



ECOTOURISM POTENTIAL AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

This article discusses the development and potential of ecotourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan, as well as the ongoing reforms, measures, and governmental decisions aimed at developing this sector and direction.

Keywords

Ecotourism, “green economy,” decrees, resolutions, tourism development.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, tourism gained an important place in the world economy. The increase in the material well-being of the global population led to a growing demand for recreation and travel. As a result, the need arose in every country to manage tourist flows by increasing tourism attractiveness. In all regions of the world, including Uzbekistan, meeting tourists’ needs for advertising and information, improving existing infrastructure, and ensuring tourist safety have become strategic objectives. Today, scientific and popular

literature, as well as mass media, actively discuss the role and significance of ecotourism.

At this point, an important question arises: What is the significance of developing ecotourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan? There are several reasons for this.

First, according to international organizations and institutions, while many types of tourism grow annually by an average of 5 percent, ecotourism is increasing by 20–30 percent every year. Scientific studies and conclusions of many specialists and researchers show that although ecotourism is a relatively new and young branch of tourism, its popularity is developing two to three times faster than other tourism sectors.

Second, Uzbekistan has already formed a solid foundation and experience in historical tourism, religious tourism, and cultural tourism.

Third, Uzbekistan currently has nearly 800 tour operator companies, around 600 hotels, more than 30 protected natural areas, and over 60 forestry enterprises. In addition, the country possesses more than 400 unique natural monuments.

The main objectives of ecotourism development are as follows:

- to demonstrate Uzbekistan's ecotourism potential, natural resources, and opportunities in the global tourism services market;
- to encourage scientific research aimed at the effective use of ecological tourism resources and opportunities of territories and geosystems;
- to increase the role and share of ecotourism in the development of tourism;
- to fundamentally improve the quality of ecotourism services and rapidly increase their volume;

- to create scientific, innovative, and methodological developments directed toward the future development of ecotourism.

Uzbekistan is extremely rich in ecotourism resources and opportunities. Ecotours organized by tour operators along routes such as “Tashkent–Chorvoq–Tashkent,” “Tashkent–Zomin–Tashkent,” and “Tashkent–Aydarkul–Tashkent,” as well as camel rides in desert areas, attract great attention and recognition not only from tourists within Uzbekistan but also from visitors around the world.

According to analyses, most tour operator companies providing ecotourism services currently operate mainly within the Chimyon–Chorvoq recreational zone. Uzbekistan also has significant opportunities for speleotourism due to its unique and attractive caves and landscapes. At present, there are more than 500 caves in the country. However, according to available information, no ecotours are organized to these caves because of insufficient tourism infrastructure.

The deserts and plains of Uzbekistan also have considerable ecotourism potential. These areas provide opportunities to organize camel tours that demonstrate sand dunes, tugai forests, saline lands, takirs, wells, and the traditional lifestyle of local shepherds.

According to scientific research institutions and specialists, the future directions and prospects of ecotourism development are closely connected with natural laws and the stability of geosystems. In recent years, a number of scientific studies aimed at revealing the scientific and methodological foundations of ecotourism have been carried out in Uzbekistan. Candidate and master’s dissertations have been defended, and scientific and educational literature has been published. Theoretical

aspects of ecotourism and local history studies have also been examined within the traditional master-apprentice educational system.

However, analyses show the urgent need to train bachelor-level specialists who possess deep knowledge of nature and geosystems, can manage tourist groups in natural and extreme conditions, and are capable of providing first medical aid when necessary. Unlike historical, religious, medical, and cultural tourism, which are mainly organized in cities with developed infrastructure and service facilities, ecotours are usually conducted in nature and geosystems and are often characterized by extreme conditions.

In this regard, the Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PQ-21 dated January 12, 2024, "On Measures for the Development of Ecological Tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan," was adopted. This resolution aims to diversify tourism services, accelerate the implementation of investment projects, create favorable conditions for ecotourism development through the rational use of available resources, attract foreign direct investment, and provide additional opportunities for business entities. It also focuses on creating jobs and expanding income sources for the population living in mountainous, remote, and desert regions.

According to the resolution:

1. The Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change, the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, regional administrations, and the Tashkent city administration approved proposals to allocate land plots located in buffer zones of state reserves, national parks, nurseries, forestry and hunting farms,

mountainous and desert areas, and water protection zones for the establishment of tourism clusters by business entities.

2. Land plots located in eco-zones will be leased to entrepreneurs for a period of 10 years through the “E-auksion” electronic trading platform, with the possibility of extending the lease period, while preserving their existing land category.
3. The Ministry of Ecology was granted the right to involve foreign project institutes and consultants in developing master plans and detailed planning projects for tourism clusters organized in eco-zones.

In addition, the national program “Travel to Nature” aimed at developing ecotourism was included in the resolution.

The measures implemented to develop ecotourism in Uzbekistan are primarily aimed at preserving the country’s natural wealth, transforming these resources into tourism opportunities, and creating new jobs for local populations. Ecotourism plays an important role not only in environmental protection but also in promoting historical and cultural heritage.

In conclusion, all the above-mentioned resolutions, decrees, and laws are directed toward the development of ecotourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan. The development of ecotourism occupies an important place in the country’s sustainable development strategy. This process ensures harmony between environmental protection, economic growth, and the preservation of cultural heritage.

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