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ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT STATE OF EXCURSION ACTIVITIES BY THE EXAMPLE OF THE WORK OF A TOUR GUIDE IN THE ALMATY REGION

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Analysis of the current state of excursion activities by the example of the work of a tour guide in the Almaty region

Abstract. Excursion activities in the Republic of Kazakhstan play a significant role in the formation of the country's tourism potential, providing unique opportunities for studying and understanding the historical, cultural and natural resources of the Almaty region and the Zhetysu region. This article is aimed at analyzing the current state of excursion activities in Kazakhstan, including identifying the main factors contributing to its development, as well as the obstacles and challenges faced by excursion programs and organizations. Particular attention is paid to issues of infrastructure and quality of services provided. The study also addresses issues of standardization, certification and professional training of personnel in the field of excursion tourism. The study also aims to examine the influence of information platforms, especially social networks, on the choice and purchase of tours, as well as to evaluate the information provided about routes and safety presented in the promotional offer of the Kolsai-Kaindy tour. The author tried to identify the differences between the ideal and real experiences of consumers of tourism services, to identify key aspects that can be improved to improve the quality of service and safety of tourists.

Keywords: excursion activity, vehicle, tourist company, excursion route, tourist season

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Алматы облысындағы гид-экскурсовод жұмысының мысалында экскурсиялық қызметтің қазіргі жағдайын талдау

Аңдатпа. Қазақстан Республикасындағы экскурсиялық қызмет Алматы өңірі мен Жетісу облысының тарихи, мәдени және табиғи байлықтарын зерделеу мен тануға бірегей мүмкіндіктер бере отырып, елдің туристік әлеуетін қалыптастыруда маңызды рөл атқарады. Бұл мақала Қазақстандағы экскурсиялық қызметтің қазіргі жай-күйін талдауға, оның дамуына ықпал ететін негізгі факторларды, сондай-ақ экскурсиялық бағдарламалар мен ұйымдар тап болатын кедергілер мен сынақтарды талдауға бағытталған. Инфрақұрылым мен көрсетілетін қызметтердің сапасы мәселелеріне ерекше назар аударылады. Зерттеу сонымен қатар экскурсиялық туризм саласындағы қызметкерлерді стандарттау, сертификаттау және кәсіби даярлау мәселелерін қарастырады. Зерттеу сонымен қатар ақпараттық платформалардың, әсіресе әлеуметтік желілердің түрлерін таңдауға және сатып алуға әсерін қарастыруға, сондай-ақ «Көлсай-Қайыңды» турының жарнамалық ұсынысында ұсынылған маршруттар мен қауіпсіздік туралы ақпаратты бағалауға бағытталған. Автор туристерге қызмет көрсету мен қауіпсіздігінің сапасын жақсартуға бағытталған негізгі қырларын айқындайтын туристік қызметтерді тұтынушылардың идеалды және нақты тәжірибесі арасындағы айырмашылықтарды анықтауға тырысты.

Түйін сөздер: экскурсиялық қызмет, көлік құралы, туристік компания, экскурсиялық маршрут, туристік маусым

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Анализ современного состояния экскурсионной деятельности на примере работы гида-экскурсовода в Алматинской области

Аннотация. Экскурсионная деятельность в Республике Казахстан играет значимую роль в формировании туристского потенциала страны, предоставляя уникальные возможности для изучения и познания исторических, культурных и природных богатств Алматинского региона и Жетысу. Данная статья направлена на анализ современного состояния экскурсионной деятельности в Казахстане, включая идентификацию основных факторов, способствующих ее развитию, а также препятствий и вызовов, с которыми сталкиваются экскурсионные программы и организации. Особое внимание уделяется вопросам инфраструктуры и качества предоставляемых услуг. Исследование также затрагивает вопросы стандартизации, сертификации и профессиональной подготовки персонала в сфере экскурсионного туризма. Исследование также направлено на рассмотрение влияния информационных платформ, особенно социальных сетей, на выбор и покупку туров, а также на оценку предоставляемой информации о маршрутах и безопасности, представленной в рекламном предложении тура «Кольсай-Кайыңды». Автор попытался выявить различия между идеальным и реальным опытом потребителей туристских услуг, обозначить ключевые аспекты, которые могут быть улучшены для повышения качества обслуживания и безопасности туристов.

Ключевые слова: экскурсионная деятельность, транспортное средство, туристская компания, экскурсионный маршрут, туристский сезон.

Key messages. The work of a tour guide is a crucial component of excursion activities. Analysis of the tour guide work will help to identify primary issues in organizing tours in the Almaty and Zhetysu regions. Special attention should be given to issues of infrastructure and quality of services provided by tour companies as well as compliance with the professional competencies' requirements for tour guides. This is stated, in particular, in the State Program for the Development of the Tourism Industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2019 – 2025 [1].

Introduction. When analyzing the current state of excursion activities in Kazakhstan, in the first instance it is necessary to refer to the fundamental principles of professional excursion organization, as well as relevant regulatory norms which must be followed for the successful launch of a tour company. Experience of tour companies that recently encountered an increase in emergencies occurring with tourists at excursion locations should be considered. In particular, dissatisfaction is caused by the inadequate tourism infrastructure and lack of professionalism among newly trained tour guides who do not have the necessary competencies and relevant education. This work analyses the experience of a practicing tour guide with an example of arranging a route to the Kolsai and Kaindy lakes, which is one of the most popular destinations among customers of the tourist market in the Almaty region.

Research Objective is to analyze the real tour services market using as an example the Kolsai – Kaindy excursion. The research tasks include conducting a comparative analysis of existing offerings from tour operators in the Almaty region and an ideal service market scenario, as well as identifying differences in approaches to providing information, accessibility, and convenience for customers.

Methods and organization of the Research. The study covers business analysis of several tour companies involved in organisation of tours in the Almaty and Zhetysu regions, which allowed identification of key issues in excursion activities and potential ways to address them. Advertisements offering tours through the region routes, which were posted on social media platforms, including Instagram, were analyzed.

Research results and their discussion. A professionally organized tour is a meticulously planned and executed event that includes route preparation, a detailed programme, informative notes, and safety instructions on the tour route for the attention of tourists.

Tour guides conducting such tours must demonstrate not only extensive knowledge about the

places they take to but also the ability to present this information in an engaging and accessible manner, following the methodological principles of excursion storytelling and demonstration [2, p. 119-124]. In addition to that, tour companies need to remember that tour guides represent their company, and depending on their work a tourist decides whether to return to travel with this tour company again in the future.

It is certainly an important step to remind about the key rules and required documents when launching a tour, especially when analyzing the compliance of the current state of the tourism market in the Republic of Kazakhstan with the requirements of regulatory norms [3]. This will allow to draw attention to crucial aspects that might require intervention from government bodies, if we discuss an ideal tourism market.

Let us consider the fundamental requirements that need to be taken into account when preparing an excursion route and what to pay attention to when choosing a tour company to organize a trip.

First, it is necessary to determine whether a tour company has all the required permissions and licenses for lawful excursion activities along with documents confirming the right to carry them out. Companies engaged in excursion activities should hold a state license for tour operator activities for domestic and inbound tourism.

Secondly, a mandatory condition for organizing an excursion is available insurance for each participant. Having insurance for excursion participants is a crucial aspect of ensuring their safety and protection against possible risks or accidents. Insurance of excursion participants provides them with additional protection and confidence in the event of unforeseen circumstances during their travel. Insurance may include medical assistance in case of illness or injury, as well as compensation in the event of an accident. Guarantee of insurance provision not only protects excursion participants and guides from potential risks but also demonstrates a responsible attitude toward their safety and well-being. Therefore, arrangements with insurance service providers are an important stage in the preparation and organization of an excursion.

Thirdly, at the point of purchasing an excursion package, tour companies must provide tourists with all the necessary information about the route, participation conditions, rules of conduct, and safety requirements. An important element is obtaining tourists' consent to participate in the excursion, as well as ensuring their understanding of the rules and risks involved.

Fourthly, a qualified tour guide with the necessary knowledge and experience should be present throughout the entire route to ensure an informative and safe excursion for tourists [4].

Fifthly, a crucial element is the availability of a technical map of the tour along with the route, which the bus driver and tour guide should typically be familiar with. This map includes a detailed description of the route, the start and end times of the excursion, major landmarks to be visited, as well as anticipated stops and actions at each stage [5].

Comparing these essential points with the actual state of the tourism market helps to identify discrepancies or gaps that require attention from government authorities to ensure the safety and quality of tour services provided. This approach highlights issues and progress in the tourism industry, such as the need for improvement of service quality, development of infrastructure, formulation of building codes and regulations (SNiPs of the Republic of Kazakhstan), presence or absence of competition and transparency in the provided services, and so on.

During the peak tourist season, which typically spans from May to September, is considered as the golden period for tour companies. A significant surge in demand for tour services is seen, resulting in buses being filled to 100% capacity. Often, tour operators dispatch up to four buses to the same location due to a high demand from tourists. This period becomes a boom for the tour industry, allowing companies to substantially increase their revenue and fully utilize their tourism resources.

The author of this article, who worked as a tour guide for the entire tourist season, conducted an analysis of over 10 tour companies, to form an objective assessment of the excursion activity market.

Let us look at the analysis of the real tour services market using Kolsai-Kaindy excursion (Figure 1,2) as an example and compare it to the ideal service market. A tour to the State National Natural Park, named Kolsai Lakes, presents a unique opportunity for a one-day excursion, offering tourists a chance to witness breathtaking natural landscapes and gain an engaging experience [6].



Figure 1 –Kolsai Lake (Photograph by the author)



Figure 2 – Kaindy Lake (Photograph by the author)

In the era of social media and digital technologies, tourists no longer need to physically visit tour operator offices to choose and purchase tours. They can easily select and buy tours online through social networks and online platforms.

Social media platforms such as Instagram provide tourists with a wide range of tour options, allowing them to view photos and reviews, engage with other users, and even directly communicate with tour operators or agencies via messages or comments.

This online approach to selecting and purchasing tours makes the process more convenient and

accessible for tourists. It enables them to explore various options, compare offerings, and make decisions according to their preferences right from the comfort of their home or while on the go, using their mobile devices.

According to the described ideal tourism market, when purchasing a tour, tour companies should provide all essential information about the route, participation conditions, rules, and safety guidelines for the tourists to assess the risks and consciously agree to participate.

The Kolsai-Kaindy tour promotional offer in Figure 3 was used as an example for the analysis.

The Kolsai-Kaindy tour

We visit:

- Lake Kolsai
- Lake Kaindy
- Black Canyon

Tour Cost:

Without lunch - 12,000 tenge
 With lunch - 14,000 tenge
 Lunch includes: pilaf, salad, tea, and bread

Tour includes:

- Comfortable transfer
- Guide services
- Ecological fees
- Black Canyon
- Travel by UAZ (off-road vehicle) to Kaindy

What to bring:

ID or passport, snack, comfortable shoes, comfortable clothing, warm clothing, cash (additional expenses: horse riding, boat rides, and snacks along the way)

Tour Schedule:

6:00 – Meeting
 6:30 – Departure
 9:30 – Arrival at Black Canyon
 10:00 – Departure from Black Canyon
 11:30 – Arrival in Saty village, departure to Kaindy (by UAZ on rough terrain)
 14:30 – Departure to Lake Kolsai
 15:30 – Arrival at Lake Kolsai, excursion
 18:30 – Departure to the city
 22:00–23:00 – Arrival in the city

* Arrivals times are approximate and depend on overall road conditions and group punctuality. As the path to Kaindy involves off-road travel, it takes about 40 minutes by UAZ from Lake Kolsai. Then, a 30-40 minute hike to the lake (Horse rental from 3000 tenge one way).

📍 Meeting Point:
 ⌚ Gathering Time: 6:00
 ⌚ Departure Time: 6:30

No latecomers!

Figure 3 – Advertising offer for the “Kolsay-Kaindy” tour

The promotional offer has been developed considering all requirements; after a thorough review of this document, each tourist is provided with a complete and comprehensive understanding of all aspects related to the offered services. In this context,

tour companies demonstrate full compliance with the requirements for excursion activities, ensuring a high level of information and transparency for their clients. The selection of the promotional offer depicted in Figure 3 was random; however, it draws

attention to the lack of uniqueness in such offers. At times, it seems that many advertising brochures simply replicate one another. In this context, tourists appear to make a decision based not so much on a tour operator company but rather on its visual representation on social media: how engaging the videos are, and how the photos are done. Another category of tourists prefers companies offering the most acceptable prices.

From a marketing perspective, tour companies take all necessary steps to sell a tour: conduct an informational campaign among potential tourists. These tourists, in turn, on the basis of their preferences, make the final choice and purchase a tour with the most comfortable conditions for themselves.

Organizing tours during the “golden” season represents not only a period of intense work for tour operators but also a unique challenge in terms of interaction with transportation companies. In Almaty and Zhetysu regions, there is a shortage of reliable and responsible service providers in the field of tour transfers. For this reason, often a collaboration with transportation companies that do not meet all standards and requirements has to be formed. Only a few transportation companies in the market comply with the norms and standards of tour transfers. For instance, personal experience of the article author revealed that out of ten companies, only one tour operator company collaborated with reliable service providers in the field of tour transfer.

Thus, preparation of a group tour package includes providing transfers and supplying a qualified tour guide to accompany the route.

The responsibilities of a tour guide in tourism and excursion activities include:

- In-depth knowledge of the tour and route content that the guide carries out, as well as the ability to effectively present this information.
- Mastery of excursion conducting techniques and the ability to apply them effectively in practice.
- Understanding routes and excursion themes, knowledge of the tour order, and peculiarities of serving tourists [2].

Professional skills and abilities expected of a tour guide include:

- Compilation and selection of materials for excursions on specific topics.
- Development of a methodological plan for conducting excursions.
- Preparation and adaptation of materials for use during excursions.
- Effective use of visual materials from the “tour guide’s portfolio.”

- Delivery of tour information in accordance with prepared text.

- Ensuring safety and informing participants about rules of conduct during excursions.

Unfortunately, there is currently a failure to fulfil the aforementioned responsibilities outlined in the job description for tour guides in the excursion activity market. There are fewer specialists who approach the preparation of their excursions responsibly by gathering material based on scientific data. The author of this research aligns themselves with this philosophy, continuing to prepare and conduct excursions in accordance with the requirements specified in the job description.

During the excursion, it becomes necessary to perform functions not only as a guide but also as a tour and customer relations manager. It is important to note that in most cases, freelance tour guides are typically engaged for work on routes. This category of guides is hired for a specific tour without engaging in the pre-selection of participants beforehand or maintaining contact with tourists before the commencement of the journey.

In accordance with the job responsibilities instructions, a tour guide is required to arrive at the designated location 15 minutes before the scheduled group gathering time. This time allows the tour guide to inspect the bus, ensure the functionality of the microphone, air conditioning, and check the overall condition of the vehicle. It’s also essential to discuss the tactical plan and potential stop locations with the driver to ensure the participants’ comfort. By the time the tourists gather, the manager begins seating participants on the bus, which has been previously prepared and checked.

In reality, experience shows that upon arriving on time, the tour guide discovers that the transportation company has not fulfilled its obligations by failing to provide the transportation on time. There are instances where the bus arrives late despite established rules. Drivers are aware that there is no time control enforcement. Tourist lists are sent to the tour guide via messengers on the day of the excursion. Representatives from the tour agency are absent, which leads to the tour guide having to take on their responsibilities. Sometimes, more seats are sold for the tour than planned. In such situations, freelance tour guides are compelled to solve issues that are typically managed by tour company managers.

Some of the problems faced by tour guides due to the unprofessional work of tour agencies and transportation companies that provide tourist transportation services include:

– The transfer vehicle being in an unsanitary condition.

– The driver making stops to refuel the vehicle during the route without disembarking passengers from the bus, which violates passenger transport rules.

– Absence of registration of tourists at specific places, leading to conflict situations among passengers.

It's also important to note that in the course of tours while accompanying tourist groups on the route, the tour guide has the opportunity to provide recommendations to the bus driver, provided that such recommendations do not contradict traffic regulations and do not lead to changes in the designated tour or travel route. Additionally, according to established rules, drivers are required to follow the itinerary, which is crucial for preparing the tour script tailored to the specific route.

Conclusions. In the realm of excursion activities, the profession of a tour guide is pivotal, as

the success of the conducted tour ultimately depends on their work. The tour guide not only provides information about tourist sites to the audience but also acts as a translator of the cultural values of their country, embodying the roles of researcher, orator, and educator simultaneously. Consequently, the professional training of tour guides holds significant importance, as the lack of such directly impacts the quality of tourist services provided in our country. In these circumstances, resorting to the classical form of organizing and conducting tours might prove beneficial, as the “old school” teaches effective management even in non-standard situations that arise on the route.

In this context, it appears that tour companies, transportation companies, and tour guides form a unified organism, where each element is closely interrelated and should operate in close coordination. The primary goal of this interaction should ultimately be providing high-quality service to tourists, which, in the long run, will attract more tourists.

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