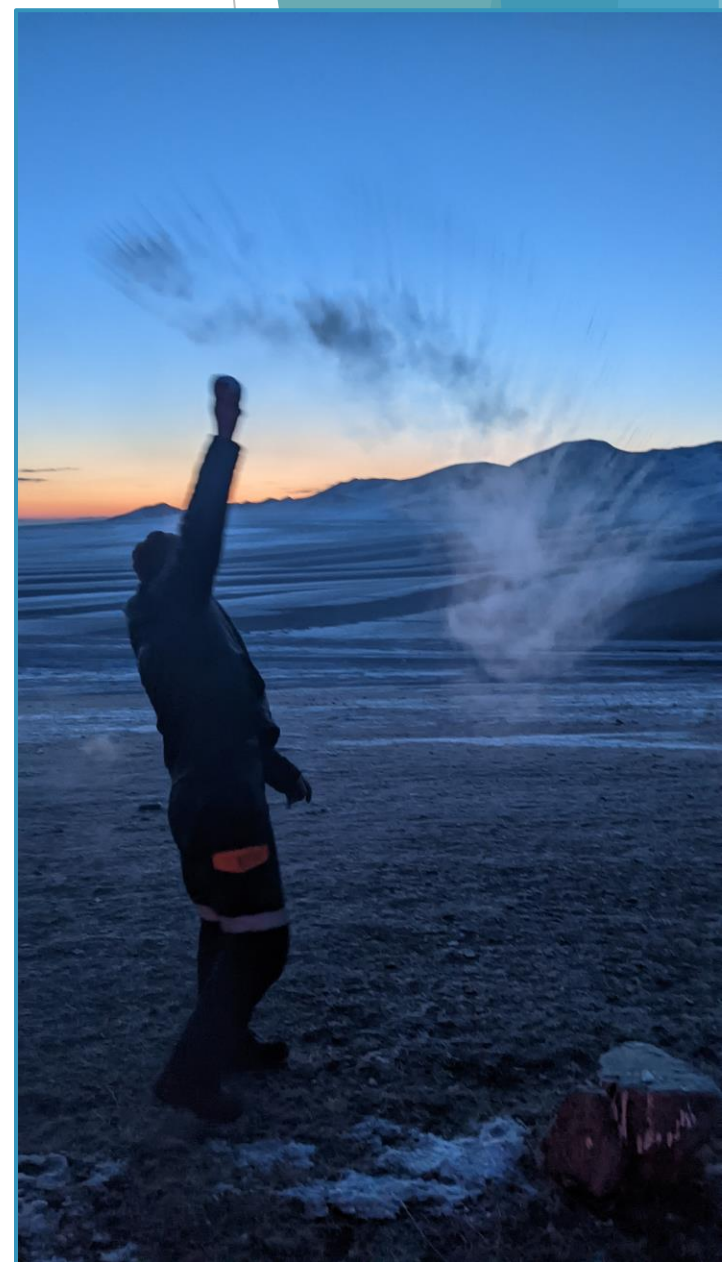
Four years ago, from June 2019 through August, I stayed with a Mongol host family in the Nomgon soum community of Selenge. Almost every week, I'd also traveled into Darkhan with fellow M30 Peace Corps Trainees for sessions and supplies before returning to our soums. That August, I received my Peace Corps assignment to Erdenet. And from Erdenet, March 2020, I evacuated to Ulaanbaatar and from Mongolia when COVID-19 unfolded.

This Tsagaan Sar, with annual leave, I went on vacation from Feb. 18 to 26, 2023 to revisit Darkhan, Nomgon and Erdenet. Seeing familiar sights reminded me so concretely of how I really had lived here before. And seeing familiar family and friends, particularly the children now grown up, amazed me. My host mother and our soum neighbor both commented about how I'd lost weight, gesturing at my thinner cheeks! I hadn't noticed, but I assumed they were right.

On parts of this trip, I also traveled with a Peace Corps M29 friend Tylor, who had since grown famous for appearing in a Tsagaan Sar film last year. During this year's Bituun, my host sister told us his film was playing! So he and I watched it on TV with my family in the countryside. The next morning, we hiked to a mountaintop.

For Tsagaan Sar's Third New Day, my host family gifted me my ticket to Erdenet. That Sunday, then, I approached the door to the apartment where I once lived. I walked the halls of the university where I once taught.

That Monday, returning to work in the capital and ceremonially greeting dozens of department coworkers, I indeed felt some peace. Although my life in Mongolia faced that two-and-a-half-year hiatus, I've indeed still lived one continuous story. So I returned to work with renewed vigor. I'm certainly in the right place.





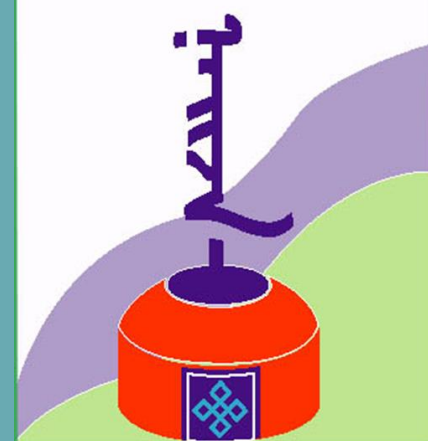
Peace Corps Experiences

Paul Reese

Vast winter-scape, cattle at graze, frozen toes, cozy homes, icy paths, gentle smiles, brisk wind, and warm embraces. These are among the sights of Mongolia in late winter, the dawn of a new year. For my first Tsagaan Sar, Mongolia's Lunar New Year, I was invited to a small soum (town) in Khentii Aimag (province). Travelling by bus from the capital, Ulaanbaatar, accompanied by a local counterpart, I was awestruck by the countryside on the day of Bituun (dark moon), the last day of the old year. After greeting my hosts, I participated in cleaning and preparing homes for the new year, which included building the ul boov (bread tower), eating lots of buuz (mutton dumplings) and consuming dairy products (milk tea, curd candy, airag). The following morning, at sunrise, or first light of the new year, we embarked on a ceremonial hike up the mountain to ring in the new year. There are no words or pictures to depict the majesty of this experience.

After a bit of vodka, snuff bottle passing, and chants, accompanied by cheerful grins and genuine embraces of old friends and new, the holiday officially began. Over the next three days, young families and all of the children visited the homes of elders. Once invited in, visitors used a special greeting, zolgokh, while asking "*amar bain uu?*" or "are you with peace?" All members of the community were dressed in traditional Mongolian attire, or deel. The new year traditions continued with eating dozens of buuz, drinking vodka & airag (fermented mare's milk), carving from the wassail (beef), listening to stories, playing shagai (ankle bone dice) games, doing chores (i.e. washing dishes, chopping wood, feeding cows), and greeting visitors. Later my counterpart and I joined another family to visit a nomadic family, where the same festivities continued in similar fashion. Among the chore list was collecting and up-righting cows with freezing joints. We even hoisted a very cold cow into the back of a Toyota Prius!

Alas, my experience continued in a very Mongolian way, as have every day in this beautiful country. I am continuing to learn the nuances of this deep, unique culture, giving new perspectives on the staples of society, family, and personal conviction. As winter turns to spring, we are reminded of the blessings of friendship, community, and generosity.



FRIENDS OF
MONGOLIA



Peace Corps Experiences

Christopher Wizda

What a whirlwind it has been these past few months; adapting to Mongolia, meeting new people, going through training, and now, finally settled in at my permanent site at School 23 in Ulaanbaatar! I am so happy to be here and I'm sure that this enthusiasm will continue for the rest of my service. I'm off to a good start, I feel; I have been making new friends, starting to work on projects, developing youth club events, and even been dabbling in some new hobbies and interests. I have lived abroad before for many years and this isn't my first rodeo working in a similar capacity but I came to Mongolia with a little bit different mindset, I came here with the attitude that I will give it my all professionally and socially. This vigor and enthusiasm has been paying off! I have been meeting many interesting characters and have been involved in events both at my site and in the local community.

One event in particular stands out- On March 8th (Women's Day), I attended a fundraising and outreach event put on by the Mongolian Quilting Center, an organization that promotes upcycling and income generation for families by taking discarded clothes and creating new products to sell; they're a great organization, I recommend stopping by their shop and supporting! During this event, there were more than just stands selling different items and showing off creativity, they also had a fashion show of the clothes they made from discarded fabric and then a musical performance by Macho, a Mongolian reggae musician. I love reggae but moreover reggae with a local twist so I was absolutely astounded when he came on. His style incorporates traditional reggae styles but he adds his own twist to the genre by creating what he terms as "nomadic reggae" in which he meshes traditional Mongolian singing/musical styles. His performance and the Mongolian Quilting Center products, got me thinking about the importance of local creativity. After assessing the feelings and interests of youth at my site, I plan to create programs that enable and promote artistic creation not only at my site but in the greater community.



Reflections from a Fulbrighter

Tom Offer-Westort

As a newcomer to Mongolia, I was incredibly excited for Tsagaan Sar. People have been telling me about how great the Mongolian lunar new year is since I first arrived, and it absolutely lived up to expectations.

I visited three families during the three days of Tsagaan Sar – the family of a close friend, my language teacher, and my morin khuur teacher. Fortunately, both that close friend and my language teacher had prepared me for some of the new traditions I would experience. The first of which is “zolgokh,” a kind of formal greeting. Younger people seek out older friends and family members and place their forearms underneath their elders’, to show support. The younger person might hold a long, blue cloth called a khatag between their hands, sometimes with a gift of money for the host or other family members. They then touch cheeks and offer holiday-specific greetings, such as “Амар байна уу?”

Many people spend a lot of time with their families, including extended family members they might not see much throughout the year. A lot of effort is spent in preparing food. I had two separate friends tell me they made 1,500 buuz in preparation for the holiday! With the focus on food and family, I couldn’t help but think about American Thanksgiving. The spirit of the holiday felt similar to me.

My language teacher is Buryat, and visiting with her family offered some insight into how their traditions vary just a bit. For many Mongolian families, the centerpiece of the table is a tower of ul boov, a kind of cookie or biscuit stacked in an odd number of layers and served with aaruul, a kind of dry dairy product, on top and sometimes between. Because many people will be visiting over a few days, it’s common to not eat the ul boov until Tsagaan Sar is over. In the Buryat tradition, the ul boov is served in a bowl, and it’s available to eat at any time. I was excited to see this, since I wanted to give it a try and wouldn’t have any once the holiday was over.

One highlight of the experience was learning traditional Mongolian games played with ankle bones. One game involved flicking sheep and goat bones into each other in a style vaguely reminiscent of marbles. In another, each player rolled a die and collected a group of similarly colored bones. It was a great opportunity to hang out and make some new friends.

I’ve encountered so much kindness, friendliness, and generosity since arriving in Mongolia, and my lunar new year experience only continued that trend. Hopefully this was only my first Tsagaan Sar of many to come!



January



January saw the FOM ExCom and Boardmembers in the DC area pull together to begin planning for the Tsagaan Sar Event in February. Additionally, FOM ExCom Officers attended and participated in the Yokosuka Council on Asia-Pacific Studies' Third Neighbor Policy discussion at the National University of Mongolia.



On January 10th, officials from the Japanese and American Embassies, joined a Mongolian scholar, and FOM ExCom Officer to engage with the Mongolian public (off-line/off-the-record) about Mongolia's Third Neighbor Policy. It was a great event that showed FOM has the potential to fill a niche in designing a similar initiative.



On January 18th, Peace Corps Mongolia held their M31 Swearing In Ceremony. It was a wonderful and heartwarming opportunity to see the Trainees move on to their next step. FOM ExCom officers were lucky enough to attend and wish them the best in their service!

February



February was our busiest month! Friends of Mongolia organized 4 events on 3 continents! For those who attended, we hope you had an incredible time celebrating Tsagaan Sar with us. We hope to expand and improve our programs next year!



FOM hosted Tsagaan Sar on February 18th in the DC Area. It was a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with friends and family. We are already in the process of planning and improving for next year!

On February 14th, FOM helped facilitate Georgetown University's Master's of Science in Foreign Service program visit the Embassy of Mongolia in order to discuss Mongolia's foreign policy and history of US-Mongolian relations.



Friends in Australia met to have a "Barbie" (Australian slang for BBQ) and Buuz, celebrating the holiday far from home.



The scholarship recipients and ExCom Officers who remained in UB during the holiday met to celebrate!

March



March was an administratively engaging month for the FOM ExCom. We primarily focused on preparing and refining the documents necessary to announce our Community Grants program. However, our team successfully arranged an event for our scholarship recipients on 23 March, in collaboration with the Education Advising and Resource Center (EARC) and Peace Corps Volunteer, Paul Reese.

Paul led a session on CV and Resume strategies and methods for strengthening their professional profiles.



We are thankful for Paul and his willingness to collaborate with us, so we could provide useful professional tips for our scholarship recipients. We are hopeful that this will lead to more grassroots collaboration between Peace Corps Volunteers and Friends of Mongolia.



Educational Programs



Friends of Mongolia recognizes there aren't as many educational programs in the academic world that focus on Mongolia, as compared to China, or Japan, or Korean studies. While our following list is not all encompassing, and we do not endorse any program over another (we are neutral), we want to share these opportunities with our community in case someone is interested in pursuing Mongolian studies. The list below is in no specific order.

We intend to keep this list as a "living, breathing" document that we can continually contribute to. If you know of, or stumble upon, an opportunity we don't have listed, please feel free to send us the details so we can include it in the future. Thank you!

ACMS-American Center for Mongolian Studies: If you are interested in a fellowship or scholarship opportunity to be able to study Mongolia while living there consider

"The Field School is open to all participants, including undergraduate and graduate students, professionals, teachers and life-long learners interested in exploring aspects of Mongolia's unique culture and geography. All participants will have the opportunity to learn field research techniques, conduct self-selected research projects, travel within Mongolia to urban and countryside areas, and gain a unique insight into the landscapes and people of Mongolia. The ACMS Field Research Fellowship provides support of up to \$4,000 to support short-term student, post-doctoral, or faculty field research in Mongolia in the Summer or Fall. The program is funded by the US State Department Educational and Cultural Affairs Bureau and the Council of American Overseas Research Centers."

[\(https://www.mongoliacenter.org/mfs23/\)](https://www.mongoliacenter.org/mfs23/)

Indiana University: offers a Mongolian language program. The Mongolian program in the Indiana University Department of Central Eurasian Studies (CEUS) is the only department in the United States that offers the opportunity to study three years of this extremely important historical and interesting region in Central Eurasia. Every year, they offer introductory, intermediate, and advanced Mongolian classes taught by professional and enthusiastic native speakers.

<https://iaunrc.indiana.edu/opportunities/languages/mongolian.html>

They also offer a PhD for Central Eurasian Studies.

University of Michigan: The doctoral degree in Asian Languages and Cultures is administered by the Rackham Graduate School. Students with at least a bachelor's degree and a strong desire to pursue research should apply to the Ph.D. Program in Asian Languages and Cultures. Department faculty specialize in the areas of East, South, and Southeast Asia, with expertise in disciplines that include cultural studies, intellectual history, linguistics, literature, performance studies, philosophy, religion, and visual culture. Students accepted into the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures may craft and pursue programs of graduate study in fields such as Asian film, Chinese history, Korean culture, Japanese literature, Javanese cultural studies, Buddhist studies or any other combination of geographical area and academic discipline for which there is sufficient faculty availability and interest.

<https://lsa.umich.edu/asian/graduates/prospective-students.html>

Educational Programs



Western Washington University East Asian Studies: The East Asian Studies Program provides opportunities for an interdisciplinary study of East Asia, with a primary focus on the countries of China and Japan. Offering a BA and a Minor in East Asian Studies, the Program is designed to attain three major objectives: offering students an opportunity to acquire accurate, detailed, and comprehensive knowledge of a region that is becoming increasingly important in world affairs; preparing students who are attracted by job opportunities related to East Asia in business, government, or teaching; and providing solid undergraduate training for students who plan to enter East Asian programs in their graduate studies.

Mongolia provides information to students, educators, and the general public regarding teaching, learning, and research about Mongolia.

(<https://studymongolia.wwu.edu/>)

Freeman Awards for Study in Asia: Freeman Awards for Study in Asia provides scholarships to U.S. undergraduate students with documented financial need wishing to study in East or Southeast Asia, including Mongolia. U.S. citizens and permanent residents enrolled at a two- or four-year college seeking support for study abroad expenses such as airfare, living costs, local transportation, books, and related costs are encouraged to apply.

<https://www.iie.org/programs/freeman-asia/>

Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program: sponsored by the United States Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs — offers teaching and research grants of between four and ten months to academics and appropriately qualified professionals outside of academia interested in teaching undergraduate courses and/or conducting specialized research at an appropriate institution in Mongolia. Fulbright Scholars are also asked to give public talks, aid with curriculum and program development, mentor students, and engage their host community in other ways.

<https://fulbrightscholars.org/us-scholar-awards>

Mongolia Foundation: Mongolia Foundation is a non-profit organization based in San Francisco that supports education about Mongolia and Mongolian Studies in the U.S. The foundation offers scholarships and fellowships to Mongolians and American students of Mongolian heritage enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities.

<http://www.mongoliafoundation.org/our-scholarship-program/>

Georgetown University: The East Asian Department seeks to give students comprehensive exposure to the cultures of East Asia. The department's wide selection of elective courses taught in English, Chinese, Japanese and Korean serves students throughout the university as well as majors and minors in the program. Through this blend of East Asian-language and English-language courses, the department seeks to enrich students' understanding of East Asian social, cultural, and literary traditions and to give them a sophisticated appreciation of contemporary East Asia beyond common stereotypes.

(<https://ealac.georgetown.edu/>)

Upcoming Opportunities

Friends of Mongolia was designed to only be limited by the capacity and resources of its members. We are eager to collaborate with individuals, organizations, and businesses to expand our impact, both in depth and breadth. Feel free to contact us with ideas!



Opportunities to Serve or Connect

-FOM operates solely on donations. We appreciate any amount you can spare. This money goes to our three core programs (nothing to the volunteers). Please share our organization with friends and family, or anyone who has an interest in Mongolia. We want to serve as a centralizing hub for community relations.

-We are looking for potential partners (individuals, cohorts, Rotary Clubs, etc) to help us with a 21 Province/21 Student Scholarship Program. In the coming years we are hoping to provide full tuition scholarships for a student from each province. If you are interested in learning more, please contact Nick at codirector.usa@friendsofmongolia.org

-We are interested in supporting formalized and informal/nascent Sister-City relationships, especially in Denver, Fairbanks, Bellingham (Washington), Irving (Texas), and St. Louis. If you are in or around these cities and interested in learning more, please contact Nick at codirector.usa@friendsofmongolia.org. If you aren't in these cities but still want to participate in events, let us know and we could potentially help you arrange something local.

-6 May, (1000-1400), the Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center will be hosting a free citizenship application workshop at the Rockville Memorial Library in Rockville, Maryland. If you want to learn more, let us know and we'll share their flyer with you!

-21 May (1200-1800), Asian Festival on Main will be held. MakeUsVisible has agreed to share their booth with Friends of Mongolia. Please check out the festival and consider stopping by our booth!

-We are in the process of designing and receiving FOM t-shirts and mugs. We are excited to share this "swag" with you once it's in.

-There has been some interest in hosting an informal Mongolian-language exchange series in the D.C. area. If you are interested in participating in this, please let us know at codirector.usa@friendsofmongolia.org.