

# KAZAKHSTAN OPENS UP BY EXPANDING VISA-FREE COUNTRIES



Kazakhstan has taken a significant step towards opening its doors to foreign tourists. The country has announced its plan to expand the number of visa-free countries to one hundred. This move comes as Kazakhstan's government negotiates bilateral agreements with several Latin American countries, including Peru and Uruguay. Furthermore, the largest Central Asian republic intends to add 17 new countries to the list in the coming days.

Last year, over 8.5 million tourists visited this country, a 20% increase from 2021. The higher number of visitors from China and India drove this growth. The Minister of Tourism and Sports, Yermek Marzhikpaev, emphasized that the Kazakh government is committed to boosting tourism, including enhancing infrastructure and services.

Last year, around 350 billion tenges (equivalent to approximately 750 million dollars) were invested in the tourism sector. This year, the President has ordered the allocation to be increased by 75%, meaning the investment could reach 800 billion tenges (more than 1.7 billion dollars).

Experts point out that the electronic visa issuance system introduced in 2019 simplified these procedures for 109 countries, combining simplicity with maximum security.

Experts emphasize the number of direct international flights their country receives weekly. Specifically, as of last month, they received 600 direct international flights to 32 countries weekly, including Tel Aviv. Additionally, it should be noted that Kazakhstan plans to establish direct flights to Tokyo, Singapore, and New York in the coming years. It's also worthwhile to mention that the "Open Skies" policy has been extended until 2027, which will attract more international airlines, reduce ticket costs, and improve services.

Recently, President Kasim-Yomart Tokayev acknowledged that Kazakhstan was lagging behind other countries and urged the republic's tourism potential to be rapidly developed.

During the EU Parliament delegation's visit to Kazakhstan in August, the Kazakh authorities discussed visa liberalization with the European Union. Experts have emphasized the importance of initiating consultations at the earliest to simplify the visa regime for Kazakh citizens. This would facilitate closer ties between Astana and Brussels.

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