

Modernization of Tourism Infrastructure in the Republic of Karakalpakstan

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Abstract. *This article examines the opportunities and existing challenges in modernizing the tourism infrastructure of the Republic of Karakalpakstan. It discusses processes that need to be implemented to enhance the tourism potential of the region, create new opportunities, and bring more economic benefits to the local economy. It highlights the decrees and initiatives of the President aimed at developing tourism in Karakalpakstan. Despite creating opportunities in tourism services, transport, hotels, tourist attractions, natural resources, and cultural heritage sites, challenges in infrastructure and service delivery may slow down progress. This article offers solutions to these issues, focusing on modernizing Karakalpakstan's tourism sector to diversify the economy, create new jobs, and improve the well-being of the local population.*

Key words: *Karakalpakstan tourism, modernization, tourism development, infrastructure, transportation system, presidential decrees, cultural heritage, hotel and tourism services, natural resources, international tourism, economic development, green tourism, tourism development strategy, improving service quality.*

Tourism is one of the most important sectors of the modern economy. It serves not only as a source of economic growth but also as a significant tool for strengthening a country's international image. The Republic of Karakalpakstan, located in the Aral Sea region, has the potential to attract tourists with its rich historical and cultural heritage and unique natural landscapes. The region offers favorable conditions for developing various types of tourism, generating significant interest from both local and foreign tourists.

In his decree No. PQ-4475, dated November 5, 2020, "On Measures for Tourism Development in the Republic of Karakalpakstan," President Shavkat Mirziyoyev set goals to develop tourism infrastructure, build new tourism facilities, promote ecotourism, and integrate Karakalpakstan's history and culture into tourism. This decree outlines mechanisms for attracting investments and creating new projects.

Additionally, decree No. PQ-7512, dated January 15, 2023, "On the Introduction and Modernization of Digital Technologies in the Tourism Sector," focuses on implementing digital technologies in tourism. Its primary goal is to digitize tourism infrastructure, develop online platforms, and enhance

tourism services through digital systems. Special attention is given to creating new apps and online services for tourists.

These decrees significantly impact the development of Karakalpakstan's tourism sector. They emphasize key areas such as constructing new hotels, promoting ecotourism, improving transportation systems, and introducing digital technologies in tourism.

The decrees issued by the President of Uzbekistan aim to modernize tourism infrastructure, implement new projects, and transform tourism into a vital source of economic growth for the country. Investments in tourism infrastructure are increasing annually. For instance, tourism-related investments in Uzbekistan in 2023 grew by 25% compared to 2022. Modern roads and airports are receiving special attention, with new international and domestic flight routes established in Nukus in 2023. New hotels and tourism centers are under construction in Karakalpakstan, expected to be completed by 2024–2025, which will create more jobs and contribute to the region's economic development. The number of tourists visiting Karakalpakstan in 2023 increased by 30% compared to 2019.

Significant efforts are being made to boost domestic tourism in the region. A series of projects and state programs are being implemented to attract more domestic tourists. The number of domestic tourists visiting Karakalpakstan in 2023 grew by 15% compared to 2022. For 2023–2024, new tourism centers and regional infrastructure projects are planned. Investments are being directed into hotels, tourism infrastructure modernization, and transportation infrastructure development. By 2024, ten new hotels and five tourism centers are expected to become operational. Investments from both the public and private sectors in domestic tourism development increased by 20% in 2023, primarily targeting transportation, hotels, excursion services, and ecological tourism.

The Aral Sea region's unique sand dunes, lakes, and other natural landscapes are famous attractions. To protect and showcase these areas, special ecological zones and informational ecological routes should be established. To attract tourists, cultural and historical heritage of the Aral Sea region should be utilized, with annual international ecological conferences, art exhibitions, and cultural festivals dedicated to the Aral Sea disaster. Local artisans' products should be showcased, and convenient air, rail, and bus transportation should be organized to reach the Aral Sea region.

Recommendations for Modernizing Tourism Infrastructure in the Republic of Karakalpakstan:

- Improve transportation infrastructure, including roads and airports.
- Develop and restore tourist facilities and attractions.
- Build infrastructure for specialized tourism (ecotourism, agrotourism, cultural tourism, wellness tourism, and sports tourism).
- Train qualified personnel for the tourism sector and enhance research in this field.
- Introduce sustainable tourism models, focusing on ecotourism and conservation of natural monuments.

By implementing these recommendations, Karakalpakstan's tourism potential can be rapidly developed, positioning the region as a leading tourism center not only regionally but also on the international stage.

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