



NEW OPPORTUNITIES IN TURKESTAN'S TOURISM

The tourism potential of Turkestan is directly related to the traditions of the region. It is possible to explain it with the cultural and historical artifacts that the city of Turkestan located on the Silk Road. It is obvious that these traditional values have a great influence on the touristic potential of the modern city. We can see Turkestan as the current preservation status of the historical city and the continuation of the medieval style in today's architectural buildings.

Turkestan has an important place in the development of tourism in the country in recent years. The preservation of medieval monuments in the city has determined the place of Turkestan in cultural tourism. However, in the context of the recent global pandemic, the number of tourists visiting the Turkestan region has decreased sharply. In 2020, 102,512 local and 1,235 foreign in a total of 103,747 tourists visited the Turkestan region. It is known that the number of tourists decreased by 40.5% in 2020 compared to 2019.

Considering the possibilities of modern Turkestan's touristic development, it has several advantages. The first of these is that the location of the city of Turkestan is suitable for all types of transport in Kazakhstan. For instance, the city has train connections by rail to cities such as Aktobe, Oral, Mangistau, Atyrau in the west of Kazakhstan, Semey in the east and Nur-Sultan, Petropavlovsk and Kokshetau in the north. The city also has rail links to Russia's Chelyabinsk, Moscow, Saratov and Ufa cities. In addition, passenger transportation to Uzbekistan's Andijan, Tashkent and Kyrgyzstan's Bishkek cities has been facilitated. In general, there are railway connections to Turkestan with the cities of Shymkent, Kyzylorda, Taraz, Almaty in the south. Bus and taxi services for cities in the south of the country also have an important place in this transportation network. The Hazret Sultan International Airport, which has recently opened in Turkestan, initiates domestic flights and provides connections with countries such

as Turkey abroad. Apart from that, there are bus services from Turkestan to many cities of Uzbekistan. These transportation possibilities show that Turkestan's tourist potential does not have a serious problem with road transportation.

Secondly, nowadays the city of Turkestan has some advantages in terms of development in the tourism sector. For instance, the completion of the construction of many buildings specified in the master plan of the city, shows that new touristic destinations have emerged in Turkestan. The "Keruen Saray" entertainment complex, the "Altin Samruk Theater", "Sikirli Keruen Complex", "Showroom Theater" and "Ethnoaul" are among the recently opened buildings. The opening of these facilities will contribute to the increase in the number of tourists.

Thirdly, considering the tourism potential of Turkestan, tourism is developing professionally in this city. The construction of multi-star hotels in the city such as Rixos Turkistan, Karavansaray Kaganat Hotel, Karavansaray Kaganat Kun Hotel, Hampton by Hilton Turkistan and Khanaka may also be linked to the emergence of tourism infrastructure. Because these hotels provide quality and versatile service. This will allow foreign tourists to choose the services and the most suitable hotel. In addition, the opening of the Tourism and Hotel Management University in Turkestan will enable the city to train experts and qualified personnel in the field of tourism in the future.

The last one is the effects of safe tourism, which is one of the habits caused by the pandemic around the world, in the field of tourism. One of them is to provide social distance and security measures in touristic facilities. Most of the modern touristic facilities in Turkestan consist of nature complexes. The increase of different parks makes tourists feel safe. In addition, the opening of police stations in the touristic complexes of the city, the installation of various video surveillance cameras, SOS buttons, and the establishment of police units for tourists can be counted as additional measures in terms of security.

It should be noted that there are some problems besides the potential mentioned above. Organized tours from other regions are of great importance for Turkistan, which develops on the basis of local tourism. Various tours are organized especially from Almaty and Shymkent cities to Turkistan. The costs of these tours only include travel expenses, guide fees and entrance fees to various historical and cultural places and facilities. Accommodation and meals are covered by the tourist. In fact, the main problem of local tourists is the high cost of hotels. Because tourists coming by road have to stay in Turkestan for 1-2 days. During this period, local tourists do not have the opportunity to stay in the above-mentioned multi-star hotels. This shows that tourists face difficulties in accommodation. Due to the fact that some affordable hotels are located far from the center of Turkestan, most individual tourists are forced to choose city tours.

As a result, the potential of the tourism sector in Turkestan is enlarging with the relatively new places that attract the attention of the tourists. Particularly, "Keruen Saray" and "Turkestan's Venice" spark great interest among the tourists who visit the city. In addition to that Turkestan has a special place in local tourism, including the development of ethno tourism, which is an example for many regions. Also, new trends in post-pandemic tourism plan to promote urban tourism. It is clear that this will allow tourists to comply with sanitary norms and organize tours using digital technologies. In this context, the tourism sector of Turkestan tries to attract as many tourists as possible by announcing its opportunities through various touristic sites. In addition, the restriction of the activities of various touristic facilities (museums, art centers) due to the pandemic constitutes the basis for the formation of new non-traditional tourism areas such as photo tourism, agricultural tourism, eco-tourism in the Turkestan region.

Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- The President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov had a phone conversation with the President of China Xi Jinping. The leaders discussed perspectives of bilateral cooperation and issues of regional and international agenda. The leaders expressed satisfaction with the current high level of comprehensive cooperation. Beside the significance of the traditional oil and gas industries, the parties noted the importance of collaboration in the fields of trade, transport, textile and chemical industries (Kabar, 07.05.2021).
- Berik Uali, the Press Secretary of the President of Kazakhstan, recently announced that Kassym-Jomart Tokayev would pay an official visit to Tajikistan on May 19-20 at the invitation of Tajik President Emomali Rahmon. Presidents will discuss issues of strategic partnership, including further strengthening of political dialogue and enhancement of trade and economic cooperation. The leaders will pay a special attention to the regional cooperation issues, in particular ensuring stability and security in Central Asia (Kazinform, 04.05.2021).
- The President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko had a phone conversation with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The Presidents discussed issues of comprehensive cooperation, confirmed the earlier approved plans to increase bilateral trade to \$1.5 billion, and agreed to assist in their implementation. President Erdogan extended Victory Day greetings to Belarusian nation, while President Lukashenko extended Ramadan greetings to Turkey (BelTA, 07.05.2021).
- The President of Kyrgyzstan Sadyr Japarov signed the new Constitution and the related Law "On the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic". The signing ceremony took place at the Ala-Archa state residence. The referendum on the new Constitution was held on April 11, 2021 and more than 79% of the citizens who participated in the elections voted for the new Constitution. In accordance with the new Constitution, the form of government in Kyrgyzstan has changed from parliamentary to presidential (Kabar, 05.05.2021).
- Tashkent hosted a regular meeting of the Council of National Coordinators (SNC) of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states. The agenda of the meeting included over 60 issues of the current activities of the organization. The national coordinators reviewed the preparations for the main event - the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO Member States, to be held in September 16-17, 2021 in Dushanbe. The member states' representatives welcomed the adoption of the UN General Assembly resolution put forward by Tajikistan entitled "UN Cooperation with the SCO" (Anadolu Agency, 03.05.2021).
- Kazakhstan and Turkey signed a plan in Ankara for prospects of military cooperation between the two countries. The document includes 17 events in the field of regional security, training of special forces and holding joint exercises. Exchange of experience on the tactics of using reconnaissance and attack unmanned vehicles are also envisaged in the document. The sides also considered a plan for training military personnel in the 2022-2023 academic year (Kazinform, 04.05.2021).

Economy, Finance, and Energy

- Authorities of Kazakhstan plan to increase budget spending by \$3 billion during the next three years. Consequently, the yearly budget expenditures will increase to \$35 billion. During 2 months of 2021, a share of social assistance and security in the total budget equaled 25%. Expenditures on healthcare increased by more than 70% compared to the same period of 2020, amounting to over \$1.1 billion. Education expenses increased by 7.3% or \$1.1 billion. Analysts mention that expenditures grew in almost all sectors (Qazaq TV, 05.05.2021).
- During the Uzbek-Saudi intergovernmental commission, which was held on May 3, 2021 in Riyadh, the Islamic Development Bank announced its readiness to support entrepreneurship in Uzbekistan. A special Economic Support Fund will be established for this purpose. In 2021, the Saudi Development Fund financed 10 projects in Uzbekistan worth \$300 million. After the meeting, the governments signed several important agreements in the field of energy and agriculture, and the final protocol on the main directions of the long-term bilateral cooperation (UzReport, 06.05.2021).
- In 2021, bilateral trade between Belarus and Uzbekistan demonstrate a significant progress. In the first quarter of the year, trade volume amounted to \$67.5 million and increased by 25.3% compared to the same period of the previous year. Exports of Belarus grew by 37.4% reaching \$58.7 million, while imports from Uzbekistan surged by \$8.8 million or 79.2%. As a result, Belarus' trade surplus equaled \$49.8 million. Belarus' main supply items include chilled and frozen beef, medicines, polymers and tractors (BelTA, 07.05.2021).
- Recently, a delegation of Lithuania led by the country's Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis visited Azerbaijan. During a meeting with the delegation, Azerbaijan's Economy Minister Mikayil Jabbarov mentioned that the countries increased mutual trade turnover in 2020 and in the first quarter of 2021, despite the pandemic. The trade volumes amounted to \$24.4 million in 2020 and reached \$7.6 million in the first quarter of 2021. The countries have so far signed 39 documents and 12 more are under consideration (AzerNews, 04.05.2021).
- The World Bank and the government of Ukraine continue to strengthen bilateral cooperation. Recently, the bank approved a \$200 million project to support the country's efforts to improve the quality and transparency of the higher education system. In particular, the project will finance modernization of teaching and research facilities and digital learning infrastructure of higher education institutions in line with European standards in order to equip young Ukrainians with the skills they need for the 21st century (Ukrinform, 06.05.2021).
- A working group consisting of officials from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and China recently conducted a videoconference, where they discussed perspectives of Uzbekistan - Kyrgyzstan - China railway construction. China's representatives presented a model for financing the project and the action plan for 2021. The parties mentioned the importance of finding a consensus in resolving the issue of financing and determining the routes of the railway. They agreed to conduct field research work after the stabilization of the epidemiological situation (Kabar, 04.05.2021).

Society and Culture

- A new 180-meter bridge will connect the town of Kukul in the Farkhor region of Tajikistan with the village of Oikhonim in the Afghan province of Tahor. This will be the sixth bridge connecting Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The decision was announced at a meeting on cooperation and opportunities for regional economic development attended by representatives of Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Aga Khan Foundation and the European Union (EU). The project will cost 16 million euros and will be built with financial support from the EU (Avesta.tj, 07.05.2021).
- Uzbekistan has sent one million disposable medical masks Ecos N95 as humanitarian aid to Turkey in accordance with the decree of the government of the republic. A consignment of medical masks made in Uzbekistan was sent to Istanbul by a cargo plane of the Uzbekistan Havo Yollari airline. In addition, Uzbekistan delivered mobile oxygen concentrators and medicines to India as humanitarian aid due to a sharp increase in morbidity and mortality from coronavirus (Fergana.agency, 03.05.2021).
- The President of Azerbaijani Ilham Aliyev signed an order declaring the city of Shusha the cultural capital of the country. The decision was made with the aim of restoring the historical appearance of the city and renewing its cultural significance after the Armenian occupation. President Aliyev also ordered the construction of an international airport in the city of Fizuli in Karabakh, which would help to develop tourism in Shusha (Centralasia.media, 07.05.2021).
- President of Russia Vladimir Putin discussed the issue of labor migration in Russia with his Tajik counterpart Emomali Rahmon. President Putin called the issue of migrants "sensitive" for Tajikistan and stated that Russian authorities were doing everything to make foreign people feel comfortable in Russia. Currently, more than a million people work illegally in Russia, of which about a quarter (247 thousand) are citizens of Tajikistan (Rbc.ru, 08.09.2021).
- Russian authorities approved the new single-dose version of the Sputnik V vaccine named Sputnik Light in order to accelerate the process of achieving herd immunity against the coronavirus. Human trials of the Sputnik Light in Russia started in January, 2021 and it has not yet passed through advanced testing necessary to ensure its safety and effectiveness in line with established scientific protocols. Up to date, only 13.4 million people in Russia, or just 9% of Russia's population, had received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine (Apnews, 06.05.2021).
- A recent survey conducted in Ukraine through computer-assisted telephone interviews using a random selection of cell numbers reveals that the incumbent Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky holds the lead in the presidential rating. According to the survey, if the presidential elections were held in April 2021, 31.4% of the respondents would support the incumbent president. Another 18.1% would vote for the former President Petro Poroshenko, the leader of the European Solidarity Party, while 11.9% would support the leader of the Batkivshchyna Party, Yulia Tymoshenko (Unian.info, 05.05.2021).