

TURİZM COĞRAFIYASI

**TOURISM POTENTIAL OF SHEKI-ZAGATALA ECONOMIC-GEOGRAPHICAL REGION
AND WAYS OF USING THEM**

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Abstract

One of the best ways of sustainable development in the economic-geographical region of Sheki-Zagatala, located in the north-western part of Azerbaijan, on the southern slopes of the Greater Caucasus Mountains, is tourism industry. The article explores natural and anthropogenic monuments existing in Sheki-Zagatala economic-geographical region, provides information on hotels with accommodation facilities, number of rooms, hotel capacity, number of people accommodated in, and overnight accommodation, calculates tourism development index, and compiles a map with tourism indicators.

As a result of these studies, it has been estimated that although the development of hotel business in the economic-geographical region is considered a positive factor, most of them are concentrated in the administrative region of Gabala. Other areas are poorly developed in terms of tourism. Nevertheless, ecological tourism in the region has been developing in recent years.

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1. Introduction.

In the modern world, tourism is one of the most economically profitable and fast-growing businesses. At present, tourism and leisure facilities are rapidly developing in many countries of the world, with significant investment in these spheres. As a result, tourism revenues are increasing, which has a positive impact on employment. At present, a number of measures are taken in the direction of sustainable development of the tourism sector in Azerbaijan. Thus, the “State Program on development of tourism in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2017-2020” and the “Strategic Road Map on the development of specialised tourism industry in the Republic of Azerbaijan” are considered important issues for the organisation and implementation of tourism in our country in accordance with international standards.

According to statistical analysis, the share of tourism in the national economy has increased significantly in recent years. An analysis of 2010-2018 shows that the share of tourism in GDP increased from 1.0% to 2.2% [9]. The increase was due to investments in the tourism sector and an increased interest in the area.

2. Material and method.

Publications of the State Statistical Committee, fund and archive materials of the ANAS Institute of Geography named after academician H. Aliyev, as well as the field work of the authors were used in carrying out the research work. At that time, observation, mathematical statistics, comparative analysis, and modern GIS (Geographic Information Systems) technology have been used.

3. Analysis and discussion.

Sheki-Zagatala economic-geographical region is one of the most attractive regions in Azerbaijan in terms of tourism. There are enough natural and anthropogenic resources to develop tourism. The highways and railways passing through the territory of the economic-geographical region play an important role in its domestic and external economic relations. However, Sheki-Zagatala, like other economic-geographical regions of Azerbaijan, is far behind its pace of economic development. The main socio-economic driving force is concentrated in Baku. Most of the population have moved to the capital city – Baku and abroad to find jobs and improve their living conditions. In this regard,

first of all, new economic facilities should be established in the regions, and the employment problem of the population should be solved.

The territory of Sheki-Zagatala economic-geographical region is 8,84 thousand km² which covers 10,2% of the country territory, and with 621,4 thousand people – 6,2% of the country population (2018). The population density is 70 people per km² [11]. The settlement system in the economic-geographical region is represented by 6 administrative districts, 6 cities, 8 settlements, and 336 rural settlements.

The motivation of tourism, its geographical specialisation, and the objectives of the settlement are related to the impact of natural and geographical factors [7]. When the type of tourism coincides with favourable climatic conditions, there is a population density in those areas at certain times of the year. This is due to the fact that climatic conditions during the tourism season affect the comfort of the leisure activity [5].

The studied area is characterised by its unique natural conditions and relief features. Being subject to relief fragmentation in a small area (20-30 km), the territory is divided into three major parts by its natural conditions: the Southern slope of the Greater Caucasus, Ganikh-Ayrichay valley, and Middle Kur highland (Ajinohur and Turud-Sarija Plain, the mountainous part of Sheki). The area is generally at an altitude from 100 m to 4466 m above the sea level. It is represented mainly by mountain meadows, mountainous forests, subalpine and alpine meadows, and nival zones [10]. Studying natural conditions and relief will help to determine the planning and form of tourism facilities in the future. So, when building a tourism facility, a special attention should be paid to the preservation of the relief and the natural landscape of the surrounding area.

The *climate* of the economic-geographical region of Sheki-Zagatala is mostly mild and humid. The area receives high solar energy throughout the year. The sunshine duration varies between 2200-2300 hours per year, and the total incoming solar radiation is 120-148 kcal/cm². The mean annual temperature is 6-14⁰ in Balakan and 0-14⁰ in other regions. The annual precipitation is 300-350 mm around Ajinohur, 500-700 mm in Ganikh-Ayrichay, and 900-1300 mm in mountainous areas [2]. Such favourable climatic conditions contribute to the development of tourism in the area. However, occasional hailstorms, foggy weather, hail precipitations, and avalanches in high mountainous areas and other weather factors hinder the organisation of tourism.

One of the key factors for the development of tourism is related to forest resources. Thus, forests have both aesthetic and cultural-health functions. It is possible to create tourism, sanatoriums, and other health centres could be established on their basis.

The economic-geographical region of Sheki-Zagatala is rich in forest resources. There are such valuable species as oak, hornbeam, mountain spruce, and pine in the forests, which account for 27% of the total area [8]. Determining the forest sites of recreational importance in the area, estimating the amount of pressure allowed, as well as determining and utilising tourism-oriented recreational potential are among the most important issues [1]. In this regard, forests are one of the important issues in the creation of tourism facilities and the development of tourism on their basis.

Protection of *water resources* and their use for tourism and recreation are among the most important factors in the socio-cultural life of people. Sheki-Zagatala economic-geographical region is one of the regions with rich water resources in the country. There are large river systems in the territory of the economic-geographical region, such as Katekh, Kish, Demiraparan, Gurmuk, Shin, Mazim, Mukhah, and Balakanchay. These rivers can be used for organising tourism and recreational activities. Thus, the Katekh waterfall, the Gabizdere waterfall, the Khalkhal waterfall, the Shirshir waterfall, the Ilisu waterfall, etc. on the rivers attract more tourists.

Sheki-Zagatala economic-geographical region is one of the regions where *thermal and mineral springs* are more prevalent. The area is exposed to water sources with hydrogen sulphide, hydrogen carbonate, sodium hydrogen carbonate, sulphur, low carbonate-alkaline, and other compounds. There are Ilisu thermal water groups on the banks of the Hamamchay River in Gakh region; mineral springs – on the left and right banks of the Gurmukh River near Alibeyli village, in Gaynama area, and near the villages of Aliabad, Bazar, and Kumir; cold salt springs – in 3 km from Mashlash-Chikhar village, on the right bank of Talachay River; two mineral cold springs named Jimjima in Zagatala region; hot Boom and cold Gamarvan springs in Gabala region; Yengice mineral spring – on the north-east of the Yengice village; hot Khalkhal mineral spring on the left bank of the Garadara River, the left arm of the Khalkhalchay River in Oghuz; cold Bugusshor mineral spring to the north-east of Khachmaz village; cold Aghbulag mineral spring to the west of Khachmaz village; and a mineral spring between 10-11 km of Shaki-Oghuz

highway in Shaki region [12]. Although these thermal and mineral springs are of great importance in resort and tourism, they are not fully utilised. Only the Yengice hot water Health and Wellness Complex operates on the basis of Yengice mineral spring since 2007.

First of all, it should be noted that the healing properties of these waters have not been fully researched yet. In addition, sources of thermal and mineral springs, which are of great importance for the establishment of health-care facilities and recovery of human health, are sometimes subjected to natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, inundations, slides, etc.), making them impracticable. Sometimes, the poor development of the social infrastructure and road transport in the treatment sources make them inaccessible.

Taking into account the natural factors of tourism in Sheki-Zagatala economic-geographical region, it could be stated that there are enough opportunities for the development of *ecotourism* in the region. The development of ecotourism in the area can condition the socio-economic status and future prospects of rural settlements. For this purpose, the areas with the most favourable conditions for the development of ecotourism in the region should be selected, the municipalities should be informed about the economic benefits of ecotourism, and the rural population should be enlightened in this regard [6].

One of the factors contributing to the development of tourism is archaeological and architectural, as well as parks, monumental, memorial, decorative, applied arts, and other monuments. Monuments in Sheki-Zagatala economic-geographical region can be grouped into three categories of global, national, and local significance. There are 412 monuments in the region. Of these, 3 are archaeological and 2 are architectural monuments of global importance; 125 archaeological and 37 architectural monuments of national importance; and 38 archaeological and 190 architectural monuments of local importance. The number of parks, monumental and memorial monuments is 13, while the number of decorative and applied art monuments is 4 [3].

World-famous archaeological and architectural monuments are located in the Gakh, Sheki, and Gabala administrative regions of Sheki-Zagatala economic-geographical region. These monuments include the Bronze Age Necropolis of Sarija Minberek on the Minberek Plain of the Gakh region, the Minberek settlement and grave mounds, the Middle Ages Kish settlement in the Kish village of Sheki region, the Kish Temple, the Middle Ages

ancient Gabala city in the Gabala region, and the Salbir Tower. The architectural monuments include the 5th century Temple in Lakit village of Gakh region, XVIII-XIX centuries “Yukhari Bash” Historical and Architectural Reserve, and Palace of Sheki Khans in Sheki.

Shaki and Gabala are rich in monuments of national importance, while Zagatala, Sheki, and Gakh administrative regions are rich in monuments of local importance. These include the Pari Tower (V century), Jingo Tower (XIV century), Sheytan Tower, Zagatala Tower, Alban Monuments (VI-VIII century), Albanian towers in Mazikh and Akhakh dara villages (XII century), Pashan village (XIII century), and Kebeloba village (XIV century), Jar Mosque (XVII century), Minaret Mosque (XIX century), Sinjan Mosque (XVIII century), etc. [13]. There are carpets, kelagayis (traditional silk scarf), pottery (ceramics), textiles, jewellery, carving, and other products presented to tourists as souvenirs near these monuments.

A great number of natural and anthropogenic monuments in the economic-geographical region of Sheki-Zagatala are among the main factors contributing to the development of tourism. However, tourism services that should meet the requirements and needs of tourists in the region are quite poor.

Many local sectors generate significant income in the process of organising tourism. This list of local sectors includes hotels, small private hotels, various public catering centres, means of transport, folk artistic establishments, excursion and information centres, etc. [4].

At present, *hotels* play an important role in the accommodation of tourists in the economic-geographical region. Hotels are one of the key indicators of tourism activity. Thus, hotels play a key role in accommodating both national and foreign citizens. In addition to providing services to citizens, they pay income tax to the state budget and exert influence on employment.

Analysing 2010-2018 years, there is an increase in the number of hotels in Shaki-Zagatala economic-geographical region, as well as in number of hotel rooms, hotel capacity, number of people accommodated in, and overnight accommodation. During the years under review, 13 hotels were built and put into operation, increasing by 978 rooms, and hotel capacity by 2,252 places, making 1,458 rooms and 4,432 places respectively [11]. Over the years, the number of people accommodated has increased by 5.4 times, while the number of overnight accommodation – by 5.9 times (table 1).

Table 1

Key indicators of hotels in Shaki-Zagatala economic-geographical region

Indicators	years						
	2010	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number of hotels, unit	50	49	51	54	55	60	63
Number of rooms, unit	970	981	1015	1072	1997	1900	1948
Hotel capacity, place	2180	2374	2469	2583	4469	4308	4432
Number of people accommodates, people	41780	31874	32077	31280	186564	165499	229500
Number of overnight accommodation, person/night	62874	64871	60136	51064	334704	247793	368205

Source: The regions of Azerbaijan. Baku, 2019

Table 2

Territorial Development Index of Sheki-Zagatala economic-geographical region in terms of tourism

Administrative regions	Area, thousand km ²	Population, one thousand people	Income from hotels, thousand AZN	Territorial Development Index
Balakan	0,94	98,3	323,9	3,4
Zagatala	1,35	128,7	513,4	3,9
Gakh	1,49	56,9	938,6	10,2
Sheki	2,43	186,6	1289,4	6,1
Oghuz	1,08	44,3	157,3	2,3
Gabala	1,55	106,6	32228,3	250,7
Total:	8,84	621,4	35450,9	47,8

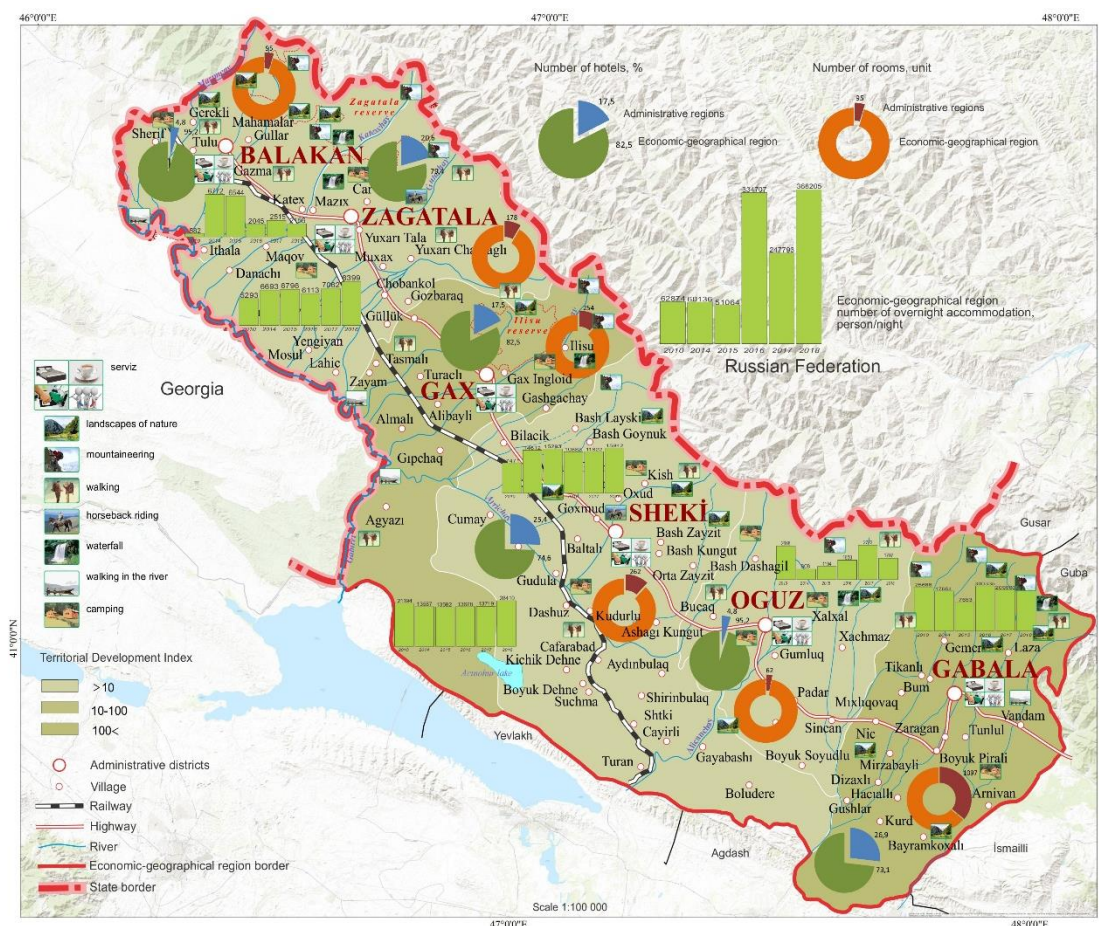
Source: Regions of Azerbaijan, 2019.



Picture 1. Five-star hotels in Shaki-Zagatala economic-geographical region

The number of five-star hotels in Sheki-Zagatala economic-geographical region, one of the most beautiful recreation areas of Azerbaijan, has increased in recent years. The main destination for visiting by foreign tourists is Gabala. Therefore, the number of five-star hotels in Gabala is higher than in other regions. Thus, Gabala is distinguished

from other regions by its advanced hotel infrastructure. There are five-star hotels operating here as Qafqaz Riverside Resort, Qafqaz Tufandag, Chenot Palace, Qafqaz Resort, Qafqaz Sport Resort and Qafqaz Thermal Hotel (picture 1).



Picture. 2. Tourism map of Sheki-Zagatala economic-geographical region

Despite the high tendency of hotels to develop, they have not been able to significantly influence the tourism infrastructure in the region, especially the improvement of services. Taking all these factors into account, we tried to determine the *Territorial Development Index* for each administrative region within the Sheki-Zagatala economic-geographical region (Table 2) and used the method of D.L.Lopatnikov for this purpose.

$$I = 0.1 \sqrt{\frac{V^2}{NS}}$$

Here, I - Territorial Development Index; V – Income from hotels, thousand AZN; N - population, one thousand people; S - total area, thousand km².

Analysing the Territorial development index of Sheki-Zagatala economic-geographical region in terms of tourism, it becomes clear that Gabala is better developed than other administrative regions. With 250.7 in Development Index, Gabala outcompetes all the administrative regions. The administrative region of Gakh ranks second with the development index of 10.2. In recent years, tourism has been developing in almost all villages of the Gakh administrative region, which has led to its high rates. Although the Sheki administrative region has

a lot of potential and is historically specialised in tourism, its territorial development index is quite low. This is due to the development of tourism primarily in Sheki city. Territorial development index in terms of tourism in Balakan, Zagatala, and Oguz administrative regions is quite low, similar to Sheki (picture 2).

As a result of our research, it was found that despite the favourable conditions for tourism development in Sheki-Zagatala economic-geographical region, the current state of tourism in the region is not at the desired level. Nevertheless, rural, environmental, religious, sports, and other spheres of tourism have been developing in the region in recent years. Effective and full use of tourism potential would result in attraction of labour resources in the region, increase of employment, and reduction of unemployment. In turn, it would play an important role in solving social problems.

4. Result.

In general, it could be stated that it would be advisable to implement the following measures for the development of tourism in Sheki-Zagatala economic-geographical region:

- natural environment, relief, climate indicators, forest and water resources, which constitute

the natural tourism resources of the region, have been analysed; development of ecotourism on their basis and availability of favourable conditions for construction of medical and health centres have been justified;

- archaeological and architectural monuments have been analysed, monuments of global and national importance, that could generate interest in tourists, as well as their location have been noted;

- the territorial development index in terms of tourism has been calculated and the uneven development of tourism in the region has been noted. Along with this, high prices in the newly built hotels, poor service, and inability of local tourists to take advantage of these opportunities have been determined as well.

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ŞƏKİ-ZAQATALA İQTİSADİ-COĞRAFI RAYONUNUN TURİZM POTENSİALI VƏ ONLARDAN İSTİFADƏ YOLLARI

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Xülasə. Azərbaycanın şimal-qərb hissəsində, Böyük Qafqaz dağlarının cənub yamacında yerləşən Şəki-Zaqatala iqtisadi-coğrafi rayonunda davamlı inkişafın ən optimal yollarından biri turizm təsərrüfatının inkişafı ilə bağlıdır. Məqalədə, Şəki-Zaqatala iqtisadi-coğrafi rayonunda mövcud olan təbii və antropogen abidələr araşdırılmış, mehmanxanalar, onlarda olan nömrələrin sayı, birdəfəlik tutumu, yerləşdirilmiş şəxslərin və gecələnlərin sayı, turizm baxımından ərazisinin inkişaf indeksi hesablanmış, turizmin indikatorlarını əks etdirən xəritə tərtib edilmişdir. Bu araşdırmalar nəticəsində müəyyən edilmişdir ki, iqtisadi-coğrafi rayonda mehmanxana təsərrüfatının inkişaf etdirilməsi müsbət hal kimi hesab edilsə də, əsas problem onların çox hissəsinin Qəbələ inzibati rayonunda cəmlənməsidir. Digər ərazilər isə turizm təsərrüfatı baxımından zəif inkişaf etdirilir. Buna baxmayaraq, son illər regionda ekoloji turizm inkişaf etdirilməkdədir.

Açar sözlər: Şəki-Zaqatala, turizm, arxeoloji abidələr, memarlıq abidələr, sosial-iqtisadi inkişaf, mehmanxana, Ərazi İnkişaf İndeksi.

ТУРИСТИЧЕСКИЙ ПОТЕНЦИАЛ ШЕКИ-ЗАГАТАЛЬСКОГО ЭКОНОМ-ГЕОГРАФИЧЕСКОГО РАЙОНА И ПУТИ ЕГО ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЯ

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Аннотация. Оптимальный путь устойчивого развития Шеки-Загатальского эконом-географического района, расположенного на южном склоне Большого Кавказа в северо-западной части Азербайджана, связан с развитием туристического хозяйства. В статье исследованы находящиеся в Шеки-Загатальском эконом-географическом районе природные и антропогенные памятники, гостиницы и количество номеров в них, одновременная вместимость, количество размещенных лиц и ночующих, рассчитан индекс развития территории с точки зрения туризма, составлена карта, отражающая индикаторы туризма. В результате проведенных исследований выявлено, что развитие гостиничного хозяйства в пределах эконом-географического района считается положительным, однако основной проблемой является то, что большая часть их сосредоточена в административном районе Габала. В пределах других территорий туристическое хозяйство развивается слабо. Несмотря на это, в последние годы экологический туризм в регионе находится в стадии развития.

Ключевые слова: Шеки-Загатала, туризм, археологические памятники, архитектурные памятники, социально-экономическое развитие, индекс развития территории.