

Understand Mongolia

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Mongolia Today

Mongolia may be a little fish in the big pond of globalisation but its importance on the world stage has only just started to grow. Pundits have dubbed the country 'Mingolia', a nod to its enormous mineral wealth. Mongolians are stepping cautiously ahead, wary of the fact that other natural-resource-rich countries have been ruined by corruption and mismanagement. The government has set up checks to ensure transparent accounting of mining revenue but whether or not the bonanza is spent wisely is something only time will tell.

Best on Film

The Weeping Camel (2005) Docu-drama that follows a camel-herder family in the Gobi.

Mongol (2007) Dramatic depiction of the rise of Chinggis Khaan.

Tracking the White Reindeer (2009) Docu-drama on reindeer herders, available online.

Best in Print

Ghengis Khan and the Making of the Modern World (Jack Weatherford; 2005) Groundbreaking book and a bestseller on the Mongol empire.

When Things Get Dark (Matthew Davis; 2010) Raw examination of life in Tsetserleg from an American teacher.

Hearing Birds Fly (Louisa Waugh; 2003) Recollections of a year spent in remote Bayan-Ölgii by a British teacher.

Wild East (Jill Lawless; 2000) Slices of Mongolian life written by a Canadian expat editor of the *UB Post*.

Mörön to Mörön (Tom Doig; 2013) Wacky adventures of two Aussies making their way across Mongolia on pushbikes.

The Great Leap Forward

The hot topic of conversation in Mongolia is the US\$6.6 billion Oyu Tolgoi copper and gold mine, developed by the Anglo-Australian company Rio Tinto, but 34% owned by the Mongolian government. Copper concentrate exports began in 2013 and the company says that by 2018 the mine will account for one-third of the country's total GDP. The hope is that this single world-class deposit will lift the whole country up by the bootstraps.

China is a ready market for Mongolia's raw materials and the government is rapidly trying to build up its infrastructure to deliver the goods. New rail and road links to China are being built, and in a bid to diversify its markets, Mongolia is also planning a 1000km railway from Ömnögovi all the way to Russia (via Choibalsan).

Mongolia's political leaders seem keenly aware of the need to invest their newfound wealth back into the country. A copper smelter, oil refinery and coal washing plants are a few of the planned factories. A new international airport is expected to open in 2016 and the government is also planning to build a new university and IT campus outside Ulaanbaatar.

Democrats Sweep to Power

Mongolians went to the polls in June 2012 and gave the Democratic Party (DP) a narrow victory over the rival Mongolian People's Party (MPP). A year later President Elbegdorj was re-elected, giving the DP control of all top political positions until 2016.

Calling itself the 'Reform Government', the DP made some surprisingly radical (and progressive) political decisions soon after taking office.

Ulaanbaatar Mayor E Bat-Uul kicked things off with a new traffic system in the capital (banning cars from driving on certain days based on their licence-plate number). Another popular move was a strict ban on