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THE DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL OF ECOTOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES IN THE KASHKADARYA REGION

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Abstract: This article explores the development opportunities of ecotourism and sustainable tourism practices in the Qashqadaryo region. The area's natural resources, ecological characteristics, and cultural heritage provide great potential for ecotourism development. The article discusses the socio-economic impact of ecotourism, its benefits for local communities, existing challenges, and provides recommendations for their resolution. It emphasizes the need for environmentally and socially responsible approaches to ensure sustainable ecotourism development.

Key words: ecotourism, sustainable tourism, tourism potential, agrotourism, extreme tourism, natural resources, local population, infrastructure, green tourism, promotion, tourism services.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the development of the tourism sector in Uzbekistan has been defined as one of the priority areas of state policy. In particular, the Kashkadarya region with its rich natural resources, historical monuments, pilgrimage sites, and unique mountainous areas holds significant potential for the development of ecological and cultural tourism. To effectively utilize these opportunities, increase the flow of domestic and foreign tourists, and improve tourism infrastructure, the government is making important decisions. In particular, Resolution No. 198¹ of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated March 8, 2019, "On Measures for the Effective Use of the Tourism Potential of the Kashkadarya Region," serves to promote the comprehensive development of tourism in the region. [1]

Furthermore, based on Resolution No. 376² of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated November 28, 2023, "On Measures to Establish Modern Service and Tourism Facilities in the Mountainous Recreational Areas of the Kashkadarya Region," modern service infrastructure, comfortable accommodation for tourists, and the development of recreational areas are being implemented. [2] Within the framework of these resolutions, agrotourism and extreme tourism destinations are being developed in the villages of Varganza, Hazrati Bashir, Tatar, and Vari. Necessary infrastructure for tourists is being constructed near the Maydanak Observatory and Langar Ota Mosque in Qamashi District. In addition, guest houses, campgrounds, festivals, and other cultural events are expanding local participation in tourism.

These activities not only contribute to the diversification of the regional economy but also support the formation of sustainable tourism practices, environmental protection, and the preservation of cultural heritage. Therefore, analyzing the potential for ecotourism and sustainable tourism development in the Kashkadarya region is of both scientific and practical significance.

1 <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/7266632>

2 <https://www.lex.uz/uz/docs/-6679925>

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several prominent scholars and international documents play an important role in exploring the theoretical foundations and practical possibilities of ecotourism. Notably, the Quebec Declaration incorporates the principles of sustainable tourism related to ecotourism and emphasizes the need to consider the economic, social, and environmental impacts of this sector. The declaration stresses that ecotourism should be based on principles such as the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, community involvement, and enhancing travelers' spiritual and educational experiences. [6] This approach underscores that ecotourism serves not only economic interests but also plays a role in fostering ecological awareness.

Furthermore, involving the population in nature conservation increases ecological consciousness and strengthens responsibility for preserving ecosystems. This is viewed as a crucial mechanism for the sustainable development of ecotourism. [5]

Russian scholars I. Zorin and V. Kvartalnov define ecotourism in two forms. In their first approach, ecotourism is associated with the use of "wild" nature, where introducing environmentally and technologically safe methods is prioritized. This type of tourism aims to minimize negative environmental impacts while promoting educational and recreational functions. The second form integrates an ecological attitude toward nature during travel, awakening a desire to explore and conserve flora and fauna. According to them, the main resources of ecotourism include nature reserves, national parks, and unique landscapes. [7] Based on the reviewed literature, ecotourism emerges as one of the most promising branches of the modern tourism system one that emphasizes ecological sustainability, social engagement, and cultural preservation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, the development potential of ecotourism and sustainable tourism practices in the Kashkadarya region was examined. The research was based primarily on statistical data, official documents, and open-source information. In particular, relevant resolutions from the President and the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan were used as foundational documents. To identify regional characteristics, the study analyzed ecotourism-related infrastructure and opportunities in the mountainous and rural areas of the region. Additionally, official statistics on the number of tourism facilities, tourist inflows, and ongoing projects were utilized. Based on the findings, conclusions and recommendations were developed.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

A number of positive changes are taking place in the Kashkadarya region related to the development of the tourism sector, the increase in the number of local and foreign tourists, and the expansion of tourism infrastructure. Projects being implemented in the region, particularly new directions such as agrotourism, extreme tourism, astronomical tourism, and ethno-villages, are significantly contributing to the increase in tourist flows. In addition, the region hosts 1,197 archaeological, 208 architectural, and a total of 1,468 cultural heritage sites, including historical locations, pilgrimage sites, and shrines. [3]

The tourism infrastructure of the region has expanded, and during 2022, 65.9 thousand people were accommodated in hotels and similar lodging establishments. These figures demonstrate the development of tourism infrastructure in the region and the creation of favorable conditions for tourists. The majority of tourists consisted of citizens of Uzbekistan, indicating a high level of domestic tourism development. Citizens of Uzbekistan made up 94.6% of the tourists, citizens of CIS countries accounted for 2.7%, and the share of foreign tourists was 4.9% – revealing opportunities for the development of international tourism in the region. [4]

Tourism companies served 1.7 thousand tourists and sold 111 tourist packages, contributing to the growth of the tourism market. Most tourists (26,250 people) participated in 1–3 day trips, indicating the prevalence of short-term tourism in the region. This suggests a higher demand for short-term tourism packages in the region's tourism sector. The implementation of new tourism projects in the region, particularly in agrotourism and extreme tourism, is expected to further increase tourist flows. The establishment of agrotourism activities in the villages of Varganza and Hazrati Bashir, the organization of extreme tourism activities in the villages of Tatar, Zarmast, and Vari, and the opening of the Maydanak Observatory in Qamashi district will contribute to attracting more tourists to the region. Agrotourism, extreme tourism, and pilgrimage tourism will help create new tourism directions in the region, and the development of these directions is expected to especially benefit the local economy. Plans to establish 214 guest houses and 9 hostels in the Kashkadarya region will expand the scope of tourism services. Additionally, the construction of 5 guest houses, 5 campgrounds, and 10 yurts in the villages will improve the accommodation conditions for tourists and help increase tourist flows.

Furthermore, new projects are being implemented to develop ethno-villages, a military training camp for

Amir Temur's warriors, and astronomical tourism. The establishment of ecological tourism destinations in the villages of Sarchashma and Suvtushar, as well as astronomical tourism activities at the Kitab Plateau Station, will enrich and diversify the region's tourist attractions. As a result, the development of the tourism sector, the expansion of tourism infrastructure, the establishment of new tourism directions, and the increase in the number of tourists in the Kashkadarya region positively impact the growth of the regional economy. This situation serves to fully utilize the tourism potential of the region and ensure its sustainable development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are significant opportunities for the development of ecotourism in the Kashkadarya region. The region's natural and cultural wealth, along with government-supported policies, are helping to promote the development of tourism. This can contribute to the growth of tourism in the region and create new job opportunities for the local population. Several recommendations have been proposed for this purpose: improving tourism infrastructure and developing the transportation system; engaging the local population in tourism and providing them with new employment opportunities; strengthening environmental protection in the development of ecotourism; enhancing marketing activities to promote the region's tourism potential; improving the quality of tourism services and upgrading hotels and restaurants. In this way, the development of ecotourism and the implementation of sustainable tourism practices in the Kashkadarya region will help boost the regional economy and enhance its tourism potential.

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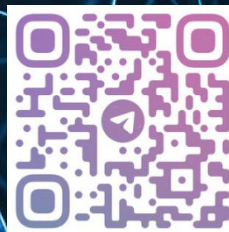
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