



# ***The Last Nomads***

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*Recently, the main reasons that nomads have been urbanizing are Zud (a very harsh winter during which many animals die), jobs in the city, and improvement for their children's education. Therefore, nomadic life is significantly changing.*

## *The Last Nomads*



*Nomadic family moving to fall camp.*



*Nomadic neighbors.*

The pictures were taken by this writer and American experts working in Western Mongolia between 2008 and 2010.

Mongolians originally were nomadic people who, for many centuries, had been living and moving from one place to another. The nomads who still maintain this lifestyle are strong and cheerful people who have been preserving the uniqueness of Mongolian culture by living in traditional *gers* in the countryside, by being hospitable and hardworking, and by wearing traditional clothes and herding their animals. The main livelihood is livestock; thus, nomads move in order to lead their livestock to better pastures according to the four seasons. There are different camps during the spring, summer, fall and winter. In the last few years, however, the number of the nomads has decreased, as Nomads are moving to the Mongolian capital city or other big cities to convert their nomadic lifestyle to a more city lifestyle. However, the nomads who still live in the Mongolian countryside keep their unique lifestyle.

## *The Last Nomads*



*Tearing down ger.*



*A cute little countryside child.*

Nomads live in *gers*, which are known as yurts for western people. *Gers* are fully furnished inside. The interior decor and pieces of furniture are also exquisitely hand-crafted, expressing the distinctive culture of Mongolia. When nomads move from one camp to the other, they tear down their *ger* and pack everything up to load on camels. For example, people in the photo on the right are loading their gear on a camel and securing it tightly. Now, they are ready to hit the road after lunch.

Recently, the main reasons that nomads have been urbanizing are because of *Zud*, a very harsh winter during which many animals die, for jobs in the city and improvement for their children's education. Therefore, nomadic life is significantly changing.



*Loading gear on camel.*

## *The Last Nomads*



*My host father and his interpreter are in front of nomads moving with their camels.*

The main transportation that nomads have been using is camels. Camels in Mongolia have two humps, and are different than camels in the Middle East. They are used for riding, moving from one place to another, and also for dairy products.

If the nomadic movement to the cities increases more than is happening today, there will be negative consequences for Mongolian Nomads, such as the abandonment of the countryside and the loss of the Mongolian traditional culture to a more westernized culture. Also, an important part of the Mongolian traditional culture is hospitality. For instance, if nomads see another family moving, they prepare milk tea and food and take it to them, even though they do not know who they are. In the cities, however, people tend to be suspicious, so nomadic hospitality that came naturally will now be lost.



*Nomads' children.*

Nomadic kids live in the countryside and herd baby goats and lambs during their summer vacation. (It is tough to herd the baby goats and lambs. Even though they are really cute, they run to many different places, so they take up a lot of attention.) Nomadic children go to school in September when their school starts. Education is very important for nomadic families. When the children reach school age, they will attend school in the village center. "Mongolia actually had one of the highest literacy rates in the world at 87 percent" ("Progression").



*Goats and lambs during the snowstorm.*

During the winter, it is very difficult for nomads. They need to take care of their livestock and herd them to more abundant pastures in order to overcome harsh winters. Mongolian nomads had a particularly cold *Zud* two years ago, when they all lost 50-70 percent of their livestock, including horses, cows, camels, goats and sheep. Livestock are very special for nomads, and they are known as one of the best sheep-herding cultures in the world. If the nomads continue moving to the cities, the main source of organic meat and dairy products for the entire country will diminish as well.

## The Last Nomads



*Dell, traditional clothing.*

The Mongolian traditional clothes are called *dell*. They are made of silk and cotton. People make their own *dell* depending on the weather during the summer and winter. The winter *dell* is made of sheepskin and is very warm. Usually nomadic people wear the *dell* in the countryside. Nevertheless, people design their *dell* in many different modern styles and wear it on special occasions in the cities. This photo was taken last year when I visited my hometown. My mom and my aunts still wear their traditional clothes. They are semi-nomads now.



*The Art of Zaya. "So [sic] cute Mongolian kid is so happy and laughing in front of laughing camel."*

This image on the left is of a real nomadic Mongolian girl. Her bright red cheeks reflect the color of her head wrap. She is dressed in traditional ethnic clothes.

Finally, Mongolian nomads are one of the few people on earth who have kept their unusual culture and lifestyle. It is very important to protect the traditional and unique culture and to make sure that, in the future, the Mongolian nomads remain as special as they have always been. With more and more Mongolian nomads migrating to settle in the cities, as depicted in the images in this article, they will become a thing of the past. I am not nomadic now and moved to the United States to improve my education. However, Mongolian culture and tradition, especially the nomadic lifestyle, will always be an important part of me.

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## Works Cited

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