

Tourism Industry Struggling Hard

Kyrgyzstan, like other ex-soviet countries has kept low profile behind the iron curtain for the last 70 years. It was an unknown country for foreign tourists. "Unknown. Pshaw! Life was not bad without tourists," sneers an old man. The life was quite well, indeed. There were no noisy tourists speaking some double Dutch and demanding supernatural living conditions... However, there is one significant factor prompting people to indulge whims of foreign tourists. Decent remuneration. This factor motivates the authorities to put tourism industry on the top of agenda.

The south of Kyrgyzstan crossed by the Silk Road has been a haunting place of foreign tourists. The major advantage of the region is the tourist season lasting for seven or eight months as opposed to three sunny months offered by the Issyk Kul Lake. However, the services provided in the region are far from being high. The number of decent hotels in Osh and Jalalabat is strikingly scanty, let alone desolated villages.



Authorities Get in the Way

Recently, the authorities have kept a close eye on the south of the country. But their ardour was cooled down by scanty funds allotted for the industry development. This financial gap is filled by businessmen who skillfully make money on tourism. If only authorities did not get in our way, the businessmen often sigh.

Kanybek Isanov, director of Beijing Hotel built in the Osh downtown, believes the tourism industry is on the upbeat at present. There are several tourist companies and guest houses offering sightseeing and transportation. Hotel business is another concern.

"I've been dreaming about a hotel for a long time. Is there any better place than Osh? Sulaiman Too, Silk Road museum, shrines of Asaf ibn Burhiya, Rawat Abdulla Khan, Barbour and celestial mountains are favourite vacation spots for foreign tourists. I imagined building a modern hotel in my native town when worked in Moscow. However, I would not take a risk a year ago. Once entangled by the vicious corruption web, the industry could hardly breathe. But for the time passed Kyrgyzstan has made significant improvements in the industry development. There were only three bodies engaged in tourism industry before 1991. Today, private enterprises prevail in the industry. The incumbent president makes significant concessions to the entrepreneurs. He took the industry under its personal control, thus

enabling businessmen to create new jobs and attract more foreign tourists and investors," Kanybek Isanov said.

Old Aircrafts & Brave Pilots

Traveler D.D. is not very optimistic about the development prospects of the tourism industry. "Roads in Kyrgyzstan are stricken with holes; hotels are uncomfortable. The most terrible thing about the country is its remoteness."

It is difficult not to agree with him. There are air flights to Kyrgyzstan from Moscow, Istanbul, London, Washington, DC, Urumqi and Tashkent. Getting to the country from Moscow by railway takes several days of going through the hot and dusty Kazakhstan. Besides, you'll have to get visa to get into Kazakhstan. More nerves and more money. Inner flights frighten foreign guests even more: old aircrafts, brave pilots and passengers quaking with fright. What a trilling romance trip! Not for the foreigners.



"Kyrgyzstan is a country full of paradoxes," D.D laughed. "That is why I like it. Can you imagine that the price of a tour to Kyrgyzstan is more expensive than to Italy or Turkey given to the level of services provided? Besides, these countries are widely promoted. Local tourism industry fails to meet either of international standards. The foreigners will never sacrifice conveniences at the altar of the Asian beauty."

Incoming Tourism

Although Kyrgyzstan's mountains and lakes are an attractive tourist destination, the tourism industry has grown very slowly because it has received little investment. Currently the industry struggles with insufficient infrastructure (roads, hotels, facilities), vague policies, excessive bureaucracy, insufficient promotion, lack of direct flights to Bishkek, and unskilled tour guides.

According to the tourism companies of Kyrgyzstan the number of foreign tourists increases by 10–15% every year. "The peak of foreign tourists was in 2001 year. Then it has been in recession since 2002. But there is a stable increase since 2005", said Valentin Derevjanko, manager of a tour agency "Yak Tour Travel". He stressed that there would be a double increase of the number of foreign tourists if the political situation was more stable.

Most of tourists coming to Kyrgyzstan are from France, Great Britain, Holland, USA, Japan and Australia. According to the statistics of the tourism companies, the most visited area in Kyrgyzstan is

Issyk-Kul Lake. Especially travelers from Kazakhstan and Russia are interested in spending their holiday by the lake. Foreigners are more attracted by the Tian Shan Mountains.

Sergey Katanaev, manager of "Dostuk Trekking" said, that about 70% of the tourists decide for the special tours of the Great Silk Road. The route goes from Kashgar to Bishkek across the Torugart pass and includes excursions around Issyk-Kul Lake. Tourists are accommodated in yurt camps on the Issyk-Kul lakeside and in Tash-Rabat gorge near the Chinese border. Besides the mountains, tourists are also lured by white-water rafting (there are rivers of seven levels in Kyrgyzstan) and heli-skiing.

Civilized wild Asia

Rome was not built in a day. The same is true for Kyrgyzstan. The period of social, cultural, and industrial facilities construction boom has passed. Many Europeans do not know even the right spelling of the country. They do believe that people here live in yurts and ride horses and camels. "Very often foreigners are disappointed when they see hotels, expensive cars and supermarkets in Osh. They came to enjoy wild Asian way of life, horses, and camels. They pay money for extreme. Those who want to relax in five-star hotels travel in other directions," says D.D.



The country has been a member of the World Tourism Organization since 1993. Besides, Kyrgyzstan participates in London Tourist Fair, Tashkent International Fair, International Tourism Exchange Fair in Berlin and other reputable events.

"The actions taken by the state are quite important," believes D.D. "Yet, the first and foremost challenge for the state is to ease the visa regime, increase the number of air flights, improve the infrastructure and build good WCs at least. This is the only way to lure the major world tour operators to Kyrgyzstan."

Eco-Tourism

Currently there are several efforts to promote "eco-friendly" tourism in Kyrgyzstan. The many tourist companies in Kyrgyzstan understand that "eco-" anything sounds very appealing to the many backpackers that come to their country, so they tend to use it to describe their organization, even if they do nothing to promote "low-impact" or "leave no trace" camping. However, the very nature of the type of tourists that are attracted to Kyrgyzstan dictates that most of the tourist attractions offered is aimed at

enjoying the beauty that the local environment has to offer. Wikipedia.org

Roads

Transport in Kyrgyzstan is severely constrained by the country's alpine topography. Roads have to snake up steep valleys, cross passes of 3,000 metre (9,000 ft) altitude and more, and are subject to frequent mud slides and snow avalanches. Winter travel is close to impossible in many of the more remote and high-altitude regions. Additional problems are due to the fact that many roads and railway lines built during the Soviet period are today intersected by international boundaries, requiring time-consuming border formalities to cross where they are not completely closed. Horses are still a much-used transport option, especially in more rural areas; Kyrgyzstan's road infrastructure is not extensive, so horses can reach locations that motor vehicles cannot, and they do not require expensive, imported fuel.

Wikipedia.org

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