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SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND ECOTOURISM: BENEFITS, PROBLEMS AND THE CASE OF UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract Tourism brings money and creates jobs for countries, but it also harms nature and increases carbon emissions. This paper compares sustainable tourism and ecotourism, describes their advantages and disadvantages, and discusses what they mean for Uzbekistan. It is a literature review based on twelve sources. The results show that sustainable tourism is a broad principle for all forms of tourism, while ecotourism is one type of tourism in natural areas. Ecotourism helps preserve the environment and earns money for local families, but it works only when it is carefully managed. In Uzbekistan, the main problems are weak infrastructure, low awareness and a lack of cooperation among organizations.
Keywords: tourism, ecotourism, Uzbekistan, protected areas, local communities

Introduction

Tourism is one of the biggest sectors in the world. Tourists come to a destination to have a rest and also to learn about the culture of other people. For nations, tourism means employment, money for taxes and an opportunity to develop poor areas. There is a negative side as well. Many tourists spoil beaches, forests and mountains and leave a lot of garbage. In some cases, local people are forced to leave their homes because it becomes too expensive to live there. Planes and cars also release a lot of carbon dioxide.

As a result, the concept of sustainable tourism emerged. According to the World Tourism Organization, sustainable tourism considers the socio-economic impact of tourism in the present and for the future [1]. The World Tourism Organization claims that sustainable tourism takes into consideration the visitor, the tourism sector, nature and the local community. In other words, sustainable tourism should not consume today what is needed tomorrow.

Ecotourism is similar to sustainable tourism, but it is not the same thing. Ecotourism involves traveling to the natural environment while protecting the environment and helping the locals. Most authors regard ecotourism as one form of tourism. All forms of tourism may be sustainable, while some forms cannot be called ecotourism [2]. Even the United Nations recognized ecotourism as important: 2002 was named the International Year of Ecotourism.

The topic matters for Uzbekistan too. Most people know Uzbekistan for Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva. However, Uzbekistan also has mountains, lakes, deserts and nature reserves, for example Ugam-Chatkal National Park, the Nurata Mountains and Lake Aydarkul. Some writers say that Uzbekistan could become a centre of ecotourism in Central Asia [3], but others say that this chance is still not fully used [3].

Tourism brings money and creates employment opportunities for countries; however, tourism can have an adverse effect on the environment as well. The present paper considers two approaches that try to deal with the damaging effects of tourism: sustainable tourism and ecotourism. It is necessary to discuss the difference between sustainable tourism and ecotourism, the positive and negative aspects of each approach and how they might be beneficial for Uzbekistan. It is a literature review, which means I analyzed numerous papers and reports created by other people. Ecotourism helps preserve the environment and

earnsmoney for local families, but it works only when it is carefully managed. In Uzbekistan, infrastructure, poor awareness and lack of cooperation among organizations are the main issues.

The purpose of the current paper is to define tourism and ecotourism, describe their advantages and disadvantages and evaluate their significance for Uzbekistan. It attempts to provide answers to the following questions:

• What are the differences between tourism and ecotourism?
• What are the advantages and disadvantages of tourism and ecotourism?
• What difficulties and opportunities can Uzbekistan have to develop ecotourism?

This paper contains six sections: the introduction, literature review, methodology, results, discussion and conclusion. References will be denoted by [1], and the number refers to the reference made in the bibliography section at the end.

1. Literature Review

This part contains a summary of what was said in previous research and reports. This part begins with definitions, followed by climate effects, advantages and disadvantages, and research in relation to Uzbekistan. Finally, this part mentions the gaps left behind.

Sustainable tourism, according to the World Tourism Organization, is tourism that gives thought to its economic, social and environmental implications, both present and future [1]. The World Tourism Organization also bears in mind the needs of travelers, industry, environment and local communities [1]. According to this definition, the principles of sustainability ought to apply to all forms of tourism, including mass, urban, business and eco-tourism.

Ecotourism is seen as one kind of tourism. Ecotourism is associated with geography, conservation of nature and education [2]. In addition, the literature states that there is no official definition of ecotourism. For this reason, some organizations use the term "eco" for promotion, but the journey does not have anything to do with nature.

Another important factor is climate change. There was an analysis done in Nature Climate Change on data from 160 countries. Emissions from transportation, food production, shopping and other aspects of tourism were considered. The analysis revealed that tourism is responsible for 8 percent of all the world's greenhouse gas emissions [5]. From 2009 to 2013, the emissions increased from 3.9 to 4.5 billion tons of CO2 equivalents per year. The effect is even more significant in island nations. In the Maldives, Mauritius, Cyprus and Seychelles, tourism accounted for 30 to 80 percent of the emissions [6].

The main message is that sustainable tourism is not about the place people visit. It is also about how they travel and how far they go.

The sources have cited four advantages of ecotourism. The first one is the ticket payments and tourist fees, which can be used to manage the parks and reserves. The second is that guides, homestays, meals, transportation and handicrafts provide incomes to the residents, especially those living far away. The third advantage is that tourists learn about the importance of nature, while the locals understand the importance of nature as a source of income. The fourth advantage is that ecotourism preserves culture [3].

However, there is evidence in the literature to indicate that ecotourism does not provide an all-encompassing solution. According to one review, a natural attraction gaining popularity can lead to the deterioration of the area's nature, and managers usually tend to prioritize
profit over preservation [7]. In addition to those risks, there are also garbage pollution, exotic species introduced by tourists, dependence of local communities on one income source, foreign corporations' involvement, which take part of the profit, as well as lack of regulations without certification.

Certain authors have noted that Uzbekistan is a rising ecotourism center of Central Asia [3]. These places include the Ugam-Chatkal National Park, the Nurata Natural Preserve, Lake Aydarkul, the Aral Sea zone, the Kyzylkum Desert, the Kitab State Geological Preserve and Zaamin National Park [8][9]. Halilov and Dehtyarev compare the world leaders in ecotourism to those countries. They consider Uzbekistan a Silk Road country in the process of development in this sphere [10].

The literature review on the topic of protected areas of Uzbekistan focused on such protected areas as Chatkal, Nuratau-Kyzylkum, Zaamin and Surkhan. The research identified three main problems, namely, the lack of adequate infrastructure, the lack of public awareness and the lack of collaboration among decision makers. There are also opportunities for improvement due to government initiatives and collaboration of stakeholders.

This notion is reflected in research conducted in 2024. There should be developed a strategy to ensure that ecotourism not only preserves natural heritage but also promotes the economic growth of the regions [11]. As a complement to that, a concept of ecotourism development has been developed by the State Committee for Nature Protection [12].

Most of the sources include definitions, statistics or reviews by experts. They do not represent the current opinion of the tourists and locals in Uzbekistan. The information on Uzbekistan is rather limited and outdated. Therefore, I have not gathered any data myself. Instead, I analyzed the sources available and tried to answer the three research questions.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research design

This is a literature review. It uses data, meaning information that other researchers and organizations have already published. I did not conduct a survey. Interviews and field research were also not used, because collecting new data in protected areas takes a lot of time and requires official permission. A literature review is a research technique that can be applied in an exploratory study, and it aligns with the objectives of this paper, which include comparison of definitions, advantages, disadvantages and prior knowledge of Uzbekistan.

2.2 Search strategy

I searched the internet in October 2026 using these search phrases

Search phrase	What it was used for
"ecotourism" "sustainable tourism"	Definitions and differences between the two ideas
"tourism carbon footprint"	Climate impact of tourism
"ecotourism in Uzbekistan"	Places, problems and chances in Uzbekistan

1.1 Selection of sources

I chose sources using three simple rules:

- it is written in English;
- it comes from an international body, a university scholar or a reputable news agency;
- it defines something, offers data, or gives an example.

I decided to exclude the pages which only offer tours and those pages which give information in figures without giving out their sources. In the end, I made use of twelve references.

1.2 Data analysis

I went through each source. Three aspects were noted: how it discusses the topic, what benefits and problems it identifies, and how it discusses Uzbekistan. I compared the sources and sorted them into groups, and these groups became the sections of the Results part. Every idea

drawn from a source is referred to by its number.

1.3 Limitations

There were certain shortcomings in the method employed. Published literature has been used, and I have no information about the current opinions of tourists or residents of Uzbekistan. The Uzbek literature includes conference papers, and some information is somewhat outdated. Where the evidence was weak, I employed cautious wording.

2. Results

2.1 Sustainable tourism and ecotourism: definitions

All sources clearly point out that sustainable tourism is a broader term. As per the World Tourism Organization, its principles are applicable to all forms of tourism, ranging from general tourism to city tourism, business tourism and nature tourism [1]. Ecotourism is a part of tourism. It involves tourism to areas where nature conservation and education take place.

	Sustainable tourism	**Ecotourism**
Size of the idea	All types of tourism	One type of tourism
Main place	Cities, resorts, villages, nature	Natural and protected areas
Main goal	Balance between money, people and nature	Protect nature, teach visitors, help people
Who should follow it	Every hotel, airline and tour company	Eco-lodges, guides, park managers

Other writers have argued that there is no official definition for ecotourism. It is for this reason that some tour operators incorporate the term "eco" in their marketing even though their tour packages do not benefit the environment.

1.1 Tourism has a climate footprint

One of the most striking findings is presented in the research conducted by Nature Climate Change. Researchers based their work on data gathered in 160 countries. They calculated all emissions associated with tourism, from transportation to food and shopping. They discovered that the tourism industry accounts for 8% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions [5]. During 2009-2013, emissions increased from 3.9 to 4.5 billion tons of CO2 equivalent per year. This is about four times larger than previous estimations, which were 2.5 to 3%. It is especially critical in the case of island countries. In the Maldives, Mauritius, Cyprus and Seychelles, tourism was accountable for 30-80 percent of emissions [6]. Also, it was noted that tourism-related emissions increase faster than the ability to decrease them using new technologies. Sustainable tourism is not only about protecting forests and wildlife but also about traveling and the distance of travels.

1.2 Benefits of ecotourism

The sources name these benefits:

• **Money for conservation of nature.** Money generated from tickets and tourist fees can help fund the conservation of parks and reserves.

• **Earnings for individuals.** Guides, homestays, meals, transport and craft products provide employment opportunities for villagers from distant regions.

• **Education.** Visitors learn why nature is important, and local people learn that nature can bring a living income.

• **Saving culture.** In places like the Nurata region, village life is still traditional, and visitors can see it in a natural way [3].

1.3 Problems and risks of ecotourism

Ecotourism is not a solution for everything. One review explains that when a natural place becomes very popular, its nature can get worse, and managers often choose profit before protection [7]. The sources also mention these problems:

- visitors can bring waste and invasive species;
- local families can depend on one source of income, so a crisis hurts them badly;
- foreign companies can take a share of the profit, so less money stays in the village;
- rules are unclear, and without certification some companies can falsely call themselves "eco" (greenwashing).

1.4 Ecotourism in Uzbekistan

The studies about Uzbekistan describe a country that has good opportunities but also many practical problems. Popular ecotourism places in Uzbekistan are Ugam-Chatkal National Park, Nurata Nature Reserve, Lake Aydarkul, the Aral Sea region, the Kyzylkum Desert, Kitab State Geological Reserve and Zaamin National Park [8][9]. Tourists in Uzbekistan can go on desert trips, walk in the mountains, watch birds and stay in homes. Halilov and Dehtyarev compared leading ecotourism countries with ones such as Uzbekistan and described Uzbekistan as an important Silk Road destination that is still developing in this area [10].

The review of protected areas in Uzbekistan studied Chatkal, Nuratau-Kyzylkum, Zaamin and Surkhan. The review found three problems: weak infrastructure, low public awareness and weak cooperation between decision makers. The review also says there are chances for growth because of government programs and cooperation between groups, and that community-based ecotourism, eco-friendly buildings and new technology are important for the future [11]. A 2024 study also considers that Uzbekistan needs an integrated approach to ecotourism that protects natural heritage and supports the economy of the regions [11].

There is some progress in the last work. The State Committee for Nature Protection of Uzbekistan prepared a concept for ecotourism development with legal, educational and social parts [12]. Still, one author notes that ecotourism is not yet in demand even though Uzbekistan has rich resources.

2. Discussion

The main idea from the results is that "green" tourism is not automatically green. Ecotourism has a good goal, but the result depends on how people manage it. If a park in Uzbekistan gets many visitors but the profit leaves the area, the original goal is lost. This agrees with the warning in the literature that profit often comes before protection [7].

The carbon footprint result is also important for students and future tourism workers. Many people think sustainable tourism means a nice hotel with solar panels. The study shows that transport, food and shopping make up a big part of tourism emissions [5]. So a trip to a nature reserve can still do harm if people fly a long way and make no effort to reduce this. For Uzbekistan this is an advantage: local and regional ecotourism, with short trips and local food, can be better for the climate than long-distance mass tourism.

For Uzbekistan, the sources are quite similar. They all say that Uzbekistan has nature, but infrastructure, awareness and cooperation are weak. These three problems seem to be connected. When roads, guest houses and guides are poor, few tourists come. When few tourists come, local people do not see why nature is valuable. When organizations do not work together, it is hard to build the missing services. This is why community-based ecotourism looks like a good way: small homestays, local guides and village handicrafts need fewer big hotels, and more of the income stays in the community.

This paper has limits. First, it uses written sources, so it shows what experts say, not what ordinary visitors or villagers feel. Second, data about ecotourism in Uzbekistan are limited and often old. Third, this is a beginner's study, so some important studies may be missing. In the future, researchers could interview families near Chatkal or Nurata, ask visitors questions in a survey and measure how tourism changes nature over time.

3. Conclusion

This paper compared tourism and ecotourism and looked at what they mean for Uzbekistan. Sustainable tourism is the idea that every type of tourism should follow. Ecotourism is one type that focuses on nature, learning and helping local people. The literature shows that ecotourism can pay for nature protection and bring income to villages. When nobody controls it, it can also cause damage and unfair sharing of profit. Tourism as a whole has a climate footprint: about 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions in the study I reviewed [5]. So the way people travel is as important as the place they visit.

Uzbekistan has conditions for ecotourism: mountains, lakes, deserts and protected areas. The main problems are infrastructure, low awareness and poor cooperation. Based on the sources, I suggest the following steps:

• Develop community-based ecotourism, for example homestays and local guides, so that money remains in the villages;
• improve roads, services and eco-friendly accommodations near protected areas;
• set clear rules and use certification for visitors and tour companies, to ensure that "eco" is not merely a marketing tool or an advertising word;
• teach tourists and local people how to protect nature;
• improve cooperation among ministries, park administrations, tour companies and local communities.

When we follow these steps carefully, ecotourism will help Uzbekistan protect its nature and also improve the lives of people who live near it.

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