

An Investigation on the Urban Tourism Marketing Potential of Turkestan

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Abstract: Cultural heritage and natural beauties in urban destinations with high touristic infrastructure and superstructure opportunities, with using effective marketing and promotion activities enable them to gain a strong image and competitive advantage in international tourism markets. Turkestan city, located in Kazakhstan, has cultural attractions with its location on the Silk Road route, its declaration as a "spiritual capital" by the Turkic Council, the Khoja Ahmed Yasawi Tomb, which is on the UNESCO World Heritage list, and its historical kurgans. In this context, the urban tourism potential of Turkestan will be evaluated and suggestions for promotion and marketing will be presented. The study is meaningful and important in terms of offering marketing alternatives to future academic studies and sectoral applications.

Key Words: Advantages, Disadvantages, Kurgan, The Khoja Ahmed Yasawi Tomb, The Modern Silk Road Joint Tour Package

1. INTRODUCTION

Figure 1: Central Asia



(Afroghindahood, 2019)

As seen in figure 1, Central Asia is a region consisting of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, far from the sea (Wikimedia Foundation, 2022). Turkish states, realizing the importance of acting jointly right after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, realized the importance of integrating their economies in the fields of culture, education, and tourism, and organized ten summits between 1992 and 2010 called Summit of the Heads of Turkic Speaking States. In 1996, the first decisions in the field of tourism were taken on the fourth summit. The International Organization of Turkic Culture, which was established among the countries participating in the summit in 1993, left its place to the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking Countries in 2011. The projects of the Council named Cultural Capitals of the Turkic World (2012), Turk vision Song Contest (2013), International Turkic World Science and Culture Festival (2014), Orkhon Exchange Program (2014) and Nomadic

Games (2014) were successfully carried out (Çokişler, 2021).

The Modern Silk Road Joint Tour Package and the Turkic World Tourism Capital projects are carried out by the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States in the "tourism field" have been supported by organizations such as UNWTO, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, ICOMOS (the International Council of Monuments and Sites). In the Modern Silk Road Joint Tour Package project, various promotional and marketing activities were carried out in media such as tourism fairs and social media (UNWTO, 2014) in order to increase the awareness of the Silk Road, action plans were prepared for the protection and development of the cultural heritage sites and monuments on the route, studies were carried out for the activation of the air transportation network, In order to increase the attractiveness of the destination, attempts were made to facilitate visas and country entrances, and training programs were organized for the specialization of tour guides (UNWTO, 2016). However, since the desired results could not be achieved until 2018, it was decided to open the Silk Road to tourism with a country-oriented approach instead of the entire route (UNWTO, 2018).

The other project of the Council, the Cultural Capital of the Turkic World, was realized in 2012 with the declaration of the city of Astana in Kazakhstan as the first capital. Since 2012, a different city has been chosen as the Cultural Capital of the Turkic World every year. Since this capital was the center of tourism and cultural activities in that year, it was planned to obtain maximum benefit as a result of the promotion and marketing activities. In this context, in 2017, the city of Turkestan in Kazakhstan was chosen as the Cultural Capital of the Turkic World. The promotion and marketing activities of the city were carried out with the support of the council in 2017 (Çokişler, 2021, p. 128).

Later, Turkestan was declared as the "Spiritual Capital of the Turkic World" at the end of the summit on March 31, 2021. Thus, the main aim is to develop the Turkestan-based tourism and trade network. In other words, it is aimed to make the city of Turkestan a favorite tourism center of Central Asia with the reconstruction and construction works, which are estimated to be 2 billion dollars. As a result, Turkestan, supported by the spiritual identity of the Khoja Ahmed Yasawi tomb, will extend to Uzbekistan and will be the starting point of a promising tourism route (Zorlu, 2021).

Turkestan or formerly Yesi is a city in the southern region of Kazakhstan, close to the Seyhun River. This city, which is famous as the place where Akhmet Yasawi lived, is the center of the province of Kazakhstan, which was called South Kazakhstan until 2018, and is now known as Turkestan. Compared to other cities, Turkestan is a residential area that is not too big, and where the income of the people is based partly on livestock, and agriculture, and partly on the University. In the city, where the main settlement planning was done properly and proportionally during the Soviet period, the absence of high buildings creates an advantage in terms of tourism, while the low asphalt quality of the roads creates an obstacle in terms of touristic transportation. In the city of Turkestan, where a classical continental climate is observed, the winters are not as harsh as in the north, but the summer temperatures are above the country average. In summer, dust storms caused by wind can prevent people from going out. This situation can be considered as an important disadvantage in terms of tourism. In addition, the fact that the water problem experienced in the summer months causes the green areas to be limited is another climatic disadvantage (Wikipedia, 2022).

The most well-known magnificent building in the city is the tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, known as "Kesene" among the people. The Tomb (UNESCO, 2021) was recognized by UNESCO as Kazakhstan's first site of property and was declared a World Heritage Site in 2003. The Tomb, which is around thirty meters in height, is in the form of a giant longitudinal-axial portal-dome structure. The walls of the Tomb are built of baked bricks obtained with high technology. The covering of the northern portal, the carved, fine bone-worked cemetery gate is quite magnificent (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi



(Milošević, 2013)

The cauldron, also known as "Yasawi's Cauldron", where Khoja Ahmed Yasawi cooked food for his students and poor people in the tomb, is the symbol of social unity and hospitality (Figure 3). The cauldron, made of seven metal alloys, has a diameter of 2.45 square meters and weighs 2 tons. The central chamber, where the cauldron is located, is covered with the largest brick dome in Central Asia with a diameter of 18.2 square meters (Tuncer, 1993).

Figure 3: Khoja Ahmed Yasawi's Cauldron



(Yuriy75, 2010)

Kurgan or Korgan is a type of tumulus (burial site) used for tombs, usually made of wood, found in the form of mounds and mounds, especially in Central Asia and Eastern Europe (Figure 4). The past is remembered with old inscriptions, city ruins and miniature sculptures. The most extensive of the monuments of the past on the territory of Kazakhstan are kurgans. The Issyk Kul Kurgan is located 50 kilometers east of Almaty, Kazakhstan, on the banks of the Issyk Kul River. It is located within a 3-kilometer field, which includes 45 large mounds, called Kurgan Issyk Cemetery. The mounds found in this cemetery are generally the mounds where the rulers were buried. More than four thousand works made of gold and precious metals were unearthed in the tomb (Karcioğlu, 2019).

Figure 3: Khoja Ahmed Yasawi's Caudron



(Wikimedia, 2008)

In the study, it is aimed to emphasize the strengths and weaknesses of Turkestan, which is one of the important cities of Kazakhstan, within the framework of urban tourism marketing, and to determine the opportunities it has and the threats it faces. By evaluating the urban tourism plans in Turkestan, in terms of the tourism potential of Turkestan, and various suggestions will be made in terms of contributing to the tourism sector and the development of the city. Turkestan, which has entered an emerging trend in terms of both modernization and urbanization, especially with the influence of Akhmet Yassawi University, the developing economy of Kazakhstan, has a great meaning and importance about the development of urban tourism in the Central Asia.

2. URBAN TOURISM

The globalization and technological development that started at the end of the 1970s removed the geographical borders of the countries and liberalized international trade with foreign investments (Ashworth & Page, 2011) By the 1980s, interactive and interdependent commercial conditions between countries began to prevail in the world. By the 2000s, this global economy caused the industrial sectors to lose their influence in cities and the efficiency of the service sector for regional economies to increase. This situation has caused the service industry, especially tourism, to be perceived as a lifeline, as a result of the decline in industrial production activities in the globalizing world, the search for new sectors due to the emerging competition, and the high unemployment in countries (Bahar & Kozak, 2006). Large urban areas are important key points in the functioning of the overall tourism system, where infrastructure services are provided for tourist destinations (Giritlioğlu & Avcı Kurt, 2010) (Karcioğlu, 2019). Urban tourism, on the other hand, emerged as a different tourism area in the 90s. In this context, urban tourism can be defined in the most general

way as the presence of tourist attractions in a city and a touristic product offered to tourists. On the other hand, expressed urban tourism as a common form of tourism that uses all kinds of attractions and urban life as a touristic product in the city (Suprina, Pradhista, & Pramanik, 2018).

Especially business trips and the desire to know different cultural structures have created a common point between the tourism sector and urban areas. But making cities a tourist attraction takes more effort than other tourist attractions. It is a necessity to support cities with natural or cultural attractions with infrastructure services such as natural, cultural, entertainment, health, and transportation. In this context, İçellioğlu (2014, p. 43) stated that the right management of resources can ensure sustainability in urban tourism, citing the fact that Dubai, which is a small port town, has become an attraction center by creating artificial attractiveness by investing in touristic infrastructure opportunities. Therefore, it should not be overlooked that urban tourism has the potential to trigger regional development with the cooperation of the public, private sector, and local people. Countries should not see tourism as a financial resource they need to solve their problems, they should first solve their problems and be open to social cooperation in order to generate income from tourism.

3. THE URBAN TOURISM MARKETING POTENTIAL OF TURKESTAN AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to its location, Turkestan has air, land and railway transportation connections at national and international level. Hazrat Sultan International Airport in Turkestan starts domestic flights and provides international connections with countries such as Turkey. Nationally, Turkestan has the advantage of national accessibility as a result of the railway connection between Aktobe, Atyrau, Kökşetau, Nur-Sultan, Petropavlovsk. at the international level Countries with a railway network with Turkestan can be listed as follows: Chelyabinsk, Moscow, Saratov and Ufa cities of Russia; It is possible to reach the cities of Tashkent in Uzbekistan and Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan by rail. Bus and taxi services for cities in the south of the country also play an active role in this transport network. There are also bus services from Turkestan to many cities of Uzbekistan. These transportation possibilities show that Turkestan's tourism potential is not a serious problem in road transportation (Zhaylybayev, 2021). However, transportation opportunities need to be supported by

infrastructure projects to improve the quality of urban roads, the development of projects required for rapid transportation in railways, and the increase of international direct flights in airlines.

Being on the silk road route of Turkestan, being declared the spiritual Capital of the Turkic World,, the Khoja Ahmed Yasawi Tomb, which is on the UNESCO World Heritage list, historical kurgans are elements of cultural attractions that should be heavily utilized in international promotion and marketing activities. These cultural attractions are the biggest advantage of the city for the identification of urban tourism with Turkestan and increasing its reputation as a must-see tourist destination in the world. According to İçelloğlu (2014, p. 52) Promotional activities at the international level supported by a symbol, logo, or symbol to be created specific to Turkestan related to these elements will be beneficial.

The entertainment alternatives supported by the "Keruen Saray" entertainment complex, "Golden Samruk Theatre", "Sikirli Keruen Complex", "Showroom Theater" and "Etnoauil", which have just come into service in Turkestan, have filled an important gap in terms of leisure activities of tourists (Zhaylybayev, 2021). Increasing this type of entertainment or cultural and artistic activities will increase the stay of tourists and the amount of spending, thereby increasing the income from tourism. However, the balance of sales prices and service quality in the market should be observed. In this way, the advantage of providing lifetime value from the customer, which is the biggest motto of the information age in the field of marketing, will be obtained. Because the investments made for the sustainability of urban tourism in Turkestan will be wasted unless the tourists feel the desire to revisit the city or share their positive impressions in their social circles. In this context, "word of mouth marketing" opportunity is missed, which is the most effective and cheap marketing alternative of Turkestan.

The opening of chain accommodation establishments such as Rixos Turkestan, Karavansaray Kaganat Hotel, Karavansaray Kaganat Kun Hotel, Hampton by Hilton Turkestan, and Khanaka in the city is a positive development for the touristic image of the city. But this development in touristic infrastructure facilities cannot contribute to local touristic accommodation. Because domestic tourists arriving by road prefer lower priced facilities due to the low average income level of the country. Due to the location of low-priced accommodation businesses far from the center, time constraints and financial difficulties, most

domestic tourists must prefer daily tours in their Turkestan travels. In the tourism incentives to be made, the state can expand the tourist market by supporting investments for potential tourists with low-income levels in places close to the city center.

Turkestan has an important place in the tourism potential of Kazakhstan with its location on the Silk Road route, being declared a "spiritual capital" by the Turkic Council, the Khoja Ahmed Yasawi Tomb, which is on the UNESCO World Heritage list, and its historical kurgans. However, the COVID-19 epidemic in Turkestan has disrupted the tourism sector here as well as all over the world. According to UNWTO data, a total of 103,747 tourists, 102,512 domestic and 1,235 foreign tourists, visited the Turkestan region in 2020. Compared to 2019, it is seen that the number of tourists decreased by 40.5% in 2020 (UNWTO, 2020). In terms of touristic distribution, travel agencies that organize tours to Turkestan offer narrow scope package tour options (Zhaylybayev). However, if they expand the scope of package tours by including accommodation and food and beverage fees, they will expand their market share. Especially in tours organized from Almaty and Shymkent cities to Turkestan, free services only cover travel expenses, guide fee and entrance fees to various historical and cultural structures and facilities. Accommodation and meals are provided by the tourist. This is a big disadvantage in terms of developing the potential market.

3.1. Advantages of Turkestan in Urban Tourism Marketing

The strengths and opportunities of Turkestan in terms of urban tourism potential are as follows:

- Located in the middle of the arid steppes in the southernmost part of Kazakhstan, the city of Turkestan has a great cultural tourism potential with its historical and cultural attractions. Turkestan bears the traces of a 1500-year history under the rule of Turkish, Islamic and Mongolian states (Yalçınkaya, 1994)
- Turkestan is between the Ural River and the Caspian Sea in the west, the Altai Mountain and the Chinese border in the east, the eastern borders of East Turkestan or Kashgar, Iran and Afghanistan in the south, Tobol, and Tomsk provinces (Siberia) in the north.
- Khoja Ahmet Yesevi Tomb, which is on the UNESCO World Heritage list, is in Turkestan City.

- The Silk Road, passing through the territory of Kazakhstan, passes through the cities of Otrar, Sayram, Sıganak, Sayran, Sozak, Taraz, Shymkent and Turkestan.
- It is an important center of Islamic culture and belief in terms of being home to great Islamic thinkers.
- Declaring Turkestan as the Cultural Capital of the Turkic World in 2017 and being the spiritual capital of the Turkic World strengthened its recognition and image.
- Streets and roads in the city, whose plan was drawn in Soviet times, are smoother and more proportional in Turkestan.

3.2. Disadvantages of Turkestan in Urban Tourism Marketing

The weaknesses and threats of Turkestan in terms of urban tourism potential are as follows:

- The potential cannot be adequately evaluated due to the fact that the touristic attractions are far from the settlements and limited accessibility.
- The provision of touristic services by personnel with insufficient education level
- Finding inconsistency between the general level of touristic product prices and the quality of the service offered
- There is no comprehensive official statistical information to guide the tourism investments of Turkestan.
- Sandstorms caused by the winds in the summer months can prevent going out on the streets in the region.
- Renovation of vehicles, roads and train tracks used for land and railway transportation will bring along a great investment cost.
- The education level of the local people is low, during the Soviet Union period, it was one of the regions that were left last in the field of education and health, and in general in the social field.

4. CONCLUSION

Urban tourism, supported by natural and cultural attractions as a result of the rapid spread of tourism, can provide great benefits to the economy in line with sustainable social, economic and environmental goals and the development of infrastructure opportunities. The need to create new economic activities, the perception of tourism as a growth industry, has directed urban areas to tourism development. Major urban areas perform

important functions in the functioning of the overall tourism system. Highlighting the city's strengths and trying to eliminate its weaknesses increases the city's share in the international market in an increasingly competitive environment. For this reason, in the study, in which Marketing Potential of Turkestan was investigated in terms of urban tourism, it was seen that Turkestan has various advantages and opportunities especially historically and culturally, and on the other hand, it has deficiencies in infrastructure, management and planning. Also, the results showed that for the development of urban tourism in Turkestan, the public, private sector, and local people should cooperate. Optimal use of resources, protection of cultural heritage and environmental protection are the main factors for the development of tourism. In addition, not only the project of infrastructure and superstructure activities of tourism stakeholders, but also the whole society should be educated in order to prepare to become a touristic city. Only in this way can geographical and climatic and the other disadvantages be eliminated.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

The study named "An Investigation on the Urban Tourism Marketing Potential of Turkestan" has been prepared in accordance with scientific rules, ethics and citation rules; no falsification has been made on the collected data and this study has not been sent to any other academic publication medium for evaluation. Since this study is based on document analysis, there is no obligation for an ethics committee decision.

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