

OVERVIEW OF THE TOURISM SECTOR OF TURKESTAN REGION

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ABSTRACT

This paper overviews the tourism infrastructure of Turkestan region based on data available from the Committee of Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy of Kazakhstan, analysis of internet sources and own experience of visiting the tourist destinations in the region.

The paper aims to focus on key aspects of the development and improvement of the infrastructure and its competitive advantages for tourism.

Keywords: Tourism, Tourism Cluster, Tourists, Tourism Infrastructure, Competitive Advantage.

OVERVIEW OF TURKESTAN REGION

According to information of the Committee of Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy, around 4972 inbound tourists visited Turkestan region in 9 months of the 2018. Compared to Shymkent city, this is 3 times less and compared to Astana city, this is 29 times less.

Created in 2018 by the Degree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Turkestan region is a new region of Kazakhstan located in the center of the Great Silk Road, with population of around 2.6 million inhabitants. The regional center of the Turkestan region is the City of Turkestan. The area of Turkestan region makes up around 117.2 thousand of square kilometers and it borders on the east and west with Uzbekistan, on the north with Kyzylorda and Karaganda regions and on the east with Dzhambul region and Kyrgyzstan Republic (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkistan_Region).

TOURISM DESTINATIONS

Turkestan region has the largest number of historical places in the whole Kazakhstan, exceeding more than 700 sacral and historical places. One of the most interesting historical places for tourism located in Turkestan, Arystanbab, Otyrar, Sauran and Sayram (Nurbek, 2017).

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Achilov

In addition, a region has a potential for development of medical tourism. Locations such as Saragash, Kaskasu, Burguluk and Tulkubas are good for health treatments, sports and relaxation. Kaskasu, Burguluk and Tulkubas are also good potential for winter sports and mountain hiking.

Located in the crossroads of the Great Silk Road, Turkestan region is focal point for development of transport and logistics infrastructure for transit tourism and business.

On the other hand, Turkestan region and the city have a strong national meaning that all Turk history started from this region. It unites many people no matter of present nationality, religion or viewpoints and who believe that their ancestors were great Turks, who originated from this area and spread in the vast territory of the Eurasian continent in the past.

TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE

International tourists can visit Turkestan's touristic destinations only via Shymkent and Tashkent International Airports. There is no direct flight to Turkestan city – a center of the Turkestan region.

However, Turkestan region connected well with main highways, especially with the highway “West China and West Europe”. According to statistics (Nurbek et al., 2018), the popular mode of transport for tourists are air and road transport.

For Turkestan region the air transport is very important because it locates from cities of the Europe and China on distances more than 3000 km.

Railroad is well connected with the main cities, but there are no international fast trains and rail links to tourist resorts and small cities.

So that, any tourist can have difficulty when planning the trip to the region, especially from regions which are not familiar with Russian or Kazakh languages.

Visiting tourist destinations of the Turkestan region from Shymkent City has some limitations and issues. For example, between Shymkent city and Turkestan city, pre-road infrastructure is in low conditions. The toilets and resting places are not developed, most of them in bad sanitation, dirty and smelly.

The road between Shymkent city and Kaskasu Resorts is very narrow and with high road traffic. For tourists from Shymkent city there is no railroad or bicycle options exist.

The road between Shymkent city and Saragash Resorts is not ideal in that the world class road reached only the Zhibek Zhol border checkpoint to Uzbekistan and around 30 km. are very narrow, with high traffic and bad condition.

Shopping and eating places are another main issue in the Turkestan region. It is difficult on-site high-quality supermarkets or eating places in all tourists' destinations of the Turkestan region.

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

The competitive advantage of the Turkestan region comes from the historical figures, ancient and medieval towns and from natural resorts. Visiting such places energize anyone with positive feeling and emotions about the region and its wealth of history and nature.

From visiting the places, the information found was so valuable that it was not described in detail in many sources of the internet. I visited 3 times the Turkestan's Ahmed Yassivi Mausoleum being the first time in the region and found out new values of the city for tourists and the world history. This Mausoleum brings visitors back to the era of spreading Islam in the region and to the generation that originated from the followers of the Prophet Mohamed. Arstanbab, one of the followers of the Prophet Mohamed, who came to the region to spread Islam, became a teacher of Yassivi. The mausoleum of Arstanbab located also around 50 km. from the Mausoleum of Yassi. In other words, after Makkah, these two mausoleums are so sacred for Arabs and followers of all Muslim people around the world.

An interesting point is that Mausoleum of Ahmad Yassivi was built by the order of Tamerlane – the third great conqueror of the history, who kept in fear the territory from the Mediterranean Sea to the Pacific Ocean. Finding that Ahmed Yassavi went to live under the earth after 63 years, at the age when the prophet Mahomed left the world, Tamerlane was impressed and ordered to build a Mausoleum for him and for his teacher.

The most importantly, the history of Mausoleums connects it with the ancestors of noble Genghis Khan – the second great conqueror of the history after Alexander Great, who seized the largest territory in the history of humanity. Genghis Khan's around 300 ancestors and a daughter of Tamerlane Rabia Sultan begum is buried in the territory of Mausoleum, making this place sacred for all nationalities living in the Central Asia and beyond.

Above mentioned is a great competitive advantage of the region to increase tourism capacity to more than 10 000 000 visitors per year. And this is only with one Turkestan city. There are many other ancient and sacral places around the region which are connected to the Great Personalities and Heroes of the Region and the World history.

At the same time, Turkestan region has very beautiful places for health treatment, relaxation, sports and outdoor activities. For example, Saragash Resorts are very popular with its hot and mineral waters for drinking and water procedures. Kaskasu and Burguluk regions are very good for hiking and relaxation in summer period and for skiing and outdoor activities in the winter period.

However, there are many issues and elements to be considered. One main element is infrastructure which should be improved to meet the requirements of the international and regional tourists.

CONCLUSION

Possessing unique competitive advantages for tourism, Turkestan region lacks tourism infrastructure. One main issue is intellectual potential, which should be developed in order to start forming a strong tourism cluster [5].

The paper tried to evaluate some of the elements of tourism infrastructure and define its competitive advantages. It provided many ideas to improve the infrastructure and services for tourists. Tourism value chain is another point of research and analysis to build a strong tourism cluster.

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