

ECOTOURISM: NATURE CONSERVATION AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

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Abstract: This paper examines the growing importance of ecotourism in the context of global sustainable development and environmental protection. Ecotourism is defined not only as travel to natural areas such as national parks and reserves, but also as a responsible form of tourism that promotes environmental conservation and raises ecological awareness among visitors. The study highlights how countries can simultaneously achieve economic benefits and environmental sustainability through the development of ecotourism.

Special attention is given to Uzbekistan's significant ecotourism potential, including regions such as the Aral Sea area, the Boysun Mountains, Zaamin National Park, the Chatkal Reserve, and natural sites in the Fergana Valley. The role of small guest houses and family-based recreation facilities operating under the concept of "Recreation in Nature" is also discussed. In addition, the example of Khiva demonstrates how historical heritage, traditional lifestyles, and local crafts can complement ecological tourism.

Keywords: Ecotourism, sustainable development, environmental protection, ecological awareness, Uzbekistan tourism, national parks, local communities, green economy, cultural heritage, nature conservation.

The paper further emphasizes the socio-economic impact of ecotourism, particularly its role in increasing local incomes, creating new jobs, and encouraging the use of environmentally friendly practices such as waste reduction and green energy. Ultimately, ecotourism is presented as a strategic sector for Uzbekistan that supports ecological sustainability while fostering cultural preservation and community development.

Today, issues of sustainable development and environmental protection are becoming increasingly relevant in the world. From this point of view, ecotourism — that is, recreation in nature, travel to national parks and reserves, and a type of tourism aimed at preserving the ecological environment — is of particular importance.

The main purpose of ecotourism is not only to give tourists the opportunity to enjoy the beauty of nature, but also to encourage them to protect nature and to raise ecological culture. For this reason, today many countries, by developing ecotourism, are not only gaining economic income, but are also ensuring a clean and pure environment for future generations.

Uzbekistan has great potential in this regard. The Aral Sea region in Karakalpakstan, the Boysun Mountains in Surkhandarya, Zaamin National Park in Jizzakh, the Chatkal Reserve in the Tashkent region, as well as natural sites in the Fergana Valley create great opportunities for ecotourism. Especially small guest houses and family recreation facilities being built on the basis of the concept of "Recreation in Nature" are becoming increasingly popular among foreign tourists.

Khiva is an ancient city and attracts tourists thanks to the "Ichan Qala" complex. Here, along with historical monuments, it is possible to feel a clean environment and a peaceful lifestyle. Guests visiting the city not only observe ancient architecture, but also become acquainted with local handicrafts and national dishes. This is an important part of ecotourism.

Another important aspect of developing ecotourism is increasing the income of the local population. Because when tourists rest in nature, they use local products and are interested in handicrafts and national dishes. This leads to the creation of new jobs in the regions. At the same time, through ecotourism, there is also an opportunity to protect the environment, reduce waste,

and develop a culture of using green energy and ecological transport. This process increases the ecological awareness not only of tourists, but also of the local population.

In conclusion, ecotourism is becoming not only a new economic direction for Uzbekistan, but also a strategic sector that ensures ecological sustainability. We must not forget that each of us is responsible for protecting nature. Nature is our future, our healthy life, and our priceless wealth.

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