

## ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF KARAKALPAKSTAN: HISTORICAL PLACES AND PROTECTED AREAS

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### Abstract

The paper examines some theoretical and methodological issues of the development of ecological tourism in the Republic of Karakalpakstan. Presents the problems and ways to solve them, given the tourism potential assessment of Karakalpakstan, including analyze new ecotourism destinations in the Region.

This paper examines some theoretical and methodological issues for the development of ecological tourism in the Republic of Karakalpakstan. As in many regions of Uzbekistan, there is a substantial tourism potential, not only for the development of standard tourism, but also for a kind of ecotourism in the Republic of Karakalpakstan. We present challenges and ways to solve them, given the tourism potential assessment of Karakalpakstan. Our analysis includes new ecotourism destinations in the Region. The region is located on the Great Silk Road which was an ancient trade route of strategic importance, and was the only land route between the Caspian and Aral Seas. Now this territory, located on the Ustyurt plateau links Uzbekistan to the east and west through road and railways which are the arteries of the economy of Uzbekistan.

**Key words:** ecotourism, historical places, development, protected areas, tourism industry.

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### INTRODUCTION

Today in economically developed countries special attention has been paid to the development of tourism services, which are an integral part of the service sector. Today, ecotourism is the most intensively developing tourism industry, according to the WTO, "the annual growth of ecotourism is 30 %, and its share in global tourism revenues is 10-15 %". However, the rapid growth of mass tourism and environmental carelessness have had environmental impacts which has led to calls for increasing tourism. Ecotourism benefits the environment, society, culture and economy of attraction areas and local communities, and provides the best solution to long-term needs to protect and promote local natural and cultural diversity. However, many ecotourism developments fail due to the lack of a proper assessment of tourism potential [10] which is necessary for tourist attraction development [17]. Tourism potential is composed of the location, accessibility, accommodations, infrastructure, services, value, and abundance of resources within a community or location that can be transformed into tourist attractions or finished products [15].

There is a significant body of literature on improving the methodological foundations for the development of ecotourism, the rational use of natural resources, and developing and improving the regulatory framework for ecotourism. Studies have focused on determining the impact of tourism on the environment, maintaining a balance between nature and tourism, and developing a model for the development of ecotourism. At the same time, a number of important tasks include determining the influence of ecological tourism to the national economy and the impact of ecotourism in the economy [3].

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Ecotourism

Ecotourism is the fastest growing sector, with an estimated growth rate of 10-15%, of one of the largest industries in the world: tourism [11]. Ecotourism has been defined as environmentally responsible, enlightening travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and

appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socioeconomic involvement of local populations [7].

According to this definition, ecotourism can involve both cultural and environmental tourism where benefits to the local population are an integral part of the activity.

The demands of increasingly affluent consumers for "remote", "natural" and "exotic" environments have created an upsurge in ecotourism ventures, particularly in developing countries. Concurrently, within western countries, wilderness areas and lands occupied by indigenous peoples have been opened up to the tourism industry. Of less developed tourism areas that ecotourists seek some, they are particularly vulnerable to cultural disruption and environmental degradation [5].

While some writers emphasize the potential for ecotourism to promote the wellbeing of both local peoples and their environments, [8] others caution us from uncritically accepting ecotourism as a common good [4, 6, 18]. As Cater (p. 85) notes, "there is a very real danger of viewing ecotourism as the universal panacea, and the ecotourist as some magic breed, mitigating all tourism's ills" [5].

In practice, with the terms ecotourism and cultural tourism often being used merely as marketing tools, [14] such forms of tourism are sometimes ethically problematic. When business is the main driving force behind ecotourism it is not surprising that the ventures which emerge may serve to alienate, rather than benefit, local communities. In the South Pacific, for example, ... the concept of ecotourism ... has been promoted within a particularly narrow band of conservation and business thought which has often failed to appreciate the role of social and political values within sustainable tourism development [12]. Thus, there is a need for an approach to ecotourism, which starts from the needs, concerns and welfare of local host communities [13].

### Ecotourism in the Republic of Karakalpakstan Potential in the region

The Republic of Karakalpakstan is the Republic located in the western side of the Republic of Uzbekistan, which has a rich tourism and recreational potential ([www.karakalpakstan.travel](http://www.karakalpakstan.travel)). Many unique natural, cultural, historical and recreational resources, objects of world and national cultural and historical heritage are concentrated here. Karakalpakstan has a wide range of potentially attractive tourist sites and complexes, which are popular with both local and foreign tourists. The concentration of different types of tourist and recreational resources makes it possible to develop almost all types of tourism - from cultural-historical to business, from recreational to ecological, as well as rural tourism.

In 2005, delivered deals on the prospects for socio-economic development of the Aral Sea by Nukus branch of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea. And notes that "Integrated service places, industry points, small hotels, sports, hunting and fishing farms in convenient areas should be constructed along small ecological tours and permanent action programs need to be developed" [2].

Like in many regions of Uzbekistan, the Republic of Karakalpakstan has great potential to develop not only general tourism, but also ecotourism. This is due to Karakalpakstan's unique nature including, the Lower Amudarya State Biosphere Reserve, Ustyurt plateau, Kizilkum desert and the area of the Aral Sea, beaches of the Amudarya River, the remaining mountains of Sultan Uvays, Beltau mountains.

In particular, the Ustyurt plateau, located in northwestern of Karakalpakstan and bordering with Kazakhstan as well as the Russian Federation, and between the Caspian and the Aral Sea is extremely arid to the extent that farming is not possible. However, despite such a difficult environmental nature, remains of human settlements from the Old Stone Age to the early twentieth century can be found in the Ustyurt plateau. In particular, there are some fortresses in the Ustyurt Plateau whose construction is mysterious for science.

The Ustyurt Plateau is located along the Great Silk Road, the ancient trade route of strategic importance and a single place between the Caspian Sea and the Aral Sea. At present, the plateau is the gate of the Northwestern region of Uzbekistan connecting East and West. The highway and railway located in the Ustyurt Plateau fit international standards and they are the blood vessels of the economy.

The Ustyurt plateau has about 600 species of plants, of which more than 70 are medicinal plants and the raw material for the global pharmaceutical industry. The 5.2 million hectare Ustyurt plains are used to feed horses, cattle, sheep and goats for nine months of the year. Bird fauna is unique, with more than 200 bird species living on the plateau over the course of a year. Fifty-two species of birds next on the plateau. Unfortunately, tourist on the Ustyurt plateau's can be considered its escarpments. This plane attracts tourists as it reminds the mountain from the side. One of the most important fauna species of Uzbekistan is the Saiga antelope, which is protected by the Red Book of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species.

The largest reserve, Sudoche Lake, is located in South-West part of Muynak, in the East part of the Ustyurt plateau and in the North-West part of the Kungrad district. In 1950, it was 40 thousand hectares in area. At the beginning of the twentieth century Sudoche Lake was 130-135 km long, 16-43 km wide and 0.6-3 meters deep. The lake produced 15-20 tons of fish and other food products per hectare per year. The sea foods are fished about 15-20 tons per hectare every year.

Every year during the migration, 8-10 million different groups of birds stop for rest and nutrition in Sudoche Lake. In the territory of Lake Sudoche and Ustyurt escarpment, 187 species of bird belonging to 44 families are found.

The main attraction of the city of Nukus, the capital of

Karakalpakstan, is State Museum of Arts named after I.Savitsky. The museum's collection includes more than 90 thousand items, including applied decoration and other cultural artifacts, ancient and medieval art, and fine art. The advertising materials about this museum, will undoubtedly allow tourists to get acquainted with the most important periods in the development of the culture. Every year, the museum is visited by 10-12,000 foreign and more than 120,000 domestic tourists.

Furthermore, the Museum in Muynak District presents information regarding a significant impact of the Aral Sea on the ecological conditions in the region, the past and the present of this sea, the life of the fishers, the Muynak canning factory, the "graveyard of ships" and culture of local people's life.

Berdakh Museum in Nukus was opened on the 25th anniversary of the establishment of Karakalpak State University and includes the poet Berdakh manuscripts, as well as artifacts reflecting the social life of the people in his period, such as money, musical instruments, books and paintings of well-known artists. In addition, the House Museum of Ayimkhan Shamuratova, who is the famous singer of Central Asia is located in Nukus.

There are about 40 hotels in Karakalpakstan. Most of them are located in the city of Nukus. In addition, there are national yurts (black houses) in Muynak, Ayazkala, Toprakkala and also on the beaches of lakes.

Today, 245 objects of historical and cultural heritage have been added to the state protection list, of which 46 Forty-six are historical architecture and 118 are historical-architectural complexes.

Several actions are being implemented to develop the tourism infrastructure of the region, including improvement of national legislation, increasing the implementation of legislation, improving the conditions of cultural, historical and archeological objects of interest to tourists, the conservation and restoration of these objects, and the creation of favorable conditions for tourists.

### Historical places

In accordance with the State Program on the development of tourism, many services are planned for foreign tourists in archaeological sites of the regions of the Republic, as well as marking road signs in parking spaces and advertising banners. For this reason, on the basis of decrees of the local authorities, lands were given to organize tourist agencies, namely: "Ayaztur", "Djambaskala tur", "Toprakkala tur", "Akhunjan Shakhshanem" along the historical and archaeological complexes "Djambaskala", "Bazar kala", "Kumbaskankala", "Koykirilgankala" in the Turtkul district, "Great Guldirsinkala", "Ayazkala 1-2", "Toprakkala" in the Ellikala district, "Shilpik" in the Amudarya district, the complex "Mizdakkhan" in the Khodjeyli district. In the next sections we describe key archaeological sites in Karakalpakstan.

**Ayaz Kala**, series of three fortresses 2<sup>nd</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries CE.

Ayaz Kala is located on three levels on the Eastern side of the Sultan Uvays mountain ridge. Ayaz-1, built on top a red rock, with a steep bank falling to the ancient delta of the Amudarya, is the oldest part of the series. At its foot lay the Palace of King Afrig (Ayaz-3), from where a ramp led up to Ayaz-2, the citadel that protected the palace. Until the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the entire fort served to the population of the fertile planes in times of attacks and warfare.

**Angka Kala**, fortresses 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries CE.

This is a good example of the Late Antique defense architecture of Ancient Khorezm. The square shape of the plan is central-symmetric and well preserved. The site is a fortified town, with double walls and large rectangular towers located in the corners and the middle of the fortress, which served to protect the large, densely populated oasis during many centuries.

**Koykirilgan Kala**, astral temple 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE - 4<sup>th</sup> century CE

This circular fortress was unanimously considered by scientists to be a cult structure used for astronomical observations of the sun and the stars. At the time construction, the Sun and Water cult prevailed and particular devotion was given to the Formalhaut star (in Arabic: 'Waters edge'), the alpha star of the Piscis Austrinus constellation. Today we can see only insignificant fragments of the concentric circles of this most mysterious and unique monument of Ancient Khorezm.

**Toprak Kala**, 1-4<sup>th</sup> centuries CE

The Toprak Kala site of ancient cities is located on the territory of the Elikkala district of the Republic of Karakalpakstan. S.P. Tolstov discovered the site in 1938. In 1940, the first excavation was carried out and digs were conducted until 1992. This site covers an area of 500x350 meters. The site has a rectangular shaped plan surrounded by fortress walls preserved in their rampart shape which are 8-9 meters high in some places. It was determined that one of the blocks housed temples which were traditionally built here throughout the city's history. Rams' horns decorated with gilded bronze rings were found in another building. There were multiple gifts scattered about: glass vessels, decorations, alabaster sculpture fragments and many murals depicting dancing fantasy masks.

**Kizil Kala**, 1-2<sup>nd</sup> centuries CE., 12 - beginning of 13<sup>th</sup> centuries CE.

The fortress is located 27 kilometers to the north of Beruniy city. Archeologists first discovered the monument in 1938. The fortress is located in a valley and has a square shape with the dimensions 65x63 meters. Its corners are oriented to the four cardinal directions of the world. The outside wall was carved with two circles of lancet loopholes. It was apparently built as a defensive fortress, and was included in the line of Khorezm fortifications created by the government to protect the northeastern borders of ancient Khorezm. At the same time, the fortress was the center of an agricultural region and a junction on the caravan routes through the Sultan Uaystau mountain range.

**Djanbas Kala**, fortress, 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE - 1<sup>st</sup> century CE

The fortress is located on the northwestern mountainside of a barren rocky cliff, enclosing a ridge stretching to the southeast from Sultan Uvays Mountain. It is of a rectangular shape, with the dimensions 200x170 meters. The materials collected from the site are mainly ceramics, which are characteristic of the early Antique (Kangyu) culture of Khorezm.

**The Great Guldursin**, a fortress from the 3-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE - 12-13<sup>th</sup> centuries CE

Located 20 kilometers to the east of Beruniy city this fortress was first studied in 1937 by the archeologist A.G. Gulyamov. In 1940, S.P. Tolstov continued the excavation which was completed. from 1987 to 1994 by I.O. Dospanov. The Great Guldursin is one of the largest Khorezm frontier fortresses, which was built on the base of a desolate ancient fortress. It represents an irregular rectangle with the dimensions 350x230 meters, with the corners oriented to different parts of the world. A great number of pieces of antique and Middle Age ceramics, bronze articles and decorations, as well as antique and medieval coins were found inside during the archeological excavations. The coin discoveries are evidence that the last period of the monument's habitation was during Muhammed Khorezmshah's rule in 1220, or to the time of the Mongol invasion of Khorezm.

**Mizdahkan (Gaur Kala)**. Archeological and Architectural complex, 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE - 14<sup>th</sup> century CE

The archeological complex of the ancient Mizdahkan is located on a vast zone covering over 200 hectares along the big arterial routes on the way to Kunya-Urgench (Turkmenistan) and to the northern regions of the republic of Karakalpakstan - Kungrad and Muynak and to the Ustyurt plateau. The main parts are situated on the three hills on the southwestern outskirts of

Khodjeyli city, including the Gaur Kala fortress, the Shamunnabi, Nazlumkhan Suliw, and Halifa Erezhep mausoleums and a Caravansaray. Archeologists excavated unique ossuaries, coins, various domestic utensils, glass, and highly artistic golden articles from this site.

**Nazlimkhan Suliw mausoleum**

The mausoleum is located in the western part of the northern half of the cliff. Half of it is underground. Only the cupola and the entrance portal are seen above the ground. A staircase leads down through the vaulted corridor from the portal to a small cupola structure. Another staircase leads down to the central room.

Data from coins found here shows that the mausoleum construction dates as far as the 14<sup>th</sup> century., which connects with the trading cities of the Golden Horde and Khorezm's rise. Mizdahkan was one of these cities, located on the brisk international trade roads.

**Shilpik**. A cult structure of the 2-4<sup>th</sup> centuries, 9-11<sup>th</sup> centuries CE.

Shilpik, a circular construction, is located along the highway 43 kilometers to the south of Nukus (on the way to Khiva, Samarkand, and Tashkent) on the edge of a conical 35-40 meter high hill. It has the shape of an open-ended circle 65-79 meters in diameter. The walls are 15 meters high. In the 2-4<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was constructed as a Zoroastrian Dahma. In the 9-11<sup>th</sup> centuries local citizens used it as a signal tower.

**Djanpik Kala**. The site of ancient cities of the 9-11<sup>th</sup> centuries, and 13-14<sup>th</sup> centuries CE.

The site of ancient cities is located six kilometers to the southeast of Karatau settlement, on the southwestern spurs of the Sultan Uvays mountain range. It is one of the picturesque monuments of the right-bank of the Amudarya river. Djanpik Kala is located in the Lower Amudarya State Biosphere Reserve. The site has a complex configuration. The citadel has been preserved in the eastern part with a rectangular shape. The walls are decorated with close semi-columns, and the tops are finished with stepped arcs in pairs.

Archeological excavations provided an idea of the site's chronology. The ancient ceramics date to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE - 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. The date of the latest habitation has been determined by the coins found at the excavations, and traces back as far as the years 1319-1320 and 1345-1346. Numerous artifacts brought earlier from different Oriental and European countries (China, Egypt, Russia, Europe, and India) were revealed at the excavations. The site of these ancient cities was used as a port in the Middle Ages.

**Special protected areas**

Ecotourism is a term that links ecological or nature sustainability with tourism, it is a segment of nature-based tourism an alternative form of tourism in the biophysical environment in natural areas, ecologically sustainable tourism and many others. Ideally, ecotourism should take place in natural areas such as protected areas, sacred natural sites, and lands owned by governments, private agencies, and communities [1]. Khamidov highlights that "... ecotourism in a number of countries has risen to the level of a leading sector of the economy. In accordance with this, and its management is carried out in new forms. Reserve, their national parks have become the main targets for the development of ecotourism. 10-12% of the territory of the protected area is used for recreational purposes" [9].

There are two models of ecotourism: the Australian model, formed in the USA and Canada, and fully implemented in Australia, and the Western European model, implemented in the cultural landscape.

Based on the analysis of the above models, we propose a model for the development of ecotourism in the special protected

areas (SPA) of the Republic of Karakalpakstan (Fig. 1).

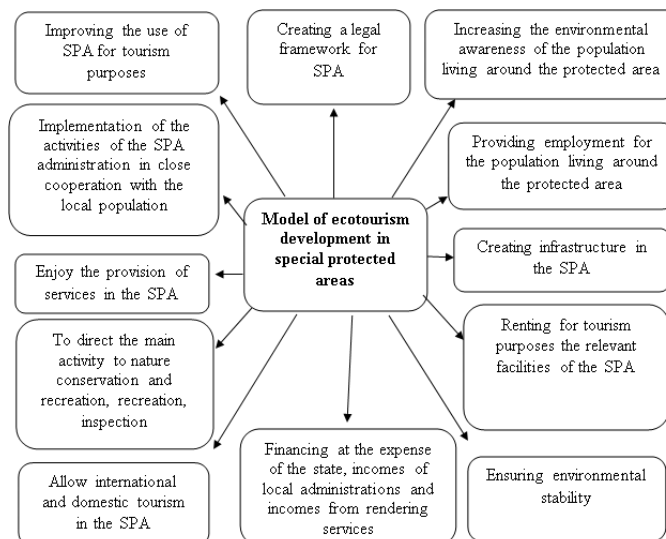


Fig. 1. Model of ecotourism development in special protected areas

Ecotourism in the SPA should develop as a single system, with clearly defined tasks at the regional level and in the SPA. To meet this goal, it is necessary to organize a specialized organization responsible for the development of ecotourism on the basis of the protected area.

The aims of the model for the development of ecotourism based on the SPA are as follows:

- increasing the ecological culture of the population;
- developing alternative options instead of non-renewable ways of using nature;
- improving the socio-economic conditions of the local population through the creation of new jobs;
- creating additional sources of financial support for SPA;
- developing of relations with the national and foreign reserve system, as well as active integration into the ecotourism world market;
- determining the criteria for sustainable development of ecotourism, assessment of compliance of ecotourism routes and services with the principles of stable international tourism;
- ensuring the accession of the SPA to a unified information and communication technology of international ecotourism. Organization of marketing and advertising for the sale of tourism products;
- organizing a unified professional center for training of ecotourism employees and holding regular workshops;
- implementing a policy to create uniform prices for ecotourism products and services;
- developing common standards for advertisements and boards, mass materials placed on the tourist trails of the protected areas;
- preparing common information materials for the design and equipment of visit centers, nature museums, exhibitions, advertising leaflets, presentations;
- developing mechanisms for monitoring awareness-raising tourism and environmental excursions in order to protect natural complexes and objects from harm.

It is necessary to gradually expand the land area used for tourism and recreational purposes in order to develop ecotourism in the protected areas located in the region.

Through the model, we will achieve the development of ecotourism in the SPA, by establishing their use for tourism purposes, providing local people with work, improving their ecological culture and knowledge, and ensuring environmental stability. Moreover, there are opportunities for the development of domestic tourism.

#### CONCLUSION

According to our analyses, the Ustyurt Plateau in

Karakalpakstan provides opportunities the establishment of scientific ecotourism. In particular, students of history, biology, geography, ecology and tourism from higher education institutions in Russian Federation, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan could use these sites for summer training, field classes (with topics including: herbaceous plants, archaeological excavations, hill and measuring geographical coordinates and fauna lifestyle, nutrition, growth, plants, etc.), scientific research and to promote it among young people.

Our analysis yields five main conclusions:

First, there are the prospects to develop tourism through extreme auto rallies such as the “Paris-Dakar” race on the Ustyurt plateau;

Second, the people living in the rural areas of the Ustyurt plateau and at the foot of the plateau, have more potential for developing cultural tourism;

Third, the deficiency of tourism development is caused both by the lack of infrastructure development and lack of tourism companies;

Fourth, it is necessary to open service centers (car repair, kitchen, motel, pharmacy, telephone, etc.) in order to mitigate potentially catastrophic situations in cold winter months and hot summer months on the long road between Kazakhstan’s border with the city of Kungrad.

Fifth, in order to develop ecotourism on the Ustyurt plateau for tourists primarily coming from the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan, tourist routes should be developed from Kungrad station that include the following sites:

- Information about the boundaries of the ancient history of the city Kungrad;
- Plateau escarpments, including information about their structure and properties;
- Bird watching at Sudochye Lake and climbing to Ustyurt mountain. Here tourists can watching bird nests and eggs in the boat on the lake, and learn local fishing techniques. Information about Sudochye Lake’s history should be given;
- Dawit Ata mausoleum, providing information about the history of the Dawit Ata, telling people’s oral tradition, climbing to the mountains the Ustyurt;
- Khakim Ata mausoleum, giving information about Sulayman Baqirganiy, the student of Khoja Ahmed Yassavi, and telling legends about his arrival in Kungrad;
- Muynak, including visit the local museum, Moynak port and its “Graveyard of ships”, and Uchsay port;
- Sarykamysch Lake – on the road of the ancient fortress,



observing rare plants and animals, such as deer and rabbits, bird watching, observing the depth of the lake for fishing, watching the escarpment.

We argue that implementing these new routes to organize tours to Karakalpakstan will be an important step in the development of eco-tourism.

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