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OPPORTUNITIES TO USE THE TOURISM POTENTIAL OF TOVUZ REGION OF THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

Purpose. In modern times, every country acts as a provider of sustainable socio-economic development of its regions, effectively using the potential of natural resources. Among these resources, tourism resources attract more attention. Thus, the potential of tourism resources is higher and plays a direct role in the development of the regions.

Tourism provides a basis for high income and quick return on investment. In a broader sense, tourism is a means affecting the formation of the state budget, the improvement of villages and cities, the preservation of historical and architectural monuments, and the development of small and medium enterprises. The purpose of the article is to study the existing tourism potential in Tovuz region and to identify opportunities for effective use of this potential. In addition, it is to analyse the tourism facilities operating in Tovuz region and make recommendations for the organisation of new tourist routes.

Methods. Comparative approach, historical-territorial, typological, field research, systematic analysis, and cartographic (GIS) method have been used during the study.

Results. The article studies both natural and anthropogenic tourism resources of Tovuz region, analyses hotel industry, and provides tourist routes and their advantages. The article also identifies opportunities to use the tourism potential of Tovuz region, and finally gives the results and proposals developed on a scientific basis.

Scientific novelty. The state programs adopted in connection with the development of the tourism sector in Azerbaijan have been analysed, the natural-climatic conditions in terms of tourism organisation in Tovuz region have been studied, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of accommodation enterprises operating in the region have been revealed.

For the first time, both natural and anthropogenic monuments of Tovuz region have been analysed in a complex way, and a map reflecting "Tourism objects and tourist routes of Tovuz region" have been provided. The organisation of the following tourist routes in Tovuz region have been proposed: Tovuz-Govlar-Abdal-Aghdara-Aghabashlar; Tovuz-Dondar Gushchu-Vahidli; Tovuz-Yukhari Oysuzlu-Alibeyli; and Tovuz-Gushchu-Azaflı-Bayramli-Asrik Jirdakhan.

The practical significance. The obtained results can be used in the Tourism Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the tourism information centre operating in the region, as well as in the implementation of tourism-oriented activities.

Keywords: Tovuz region, tourism, touristic route, archaeological monument, mosque, church.

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ВОЗМОЖНОСТИ ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЯ ТУРИСТИЧЕСКОГО ПОТЕНЦИАЛА ТОВУЗСКОГО РАЙОНА В АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНСКОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКЕ

Цель. В наше время каждая страна выступает в качестве поставщика устойчивого социально-экономического развития своих регионов, эффективно используя потенциал природных ресурсов. Среди этих ресурсов большое внимание привлекают туристические ресурсы, потенциал которых очень высок и играет непосредственную роль в развитии регионов. Мы знаем, что туристическая сфера обеспечивает высокий доход и быстрый возврат инвестиций. В более широком смысле туризм является средством, влияющим на формирование государственного бюджета, благоустройство деревень и городов, сохранение исторических и архитектурных памятников, а также развитие малых и средних предприятий. С этой точки зрения целью статьи является изучение туристического потенциала в Товузском районе и выявление возможностей его эффективного использования. А также, проанализировать действующие в Товузском районе туристические объекты и дать рекомендации по организации новых туристических маршрутов.

Методика. В ходе исследования использовался сравнительный подход, историко-территориальные, типологические, полевые исследования, систематический анализ и картографический (ГИС) метод.

Результаты. В статье рассматриваются природные и антропогенные туристические ресурсы Товузского района, анализируется гостиничный бизнес, даются туристические маршруты и их преимущества, а также определяются возможности использования туристического потенциала, приводятся результаты и предложения, разработанные на научной основе.

Научная новизна. Проанализированы государственные программы, принятые в связи с развитием туристического сектора в Азербайджане, изучены природно-климатические условия с точки зрения организации туризма в Товузском районе, а также в регионе были выявлены преимущества и недостатки предприятий по размещению туристической индустрии. Впервые природные и антропогенные памятники Товузского района были подвергнуты комплексному анализу, и была предоставлена карта, отражающая «Туристические объекты и маршруты Товузского района». В Товузском районе были предложены следующие туристические маршруты: Товуз-Говлар-Абдал-Агдара-Агабашлар; Товуз-Дондар Гушчу-Вахидли; Товуз-Юхары Ойсузлу-Алибейли; Товуз-Гушчу-Азафлы-Байрамлы-Асрик Джирдахан.

Практическая значимость. Полученные результаты могут быть использованы в Туристическом Агентстве Азербайджанской Республики, действующих в регионе туристических информационных центрах, а также при реализации различных туристических мероприятий.

Ключевые слова: Товузский район, туризм, туристический маршрут, археологический памятник, мечеть, церковь.

Introduction. Tourism is the main sphere of activity in the modern integration process, which is able to provide a solution to a number of complex problems. Thus, the territorial and sectoral structure of

tourism is carried out in accordance with the structural changes in the economy. Therefore, the balance of socio-economic factors of tourism and its geographical aspects is assessed as a driving force for sustainable development.

Sustainability in tourism implies a positive overall balance of the environmental, socio-cultural, and economic impacts of tourism, as well as the positive impact of visitors and locals on each other [11, p. 129]. The dynamics of tourism first affects the country's economy, then the quality changes in social and cultural construction and the development of services in accordance with world standards [7, p. 43]. In terms of efficiency, tourism has the potential to be the most important area in a modern international development strategy. Thus, the development of tourism creates the basis for improving the living standards of the population and strengthening foreign economic relations, as well as leads to the creation of tourism products.

Tourism products are created on the basis of tourism resources. Tourism resources are divided into ready-made resources, such as natural, historical, and cultural resources, and human (anthropogenic) resources. All natural, historical, cultural, as well as artificial tourism resources are distinguished by their attractiveness, familiarity and recreational value, employment, uncommonness, and convenience and safety for travel in order to meet the needs of tourists [4, p. 78].

Azerbaijan has a rich natural resource potential for the development of the tourism market. This is explained, above all, by the country's favourable political and geographical position [7, p. 73]. At the same time, there has been a revival in the tourism industry of Azerbaijan in recent years. Thus, while the share of tourism in the structure of GDP was 1.0% in 2010, this figure increased to 2.2% in 2018 [2, p. 63]. The reason for this was the announcement of 2011 the "Year of Tourism" and, consequently, the number of tourists visiting the country doubled in a short time.

In general, in order to develop the tourism sector in the Republic of Azerbaijan, a number of measures has been taken, including the adoption of the "Law on Tourism" in 1999, the State Program on Tourism Development in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2002-2005 and 2010-2014, and State Program on the Development of Resorts in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2009-2018. These decisions and orders have helped to alleviate some of the problems in the tourism sector. At the same time, the State Program on Socio-Economic Development of the Regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2004-2008, 2009-2013, and 2014-2018 envisages a number of measures regarding the development of the tourism sector.

The above-mentioned statistics are general; the role of the tourism industry in the socio-economic development of the regions of Azerbaijan is very low. To tackle this problem, attractive tourism resources of the regions should be identified, and new tourist routes should be offered to tourists. These routes should be established mainly on the tourist facilities of national importance and fully reflect the historical, cultural, and natural monuments of the region. The creation of such tourist routes can play an exceptional role in the employment of the population living in the regions. In addition to guiding activities, locals can help tourists meet their daily food needs and stay in their homes as guests.

Object of research. Tovuz region is located in the west part of the republic, bordering with Georgia and Armenia. The area of the region is 1.94 thousand km², making 2.2% of the country's territory, and the population is 175.5 thousand people, making 1.8% of the country's population. The population density is 90 people per km². 17.08% of the population lives in cities and 82.92% in villages. Although the majority of the population in the region is Azerbaijani, there are Turks, Russians, Ukrainians, Talysh, Tatars, and other nationalities as well. The region is located 439 km away from the capital Baku [8, p. 22].

Research results. In the context of modern integration, an increasing number of countries interested in the development of tourism has led to formation of a certain competitive environment in the tourism market, which makes it necessary to choose the development problems of tourism and its economic and regional aspects as an object of study. Tourism is one of the priorities of economic development. It is one of the fastest-growing and most profitable areas from the economic point of view. Thus, utilising local resources for tourism creates conditions for the integrated development of the region and the welfare of the population. The socio-economic efficiency of tourism is related to its economic growth and security and is assessed as an integrated benefit. From this point of view, the study envisages exploring the possibilities of using the tourism potential in Tovuz region.

Tovuz is one of the regions with favourable natural-climatic conditions, fertile lands, and great agrarian potential. Tovuz has mountainous, foothill, and plain relief, which plays an important role in the diversification of the economic structure in the region. At the same time, the tourism industry has been significantly developed in Tovuz region in recent years. There are both natural and anthropogenic tourism resources in the region.



Asrik valley. It is the most popular place for tourists in summer. The villages are located on the slopes of the mountains along the Asrik River. Its main wealth is forests and Asrik waterfall. The nature, greenery, air, view, landscape, and mineral waters of this place, called the Switzerland of Tovuz, do not lag behind the European Alpine paradise.



Khinna Valley. The area called Chanakchi Valley has left mark in history as Khinna valley. The area is also called Zayam valley because the name of the river that forms the valley is Zayam River. Khinna valley covers a large area from Govlar settlement of Tovuz region to Giziltorpag village of Gadabay region. Its historical name was Khunanyurd. According to ancient authors, the Khunans were the first heirs of the Albanian lands.



Hachagaya. Hachagaya is located at an altitude of 2200 m, at the end of the road leading from the Khinna valley. Accompanied by mountain views and spring waters along the way, this place is a natural monument and the largest shrine in the western zone. There are hand and footprints on a piece of rock in the shrine, which people believe belongs to Hadrat Ali and come here to visit it.

Figure 1. Natural monuments of Tovuz region

The natural recreational potential of Tovuz region is great for the development of tourism. Tovuz region differs from other regions by its flora and fauna due to the fact that it is surrounded by mountains and forests. The vegetation of the region in the northern and central parts is mainly steppe and semi-desert. Semi-desert plants are widespread in the Jeyranchol area, which occupies the northern part of the region. There are four types of Azerbaijani endemics found in Jeyranchol wormwood. They are *Onobrychis vaginalis*, *Torularia contortuplicata*, *Tulipa eichleri*, and *Tragopogon karjaginii*. There are

also 13 Caucasian endemics. Trees and shrubs such as apple, pear, cherry, cornel, maple, rosehips, and hawthorn are found in the forests. Oriental beech, Caucasian hornbeam, eastern hornbeam, Iberian oak, and maple species are widespread in the mountain forests. There are Caucasian pine forests in small areas in the basins of the Zayam and Asrik rivers, at an altitude of 1300-1600 m above sea level. There are riparian woodland along the Kura River. The fauna of Tovuz region includes wolves, jackals, foxes, wild boars, gray rabbits, stone squirrels, roe deer, Iranian sand mice, partridges, and ptarmigans.



Goytapa monument. *The Goytapa monument covers an area of nearly 2 hectares. It has a diameter of 145 m and a height of 9 m. In order to study the history of this Neolithic settlement, an order on “Some measures concerning the establishment of the Goytapa Archaeological Park” was signed on April 18, 2012.*



Albanian temple. *It is a 5th century monument of Caucasian Albania. The historical monument belonging to the Albanians, in the forest area of Asrik Jirdakhan village, is located 100 meters above the ground. It covers an area of 2 hectares. As the temple was left unused, it was partially demolished, and now it is in dire strait.*



Sultan Bridge. *It was built on the Akhinja River in 1751 by the order of Sultan bey, one of the sultans of Shamshaddil. Lime soil, eggs, goat's wool, sheep's milk, and pebbles were used in the construction of the bridge. Although the Akhinja River was flooded frequently at that time, it never collapsed after the bridge was built.*

Figure 2. Anthropogenic monuments of Tovuz region

A significant part of modern types of tourism is focused on the use of natural tourism resources [1, p. 17]. The distribution of natural tourism resources depends on the geographical features of the area, mountain ecosystems, and the type of use of nature for tourism purposes. These include use for health and recreation, awareness and excursions, ecotourism, and rural tourism. The attractiveness of natural tourism resources is determined by the rich diversity of landscapes. However, natural tourism resources create seasonality depending on the purpose, which, in turn, slows down the organisation of the tourism industry. Thus, during the tourist season, utilities do not meet the growing demand, the needs and wishes of tourists are not fully met, and at the same time, it leads to an increase in prices and shortages in employment services. To solve the problem, seasonal tours are organised, which are tours that are effective during any season or seasons.

The natural recreational potential of Tovuz region (Asrik valley, Goyabakhan, Cheshmali, Aghgaya pastures, Shamlig, Goshabulag forests, Kura River, Tovuzchay, Zayamchay, and Asrikchay riverbanks) is great. Tovuz differs from other regions by its flora and fauna, as it is surrounded on all sides by mountains and forests. The main tourist centres of the region are mountainous areas. There are dense forests and cool water springs (about 300 springs: Maral spring, Atan spring, Findigli spring, Seyid spring, Turshsu, Boyrak water spring, etc.) even on the highest peaks of the mountains (Figure 1). However, the tourist centres in the region are seasonal and operate mainly in the summer months. Nevertheless, villages such as Asrik, Qosha, Findigli, Chatag, Boyuk Qishlag, and Kiran are able to receive tourists all year round.

In addition to natural and anthropogenic tourism resources, a number of sanctuaries and shrines in the Tovuz region, such as Chinarli, Smagli, Garib Seyid, Aldada, and Hachagaya, as well as the 16th century Shah Abbas Mosque in the village of Yanigli are the most visited places by religious people.

There are many historical monuments in Tovuz, one of the ancient human settlements. The decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated August 2, 2001, confirmed the existence of 64 historical-cultural and archaeological monuments in the territory of Tovuz region. 18 of them have national (two architectural and 16 archaeological) and 46 – local importance (32 architectural, 11 archaeological, one monumental monument, and two decorative-applied art), which are protected by the state. For example, the 300,000-year-old rocks found in the Zayamchay basin, the monuments of Torpaggala, which are considered to be the remains of the ancient city of Hunan, the monuments of Kohnagala and Goytapa with a history of 8,000-10,000 years, etc. witness that these areas have a very ancient history. The correspondence of the names of different territories and places in the region to the ancient Turkic toponyms proves the ancient settlement history and Turkic origin of the indigenous population living in the area. There are also preserved temples in the region: the town in Alakol village of historical Khinna valley in the direction of Saratovka village of Gadabay region, “Albanian Church” (V-VI centuries) in Yanikhli village, “Albanian Church” (V-VII centuries) registered as a temple on the left bank of Asrik River, a Mosque in Yanikhli village (XVII century), the Tomb complex (XVII century), a Mosque (XIX century) in Yukhari Oysuzlu village, single tied arch bridge (X century), Sultan bridge (XIX century) in Vahidli village, 8-pointed tomb (XIX century), and ancient Albanian temples with original architecture in Garibli and Abdal villages (Figure 2). The ancient settlement "Torpaggala" on the right bank of the Kura River, located 12 km from the region and the area called “Gala Duzu” with a special geographical appearance in the village of Vahidli are interesting historical monuments for tourists [10, pp. 237-238].

In recent years, our country has gradually shifted to market principles of development and management. In the market economy, a huge role belongs to the tourism and hospitality industry. This branch of the national economy is called upon to be a visiting card of the country [6, s. 73]. For this purpose, there is an Olympic Sports Complex on 5 hectares at the entrance to the city of Tovuz, a 5-star hotel (Ayan-Palace) on 5.2 hectares, a caravanserai-type “Gala”, “Bayrag Meydani”, the symbolic “Three Towers” complex near it, a culture and recreation park on an area of 10.4 hectares, as well as about 50 recreation facilities along the Khinna and Asrik valleys.

Accommodation is one of the most important components of the tourism industry. [9, p. 18]. In 2018, there were registered 3 hotels operating in Tovuz region, with 133 rooms and a hotel capacity of 266 people. Throughout the year, 10,462 people benefited from services of these hotels [8, p. 148]. However, in addition, there are a large number of small accommodation facilities and guest houses in the area.

Ayan-Palace hotel consists of 5 floors, 65 rooms, and 4 cottages. There are a restaurant for 120 people, a conference hall for 40 people, a bar for 50 people, and various offices and shops. The rooms are equipped with digital safe, mini-bar, ventilation system, satellite TV, international phone line, and

wireless internet. The hotel also offers a swimming pool, sauna, Turkish bath, massage rooms, hydrotherapy service rooms, and a gym. Tourists visiting the region choose this hotel to rest and spend the night.

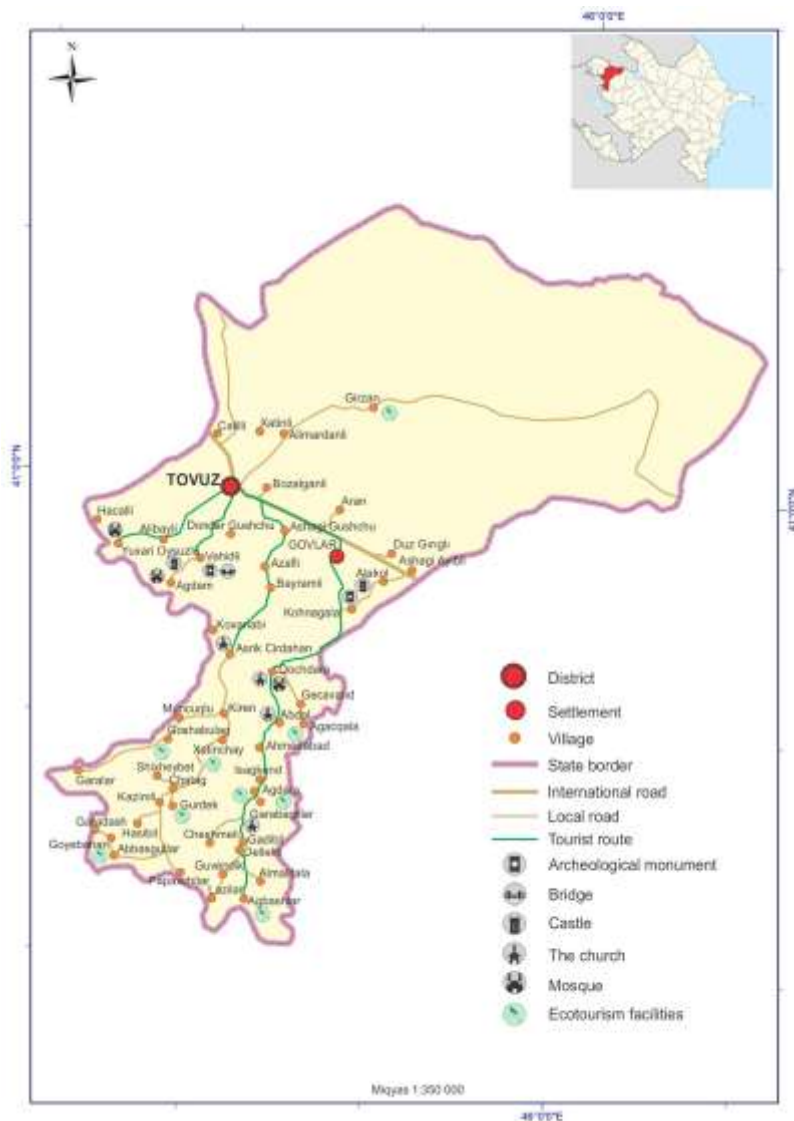


Figure 3. Tourism facilities and tourist routes of Tovuz region

In order to foster the development of tourism in Azerbaijan and promote the country's domestic tourism potential, the “Exemplary Statute on Tourism and Recreation Areas” was approved in 2008 [3]. According to this regulation, tourism zones have been established in the regions. At present, Tovuz region is within the Western tourism region. This region is the largest and longest tourist zone in the country. One of the main features of this zone, which extends to the Georgian border, is its suitability for cross-border cooperation. The western tourism region has a rich history, culture, and natural monuments.

In general, tourist routes are a whole action plan prepared in advance in a certain direction for tourists visiting the region to get acquainted with the area [5, p. 8]. As a result of the conducted research, the following routes are proposed to be organised in Tovuz region: Tovuz-Govlar-Abdal-Aghdara-Aghabashlar; Tovuz-Dondar Gushchu-Vahidli; Tovuz-Yukhari Oysuzlu-Alibeyli; Tovuz-Gushchu-Azafli-Bayramli-Asrik Jirdakhan.

In addition to the above-mentioned routes, the winery built by the German community in Tovuz in 1923 has already been included in the “Wine Route” tourism project. Tourists traveling along the proposed routes can get acquainted with the mysterious nature, rich cultural heritage, and interesting historical monuments of the region. Looking at the map, it could be seen that the tourist routes are mainly directed to south, as these areas are mountainous and rich in resources (Figure 3).

Results and proposals. As a result of the conducted research, it can be concluded that the tourism industry in Tovuz region is poorly developed compared to other regions of the country. However, the

tourism potential of the region is highly appreciated. Thus, it is possible to eliminate seasonality in the future and develop various types of tourism in the region, which is rich in both natural and anthropogenic tourism resources. In this connection, both domestic and foreign investments should be attracted to the area, new hotels of various levels should be built, well-founded new tourist routes should be organised, and detailed information should be provided about each tourist facility. It is considered that Tovuz region has real opportunities for the development of ecotourism, mountain tourism, rural tourism, and agro-tourism here.

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