

Mongolia Changing Tourism Landscape

Mongolia, the land of endless steppes and nomadic traditions is changing; it is happening very fast but is it a change for good or rather a change for worse?



Mongolia is undergoing an economic change - the land of Genghis Khan is evolving fast and the country has recently joined the world of rapidly developing nations. Thanks to the abundance of mineral resources, the country has opened itself up to large global mining players keen to make the most of its underground wealth. The GDP of the country is set to triple over the next few years with its small population (3 million) set to become one of the globally wealthiest per capita within the next 10 years.

This change is apparent the most in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar where its citizens sport new Louis Vuitton bags, where cars are new and expensive and where ostentatious displays of wealth are becoming increasingly common. This is also visible in the new luxury skyscrapers appearing all over the city and the new shopping malls bustling with expensive goods.

This has both positive and negative impacts on the country and its tourism industry. Among the positive effects is the development of the transport infrastructure. A richer country can invest in improving roads, opening new airline routes and providing incentives to the private sector to invest in hospitality and tourism.



The investments of the private sector can be already seen in the development of international brand hotels in Ulaanbaatar. Shangri-La, Hilton, Best Western, Sheraton and Ramada are all in construction and set to open in the next couple of years. The new Ramada Hotel and Suites will be the first international brand hotel to open in UB in June 2011 in the new Max towers near the Gandan Monastery.

This will lead to a new phase in Mongolia's tourism development since it will allow high-end travelers to make the most of Mongolia's natural beauty and enjoy its incredible diverse landscape. The country has a unique set of attractions including camels in the Gobi, yaks in the endless steppes of central Mongolia, reindeers in the distant northern mountains - all of this mixed with vast lakes, sand dunes and some of the most pristine and untouched natural beauty on earth.

Mongolia is one of the few countries in Asia to have retained its traditional nomadic heritage alive as an important part of its daily life. A large portion of the Mongolian population still lives as nomads and it provides an important basis for its economic development.

It is equally likely that the increasing income per capita as well as the opening up of the country to high end tourism will promote the development of adventure sports and recreational activities such as flight schools, parachuting, go-karting, quad biking, hunting and the opening up of dedicated recreational parks and facilities all over the country.



It is hoped that within a few years, Mongolia will be able to develop its tourism sector towards winter activities, thereby enabling the tourism sector to remain active throughout the year and allowing those working within it to become professional tourism operators instead of amateurs who consider it as a summer job.

Of course, large scale mining operations scar the earth and destroy the natural beauty of Mongolia. Even responsible mining will leave a visible impact in the countryside. The positive impacts of Mongolia's economic development far outweigh the negative damage though. Most important of all the development of Mongolia's tourism sector will allow the country to obtain a diversified source of wealth which does not involve mining activities as well as employ a significant portion of the population.

The challenge for Mongolia will be to manage carefully the enormous increases in revenues and not ruin its existing potential for the sake of cheap tourism or pleasing international operators looking for a more sterile environment for the tourists.

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