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PROBLEMS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF KAZAKHSTAN ECOTOURISM

Omirezak N., 1st-year Master student
Kitaibekova S., supervisor

Forest Resources and Forestry Department
Kazakh Agrotechnical University named after S.Seifullin, Nur-Sultan

The purpose of the study is to analyze some problems that are relevant in the authors' opinion and hinder the development of Kazakhstan tourism.

Methodology – methods of analysis and synthesis, induction, deduction, logical, systematic approach.

Originality/value – the gaps between the current reality and the supposed perspective vision of tourism are shown.

Conclusions – Kazakhstan tourism is characterized by underdevelopment and uncompetitiveness in the global tourism market, unattractiveness for the local population and foreign guests. The entry of foreign tourists is complicated due to the high visa requirements. The issues of employment in the industry and high-quality training of future and working specialists are poorly developed in Kazakhstan tourism. The issue of the full functioning of the transport infrastructure remains vulnerable. The most promising and low-cost is the development of ecotourism along with MICE and cultural tourism.

Introduction

In the conditions of global economic and natural upheavals, tourism has proved its valuable role not only in stimulating the economic growth of the country, but also in preserving natural resources, the national historical and cultural heritage of the peoples living there and improving the well-being of people all over the world. Therefore, at the highest political level, tourism is recognized for its significant contribution to the sustainable development of countries and its value in implementing the concept of inclusive economic growth has been proven. According to the Global Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report, the role of tourism is increasing in emerging economies, which are becoming major players in the global tourism market. Developing destinations are making efforts to increase their competitiveness and attractiveness as a tourist destination [1].

Currently ecotourism plays an important role not only for citizens but for rural people too. As Indonesian author Pajar Hatma Indra Jaya et al. mentioned Ecotourism has evolved into a strategy for establishing sustainable livelihoods and plays a vital role in the management of local communities. It confronts numerous

difficulties despite appearing to be the ideal tool for enhancing socio-economic development. Ecotourism helps local communities thrive through a case study of a tourist village. A series of observations and interviews were conducted to learn more about the ecotourism of rural development [2]

The issue of developing competitive and attractive tourism is becoming more relevant for modern Kazakhstan every year. Its strategic importance is due to the entry of Kazakhstan into the top 30 developed countries of the world, the diversification of the economy and the transition to the "green path" of the country's development. Within the framework of the developed Concept of the development of domestic tourism, Kazakhstan should become a globally recognizable tourist destination by 2020 [3]. In order to improve the image of Kazakhstan by increasing the competitiveness of the country's regions and offering them effective tourist products, a cluster approach for the development of five regions of Kazakhstan was chosen. Among them: the cities of Almaty and Astana, Eastern, Southern and Western Kazakhstan. Through the development of tourism clusters, the competitiveness of the tourism industry as a whole will be formed and, subsequently, more successful integration into the global tourism market will be carried out. However, the current stage of development of domestic tourism indicates that with the best achievements of the industry, there are gaps between the current reality and the supposed perspective vision of tourism. In this regard, in this paper, along with the positive aspects in the tourism industry, some, in our opinion, key problems that hinder the positioning of Kazakhstan as a competitive and attractive tourist destination in the minds of foreign and domestic tourists will be presented.

The main part

To date, the contribution of tourism to the country's economy remains insignificant. Kazakhstan is on the list, frankly speaking, a low 129th place with a share of tourism from GDP of 6.2% and a monetary volume of \$ 7.9 billion (2022). Meanwhile, the government of the country is building ambitious plans to increase the contribution of the industry to GDP to 15% within five years. The current situation testifies to the low profitability and uncompetitiveness of Kazakhstan tourism [4].

Insufficient work on the qualitative improvement of the tourist infrastructure has negatively affected the attractiveness of Kazakhstan as a tourist destination. Many Kazakhstanis prefer other countries for recreation, travel, entertainment, spending their leisure time and realizing personal goals. Therefore, the predominance of outbound tourism over inbound and domestic tourism remains a characteristic feature of domestic tourism. This year, the share of outbound tourism was 47%, inbound – 31% and domestic – 22% [5].

The existing visa regime worsens the attractiveness of Kazakhstan for foreign tourists. The Kazakhstan visa is recognized as one of the most "inaccessible" in the post-Soviet space [9]. According to the data of the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index of International Openness, Kazakhstan was assigned the 113th place among 136 countries of the world [6]. This position shows that it is quite difficult to visit Kazakhstan without a visa and there are difficulties in obtaining an electronic visa or upon arrival. International experts also noted the high requirements for obtaining a visa for the purpose of a tourist visit to the country – the 114th place.

Kazakhstan is not open to bilateral air service agreements – 124th place. According to the number of existing regional trade agreements, Kazakhstan is in 62nd place [7]. However, Kazakhstan has taken some measures that have made a positive contribution to the development of the country's economy, the attractiveness of tourism, including, and the well-being of the population [8]. Thus, according to the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index among 136 countries of the world, especially among the CIS countries, Kazakhstan distinguished itself by two indicators, taking a decisive step in forming the best conditions for preserving and improving the health of the country's residents – 6th place and a beneficial basis for doing business in the tourism industry – 36th place among 136 countries [4].

According to the Concept of tourism development of Kazakhstan, tourist products have been identified, the rational management of which will contribute to the better development of the domestic tourism industry [10]. Among the tourist products, MICE tourism, cultural tourism and tours, as well as active and adventure tourism are commercially successful in the short term at the state level. Strategic products are recognized as: recreation in the mountains and lakes, beach tourism and short-term rest. For the development of ethnographic, ecological, cultural, educational, gastronomic, extreme tourism, skiing, mountain and sailing sports in the country were held: the international festival "Mangilik El", dedicated to the 550th anniversary of the founding of the Kazakh Khanate, the international ethnofestival "Uly Dala Rukhy", eco-ethnofestival Four", international festival Almaty Mount Fest 2016, gastronomic family festival "Delicious Alma-Ata", as well as the international conference "1000 years of Almaty on the Silk Road and prospects for tourism development in the region", Sailing Regatta-2016, Workshop-Zhetysu Travel and other events [11].

The activities carried out by the state and the analysis of the content of tourist products, in our opinion, shows that each of them is directly related to the natural resources of Kazakhstan, i.e. ecological tourism. The latter, in our opinion, remains an unshakable principle of successful integration of Kazakhstan into the world tourist space. However, the full-fledged development of ecotourism comes into contact with a lot of ill-considered decisions and actions on the part of the state and requires a mandatory rational approach to its effective management.

Misunderstanding of the role and value of ecotourism can be traced in the Concept of development of Kazakhstan tourism, where ecotourism is considered as one of the types of tourist products only for other regions of Kazakhstan not included in the priority list, along with the fact that its development is designated as one of the goals of development of Kazakhstan tourism for the period up to 2020 [3]. There is no conceptual apparatus of ecotourism in the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On tourist activity in the Republic of Kazakhstan" [12].

The ill-considered actions on the part of state authorities are connected with the creation of the international-level Kok-Zhailau ski resort, the construction of which required cutting down of forest lands with an area of 21.5 hectares in the Ile-Alatau State National Natural Park, which is included in the UNESCO World Heritage tentative list [13]. Such a decision caused a negative response from the public. According to the latter, the construction of a ski resort will entail the destruction of

animals and plants listed in the Red Book, negative consequences in the biodiversity of the national Park [14], shortage of drinking water [15], environmental pollution, destruction of fertile soils, subsequently, desertification and the appearance of sand and dust storms that occur in Almaty, Atyrau and other regions of the country. Another problem remains the issue of preserving one of the national treasures of the country, the *Artemia salina* crustacean, which feeds on flamingos, pegasus and other waterfowl and near-water birds in the Teniz Lake of the Korgalzhyn State Nature Reserve. The urgency of the problem is caused not only by the threat of extinction of the pink flamingo, whose nesting on the territory of the Korgalzhyn Reserve over the past 30 years has been the only place among the CIS countries. The need for an immediate solution to the problem is primarily due to the importance of the wetlands of the reserve, which are the key to preserving the quality of life of Kazakhstanis and future generations of the country, and their recognition by the world tourism society. In particular, Lake Tengiz was included in the international network of unique lakes of the world "Living lakes" in 2000. In 2007, the Korgalzhyn Nature Reserve became part of a Worldwide network of places recognized as Key Ornithological Territories (IBA). In 2008, as part of the nomination "Sary-Arkastepes and lakes of Northern Kazakhstan", the reserve was included in the UNESCO World Natural Heritage List.

There is a difficulty in implementing one of the goals of the development of the tourism industry – the development of ecological tourism and environmental education, including in specially protected natural areas (hereinafter protected areas). International experts raise the issue of the need to manage protected areas (national parks, reserves, reserves) by partially conducting economic activities, especially in reserves and obtaining economic benefits by the population and state authorities. Nature reserves that are closed from society and do not allow conducting any economic activity for the purpose of preserving nature and rare or endangered species of animals and plants become the subject of controversy among the public, representatives of science, government authorities and international organizations. According to the Kazakh scientist Makimov M., the development of ecotourism in nature reserves is an encroachment on the fundamental principles of nature conservation, and obtaining economic benefits is unacceptable for the Kazakh society [16]. The value lies not in material achievements, but in the preservation and transfer to the next generation of spiritual, cultural, religious, ethical and other positions. In his opinion, it is impossible to preserve the wildlife of the reserve and be a center of education and recreation. This will create a threat to its existence, "wildlife is more valuable the more it is independent and free from us". Makimov M. cites the need for the development of ecotourism in national parks, which provide more opportunities for tourists to communicate with nature, walking, trekking, etc. In turn, representatives of national parks also talk about the recreational load of ecotourism due to the large flow of foreign and local tourists from densely populated areas of Almaty and Almaty region, who also leave garbage as a result of non-compliance with sanitary standards. Another problem is the construction of multi-storey cottages in foothill and mountainous areas, which are prestigious among Almaty residents.

However, despite the existing controversy, work has begun on the long-term lease of protected areas for the development of domestic and inbound tourism in five national nature parks. At the same time, the lack of a holistic vision of ecotourism development using the potential of national parks, the creation of a special competitive tourist product with the preservation of the environment of national parks was noted.

Problems with the preservation of natural resources and the environment were identified according to the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index, where Kazakhstan is on the 99th position in terms of environmental sustainability. Kazakhstan has insufficiently strict environmental legislation – 85th place, compliance with the norms of environmental legislation is not fully observed – 80th place, there are international treaties in the field of environmental conservation that have not yet been ratified by Kazakhstan – 107th place, quite a large number of species of mammals, birds and amphibians are endangered – 95th place [17].

Conclusions

Thus, the analysis of the current stage of development of Kazakhstan tourism reflects its underdevelopment and competitiveness in the global tourism market according to the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index, despite the measures and actions taken by the state.

Kazakhstan continues to be an unattractive place for recreation, travel and entertainment, primarily for its residents of the country. Therefore, most Kazakhstanis consider other countries as tourist destinations. Kazakhstan remains unattractive for foreign tourists, for whom the mechanism of convenient and facilitated entry into the country has not been developed. Noteworthy, in our opinion, is still the practice of maintaining the visa regime due to increased terrorist activity in Kazakhstan and other countries of the world, as well as the introduction of a simplified procedure for obtaining a visa, including via the Internet.

The issue of high-quality training of future and working specialists, disinterest in the investments of company managers in the development and improvement of professional skills and competencies of their employees is problematic. As a result, there is a low focus of domestic business on the needs of target groups, which further affects the inefficiency of marketing programs, reducing profits and employment in the industry. We believe that it is the interest of representatives of the domestic and foreign business community of Kazakhstan in the best and qualified personnel that will solve a number of problems that have developed over the years in the industry. The conscious approach of company managers will trigger the formation of a mechanism for cooperation with the country's universities, conducting productive research by Kazakhstani scientists with practical value, improving the qualifications of existing specialists and high-quality training of graduates and creating a market for highly qualified personnel.

The full functioning of all types of transport infrastructure will guarantee the accessibility of tourists to natural, cultural, historical sites of attractions.

The last one is the problems of ecotourism development in Kazakhstan, which remains relevant, first of all, for residents of the country who have the right to rest in nature, and for foreign guests who want to see wildlife different from the nature

of their country. Despite the fact that ecotourism is not primary for the state, its role and value is paramount for Kazakhstan tourism and the country as a whole, due to the possession of a rich and diverse natural potential, some objects of which are already included in the UNESCO World Heritage, and a smaller investment of financial, human and other resources. Therefore, we believe that ecotourism should be present among such tourist products as MICE tourism and cultural tourism, as evidenced by the large-scale activities carried out by the state in these areas. The solution of the problems discussed in this article is not sufficient for the successful development of Kazakhstan tourism. The attractiveness of Kazakhstan as a tourist destination for domestic and foreign tourists is limited to a complex of problems that require a conscious approach to study and solution by scientists, government officials, the business community and citizens of the country.

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