

WHY IS THE KAZAKH TOURISM STAGNATING?



Kazakh tourism is facing an ambitious task. The goal is to increase the share in the country's GDP from the current 0.9% to 8% by 2025. What issues are there that are preventing the sector from registering a positive growth trend?

Interestingly enough, Kazakhstan ranks 81st among 136 countries in the World Economic Forum's Tourism Competitiveness report. Others rank Kazakhstan somewhat higher, for example 57th. Whatever it is, the government intends to change this situation and launch the country into the top 30. However, the realization of this goal cannot be expected in the near future.

One of the problems of Kazakh tourism industry is the lack of publicity of the country in the West. Most Europeans still do not know what to expect from the destination, despite events like the Asian Games or the EXPO being held in the country recently.

Other issues are high prices or terrible conditions of national parks. There is also unsatisfactory care of cultural and historical monuments. For example, the ancient settlements of Suzak, Ortar or Talhiz. Moreover, another common problem in post-communist states is the bad transport infrastructure – including airports and bus transport.

In May 2017, the figures of the Kazakh tourism sounded somewhat more impressive. It was predicted that a 15% share of tourism in the GDP could be reached in five years. Simultaneously, the investment in the sector was supposed to increase by almost 23%.

It is true that the concept of tourism development until 2023 was adopted very recently. This led to many corrections and changes afterwards. But things have been stalling for some time. Not long ago, the regions and Ministry of Culture and Sports signed a memorandum of cooperation to accelerate the development.

This should give an impetus to the implementation of the program documents for the development of the infrastructure of Astana and the Shchuchinsk–Borovo resort zone. These two are the main clusters of Kazakh tourism and it is expected to be so towards the future.

Unlike the capital, the Shchuchinsk–Borovo resort requires more attention in all directions. From the reconstruction of a favorable ecological environment to the introduction and control of a reasonable pricing policy.

Visa and migration regimes are also an integral part of the sector's development. For example, Chinese citizens who transit through Kazakhstan have a 72-hour visa-free regime. It is reported that soon a

similar regime is planned with Indian tourists.

However, the biggest achievement was the introduction of a visa-free regime for citizens of countries that lead in investments in the Kazakh economy. Today it is the Netherlands, UK, Germany, Italy, USA, France and more – a total of 19 countries.

Claims of Kazakhstan becoming the “tourist Mecca” were perhaps somewhat far-fetched. **However, if Kazakhstan focuses on quality rather than quantity and the diversity of the product it can offer, the country can bounce back** from the numb period of the Kazakh tourism industry.

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