TOURISM IN THE NAVOI REGION FROM A PHYSICAL-GEOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. The Navoi Region of Uzbekistan possesses significant tourism potential determined by its distinctive physical-geographical characteristics, including extensive desert landscapes, geological formations, mountain systems, natural water bodies, unique ecosystems, and a continental climate. The region occupies an important position in the central part of Uzbekistan and includes the Kyzylkum Desert, the Nuratau Mountains, the Zarafshan River valley, and several areas of ecological and landscape significance. These natural conditions create opportunities for the development of ecological, recreational, adventure, geological, landscape, and nature-based tourism. This review examines the principal physical-geographical factors influencing tourism development in the Navoi Region, with particular attention to relief, climate, hydrology, landscapes, biodiversity, and the spatial distribution of natural recreational resources. The study demonstrates that a geographical approach to tourism planning can contribute to the rational use of natural resources, diversification of tourist routes, and sustainable development of tourism in the region.

Keywords: Navoi Region, physical geography, tourism, natural resources, Kyzylkum Desert, Nuratau Mountains, landscape, ecotourism, recreation, Uzbekistan.

Introduction. Tourism development is closely associated with the geographical characteristics of a territory. Natural landscapes, climate, relief, water resources, vegetation, wildlife, and geological formations constitute the physical-geographical foundation for many forms of tourism. In regions characterized by diverse natural environments, geographical analysis is particularly important for identifying tourism potential and determining suitable areas for recreational activities. The Navoi Region occupies a distinctive geographical position in Uzbekistan. Its territory combines vast desert areas, mountain landscapes, river valleys, foothill zones, and anthropogenically transformed landscapes. The Kyzylkum Desert occupies a considerable part of the region, while the Nuratau Mountains form an important mountainous landscape in the southern and southeastern parts. The Zarafshan River and associated irrigated landscapes provide a contrasting environment to the surrounding arid territories.

The combination of these natural components gives the Navoi Region considerable potential for nature-based tourism. Desert tourism, mountain tourism, ecological tourism, geological tourism, recreational tourism, wildlife observation, and landscape-based tourism can all be developed within appropriate geographical and environmental limits. Therefore, the physical-geographical assessment of tourism resources is important not only for identifying attractive natural sites but also for determining their accessibility, seasonality, environmental sensitivity, and suitability for different types of tourism.

Geographical Setting of the Navoi Region

The Navoi Region is located in the central-western part of Uzbekistan. Its geographical position creates a transition between several major natural complexes of Central Asia. The territory includes predominantly arid landscapes, but significant variations in relief, altitude, climate, soils, vegetation, and hydrological conditions occur across the region. One of the most important physical-geographical

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features is the Kyzylkum Desert. The desert landscape is characterized by sandy plains, dune formations, sparse vegetation, saline and clayey surfaces, and areas of rocky terrain. Although desert environments are often regarded as harsh for conventional recreation, they possess considerable potential for specialized tourism. The southern and southeastern parts of the region are influenced by the Nuratau mountain system. Mountain landscapes provide a strong contrast to the lowland desert environment and create opportunities for hiking, trekking, landscape observation, photography, biodiversity tourism, and rural tourism.

The Zarafshan River valley represents another important geographical component. Compared with the surrounding arid areas, the river valley has relatively favorable conditions for settlement, agriculture, vegetation, and recreational activities. The contrast between riverine landscapes and desert environments increases the geographical diversity and tourism attractiveness of the region.

Physical-Geographical Factors of Tourism Development

Relief

Relief is one of the principal natural factors determining the spatial organization of tourism. The Navoi Region contains several major relief types, including plains, sandy desert formations, low mountains, foothills, and river valleys. The Kyzylkum landscape offers opportunities for desert tourism and off-road recreational routes. Sandy areas, dune formations, and broad open landscapes provide distinctive visual experiences and opportunities for adventure tourism.

Mountainous areas, particularly in the Nuratau system, have greater potential for active forms of recreation. Differences in altitude create variations in temperature, vegetation, scenery, and biodiversity. Mountain trails can therefore be developed for hiking and ecological tourism, provided that environmental carrying capacity is considered.

From a tourism-geographical perspective, relief should be evaluated according to: landscape attractiveness; slope steepness; altitude; accessibility; geological and geomorphological uniqueness; suitability for hiking and recreation; susceptibility to erosion and other environmental processes.

Climate

The climate of the Navoi Region is sharply continental and predominantly arid. High summer temperatures, low precipitation, strong solar radiation, and substantial seasonal temperature differences influence the spatial and temporal development of tourism. Climate creates both opportunities and limitations. Warm and dry conditions can be favorable for tourism during spring and autumn, whereas extremely high summer temperatures may restrict outdoor activities during daytime. Therefore, the most favorable periods for many forms of nature-based tourism are generally spring and autumn. Mountain areas may have different climatic conditions because temperature decreases with increasing altitude.

Climate should consequently be incorporated into tourism planning through the assessment of: air temperature; precipitation; duration of favorable weather conditions; extreme heat; wind conditions; solar radiation; seasonal comfort.

Hydrological Resources

Water resources are particularly important for tourism in arid regions. The Zarafshan River represents the principal natural watercourse associated with the region and has considerable geographical importance. Water bodies and riverine landscapes can contribute to recreational tourism, landscape tourism, biodiversity observation, and local leisure activities. In an arid environment, the presence of water significantly increases landscape attractiveness and ecological value. At the same time, tourism development around water resources should consider water scarcity, ecosystem vulnerability, pollution risks, and competition between tourism, agriculture, and domestic water consumption.

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Landscapes and Ecosystems

Landscape diversity is one of the strongest physical-geographical foundations for tourism development in Navoi Region. Several landscape complexes can be distinguished: desert landscapes; sandy landscapes; mountain and foothill landscapes; river-valley landscapes; irrigated agricultural landscapes; semi-desert and transitional landscapes. Each landscape type has a different tourism function.

Desert landscapes are suitable for ecological, adventure, photographic, geological, and ethnographic tourism.

Mountain landscapes are suitable for hiking, trekking, biodiversity observation, and recreational tourism.

River-valley landscapes may support recreation, landscape tourism, and rural tourism.

Foothill landscapes can provide transition zones between mountain and lowland tourism routes.

The geographical diversity of these landscapes allows the creation of integrated tourist routes connecting several natural environments within a single itinerary.

Conclusion. The Navoi Region possesses substantial tourism potential based on its unique physical-geographical characteristics. The combination of the Kyzylkum Desert, Nuratau Mountains, Zarafshan River valley, diverse landscapes, geological formations, and biological resources creates favorable conditions for the development of nature-based and specialized tourism. From a physical-geographical perspective, tourism resources are unevenly distributed across the region. Therefore, tourism development should be based on spatial differentiation rather than a uniform regional approach. Desert, mountain, river-valley, and foothill areas require different tourism models, infrastructure standards, and environmental-management mechanisms.

The most promising directions include ecotourism, desert tourism, mountain tourism, geotourism, landscape tourism, and rural tourism. However, their development should be accompanied by environmental monitoring, carrying-capacity assessment, protection of vulnerable ecosystems, and rational use of water and land resources. The application of GIS and spatial modelling can substantially improve tourism planning by integrating natural-resource potential, accessibility, environmental sensitivity, and infrastructure conditions. A GIS-based Tourism Potential Index for Navoi Region could serve as an important scientific and practical instrument for identifying priority tourism zones and supporting sustainable regional development. Thus, the physical geography of Navoi Region should be regarded not merely as a background factor for tourism but as a fundamental scientific basis for determining the location, specialization, seasonality, intensity, and sustainability of tourism activities.

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