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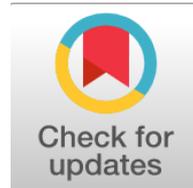
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The Touristic Potential of Aral Sea and an Innovative Approach in its Effective

Potensi Wisata Laut Aral dan Pendekatan Inovatif yang Efektif

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Abstract

The article mainly illustrates Aral Sea as one of the largest man-made environmental devastation and provides eligible programs that aims at remedying humanity mistake partially through converting the disastrous territory into an eco-touristic destination. Together with exploring adverse impacts of Aral Sea on the locals, the study also examines attractiveness and touristic potential of the territory which will then leads creating an attractive image of the land to ensure a surge of foreign investment. This is the strategic thinking that can reform the prospective revenue generated by the use of Aral Sea as a tourist destination. Based on the identified problems and examined potentiality, the prospects for the further development of integration processes focused on the effective use of the area will be determined.

Introduction

The advancement of ecotourism offers all-inclusive protection for biodiversity, environment and remarkable natural areas, where the maintenance of local earnings is the guaranteed for venture developments as well.

Overall, ecotourism cannot be defined straightforwardly. On the one hand, some specialists in the industry describe it as a spectrum, with mass tourism at one end, and volunteer, community-based ecotourism at the other end. Alternatively, majority professionals approve that eco-tourism includes travel to natural areas aiming to benefit local communities and preserve the environment.

Worldwide, \$77 billion income is generated through ecotourism which accounts for 5-7% of the total travel and tourism market. As a result, it has become one of the fastest developing spheres of travel industry, representing 10-30% increase ratio [1].

Turning to Asian countries, currently, Uzbekistan is one of the leading countries in Central Asia in terms of the popularity of its ecotourism destinations. Advantageous geographical position of Uzbekistan being at the crossroad of routes from east to west and from the south to the northern countries, quite rich variety of landscapes, an exclusive network of preserved natural regions and climatic features, all offers unique prospects for eco-tourism route advancement. That means, Uzbekistan possesses a huge potential for the advance of ecotourism, where creating a sustainable and unique system of ecotourism routes via further incorporation of the republic into the global market would be practical to attract all groups of tourists [2].

It has been accepted by experts that the country has carried out a wide range of measures to encourage ecotourism. This selection would let Uzbekistan strengthen international relations, improve living standards notably and create new jobs. Effective execution of set issues in this direction assesses the significance of target opportunity and value of development, as an aspect of ongoing progress of the country overall.

One of the significant measures directed to the development of ecotourism in Uzbekistan is converting The Aral Sea from the disastrous region to a touristic zone.

Background on Aral Sea

Straddling the border between and , Aral Sea was the world's fourth largest lake before mid-60s of the last century. Its territory used to cover around 68,000 km² area, with 284 km width and 426 km length, and deepest part was 68 m. The sea used to have ports, fish plants and fishing boats floated. Up to the 1980s it got inhabited by 34 types of fish, where 20 of them had marketable value. However, now, various flora and fauna remains have been found in the dried area of Aral Sea which was caused by several times shrunk in its history. It was and continues to be exhausted for cotton production, to the extent that it is now almost going to exist. The eastern part has been renamed the Aralkum desert. Remaining of the Aral Sea survive both in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan [3].

The shrinking of the Aral Sea is a huge environmental disaster that predicts much of the future of Central Asia, and the rest of the world: a hotter, drier, more extreme weather in which the survival of human will become increasingly difficult.

Tourism development in Aral Sea

Based on the facts above, we should take the full potential advantage of the advantageous territory, the Aral Sea, through making it eco and adventure tourism destination which would be a unique place in Central Asia. At the same time, the modification can provide comprehensive support for environmental protection of the area and maintenance of local incomes, and it is a promising market for investment projects.

Of course, several measures have carried out to promote eco and adventure tourism in the Aral Sea. However, we should make those promotions more extensive as there is a huge possibility of making the territory as important touristic destinations as Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva. The program also allows to improve living standards of locals significantly, create new jobs and strengthen international relations.

Currently, tours to the Aral Sea have become quite common. Beauty of its precipitous shore, magnificent sunset view, the availability to swim in the vanishing sea and cemetery of ships in the former port of Muynak makes the destination fascinating for tourists. Difficulties in the road to Aral Sea are also very interesting. On the way tourists may enjoy the beauty of coastal landscapes of Sudochoye lake and take some pictures of huge quantity of birds gathering there, and at historical Sak burial lands nearby the village of Urta. Tourists can have a chance of travelling across the wild Ustyurt plateau and enjoy an incredible nature of the area [4].

In the article, except for doing research I would also like to give my suggestions to enhance tourism and increase

the number of travelers in the area and around of the Aral Sea. Overall, I have chosen two main type of ecotourism and adventure tourism activities which I will explain broadly in details in the following paragraphs.

Helicopter Tours

According to the recent news announced by centralasia-adventures.com, Ulysse Tour Travel Agency has planned to launch a brand-new project cooperating with Uzbekistan Airways which is aimed at establish Special Helicopter Tours to the rare-visited natural areas of Uzbekistan which are preserved by the government to keep their uniqueness. Travelers can have a chance to enjoy incredible scenery of Ugam-Chatkal National Park and Chimgan Mountains, the biosphere protected by UNESCO. However, the Aral Sea is still not listed in the tour-routine of helicopter tours which would a great opportunity for clever businessmen to create a lucrative business [5].

As a helicopter takes you to the sky, you will certainly feel the excitement of the view and gaze down over the salt-covered fields in the former place of the sea and discover the remaining part of Aral. Flying over the edge of magnificent plateau, it is hard not be impressed as you Experience the adrenaline rush. From here it was down to the water's edge for a dip. Finally, you will reach the body of water that experienced a huge decline in size and became incredibly salty.

Twin-turbined Mi-8, a legendary and powerful helicopter originally engineered by Soviet Military is used to carry out the flight. Of course, who has not had a dream of being on a great quest by travelling on the board of the legendary Soviet Military helicopter, which is the most reliable and demanded operational aircraft in more than 50 countries. Having the courage to step on the land that is completely different compared to the other deserts, tourists will be able to gain unique experience through discovering all abovementioned treasures from a bird's eye.

It would be a unique opportunity to admire an incredible scenery of ship cemetery where a group of ships abandoned to rust in what used to be the harbor. Perhaps, this is one of the most iconic remaining of the former Soviet Union and most undeniably belongs to Uzbekistan itself.

Camel Safari

Actually, a camel safari is the perfect way to discover desert regions - especially culturally and historically rich ones as Muynak region or huge and breathtaking as Aralkum desert that is located in the previous place of the Aral Sea. A significant advantage of camels is that they can get you to the spots where an ordinary-motor vehicle would struggle to reach. In this case, only camels can possibly navigate to the target destination. As camels are recognized as the "ship of the desert" for periods, it is one of the most convenient transport available in the inhospitable stretches of Ustyurt plateau [6].

So as to make available Camel Safaris in the Aral Sea, we firstly need to have camels and a tour routine that begins from Ustyurt plateau and continues until Muynak region where you can reach the edge of the remaining part of the Aral Sea.

During their journey, tourists can see how the Sea actually used to be in the past. On the way they come across with abandoned fishing village of Urga where fish was sold and stored. Afterwards, they can see a tiny hamlet of Qubla Ustyurt created by the Soviet Government as a base to conduct gas explorations which is located high up on the plateau. Although, a tiny quantity of gas is still being extracted, the area doesn't certainly have huge of activity. Currently, the village is occupied by around 40 residents who make their living through farming and tourism combined with the gas. Huge runway is the village's most impressive and largest structure that was built for military and cargo planes to land on.

Along the way tourists can have some camel's milk, which can be described as tasting carbonated yoghurt with the quality of rather lumpy water, before heading for the primary event: the Aral Sea. As well as travelers cross the desert, they face by vast expanses of nothing. After passing across the field, tourists face with the edge of the Ustyurt plateau as that fallen dramatically towards the edge of the Aral Sea. While standing on the edge of the highland observing out over what remains, it is impossible not to get impressed.

From there, it is down to the water's edge for a dip. Tourists can see the vast decrease in size has left a form of water that is currently extremely salty and enjoy the scenery around. After sunset, they witness a unique night in a traditional home: The Yurt camp. The Yurt facilities include a hand pump shower, a toilet, along with enjoyable view out over the Aral Sea which reminds the comfort in luxurious hotels. Lastly, they can finish the day with an excellent Uzbek food washed down with a healthy amount of local vodka.

Getting quite early in order to observe sunrise through looking east over the Aral well worthy. After breakfast travelers can explore a nearby caravanserai, one of the most iconic sites in the former Soviet Union, before heading back up onto the plateau and towards Muynaq. To get to Muynaq they need to come down from the plateau and head southeast. It is right here where was underwater around 20 years ago, now however, it's a desolate desert

landscape. As Muynaq is most famous for its ship graveyard, people can also undergo an incredible scenery where a bunch of ships left to rust in what used to be the harbor.

As for medical concerns, of course, a camel safari can be energy testing - if you're planning a ride of a week or more. Even the short-term safaris require the condition of physically health. If one is afflicted by a medical condition, it is necessary to bring prescribed medication and plenty of water to stay rehydrated.

The government has started a program of planting saxaul trees in the so as to prevent the spread of poisonous salts left over when the sea dried out, which have released several health issues for locals inhabiting on the edge of the desert. Remarkably, while travelling, tourists can contribute to remedying the catastrophic effects of salty air on locals by volunteering at planting the trees [7].

Conclusion

All in all, tourism industry can benefit Uzbekistan in the form of job creation and income that people would benefit both directly and indirectly. One of the main benefits is to the environment when tourists act as volunteer ecotourists and be aware of the result of humanity's mistakes. The economic benefits of the program lead improving life-standards of local people building infrastructure, additional jobs within the community and the sale of local crafts and products.

In general, implementation of ecotourism in northwest part of Uzbekistan, namely in the Aral Sea territory would bring both community and government significant advantages.

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