



FISHING PARADISE

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Mongolia is a true paradise for fishermen with more than 3,000 rivers and lakes filled up with fish and very few fishermen around. Traditionally, Mongols do not eat fish considering it to be inferior to meat, a "real" food, thus allowing fish to multiply as freely as they could for centuries. Even nowadays, only a small group of dedicated amateur fishermen and a 1200 strong expatriate community make the most ardent consumers.

Although, there are historical records when nobles tender white fish from Huvsgul Lake for their lavish meals.

The Secret History of Mongols vividly describes how young Chinggis Khaan, the most powerful king to become, used to live by fishing when deprived by a rival tribe of all his family property and cattle.

The largest fish available in Mongolia is taimen or Hucho taimen, on average 1- 1.5 meters long and sometimes reaching six feet and up to 40 kg weight.

But the most valued is Darkhat White fish known for its tender flesh with almost no bones. It is available only in the lakes of Darkhat Valley in far north of Huvsgul province and accounts for 85 percent of consumption. On average White fish is 60 cm long and weights around three kg.

When it comes to catching fish, Mongols use old ways tested by centuries. These include spiking, i.e. using a big spoon-like pike while sitting on a horse in the middle of river, or a small hook attached to a rope. Sometimes a shirt can do if there are no other means.

Though the country is considered to have large, and yet untapped, fish reserves, Doctor A. Dulmaa, a chief expert, is concerned about uncontrolled commercial fishing at Buir Nuur Lake and Darkhat Lakes Valley by recently set up companies that export their catch to China and Russia.

Says she "Few years of such uncontrolled fishing may bring more damage than decades of Soviet military presence..." (100,000 strong troops and more than 50,000 advisors and experts stayed in Mongolia during 1960-1990, seriously depleting fish reserves by illegal fishing with use of nets, dynamite, and other prohibited means.)

But for the time being Mongolian aficionados have enough places to go.

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