

## TOPICAL ISSUES OF DEVELOPING ETHNOGRAPHIC TOURISM IN KARAKALPAKSTAN

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**Abstract:** The organization of ethnographic tourism in Karakalpakstan is considered one of the key directions in the country's tourism development strategy. This region possesses a rich historical, cultural, and ethnographic heritage, offering great potential for the advancement of modern ethnographic tourism. In highlighting its main features, it is important to study historical, cultural, and natural treasures, as well as scientific sources related to this field.

**Key words:** cultural and historical heritage, ethnographic significance, artifacts, international tourism market, archaeological sites.

If we first focus on the cultural and historical heritage of Karakalpakstan, the main foundation for ethnographic tourism in this land is closely tied to the traditions, arts, and historical monuments of the Karakalpak people. One of the most remarkable sites is the Igor Savitsky Museum in Nukus, which houses a vast collection of the cultural heritage of the Karakalpak people, as well as works of fine and applied arts. Although the Savitsky Museum is not a natural site, its significance occupies a special place as part of the cultural aspect of ethnographic tourism. The Savitsky Museum in Nukus preserves one of the world's largest collections of avant-garde art and the cultural artifacts of the local Karakalpak people. This museum serves as an important source for studying the rich ethnographic and cultural heritage of Karakalpakstan.

In addition, numerous archaeological monuments of Karakalpakstan, such as the fortresses of Topraq Qala and Ayaz Qala, provide insights into ancient trade routes and the

interactions between civilizations. These archaeological sites play a crucial role in introducing tourists to the historical importance of the region.

It is well known that the Karakalpak people are famous for their rich ethnographic culture. This includes traditions, handicrafts, national clothing, traditional cuisine, and folk art. For example, among the Karakalpaks, traditional crafts such as wood carving, weaving, and handmade goods hold great significance. These artisanal products are attractive to tourists, increasing their interest in the region's cultural heritage.

In the sphere of ethnographic tourism, Karakalpakstan's unique natural environment is also of particular importance. The drying of the Aral Sea, as a result of an ecological disaster, has drawn the attention of scientists and environmentalists worldwide. The distinctive ecology of this region and its consequences spark strong interest among tourists.

The Kyzylkum Desert, the Sultan Uvays Mountains, and other natural sites in Karakalpakstan are considered attractive destinations for ethnographic tourism. These areas draw tourists not only with their natural beauty but also with their historical, cultural, and ethnographic significance.

We found it necessary to briefly highlight each of these tourist sites. The Kyzylkum Desert is one of the largest deserts in Central Asia, with a significant part of it located within Karakalpakstan. Its vast territory and unique natural conditions provide opportunities to explore diverse wildlife and plant species. The natural landscapes of the Kyzylkum allow tourists to learn about desert life, traditional Karakalpak desert villages, and livestock breeding practices. Visitors can also explore sacred sites, or *qadamjoi*, which are places associated with spiritual leaders or historical figures in ancient areas.

The Sultan Uvays Mountains, located in the southern part of Karakalpakstan, are famous not only for their natural beauty but also for their historical and religious significance. Since ancient times, the Sultan Uvays Mountains have been considered a sacred place and are highly revered in the Islamic world. Associated with the name of Ubay ibn Ka'b, these mountains are also an important destination for Islamic pilgrims.

From the perspective of ethnographic tourism, this area provides insight into the religious beliefs, customs, and traditions of the local population.

The Aral Sea has become a symbol of ecological disaster on a global scale. The drying of the sea and the subsequent natural, social, and economic changes attract the attention of tourists. In the towns and villages of the Aral region, ecological tourism is being developed, allowing visitors to learn about the sea, life around it, the ecological problems, and their impact on the local population. This region is also significant for ethnographic tourism, as the local people have adapted their lifestyle to environmental changes.

The Ustyurt Plateau is another important natural site of Karakalpakstan. This area is home to ancient historical monuments and diverse wildlife, making it attractive for ethnographic tourism. The natural cliffs, canyons, and ancient fortresses of Ustyurt fascinate visitors not only with their natural beauty but also with their historical value. In the specially designated Ustyurt National Park, both local and foreign tourists can explore natural resources and archaeological sites accompanied by guides.

*Along with the great opportunities mentioned above, there are also various challenges and obstacles in the development of ethnographic tourism in Karakalpakstan, which hinder the full realization of its tourism potential. In our opinion, the main problems are as follows:*

- ✓ **Lack of Infrastructure.** Some regions of Karakalpakstan lack adequate infrastructure. The underdevelopment of roads, hotels, dining facilities, and tourism services makes it difficult to attract visitors. In particular, transportation and amenities are insufficient when it comes to reaching remote ethnographic and natural sites.
- ✓ **Lack of Tourist Information and Promotion.** There is a shortage of comprehensive information about the rich ethnographic potential of Karakalpakstan. The limited availability of information for foreign tourists and the lack of effective promotion significantly reduce the tourist flow to the region. Since travel agencies and tour

operators have not carried out sufficient work in this direction, Karakalpakstan remains little known in the international tourism market.

- ✓ **Environmental Problems.** The ecological issues associated with the drying of the Aral Sea have negatively affected the overall environmental condition of the region. As a result of this ecological crisis, the Aral area faces economic and social difficulties. These environmental problems also impact the development of tourism, since creating a favorable natural environment to attract visitors becomes challenging.
- ✓ **Shortage of Tourism Specialists.** Another major problem in Karakalpakstan is the lack of qualified specialists and guides in the field of tourism. The insufficient training of local guides and tour operators limits the ability to provide high-quality services to tourists. Ethnographic tourism requires specific knowledge and expertise, as it involves delivering in-depth information about local culture, history, and traditions to visitors.
- ✓ **Lack of Financial Resources and Investments.** The development of ethnographic tourism requires sufficient financial resources and investments, which are currently lacking. Significant funding is needed to improve tourism infrastructure, restore and preserve ethnographic sites, and ensure their protection. However, the economic situation in the region makes it difficult to attract such investments.
- ✓ **Legislative and Regulatory Issues.** A favorable legal environment is also crucial for the development of tourism. It is necessary to ensure the effectiveness of laws and regulatory documents governing tourism in Karakalpakstan.
- ✓ **Low Level of Tourist Amenities.** Despite the abundance of ethnographic and natural sites in Karakalpakstan, tourist-friendly facilities are underdeveloped. For example, there is a lack of information centers, modern sanitation facilities, and service points. This problem reduces the likelihood of tourists returning and prevents them from staying in the region for longer periods.
- ✓ **Low Level of Local Community Involvement in Tourism Activities.** The participation of the local population plays an important role in ethnographic tourism. In Karakalpakstan, local residents are not sufficiently engaged in tourism activities, which

limits tourists' opportunities to gain deeper insight into local culture. Another major issue is that handicrafts, local traditions, and manual labor have not been effectively transformed into tourism products.

We believe that solving these problems will provide a strong foundation for the future development of ethnographic tourism in Karakalpakstan. We have decided to conclude this article with a number of proposals and recommendations for advancing ethnographic tourism in the region.

In our opinion, the following proposals and recommendations can help enhance the tourism potential of Karakalpakstan for the development of ethnographic tourism. These recommendations are aimed at improving tourism infrastructure, marketing strategies, education, and increasing local community involvement.

**1. Development of Tourism Infrastructure.** In the development of ethnographic tourism, the primary focus should be on improving infrastructure:

- Transport and road infrastructure. Access to major sites in Karakalpakstan should be convenient for tourists. In particular, it is important to establish additional transport services to reach remote ethnographic and natural sites.
- Hotels and dining facilities. Building hotels and recreational complexes, as well as opening restaurants and cafes that introduce tourists to national cuisine and traditions, would be beneficial.
- Tourist amenities. Around archaeological monuments and natural sites, it is recommended to establish information centers, guide services, sanitation facilities, and handicraft-oriented souvenir shops for visitors.

**2. Strengthening Marketing and Promotion.** To introduce Karakalpakstan to the international tourism market, strong marketing and promotional strategies need to be developed:

- Creation of tourism websites. It is necessary to establish one or several official tourism websites that provide information about ethnographic, cultural, and natural sites in

Karakalpakstan. These websites should include details about tour packages, excursions, and guide services, as well as photo and video materials.

- Enhancing social media presence. Actively promoting Karakalpakstan's tourism potential on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok is crucial. Collaboration with various bloggers and influencers can also play an important role.
- Participation in tourism fairs. It is advisable to actively promote Karakalpakstan at international and local tourism exhibitions and fairs, as well as to cooperate with foreign investors and tour operators.

**3. Training Specialists and Engaging the Local Population in Tourism.** For the effective development of tourism, it is essential to train specialists and involve the local community in tourism activities:

- Organizing tourism training courses. To address the shortage of specialists in the tourism sector, training courses for guides and tour operators should be organized locally. Preparing local guides and tourism professionals is especially important for the development of ethnographic tourism.
- Involving the local population in handicrafts and services. Ethnographic tourism creates opportunities to transform traditional handicraft activities of the local population into tourism products. It is necessary to support local artisans and ensure that their products are available for tourists to purchase.

**4. Preservation and Development of Cultural and Ethnographic Sites**

- Restoration and protection of historical monuments. Archaeological and ethnographic monuments in Karakalpakstan should be preserved and restored using modern technologies. It would also be advisable to organize special excursions for both local residents and tourists to raise awareness of their importance.
- Ethnographic festivals and cultural events. It is recommended to hold annual festivals dedicated to Karakalpakstan's national culture, traditions, and handicrafts, as well as

exhibitions of folk art and national clothing. Such events play an important role in attracting tourists.

- **Measures Focused on Ecology and Nature Conservation.** The ecological problems of the Aral Sea region in Karakalpakstan also affect the development of tourism. To address this, the following measures should be implemented:
  - Development of ecological tourism. In the Aral Sea region, it is necessary to develop ecological tourism by organizing special excursions and eco-camps for tourists. This will provide visitors with information about the environmental situation of the area and its impact on the lives of the local population.
  - Protection of natural resources. To safeguard natural sites such as the Sultan Uvays Mountains and the Ustyurt Plateau, it is important to establish special national parks and nature reserves.

**Conclusion.** Our research has shown that despite the great natural potential for the development of ethnographic tourism in Karakalpakstan, the lack of infrastructure, limited financial resources, weak promotional efforts, and unmet regulatory needs are slowing down progress in this field. To address these challenges, a comprehensive approach and stronger government support are necessary. Developing tourism infrastructure and marketing, involving the local population, taking ecological protection measures, and providing financial assistance will help unlock the region's full tourism potential. This will not only contribute to the economic development of the area but also play a significant role in preserving the cultural heritage of the Karakalpak people.

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