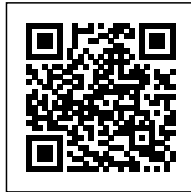


CELEBRATING MONGOLIA'S NATURAL BEAUTY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE AT THE BLUE PEARL FESTIVAL HELD ON 1-3 MARCH

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The Blue Pearl festival was held from March 1st to March 5th this year. Approximately 300 foreign tourists from ten countries, including Japan, South Korea, Germany, and the USA, participated in the festival. Additionally, over 20,000 domestic tourists took part in the festivities. The festival showcases traditional Mongolian winter activities and celebrates the region's natural beauty, including the pristine Khövsgöl Lake, which is a major draw for visitors.

The Mongolian Government has designated 2023-2025 as the Years to Visit Mongolia, with the goal of attracting 1 million foreign tourists annually. One of the most popular tourist destinations in Mongolia is Khuvsgul Lake, which is home to an annual festival. The lake is situated in the northernmost part of Mongolia, bordering Siberia. The number of domestic and foreign tourists visiting the pristine nature of specially protected areas such as the Khoridol Saridag Mountains, Khuvsgul Lake, Ulaan Taiga, and Dayan Caves in the northern regions is increasing every year. The aimag has the capacity to accommodate 7,000 tourists at a time in 94 tourist camps, 132 guest houses, 8 hotels, and 15 inns.

The festival is celebrated with horse-drawn sleighs, intricate ice sculptures, traditional food, and exciting competitions, including ice skating, ice sumo wrestling, tug of war, ice ger building, and dog sledding, all on the dark blue ice of the frozen lake. Visitors can witness the traditions and lifestyles of Mongolian reindeer herders who descend to the lake from their taiga homeland, while local shamans perform their rituals with a fire-burning ceremony.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Ice Festival. In 2000, D. Lkhagvatsogt and J. Tumursukh, former environmental inspectors of the Khuvsgul Special Protected Area, organized the first ice festival at a place called Santin Uvur. The festival aimed to promote winter tourism and protect Khuvsgul, also known as the Mother Ocean.

The festival's origins are rooted in a desire to promote winter tourism in the region and protect the environment. The event's organizers have worked to raise awareness of the importance of preserving the natural resources of Khövsgöl and its surrounding areas. Additionally, the festival serves as a platform for local residents to showcase their cultural traditions and customs, including horse racing, ice skating, and ice sumo wrestling, among other activities.

Overall, the Blue Pearl Festival has become an important event for both locals and visitors alike, helping to foster a greater appreciation for Mongolia's natural beauty and cultural heritage while also promoting sustainable tourism practices in the region.

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