

Introduction of theme parks in Kazakhstan: Uniqueness and problems

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1. Introduction

Theme parks are an important part of the entertainment and cultural field of each country. The role and effects of theme parks have been discussed by scholars of different spheres. Sun and Uysal (1994) argue that theme parks go beyond the amusement role and help visitors to escape reality using the fantasy. Mannapova et al. (2021) discussed in their studying about theme parks in Uzbekistan, that facilities, which refer here, can affect not only tourism in the country they are located in, but also have impact on neighboring countries. Theme parks are in demand and exist in every modern country for their further development and proper life quality. In this article, the theme parks in Kazakhstan is briefly introduced.

2. Parks in Almaty

I first would like to describe theme parks in Almaty city as it is the biggest city in the country (in terms of population) and is considered as the economically strongest city (the biggest part of Gross Domestic Regional Product refers to Almaty). As in all the countries, the main and most theme parks and other entertainment facilities are located in the biggest city.

There are no official statistics about the theme parks in Kazakhstan. But using the 2GIS electronic map, we can find 81 'amusement parks' in Almaty. Speaking about open-type amusement park, there are central park named after Gorky,

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Fantasy World park and Family park. Central park is probably the oldest theme park in Almaty, since its history goes back to the 1850, when it first was developed as a public garden. These days the park is owned by private company Altyn-Taraz LLP and was reconstructed by it. Park still has quite good flora, as it used to be a garden previously. But these days it also has an amusement park, aqua park and other facilities located in total on the 103 acres of the park.

Perhaps, the second oldest park in Almaty is Family park, which was first opened in 1990 as the 50th Anniversary of October Park. Park also has an amusement park, aqua park, bowling, carting, little zoo park and many other things to enjoy. One of the unusual points of the park is that it has an outdoor exhibition of military machines as Boramae Park in Seoul has airplane sculptures(Figure 1).



Figure 1. Military equipment in Family Park

The newest amusement park in Almaty Fantasy World was established in 1997. Compared to the previous two parks, Fantasy World does not offer any other facilities except roller coasters. You can compare it to the Lotte World in Seoul, since visitors need to pay only for entrance and enjoy almost everything inside the park. As it was mentioned before, Central

and Family parks also have Aqua parks, which are popular among Almaty citizens. Another popular Aqua parks is called Hawaii, which locates inside the Aport Mall. It is the unique Aqua park in Central Asia due to the fact that its territory consists of 35000 quadrant meters. Hawaii also has SPA and different types of entertainment typical for this type of theme parks. Holzner(2011) discusses that Aqua parks have big potential as artificial world entertainment and need to be exploited more around the world. Hawaii park is a good example of Kazakhstan's endeavor to develop this type of theme parks. Another popular type of theme parks is zoo park. There is Almaty National Zoo Park, which is close to Central Park. It is the oldest zoo park in the country and was opened November 7th, 1937 and today has 3900 species in it. Park is the member of the international community - it is a member of such organizations as European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA), Southeast Asian Zoos and Aquariums Association (SEAZA), World Association of Zoos and Aquariums: WAZA), International Zoo Educators Association (IZE), International Species Information System (ISIS).

3. Parks in Astana

The second biggest city and the capital of Kazakhstan is Astana. Almaty used to be Kazakhstan's capital till 1997 and since then, Astana represents the country. After receiving the status of the capital, the city attracted a lot of investments and consequently, many theme parks appeared there. Being a young capital, Astana has less theme parks than Almaty. For example, searching for "amusement parks" in the 2gis electronic maps, shows here only 50 places. However, there are some unique theme parks, which you can not find in other cities. First of all, there is an oceanarium, which is one of the favorite places of citizens. It is the first oceanarium in Kazakhstan, and the only one in the world, listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the most distant Oceanarium from the seas and oceans, more than 3,000 kilometers. To create a comfortable environment for more

than two thousand fish, the main tank and two additional compartments with a total capacity of 3 million liters of water, with 120 tons of sea salt dissolved in them. The aquarium is a 70-meter long tunnel that gives the sensation of walking on the seabed. The facility also has the theme park 'Jungle'. One of the biggest projects in Kazakhstan in the sphere of theme parks. Guides provide entertaining, intriguing and informative journeys into the bowels of a previously unknown world. Dinosaurs, triceratops, tyrannosaurs, ancient tribes - the whole environment is imbued with an exciting and intriguing air. Immersed in which, you forget about everyday life and believe that this reality is real. Animatronics Theater impresses not only children, but also adults. Interesting fact: all animatronics were produced in Kazakhstan.

In 2017 Astana also held EXPO and the facilities built for it are now used as theme park. The outside territory is mostly used as a children's park and the main pavilion is called 'Nur Alem' museum. The first and eighth floors of the museum tell the story of Kazakhstan and the future of Astana, while the eighth floor has an observation platform. Another unique theme park in Astana is 'Kazakhstan-Korea friendship park' (Figure 2), which was opened in 2017.



Figure 2. Kazakhstan-Korea friendship park

There are buildings, which introduce visitors into Korean architecture and a small foster to enjoy. Park became popular among locals and tourists because of the beautiful photo zones and peaceful atmosphere.

4. National parks

National parks are other theme parks, which are highly appreciated in Kazakhstan. The very first national park Bayanaul was established in 1985 and since then 13 more parks have emerged: Altyn-Emel, Burabay, Buiratau, Charyn Canon, Ile-Alatau, Karkaraly, Katon-Karagay, Kokshetau, Kolsay Lakes, Sayram-Ugam, Tarbagatai, Zhongar-Alatau, Ulytau. The main purpose of national parks is to preserve rich biodiversity. It also has educational goals and thus, all of the parks are open to the local visitors and tourists. These parks more than other theme parks in Kazakhstan attract foreign tourists and foster inner tourism as well. According to the Ministry of Sport and Culture of Kazakhstan, National parks were visited by more than 1.7 million people in the first 9 months of 2022. The most visited parks are Ile-Alatau, Charyn, Altyn-Emel and Kolsay lakes, all located in the Almaty region. They were visited by 900 thousand people, that is, more than half accounted for these areas.

5. Parks in other cities as symbol of Kazakhstan's unsolved issue

Unequal distribution of the resources is one of the main problems in Kazakhstan too. Most of the investments are dedicated to Astana and Almaty. Most popular, modern and entertaining theme parks are located in those cities too. Ge and Hako (2006) in their research on residential lifestyles in Japanese cities see the connection between entertainment components and residential choice.

In Kazakhstan, more people are moving from the other regions to Almaty, Astana or Shymkent, three biggest cities. According to the Ministry of Industry and Infrastructure Development of Kazakhstan, in the last 10 years the population of Astana

increased by 59% (from 451.5 thousand to 1.2 million), Almaty - by 37% (from 1.4 million to 2 million), Shymkent - by 67% (from 659 thousand to 1.1 million). And regions remain undeveloped and less attractive to the citizens. In Akotbe, Karaganda, Kyzylorda and other regions, there is only one amusement park, couple of water parks. All of the regions experience a lack of theme parks. The problem seems to be ignored by entrepreneurs and the government: in 2022 new parks were mostly opened in Almaty or Astana, and other towns are still waiting. In conclusion, there are various parks in Kazakhstan (Table 1), however, most of them are located in the big cities.

Table 1 Official statistical information about activities of theme parks in Kazakhstan

| Activities of theme parks | |
|--|-----------|
| Number of parks, units | 177 |
| Area of parks located in the open air, ha | 2218.9 |
| The area of parks located in the premises, sq. m. | 127,125.8 |
| Number of leisure facilities, units | 3,576 |
| Including: | |
| rides | 1,340 |
| gaming machines | 1,639 |
| other | 597 |
| The number of visitors to recreational facilities, thousand people | 10,644.7 |
| Including: | |
| rides | 6,941.8 |
| gaming machines | 1,651.7 |
| other | 2051.2 |

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