



ASSESSMENT OF THE TOURISM POTENTIAL OF ZAAMIN NATIONAL PARK BASED ON INTERNATIONAL CRITERIA

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Abstract: *This article analyses the tourism potential of Zaamin National Nature Park, located in the Jizzakh Region, on the basis of international assessment criteria - the Destination Criteria of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) and the guidelines of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) for managing tourism in protected areas. At a time when the development of ecological and mountain tourism has become one of the priority directions of state policy in Uzbekistan, assessing the recreational potential of protected areas in a scientifically grounded manner and in accordance with international standards is of pressing relevance. The article systematises official data on the park's natural-geographic indicators and biodiversity and, on that basis, offers an expert assessment of its tourism potential against ecological, socio-economic and management criteria, together with proposed directions for development.*

Keywords: *Zaamin National Park, tourism potential, international criteria, ecological tourism, GSTC, IUCN, protected area, sustainable tourism, Jizzakh Region.*

Introduction

Protected natural areas occupy a special place in the modern tourism industry: they serve both to conserve unique ecosystems and to connect visitors with natural values. The IUCN specifically emphasises that protected areas can



become a positive force for nature conservation through tourism. In recent years Uzbekistan has been carrying out large-scale reforms aimed at the rapid development of domestic and international tourism, in which mountain and ecological tourism have been designated as priority directions.

Zaamin National Nature Park in the Jizzakh Region is one of the oldest and most popular mountain-tourism destinations in the country. Because of its mild climate, juniper forests and rushing rivers, the park is often called the “Switzerland of Uzbekistan”. However, the area’s tourism potential is frequently described only in narrative terms and has not been assessed systematically against international, measurable criteria. The aim of this article is to propose a methodological approach for assessing the tourism potential of Zaamin National Park on the basis of international standards such as those of the GSTC and IUCN, and to apply it using official data.

Main body. Zaamin National Nature Park is located in the Zaamin and Bakhmal districts of the Jizzakh Region, on the northern slope of the Turkestan Range. According to official data, the park covers an area of 23,429.2 hectares, with absolute elevations ranging from 1,000 to 4,033 metres; the highest point is the summit of Shavkartog in the Turkestan Range. Established in 1926, it is among the oldest protected areas in Uzbekistan. Its main natural-geographic indicators are presented in (Table 1)

Table 1

Main natural-geographic indicators of Zaamin National Park

Indicator	Value
Location	Jizzakh Region, Zaamin and Bakhmal districts; northern slope of the Turkestan Range
Area	23,429.2 hectares
Elevation range	1,000-4,033 m (above sea level)



Indicator	Value
Highest point	Summit of Shavkartog (Turkestan Range)
Year established	1926 (originally the Guralash Reserve); as a national park 1970s
Distance to nearby cities	~55 km south-east of Jizzakh; ~159 km east of Samarkand

One of the principal factors determining the park's tourism appeal is its rich biodiversity. According to official sources, more than 1,216 species of wild plants grow in the area, 107 of which have documented medicinal properties. The fauna is likewise diverse, and a number of species are listed in the Red Book of Uzbekistan. These indicators are summarised in (Table 2). In addition, the park contains ecotourism sites such as Boboyongoq, Uriklisoy, Sharshara, Sherbulak and the Thousand-Year-Old Juniper, and 456 hectares of land have been specially allocated for the development of ecotourism.

Table 2

Main biodiversity indicators of Zaamin National Park

Group	Number of species
Wild plants (total)	more than 1,216
Of which medicinal plants	107
Mammals	more than 30
Birds	more than 102
Reptiles	more than 14
Invertebrates	more than 282
Listed in the Red Book (mammals / birds)	3 and 12

International assessment criteria and methodology. Two principal international standards were used to assess the tourism potential. The first is the Destination Criteria developed by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council



(GSTC), which are divided into four groups: (A) sustainable management; (B) socio-economic sustainability; (C) cultural heritage; and (D) environment and biological diversity. The second consists of the guidelines of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas for managing tourism and visitors in protected areas, together with the Green List criteria. In this article the assessment was carried out against five integral criteria on a 5-point scale (1-very low, 5-very high). The score assigned to each criterion represents the author's expert assessment based on the official data cited above (Table 3).

Table 3

**Assessment of the tourism potential of Zaamin National Park
against international criteria**

Criterion	Assessment content	Score (1–5)	Remark
Natural-recreational resources (IUCN)	Landscape diversity, elevation range, biological richness	5	High potential
Environment and biodiversity (GSTC-D)	Red Book species, protection regime, ecosystem condition	5	High potential
Tourism infrastructure (GSTC-A)	Availability of sanatorium, hotels and roads; capacity	3	Moderate
Accessibility (GSTC-A)	Proximity to major cities (Jizzakh, Samarkand)	4	Good
Management and monitoring (IUCN/GSTC-A)	Capacity calculation, visitor monitoring, sustainable plan	2	Low



Criterion	Assessment content	Score (1–5)	Remark
Average score	Mean across the five criteria	3.8	Upper-medium to high

The assessment results show that the *natural-resource and ecological potential* of Zaamin National Park fully meets the international criteria (5 out of 5). At the same time, *management and monitoring* remains the weakest link: management tools required by the GSTC and IUCN - such as the scientific calculation of tourism carrying capacity, the monitoring of visitor flows and a sustainable development plan are not yet sufficiently developed. Field research and official statistical data are needed to fill these gaps.

Based on the assessment results, the following priority measures are proposed: calculating ecological carrying capacity using the IUCN methodology and distributing visitor flows across zones; developing a sustainable tourism management plan and introducing a monitoring system in accordance with GSTC requirements; improving visitor infrastructure through eco-tickets, route maps and information centres; involving the local population in ecotourism services in order to increase socio-economic benefits; and preparing for a Green List or GSTC certification process. These measures would help transform the park's high natural potential into a sustainable tourism product of international standard.

For an integrated view of the assessment results, a SWOT analysis of the park's tourism potential is summarised in (Table 4). By comparing strengths and weaknesses with opportunities and threats, it helps to justify the priority measures.

Table 4

SWOT analysis of the tourism potential of Zaamin National Park



Strengths (S)	Weaknesses (W)
Rich biodiversity (1,216 plant species); wide elevation range (1,000-4,033 m); unique mountain-juniper ecosystem; “Switzerland of Uzbekistan” brand; long conservation history (since 1926)	Tourism carrying capacity not scientifically calculated; weak monitoring system; no sustainable management plan; partly outdated infrastructure; no international certification
Opportunities (O)	Threats (T)
State policy supporting ecotourism; proximity to the Samarkand tourist flow; prospect of GSTC/IUCN Green List certification; potential to increase local employment	Ecological pressure from uncontrolled visitor flows; climate change; seasonality; conflict between the protection regime and tourism interests

Conclusion

The analysis conducted shows that the tourism potential of Zaamin National Nature Park is high when viewed through the lens of international criteria. Its rich biodiversity, wide elevation range (1,000-4,033 m) and unique mountain-juniper ecosystems make it one of the most promising destinations in Uzbekistan for both ecological and mountain tourism. At the same time, the expert assessment carried out against the GSTC and IUCN standards (an integral average of 3.8 points) identified significant gaps in the areas of tourism management, carrying-capacity calculation and monitoring.

Thus, in order to transform the park’s natural potential into a genuinely competitive tourism product, it is necessary to establish a management system that conforms to international sustainable-tourism standards. In future research it would be advisable to supplement the assessment matrix proposed in this article with data from field research and geographic information system (GIS)



analysis, and to calculate empirical indicators of visitor flows and ecological carrying capacity.

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