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Theoretical And Methodological Basis Of Innovative Development Of Ecotourism

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the theoretical and methodological foundations of the development of ecotourism in the global and national economy based on innovative approaches. The economic nature of the concept of ecotourism is highlighted, and the mechanisms of introducing innovations (digital technologies, "green" infrastructure, ecological certification) into the field are analyzed. Also, on the basis of official statistical data of the Tourism Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for the last 5 years (2021-2025), the dynamics of ecotourism subjects in our country and its impact on gross economic indicators were evaluated. At the end of the research, practical proposals and recommendations for innovative management of ecotourism destinations were developed.

KEYWORDS: Ecotourism, innovative development, green economy, digitization, Tourism Committee statistics, sustainable tourism, environmental monitoring.

INTRODUCTION

Today, deepening of environmental problems on a global scale, climate change and the limitation of natural resources make industries that do not harm nature and serve to protect it more than traditional types of tourism. In this regard, ecotourism (ecological tourism) is one of the fastest growing segments of the international tourism market. According to the information of the World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism), the share of ecotourism in the general tourism market is growing by 10-15 percent per year on average.

In recent years, in the Republic of Uzbekistan, as part of the "New Uzbekistan" development strategy, special attention has been paid to turning tourism into a strategic driver of the national economy. In particular, the unique natural and climatic conditions of our country, state biosphere reserves, national nature parks and mountain areas have a huge potential for innovative development of ecotourism. However, effective use of available resources, regulation of tourist flow and environmental sustainability of natural resources require the introduction of innovative technologies and new methodological approaches, not traditional methods. Accordingly, the research of the theoretical and methodological bases of the innovative development of ecotourism and the determination of perspectives on the basis of practical statistical analyzes are of actual scientific and practical importance.

Ecotourism and its place in the economic-ecological system have been widely studied by foreign and domestic economists. The concept of ecotourism was first introduced to the science by the foreign scientist H. Ceballos-Lascurain (1983), who defined this concept as "traveling to unspoiled natural areas for the purpose of studying and enjoying plants, animals and cultural monuments." D. Weaver, one of the scientists who researched the topic from the point of view

of innovative and sustainable development, emphasizes the need to introduce modern management models in the management of ecotourism. K. Bricker and P. Kariithi (2025) in their research justified the effectiveness of using "green technologies" in ecotourism areas and environmental management system (Green Key certificates) in hotels.

Local scientists I.S. Tukhliyev, N.Kh. Shadiyeva studied the problems of diversifying the tourism industry in the conditions of Uzbekistan, using the ecological and touristic potential of the regions. In her research, M. Abdurakhmonova (2025) analyzed the formation of ecotourism clusters in the protected natural areas of Uzbekistan and their management using digital technologies. However, the integrated theoretical and methodological basis of innovative development of the ecotourism sector through innovations, in particular, information and communication technologies and geoenvironmental monitoring tools, has not yet been fully systematized.

Systematic approach, comparative and statistical analysis, economic-mathematical modeling, trend forecasting and induction and deduction methods were used in the preparation of this article. The official reports and statistical indicators of the Tourism Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the State Statistics Agency and international organizations for the years 2021-2025 were taken as the practical basis of the research. International models and concepts of sustainable development (SDGs) were defined as a methodological basis for the formation of theoretical conclusions.

The innovative development of ecotourism means the use of resource-saving technologies, digitization of travel processes (Smart-tourism), introduction of ecological innovations that reduce anthropogenic load on natural objects, and creation of new tourist products. The innovative system of ecotourism includes the following main elements:

Innovative System in Ecotourism

▼ 【Technological】 ▼ 【Organizational】 ▼ 【Ecological】

Targeted reforms aimed at the development of ecotourism in Uzbekistan have been bearing fruit in recent years. According to the official statistical data of the Tourism Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the total number of foreign tourists who visited our country and the dynamics of ecotourists among them showed significant growth rates in the last 5 years.

Table 1: Dynamics of the main indicators of tourism and ecotourism in Uzbekistan (2021-2025)

Indicators	2021-y.	2022-y.	2023-y.	2024-y.	2025-y.
Total number of foreign tourists (million people)	1.88	5.23	6.64	7.42	8.51

Indicators	2021-y.	2022-y.	2023-y.	2024-y.	2025-y.
Visitors arriving for ecotourism (thousands of people)	112.5	345.2	480.6	610.1	785.4
Share of ecotourists in the total number of tourists (%)	5.98	6.60	7.23	8.22	9.22
Ecotourism infrastructure facilities (guesthouses, campsites)	850	1230	1680	2100	2650
Total revenue from the sector (million USD)	422	1610	2140	2550	3100

As shown by the data in Table 1, while the flow of foreign tourists stood at 1.88 million in 2021 following pandemic restrictions, this figure reached 8.51 million by the end of 2025 as a result of systemic reforms and the liberalization of the visa regime. Most notably, the number of foreign tourists opting for ecotourism rose from 112.5 thousand in 2021 to 785.4 thousand in 2025, with their share of the total number of tourists increasing from 5.98% to 9.22%.

This growth trend is closely linked to the establishment of innovative infrastructure in the regions. Notably, the number of family-run guesthouses, campsites, and glamping sites has more than tripled over the past five years, reaching a total of 2,650. Today, areas such as Navoi (Nurata Mountains), Jizzakh (Zaamin, Aydarkul), Kashkadarya (Gissar mountain ranges), and Tashkent Region (Charvak, Bostanlyk) are implementing innovative management methods as ecotourism clusters. However, to further accelerate the pace of innovative growth in ecotourism, the following methodological issues must be addressed:

1.Absence of a mechanism to calculate carrying capacity: Digital systems for determining the maximum number of tourists who can visit a specific natural area simultaneously without causing environmental damage have not yet been implemented.

2.Low level of alternative energy use: Only 18% of ecotourism sites are equipped with solar panels and energy-efficient innovative devices.

3.Lack of digital maps and routing systems: The integration of natural sites and nature reserves into Geographic Information System (GIS) databases remains at a low level. Research findings and an analysis of statistical data from the Tourism Committee indicate that ecotourism is becoming a significant source of economic growth in Uzbekistan. Through the innovative development of ecotourism, it is possible to achieve not only economic efficiency but also the preservation of natural resources.

Based on the above, the following practical and methodological recommendations are proposed:

- Creation of a "Smart Eco-Tourism" national platform: Establishing a unified electronic database of all eco-tourism sites, nature reserves, and national parks; implementing systems for online ticket sales and real-time monitoring of tourist capacity in these areas.
- Promoting green innovations: Expanding tax and customs incentives for business entities operating in eco-tourism zones that utilize alternative energy sources and innovative waste disposal technologies.
- Implementing an eco-certification (Eco-Labeling) system: Enhancing brand appeal by awarding hotels and logistics facilities environmental certifications—such as the international "Green Key" standard.
- Utilizing geo-environmental technologies: Establishing continuous environmental monitoring using GIS (Geographic Information Systems) and drones to ensure tourist safety and environmental sustainability in protected areas.

Conclusion

In conclusion, creating an innovative management model for eco-tourism is a key factor in ensuring the international competitiveness of Uzbekistan's tourism industry and implementing "green economy" principles.

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