

NORTH KOREAN TOURISM WAITING FOR A NEW HOLIDAY RESORT



Costal city Wonsan is a city where North Koreans go to enjoy their holidays, eat ice cream, enjoy the sea, and have a barbecue. For their leader, however, it is not only a summer resort and future North Korean tourism centre, but also an excellent place for missile launches.

Kim Jong–Un is rebuilding the city with a 360 thousand inhabitants and is ready to spend billions of dollars to turn it into a tourist centre. **It was from here that he launched about 40 missiles as a part of the program to build up the country’s nuclear potential.** Moreover, many governmental organizations like Management 39 or Korean National Insurance Corporation and the Department of State Security itself reside here in their resting time.

“Outside observers may find it wild to launch missiles from a place that they want to develop from an economic point of view. But that’s how Kim Jong–Un governs his country,” said North Korean economist Kyonnam Lim Eul Chol from a South Korean university.

The combination of tourism industry and nuclear weapons characterizes the survival strategy adopted by Kim, say researchers and sources familiar with the project.

Wonsan Significant for Kim

North Korea is increasingly engaged in Wonsan development plans since the announcement in 2014. The content is outlined on 160 pages in about 30 brochures published by the Wonsan Zone Development Corporation.

Wonsan has an important symbolic significance for the Kim dynasty. It was here that Kim Il Sung, the grandfather of Kim Jong–Un, came to fight for the sovereignty of North Korea along with Soviet soldiers in 1945. On the embankment there are monuments of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, to which tourists, bowing, lay artificial flowers.

Tourism industry is one of the few sectors of the North Korean economy that has not yet been affected by UN sanctions. The brochure offers foreign investors options for investments totalling about 1.5 billion dollars in a special tourist area of over 400 square kilometres. Kim has built a ski resort and new airport in this place. The airport, however, has not yet opened for international flights.

According to one of the brochures, there are about 140 historical monuments in this zone, 10 sandy

beaches, 680 tourist sites, four mineral springs and several balneological resorts and lakes. The project for which Kim is attracting investors involves the construction of a \$7.3 million shopping centre. Moreover, Kim wants to rebuild the city centre and create new golf courses.

In 2017, Kim sent 16 officials to Spain. Here they had to draw ideas for the modernization of Wonsan. The delegation visited one of the largest holiday complexes in the country – Marina d’Or, as well as the amusement park Terra Mitica in Benidorm.

Ambitious Plans for the Future

North Korean tourism officials plan to attract more than 1 million tourists annually in the short term and about 5–10 million “in the foreseeable future” according to the brochures.

There are no fresh statistics on tourism inflow to the country. China reported that more than 237,000 of its citizens visited the country in 2012, but in 2013 it stopped publishing statistics. In comparison, South Korea was visited by about eight million Chinese in 2016.

According to the estimates of the Korean Maritime Institute, a South Korean research centre, **North Korea’s annual income from tourism is about \$44 million. This accounts to 0.8% of the country’s GDP.** About 80% of foreign visitors are residents of China, the organization said. The rest are tourists from Russia and Western countries.

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