ANALYSIS OF THE TOURISM AND RECREATIONAL POTENTIAL OF THE SUGHD REGION

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Abstract. *This article analyzes the tourism and recreational potential of the Sughd Region for development as a strategic area for regional development. It examines landscape features, tourism and recreational resources, the state of specially protected natural areas, and key challenges hindering the effective development of ecotourism: personnel shortages, insufficient study of mountain and valley zones, and weak infrastructure. It also assesses the prospects for developing regional eco-tourism routes and mechanisms for interaction between local residents, government agencies, and tourism organizations. A SWOT analysis identified key areas for optimizing regional tourism policy.*

Keywords: *tourism and recreational potential, Sughd Region, recreational resources, specially protected natural areas, sustainable development, tourism infrastructure, development of tourism potential*

Introduction. Given the limited land resources in mountainous regions, the issue of their rational use is becoming increasingly important. While in densely populated plains every piece of land has high economic value, in sparsely populated mountainous areas there is often inefficient use of resources. One of the most effective and promising solutions to this problem is the development of tourism. The development of tourism in the Republic of Tajikistan depends on the scientifically sound territorial organization of types and forms of tourism in different regions. To ensure the sustainable development of tourism and prevent the exacerbation of socio-economic contradictions that arise in this process, it is necessary to establish regulations for the use of tourist areas, primarily specially protected natural sites. [10.c. 54-56].

Research methods. This study aims to analyze the tourism and recreational potential of the Sughd region, identify key problems and constraints, and formulate practical recommendations for the development of sustainable forms of tourism, taking into account the natural, socio-economic, and cultural characteristics of the region. SWOT analysis was used to provide a more in-depth interpretation of tourism development in the Sughd region. It allowed us to identify the region's strengths and weaknesses, as well as to determine the main opportunities and threats. In addition, an analysis of the political, economic, social, and technological context of innovation policy was conducted. The use of SWOT analysis contributes to a comprehensive assessment of the factors influencing the sustainable development of tourism and the formation of an effective regional strategy.

Research results. Given the relevance of ecological tourism, the goal was set to study the natural resource potential and infrastructure capabilities of the Sughd region. The nature of the Sughd region is extremely diverse, full of striking contrasts and unique landscapes. The specific

nature of the natural components of the Sughd region is of great importance for the development of tourism and non-manufacturing industries. The Sughd region is located in the north of the republic. Individual territories of the Sughd region differ greatly from each other in terms of geographical location, relief features, climate, and combination of altitude zones. In this respect, the nature of the Sughd region has its own characteristics. The mountainous nature of the relief is less pronounced here than in other regions of the republic. Most of the territory is occupied by the plains of the Fergana Valley of the Hungry Steppe. Only to the north and south of them do ridges and mountains rise [2.c.128].

There are prerequisites for the development of recreational tourism in the Sughd region, and this region is one of the most attractive tourist areas in the republic. Based on existing tourist resources, conditions have been created for the development of historical and educational, mountain sports, ecological, medical and health, sanatorium and resort, amateur, and other types of tourism for both domestic and foreign tourists. Table 1.1 presents systematic statistical data reflecting the current state and level of development of the tourism infrastructure in the Sughd region based on the results of the reporting period for 2025. The indicators presented allow for a comprehensive assessment of the level of development of tourism activities, the dynamics of tourist flows, the state of recreation areas, and the availability of infrastructure in the region.

These data are of scientific and practical importance, as they demonstrate trends in the spatial distribution of tourism resources, determine the level of attractiveness of domestic and international tourism, and identify imbalances and possible directions for the further development of the tourism and recreation complex of the Sughd region.

Table 1. Analysis of tourism development indicators in the Sughd region for the first nine months of 2025

№	Indicators	Unit of measuremen	January–September 2025			January–September 202			Compared to last ye	
			Total	Foreign	Internal	Total	Foreign	Internal	Quantitative rati	Percentage ratio
1	Number of tourism companies operating in the cit and surrounding areas	number	42	0	0	45	0	0	-3	93,3
2	Number of domestic and foreign tourists staying i hotels and resorts in the city (and surrounding area	people	116611	25514	91097	10119	20267	8092	15420	115,2
	Number of foreign visitors entering through borde crossings for various purposes	Thousand people	1017,6			790.9			226,7	128,7
3	Number of tourist routes/historical and tourist site		210	-	210	225		225	-15	93,3
4	Types of tourism used by foreign and domestic tourists, including:									
	- - mountaineering	person	264	264	0	28	28	0	236	943
	- - vacation, recreation, and entertainment	person	11587			7672			3915	151,0
	- - retraining and professional developmer	person	1958			959			999	204,2
	- - health rehabilitation and medical	person	33788			36533			-2745	92,5
	- - pilgrimage to holy places	person	472			2334			-1862	20,2
	- - ecological	person	11571			12851			-1280	90,0
	- - related to work and professional activiti	person	28506			22506			6000	126,7
	- - -other types of tourism	person	28729			18336			10393	156,7
5	The availability of facilities and infrastructure tha will facilitate the reception of guests									
	-hotels and other tourist destinations (hostels, touri camps)	places to stay	7441			7324			117	101,6
6	Restaurants and public catering establishments	places for visito								
	-other service outlets									
7	The volume of paid services in all sectors	million somor	4360,0			3689,0			671.0	112,7
	including the volume of hotel and restaurant servic	million somor	655,9			582,4			73.5	107,4

Source: Statistical data from the Tourism Committee under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan for the first nine months of 2025.

Analysis of the data presented in the table above allows us to draw general scientific conclusions about the current state, dynamics, and prospects for the development of tourism and recreational activities in the Sughd region. The indicators presented testify to qualitative changes in the formation of the regional tourism system, which are characterized by an increase in tourist flows, expansion of infrastructure, and gradual strengthening of the region's integration into the national and international tourism space. An analysis of the table shows that the number of tourism companies operating in the Sughd region in the reporting period is 7 percent less than in the same period last year. The decrease in the number of tourism companies has led to a decrease in the number of tourist routes by approximately 7 percent, which is an alarming indicator. On the one hand, these indicators represent a negative growth rate for the industry, but on the other hand, they show that under the current conditions, this market is free and there are opportunities for the creation of tourism companies.

Based on the types of tourism that foreign and domestic tourists engage in within the region, it can be concluded that tourists are more interested in areas such as working holidays, entertainment, retraining, and professional training, i.e., the growth in these areas during the period under review compared to the same period in 2024 ranged from 150 to 200 percent. However, the main problem is that these types of tourism are only attractive to domestic tourists. Among all the above-mentioned areas, foreigners are more interested in mountaineering, which has increased ninefold compared to last year. Since the subject of our research in this article is the recreational opportunities of the Sughd region, the analysis must take into account the possibilities for the development of ecological tourism. Statistical data show that the state of development in this area is negative and has declined by 10 percent. We believe that the main problems in this case are weak scientific and methodological developments, as well as insufficient accessibility of information about ecotourism sites for tourists.

Thus, it can be concluded that the industry can be made attractive by implementing a number of measures, such as the proper promotion of tourism, the use of institutional opportunities, the attraction and effective use of investments allocated to the industry, and the improvement of the professional skills of industry specialists. One of the most important tasks for the development of tourism in the region is the implementation of investment projects. It should be noted that with the financial support of the Asian Development Bank, Kios Consulting has prepared a list of 25 projects for the development of tourism infrastructure in the Sughd region as part of the development of the “Comprehensive Master Plan for Tourism Development in the Sughd Region”. Four of these projects (two sectoral and two multi-sectoral) have been identified as priority investment projects. Specifically, these are:

• The Fon Mountains Nature and Wildlife Protection Network (sectoral project),

• National Center for Water Sports and Recreation on the shore of the Kairukum Reservoir (sectoral project),

• Khujand Tourism Development Program (multi-sectoral program),

• Ayni Tourism Development Program (multi-sectoral program).

As we have already noted, there are currently 42 tourism companies and two public organizations operating in the Sughd region: the Tourism Development Council and the Zarafshan Tourism Development Association. There are 210 tourist routes in the region, covering all historical and cultural attractions. At the same time, two newly established companies have applied to the Committee for a tourist license, while other companies have applied to expand their

activities. To serve domestic and foreign tourists in the region, there is 1 international airport in Khujand, 6 international border crossing points, and 97 tourist facilities, including:

- 65 hotels,
- 19 sanatoriums,
- 4 camps,
- 4 resorts,
- 2 holiday homes,
- 1 medical center,
- 1 recreation center,
- 1 tourist base with a total capacity of 7,441 beds.

There are 24 museums and 97 shrines in the cities and districts of Khujand, Isfara, Panjakent, Istaravashan, Konibodom, Bobojon Gafurov, Jabbor Rasulov, Asht, Devashchich, Spitamen, Shakhriston, Ayni, and Maschokh [11]. The development of tourism in the region is facilitated by historical sites such as Sarazm, which is more than 5,500 years old, ancient Penjikent, the birthplace of the founder of Tajik-Persian classical literature Abu Abdullokh Rudaki - the village of Panjrud, the Fon and Archamidon mountains, the fabulously beautiful lakes of Kulikalon, Haftkul, Iskanderkul, and others [9.pp.50-54]. According to statistics, in January–September 2025 alone, 1,017,600 visitors from the Commonwealth of Independent States and foreign countries entered the Sughd region through border crossings for various purposes, which is 226,700 more than in the same period last year, or 128.6% .

In particular, entry was granted for the following purposes: [11.]

- 289 people — diplomatic purposes,
- 282 people — official purposes,
- 5,121 people — business purposes,
- 5,004 people — work purposes,
- 46,514 people — tourism purposes,
- 2,605 people — educational purposes,
- 7,600 people — personal purposes,
- 39,985 people — trips,
- 26,092 people — transit, etc.

Guests came mainly from the following countries: Greece (389), Denmark (240), Lithuania (225), Germany (2,996), Poland (2,251), India (413), Azerbaijan (335), Switzerland (565), Kazakhstan (16,262), Uzbekistan (610,130), Taiwan (383), Kyrgyzstan (89,944), Turkmenistan (709), New Zealand (389), Korea (975), Czech Republic (491), China (7,159), Japan (2,368), Belgium (442), Georgia (137), Italy (2,323), Canada (657), Latvia (178), Turkey (1,069), Austria (314), Belarus (727), Hungary (217), Spain (711), Mexico (53), Moldova (879), Romania (245), Thailand (162), Ukraine (1,030), France (1,744), Sweden (354), Estonia (124), Brazil (231), Ireland (170), Malaysia (552), Norway (269), Pakistan (463), Singapore (540), Slovakia (205), Philippines (484), Australia (1,859), Bangladesh (250), Indonesia (527), Netherlands (1,019), Russia (256,096), United Kingdom (942), United States (3,704), Iran (717), etc.

During this period, 116,600 people stayed and received treatment in hotels, sanatoriums, and resorts in the region, which is 115.2% more than during the same period last year. Of these, 91,000 were citizens of the Republic of Tajikistan, and 25,500 were foreign visitors. According to preliminary data, during the same period, more than 190,700 people, including about 27,000

foreign tourists and 163,800 citizens of the country, visited historical and cultural attractions, parks, and boulevards in the region.

Advantages

Key improvements:

1. Broke long sentences into logical blocks for better readability.

2. Standardized the formatting of numbers and units of measurement (e.g., “thousands of people,” “%”).

3. Lists of goals and countries are formatted as bullet points for clarity.

4. A formal and scientific style was used, appropriate for statistical and analytical reports.

In the Sughd region, given the abundance of natural, historical, and cultural resources, tourism is considered one of the priority areas of the region's economy. Analyses show that every year, a large number of tourists engage in such types of tourism as historical and cultural, ecological, mountain, health resort, and resort tourism. Social and cultural sites, including immovable material and historical and cultural values, play an important role in satisfying the spiritual needs of tourists and improving their health. Tajikistan, being a mountainous country, has rich ecological and tourist resources for organizing various types of tourism: ecological agricultural tourism, scientific and adventure tourism, sanatorium and resort treatment (Gissaro-Rasht zone, western part of the Fergana zone, and mountainous Badakhshan), ethnic and sports tourism, etc.

Ecotourism, as a specific form of tourist and recreational activity, combines recreation with minimal impact on natural ecosystems. Its goal is to study spatial patterns and the functioning of resources for the development of ecological types of tourist facilities. At present, the potential of ecological types of tourist facilities in the tourist and recreational areas of the republic has not been sufficiently studied. [2.c.54-56]. The lack of professionally trained specialists – geographers, biologists, geologists, guides, and tour guides with experience working in the mountainous and high-altitude conditions of the republic – is an obstacle to the successful development of ecotourism. As the material production sectors grow and the territory for their development expands, ecological tourism, especially in the Gissar Valley, must develop sustainably.

The combination of natural and geo-ecological features of the Sughd region, including the western part of the Fergana Valley with plains at the foot of the mountains and slopes of the ridges near it, as well as the Zeravshan Valley, surrounded by the Fergana Mountains in the northeast and the Kuram Mountains in the northwest. The Shahin recreation and health center for children, teenagers, and young adults in Guliston, the recreation and health center for children, teenagers, and young adults named after the 20th anniversary of Tajikistan's independence, located in the Jabbor Rasulov district, “Avissiti” in the city of Istaravshan, the “Khujand Grand Hotel” and “Khujand Deluxe” hotels in the city of Khujand, Nuri Rahmon in the Aininsky district, Sipekhr and Shohkant in the city of Boston, the Sogd entertainment center, the fountain complex, the statue of King Ismail Somoni, the Istiklal historical and cultural complex in the city of Khujand, etc. According to experts, the presence of this infrastructure is one of the key factors in the development of ecotourism in the Sughd region and plays an important role in increasing the income of the population and the overall development of the region's economy.

Despite its vast resources, many of the tourist and recreational areas of the mountainous and valley landscape of the Sughd region, including hundreds of unexplored corners of nature, remain poorly studied. For example, in the Zarafshan, Iskandar Kul, and the Yagnob National Nature Park, there are many tourist destinations, such as geomorphological, litho-paleontological,

tectonic, hydrological, and petrographic-mineralogical sites, which have not yet been sufficiently explored for the development of ecological tourism [10.c.4]. Due to the lack of research into the mountain and valley conditions of the Sughd region, travel to the hundreds of untouched corners of nature is not considered possible. Resources for the sustainable development of ecotourism are extensive in almost all tourist and recreational areas of the republic.

Of particular interest is the western part of the Fergana recreational zone, where there are unique ecological resources associated with such sites as the "Tajik Sea," "Koni Mansur," the underground labyrinths of Karamazara, dinosaur tracks and stone trees of Ravota, as well as Black Ore and Aksukona [3. c.156]. The space for ecological tourism and the location of ecotourism and recreational services in the Sughd region are organized by beautiful and unique nature in specially protected natural areas (SPNA), such as five nature reserves and one national park (Table 1), with a total area of 107,690 hectares, which make a significant contribution to the protection of flora, fauna, and natural landscapes [5.p.88].

Table 2. System of protected areas of the Sughd region

№	Name of protected area	Day, month, and year of establishment	Area. ha	Administrative-territorial division	Purpose of the nature reserve
1	Makon Sugur Nature Reserve (Oktosh)	30.12.1977	15049	Ashta District	Protection and restoration of the Menzbir marmot species, listed in the Red Book
2	Dara Sabz Nature Reserve (Kusavlisoy)	09.05.1959	18266,99	Shakhriston District	Protection and restoration of juniper groves and preservation of unique flora and fauna
3	Orion Nature Reserve (Soyvota)	01.03.1972	4120	Aynin District	Protection and restoration of juniper groves on the slopes of the Zarafshan Range
4	Zarafshan Nature Reserve	10.06.1976	2380	Penjikent City	breeding and protection of the rarest natural population of a pheasant subspecies
5	Iskandar Kul Nature Reserve	12.12.1969	27874	Aynin District	protection of wonderful and beautiful places, juniper forests, mountain goats, and the unique nature of this valley in general
6	Yagnob National Nature Park	02.05.2019	40000	Aynin District	preservation of the unique gene pool of fauna and flora, ecosystems, natural and historical resources

Compiled by the authors based on scientific works [3.p.153, 4.p.58, 5.p.94].

The deterioration of the ecological situation and the increase in man-made pollution require a careful approach to nature. Eco-tourism is the only branch of the recreation industry that seeks to preserve natural landscapes considered to be national treasures. This study aims to address issues related to the development and improvement of the network of protected areas in the Sughd region and throughout the country as a whole by developing eco-tourism and promoting this type of environmental activity. The nature of this area is of unparalleled beauty, adorned with giant stone flowers—snow-white vases formed by salt deposits from underground mineral springs. When organizing ecotourism, tourist agencies should pay special attention to the rational use of resources and their tourist and recreational value, in particular: land plots, water resources, natural complexes and objects of special environmental, scientific, cultural, aesthetic, recreational, and health significance [10.p. 38].

Traveling to unspoiled landscapes to explore their ecological, cultural, and ethnographic riches is hugely popular around the world. Tajikistan has not been left behind by this rapidly developing trend in recent years. The growth of ecotourism in the country is largely due to its extensive network of specially protected natural areas (SPNAs). These include wildlife sanctuaries, nature reserves, and national parks, all of which offer eco-routes for tourists seeking an exciting encounter with wildlife.

It should be borne in mind that in the territorial organisation of tourism and recreational activities, the tasks of specially protected areas are primarily determined by the protection of these ecosystems, the preservation of exotic natural and cultural objects to meet the recreational needs of ecotourists, the conduct of scientific research, and fostering in visitors a love for nature and the natural resources of Tajikistan and a careful attitude towards them. Within each of these areas, it is necessary to designate: a reserve area, a buffer zone, and a recreational area. Such types of territorial organization have not yet been established in the specially protected reserve areas of the republic [9.p.54].

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2. Preservation of the appearance of 47 geolandscapes and protected natural and historical areas: this involves ensuring careful treatment of nature and preserving its uniqueness for future generations. Introduce strict rules of conduct in protected areas, organize a control and monitoring system, and develop environmentally sustainable tourism. It is necessary to invest in infrastructure

that minimizes the impact of tourism on the environment and to develop the principles of sustainable development.

3. Based on the fact that it is the citizens who are the creators of all the elements of life, customs, historical and cultural heritage, folklore, and folk crafts of individual destinations in the republic (Gissar, Vakhsh, Kulob, Rasht, Western and Eastern Pamir), shape the public opinion of local residents on strengthening responsibility for the protection of the above-mentioned elements.

The development of ecological, mountain, cultural, and medical tourism, as well as the strengthening of cultural ties through tourism, can transform the Sughd region into an attractive world-class destination and improve the living standards of the local population. Therefore, tourism, as an important driver of the economy and a factor of social progress, occupies a special place in state policy. Thus, by conducting a SWOT analysis, it is possible to identify the strengths and weaknesses, as well as the opportunities and existing threats in the region's tourism sector (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. SWOT analysis of the tourism industry in the Sughd region

In conclusion, it should be noted that the Sughd region is one of the most promising tourist regions of the Republic of Tajikistan, with significant natural, historical, ethnographic, cultural, and recreational potential. The region's tourist appeal is shaped by a variety of resources, including snow-covered ski slopes, hunting and fishing opportunities, specially protected natural areas, historical, cultural, and architectural heritage sites, as well as industrial and geological tourist attractions.

Favorable natural and climatic conditions and a rich cultural heritage create the conditions for the organization and development of various types of tourism and recreation. Priority areas include health and recreational tourism, hiking and mountaineering, ecotourism (including ecological routes in specially protected natural areas), ethnotourism, and sports tourism. In addition, in 2025, the region hosted significant cultural events and the international forum "Sogdiana Region – Crossroads of the Great Silk Road. Journey to the Heart of Eurasia – 2025," which contributed to raising the region's tourist profile at the national and international levels. Studying successful practices and implementing innovative approaches will unlock the full potential of ecotourism for the benefit of local communities and the entire planet, contributing to a more sustainable and equitable future for all. Therefore, in order to further increase tourist attraction, it is necessary to develop and improve the national tourism industry, especially in terms of creating tourist infrastructure in accordance with modern requirements and tourist needs.

Thus, achieving sustainable tourism development, which is the goal of the country's current tourism policy, provides an opportunity:

Firstly, it contributes to the introduction of resource-saving technologies and the modernisation of production, which is a necessary condition for improving environmental efficiency and preventing natural and man-made emergencies, especially in the mountainous areas of the republic.

Secondly, it allows for maximising revenue from the use of natural and tourism resources, which goes to the republican and local budgets, which in turn allows for the rational use of tourist and recreational areas.

Thirdly, advertising is one of the most important and integral parts of the tourism industry, one of the main means of marketing communication. It is implemented not only for foreign tourists, but also for domestic tourists, so that every Tajik citizen or guest of the country can enjoy the unique nature of 'Dara Sabz' and visit it.

Fourthly, it is necessary to strengthen cooperation between the population and local authorities. Residents of tourist areas should be persuaded to provide adequate tourist services in order to generate significant income, which will help to solve everyday problems, improve their social situation and provide jobs.

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