



## Prospects and Problems of Ecotourism in Iran

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### ABSTRACT

*For the development of eco-tourism and, firstly, tourism, we need to be aware of tourists and their needs as a traveler. Awareness of why people make the journey and choose special places to visit can play an important role in the planning of tourism. A significant role in ecotourism plays the exotic flora and fauna of the region. The development of any kind of tourism is based on marketing planning. In planning marketing component of tourism, emphasis should be put on the nature of the users and their needs and expectations. Ecotourism market must be able to reflect properly the demands of consumers and the needs of the ecotourism industry.*

**Keywords:** Ecotourism, Ecotourism Industry, Exotic Flora, Exotic Fauna

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### INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that promote environmental conservation and improvement of local living conditions.

Ecotourism, also called cognitive (ecological) tourism, is one of tourism forms, which considers environmental sights and unique social individuals. Ecotourism, unlike conventional tourism, includes programs that provide the least negative influence on the environment, thus enhancing the culture of the local population. Hence, in ecotourism, not only important environmental and cultural factors are exposed to assessment, but also advanced and improved programs for nature recovery cycles, efficient usage of energy, protection of water resources and the creation of economic opportunities for local communities are seriously being considered (Dzhahaniyan, Manochehr; Nad Alipur Zakhra, 2009).

One of the most important recreational and natural attractions of Iran are medicinal waters springs, sediments of silt sewage waters, mineral and hot waters with different chemical composition, for example, hot water springs of Larijan, Mahallat, Sarein, Bostal, Abad, Ramsar, etc., which have many therapeutic qualities and are visited by thousands of tourists every year.

Lake Urmia (lake Kaputan in the past) with a surface area of 5775 km<sup>2</sup> (in the proportion of dry and rainy seasons), with long coastline and high - reaching 30%, salinity, is considered to be the main center of sludge treatment. It is located at an altitude of 1275 m above sea level, the average depth - 4-5 m, maximal - 15 m. A lot of rocky islands are located in different parts of the lake. The shoreline and sizes of the lake vary throughout the year. In summer, when evaporation is high, the lake decreases, and a widespread area of wetlands and salt marshes

arise Urmia is a closed lake. Several rivers flow into it: the most famous of them is Aji Chai, but the lake does not give rise to any river. It is characterized by high salinity, which is 6 times more than the ocean water. Lake Urmia is one of the most saline lakes in the world. There is no wildlife in the lake. The concavity of the lake is of tectonic origin.

Treatment in bath of hot water mineral sources and processing with clay and mud sources, known as mud therapy, occupies a special place in medicine at present. Lake Urmia with its many possibilities is a prime example of this type.

In Iran ecotourism a special place occupies the Mazandaran province on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea, with an area of 23 714 sq.km. Mazandaran climatic conditions contributed greatly to the preservation of historical monuments. Suitable environmental conditions, pleasant and mild

subtropical climate, beautiful natural scenery and proximity to Iran made the province one of the main places of tourism in Iran.

A significant role in ecotourism plays the exotic flora and fauna of the region, national park Dasht-e Naz, Mount (volcano) Damavand, lake Lahr, waterfall and fortress Malek Bahman. A garden of Safavids epoch is located in city of Bushehr, in the neighborhood - a bird sanctuary on Miankal Peninsula and Lake Abbas Abad. In the surrounding area of Nowshehr Sisangan National Park and Lake Avidar are situated and near the city Tonekabon Chaldareh National Park is located. The village Namakabrud is famous with its aerial tramway. Lake Valasht is near the village Kelardasht. Natural terraces and hot mineral springs Badab-e Surt are also located in the province.

Iran ecotourism attractions can be divided into 8 separable sub-complexes, which, in their turn, can be divided into smaller groups:

- Climbing range
- Hunting and fishing
- Anthropological tourism (in terms of eco-tourism)
- Winter sports.
- Beach and water sports
- Natural Therapy

A region with specific boundaries and plots of land adjacent to the historical, cultural, religious, natural and tourist attractions and providing tour services is considered to be an exemplary tourism region, which is established and managed by the non-governmental sector. The model region Zone includes a village, town, even a separate country and is the upper part of the exemplary region. These zones, as per possibilities, are being created on four levels - international, national, provincial and local - to provide services to local and foreign tourists. Until the mid-2010, 1123 region models have been validated all over the country by the State.

The World Tourism Organization of UN predicted annual growth of the tourism industry from 3.4% to 6.7% until 2010,

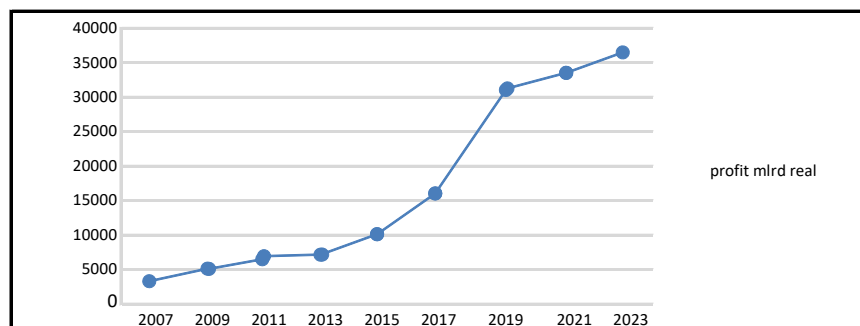
wherein ecotourism, with an annual growth of 30% to 40%, will have the highest increase as compared with other sectors of tourism.

According to the International Ecotourism Society (TIES)<sup>1</sup> forecast, "up to the end of 2020, 55 per cent of tourists will be eco tourists. According to the International Ecotourism Society data, ecotourism industry constitutes a large part of the global economy, in which 200 million people are directly involved with a turnover of 6.1 trillion dollars; it makes 8.2 per cent of the total number of work places in the world (Grigoryan V.V., Hovhannisyan G. J., 2016).

Under such circumstances, countries, having potentiality for tourism and ecotourism such as Iran, can get the maximum benefit from the tourist attraction and thus increase their income. The relative growth in per capita income has resulted in free time increase in different segments of society

Thus, the factor of desire for travel and trips appeared, that contributed to the development of this industry. When considering the ecotourism status in Iran, it is revealed that, despite the existence of many perspective conditions in the tourism sector, the situation in Iran (including the field of activities for international tourists' attraction or activities of foreign and domestic tours conduct), is not on desired and expected level as compared with the world level.

Furthermore, so far the country has failed to achieve an acceptable level of balanced development of tourism in the country, which would help to create more logical conditions for development in different regions of the country, to distribute economic benefits, received from tourism. Under such circumstances, one of the most fundamental issues for the constructive use of tourism as an engine of economic development is planning of strategy for the development and management of ecotourism. The amazing variety of natural and human attractions could turn Iran into a main centre for international eco-tourists. The organized stimulation of the demand in the world markets and its orientation toward Iran is considered to become implementation of the ecotourism strategy and management.



Ecotourism acts as a system due to factors of demand and offer. Consequently, the conduct of the political lines in

ecotourism should be implemented on the basis of these political settings. The demand factors related Policy, includes

<sup>1</sup> The international ecotourism society (TIES). Ecotourism

inner and international tourism markets, local (communities, which use tourism attractions, facilities and services). Political lines associated with offer factors include investment, development and management of tourism activities and attractions, of organizational elements, accommodation and other facilities and services. Attractions include the natural and cultural attractive places (amusement parks, wildlife, botanical gardens, aquariums, waterfalls, wetlands, scenery and landscapes, plains, hot springs, rites and customs, settlement patterns, etc). Places of accommodation and reception- hotels, motels, bed and breakfast facilities, restaurants and service centers, shopping, banking centers, banks and currency exchange offices, post offices and medical facilities, are part of a complex of offers factor of the tourism sector (*Development of International Tourism in Iran, 2007*).

In addition, objects of tourist infrastructure, such as transportation network (air, road, railway, sea, etc.), facilities of drinking water, electricity, sewage, garbage, telecommunications, etc., can also be referred to the offer factors: they are considered a part of additional factors of the offer sector. These elements and components are located in two environments: the political lines on the offer and political lines on demand, which should be taken into account in conducting the political lines for eco-tourism. There is no doubt that the development of the political lines on ecotourism in many aspects in Iran is considered the basic foundation for the development and management of ecotourism industry and a key element of national and regional planning of ecotourism in the country. These policy lines are a set of statements about different aspects of nature tourism, which should be linked to general policy of national and regional development of the country.

Due to the fact, that such political lines affect the general policy of the country, the region and their society, the government should play a leading role in determining policy and ,thus, to realize his managerial role, in order to create an appropriate balance between economic, environmental and social interests . This policy should provide a framework in which the private sector, community groups and other parties concerned could effectively play their role and carry out their activities. Moreover, nature tourism policies must consider various aspects of the industry and proceed to settling the problems, related to the above mentioned aspects. In summary, it can be stated that ecotourism policy should be carried out under certain conditions. One of the important conclusions of this study is to determine the importance and role of ecotourism attractions of Iran in the global tourism market and their influence on the choice and the desire of tourists to visit Iran. The detection of the main directions of development of tourism in Iran, as well as of the markets indicate, that ecotourism in Iran is capable of intensive development by investing in domestic and international tourism. Nevertheless, the significance of demand is not the same. To assess the degree of demand, we turned to the "tourist package", bought tour operators. The observations showed that among tourist facilities in Iran more attractive for the tourists are the incomparable deserts of the country. In development of tourism in Iran great is the importance of

demonstration of Iran's peaceful image and of the safety of tourism in the country on the international level. The fact of spread of the objectives and strategies of the international tourism community over the area of ecotourism in Iran can refer to the results of this article (*The Potential and Development of Iran Alamut tourism,23008*).

For the development of eco-tourism and, firstly, tourism, we need to be aware of tourists and their needs as a traveler. Awareness of why people make the journey and choose special places to visit can play an important role in the planning of tourism. The development of any kind of tourism is based on marketing planning. In planning marketing component of tourism, emphasis should be put on the nature of the users and their needs and expectations. Ecotourism market must be able to reflect properly the demands of consumers and the needs of the ecotourism industry.

**Results:** In conclusion, the solutions of the following problems are of high importance (*Ecotourism and Rise Of Local Communities,2011*).

1. Determination of the right course, clear direction and adaptation of local regulations and instructions to the World Ecotourism organization to ensure the success of eco-tourism in the future and to determine the priorities and preferences of ecotourists, as well as consolidated management for accurate targeting and monitoring success of the industry. - It is also necessary to take into account the factor of respectful attitude of eco-tourists to the local community, their culture, traditions and beliefs. On the other hand, the host communities
2. should also receive special training to master the necessary techniques and manners of reception and communication with ecotourists. Therefore:
3. Training of the host (local) community of worthy reception of ecotourists leads to an increase of the country attendance. Therefore, training should be perceived as a necessary condition of the development of the industry. Development of all kinds of ecotourism industry infrastructures should be carried out in compliance with the principles of sustainable development and Environmental Protection. Cultural structure of the local community should also be taken into account, and the unscrupulous development of the capitalist system should be prevented. Consequently,
4. Development of infrastructure should be carried out in accordance with the culture and way of life of the local community. First of all, the priorities of tourism planning must be concretized; frequented territories and attractions should be classified considering the number of tourists and the season of attendance, indicating preferences.
5. Setting priorities in classification of ecotourism attractions, based on the significance of these sites and the number of visitors, is very important. The entry of foreign tourists into Iran should be facilitated by eliminating the currently existing visa system. Nowadays, for entry to Iran, all the foreign tourists need to get a visa in Iranian embassies of their countries, which takes time and

- reduces the number of people wishing to go on a tourist trip. It is therefore suggested to issue the entry visas directly at entry- at airports, border and customs posts.
6. By cancellation of certain administrative formalities in getting a visa upon entry to the host country, the arrival of foreign tourists in Iran becomes much easier. The tourist system of Iran, in some cases, does not have effective control and this is reflected in the decision-making process in the control and executive spheres. Knowledge and education of managers and executive staff in the field of technology and international tourism industry are an obligatory condition for success in this field.
  7. Integration of the country ecotourism management and the employment of efficient management, professionals and skilled workers in this field. The Geomorphologic position of Iran makes it possible to observe the best and rarest geomorphologic attractions. When planning the ecotourism, one should focus on visits to Iran International Geopark (Qeshm Island) and Iranian deserts, such as Desert Kavir, Markazi Kavir and Lut and on provision of suitable packages to local and foreign tour operators and agencies. This will ensure optimal use of a variety of ecotourism attractions of Iran and the country's geo-tourism development in the framework of ecotourism programs.
  8. The local community should be treated with great confidence and should be given the management reins of the ecotourism affairs on its territory, to encourage a sense of responsibility and initiative in the tourism management business in the rural community.
  9. Increase of interaction with local and rural communities in the management of eco-tourism on the basis of creativity and confidence in the local people, which contributes to the creation of new jobs and sustainable economic activities of the local community. Teaching Ecotourism, as an independent subject in the scientific and educational centers, as well as in primary schools with the aim of prompting a sense of naturalism in adults and young people and organization of naturalistic excursions together with training can strengthen the sense of interaction, cooperation among the younger generation and increase their knowledge.
  10. Teaching Ecotourism as an independent discipline in the schools and universities, combined with naturalistic excursions in order to foster a newly- thinking generation acts as a necessary task. It is essential that the representatives of the authorities and the private sector took an active part in international exhibitions of tourism and ecotourism. "Travel packages" direct selling and activization of the cultural sector of the Iranian embassies abroad contribute to the ecotourism attractions of Iran presentation at their best.
  11. Comprehensive promotion of ecotourism attractions of Iran through active participation in the international exhibitions of tourism with the participation of cultural attaché of Iranian embassies abroad, is a premise for the development of international ecotourism in the country. - Iran has the necessary stability and security for the stay of tourists in all its regions. The psychological fear of the strategic policy of the state is the reason preventing many tourists from visiting Iran. The Iranian authorities must make transparent the country's internal and external policies, which lead to political tensions. The shift away from the present policy will cause a sense of trust in tourists and remove misunderstandings in the choice of Iran as the host country. Consequently, refrain from political confrontation, the establishment of the trust of the international community with an emphasis on humanism, peacefulness and tolerance will attract international tourism.

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