



THE SPECIFIC FEATURES OF ECOTOURISM SERVICES IN ENHANCING THE EFFICIENCY OF TOURISM

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Abstract

This article analyzes the development of tourism in Uzbekistan, with a particular focus on ecotourism and its economic, environmental, and social significance. It emphasizes the important role of ecotourism in nature conservation, increasing the incomes of local populations, and promoting sustainable tourism. Various types and conceptual approaches to ecotourism are examined based on international experience and scientific research. The article also highlights the role of innovative approaches and technological solutions in the tourism sector. Overall, the article is dedicated to the prospects for the development of ecotourism in Uzbekistan and effective ways to utilize its potential.

Keywords. Tourism, ecotourism, economic development, nature conservation, environmental sustainability, socio-economic impact, national tourism, infrastructure, innovation, investment..

Introduction

The Republic of Uzbekistan is considered one of the countries in Central Asia with the greatest tourism potential. The country's rich historical and cultural heritage, unique natural areas, and favorable geographical location create ample opportunities for the rapid development of the tourism sector. Tourism is one of the key sectors of the economy, contributing positively by creating new jobs, attracting local and foreign investments, and increasing foreign currency earnings.

In recent years, considerable attention has been given to the development of tourism in Uzbekistan, particularly ecotourism. Ecotourism plays an important role in nature



conservation, ensuring economic sustainability, and improving the well-being of the population. For this reason, national programs related to ecotourism have been adopted, and a number of regulatory and legal reforms have been implemented.

In Presidential Decree No. PQ-21 dated January 12, 2024, President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev instructed the Ministry of Investments, Industry, and Trade, together with the Ministry of Ecology, to take measures to attract potential foreign and local investors as well as international organizations and their grant resources for the establishment of tourism clusters in eco-regions. Clearly, this topic is highly relevant today.

This study analyzes the opportunities for developing ecotourism in Uzbekistan, its economic and environmental significance, and the current challenges and promising solutions in the sector. Moreover, the paper provides proposals for the effective organization of ecotourism based on international experience and scientific approaches.

Review of the Literature

Currently, the development of the ecotourism sector and the study of its scientific and theoretical-methodological foundations are considered priority areas. The improvement of the scientific and theoretical-methodological foundations for the development of ecotourism has been extensively studied by both Uzbek and foreign scholars. In this regard, the scientific works of foreign researchers such as A.V. Babkin, M.B. Birzhakov, A.V. Drozdov, and L.I. Egorenko can be mentioned. In their studies, these scholars have explored the theoretical and methodological issues related to the development of tourism and ecotourism. Within Uzbekistan, the issues of enhancing the competitiveness of the national economy and the theoretical-methodological bases for the development of tourism have been reflected in the works of scholars such as M.Q. Pardayev, H.N. Musayev, N.N. Safarova, N.S. Ibragimov, S. Ibodullayev, and others. These studies have also paid considerable attention to the scientific foundations of ecotourism as an important direction in tourism development.

Methodology

During the research process, various electronic and printed sources authored by both foreign and Uzbek scholars on the subject were analyzed. The methodological



framework of the study is based on general theoretical and methodological approaches, system analysis and synthesis methods, economic-statistical tools, decision-making strategies, and comparative analysis techniques.

Analysis and Results

The Republic of Uzbekistan possesses relatively large tourism potential among the Central Asian countries, enabling it to withstand strong international competition and offering considerable opportunities for further tourism development. Tourism development is economically efficient — its organization is cost-effective and provides high returns. As a result, the investments made into the sector pay off quickly and generate profit. In addition, in the context of growing international competition in the tourism market, the development of ecotourism in Uzbekistan remains a highly relevant issue.

At present, Uzbekistan is implementing major tasks aimed at improving the tourism sector, which has great potential to create jobs, stabilize the economy, accelerate regional development, increase foreign exchange earnings, and raise population incomes and living standards, thereby addressing socio-economic challenges in the long term. In this context, on January 12, 2024, the President of Uzbekistan adopted Decree No. PQ-21, "On Measures for the Rapid Development of Ecological Tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan."

This decree sets out objectives for creating a favorable economic, administrative, and legal environment for the rapid development of tourism, implementing the most effective management practices, expanding the economic potential and income base of regions, creating new jobs, increasing the flow of tourists to the country, and promoting national tourism products in the global market in an active and integrated manner.

Based on this decree, actions have been initiated to improve legal and regulatory frameworks, strengthen international cooperation, reduce the cost of travel to Uzbekistan, develop tourism and related infrastructure in all regions of the country, diversify tourism products, establish new tourism sites, and actively promote national tourism products in both domestic and international markets.

Additionally, the decree highlights the attraction of foreign investment into tourism zones and mountain (and foothill) tourism clusters, as well as the invitation of leading



international hotel brands to construct new hotels in Uzbekistan or take over the management of existing hotel facilities.

Before delving into the specifics of ecotourism in Uzbekistan, it is appropriate to define the concept of “tourism” and clarify its meaning. Tourism refers to the travel of individuals outside their permanent residence for recreational, educational, professional, or other purposes, for a period of no more than one year, without engaging in income-generating activities in the destination location (country).

Ecotourism, in turn, is an integral part of the natural tourism infrastructure. It is not just a concept, but a distinct form of general tourism that can have varying impacts on the environment — negative, neutral, or positive. The concept of “ecotourism” is widely used today in the operations of nature reserves and national parks. The rapid global growth of this form of tourism is driven not only by environmental degradation but also by the increasing commercialization and overuse of popular recreational areas such as mountain resorts, warm coastal regions, plains, and forest zones.

According to global data, tourism, as one of the world’s largest industries, is closely linked to many key sectors of the global economy. Over the past half-century, tourism and international travel have steadily increased, with a particularly growing interest in ecotourism. Today, traditional ecotourism is often characterized by natural environments that possess certain conservation qualities valuable for wildlife, specific regions, local populations, and natural resource bases. In many cases, it requires minimal investment while generating higher returns.

Hotels or mega-resorts built using non-local materials—often symbols of dominant ecotourism—tend to show limited demand for local food products and typically serve urban interests. Their marketing strategies focus on attracting large crowds, operating at high volumes. The seasonal nature of this tourism often results in local communities only gaining temporary, low-paying jobs linked to this form of travel.

In a narrow sense, **ecotourism** refers to travel to natural habitats where living organisms reside. More broadly, it includes environmentally oriented trips by individuals who leave their permanent residences for a limited period to engage in recreation, sports, wellness, and educational or cultural activities. In this context, we may define ecotourism as a type of tourism that specifically aims to achieve environmental goals.



Ultimately, regions undergoing significant change are transformed to meet visitor demands, which can lead to the commodification of natural and cultural resources. For instance, overly dramatized representations of cultural or historical events may distract and mislead tourists, rather than offer genuine learning experiences.

Today, a broader definition of “ecological tourism” may also refer to the process of aligning the awareness and behavior of local populations with the principles of ecotourism. This approach enables the gradual development of optimal technologies for tourism that do not harm natural resources. The growing interest in ecotourism is largely due to the increasing demand for authentic travel experiences and a heightened awareness of environmental conservation.

Ecotourism includes tourism types that are compatible with natural, cultural, and social values and that promote the integration of nature and culture within the local environment. According to scholars, **ecotourists** often consist of well-funded and highly educated travelers from middle to upper-income groups. Due to the scarcity of untouched natural areas on our planet, travel to such destinations is typically limited and significantly more expensive. As a result, the revenue generated from ecotourism is often several times higher than that of traditional tourism.

Currently, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) and the World Tourism Organization (WTO), **ecotourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors** in the global tourism industry and is receiving considerable attention for its development.

In many cases, terms such as **nature-based tourism, sustainable tourism, green tourism, responsible tourism, and volunteer tourism** are used interchangeably with “ecotourism.” Although these types of tourism may share certain elements, they are not synonymous and cannot fully replace one another.

Ecotourism is a type of nature-based tourism. It may include certain elements of adventure tourism, such as horseback riding or kayaking. The most commonly accepted definition of ecotourism is as follows:

Ecotourism is nature-based tourism that involves experiencing and understanding the natural environment. Its management is conducted in a way that ensures ecological, social, and cultural sustainability. It incorporates the conservation of the natural environment and cultural components, promotes ecological sustainability, generates appropriate income for local populations, and ensures the long-term preservation of the resources used.



Like other forms of tourism, **ecotourism** should be environmentally sustainable, provide enjoyment to travelers, and generate income for local communities. Moreover, it must be **compatible with the natural and cultural environment**. Compatibility means that the form, scale, and type of activity must align with the landscape's scale and character, as well as the customs and traditions of the local population.

Ecotourism involves travel by individuals from their permanent places of residence into natural environments for the purposes of leisure, physical activity, wellness, educational or spiritual engagement, and environmental objectives. From this perspective, the main goal of ecotourism is to **ensure ecological safety and sustainable development** for current and future generations through tourism.

Today, ecotourism is a complex field that links the interests of tourism, nature conservation, and environmental protection — making it highly significant.

The many definitions of ecotourism can generally be grouped into two categories. In the first case, when referring to actual trips, **ecotourism** means travel to pristine or minimally disturbed natural areas — to experience landscapes, wild flora and fauna, and culturally enriching experiences in relatively undisturbed environments. In the second case, **ecotourism** is defined as an activity aimed at preserving the ecological balance of nature — a form of nature-based tourism that studies the natural and cultural environment and seeks to improve its condition.

Let us consider several widely accepted definitions of ecotourism:

- According to **The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)**, ecotourism is defined as:
 - *“Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education.”*
 - Ecotourism is a form of nature-based tourism that is implemented in accordance with principles of environmental sustainability and is based on **ecological education and awareness programs**.
 - Ecotourism also refers to purposeful travel to natural areas with the aim of gaining a **deeper understanding of local culture**, while ensuring the conservation of natural resources that benefit local communities — all without compromising the integrity of the ecotourism experience.

Ecotourism is an environmentally sustainable form of nature tourism that focuses on wildlife experiences and environmental awareness, while minimizing environmental



impact, consumption, and expenses. It is typically organized in accordance with ethical principles and is oriented toward local benefit. This form of tourism usually develops within protected areas and is aimed at contributing to the preservation of those territories.

Ecotourism is a type of tourism that allows people to enjoy nature and better understand living organisms and their interactions with the environment. This activity does not cause environmental degradation and aims to conserve natural resources. It is also accessible to the majority of local social groups and ensures the economic benefits of sustainable “horizontal” development. In addition, true ecotourism promotes fairness toward both people and nature.

Ecotourism refers to a form of nature tourism that supports environmental protection and helps preserve natural heritage.

According to the **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**, *“ecological tourism or ecotourism is responsible travel to natural environments that does not harm the natural surroundings. It promotes learning about nature and its attractions, contributes to conservation, exerts minimal environmental impact, improves the socio-economic conditions of local populations, and ensures that these communities benefit from such activities.”*

Similarly, the **Tourism Society** defines ecotourism as: *“Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.”*

According to the **World Wildlife Fund (WWF)**, *“Ecotourism is travel to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the aim of learning about their ecological and cultural characteristics. It creates economic conditions under which environmental protection and sustainable use of natural resources benefit local communities, without compromising the integrity of the ecotourism experience.”*

Another definition describes ecotourism as:

“A set of interconnected activities that involve travel to exotic natural areas—focusing not only on educational and spiritual goals, but also on addressing socio-economic challenges.”

Although these definitions differ slightly in detail, they all share the same core purpose: to **conserve nature**, protect and increase biodiversity, establish protected areas and national parks, improve the living conditions of local populations by



creating new jobs, and enrich the state budget through the attraction of both local and foreign investments.

To better understand the concept of “ecological tourism,” scholars propose a conceptual system consisting of interconnected terms such as **ecotourism**, **ecology**, and **ecotourism ethics**. Among these, ecotourism ethics is of particular importance. It is described as a **code of respect** toward living nature, the landscapes visited, and the people who inhabit them.

Conclusion and Recommendations

An analysis of the various definitions of the term “ecotourism” reveals that it encompasses several key characteristics, including:

- the indirect use of wild nature as the environment visited by tourists;
- minimal damage to the surrounding environment;
- a recreational and positive educational impact on individuals;
- opportunities to discover new landscapes and study samples of flora and fauna for conservation purposes;
- the use of tourism-generated revenue to protect and restore flora and fauna across various global regions;
- strict adherence by all tourists and service providers to a code of respect for wildlife and local communities.

The generalization of the concept of “ecotourism” leads to the conclusion that the principles underlying the organization of tourism—those listed above—are not only local in nature but also global.

These principles should be applicable not only to certain parts of the world or specific land, water, and air zones, but to all areas engaged in tourism activities worldwide.

Furthermore, the theoretical grounding of the “ecotourism” concept enables the local population to gradually align their mindset and behavior with the requirements of ecotourism. In turn, this fosters the development of optimal technologies for advancing tourism activities without causing harm to natural resources.

Thus, the ecotourism system is based on principles that can be applied across various areas of tourism, including:

- educational or adventure-based travel (e.g., hiking, horseback riding, water sports, mountain trekking, nature walks, etc.);
- student holidays;



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- ornithological tours;
 - scientific trips and expeditions;
 - weekend excursions;
 - summer camps for children, and more.

The growing interest in ecotourism stems from an increasing demand for authentic travel experiences and a heightened public interest in nature conservation.

Ecotourism includes types of tourism that align with natural, cultural, and social values, promoting the harmony between culture and nature within a natural environment.

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