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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

**KYRGYZ REPUBLIC**

## SNAPSHOT

# Tourism Development in 45 Minutes

**45 minutes in the air can make a huge difference to the tourism industry: a tale of a resort town in recovery**



Photo: USAID Local Development Program

*Almaty passengers deplane at Issyk-kul International Airport, June 2011.*

***“We are ready to receive passengers. From here, they can easily find transportation to tourist destinations.”***

- *Rashid Ismanov,  
Head of Issyk-Kul  
Airport*

On June 30, 2011 for the first time since the break-up of the Soviet Union, a plane landed at Issyk-Kul International Airport, carrying 50 tourists from Almaty, Kazakhstan. Visitors from Kazakhstan make up 70 percent of the tourists who come to Kyrgyzstan – nearly 1.4 million Kazakhs visited the country in 2009. Most of them come to the beautiful lake, which is renowned for its healing qualities. Thanks to USAID’s Local Development Program, getting from Kazakhstan to Issyk Kul’s vacation resorts is easier than ever – travel time has been reduced from an 8-hour drive to a 45-minute flight. The flight has attracted more tourists to Issyk-Kul, increasing revenue from the main source of income for most people in the region. According to Mirali Muhamedzиеv, a private investor in the Almaty-Issyk-Kul flight, who also manages a tourism company in Kyrgyzstan: “All flights were fully booked through the last week of August.”

In the Issyk-kul region, tourism is a key growth sector, as many local entrepreneurs spend most of the year preparing for the tourist season, which only lasts two months. Due to the short tourist season, many small and medium enterprises have to earn enough in the summer to support their families throughout the rest of the year. As such the introduction of the direct flight from Almaty was a very welcomed development, since more tourists mean more money. The political instability of 2010 caused the number of tourists who came to Issyk-Kul for their summer vacation to fall dramatically, resulting in a very poor season for the bulk of small businesses which make up the tourism industry in the area. This year, they hoped to make up for their losses.

Tourism is identified as one of the key priority sectors for development by the Kyrgyz government. With USAID’s support, the local authorities hope to increase the number of flights from Kazakhstan and to open new direct routes to Issyk-Kul from other countries. The majority of tourists in Kyrgyzstan are from the Commonwealth of Independent States, primarily from Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation. According to Rashid Ismanov, head of the Issyk-Kul Airport, “We are ready to receive passengers. From here, they can easily find transportation to tourist destinations.”

### Telling Our Story

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