

TOURISM IN KYRGYZSTAN HIT BY THE LACK OF HELICOPTERS



Tourism in Kyrgyzstan has suffered a loss when the authorities forced companies to cancel about five thousand highland tours that were booked in the country. The problem was the lack of rescue helicopters necessary for tourists security. In the past, local tour operators used the helicopters belonging to the national army. However, since April they are no longer available.

Kyrgyzstan, with over 90% of its area covered with mountains, attracts climbers from all over the world. **There are many mountain peaks reaching 7000 meters in height.**

One of them, the Peak of Lenin, is located on the border of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Its height is 7,134 meters above sea level. The peak of Khan Tengri (6695 meters) is popular with climbers of the whole world. It is considered one of the most difficult and dangerous peaks of the planet. Every year dozens of accidents occur in the mountains, requiring emergency evacuation of climbers and mountain tourists to be available at all times.

The reason for the refusal of authorities to provide the helicopter was their malfunction. Tour operators also failed to agree on the lease of rescue helicopters with the authorities of neighboring countries which would help provide for the tourists security. A number of mountain peaks are located in the border area. Flights of foreign military equipment to these areas require special approvals.

“The absence of helicopters means that the Kyrgyz side cannot provide security to the incoming tourists,” a representative of tour operators said. She added that if a solution is not found, the cancellation of the booked tours will damage the image of the whole tourism in Kyrgyzstan. She also added that bookings for mountain tours in Kyrgyzstan have already been received from five thousand people from 18 countries.

In the event of the abandonment of booked routes, tour operators will suffer immense damage. “The average adventures of one travel agency is about 250 dollars a year. Even if half of tourists refuse to go, the losses will be enormous,” Vladimir Komissarov, an expert on the matter, said. According to him, one rescue operation in the mountains can cost up to 30 thousand dollars and is covered by the insurance of tourists.

This is a big blow for the state that is the tenth poorest country in the world, according to Focus Economics. The country’s GDP per capita is \$1222. Some reasons for the situations are political instability, economic weakness, corruption and more.

Despite these issues, however, Kyrgyzstan is considered a country with great tourism potential. In 2017, the World Tourism Organization included the country in the TOP 10 countries in which a tourist boom can occur.

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