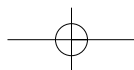
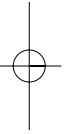
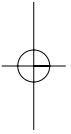
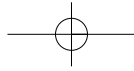


CHAPTER 12

Tourism and culture
in Mongolia: the case
of the Ulaanbaatar
Naadam

Kevin O’Gorman and
Karen Thompson



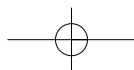
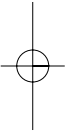


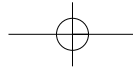
Introduction

In 2006 Mongolia celebrated the 800th anniversary of the unification of the Mongol tribes, the foundation of the Great Mongol Empire under Chinggis Khan. At its zenith, this empire covered a 12 million square mile expanse that stretched 7,000 miles from the Pacific Ocean to the Baltic Sea. Historically, Mongolia's isolation and the combination of high-altitude steppes, deserts and mountains produced a small, but hardy population of horse-riding, nomadic herders. The country is entirely landlocked and held to be the nation furthest from the sea. Today Mongolia has a population of fewer than 3 million people, the majority of whom are indigenous, in a country about the combined size of Western Europe. Roughly half the population still pursue a traditional semi-nomadic lifestyle on the steppe, while the rest live in the cities, mainly in the capital Ulaanbaatar.

The country's name is synonymous with remoteness and wilderness and, as Yu and Goulden (2006, p. 1331) note, 'stirs up the nomadic, exotic and mystic images of an international tourism destination'. Perhaps for this reason, it is relatively well positioned in the mind of the potential tourist, for whom the country's lack of infrastructure is part of its attraction. The tangible appeal of Mongolia for the tourist is clearly its natural resources, rather than the few built heritage sites which survive throughout its territory. At the same time, the exotic and alien image of the country creates a substantial cultural tourism market, propagated by the flourishing, semi-nomadic culture of the Mongolian people. Cultural festivals throughout Mongolia celebrate the rich nomadic tradition and the largest, the Ulaanbaatar Naadam, has become a significant attraction for international, as well as domestic tourism. However, whilst international visitors are attracted by the historical tradition and cultural uniqueness of the events that take place during Naadam, Mongolians are attracted by indigenous sports and the opportunity to spend time with friends and family and renew old acquaintances. Indeed, the experiences of international visitors may be quite different to that of Mongolians attending the festival, mediated as they are by tour operators and an assortment of special arrangements.

The chapter discusses the different experiences of the two sets of visitors to the Ulaanbaatar Naadam festival, based on a study conducted in 2005, and explores the challenges for this traditional cultural event posed by modern tourism and other forces. It commences with a brief overview of international and domestic tourism in Mongolia. The overview is followed by a review of the origins and history of Naadam as an indigenous





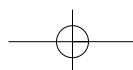
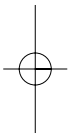
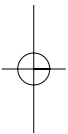
cultural festival. The experiences of modern day visitors to the festival from overseas and from Mongolia are then examined and compared, with reference to similarities and differences between the two groups. Finally, the chapter considers issues and future challenges for the festival as a result of the increasing number of international visitors and their expectations of the festival.

International and domestic tourism in Mongolia

Up until the end of the 1980s, tourists from the Russian Federation, Central and Eastern Europe accounted for the vast majority of international visits to Mongolia. According to Kokubo and Haraguchi (1991), for example, only 5% of the total 236,540 overseas visitors to Mongolia in 1989 came from beyond the Eastern Bloc countries. All leisure visitors were handled by the state owned tour operator, Juulchin. However, the evolution of democracy at the beginning of the 1990s led to rapid but peaceful change in Mongolia, with the result that, since 1990, the number of international leisure visitors from beyond the Eastern Bloc has grown, on average, by around 20% per year with the main generating markets being Japan, South Korea, France, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA) (Ministry of Road, Transport and Tourism, 2005). Yu and Goulden (2006) note, however, that this rise was offset by a sharp decrease in visitors from the Russian Federation with the result that total numbers fell to a low of 82,000 in 1997, before rising steadily and dramatically after 1998. In 2004, a total of 300,537 leisure tourists visited Mongolia, an increase of 49% over the previous year (Ministry of Road, Transport and Tourism, 2005).

An understanding of the profile of international tourists to Mongolia has been facilitated by a number of recent studies, principally funded by international development organizations. Since 1998, four surveys of international visitors have been undertaken (TACIS, 1998; Saffery and Sugar, 2003; Gansukh, 2005; Weinig, 2006). Although funded and organized by different groups, each of these studies has attempted to build on the previous ones, using similar methodologies and producing data which are comparable. It has thus been possible to build a picture of how international tourism to Mongolia has developed in the period since 1998. Less information is available on domestic tourism within Mongolia, however one study, undertaken in 2003, does shed some light on the profile, behaviour and expenditure of domestic tourists (Gansukh, 2003).

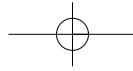
In 2005, 68% of overseas visits to Mongolia were for leisure, recreation and holiday purposes. Sixty percent of leisure visitors



to Mongolia originated from the European Union, with visitors from France representing 16%. Visitors from the USA represented 14% of total leisure arrivals with Japan, South Korea and China together accounting for 14% (Weinig, 2006). Since 1998, the number of Asian and American tourists has decreased, while leisure visits from European countries have increased (TACIS, 1998; Saffery and Sugar, 2003; Weinig, 2006). The average age of leisure visitors to Mongolia is falling. Whilst, in 1998, 58% of visitors were aged over 40 years, in 2005 only 42% fell into this category, with 51% being between the ages of 20 and 39 years (Saffery and Sugar, 2003; Weinig, 2006). In 2005, the most important reasons leisure visitors cited for travelling to Mongolia were natural scenery (78%), Mongolian traditional culture (60%) and adventure tours (32%) (Weinig, 2006). In regards to domestic tourism in Mongolia, Gansukh (2003) reports that the most common purpose of travel is visiting friends and relatives (40.5%), followed by leisure (35.2%). The Mongolian countryside is the most popular destination, with 63% of those surveyed indicating that they travel to the countryside one to two times per year. The most popular motivation for travel, as with international visitors, is to enjoy the natural scenery (53.7%). Gansukh (2003) also reports that Mongolian history, culture and nomadic traditions are increasingly attracting domestic tourists to rural areas to enjoy indigenous cuisine and hospitality.

Mongolia's political history and commercial and economic isolation have clearly constrained large-scale tourism development and, consequently, the product which Mongolia offers to overseas tourists is comparatively limited, highly seasonal, resource based and focussed on wilderness and cultural tourism. Attractions include relatively unspoiled natural resources such as the Gobi desert, scenic lakes such as Khuvsgul and the mountains of the Altai. The country is rich in flora and fauna, which attracts both naturalists and sportsmen. It also contains a number of interesting archaeological, geological and palaeontological sites. Yu and Goulden's (2006) survey identified nature as the destination attribute with which international visitors to Mongolia were most satisfied. Although, as related above, Mongolian traditional culture is the second most important reason overseas visitors come to Mongolia, Yu and Goulden (2006) report a lower rate of satisfaction with this aspect of the tourism product. Nonetheless, it is evident that the culture and civilization of the Mongolian people, well preserved by years of isolation, are major attractions for visitors from post-modern societies.

The Department of Tourism Policy and Coordination, located within the Ministry of Road, Transport and Tourism, has responsibility for formulation and coordination of tourism policy and

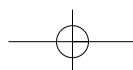


strategy, including product development and promotion. Within the constraints of its limited funding (Gansukh, 2003), the Mongolian Tourism Board promotes a calendar of events to domestic and overseas visitors that celebrate Mongolian culture and tradition. Featured attractions include the Ice Festival at Khuvsgul Lake, festivals of reindeer herding and shamanic art, as well as poetry and art festivals. In 2006, the events calendar was expanded to highlight the celebrations surrounding the 800th anniversary of the Great Mongolian State. Despite this range of attractions, the National Naadam Festival in Ulaanbaatar in mid-July, organized by a special organizing committee appointed by the Mongolian government, remains the centrepiece of the annual events calendar and was highlighted as the main event of the anniversary celebrations. Thus, the importance of Naadam, both as an element of the cultural tourism product for international visitors and as a celebration of indigenous culture for domestic visitors.

Naadam: history and traditions

Eriyn Gurvan Nadaam, the Festival of the Three Manly Sports (commonly known as Naadam) is the biggest festival of the year for Mongolians. Separate festivals are held across the country; the largest, in the capital Ulaanbaatar, takes place from the 11th to 13th of July each year and in 2005 was attended by approximately 50,000 spectators. Official attendance figures are unavailable, however the stadium has a capacity of 35,000 and a further 15,000 are estimated to have attended the festivities outside the stadium and elsewhere in the city. The modern day festival begins with a colourful opening ceremony, followed 2 days of horse racing, archery and wrestling competitions with a third day generally reserved for eating, drinking and relaxing. Despite still being known as the three manly sports, women now participate in all but the wrestling category.

Naadam is an enduring celebration of the indigenous majority culture in Mongolia. According to Kabzińska-Stawarz (1987), contemporary Mongolians trace the origins of the festival back to the needs of war, defence and hunting. In Old Mongolia, the festivals celebrated the prowess of the male and were linked to religious rites intended to both celebrate and attract wealth, health and prosperity from the gods of nature and from ancestors. After the advent of Buddhism in Mongolia, monasteries held four or five festivals each year at ritual sites around the country, which occasionally were huge affairs, drawing people from many different provinces. These festivals coincided with



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sacrificial offerings made in autumn to local spirits or Buddhist gods, to initiate the next stage of the annual cycle. They began with ritual offerings of sheep and dairy products to the gods followed by traditional sports and closed with a distribution of food to the poor. Bulstrode (1920) observes that at the beginning of the twentieth century in Urga (now Ulaanbaatar) there were spectacular festivals lasting up to 2 weeks. These festivals were scheduled to coincide with the oncoming of autumn and contained both Buddhist ceremonies as well as the three traditional sports. Carruthers (1914) notes that wrestling bouts were frequently held between representatives of church and state and were attended by the Bogd Khan (living Buddha), the religious and secular leader.

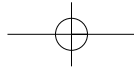
After 1921, the Naadam festival became an official celebration of the National Revolution's victory. On 11 June 1921 the revolutionaries mounted a successful attack on Urga, the capital city, and expelled the Chinese military garrison. So the first Nadaam of the 'new Mongolia' was celebrated on the first anniversary of the state's foundation, 11 July 1922, on the south bank of the River Tula – a spot reportedly chosen by a great Mongol hero, Sükhbaatar (Montagu, 1956). During the communist regime, Nadaam was secularized and organized by the local state controlled cooperatives. The differences between the festival during the socialist period and those preceding it were substantial. For example:

in Old Mongolia, a festival lasted until all the competitions had been won; in the socialist period, it was limited to two days. Attendance became compulsory. Mongols had to be seen supporting the [communist] flag or forfeit their wages

(Pegg, 2001, p. 213).

Dashdondov (2005) observes that each of the individual sporting events within the festival have special cultural and historical significance and contain deeply embedded rituals. To help develop an understanding of the centrality of Naadam for Mongolians, it is important to gain some understanding of the origins and history of the festival's sporting events.

In Old Mongolia, horse racing was linked to rituals which offered the first milk of the new year to the gods, and the consecration of mares who were then left to run free. With the help of a Shaman or Lama, a spiritually and climatically auspicious time close to the summer solstice was chosen for these offering rituals. The ceremonies were followed by the racing of stallions, with the aim of the contest being to determine the swiftest horse, rather than the best rider. Serruys (1974), noted that, along with racing,



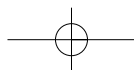
Tourism and culture in Mongolia: the case of the Ulaanbaatar Naadam

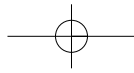
contestants and spectators sang praises to the gods. These praises were an amalgam of folk, shamanist and Buddhist beliefs. Offerings of milk were made to gods appropriated from Mongolian folk religion with the winning horse being consecrated to the gods and allowed to run free. Just before the communist era, Andrews (1921) observed a horse race where the Lamas, in dazzling yellow gowns sat on a hillside northeast of Urga (Ulaanbaatar) and opposite them were positioned the judges. Horsemen were dressed in colourful robes, chanting their ritual songs. The winners were given cheese to scatter towards the spectators and ritual sites as an offering to the gods and ancestors. Bulstrode (1920) noted that both boys and girls competed in these races.

Kabzińska-Stawarz (1991) records that, until the early years of the twentieth century, the skills of archery were used by Mongols for both war and hunting. Bows and arrows also symbolized fertility and life force during weddings and funerals and were used as offerings at ritual places to ward off evil spirits (Bawden, 1958). Similarly, in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth century, archery contests, featuring cylindrical camel skin targets stacked to the height of a man, were thought to dispel illness (Kabzińska-Stawarz, 1991). In a match observed by Bulstrode (1920), archers positioned themselves in front of tents at the southern end of the arena and shot in pairs; princes and herders alike. Archery exists in Mongolia today primarily as a competitive sport rather than a tool of war or hunting and has declined even as a sport because of restrictions on killing animals under the communist regime (Pegg, 2001). Lattimore (1941) noted that in 1941, it was only the rich that could afford a bow which by then had become an extravagant luxury.

In addition to being a trial of strength, Pegg (2001, p. 217) states that Mongolian wrestling 'is a combined performance of music, ritual and dance that encourages an exchange of powers between the wrestler, community, gods of the universe and spirits of nature'. The Mongols considered the best wrestlers to be incarnations of their epic heroes, personifying the strength, skill and courage of the ideal of man (Kabzińska-Stawarz, 1991). Ritual symbolism is important in wrestling. For example, victorious wrestlers were traditionally given some cheese which they held to their forehead before throwing a portion toward the mountains and sky, eating some, and flinging the remainder toward the spectators (Andrews, 1921). In this way, the wrestler shared his victory with the spirits of nature and with the spectators. This tradition continues to be practiced in the festival's wrestling event.

A further ritual that has survived, albeit in modified form, is that prior to the match, each wrestler's trainer or herald chants



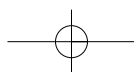


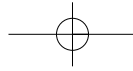
the wrestler's praises. In Old Mongolia, the recitation situated the wrestler by referring to the noble or monastery to whom he gave allegiance, the gods, clan, lineage, any titles and achievements; thus introducing the wrestler to the audience, other contestants and his opponent (see chapter by Carr, Editors' Note). Pegg (2001) notes that during the communist era, so as not raise questions of race, history or religion the traditional chants were adapted to fit the new ideology by only providing the name of the sports club to which the contestant belonged. Wrestlers also perform the Garuda Dance (commonly known as the Eagle Dance) during the introductions and before and after each round. In this dance, the wrestler stretches out both arms and flaps them as he leaps into the air. In doing so, the wrestler is 'imitating two birds – the legendary, powerful Khan Garuda of the Buddhist pantheon and the hawk, admired for its bravery and the way it swoops, dives and quickly snatches its prey' (Pegg, 2001, p. 217). These rituals and traditions are still woven into the fabric of modern day Naadam. Whilst these rites serve to entertain the visitor from overseas, there is often a lack of appreciation among the foreign tourists of their deeper cultural significance.

The historical and cultural significance of Naadam serve as important attractions for both international and domestic tourism in Mongolia. This festival is by far the most important event of its kind on the Mongolian calendar and represents a fascinating combination of historical tradition, indigenous cultural and sporting competition. The aim of the research reported in this chapter was to explore differences in the visitor experiences of this festival in order to develop an understanding of how the different elements of Naadam interact to attract and entertain both domestic and international visitors and the challenges for an indigenous event that has recently targeted two distinct audiences. Moreover, the study explores potential differences in the behaviour and experiences of domestic and overseas visitors, and possible conflicts between promotion and development of the festival as an international attraction while retaining its indigenous attributes and heritage. Finally, the investigation highlights positive and negative influences of tour operators and festival organizers on visitor experiences.

Methodology

The study was undertaken by a team of researchers from the University of Strathclyde, UK and Orkhon University, Mongolia. Mixed methods were employed for the research, namely a combination of observational and social survey techniques. Due to



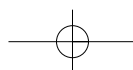


an apparent absence of academic literature on the Naadam festival and the special nature of the festival as a combination of cultural and sport attractions, exploratory techniques were felt to offer the best opportunity to develop an in-depth understanding of the visitor experience. Direct observation requires the researcher to actively participate in the event that is being investigated because in 'observing and talking to people you learn from them their view of reality' (Agar, 1996, p. 157). Observation has the advantage that it allows patterns of behaviour to be observed, which may not be apparent to individual subjects involved (Veal, 1997). The observational research was undertaken during the first 2 days of the festival, in and around the Naadam stadium and the other sporting sites used for the festival. The temporal and spatial behaviour of both overseas and domestic visitors was observed and recorded in the form of research notes.

It has been noted that observation should play a role in most strategies, but often needs to be supplemented by other data collection techniques (Veal, 1997; Elliott and Jankel-Elliott, 2003). To this end, and to augment the observational component of the research, a three page self-completed questionnaire was designed to be administered to visitors to the 2-day Naadam festival in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia on the 11th and 12th July 2005. The main content of the questionnaire consisted of a series of 27 statements regarding motivation for attending Naadam. These items were drawn from the literature on motivation for attending cultural festivals and events and sports events in the USA and South East Asia (see Lee et al., 2004). Subjects were asked to rate their level of agreement/disagreement with each statement on a Likert-type scale. Further sections of the questionnaire asked about the characteristics of respondents' visits, their levels of satisfaction with certain aspects of the Naadam festival and the event overall, as well as their likelihood of revisiting. Questions were also included to collect demographic information on respondents.

Some changes were made to the questionnaire as the result of a test for face validity, conducted with tour operators and festival organizers. The questionnaire was translated into Mongolian by a native speaker and, as a further test of reliability, a back-translation was conducted by a different native speaker and compared with the original. Some slight differences were necessary between the Mongolian language questionnaire and the questionnaire for international visitors with regard to trip characteristics, as certain questions were only relevant to one cohort.

The survey was undertaken at a number of sites across the festival including inside and outside the main Naadam stadium, the archery stadium and the horse racing venue. International

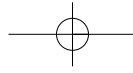


visitors were targeted by researchers with English as their first language whilst a team of Mongolian speaking researchers collected data from domestic visitors. A total of 539 useable questionnaires were obtained from a convenience sample of those attending the festival. Of these, 34% were completed by international visitors and 66% by Mongolian nationals. A large majority (75%) of Mongolian respondents were from Ulaanbaatar with the remainder coming from throughout Mongolia but also from overseas. The most frequently represented nations among the overseas visitors were Australia, France, UK and USA.

Overseas and domestic tourists experience of contemporary Naadam

The role of Naadam as a bridge between the urban and nomadic populations of Mongolia has been commented on by *Finer (2002)*, who observed the uniting of traditional and contemporary lifestyles, but also a blending of the traditional and the commercial. The population of Ulaanbaatar experiences a dramatic increase over the 3 days of the Naadam public holiday. The city fills up with nomadic families visiting from the countryside with gers and livestock, so that small animal holdings appear across the suburbs; an interesting sight in a capital city. For some of these families, Naadam represents a commercial as well as a leisure opportunity. At the same time, overseas visitor numbers experience a peak during the Naadam period, with accommodation being in short supply. The Director of one incoming tour operator reported that 60% of the overseas visitors handled annually by the company arrive within 3 days of the Naadam festival (*Wigsten, 2005*).

The main part of the festival takes place within the National Naadam stadium, just south of the commercial centre of Ulaanbaatar. The opening ceremony, on the first day, serves as a useful barometer of how Naadam has evolved. During the communist period, there was little reference to Mongolian national heroes, such as Chinggis Khan. The opening ceremony contained a marching brass band playing 'The Red Flag', a military parade saluting the Party leaders and various other military-esque behaviour (*Dashtseren, 2001*). By contrast, the modern opening ceremony is a mix of traditional and modern symbols. It starts at the Parliament building, where the Mongolian national flag is raised, alongside the nine-legged, white standard of Chinggis Khan. A short procession carries the standard to the Naadam stadium where around 35,000 spectators are packed into fairly basic seating (see Figure 12.1). In 2005, Mongolians paid approximately



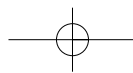
Tourism and culture in Mongolia: the case of the Ulaanbaatar Naadam



Figure 12.1
Nadaam stadium

US\$ 2 for their entrance tickets, whereas western travellers paid US\$ 25. However, visitors from overseas are automatically allocated seats in the only shaded area of the stadium. This system of dual pricing is commonly employed at visitor attractions and arts venues throughout Mongolia. However, in the case of Naadam, it has the effect of segregating overseas and domestic visitors.

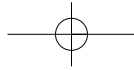
Most tour groups attend the opening ceremony on the first morning of the festival. They may stay briefly to watch the wrestling or travel out of town to the horse racing, but normally move on to the next item on their tour itinerary by the afternoon of the first day. Independent travellers and local people, on the other hand, are more likely to spend a full day at the stadium, watching the various sports competitions that are taking place as well as eating, drinking, shopping and socializing at stalls which are located outside the stadium. Among the independent



overseas travellers who were interviewed, the substantial presence of organized tours, consisting mainly of older Japanese and American tourists, had a negative impact on their satisfaction with the festival. Visitors on these organized tours were more likely to complain of overcrowding and the lack of comfort in the stadium, while independent travellers particularly disliked the behaviour of other international tourists. For independent international travellers, segregation into tourist enclaves appeared to detract from the authentic experience of Naadam as it limited the possibilities of mingling with local people inside the stadium.

The opening ceremony itself takes the form of a gala-type celebration, complete with an aerial show, a parade of lavish floats, Mongolian traditional and contemporary song and dance and an address by the Mongolian President. Feedback from overseas respondents indicated a level of surprise and slight distaste at the content of the opening ceremony. The presence of motorbikes, cheer leaders and hip-hop dancers apparently did not correspond to the more traditional display of Mongolian culture and customs which these visitors had expected. Nonetheless, levels of satisfaction with the opening ceremony were relatively high, on average 5.36 on a 7-point Likert scale for overseas visitors and 5.63 for Mongolians attending the festival (with 7 being the highest satisfaction score). Corporate sponsorship of the event by national and international companies, such as Dell, Panasonic, Pepsi and Coca-Cola, has become increasingly visible in recent years within the main stadium. This commercialization extended to the opening ceremony, since several of the parade floats were designed to advertise local products such as beer and food. Commercialization and corporate sponsorship were cited by both Mongolian and overseas visitors as negative aspects of the Naadam festival. The commodification of festivities has previously been criticized by, *inter alia*, Boissevain (1996) and Taylor (2001) for jeopardizing the authenticity of social relations and cultural rituals.

Wrestling is the most important sport of the Naadam games, and the competition begins immediately after the opening ceremony and finishes at the end of the second day of the festival. It is extremely popular with the Mongolian spectators. Organized tour groups have an opportunity to observe the initial stages of the competition on the first morning. However, constraints imposed by organized itineraries mean that overseas visitors in tour groups have a limited opportunity to experience this unique competition. Whilst the novelty of the costumes and the 'Eagle Dance' performed by the competitors hold the visitors interest for a short period, the lack of explanation and interpretation detracts from their experience. For the tourist who is unfamiliar

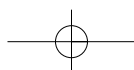


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with the rules of the competition and who does not understand the Mongolian commentary, it is difficult to remain absorbed by the contest. There would appear to be considerable opportunity to improve the experience through a better explanation of and education about the sporting events by the tour operator or event organizers. For example, a festival programme for visitors could highlight the cultural significance of the sporting events and the rituals surrounding them. This is arguably more important for independent travellers, who are not accompanied by a guide and were observed to be more likely to spend longer in the stadium. Visitors on organized tours miss the excitement and atmosphere generated in the stadium among local spectators by the wrestling finals, which are held on the second day of the festival. As such, they miss a key cultural highlight of the event.

Such mediation of the visitor experience of Naadam by tour operators and guides extends to other aspects of the festival. It was observed, for example, that tour groups entering and exiting the stadium were discouraged from exploring other areas of the stadium complex, including the thriving marketplace outside the stadium. This market is an important centre of activity for local people and serves as a site where competitors, traders and spectators mingle. Moreover, at the horse racing venue, a dusty plain about 30 kilometres outside Ulaanbaatar, the few tour groups that did attend this captivating event were accommodated in temporary, tiered seating set up on the finish line of the races. Again, their experience contrasted greatly with that of independent travellers and Mongolians attending the festival, most of whom spectated from within a chaotic and dusty throng of people and horses (Figure 12.2).

In terms of the domestic visitor experience, it is possible to identify a number of key reasons that Mongolians have for attending Naadam. Spending time with family and friends was observed to be highly important to domestic visitors to Naadam, since the celebrations present an opportunity for nomadic herders to assemble together, renewing old and making new acquaintances. The Naadam holiday is the time of year when families traditionally reunite. Clearly there is also a strong sports attraction for Mongolians visiting the festival. Many respondents indicated that they had attended the festival in order to support certain competitors. The wrestling contest in particular attracts a large number of serious fans, in the same way that an important football match would in Europe. Thus, the festival must be regarded not only as a cultural festival, celebrating Mongolian ethnicity and traditions and showcasing them to the international visitor, but also as an important national sporting competition.



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Figure 12.2
Horse racing venue

Indeed, given that the opening ceremony is increasingly being criticized for over commercialization and a subsequent loss of meaning, it is perhaps the sporting events themselves which offer the most authentic cultural experience for both overseas and domestic visitors.

At the same time, questionnaire responses indicated that the festival is perceived as an exciting event with 'seeing new and different things' being rated as the most important reason for Mongolians to attend Naadam. This finding highlights an interesting phenomenon amongst the domestic market as domestic visitors, on average, indicated that they were unlikely to attend the event in the future. It seems, therefore, that, although 75% of Mongolians attending the festival live in Ulaanbaatar, they do not represent a potential repeat market for the festival. Overseas visitors also declared themselves to be, on average, unlikely to return to the festival, although somewhat more likely than domestic visitors. Thus, attendance at the festival seems to be a 'once in

Table 12.1 Levels of satisfaction with attributes of the Naadam Festival

Festival attribute	Level of satisfaction (7-point Likert scale, 7 = highest level of satisfaction)	
	International	Domestic
Opening ceremony	5.36	5.63
Authenticity of cultural experience	5.37	5.54
Wrestling	5.34	5.98
Horse racing	5.58	6.03
Archery	5.29	5.39
Festival atmosphere	5.53	5.41
Uniqueness of experience	5.78	5.54
Level of sports competition	5.19	5.59
Safety	4.88	4.75
Amenities and facilities	4.48	4.43
Overall satisfaction	5.51	5.33

a lifetime' experience for Mongolians, as well as for international visitors.

As an overview of the festival experience, it is useful to summarize the levels of satisfaction experienced by overseas and domestic visitors, with regard to key aspects of the festival. Table 12.1 illustrates that levels of satisfaction with the festival are relatively high, with the exception of safety and amenities which proved less satisfactory.

Whereas overseas visitors were, on average, most satisfied with the uniqueness of the Naadam festival, Mongolians particularly enjoyed the two key sporting events; horse racing and wrestling. Perhaps surprisingly, it was domestic visitors to the festival who were least satisfied with the level of safety at the festival and the amenities and facilities. This is also evidenced by the fact that drunkenness, cheating, and a generally chaotic lack of organization were frequently cited by Mongolians as key dislikes about Naadam. Many Mongolians also felt that the level of rubbish in and around the stadium was unacceptable.

T-tests were run on the satisfaction variables to investigate the presence of statistically significant differences between the groups. For those satisfaction variables on which statistically significant differences were found between overseas and domestic visitors to Naadam, an eta statistic was calculated as a measure of the

Table 12.2 Magnitude of between groups differences on satisfaction variables

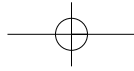
Satisfaction Variable	Eta ²
Opening ceremony ($t = 2.02$, $df = 112.87$, $p < 0.05$)	0.01
Authenticity of cultural experience ($t = 2.46$, $df = 273$, $p < 0.05$)	0.02
Wrestling ($t = 4.95$, $df = 273$, $p < 0.01$)	0.08
Horse racing ($t = 3.66$, $df = 273$, $p < 0.01$)	0.05
Level of competition ($t = 2.68$, $df = 273$, $p < 0.01$)	0.03

degree of association between independent and dependent variable. Results are shown in Table 12.2.

As demonstrated by Table 12.2, statistically significant differences of moderate magnitude exist between overseas and domestic festival attendees on satisfaction with wrestling. The significantly lower level of satisfaction among overseas visitors with the wrestling competition can, potentially be related back to issues discussed above, such as lack of interpretation and the fact that the final stages of the competition are experienced by only few visitors from overseas. Differences also exist in terms of satisfaction with the opening ceremony, authenticity, horse racing and level of competition, but they are small in magnitude. There is, however, no significant relationship between origin of visitors and *overall* level of satisfaction with Naadam. These quantitative findings are consistent with conclusions drawn from observation and the open-ended answers obtained from attendees.

Conclusions: issues and challenges for the future

It has been shown that international visitors' experiences of and satisfaction with aspects of the Naadam festival differ significantly from those of local visitors. The opportunity to observe and participate in a culturally and historically unique event clearly appeals to tourists from overseas, but also appears to be a valuable way of reaffirming Mongolian identity and culture for the indigenous audience, some of whom travel great distances to attend. Nonetheless, there is some evidence to suggest that the sporting events are seen as less culturally important than, for example, the opening ceremony by overseas visitors. This is an aspect of the festival which requires further academic investigation. It also highlights the challenge for festival organizers of reconciling the key cultural attractions of the festival for



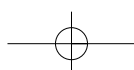
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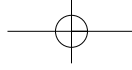
overseas visitors with those of greatest importance to domestic visitors. This reconciliation could potentially be achieved through better interpretation of the sporting events, their history, tradition and conventions. In addition the cultural programme of the opening ceremony could perhaps be better structured to appeal to both groups of attendees. There is also a need to improve the integration of local and overseas attendees during the event in order to increase the authenticity of the experience which traditionally would not have had two such distinct and segregated audiences.

Many of the negative comments on the Naadam experience made by both international and domestic visitors related to a lack of organization and general feeling of chaos surrounding the events. For example, despite a sizeable police presence at the opening ceremony, there was serious overcrowding in the stadium and possession of a ticket did not appear to guarantee entry. Indeed, the area surrounding the stadium was poorly organized to deal with the number of vehicles and persons in attendance. Tourists who are part of an organized tour tended to expect a greater degree of organization surrounding their visit to the stadium. Clearly tour operators have to work with the confines of the existing organizational structures. A desire to increase international tourist attendance depends, in part, on improved levels of organization. On the other hand, the degree of chaos may be attractive to independent travellers who are more concerned with experiencing an authentic rather than a clinical delivery of the festival. This is an area that merits further research.

Safety and amenities were the two attributes of the Naadam festival with which respondents were least satisfied. Both the observational research and the questionnaire survey uncovered evidence that tourists had been victims of crime, such as pick-pocketing and bag slashing both inside and outside the stadium. However, the level of chaos discussed above potentially increases the feeling of risk among tourists to the event. With regard to amenities, there is a need to bring facilities such as toilets up to a more acceptable standard, and this should be a priority. At the present time the introduction of any sort of quality standard for vendors and caterers is considered unrealistic.

The research was conducted at an exploratory level, and has produced a relatively detailed account of the experiences of international and domestic visitors to the Naadam festival. Insight has been gained about the motivations of the two main groups of visitors who attend the festival, as well as their levels of satisfaction and key likes and dislikes. Moreover, behavioural differences between visitor groups have been noted, as have the





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mediating roles of tour operators on the experience. It has been argued that international visitors fail to fully appreciate the cultural significance of Naadam's sporting events, which potentially offer the most authentic cultural experience of the festival. Further research is required related to the commercial dimension of the festival as an important motivator for attendance for Mongolians, both in terms of entrepreneurial activities and networking. Future research should also investigate whether expectations of the cultural product offered by the Naadam festival are similar or different for overseas and domestic visitors. The key challenge for the Naadam festival will be to maintain its cultural uniqueness, which has been shown to be a key factor in motivating visitors to attend, whilst catering to two distinct audiences, each of which consists of a number of visitor segments.

