

# Assessment of the Attractiveness of Sacred Tourism

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**Abstract:** The article presents the experience of scoring sacred objects, the most promising for the purposes of development of sacred tourism in the territory of Almaty region of Kazakhstan. These objects were the object of research, and the subject was the methodology of integrated assessment of these objects in order to determine the most priority and promising centers of sacred tourism in the studied territory. The research purpose is to determine the tourist attractiveness of sacred objects of Almaty region. The level of tourist attractiveness of sacred objects of Almaty region was assessed using the method of expert assessments. The tourist attractiveness of the studied objects was estimated in points by 3 groups (suitability, accessibility, significance) and by 6 indicators. 14 most attractive sacred objects for tourists of Almaty region were allocated. The obtained results allow the parties interested in the development of sacred tourism to concentrate their efforts on developing the most attractive sacred objects for tourists.

**Keywords:** Tourism, sacred tourism, attractiveness of sacred tourism objects, tourist infrastructure, Almaty region.

## INTRODUCTION

In the course of field research, sacred objects of the Almaty region of Kazakhstan, which may be of interest to tourists were studied. The article presents the experience of scoring sacred objects of the Almaty region of Kazakhstan, the most promising for the purposes of development of sacred tourism. Tourist attractiveness of the studied objects was evaluated in points for 3 groups (suitability, accessibility, significance) and 6 indicators. So 14 most attractive sacred objects of Almaty region for tourists were highlighted. The obtained results allow the parties interested in the development of sacred tourism to concentrate their efforts on developing the most attractive sacred objects for tourists.

Assessing the current state of the tourism industry in Kazakhstan, it is necessary to note the main trends in its development. Tourism in Kazakhstan is recognized as a promising direction for the development of the non-resource sector of the economy and is included in the number of seven national priority clusters.

The study of sacred places in the context of development of tourism is typical for many countries of the world, which indicates some commonality of trends taking place in the modern world. In Kazakhstan, the appeal to this issue was caused by real processes that are characteristic of the spiritual culture of recent years.

The need to develop sacred tourism in Kazakhstan is due to its rich potential and focus on solving a number of cultural and spiritual problems, primarily related to the provision of intangible benefits, the formation and maintenance of the cultural level of the population.

The cultural and historical space of Kazakhstan is saturated with various historical and cultural objects: monuments of history, culture, architecture, including museums, theaters, exhibition centers, parks, protected areas and so on. The natural tourist space is preserved almost in its original form and attracts tourists with its rich natural tourist resources, which make it possible to engage in active sports, contact with untouched nature and unchanged natural landscapes.

As you know, thanks to the development of sacred tourism, many countries have created image tourism products that have the certain place in the international market of tourism services.

The study of sacred places in the context of tourism development is characteristic of many countries of the world, which shows the actualization in this direction of events taking place in the modern world.

In Kazakhstan, the raised problem of the sacredness of natural and cultural heritage was mainly caused by those processes that characterize the spiritual culture of the last years of our country (Ussubaliyeva *et al.*, 2018; Adedeji, 2018). For example, in a programmatic article by the Head of State N. Nazarbayev "Orientation: the spiritual revival of the future. A look into the future: modernization of public consciousness" reflects the possibility of the spiritual

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development of the people within the framework of an established cultural environment.

In general, the territory of Kazakhstan is rich in a variety of objects related to the category of sacral (sacred), especially revered, which are of great value. It is important to note that the sacred heritage is the most important resource for the development of tourism, which is one of the priorities for the development of modern society.

Today, sacred tourism in Kazakhstan is one of the new directions of the tourism industry, which studies the historical and geographical knowledge of the especially revered and sacred objects of natural, cultural and historical heritage. In sacred tourism, acquaintance with various types of objects, their location, history of origin, modern traditions associated with these objects, their significance in the life of the people and much more.

The territory of Kazakhstan is rich in a variety of objects, which, one way or another, are related to the category of sacred, i.e. especially revered places, which have great value in the individual and collective conscious and unconscious relation of peoples. To date, there are 731 sacred objects in Kazakhstan, and 79 sacred objects in Almaty region (Sacred places of Almaty region, 2019).

Sacred objects in accordance with the state project "Sacred Geography of Kazakhstan" are conditionally divided into six blocks: especially revered natural heritage monuments (cultural landscape), archaeological and architectural monuments, large medieval city centers and capitals of the Kazakh Khanate, religious and hieratic objects - places of worship, sacred places associated with historical figures, and sacred places associated with historical and political events (Sacred places of Almaty region, 2019). The creation of the cultural and geographical belt of the sanctuary of Kazakhstan pursues many global goals, one of which is the revival of spiritual values, knowledge of the history of their homeland.

Objects with a special sacred meaning attract the attention of people living in distant places, in other cities and countries, people with other cultural and historical traditions. This phenomenon has long generated streams of travelers who make contributions to the budget of the state, on the territory of which the sacred objects are located.

The key link in the image of the country in general is its tourist attraction. It immanently suggests a number of components that determine the high competitiveness of a region (for example, a high level of security, service, developed infrastructure, prominently expressed cultural heritage, etc.).

Kazakhstan, including the Almaty region, has significant potential for the development of sacred tourism. The main negative factor today is the insufficient level of its tourist attractiveness, based on the unformed tourist infrastructure.

Currently, there is a large layer of educational literature on tourism, but some publications do not pay enough attention to studying the attractiveness of objects of sacred tourism. Little attention is paid to assessing the attractiveness of objects of sacred tourism.

Solving these problems requires the necessary scientific researches, which emphasizes the relevance of this scientific research.

The methodological basis of assessing the attractiveness of tourist objects was laid in the last century. Many domestic and foreign scientists have contributed to the development of this area. They studied the methodology and methods of assessing the attractiveness of tourist objects. As tourism began to develop in the country, methods of assessing attractiveness improved and the scope of their application expanded. Analyzing the methodology for assessing the attractiveness of tourist objects, we found that different authors propose different methods, types and approaches for assessing the attractiveness of tourist objects. The assessment of the attractiveness of tourist objects was developed in the scientific researches of Afanasyev O.E. (Afanasyev, 2018), Ataman L.V. (Ataman, 2015), Bozhuk T.V., Vedenin Yu.A. (Vedenin, 1982), Miroshnichenko N.N., Kolbovsky E.Yu. (Kolbovsky, 2006), Khudenkikh Yu.A. (Khudenkikh, 2006) and others.

One of the first to propose a methodological approach to assessing the natural conditions for tourism and recreation - Yu.A. Vedenin (Vedenin, 1982) and N.N. Miroshnichenko. They suggested assessing the favorability of influencing factors within a specific territory based on a score. Applying their methodology, it is possible to receive the following categories of objects for the purpose of organization of large natural and tourist areas: adverse, unfavorable, rather favorable and favorable.

E.Yu. Kolbovsky (Kolbovsky, 2006) makes a certain contribution to the development of the methodology of the integrated assessment of tourist resources based on the use of a unique algorithm for assessing the tourist potential of the territory. The algorithm is based on the following: at the first stage, the presence of attractive objects of historical heritage is determined (monuments of archeology, places related to historical events, etc.); at the second stage, unique natural objects and objects associated with the cultural landscape are identified; at the third stage, the availability of places chosen independently by the population for recreation is revealed; at the fourth stage, there is given conclusion on the nature of the tourist potential of the territory: types of tourist activities within the studied territory, actively using objects in tourism, promising types of tourism, new routes offered to tourists, restrictions on the use of the natural and cultural-historical potential of the territory.

The methodology of Yu.A. Khudenkikh (Khudenkikh, 2006) is based on the assessment of tourism potential by highlighting natural, historical, cultural and socio-economic elements of tourism potential. In order to evaluate them, the author suggests to assess the tourist potential regarding the most massive forms of tourism (recreational, cognitive, sports, business, medical) based on the use of the scoring scale with the involvement of experts.

In the course of analysis of methodology on assessment of attractiveness of tourist objects of Afanasyev O.E. (Afanasyev, 2018), for the purposes of our research the method of expert assessments was applied to determine the level of tourist attractiveness of sacred objects. The possibility of using expert estimates and their objectivity is justified by the fact that the unknown characteristic of the studied object is interpreted as a random variable, the reflection of the distribution of which is the individual assessment of the reliability and significance of a particular event by the expert. It is assumed that the value of the studied characteristic of the object is within the range of estimates obtained by the expert group, and the generalized collective opinion is reliable.

According to this methodological approach to assessing the tourist attractiveness of sacred objects, the final result of the assessment is a ranked number of points, reflecting the potential of the administrative region in terms of the availability and opportunities for the realization of resources of sacred tourism. This approach determines not only the suitability of the

territory for the development of tourism, but also the attractiveness of tourist resources for consumers.

During field researches, the sacred objects of Almaty region of Kazakhstan, which may be of interest to tourists, were studied.

Undoubtedly, one of the first tasks in the development of sacred tourism is the formation of tourist infrastructure in order to attract tourists. The tourist infrastructure is a combination of subsystems: the primary motivation of travelers; ensuring their stay in the tourist region; support and development of regional tourism, provision of production and sale of tour products. Functioning of this data subsystem ensures the priority of consumer interests and adherence to the principles of sustainable development of tourism in a given territory.

Almaty region consists of 17 districts, which are distinguished by natural and climatic resources, levels of socio-economic development, availability and condition of sacred objects of tourist infrastructure (Sacred places of Almaty region, 2019). It is known that the development of the infrastructure of this or that area requires certain financial costs. Therefore, the task of research is to determine the sacred objects on the territory of which it is expedient to develop sacred tourism. Purposefulness in this case is determined by the high level of tourist attractiveness of sacred objects.

In this research work by applying the method of expert assessment was made an assessment of the level of tourist attractiveness of sacred sites in the Almaty region.

The abundance of sacred objects can be significant elements in the structure of tourist products, which are oriented as individual tourists, as well as travelers in the group.

To determine the level of tourist attractiveness of sacred objects, the method of expert assessment is used (Afanasyev, 2018). The possibility of using expert assessments and their objectivity is based on the fact that the unknown characteristics of the studied object are interpreted as a random magnitude, reflection of the distribution of which there is an individual assessment of the reliability and significance of this or that event by the expert (Durovich & Anastasova, 2002).

It is assumed that the meaning of the studied characteristics of the object is within the range of the

assessment obtained by the group of experts, and the general collective opinion is trustworthy. Representatives of the tourism management, as well as interested specialists acted as experts.

The following indicators are proposed for the assessment of tourist attractions of sacred objects: excellent or good condition of the sacred object, useful for external and internal review; sacred objects have a history of renaissance and architectural-artistic value

expressed through legends, historical events, historical characters and personalities; sacred objects have access to transport (condition of the road, location, cash registers, parking and public transport communication). Each of the indicators is evaluated in balls.

The obtained quantitative assessments of the sacred object are divided into a range of values, in accordance with which typological groups of sacred

**Table 1: Parameters of the Score of Sacred Objects**

Indicator group	Indicators	Scores
Appropriateness	Appropriateness to the appearance, the state of the sacred object from its planned characteristics as the object to visit	from 1 to 5
Availability	Road transport accessibility of the facility	from 0 to 3
	Access to a sacred object for people with disabilities	from 0 to 2
Significance	Assessment of the historical, cultural significance of the object, originality	from 1 to 5
	The time of creation of a sacred object, its authenticity	from 1 to 4
	Modern use of the sacred object in the network of excursion routes	from 0 to 2

**Table 2: Results of the Score Assessment and Ranking of Objects of Sacred Significance of the Almaty Region in Terms of their Potential for Participation in the Implementation of Sacred Tourism**

The name of the object	Estimated indicators						Rank (% of the sum of the maximum number of points)	Potential
	1	2	3	4	5	6		
Architectural and artistic complex "Zharkent Mosque"	4	4	2	5	3	1	90	highest
Issyk Kurgans	5	4	2	4	3	1	90	highest
Archaeological complex "Tamgaly"	5	4	2	4	2	0	81	high
Mausoleum of Zh. Zhabayev	4	3	2	5	3	1	81	high
Mediterranean town "Talgar"	5	3	2	4	3	0	81	high
"Altynemel" Memorial Complex	5	3	2	4	2	0	76	high
Mausoleum of Kapal Batyr	4	3	1	5	3	0	76	high
Aulieagash (sacred tree)	4	3	2	5	2	0	76	high
Place of Orbulak battles	5	4	1	3	2	0	71	average
Place of battles of Anyrakai	5	4	1	3	2	0	71	average
Mineral springs of Zhamanty (Arasan)	4	3	2	4	3	0	67	average
Holy place "Nayzatapkan"	4	3	2	3	2	0	67	average
"Kora Gorge"	4	3	1	3	2	0	62	average
Ancient settlement "Koilyk"	4	3	1	3	2	0	57	average

The numbers indicate the estimated indicators:

1. Assessment of the historical, cultural significance of the object, originality.
2. The creation time of the object, its authenticity.
3. Modern use of the object in the network of excursion routes.
4. It's useful to show the condition of the object from its planned characteristics as an object to visit.
5. Road transport accessibility of the facility.
6. Facilities for people with disabilities.

objects, possessing high, medium and low potential, are based on the level of its tourist attractiveness are distinguished. The data obtained characterize the achieved results and determine the possible directions of development of the sacred object (Durovich & Anastasova, 2002; Hasani Hossienabadi, 2016).

In this research work, the assessment of the tourist attraction of sacred objects of the Almaty region was conducted by three groups of indicators - usefulness, accessibility, significance (Table 1). Quantitative indicators are arranged on the principle of decreasing of the level of their tourist attractiveness, and the final results of the evaluation of the objects obtained by the highest rankings are presented in the Table 2 in the form of assessment of the potential for the involvement of objects in the development of sacred tourism. Thus, in the studied territory were identified objects of sacred significance, possessing the greatest tourist potential (interest and attractiveness for consumers of sacred tourism) (Ataman, 2015).

In general, in the studied region, taking into account objects of this category, the average rank (level of

tourist attractiveness) is 73%. At the same time, the highest rank (90%) was assigned to two objects, the highest rank (76-81%) - to 6 objects, the average rank from 57% to 71% - to 6 objects (Figures 1, 2).

The architectural-art complex "Zharkent Mosque" and the Yesik mounds received the highest points, since they have high tourist potential and opportunities to form new tourist products aimed at tourists traveling as part of excursion groups. The objects of sacred significance located in Arasan, the sacred object Naizatapkan, the Kora gorge and the Koylyk site of ancient settlement do not have fully realized tourist potential.

It was revealed that almost all the sacred objects studied take part in tourist and excursion activities. One of the important factors for using sacred objects in tourism is the interest of the local administration. Also adjoining the indicated objects of roads of regional and district significance, as well as the presence of unique natural and recreational landscapes create additional opportunities for the development of individual autotourism and the formation of new tourist routes.

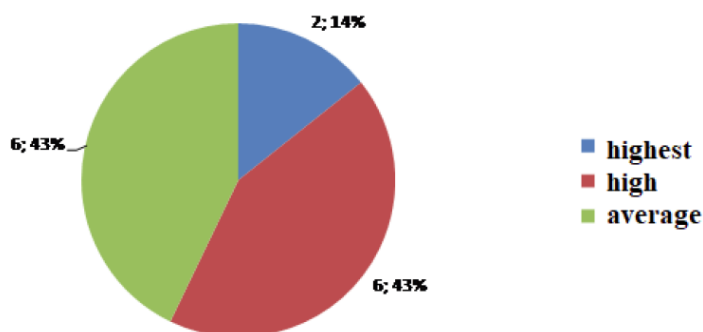


Figure 1: The ratio of sacred objects of the Almaty region in terms of their level of tourist attractiveness.

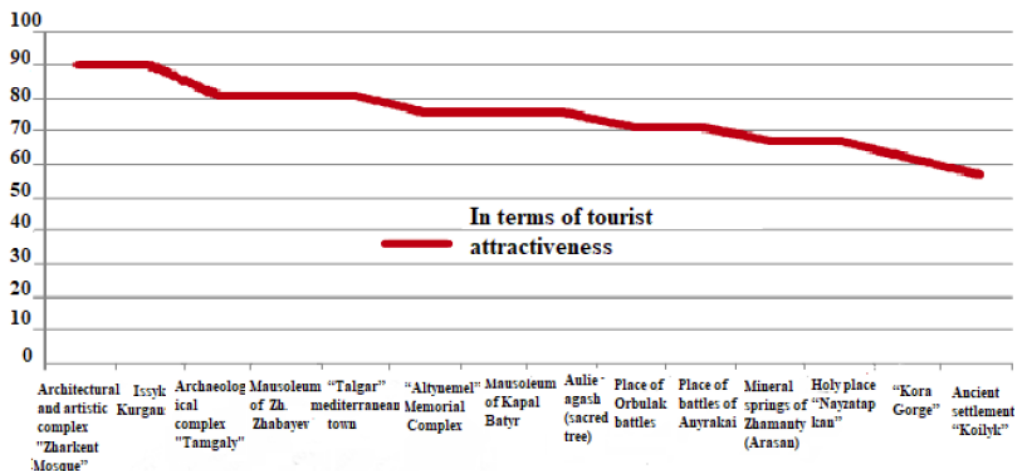


Figure 2: Comparative tourist potential of sacred objects of the Almaty region in terms of attractiveness.

An assessment of the level of tourist attractiveness suggests that in the future it is advisable to develop infrastructure in the first and second groups, in a more distant future, development in the third group is possible.

## CONCLUSION

The purposefulness of developing the infrastructure of the tourist region in order to develop sacred tourism is determined by the level of its tourist attraction. For this purpose, an expert assessment method was applied. The corresponding indicator was calculated, based on the value of which four groups of districts were identified. The study showed that it would be advisable to develop the infrastructure of sacred objects in the short and medium term related to the first and second groups.

The architectural-art complex "Zharkent Mosque" and the Yesik mounds received the highest points, since they have high tourist potential and opportunities to form new tourist products aimed at tourists traveling as part of excursion groups. The objects of sacred significance located in Arasan, the sacred object Naizatapkan, the Kora gorge and the Koylyk site of ancient settlement do not have fully realized tourist potential. The most promising direction for the development of excursion programs is the promotion of combined excursion tours, in which sacred objects occupy an important place along with other objects of tourist display, as well as the formation of eventive events of sacred pilgrimage content. The architectural-art complex "Zharkent Mosque", the Yesik mounds, the Zh. Zhabaev Mausoleum, the Kapal Batyr Mausoleum and the Aulieagash (holy tree) can serve as the main objects of tourist interest when designing tours aimed at road travelers or small tourist groups. In order to do this, it is advisable to use the strategy of the development and promotion of the tourist product based on the cooperation of all participants in the tourism market.

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