

## **Katie Gibson – Mongolia elective, Summer 2016**

Warm sunshine, cloud studded sky, friendly banter over a Sunday afternoon game of monopoly – I could be anywhere in the world, but I'm not just anywhere, for outside the window sits a ger and inside the debate over chance cards and properties is held in Mongolian. This is the ancestral home of Genghis Khan, the land of Naadam, of archery, wrestling and horse racing, of rugged mountains, vast plains and the arid Gobi; a land largely untouched and unspoilt, its population widely dispersed, from the southern Chinese border to the reindeer herders of the northern Siberian reaches, traditionally nomadic and passionately hospitable...

My month in Mongolia was a real rollercoaster ride - plenty of less than smooth travel, getting to know many new people (not the easiest of tasks when you speak exactly 12 words of Mongolian), and working in challenging conditions. It was a real joy to be able to connect with local children through playing volleyball, basketball and other games, helping with prize givings and supporting the summer school teachers by correcting their (self-made) English textbooks for the first two weeks.

The last fortnight was spent at a veterinary clinic in Ulaanbaatar, run predominantly by Mongolian staff with a few expats, and as I type this out I'm keeping half an eye on a gorgeous cat called Panda, who's come home with me tonight so she can be monitored after undergoing a caesarean section and having hepatitis. It's been a real privilege to see the work done by established and newly graduated vets in Mongolia: the training they've been giving herders annually, the continuing education classes and the service they provide to the residents of Ulaanbaatar and those further afield. I've learnt a huge amount of clinical veterinary medicine in just 2 weeks and getting hands on with a multitude of patients has been invaluable.