

NAADAM FESTIVAL SPECIAL

The 800th Anniversary of the Founding of the Mongolian State

- ✦ Naadam Competitions – Wrestling ✦ Horse Racing ✦ Archery
- ✦ Exploring the Gobi Desert ✦ Mongolian Vodka Tasting
- ✦ Mongolian Music, Film and book reviews



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Hi, I'm Chris Devonshire-Ellis
and welcome to the latest issue of "Mongolia Expat" magazine !

This issue is a Naadam special and deals with all the sports and sights you are likely to see. Check your hotels, your travel agent or at the tourist office for details of timings as these can be subject to change. This year of course is a special anniversary – the 800th founding of the Mongolian State by Chingghis Khan in 1206, and the birth of the largest empire the world has yet seen.

Please also feel free to check out our website at www.mongoliaexpat.com, with many more details of travel, culture and life in this huge and diverse country. Special thanks are also due, as always, to our sponsors, Ric and Tseren, who operate Tseren Travel in Ulaan Bataar – if you need information about trips within the country from just one day to one month, you can find their offices just to the side of the State Department Store on Peace Avenue.

We hope you enjoy this issue of Mongolia Expat and have a great Naadam !
"Ayan Zamdaa Sain Yavaarai" – Happy Travelling !

Chris



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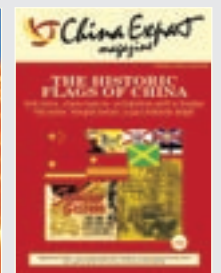


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Contact : Editor@mongoliaexpat.com

China Briefing Media Ltd: 12/f, VIP Commercial Centre, 120 Canton Road, Tsimshatsui, Hong Kong.

MONGOLIA'S NAADAM FESTIVAL

– By Chris Devonshire-Ellis

Mongolia's annual Naadam Festival is where the entire country's champions in the "Three Kingly Sports" – Archery, Wrestling and Horseracing – all come together in spectacular style. The competition is nationwide, with many villages and towns having their own local Naadams to determine the local champions. Then each summer, the best of these congregate – as do much of the population of the entire country – to Ulaan Bataar, for the national championships. This year, it is held in UB from 14th-15th July.



• Archery

Held just outside the national stadium, in a smaller venue purpose built for the sport, the event is divided up into mens and womens categories and is designed for accuracy. Competitors don full traditional regalia and have to hit a golf ball sized target at a distance of 75 to 100 yards. The accuracy is astonishing – archery as a means to capture game is still practiced in the country and using it can be a matter of survival or death during the winter months. Note the target is actually on the ground rather than the Western, raised target we are used to – Mongolians still hunt today and the animals they need are ground dwellers.

• Wrestling

This is where a lot of money gets bet – and some of the world's most powerful men come to compete. It's no coincidence that Japanese Sumo is a sport currently dominated by Mongolians – this most ancient of muscle-flexing activities is almost balletic at times, and technique is part of the game here. Smaller adversaries can and do beat far bulkier combatants, although at the top end, the big shots – national champions – are almost professional in their training and skills. However, expect to see some gargantuan sized men with huge bellies and curious tiny shorts and waistcoats cutting a rug – and each other – down to size in the national stadium.


Like Sumo though, bulk is not everything – there is a huge amount of skill involved and grappling to overthrow one's opponent can go on for some time in the more evenly-matched bouts. Look out too for the 'eagle dance' – the traditional routine dance the winner always undertakes after defeating his opponent – a mixture of ballet-style

movements and the cultural significance of mimicking a bird or prey.

• Horse-Racing

A competition of stamina and endurance as well as speed – this is a 27km gallop across the Mongolian plains, run by young riders aged 7 and upwards. Those big hearted Mongolian Horses (don't call them ponies) exert themselves to the limits to get across the finishing line – and with thousands of riders all competing at once, over a 27km course it ends up being a steady stream of finishers for hours. The winner though is lauded, the sweat treated as liquid gold and flung about like champagne, and a life of stud awaits the lucky horse who gets that far. As for the kids – they are born in the saddle and everybody has their own horse just as Chinese do a bicycle.

Getting To Naadam : We suggest contacting Rik at Tseren Tours : tserentours@cs.com to arrange accommodation, arrival visas and other countryside treks you may want to undertake. Otherwise, it's a 90 minute flight north from Beijing. You will need to arrange visas before arriving, or at least have someone prepare documentation for you upon arrival for this. Visas are USD53. As for accommodation, well during Naadam, UB gets very busy, but you can usually find somewhere. The main festival is held in the central sports stadium, while the horse racing is a 30 minute drive out into the pastures.

Alternatives are staying at Ger camps just outside UB – these are felt covered 'tents' that sleep up to ten – ideal for a group. Most of these camps have toilet and communal washing facilities. 

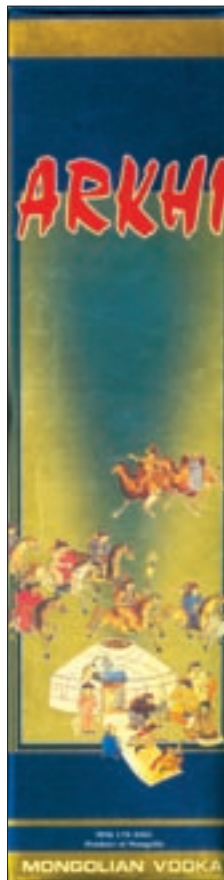
MONGOLIAN VODKAS



Five of the Best : L-R: Zaam Vodka, Bolor Vodka, Chinggis Regular Vodka, Arkhi Vodka, Mongolian Grain Vodka

Mongolia has a long history of making vodka and similar beverages, dating back to the self-produced – and often home made “arkhi” – which actually can be made from pretty much anything. However, locally, commercially manufactured arkhi is usually a grain vodka. It can, on occasion, be distilled airag – or fermented mares milk. Airag itself is very definitely a home made brew – with practically every ger in the country having it on the go. You’ll see it during Naadam, dispensed by the ladle from large industrial sized blue containers – and even in some of the ger bars that spring up in UB at this time will sell you a bowlful. Mildly salty – and not especially alcoholic – it’s a welcome beverage on a hot summer day.


But back to vodka. Chingghis Khan vodka is the best publicized brand, with commemorative bottles dressed up in leather sacks costing a small fortune. Then there is the “Black” Chingghis, a clear bottle, with a pen and ink drawing of the warrior on it, also sold with a gift box. Regular Chingghis Vodka has a white label with a traditional picture of Chinggis on it – actually stylized from old Chinese paintings of when he ruled China not just as the Great Khan of the



entire Mongol Empire – but also as Emperor of China (which has been the only way in which the Chinese can stomach that period of their history – making Chingghis Khan a Chinese Emperor in their account of the history of the nation !). All are good, and wonderful chilled.

There are a number of other vodkas on the shelves, the oily, yet peppery “Gobi Vodka” with a picture of an antelope on it is pretty good – if you can find it – while the unlikely looking “Zaah” vodka – complete with a picture of an African elephant – is a decent enough brew for a Mongolian Martini. The blue boxed “Arkhi” vodka has a great design (pictured) but again, is a fairly standard brew, packaged for tourist consumption.

The best of the bunch ? The unlikely looking “Bolor Vodka” – with it’s bright yellow label and picture of a Russian Spacecraft on it – brewed to commemorate the first Mongolian in space as a cosmonaut back in 1988 – and reputed to be the best. Handily, it’s also very good value.

So – Toktoy ! Cheers – and raise a glass to the 800th anniversary of the Great Mongolian State ! 

TOGROG - CURRENCY



The Mongolian currency is the wonderfully named Togrog. One thousand Togrog is worth US\$1.17 Dollar, Euro 1.474 and about RMB15 at the time of going to press. US dollars and Togrog are exchanged in equal measure, and dollars are readily acceptable almost everywhere. Be careful not to mix up 1,000 notes with 10,000 notes !

Banks and currency exchanges are readily available throughout Ulaan Bataar as well as foreign exchange facilities in your hotel. Remember to change enough though if you are planning on traveling in the countryside.


Togrog notes feature the famous Mongolian Sukhbataar on the lower notes, and Chinghis Khan on the higher value notes. Sukhbataar is the fellow perched on his horse at Sukhbataar Square in the city centre, he was the main figure behind the formation of the Mongolian Peoples Party in the early 1920's – the first time Mongolia had a political party. Chinghis Khan of course needs no introduction.

• A FEW WORDS

The Mongolian language has famously been described as like listening to two cats fighting, and is generally difficult to master. Phrase books and dictionaries are readily available in UB, however here are a few words and phrases that may help you get around :

Hello : Sain Baina Uu
 How is your family ? : Tanai ger bulliinhen sain uu ?
 Yes : Tiim
 No : Ugui
 Thanks : Bayarlalaa
 Do You Speak English : Ta anglar yairdag uu ?
 How can I get to....? (place name) :ruu bi yaj ochikh ve ?
 Goodbye : Bayartai

Numbers :

0: teg	7: doloo
1: neg	8: naim
2: khoyor	9: yos
3: gurav	10: arav
4: dorov	100: zuu
5: tav	1000: myangga
6: zurgaa	

MONGOLIA'S MUSIC SCENE

Ulaan Bataar has an eclectic and diverse music scene, somewhat surprising given the size of the community and the nomadic nature of many Mongolians. Rock tends to dominate, but other scenes are also thriving as follows and are well worth checking out. Heres an overview of recommended and relatively easy to buy Mongolian contemporary and traditional music.



• HIP HOP & RAP

Often imitating American and, to a lesser extent, Japanese hip hop, Ulaan Bataar nonetheless has a thriving underground scene with several clubs and raves occurring during the summer. If anything, possessing a more laid back and soulful groove than the hard rap coming out of America's ghettos, local artists such as Mastaflow, Amai, Gennie, Hulan and Funksta are all adept on the turntables as well as being possessed of a remarkably authentic rap sound, - all in Mongolian.

Must Buy : "Born In UB" Masta Flow

• ROCK

The granddaddy of them all is Jargalsaikhan (see May issue of Mongolia Expat online at the archives section of the website for a full interview) and his long lived band, Chinggis Khan. Rocking Mongolia since the pre-independence days of the Soviet era, Chinggis Khan, and the song of the same name, came about in



1988 amidst the authoritarian rule of the Russians, and proved to be a rallying call for many Mongolians. Chinggis Khan play a huge number of concerts each year and are a well known and highly regarded live act in their own country, where they often venture out into the countryside to entertain the nomadic families. Chinggis Khan have released just three CD's over the years, preferring to concentrate on live work (which has given rise to a whole raft of bootleg live CDs), however a series of new studio releases are scheduled for this year, as are a number of large concerts in UB and around the country. Watch the news section on the main website of Mongolia Expat for details.

Must Buy : "Knock On My Door"

Otherwise, The Hurd are a legendary Mongolian band, melodic and are often likened to Mongolia's version of the Eagles. Also dating back many years, the group has a solid fan base and has spawned many spin off projects - including their sons and daughters now following in their footsteps and releasing CD's ! They are also rumoured to be performing a number of concerts this year, so again, look out for details.

Must Buy : **Unplugged** (Live selection of their best songs)

Haranga are another local band worth checking out – jangly guitars and power chords all to the fore and some rousing grooves not dissimilar to a raw, funky and basic Rolling Stones. Their recent CD has been a mainstay of the local radio programmers the past year.

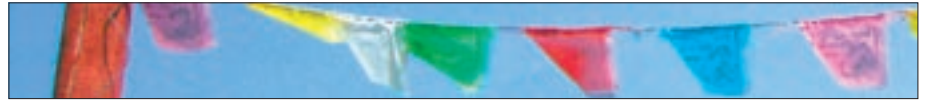
Must Buy : **Color Of The World**





Of the girl singers, Saraa is the best known and admired in Mongolia. Softer rock, occasionally mixed up with a hefty dose of dance beats, this is aimed more at the dancefloor than at the headbangers. Nonetheless, many of her songs have become anthems to many Mongolians and she is rather more than the typical pouting soft rock chick singer the west currently seems infatuated with. Her songs are a mixture of fun, rolling plains and handle the occasional social issue also – with the occasional David Bowie cover thrown in for good measure.

Must Buy : **Martya Remix** (dance floor remixes of some of her best known songs)

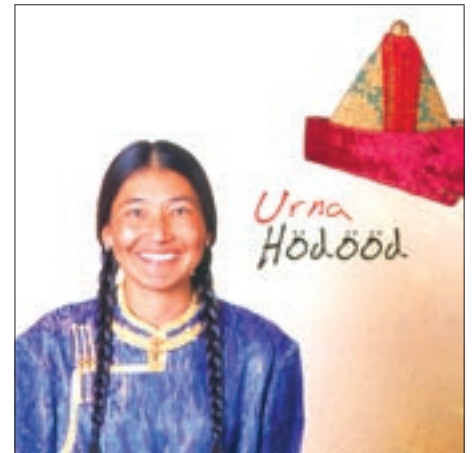


• **NEW AGE**

Without doubt the only Mongolian singer to combine traditional songs with modern arrangements is Urna – yet she remains unknown to many Mongolians ! Largely the result of some inverse snobbery (Urna is from Inner Mongolia – now part of China, and not always considered “authentic” by many Mongolians) she also has spent much of her recording career in Europe, where she is better known.

This is a shame, as her CDs combine the best of traditional Mongolian folk with modern instrumentation, not unlike a Mongolian version of Enya. With most of her songs detailing life out in the plains, and sung in Mongolian, she has been able to call upon the wide range of Chinese instruments as well as her Mongolian ethnic roots in addition to synthesizers, drum machines and electric guitars. Hard to find – but if you can – well worth a listen.

Must Buy : **Hoodoo**



• **TRADITIONAL**


Mongolia's traditional music revolves around the Horse-Head Fiddle – a two stringed instrument related to the Chinese er-hu, in addition to various lute type instruments, an assortment of central asian derived wind instruments and percussion. One thing uniquely Mongolian however is ‘throat singing’ – an initially odd sounding eerily whistling noise created by opening the throat’s minor larynx and enabling the voice to produce two sounds simultaneously. There are a number of well known practitioners of this (see Music Review in previous issue of Mongolia Expat on the website archives) and it probably dates right back to shamanistic rituals. Very much part of a traditional Mongolian evenings entertainment and musical evening out, one of Mongolia’s best known throat singers is Booyoo, who comprises his singing with traditional instruments and ancient melodies handed down across the centuries.

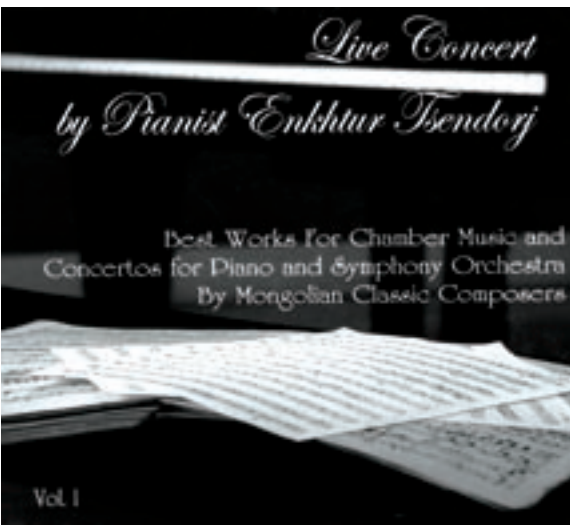
Must Buy : **Spirit Of Skyland**



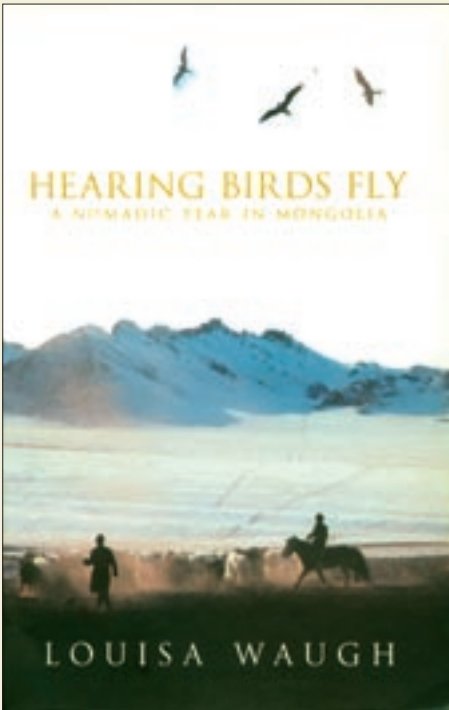
• **CLASSICAL**

Although the Soviet Communist era left much to be desired as regards Mongolian culture, the communists always did have a huge structure of musical education, mainly in the realm of the traditional western orchestra and piano led pieces. Mongolia also, as a result, has acquired a rich heritage of classical concert pianists who grew up during this period. Amongst the best is Enkhtur Tsendorj, who was born into a family of traditional composers, before being educated in Moscow at the prestigious P.I. Tchaikovsky Conservatory as a concert pianist. Now a professor at the Mongolian University of Culture and Arts, Enkhtur releases occasional CDs, often collaborating with the Mongolian Opera & Ballet Theater Company, mixing up well known works by the likes of Tchaikovsky as well as traditional Mongolian pieces.

Must Buy : **Live Concert – Best Works for Chamber Music and Concertos for Piano – a selection of Mongolian traditional songs played by full orchestra and led by Enkhtur.** 



“Hearing Birds Fly” - Louisa Waugh



Subtitled “A nomadic year in Mongolia”, this recent account (covering 2001-2) is about as evocative and accurate essay on living way out in the wilds as is currently available. Waugh is sensible enough not to over-romanticize the lives of the nomadic community she visits and lives with in the very far West of the country, dealing with the mens occasional drunken attempts to have sex with her, the perils of hunger, warmth and hygiene in temperatures of minus 30, and the despair of the plague and other illnesses or accidents that occur hundreds of miles from anywhere are well documented. She manages, despite her previous reliance on the simplest of luxury items, to adapt and earn the trust and respect of those she lives with – no mean feat in an environment where a wrong move or unnecessary burden can mean the difference between life and death. She has the grace and toughness to live in her own accommodation and prepare herself for the onset of the ruthless winter just as the locals do. Summer however brings an exalted feeling of re-birth, the celebration of survival, the warming sun and the flowering of crops, pastures and the season of feeding, birth and a new generation of fattening livestock. Waugh's account is a sensitive, real and successful attempt to capture the true meaning of what it means to live as a nomad and is essential reading for anyone interested in their lives – or thinks they know what it must be like to be truly alone in a strange country. [ME](#)

The Cave Of The Yellow Dog

– Directed by Byambasuren Davaa (2005)



A remake of an old Mongolian folk story, this is a lovingly filmed part documentary, part storytale look at the lives of today's modern Mongolian nomads. Mongolian-born, German-trained and financed director Byambasuren Davaa's follow-up to her Oscar-nominated “The Story of the Weeping Camel” (2003, see previous issue of Mongolia Expat) is, once again, beautifully filmed and extraordinarily powerful yet tender and charming. A drama-documentary about Mongolia's nomadic herdspeople, Cave Of the Yellow Dog concerns the Batchuluun family's relationship with a stray dog, which eldest daughter Nansal finds in an ancient cave. Her Father however doesn't want another mouth to feed – until the dog proves his worth unexpectedly by coming to the rescue when one of his children get into trouble. The real beauty of the film lies in the wonderful evocation of the Batchuluuns' everyday household tasks which are both the essence of simplicity and wondrously exotic. The film also explores some of the traditions concerning re-incarnation and the value of mans relationships with animals – a uniquely Mongolian Buddhist – Shamanist mixture. Beautiful, evocative, and well worth looking out for. [ME](#)



GOBI DESERT SCENERY

Mongolia's Gobi Desert is a major attraction for the adventurous tourist, and with over 37 different types of desert ecology - surprisingly varied. Here are a few illustrations of the different faces of the Gobi from a recent trip Mongolia Expat took in May this year :

- **Dinosaur Bones**

Embedded in the cliffs it is possible to uncover ancient species jutting out from the rock.



- **Flaming Mountains**

Discovered by the American archeologist Roy Chapman Andrews, the Flaming Cliffs are all that remain of sedimental cliffs that once towered over a prehistoric sea basin that covered much of the Gobi. It was a dinosaurs paradise, and many new species are still being discovered today.



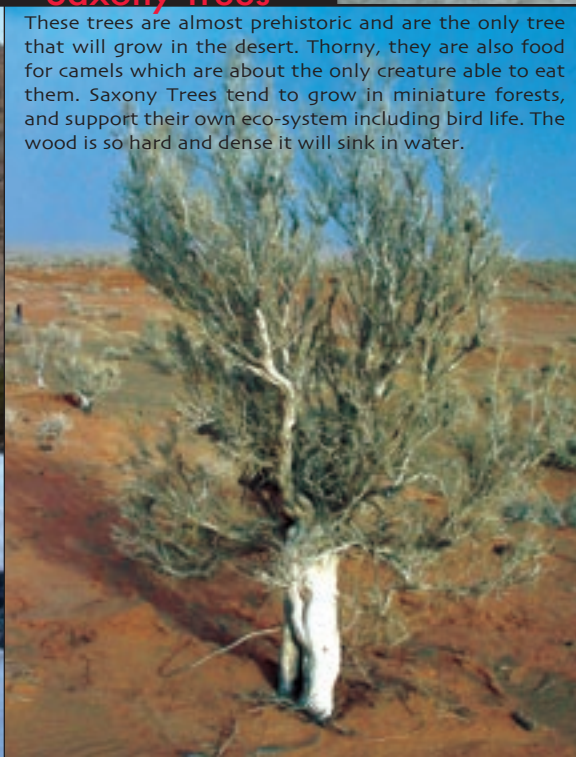
- **Glaciers**

Parts of the Gobi are mountainous, and with snow in the winter, it compacts over the centuries and forms mini-glaciers. In the valleys were even the sun doesn't quite penetrate, these ice waters remain year round and are a vital life source for an astonishing variety of birdlife and animals.



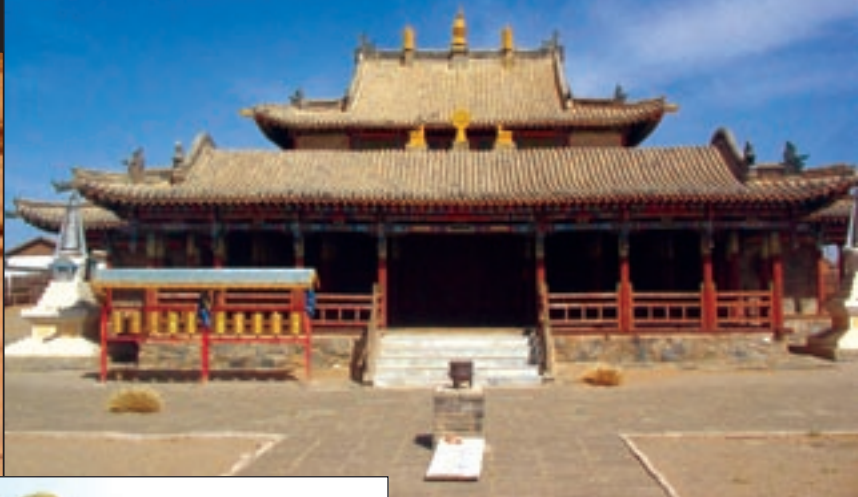
- **Saxony Trees**

These trees are almost prehistoric and are the only tree that will grow in the desert. Thorny, they are also food for camels which are about the only creature able to eat them. Saxony Trees tend to grow in miniature forests, and support their own eco-system including bird life. The wood is so hard and dense it will sink in water.



- **Damba Darjaalan Sum**

This Monastery was originally built in the late 18th century to commemorate the first-ever visit by a Dalai Lama to Mongolia, and originally housed 500 monks. Sited in the wind and sand swept remote village of Gimpil Darjaalan Khid, the position marks the boundary between arid-scrub and parched rock and sand in the desert. It was visited by the Dalai Lama again in 1992.



- **Camels**

As one gets further into the Gobi, horses are overtaken by the hardier camel as the mode of transport. This rare white camel is enjoying a lunch of thorny Saxony.



- **Salt Lakes**

There are many dotted throughout the Gobi, an underground spring far below giving just enough moisture to draw out natural minerals to the surface, where, scorched by the desert sun, they dry out.



- **Ibex Skull**

The Gobi supports a surprising amount of wildlife, from eagles and cranes, to wild ass, the world's only desert bear, to antelope and Ibex. The huge horns on this skull weighed about 30lb.





Interview with Alfred Naf, Founder of the Chingghis Brewery, Ulaan Bataar.

Alfred Naf probably has one of the best jobs in the world – he founded the Chingghis Brewery – Mongolia’s first – and is the largest brewer of beer in the country. His brewery also owns the Chingghis Pub – next to the brewery, with the beer being piped straight to pump directly from the vats just next door.

Mongolia Expat met up with him to find out how he got the enterprise started...

Q : Why did you start your brewery in Mongolia? Was it difficult to start up ?

A : My company has been involved in international trading for many years, based in Switzerland. We were looking for new opportunities. So we expanded in the mid-nineties to Mongolia and started the import and distribution of consumer items in Mongolia. Our business was going - after a difficult starting period - pretty well and we were looking for a new line of business in the Mongolian domestic market. At this time there was not too much choice of beer in Mongolia.



Together with Zaluu Mongol we formed in 1997 the Swiss Mongolian Joint venture Chingghis Beer Co. Ltd. We imported a brand new brewery from Germany, hired a German brewmaster and started to work on it. Of course there also were certain difficulties with administration, permits etc. but in 1998 we started production. Nowadays we are distributing our draft beer all over Ulaan Baatar and other Mongolian cities.

Q : What is the difference doing business in Mongolia compared with other countries?

A : One big difference in working with Mongolia is the different mentality of the partners and the workers. As



a foreign investor it is very important to understand the different way of thinking of my co-workers and to lead them to a joint goal.

Q : Mongolia is the country of airag (home brewed fermented mares milk), and archi (vodka). Was it difficult to introduce the Mongolians to start drinking beer?

A : Mongolians are not big beer drinkers yet. The average annual consumption is about 0.9 liters while countries like Ireland, Germany and Russia have an average consumption of 160-180 liters per person per year. But it is becoming more popular and our pub is often full with locals, both men and women, as well as expatriates.

Q : What is special about your beer compared with the other beers in Mongolia ?


Our beer is a premium product strictly brewed according to the German purity law. Only selected ingredients are being used in order to keep the quality consistent.

A : What are your plans for the future with the brewery ? Will you be exporting Chinggis beer?

We are planning to increase the capacity of our brewery but we are not sure yet whether we are going into the export market. There is still more market in Mongolia we need to penetrate first !

Q : What is the Mongolian for "Cheers" !

A : "Toktoy !" and please feel free to visit the brewery pub to sample some of our beers !

The Chinggis Brewery and Pub can be found on Sukhbataaryn Gudamj and is a well known location in central UB. Fresh brewed light and dark beers are available with a traditional German food menu. 



Mongolia Expat magazine

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The next issue of Mongolia Expat will be out in September, and from next year we will be printing regular monthly copies.

Part of that will be an expanded services directory with details of where to go, bars, restaurants, hotels and other service industry facilities. If you want to tell our readers about your operation - then email us, tell us about what it is you're doing, and we'll include it in the Mongolia Expat service directory !!



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IN MONGOLIA ECO-TRAVEL, TREKS & ADVENTURE HOLIDAYS



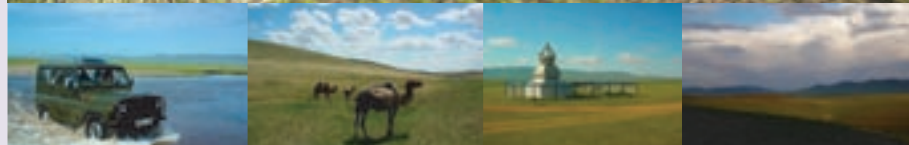
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