

**REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN**

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**ABSTRACT**

of the dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**GEOGRAPHICAL ISSUES OF TERRITORIAL  
ORGANIZATION OF RECREATION AND TOURISM  
ECONOMY IN THE GUBA-KHACHMAZ ECONOMIC  
DISTRICT**

Speciality: 5401.01 – Economic geography

Field of science: Geography

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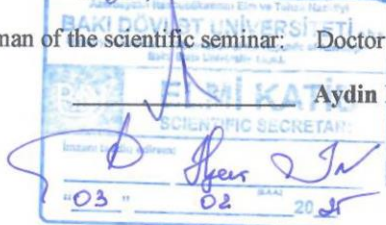
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## **GENERAL CHARACTERISTIC OF THE WORK**

### **The actuality of the topic and level of research on the topic.**

Recreation and tourism assets have a special role in the expansion of international economic relations, in the increase of transportation, in attracting foreign investors to the country, as well as in providing regional leisure comfort. The development of the recreation-tourism economy helps to improve the social standard of living of the population in the region, to increase the labor capacity (employment) of the local population, to open new jobs, and to economic development. Because in the modern world, in terms of income, the recreation tourism industry has become an integral part of the economy.

Effective and correct use of recreation-tourism assets allows the creation of a regional recreation-tourism economy, and this area has been developing rapidly in the last 30 years. In order to establish the recreation-tourism economy at a high level and bring it to world standards, the government of Azerbaijan adopted the law on tourism, state programs, and the Strategic Road Map, declared 2011 as the "Year of Tourism," and held conferences, symposiums, seminars, and several international events in this direction organized exhibitions.

Although the recreation-tourism industry in our republic is considered one of the more profitable and promising fields after the oil sector, its potential opportunities for development in a sustainable geographical aspect have not yet been assessed on scientific grounds, and the existing problems in the regions have not been fully resolved. The Guba-Khachmaz economic region is one of our regions with wide potential recreation and tourism opportunities, but it is facing problems and still cannot be fully developed.

The Guba-Khachmaz economic region, rich in favorable climatic conditions, mysterious forests, rivers, waterfalls, natural lakes, mountain massifs, as well as rare settlements and historical cultural monuments, is considered one of the most attractive areas for tourists. In recent years, the construction of hotels and tourist facilities that meet modern requirements in the economic district,

creation of recreation areas, improvement of transport and service infrastructure, organization of guide services, operation of tourist routes, etc. have increased the interest of tourists in the region.

**The object and subject of the research.** The Guba-Khachmaz economic region, which is the object of the study, is located in the northeastern part of Azerbaijan between  $40^{\circ}52^I-41^{\circ}50^I$  north latitude and  $48^{\circ}05^I-49^{\circ}22^I$  east longitude. The economic region has favorable economic trade, transport, and communication, as well as geographical position, and borders with the Republic of Dagestan of the Russian Federation to the north, the Caspian Sea to the east, Absheron to the southeast, Nagorno-Shirvan to the south, and Sheki-Zagatala to the southwest. The territory of the Guba-Khachmaz economic district is 6.96 thousand  $\text{km}^2$ , which is 8.1% of the country's territory, and its population is 543.8 thousand people (2021), which is 5.4% of the country's population. The average population density is 78 people per  $\text{km}^2$ <sup>1</sup>. The amplitude of settlement in the area (2428 meters) covers areas from -28 m (Khachmaz district, Nard village) to 2400 m (Guba district, Khinalig village). There are 6 cities, 21 settlements, and 474 rural settlements in the territory of the economic district<sup>2</sup>.

The subject of the research is to study the territorial organization of the recreation-tourism economy, which has been intensively used in recent years in the Guba-Khachmaz economic district, and to reveal the existing problems.

**The purpose and the missions of investigation.** The main goal of the research work is to identify and eliminate the economic-geographical problems of the recreation-tourism economy, taking into account the natural conditions and recreational resources, as well as the development characteristics of tourism in the Guba-Khachmaz economic region. To achieve the goal, it is required to solve the

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<sup>1</sup> Regions of Azerbaijan, 2023 (statistical compilation) / head, T. Budagov. - Baku: Chashiogly EI, - 2023. - 864 p. (In Aze)

<sup>2</sup> Imrani Z.T. Guba-Khachmaz economic region / Z.T. Imrani. - Baku: Elm, - 2007. - 172 p. (In Aze)

following tasks:

- justification of the scientific-methodical and theoretical-practical approach in the study of recreation-tourism assets;
- grouping of natural-historical cultural monuments in terms of the development of the recreation-tourism economy;
- conducting recreation-tourism zoning;
- determination of ways to influence the transport-communication system on the recreation-tourism economy and justification of the role of transport in the design of new tourist routes;
- conducting monitoring to study the quality level of service infrastructure and verifying their compliance with international standards;
- investigation of existing inconsistencies in the use of recreation-tourism assets in the research area under modern conditions and giving reasoned recommendations.

**The methods of research.** Historical and comparative analysis, analysis of statistical and mathematical materials, regionalization, cartographic GIS technologies, etc. tables, diagrams, maps, and schemes were drawn up using the methods. Experimental studies were conducted in field and indoor conditions (2008-2022).

**The main provisions defended:**

1. The importance of researching the resources of recreation and tourism in the Guba-Khachmaz economic region in the natural-geographical and socio-economic aspects.
2. Current situation and regionalization of recreation-tourism economy in the Guba-Khachmaz economic region.
3. Elimination of negative problems occurring in the development of the recreation-tourism economy in the Guba-Khachmaz economic district and development prospects of territorial organization.

**The scientific novelty of the research.**

In the comprehensive study of recreation-tourism resources and economic-geographical problems of its development in the Guba-

Khachmaz economic region, the following innovations were obtained and scientifically substantiated:

- A complex analysis of recreation-tourism resources from the economic-geographical point of view was conducted and the prospective development directions of territory appropriation were determined;
- the attractiveness of natural conditions, as well as natural-historical cultural monuments in terms of recreation and tourism, was assessed and new tourism routes were proposed;
- recreation-tourism zoning was carried out, the degree of appropriation of the territory was determined;
- geographical aspects of sustainable territorial organization of recreation-tourism economy were determined;
- the strategic directions of the recreation-tourism economy were carried out together with tourist attraction and population employment.

#### **Theoretical and practical significance of the research.**

The theoretical basis of the research consists of the methodological guidelines proposed by the author for evaluating natural conditions and natural-historical cultural monuments, as well as for recreation-tourism zoning. The practical significance of the research lies in considering the characteristics of the development of the Guba-Khachmaz economic region, the recent changes in the region, and the improvement of the socio-economic status of the local population, particularly rural residents in mountainous areas, as well as the promotion of ecotourism, mountain tourism development, and rural tourism. The materials from the dissertation can be utilized by tourism companies, for the training of tour operators, and in the teaching of higher and secondary education.

#### **Approbation and application of the research.**

According to the contents and results of the dissertation, speeches were made at the following conferences: Outstanding Naturalist Scientist, an academic conference dedicated to the 100th anniversary of H.A.Aliyev's (Baku, Azerbaijan), Strategy of Quality

Industry Education, 5th International Conference 2009 (Varna, Bulgaria), "Innovation, Quality of Education, and Development," 1st International Scientific Conference 2010 (Baku, Azerbaijan), "Dedicated to the 90th anniversary of the birth of Rizvan Khanami oglu Piriyeu" Scientific Conference, 2014 (Baku, Azerbaijan).

10 scientific articles have been published on the topic of the research work.

The suggestions and recommendations given in the dissertation regarding the development of the recreation-tourism economy are used in the organization of tourism work, population employment, the creation of service infrastructure, the attraction of investors to the region, the preparation of state programs, as well as the preparation of annual work plans of local executive authorities, the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Health. They can also be used in the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, the Tourism Agency.

**The name of the organization where the dissertation work was implemented:**

The dissertation work was performed in the "Economic and political geography of Azerbaijan" department of the Institute of Geography, named after academician H.A. Aliyev of the Ministry of Science and Education.

**The volume, structure and main content of the dissertation.**

The dissertation consists of an introduction, 3 chapters, a conclusion and a list of used literature. The volume of the work is 128 pages. The work consists of 3 maps, 4 tables, 10 diagrams, a list of literature with 123 titles. Introduction – 5 pages, Chapter I – 35 pages, Chapter II – 40 pages, Chapter III – 33 pages, conclusion – 2 pages, a list of literature – 10 pages. It consists of 208754 characters without tables, graphs, pictures and a list of literature.

## THE MAIN CONTENT OF THE RESEARCH

In the **“Introduction”**, the relevance and degree of development of the topic, goals and tasks, methods, the main propositions defended, scientific innovations, the theoretical and practical significance, approval, and application of the research are given.

The first chapter of the dissertation is devoted to the **"scientific-methodological foundations for studying recreation-tourism resources and the economic-geographical characteristics of potential recreation-tourism resources."** In this chapter, recreation-tourism resources are examined through scientific, methodological, and theoretical-practical approaches, with a focus on the potential utilization of natural conditions and historical cultural monuments in the recreation-tourism economy.

In the study of recreation and tourism resources, their importance, and role in human health, as well as assessment, one of the world's scientists C.A.Olowookere, D.O.Taiw, S.F.McCool, R.N.Moisey, L.Roberts and D.Hall, P.F.Eagles, C.D.Examples include Haynes et al. Many local scientists were involved in the comprehensive study of the Guba-Khachmaz economic region that we studied and conducting scientific-methodical research works. Mainly in this field: H.A.Aliyev, B.A.Budagov, E.M.Hajiyev, N.A.Babakhanov, A.J.Ayyubov, Sh.G.Demirgayayev, A.A.Nadirov, Sh.Y.Goychaily, A.A.Salmanov, E.G.Mehraliyev, V.A.Efendiyev, C.N.Ismayilov, G.S.Mammadov, M.Y.Khalilov, Z.TImrani, Z.S.Mammadov, H.B.Soltanova, N.A.Pashayev, N.H.Ayyubov, Z.N.Eminov, C.M.Jafarov, V.S.Dargahov, S.T.Yeganli and other scientists and the services of researchers are great.

In conducting the methodological analysis of the territory of the Guba-Khachmaz economic region, we have greatly helped the study of the problem from the economic and socio-geographical point of view by covering various fields of geography in our dissertation, using the theoretical and practical suggestions and propositions put forward in the scientific works of scientists who have conducted



research in this field. Thus, recreation-tourism resources are selected according to natural, historical and cultural resources, as well as the degree of their use.

Natural recreation resources include natural terrain complexes, their components, attractiveness, alternation of landscapes, exoticism, uniqueness, etc. capabilities are understood. Natural conditions are a natural component that is important for the life activity of productive forces but does not directly participate in their material and productive activity. From an economic point of view, natural resources are elements that can be used in production and social fields to meet the needs of tourists.

In order to achieve sustainable socio-economic development, an increase in national income, and the development of tourism in the Guba-Khachmaz economic region, where we conducted research, first, it is important to evaluate the natural-geographical conditions from an economic-geographical point of view. Height unevenly distributed the economic region's natural conditions, recreation-tourism resources, and recreation-tourism facilities. The wealth of natural conditions creates a basis for the development of various areas or directions of the recreation-tourism economy.

The relief of the Guba-Khachmaz economic region is considered one of the important factors affecting the territorial organization of tourism infrastructure in the region. The slope of the northeastern part of the economic district is complex compared to the southern slope. The transverse range of mountains is separated from the main watershed because erosion extends mainly in the northeast direction and gradually lowers. In the north of the Main Caucasian Range, the Yan Range extends. The highest peak of the region is Shahdag Mountain, which is located at an altitude of 4243 meters above sea level. Shahdag is separated from its southeastern part by the upper course of Gusarchay, which cuts through the Shahduzu depression. Several tributaries depart from Shahdag in different directions, the longest of which is the Suval range. Traces of ancient glaciers are clearly visible on the bare rocks in the high mountainous parts of the Suval range up to the parallel of the village of Laza.

Ancient glaciers extended from the mountain slope to the bed of the Shahnabad river and split along the slope<sup>3</sup>. These areas have all kinds of favorable conditions for developing mountain tourism (alpinism)<sup>4</sup>.

One of the main factors determining the recreation-tourism economy is climate reserve. As you know, the main factors that create climate are solar radiation, air circulation, and surface cover. The climatic conditions of the Guba-Khachmaz economic region are diverse and colorful. The reason for this is the height differences in the area. Our research within four zones (altitude zones) shows that hot semi-desert and desert, mild hot, humid cold, and mountain tundra climates are spread in the territory of the economic region. The average annual temperature in the territory of the economic district varies between 8 and 10°C. The months of June-August are relatively cool, the average monthly air temperature is 20°C (19-24°C in July), and at some times of the day, it varies between 37°C and 39°C and reaches the absolute maximum. The number of frost-free days is high, 185–235 days a year. From this point of view, summer tourism in the economic region is better developed. January is considered to be the coldest month, and the average monthly temperature in the mountainous part of the area is recorded as 2-30°C frost and 10°C heat in the plains. The absolute minimum temperature in the area is -200C, sometimes it can be lower. The duration of the snow cover is 50-80 days in mountainous areas and 20 days in plains<sup>5</sup>. For this reason, the Shahdag winter-summer recreation complex was put into use to develop winter tourism in the Gusar region. The road, gas, and electricity lines built to the tourism complex have solved certain communication problems in 7 remote rural settlements close to the

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<sup>3</sup> Aliyev, H.A. Legendary mountains / H.A. Aliyev, B.A. Budagov. - Baku: Elm, - 1973. - 86 p. (In Aze)

<sup>4</sup> Soltanova, H.B. Possibilities of creating mountain tourism complexes in the Republic of Azerbaijan / conference materials "Caucasus and Central Asia in the process of globalization", book II. - Baku: [n.y.], - 2007. - p. 546-548. (In Aze)

<sup>5</sup> Ayyubov, A.C. Agroclimatic atlas of the Republic of Azerbaijan / A.C. Ayyubov, Kh.Sh. Rahimov. - Baku: Elm, - 1993. - 172 p. (In Aze)

area.

In terms of recreation and tourism, rivers are considered to be one of the most attractive areas. In the Guba-Khachmaz economic region, the rivers take their source from the mountains of the Main Caucasus range and flow into the Caspian Sea. The biggest rivers of the region are Samur, Gusar, Gudyal, Valvala, Ata, Gilgil, Shabran, Kara, etc. are rivers. The Samur River, fed mainly by snow and underground water, is the largest in the region. The length of the Samur River is 216 km constitutes. In general, this region accounts for 7.1% of the water resources of our republic. In 1940, the Samur-Absheron canal, 182 km long, designed to irrigate 92 thousand ha of land, was built from the Samur River, the main source of irrigation in the region<sup>6</sup>.

The rivers flowing through the Guba-Khachmaz economic region possess significant hydro-tourism potential. Factors such as the region's relief, rivers running through forests and into the Caspian Sea, and the clean hydro chemical composition of the water contribute to the creation of recreation-tourism zones and the development of hydro-tourism. However, rivers that pass through large residential areas, recreation and tourism facilities, and industrial zones are subject to environmental pollution. The research revealed that while the upper reaches of the rivers are more suitable for recreation and tourism, the lower reaches are affected by environmental pollution, making them less appropriate for the development of recreation and tourism facilities.

Mineral, thermal, and cold springs, which are one of the important indicators of natural recreation-tourism resources, can be found in the foothill forests and highlands of the Guba-Khachmaz economic region. Galaalti, Khaltan, Duz Bilici, Cimi, etc. exist in the region<sup>7</sup>. The healing properties and chemical composition of mineral,

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<sup>6</sup> Rustamov, S.G. Water balance of the Azerbaijan SSR / S.G. Rustamov, R.M. Qashqai. – Baku: Elm, – 1989. – 181 p. (In Russ)

<sup>7</sup> Askerov, A.H. Mineral waters of Azerbaijan / A.H. Askerov. - Baku: Maarif, - 1996. - 62 p. (In Aze)

thermal, and cold springs are of great importance for the development of the resort-recreation economy in the region. In the region with inexhaustible mineral water resources, most of the springs differ from each other according to their origin, degree of mineralization, temperature and chemical composition, and physical properties. In the future, these waters can be widely used in the creation of recreation-tourism health centers.

The functions of forests, which are divided into various groups, include anti-erosion, water protection, protective forests on river banks, urban greenery, roadside protective forests, and forest areas in recreational and sanitary resort areas, among others. 10–11% of the territory of the Guba-Khachmaz economic district is covered with forests. The fact that the area has complex physical and geographical conditions has led to the uneven distribution of forests, their structure, and the diversity of gender and age composition<sup>8</sup>. Forests are widespread mainly in the areas along the coast of the Khachmaz region of the Caspian Sea, in the east of the Shollar plain, and in the Guba and Gusar regions of the middle highlands. On the other hand, the reduction of forest areas in the region is related to the economic activity of people as well as natural destructive events, and on the other hand, the increase in the number of dry days of the climate and the decrease in the level of rivers and springs. Wormwood, wormwood, and other semi-desert plants are widespread south of the Shabran River.

Pomegranate sandy beaches are one of the important recreational and tourism resources of the coastal areas of the Caspian Sea. Pomegranate sandy beaches along the coast are considered the main destination for tourists in the region<sup>9</sup>. This zone is considered one of the most favorable regions for the mass recreation of people. Pomegranate sandy beaches increase the attractiveness of the region

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<sup>8</sup> Mammadov, G.S. Forest ecology / G.Sh.Mammadov, K.S.Asadov. - Baku: Elm, - 2010. - 452 p. (In Aze)

<sup>9</sup> Ismayilov, Ch.N. Natural resources of the Caspian Sea / Ch.N. Ismayilov. - Baku: Nurlan, - 2007. - 185 p. (In Aze)

and create suitable conditions for the construction of tourist facilities.

The recreation tourism industry is a factor that provides people with recreation and entertainment by studying natural conditions and their components, introducing cultural heritage examples, and providing directions for improvement of service infrastructure and ways of their regulation<sup>10</sup>. Recreation-tourist recreation, entertainment, health, awareness (introduction of historical and cultural heritage monuments), religious visits, etc. making trips for purposes.

In the Guba-Khachmaz economic district, the natural-historical cultural monuments are rarely used for recreation and tourism. Natural resources are sufficient for the development of health centers in the region. However, their potential has been underestimated. Recreational networks are poorly developed in the area. These natural, historical-architectural, and religious monuments, which are interesting travel destinations, are more interesting for tourists. In the region, there is a need to protect natural monuments from an ecological point of view and to restore historical-architectural and religious monuments (fig. 1).

It should be noted that in the conditions of globalization, one of the most important factors in ensuring the sustainable development of society, as well as in the establishment of historical-geographical relations and the preservation of traditional human values, is the recreation-tourism economy. The importance of natural and historical cultural monuments also measured this. Because the strategic direction and priorities of the activity on the preservation of the cultural-historical heritage are related to public interests. In this regard, effective mechanisms for the protection of natural-historical cultural monuments arise from the necessity of forming and defining the traditional heritage in the society itself.

In the map, we compiled not only the natural-historical cultural monuments but also the grouping of potential tourism based on them.

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<sup>10</sup> Preobrazhensky, V.S. Geography and recreation / V.S.Preobrazhensky, Y.A. Vedenin. - Moscow: Znanie, - 1971. - 48 p. (In Russ)

Grouping: places with natural scenery, healing potential, historical-architectural examples, and cultural heritage examples. Areas of factors that can stimulate the development of the recreation-tourism industry within each group have been determined. This can also be used as an auxiliary tool in writing regional programs and their analysis in the future.

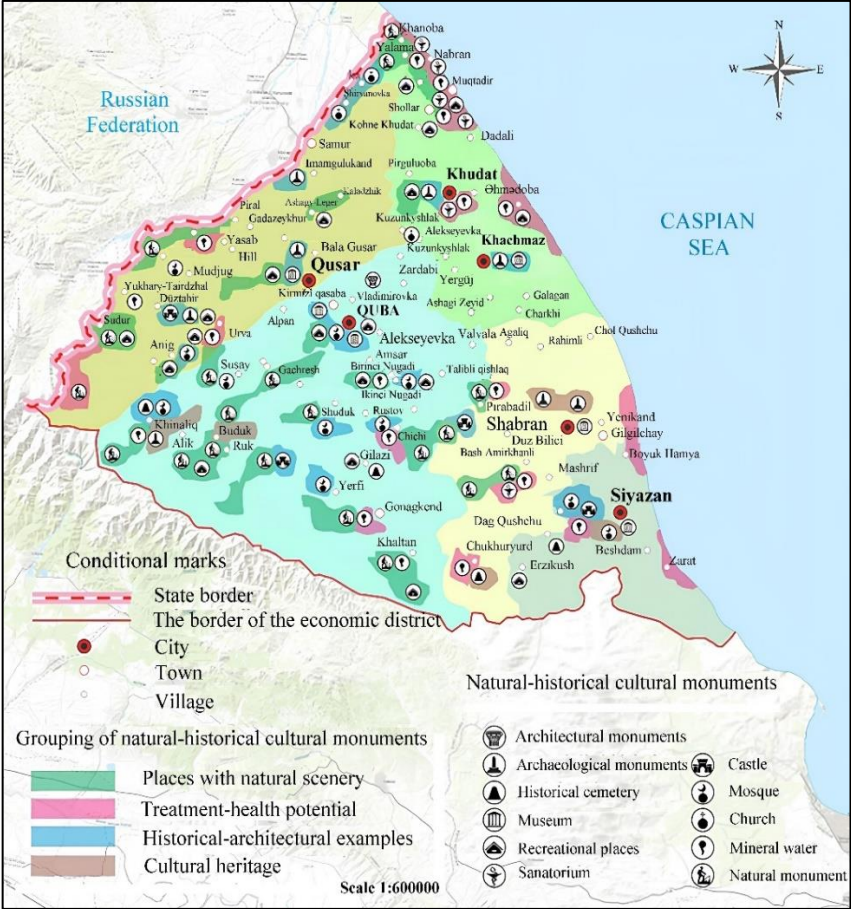


Fig. 1. Natural-historical cultural monuments and their grouping in the Guba-Khachmaz economic district (Compiled by the author)

Based on the principle of grouping natural and historical cultural monuments in the Guba-Khachmaz economic district, the territorial

organization of the recreation-tourism economy should ensure its economic efficiency with its activities. The development of the recreation-tourism economy can affect the purposeful development of service areas operating in the economic region. The application of grouping allows for an increase in the competitiveness of both individual natural-historical places and the recreation-tourism economy. Therefore, the recreation-tourism space is a means of territorial organization of economic activity, and it is primarily considered a very attractive area for tourists.

Taking into account the above-mentioned factors, it can be used in the preparation of new tourism routes that reflect the natural-historical cultural monuments that are of greater interest to tourists in the region.

The second chapter of the dissertation work is dedicated to **"Geographical aspects of recreation-tourism economy in Guba-Khachmaz economic district and its role in socio-economic development."** In this chapter, the current state of the recreation-tourism economy in the Guba-Khachmaz economic region, its necessity and the factors that determine it, the importance of the socio-economic base in the development of the recreation-tourism economy and the modern territorial organization, as well as the potential opportunities of the recreation-tourism economy and tourism routes, have been studied.

The Guba-Khachmaz economic region is one of our areas rich in recreational and tourism resources. However, the current level of utilization of these resources is quite low. In particular, the development of medical tourism is weak compared to other regions. On the other hand, the area is highly utilized for recreation and entertainment purposes.

The Guba-Khachmaz economic district has numerous mineral and thermal waters with therapeutic properties, which are important for the development of health tourism. There are more than five high-flow mineral and thermal springs in the district, containing hydrocarbons, sulfates, calcium, and sulfur. Examples include Galaalti, Gubada Cimi, Khashi, Khaltan, Duzbilici, Budug, Erfi, as

well as the hot springs in Khachmaz, Nabran, and the Shabran region. By establishing health and wellness centers in the district, it is possible to sustain recreational and tourism activities year-round. Medical tourism, which generates significant revenue, can improve the socio-economic situation, develop general infrastructure, and provide employment opportunities for the local population.

In addition to its natural recreational resources, the Guba-Khachmaz economic region also boasts small villages that are particularly attractive for ethnic tourism. Among them, Khinalig village stands out. The road leading to Khinalig was constructed and opened in 2006 by order of the country's president, leading to a sharp increase in the number of tourists visiting the village. Small tourist facilities, such as Retro, Aynur, Khal-khal, Terras, Guba, Nazli Bulag, and Minare, operate in the Gachrash forest and villages along the road (e.g., Gachrash, Kyzylgazma, Kusnetgazma, Girizdahna), contributing to the rise in tourist numbers. It is noteworthy that 80% of the tourist and recreational centers in the Guba region are located along this route (on the Khinalig Road). The number of tourists visiting the area has been growing steadily each season. Although tourist flow declined during the pandemic, it rebounded in subsequent years, and the increase in foreign tourists visiting Khinalig village is seen as a particularly positive development.

To the Khizi-Siyazan-Shabran-Khachmaz-Guba-Gusar route, which falls within the territory of the Guba-Khachmaz economic district, which has rich natural and historical cultural monuments; From the high mountains of the Greater Caucasus, Shahdag, Tufandag, Beshbarmagh Rock and the remains of the Defense Wall (III century), the ruins of the ancient city of Shabran, the Gilgilchay fortification complex, Chiraggala (V century), the coastal zone of Yalama and Nabra, part of the Shahdag National Park, Tangalti Gorge, Gachresh forest, Afurca waterfall (Guba), Shahnabat and Leza waterfalls (Gusar), religious monuments, Friday mosque (XII century), Khinalig village, Guba cemetery (2007), "Shahdag winter-summer recreation complex" in Gusar (2012), carpet weaving



museums, natural and historical-architectural monuments belong<sup>11</sup>.

The Guba-Khachmaz economic district is one region with the richest resort and recreational resources in our country. The Yalama-Nabran zone is considered the primary area used for recreation and tourism within the district. This zone is characterized by sanatoriums, resort-recreation centers, tourist facilities, hotels, and hotel-type establishments, attracting many tourists seeking leisure and entertainment. The area is renowned for its unique combination of forest and recreational resources. In 2004, American specialists recognized this natural wonder, where the sea meets the forest, by naming the Yalama-Nabran zone the "Most Beautiful Recreation Zone of the Year." However, because of anthropogenic impacts, the forested areas within the economic region have significantly thinned, weakening the soil protection function of the forests. Additionally, fluctuations in the level of the Caspian Sea have had a notable effect on the region's ecological development.

Seacoast areas of the Guba-Khachmaz economic district are used only in the summer months. However, the variety of landscape resources and climatic features are very favourable for the creation of tourism-alpinism centres in the mountainous part of the region. One of the important conditions for the development of winter tourism in the economic region is the creation of suitable tourism infrastructure in mountainous regions. In winter, not only walking tours but also tours related to mountain skiing and winter sports can be organized for complete relaxation. From this point of view, an example can be given of the "Shahdag" winter-summer Tourism and Recreation Center, located at an altitude of 1440-1640 m above sea level in the territory of the Gusar region.

Shahdag National Park is one area that attracts more tourists in terms of recreation and tourism in the Guba-Khachmaz economic district. Shahdag National Park was established on December 8, 2006,

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<sup>11</sup> Khasmammadova, A.M. The Historical and Cultural Monuments as Rekreational in Guba-Khachmaz Region of Azerbaijan // American International Journal of Contemporary Research. – 2013. No 6, – 30 p.

to preserve endemic plants as well as grassland ecosystems and forests and increase the species composition of endangered animal species. The reserve area of the national park is more than 73 thousand ha, the recreation-tourism zone is more than 50 thousand ha, the service area is 5601 ha, and the farm-production area is 1689 ha<sup>12</sup>. There are various types of overnight accommodation, catering facilities, parking places, etc. to develop the recreation-tourism economy. Tourist routes within the national park have been prepared and are operating for ecotourism enthusiasts, which have been legally leased. The obtained income is used to restore local infrastructure, increase the income of the population, and protect the environment.

Recently, in connection with economic development, hotels and hotel-type establishments according to international standards have been built and put into use in our republic. They were motivated because 2011 was the "Tourism Year". Currently (in 2022), 757 hotels and hotel-type enterprises are operating in our republic, which is the highest indicator of the last 30 years. In the Guba-Khachmaz economic district, this indicator is 112, which makes up 14.8% of the total number of hotels and hotel-type enterprises in the republic. Although the indicator is quite high compared to the general economic regions of the republic, there are significant differences in the number of hotels and hotel-type enterprises within the economic region. Thus, 50.9% of total hotels (57 hotels) are concentrated in Khachmaz district, which prefers its own natural conditions, and development potential, as well as short-term rest and small hotels. This is mainly because of the large number of tourist facilities in the Nabran zone of the Caspian coast and the fact that people prefer this area for recreation. Although there are 29 hotels in the Guba district and 20 hotels in the Gusar district, these hotels are mainly distinguished by their regional differences. Although 6 hotels are registered in Shabran district, which is distinguished by its beach areas and is located on the

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<sup>12</sup> Khasmammadova, A.M. Tourism recreation potential of the republic of Azerbaijan (Guba-Khachmaz economic region) // VI International Conference. – Varna: 4-11 June, 2010. – p. 527-530.

North-South transport corridor, there are no hotels at all in the Vazenayan district<sup>13</sup>. This has caused serious problems in tourism, the lack of an accessible base for its development even though tourism is a priority area in the future, as well as a delay in the development of tourism within the framework of state programs.

According to official statistics, in 2022, the income from hotels and hotel-type enterprises in our republic amounted to 355,322.1 thousand manats, of which 490,136.9 thousand manats, i.e., 13.8%, fell to the Guba-Khachmaz economic region. If we compare this indicator with 2005, we can see that there was an increase of more than 33.6 times (diagram 1.). However, even though the majority of hotels and hotel-type enterprises are concentrated in the Khachmaz district, most of the incomes go to Gusar (42.3%) and Guba (31.1%), and a small part to the Shabran (14.1%) district<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, to obtain high income, not the number of hotels, but their direction of operation and service strategy should be in the foreground.



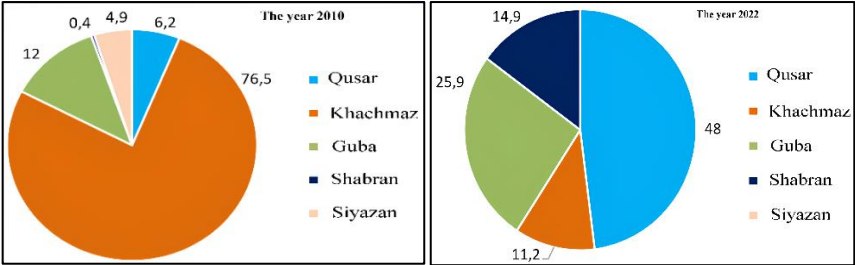
**Source: State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Tourism in Azerbaijan, 2023**

<sup>13</sup> Regions of Azerbaijan, 2023 (statistical compilation) / head T.Budagov. - Baku: Chashiogu EI, - 2023. - 864 p. (In Aze)

<sup>14</sup> Tourism in Azerbaijan (statistical compilation) / head T.Budagov. - Baku: Chashioglu EI, - 2023. - 100 p. (In Aze)

Looking at the income chart of hotels and hotel-type enterprises, it is evident that the majority of income from these establishments comes from the Gusar and Guba regions. Although the overall trend shows positive development, there were sharp declines in 2017 and 2020. In 2017, the reasons for this included the depreciation and devaluation of the manat, coupled with the highest inflation rate in three years (12.9%). In 2020, the hotel industry was severely impacted by the pandemic, leading to a significant drop in revenue. Additionally, it should be noted that since 2006, income from hotels and hotel-type enterprises in the Siyazan region has been minimal, resulting in a lack of statistical data.

One of the main indicators of hotels and hotel-type enterprises is related to costs. Costs have a significant impact on the trend of gross receipts. When analyzing the expenses of the hotel economy in the Guba-Khachmaz economic district, it is known that the expenses have not remained the same as the incomes and have undergone changes. When we examine this change for the years 2010 and 2022, we witness a sharp change in costs. Thus, in 2010, the Khachmaz region, which accounted for 76.5% of the expenses of the total economic region, caused a sharp decrease in 2022 and was 11.2%. This indicator can also be related to income. Because the income of the Khachmaz region has decreased significantly during the research years. However, expenditures in Gusar (from 6.2% to 48.0%), Guba (from 12.0% to 25.9%), and Shabran (from 0.4% to 14.9%) districts have increased. In the Siyazan district, because of the lack of hotel industry, expenses and income were not recorded (diagram 2.).



Source: State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Tourism in Azerbaijan, 2023.

I want to note that the expenses from the operation of hotels and hotel-type enterprises throughout the republic in the Guba-Khachmaz economic district have always been high. In 2010, this indicator was 18.4%; in 2022 it was 18.7%<sup>15</sup>. This indicator significantly exceeds the average figures for the republic. Some experts associate it with newly built and under-construction hotels, and others with reconstructing tourism infrastructure. But in any case, high costs are considered one of the factors that slow down the development of the recreation-tourism industry.

If we look at the trend of beds in the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Guba-Khachmaz economic region by years, we will see that during the years 2005-2022, a constant growth trend was observed in the Republic of Azerbaijan, and in the Guba-Khachmaz economic region, an increase was observed in other years, except for 2011 and 2016. This increase was recorded due to newly built hotels and motels. However, a decrease was observed in the Siyazan district, and an increase was observed in Shabran district after 2019, which is related to the lack of tourism facilities in Siyazan district and the existing businesses in a dilapidated state, as well as the construction of new recreation and tourism centers in Shabran district. In addition to these, in 2020, the construction of the "Shabran Hotel & Resort" tourist complex was started on an area of 12.7 ha near the village of Pirabadil of the Shabran region. In the future, it is aimed at the further development of tourism and hotel industry in the region.

One of the main indicators determining the development of the tourism industry is determined by the number of people accommodated in hotels and hotel-type establishments. Thus, the number of accommodated persons is closely related to the future development of the hotel industry. The number of persons placed in the reservation of numbers and places is considered the main indicator. This indicator, along with the income of the hotel industry, plays an auxiliary role in determining the future activity strategy.

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<sup>15</sup> Tourism in Azerbaijan (statistical compilation) / head T.Budagov. - Baku: Chashioglu EI, - 2023. - 100 p. (In Aze)

As the hotel industry in the Republic of Azerbaijan attracts attention with its development trend, a constant increase in the number of people accommodated in them has also been observed. However, in the comparison of 2019 and 2020, this indicator decreased sharply, that is, by 2.9 times, and in the following years, an increase was noticed again. Such an indicator was also observed in the Guba-Khachmaz economic district. Thus, in the analysis of the relevant years, the number of people accommodated in the hotels in the economic district decreased by 2.3 times. All of this has been caused by the pandemic and shutdowns. But one fact should be taken into account: in the following years, i.e., in the comparison of 2020 and 2022, the number of persons placed in the Republic of Azerbaijan decreased by 222,407 people, but in the Guba-Khachmaz economic region, it increased by 39,192 people (table 1).

Table 1

The number of persons accommodated in hotels and hotel-type establishments in the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Guba-Khachmaz economic region, people

	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Qusar	1396	11345	34700	64425	59378	68228	35892	40573	58699
Xaçmaz	50260	22330	15851	19163	27771	28165	4303	20678	22267
Guba	13888	23761	31332	64611	65728	66870	26232	68072	100076
Shabran	437	1174	1115	1236	529	30191	17640	57045	51604
Siyazan	83	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Economic district	66064	58610	82998	149435	153406	193454	84067	186368	232646
Rep. Azer.	438479	838145	1122068	1414708	1749475	1919765	668813	1172123	1697358

**Source: State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Tourism in Azerbaijan, 2023.**

Travel in tourism is carried out taking into account the natural tourism attractiveness. Because the travel behavior should be better understood, and the purpose of the trip and the destination should be attractive. Such a relationship depends on the tourist's professionalism<sup>16</sup>. The formation and development of tourism as a

<sup>16</sup> Fridgen, J.D. Environmental psychology and tourism // Annals of tourism research, – 1984. No 11, – p. 19-39.

regional system is based on the organization models of tourist routes. Because tourism routes explain the wishes and behaviour of tourists<sup>17</sup>.

Taking into account the above, we can divide the tourism routes in the Guba-Khachmaz economic region into several directions:

- organization of visits to ancient villages, and ethnocultural settlements;
- visits to healing mineral springs;
- understanding of historical and cultural places (mosque, tomb, castle walls, ruins, etc.);
- environmental awareness tours related to nature travel;
- viewing and taking pictures of hydrological natural monuments, etc.

The third chapter of the dissertation work is dedicated to "prospective development directions of recreation-tourism economy in the Guba-Khachmaz economic region". In this chapter, the main features of recreation-tourism zoning and territorial organization are given, the prospective development directions of the recreation-tourism economy are determined, and the strategic directions of development are developed.

As a new and promising sector of the economy of Azerbaijan, the recreation-tourism industry has wide opportunities. To organize more efficient use of these opportunities, recreation-tourism zoning is required, which is measured by the availability of natural-climatic resources, the attractiveness and diversity of landscapes, the richness of cultural-heritage examples, and historical-architectural monuments.

When recreation-tourism zoning is carried out, its prospective recreation zones, natural and historical features of the area, population density, overnight accommodation facilities for tourists, and food and recreation centers should also be taken into account. In addition, new approach methods should be used when recreation-tourism zoning is carried out in each region, state-important objects in the area should

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<sup>17</sup> Flognfeldt, T. The tourist route system – models of travelling patterns // Belgeo, – 2005. No 1-2. – p. 1-26. Doi: 10.4000/belgeo.12406

be identified, and appropriate maps should be drawn up based on them. When drawing up maps, along with the natural conditions, resources, and cultural monuments of anthropogenic origin, each region should take into account its traditions, the social status of the local population, the economic structure, and prospective areas of development.

The zoning process allows for sustainable development to be considered. Because there is no end to development, regionalization acts as a provider of both mutual communication and development at all stages. This can be seen in the following context:

- to identify functionally adequate parties;
- involve all positively affected components in the development;
- acceleration of progress based on free market principles;
- increase of political, economic, social and intellectual capital.

The richness of the nature of the Guba-Khachmaz economic region has led to the diversity of its natural conditions; several internal differences have arisen taking into account the recreation and tourism enterprises operating in the area and their development characteristics. These advantages and differences require that the recreation-tourism zoning in the Guba-Khachmaz economic region, where we conduct research, be carried out taking into account natural, historical, cultural, and economic factors.

Based on the above-mentioned parameters, in a general way, we carried out the recreation-tourism zoning in the Guba-Khachmaz economic district as follows (fig. 2)<sup>18</sup>:

1. Caspian Coast tourism zone: covers a wide area starting from the border of the Republic of Azerbaijan with the Russian Federation to the southern border of the Shabran region. It is characterized by favorable climatic conditions, forest reserves, and sandy beaches. The infrastructure area is well developed in the zone, which is considered a suitable area for tourists.

2. The Gusar tourism zone extends from the southwest of the

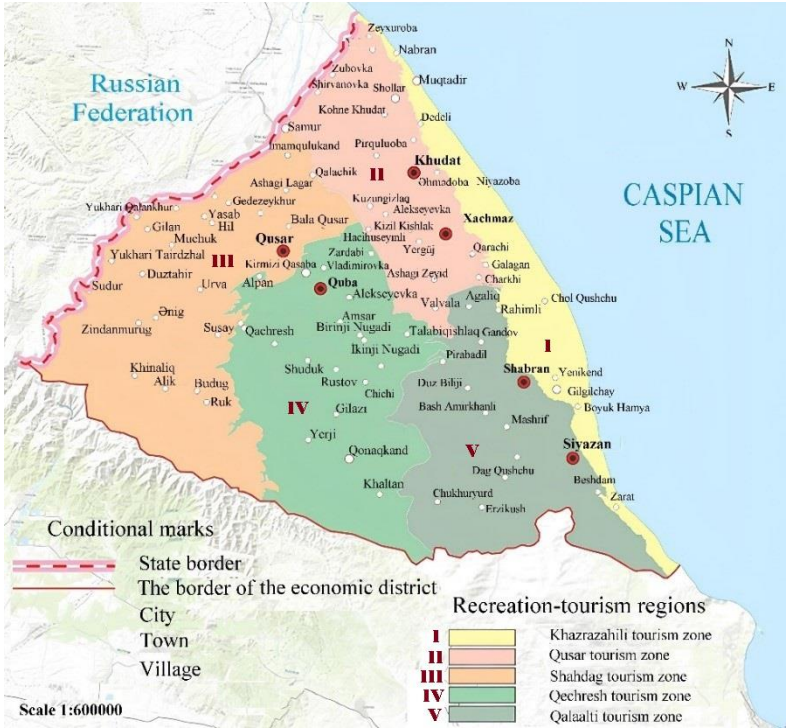
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<sup>18</sup> Khakee, A. Community planning / A. Khakee. – Swedish: Student literature, – 2000. – 171 p.



Gusar sloping plain to the side ridge of the Great Caucasus Mountains. The border of the zone with the Russian Federation and the location near the Yalama-Nabran zone of the Caspian coast, as well as the diversity of the natural landscape and favorable climatic conditions, provide ample opportunities for the organization of resorts, recreation areas, and tourist complexes.

3. Shahdag tourism zone: the main part of this zone, which covers the mountainous and foothill areas of the Gusar and Guba regions, consists of the Side Range of the Greater Caucasus and the Main Caucasus Range. To ensure people's recreation in the zone, the main attention should be focused on the development of mountain tourism and the organization of tourist routes to historical cultural objects.



**Fig. 2. Recreation-tourism zoning of Guba-Khachmaz economic district (Compiled by the author)**

4. Gachresh tourist zone: There are many recreation centers in the Gachresh tourist zone, which is rich in natural monuments. After the Caspian Coast tourism zone, the tourism zone is considered to be one of the areas where tourists are more concentrated in the region, and in the summer months, tourist visits are more frequent throughout the republic.

5. Galaalti-Zeyva tourism zone: covering the foothills of the Shabran and Siyazan regions, this zone is the most attractive and attracts more tourists for health purposes. With the support of the state and the attraction of investors, it is possible to achieve the creation of health and treatment resorts of international importance in the area.

In the conditions of market relations in the Guba-Khachmaz economic district, the development of the recreation-tourism economy acts as a set of economic relations of service areas. Taking into account all this, there is a need for models of service areas in the recreation-tourism economy. Modernization is characterized by the current state of a certain type of service subject in the national or regional recreation-tourism market, based on the level of existing competition. At this time, improving the quality of service, creating a competitive environment, achieving sustainable economic development, and its management are reflected. Based on all the mentioned components, we have classified the market models of service areas (table 2).

Table 2

Classification of market models of service areas in the recreation-tourism economy

Features of classification	Market models		
	Free economy	Regional environment	Monopoly
Number of service providers	Too many	Lots of small businesses	It concentrates all areas in its hands
Type of services	Standard	Differential	Unique
Control of prices	No control	Narrow control	Substantial control
Competitive environment	Free competitive environment	Uncertainty of competition	The competition itself determines

Note: Compiled by Author

If we apply the presented market models to the Guba-Khachmaz economic region, we will see that the service areas of the recreation-tourism industry correspond to the classification of the regional environment. Although there are numerous enterprises providing services in the territory of the economic district, they are mostly small and operate in the summer months. These enterprises provide differential services to tourists and cannot fully control the price policy. Although prices are in line with market economy conditions, there are difficulties in fully regulating them. The competitive environment in this field attracts attention with its uncertainty, and there are sharp differences between small and large companies.

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The number of the employed population in the Guba-Khachmaz economic district was in an almost stable development trend for the period 2015-2022, and in 2022, 249,704 people were registered as employed population in the economic district. This means 5.1% of the employed population of the entire republic. Khachmaz (31.3%) and Guba (30.2%) regions occupy the main places in population employment in the economic region. This indicator is 20.4% in Gusar district, 10.6% in Shabran, and 7.5% in Siyazan<sup>19</sup>. The difference in indicators is related to the number of the district's population and the structure of their farms and business entities. Here, the indicators of

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<sup>19</sup> Labour market (statistical collection) / Head T. Budagov. - Baku: Chashioglu EI-MMC, - 2023. - 192 p. (In Aze)

Khachmaz, Guba, and Gusar regions, where the recreation and tourism economies are better developed, are higher. I would like to note that the majority of the population of the economic district is settled in rural settlements, especially in high areas.

In 2022, 110448 new business entities started operating in the Republic of Azerbaijan in connection with the measures envisaged within the framework of the adopted state programs related to the socio-economic development of the regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 71280 new jobs were opened in the region, and 6275 of them fell to newly established enterprises. In the Guba-Khachmaz economic district, it is reported that 6655 new business entities, 1877 new jobs, and 215 new businesses are the result of these indicators. If we compare new entrepreneurial subjects and newly opened workplaces with the republic and Guba-Khachmaz economic region, we will see that the indicators are not so encouraging. Guba-Khachmaz economic district, which is the most attractive region of the republic in terms of recreation and tourism, has 6.0% of new business entities, 2.6% of new jobs, and 3.4% of newly created enterprises.

As we know, the recreation and tourism sector are labor-intensive and offers significant opportunities for the development of small and medium-sized enterprises. Income from this sector is distributed not only among direct participants but also among local entrepreneurs, making it attractive to producers. Thus, the development of the recreation-tourism economy plays a crucial role in preventing migration, creating new settlements, opening new jobs, and reducing unemployment<sup>20</sup>. However, it is important to note that many jobs in the recreation-tourism industry are seasonal, and much of the labor involves women (such as housekeepers, dishwashers, laundresses, ironers, cooks, etc.). This creates an opportunity for residents to earn additional income, thereby improving the social status of their families.

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<sup>20</sup> Salmanov, A.A. Tourism in the Turkic-speaking countries of the CIS / A.A. Salmanov. - Baku: Elm, - 2005. - 160 p. (In Russ)

Employment, considered one of the main elements of sustainable development, which provides a reliable guarantee for the acceleration of dynamic economic development and progressive reforms in all areas of life, plays an important role in the life and economic activity of the population in Azerbaijan. In this regard, to increase the knowledge and skills of those working in the recreation and tourism industry, training courses should be organized, the modernization of the national tourism system through the application of progressive innovations, and the preparation of highly qualified personnel distinguished by high moral and moral qualities, intellect, and education for tourism management as a priority issue remains.

## **CONCLUSION**

1. To determine the direction of development of the recreation-tourism economy in the Guba-Khachmaz economic region, its recreation-tourism assets were studied on a scientific-methodical and theoretical-practical basis, and the region's natural conditions and resources, as well as historical and cultural monuments, were grouped. Grouping: based places with natural scenery, treatment potential, historical-architectural examples, and cultural heritage were made.

2. The natural conditions of the Guba-Khachmaz economic region, as well as the natural-historical cultural monuments, were evaluated from the point of view of recreation tourism. The classification of the market models of recreation-tourism service areas was given: Gusar-Sudur, Gusar-Anig, Gusar-Ashaghi Lagar, Guba-Khinalig, Guba-Budug, Khachmaz-Zubovka, Shabran-Birinci Nugadi, Siyazan-Khaltan, etc. Tourism routes such as walking, horseback, bicycle tours, and mountain tourism (alpinism) have been developed.

3. Taking into account the natural conditions, historical cultural monuments and economic factors, the Guba-Khachmaz economic region is divided into five tourism zones: Khazar coast, Gusar, Shahdag, Gachrash and Galaalti-Zeyve. In the region, the main advantage is given to the exoticism of the landscape, the comfort of

the climate, the areas where mineral and thermal waters are spread, historical cultural monuments, settlement areas, and places where recreation and tourism facilities exist.

4. The sustainable territorial organization of the recreation-tourism economy is related to the activity of hotels and hotel-type enterprises. 112 hotels are operating in the Guba-Khachmaz economic district, from which 490,136.9 thousand manats were earned, which is 14.8% of the hotels in the republic and 13.8% of the earned income. However, because of statistical-mathematical analysis, it was determined that even though most of the hotels are concentrated in the Khachmaz district (50.9%), 12.6% of the revenues fell into this district. Gusar region is 42.3%, the Guba region is 31.1%, and the Shabran region is 14.1%, surpassing the Khachmaz region in this indicator.

5. Most of the tourism centers, recreation centers, sanatorium resorts and hotels, which are the strategic activities of the recreation-tourism economy, are located in the coastal and foothill areas of the Guba-Khachmaz economic region. However, since the vast majority of them operate only in summer, the labor productivity of the population decreases. 5.1% of the employed population of the republic and 6.1% of the unemployed are concentrated in Guba-Khachmaz economic district. It was determined that only hotel workers make up 0.9% of the employed population in the economic district.

### **Recommendations**

1. In the Guba-Khachmaz economic district, rural settlements with an ancient history and unique culture should be listed, the tourism potential of villages should be assessed using modern methods and methodologies, an infrastructure network of modern tourism should be created, educated tour operators should be trained, and propaganda work should be carried out.

2. The villages in the Guba-Khachmaz economic district that are more interesting to tourists should be included in the international tourism route and should be preserved as historical and cultural

monuments for future generations.

3. In the Guba-Khachmaz economic district, which is one of the most convenient regions for people's recreation, health, and treatment, there is a great need to create resort-sanatorium complexes that meet the mass demand of tourists.

4. To fully provide recreation and treatment in the Guba-Khachmaz economic district, more promising areas should be determined by conducting natural-biological, resort-logical, geological, hydro-geological, and other studies, and resort-sanatorium complexes meeting new modern standards should be created on their basis.

5. The development of the recreation-tourism industry, which is considered one of the labor-intensive areas, can play an exceptional role in creating new jobs. For this, there should be financial support from the state, local and foreign investors should be involved in this field, and local entrepreneur should be given loans preferentially.

**The main content of the dissertation is reflected in the following articles and theses of the author:**

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