

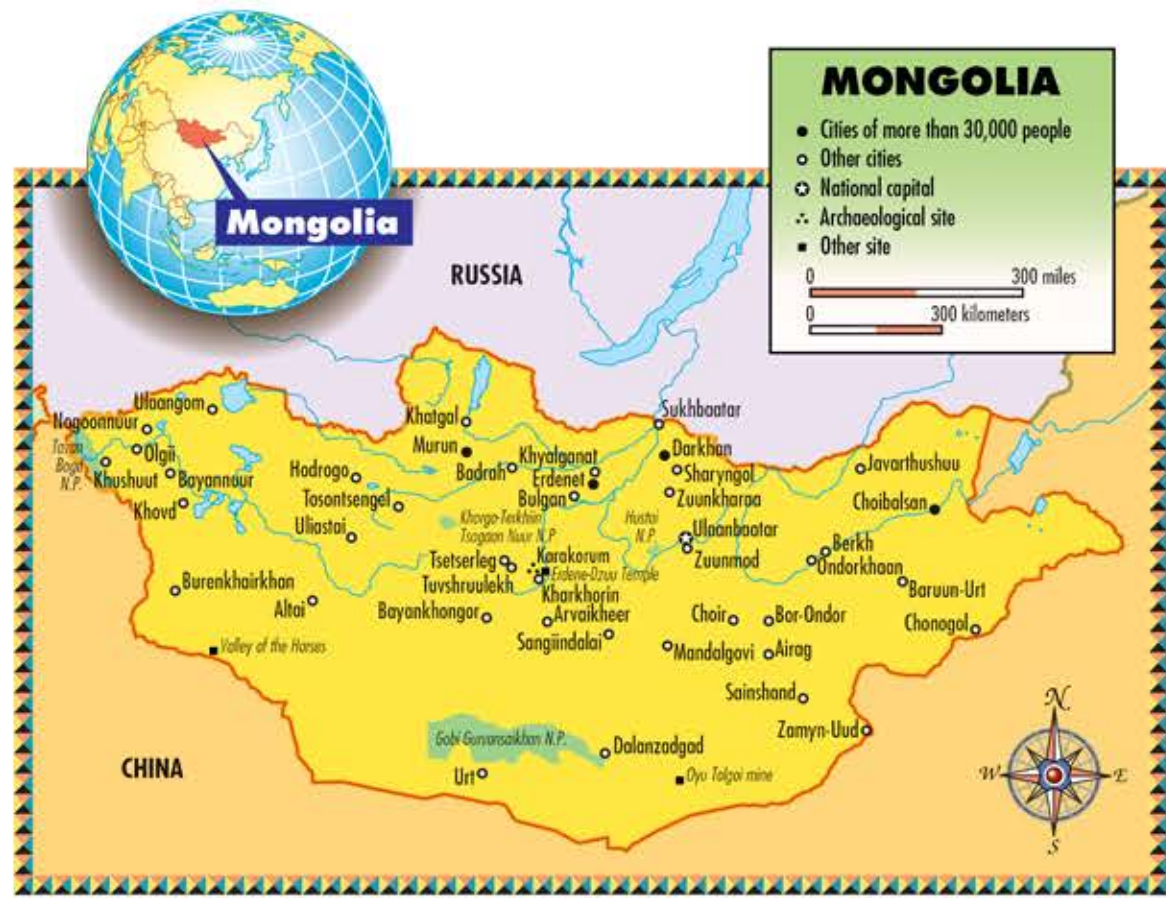
Above Only Sky

SUREN IS FROM A SMALL VILLAGE IN MONGOLIA, a country in central Asia. For centuries, his family members have been nomadic herders who raised livestock on the steppe, a vast grassland near the Gobi Desert. They moved their animals around to find sources of fresh water and good grazing grounds. Mongolian nomads live in large, round tents called *gers*, which they pack up and take with them when they move to the next pasture. The Mongolian steppe and parts of the Gobi are well suited for herding sheep, goats, horses, yaks, and Bactrian camels. Suren's family herded camels.

On the Steppe

Suren was proud of his family's camel herd. A Bactrian camel has two humps. It can carry 450 pounds (200 kilograms) of cargo and walk 3 to 4 miles per hour (5 to 6 kilometers per hour). Suren loves how they plod along in their odd, loping

Opposite: In winter, Bactrian camels have long, woolly coats. These coats shed quickly, in large pieces, when the weather begins to warm.



Suren spent part of the year back in his village so he could attend school. He would rather have been on the steppe, but his older sister, Khulan, liked living in town. She would prefer to live in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia's capital, where nearly half the country's population lives.

Hard Times

Then, one winter, Suren's life completely changed. The desert, steppe, and mountains experienced a brutal winter called a *zud*. Bitter cold, snow, and winds devastated the herds, and millions of animals died. Hundreds of thousands of herding

A herder drives sheep across the frozen land in western Mongolia.



way. But camels can run, too. After Suren's family settled in a new camp and unloaded the packs from the camels' backs, the camels were let loose and off they went. Some camels can outrun a horse. Camels provided Suren's family with milk and wool. Some herders also use the camels for meat, but Suren's father did not slaughter his livestock.

When Suren's family reached a new pasture, they set up their ger camp and looked for water for the camels. The region has few streams or ponds so they took water from wells. Suren was six when he began helping pull buckets of water up for the camels. A camel can drink 25 to 30 gallons (95 to 115 liters) at a time, so it takes a long time to water the herd.

families lost everything. Some people kept what few camels had survived and decided to try making a living as tour guides. In that business, tour companies send tourists to the village and the herders lead them on camel rides through the desert and steppe. The tourists stay overnight with people at “home-stays”—lodgings in the nomads’ gers. The tourists enjoy the hospitality, and the income is good for the local people who have lost their traditional livelihood.

Suren’s family lost their livelihood. Most of their camel herd died in the zud, and his father decided enough was enough. He gave the surviving camels to his brother, and the family packed their ger and moved to Ulaanbaatar.

In the City

The family moved to a *khasha*, one of many fenced camps of gers outside of Ulaanbaatar. Khulan excitedly made plans to spend her last year of high school in the big city and then go to the university. Suren’s mother found work in a shop selling clothes and handicrafts. She had been the finest seamstress in the village, using needles that had been passed down from her grandmother. Suren’s father is considering going to work in a mine in the Gobi. Suren, Khulan, and their mother do not want him to go, but mining jobs pay well.

Khulan would like their family to make enough money that they can move out of the ger and into an apartment with indoor plumbing and electric heat. Suren and his mother do not want to leave the *khasha* community. Their ger is home. Suren’s mother says they have all they need. The ger is roomy, beauti-



ful, and comfortable, with red and blue camel-hair carpets and embroidered blankets on the walls. A cook stove in the center keeps them all warm and well fed. In Suren’s sleeping area, he hangs pouches made of animal hide and felt that hold his favorite belongings, including books, a chessboard, and *shagai*, sheep anklebones he uses to play many different games.

Suren is thinking about his future, but it is uncertain. Will he go to university? Will he work in the mines? Or will he return to the steppe and build a new herd? For the time being, he will remain with his family in their ger outside the big, bustling city that is the nation’s capital.

Roughly half the people in Mongolia live in gers.

Land of Blue Sky

MONGOLIA IS A LAND OF SPECTACULAR AND nearly untouched beauty. Mountains, some snowcapped, tower over a vast landscape of valleys, meadows, forests, steppe grasslands, and deserts of ever-swirling sands. Above all the diversity of landforms, the sun shines in a vivid blue sky.

Mongolia is the fourth-largest country on the Asian continent, more than twice the size of the U.S. state of Texas. It is located in the eastern part of the Central Asian Plateau, bordered by Russia to the north and China to the south. Mongolia is completely landlocked. The nearest body of water is the Yellow Sea in the Pacific Ocean, 435 miles (700 km) to the east across northeast China.

Mountains

Mongolia has three major mountain ranges. In the west, the soaring Altai Range stretches about 250 miles (400 km) from the far west toward the south. This range includes the country's highest peak, the snowcapped Mount Huiten, which

Opposite: Lakes nestle in craggy valleys high in the Altai Mountains of western Mongolia.

Timeline

MONGOLIAN HISTORY

The Chinese Qin dynasty builds walls to fend off Mongolians on horseback.	221 BCE
Mongolian groups unite and expand their empire.	200 CE to 400 CE
Uighurs take control of Mongolia.	741
The Mongol Empire is the world's largest land empire ever.	Late 1200s
Kublai Khan becomes the Great Khan.	1260
Italian explorer Marco Polo joins Kublai Khan's court.	1275
Kublai Khan takes over Mongolia and China and creates the Yuan dynasty.	1276
The Ming dynasty takes over Mongolia.	1368
Altan Khan introduces Buddhism to Mongolia.	1578
The Qing dynasty begins its rule over Mongolia.	1636

WORLD HISTORY

ca. 2500 BCE	The Egyptians build the pyramids and the Sphinx in Giza.
ca. 563 BCE	The Buddha is born in India.
313 CE	The Roman emperor Constantine legalizes Christianity.
610	The Prophet Muhammad begins preaching a new religion called Islam.
1054	The Eastern (Orthodox) and Western (Roman Catholic) Churches break apart.
1095	The Crusades begin.
1215	King John seals the Magna Carta.
1300s	The Renaissance begins in Italy.
1347	The plague sweeps through Europe.
1453	Ottoman Turks capture Constantinople, conquering the Byzantine Empire.
1492	Columbus arrives in North America.
1500s	Reformers break away from the Catholic Church, and Protestantism is born.
1776	The U.S. Declaration of Independence is signed.

MONGOLIAN HISTORY

The Qing dynasty falls and Outer Mongolia declares independence.	1911
The Chinese army occupies Outer Mongolia.	1919
The Mongolian People's Party is founded.	1920
Soviet troops drive China out of Mongolia.	1921
Mongolia renames itself the Mongolian People's Republic.	1924
The Soviet Union orders the destruction of Buddhist temples in Mongolia.	1936
Demonstrators in Sukhbaatar Square call for free elections and an end to Soviet control of Mongolia.	1989
The Soviet government withdraws from Mongolia.	1990
Mongolia changes its name back to Mongolia.	1992
Eight million livestock animals die in a zud.	2010
Oyu Tolgoi mine opens in the Gobi Desert.	2013
Mongolia becomes one of the fastest-growing economies in the world.	2015

WORLD HISTORY

1789	The French Revolution begins.
1865	The American Civil War ends.
1879	The first practical lightbulb is invented.
1914	World War I begins.
1917	The Bolshevik Revolution brings communism to Russia.
1929	A worldwide economic depression begins.
1939	World War II begins.
1945	World War II ends.
1969	Humans land on the Moon.
1975	The Vietnam War ends.
1989	The Berlin Wall is torn down as communism crumbles in Eastern Europe.
1991	The Soviet Union breaks into separate states.
2001	Terrorists attack the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon near Washington, D.C.
2004	A tsunami in the Indian Ocean destroys coastlines in Africa, India, and Southeast Asia.
2008	The United States elects its first African American president.