



## The Role of Tourism in the Socio–Economic Development of the Republic of Karakalpakstan Today

Juginis Idirisovich Dosekeev

Assistant, Karakalpak State University named after Berdakh, Uzbekistan

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### **Abstract**

Today, tourism plays an important role in the socio–economic development of the Republic of Karakalpakstan. This has a great impact on the economy of the region, serves to create jobs, attract investment, and develop small and medium–sized businesses. Considering that one of the most important aspects of the economic contribution of tourism is the creation of new jobs, the local government focuses on the development of hotel services, restaurants, transportation services, tour guides, handicraft workshops and many other services. In addition, the development of the tourism sector helps to improve the skills and qualifications of the native residents, creates new opportunities for training and employment in the tourism sector.

**Keywords:** *Tourism; Socio–Economic Development; Natural Heritage; Karakalpakstan; Regional Tourism; Tourism Infrastructure; Quality of Services; Investment; Marketing; Advertising; Ecology; Central Asia; Cultural Heritage*

### **Introduction**

The Republic of Karakalpakstan, located in the western part of Central Asia, has a rich and diverse cultural and natural heritage, attracting the attention of tourists from all over the world. The history of tourism in this region has several centuries of roots related to its unique attractions and culture.

The first forms of tourism in Karakalpakstan date back to ancient times when travelers and explorers visited these lands. The region is famous for its archeological monuments, Mizdakhkan, Sheep Killed Castle, Shilpiq and others, which attract historians and archaeologists from all over the world. These ancient monuments testify to the rich history of the region and attract tourists interested in archeology and the history of ancient civilizations.

Today, tourism plays an important role in the socio–economic development of the Republic of Karakalpakstan. This has a great impact on the economy of the region, serves to create jobs, attract investment, and develop small and medium–sized businesses. Considering that one of the most important aspects of the economic contribution of tourism is the creation of new jobs, the local government focuses on the development of hotel services, restaurants, transportation services, tour guides, handicraft

workshops and many other services. In addition, the development of the tourism sector helps to improve the skills and qualifications of the local population, creates new opportunities for training and employment in the tourism sector.

According to the Statistics Department of the Republic of Karakalpakstan of the Statistical Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the gross territorial product of the Republic of Karakalpakstan in 2022 will be 29.9 trillion soums (for information: gross domestic product in 2021–25.68 trillion soums), of which 10.6 trillion soums corresponds to the service sector (Figure 1).

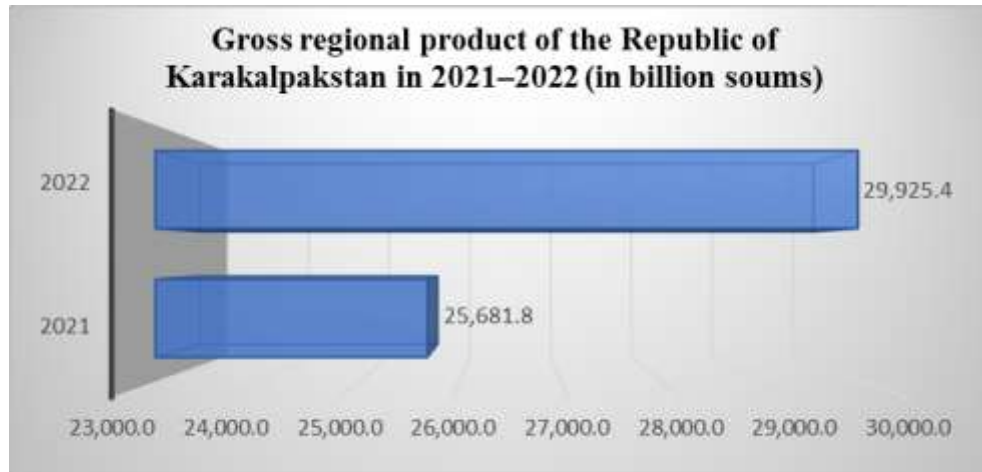


Figure 1. The size of the Gross Territorial Product of the Republic of Karakalpakstan in 2021–2022 [1]

In 2022, the volume of services provided in the field of tourism amounted to 3 trillion soums, that is, about 28.4 percent of the total services in the region. Of course, the result of 3.8 trillion soums in 2019 before the COVID–19 pandemic has not yet been achieved, but the growth trend in 2021–2022 can be predicted that the volume of services in the sector will fully recover with the result of 2024 (Figure 2).

The volume of services in the field of tourism is closely related to the number of tourists visiting the Republic of Karakalpakstan. For example, in 2019, 8194 tourists visited, in 2020 there was a significant decrease due to the pandemic (3902 tourists), and in 2021 the number of visitors reached 6853 (Figure 3).

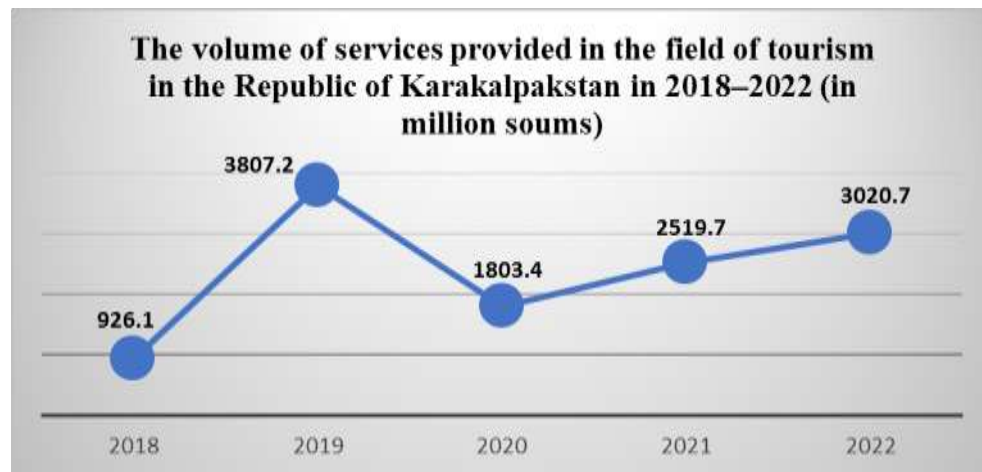


Figure 2. The volume of services provided in the field of tourism in the Republic of Karakalpakstan in 2018–2022 [2]

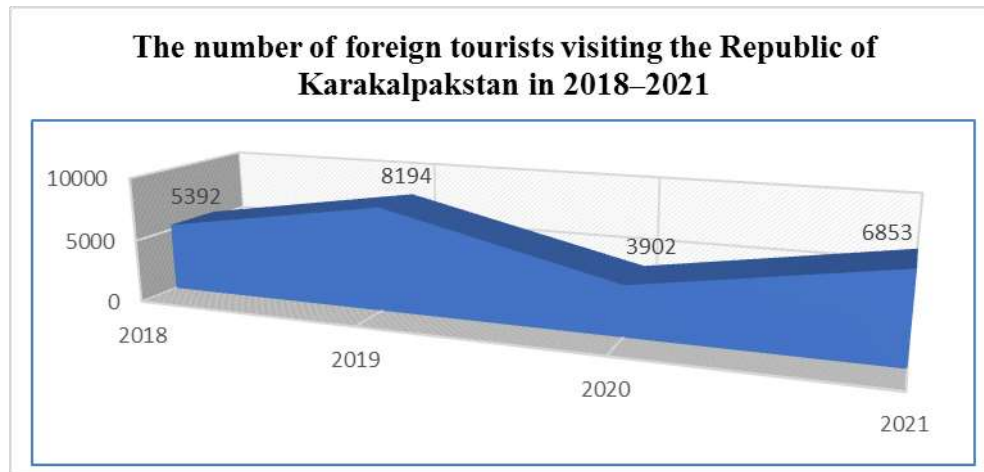


Figure 3. The number of foreign tourists visiting the Republic of Karakalpakstan in 2018–2021 [3]

Work is also underway to develop tourism infrastructure, including the construction and operation of new hotels, guesthouses, restaurants and entertainment facilities. For example, in 2018, there were 28 hotels operating in the region, and by 2021, this indicator will be 38 (Figure 4).

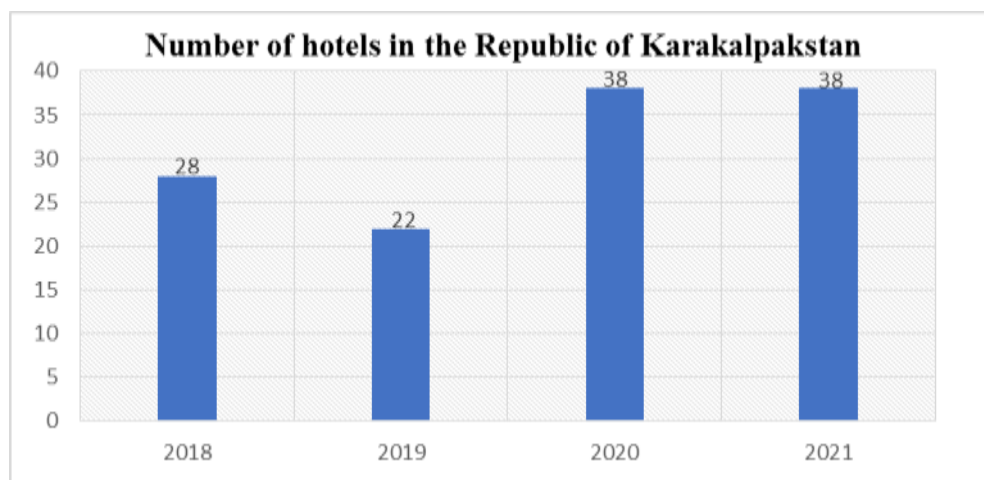


Figure 4. The number of hotels operating in the Republic of Karakalpakstan in 2018–2021 [4]

The development of the tourism potential of the region is carried out through the organization of new tourist destinations, cultural events and festivals that allow tourists to get acquainted with the rich culture and traditions of the Karakalpak people.

For example, the events such as “Stikhiya” electronic music festival, “Rally–Moynoq” car race, “NavrUz” ethno–festival, “99 dishes from fish”, gastronomic festival “National Horse Games”, Bakhshchilik art festivals attracts foreign and domestic tourists to the region and serves to increase the number of visits. The sustainable development of tourism is becoming an important direction of the development of the Republic of Karakalpakstan. This implies taking into account environmental, social and economic aspects in the development and implementation of tourism projects. Introduction of ecological standards, educating and informing the local population about the importance of preserving the environment and cultural heritage are some of the important steps being taken in this regard in the Republic.

In addition, tourism contributes to the growth of consumption and income of the local population. The arrival of tourists to the Republic of Karakalpakstan is accompanied by significant expenses for various services, including accommodation, meals, transportation and souvenir shopping. This creates additional demand for goods and services from local entrepreneurs and artisans, resulting in increased sales and revenue for local businesses. The tourism industry stimulates the development of the local economy, as tourists contribute significantly to the local income and tax base. An important aspect of the economic contribution of tourism is the possibility of diversification of the economic structure of the region. The development of tourism in the Republic of Karakalpakstan, where agriculture has traditionally played an important role, makes it possible to expand the economic base and reduce dependence on certain industries. In addition, tourism creates new opportunities for the development of handicrafts in the region. The opening of the “Yurta” craft center in Moynaq district, the production of black deer in Chimboy district, and the development of various souvenir products from the souls of deer animals in Shumanoy district are worth mentioning as examples.

Tourism in the Republic of Karakalpakstan serves to preserve and attract attention to the natural and cultural resources of the region. Restoration of the Aral Sea and preservation of its ecosystem has become an important direction of tourism, attracting tourists interested in ecology and nature. For example, a total of 461,000 hectares in the 2018–2019, 706,000 hectares in the 2019–2020, and 354,000 hectares in the 2020–2021 of desert and dust-resistant forests are being established in the bottom of the Aral Sea.

The increase in demand for tourism in the Republic of Karakalpakstan also contributes to the development of catering and retail trade. In particular, in 2022, a total of 1,437.0 billion soums worth of trade, living and dining services were provided, and this indicator increased by 227 billion soums compared to 2021. The number of business entities operating in the catering sector has also increased significantly in recent years. In particular, in 2022, the number of subjects in this field will be 1,497 in total, which have increased by 1.65 times compared to 2018 (Figure 5).



Figure 5. The number of business entities in the field of catering in the Republic of Karakalpakstan in 2018–2022 [5]

Additional income from tourism contributes to the development of local infrastructure and social services. For example, the increase in tax revenues from the tourism sector creates an opportunity to allocate funds for the improvement of roads, the construction and maintenance of hotels, and the development of educational and medical facilities in the region. This will not only improve the living conditions of the local population, but also make the Republic of Karakalpakstan a more attractive place to live and invest. The socio-cultural benefits related to tourism are also important in the development of the region. Communication with tourists from different countries and cultures serves to exchange experiences, increase intercultural understanding and create a positive image of the region. Local people

can be involved in the tourism industry as guides, translators, tour leaders and participants in cultural events, which serve to preserve and transmit the cultural heritage of the local people.

However, in order to fully realize the potential of tourism and maximize its economic contribution, it is necessary to solve some issues and problems. The development of tourism infrastructure, including the development of transport communications, accommodation of hotels and the provision of public utilities, requires large investments. It is also necessary to ensure a high level of service quality, to train and improve the skills of local personnel in the field of tourism.

An important step towards the development of tourism in the Republic of Karakalpakstan is to promote and market the tourism potential of the region both domestically and internationally. Effective advertising and information campaigns will help attract more tourists and increase their flow to the region. Tourist fairs, exhibitions and festivals are also held, which allow the local attractions and cultural heritage to be presented to the general public. Unfortunately, insufficient efforts are being made to promote the tourism potential of the region in international markets. Foreign tourists are mostly familiar with the Savitsky Museum in Nukus because of its participation in various international exhibitions, but they do not know enough about the ancient towns, pilgrimage sites and cultural festivals of the region.

One of the important aspects of the sustainable development of tourism is the involvement of the local population in the process of development and management of the tourism industry. This can be done through various mechanisms, including the establishment of local initiatives and communities, training and support of local entrepreneurs, encouraging the development of local crafts and agriculture, and the participation of local people in decision-making for the development of tourism. The sustainable development of tourism requires consideration of the socio-economic impacts on the local population. It is necessary to ensure that the benefits of tourism reach all segments of the population and are equitably distributed to improve the quality of life in the region. This may include creating training and development programs for local residents, improving access to social services and infrastructure, and encouraging cooperation between tourism businesses and local suppliers of goods and services.

Finally, the sustainable development of tourism should include monitoring and evaluation of its environmental, economic and social impacts. Regular analysis and evaluation of these aspects will permit to adjust the development strategy and plans to achieve a balance between the development of tourism and the preservation of the unique natural and cultural resources of the region. Monitoring allows you to observe changes in the environment, identify potential problems and take appropriate measures to prevent or reduce them. This includes controlling pollution of water and natural resources, eliminating negative impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems, and adhering to the principles of environmentally responsible tourism.

In addition, monitoring the economic aspects of tourism allows to assess its contribution to the local economy. This includes analysis of tourism revenue, job creation, entrepreneurship and investment development. The results of monitoring permit to determine the efficiency of investments, develop new tourism directions, attract investors and take measures to increase the economic stability of the region. Social monitoring includes assessing the impact of tourism on the local population and socio-cultural aspects of the region. In addition, the impact of tourism on the preservation and promotion of local traditions, customs and cultural heritage is assessed. The results of social monitoring help to develop programs and measures to ensure social justice, preserve the authenticity of cultural values and improve the well-being of the local population. In general, monitoring and evaluation of the sustainable development of tourism in the Republic of Karakalpakstan allows making informed decisions and correcting the development strategy. It is clear that they serve to achieve a balance between the development of tourism and the preservation of the unique natural and cultural resources of the region, the sustainable development of the tourism industry, the economy and the social sphere.

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