

# Toemmes on Mongolia: 'Things are different here'

Cottage Grove's resident world traveler recently returned from Mongolia, and the trip has given him a new outlook.

When not at home, Steve Toemmes travels to far-flung destinations not frequented by the average tourist. Recently, the Sentinel has reported on Toemmes' visits to Norway, Greenland and Antarctica, among other locales. A recent trip to Mongolia, however, had a profound impact on Toemmes, as he himself writes:

Having just spent three weeks in Mongolia I came away with a unique perspective on life. After traveling the world, I came away with the belief that after everything goes to hell in the world, there will always be Mongolia.

The people of Mongolia can document their history from the Stone Age to the present day. They threw off the chains of domination by the Manchu in 1911, achieved full independence from China in 1921 and finally, from Russian domination in 1990. They are a proud people, but very hospitable and warm. They were seriously amused at my love for animals. Not know-

ing who I was, we were always invited into their Gers (pronounced geers) or yurts, for Yak butter tea, various homemade cheeses and cookies. We exchanged gifts and heartfelt emotion. The children competed to be photographed. Every person was treasured, from the young boy who loved to care for infants to the aged who had not only the patina of experience but wisdom that they happily passed on.

I traveled with a native guide and driver through southern, central and northern Mongolia. My guide Chimgee was well versed in English and history. She holds a Masters in Mongolian studies. Her dream is to stop the flight of youth from their nomadic family life for service jobs in the city. She wants to do this by educating them in local history and become tour guides for their native provinces.

The varied terrain, dynamic weather, and wide-open skies entranced me. I am already booked for a more extensive tour next year. I would encourage people to forgo the usual travel destinations and experience a true life-changing destination.



Yurts, or Geers, are the main form of housing for many in Mongolia.



The people of Mongolia are warm and friendly.



Domesticated reindeer herds are common in the northern part of Mongolia.

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