

## The Mongolian Horse



Mongolia is a civilization centering on horses.

The horses in Central Asia were domesticated around 10,000 years ago. The country of Mongolia has the 7th largest population of horses, and has the greatest number of horses, per capita, in the world, in a country with a human population of barely more than 3 million. The Mongolian horse breed is largely unchanged since Genghis Khan's time and these horses are unmatched in their toughness, strength, and endurance. Despite their small size, they are considered horses, not ponies, and have a very high capacity for weight bearing. Mongolian horses come in every color of the equine rainbow.





Racing plays an important part in the Mongolian social culture. For this reason, *Naadams* or race meetings, happen throughout the summer, all over Mongolia, bringing nomadic families together. In particular, *Nadaams* are held nationwide, in every region, in the middle of July. The races can range from 5kms to 40kms and are usually divided into six age groups of horses, all ridden by child jockeys from 6 to 12 years old.

Most of the horses are owned by a herder or family, and branded accordingly. There isn't a fence to be seen, and horses, and most of the animals, roam loose at night, usually staying within 10km, but sometimes driven further by foul weather, or other extenuating circumstances. The horses live outside year-round with temperatures that exceed 30 °C (86 °F) in the summer to -40 °C (-40 °F) in winter, so spend a majority of the year, simply surviving.



Only the geldings are ridden, as the mares are used for milk (up to six times a day in summer) and breeding. The mares' milk is fermented to create the national beverage *airag*, and the horses' mane and tail hair is often braided to make rope or used for the traditional violin, the *morin khuur*.