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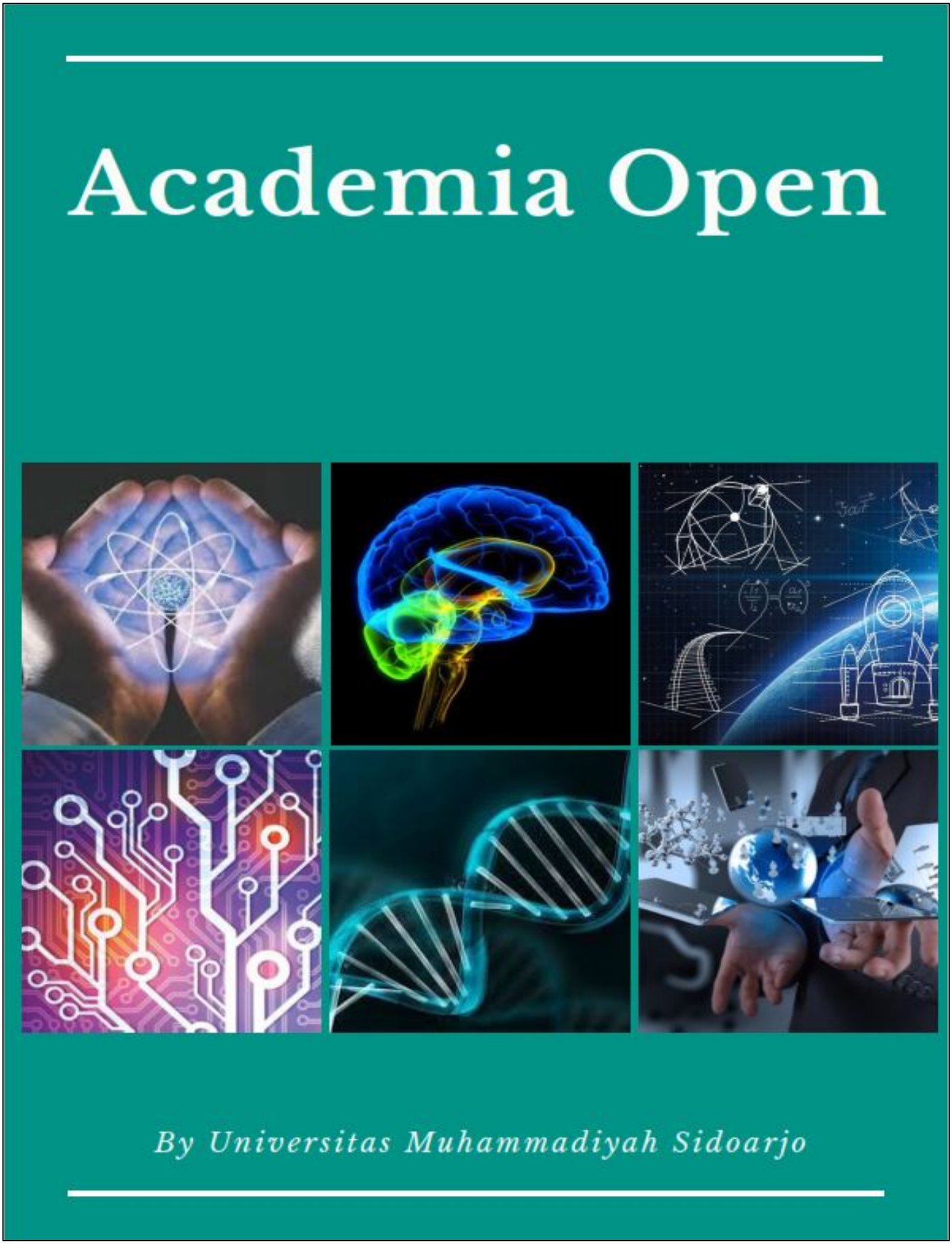

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Analysis of Safari Tourism Development Opportunities in Kashkadarya Region

Analisis Peluang Pengembangan Pariwisata Safari di Wilayah Kashkadarya

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Abstract

General Background: Tourism is a crucial driver of economic growth, particularly in emerging destinations. **Specific Background:** The Kashkadarya region of Uzbekistan has significant potential for safari tourism, yet infrastructure gaps and sustainability challenges persist. **Knowledge Gap:** Despite increased tourist arrivals and revenue, there is limited research on the socio-economic impact of tourism and strategies for sustainable development in Kashkadarya. **Aims:** This study evaluates the socio-economic impact of tourism and explores the development potential of safari tourism in the region. **Results:** A mixed-methods approach, including statistical analysis (2017–2024), interviews with stakeholders, and field surveys of 1,564 tourism sites, revealed a 65% rise in tourist arrivals (2.54 million in 2024) and a tenfold increase in foreign currency revenue ($105.8 million). However, infrastructure disparities, limited eco-friendly transport, and uneven lodging distribution remain challenges. **Novelty:** The study proposes a framework integrating infrastructure modernization, eco-innovation, and community engagement to enhance sustainable tourism development. **Implications:** Findings highlight the need for equitable infrastructure investment, environmental sustainability, and stakeholder collaboration to position Kashkadarya as a leading safari tourism destination in Central Asia. Future research should explore agro-tourism and digital nomadism to further diversify the regional tourism economy.

Highlights:

1. Issue: Tourism growth in Kashkadarya faces infrastructure and sustainability challenges.
2. Findings: Tourist arrivals +65%, revenue ×10, but infrastructure gaps persist.
3. Solution: Modernization, eco-innovation, and community engagement for sustainable tourism.

Keywords: Safari tourism, Kashkadarya region, tourism infrastructure, socio-economic development, sustainable tourism, Uzbekistan

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Introduction

Our country, historically located at the crossroads of the Great Silk Road, has long attracted numerous tourists with its rich cultural heritage, traditions, and diverse natural landscapes [1]. Among the regions of Uzbekistan with high tourism potential, Kashkadarya stands out. It is distinguished by its unique natural resources, desert areas, lakes and rivers, mountainous landscapes with diverse rare wildlife, and UNESCO World Heritage sites such as Shahrisabz. However, today, Kashkadarya faces pressing challenges in integrating tourism types such as safari tourism—which involves observing rare wildlife and exploring untouched natural environments—alongside its focus on traditional tourism models [2].

The safari tourism industry is now a key economic driver for many countries, contributing significantly to national currency revenues and improving local employment rates [3]. In Uzbekistan, regions like Kashkadarya possess substantial opportunities to develop safari tourism. However, advancing this sector requires in-depth scientific research to clearly identify and unlock its potential [4]. Additionally, since safari tourism sites in Kashkadarya are often located far from residential areas, infrastructure issues and service-related shortcomings remain significant obstacles [5].

Globally, countries are prioritizing ecological sustainability, the conservation of rare species, and measures to prevent environmental pollution to maximize revenue from safari tourism [6]. In Kashkadarya, the presence of the Hisor State Reserve, Kitab Geological Reserve, Mubarak State Reserve, forested areas, vast sand dunes in Mirishkor district, and the desert landscapes of Sechankul highlight the region’s immense potential for safari tourism. However, inadequate road infrastructure, a lack of qualified guides, and insufficient marketing strategies hinder the realization of these opportunities [7]. During our research, we have identified the following objectives:

1. Analyze the current tourism potential of Kashkadarya region.

2. Assess the existing infrastructure capabilities for safari tourism.

3. Develop strategies to elevate safari tourism to the level of traditional tourism models.

The results of this study will contribute new insights to the academic literature on tourism development in Kashkadarya and serve as a practical guide for stakeholders in the region.

Methods

Data collection conducted with the Kashkadarya Regional Tourism Department, local tourism operators, and community leaders to gather insights on current challenges and opportunities. Surveys of 1,564 tourism sites, including cultural heritage locations, hotels, and transport hubs, were conducted to assess infrastructure readiness. Analysis of government reports and investment plans, such as the PF-6165 Presidential Decree, provided data on funding allocations and development priorities.

Analytical Framework a mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Statistical analysis of tourist flow data (2017–2024), infrastructure growth metrics (hotels, hostels, family guesthouses), and transportation efficiency. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts and field survey responses to identify key challenges and opportunities.

Evaluation Criteria the study evaluated tourism potential based on the following criteria:

1. Infrastructure: Availability of lodging, transport, and tourist services.

2. Accessibility: Proximity to major cities and transportation hubs.

3. Sustainability: Environmental impact and eco-friendly practices.

4. Community Engagement: Involvement of local communities in tourism activities.

Result and Discussion

Result

Tourist arrivals and economic impactfrom 2022 to 2024, tourist arrivals surged by 65%, with foreign tourists increasing tenfold (Table 1). Revenue from tourism reached $105.8 million in 2024, driven by infrastructure investments and international promotions [8].

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Indicator	2022	2023	2024 (10 months)
Total tourists	1,538,687	2,101,300	2,542,963
Foreign tourists	53,204	222,300	515,897
Revenue (USD)	11.3M	44.9M	105.8M

Table 1. ***Tourist Inflow and Revenue (2022–2024)***

The sharp increase in foreign tourists (from 53,204 in 2022 to 515,897 in 2024) highlights the region's growing appeal as a tourist destination. However, the majority of tourists are still domestic, indicating the need for targeted international marketing campaigns.

1. Accommodation: Hotel capacity grew by 169% (16 to 43 hotels), while hostels expanded from 1 to 51 units (Table 3).

2. Transportation: Microbuses dominate (50 units), but electric vehicles are absent (Table 2).

3. Regional Disparities: 60% of lodging is concentrated in Qarshi and Shahrisabz, neglecting rural areas like Mirishkor and Yakkabog'.

Vehicle Type	Quantity
Microbuses	50
Buses	23
Quad bikes/Others	23
Electric vehicles	0

Table 2. ***Tourism Transport Services (2024)***

The lack of electric vehicles is a significant barrier to eco-tourism development. Investments in eco-friendly transport could enhance the region's appeal to environmentally conscious travelers.

a. 1,468 cultural heritage sites, including 1,189 archaeological monuments.

b. Key safari zones: Hisor State Reserve, Kitab Geological Reserve.

Infrastructure Type	Quantity
Hotels	43
Hostels	51
Family Guesthouses	262
Tourist Routes	73

Table 3. ***Distribution of Tourism Infrastructure (2024)***

The concentration of infrastructure in urban areas limits the potential for rural tourism development. Expanding lodging and services in rural districts could attract more tourists to underdeveloped areas.

Discussion

The Kashkadarya region has achieved notable progress in tourism development, driven by its cultural heritage, unique natural resources, and strategic investments. The implementation of Presidential Decree PQ-104 between 2022 and 2024 led to an 836% increase in tourism revenue, reflecting the region's growing economic potential. This growth was fueled by infrastructure projects, including new hotels, tourist routes, and restored cultural sites. In 2024, the region attracted 2.54 million visitors, with foreign tourist numbers increasing tenfold, solidifying its position as an emerging global destination [8].

UNESCO World Heritage sites like Shahrisabz have cemented Kashkadarya's status as a cultural tourism hub. Its 1,468 cultural heritage sites, including 1,189 archaeological monuments, draw over 700,000 annual visitors. These sites not only boost tourism but also facilitate international cultural exchange programs, elevating the region's global profile [9].

The Hisor State Reserve, Kitab Geological Reserve, and Mubarak Nature Reserve offer exceptional opportunities for safari tourism. Mountainous terrains, desert ecosystems, and diverse wildlife create a strong foundation for eco-tourism. However, several challenges hinder the full realization of this potential:

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Infrastructure Imbalance: While cities like Qarshi and Shahrisabz boast developed infrastructure, rural districts such as Mirishkor, Yakkabog‘, and Dehqonobod lack adequate lodging, transportation, and tourist services. This disparity limits equitable distribution of tourism benefits [11].

Lack of Eco-Friendly Transport: The absence of electric vehicles and reliance on fuel-based transportation contradict eco-tourism goals, deterring environmentally conscious travelers. Poor waste management systems further exacerbate environmental concerns [12].

Shortage of Skilled Personnel: Only 45 certified guides serve 2.5 million tourists, restricting specialized services like safari tours and cultural excursions [13].

Seasonal Tourism Peaks: Visitor numbers concentrate in spring and autumn, creating revenue instability. Promoting winter sports and cultural festivals could mitigate seasonality [14].

Recommendation

Develop roads, lodging, and digital services (e.g., Wi-Fi) in rural areas to balance tourism distribution.

Introduce eco-friendly transport (e.g., electric buses) and adopt sustainable technologies through international partnerships.

Train local communities in hospitality, guiding, and eco-tourism practices.

Promote Kashkadarya’s cultural heritage and safari tourism globally via platforms like Kazan EKSPO.

Implement waste management systems and eco-certification programs for tourism businesses.

Strengthen collaboration between government, private sector, and local communities.

Conclusion

Despite significant achievements, Kashkadarya’s tourism sector requires equitable infrastructure development, eco-innovation, and stakeholder collaboration to ensure sustainable growth. Future research should explore the economic impacts of agro-tourism and digital nomadism. This study highlights the need for an integrated approach combining infrastructure improvements, ecological practices, and community engagement to position Kashkadarya as Central Asia’s premier safari tourism destination.

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