

## How Mongolia is helping its nomads adapt to big city life

### Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

#### 1 Warmer

Complete these sentences. Then check your answers in the text.

1. The capital city of Mongolia is ...
2. A large Mongolian tent is called a ...
3. The famous 13th-century Mongolian ruler was called ...

#### 2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then find them in the article to read them in context. The paragraph numbers will help you.

insulating

herder

framework

nomadic

plain

1. a structure that supports something and gives it a shape \_\_\_\_\_ (para 2)
2. keeping heat in and cold out \_\_\_\_\_ (para 2)
3. a person who looks after groups of animals and moves them from place to place \_\_\_\_\_ (para 2)
4. a large flat area of open land \_\_\_\_\_ (para 2)
5. moving from place to place; not staying in one place \_\_\_\_\_ (para 2)

shelter

pride

fixed

empire

densely populated

6. with a lot of people living close together \_\_\_\_\_ (para 3)
7. when something doesn't move \_\_\_\_\_ (para 4)
8. a number of countries ruled by one person or government \_\_\_\_\_ (para 4)
9. a feeling of respect for yourself \_\_\_\_\_ (para 7)
10. a place where people are protected from bad weather \_\_\_\_\_ (para 8)

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#### Welcome to the yurt-opolis! How Mongolia is helping its nomads adapt to big city life

Oliver Wainwright

17 May, 2020

- 1 On Google Earth, you can see that the Mongolian capital, Ulaanbaatar, looks completely different from other cities. Around the city centre, there are hundreds of thousands of tiny white dots.
- 2 These dots are yurts (or *gers* in Mongolian). They are tents, made of a wooden framework and insulating felt and canvas. For thousands of years, they have been the houses of the Mongolian herders on the plains. Nomadic habits are not easily changed when herders move to the city – and this causes problems.
- 3 “Mongolia is the least densely populated country in the world,” says Badruun Gardi. He grew up in Ulaanbaatar and, in 2016, started GerHub. It helps people learn how to live in a city. “When you’re a herder, you can go for miles and miles without seeing another family. You don’t have to think about living in a small space with hundreds or thousands of people.”
- 4 The idea of a fixed capital city has always felt strange for this country of nomadic herders. In the 13th-century, Genghis Khan ruled his vast empire from a nine-metre-wide yurt. Ulaanbaatar itself used to be a nomadic town, formed by thousands of tents that followed wherever the herds of animals went. In the 1920s, the Soviet Union changed the name of the capital from Urga to Ulaanbaatar (which means *Red Hero*) and built concrete blocks of flats there. But, as thousands have moved to the city in recent years, the capital has got bigger. The herders have come to the city for better education, healthcare and jobs. But moving from a nomadic life to life in a big city is difficult.
- 5 The world outside the *ger* is not grassland but a small private piece of land, with a two-metre-high fence. Secondly, the new city residents must learn that what they do and how they live affects others.
- 6 There is no running water in the *ger* districts, sewerage or central heating. In winter, when temperatures can fall to -40C, each family burns around three to five tonnes of coal. This makes Ulaanbaatar one of the most polluted cities in the world. And the problem is getting worse because the *ger* districts are growing by 30,000 people every year.
- 7 Gardi founded GerHub to help bring a sense of pride to the *ger* districts. Now the organization’s educational and social programme has a new home, in a modern version of the traditional *ger*.
- 8 The new Ger Innovation Hub has plastic walls around a wooden framework and an inner space that has mud-brick walls. In summer, the plastic walls can open up. In the hard and difficult winter, the building creates a shelter.
- 9 The building has spaces that can be used for all kinds of activities, from preschool playtime to workshops for teenagers, training sessions for local businesses and meet-ups for the elderly.
- 10 The layered design means that, if it’s -40C outside, it would be about 0C in the outer part of the building, thanks to solar heat. This is fine for children to run around with their coats on. The central space only needs to be heated to 15C because of the warmth that comes from the mud walls. A circular space at the centre can be covered by a *ger* to create an even more cosy space where small groups of people can meet.
- 11 “We want it to be as lively a place as possible,” says Gardi. “In winter, it can be very difficult being indoors for months on end, so we hope this will be a place for herders to have a social life.”

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#### 3 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Thousands of nomadic herders are moving from the countryside in Mongolia to the capital city.
2. Mongolian herders and their families must learn how to live with other people in the city.
3. Mongolia is the most densely populated country in the world.
4. It can get extremely cold in the winter in Mongolia.
5. Most people have central heating in their yurts.
6. Ulaanbaatar is one of the least polluted cities in the world.
7. The new Ger Innovation Hub gives nomadic herders a place to live in the winter.
8. The Ger Innovation Hub is for people of all ages.

#### 4 Matching

Match the beginnings and endings to make statements about the text.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Mongolia's capital city is ...                        | a. ... water or central heating.           |
| 2. Modern-day Ulaanbaatar ...                            | b. ... was built by the Soviet Union.      |
| 3. The white <i>gers</i> are ...                         | c. ... all around the edges of the city.   |
| 4. Most of the <i>gers</i> are in their own piece of ... | d. ... getting bigger every year.          |
| 5. The <i>gers</i> do not have running ...               | e. ... ruled from a yurt.                  |
| 6. The Mongolian Empire was once ...                     | f. ... land and are surrounded by a fence. |

#### 5 Discussion

1. Find Ulaanbaatar on Google Earth. Look at the satellite views and photographs and talk about what you see.
2. Follow the link below and discuss the four pictures of the Ger Innovation Hub. Is it different from what you imagined when you read the article?

[www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/may/17/yurt-opolis-mongolia-city-life-ulaanbaatar-community-hub#img-1](http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/may/17/yurt-opolis-mongolia-city-life-ulaanbaatar-community-hub#img-1)

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### 6 Webquest

Make a country fact file about Mongolia. Look for information on the following topics.

- The land
- The people
- The language(s)
- Money and businesses
- Food
- Transport
- Traditions and festivals
- The weather