



**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT
HASAN KAHRAMAN,
President,
JOY GROUP**

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UNITED WORLD (UW): Could you please tell me why opening a hotel here in Kazan was deemed important to Joy Group and why, of the many regions in the Russian Federation, Kazan was chosen as the site for a Mirage Hotel?

HASAN KAHRAMAN (HK): As the largest company of its kind in Turkey, we were invited to develop the hotel business in Kazan because the big companies in the region were a bit whimsical. The Mirage Hotel was the project we were offered, and one of the prerequisites was to use our logo, Joy.

UW: Could you tell us how the tourism industry here has developed since your arrival?

HK: In terms of tourism, this is a very exciting historical city. In the last 10 years the economy of Tatarstan has had outstanding development, and Kazan has virtually become the unofficial business and economic center of the Volga region. Therefore, there is quite a bit of business tourism. Beyond that, in recent years leisure tourism has begun to grow strongly, especially during summer, and mainly thanks to the help of ships that cruise the river Volga. I cannot give you the exact figures regarding how many tourists come to town, but there are a lot. Both the Government and the businessmen of Tatarstan have also placed emphasis on winter tourism. You do know about our ski resorts and ice roads.

Another strong priority for our businessmen is the development of business-tourism. Large delegations, of around 150 to 200 people, come to Kazan in order to get acquainted with the city and the Republic, and with the economy and industry that is developing here.

UW: And what role do you play in terms of business tourism?

HK: In terms of business tourism, there is a company interested in working with us because we accompany delegations from the point of arrival till departure if necessary. Furthermore, and if needed, we arrange flights and meetings here and offer our complete support wherever it is needed. Since I have been here for 15 years, we also offer information on any subject, including how to meet. Very often we fully organize the trips of delegations that come to Kazan, and sometimes take them to Samara, UFA or Nizhny Novgorod.

UW: *Do you interact with the City Administration in order to help develop tourism, especially leisure tourism?*

HK: Certainly. We are working very closely with the Government of Tatarstan and the City Administration. I believe that leisure tourism needs a certain period of time in order to prepare itself and decide which direction to take. Consequently, that means that it must deal with large, well-organized tour operators because even just in Tatarstan, just to get acquainted with the history, and visit historical places of interest, I think the minimum time needed is a week.



Leisure tourism has also been developing rapidly. We have very good options for winter activities and it's getting harder from year to year to reserve a place because they become more popular. And I believe that over the next 3-4 years, Kazan and Tatarstan will be very good place for leisure tourism. But as I know, your compatriots are more interested in educational tourism rather than leisure tourism.

UW: *Given the remarkable economic progress that has been witnessed in this region, do you see the development of Mirage Hotels in other parts of Tatarstan as a viable option?*

HK: We are building a hotel in the Alabuga Free Economic Zone. We bought the house of one of the most famous Russian merchants and the restoration of it is almost finished. In the end of winter or in the beginning of spring we'll finish an additional building and will open the hotel in autumn. Yelabuga City is also interesting in historical terms; it actually used to be an economic center of Russia and all major merchants lived there. That's why still a lot of tourists come to visit that place. Unfortunately, due to the fact that the base was not developed accordingly there are only one-day tours to Yelabuga.

The next step is opening our third hotel, which will be in Naberezhnye Chelny - the second largest city in the Republic after Kazan. It is also a very rapidly developing center, but in historical terms the city is young. This means that there will only be business tourism. However, there are other activities such as a skydiving. There is a small private airfield in Menzelinsk, near Chelny. This direction in Russia is so heavily developed that a championship has already been held in Russia and people are constantly coming from Vladivostok and Novosibirsk. The only problem, of course, is accommodation, for which we are trying to create the right conditions.

UW: **As the leader of a Turkish company that acted as a pioneer in the region by opening the first 5-star hotel, how would you evaluate the potential for American investors in Tatarstan?**

HK: As a private person, not a bureaucrat, I can say that Tatarstan naturally needs investment, just like any rapidly developing economy. However, my observations have brought me to the conclusion that Tatarstan needs investment in terms of new technologies and know-how. In other words, the economy of Tatarstan has already reached a level where local businessmen are free to choose their partners, and from my point of view as an investor, the Republic of Tatarstan is a very promising destination thanks to its fast growing and strong economy. Also, one cannot forget about the geographical location of the Republic of Tatarstan and the city of Kazan, because with investments here, you can control the whole Volga region.

Initially, investors were interested in working with Moscow. I once said that in 6-7 years investors would turn their attention to the regions, but I was wrong. That



happened in half that amount of time. Today almost all large, medium and small investors are more interested in the regions rather than Moscow. If we look at the level of economic development and the geographic location of the city of Kazan and Tatarstan, my personal opinion is that this is the right place. In order for people to understand me they should know what Kazan looked like 10 years ago and what it looks like nowadays.

UW: Do you see yourself playing a role in aiding the development of a sound hospitality mentality here in Tatarstan?

HK: I do not just see it – that is how it is! Together with the government, the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labor, we have developed and already launched a training program in hospitality management. We also held seminars, which are interesting not only for people engaged in hospitality but other businesses.

UW: Is there a final message you would like to send to our readers?

HK: As a wish or as a recommendation, in order to correctly understand me as a foreigner who works here or other businessmen who work here too: they must come and see with their own eyes, touch with their own hands, and I think then they will not need to be explained anything, they'll just want to work here. We, I mean Mirage Hotel, will provide all the necessary help and support from our side. Many people, different delegations when coming to a new place, need to be accompanied.