

**KAZAKHSTAN ECOTOURISM MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**



**Executive Summary**

**By**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kazakhstan has an abundance of natural and cultural resources, which offer ample opportunities to further develop, package and promote tourism, especially niche-based segments such as, ecotourism, cultural tourism, and adventure tourism. Given the creation of a new Ministry of Tourism and Sport, and the elevation of tourism as a priority cluster for the government, opportunities are imminent considering the low level of tourism development. The government's goal is to increase international and domestic visitors in the coming years, and take certain measures to achieve its goal. However, a major effort will need to be conducted in developing a qualified, trained and skilled labor force. Building capacity in the overall tourism sector is one key component for the vitality and sustainability of the industry.

Based on the need to develop capacity especially in ecotourism, the Eurasia Foundation commissioned a study and contracted an international expert and professor, Dr. Brijesh Thapa from the Department of Tourism, Recreation & Sport Management at the University of Florida, USA to accomplish the following four objectives: 1) Carry out an evaluation of existing tourism educational programs in Kazakhstan; 2) Develop an ecotourism elective curriculum and executive training modules; 3) Train four faculty members of the Department of Tourism and Service at Turan-Astana University on customization of the ecotourism program based on case study methodology; and 4) To develop recommendations to improve ecotourism services in Kazakhstan. To achieve these objectives, the international expert traveled to and within Kazakhstan from May 16, 2006 - June 10, 2006.

Visits to four major universities (Kazakh State University, Kazakh Academy of Sports and Tourism, Turan University, and Turan-Astana University) that specialize in tourism education were conducted. The current undergraduate tourism curriculum was newly created and faculty was still undergoing the learning process. The curriculum was set at 149 credit hours by the Ministry of Education with core standard requirements (69 credit hours plus 8 credit hours for State Exam), and elective courses (59 credit hours plus 13 credit hours of internship) to be determined by the individual institution. Based on the existing curriculum, various recommendations in structure and coursework were outlined. A major recommendation was to categorize the curriculum into four areas: 1) General Discipline; 2) Tourism Discipline; 3) Specialization Discipline (e.g., Ecotourism, Adventure Tourism, International Tourism); and 4) Internship & State Exams. The overall requirement was also recommended to be set at 128 credits.

About 15 days was spent with four faculty members at Turan-Astana University. In addition, field visits along with a group of 15 students were conducted to two newly created ecotourism sites in the northern region. Six ecotourism related courses were developed, which was two more than the requested number. The coursework represented a strong cognate that complemented each other. Each course was theoretical and applied with a strong case study approach largely based on local and domestic sites. The developed courses were: 1) Principles of Ecotourism; 2) Business of Ecotourism; 3) Organization & Management of Ecotours; 4) Cultural Heritage Tourism; 5) Management of Protected Areas, and 6) Ecotourism Management of Sary Arka. Similarly, three executive training modules were developed which was one more than the requested number. The modules represented an applied perspective utilizing case studies that were global and local. Training modules were designed to provide an understanding of the concept of tourism and ecotourism. Each module (four units) was created as two-day intensive sessions consisting of 8 hours per day with a 1 hour break. Modules were created to target officials of Government Ministries, employees of Tour Agencies, and local communities & Park employees. The major challenge in the overall process was the lack of direct communication, as a translator was the intermediary.

Overall, various recommendations were outlined for Kazakhstan in terms of tourism and ecotourism development. Some of the themes that were discussed included: 1) Capacity Building; 2) National Tourism Organization; 3) Infrastructure Development; 4) Visitor Services and Management; 5) Marketing and Regional Cooperation, and 6) Miscellaneous Issues Specific to Ecotourism.