



# Mongolia Expat

magazine

SEPTEMBER 2007, VOL 2 NUMBER 4

## THE MONGOLIAN DALAI LAMA

**Making A Buddhist Sand Madala \***

**An Introduction To Mongolian Buddhism \***

**Sven Hedins "Riddles Of The Gobi" \***

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Hi, I'm Chris Devonshire-Ellis and welcome to this issue of Mongolia Expat magazine ! This months issue is a Mongolian Buddhism special issue – we take a look at the life of the Fourth Dalai Lama – the only one to have been born in Mongolia – examine the mysteries behind the Buddhist art form of making Sand Mandalas, and complete the issue with a historical look at the development of Buddhism in Mongolia, with some tips on places to go to see various Monasteries in Ulaan Bataar as well as contacts for traditional Buddhist medicine, lectures and courses on the subject.

Please also remember the Mongolian Expat Guide to Ulaan Baatar and the Mongolian Countryside can be purchased in Ulaan Bataar from Millies Bookstore, or via email from [tuya@mongoliaexpat.com](mailto:tuya@mongoliaexpat.com), priced just USD10. At 135 pages, and over 250 photos and illustrations, it is the most comprehensive use friendly guide to the country yet available. We hope you find it of interest – the next issue of the magazine will be out in October.

Best wishes  
Chris



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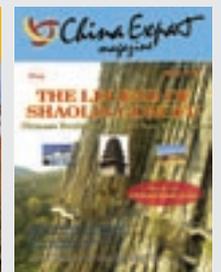


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# THE MONGOLIAN DALAI LAMA

– By Chris Devonshire-Ellis

## The First Dalai Lama

The Dalai Lama's of Tibet stretch back to a line originally founded in 1391, with the first Dalai Lama, Gedun Drub, being posthumously recognized as such. Born as Pema Dorje in 1391, he was fully ordained in 1411 as a monk, and in 1447 founded the Tashilhunpo Monastery in Shigatse. At this time the recognition of the position of "Dalai Lama" did not yet exist. However, Gedun Drub became fascinated by the system of reincarnating Lamas that the then Kagyu School of Buddhism had devised, which in its own right ensured a smooth and unbroken line of spiritual leaders without having to go through disruptive and debilitating succession struggles.

The high parliament of Tibet at the time, the Gelug, was influenced also by this thought process, and with Gedun Drub announcing his reincarnation would be found, also near Shigatse, the stage was then set for this to occur. Gedun Drub died in 1474, aged 84, while in meditation at Tashilhunpo. In 1476, his successor, Gedun Gyatso was born – the first reincarnation, but the second Dalai Lama. As we will see however, it was not until a third high monk, Sonam Gyatso, - the reincarnation of Gedun Gyatso, was recognized by the Mongolian tribal leader Altan Khan in 1578 that the title "Dalai Lama" was bestowed upon the line. The current Dalai Lama, Lhamo Dondhup, is the fourteenth.

## Mongolian Influences

Before the Dalai Lama's, Tibetan had been ruled by a series of Emperors from the sixth to the tenth centuries, who united various tribal factions of Tibetan speaking

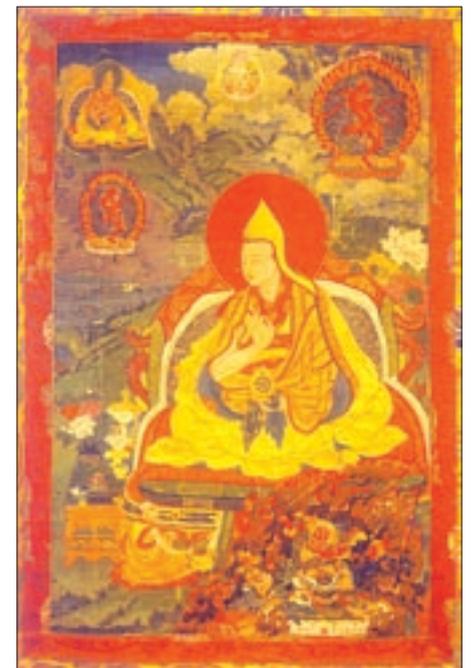
peoples and forged the country into a then expansionist military state. Three of the most prominent of these, during Tibet's Yarlung Dynasty, patronized Buddhism, sent Tibetan students to study in India and invited Indian scholars to Tibet. The last Emperor, Tri Ralpachen, was murdered in 841 by his elder brother, Lang Dharma, who was himself assassinated five years later. After his death, the Tibetan Empire fell apart, becoming fractured again with the rise of regional warlords and fiefdoms, constantly fighting each other, trying to gain the upper hand and obtain national dominance. Tibet suffered a civil war for over 300 years. In 1207, the Tibetans learned that Genghis Khan had destroyed the Tangut (Western Xia) Empire based on the borders of Eastern Tibet (modern day Qinghai), and hurriedly convened a Council of Elders to send a delegation to the Mongol Camp to pay respects. Tibet was thus spared a Mongol onslaught.

Genghis Khan's Grandson, Dodan Khan, then appointed a Tibetan, Saka Pandita, a great scholar and abbot of the Sakya Monastery as spiritual preceptor and gave him the temporal authority of Tibet, yet reporting to the Mongolians. Tibet thus became integrated into the Mongolian Empire, much as most of China had been although unlike China, Tibet was never administered directly by the Mongolians. With the backing of the Mongolian armies, the Sakya Lamas were the first in line of the Tibetan Priestly Kings, and were often consulted for oracles or omens by the Mongolians during their quests and campaigns further West. In return for this spiritual guidance, not to mention the prestige and blessings of the Tibetan Lamas, Mongolia, and then later the Manchus guaranteed the protection of Tibet from external invasion and internal strife. Tibet had become, in effect, a vassal state of Mongolia.

Godan Khan was succeeded by Kublai Khan, one of the great Mongol monarchs.

He became the Supreme Ruler of all the tribes and territories conquered by the Mongolians, including all of China by 1279, when he formed the Yuan Dynasty – the first non-Chinese rulers of China. In Tibet, Sakya Pandita was succeeded by his nephew, Phagba, who continued and strengthened the Tibetan relations with the Mongols. He was summoned by Kublai Khan to become his personal guru, and agreed – but only on condition that then he was teaching the Great Khan, he would sit at a higher level than the Khan, although the Khan would sit at a higher level during secular ceremonies. This was agreed, and Tibetan Leaders became the spiritual lamas to the Mongolians. Phagba however was more useful than this – he devised a new script for the Mongols which Kublai Khan used as the official means of communication throughout the huge Mongol domain.

## Revolt, Renamed & Reunited



However, when the Mongol Empire began to wane, various factions in Tibet took action. In 1350, Changchub Gyaltzen,

one of the governors of the Sakya Lamas, revolted, terminated Sakya hegemony and subservience to Mongolian domination, attempting to give Tibet back its former Imperial glory. The reign of the Ringpung Kings in Tibet then followed afterwards, ruling from 1498 to 1565, and the Tsangpa Kings who ruled from 1566 to 1641, when again Tibet teetered on the edge of collapsing into tribal factions and infighting. In 1642, the fifth Dalai Lama, again with support from Mongolian Armies, seized control, assumed the supremacy of the position in Tibet, and formed a new government – the Gaden Phodrang.

Buddhism by this time had become entrenched in Tibet, and elsewhere in Central Asia, including Mongolia. The Fifth Dalai Lama united the three main Monastic Universities of Tibet, the “Three Great Seats” of Gaden, Drepung, and Sera, and these became his powerful religious and political base.

Prior to this however another event intertwined Tibet and Mongolia. Sonam Gyatso, the reincarnation of Gedun Gyatso, and the highest official monk and de facto ruler of Tibet, accepted an invitation to visit Altan Khan, chief of the Tumet tribe of Mongols. Sonam Gyatso was the then abbot of the Drepung Monastery, and in 1558 the abbot of Sera. He had also established the Namgyal Monastery – whose monks assist the Dalai Lama in his private religious ceremonies and prayers.

Altun Khan, a direct descendant of Genghis & Kublai, was a new Mongol chieftain in the making, strong, direct, he was the most powerful chief amongst Mongolians based along the borders of China at the time.

They met on the shores of Lake Kokonor (Qinghai Lake, near Xining, Qinghai Province in China) in 1578. The two men got on well, and Altan Khan bestowed upon Sonam Gyatso the title, (previously unused, although the reincarnations of the Lamas had begun) of “Dalai Lama”.

These words are Mongolian, “Dalai” meaning Ocean and “Lama” meaning Teacher. Put together however, they mean “Ocean of wisdom”. Posthumously, Gedun Drub and Gedun Gyatso were recognized as the first and second Dalai Lama’s.

Sonam Gyatso, now crowned as “Dalai Lama”, had the entire military might of Mongolia behind him, and the Tibetan – Mongolian previous arrangement of

Military support in return for religious blessings and oracles was reinstated.

Sonam Gyatso traveled extensively throughout the Mongolian Empire after this meeting, underpinning the rule of the Mongolians with a religious empire controlled from Tibet. He was highly successful – he converted the powerful Nashi Tribes in the border areas of Kham (now modern day Yunnan, China) to Buddhism and also founded two further monasteries – the Kumbum Monastery (now Ta’er, in Qinghai Province, China) and the Lithang Monastery in the Eastern Tibetan Province of Kham (now Gaocheng, Sichuan Province, China).

He died, teaching Buddhism in Mongolia, in 1588. His reincarnation was found in 1589 – and was born as the Great Grandson of Altan Khan, in Mongolia.

## Yonten Gyatso – The Fourth Dalai Lama



The only Mongolian born Dalai Lama, Yonten Gyatso, was born on the thirtieth day of the twelve month of the Earth-Ox year of the Tibetan calendar, somewhere in the South-West of Mongolia where the Pamir Mountains migrate into the Altai. A month before he was born, a white figure appeared to the boy's Father and told him his son was the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama, while in Tibet itself, the State Oracle also predicted he would be found in Mongolia. This was further underlined when a second important oracle made the same pronouncement.

At the same time, Tsultrim Gyatso, the Chief Attendant of the previous Dalai Lama, was also living in Mongolia after his master had died there. Hearing the news from the boy's Father, he traveled to the site and noticed that on the morning of the birth, the whole neighborhood had heard heavenly music, followed by a minor earthquake.

Mysterious events continued to surround the boy, including one time when he slept undisturbed as a child for three days and nights. Upon awakening, his Mother asked him why he had slept for so long. Yonten Gyatso replied that on the first day, he had dreamt that he had taken the families butter lamp, and held it up, whereupon its radiance lit up the whole world. On the second, he dreamt that the sky was filled with a huge rainbow under which sat countless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, while on the third, he dreamt he rose from a throne, studded with precious stones, from the family ger, and began to walk to Lhasa.

## Recognition & Training

The Highest Lamas from Tibet traveled to Mongolia to meet with the boy. The Primary Abbot of Gaden Monastery recognized him as the reincarnation, and during the recognition ceremony the child was able to recite the names of all the attendants of the previous incarnation, including the name of the Nepali sculptor who had carved the principal Buddhist image in the Lithang Monastery the third Dalai Lama had founded. He was then named Yonten Gyatso by the Tibetan Lamas.

His parents however refused to permit him to be parted from them. Accordingly, it was agreed, that until he turned twelve years old, he would be educated in Mongolia and live as a Mongolian. He received a religious education, in Mongolia, from Tibetan Lamas, and when his 12th birthday came, was escorted to Lhasa by his Father, Tibetan officials and Lamas, and a cavalry force of 1,000.

## Enthronement & Demise

Yonten Gyatso was enthroned as the fourth Dalai Lama in Lhasa in 1601, and was initiated into the monkhood by the Abbot of Gaden Monastery. While a student monk at Drepung Monastery, he was also educated by a humble, yet scholarly monk from Tashilhunpo, named Lobsang Chogyen. He would later become, posthumously, the first Panchen Lama, the second highest spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism.

Yongten Gyatso would later become Abbot of Drepung Monastery, and later, also of Sera. However, controversy over the recognition of a non-Tibetan as Dalai Lama continued to fester amongst certain Tibetan factions, including the persecution of the Dalai Lamas Gelugpa (Yellow Hat) sect by the Kagyupa (Red Hat) order, and

it is possible the Fourth Dalai Lama was murdered. He died early, at the age of 28, at the Gandan Podang (Palace of Joy).

His reincarnation, however, one of only two Dalai Lamas to be awarded the additional prefix "Great" would prove to be a popular and well read man, although to quell intrigue, he was not discovered until 1620, nearly four years after the death of the Fourth Dalai Lama.

Regrettably, as the only Mongolian-born Dalai Lama ascended at a time of political

turmoil in Tibet, and as he only held his position for a few years, not much remains as detail about his life.

However, the die had been cast, and with two other subsequent Dalai Lamas having been discovered in parts of what are now India, it is an object of some speculation where the fifteenth Dalai Lama will be found.

Meanwhile, Mongolia itself has undergone occupation and the systematic destruction of its Monasteries under the Soviets for much of the last century until the Russians

left in 1991. A resurgence of Buddhism has occurred since then, with the 14th Dalai Lama visiting on numerous occasions to reconsecrate old monasteries and holy sites. Mongolia's spiritual destiny is still linked very strongly with Tibetan Buddhism, and it was the efforts of the third and fourth Dalai Lamas in particular whose positions and influence some 400 years ago are still felt so strongly amongst Mongolians today. [ME](#)



# THE BUDDHIST SAND MANDALA

– By Chris Devonshire-Ellis



Creating a sand mandala is an ancient and auspicious Buddhist ceremony, and was carried out at the Gandan Khid Monastery in Ulaan Baatar in 2006 by the current Dalai Lama.

Of all the artistic traditions of Tantric Buddhism, the creation of the sand mandala with colored sand ranks as one of the most unique and exquisite. In Tibetan this art is called *dul-tson-kyil-khor*, which literally means "mandala of colored powders." Millions of grains of sand are painstakingly laid into place on a flat platform over a period of days or weeks.

Formed of a traditional prescribed iconography that includes geometric shapes and a multitude of ancient spiritual symbols, the sand-painted mandala is used as a tool for re-consecrating the earth and its inhabitants.

The monks begin by consecrating the site of the mandala sand painting with approximately 30 minutes of chants, music, and mantra recitation. This event is visually and acoustically striking, and draws large audiences and enormous media attention. The lamas begin the work by drawing an outline of the mandala on the wooden

platform, which requires the remainder of the day. The following days see the laying of the colored sands, which is effected by pouring the sand from traditional metal funnels called *chak-pur*. Each monk holds a *chak-pur* in one hand, while running a metal rod on its grated surface; the vibration causes the sands to flow like liquid.

Traditionally most sand mandalas are destroyed shortly after their completion. This is done as a metaphor of the impermanence of life. The sands are swept up and placed in an urn; to fulfill the function of healing, half is distributed to the audience at the closing ceremony, while the remainder is carried to a nearby body of water, where it is deposited. The waters then carry the healing blessing to the ocean, and from

there it spreads throughout the world for planetary healing.

The site where the sand mandala was created at Gandan Khid can still be seen just to the right of the main building, with photos of the various stages of the ceremony on display within the Monastery. [ME](#)



# MONGOLIAN BUDDHISM

– By Chris Devonshire-Ellis

Mongolian Buddhism is often described as a part of Tibetan Buddhism, in which it is similar in many ways. However, there are enough distinct features to refer to the practice as Mongolian Buddhism.

Early Mongolian contacts with Buddhism are dated to the fourth century, when the activities of Chinese monks among the population of this border area are reported in contemporary Chinese sources. Buddhist influences spread as far as the Yenisei region by the seventh century, as evidenced by Buddhist temple bells with Chinese inscriptions found there. Another factor in the spread of Buddhism into Mongolia was the flourishing of Buddhist communities in the predominantly Uyghur oasis states along the Silk Route, with many caves and grottoes to this day still showing carvings and wall paintings from Lamas and Buddhist travellers. Dunhuang and Bezeklik being just two primary examples (now in modern Gansu and Xinjiang Provinces in China).

Furthermore, the palace that was built by Ogedei Khan (1229-1241) in Karakorum, the Mongol capital, were constructed on the foundations of a former Buddhist temple; some of the murals from this temple have been preserved.

Reports in Mongolian sources on the early spread of Buddhism shroud these missionary activities in a cloak of mysterious events that testify to the superiority of Tantric Buddhism over other religions during the reign of Khublai Khan (1260-1294). Contacts with the Sa-skya pandita Kun-dga'rgyal-mtshan (1182-1251) were established during Ogedei's reign, but Buddhism only gained influence with the Mongols after their expeditions into Tibet, which resulted in the sojourn of Tibetan monks as hostages at the Mongol court. The activities there of the Lama Phagba – the personal tutor of Kublai Khan - resulted in an increase in conversions to Buddhism, and his invention, in 1269, of a block script by Phagba led to the translation into Mongolian of great numbers of Buddhist



*Young Monks blowing Conch Shells*

religious literature, the translations often based on already existing Uyghur translations. Following this, the Mongolian Empire went into a period of some decline, leading also to unrest in Tibet. However, after a period of about 250 years, one of Kublai Khan's descendants, Altan Khan succeeded in power over the Mongolian tribes. He met with the then highest Tibetan Lama, Sonam Gyatso, upon whom he gives the title of "Dalai Lama" at the edges of Lake Kokonor (Lake Qinghai). This meeting paved the way for a revival of Buddhism in Mongolia. The later great-grandson of Altan Khan was appointed as an incarnation of the Dalai Lama, (becoming the fourth Dalai Lama) further strengthening the ties between Mongolia and Tibetan Buddhism. From that period on Buddhism became the predominant religion in the Mongolian territories and establishes a big clergy. At the end of the nineteenth century there were 583 monasteries and temple complexes and 243 incarnate lama's would be living in the Mongolian territories, of which 157 resided in Inner Mongolia. The Buddhist clergy controlled about 20 percent of the country's wealth and in the 1920s there were about 110.000 monks, making up one-third of the male population.

In spite of the extensive translation and printing of Buddhist tracts, conversion seems to have been limited to the nobility and the ruling families. Judging from the Mongols' history of religious tolerance, it is rather doubtful that Buddhism spread among the general population on a large scale. Syncretic influences resulted in the transformation of popular gods into Buddhist deities and the acceptance of notions from other religions during this period.

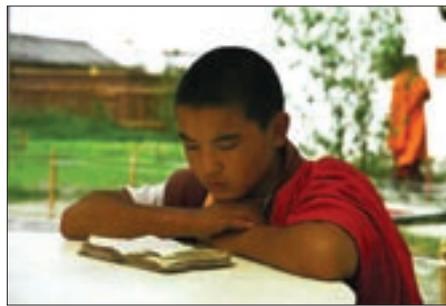
After Mongol rule over China ended in 1368 the practice of Buddhism diminished among the Mongols, deteriorating into mere superstition or giving way once again to the indigenous religious conceptions of the Mongols and to shamanism. It was not until the sixteenth century that a second wave of Buddhist conversion began, brought about by the military expeditions of Allan Khan of the Tumet (1507-1583) into the eastern border districts of Tibet, which resulted in contacts with lamaist clerics. Within the short period of fifty years, beginning with the visit of the third Dalai Lama to Altan Khan's newly built residence, Koke Khota, in 1578, practically all of the Mongolian nobility was converted to Buddhism by the missionary work of many devoted lamaist priests. The most famous of these were Neyici Toyin (1557-1653), who converted the eastern Mongols, and Zaya Pandita, who converted the western and northern Mongols. Sustained by princes and overlords who acted according to the maxim "huius regio, eius religio," inducing the adoption of the new faith by donations of horses, dairy animals, and money, the population willingly or forcedly took to Lamaism. Shamanism was outlawed, idols sought out and burned. The establishment of many



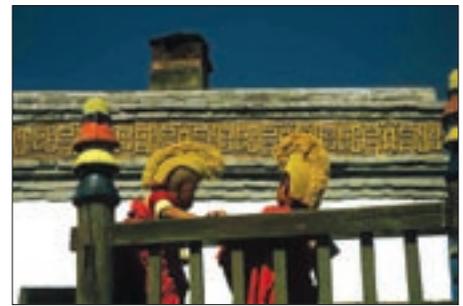
*Mongolian Buddhist Jazz*



*Yellow Hat Mongolian Buddhist Parade*



*A Young Mongolian novice monk studying*



*Mongolian Buddhism is primarily the Yellow Hat Sect who spiritual leader is the Dalai Lama*

new monasteries opened to a greater part of the population the opportunity to become monks, resulting in a drain on Mongolian manpower. The monasteries, however, became similar to those of early medieval Europe; they were the cradles of literature and science, particularly of Buddhist philosophy. By 1629 many other lamaist works were translated into Mongolian, including the 1,161 volumes of the lamaist canon, the Bka'-gyur (Kanjur). Tibetan became the lingua franca of the clerics, as Latin was in medieval Europe, with hundreds of religious works written in this language.

During the Ch'ing dynasty in China, particularly during the K'ang-hsi, Yung-cheng, and Ch'ien-lung reign periods, the printing of Buddhist works in Mongolian was furthered by the Manchu emperors as well as by the Mongolian nobility. Donating money for copying scripture, cutting printing blocks, and printing Buddhist works were thought of as meritorious deeds. Works on medicine, philosophy, and history were also published and distributed. The spiritual life of Mongolia became strongly influenced by religious and semi-religious thoughts and ethics. Sponsored by the K'ang hsi emperor, a revised edition of the Mongolian Bka'-gyur was printed from 1718 to 1720; translation of the Bstan'-gyur (Tanjur) was begun under the Ch'ien-lung emperor in 1741 and was completed in 1749. Copies of the completed edition (in 108 and 223 volumes, respectively, for the Bka'-gyur and Bstan'-gyur) were given as imperial gifts to many monasteries throughout Mongolia.

In the eighteenth century elements of indigenous Mongolian mythology were incorporated into a national liturgy composed entirely in Mongolian. A century later there were about twelve hundred lamaist temples and monasteries in Inner Mongolia and more than seven hundred in the territory of the present-day Mongolian People's Republic. More than a third of the entire male population of Mongolia belonged to the clergy. The monasteries,

possessing their own economic system and property, formed a separate administrative and political organization. In the twentieth century the decline of monasteries and Lamaism was brought about by inner strife and a changing moral climate as well as by political movements and new ideologies, including massive persecution by the Soviet Communists. Many Lamas were murdered and Monasteries destroyed. Since Mongolian independence in 1991 however, some monasteries been reopened in the Mongolian parts of China, in the Mongolian People's Republic, and in Buriat-Mongolia in the former U.S.S.R, and in Mongolia, previously wrecked Monasteries are being rebuilt and monks returning. The current Dalai Lama has also begun revisiting Mongolia, visiting and reconsecrating many ancient sites.

### **Mongolian Lama's**

One of the characteristics of Mongolian Buddhism are the many independent lama's. These lama's don't belong to any kind of monastery. Their income is partly derived of gifts or payments from people consulting them. These consults might concern religious, spiritual or medical issues. Also lama's can be asked to ensure the well being of a certain project/for special occasions, like I observed sometime when someone wanted to build a kiosk he had a lama come to bless the ground. These independent lama's in most cases have not taken (all) the monks vows. The independent lama's might have bonds with a monastery, or even work for them as for instance a librarian.

### **Medicine**

Mongolian traditional medicine is very much based on the Tibetan Buddhist practice. There are some differences however. According to Lama Baatar, working at the Medical college in the Dornogobi aimag, Mongolian medicine would be much better in handling physical problems because of the weather, diseases related to food and taking blood from the body. Furthermore in the Mongolian tradition there is an acupuncture like treatment with needles.

At several monasteries, like Dashchoilon Khiid, Gesar Sum and Mamba Datsun it is possible to obtain medical advice. Also there are independent lama's who offer these consultations.

### **Ovoo Worship**



One of the distinct features of Mongolian Buddhism, which actually has its roots in Shamanism, is the ovoo worship. At these sites rituals are carried out by Buddhist lama's.

### **Major Buddhist Sites in Central Ulaan Bataar**

#### **Gandan Khiid**

An impressive site and the largest Monastery in Mongolia, dating from 1838, with many temples, stupas and statues. Central UB, entry daily 9am-9pm.

#### **Museum of Choijin Lama**

The previous home and temple of the Mongolian State Oracle, dating from 1904. Several temples and mummified remains of auspicious Monks.

#### **Amgalam Sum**

Temple with many statues, some cast by the famous Mongolian sculptor Zanazabar, and a stupa brought to Mongolia from Tibet.

Useful Contacts, offering information on courses, traditional healing, lectures, tours etc:

Mongolian Buddhism: [www.buddhism-mongolia.com](http://www.buddhism-mongolia.com)

Federation of the Preservation of Mahayana: [fpmt-mongolia@magicnet.mn](mailto:fpmt-mongolia@magicnet.mn) 

# MONGOLIA EXPAT GUIDE TO ULAAN BAATAR & THE MONGOLIAN COUNTRYSIDE LAUNCHED

## Launch Proceeds Given to Local Children's Charity



**Mongolia Expat** launched the new *“Travel Guide to Ulaan Baatar & The Mongolian Countryside”* on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> May at the British Embassy in UB, with all proceeds from the book launch going to a local charity of the Ambassadors choice, The Equal Steppe Centre, which has gone to building a summer camp for underprivileged children in Mongolia. The event, televised by Mongolian Channel 9, raised 360,000 togrog (about USD400) and allowed the centre to meet their financial targets for the year to complete the work needed to get the camp ready for this summer. Pictured are Chris Devonshire-Ellis (left) with British Ambassador Chris Osborne (right), with the donation and a copy of the book. We would like to thank all those who attended and gave generously to this event.

## Travel Guide to Ulaan Baatar & The Mongolian Countryside — OUT NOW !!!



This 140 page, full color guide, illustrated with over 250 photos, details all the places to see and visit in Ulaan Baatar, as well as trips from UB out into the Mongolian countryside. These include articles on:

- Mongolia's Naadam Festival
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- Crossing The Khakirra with Two Horses & A Camel
- An Evening With the Shaman

Plus many more detailed articles about Mongolia's nomads, staying in gers, Mongolia's birds, wildlife and flowers, how to get around Mongolia and complete tour guide, hotel, bar, restaurant and nightclub listings in Ulaan Baatar.

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## Book Review: **Sven Hedin** - *“Riddles Of The Gobi”*

– Reviewed by **Chris Devonshire-Ellis**

**S**ven Hedin was a Swedish explorer of Asia, a writer, and geographer, and the last person to receive a Swedish knighthood (1902). Hedin was a member of the Swedish Academy from 1913. Of his journeys Hedin wrote several accounts, which became extremely popular. His classical work, *Through Asia*, appeared in 1898. Hedin had a phenomenal memory and his books, with their vivid details, are still fascinating reading for anyone who is interested in Asian cultures.



Already at an early age Hedin was inspired by the books of James Fenimore Cooper and Jules Verne, and the exploits of Livingstone and Erik Nordenskjöld, whose voyage on the “Vega” through the Bering Strait into the Pacific aroused great enthusiasm in Sweden. Already at the age of twelve he decided to pursue the life of an adventurer. “Happy is the boy who discovers the bent of his life-work during childhood. That, indeed, was my good fortune”, Hedin wrote in *My Life as an Explorer* (1930).

However, the first opportunity to follow his calling opened up when he studied at the University of Stockholm. “During the spring and summer of 1885, I was consumed with impatience for the moment of departure. Already, in imagination, I heard the roar of the waves of the Caspian sea and the clangour of the caravan-bells. Soon the glamour of the whole Orient was to unfold before me.” (from *My Life as an Explorer*) He accepted work as a tutor in Baku, on the Caspian Sea, and his rides on horseback led to the travel book *A Journey Through Persia and Mesopotamia*, which appeared in 1887. During these years he learned to speak Tatar and Persian.

After returning to Sweden in 1889, Hedin studied geography and geology at the Universities of Uppsala and Berlin. In 1890 he served briefly as an interpreter with the Swedish/Norwegian embassy to the Shah of Persia and started a 3 600 mile long journey through Asia. Hedin was blinded in the early 1890s in one eye, and suffered from it until he was 82 - after an operation the sight was restored. Hedin returned home in

1891. In 1892 he received his PhD - at the age of 27. During this period in Sweden he met Mille Broman, his great love, who married Albert Lindström. She died in 1928. “Asia became my cold bride”, Hedin once wrote – and he never stopped loving her.

Hedin began in October 1893 a journey that lasted three years. “The whole of Asia was open before me. I felt that I had been

called to make discoveries without limits - they just waited for me in the middle of the deserts and mountain peaks. During those three years, that my journey took, my first guiding principle was to explore only such regions, where nobody else had been earlier.” In *A journey through Asia* (1898) he described how he saved one of his servants by bringing him water in his boots. Later he returned to this episode several times in his drawings and writings.

Between the years 1893 and 1935 Hedin made four expeditions to Central Asia. He charted maps of significant areas in Pamir, Taklamakan, Tibet, Transhimalaya (also called Hedin Mountains). In 1900-01 he made two attempts to reach Lhasa, but the race was won by a Japanese scholar Ekai Kawaquchi, who was a genuine Buddhist monk. However, Hedin met in 1906 Ta\_i Lama, to whom he gave a medicine box made of aluminum. The Dalai Lama had fled in 1904 when the British troops entered Lhasa, and Ta\_i Lama became the most powerful man in Tibet.

With German, Danish, Chinese, and Swedish scientists he travelled in the Gobi Desert and Turkestan between the years 1927 and 1935. During this period Hedin met Chiang-Kai-shek, head of the Nationalist government and generalissimo of all Chinese Nationalist forces, of whom he also published in 1939 an admiring book. In 1933 Hedin helped the Chinese government retain control of the Sinkiang province, by mapping out the old Silk Road of Marco Polo so that it could be motorized. Hedin’s China expeditions provided material for three books, *The Flight of Big Horse* (1936), *The Silk Road* (1936) and *The Wandering Lake* (1940). In 1930

Hedin received the first Hedin medal, which was founded the same year for significant geographic, especially cartographic research of less known areas.

In 1933 he published “*Riddles Of The Gobi Desert*”, an account of his expedition from China’s capital, Peking, heading North-West into the Gobi (parts of which are now in Inner Mongolia) on a quest to try and retrace the steps taken by Marco Polo on his return to Venice from China. Hedin also was fascinated by the source of water that had irrigated the ancient silk road city of Lop Nor (in the centre of the Taklimakan Desert in Xinjiang Province in China) at which he had previously undertaken several archaeological expeditions, and was searching for a possible source from the Northern Gobi. Travel at this time was fraught with dangers, China was in a state of anarchy with warlords controlling Western regions, and Mongolia wasn’t much better. Spies, bandits and thieves spun out of the shifting sands and gritty wastes of the Gobi like demons, and Hedin had to deal with all of these while continuing his search of sources of desert springs. His accounts of these travels are well documented in this book, catering for an adventure lasting nearly six months and which culminated with his finding a new, ancient town, long abandoned, in the middle of the Gobi.



Following the success of this volume and the expedition in general, Hedin subsequently worked on a further thirty-five volumes of text between 1937-1949 which detailed his expeditions in Northern China.

Sven Hedin died on November 26, 1952. On his table he still had a photograph of Mille Lindström, stuck inside a small religious calendar. Hedin’s excellent panoramic drawings have been of significant help, even up to the latest decades, in interpreting satellite photographs, while his books remain masterpieces of exploratory journalism and are well worth seeking out. [ME](#)

# ULAAN BAATAR LISTINGS

This section of Mongolia Expat is a free listings section of bars, restaurants and nightclubs in Ulaan Baatar. Things change, and places close and new places open, so check before you go. If you think you should be listed in this section please contact [editor@mongoliaexpat.com](mailto:editor@mongoliaexpat.com) with details.

## BARS



pints brewing away. A variety of light and dark beers are on tap and there is a good German themed menu.

### Isimuss

Just opposite the Wrestling Stadium on Peace Avenue East  
Tel: 461146

Worth the visit just to take in the huge statue of Stalin – which used to be opposite the Central library – that now graces this Soviet themed bar. Well cool, and Uncle Joe even suggests a smirk as young buxom beauties cavort around his feet.

### Khan Brau, German Beer Garden

Chingisiin Orgon Choloo  
Tel 326 626  
The German bier garden by excellence. Klaus, the owner of Khan Brau is usually spotted at the regular's table. He will entertain you with his tales of Mongolia while you drink a pint of his excellent home brewed bier and listen to the live Mongolian band. Situated just across from the National Theatre, it is a favourite hang out of the German community of Ulaan Baatar.

### Dave's Place

Sukhbaatar Square  
Tel 99798185  
Dave is the archetypal British pub landlord, and will look after you in his small bar in the basement of the Cultural Palace – or in the summer, on his impressive veranda right on Sukhbaatar Square. Homebase of the UB Yaks, the local rugby team as well as the final target of the Mongol Rally, this bar is popular all year round. Thursday's feature a well attended pub quiz. In winter it is cosy with assorted British regulars there most nights. Typical British menu and beers on tap.

### Crystal Lounge

Peace Avenue, just across from the State Dept Store  
Ulaan Baatars first lounge bar is a classy, minimalist, all white bar with an eclectic selection of spirits, liquors and wines. The place to come if you want to splash 700USD on a bottle of Cristal. However, cocktails are reasonably priced and it's an inventive menu. Probably not the type of place to turn up in desert boots and rucksack, so pack your guccis if you want to get in.

### Canuckz, Canadian Pub

Embassy area in front of the German Embassy – Negdsen Undestnii Gudamj  
Welcome to Tyler and Canuckz new pub. Opened by a Canadian Hockey player and English Teacher, this is a home from home for Canadians in UB. The main room has been decorated by the students of the art college. Normal range of imported beers and a limited but good menu.

### The Steppe Inn

British Embassy  
Fridays only, from 6pm, sited in the British Embassy, this is the longest running bar in UB. You need to be a British national and / or invited by a member to get in. To be on the safe side it is better to call the Embassy to ask for permission to attend: Tel: 458 036. Pints are pulled by the Ambassador which is an excellent way to deploy Her Majesties diplomats.

Ulaan Baatar has a wealth of bars and there are many to choose from. Here we feature some of the best known and well established, but new bars open up regularly, so ask around for what's hot and where's new. Most bars open 'til late – UB is a late night party city.

### Budweiser Bar

Sukhbaatar Square, West Side  
The original Czech Budweiser, not the pale American imitation, this bar is sited right on Sukhbaatar Square and is a good venue to go for the real beer and fried lamb and chicken. Good value.

### Ikh Mongol

Seoul Street, next to the State Circus  
This large venue is German in style and look with a big central room and various smaller rooms at the back. With a very large outdoor terrace overlooking the circus, it gets very busy during the summer months. Ikh Mongol is a fun place to spend the Oktoberfest as well as those cold winter nights. With their own brews on tap, there is plenty of choice in both drinks and food – German inspired – this is a happening place with live Mongolian bands on the busy nights and a DJ after hours.

### Dublin

Seoul Street, on the corner with the circus  
The Dublin is a small pub on the corner facing the circus, this extremely popular locale serves Irish and international beers in a clean, comfortable and safe environment, while the service is swift and efficient. A typical Irish style expat bar, and there's nothing wrong with that.

### Grand Khan Irish Pub

Seoul Street, Next to the National Theatre  
This is by far the largest and most popular bar in town. This large glass structure houses the Irish bar on the ground floor and the VIP rooms as well as a beauty centre on the first floor. The bar itself is large and commercial in its look but always full of expats and wealthy Mongolians, great for meetings or groups, the level of service is professional and the quality constant. In summer there is a large terrace and a stage for the live band. Situated just across from the Prime Minister's residence and next to the National Theatre it is easily accessible by foot from anywhere in the city centre. Who knows? You may see the PM himself in for a pint.

### Chinggis Brewery and Pub

Sukhbaataryn Gudamj  
A pub sited right next to Ulaan Baatars Chinggis Brewery – how cool is that? Talk about the freshest beer in town – glass walls between the pub and the brewery mean you can see your future

## RESTAURANTS



### City Coffee

Chingisiin Orgon Choloo  
Tel 329 077  
City Coffee is located next to Khan Brau. It is a cafe, a bakery, internet and library. They also have some good dishes – mainly Chinese, and a selection of beers and coffees.

### Orange Café

By the German Embassy  
Orange is a warm relaxing place, with a German menu and imported magazines  
There is another Orange café next to the Natural History Museum

### Micheles Bakery

1st Khoroo, Chingeltei  
(turn left on Peace Avenue opposite the Russian Embassy)  
Tel: 9916 9970  
Michele's is back! For all of you who missed your daily French fix of coffee and croissants - Alex has reopened with all his usual array of home baked pastries. Open 8am to 8pm, great snacks or for lunch.

### Millie's Café

Marco Polo Building, the café faces the Monastery of Chojin Lama.  
Tel 330 338  
Millie's is an Institution for expats in UB and its perfect location attracts tourists too. Millie's is well known not only because of the location but also for their excellent shakes and smoothies, chocolate cake or the Apple pie, or to enjoy a great breakfast while glancing through their wide selection of magazines. Just next door is the Xanadu bookstore, it's a mandatory stop to stock up on English language Mongolian guides, books, and novels.

### Sachers, German Bakery

Peace Avenue and a branch behind the Trade and Development bank (our favourite of the two)  
Tel 324 734  
An appealing German bakery with a charming cozy atmosphere. Fresh flowers on the tables  
Drinks: Coffee, Café Latte, Tea, chocolate; Soft drink: Juice, milkshake; All day Breakfasts Classic German and non –German pastries : apple strudel, quarchle strudel, pineapple pie, bretzle, donut bagels, freshly baked. Also open in the evening, doubling up as a wine bar.

### Chez Bernard, European

Peace Avenue 27  
Tel 324 622  
Chez Bernard is located on central Peace Avenue. It offers a nice, warm atmosphere and is a back packers favorite, with its notice board used to find travel mates to go to the countryside, second hand gear and so on. Mainly frequented by tourists.

## Mongolian Restaurants

### World Restaurant

Located behind the London Pub this restaurant serves proper Mongolian food while a reasonable try is made of occidental dishes but they are of varying quality. Big mirrors and world maps decorate this local. Tuya the owner speaks French and would be happy to assist you in any way.

### New Mongolia

Behind the State Department Store, you will recognize the restaurant from the sign outside  
Tel : 88828999.  
Inexpensive but excellent Mongolian, Asian and Central European dishes.

### Nomad Legend

Located on the left side of the central museum.  
Mongolian Food at a reasonable price.  
Tel: 330633.

### City Nomads

West side of Sukhbaatar square next to the Golomt bank.  
Tel : 327700  
A buffet restaurant offering good Mongolian dishes and a favourite with expats and locals.

### History Club

Juulchin street, near Channel 25 building,  
Tel: 311732  
Newly open Mongolian restaurant. They serve European dishes and Mongolian traditional food prepared by a professional Mongolian chef.

### Talin Mongol restaurant

Chingeltei district, 4th horoo trade street CIA building, 2nd floor  
Tel: 319451  
Serving traditional Mongolian food, with an excellent barbecue

**Modern Nomads**

Baga Toiruu north. Just opposite to Chinggis Club.

Tel 318 744 – Reservation recommended the place is always packed!

<http://www.modernnomads.mn/>

If you feel like trying Mongolian Food but do not feel like going to those small street restaurants this is your place - offering high-quality traditional Mongolian dishes". Selection of wine. Nice atmosphere, an outdoor terrace and a favourite of locals and expats.

**Western Restaurants****Chinggis Brewery Area – Sukhbataaryn Gudamj**

(to the North of Sukhbaatar Square)

**Bella - Italian restaurant**

Good English Pleasant atmosphere – Piano concert in summer

Very well established and authentic Italian restaurant, with wide selection of pasta and regional Italian dishes and French and Italian wines.

**Bora Bora**

Just down from the State Department Store towards the Circus on the left hand side, this white minimalist trendy joint does good cheap Italian and Japanese style food.

**Los Bandidos, Mexican Indian Restaurant**

Baga toiruu ikh surguuliin gudamj

Tel 314167. 99194618. 99095746

A unique combination of Mexican and Indian foods – and very good they are too!

**Chinggis Restaurant (Korean)**

Huge wood panelled dining room, perfect for groups!

Concert and live band, and an excellent Teppanyaki buffet

French & Australian wines

**The Gate Restaurant and Pub**

Tel : 11332009

Nice atmosphere, elegant setting. Very friendly staff

Great for business lunch or to spoil yourself, this restaurant was recently chosen to host the Mongolian music awards, and is often regarded as having the best burgers in town. Add to that great desserts and an exhaustive wine list French, Italian, Australian, Chile.. and a cocktails master.

**Choijin Lama Monastery Area**

(to the South of Sukhbaatar Square)

**The Silk Road restaurant**

Jamiyan Guunii Gudamj, Close to the Monastery

Tel 91910211

<http://www.silk-road.mn>

A charming, well located restaurant with an open terrace facing the Temple. Good for Mediterranean style cuisine and a great chilled out atmosphere.

**La Veranda, European Style**

Above Silk Road. Same location, Jamiyan Guunii Gudamj

Great view over the Monastery. Great atmosphere, relaxing place with big sofa, perfect for a date.

The cuisine is good, they have a good selection of wines...and they have that view....

**Circus Area**

(Just south of the State Department Store)

**Marco Polo, Italian restaurant**

Seoul Street 27

Tel 325 240

Wood fired Pizza oven in the entrance, with a warm atmosphere, perfect for winter lunch and dinner. You will enjoy the outdoor terrace during summer. Voted best pizzas by many of UB residents. Beware of same named Strip Bar upstairs if you're with kids, but that doesn't open until midnight.

**UB Deli**

Seoul Street 48

Tel 325 240

The UB Deli serves gourmet sandwiches with salads, pasta and pizza. It has a cosy and comfortable atmosphere. Managed by Lee Cashell the American entrepreneur, the UB Deli has become a popular location for parties and meetings while the English speaking staff is always happy to help with tips and info about Mongolia.

**California**

Seoul Street. Same street same side as Marco Polo but a bit further along.

Tel 319 031

Nice atmosphere, US styled bar / diner, with red leather bench seating, and an enclosed front terrace. Great steak and salads, western / American dishes but Mongolian dishes as well. Good selection of wines. Reservation recommended the place is often packed. Very popular with the American community.

**Emerald Bay**

Tserendorjiin Gudamj - the street leading from the State Department Store to the Circus. Opposite to Michele's Bakery.

Located above a disc shop, Emerald Bay restaurant offers a small outdoor terrace and great Greek and Mediterranean food

**Other Locations****Le Bistrot Français, French Food**

Surguuliin Gudamj

Tel ( 976 ) 11 32 00 22

More info on their website – in French only - <http://www.bistrot-mongolia.mn/links.html>

Styled as a traditional French Bistrot, Guy the owner manages to import the traditional French Bistrot Atmosphere, with small coffee tables in the entrance, a bar as in every bistrot, French magazines, and traditional French cuisine, with a good selection of wines. A popular place.

**Hazara, Indian Restaurant**

Behind the Wrestling Palace

Tel 9919 5701

East of the city centre, Hazara, is UB's first Indian restaurant and is a long term expat favourite for their North Indian dishes. They have their own tandoori oven. Recommended by local expats as the best Indian in UB.

**Night Clubs**

There are a growing number of night clubs in Ulaan Baatar where the city gets up, out and has a good time, dancing to the latest hip hop and cool tunes out of the US or Europe. UB increasingly has a growing selection of upmarket clubs and you can buy anything here from beer on tap to bottles of Krug. Again, places change and go in and out of fashion so check before you turn up. These listed however represent some of the most popular and reliable.

**River Sounds**

Olympiin Orgon Choloo – south of Sukhbaatar Square

River sounds is one of the most established and best located night clubs in UB. Just south of Sukhbaatar square along Olympic avenue it is easily recognizable by its neon lights spelling out it's name. The inside is modern with a large dance floor surrounded by sofas and chairs. A variety of bands and artists play on Friday and Saturday nights to offer a very wide variety of musical styles. A cover charge is applicable. The River Sounds crowd is generally slightly older than most of the other clubs, it is a favourite spot with the consultants and executives from the expat community.

**Strings**

Strings is modeled after the Hard Rock Café in Beijing, and is also one of the most popular night clubs of the moment. It's a little hard to find at the back of a little alley way slightly outside of the city centre. It is set on two floors with a large central stage where a live band plays on most nights. Strings is popular with the local Mongolian youth, usually packed on Friday's and Saturday's. Some of the younger expats attend but generally it's a crowded and entertaining venue. The upstairs seating is quieter and has its own bar which is not as busy at the main bar downstairs.

**Flux**

An enormous night club set just to the south of Sukhbaatar square with bright red neon lights. The inside of the club has a feel of the American 70's while the local crowd dances away on the heavy house music. Popular with locals and worth a visit.

**The Oasis Club and Lounge**

The Oasis club is the newest and swankiest lounge club in Ulaan Baatar, it is an entirely new and unique concept in Mongolia with a trendy, relaxed and cool interior design which allows you to pose or be more modest, settling down into deep

sofas. They play the latest tunes from the UK and France and is a firm favourite with the expats in UB. Christophe, the French manager of the bar is usually found behind it serving his unique cocktail creations and various alcohols he has travelled the world to find. The Oasis Club and Lounge is situated in the courtyard just behind the popular UB Delicatessen restaurant. In summer there is vast and comfortable seating in the lounge own courtyard with a BBQ and fountains to set the town. An extremely popular venue for the weary travellers after a long tour in the Gobi seeking peace and relaxation from the hustle and bustle of Ulaan Baatar.

**Hollywood**

Zaluus Youth & Cultural Center, Zaluuchuudyn Orgon Choloo

Located near the Indian Embassy, this small club is pretty cool and popular with the locals. Relatively upmarket with a Hollywood movie theme, the film inspired décor is interesting and it plays the latest tunes.

**Muse**

Maral Tavern Bldg, Baga Toiruu

Very popular with the new yuppie Mongolians who have just discovered the fun that can be had dancing and dressing up for the occasion. This small venue gets quickly packed but can form the basis of a great night out.

**Face**

Juulchin Gudamj

Always busy, very popular with the young Mongolians and expats, very black and dark interior decoration with large mirrors and lots of flashing lights. A place to dance rather than relax.

**UB Palace**

Chingunjavijn Gudamj

The UB palace is a large entertainment complex with several venues within it. It is located north of Peace Avenue on the east side of the 1st micro-district. It plays different music styles to suit all tastes. Plenty of cheap drinks and bar fines for heaving up on the dance floor.

**Berlin**

Baruun Selbe 14/1

Loud techno joint popular with locals and Russian expats and travelers, open until 5am.

**Marco Polo Club**

Seoul Street 27

Somewhat notorious, the Marco Polo club is situated above the pizza restaurant of the same name; the club is accessed by a discreet door to the rear of the restaurant, with a cover charge to gain entry. The club was UB's first strip joint and is reasonably classy, with sashaying ladies in various state of undress suggestively dancing along the lounge. 5,000 tg tips tucked in suspenders and underwear will usually result in speedier removal, but no touching.

**Seoul Hotel Nightclub**

Peace Avenue, to the west of the State Department Store

Another popular strip club, with various assorted views of some spectacular Mongolian hills and valleys.

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