

## Perspectives of the Tourism development in Georgia

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### Abstract

Tourism development in Georgia, taking into consideration the geographic location of the country, unique natural and resort potential, existence of the historic monuments etc. creates the opportunities for the rapid development of tourism industry in Georgia. This research paper tries to examine tourism-recreational potential of Georgia, historical and geographic sights of the country, development of the tourism-recreational economy, analyzing of the importance of the different recreational and tourist places in Georgia, making comparative analysis of the different types of tourism, presenting main strengths and weaknesses of the tourism development in Georgia.

**Keywords:** Tourism, recreation, Geographic location, Historic monuments, International travelers.

### Introduction

The economy of modern Georgia is transferring to the market relationships. Tourism and recreation are very sensitive toward any political, economic or social processes. Any changes in those fields toward the negative direction are followed by rapid reaction – decreasing the number of tourists and decreasing the attraction of foreign currency in the economy of the host country. It can be mentioned, that tourism-recreational economy of Georgia has passed very difficult period and now is in the period of development.

Except of incomes, well-organized tourism industry can bring many benefits, particularly: it promotes the increasing the employment as concretely in the tourism sector, also in its neighboring fields. Tourism, as important resource for the regional development, is able to prevent the migration of population (this circumstance is especially important for the preventing the migration of the people from mountain regions, where there are good conditions for the spending winter holidays etc.); in case of the sustainable development, tourism provides the protection of natural environment and historic-cultural values; creates the positive image for the investment's attraction; promotes the people to people contacts and strengthening cultural ties.

Meanings – “tourism” and “recreation” have many common, but, there are differences: different types of tourism (rest, treatment, fun, cognition etc.), means the implementation of the professional actions in distance with the permanent residence, so, in this case the travel is necessary condition. During the recreation, the same

actions are held without travel - in the usual environment for the personality. The coincidence of two meanings takes place, when tourist travels with rest purposes. Usually, the satisfaction of the tourist-recreational demands are held in big cities and resorts. Officially, there are known 102 resorts and 182 resort places in Georgia (Pavliashvili N. 2003. P. 167).

Resort represents the territory, which possesses tourism-recreational resources, where the necessary buildings and infrastructure for the rest and treatment are located. Resort place is rich with tourism – recreational resources, but has not the necessary facilities for the vacationers.

### Tourism-Recreational Resources (TRR)

For any tourism-recreational activities the existence of the appropriate conditions are necessary. The natural and cultural values of the country gives an opportunity, to develop both – winter and summer species.

TRR are divided on two groups: natural and anthropogenic resources:

To the group of natural TRR are included climate, balneology, sea, snow-glacier, speleological, inland waters, forest etc. resources.

For the treatment-holidays, the most convenient are the low (500-1000m above the sea) and middle (1000-1500 m above the sea) mountainous resort zones, where are located popular climate resorts – Bakuriani, Bakhmaro,

Rica, Tsemi, also, the rest places around Tbilisi – Tskneti, Tsavkisi, Kojori, Manglisi. In general, there are 43 climate resorts in Georgia (Pavliashvili N. 2003. p. 168).

With regard to the balneology resources, they are represented by the waters with different temperature, mineralization etc. also medicinal mud. There are about 2 million mineral springs in Georgia, daily debit of which prevails 130 million liters. Especially important resources are in Kazbegi, Tskhaltubo, Java and Borjomi Regions. Among of 102 resorts, functioning of 59 is more or less connected with the treatment waters, among of them 28 are with balneology, 31 – mixed, 17 Balneology-climatic and 14 climate-balneology directions. Among of medical mud resorts, there are only two, which are functioning in the modern period – Akhtala and Kumisi (Pavliashvili N. 2003. P. 169).

As it is known, the seaside is the most attractive Tourist-Recreational resource in the World. The length of sea coast in Georgia prevails 300 Km. In the seaside of Georgia, the convenient period for holidays is at least 130-134 days, when, the same date in Baltic Regions is 60-90 days, and in Crimea 120 days (Kornilova, 1979). The whole length of Georgian seaside includes beaches, which are covered by sand and gravel. Additionally, it should be mentioned about aesthetic value of landscape. The biggest part of seaside is located on the coasts of Abkhazia (Sokhumi, Leselidze, Gagra, Bichvinta, Gantiadi etc.) and Ajara (Kobuleti, Tsikisdziri, Mtsvane Kontskhi, Batumi). In Ureki (Guria Region) one of the most natural-recreational resource is represented by magnetic sands, which includes about 4 % of Magnetism and Titan-Magnetism and it is positively reflected on the functioning of the children's organism and vessels system (Elizbarashvili N. 1980).

From the second half of the XX Century, in the whole World the rest in the winter resorts has been activated. For its development, it is necessary the existence during the concrete period of time (3 Months and more) sustainable snow cover and an appropriate relief configuration (the concrete length and inclination of the slope). Taking into account those requests, there are convenient conditions in Svaneti, Tusheti, Abastumani, Bakuriani, Gudauri and Bakhmaro. Among of them, the sport complexes are developed in Bakuriani and Gudauri.

At the same time, the western part of Georgia is rich by speleo-resources. There are researched more than 1000 Karst caves (in general, 200 Km). Among of them, the most popular were Sataplia and Akhali Atoni (Tatashidze Z. 1976).

Among of the internal waters, for the recreational purposes, most useful are rivers near the Black Sea coast, also rivers Mtkvari (Kura), Aragvi. Lakes – Ritsa, Paliastomi, Bazaleti, Tabatskuri. Also Tbilisi and Sioni reservoirs.

The general area of forests is 2,7 million hectares (Pavliashvili N. 2003. P. 170). Especially should be

mentioned about western part of Georgia. During the last period, the national parks (Borjomi-Kharagauli, Kolikheti) have been founded.

Georgia's landscape variety is outstanding in the World, especially in subtropical and moderate belt. There are more than fifty natural landscapes here, starting from damp subtropical or semiarid light forests to humid and naval landscapes. Such variety several reasons, the most important of them being as follows: geographic location (on the edge of tropical and moderate belts), high landscape belts (up to 5200 meters above sea level), and several millennia of land cultivation of this territory.

### Georgia's Geographic Sights

Georgia is located in the South Caucasus Region, between latitudes 41° and 44° N, and longitudes 40° and 47° E. Total area of the territory of the country is 67,900 km<sup>2</sup> (26,216 sq mi). Very important part of the state is covered by mountains (Chitadze N. 2012. P. 1).

According to physical-geographical point of view, Georgia is located between the borders of Europe and Asia.

Georgia's territory, which borders in the north with Russia, in the east with Azerbaijan, and in the south with Armenia and Turkey, that share a south-eastern portion of its border with Iran, makes Georgia an attractive geopolitical-economic region, particularly since it is a country through which runs the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline that flows from the Caspian Sea to Europe. Georgia also has easy access to the Black Sea ports. However, it is Georgia's military strategic importance which brings Georgia into greater focus and attraction geopolitically than its neighbors.

Georgia is singled out in the World also for its big share of pristine natural environment (territories) which represents 14% of the nation's area. Pristine natural landscape can be found both in protected territories and in high – mountain and mix relief areas (Elizbarashvili N. Kupatadze B. 2011. P. 3).

The formation of the territory of the country counts 600 million years. All kinds of reliefs known in the World are present here. The 2/5 of the territory is covered with forests which is a preeminent ecological asset. There are more than 15 thousand species of plants in Georgia, among them more than 4 thousand types of seminal, 75 filical and 2600 water plants. 6% of flora (or up to 900 species) are endemic and relict. The same kind of variety is typical for the wildlife, among them more than 100 species of mammals and more than 300 birds. By volume, endemism and biovariety of the wildlife Georgia is among the top five European nations which is a vivid proof of its inimitable natural environment (Elizbarashvili N. Kupatadze B. 2011. P. 3).

There are hundreds of natural specimens which make momentous impression on visitors. Among them are dinosaur tracks, enormous and very deep caves, deep

and endemic types of canyons, full-flowing rivers having buoyant energy force, lakes and glaciers of different origin, virgin and light forests, semi-deserts and marshes, soils and endemic plants etc. It is also important, that various specimens of nature are concentrated on small spaces that increases their recreational purpose. The bulk of them are located in the protected territories of Georgia.

The protected territories of Georgia have 100-year history. The first sanctuary was established back in 1912, in Eastern Georgia, on the Southern slope of Caucasus mountains, on the outskirts of the town of Lagodekhi. In the course of a century the space of protected territories has constantly expanded. In Soviet period they were set to protect wildlife with a status of reserves or conservation areas. In the end of the XX century protected territories of Georgia exist in many categories, national parks enjoying particular popularity. Nowadays the total area of protected territories runs up to 500 thousand hectares that amounts to roughly 7% of the nation's territory. The biggest part of protected territories is covered with forests which, other than having recreational or educational function, carry also huge environmental and regeneration value as well (Elizbarashvili N. Kupatadze B. 2011. P. 3).

### Georgia's Historical Sights

Georgia is the nation of long and complicated history, that is why plethora of cultural monuments are preserved on its territory. These are archeological sights of stone and bronze age, Antique era settlements, Middle Age fortresses, churches and monasteries, bridges and many other memorials.

The Geography of the Georgian historical architecture strictly reflects historical developments which took place in Georgia. Construction of bridges and roads is primarily connected with the period of United Georgia (XI-XV centuries AD), that is why these bridges are called among the population Tama's bridges. Fortresses and defense facilities of a large scale basically belong to the early middle Age period (IV-X AD) when the nation waged important defense wars. In later times these fortresses were renovated. In later Middle age period primarily feudal towers and relatively smaller castles were erected (Elizbarashvili N. Kupatadze B. 2011. P. 4).

In the course of different development stages of Georgian church architecture different houses of worship were built. Among them the oldest churches belong to a simple hall style. Such churches are constructed up to these days. Starting from V century AD bigger churches – basilicas (two – and three – nave edifices) emerge, and from VII century AD cross-type churches with domes start to be build. From VIII century AD a central-dome style architecture developed in Georgia which reached its apex in X-XI centuries AD cathedrals (Oshki, Bagrat Cathedral, Svetitskhoveli, Alaverdi).

From the outset the Georgian religious architecture

primarily experienced influence of Byzantine style (the specimens of this style are tow-dome cathedral of Gurjaani, round cathedrals of Gavazi, old Ishkhani, Katskha, Bana which belong to VII-X centuries AD). At the same time original church architecture was under development which has been finally shaped up in XI-XII centuries. Alongside the church architecture Georgian mural painting art made strides, the best specimens of which are dated to X-XIV centuries AD (Elizbarashvili N. Kupatadze B. 2011. P. 4).

Within the space of VIII-X centuries active church development is under way in almost the whole territory of Georgia (however, the southern and western Georgian kingdoms of Tao-Karjeti and Egrisi-Abkhazeti can be singled out). This is the period when 5 independent political entities take shape on the territory of Georgia and potentate of each one conducts active development. During the period of unified Georgian monarchy (XI-XIII centuries AD) big churches and monasteries were built near administrative centers and strategic venues. In later Middle ages construction of churches was under way basically in locations and timing where relative peace settled (for example, in Samtskhe – in XIV century AD, in Kakheti – in XVI century AD, in Kartli and Samegrelo – in XVII century AD) (Elizbarashvili N. Kupatadze B. 2011. P. 4).

There are fixed more than about 12 thousand historic-architectural monuments in Georgia (Pavliashvili N. 2003. P. 171).

### Development of the Tourism-Recreational economy

The rest and treatment of the different illnesses on the territory of Georgia has long traditions. The remaining of the bathes on the territory of Borjomi are dated with the I Century. The treatment feature of the waters in Tskaltubo were known in XII Century (Pavliashvili N. 2003. P. 171).

Before the occupation of Georgia by Russian Empire, the recreational resources were used by local population. Later, the main customers of the Georgian resorts were the elite classes of Russia. Since the first half of XIX Century, there were founded balneology-climatic resorts (Borjomi, Abastumani), and from the end of the century the net of resorts at the sea cost in Abkhazia (Gagra, Gulripsh) and in Ajara (Kobuleti, Tsikisdziri).

Before the second occupation of Georgia in 1921, there were 6 sanatoriums (total number of places - 376) in Georgia. In 1939, the total number of sanatoriums increased till 60.

At the end of 80-th, there were functioning 500 tourist-recreational facilities, with total capacity 120 thousand beds. Among of them, 25 % was coming on medical facilities, 54% on holiday houses and bases, and 21% - on tourist objects. At this period, Georgia was at the third place (after Russia and Ukraine) among of post – soviet Republics. About 4,5 million tourists visited Georgia during this period (Pavliashvili N. 2003. P. 171).

Events, which were developed in the beginning of 90-th, interrupted the arrival of tourists, but since 1995, again started the increasing the number of tourists. According to State Border Protection Department, in 2000 Georgia was visited by 387 thousand people. This date is less for almost 10 times, the dates of 80-th (Pavliashvili N. 2003. P. 171).

It is necessary to point out, that in general, from the second part of 90-th, there has started the positive movement in the Georgian tourism industry. The number of visitors and tourists entered in the country have increased almost 30-40 times within 1995-2012 and its positive dynamic is still continuing. According to data of World Tourism Organization growth rate of the international travelers in Georgia in the recent years is nearly 40-50%, while in the neighbor Azerbaijan this rate was about 22%, in Armenia 11% and 12% in Russia (Shavgulidze T. 2013. P. 50).

To compare last years, number of international travelers in 2012 was 4 389 256, and in 2011 it was 2 822 363, in 2010 it was 2032586 and in 2009 it was 1500049 (Shavgulidze T. 2013. P. 49).

## Conclusion

Tourism development in Georgia through fostering its unique resort potential is a shortest way to sustainable development of the national economy (Gigauri L. 2012. P. 413).

Among of the strengths of the tourism development should be mentioned about inherited tourist attractions – cultural and historical heritage, cuisine, natural contrasts, spa facilities as well as recent achievements – creation of competitive brand – homeland of wine and first Europeans, minimization of crime rate, simplification of public service system, etc. (Gigauri L. 2012. P. 413).

Weaknesses: Georgian tour agencies are not well organized, their offered packages are limited, while tourists have a desire to see as much as possible sightseeing's. The prices charged do not coincide with the quality of services provided by the Georgian agencies. Unfortunately, the employees in Georgian tourism business are not well prepared. Tourism infrastructure was mainly created some decades ago, during the Soviet era which is significantly outdated and its timely modernization on international standards level could not be done by Georgia's resources only.

Threats: Political developments in the neighboring country from the North; competitors – neighboring countries offering similar cultural heritage and resorts.

Opportunities: increased interest of reputed investors, international recognition of successful reforms carried out in the country, cancelation of visa requirements for citizens of the Russian Federation, potentially a major provider of visitors to Georgia, rapid growth of the national economy allowing faster execution of tourist projects

(Gigauri L. 2012. P. 413).

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