

TOURISM IN KYRGYZSTAN PLANS TO IMPROVE THE SERVICES



In 2015, tourism in Kyrgyzstan recorded 4 million visitors. The authorities plan to improve the conditions and services in the country and to attract more tourists.

At a round table devoted to the problems of the industry, the head of the tourism department Azamat Zhamankulov announced his plans to revive tourism in Kyrgyzstan. **Insufficient infrastructure and lack of staff are only some of the issues that need to be solved.**

“Tourism is a priority sector of the economy, but we must work together to resolve the existing problems. It is a dynamic sector, the third largest in the world. Even 50 years ago, 200 million people travelled around the world. In 2015, the number of international trips is 1.2 billion, and the figure is growing,” said Zhamankulov.

The inflow in Kyrgyzstan is mainly dependent on CIS countries (Russia and Kazakhstan), which account for 70% of all tourists who visit the republic. Arabs and Indians also come in significant numbers. Kyrgyzstan is a popular destination for skiing, hiking, biking and horse traveling. The authorities now plan to attract especially Chinese tourists.

“To attract tourists to the country, we need to tell the visitors about us and prepare for their stay. CIS countries, India and Arab states are the biggest markets, but currently the most interesting market for us is China. According to official information, in 2015 140 million Chinese tourists traveled around the world. In Russia, they are trying to introduce visa-free group tours from China. Kazakhstan has announced 2017 as the Year of Chinese Tourism. We are also close to China and we have something to offer to them,” Zhamankulov said.

One of the issues that require attention are the unsatisfactory restroom conditions. “We have developed a project to build camps throughout the country. They will include a mini-hotel with an information center, shops with agricultural products and café and of course a comfortable restroom,” Zhamankulov explained.

Another problem needed to be addressed are the roads. “In 2017 we plan to proceed with the reconstruction of roads in cities and regions. To boost tourism in Kyrgyzstan, we need a visa regime and direct flights. Nobody will fly here with transfers via Istanbul. It is important to implement an open sky policy. We have high hopes for electronic visa. In November – December we expect to launch the testing program,” Zhamankulov continued.

Moreover, the country is proposing the creation of the tourism police to ensure the safety of visitors. The lack of trained staff throughout the country is currently addressed by several preparation programs organized by universities to produce tourism specialists.

Recently, the authorities launched a new travel site www.discoverykyrgyzstan.org, where all information about the country can be found. The website operates in six languages, including Chinese. The government has also launched brand promotion of the website on social networks such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

“Today, our tourism budget is 7 million soms (about 103 000 USD), of which 3 million soms (about 44 000 USD) is spent on salaries of employees of the sector. Therefore 4 million remains for the entire industry. **If we want tourism to become the engine of our economy, it is necessary to invest.** We propose to establish a fund for development of tourism in Kyrgyzstan, as it is done in the world. Private business would deduct, for example \$1 from the cost of a hotel room, and so on,” the head of the department concluded.

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