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RESOURCE POTENTIAL ASSESSMENT FOR THE TOURISM COOPERATION ON BORDER TERRITORY OF ALMATY (KAZAKHSTAN) AND ISSYK-KUL (KYRGYZSTAN) REGIONS

The openness of border areas under the influence of the integration process taking place in the world community as a result of socio-economic transformations in the countries facilitates cooperation in the development of cross-border tourism between neighboring countries. There are great opportunities for the joint development of cross-border tourism between the Almaty region of Kazakhstan and the Issyk-Kul region of the Kyrgyz Republic. This paper aims to investigate the evaluation of the potential of cross-border tourism cooperation between the southern part of Almaty and the northern part of the Issyk-Kul region. The methodological basis of the research presented in this article is comprised of information from periodicals, reference sources and data from the Federal State Statistics Service of relevant countries. The research was carried out using the comparative geographical, cartographic, statistical methods. The results show that there are a lot of tourist facilities near the border between the two regions, roads between the two regions are highly developed, strategic projects for joint tourism development are being implemented between the two regions, both regions have great potential for tourism development, a comparatively large number of tourists flow to these two regions every year, and these two regions have the advantage of geographical location to receive millions of Chinese tourists. From the above results, we easily assess that there is great potential for cooperation in cross-border tourism between the two regions.

Key words: potential, cross-border tourism, cooperation, Almaty, Issyk-Kul region.

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Алматы (Қазақстан) және Ыстықкөл (Қырғызстан) облыстарының шекаралас аумағында туристік ынтымақтастықтың ресурстық әлеуетін бағалау

Мемлекеттердегі әлеуметтік-экономикалық қайта құрулар нәтижесінде әлемдік қоғамдастықта болып жатқан интеграциялық процестің әсерінен шекаралас аймақтардың ашықтығы көрші елдер арасындағы трансшекаралық туризмнің дамуындағы ынтымақтастықты жеңілдетеді. Трансшекаралық туризмді бірлесіп дамытуда Қазақстанның Алматы облысы мен Қырғыз Республикасының Ыстық көл облыстары арасында зор мүмкіншіліктер бар. Бұл мақала Алматының оңтүстік бөлігі мен Ыстықкөл облысының солтүстік бөлігі арасындағы трансшекаралық туристік ынтымақтастықтың әлеуетін бағалауды зерттеуге бағытталған. Осы мақалада келтірілген зерттеудің әдіснамалық негізін мерзімді басылымдар, анықтамалық ақпарат көздері және тиісті елдердің мемлекеттік статистика қызметінің деректері құрайды. Зерттеу салыстырмалы географиялық, картографиялық, статистикалық әдістерді қолдану арқылы жүргізілді. Нәтижелер көрсеткендей, екі аймақ арасындағы шекараның маңында туристік

объектілер көп шоғырланған, көлік жолдары жоғары деңгейде дамыған, бірлескен туризмді дамыту стратегиялық жобалары жүзеге асырылуда, екі аймақта да туризмді дамытудың зор әлеуеті сақталған, салыстырмалы түрде жыл сайын осы екі аймаққа туристердің көп ағымы келеді және осы екі аймақтың миллиондаған Қытайлық туристерді қабылдауға географиялық орналасу артықшылықтары бар. Жоғарыдағы нәтижелерден біз екі аймақ арасында трансшекаралық туризмде ынтымақтастық үшін үлкен әлеует бар деп бағалай аламыз.

Түйін сөздер: әлеуеті, трансшекаралық туризм, ынтымақтастық, Алматы, Ыстықкөл облысы.

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Оценка ресурсного потенциала для туристского сотрудничества на приграничной территории Алматинской (Казахстан) и Иссык-Кульской (Кыргызстан) областей

Открытость приграничных территорий под влиянием интеграционных процессов, происходящих в мировом сообществе в результате социально-экономических преобразований в странах способствует сотрудничеству в развитии трансграничного туризма между соседними странами. Есть большие возможности для совместного развития трансграничного туризма между Алматинской областью Казахстана и Иссык-Кульской областью Кыргызской Республики. В этой статье приводятся результаты исследований оценки потенциала трансграничного туристического сотрудничества между южной частью Алматинской и северной частью Иссык-Кульской областей. Методологической основой исследования, представленного в данной статье, является информация из периодических изданий, справочных источников и данные государственной статистики соответствующих стран. Исследование проводилось с использованием сравнительно-географических, картографических, статистических методов. Результаты показывают, что в районе границы между двумя регионами сосредоточено большое количество туристических объектов, на высоком уровне развиты транспортные пути, реализуются стратегические проекты по развитию совместного туризма, в обоих регионах сохраняется огромный потенциал для развития туризма, ежегодно в эти два региона поступает большой поток туристов, и эти два региона имеют преимущества географического расположения для приема миллионов китайских туристов. Из приведенных выше результатов мы можем оценить, что существует большой потенциал для сотрудничества в трансграничном туризме между двумя регионами.

Ключевые слова: потенциал, приграничный туризм, сотрудничество, Алматы, Иссык-Кульская область.

Introduction

Globalization and regionalization are strong trends for both economic and political development. Nation-states are more cooperative than insular, and once impermeable borders become thinner, which is evident with the foundation of the European Union and signature of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Cross-border systems are characterized by the integrity and mutual influence of two or several autonomous links located on opposite sides of the borders, the intersection of the geopolitical interests of the neighboring states, the asynchrony and asymmetry of changes on opposite sides of the border (Artemenko, 2010).

Historically borders mainly existed as barriers to intrusion and trespassing. They are created between countries for national security and military protection (Prokkola, 2010). However, with the fast development of globalization and regionalization, economic and political cross-border cooperation catches the world's attention (Wang, Dong, & Dong, 2018). Countries try to balance the security and interests of border areas by inheriting legacy, inventing and establishing mechanisms to keep border areas in operation.

Tourism, as a method of development, provides opportunities to develop destinations in places where tourism attractions and resources, and comparative and competitive advantages, exist. Cross-border tourism can be defined as activities in which people travelling across a wide range of places stay

outside their usual environment within a reasonable period of time (Tobora, 2014). Cross-border cooperation in tourism is understood as a tool to increase regional competitiveness, sustainability and stability, strengthen regional identity and promote the emergence of functional and imaginative regions (Prokkola, 2008). Cross-border areas can benefit from cooperation – cooperation helps to create greater diversity and differentiation of the range of tourism and environmental products; creating economies of scale and making the promotion more effective, as well as helping to solve specific problems or issues in tourism (Livandovschi, 2017). In addition, both cross-border areas share common historical, cultural values & each represents, to the other one, a potential tourists & visitors demand to foster a sustainable development. The role of tourism as a tool of cross-border cooperation and regional development has been continuously strengthening within the border-sharing regions or countries (Bujdosó et al., 2015). Nowadays, the role of natural resources, lakes, rivers, forests and mountains in cross border tourism development is increasing. From this point of view, it is very interesting how attractive the border areas of the country are as a tourist destination for citizens of neighboring countries, or what the proportion of border regions in the inbound tourist flow from these countries is (Stepanova, 2014). Cross-border tourism cooperation helps to reduce the negative effects of state borders and the periphery of border areas, improve the socio-economic status of the local people. And It is important to study the cross-border area to identify the prerequisites for the development of tourism cooperation (Dunets, Ivanova, & Poltarykhin, 2019).

Study area overview

The Southern part of the Almaty region: Kazakhstan is divided into 14 regions and 4 independent cities. Almaty is the name of the largest republican city in Kazakhstan and the name of one region. Therefore, in our research article, the Southern Almaty region includes the City Almaty and some areas of the Almaty region near the border of China's Yili region and Kyrgyz Republic's Issyk-Kul region. The Southern part of the Almaty region surrounds the city of Almaty and encompasses some areas near the border of Yili region of the People's Republic of China. At the same time it includes the northern part of the Tien Shan Mountain's Trans-Ili Alatau branch, which originates in China, divides Almaty Region and Kyrgyzstan, and its southern border extends to the northern regions of Kyrgyzstan. Almaty city and Region is located in the southeast of Kazakhstan. Almaty city is a population center for the country and the most popular destination for foreign tourists, especially those who want to trek in the Tian Shan mountains. Almaty is also home to the principal border crossings into and out of China's Xinjiang province and Kyrgyzstan's Issyk-Kul region and still the major commercial and cultural centre of Kazakhstan. The city is located in the mountainous area of southern Kazakhstan near the border with Kyrgyzstan in the foothills of the Trans-Ili Alatau at an elevation of 700–900 m (2,300–3,000 feet), where several big and small rivers run into the plain. The city has been part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in the area of music since November 2017 (www.vietnamgolf.com.au)

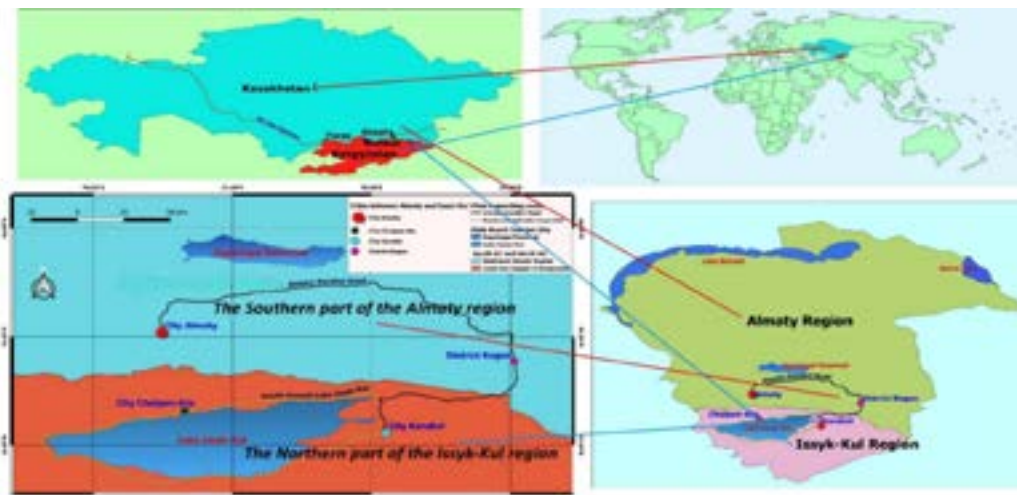


Figure 1 – The Southern part of the Almaty region and Northern part of the Issyk-Kul region. © Imanaly Akbar

The Northern part of the Issyk-Kul region: Kyrgyzstan is divided into seven administrative regions: Batken, Jalalabat, Issykkul, Naryn, Osh, Talas and Chui. The capital of Kyrgyzstan is Bishkek, which is situated at the northern end of the Ala-Too Range, in the middle of the Chui Valley, at a height of 700 – 900 meters above sea level. Issyk-Kul is one of the regions and the name of the lake in Kyrgyzstan. The administrative center of the Issyk-Kul region is Karakol. It is surrounded by Almaty Region of Kazakhstan (north), Chuy Region (west), Naryn Region (southwest) and Xinjiang province of China (southeast). The region is centered around the massive Issyk Kul lake, which is the second largest alpine lake in the world and does not freeze even in the most severe winters (Palmer, 2006). It is completely ringed by the massive snow-capped Tian Shan mountains that lie between 3000 and 4000 meters. On both sides the lake is surrounded by mountain ranges: Terskey Ala-Too on the south side and Kungey Ala-Too on the north. The ridge Terskey Ala-Too is popular among tourists with its trekking routes. City Karakol is the fourth largest city in Kyrgyzstan, near the eastern side of Lake Issyk-Kul in Kyrgyzstan, about 150 kilometers (93 mi) from the Kyrgyzstan–China border and 380 kilometers (240 mi) from the capital Bishkek. Karakol is one of Kyrgyzstan’s major tourist destinations, serving as a good starting point for the excellent hiking, trekking, skiing and mountaineering in the high central [Tian-Shan](#) to the south and east. Also this city is culturally rich by different ethnic groups that live here such as Dungan, Uighur, Kalmak, Uzbek, Russians and of course Kyrgyz. The city offers a great opportunity to discover other nationalities and cultures within the city.

Material and methods

The main idea of this research was born during a week-long photography and mapping of the popular tourist attractions of the Almaty region of Kazakhstan and the Issyk-Kul region of Kyrgyzstan in the autumn of the 2018 and 2019 years respectively (see: Figure 2). And this paper was written after filtering, analyzing and discussing the materials collected so far.

In this article, we will assess resource potential for the tourism cooperation on border territory of Almaty and Issyk-Kul regions. When we evaluate the potentials for cross-border tourism cooperation, the following indicators are analyzed. They are the main Tourist Attractions on the border areas be-

tween Almaty and Issyk-Kul Regions, Transportation Conditions between the Almaty and Issyk-Kul Regions, Tourism Cooperation Initiatives between the Almaty and Issyk-Kul Regions, Tourism development potentials in the Regions of Almaty and Issyk-Kul, Comparison of the Most Visited Countries to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and Location Advantages of the Almaty and Issyk-Kul Regions for Chinese potential tourists.

The methodological basis of the research presented in this article is comprised from information from periodicals, reference sources and data from the stat.gov of the Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Ili regions of China for 2011-2018. The research was carried out mainly using the methods of descriptive, content analysis of documents. At the same time comparative, geographical, cartographic methods were also used. Spatial maps were created using the QGIS Desktop 3.14.1 with GRASS 7.8.3.

During assessing the resource potentials for the tourism cooperation on border territory of the selected research areas, a number of online databases were reviewed. The review of documents included all general reports, mission reports and periodic reports produced in recent years as well as some documents dating further back. News and articles related to the topic of “cross-border tourism” were also selected by using GOOGLE CHROME BROWSER.

Results and discussion

The border areas of the two regions are home to many internationally popular tourist attractions

The main tourist attractions on the Kazakhstan side: Although Kazakhstan is one of the 10 largest countries in the world, it’s still a destination that many travelers haven’t put on their bucket list. There are many hidden treasures in the country that will leave you in awe, whether it’s because of their beauty or their weirdness. Here are the best cities to go to, the most beautiful landscapes to see, the best national parks to hike in and the most remarkable cultural and historical sites worth visiting (Cynthia, 2019). However, the city of Almaty and areas of the Almaty region are the most visited places in the country. Almaty is very often the first city where travelers arrive and the majority of them don’t go beyond this part of the country, because Almaty is not only a popular destination for nature-based and cultural tourism but also it is attractive with its mild climate and convenient transportation. Thus, More than half (56.7%) travel agencies are concentrated in Almaty (www.stat.gov.kz).

Figure 2 – Field research work in the Almaty region and the Issyk-Kul region in 2018 and 2019



The natural diversity of the Almaty region is amazing – from arid deserts and scenic canyons to lush valleys, snowcapped mountains, beautiful glaciers, and turquoise lakes. There are many beautiful and coolest places to visit near Almaty and in the Southeast of Kazakhstan. The most visited beautiful places in the south Almaty district near the Kyrgyzstan border are as follows: City Almaty; Ile-Alatau National Park; Big Almaty Lake; Esik Lake; Turgen Gorge; Sharyn Canyon; Altyn-Emel National Park; Kolsai Lakes; Lake Kaindy; The sacred sanctuary of Tamgaly-Tas. The above-listed attractions are shown on Figure 3.

The main tourist attractions on the Kyrgyzstan side: Kyrgyzstan is surprisingly astonishing with its extremely hospitable culture and holders of one of the most strong nomadic traditions yet existent. Kyrgyzstan is a pristine mountainous country that will charm hikers and nature lovers from all over the world. It's defined by the beautiful Tien Shan mountain range which occupies 90% of the country, lush valleys and thousands of crystal-clear alpine lakes (Cynthia, 2020).

The mountainous region of the Tian Shan covers over 80% of the country (Kyrgyzstan is occasionally referred to as “the Switzerland of Central Asia”, as a result), with the remainder made up of valleys and basins. Especially, the north Kyrgyzstan regions have many natural beauties. Most of the country's popular ecotourism destinations are located in the northern border region of Kyrgyzstan. Issyk-Kul is gaining more and more popularity every year, attracting tourists not only with stunning nature, but also with wonderful service combined with very attractive prices (www.skyway.kz). The tourism industry is an important sector of the economy and a significant factor in the socio-economic development of the Issyk-Kul region and the country as a whole (Kozhokulov et al., 2019). Top Tourist Attractions in Issyk-Kul region of Kyrgyzstan are as follows: City Karakol; Chon-Kemin National Park; Issyk Kul Lake; Cholpon-Ata City; Jeti-Oguz resort; Ala Kul lake; Altyn Arashan; Fairytale Canyon (Skazka). The above-listed attractions are shown on Figure 2.

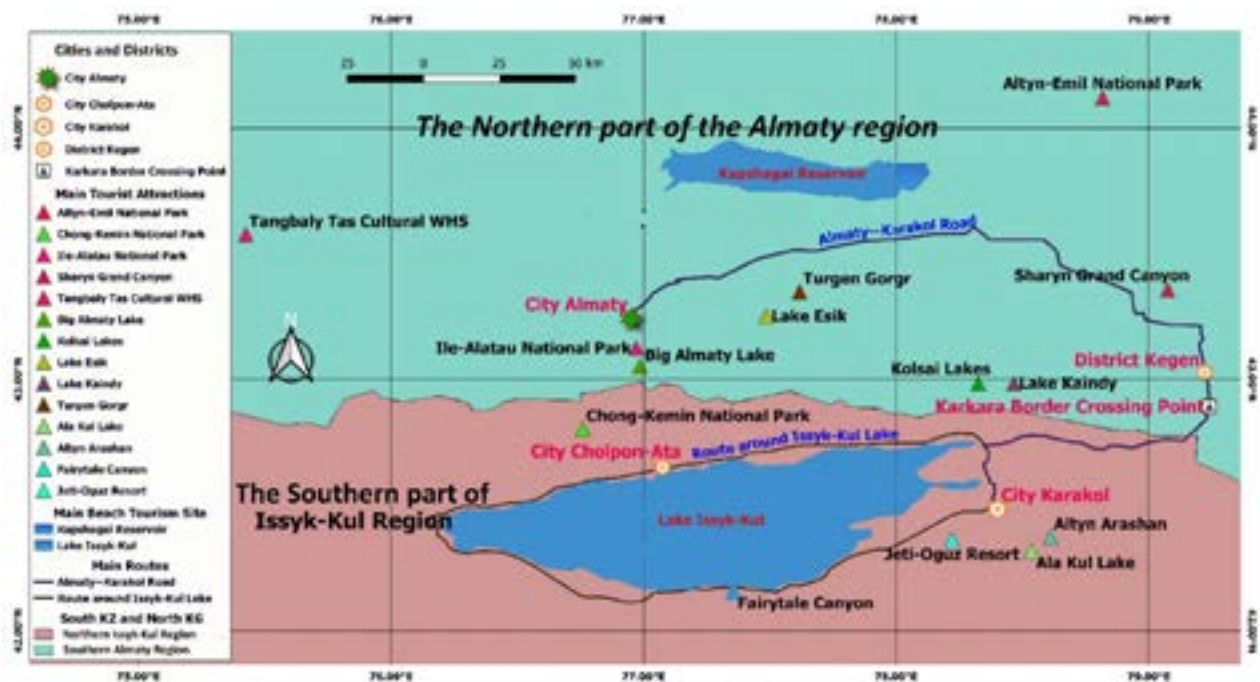


Figure 3 – The main tourist attractions in the Southern Almaty region and Northern Issyk-Kul region. © Imanaly Akbar

Transportation between the two regions are well developed

The Kazakhstan–Kyrgyzstan border is 1,212 km (753 mi) and runs from the tripoint with Uzbekistan to the tripoint with China. The border between the Almaty region and the Issyk-Kul region occupies about half of total borderlines, and Almaty (Kazakhstan’s largest city and former capital) is situated just 29 km (18.4m) to the north of Kyrgyzstan. Almaty and Issyk-Kul regions are located on both sides of the Trans-Ili Alatau. Due to the fact that the direct boundaries are four thousand meters high peaks covered with snow and ice throughout the year, the main transportation between the two regions is carried out only in two directions by car: The road that directly connects the main cities of the two regions is the Almaty-Karkara Valley Border Crossing Point (Kegen—Tup-Kensu)Karakol highway.

The second main road is the Almaty-Kordai-Bishkek-Cholpon-Ata-Karakol highway. It is a safer and international quality road, but it is a long way to pass through the other two regions. Karkara Valley Border Crossing Point is a scenic crossing, the Karkara valley is a good way to go from Almaty to Karakol, with attractions like Sharyn Canyon and Kolsai Lakes on the way. Although Karkara is the only border crossing point between the Almaty re-

gion and the Issyk-Kul region, it opens only in summer. In winter, people from the Almaty region can go to the Issyk-Kul region through the Korday border crossing point (seen in Figure 4).

New routes connecting Kyrgyzstan’s resort region with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are boosting regional tourism. In terms of other transportation types, On July 1st. 2019, charter flights began operating every Monday and Friday from Almaty, Kazakhstan, to Issyk-Kul International Airport, which is situated 35km away from the resort city of Cholpon-Ata. Now, only a 40-minute flight separates Almaty residents from a vacation at the mountain lake (Ashimov, 2019).

The two regions have established an effective policy for the joint development of tourism

The border cooperation between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan has constructive potential, influencing the prospect of regional processes in Central Asia (Amrebayev, 2020). Cross-border cooperation between the two regions started in 1992, when Diplomatic relations between the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Kazakhstan were established. Over the years of independence, more than 120 Kyrgyz-Kazakh interstate, intergovernmental and interdepartmental agreements have been signed, one of the most significant of which is the signed Road Map on bilateral economic cooperation by the First Deputy

Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan Askar Mamin and the Deputy Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic Tokmunkbek Abdygulov on December 2, 2017. The road map contains 50 measures on the complex solution of topical issues of bilateral cooperation, cooperation in the field of border, transport, sanitary and veterinary control, customs and tax administration (www.government.kz). The two states have the same or close positions on a wide range of international policy issues. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are closely cooperating in the framework of the UN, OSCE, CIS, CSTO, EAEU and SCO (www.mfa.gov.kg).

So far, a considerable emphasis placed on cross-border cooperation between the Almaty-Bishkek, and the two cities has manifested themselves in a series of partnership agreements and contracts. On the Third Almaty-Bishkek Economic Corridor Subcommittee Meeting of March 2019, Asian Development Bank (ADB) Regional Cooperation and Operations Coordination Division (CWRC) Director Safdar Parvez and Kyrgyz Republic Resident Mission Country Director Candice McDeigan facilitated the discussions and agreements toward establishing modern agricultural wholesale markets, developing a regional mountain tourism cluster, and facilitating efficient border crossings in the economic corridor (www.carecprogram.org). In 2011, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) provided parallel co-financing for the Almaty-Bishkek road rehabilitation project to restore the 245 km area between Almaty and Bishkek highway (Asian Development Bank, 2009). The regional road rehabilitation project between the Almaty and Bishkek will give an additional impetus to the development of the economies, services sectors and tourism industries of the border territories and facilitate the development of these regions on the whole. Almaty-Bishkek Economic Corridor Tourism Master Plan was created by Asian Development Bank in December 2019. In Central West Asia, the area between Almaty in Kazakhstan and Bishkek in the Kyrgyz Republic is home to exceptional heritage and a wealth of cultural and natural assets. The tourism potential is immense, but remains largely untapped. This tourism master plan provides a framework for developing the Almaty-Bishkek Economic Corridor (ABEC) into an international-quality destination. It identifies key investment priorities such as developing ski resorts along the mountain range between Almaty and Issyk-Kul and linking these winter sport facilities with summer tourism opportunities. It also proposes transport infrastructure improvements, including enhancing Almaty International Airport as the major gateway to the region (Asian Development Bank, 2019).

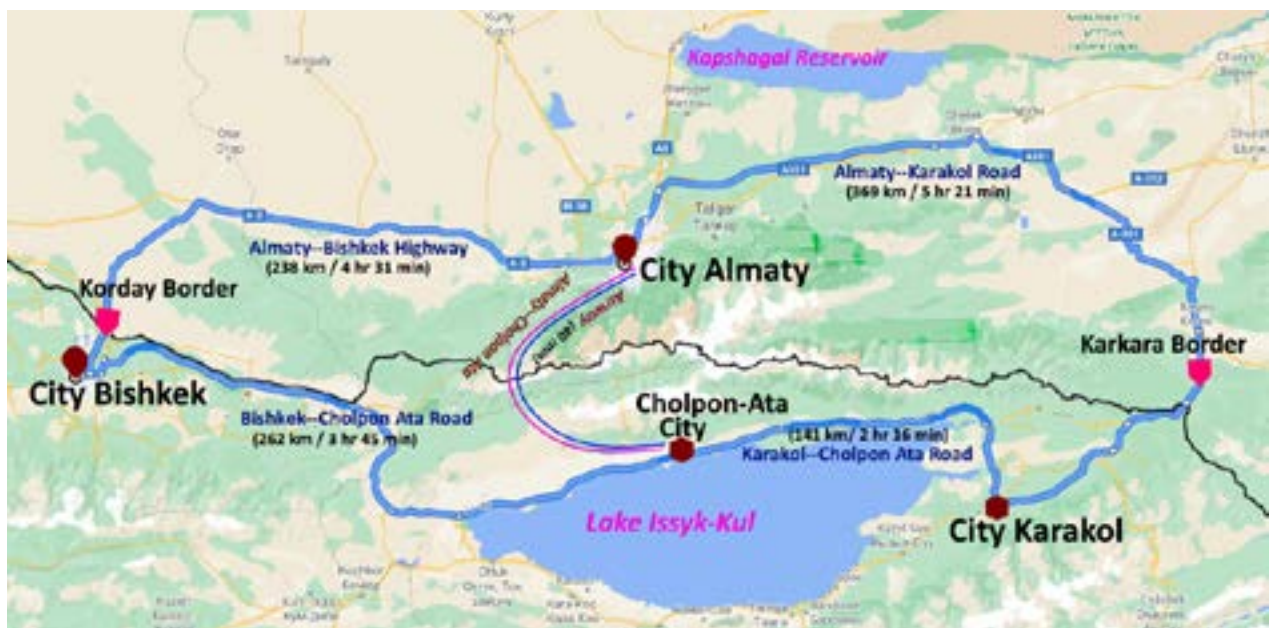


Figure 4 – The transportation connection between the Almaty region and the Issyk-Kul region. © Imanaly Akbar

Both Almaty and Issyk-Kul regions have a greater potentials in the development of tourism

Tourism development potentials in the Almaty region: Nestled between Europe and Asia, Almaty is Kazakhstan's largest city that is both literally and culturally rich. Almaty is the 5th largest region of Kazakhstan and its administrative center is Taldykorgan city. The population of the Almaty region is 3,893,590 inhabitants and 47.6 % of them living in the Almaty city (www.stat.gov.kz). City Almaty first came to global prominence as one of the many stops on the Silk Road, as merchants crossed countries and continents to trade. Almaty is known as the "Golden Triangle" in Kazakhstan for its trio of major natural attractions – the Kolsai Lakes, Sharyn Canyon and Altyn-Emel National Park. Located near the massive Tian Shan Mountain range, Almaty is described as a "majestic city full of surprises, from charming scenic views to luxury shopping experiences." Almaty is the cultural capital and largest metropolitan area in Kazakhstan. Nestled cozily between mountains, the "city of gardens" attracts plenty of travelers from all over the world (www.euronews.com). To attract foreign tourists, in 2018, 72-hour visa-free transit was introduced for citizens of the People's Republic of China and India, traveling through the cities of Almaty and Nur-Sultan (Bisakayev, 2019).

Tourism potential in Almaty continues to attract travelers from around the world. More than one million visitors visited the region every year. One of the most attractive tourist destinations is the mountains, which is visited by nearly 500,000 tourists every year. Experts forecasted that the number of visitors would increase to 2.5 million in five years. Government of Kazakhstan has set the task to increase the tourist numbers under its state program for tourism industry development by 2025. Mountain trails that are popular among tourists are being improved. Signs, information stands, arbors and benches are installed along the tracks. Recently, the country has opened its first mountain tourism development project office in Almaty. "The task of the project office is to create a team that is responsible for the introduction and implementation of all the regulations of the state program in this area. The goal is looked at from the point of view of investment attractions, public-private partnership projects and creation of a base to form personnel in tourism as well as standards and service quality in the industry," said Deputy Chairperson of Kazakh Tourism National Company, Timur Duisengaliyev. The project office is also responsible for the simplification of visa issuance to foreign tourists as well as the reduction of time

for the approval of visa. It also provides support and assistance to the implementation of tourism-related projects as well as searching and attracting investors (www.kazakh-tv.kz).

Tourism development potentials in the Issyk-Kul region: Boardinghouses, sanatoriums, children's health camps, vacation houses, sports bases and touristic bases are the significant places in development of tourism in Issyk-Kul region, in perspective we can find holiday inns, motels and campsites there. It should be supposed that technology of using touristic zones in rural territories – creating a fund of touristic lands, which have comfortable recreational conditions and large spectrum of high quality resources as natural and cultural-historical; organization of servicing enterprises, accomplishing usage of lands for the purposes of relaxation and tourism. Functional parks organized in rural territories must express existing touristic needs (Balabanov & Balabanov, 2003). The territory of Issyk-Kul region has great natural resources – minerals, water, stern, forest, recreational zones where agriculture is widely developed. Original combination of natural recourse potential of mountains, marine climate, unique nonfreezing basin, landscape's extraordinary diversity, health resort's and sanatoria presence make favorable ecological conditions for organization labor, mode and relaxation (Bekboeva, 2015). Tourism industry know-how and global best practices will be applied to develop a long-term development strategy for Issyk-Kul. International experts estimate that tourism has the potential to grow six-fold in the Kyrgyz Republic, especially around the Issyk-Kul Lake region (www.worldbank.org).

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have the largest number of visitors to each other

The development of domestic and inbound tourism is one of the priorities of state policy of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Both nations are actively working to shape the image and attractiveness of the local tourist environment.






















































The statistics take into account the total number of visitors, including travelers for business purposes, for seeing friends and relatives, as well as for leisure. If we look at the statistics of visitors to Kazakhstan for the recent 4 years (from 2014 to 2017), Most visitors to Kazakhstan territory are from central Asian countries. Uzbekistan is located in the first place, with 3,344,577 visitors in 2017. Then Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Azerbaijan. They are included in the top five places by the order. In terms of the number of visitors from Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan, it is the third most visited country. In the previous two years (2014 and 2015) the number

of visitors was high, accounting for about 20% of the total visitors. However, in the last two years (2016 and 2017) there has been a decline (Table 1).

If we compare the most visited countries in the Kyrgyz Republic, we can see that Kazakhstan is travel to Kyrgyzstan the most, accounting for above 50% of the total visitors. Although the number of Kazakh visitors to Kyrgyzstan has increased in

2017 compared to the previous year, in general it has decreased over the 4 years period, the number of Kazakh visitors decreased from 1,998,500 people in 2014 to 1,833,900 people in 2017 (Table 1). According to the Table 1, the total number of visitors to Kyrgyzstan decreased in 2016. This may be due to the political and economic instability in Kyrgyz Republic in recent years.

Table 1 – The most visited countries to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan from 2014 to 2017

Kazakhstan (All visitors)	 2017 (7,701,000)	 2016 (6,509,000)	 2015 (6,430,000)	2014 (6,333,000)
 Uzbekistan	 3,344,577	 2,459,757	 2,297,180	2,107,177
 Russia	 1,708,873	 1,587,409	 1,646,568	1,757,721
 Kyrgyzstan	 1,273,378	 1,348,709	 1,359,625	1,308,139
 Tajikistan	 383,368	 207,009	 158,507	137,443
 Azerbaijan	 110,810	 94,846	 89,296	83,174
The total number	 6,821,006	 5,697,730	 5,551,176	 5,393,654
Kyrgyz Republic (All visitors)	 2017 (3,219,700)	 2016 (2,930,200)	 2015 (3,050,600)	2014 (2,849,400)
 Kazakhstan	 1,833,900	 1,787,100	 1,989,200	1,998,500
 Russia	 471,400	 431,000	 528,700	447,700
 Tajikistan	 250,900	 169,500	 117,600	79,300
 Uzbekistan	 479,600	 150,700	 60,900	125,900
 Ukraine	 8,200	 141,300	 133,600	5,800
The total number	 3,044,000	 2,679,600	 2,830,000	2,657,200

Data sources: “stat.gov.kz” and “stat.gov.kg”

Most of the people from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Azerbaijan come to Kazakhstan for the purposes of looking for a well-paid job, whereas the majority of Russian visitors come for business purposes, for seeing friends and relatives, as well as for leisure. In Kyrgyzstan case, most of the people from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan come to Kyrgyzstan

for the purposes of looking for a job, whereas nearly all of Kazakhstan, Russian and Ukraine visitors come for leisure, for business purposes, for seeing friends, as well as for seeing relatives.

If we take the most visited places between two countries into account, there is no doubt that the vast majority of visitors from Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan

come to Almaty. Those traveling from Kazakhstan to Kyrgyzstan can go on vacation to Issyk-Kul or on a business trip to Bishkek. According to the plenipotentiary's office, in 2019, the Issyk-Kul region was visited by 1,200,000 tourists, about 212,000 of them were foreign tourists. This is about a third of the total number of visitors to Kyrgyzstan. As can be seen from the statistics in the table 1, more than half of Kyrgyzstan's visitors are still Kazakhs, and of course a large number of Kazakh tourists go on holiday to Issyk-Kul region, as access between the densely populated Almaty region and Issyk-Kul has improved. Easier transportation to the lake has helped boost tourism.

Both Almaty and Issyk-Kul regions have location advantages for Chinese potential tourists

The northwest side of Ili in China's western Xinjiang province shares borders with Kazakhstan's Almaty region, and the Issyk-Kul region of Kyrgyzstan is the southeast neighbor of the Almaty

region. There is a direct road from Khorgos Crossing Point to the city Almaty and Karakol city of the Issyk-Kul region (Figure 5.). This shows that tourists from China have the opportunity to visit the natural and cultural sights of Almaty and Issyk-Kul regions on a single trip. At 280,000 square kilometers (108,108 square miles), Ili has no shortage of natural wonders. In fact, it contains some of the most stunning beauty in all of Xinjiang (Deason, 2019). The Nalati Grassland in district Kunes, worthy of a one to two day excursion, offers a peek into nomadic Kazakh life. Whether you call it "Yili", "Ili", "Yining" or even the historical name "Ghulja", one thing is for sure: it's definitely worth traveling to this unique part of Xinjiang, China. Most people tend to focus most of their attention on places like Turpan or Kashgar, but they fail to realize that there is just as much ethnic diversity and history in a lesser-known place like Yili (Summers, 2016).

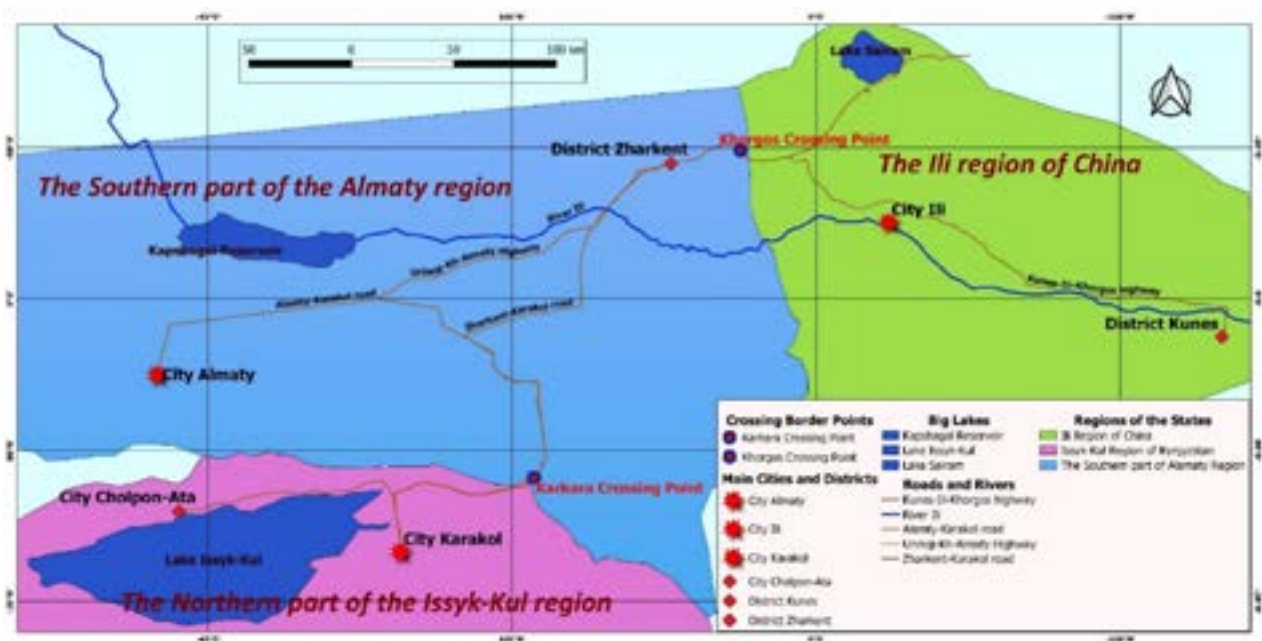


Figure 5 – The main tourist attractions in the Southern Almaty region and Northern Issyk-Kul region. © Imanaly Akbar

According to the Figure 4, the highway from Urumqi, a strategically large city in western China, will continue to the Kazakh-Chinese Khorgos crossing point. The large number of tourists coming to Ili region from the southern coast of China can be divided from Khorgos into three routes: Khorgos-Kunes direction, Khorgos-Almaty direction and Khorgos-Karakol direction. This means that the development of cross-border

tourism between Almaty and the Issyk-Kul region will open the way to enter the Chinese tourism market.

Millions of tourists from the southern regions of China visit the Ili region, which covers the eastern part of the Tianshan Mountains, the most picturesque region in the western part of China. Tourists are fascinated by the beautiful nature of the Ili and the Kazakh people's nomadic culture.

Table 2 – The number of visitors to the Ili region in China's Xinjiang province from 2011 to 2018

Year	The number of visitors	Year	The number of visitors
2011	7,917,000	2015	14,063,000
2012	9,800,000	2016	22,345,100
2013	6,600,000	2017	29,056,400
2014	7,606,000	2018	41,180,700

Data source: Statistical Bulletin on National Economic and Social Development of Yili Prefecture.

Table 2 shows that, excluding 2013 and 2014, the number of visitors to the Ili region of China is growing every year. By 2018, it had reached 41,180,700 people. This is about twice the total population of the Kazakh-Kyrgyz two countries. This means that if the Almaty and Issyk-Kul regions take effective measures to develop cross-border tourism with the Ili region, the two regions will have a large tourism market in the future.

Conclusion

The competitiveness of border regions is generally lower than that of a country's interior regions. Typically being areas that mark the end of one entity and the beginning of another, border regions demonstrate weaker economic performance (Vodeb, 2010). One of the top priority directions of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz economy is the development of the inbound tourism with emphasis on the creation of tourism clusters. Cross-border tourism cooperation between neighboring countries plays an important role in the development of inbound tourism. The

southern regions of Kazakhstan have a large number of tourist attractions, and there is a great potential for the development of cross-border tourism with China, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. In this article, we assessed the potentials for cross-border tourism cooperation between the southern part of the Almaty region of Kazakhstan and the northern part of the Issyk-Kul region of Kyrgyzstan.

According to the content discussed in the article, the most popular tourist destinations of the Almaty region are located in the border areas with Kyrgyzstan. And the main tourist destinations of the world-famous lake Issyk-Kul and some other popular tourist attractions of the Issyk-Kul region are located in the northern part of the Issyk-Kul region. This is one of the primary potentials for cross-border tourism cooperation between the two regions. The high level of development of transport links between the two regions and the various strategic partnerships for the joint development of tourism between the two regions is another guarantee of implementation of the cross-border tourism cooperation in the border areas of the two regions. In the discussion of this article, it can be easily seen that the tourism development potential of Almaty and Issyk-Kul region is great, and most passengers between the two countries choose these two regions. This is clearly one of the main potentials for cross-border tourism development cooperation between the two regions. One of the possible conditions for cooperation in the development of cross-border tourism between the two regions is the favorable geographical location of the two regions for Chinese tourists, which provides opportunities for the joint reception of tourists from the large tourist market. Based on the results of the above analysis, we can say that there is a great potential for cooperation in the development of cross-border tourism between the two regions.

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