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# Cultural And Historical Tourism In Kyrgyzstan And Kazakhstan Development Trends and Potential (1992-2023)

**ABSTRACT.** The work is devoted to the issue of cultural and historical tourism in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The current state of this field is studied, and the author concludes that cultural-historical tourism has a powerful potential and can become a strategic resource for the economy of both countries in the future, based on the analysis of materials on this topic. Such prospects are determined by the correct approach to solving existing problems, favorable geographical location, which caused Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan to be in the center of famous historical events in Eurasia, and the Great Silk Road also passes through these countries. The cultural and historical heritage accumulated throughout the history of the local population in these countries has a special character with its own ethnic flavor, rich philosophical meaning, and is deeply embedded in history. All this creates great interest among tourists who want to not only receive the standard services of a travel company, but also become spiritually enriched and learn about the culture and history of the local people.

The development of cultural and historical tourism is closely related to the general tourism industry and, unfortunately, it should be noted that these industries are experiencing certain difficulties in terms of infrastructure. Therefore, the construction of strategic projects to solve the problems of this segment of the economy in the future can bring enormous benefits for the states.

The purpose of the article "Cultural and historical tourism in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan: development Trends and Potential (1992-2023)" is to analyze the role of cultural and historical tourism in the economic and cultural development of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The article aims to explore how the rich historical and cultural heritage of these countries is used to attract tourists and stimulate economic growth. In addition, she emphasizes the importance of preserving cultural heritage and its role in the strategy of tourism development in both countries.

**KEYWORDS:** cultural and historical tourism, tourism, historical heritage, cultural heritage, spiritual heritage, strategic resource, economy.

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## Қырғызстан мен Қазақстандағы мәдени-тарихи туризм: даму үрдістері мен даму әлеуеті (1992-2023 ж.)

**АНДАТПА.** Мақала Қырғызстан мен Қазақстандағы мәдени-тарихи туризм мәселесіне арналған. Осы саланың қазіргі жағдайы зерттеп, автор осы тақырып бойынша материалдарды талдау негізінде мәдени-тарихи туризмнің күшті потенциалы бар және болашақта екі елдің экономикасы үшін стратегиялық ресурс бола алады деген қорытындыға келеді. Мықты потенциалды пайдаланып, бар мәселелер дұрыс шешімін тапса, бұл сала экономикада өзінің орнын иемденетіне елдердің қолайлы географиялық орналасуы, Қырғызстан мен Қазақстанның Еуразиядағы әйгілі тарихи оқиғалардың ортасында болуы және Ұлы Жібек жолы да осы елдер арқылы өтуі себеп болады. Бұл елдердегі жергілікті халықтың өмір сүру салты бүкіл тарихында жинақталған мәдени-тарихи мұрасы өзіндік этникалық иісімен, тарихқа терең тамырын жайған бай философиялық мәнімен ерекше сипатқа ие. Осының барлығы туристік компанияның стандартты қызметтерін алып қана қоймай, рухани байып, жергілікті халықтың мәдениеті мен тарихы туралы білім алғысы келетін туристер арасында үлкен қызығушылық тудырады.

Мәдени-тарихи туризмді дамыту жалпы туризм саласымен тығыз байланысты және, өкінішке орай, инфрақұрылымдық жағынан бұл салалар белгілі бір қиындықтарды бастан кешіріп жатқанын айта кеткен жөн. Сондықтан, автор болашақта экономиканың осы сегментінің мәселелерін шешу үшін стратегиялық жобаларды жүзеге асыру мемлекеттер үшін орасан зор пайда әкеледі деген айтады.

«Қырғызстан мен Қазақстандағы мәдени-тарихи туризм: даму үрдістері мен даму әлеуеті (1992-2023 ж.)» мақаласының мақсаты Қырғызстан мен Қазақстанның экономикалық және мәдени дамуындағы мәдени-тарихи туризмнің рөлін талдау болып табылады. Мақала осы елдердің бай тарихи және мәдени мұраларының туристерді тарту және экономикалық өсуді ынталандыру үшін қалай пайдаланылатынын зерттеуге бағытталған. Сонымен қатар, ол мәдени мұраны сақтаудың маңыздылығын және оның екі елдегі туризмді дамыту стратегиясындағы рөлін атап көрсетеді.

**ТҮЙІН СӨЗДЕР:** мәдени-тарихи туризм, туризм, тарихи мұра, мәдени мұра, рухани мұра, стратегиялық ресурс, экономика.

**МҮДДЕЛЕР ҚАҚТЫҒЫСЫ:** Автор мүдделер қақтығысының жоқтығын мәлімдейді.

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## Культурно-исторический туризм в Кыргызстане и Казахстане: тенденции и потенциал развития (1992-2023 г.)

**АННОТАЦИЯ.** Работа посвящена проблеме культурно-исторического туризма в Кыргызстане и Казахстане. Рассматривается современное состояние данной отрасли, и автор на основе анализа материалов по данной теме делает вывод о том, что культурно-исторический туризм имеет мощный потенциал и в будущем может стать стратегическим ресурсом для экономики обеих стран. Такие перспективы при должном подходе при решении имеющихся проблем обуславливаются удачным географическим расположением, послужившим причиной того, что Кыргызстан и Казахстан находились в центре известных исторических событий Евразии, также через эти страны проходит Великий Шелковый Путь. Культурно-историческое наследие, накопленное за всю историю существования местного населения в этих странах, имеет уникальный характер со своим этническими колоритом, богатым философским значением, уходящий в глубь истории. Все это вызывает живой интерес у туристов, которые хотят получить не только стандартные услуги туристических компаний, но духовно обогатиться, получить знания о культуре и истории местного населения.

Стоит отметить, что развитие культурно-исторического туризма тесно связано с туристической сферой в целом и, к сожалению, в плане инфраструктуры эти отрасли испытывают определенные трудности. Поэтому построение стратегических проектов для решения проблем данного сегмента экономики в будущем могут принести колоссальную прибыль для государств.

Целью статьи «Культурно-исторический туризм в Кыргызстане и Казахстане: тенденции и потенциал развития (1992-2023 г.)» является анализ роли культурно-исторического туризма в экономическом и культурном развитии Кыргызстана и Казахстана. Статья направлена на исследование того, как богатое историческое и культурное наследие этих стран используется для привлечения туристов и стимулирования экономического роста. Кроме того, она подчеркивает важность сохранения культурного наследия и его роль в стратегии развития туризма в обеих странах.

**КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА:** культурно-исторический туризм, туризм, историческое наследие, культурное наследие, духовное наследие, стратегический ресурс, экономика.

**КОНФЛИКТ ИНТЕРЕСОВ:** Автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the contemporary global economy, the tourism industry is one of the most important, profitable, and dynamically developing sectors. Approximately 200 million people are employed in tourism, accounting for about 8% of total global employment. Since 1998, tourism has ranked first in global exports (according to data from the World Tourism Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund), and its growth rates have outpaced those of the global economy as a whole (Bashkova, 2008).

In the modern world, where the achievements of technological progress occupy a dominant place in human life, tourism is increasingly gaining importance as a recreational resource, enabling individuals to feel connected to history, culture, and nature. Among the main types of tourism, cultural and historical tourism occupies a special place, targeting audiences interested in exploring the historical and cultural attractions of different countries. Historical and cultural sites include monuments of history and culture that possess artistic, historical, and scientific value, serving as a vast source of information and a national heritage of the people.

In order to actualize and promote the historical significance of a country, it is essential to combine traditional tourism activities with cultural and historical tourism, particularly through organizing such activities in territories rich in historical heritage. In our view, a systematic approach to planning large-scale projects in the tourism sector, taking into account the historical and cultural value of a region, can ultimately have a significant impact not only on the well-being of the population but also serve as one of the key resources for enhancing a country's economic potential in the global arena. The development of tourism, including cultural and historical tourism, in many countries today contributes to improving living standards, developing transport systems and logistics, creating jobs, and expanding foreign trade relations, which ultimately has a positive effect on the formation of gross domestic product. The social and economic benefits of historical and cultural tourism in the modern global economy have elevated it to one of the three leading sectors of the national economy.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The author analyzes scholarly and expert materials on the research problem (including studies by experts from Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan), applies a comparative method to determine the current level of development of cultural and historical tourism in both countries, and, based on the synthesis of the examined materials, presents her own interpretation of the issue.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are countries endowed with a rich cultural heritage intertwined with historical events associated with well-known Central Asian states and their rulers, as well as with the famous cities located along the Great Silk Road. These monuments of antiquity and the Middle Ages should undoubtedly serve as key attractions for tourists visiting these countries to become acquainted with Central Asian culture and history, broaden their horizons, and achieve spiritual enrichment.

The tourism industry in Kyrgyzstan has had a positive impact on the national economy.

Four major areas of tourism in Kyrgyzstan can be identified:

1) resort and recreational tourism, which generates approximately 90% of the sector's total revenue (represented by health resorts and recreational facilities in the Issyk-Kul, Chui, Osh, and Jalal-Abad regions);

2) business tourism (about 1%), which can be subdivided into shopping tourism primarily inbound wholesale buyers of goods from neighboring countries (Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan) and conference tourism associated with private and public companies and organizations;

3) adventure tourism, including mountaineering, trekking, equestrian tourism, rafting, hunting, and tours focused on the study of fauna, flora, geography, archaeology, geology, and related fields (approximately 5%). This type of tourism represents a distinctive segment aimed at providing travelers with unique and memorable experiences;

4) cultural and historical tourism, which, in contemporary terms, may be regarded as a national brand that attracts foreign visitors due to the country itself as a socio-cultural environment (Bashkova, 2008).

Today, Kyrgyzstan is widely known for its high-mountain lakes and rivers, and tourism plays a significant role in the country's economic development. At the same time, the country attracts considerable interest from those seeking to explore its history, including sites of both regional and global significance.

More than five thousand historical and cultural monuments are located within the country, including ancient cave settlements, runic inscriptions on boulders, rock carvings, stone statues, medieval fortresses, and other archaeological remains. The Great Silk Road, which once passed through this territory, left behind the ruins of cities and caravanserais.

Historical tourism in Kyrgyzstan is represented by such prominent sites as the Sulaiman-Too Sacred Mountain (inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2009), the Uzgen Historical and Architectural Complex, the Saimaluu-Tash Petroglyphs, and the Manas Gumbuz. Tourists also visit the historical and cultural zone Burana Tower, located on the ruins of the ancient city of Balasagan.

The Silk Roads: the Chang'an Tianshan Corridor was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2014, and the Western Tien-Shan (including Sary-Chelek, Padysha-Ata, and Besh-Aral) was added in 2016. In the Osh region, the city of Uzgen features a significant historical and architectural complex; in the Jalal-Abad region stands the Shah Fazil Mausoleum; in the Naryn region, visitors can explore the Tash Rabat Caravanserai; and in the Talas region is located the Manas Gumbuz (Borubaeva and Barakanova).

S. Yilmazel and G. Tashkulova emphasize that the Great Silk Road may occupy a special place in Kyrgyzstan's economy, noting that today the Silk Road holds particular significance for Western tourists, for whom it is associated with Eastern mysticism and attracts interest as the cradle of Turkic civilization.

Kyrgyzstan is one of the few countries in the world where pristine natural landscapes have been preserved. In combination with Silk Road tourism, this endows the country with substantial potential to attract visitors from across the globe. Although the routes of the Silk Road have changed over thousands of years, the caravan paths passing through the territory of Kyrgyzstan have remained largely intact, which has allowed the country to become a guardian of this ancient trade corridor.

For example, the Osh Bazaar in Bishkek has existed for several centuries, preserving the traditions of historic trade routes.

The fact that Kyrgyzstan is situated along the principal route leading to Iran and Anatolia via the Fergana Valley, as well as toward the countries of the Far East and China, grants the country strategic significance and a competitive advantage over Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. As a result, Kyrgyzstan has the potential to integrate into the global economy from a socio-cultural perspective by presenting the historical and cultural values of Central Asia to the international community (Yilmazel & Tashkulova, 2018).

Sh.Z. Elmuradov highlights the significant role of branding by explaining the concept of regional branding. Discussing the relevance of regional branding for Kyrgyzstan's economy, the author considers one of the main factors for sustainable regional development to be the positive image of the region, which plays a key role in enhancing the region's resource potential and implementing effective innovative projects that create new jobs.

The regional image through the development of tourism entrepreneurship and the attraction of investments fulfills a central function in addressing various production and economic challenges and increases both scientific and practical interest. In particular, the author examines sites in the Batken region that possess historical, cultural, and tourism potential and can enhance the region's image. By discussing various ways to increase the region's investment potential and considering the factors that strengthen regional branding, the author concludes that studying these issues will allow for the development of an effective system for regulating regional branding (Elmuradov, 2021).

The challenges of preserving the original appearance of the historical and cultural site Sulaiman-Too are addressed by a group of experts. Located in the center of Osh, Sulaiman-Too holds

exceptionally high cultural value and was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2009. According to the authors, certain measures are currently needed to establish the site's true value in accordance with international standards, as there are several violations that alter the overall landscape and detract from the unique historical character of Sulaiman-Too. These violations include modern and Soviet-era buildings and structures that are incompatible with the historic appearance of the site. The authors recommend eliminating these disruptions and developing cultural and historical tourism in the region (Smirnov, 2023).

Since gaining independence, Kyrgyzstan's cultural and historical heritage has faced numerous challenges, which led to the deplorable condition of many cultural and historical sites; some historical monuments have completely disappeared or were on the verge of vanishing, as the state was unable to provide adequate support for their preservation during the early years of independence.

Today, however, a new issue has emerged: the need to revitalize cultural and historical heritage for the younger generation, so that they understand the importance of their country's history and culture not only for the nation's self-identification but also as a crucial tool in the country's economy. Tourism in Kyrgyzstan has also been negatively affected by social and political upheavals, regional ecological problems, and the pandemic.

Despite these challenges, tourism remains one of the key sectors of Kyrgyzstan's economy, requiring continued support from both the state and the population, along with a systematic approach to addressing marketing and management issues using modern innovative technologies. Leveraging the achievements of technological progress for the development of tourism including cultural and historical tourism in today's digitalized society is a critical condition for implementing large-scale projects in the market, ensuring the attraction of tourists from around the world.

O.A. Moskalenko emphasizes the decisive role of internet technologies in Kyrgyzstan's economy, particularly in the tourism industry, noting that even during the pandemic, the digital sphere helped create a broad platform for tourism development (Moskalenko, 2023).

Despite the fact that the number of tourists visiting Kyrgyzstan increases every year, the country still cannot offer a well-developed infrastructure. This shortcoming is noticeable to any traveler and negatively affects not only the tourism industry but also the development of all sectors of the national economy.

Before gaining independence, during the Soviet period, the tourism sector was managed by trade unions and primarily aimed at providing low-cost recreation for Soviet workers. Integration into the global tourism network was not even considered, which, following the collapse of the USSR, rendered the sector completely unprepared for market conditions.

Since the early 1990s, despite efforts to find a new development model, A. Kamalova notes that Kyrgyzstan has lacked a systematic approach to addressing the challenges of the tourism industry (Kamalova, 2019). This situation has resulted in many historical and cultural heritage sites falling into poor condition, making it essential for the state to focus on their preservation and the development of infrastructure in these historical regions. The author emphasizes the absence of systematic management policies for example, a model similar to the Soviet era that could inform major enterprises within the EAEU countries to attract corporate clients through long-term contracts.

Problems also persist in the air transport system, which offers a limited selection of carriers, and the conditions for foreign passengers do not meet international standards (flight delays, lost baggage, small allowances for free luggage, etc.). Consequently, the European Union has blacklisted all Kyrgyz airlines. The ground transport system is very underdeveloped, and traveling by car involves numerous difficulties related to accommodations, meals, road quality, and the lack of information in foreign languages. These issues have remained unresolved even after significant investments in the transport infrastructure that provides access to the country's main attractions.

Equally important is the availability of highly qualified personnel for the tourism industry. Although specialists are being trained in the country, the quality of education does not meet international standards, which often results in negative feedback regarding hotel services, translator services, and instructors for extreme sports tours such as rafting, skiing, mountaineering, and similar activities.

According to A. Kamalova, addressing all of the aforementioned problems should form the foundation for creating a developed tourism infrastructure that meets international standards (Kamalova, 2019).

As for Kazakhstan, cultural and historical tourism is developing, and recent statistics indicate that this sector is slowly but steadily gaining momentum. In 2022, the number of foreign tourists visiting the country reached 610,000 (compared to 208,500 in the first nine months of 2021 and over 750,000 in the “pre-pandemic” year of 2019). The same year also saw a record number of domestic tourists, reaching 8.6 million, which is 1.7 million more than in 2021. Experts note that the most popular regions are Almaty, Astana, and Shymkent.

In the Almaty region alone, there are 2,363 historical and cultural monuments, including 1,862 archaeological sites and 501 architectural and urban development monuments. Among these, six are listed as UNESCO World Heritage sites, and twelve are recognized as monuments of national significance. Notable sites include the Tamgaly Archaeological Complex, the Issyk Burial Mounds, Khan Tengri Peak, the Charyn Canyon, the Koylyk Settlement, the Kapaldy Batyr Mausoleum, the site of the Orbulak Battle, the site of the Anyrakay Battle, the Altynemel Memorial Complex, the Zherkent Mosque Architectural Complex, the site of the Karkara Battle, the Nauryzbai Batyr Mausoleum, the Zh. Zhabaev Mausoleum, the Tamshybulak Spring, the Memorial for Victims of Political Repression, and Kolsay Lake (Koichubaeva, 2023).

Considering such a rich cultural and historical heritage, D.S. Koichubaeva believes that tourism is one of the most important tools for exploring and understanding the history and culture of Kazakhstan in all its diversity. The development of a modern cultural and historical tourism system, based on the country’s unique historical, cultural, and natural resources, will gradually allow Kazakhstan to integrate into the global economic and cultural system, potentially becoming a profitable sector for the state in the future (Koichubaeva, 2023).

The tourism policy of any state aims to create a modern and competitive tourism industry that ensures the development of this sector as a key segment of the national economy and facilitates gradual integration into the global tourism market. Today, international experts note that tourism in Kazakhstan is developing steadily, and in the near future, the country has the potential to become a prominent destination for travel and tourism. To achieve this, Kazakhstan possesses significant social, historical, cultural, and natural resources.

These same international experts believe that their positive forecasts are supported by factors such as the hospitality and friendliness of the Kazakh people, the country’s natural attractions, its history, and the richness of its cultural and ethnic diversity, as well as its tourism infrastructure. Among the main types of tourism, cultural and historical tourism is the most popular and widely practiced, and in Kazakhstan, this segment continues to gain momentum each year.

There is a clear explanation for this phenomenon. The diversity and richness of cultural heritage are fundamental characteristics of a civilized society and an integral component of national self-identification. The national character, thought, literature, and art of Kazakhstan are complex and may be difficult for outsiders to fully comprehend. It is precisely this intricate yet appealing uniqueness of Kazakh history and culture that generates strong interest among foreign tourists.

The formation of the Kazakh people is closely linked to the history of numerous tribes and peoples who have inhabited the vast territory of the country since ancient times, which inevitably influenced the development of a distinct history and culture among the local population. Thus, it can be assumed that the Kazakh people possess one of the richest cultural heritages in the region.

Until the 20th century, Kazakh culture remained primarily nomadic; nevertheless, over many millennia, its evolutionary path was as complex and fascinating as that of other peoples. The nomadic Kazakhs developed a unique way of thinking and social organization, representing a synthesis of both Western and Eastern cognitive forms.

The geographical location of Kazakhstan, like that of Kyrgyzstan, accounts for its abundance of historical and cultural sites. Situated at the heart of Eurasia, Kazakhstan became a crossroads of some of the world’s oldest civilizations, ancient trade routes, and social, economic, cultural, and ideological connections between the West and the East, the South and the North. The Great Silk Road

passed through Kazakhstan, and along its routes, states with distinct cultural, historical, and social characteristics emerged and developed.

In terms of the number of historical and cultural monuments and natural resources, Kazakhstan can be compared to countries such as China, India, the Mediterranean states, and those of the Middle East. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the entire territory of Kazakhstan is, in essence, an open-air museum. Many historical and cultural monuments are included on the UNESCO World Heritage List, and the country's rich cultural and historical heritage is represented by more than 25,000 monuments of history, archaeology, and monumental art, over 2,056,000 units of cultural property preserved in the collections of 89 state museums, and 66,840,000 volumes of books, rare manuscripts, and publications housed in 3,495 state libraries.

The catalyst for the development of cultural and historical tourism was the State Program "Cultural Heritage," which was launched in 2004.

The revitalization of tourism and recreational activities in the country is driven by national policies aimed at implementing socio-economic reforms. The preservation and development of tourism resources as a national heritage, as a means to improve quality of life, and as a resource for fostering stable international understanding and partnerships represent a matter of state prestige and of intergovernmental significance.

Tourism is one of the most effective sectors of the economy; therefore, today the state prioritizes tourism as a key direction in the national economic strategy.

A.A. Kuralbayev pays particular attention to the southern region of Kazakhstan as the most attractive for tourists, which led the author to designate this area as an independent tourism complex. The author argues that for the cluster-based development of tourism, active participation by local executive authorities is essential to create favorable conditions for private entrepreneurs, who serve as the backbone of both the project and the economy, ensuring effective returns in this sector.

Kuralbayev especially emphasizes the need to establish a tourism cluster system in the South Kazakhstan region, with centers in Turkestan and Kentau. In the vicinity of Shymkent, the cities of Sayram, Tulkubas, Arys, and Lenger are identified as the most interesting for tourists (Kuralbayev, 2017).

From a historical and national-ethnographic perspective, a group of authors describe the Kazakh yurt and traditional crafts such as felt production, mat weaving, embroidery, artistic handicrafts, and various ornamental motifs. They examine the current state of cultural heritage in terms of the country's potential and the effectiveness of state programs aimed at preserving historical and cultural heritage (Akimov et al., 2020).

Kazakhstan is home to numerous sacred sites known for their mystical stories and legends, which hold a powerful, almost magical attraction for people. Even when the historical accuracy of these stories is not supported by material evidence, people flock to these places and regard them as holy.

Among such sites are Aulietau Peak and Ulytau (from Kazakh, meaning "Great Mountain" or "Big Mountain"), which, according to legend, is the birthplace of Zoroaster and was used in the Middle Ages as a burial site for Chinggisid khans. These locations are also historically connected to the six Alash tribes, the forebears of the Kazakh people, and have long been places where pivotal decisions for the nation were made.

Not far from Ulytau, on Edige Peak, lie the burial sites of Bi Edige and Toqtamish Khan of the Golden Horde, founders of the Nogai Horde (14th–15th centuries). Historical events from their lives are recounted in many Turkic epics and were first mentioned in the writings of the Arab scholar Ibn Arabshah.

According to legend, Altyn Shoky Mountain ("Golden Peak") is the site where Tamerlane erected a stone monument inscribed with characters made from a meteorite alloy. This artifact is now housed in a museum in Saint Petersburg.

In central Kazakhstan, the Terekti Aulie historical and cultural complex includes rock petroglyphs, Neolithic human settlements, Bronze Age necropolises, and Iron Age burial mounds. This area is of interest both to tourists and to the international scientific community.

According to ancient legends, during the period of the Golden Horde, mausoleums for Bolgan Ana, Zhuban Ana, and Belgen Ana were constructed on the banks of the Sarysu River. These structures are notable for their intricate and unique architecture, with the mausoleum of Zhuban Ana (Zhuhan Aulie) a 11th-century monument holding a special place and venerated by locals as an “aulie mola” (sacred tomb).

Another mysterious figure is Dombayul, in whose honor a mausoleum was erected during the pre-Islamic period of the 8th–9th centuries. Scholars believe that Dombayul is a composite or symbolic character rather than a historical person, although some versions suggest that Dombayul is mentioned in the epic *Oghuz-Name* as a musician.

Also notable are the mausoleums of Jochi Khan (son of Genghis Khan), dating back to the 12th–13th centuries, and Alash Khan (the progenitor of the three zhuzes), constructed in the 10th–11th centuries.

In southern Kazakhstan stands the 12th-century Aisha Bibi Mausoleum, distinguished by its unique architecture and revered by locals as a pilgrimage site for women wishing to have children. Just twenty steps away is the mausoleum of Aisha Bibi’s beloved nurse, Babadzhan Khatun. This mausoleum is notable for its distinctive sixteen-ribbed tent-shaped dome (Uaisova et al., 2020).

On June 27, 2019, Charyn Canyon was included in the list of sacred monuments of Kazakhstan. Six sites in Kazakhstan are included in the UNESCO World Heritage List as cultural heritage (UNESCO, n.d.).

- 1) The Khoja Ahmed Yasawi Mausoleum in Turkestan (2003);
- 2) The Tamgaly Petroglyphs in the Almaty Region (2004);
- 3) The Steppes and Lakes of Sary-Arka (2008);
- 4) The Chang’an–Tian Shan Corridor of the Great Silk Road (2014);
- 5) The Western Tien Shan (2016);
- 6) The Turanian Deserts of the Temperate Zone (2023).

The limited scope of this work does not allow for a detailed presentation of the full range of cultural and historical zones in Kazakhstan. For example, many experts emphasize the enormous resources of this rich country, noting the high potential of its regions for cultural and historical tourism, provided that strategic projects are properly developed.

From the perspective of strategic resources in this area, regions such as Mangystau Province attract significant interest (Kubessova & Tursinbayeva, 2015). For instance, the Northern Ustyurt can be highlighted as an appealing site for educational and exploratory tourism (Ahmedeenova et al., 2020). Northern Ustyurt is one of the country’s remarkable treasures, possessing crucial historical and cultural heritage of nomadic culture. This territory contains several thousand sacred historical, cultural, architectural, and archaeological monuments, impressive not only for their quantity but also for their quality and uniqueness. These include ancient necropolises, settlements, cultural complexes, mausoleums, kulpytas steles, tombstones, and more.

Western Kazakhstan can contribute to the development of cultural and historical tourism in the country, according to the research of T.Z. Rysbekov on the history of the Bukey Horde, the life and activities of Zhangir Khan, and related topics (Rysbekov, 2021).

The Sarayshyk historical and cultural complex in Atyrau Region, opened in 1999 and granted national status in 2018, attracts tremendous educational interest. The site houses approximately 4,000 artifacts from medieval Sarayshyk, and each year the museum welcomes over 15,000 tourists (Mukhtar, 2019).

One of the priority areas of state policy should be the development of projects aimed at ensuring the accessibility of both domestic and international tourism for the population. In Kazakhstan, intensive efforts are underway to create an attractive image of the local tourism environment. Promoting the progressive development of the country’s tourism sector ensures sustainable employment growth, the development of related industries, and the attraction of investment into the domestic economy, thereby increasing the share of the national tourism industry in the international tourism market.

In this context, attention should be given to the proposals of certain experts. In particular, a group of specialists on this issue recommends a cluster approach, which involves the integrated use of the labor market and qualified tourism infrastructure to establish regional industrial centers as a type of cultural-tourism cluster.

Prospective competitiveness creates advantages for the country in the domestic market, shaping national competitiveness. Each competitive firm contributes to improving the quality of services offered by other firms, and this close interconnection is referred to as a cluster.

The main areas of interaction through which cluster advantages are distributed usually involve key sectors such as information exchange, the dissemination of innovations, new opportunities for competition and development, and novel synergies between people and resources. According to the authors, applying a cluster approach in tourism allows enterprises within the cluster to enhance their competitiveness, improve operational efficiency, and stimulate innovation in the development of new tourist offerings.

For Kazakhstan, positioning itself as a tourism hub in the Central Asian region holds strategic importance. In developing a cluster-based method for tourism in Kazakhstan, the authors recommend modeling it on a similar cluster in Japan. They argue that the Japanese cluster is most suitable for Kazakhstan due to similarities in aspects of national mentality. Based on their proposal, six clusters should be identified in Kazakhstan:

- 1) Astana - the Heart of Eurasia;
- 2) Almaty - the Center of the Free Cultural Zone;
- 3) The Treasures of Altai;
- 4) Nomadic Civilization and the Unity of Nature;
- 5) The Great Silk Road;
- 6) The Caspian Gate.

The innovative method proposed in this work for advancing the tourism industry in Kazakhstan, according to the author, could serve as the foundation for a full-scale state project (Dabylytayeve et al., 2019).

The greatest challenge for tourism in Kazakhstan is the population's focus on outbound tourism, not to mention foreign visitors. Within the tourism industry, more than 60 percent is accounted for by outbound tourism, while inbound tourism represents only 6 percent (Kuralbayev, 2017). The first step, therefore, is to capture the interest of the local population before promoting the tourism product to foreign consumers.

The most pressing issue in this sector is poor infrastructure. The development level of the tourism industry largely depends on the conditions the country can offer tourists, which in turn rely on transportation, services, and communication. All these sectors in Kazakhstan's economy are currently in poor condition and cannot adequately satisfy domestic tourists, let alone discerning foreign visitors. Traveling across the country is often fraught with difficulties related to food, lodging, and the lack of basic services such as sanitary facilities, pharmacies, and hotels. Furthermore, travel during the warmer months may be hindered by limited availability or high costs of air and train tickets. It is also worth noting that Soviet-era trains are still in operation in Kazakhstan, offering travel conditions comparable to "extreme" tourism experiences.

Kazakhstan's tourism industry suffers from a shortage of specialized personnel, which results in very low service quality at many historical and cultural sites. Therefore, it is necessary to improve the quality of education in the country so that workforce training meets international standards. Additionally, the sector lacks a comprehensive marketing strategy, and advertising remains the main factor shaping the tourism market as a whole. The absence of information about the country's vast historical and cultural resources leads to the loss of a significant number of potential tourists.

All of the above-mentioned shortcomings in tourism infrastructure explain the stagnation observed in this sector.

In turn, the author believes that, given the vast natural and historical-cultural resources of both countries, attention should be paid to creative methods that could attract foreign tourists. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have the potential to become a focal point of interest as the historical and cultural

center of Central Asia, using the tools offered by today's technological age. The history of both countries could, for instance, serve as the basis for outstanding historical films that draw inbound tourists specifically interested in history and culture similar to how Turkey, Korea, and China promote their tourism products through cinematic adaptations of their histories.

Alternatively, media personalities and popular video bloggers could be engaged to popularize national culture and history on social networks, in short video clips, and other digital formats. Considering the prominence of social media, which plays a central role in promoting any product, including tourism, the author emphasizes the need to focus on the innovative aspect when developing state programs. The world does not stand still, and accordingly, state policy must adapt to today's societal realities. Developing strategies and projects without considering the requirements of the modern consumer cannot achieve their objectives; therefore, developers should integrate innovative methods and creative approaches into the implementation of state programs to meet the expectations of potential tourists.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, it can be concluded that both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan possess significant potential to transform historical and cultural tourism into a strategic resource for the state. Despite certain challenges in this sector, Kyrgyzstan currently outpaces Kazakhstan in tourism development, as the returns from its tourism segment already have a tangible impact on the national economy.

As for Kazakhstan, an analysis of the literature indicates that this type of tourism, and the tourism sector in general, requires systematic development of strategic projects to ensure that the country's enormous tourism potential becomes a major and effective economic sector. Experts in the field are already addressing this issue, as evidenced by numerous studies on the country's historical and cultural zones, challenges in the tourism industry, and proposed solutions to transform tourism into a strategic national resource.

Today, the tourism industry in both countries represents one of the most promising sectors of the national economy, making state policy in tourism a frequent subject of scholarly discussion. Some proposals merit particular attention because they are based on international experience and could serve as essential tools for achieving high levels of tourism development.

According to the author, developers of state tourism programs should consider that the effectiveness of government regulation in this sector directly depends on the methods of implementation. Specifically, attention should be given to the integration of innovative approaches into the execution of state programs, as modern tourist expectations are closely linked to scientific and technological progress. These advances offer new opportunities for promoting goods and services, and the tourism industry must fully leverage the possibilities of the contemporary world to bring its products to the global market.

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