

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECOTOURISM IN UZBEKISTAN.

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Abstract: This article examines the main directions of ecosystem ecology, focusing on functional processes and the structures and services produced by ecosystems. It emphasizes the interaction between physical and biological structures and how understanding these processes supports sustainable development, including environmentally responsible tourism. The study highlights the ecological, economic, and social importance of ecotourism in Uzbekistan, considering both natural and cultural resources, and suggests strategies for improving ecotourism services and expanding tourism potential.

Keywords: Ecosystem ecology, physical and biological structures, functional processes, pollution assessment, environmental impact, green space project, ecotourism development.

Ecotourism in Uzbekistan is one of the most actively analyzed types of tourism today, largely due to the growing interest in restoring human physical and psychological well-being. The unique features of ecotourism include environmentally responsible interaction with nature, focus on natural and minimally developed cultural or historical sites, and travel to relatively unexplored locations. The environmental sustainability of tourism is assessed by its impact on ecosystems, including the atmosphere, water resources, soil, flora, and fauna. Environmentally friendly tourism minimizes harm to natural surroundings, incorporates conservation and restoration measures, and promotes ecological responsibility, while tourism that is not environmentally sustainable may negatively affect the natural environment.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature defines ecotourism as travel organized to explore natural and cultural sites with minimal environmental impact, while maintaining responsibility toward nature. The main goals of ecotourism development in Uzbekistan include promoting the country's ecotourism potential in the global tourism market, encouraging scientific research for effective use of ecotourism resources, increasing the contribution of ecotourism to the tourism sector, improving the quality and volume of ecotourism services, and fostering scientific, innovative, and methodological developments to support future growth.

Uzbekistan possesses rich ecotourism resources and opportunities. Current ecotours organized by tour operators, such as "Tashkent-Chorvoq-Tashkent," "Tashkent-Bildirsoy-Chimyon-Tashkent," "Tashkent-Zomin-Tashkent," and "Tashkent-Aydarkol-Tashkent," as well as camel treks in desert regions, have gained recognition from both domestic and international tourists. Most ecotourism operators currently operate within the Chimyon-Chorvoq recreational zone. However, regions such as Hisor, Bobotog, Ko'hitangtog' (Surkhandarya), Chaqchar (Kashkadarya), Nurota (Navoi-Jizzakh), Zarafshan (Samarkand), Turkistan (Jizzakh), Oloy (Fergana), Qurama and Chotqol (Namangan) mountains, Qizilqum desert remnants, the Aral Sea dried bed, and salt lakes have unique landscapes suitable for speleotourism and other ecotourism activities. Over 500 caves in Uzbekistan remain largely untapped due to insufficient tourism infrastructure.

Desert and steppe regions offer opportunities for camel trekking, observation of natural features such as dunes, salt flats, and local nomadic lifestyles. Scientific research has laid the theoretical and methodological foundations of ecotourism in Uzbekistan, including the preparation of bachelor, master, and doctoral dissertations and the publication of educational materials. However, studies

indicate the urgent need for trained personnel capable of guiding ecotourism groups in natural and extreme conditions, knowledgeable about ecosystems and geotopes, and qualified to provide first aid when necessary. Unlike historical, religious, medical, or cultural tourism, which is typically conducted in urban areas with adequate infrastructure, ecotours take place in natural settings and often involve physically challenging conditions.

In summary, Uzbekistan's ecotourism sector has significant potential for growth due to its diverse natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and emerging tourism infrastructure. Strategic development, professional training, and the expansion of ecotourism services can strengthen the country's tourism industry, promote environmental sustainability, and enhance the international reputation of Uzbekistan as a unique ecotourism destination.

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