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KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

SUCCESS STORY

Historical Town Plans Better Future

A Kyrgyz city invests in preserving and restoring its unique history in to improve its economic future



Children enjoy the new attractions in Karakol's historical downtown. Photo: Urban Institute

“It’s amazing that Karakol is on the way to renovate its historical streets. These are just the kinds of sites that tourists want to see – I will definitely be bringing more people here.”

- a tourist guide from Kazakhstan

Challenge

Karakol, a historical city located on the far eastern tip of the Kyrgyz Republic’s scenic Issyk-Kul Lake, is often overlooked by the multitude of tourists who come to the region every year. Most tourists stop at one of the many resorts to the west of the city and never make a detour to explore Karakol. Though the city contains Kyrgyzstan’s best examples of 19th century architecture, until recently, the city failed to capitalize on its attractions. Most historical buildings had fallen into disrepair and some had even been demolished to make way for newer buildings.

Initiative

With tourism a major industry in the Issyk-Kul area a short drive away, city leaders had been looking to find ways to make Karakol stand out as a tourist destination. USAID’s Decentralization and Local Government Program helped representatives from Karakol’s government, business, and nonprofit sectors to develop a strategic local economic development plan. USAID’s project helped city leaders identify and plan various initiatives to protect historical sites and develop tourism, guided them through their implementation. To demonstrate how the city’s history could help attract tourists, USAID provided an in-kind grant to help restore one of Karakol’s historical streets and the surrounding buildings.

Results

Armed with the advice and guidance from the USAID project, the city began the work on preservation of its history and the development of its tourism sector. As a first step, Karakol City and Issyk-Kul Region’s governments secured almost \$4.8 million for improvements on a ski resort near the city. An Association of Tourist Service Providers was established to organize tourism promotion activities.

Utilizing USAID’s grant, the city also completed the renovation of its historical street in time for the celebration of the region’s 70th anniversary, which was held in Karakol. The unveiling of the street became one of the main attractions for the festivities. “I am pleased that our city now has a nice public place that we can feel proud of and visit with our families,” said one of the residents at the ceremony.