

Kazakhstan Wants to Turn Baikonur Cosmodrome Into Tourist Attraction

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The Russian Progress-M spacecraft is set on its launch pad at Baikonur cosmodrome, Kazakhstan, July 1, 2015.

Kazakhstan hopes to turn Russia's Baikonur Cosmodrome into a tourist attraction within the next two years, expecting it to accommodate thousands of potential visitors wanting to watch space launches from the Central Asian steppes, RIA Novosti reported.

The project envisages the building of several viewing platforms at Baikonur and simplifying the visiting procedure to allow about 200 people to watch rocket launches at any one time, RIA reported Thursday, citing Timur Duysengaliyev, the head of the tourism department at Kazakhstan's Investment and Development Ministry.

However all visits would still need to be approved by the authorities in Russia — which holds a lease on the cosmodrome and maintains security measures around the area

Both Kazakh and foreign investors have shown interest in the project, which could be completed by 2017. RIA quoted Duysengaliyev as saying, without providing additional details

on the potential investors.

Baikonur has its share of basic structures for space officials to watch launches, but offers few provisions for comfort and infrastructure would need to be developed before it could start accepting visitors, Duysengaliyev said, RIA reported.

The Baikonur Cosmodrome sits on the dry steppes of southern Kazakhstan, in one of the bleakest regions of the republic. It is generally accessible through its own airport, which for decades was operated by the Russian military, until it was handed over to a civilian affiliate of the Roscosmos space agency in 2008.

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