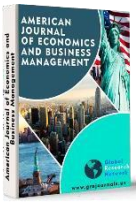

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Article

Tourist-Recreational Zones in Regions: Opportunities for Organization and Development

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Abstract: This article examines the opportunities for establishing and developing tourist-recreational zones in the regions of Uzbekistan. Drawing on international experience and national legislation, the study analyzes conceptual definitions, methodological approaches, and best practices in the organization of free tourist zones. The research highlights the strategic role of such zones in attracting foreign investment, improving infrastructure, and diversifying tourism services. Moreover, the article identifies key challenges related to organizational, economic, and legal aspects that hinder the effective functioning of tourist-recreational zones in Uzbekistan. Based on the findings, practical recommendations are proposed to enhance the competitiveness of regional tourism, ensure sustainable development, and strengthen the socio-economic impact of tourist-recreational zones.

Keywords: tourism, tourist area, tourist zone, tourist-recreational zone, tourist region, domestic tourism, inbound tourism, international tourism, tourism potential.

1. Introduction

International experience shows that in the process of enhancing tourism potential, improving the quality of services, attracting foreign investments in the sector, and most importantly, entering new tourism markets, a special type of free economic zones – tourist-recreational zones – play a significant role [1]. Such zones provide opportunities for the rapid development of tourism infrastructure, the creation of favorable conditions for foreign investors, and the expansion of modern types of tourism services [2], [3]. Therefore, in our country as well, special attention is being paid to the establishment of tourist-recreational zones and ensuring their effective operation. This, in turn, is considered an important factor in the sustainable development of tourist-recreational zones in the regions and in enhancing the competitiveness of national tourism [4].

Analysis of the Literature on the Topic. During the study of tourist zones, a range of scholarly works by foreign researchers, accessible through international scientific research databases, were analyzed. The review of these sources revealed the existence of certain terminological discrepancies, which, in turn, may affect their consistent interpretation and practical application within legislative frameworks [5].

Specifically, the term "tourist zone" is interpreted differently across the academic literature. For instance, according to the views of N.S. Kudryavtsev, Zh.G.

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Trabskaya, and L.V. Khoreva, a tourist zone represents a specific part of a destination that enjoys the highest demand among travelers. Such zones encompass the principal attractions that are promoted and offered within both national and international tourism markets [6], [7].

According to A.V. Lebedev, a "tourist zone" is defined as a tourism complex located within one or several territories that provides the necessary conditions for establishing interconnections among the components of the tourism industry, ensures the stable and dynamic development of a specific area, and satisfies the recreational needs of the population [8].

S.A. Stepanova defines a "tourist zone" as a territory bounded by one or several regions, characterized by a high concentration of tourist attractions, specific features of the area, the presence of developed infrastructure components, economic potential, and favorable natural and climatic conditions. Such a territory is shaped by the supply of tourist services, supported by a high level of transport accessibility, and possesses the capacity to integrate tourism services into external and internal programs for tourism development . Meanwhile, L.I. Poroiko, in her research, emphasizes the application of the cluster approach in the development of tourist-recreational zones [9].

Among domestic scholars studying the specific characteristics of free tourist zones, M.T. Alimova argues that special tourist economic zones are not a new phenomenon within the global practice of various types of special economic zones. At present, there are more than three thousand different free economic zones operating in 120 countries worldwide, with an annual turnover amounting to 600 billion US dollars.

According to A.Sh. Berdimurodov, a free tourist zone is a specially established territory, created in accordance with interstate agreements or special laws, with the purpose of developing the tourism sector of a particular area or region and implementing tourist and recreational activities [10]. Such a zone is defined as a territory where domestic and foreign entrepreneurs are provided with special conditions and granted tax, financial, customs, investment, and legal privileges to engage in tourism activities and to construct modern tourism infrastructure facilities, with the involvement of foreign capital and advanced international technologies.

According to I.S. Tukhliyev, a tourism activity territory is defined as a national area officially approved and declared by the relevant state authorities, which must contain at least 5,000 accommodation places for tourists and include two or three centers designated for receiving visitors. A tourist zone, on the other hand, is regarded as a territory established for the purpose of developing the tourism sector—including domestic and inbound tourism—while ensuring the protection and rational use of tourism resources [11]. Such a zone is characterized by clearly defined boundaries and encompasses one or several tourist resources.

2. Materials and Methods

In this study, the possibilities of establishing and developing tourist-recreational zones in the regions were analyzed on the basis of economic-geographical, social, and ecological approaches. As the scientific and theoretical foundation, the research works of foreign and domestic scholars, as well as the recommendations of the World Tourism Organization, were examined.

3. Results

Free tourist zones hold strategic significance in the development of tourism and are utilized as an effective tool to achieve considerable efficiency in various international practices. In particular, countries such as Malaysia, Dubai, and Singapore have made substantial contributions to the growth of both domestic and international tourism through the establishment of free tourist zones [12].

The main feature of such zones lies in their operation on the basis of economic and administrative incentives. This not only creates favorable conditions for foreign investors

but also expands opportunities for local entrepreneurs. The key advantages of free tourist zones can be summarized as follows (Figure 1):

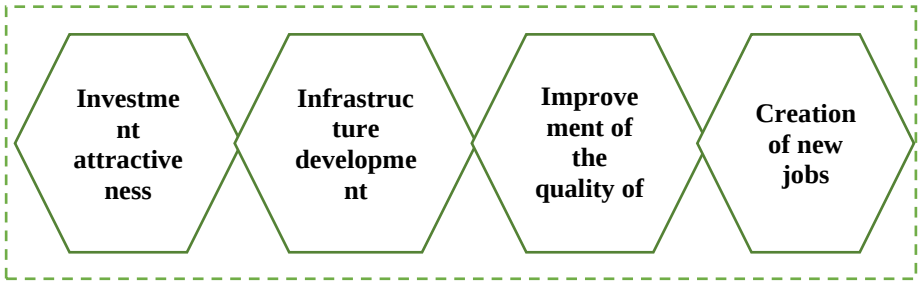

Figure 1. The Main Advantages of Free Tourist Zones

Based on the data presented in Figure 1, investment attractiveness increases the opportunities for attracting foreign capital through tax incentives and the removal of administrative barriers. In free tourist zones, infrastructure is developed by creating modern hotels, entertainment venues, shopping centers, and transport routes, which in turn contributes to the growth of tourist flows.

By fostering a healthy competitive environment between foreign and domestic tourism entities, the quality of services can be improved. At the same time, new jobs are created for the local population, positively influencing the functioning of the labor market [13].

"The establishment of free tourist zones in the natural areas of Uzbekistan will further enhance their importance as internationally recognized tourist centers. Moreover, the application of international recommendations within the framework of the UN World Tourism Organization's Development Program, the use of innovative technologies, and adherence to the principles of sustainable development will serve to ensure the long-term efficiency of these zones".

It should be emphasized that free tourist zones not only contribute to economic growth but also play an important role in the preservation of cultural heritage [14], [15]. In modern tourism, tourist zones are regarded as a factor that accelerates the rapid development of the sector while ensuring economic and social sustainability. For this reason, many countries around the world are establishing numerous tourist zones within their territories.

According to the definition of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), a tourist zone is understood as a territory that contains a large-scale system of specialized structures and services necessary for recreation and health improvement [16].

At present, more than 7,000 free tourist zones are operating worldwide. They are directed not only towards various areas of tourism but also towards the broader economic sector. Typically, tourist zones are established in territories with high natural, cultural, and historical potential [17], [18].

Free tourist zones serve as an important link in the implementation of open economy principles for their founders. Their operation is closely connected with processes of liberalizing and activating foreign economic activity. In such free economic zones, the level of economic development is comparatively high, while customs, tax, and investment conditions are considered favorable for both domestic and foreign investors.

The development of foreign free tourist zones has been shaped by processes carried out over many years on a global scale, which continue to ensure their effective functioning today.

According to the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Tourism," a tourist zone is defined as a territory with clearly defined boundaries, within which one or several tourist resources are located (natural, historical, socio-cultural, therapeutic and health-improving facilities, as well as other objects capable of meeting the needs of tourists and excursionists). Such a zone is established for the purposes of developing inbound and domestic tourism, promoting the tourism industry, protecting tourist resources, and ensuring their rational use. In accordance with the provisions of this law, the following types of tourist zones may be established: free tourist zones, small tourist zones, and special tourist zones [19].

A free tourist zone is equated with a free economic zone. A small tourist zone is equated with a small industrial zone, and the provisions of the legislation on small industrial zones are applied to small tourist zones.

A special tourist zone is a designated area in which tourism resources are concentrated, along with facilities of the tourism industry that ensure the provision of services to tourists through the formation of a specific tourism product within that territory. When establishing a special tourist zone, specific conditions, benefits, and preferences for the participants of the zone are envisaged.

Tourist zones at the national level are established on the basis of resolutions of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, while tourist zones at the local level are established on the basis of decisions of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, regional authorities, and the Tashkent city administration, in coordination with the authorized state body. In determining tourist zones, the availability of tourism resources, as well as the potential and opportunities of these territories for the development of various types of tourism, are taken into account [20].

In our view, a tourist zone should be understood as a geographically designated area within a tourist territory, which serves to concentrate tourist facilities formed by a collection of tourism resources. At the same time, it is appropriate to regard it as a destination that brings together attractions and appealing tourism resources of interest to visitors.

The tourism potential of a territory, in turn, represents the aggregate of its natural, productive, economic, and social resources within an established institutional environment that allows for the marketing of tourism products on the basis of sustainable development principles.

"The results of the research show that, under the current conditions of Uzbekistan, the least effective among all types of free economic zones are the special tourist-recreational zones. The main reasons for this situation include the following: organizational, economic, and legal issues that prevent the use of the full range of benefits related to preferential customs, taxation, and currency regulation in tourist-recreational areas; the allocation of large, undeveloped land plots; their remoteness from regional centers; the necessity of creating costly supporting infrastructure; and the high seasonality of demand".

Therefore, conducting scientific research aimed at assessing the performance of tourist-recreational zones in order to determine directions for their development in the regions has become an urgent requirement of the present time.

At the present stage, research on the territorial organization of tourism and recreational activities is considered a key issue, since such studies are closely connected with the economic development of regions and are essential in the preparation and coordination of projects, territorial planning systems, and other fundamental documents of the social sphere.

Given that tourism links together many neighboring regions, with tourism activities operating on this basis and being organized at the interregional level, we believe that it is appropriate to establish not only tourism clusters but also interregional special economic zones for tourism and recreation.

A comparative analysis of modern terminology for designating areas of tourism and recreational activity shows that in economic science, such concepts as free economic zones, free tourist zones, recreation zones, resorts, recreational areas, tourist-recreational zones, and recreational development zones are commonly used. In legislative practice, the following terms are applied: tourist-recreational zone, recreational areas, health and wellness complexes, tourism zones, tourist-recreational territories, and tourist-recreational clusters. A comparative analysis of the terms and spatial classifications used in scientific research and legislative practice to describe areas of tourism and recreational activity is presented in Table 1.

4. Discussion

Table 1.
Comparative Analysis of Terms and Spatial Classifications Representing Areas of Tourism and Recreational Activities in Scientific and Legislative Practice

Term	Legislative Practice	Definition
Free Economic Zones (M.K. Rashidov)	Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Free Economic Zones," December 15, 2005.	According to this Law, and in line with the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. ЗРУ-604 "On Special Economic Zones" dated February 17, 2020 (effective until May 19, 2020).
Special Economic Zones	Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Special Economic Zones," February 17, 2020, No. ЗРУ-604.	A special economic zone is a part of the territory of the Republic of Uzbekistan that has been allocated to attract foreign and domestic investment, introduce high-tech processes, develop production and export potential, and where special favorable conditions and privileges are granted.
Tourist-Recreational Zone	Based on the Law "On Special Economic Zones," Article 12.	A tourist-recreational zone is a designated territory for implementing investment projects to build modern tourism infrastructure facilities (hotel complexes, cultural-entertainment, shopping centers, and other tourism sites), as well as seasonal recreational

		areas, with all the necessary conditions to provide tourism services.
Free Tourist Territory (I.S. Tukhliyev, M.E. Pulatov, A.Sh. Berdimurodov)	In accordance with interstate agreements or special laws.	A free tourist territory is a specific area where tourism activities are carried out, with tax, financial, and legal benefits, and which meets the requirements of safe tourism.
Tourist-Recreational Zone (A.V. Novikov)	—	The author studied the main aspects of modern development of tourist-recreational zones as one of the tools for creating an attractive investment climate and developing innovative infrastructure in the region.
"Charvak" Tourist-Recreational Zone	Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PF-5273, 05.12.2017.	Created to further develop the tourism potential of Tashkent region and improve efficiency of its use; includes two pilot areas within the Charvak TRZ: "Chorvoq Darvozasi: Southern Khojikent" and Yusufhona, with master plans and concepts under development.
"Zomin" Tourist-Recreational Zone and International All-Season Resort	Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 06.04.2021.	Established to effectively utilize the tourism potential of mountain areas, create favorable conditions for business entities, and build international all-season recreation facilities and hotel complexes.
"Ohalik-Okbuiro-Mironqul" Tourist-Recreational Zone	Presidential Resolution of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PQ-60, 06.02.2024.	Created to efficiently use the tourism potential of Samarkand region, develop eco- and extreme tourism, and create new jobs in mountainous areas.
"Gelon" Tourist-Recreational Zone and International All-Season Resort	Presidential Resolution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 05.12.2024.	Established to continue reforms to increase the country's tourism potential, rationally use untapped opportunities in mountainous and foothill areas, and build eco-tourism infrastructure.

A comparative analysis of the terminology and spatial designation of areas of tourism and recreational activity in scientific and legislative practice shows that, in the regions of Uzbekistan during the period of 2017–2024, tourist-recreational zones were established primarily on the basis of the Law "On Special Economic Zones" and by Decrees of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Among them, two zones — the "Zomin" Tourist-Recreational Zone and International All-Season Resort and the "Gelon" Tourist-Recreational Zone and International All-Season Resort — are currently in operation.

The analysis revealed that existing tourist-recreational zones are unevenly distributed across the regions of Uzbekistan. Therefore, in order to ensure comprehensive socio-economic development of the regions, balance between territories and sectors, and to apply the method of territorial-systemic tourism zoning, it is necessary to establish tourist-recreational zones taking into account the geographic location of territories, the potential of tourism resources, the level of

tourist attractiveness, and the natural-climatic as well as cultural-historical resources.

Furthermore, in line with the instructions of the President, it is essential to expand the range of services, develop active tourism, design such integrated zones in other districts as well, and to pay special attention to environmental protection and the increase of green spaces.

At the present stage of tourism development, the effective establishment of tourist-recreational zones makes a significant contribution to the socio-economic development of the country. The uneven distribution of existing tourist-recreational zones across the regions of Uzbekistan highlights the necessity of strategic planning and ensuring balance in this sector. In this process, the application of the scientific foundations of territorial-systemic tourism zoning plays an important role.

Moreover, by thoroughly analyzing the geographical characteristics, natural-climatic conditions, cultural-historical heritage, and tourism resource potential of territories, it is possible to enhance their tourist attractiveness. On this basis, special attention should be given to the development of active tourism routes, the expansion of service offerings, and the promotion of ecological tourism.

At the same time, when establishing new tourist-recreational zones, it is essential to introduce innovative projects aimed at the comprehensive socio-economic development of regions. In accordance with the instructions of the President, every project should be implemented in compliance with environmental requirements, with the objectives of ensuring ecological sustainability, creating green areas, and protecting natural resources. This approach will not only increase the attractiveness of tourist areas but also have a positive impact on the living standards of the population.

5. Conclusion

In the establishment of tourist-recreational zones, ensuring proportionality between regions and applying modern innovative approaches serve as decisive factors in the development of the tourism sector.

Based on the research results, it is recommended to improve the method of organizing the activities of tourist-recreational zones in Uzbekistan through the establishment of new tourism zones on the basis of the proposed territorial-systemic tourism zoning approach:

1. In the Central Tourism Region, it is recommended to develop Samarkand as a cultural and historical tourism zone, taking into account its UNESCO World Heritage sites, historic city center, and ancient architectural monuments; to improve the infrastructure for pilgrimage tourism in Bukhara and create tourist areas around historic madrasahs and mosques; to promote ecotourism along Aydarkul Lake in Navoi, desert tourism in the Kyzylkum Desert, and expand cultural-historical tourism services in Sarmishsay; as well as to establish health and extreme tourism zones in the Zomin and Nuratau mountains in Jizzakh.

2. In the North-Eastern Tourism Region, it is recommended to establish tourism zones in Tashkent based on business tourism and modern infrastructure, to create venues for hosting international events, to open new ecotourism routes in Syrdarya, and to develop recreational areas in the scenic locations along the Syrdarya River.

3. In the Eastern Tourism Region, it is recommended to transform handicraft centers in Andijan into tourist-recreational zones; to develop ethnographic tourism zones in Namangan, particularly in Kokand and its surrounding ancient fortresses and cultural

sites; and to establish agro-tourism areas in Fergana, based on its natural landscapes and the export-oriented fruit and vegetable industry.

4. In the Southern Tourism Region, it is recommended to establish a cultural-historical zone in Kashkadarya, encompassing the historic sites of Shahrisabz; to develop zones specialized in archaeological tourism in Surkhandarya; and to create ethnographic and ecotourism zones in the Baysun mountains.

5. In the North-Western Tourism Region, it is recommended to develop ecological and ethnographic tourism zones in the Aral Sea and Muynak area of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, and to establish a zone in Khorezm focused on cultural and educational tourism around the historical monuments of the city of Khiva.

By establishing new tourism zones across the regions of Uzbekistan, the method of organizing the activities of tourist-recreational zones can be improved. This approach will expand the range of tourism services, promote active tourism, and enable the design of such integrated zones in other districts as well. Special attention will be given to green and ecological tourism, while ensuring balance between the regions and creating new jobs, thereby contributing to the improvement of the living standards of the local population.

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