



IRSTI 71.37.75
Scientific article

<https://doi.org/10.32523/2789-4320-2025-2-350-364>

Promotion of the tourism brand of small towns of Turkestan region through historical and cultural heritage

N. Nurmaganbetkyzy^{*1}, A.A. Zhakupov², B.Zh. Sharapayeva³

L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Kazakhstan

(E-mail: ¹nurdana.nurmaganbetkyzy@iuth.edu.kz, ²zhakupov_aa_1@enu.kz, ³botashka-14@mail.ru)

Abstract. This article considers theoretical, methodological, and applied aspects of the formation and promotion of the tourist brand of small towns of Turkestan region based on the cultural and historical heritage of the region. The relevance of the research topic is inextricably linked to the need for sustainable development of regional tourism, the importance of increasing investment attractiveness, and forming a unique image of the region.

The study aims to identify the potential of small towns as a tourist destination, to analyse the degree of perception of the tourist brand by tourists and the local community, and to develop a conceptual model based on the cultural identity of the region. The research used the methods of content analysis, sociological survey, and SWOT analysis. The empirical base constitutes the results of the research obtained in Sauran.

As a result of the study, the key advantages and disadvantages in the formation of tourism brands in small towns of the region are identified. The developed conceptual model plays an important role in the strategic planning of tourism development in small towns.

Keywords: small towns, Turkestan region, historical heritage, cultural heritage, tourism brand, cultural identity.

Introduction

In the conditions of globalisation and high competition in the modern tourist market, regions and small towns are forming and promoting a unique tourist brand based on cultural and historical heritage. Turkestan region, which has a rich cultural and historical heritage, has significant potential for the development of domestic and international tourism. However,

Received 23.02.2025. Revised 17.05.2025. Accepted 14.06.2025. Available online 30.06.2025

as the city of Turkestan has received increasing attention, other smaller cities in the region remain unnoticed despite their rich history, architectural historical sites, and unique traditional appearance.

The creation and promotion of a tourism brand in small towns based on historical and cultural heritage can not only increase tourist flow but also contribute to the socio-economic development of the region, preservation of cultural identity, and involvement of local communities in tourism activities. Of particular relevance in this context is the process of studying the mechanisms of formation of a sustainable tourism brand consisting of cultural and historical narratives, local traditions, and symbolic resources.

This research is aimed at studying the tools that are important for small towns of Turkestan region to actively appear on the tourist map of Kazakhstan, using their cultural and historical capital in the formation of a tourist brand. The study aims to analyse the possibilities for promoting the tourism brand of small towns in the Turkestan region through the effective use of historical and cultural heritage, and to develop recommendations for creating a sustainable and attractive image of the region based on local identity. In accordance with the purpose of this study, the following tasks were set: 1. To analyse theoretical methods of small towns' brand development and integration of cultural heritage into the tourist product on the basis of world experience; 2. To study the potential of the historical and cultural heritage of small towns of Turkestan region as a resource for the formation of a tourist brand; 3. To assess the current state of the tourist image of small towns in the region and identify the key barriers in this process; 4. To study the level of perception of tourist brand of small towns by the target audience - the local population, tourists, and participants of the tourist industry. In this context, the object of the study is the cultural and historical potential of small towns in Turkestan region. And the subject of the study is the features and mechanisms of the formation of tourist brands using the historical and cultural potential of small towns.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in the fact that, for the first time in the Kazakh scientific discourse, a comprehensive analysis of the process of formation of the tourist brand of small towns in Turkestan region with a focus on the cultural and historical potential was conducted. The general model of integration of cultural heritage elements into the process of branding of small towns was also proposed.

Literature review

Tourism development through cultural heritage elements involves the effective enhancement of local traditions, historic sites, and communities to shape the region's economic growth and sustainable tourism practices. This strategy not only attracts tourists but also creates a deep interest in cultural features.

According to Sumi and others, cultural heritage as an economic catalyst helps to create sustainable tourism while developing local traditions and tourism offer practices with new economic opportunities for the tourism region [1, p. 28]. In addition, focusing on the development of spiritual and cultural attractions is considered as one of the important steps to increase tourist growth. And this step will lead to more investments to be designated by the government for the improvement of such places [2].

The Sustainable Development Goals, which are now gaining global relevance, reflect the importance of local society's involvement in tourism development through cultural heritage [1, p. 35]. The integration of cultural heritage in tourism marketing can contribute to the development of cultural commodification opportunities, enhancing the attractiveness of a tourist destination [3, p. 990].

And the use of digital technologies in tourism development through the potential of the cultural heritage of small towns will improve the tourist portrait of the region and increase the motivation of tourists to visit the region [3, p.998]. Unique traditions and culinary experiences in small regions diversify tourism offerings, increase tourist satisfaction with tourism services, and encourage repeat visits to tourist destinations [4].

The development of tourism in small towns in countries around the world through historical heritage sites has a positive impact on economic growth. One of the interviews with business operators and residents of one of the small cities in China, such as Guangxi, revealed that the tourism sector brings changes in the structure of small towns, providing economic growth, development of local regions, and popularity of historical and cultural heritage. That is, it increases the popularity of cultural heritage sites and innovates society's perception of tourism. In this context, it is noted that through special strategic planning, it is possible to achieve great success in the development of small town tourism through the collaboration of members of society and stakeholders [5]. Tourism development in small towns implies sustainable development of the local economy at the expense of local culture and local cultural resources. That is, it is an integrated form of all cultural and historical resources of the tourist destination. It attracts the attention and interest of tourists and visitors. There is a close relationship between cultural tourism and local cultural heritage. This is due to the fact that cultural and historical heritage constitutes valuable information about the history of human life [6]. The formation of tourism brand in small towns should be in line with the goals of global sustainable development. That is, the influence of cultural and historical heritage on the formation of sustainable tourism in the regions can be highly appreciated. The development of tourism in small towns through cultural and historical heritage is carried out with the participation of local communities and entrepreneurs, which opens new opportunities for the sphere of tourism in the region [7]. Through cultural and historical heritage, understanding all the features of the area and developing links between important concepts such as tourism, it is possible to form a tourism brand in small towns. This is achieved by involving local communities in the process of tourism development [8].

Cultural heritage elements such as historical and cultural sites, traditional practices, national festivals and local community arts play an important role in shaping a unique tourism experience. For example, some small provinces in France receive more than 2 million tourists annually. The display of cultural heritage sites in these cities is developed along with gastronomic experiences and recreational tourism activities [9]. Also, the tandem development of traditional sites and national events in local regions and small towns in Austria is carried out in order to form sustainable tourism [10].

Collaboration with local stakeholders is the key to proper tourism brand building in small towns. The tourism brand in small towns in Germany was formed due to the participation of farmers and local residents in sustainable tourism development [11]. In addition, the Marche Food and Wine Memories project in Italy was created with the aim of preserving culinary

heritage by local communities and businesses [12]. In the mountain towns of Spain, remote from major cities, the preservation of cultural identity and the demonstration of it to tourists have been firmly embraced to attract tourists. The project has helped somewhat to boost the local economy [13]. In Mertolá, a small Portuguese town, the tourism brand has been shaped by the rich cultural heritage of the region. The cultural heritage of the town has greatly contributed to local development through tourism development with the help of various stakeholders [14]. And the city of Jiayu in China was designed a tourism brand through the modernisation of national-style houses and the participation of local people in the process. In this way, by involving cultural heritage and the local community, the city formed a unique tourism picture in front of tourists [15]. Cultural heritage plays an important role in building a tourism brand. However, this process requires constant monitoring of the flow of tourists, proper communication with community members, and the creation of a unified system plan [16].

Methodology

This study uses comprehensive qualitative and quantitative analysis methods aimed at a comprehensive study of the potential of historical and cultural heritage in promoting the tourism brand of small towns in the Turkestan region.

The main research question is:

How can the competent exploitation of the potential of historical and cultural heritage contribute to the promotion of the tourist brand of small towns in the Turkestan region?

The working hypothesis of the study is as follows:

- if the branding of small towns in the region is systematically integrated with the potential of historical and cultural heritage, taking into account local characteristics, this will lead to an increase in the attractiveness of the region as a tourist destination, an increase in tourist flow and a strengthening of the socio-economic potential of the territory.

Stages and methods of research:

- Analytical review of literature:

At the initial stage, a systematic analysis of scientific literature was carried out in the following areas:

Research by leading domestic and foreign scientists in the field of tourism branding of territories;

Review of foreign experience in the effective use of historical and cultural heritage in the formation of regional brands;

Analysis of theoretical models of territorial marketing and approaches to integrating cultural heritage into tourism strategies.

- Analysis of the current state of the information field:

To determine the level of coverage of the tourism potential of small towns in the Turkestan region in the media space, content analysis of publications in authoritative publications, including national tourism portals, social networks and the media, was used.

Particular attention was paid to:

- The frequency of mentions of key tourist attractions;
- The tone of publications (positive, neutral, negative);
- The identification of stable associations related to small towns in the region;

- Collection of primary data.

To identify public perceptions of tourism potential and historical and cultural heritage, a sociological study was conducted, including:

- A survey of the local population of one of the small towns in the Turkestan region (the specific town will be indicated below), aimed at studying residents' attitudes towards the development of tourism, their willingness to participate in tourism projects, and their identification of local cultural values;

- In-depth interviews with representatives of local government bodies, tour operators, museum staff, and local historians.

- SWOT analysis of tourism potential.

A detailed SWOT analysis was conducted to identify the strengths and weaknesses, as well as the opportunities and threats associated with the development of a tourism brand based on historical and cultural heritage. The analysis took into account:

- The state of infrastructure;
- The level of identification of cultural objects;
- Problems with the perception of the city's tourist image;
- Opportunities for cooperation with regional and international structures.

Development of a conceptual model

Based on the empirical data obtained, as well as the analysis of theoretical sources, a conceptual model for promoting the tourist brand of small towns through historical and cultural heritage was developed. The model takes into account:

- Local specifics;
- Tools of visual and semantic identity;
- The potential of digital marketing;
- The participation of local communities in brand formation.

Findings and discussion

Turkestan region is a region located along the ancient Great Silk Road. Therefore, there are a lot of cultural-historical, sacred places and objects in the region. Many objects of cultural and historical heritage, testifying to the tourism potential of small towns of Turkestan region, are reflected on the websites and social pages of local akimats (Table 1).

Table 1. Cultural and historical sites in small towns are reflected in social networks

No.	Object of cultural and historical heritage	Small town	information about the tourist attraction
1	Sauran settlement	Sauran	The ancient city of Sauran is a very valuable archeological and architectural monument of national importance in Kazakhstan, known for its high, preserved walls, residential quarters, public buildings, and ancient agricultural lands. The city of Sauran is

			the only one in Kazakhstan, preserved in its original state, fully reflecting the origin, development, prosperity of one city [17].
2	Ukash Ata Mausoleum	Kentau	Visitors make a pilgrimage to the Mausoleum to the Ukash ata well. The well is located 200 metres from the Mausoleum [18].
3	Keme Kalgan Monument	Kazygurt	On the right side of the entrance to the small town of Kazygurt, you can see several mountains 40 kilometres from the town. On top of the mountain, there is a monument resembling a large ship. This is the sacred mountain Kazygurt, and the monument itself is called 'Keme kalgan'. For tourists who want to relax, there are many parks in the region. One of them is the ethno-historical complex 'Kazyna'. Here you can see the Monument of Baidibek bi, who was a hero of his time, a wise ruler. The green park 'Nauryz' also combines a marble architectural picture and beautiful gates.
4	The Complex of "Babalar ruhyna tagzym" "Mangilik el" Park		In the complex it can be seen all the historical information from the ancient times of the Kazakh people to the present day. There are also presented buildings from each region of Kazakhstan. For example, the monument 'Sages of the Great Steppe'.
5	Otrar settlement	Otrar	It consists of the city-complexes of the ancient cities of Tarband, Turarband, Turar and Farab.
5	The Mausoleum of Arystan baba		Located 2 kilometres from the town of Otrar. Arystan Baba is the teacher of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi. For this reason, tourists make their trips starting from Arystanbab Mausoleum and then visiting the mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi.
6	Sutkent settlement	Shardara	At the site of the ancient city, there are many ancient tables, ceramic matter jars. Allows tourists to visually see and understand information about the cities of ancient times [19].

Note - Compiled by the authors based on [17, 18]

As can be seen from Table 1, judging by the information on social pages and websites, it can be noted that historical and cultural themes are little used in the tourist popularisation of small towns. In the sources, there is insufficient information about the cultural object. Some do not display a photo of the object attracting tourists, and in some, the information is not presented in full. Among the cultural and historical tourist objects, there is relatively much information about mausoleums and ancient towns. And a unified branding style was not observed in the sources. It can be noted that there is little use of digital channels in promoting the tourism brand. This reduces the degree of popularity of the rich historical and cultural potential in small towns.

To assess and analyse the knowledge of residents and visiting tourists of the city of Kentau and Sauran, a small town of Turkestan region, about cultural and historical objects and their importance in the formation of the tourist brand, a sociological survey and interviews were conducted. The number of tourists to the city of Sauran, Sauran district, who took part in the survey was 28, and local residents of Sauran district - 35 (Tables 1, 2).

Table 2. Results of the survey taken from tourists

No.	Question	Tourists' responses and frequency of mention	Question motive	Inference
1	How did you find out about this town (Sauran settlement)?	Recommendations - 30% Social media - 25% Travel websites/blogs - 20% TV and advertising - 5% Spontaneous decision - 20%	Source of information about the tourist object	Recommendations and social media are the main channels, which means that promotion in these areas is a priority
2	What was the main reason for your visit?	Interest in history and culture - 45% Pilgrimage - 20% Recreation or diversity - 15% Participation in events or festivals - 10% Occasional itinerary visit - 10%	Motive for visit	Almost half of tourists are motivated specifically by cultural interest - historical and cultural heritage should be a central tool in shaping the tourism brand.
3	What places or objects impressed you the most?	Ruins of an ancient city - 60% Natural landscapes - 15% Local hospitality - 10% The atmosphere of 'forgotten history' - 15%	Objects/ themes	A tourism brand can be shaped through the heritage of Sauran city as a sacred site and an example of cultural identity
4	How quick and easy was it to find information about the city?	Very easy - 12% Almost accessible - 28% Had to look it up myself - 35% Difficult, little information available - 25%	Level of information accessibility	Information support is weak. Need to create guides, audio guides, maps and digital promotion in general
5	Is there a sense of historical and cultural atmosphere around the city?	Yes, very vividly felt - 30% Almost felt, but not always - 40% Faintly felt - 20% Not felt - 10%	Level of tourists' perception of the tourist object	The city is rich in cultural heritage, but it is necessary to strengthen this potential through the design of the urban environment and events.
6	In your opinion, what needs to be improved in the tourist infrastructure of this city?	Improving the quality of roads - 35% Creating more clean toilets, hostels and catering facilities - 25% Providing information boards and signs - 20% Developing tourist routes - 10% Offering souvenirs, workshops - 10%	Tourists' suggestions	The lack of basic infrastructure hampers a positive impression even with interesting facilities.
	Would you recommend other visitors to visit this city?	Yes, absolutely- 42% Partly- 28% Perhaps, with a certain amount of interest - 18%	Tourists' satisfaction level	The majority of tourists are willing to recommend the city, which indicates the high potential of the

7		No - 12%		city, but also raises the issue of removing key barriers.
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Note - Compiled by the authors based on the survey.

According to Table 2 above, it is known that the vast majority of visiting tourists heard about the city of Sauran through recommendations from other people and through social media. In addition, the main motivation for tourists' trips is an interest in history and culture, as well as religious travel. The vast majority of visiting tourists expressed interest in the ancient city and natural landscapes. According to the tourists, they found information about the city themselves, which indicates a lack of data on social media. In addition, during the survey, visitors expressed their dissatisfaction with the quality of the road to the old town and the quality of roadside toilets. They said they would advise other tourists to visit.

Table 3. Results of the survey taken from tourists

No.	Question	The most frequent answers
1	In your opinion, what makes your city unique and special?	Historical importance, religious sites, and traditions
2	What attractions are attractive to tourists?	Ruins of an ancient city, nature
3	How do you feel about the arrival of tourists?	Positive (50%), neutral (30%), cautious (15%)
4	Are you willing to participate in tourism initiatives?	Excursions, accommodation, and workshops, one part of respondents don't know how to participate
5	How do you think it is possible to attract more tourists to this city?	Advertising, festivals, improved services, and accessibility of facilities.
6	Are you proud of the cultural heritage of your city?	Yes, thanks to history, one part of the respondents hasn't thought about it
7	What suggestions do you want to recommend to improve tourism in the city?	Routes, improvement, job creation, cultural and ethnographic events

Note - Compiled by the authors based on the survey.

As can be seen from Table 3, through the survey of local residents and tourists, it can be seen that there are some advantages and disadvantages in the tourism potential of a small town in the region. Provided that these minor disadvantages are taken into consideration and resolved, sustainable tourism development can be achieved in the region due to the rich tourism potential.

In order to identify internal and external factors affecting the promotion of the tourism brand of small towns in the region, a SWOT analysis was conducted. The results of the analysis are shown below (Table 4):

Table 4. SWOT analysis

S - Strengths	W - Weaknesses
Presence of rich cultural and historical potential; Presence of cities of archaeological significance; Presence of important tourist information knowledge in local communities.	Low quality of infrastructure; Small number of hotels and guest houses; Lack of navigation systems for tourists; Lack of visual brand; Low level of information provision for tourists.
O - Opportunities	T - Threats
Emerging interest on the part of tourists in cultural and historical tourism; Development of state programmes aimed at the development of regions and small towns; Possibility of attracting foreign investors.	Emergence of competition from major tourist centres in other regions; Obsolescence of historical and cultural objects in case of failure to launch appropriate protection activities or to carry out restoration works; Seasonality of tourist flow.

Note - Compiled by the authors based on the survey.

The results of the study allow us to develop the following recommendations aimed at effectively promoting the tourism brand of small towns in the Turkestan region through their historical and cultural heritage:

Social perception of the tourism brand

To strengthen the positive perception of the brand among the local population, it is recommended to develop mechanisms for public participation in brand formation, strengthen the role of cultural identity in positioning the city, and conduct information and educational campaigns aimed at raising residents' awareness of the tourism opportunities in their region.

Communication and marketing strategies

Effective promotion of a tourism brand requires the implementation of modern digital marketing tools, including social media, visual storytelling, and the development of online platforms with a multilingual interface. It is necessary to create targeted marketing campaigns that take into account the specific historical and cultural heritage of each city and focus on domestic and foreign tourists.

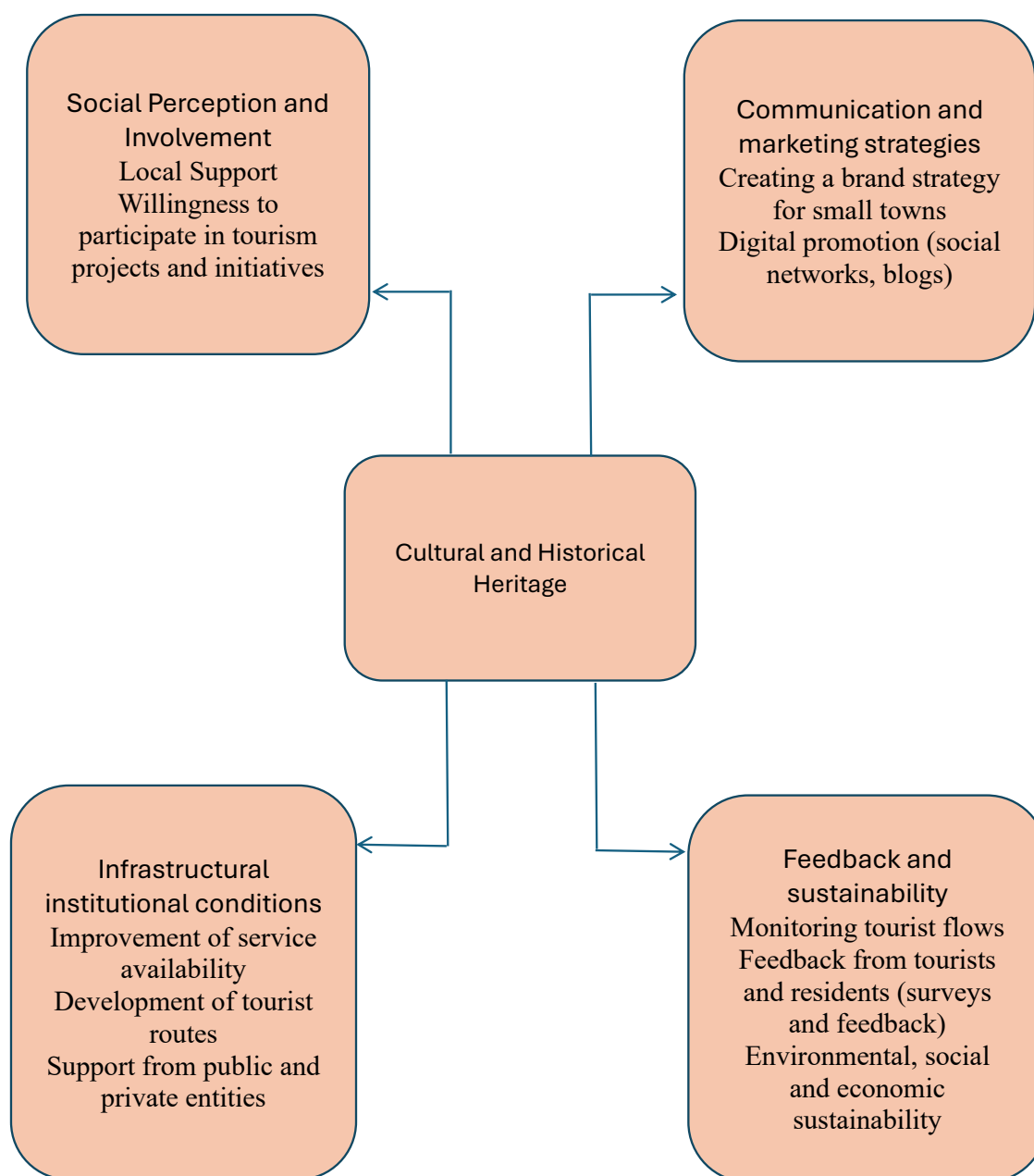
Infrastructure conditions

The most important condition for sustainable tourism development is the development of basic and tourist infrastructure. It is recommended to increase investment in transport accessibility, the quality of hotel services, the creation of a navigation environment, and convenient tourist routes. Particular attention should be paid to the improvement of cultural heritage sites and adjacent areas.

Sustainable development

When creating a tourism brand, it is necessary to take into account the principles of sustainable tourism: preservation of cultural heritage, minimisation of negative impact on the environment, and participation of the local population in the tourism economy. Models aimed at evenly distributing the load on resources and promoting environmentally and culturally

responsible behaviour among tourists and operators should be implemented. Based on the above research, a conceptual model for promoting the tourism brand of small towns in Turkestan region is proposed. According to the model, cultural and historical heritage is the central element of tourism brand formation, and strategic emphasis is based on cross-sector partnership, participation of digital technologies and local community.



Picture 1. Conceptual model of promotion of the tourist brand of small towns of Turkestan region through historical and cultural heritage

The central idea of the model is that historical and cultural heritage acts as the core around which the whole process of formation and promotion of a unique tourist brand is built. The interest of local residents, quality positioning, accessible infrastructure and sustainable development form a sustainable interest in small towns and turn these towns into attractive routes on the tourist map of Turkestan Region.

Conclusion

The conducted research allowed us to comprehensively consider the main issues of formation and promotion of the tourist brand of small towns of Turkestan region on the basis of historical and cultural heritage. The analysis revealed that small towns have a potential that plays an important role in the development of sustainable tourism in the regions, but has not yet been fully disclosed.

In the era of growing competition and globalisation, to attract the attention of tourists, cultural and historical heritage is an integral component of small towns' identity formation. International experience confirms the high effectiveness of historical and cultural heritage as the main tool of tourism brand formation. The results of the empirical research, such as content analysis of information sources, questionnaires of local residents and tourists, interviewing representatives of the tourism industry, revealed several major shortcomings in the formation of the tourist brand. In particular, small towns of Turkestan Oblast are not sufficiently spread in the media space, and information and visual data of tourist products do not always fully reflect the unique cultural features. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the population notes that there is an interest in participating in brand initiatives that involve the local community in the process of tourism development. According to the results of the SWOT analysis, the main key advantages of the region can be named rich cultural and historical heritage and favourable geographical location, as well as the presence of interest in ethno-cultural tourism. However, it can be seen that there are difficulties in the formation of a tourism brand due to the limited tourism infrastructure and insufficient coordination of stakeholders.

Based on the conducted research, a conceptual model for promoting the tourism brand of small towns in the region has been developed. According to this model, cultural heritage serves as a central element of tourist identity. And the main emphasis will be placed on cross-sector partnerships, digital technologies, and local community participation.

Thus, we can say that the tourist formation of small towns in Turkestan region is possible in the conditions of using integrated strategies of cultural resources and elements of sustainable development, modern branding. The recommendations presented in the research work allow not only to increase the tourist attractiveness of the region, but also to preserve its unique historical and cultural image, to launch socio-economic processes, and to consolidate regional identity.

Authors' contribution.

Nurmaganbetkyzy N. – substantive contribution to the concept or design of the work; collecting, analysing or interpreting the results of the work; writing the text and/or critically revising its content; Visiting a small town Sauran of Turkestan region, questionnaire survey of tourists, study of information necessary for the research with the construction of

communications; Taking a survey of local residents and identification of the main advantages and disadvantages in the formation of the tourist brand; data analysis based on the obtained data; Elaboration of a conceptual model based on the work performed.

Zhakupov A.A. – approving the final version of the article for publication;

Sharapayeva B.Zh. – responsible for all aspects of the work, properly examining and addressing issues related to the validity of the data or the integrity of all parts of the article.

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Н. Нурмаганбеткызы*, А.А. Жакупов, Б.Ж. Шарапаева

Евразийский национальный университет имени Л.Н. Гумилева, Астана, Казахстан

Продвижение туристического бренда малых городов Туркестанской области через историко-культурное наследие

Аннотация. В данной статье рассматриваются теоретико-методические и прикладные аспекты формирования и продвижения туристского бренда малых городов Туркестанской области на основе культурно-исторического наследия региона. Актуальность темы исследования неразрывно связана с необходимостью устойчивого развития регионального туризма, важностью повышения инвестиционной привлекательности и формирования уникального имиджа региона.

Целью исследования является выявление потенциала малых городов как туристской дестинации, анализ степени восприятия туристским брендом туристами и местным сообществом, а также разработка концептуальной модели, основанной на культурной самобытности региона. В ходе исследования были использованы методы контент-анализа, социологического опроса, SWOT-анализа. Эмпирическая база составляет результаты исследований, полученных в Сауране.

В результате исследования выявлены ключевые преимущества и недостатки в формировании туристского бренда в малых городах региона. Разработанная концептуальная модель играет важную роль в стратегическом планировании развития туризма в малых городах.

Ключевые слова: малые города, Туркестанская область, культурное наследие, историческое наследие, туристический бренд, культурная идентичность.

Н. Нұрмағанбетқызы*, А.А. Жакупов, Б.Ж. Шарапаева

Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, Астана, Қазақстан

Түркістан облысының шағын қалалар туристік брендінің тарихи-мәдени мұра арқылы ілгерілету

Аңдатпа. Аталмыш мақалада Түркістан облысының шағын қалаларының туристік брендінің қалыптастыру мен ілгерілетудің өңірдің мәдени-тарихи мұрасы негізінде теориялық-әдістемелік және қолданбалы аспектілері қарастырылады. Зерттеу тақырыбының өзектілігі өңірлік туризмді тұрақты дамыту қажеттілігімен, инвестициялық тартымдылықты арттырудың маңыздылығымен және аймақтың бірегей имиджін қалыптастырумен тығыз байланысты.

Зерттеудің мақсаты шағын қалалардың туристік дестинация ретіндегі әлеуетін анықтау, туристер мен жергілікті қауымдастықтың туристік брендті қабылдау дәрежесін талдау, сондай-ақ, өңірдің мәдени ерекшелігіне негізделген концептуалды модельді әзірлеу болып табылады. Зерттеу барысында контент-талдау, әлеуметтік сауалнама, SWOT талдау әдістері қолданылды. Эмпирикалық база Сауран қаласында алынған зерттеу нәтижелерін құрайды.

Зерттеу нәтижесінде аймақтың шағын қалаларында туристік бренд қалыптастырудағы түйінді артықшылықтар мен кемшіліктер анықталды. Әзірленген концептуалды модель шағын қалаларда туризмді дамытуды стратегиялық жоспарлауда маңызды рөл атқарады.

Түйін сөздер: шағын қалалар, Түркістан облысы, мәдени мұра, тарихи мұра, туристік бренд, мәдени ерекшелік.

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Information about authors:

Nurmaganbetkyzy N. – corresponding author, Doctoral student, Department of Tourism, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Satpayev Street, 2, 010008, Astana, Kazakhstan.

Zhakupov A.A. – PhD, Acting Professor, Associate Professor, Department of Tourism, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Satpayev Street, 2, 010008, Astana, Kazakhstan.

Sharapayeva B.Zh. – Doctoral student, Department of Tourism, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Satpayev Street, 2, 010008, Astana, Kazakhstan.

Сведения об авторах :

Нурмаганбетқызы Н. – автор для корреспонденции, докторант, кафедра туризма, Евразийский национальный университет имени Л.Н. Гумилева, ул. Сатпаева, 2, 010008, Астана, Казахстан.

Жакупов А.А. – PhD, и.о. профессора, ассоциированный профессор (доцент), кафедра туризма, Евразийский национальный университет имени Л.Н. Гумилева, улица Сатпаева, 2, 010008, Астана, Казахстан.

Шарапаева Б.Ж. – докторант, кафедра туризма, Евразийский национальный университет имени Л.Н. Гумилева, ул. Сатпаева, 2, 010008, Астана, Казахстан.

Авторлар туралы мәлімет:

Нұрмағанбетқызы Н. – хат-хабар авторы, докторант, туризм кафедрасы, Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, Сәтбаев көшесі, 2, 010008, Астана, Қазақстан.

Жакупов А.А. – PhD доктор, профессор м.а., қауымдастырылған профессор (доцент), туризм кафедрасы, Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, Сәтбаев көшесі, 2, 010008, Астана, Қазақстан.

Шарапаева Б.Ж. – докторант, туризм кафедрасы, Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, Сәтбаев көшесі, 2, 010008, Астана, Қазақстан.



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