



POTENTIAL FOR DEVELOPING CULTURAL TOURISM IN TURKISTAN REGION

Kazakhstan's tourism industry ranked 81st out of 136 countries in the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index 2017. This indicates that the country's rank has moved up from the 85th position in 2015. If we compare it with the rankings of other post-Soviet countries, we can see that Russia is ranked 43rd, Georgia is 70th, Azerbaijan is 71st, and Kyrgyzstan is 115th. Step 57 of the "Plan of the Nation – 100 concrete steps to implement the five institutional reforms" set out by President Nursultan Nazarbayev envisaged the attraction of strategic (anchor) investors, who have successful experience in creating tourist clusters.

The development of tourism in Kazakhstan is in full swing. In particular, cultural tourism has a special place. For instance, according to the 2018 index of the world tourist agencies, 4,560,000 people visited Kazakhstan, with tourism services contributing to 5.3% of the total GDP. According to the Concept of the Development of the Tourism Industry until 2025, this figure is expected to increase up to 8%. The inclusion of Kazakhstan's two natural and three architectural objects in the UNESCO World Heritage List shows that in the world statistical indicators Kazakhstan is favorable for the development of cultural tourism. Tourism in Kazakhstan is based on cultural tourism or ethno-tourism, which is the result of the preservation of the ancient nomadic civilization and the urban culture along the Silk Road. The fact that the natural and architectural monuments in Kazakhstan have been preserved until nowadays is directly related to the ethnic culture of the people. In this regard, the "Sacred Kazakhstan" project for studying all sacred sites and monuments on the territory of Kazakhstan was launched in 2017. In general, the project is aimed at identifying objects of cultural tourism in our country. The Turkistan region is the center of cultural and architectural monuments of Kazakhstan. There are 99 archeological monuments near the city of Turkistan, which shows the deep cultural layer of the ancient cities in the region.

The latest periods of Turkistan's ancient culture are directly linked to the Kazakh Khanate as the pantheon of Kazakh khans and biys (judges) was formed there (Kazakh people believe that visiting Turkistan is equivalent to a small hajj). These cultural objects in the city require conducting archaeological and ethnographic research.

In the Turkistan region, there are many state protected objects, which are currently being adapted for the development of cultural tourism. For example, the region's Aksu-Zhabagly nature reserve, which was created in 1926, is the first and oldest nature reserve in Kazakhstan, and its total area is 131,934 hectares. The list also includes the Sayram-

Ugam national park, which covers an area of 150,000 hectares. The ancient cities of Otrar and Sauran, and the mausoleums of Arystan Bab, Khoja Ahmed Yasawi and Domalak Ana are the main objects of cultural tourism. In addition, in 2018, 27 museums of various types were registered in the Turkistan region. It is worth noting that the region's museums are the most visited museums in Kazakhstan. In 2018, 1,967,700 people visited museums of the region.

The tourism funding programs in the region vary from year to year. For example, cultural monuments in Turkistan were included in the State Program "The revival of the historical centers of the Silk Road, the preservation and successive development of the cultural heritage of the Turkic-speaking countries" in 2011. In 2016, the general plan and development prospects of the city were considered within the framework of the "Old City of Turkistan" project. The following data can be seen in the 2018-2020 budget investment project of the Turkistan region (before relocating the regional center). In 2018, 120 million tenge was provided for the three-year period for the construction of tourist infrastructure on the shore of the Shardara water reservoir. With regard to the investment project after transferring the regional center to the city of Turkistan, the project has been revised and new plans have been introduced. For example, under the 2019-2021 investment project, in 2019, 433 million tenge will be allocated from the regional budget for design estimates, while 3 billion tenge in 2020 and 6.9 billion tenge in 2021 will be spent on construction projects. Most of these funds are intended to contribute to the region's prosperity and the development of tourism. For example, under the project, it is planned to construct more than 10 large cultural complexes in the city of Turkistan, including the Museum of Fine Arts of Turkistan, the Country of the Great Steppe Center, the Opera and Ballet Theater, the Center of the Turkic World, the Kultobe Open Air Museum, the City Amphitheater, cultural and recreational facilities within the Azret Sultan Historical and Cultural Reserve, and the Museum of Local History of the Turkistan Region. Most of these sites to be constructed are aimed at developing cultural tourism.

The Turkistan region will allocate 1.5 million tenge annually for tourist objects which are included in TOP-10 of the State Program for the Development of the Tourism Industry in the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2025. In addition, the special cluster "Modernization of the Great Silk Road" in the southern regions of Kazakhstan is considered in the Concept of the Tourism Industry Development in Kazakhstan until 2025. The cluster includes the central and eastern parts of the Kyzylorda region, the southwestern

and northwestern parts of the Turkistan region, and the southwestern part of the Zhambyl region. The cluster "Modernization of the Great Silk Road" will be gradually expanded and described as "the heart of the Silk Road". The cluster is also expected to contribute to the development of the tourism industry in the settlements along the Western Europe-Western China transport corridor. This, in its turn, will increase the competitiveness of the city of Turkistan through the development of the tourism and service industry and the use of information and communication technologies. The main driving force of these programs is the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Tourist Activity". Article 8, paragraph 3 of the Law contains the principle of "forming the perception on the Republic of Kazakhstan as a country favorable for tourism". Based on this principle, ethno-tourism centers in the country are identified and appropriate measures are being taken.

According to the local administration of Turkistan, 1,542,000 tourists visited Turkistan in January-September 2018. 332,000 of them are tourists from near and far abroad. This shows that the number of tourists has increased by 5.6% compared to 2017. Moreover, the volume of services rendered to tourists was 3,936,000 tenge and made 4.9% of the city's GDP. The leading position of the city in cultural tourism is due to the fact that the adjacent cultural centers belong to the Otrar oasis. Meanwhile, there are plans for 2019 related to the development of tourism in the Turkistan region, such as the Tulip Path international festival organized by the Kazakh Tourism national company. As part of the festival, approximately 5,000 guests are expected to visit the Turkistan region, including about 1,000 foreign tourists. The main purpose of the event is to introduce the Aksu-Zhabagly and Sairam-Ugam nature parks in the Turkistan region and to promote the development of tourism in the region. In addition, the international bus route Turkistan-Samarkand is planned to be launched in the first quarter of 2019, which will contribute to the development of the region's economy and tourism. It should be noted that the Silk Visa project initiated by Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan would give an additional impetus to the development of cultural tourism in the Turkistan region this year. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan intend to join the project in the future.

In general, cultural tourism has a special place in the tourist cluster of the Turkistan region. Its potential will be fully developed in the future. Obviously, this will serve not only for Kazakhstan's tourist industry, but also as an economic and cultural platform for all Central Asia. It will also have a positive impact on the social structure of the region's population.

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Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov conducted a two-day trip to Central Asia, visiting Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. During his meetings with the regional leaders and officials, Lavrov reportedly focused on regional security issues, including a possible opening of a second Russian military base in Kyrgyzstan, as well as on prospects of economic, trade and energy cooperation.
- Uzbekistan and the EU held the first round of negotiations on the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in Tashkent. The parties reached an understanding on the structure of the draft agreement, which is expected to cover such areas as political dialogue and reforms, the rule of law, justice, freedom and security, human rights, anti-corruption, migration, and trade, as well as economic and sustainable development.
- The delegation of Uzbekistan led by Deputy Prime Minister Tanzila Narbajeva visited the United States to attend the annual meeting of the Cotton Campaign global coalition and gold meetings with U.S. officials. The parties discussed issues related to the protection of human rights, as well as practical measures taken in Uzbekistan to eradicate forced labor, promote interaction with civil society institutions, and ensure media freedom.
- During his working visit to Turkmenistan, Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Afghanistan and Head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, met with Turkmen Foreign Ministry officials. The parties discussed ongoing efforts to peacefully resolve the Afghan conflict, as well as possibilities to involve Afghanistan in regional economic projects.
- SCO Secretary General Vladimir Norov paid his first visit to Kyrgyzstan, which serves as the SCO chair for 2019. During his meetings with high-ranking Kyrgyz officials, including President Sooronbay Jeenbekov, Norov addressed issues related to cooperation among the organization's members and the SCO summit to be held in Bishkek in June 2019.
- President of Kyrgyzstan Jeenbekov paid a one-day working visit to Sochi for an informal meeting with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin. The two leaders exchanged views on a number of regional issues and discussed in detail the current state of bilateral cooperation, including preparations for Putin's upcoming state visit to Kyrgyzstan.
- Ukraine's Central Election Commission concluded the official registration of candidates to run in the presidential election scheduled for March 31, 2019. The final list includes a record-breaking total of 44 candidates approved out of more than 80 applicants. According to recent polls, incumbent President Petro Poroshenko, former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and comedian Volodymyr Zelenskiy are the likely front-runners.

Economy, Finance, and Energy

- Food exports of Belarus to European countries in 2018 amounted to \$233.5 million, growing by 66.6% compared to 2017. Lithuania, Poland, Germany and Norway remain the main consumers of Belarusian food products, while trade with Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Switzerland has expanded. The government plans to increase the number of Belarusian enterprises certified to export goods to European markets.
- The volume of money transfers from other countries to Kazakhstan in 2018 amounted to 362 billion tenge (958.5 million dollar), which is 18.2%, or 55.9 (148,02 million dollar) billion tenge, more than in 2017. Half of the funds received from abroad where 181.3 billion tenge (480 million dollar) were sent from Russia, which is followed by South Korea with 56.8 billion tenge (150,4 million dollar) and Kyrgyzstan with 30.3 billion tenge (80,23 million dollar).
- President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev issued edicts establishing several new government agencies – the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of Transport, and the Agency for Development of Viticulture and Wine Production under the Ministry of Agriculture. In addition, the president approved the Concept for the Development of the Atomic Energy Industry for 2019-2029.
- President Mirziyoyev instructed Uzbekistan's Central Bank to establish a separate Development Bank with a capital of \$500 million. The new bank will be tasked with developing a comprehensive export support system that will employ aggressive models of financial and technical support, including pre-export lending, post-credit services, export subsidies, and logistics.
- The government of Tajikistan identified seven promising economic sectors to attract foreign investment – hydropower, agriculture and agro-processing, the mining and chemical industries, the light industry, transport, the financial sector, and tourism. To create a favorable business environment, the Tajik legislation provides for more than 70 investment incentives, including fiscal, such as tax benefits, and non-fiscal, such as grants and concessional loans.
- According to the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure of Turkey, in 2018, the total volume of cargo transshipment from Kazakhstan (28,800 tons), Turkmenistan (97,200 tons) and Uzbekistan (18,300) through Turkish ports amounted to 144,300 tons. All cargo transshipment from Central Asia was carried out by ships sailing under flags of other countries.
- The 22nd Eurasian Economic Summit organized by the Marmara Group Strategic and Social Research Foundation was held in Istanbul. The two-day event that brought together active and former high-ranking officials, parliamentarians, representatives of international organizations, and public figures from nearly 40 countries addressed issues re-

Society and Culture

- lated to the future of humanity, including the development of artificial intelligence and new dimensions of globalization.
- In 2014-2018, the Ukrainian Red Cross Society provided over 1 billion hryvnia (37.25 million dollar) in humanitarian assistance to the vulnerable groups of the population, including the victims of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine. The society's main priority activity directions for 2019-2021 will be emergency response, volunteer movement development, mobile medical brigades, first aid training, psychosocial support, patronage service, as well as support for low-income households.
 - President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev issued edicts establishing the Center for the Analysis of International Relations and the Center for Social Research. The first institution will be tasked with studying foreign policy directions of importance to the country's national interests, while the second entity will study important issues of domestic politics.
 - The fifth meeting of the Turkic Council Diaspora Contact Group was held in Baku to promote the exchange of experience among the government agencies of the Turkic speaking countries responsible for diaspora issues. The meeting was organized jointly by the Turkic Council and Azerbaijan's State Committee on Work with Diaspora.
 - As part of the Year of Uzbekistan in Kazakhstan, the Uzbek Embassy in Astana organized the exhibition called "Contemporary Uzbekistan" that features 100 photographs and 39 paintings of Uzbek authors at the National Museum of Kazakhstan. In its turn, the museum plans to visit Uzbekistan with the exhibition "Procession of the Golden Man in the Museums of the World".
 - The Center of the Turkish Language and Culture opened at the Alisher Navoi Tashkent State University of the Uzbek Language and Literature. The main goal of the center established with the support of the Turkish Embassy in Uzbekistan is to promote the development of relations between universities and scientists of the two countries.
 - During the 11th round of bilateral political consultations held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan requested Georgia to grant the "fifth freedom of air" to its airlines. The fifth freedom is the right to carry passengers from an airline's own country to a second country and from that country to a third country. This year, Uzbekistan Airways plans to open a direct flight from Tashkent to Tbilisi.
 - According to the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, in 2018, 1.35 million tourists from Central Asia visited Turkey, including 426,900 from Kazakhstan, which is 5.98% more than in 2017, the increasing trend also seen in numbers of the following countries 252,900 from Turkmenistan (9.54%), 241,200 from Uzbekistan (23.24%), and 114,900 from Kyrgyzstan (9.55%). Turkey's last-year income from tourism increased by 12.3% and amounted to \$29.5 billion.