

**The Truth to “Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan”
Ke-Jia Chong, Production Assistant**

Culturally diverse, rich in fuel resources, and economically expanding—the Kazakhstan of reality is a far cry from the Borat version, rampant with second-world stereotypes and fourth-rated prostitutes.

The outrageous comedic work of Sacha Baron Cohen has brought Kazakhstan fame through fairly unorthodox methods. His mockumentary, “Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan” unearths the most shocking racist and sexist remarks from Americans. Under the guise of Borat Sadiyev, a fictional Kazakh journalist on a mission to improve his supposed backward nation of Kazakhstan, Cohen lowers the guard of unsuspecting Americans by spouting misogyny and anti-Semitism across his coast-to-coast trip of America. Kazakh scenes, filmed in an impoverished Romanian village, are equipped with horse-drawn cars, kindergartens armed with AK-47s, and even a village rapist.

Kazakhstan government officials, not surprisingly, have been the strongest critics of Borat for insulting their national identity.

The poverty-stricken fictional Kazakhstan reflects little of its true surging economy. Since its independence in 1991, foreign investment in Caspian oil supported Kazakhstan’s annual growth rate. According to the CIA Factbook, this was 10% per annum between 2002 and 2005; Kazakhstan’s growth is on par or greater than that of China.

Unlike the comical image of Borat, a thick moustached and gangly man, an image of a typical Kazakh is non-existent. The former Soviet Republic has been home to many nationalities: Russians, Turkish, German and even Korean populations. With 99.1% male and 97.7% female literacy rate, Kazakhstan’s reality is much removed from Borat’s Kazakhstan (where women recently were granted rights to travel on busses). In fact, Kazakhstan’s diverse ethnicity and booming economy parallel South East Asian economic leaders, Singapore and Malaysia.

Unlike the fictional Kazakstan’s ridiculous reforms where homosexuals no longer have to wear blue hats, the true Kazakhstan is working on a cohesive national identity.

President Nursultan Nazabayev has been credited with calming social tensions and creating a more united Kazakhstan. While its economic growth depends greatly on oil, the government plans to expand and diversify its economy. Unlike Borat’s undying hatred of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan’s future involves strengthening foreign policy and nation ties.

President Nazabayev may still have hope in correcting those who believes Kazakh leisure is comprised of mediocre disco dancing and ping-pong. In December 2006, architect of the Wembley station, Lord Foster, was commissioned to create the world’s largest yurt in

Kazakhstan's capital, Astana. This futuristic transparent dome will be a public oasis for an indoor city, trouncing the below -30°C Kazakhstan winters, and housing over 225 shops and a concert hall. Not what would expect from a Borat "Kazakhstan" with horse-drawn cars.

Despite the occasional bigot who misses Borat's satire and laughs at the backward fictional country, Kazakhstan may have the last laugh. British and American travel agencies, according to The Times, report major increase in inquiries about Astana in November 2006. The US Kazakhstan embassy phone lines were flooded with 100 calls a day asking how to enter the country. Travel companies such as Sayat Tours have launched campaigns of a "Kazakhstan versus Boratstan Tour" to educate the adventurous Westerner.

Like it or not, Borat put Kazakhstan on the Western social radar. Cohen's brand of shock comedy mocked Western social convention and political correctness, but its side effect sparked intrigue in Kazakhstan. By using current media attention to its advantage, perhaps Kazakhstan's prominence may rise to its 'glorious' proportions, and Borat may think that is "*Very Nice*".

Side bar:

BORAT'S Kazakhstan

1. **Exports:** Potassium as a prosperous export
2. **National Anthem chorus:** "Kazakhstan, Kazakhstan, you very nice place, from plains of Tarashek to northern fence of Jewtown."
3. **Annual festivities:** "Running of the Jew" –a masked witch character plays a Jewish person and children smash "Jew eggs"
4. **Treatment of women:** Five women are not allowed to be in the same place at the same time

The Real KAZAKHSTAN

1. **Exports:** Oil is a prosperous export
2. **National Anthem chorus:** "My country, my country, / As your flower I'll grow, / As your song I'll stream, country! /My native land — Kazakhstan!"
3. **Annual festivities:** March 22 – Holiday of Nauryz (Nauryz is the first month of the traditional Kazakh calendar)
4. **Treatment of women:** Organization such as Kazakhstan Women's Information Network and other NGO's push for more modern technology in education centres