

MONGOLIA CUSTOMS

Greetings:

A standard greeting in formal situations or among strangers is *Ta sain baina uu?* (How do you do?).

Acquaintances prefer more casual greetings such as *Sain uu* (Hello) or *Sonin yu baina?* (What's new?).

Gestures:

Mongolians gesture and pass items only with the right hand. To show special respect, one supports the right elbow with the left hand when passing an item.

Mongolians point with an open hand. Pointing with the index finger is seen as threatening. To beckon, one waves all fingers with the palm down.

Crossing legs or yawning is avoided in the presence of an elder.

Mongolians do not like to be touched by people they do not know. Unavoidable contact, such as in line or on a crowded bus, is not offensive. However, kicking another person's foot, even accidentally, is offensive if the two people do not immediately shake hands to rectify the insult.

It is impolite to sit in a way that the soles of the feet show.

Mongolians use gestures to show appreciation, and gestures often take the place of a verbal "thank you." Some use a respectful gesture (*zolgah*) when first meeting on the holiday of *Tsagaan Sar*: the younger person gently holds the elbows of the older person, whose forearms rest on the younger person's forearms; the older person lightly touches his or her lips to the younger person's forehead. This gesture may also be used when meeting a friend or family member after a long absence.

Holidays:

Mongolia's national holidays include New Year's Day (1 Jan.), the Lunar New Year, Children and Women's Day (1 June), Mongolian People's Revolution or *Naadam* (11–13 July; celebrated with horse races, wrestling, and other events), and Independence Day (26 Nov.).

The Lunar New Year, called *Tsagaan Sar* (White Month/Moon), is marked by family gatherings. People go to the home of the eldest member of their family at sunrise, greet them with the *zolgokh* gesture, and exchange gifts. The holiday is preceded by days of house cleaning. Also, since many older Mongolians do not know their date of birth, they add a year to their age on *Tsagaan Sar*.