

# **SUSTAINABLE ECOTOURISM AND THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM IN AZERBAIJAN**

**A symposium held in Baku, Azerbaijan,  
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**Proceedings, Working Group Reports and  
Recommendations**

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Contents



Preface	
Ulduz Hashimova.....	3
Opening speeches	
Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources.....	5
Minister of Youth, Sport and Tourism.....	6
Part I: A National Perspective on the Potential of Azerbaijan for Ecotourism.....	8
Protected Areas and other Natural Attractions in Azerbaijan	
Sadagat Mammadova.....	9
Infrastructure and Human Resources Available for Ecotourism	
Mahir Gahramanov.....	15
What Azerbaijan can Offer Tourists, and Suggestions for Overcoming Potential Limitations	
Mark Elliott.....	19
Part II: An International Perspective on the Pitfalls and Potential of Ecotourism for Azerbaijan.....	27
Ecotourism in principle: definitions, opportunities and limitations	
Nigel Leader-Williams.....	28
Ecotourism in practice: issues and challenges	
Matt Walpole.....	37
Part III: Recommendations for the Development of Ecotourism in Azerbaijan.....	42
Working Group 1:	
Tourism to Protected Areas: Conservation Needs and Priorities.....	43
Working Group 2:	
Local Community-based Tourism: Conservation Needs and Priorities.....	45
Working group 3:	
Co-ordination of National, Regional and Local Efforts to Promote Ecotourism.....	47
Final Recommendations.....	49

## Preface

This workshop on *Sustainable Ecotourism and the National Park System in Azerbaijan* has two key objectives:

- to bring together different groups of stakeholders to discuss the potential of Azerbaijan, both natural and human, for establishing a sustainable ecotourism industry; and
- to elaborate key issues and challenges for ecotourism planning and policy development in Azerbaijan.

The workshop has been organised through a link project between Western University (WU), in Baku, Azerbaijan and the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE) in the University of Kent, in Canterbury, UK. The project aims to develop an ecotourism curriculum at WU and has been implemented in partnership with the OSCE Office and the British Council in Azerbaijan. I express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to both these international organisations for their cooperation and support throughout the project, and for so generously funding this workshop.

With its diverse flora and fauna, unique landscapes, and very rich historical and cultural heritage, Azerbaijan holds tremendous potential for developing a successful ecotourism industry. At present, a network of national parks is being developed by the national government to promote sustainable ecotourism to natural areas. With proper planning and management, ecotourism may contribute actively to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage on one hand, and to the well being of local communities on the other hand. The Government of Azerbaijan acknowledges the dual role that ecotourism can play and supports the development of this promising sector of the economy as a priority task. Indeed, the presence of our two Ministers at the workshop acknowledges government commitment to developing environmentally sound tourism to natural areas.

The Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism of 2002 recommends national governments to formulate national ecotourism policies and development strategies. To do this successfully requires wide consultation with those who may be involved in, or affected by, ecotourism related activities. Such consultation is important to ensure consistency across the policies and strategies that are developed, to allow for the interests of different groups of stakeholders, and to ensure that ecotourism is developed in line with the principles of sustainable development. With its impressive list of participants, ranging from top governmental officials to academicians, and representatives of international organisations, private sector and NGOs, I hope this workshop will serve as a starting point in initiating the process of strategic planning and policy making for sustainable ecotourism in Azerbaijan. While this is quite an ambitious task, by working together we can help to achieve this goal. In doing so, we will repay the faith shown in us by three key groups.

First, our initiative to hold this conference as part of the WU-DICE link project has gained support at the highest levels, both from international organisations and the national government. I would especially like to thank His Excellency Mr Burkhard, OSCE Ambassador; Mr Hussein Bagirov, Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources; Mr Abulfaz Garayev, Minister of Youth, Sport and Tourism; and Ms Margaret Jack, British Council Director, for their support of our academic initiative and for their gracious acceptance of our invitation to participate at this workshop. I also express my gratitude to Ms Asya Manafova and Mr Shamil Husseynov, Members of Parliament, for being with us today. The presence at this workshop of international servants and governmental officials of such high standing is both an honour and an incentive that should encourage us all to use these two days wisely.

Second, our initiative has been fully supported by the expertise and experience of our academic partners from DICE, an internationally recognised, specialist centre in biodiversity conservation and management. I greatly appreciate the engagement of our academic partners in this workshop and their commitment to develop a vision among the key Azerbaijan stakeholders about ecotourism as a tool for balancing conservation with development.

And last but not least, I would like to thank a highly efficient team of mostly young professionals from Western University, British Council, and OSCE for engaging so fully in the organisation of this workshop. Their professionalism and enthusiasm has most successfully overcome all problems and difficulties associated with holding a workshop of this scale and importance. I would very much like to thank all team members for their hard work in making this event happen.

I do hope that such a strongly supported initiative enjoys the success it deserves.

*Ulduz Hashimova, Academic Co-ordinator of the Western University-University of Kent Link Project*

## **OPENING SPEECHES**

### **Hussein Bagirov**

#### **Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources, Republic of Azerbaijan**

First of all, I would like to welcome you all, and to express my sincere appreciation to both the OSCE Office and the British Council in Baku for organising this workshop, which addresses the very important issue of conservation and ecotourism in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan supports a very interesting flora and fauna, including many endemic species, because of its location, and the diverse landscapes and climatic conditions found in the country. In recent times, anthropogenic influences have threatened the future of this biodiversity. One solution to this problem is to establish a fully representative protected area system. National parks can help foster a more benign relationship between people and nature, and make it possible for people to benefit from nature conservation. In some countries, such as the United States, there is already a well-developed network of national parks that are a source of national pride. In many other countries, national parks have become a tourist draw card, and earn revenue year round from hundreds of thousands of visitors, that in turn make an important contribution to national development.

Azerbaijan is taking its very first steps in developing its national parks as the basis for a nature tourism industry. This is a new direction for our country and its citizens. Azerbaijan enjoys great tourism opportunities, enriched by our great history, well-developed culture and diverse natural attractions. We enjoy the conditions necessary to develop new infrastructure and services to support nature tourism in Azerbaijan, alongside the traditional tourism opportunities to our cultural attractions.

We see a future for national parks in helping to develop ecotourism in Azerbaijan. As a new form of tourism for Azerbaijan, ecotourism is addressed in the National Programme on Environmentally Sustainable Social-Economic Development, prepared by the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources and approved by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. In this document, the main criteria for developing and managing tourism infrastructure are to cause minimum impact to the environment, and to follow the principles of sustainable development.

The opening of Shirvan National Park in 2003 provides symbolic evidence of the chosen development strategy of our Republic, based on the principles of environmentally sustainable development. Currently, Azerbaijan has established national parks at Shirvan, Ordubad, and Aggol, Hirkan. Plans are underway to establish national parks at Altiagach, Absheron, Goygol, Shahdag, and Samur-Yalama.

Nevertheless, the national government alone cannot solve all the problems linked to creating new national parks. It is important that all levels of society participate in this undertaking. Indeed, a priority for involving the public is to increase environmental awareness and to develop public support for nature conservation. Key goals for developing ecotourism in national parks are to raise awareness of environmental problems and to show the public our varied national landscapes, and our unique flora and fauna.

We need assistance from the government, and from international organisations and the public, at this early stage of developing national parks in Azerbaijan. Equally, we expect that national parks will become self-sufficient in the near future, helping local communities to meet their livelihood needs, with minimal damage to the environment, while also offering visitors the opportunity to experience wild nature. Therefore, the deliberations of this workshop are important to my ministry in its efforts to integrate Azerbaijan's biodiversity into a sustainable

tourism industry, and thereby to provide local communities with an incentive to conserve wild nature.

In closing, would like to take this opportunity to welcome the partnership between the Western University and the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology at the University of Kent, and I would like to thank the OSCE and British Council for funding this partnership and this workshop.

**Abulfaz Garayev**  
**Minister of Youth, Sport and Tourism, Republic of Azerbaijan**

This workshop on *Sustainable Ecotourism and the National Park System in Azerbaijan*, organised through a project between the OSCE Office, the British Council and Western University, in Baku, is noteworthy because it addresses one of the main foci of my ministry's activity. The steps that must be taken to develop a sustainable tourism industry are very important from the perspective of promoting tourism within the Azerbaijan Republic.

The rich biodiversity of Azerbaijan forms a great basis for developing a sustainable ecotourism industry. Since it was founded, my ministry has promoted cooperation among tour operators and NGOs interested in engaging in ecotourism. The framework of the State Programme on Tourism Development in Azerbaijan in 2002-2005 places great emphasis on the key role of ecotourism in developing tourism within Azerbaijan. The Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism actively participates in the activities of the World Tourism Organisation, which seeks to promote tourism globally. The work of my ministry is guided by the principles put forward in the Quebec Declaration in 2002 during the International Year of Ecotourism. My ministry constantly seeks to build on world-wide experience and expertise in this field.

Green rural tourism is popular in Europe and to a large extent revolves around ecotourism development in national parks. The Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism welcomes the establishment of four new national parks in the Azerbaijan Republic, founded in line with a recent Presidential Degree. Indeed, my ministry's officials actively participated in the workshops and seminars to promote the development of national parks in the South Caucasus region through ecotourism. We believe that the establishment of these national parks will be very helpful in creating opportunities to expand new tourist infrastructure in Azerbaijan.

The creation of new forms of tourism, and of various new tourism itineraries in areas of high tourist potential will create favourable conditions for production of new tourism products. In turn, this will create the opportunity to expand the activities of the 114 operators currently holding a license for tourism. As a result, the national exchequer will benefit, while infrastructure in the service sector will rise to meet international standards, in turn further contributing to increasing the numbers of foreign tourists. New tourism products will also help eliminate rural unemployment, and increase employment in mountain areas, as well as to create opportunities for the development of small and medium enterprises in the tourism industry.

With financial support from UNDP and the Government of Azerbaijan, my ministry has established new tourism information centres in the Azerbaijan Republic. I hope these centres will help deliver ecotourism products, and widen cooperation between national parks and tourism operators, to develop the ecotourism market and to integrate the ecotourism product into the international tourism market. I confirm that the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism is willing to help create of tourism service infrastructure within our national parks that meets international standards.

In conclusion, I wish the workshop every success in its deliberations.

**Part I**

**A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE  
POTENTIAL OF AZERBAIJAN FOR  
ECOTOURISM**



# **PROTECTED AREAS AND OTHER NATURAL ATTRACTIONS IN AZERBAIJAN**

**Sadagat Mammadova**

**Director, Conservation and Protected Area Development Department, Ministry of Ecology  
and Natural Resources, Republic of Azerbaijan**

## **Introduction**

Very few places on Earth at the start of the 21st Century remain untouched by the destructive activities of humankind. Protection and preservation of biological diversity, of functioning natural ecosystems, and of rare and threatened species of flora and fauna, is one of the most significant challenges facing humankind today. Therefore, the development of specially protected natural areas is vital for ecosystem and species protection, and for the study of wild nature. At the international level, through the Convention on Biological Diversity, it has been accepted that protected areas have a key role in strengthening the development of biodiversity protection at national, regional and local levels. Furthermore, the Convention on Biological Diversity supports developing sustainable ways to use biodiversity as an incentive for conservation. This paper reviews the biodiversity of Azerbaijan, the protected area system that has been established to date to conserve that biodiversity, and the directions being taken by the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources to ensure that biodiversity contributes to the development of a sustainable ecotourism industry.

## **The biodiversity riches of Azerbaijan**

Azerbaijan possesses the richest natural heritage of any country in the Caucasus region. The main reasons for this rich biological diversity are the geological history, diverse landscapes and the varied climatic conditions that occur in the region. Indeed, nine different climatic zones are found in Azerbaijan. The biodiversity riches of the Caucasus, in terms of numbers of endemic species they support, and the threat that this biodiversity faces, has been recognised by Conservation International who, in 1998, identified the Caucasus region as one of 22 “Hotspots” globally.

The flora of Azerbaijan comprises 4500 species that represent 64% of the known flora of the Caucasus, and 24% of the known flora of the former Soviet Union. Some 240, or 5% of these species, are endemic and relict species that are classified under 108 genera and 36 families. Most of the endemic species occur in the Talish natural area. More than 400 plant species in the Azerbaijan Republic require special protection, and 140 rare and endangered species are included to the Red Book of Azerbaijan.

Some 18,000 species of fauna have been recorded within the territory of the Azerbaijan Republic. This total comprises 99 species of mammals, 360 species of birds, around 100 species of fish, 67 species and sub-species of amphibians and reptiles, and around 15,000 species of insects. Of these, 14 species of mammals, 36 species of birds, 5 species of fish, 13 species or sub-species of amphibians and reptiles, and 40 species and sub-species of insects, are nationally threatened and included in the Red Book of Azerbaijan.

## **Protected areas in Azerbaijan**

Different categories of State Protected Natural Areas have been created in the Azerbaijan Republic, with the aim of protecting existing natural complexes, and allowing the study and use of wild nature and natural processes. These State Protected Natural Areas each have special environmental, scientific, cultural and aesthetic values. The differing status of State Protected Natural Areas is laid down in the Laws of the Azerbaijan Republic on *Environmental Protection of 8 June 1999* (#678-IG) and on *Special Protected Natural Areas and Facilities of 24 March 2000* (# 840-IG).

State Protected Natural Areas vary in protection status and sanctioned forms of use, as laid down in the Laws of the Azerbaijan Republic. The following categories of protected areas are currently allowed, although other kinds of natural areas can also be considered specially protected under the Laws of the Azerbaijan Republic:

- State Nature Reserves (SNR),
- National Parks (NP)
- Natural Monuments
- Special State Nature Reserves (SSNR)
- Ecological Parks
- Zoological Parks
- Vegetation and Dendrological Parks
- Recreation areas and resorts

IUCN – The World Conservation Union places Azerbaijan’s State Nature Reserves in Protected Area Management Category Ia, and places Special State Nature Reserves in Protected Area Management Category IV. The definition of these two categories is as follows:

*Ia: Strict Nature Reserve: protected area managed mainly for science*

Area of land and/or sea possessing some outstanding or representative ecosystems, geological or physiological features and/or species, available primarily for scientific research and/or environmental monitoring.

*IV: Habitat/Species Management Area: protected area managed mainly for conservation through management intervention*

Area of land and/or sea subject to active intervention for management purposes so as to ensure the maintenance of habitats and/or to meet the requirements of specific species.

As of 2003, there were 14 State Nature Reserves, with a total area of *c.* 191,000 ha, and 20 Special State Nature Reserves, with a total area of *c.* 286,000 hectares, under the management of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources. The total coverage of all State Protected Natural Areas was 478,000 hectares, which constitutes some 5% of the surface area of the Azerbaijan Republic. In addition, 30 important forest areas, 2083 trees over 100 years of age, and 73 geological and paleontological objects, were included in the list of Natural Monuments.

### **Creation and coverage of State Protected Natural Areas**

State Nature Reserves (SNR), and Special State Nature Reserves (SSNR), are designated to protect typical and rare natural complexes and objects, and to allow study of important natural processes. The use of land, water, flora and fauna for economic needs within the boundaries of any reserve is prohibited. Despite the uneven representation of State Protected Natural Areas across the territory of the Azerbaijan Republic, they cover some of the main landscapes and have great significance in protecting key natural complexes:

- Different natural complexes in the Greater Caucasus have been protected through the creation of Zagatala, Ilisu Pirquli, Ismailly, and Altiagach SNRs, and of Gusar, Ismailli, Gabala Sheki SSNRs.
- Different natural complexes in the Lesser Caucasus have been protected through the creation of Goygol, Garagol and Besitchay SNRs, and of Gubadli, Lachin, Dashalti, Gizilja, Arazboyu and Ordubad SSNRs.
- Hirkan SNR and Zuvand SSNR were created to protect the biologically valuable, endemic and relict Hirkan flora.
- Kura River's Tugay Forests and fauna have been protected by the creation of Garayazi SNR, and Garayazi-Agstafa, Barda, and Shamkir SSNRs.
- Turyanchay SNR was created to protect arid forest landscape complexes.
- Migrant waterfowl and waders, and steppe birds have been protected by the creation of Aggol and Gizilagach SNRs, and Small Gizilagach, Absheron and Gil SSNRs.
- Shirvan SNR, now expanded in size and re-gazetted as Shirvan NP, and Bandovan and Korchay SSNRs, were created to protect gazelles and waterfowl.
- A project is currently under consideration to create a SSNR in the delta of the Kura River as it enters the Caspian Sea. The project aims to protect migration routes of valuable commercial species of fish from the Caspian Sea to the Kura River, and to create favorable environment for wading birds.

A gap analysis of the State Protected Natural Areas showed that current coverage does not include a number of ecosystems as much and as fully as necessary. Therefore, the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, in collaboration with various international organizations, has recently taken steps to improve the network of protected areas in the Azerbaijan Republic, by expanding the coverage of some existing reserves and by creating new protected areas. As a result, the area of five existing SNRs has been expanded. Currently, my ministry is also taking steps to create Absheron, Altiagach, and Goygol NPs, to create some new categories of special protected areas, and to expand the area of Zagatala SNR and other priority ecosystems of the Azerbaijan Republic.

### **The creation and status of some State Natural Reserves**

The protected areas that have been created in Azerbaijan are many and varied, and include the following:

**Goygol** was the first SNR created in Azerbaijan, in 1965, and was established to protect and study the mountainous forest and the landscape of the Lesser Caucasus sub-alpine strip. Goygol lies to the north-east corner of the Little Caucasus, 36km south of Kirovabad, and a separate annex is situated on the right bank of the Yori (Gabirli) River some distance to the northeast. The total area of Goygol is 7131 ha, including the annex. The ecological zones of Goygol SNR span mountain forest, and sub-alpine and alpine mountain meadow. Goygol SNR is currently strictly protected and is in IUCN Management Category Ia. The Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources plans to re-designate Goygol as a National Park.

The flora of Goygol SNR is rich, and comprises over 420 species, of which 20 species are endemics. The main tree species include oriental beech *Fagus orientalis*, oak *Quercus* spp., hornbeam *Carpinus orientalis*, yew *Taxus baccata* and pine *Pinus sosnowskyi*. The eldar pine *Pinus eldarica*, protected by the annex to Goygol, is a relict species of considerable scientific interest that occurs only in Goygol SNR.

The fauna of Goygol SNR is also rich, and comprises 53 species, including 40 birds, of which 15 are endemic species. Mammals include beech marten, *Martes foina*, wild pig *Sus scrofa*, red deer *Cervus elaphus*, roe deer *Capreolus capreolus* and wild goat *Capra hircus*. Brown bears *Ursus arctos* were reported to be present a few years ago but their number is little now in Goygol SNR. The lake on Goygol is a wintering area for various species of waterfowl.

**Zagatala** was established as an SNR in 1929, to protect plants and animals of the southern slopes of the Greater Caucasus. With a total area of 23,762 ha, Zagatala SNR spans both the Zagatala and Balakan districts, and lies towards the extreme northwest corner of Azerbaijan. The ecological zones of Zagatala SNR span deciduous forest, mountain-forest meadow, and sub-alpine and alpine meadows. Zagatala SNR is strictly protected and is in IUCN Management Category Ia. The Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources has proposed to expand the area of the Zagatala SNR and to re-designate it as a State Biosphere Natural Reserve, and these proposals have been laid before the Cabinet of Ministers to take the necessary actions.

The flora of Zagatala SNR is very rich and comprises over 1000 species, of which 38 are endemics. The main tree species include oak *Quercus castaneifolia*, sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa* and hornbeam *Carpinus orientalis* in the lower deciduous forests, and extensive cover of beech *Fagus orientalis* to the tree line. The sub-alpine belt is characterized by the Caucasian endemic, the rare, evergreen ornamental plant *Rhododendron caucasicum*. An area of at least 7ha in one shaded ravine has a grove of yew *Taxus baccata*.

The fauna is also very rich, and comprises over 120 species including 86 birds, of which 17 are endemics. Common mammals include wolf *Canis lupus*, brown bear *Ursus arctos*, pine and beech martens *Martes martes* and *M. foina*, wild cat *Felis catus* and lynx *F. lynx*. The ungulates include numerous wild pig *Sus scrofa*, a local race of red deer *Cervus elaphus*, roe deer *Capreolus capreolus*, chamois *Rupicapra rupicapra* and wild goat *Capra hircus*. The non-passerine birds include griffon *Gyps fulvus*, black vulture *Aegypius monachus*, lammergeyer *Gypaetus barbatus*, golden eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*, Caucasian snowcock *Tetraogallus caucasicus*, Caucasian blackcock *Lyrurus mlokosiewiczi* and chukar partridge *Alectoris chukar kurdestanica*.

**Gizilagach** was established as an SNR in 1930, to protect populations of wader and steppe birds, as well as to protect natural waterscapes. With an area of 88,400 ha and lying to the south-west of the Caspian Sea, Gizilagach SNR spans parts of Gizilagach Bay, and of the Salyan Plain. Gizilagach SNR is strictly protected and is in IUCN Management Category Ia. Gizilagach SSNR was established in 1973 with total area of 10700 ha. Together with Gizilagach SNR it also forms the majority of Ramsar area and one of the two Ramsar sites in Azerbaijan.

The flora of Gizilagach SNR comprises 360 species, including 4 rare species and 3 endemic species. The flora ranges from semi-desert areas of wormwood *Artemisia fragrans*, sand glasswort *Salsola dendroides*, to thickets of thorny shrubs with *Rubus* spp. and shallow waters with reeds *Phragmites communis*. Water reservoirs have eel-grass *Zostera*.

The fauna comprises a total of over 248 bird species, including 30 endemics, and 23 other species of which 11 are endemics. Mammals include the Asiatic jackal *Canis aureus*, the jungle cat *Felis chaus* and the wild pig *Sus scrofa*. However, the main importance of Gizilagach's fauna

lies in massive numbers of over-wintering waterfowl, especially waders. Species present include flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*, red-breasted goose *Branta ruficollis*, black partridge *Francolinus francolinus* and purple swamp hen *Porphyrio porphyrio*.

**Turyanchay** was established as a SNR in 1958, to protect sparse arid forest and shrub, and thus to limit and restrict the erosion at the foot of the Greater Caucasus mountains. With an area of 12,630 ha, Turyanchay SNR occupies the area between Turyanchay and Alincachay rivers, the Boz-dag Ridge and the southern part of the Greater Caucasus, some 180km due east of Baku. In 2003, the area of the reserve was expanded and now is ca 22400 ha. Turyanchay SNR is strictly protected and is in IUCN Management Category Ia.

The flora of Turyanchay SNR comprises about 320 species, including 45 endemics. The northern slopes and summit of the ridge are sparsely covered by juniper *Juniperus foetidissima* and pistachio *Pistacia*, together with some Iberian oak *Quercus iberica*, elm *Ulmis* spp., Christ's thorn *Paliurus spina-christi* and pomegranate *Punica granatum* and occasional sumach *Rhus coriaria*.

The fauna of Turyanchay SNR comprises about 140 species, including 112 bird species, of which 41 are endemics. The fifteen species of mammal include the wolf *Canis lupus*, jackal *C. aureus*, brown bear *Ursus arctos*, badger *Meles meles*, beech marten *Martes foina*, lynx *Felis lynx* and wild pig *Sus scrofa*. Among the breeding birds, there is the griffon vulture *Gyps fulvus*, black vulture *Aegyptius monachus*, sparrow hawk *Accipiter nisus*, rock partridge *Alectoris graeca*, little bustard *Otis tetrax* and wall creeper *Tichodroma murina*, while seven species of thrush Turdidae are among the numerous winter visitors. The spur-thighed tortoise *Testudo graeca graeca*, the slow worm or legless lizard known as Pallas's glass snake *Ophisaurus apodus* and the viper *Vipera lebetina* are among the 11 species of reptiles.

**Pirqulu** was established as a SNR in 1968, to protect some of the natural complexes of the Greater Caucasus. With an area of 1521 ha, Pirqulu SNR lies on the southern slopes of the eastern end of the main Caucasus range, to the north of Shemakh and about 100km northwest of Baku. Pirqulu SNR consists of three zones: Arkachi with an area of 441 ha, and at a height of 1200-2000m; Pirqulu mountain forests, with an area of 529 ha, and a height of 100-1500m, and Changi with an area of 551 ha, at a height of 800-1100m. Pirqulu SNR is strictly protected and is in IUCN Management Category Ia. In 2003, the area of the reserve was expanded up to 4274 ha.

The flora of Pirqulu SNR is very rich, and comprises 1200 species, of which 45 are endemic and rare species. The lower zones support broadleaf forest of oriental beech *Fagus orientalis*, oriental hornbeam *Carpinus orientalis* and oaks *Quercus* spp.. Some stands of yew *Taxus baccata* also survive. The higher zones support typical subalpine meadow and mountain steppe vegetation.

The fauna in the forest zone includes the wild pig *Sus scrofa*, roe deer *Capreolus capreolus* and various small mammals. The characteristic species of the arid foothills is the Caucasian or goitred gazelle *Gazella subgutturosa*.

**Shirvan** was initially established as a SNR in 1969, to protect the semi-desert landscape and some Azerbaijan Red Book species. Originally with an area of 27,561 ha, Shirvan lies in the administrative jurisdictions of Garadagh, Salyan and Neftchala districts, on the Caspian Sea towards the southeast of Azerbaijan. Shirvan was re-designated in 2003, as the first National Park in Azerbaijan, by the order of the President, and now has a total area of 54,400 ha.

The flora consists largely of steppe and semi-desert plants such as wormwood *Artemisia fragrans* and *A. szowitziana*, with grasses such as *Ereomopyron orientale*, *E. tricioeum*, *Poa*

*bulbosa* and *Cynodon dactylon*. Other plants include the manna plant *Alhagi pseudalhagi*, *Halocnemum strobilaceum*, *Kalidium caspicum*, *Halostaschys caspica* and liquorice *Glycyrrhiza glabra*, while reeds *Phragmites communis* occur along the margins of standing waters.

The mammalian fauna includes the wolf *Canis lupus*, Asiatic jackal *C. aureus*, red fox *Vulpes vulpes*, weasel *Mustela nivalis* and Caucasian gazelle *Gazella subgutturosa*. Birds include the great crested grebe *Podiceps cristatus*, purple heron *Ardea purpurea*, little egret *Egretta garzetta*, black partridge *Francolinus francolinus*, purple swamp hen *Porphyrio porphyrio*, great bustard *Otis tarda*, little bustard *O. tetrax*, Calandra lark *Melanocorypha calandra* and crested lark *Galerida cristata*. Reptiles and amphibians include the spur-thighed tortoise *Testudo graeca*, worm snake *Typhlops vermicularis* and Montpellier snake *Malpolon monspessulanum*.

As a result of its re-designation, Shirvan NP now encourages environmental monitoring, the creation of environmental awareness, and the creation of appropriate conditions for tourism and leisure. IUCN will change to the Protected Area Management Category of Shirvan to II, defined as follows:

*II National Park: protected area managed mainly for ecosystem protection and recreation*  
Natural area of land and/or sea, designated to (a) protect ecological integrity of one or more ecosystems for present and future generations, (b) exclude exploitation or occupation inimical to the purposes of designation of the area and (c) provide a foundation for spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities, all of which must be environmentally and culturally compatible.

## **Conclusions**

The Azerbaijan Republic spans a wide range of different habitats and scenery, as well as a wide range of biodiversity in different categories of protected areas, offering many potential opportunities for ecotourism. The 14 SNRs (also categorized as Strict Nature Reserves by IUCN) are too strictly protected under Azerbaijan's legislation to currently allow use through tourism. However, Azerbaijan has already established by the order of the President the Shirvan, Ordubad, and Aggol NPs to allow, amongst other things, tourism and leisure. Furthermore, the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources has plans to increase the numbers of national parks, to allow their effective integration into an ecotourism industry.

# **INFRASTRUCTURE AND HUMAN RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR ECOTOURISM**

**Mahir Gahramanov**

**Tourism Expert, Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism, Republic of Azerbaijan**

## **Introduction**

Most of the existing tourism infrastructure in Azerbaijan was created during the 1980s to meet the needs of tourists from the former Soviet Union. Tourist facilities were established in all districts of Azerbaijan, and could accommodate 14,000 visitors at any one time. Year round in Azerbaijan, some 460,000 tourists were serviced annually, including 30,000 foreign tourists. However, the tourism infrastructure created during that period has been unable to function independently of the former Soviet Union, or to meet the demands of a free market. Furthermore, some 20% of Azerbaijan's territory is occupied by Armenia, and the conflict has still not been resolved. Many refugees from the resulting conflict are currently housed in hotels, sanatoriums and other tourist facilities established during the former Soviet Union period. In turn, this has resulted in the loss of some 60-70% of these facilities for tourism. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan has been able to restore some of its previous tourism image and to begin re-developing its tourism sector. This paper reviews the tourism infrastructure and attractions available to promote tourism in Azerbaijan, and the steps being taken by the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism to ensure that the tourism infrastructure and human resources within the industry are able to contribute to the development of a sustainable ecotourism industry.

## **Promotion of tourism in the post Soviet Union period**

Since it was first established in 2001, the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism has sought to promote Azerbaijan as a tourist destination to the world tourism market and to increase international interest in the country. Azerbaijan can benefit from its prime location, panoramic landscapes and natural features, and its many historical and cultural monuments. For the last three years, Azerbaijan has participated at international exhibitions held in London, Berlin, Moscow, Kiev, Istanbul and elsewhere. Various new promotional materials, describing the existing tourism service facilities of the Azerbaijan Republic, were produced for the Third Azerbaijan International Tourism Fair held in Baku in April 2004.

Some improvements have also been made to the tourism service infrastructure of the most visited areas of the Azerbaijan Republic. Nevertheless, the infrastructure available for tourism in the modern period is largely determined by the history of Azerbaijan's tourism industry. In the former Soviet Union period, Azerbaijan's tourism image was little known, even among the CIS countries, and hardly known at all among the rest of the world. One key feature of Soviet Union tourism was the development of social tourism and the creation of sanatorium-resort and medical facilities. Another key feature was the creation of tourist bases and youth camps in various districts of the Azerbaijan Republic. However, some hotels were established to service foreign tourists, and tourism routes were created in the areas with the largest flows of tourists. Furthermore, some important historical and cultural monuments were restored and used to promote tourism.

More recently, Azerbaijan has begun to promote an entrepreneurial approach in the tourism sector, in order to encourage the rapid development of tourism in this transitional period. The many foreign oil companies now operating in Azerbaijan, and the consequent inflow of the

foreign businessmen, has had a positive effect on the creation of improved tourist service infrastructure.

### **Natural attractions in Azerbaijan**

Azerbaijan lies in a very favourable geographical location between Asia and Europe, while its nine climatic zones range from the sub-tropical to alpine meadows. The Greater and Lesser Caucasus, and the Talish Mountains, cover well over half of Azerbaijan, offering the visitor spectacular scenery and varied landscapes, as well as key biological diversity (see Mammadova, this volume). There are also about 100 lakes, which have been formed during various volcanic and glacial periods.

Azerbaijan is also located on the Caspian Sea, offering visitors coastal and beach opportunities, as well as important wildlife opportunities. The Caspian Sea is the largest closed water basin in the world, and contains many mud volcanoes on its floor. The Caspian Sea contains many endemic species, including five species of sturgeon, and the Caspian seal, all of which have declined significantly in number and are listed in the Red Book of Azerbaijan. Apart from Gizilgach SNR and Shirvan NP, relatively little of the Caspian Sea or its shoreline is currently included in protected areas. However, consideration is being given to creating a new SSNR near the mouth of the Kura River (see Mammadova, this volume).

The Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism is currently implementing Presidential Decrees of 13 January 2003 on *Measures on the Usage of Shores of the Caspian Sea* and of 11 November 2003 on *Leisure and Tourism Development*. The Ministry envisions the creation of six types of coastal zone on the Caspian Sea, comprising: beaches, mass leisure zones, recreation and health zones, ecological zones, industrial zones, and free economic zones.

Many thermal and medical waters are also located within the Azerbaijan Republic. Medical Naftalan oil has no equivalent anywhere in the world, while medical springs include those at: Istisu, Badamli, Sirab, Vaykhir, Daridagh, Gomur, Turshsu, Shirvan, Gizilbank, Abrakunis, Gizilja, Galaalti, Kechigaya, and Tengealti, and in other areas rich with mud volcanoes.

### **Cultural and historical attractions in Azerbaijan**

The Azerbaijan Republic boasts more than 6300 nationally designated historical, archaeological and cultural monuments, largely as a result of its key position on ancient trade routes from Europe to Asia. Some 65 of these monuments are of global importance.

Skeletal remains found in Azikh cave show that humans lived within this territory some 250,000 years ago, during the Paleolithic era. Gobustan, located some 60 km from Baku, boasts more than 4,000 petroglyphs dating from the 7th and 8th Century AD.

Icheri Sheher, the Walled City of Baku, dates from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, and covers 22 ha. The Walled City has preserved much of its defensive walls and contains 44 monuments that show evidence of Zoroastrian, Sassanian, Arabic, Persian, Shirvani, Ottoman and Russian presence in cultural continuity. Notable among the monuments for tourists are: the 15<sup>th</sup> Century Shirvanshah's Palace Complex; the 11<sup>th</sup> Century Broken Castle Minaret; the 12<sup>th</sup> Century Giz Galasy-Maiden Tower; and the 15<sup>th</sup> Century Jume Mosque. This complex of architectural monuments was inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 2000. The site was also inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2003. The site suffered damage during an earthquake in



2000, and is increasingly affected by the presence of urban development, the absence of conservation policies, and by dubious restoration efforts.

Ateshgah, the fire worshippers' temple, is located 30 km from Baku, and dates from the Zoroastrian period. Sheki Khan's Palace, located 305 km from Baku, dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

### **Securing and developing Azerbaijan's tourist attractions**

The National Heritage Protection Project aims to turn Azerbaijan's cultural and historical monuments into tourist attractions that meet modern expectations and are serviced by appropriate infrastructure. The project is being implemented by the Ministry of Culture, supported by the Government of Azerbaijan and funded by the World Bank. Shirvanshakh's Palace and Sheki Khan's Palace are being restored, while Momunekhantun and Garabaghar tombs in Nakhchivan are being conserved, within the framework of this project. Area Tourism Development Plans are being developed to ensure that infrastructure is developed around these attractions.

New tourist facilities and infrastructure are also being developed in Azerbaijan. Much new infrastructure has been developed since September 1998, as a direct result of TRACEKA, the Transcontinental Transport Corridor programme. New Olympic-standard complexes have been constructed in Baku, Nakhchivan, Ganja, Sheki, Guba, Lenkaran and Barda, in part to help the hotel sector meet the expectations of modern tourists.

Tourism information centers have been established in Nakhchivan, Lenkaran, Ganja, Shamakhi, Guba, Khachmaz, Sheki, and Baku by the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism. This project has been funded jointly by UNDP and the Government of Azerbaijan, and will have a positive effect in further developing the tourism sector in Azerbaijan.

The development of seven main tourism routes has been approved as a priority for developing modern tourism service infrastructure, through a decision in 2002 of the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism Collegiums, the board that covers all the districts of the country. The implementation of these seven routes will promote the creation of all the necessary tourist facilities along their way.

### **Training within the tourism sector in Azerbaijan**

The professional education and training of human resources for the tourism sector, and the effective use of these human resources to promote tourism in the post Soviet Union period, has been a key focus of the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism. Many employees of the ministry, as well as students and representatives of the private sector, have taken part in several of short-term, long-term and intensive courses.

Turkey has a long-term cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism to provide appropriate training courses. Furthermore, Austria, Sweden, Egypt, Japan and other countries have provided tourism opportunities within the tourism sector. Ministry officials and the Principal of the Azerbaijan State Physical Culture and Sports Academy have participated in refresher courses organised by the World Tourism Organisation for tourism sector specialists of its member countries.

## **Conclusions**

Notwithstanding its considerable achievements to date, the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism still has much to do to develop Azerbaijan's tourism industry and to establish a tourism infrastructure that achieves world standards. There is currently a lack of long-term development plans for the potential tourism zones in Azerbaijan, and large investments have not yet been attracted to the tourism sector. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan expects to become a leading attraction in the world tourism market, after the necessary steps have been taken under the leadership of the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism.

# WHAT AZERBAIJAN CAN OFFER TOURISTS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR OVERCOMING POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

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## **Introduction**

This paper does not seek to sound presumptuous in telling Azerbaijanians about their own country, which doubtless they know better than any outsider. However, it may help to hear an outside view, particularly where tourism is concerned. As foreigners go, I have seen much of this beautiful and incredibly varied country, in order to write my Trailblazer guidebook *Azerbaijan*, now coming up for its third edition. I have travelled from Astara to Zaqatala, and from Baku to Balakan to Batabat, and I have travelled on horseback, by car, by bus and by trains, and on foot. Over ten years of repeated visits I have come to love Azerbaijan.

There are a number of key selling points for tourism in Azerbaijan. The country is safe, hospitable and cultured. The cosmopolitan and vibrant capital of Baku has fascinating fire phenomena and mud volcanoes closeby. Azerbaijan has particularly beautiful and unspoilt rural areas of incredible variety. The mountains of the Greater Caucasus have splendid scenery, with great villages like Jar and Illisu. Access to the countryside, especially in the north-east, allows freedom to roam, and is great for horse-riding. Because of its low-key charm, sensitivity in any future development of the countryside is essential.

The biodiversity of Azerbaijan has been well documented elsewhere (see Mammadova, this volume). However, at this stage, tourists are unlikely to visit Azerbaijan solely to see the country's wildlife, or the different habitats in its nine climatic zones. Ecotourism in Azerbaijan is only likely to work when natural attractions are developed alongside the country's great range of historical monuments, scenic splendours and other natural curiosities. I will now provide brief overviews of the country to point out some of its selling points, and suggest some ideas for improving the tourism potential, of each area. I will close by suggesting some targets to encourage more tourists to visit the country. The aim of this paper is to make suggestions for the development of tourism in Azerbaijan that will hopefully prove useful, helpful and constructive.

## **Around Baku**

Most potential tourists to Azerbaijan will arrive through, and spend their first few days in, the cosmopolitan capital city of Baku. It is also the likely base from which tourists would visit the newly designated Shirvan National Park (see Mammadova, this volume). The main selling points of Baku and its surrounding areas include the following:

- its safe, friendly, and cultured atmosphere;
- its fascinating historical context;
- a city of contrasts with a UNESCO World Heritage Site at its heart;
- its diverse range of entertainment and dining venues, including Caravanserai restaurants;
- its variety of top and upper to mid-range accommodation; and
- the nearby mud volcanoes and the monuments of Gobustan (see Gahramanov, this volume).

Some ideas for improving the tourism potential of Baku and its surrounding area include the following:

- the former terrace cafés could be restored, especially on Fountains Square: their Mediterranean atmosphere was very marketable to tourists, and their closure in 2001 has been a great loss to Baku's tourist industry;
- the lack of appealing lower midrange (US\$20-30 per night) options could be addressed;
- the carpet and art export procedures could be made more easily understandable, and the license application procedure could be made more accessible: a particular need is to ensure more regular and predictable office hours for officials to examine and certify exportable items;
- the potential for semi-exclusive tourist flights to visit Oily Rocks (Neft Dashlari) could be investigated;
- the police identity checks of visitors at the train station could be stopped, or made more friendly;
- photography could be allowed on the metro, or signs could say it is not allowed; and
- visits to the Puta tank graveyard could be allowed on specific dates: before 2001 it was an interesting attraction for foreign tourists, but is now out-of-bounds. This appears unfortunate, as these rusty, ancient wrecks are not unlikely to have any military value.

### **The Sheki route**

Sheki is famous for its fabulous forested hills, its mountain villages, its Albanian churches, and its confectionery. The Sheki route provides an opportunity to enjoy a weekend away from Baku, whether using the night train, or travelling by the paved, yet quiet main road. Should ecotourism be allowed within the Zagatala and Ilisu Pirquli SNRs (see Mammadova, this volume), it would be natural to combine visits with other attractions along this route, and probably in tandem with visits to Tbilisi and Kaheti in neighbouring Georgia. Some of the main selling points for tourism along the Sheki route include the following:

- its marvelously varied scenery starts in the desert around Baku, and within three hours moves into glorious forests and avenues between fields, all backed with majestic mountain scenery;
- Lajic is an attraction and good base, with its copperwork and scenery, and now has organised homestays;
- the Caravanserai accommodation at Sheki is very atmospheric;
- accommodation at Ilisu is set in spectacular scenery, as is the Yurt Hotel near Pirquli/Shamakha;
- Khan's Palace is under repair (see Gahramanov, this volume), and supports an interesting shebeke window-making workshop;
- Kish has now been renovated, indeed possibly over renovated; and
- Balakan has great minaret, but is otherwise not of major tourist interest, except that the border here best way to Georgia.

Some ideas for improving the tourism potential of the Sheki route include the following:

- preferential border procedures could be established for group tourists on a Georgia-Sheki package, so they do not waste too long at the border: this has already resulted in the dropping of Sheki from a Japanese tour of Georgia;
- the lower Caravanserai and the museums, could be more fully used;

- Lekit and Qum require some restoration, but could be less heavily re-built than Kish;
- the plan to build a cable car on Mt Marxal would prove a great attraction, and this project could be brought to fruition;
- the situation over visits to Gelersan Gorarsen Castle could be clarified, as soldiers sometimes stop visitors walking up there from Kish;
- Nic and Oguz are both potential attractions but police attitudes towards visitors travelling alone could be improved, as some have been treated in an unfriendly, officious manner; and
- the Sheki silk factory could be opened to paying visitors.

## **North of Baku**

Perhaps the most inspiringly unique and photogenic parts of Azerbaijan are hidden deep within the glorious Caucasus mountain foothills behind Quba and Qusar, notably in the area around Shahdag and Khinalig. There are plans to create a protected area at Shahdag. However, the Greater Caucasus are only accessible seasonally by 4WD vehicles, and the development of specialist ecotourism, for example to see spring flowers, would be best combined with attractions en route, that include the following:

- the curious geology, and the Candy Cane mountains;
- the dramatic former fortress at Besh Barmaq, and its Islamo-Animist cultural site;
- the best preserved fortress in Azerbaijan at Chirax Castle, with great views from the top at dawn, but in urgent need of repairs;
- the Nabran beach resort, that while not an incredible beach, has a nice forest setting, and is already booming with local tourists without any need for help!
- the appeal of Quba, and the all Jewish village at Krasnaya Sloboda;
- the spectacular scenery between Quba and Khinalig, with deep canyons, and villages with their own local languages;
- the fabled destination of Khinalig, served by a bad road, but offering fabulous scenery;
- homestays, horse riding and hiking remain ‘unorganised’ but can be arranged;
- there is great potential for cross-country trekking;
- there is also mountaineering and rock-climbing potential, with Laza waterfalls an attraction and Suvar as a good mountain climbing base; and
- there are existing tourist camps notably at Long Forest, Jannat Bagi and Qarabulaq.

Some ideas for improving the tourism potential of the Quba, Qusar, Shahdag and Khinalig areas are as follows:

- urgent maintenance is required to prevent the collapse of the keep at Chirax Castle: this has reportedly been agreed between the ministries of tourism and culture but should be implemented quickly;
- mountain areas should not be over-developed as their charm lies in their remoteness;
- while the Shahdag area is proposed as a national park, the level of protection should not be set too high, ideally as a protected landscape in IUCN Category V. The key biodiversity interests of the area have been integrally shaped by sheep-rearing. Therefore, it is essential that the final designation should not exclude the traditional husbandry system for sheep rearing, as this could actually undermine the very landscape that the new protected area is designed to protect;

- tracks, notably to Rük, Khinalig and Budug could be improved, although not by asphaltting, which might make the area too accessible and undermine the sense of exclusivity felt by those who reach the area; and
- a system could be designed to regularise trekking into and out of south Laza, without incurring *gümruk* problems.

## The Talish area

The Talish area is the main centre for endemic species in Azerbaijan, which Hirkan SNR was established to protect (Mammadova, this volume). In 2003 Hirkan was redesignated as a national park, to allow the development of ecotourism. The birdwatching potential of the Gizilagach SNR (Mammadova, this volume) could also be developed and marketed for ecotourism. The Talish area is also famous its food, particularly chicken *lavangi*, its hospitality, its tea and its centenarians. Bazarvud village was home to world's oldest man, who lived to 168 years of age. The main accommodation for upper Talish is around Masalli, while the main centre for southern Talish is Lankaran. However, some parts of Talish are difficult to access: for example, there is no accommodation in or near Lerik. Some of the main selling points for tourism in the Talish area include the following:

- its lush, semi-tropical terrain rising up to attractive, grassy foothills;
- the magic of Allar, although it is hard to reach;
- its improving accommodation, notably the Qala Hotel;
- the forward thinking ideas of the dynamic mayor of Lankaran including the planned hydrofoil from Baku;
- the lovely road to Lerik, which is being partly resurfaced;
- great hiking at Mondigar; and
- the easy access from Iran with polite, clean border formalities.

Some ideas for improving the tourism potential of the Talish area are as follows:

- a homestay programme could be started in Lerik, Mondigar, Pirembel, Yardimli and Allar;
- local authorities could be alerted to the possibility of foreign hikers, notably in Allar where visitors are so rare as to make local people suspicious;
- a monument to the world's oldest man could be erected and/or a museum could be established in Bazarvud, while its road access could be improved;
- the mountain roads in the Astara region are in desperate need of improvement;
- the Astara Tourist Office could be persuaded to be more pro-active and friendly;
- a 'Babek Route' could target Iranian-Azeri tourists; and
- a sign could be erected showing for the pedestrian border door in Astara, where at present it is almost invisible.

## Lesser Caucasus

The Lesser Caucasus presently face problems in attracting tourists because of their proximity to the territory of Azerbaijan that is occupied by Armenia. The key potential ecotourism attraction of the region is the lakes of Goygol, included in Azerbaijan's first SNR (see Mammadova, this volume), whose beauty in late autumn is quite remarkable. However, a possibly overcautious approach to allowing visitors (fearing possible sniper action from Armenian marksmen on the mountain ridge far above) means that Goygol has officially been closed to tourism for over a

decade. This has served to protect it from over development, but also represents the loss of a key attraction for visitors to the whole, under-appreciated region. Nevertheless, there are now plans to redesignate Goygol as a national park (Mammadova, in this volume), and encourage the development of ecotourism. A second potential key attraction would be to redevelop Yuxari Agcakand (Bashkand) village as a tourist-arts destination, as discussed below. Once more tourists are encouraged to the Lesser Caucasus, several other interesting but lesser sites could also start to gain more visitors. Such attractions include:

- the splendid scenery around Gadabey and Hosh Bulaq;
- potentially lovely villages such as Bayan, Chanlibel, Hajikand and Slavyanka;
- as suggested elsewhere (Gahramanov, in this volume), the renovation of the Naftalan sanatorium could prove a great attraction to Russian/CIS visitors: it was once widely famous across the former USSR, and is well placed as a base for visiting the area; and
- the particularly nice sites at Xanlar, and Mt Kyapaz.

One idea for improving the tourism potential of the Lesser Caucasus could be to look more closely at restoring Yuxari Agcakand (Bashkänd) to serve both the needs of refugee housing and of a tourism enclave. Long-term ideas for tourism development could be incorporated into a wider political vision than inappropriately designed refugee housing.

- artists could help housing agencies to rebuild the village using local materials;
- money for rebuilding houses that remain half standing could be used to build in local stone;
- artist-designed new housing could form a circuit for visitors to discover;
- functional ‘monuments’ like wells could be built that combine usefulness with beauty;
- a Swaneti style tower house could be built on the ridge above Yuxari Agcakand to create an interesting circuit for a short hike;
- the village could be designated as a “friendship” village, and mount its own festival;
- such an approach could create a knock-on effect for places like Pir Hussein, Yevlax and especially Barda, as visitors would be drawn to a honeypot in the area, and thus visit less developed attractions.

## **Nakhchivan**

Nakhchivan is dislocated from the rest of Azerbaijan because of the unresolved conflict with Armenia whose borders with Nakhchivan remain firmly closed. Nevertheless, Nakhchivan has great tourism potential. Nakhchivan airport is under reconstruction, and Nakhchivan has borders that are accessible from Turkey and Iran. There are very regular direct buses from Istanbul and Igdır in Turkey, to Nakhchivan yet there is little or no attempt to market the enclave to Turkish or European tourists. The Julfa border is 140km from Tabriz, a large ethnic Azerbaijani city in Iran, which makes Nakhchivan very accessible for Iranian tourists. An entry visa for Iranians to visit Nakhchivan is \$50 cheaper than for Iranians wishing to visit Baku or the rest of Azerbaijan, but is still very expensive for many Iranian family tourists. Some of the main selling points for tourism in Nakhchivan include the following:

- its desert landscapes, including the fabulous İlan Dag with its Biblical connection;
- its interesting monuments: the splendid Momine Khatun is under restoration, and Qarabagħlar is also being restored;
- the charm of Ordubad, and the curious Batabat;
- Nakhchivan city's good new hotels;

- the very scenic Nakhchivan City to Ordubad train could be marketed as one of the great rail journeys of the world to specialist railway enthusiasts; and
- the mythical Mt Agri (Ararat) is on the direct bus route from Istanbul and could be marketed to international visitors, even though the mountain itself is in Turkey: views of its peak from Shahrur or even parts of Nakhchivan city are mesmerizing on clear days.

Most problems that tourists experience in Nakhchivan arise from the lack of interest in tourism among the authorities and the resultant suspicion amongst officials and police that any visitor wandering beyond the main city limits might be a spy. This inconvenience could be very easily corrected with some official support. Some ideas for improving the tourism potential of Nakhchivan include the following:

- the corrupt image of the Sadarak border could be improved;
- the staff and police on the Julfa railway could display friendlier attitudes that encourage tourists;
- police harassment in rural areas could be curbed and a clear system of open or closed areas could be publicised, to avoid tourists unwittingly straying somewhere that is out-of-bounds. For example, the graveyard of Old Julfa/Cugha is prominently displayed in tourist literature in Baku, yet is out of bounds to tourists who try to visit the site: the official reason appears to be its proximity to the Iranian border. Ironically, however, foreign visitors travelling on the Iran side are free to photograph the site across the river, making it hard to argue that the border is a sensitive military zone;
- the site of old Cugha could be developed as a museum site and ‘desensitised’;
- a sign-in procedure at Shahbuz could be instituted for foreign visitors heading to Batabat, that could be made less time-consuming than the present system;
- a very easy transit visa could be considered for Nakhchivan, and made available at the land borders for overland travellers who pass through between Turkey and Iran. While numbers are not enormous, many travellers do cross that way and would be prepared to pay a small extra sum to add another country to their overland list if the visa regulations and hassle factor were reduced. This might take a while to catch on but the beauty of the Araz valley is already included in the new edition of *Lonely Planet Guide to Iran*, so there is a window of opportunity;
- tourist information could be made available at borders, as well as in Nakhchivan City; and
- information and maps could be made available (in Farsi as well as in Azeri/English), with signs for points of interest in Arabic and Latin script.

### **Targeting potential tourists to Azerbaijan**

For developing the tourism potential of Azerbaijan, extravagant plans to mount exclusive holidays from the west do not appear the best way forward. Such an approach is expensive and such visitors are fickle and easily put off by geo-political rumour that can be beyond Azerbaijan's control. However, there are many niche markets that could be better served, and so develop Azerbaijan's tourism potential from the bottom up.

#### **a) Expatriate workers in Azerbaijan**

- awareness of the opportunities for tourism could be raised among the expatriate community;
- more group climbs or hikes could be organised, to add those already mounted at Babadag; and



- arts, food, cultural festivals could be established at in regional centres, for example at the Quba agricultural show.
- b) Stopover passengers
- awareness of Azerbaijan Airlines routings could be raised, and stop-over possibilities could be offered, for example a 2 day experience in Azerbaijan on the Dubai to London route; and
  - Baku and Azerbaijan could be offered as a potential ‘rest-and-recuperation’ destination for expatriates working in Kabul.
- c) Multi country tours
- the optimism emerging in neighbouring Georgia could be extended to Azerbaijan;
  - border clearance procedures could be more streamlined for package tours, to prevent further examples of the Japanese experience at Postbina;
  - a Baku to Bukhara flight could be investigated, which would link Azerbaijan into the Central Asian tour circuit, particularly if Azerbaijan Airlines and Uzbekistan Airlines could offer a triangular ticket from London and Paris; and
  - discounts on Azerbaijan Airlines could be considered for travelers on a tourist visa.

d) Overlanders and backpackers

An often underestimated force for developing a tourist industry is making travel appealing to low-budget backpacker and student travelers, those who are part of the explorer stage of a tourism cycle (see Leader-Williams, in this volume). Although budget travelers bring an apparently limited advantage in terms of actual spend, these visitors are extremely influential in spreading the image of a country to richer family members, in discussing countries on internet forums and by returning later in life when richer. Furthermore, low budget travelers tend to visit small towns, stay and meet people locally, and often put money directly into those local and rural economies, where tourist money is most usefully spent (see Walpole, in this volume). They also spread the word about just how delightful and friendly a country Azerbaijan can be thanks to personal cultural discoveries. However, individual travelers are still viewed with Soviet style suspicion by the police in many areas. While Azerbaijan's recent history makes certain caution on the part of the authorities understandable, those wishing to develop tourism should appreciate that police harassment of a few travelers is swiftly reported through the internet and by word of mouth. The damage caused to the nation's image by corrupt officials on the Sadarak and Red Bridge borders in the mid 1990's still causes certain travellers to be nervous of visiting Azerbaijan years later. In contrast, the friendly Astara border and the delightful, if slow, Postbina border show how officials can provide a very pleasant welcome or farewell to the country. Improvement of certain regional and national transport connections would also be desirable, although this is not necessarily possible to influence easily. Some key issues that might further encourage independent tourists include the following:

- Georgia is improving as a destination, but the Turkmenistan/Kazakhstan ferry connections continue to be unreliable, while the Turkmenistan visa regime remains annoying;
- a cheap flight from Baku to Bukhara could be very useful in overcoming these problems;
- fear of corrupt border procedures could be reduced, although old internet reports often prove hard to counteract;
- the annoying identity checks could be stopped on the concourse outside the main metro station; and
- the harassment of individual tourists at Qazax, Nic and Ordubad could be reduced.

e) Iranian tourists

- tourists from northeastern Iran do not encounter language problems as they are mostly ethnic Azerbaijanis: they are reasonably mobile and could be attracted to visit Azerbaijan if better catered for;
- the distance of 140km from Tabriz to Culfa by a good road is short;
- more tourist-friendly infrastructure, such as information and tours could be considered in Nakhchivan; and
- the Babak route could be enhanced to encourage tourism in the deep south.

## Conclusions

Azerbaijan is a beautiful country, varied with many relatively unspoilt areas for out-door exploration. Many places are attractive because of their low-key charm, so sensitivity in any future development is key. A key need is to encourage the better understanding of non-group tourism in the provinces, and to improve awareness of the contribution of individual travellers to opening up tourism possibilities longer term. As tourism becomes a stated priority of the Azerbaijan Republic, then harassment of travellers could be increasingly discouraged. A certain degree of geo-political good luck, combined with some hard work, is needed to solve the factors that make land access awkward for many potential tourists.

Some final general recommendations to improve tourism include the following:

- Maps at a scale of 1:50,000 could be made generally available for trekking: at present they exist but the Cartographic Committee appears reluctant to put them on sale and they are considered almost 'secret';
- The Soviet mentality of suspicion towards those travelling alone could be changed;
- Any system of open or closed areas, for example those around Qazax could be better clarified, so that tourists do not unwittingly stray out-of-bounds and find themselves in awkward situations with police; and
- Tourist information centres are being established, but might be helpful if the same maps and tourist information were available at border posts.

## **Part II**

# **AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE PITFALLS AND POTENTIAL OF ECOTOURISM FOR AZERBAIJAN**

# ECOTOURISM IN PRINCIPLE: DEFINITIONS, OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS

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## **Introduction**

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a “tourist” is “one who makes a tour..., especially for recreation; one who travels for pleasure or culture, visiting a number of places for their objects of interest, scenery or the like.”

Tourists have travelled throughout history. Tourism started on a large scale during the Industrial Revolution, when affordable travel on railways, combined with employers offering paid holidays for their staff, stimulated the development of seaside resorts in Europe and the United States that catered for a new class of domestic tourists.

Larger scale, international tourism begun to develop in the early 1900s. Aeroplane technology developed during the two world wars led to more affordable and long distance air travel. In the post war period, tourism grew into a mass industry that has its origins in the affluence of the industrialised nations of the West and the Asia Pacific region, and the associated increase in disposable income and leisure time.

Besides advances in transport technology, the development of tourism has been further associated with cheap oil and the entry of multinational companies to the industry. Tourism is now both an industry and a response to social need. Its products includes all the elements that combine to form the tourism consumers’ experiences and exists to service their needs and expectations. The core components of travel and tourism are the same: *‘transport, accommodation and trimmings’*.

This paper reviews the development of the tourist industry internationally, the role that wildlife or nature-based tourism plays in the tourism industry, and how ecotourism should be correctly defined as a subset of wildlife tourism.

## **The size of the tourist industry**

Tourism is now considered the world's largest industry. The tourist industry consists of all those firms, organisations, and facilities that are intended to serve the specific needs and wants of tourists.

The tourism industry generates over 10% of the world's gross domestic product, and employs one in nine workers world-wide. The value of international tourism reached US\$ 476 billion in 2000. Receipts from international tourism have increased by 9% annually for the past 16 years. The exponential growth in the world-wide tourist industry can be gauged by the numbers of international tourist arrivals globally. During the same 16-year period, international arrivals rose by an average of 4.6% per year.

- 25 million in 1950

- 183 million in 1970
- 450 million in 1991
- 594 million in 1996
- 693 million in 2001
- 715 million in 2002; and,
- and are predicted to reach 1 billion by the year 2010.

## **Tourism and development**

Since the late 1960s, tourism has been promoted as a route to development for developing countries. Tourism appeared to constitute a relatively non-controversial form of development, that offered substantial rewards and resulted in few interests to placate or offend. Therefore, tourism has represented an active policy choice for many governments, and its ever increasing economic importance has now gained the attention of most countries world-wide. Many countries devote considerable amounts of money to tourism promotion.

The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) views the key benefits of tourism as:

- **Export earnings:** the world's largest export earner and important in the balance of payments of many countries;
- **Employment:** the world's fastest growing job creator, with 100 million employed around the world;
- **Rural opportunities:** an opportunity to create jobs in less developed regions of a country;
- **Infrastructure investment:** stimulating investment in new infrastructure, helping both residents and tourists;
- **Tax revenues:** providing governments with hundreds of millions of US\$ in tax revenues; and
- **Gross domestic product (GDP):** international and domestic tourism combined generate up to 10% of global GDP, and a considerably higher share in many developing countries and smaller nations.

Despite the huge growth in the industry, numerous studies have revealed that tourism is no panacea for development. A particular concern is the high "leakage" of tourism-generated foreign exchange, whereby such revenue ends up benefiting foreign-owned tour operators, hotels and airlines. An estimated 55% to 90% of tourist spending for visits to developing countries leaks back to developed countries. At the same time, public concern about the environment has increased. In the 1980s, this disquiet was concerned with the impacts of mass tourism on the natural environment and on the culture of local people.

These concerns saw the emergence of alternative forms of tourism, the enterprises of which tended to be small-scale and "low key", with an emphasis on locally owned, traditional accommodation. This was intended to cater for the "alternative traveller seeking intimate but non-destructive contact with foreign cultures and environments". This form of tourism had two branches, paradise hideaways on islands such as Bali, Indonesia and "ethnic tourism" such as trekking in the Himalayas. This proved to be a very lucrative sector of the industry, and commercial considerations of marketing the latest 'undiscovered' paradise quickly overshadowed any concerns for environmental or cultural degradation. Indeed, the marketing of alternative

tourism may well have accelerated social degradation, because more previously unknown destinations were “discovered” and subsequently opened up to mass tourism.

By the late 1980s, another shift in the tourism industry's marketing strategy occurred alongside the emergence of the global environmental movement. In the decade of "green consumerism", critical consumers were soon leading the demand for "environmentally sound" holidays. Tour operators and travel companies began to promote themselves and their products as "environmentally friendly", and a number of companies published ethical and environmental codes of conduct and guidelines for travellers as well as guidelines for self-regulation.

Several trends can be discerned in today's tourism industry. These include:

- continued growth in both domestic and international tourism;
- a shift in destinations from developed to developing countries;
- an increased interest in "activity" holidays as opposed to traditional beach holidays;
- an increased interest in travelling to more natural settings and less disturbed areas as a result of increased interest world-wide in environmental matters and nature; and
- an increased interest in "exotic" locations and cultures as a result of television documentaries, films and "glossy" literature.

### **Tourism and sustainable development**

The growth in alternative forms of tourism has occurred simultaneously with increased recognition of the need to implement the concept of sustainable development. "Sustainable development" is another environmental catch phrase with no single definition. The most widely used definition is that of the Brundtland Commission in *Our Common Future*:

*"development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".*

On the face of it, no other economic activity would appear to lend itself to sustainable development better than tourism. Alternative forms of tourism that incorporate environmental and cultural conservation objectives with an emphasis on economic benefits to local communities would appear to be a panacea for sustainable development. Because damage to the environment threatens the resource base on which alternative forms of tourism depend, it would be logical to expect all involved in tourism to ensure the protection of these resources.

Alternative forms of tourism, however, have the potential to be more damaging than mass tourism since they often occur in fragile or unique environments. Small-scale operations in environmentally sensitive locations may eventually turn into much larger and more destructive operations. Alternative forms of tourism may simply represent the early stages of the conventional tourist destination life cycle. The life cycle concept essentially revolves around the premise that, unless intervention occurs, tourist destination areas and resources inevitably will become over-used and, consequently, will decline. The six stages of the cycle are as follows:

- Exploration (few tourists, poor access and facilities, environment unchanged);
- Involvement (local initiatives, some promotion, increasing numbers);
- Development (many tourists, locals lose control, deterioration of environment);
- Consolidation (tourist numbers exceed local residents, all major chains represented);
- Stagnation (numbers peak, destination falls out of fashion, environmental and social problems); and,
- Decline or rejuvenation (or intermediate stages).

This cycle has a number of obvious implications for sustainability, based on the consideration of factors such as carrying capacity, local participation, ownership, and social and environmental impacts.

Mass tourists, on the other hand, may have less impact because they tend to limit themselves to well known, easily accessible areas and insulate themselves from the local people. In some instances, the zoning of mass tourism (or enclave tourism) is adopted as a deliberate policy by a host country. Tourists in the Maldives Islands in the Indian Ocean are confined to self-contained, purpose built resorts on isolated, often formerly uninhabited islands, in order to avoid a culture clash between bikini-clad tourists and the conservative, Islamic islanders. Enclave tourism may similarly be used to limit environmental impacts, sometimes by default rather than design. Thus, despite criticisms for their totally artificial character, it has been estimated that theme parks provide the kind of tourism that millions of people want at a fraction of the environmental and social costs of the many charter flights and resort hotels around the world.

### **Characteristics of wildlife or nature-based tourism**

Wildlife or nature-based tourism, hereafter termed *wildlife tourism*, encompasses a range of activities, including bird watching, wildlife viewing, photographic and walking safaris, reef diving, whale watching, trophy hunting and sport fishing. Wildlife tourism may be achieved through many different forms of transport, including on foot, by vehicle, boat or balloon. Wildlife tourism may be purposeful or may also include tourists who visit wildlife areas as an incidental part of a broader trip. For example, many tourists book a combination beach and safari holiday in Kenya. Business trips may also involve visits to wildlife areas that are casual diversions rather than the prime motivation for visiting a country.

Tour companies also started to promote wildlife tourism and ecotourism holidays to all corners of the world, to coincide with the inclusion of the environment on the mainstream political agenda. Wildlife tourism is an important component of the international and domestic tourism industry. Wildlife tourism currently accounts overall for 10% of international tourism, but depending on the region, wildlife tourism can account for 20 to 40% of international tourism. The scale of wildlife tourism is even larger if domestic wildlife tourism is taken into consideration. However, statistics are often not available to determine what proportion of wildlife tourism is domestic in origin, but it is likely to be very high in some countries.

As with tourism generally, wildlife tourism is likely to increase in importance and scale. Furthermore, it may also attract an increasing market share, as suggested by a number of surveys indicating an increasing interest in wildlife among tourists. More and more countries now actively promote tourism to natural areas, usually to areas protected for wildlife (see Bagirov, this volume). Nature-based tourism may comprise 40-60% of international tourism expenditures, and is increasing at 10-30% annually. The last 20 years have seen a shift in favoured tourism destinations towards developing countries, especially those rich in biodiversity. Notable areas are Central America, the Amazon, Southern and Eastern Africa, South and South East Asia. The rate at which wildlife tourism is growing in protected areas in developing countries exceeds that in developed countries.

Key habitats and species have an undeniable influence on the popularity of wildlife tourism destinations. The major destinations for wildlife tourists are African savannahs, which support high concentrations of easily accessible, readily visible large mammals. In contrast, wildlife tourism has been slower to develop in rainforests. In Latin America, for example, rainforests provide difficult access to wilderness areas, may occur in politically unstable areas and have

been weakly marketed. Furthermore, the flagship mammalian species of interest to most tourists are secretive in their habits and less well known than their African counterparts. Equally, many more unusual tourist destinations with good visibility, such as the Antarctic, are becoming increasingly popular.

The successful marketing of wildlife tourism appears to be related to the predictable occurrence of certain target species within a relatively restricted area. Wildlife tourists expect a reasonable guarantee of seeing a particular key species or species group before they visit a location in substantial numbers. Nevertheless, bird watching is the largest single category of non-consumptive wildlife tourism worldwide, largely because bird communities always remain in the highly modified habitats found throughout developed countries and are generally accessible. In North America, bird watching is one of the fastest growing wildlife-based activities involving maybe as many as 40 million people annually. Overall, however, whale watching is the fastest growing form of tourism in the world, attracting more than 6 million visitors every year.

A summary of prerequisites for wildlife tourism suggests four essential factors:

- the management of wildlife tourism needs to be sensitive to the scale and type of tourism, both of which can impact on wildlife populations and local communities;
- local communities need to benefit from tourism-generated income so that they have an incentive to protect lands and wildlife;
- tourism in protected areas should further, rather than counteract, the goals of protected areas management; and
- wildlife tourism needs to be accessible to visitors from a wide range of regions and economic backgrounds, and not restricted to rich foreigners.

Despite these statements, wildlife tourism has developed in rather a different manner on different categories of land.

### **Wildlife tourism in protected areas**

Wildlife tourism is often thought of in the context of legally protected areas set aside both for conservation and for economic development. The world's first national park was established at Yellowstone in USA in 1872, as *a public park or pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people*. Soon afterwards four national parks were established in Canada around railways in scenic mountainous areas, on the initiative of railroad companies wishing to increase their tourist traffic. These and several other Canadian national parks established subsequently have not been removed from economic development, but instead have been the focus for that development. The trend of developing tourism in more natural settings continues, and protected areas are among the prime attractions for tourists. The United States National Parks System continues as the largest tourist attraction anywhere in the world. Australia's Great Barrier Reef is one of the best-known national parks and attracts many thousands of visitors a year.

Protected areas are prime sites for wildlife tourism, and offer some guarantee of maintaining their attractions in the long term through a strong legislative regime. At the same time, international wildlife tourism can contribute enormously to the management of protected areas. Benefits include foreign exchange revenue, employment opportunities, improving awareness of conservation objectives and stimulation of economic activity.

Equally, the goals of wildlife conservation, sometimes stated in utilitarian terms of promoting tourism, may at times be diametrically opposed to those of social sustainability. The designation of protected areas is often at the cost of excluding local communities from traditional practices



such as nomadic pastoralism (see Elliott, this volume regarding the possibility of such exclusion occurring at Shahdag in Azerbaijan), cultivation and gathering wood, grass, medicinal plants and minor forest products, and so on.

Patterns of wildlife tourism may also have negative impacts upon particular areas. For example, Kenya's wildlife tourism industry heavily depends on just a few national parks, which then produce revenue for the wildlife authority to manage less visited areas. Hence, unevenly distributed patterns of visitation can have serious implications for the carrying capacities of the most heavily visited sites. The potential problems caused by tourism are increasingly recognised in protected area management plans for key destinations such as the Galapagos Islands and Mount Kilimanjaro, as well as by national wildlife and tourism policies. For example, policies for both national parks and other protected areas in Tanzania recognise the need to determine acceptable volumes of tourists, and to diversify the tourist circuits to incorporate the less heavily visited parts of southern Tanzania.

A major challenge for wildlife tourism is to ensure that protected areas are financially self-sufficient without detracting from their primary function of preserving biodiversity and natural values. To achieve this, it is usually necessary to encourage private sector investment and provide local communities with a vested interest in wildlife tourism.

### **Private sector involvement in wildlife tourism**

National parks and other state-owned and managed protected areas are major destinations for wildlife tourists. However, the private sector is playing an increasing role in providing accommodation, facilities and other support services within these areas. The private sector is also involved in managing and utilising wildlife, and providing tourist facilities on privately owned land.

Private sector involvement in developing tourism in protected areas may be the subject of much criticism and heated debate. However, in many developing countries, governments lack the capital to develop a tourist industry. Hence, private sector funding becomes a necessity if the benefits of tourism are to be realised. Private sector involvement may not be appropriate in all aspects of managing or regulating tourism activities within a state-owned protected area, but in some aspects of tourism development private sector funding may not only be acceptable but also necessary. Thus, the state has a responsibility to retain ownership, management and regulation of protected areas on behalf of the nation. However, the private sector has a clear role in the development of support services and construction and management of tourist service facilities such as restaurants, car hire and retail facilities.

There are, in addition to state-owned protected areas, many reserves that are privately owned. In South Africa there are an estimated 800 private game reserves, ranging from luxury resorts to small "tribal resource areas". Many private reserves are of particular conservation significance because they are located around state-owned national parks and other protected areas, thus serving to increase the size of areas under effective protection. In Latin America, the emergence of privately owned protected areas is an important phenomenon. In many cases, private reserves are operated by concerned individuals and organisations, which are conscious of the environmental impacts of tourists and the need to preserve an area in its natural state. In Costa Rica, private investment in tourist enterprises has been encouraged, since the government has lacked the funds to develop national parks and protected areas.

Private sector involvement in wildlife tourism may often be dependent on high levels of foreign investment, as the costs of establishing private reserves are relatively high. Restrictions on

foreign investment may therefore have an impact on wildlife tourism. Countries with large numbers of private reserves tend to be those that permit foreigners to own land, for example in Costa Rica. Where international investment is not restricted, wildlife tourism can mean big business.

### **Consumptive forms of tourism**

In line with rising environmental consciousness, many people have difficulty in accepting that the killing of animals and consumptive use can play a role in tourism. Hence, hunting and fishing are not included in much of the literature on wildlife tourism initiatives. Equally, Safari Club International in the United States reports a rapid growth in both domestic and international hunting, estimating that as many as 33% of its 20,000 members world-wide go to Africa to hunt every 12 to 18 months. Sport or trophy hunting attracts a low volume of high paying clients, both domestic and international, who can make considerable contributions to wildlife authority revenue and to local communities. Hence, many would view this as a true form of ecotourism, and such tourism is already a feature of wildlife-based tourism in Azerbaijan (see <http://azerbaijan.tourism.az/specinte/hunt/hunting.html>), although not discussed in detail at this meeting, which instead concentrates on non-consumptive tourism in national parks.

Hunters argue that well-regulated trophy hunting has the least negative impact of all forms of ecotourism, because it requires very little infrastructure, provides high per capita economic returns and, assists in the management of wildlife populations as the animals collected by trophy hunters are usually biologically surplus males.

Tourist hunting can also provide significant benefits to local communities, particularly in some communal lands suited to hunting operations but unsuitable for wildlife viewing tourism due, for example, to their remoteness, insufficient wildlife populations, or generally low interest habitat. As with non-consumptive tourism, particular species are of special importance in the trophy hunting industry. For example, the big cats, elephants and buffalo make a large contribution to game fees in Tanzania.

Nevertheless, trophy hunting may be incompatible with other forms of wildlife tourism in certain areas, since it can make some species extremely shy and therefore difficult to see. Most national parks, which largely promote non-consumptive tourism, do not permit trophy hunting for this reason. Equally, with careful zoning, hunting and wildlife-viewing have been combined in certain national parks. Sport hunting has, however, more commonly been a component of wildlife utilisation in protected areas other than national parks, particularly where there is no possibility of attracting sufficient volumes of game viewing tourists. Furthermore, trophy hunting is an important component of tourist potential on privately owned reserves and on communal lands, particularly in southern Africa.

The opponents of consumptive forms of tourism argue that similar benefits to conservation and local people could equally be derived from non-consumptive wildlife tourism. However, wildlife viewing tourism is more likely to show symptoms of impact than hunting tourism as more tourists are needed to produce a similar income. Equally, in the long term and later in the tourist development cycle, the economic returns may be greater from wildlife viewing than from hunting.

### **What is ecotourism?**

Ecotourism has been variously defined, and has become a widely misunderstood and a widely misused term. Incorrectly, ecotourism has become widely adopted as a generic term to describe tourism that has, as its primary purpose, an interaction with nature. Correctly, ecotourism is a subset of nature or wildlife tourism that incorporates a desire to minimise negative impacts. Implicit in the term is the assumption that local communities should benefit from tourism and will have an incentive to help to conserve nature in the process.

Proponents of ecotourism often assume that its activities are environmentally benign.

- This assumption is made because tourist group sizes in what are considered ecotourism situations tend to be small and because the visitors are interested in aspects of the environment and are therefore assumed to respect it.
- Visitors may be encouraged to *take only photographs, leave only footprints*, but even footprints make their mark, particularly in fragile environments such as Antarctic moss-banks.
- The fact that tourists have chosen an expensive wildlife-based holiday does not necessarily mean that they care about the long-term impact of their tours. Many feel that they have paid a lot of money for what they perceive as a great adventure, and assume that they have an inalienable right to see and do what ever they want.
- Furthermore, the environmental and social impacts of ecotourism may be more significant than mass tourist developments since ecotourism tends to take place in unspoilt environments that are often ecologically fragile, contain rare species and may be inhabited by indigenous people. The impact per capita may therefore actually be greater for ecotourists than for mass tourists.
- In addition, ecotourists want to escape from other tourists, and so by its very nature, ecotourism can raise the risk of ‘hit and run’ tourism: an influx of nature lovers to the latest wild spot, followed by its abandonment once discovered and degraded by other tourists.

No definition excludes any category of land from supporting ecotourism. All definitions of ecotourism emphasise that it must take place in natural areas, which could therefore include state-managed protected areas, private land and communal land. The key criteria for ecotourism are that the activity must be environmentally and culturally sensitive, must directly benefit conservation and/or local people who in turn have an incentive for conservation, and be self-sustaining within the context of the natural and cultural habitats in which it takes place.

Under the definitions of ecotourism, any forms of wildlife tourism could be classified as ecotourism, if they were run and managed in such a manner to fulfil the objectives outlined in the definitions. For example, when well-regulated, trophy hunting is undoubtedly a form of ecotourism.

### **International Year of Ecotourism 2002**

The WTO held a summit in Quebec, Canada in May 2002 with 1000 delegates from 130 countries as the centre point of the International Year of Ecotourism 2002. The WTO assessment of IYE 2002 was that, *in general terms, even though the global situation of ecotourism still needs improvements, the International Year of Ecotourism permitted in most countries and in all domains to improve sustainability levels in ecotourism, and in the tourism sector generally.*

The Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism made 49 recommendations to provide a new tool for the international development of ecotourism. A summary of the 19 recommendations to national, regional and local governments are as follows:

- formulate policies and development strategies;

- guarantee the protection of nature, local and indigenous cultures, and rights to land;
- ensure participation and co-ordination of relevant public institutions;
- include regulatory and monitoring frameworks, and provide feedback to the public;
- develop mechanisms to internalise environmental costs including of international travel;
- develop capacity to implement growth management tools such as zoning and land use planning;
- use internationally approved guidelines to develop certification schemes and ecolabelling;
- ensure provision of resources to support development of micro and SMEs to allow them to develop their business in a sustainable manner;
- define policies, management plans and interpretation for visitors;
- include SMEs and NGOs in promotion strategies by national tourism administrations;
- encourage regional networks and co-operation to promote ecotourism products internationally and nationally;
- provide incentives to tourist operators and other providers to make their services sustainable;
- ensure that basic environmental health standards are met in ecotourism developments in rural areas;
- institute baseline environmental impact assessments and surveys;
- support the further implementation of international principles, guidelines and codes of ethics for sustainable tourism;
- consider reallocating the tenure of public land from an extractive or intensive option to tourism combined with conservation;
- promote and develop educational programmes addressed to children and young people to enhance awareness;
- promote collaboration between tour operators and service providers to educate tourists at destinations; and,
- incorporate sustainable transport policies into tourism planning.

## **Conclusions**

The full set of recommendations were presented to, and accepted by, the World Summit on Sustainable Development at Johannesburg later in 2002. Ecotourism is now firmly on the world's sustainable development agenda. The challenge now facing the tourism sector in Azerbaijan is to help implement these fine words and turn them into reality!!

# **ECOTOURISM IN PRACTICE: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

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## **Introduction**

The rise in ecotourism is a result of increasing interest in wildlife and nature-based attractions, together with increasing demand for responsible travel. In practice, tourism can be considered a three-cornered stool. The three corners are the environment within which ecotourism takes place, the ‘hosts’ that provide the tourism experience, and the ‘guests’, or tourists themselves. The needs of all three must be balanced in a sustainable manner for nature-based tourism to meet the ideals of ecotourism.

In essence, the challenge for governments is to balance the need for foreign exchange earnings with the need for environmental conservation and rural development. This paper reviews some of the factors affecting this balance, and considers the ways in which ecotourism can be planned and managed.

## **Factors affecting commercial viability**

For ecotourism to be successful, it must first and foremost be a viable business, with market demand for its ‘product’. A range of factors may affect whether visitors are attracted to a certain destination, of which four are particularly important.

The product itself must be of high quality, covering a diverse range of attractions, be competitive (or unique) in comparison to similar attractions elsewhere and, most importantly, be guaranteed. Azerbaijan has a range of cultural, historical and landscape attractions (see Mammadova, Gahramanov and Elliott, this volume), but note the difficulty of guaranteeing wildlife sightings, especially or rare or elusive species such as the leopard. Equally, some natural attractions such as flowers or birds may be seasonal in their availability, which will affect when and where certain products can be offered.

The delivery of the product must embody the utmost professionalism at every level. This goes beyond the tour guides, hotel receptionists and waiters that deal with tourists face to face, but must include all aspects of the product and the support sectors upon which it relies. Ultimately, tourism is based on the enjoyment and satisfaction of the visitor, and having a quality attraction alone is not enough to ensure such enjoyment.

A range of practicalities also affects visitor demand. The destination and attractions must be accessible to visitors without too much effort. Coupled with this, any circuit based around multiple attractions must take into account the time constraints placed upon most tours. It is important that travel between attractions does not take up too large a proportion of the visit.

A third practicality is pricing. Most products, including national parks, are very price sensitive. Increasing price reduces demand but not necessarily revenues. There is usually an optimal price at which revenue is maximised. Understanding how the market may respond to price variation is critical in ensuring a balance between visitation and income.

A fourth practicality concerns accommodation. How much is required? Where should it be located? What style should be considered? Consumer tastes are changing in this regard, and many ecotourists would prefer small-scale eco-lodges or simple local accommodation to large scale, anonymous resort hotels. But ultimately this depends upon the type of visitor being targeted, as discussed further below.

Finally, there is the issue of security. Visitors require peace of mind, and this demands that a destination is not only safe, but appears safe, is promoted as safe, and is accepted as safe by overseas visitor, tour operators and governments alike. There are numerous examples from around the world where political unrest, terrorism, health scares and natural disasters have badly affected visitor arrivals. Azerbaijan itself is relatively safe and secure (Elliott, this volume), but it suffers from an unresolved territorial dispute with Armenia that may be a major constraint to the development of international tourism (Elliott, Gahramanov, this volume). It also lies in a region with an image of some insecurity, and this image will require change.

### **Understanding customer needs and expectations**

Why do people go on holiday? Different people have different motives for travel, and this affects not only the type of attraction they seek, but also their requirements in terms of price and style, and the impacts they have economically and environmentally. It is important to identify target market niches that are most likely to take up the product on offer (Elliott, this volume).

Targeted marketing increases efficiency by gearing the marketing effort, including design and promotion of products and services, to the specific needs of specific customers. However, it may be used not simply for maximising profit, but also to meet ‘sustainability’ objectives, including responsible clientele, educational benefits, and so on.

In the case of Azerbaijan, it is possible to identify at least four major market segments, as shown below. The segments that are the most likely to grow in the short term in Azerbaijan are the second, third and fourth, and these should not be ignored (see Elliott, this volume). However, the first segment is the most challenging to attract and maintain in the long-term.

1. ***International, high end ‘ecotraveller’***
  - Higher spending;
  - More demanding, more sensitive; and
  - Higher imports and leakages.
2. ***International independent budget traveller***
  - Lower spending; but
  - More integration with local economies;
  - Less demanding, less sensitive; and
  - More likely to explore new destinations.
3. ***Resident expatriates***
  - Potentially high spending;
  - Accessible and stable market; and
  - Looking for recreational opportunities locally.
4. ***Domestic citizens***
  - Potentially large market;
  - Generates environmental awareness; and

- Creates a culture of tourism.

## **Environmental impacts and management of tourism**

Nature-based tourism has four mechanisms for creating environmental stress:

- Environmental transformation due to infrastructure development;
- Generation of litter and waste;
- Effects associated with various recreational activities; and
- Resource consumption: changes in human population dynamics, especially seasonal increase in population and population densities.

These impacts depend upon where and when tourism takes place, the type of activity, the type of transport used, and the behaviour of tourists and guides. For example, motor vehicles have a different type and level of impact on fragile environments than walking or horse riding. If such impacts are uncontrolled they can become very damaging. For example, in Kenya's Masai Mara National Reserve, uncontrolled off-road driving has resulted in literally thousands of kilometres of tracks, where the vegetation is either damaged or destroyed. This reserve has many similarities with Shirvan National Park, so it is important that such problems are anticipated and prepared for.

Managing the environmental impacts of tourism can take three forms, with different levels of 'control' or regulation, from direct limits on access through to the use of education and codes of conduct as a means of influencing people's actions:

- Hard management: controlling visitor use;
- Intermediate management: redistributing use; and
- Soft management: influencing behaviour of tourists and guides.

The most appropriate management of tourism in protected areas is likely to employ a range of tactics taken from these different forms.

## **Community involvement in ecotourism**

The involvement of rural communities and local people in tourism is often overlooked. However, it is a vital part of ecotourism, since their involvement is taken to enhance sustainability. By sharing the benefits and opportunities of tourism equitably amongst local communities living in or near fragile environments such as protected areas, it is assumed that local support for conservation efforts will be strengthened.

Equally, many rural areas in which tourism takes place are cultural landscapes that have been influenced by local people for generations. Montane pastures in the Caucasus are a direct result of livestock grazing, yet these pastures are both high in biodiversity and attractive to tourists. Thus, excluding pastoral communities from such areas, and denying them benefits from tourism, will have negative environmental (Elliott, this volume), as well as socio-economic, effects.

Moreover, as noted above, responsible travel is increasingly important to many visitors, and the involvement of local communities can become a valuable selling point for tour operators aiming at the ecotourism market. Community involvement may take a variety of forms:

- Employment;
- Retail;
- Manufacturing/Agricultural Co-operatives;
- Private/Communal business; and
- Informal sector.

There are, however, a variety of constraints to local involvement in tourism in rural areas including access to land, access to skills and capital, access to tourists, and an understanding of tourists and tourism. This results in a tendency for the benefits of tourism to leak from rural locations and cluster geographically in capital cities or abroad. Equally, many package tours and resort complexes act as enclaves that provide little or no access to local people to benefit. In such circumstances there are few if any linkages with the local economy, and community members may be reduced to hawking and touting outside such enclaves.

Even where local people can find employment in tourism, it has many constraints. It is often low skilled, low paid, seasonal, and part time. Many jobs are dependent upon skills not available locally. Labour demands of tourism and agriculture often coincide. Finally, visible female employment in tourism is low. However, there are a number of ways to promote community involvement in tourism:

- Create linkages
  - Within the tourism industry: employment and training;
  - With other industries: transport, agriculture, construction, and so on;
  - With the informal sector: guiding, handicrafts, and small-scale enterprises;
- Training and support for individuals, small-scale enterprises and community associations; and
- Business partnerships between the public and private sectors.

### **Socio-cultural impacts of tourism**

Spreading the economic benefits of tourism among communities has the potential to bring unwanted socio-cultural impacts that negatively affect traditional cultures and lifestyles. It is important to be aware of some of the dangers, such as:

- Culture clash/antagonism;
- Cultural drift (erosion of traditional cultures); and
- Unmet expectations (predicted benefits do not materialise).

Any form of development will bring change, but it is important in the context of sustainability that ecotourism does not accelerate such change in a negative way. There are several options for limiting such impacts and ensuring positive cultural exchange:

- Controlled visitation, by limiting numbers and distribution of tourists;
- Education and awareness of both tourists and hosts;
- Codes of conduct; and,
- Community involvement in planning.

### **Developing a vision and strategy for ecotourism development**



In the final analysis, if nature-based tourism is to achieve the ideals of ecotourism (Leader-Williams, this volume) then it must be properly planned and managed from the outset. This requires a vision for the future of ecotourism that can be aspired to. A suggestion for such a vision is as follows:

*To achieve sustainable tourism that maintains the integrity and supports the conservation of Azerbaijan's National Parks, whilst benefiting surrounding local populations in particular and Azeris as a whole.*

To achieve such a vision will require a strategic plan at the national level, based on sound principles and policies. Such a plan will need to address a range of issues that, together, will ensure the achievement of the strategy. Below are ten issues around which strategic objectives must be developed:

- Consolidation of existing market segments;
- Attraction of new international market segments;
- Attraction of new domestic market segments;
- Community participation;
- Environmental sustainability;
- Capacity (human and infrastructure);
- Communication (infrastructure, information-sharing, and promotion);
- Education and interpretation;
- Monitoring and evaluation; and
- Co-ordination and support.

## **Conclusions**

The next step for Azerbaijan is to explore its options through detailed research, and to bring together a forum of mutually supportive stakeholders to develop a vision, policies and strategy for ecotourism based upon such research together with a consideration of the issues and options discussed in this paper.

## **Part III**

# **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECOTOURISM IN AZERBAIJAN**

### **WORKING GROUPS**

Three working groups were established to consider key recommendations for taking forward the development of ecotourism in the context of Azerbaijan's protected areas. Each working group was provided with a list of topics upon which to formulate recommendations. The Chair was requested to focus and stimulate discussion and to ensure that all relevant points were covered. There may have been areas of overlap between the discussions of working groups, but this was not problematic. The Secretary was requested to keep a record of the working group's recommendations, to report back to plenary on the conclusion of the working group session and to provide a full written report of the working group for the workshop proceedings. The working group members were requested to provide their advice and experience to the discussion of the working group, and to move between working groups where appropriate.

## **WORKING GROUP 1: TOURISM TO PROTECTED AREAS: CONSERVATION NEEDS AND PRIORITIES**

**Chair:** Professor Nigel Leader-Williams, (DICE, Canterbury)

**Secretary:** Professor Ulduz Hashimova, (WU, Baku)

### **Members:**

Mr Aziz Najafov (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Biodiversity and Protected Areas Department, Baku)

Mr Aliabbas Shukurov (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Aggol SNR)

Mr Gabil Efendiyev (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Ilisu SNR)

Mr Sadagat Abdullayev (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Hirkan SNR)

Mr Khudush Iskenderov (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Basit-Chay SNR)

Mr Ramiz Talibov (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Alti-Agaj SNR)

Mr Javanshir Abbasov (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Ismailly SNR)

Mr Haji Chakhiyev (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Zagatala SNR)

Ms Gulnaz Amrahova (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Biodiversity and Protected Areas Department, Baku)

Mr Mammad Ahmedov (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism, Sheki Region)

Mr Nadir Mukhtarov (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism, Baku)

Mr Tarlan Ramazanov (Mountain Sports Club, Baku)

Mr Bilal Verdiyev (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Goygol SNR)

Mr Iltifat Fatdayev (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Biodiversity and Protected Areas Department, Baku)

Mr Firuz Bunyatov (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism, Ismailli Region)

Mr Mikail Mikailzadeh (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism, Lankaran Region)

### **Topics:**

- Which protected areas should be promoted as foci for ecotourism?
- How can these protected areas be integrated to national tourism routes?
- How can protected areas meet their conservation objectives while encompassing ecotourism?
- How can protected areas, local communities and the private sector be integrated in developing ecotourism objectives?

### **Discussion and recommendations:**

#### **1.1 Types of protected area and integration into tourism routes**

We noted the great achievement in establishing four new National Parks (NPs). However, we recommend that approaches to designation should be more flexible, and allow for types of use within the most strictly protected areas. We recommend that many State National Reserves (SNRs) could be used for sanctioned tourism, both to widen tourism opportunities along national tourism routes, and to provide revenue for reserve maintenance. If established as NPs, people would be excluded from the currently proposed NPs. This may result in loss of the anthropogenic influences that have helped to shape their landscape and biodiversity. Therefore, after their establishment, some NPs may be at risk from conflict with local communities, while also losing much of their biodiversity.

#### **1.2 Meeting conservation objectives**

We believe that zoning will be critical to protected area management, to allow for core areas where no use is allowed and zones of increasing use that encompass tourism and community objectives. We acknowledge that achieving a balance between protection and use is difficult. However, too much protection probably results in resentment by local communities and illegal use of resources inside protected areas.

### **1.3 Integrating communities and the private sector**

The local community needs to be made aware of plans for protected areas. Even more important, we recommend that communities should participate in the development of protected area plans, for communities will resent activities that remove, or conflict with, their livelihood activities.

We recommend that the private sector should be offered opportunities to develop tourism facilities in appropriate zones of protected areas. However, these opportunities should be regulated by the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, while the standard of the tourism product should be regulated in co-ordination with the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism.

## **WORKING GROUP 2: LOCAL COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM: CONSERVATION NEEDS AND PRIORITIES**

**Chair:** Dr Matt Walpole (DICE, Canterbury)

**Secretary:** Ms Gulara Guliyeva (WU, Baku)

### **Members:**

Mr Mahir Gahramanov (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism, Baku)

Ms Firuza Sultan-zadeh (Ecosphere Social-Ecology Center, Baku)

Mr Fikret Djafarov (Society for Sustainable Development)

Mr Kheyrraddin Jabbarov (Khinalig Village, Guba Region)

Mr Mubariz Garayev (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism, Khizi Region)

Mr Shahin Israfilov (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism, Khachmaz Region)

Mr Yusif Musayev (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism, Devechi Region)

Mr Musa Bagirov (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Aggol SNR)

Mr Ramiz Talibov (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Alti-Agaj SNR)

Mr Bilal Verdiyev (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Goygol SNR)

### **Topics:**

- What are the main economic opportunities for local people and rural communities in ecotourism?
- What do local people require to assist them to become involved in ecotourism?
- How can the benefits and opportunities of ecotourism be distributed most equitably?
- How should local community issues and concerns regarding ecotourism be incorporated into national planning, and who should represent them?
- How should the negative socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism in rural areas be minimised?

### **Discussion and Recommendations:**

#### **2.1 The main economic opportunities**

We believe that the main economic opportunities for local communities from ecotourism will be: the development of the local handicraft, carpentry and bee keeping industries; job creation; rental of facilities and apartments to tourists; and, the provision of services to tourists, such as guiding to local sites, take tourists on horse riding trips, and serving food to tourists.

#### **2.2 Needs for developing ecotourism to benefit local communities**

We recommend that education and training are vital to ensure the training of tour operators, to raise awareness among local communities of the economic benefits of ecotourism, to train farmers and members of the local community to produce organic food and explain the benefits of selling it to tourists, and to establish tourist information centres.

We also believe it is important to provide facilities for short- and long-term credit and loans to local people, in order to support ecotourism development in isolated regions. It will also be necessary to improve roads, health care and telecommunication in the regions, and to resolve Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We also underscore the importance of establishing Tourism Associations for various interests, for instance, a Family Tourism Association.

#### **2.3 Incorporating local concerns into national planning**

We recommend that local municipalities should represent local communities and resolve their issues. We also recommend that a special commission, comprising representatives of the Ministries of Youth, Sport and Tourism, and of Ecology and Natural Resources, local communities, NGOs and other stakeholders should be established. This commission should work

out a local strategy for involving local communities. The Government of Azerbaijan should approach the development of ecotourism as a priority for regenerating rural areas.

#### **2.4 Minimising socio-cultural impacts**

We recommend that tourists should be educated about local customs, to ensure their respect towards the local community. Furthermore, we recommend that local communities in tourist areas should be educated about the needs of tourists and the customs of other cultures, to ensure appropriate cultural exchanges between communities and tourists. We also recommend the promotion and preservation of the local culture for example the wearing of national costumes, and the development of local handicrafts and local cuisine for sale to tourists.

### **WORKING GROUP 3: CO-ORDINATION OF NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL EFFORTS TO PROMOTE ECOTOURISM**

**Chair:** Ms Jennifer Raymond (MBAEC Consultant/Citizenship Development Corps, Baku)

**Secretary:** Ms Vafa Fati-zadeh (OCSE, Baku)

**Members:**

Mr Elchin Sardarov (Caucasus Environmental NGO Network, Baku)

Ms Saadet Kaffarova (UNDP, Biodiversity Strategy, Action Plan & National Report)

Mr Ali Dovlatov (Ecotourism NGO, Lankaran)

Mr Namik Ibrahimov (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Shirvan NP)

Mr Vugar Ahmedzadeh (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Biodiversity and Protected Areas Department, Baku)

Mr Shamil Husseyinov (Member of Parliament)

Mr Davud Ibrahimkhalilov (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism, Gusar Region)

Mr Elliot Mark (Independent Tourism Expert)

Mr Ilyas Babayev (Institute of Zoology, Director of Zoological Museum, Baku)

Mr Shahin Israfilov (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism, Khachmaz Region)

Mr Nabi Aliyev (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism, Siyazan Region)

Mr Yusif Musayev (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism, Devechi Region)

Mr Eldaniz Gambarov (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism, Baku)

Mr Mansur Agayev (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism, Guba Region)

Mr Faig Sadikhov (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Biodiversity and Protected Areas Department)

Mr Haji Chakhiyev (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Zagatala SNR)

**Topics:**

- Who are the key stakeholders that need to collaborate for ecotourism development?
- What are the important issues and decisions that should have input from some or all of the above stakeholders?
- What framework can be established to facilitate collaboration at a national and local level?
- How can vertical co-ordination, from national to regional and local levels, and vice-versa, be facilitated?

**Discussion and Recommendations:**

**3.1 The key stakeholders**

We recognise that there will be many stakeholders as ecotourism emerges in Azerbaijan, including: the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources; the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism; the Ministry of Agriculture; the Ministry of Economic Development; the Ministry of Communication and Information Technologies; the Ministry of Education; the Ministry of Culture; the National Parliament; the Biodiversity Department of the Cabinet of Ministers; the State Committee on Refugees; the Academy of Science; many municipalities and local communities; several donor organisations and environmental NGOs, both international and local; tour operators, both local and international; and the transport industry, and service and catering establishments

**3.2 Important decisions for stakeholders**

We recommend that the most important decisions in which stakeholders need to be involved are the establishment of an appropriate legislative framework for tourism generally, and for ecotourism specifically, and developing a national ecotourism policy.

**3.3 Framework for establishing collaboration**

We recommend that an Ecotourism Co-ordination Centre, an inter-ministerial working group should be established with the following objectives:

- serve as a forum for, and encourage co-ordination between all stakeholders;
- raise public awareness over the possibilities and limitations of ecotourism;
- minimise possibilities of conflict and duplication of efforts; and,
- develop a national strategy of ecotourism that meets the international ecotourism standards.

The Centre should be responsible to the Deputy-Head of the Cabinet of Ministers and to the two Ministers of Ecology and Natural Resources, and of Youth, Sport and Tourism. The Centre should have branches in the regions organised through regional departments of the Ministries of Youth, Sport and Tourism, and of Ecology and Natural Resources, and reach down to municipalities and communities.

The Centre should operate according to international standards, and be established along the lines recommended in the Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism, with an executive committee and working groups. The Centre should include representation at all levels from the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Economic Development, the private sector, local and international environmental NGOs, and the Academy of Sciences.

The Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism should establish a dedicated department to collect the necessary data to effectively plan for an ecotourism industry.



## **RECOMMENDATIONS MADE AT FINAL PLENARY SESSION**

There is a need to develop a National Policy for Ecotourism, which may be achieved through establishing a Co-ordination Centre, an inter-ministerial working group, with equal representation of key stakeholders, and with the mandate to:

- develop a national ecotourism policy and development strategy, on the basis of up-to-date international expertise, that encompass the policies and interests of all stakeholders;
- co-ordinate of ecotourism-related activities undertaken by different groups of stakeholders, both vertically and horizontally;
- provide for closer co-operation between regulatory bodies and environmental NGOs;
- develop teaching programmes and training materials, tailored for different groups of stakeholders, from top management to local communities; and
- develop the mechanisms for research and monitoring of environmental, social and economic impacts of tourism to natural areas.