

The Historical and Cultural Monuments as Recreational Reserves in Guba-Khachmaz Economic Region of Azerbaijan

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Abstract

Tourism as most beneficial economic activity has been rapidly developing in the Republic of Azerbaijan in recent years, and this process is continuing as well. The increasing role of tourism potential on international scale finds its reflection in growth of trips made by visitors to this country. The development of different kinds of recreational business, assistance made for small- and medium ownerships, and also creation of modern tourism infrastructure considerably influence on amount of investments in tourism industry of Azerbaijan. The 2011 year has been declared as "The year of tourism" in the country. Different ways of development of tourism, improvement of services in this area, training of professional specialists, solution of visa problem, creation of new touristic routes and city tours, and other issues were at the center of government's attention. In 2011, Azerbaijan were visited by 1836226 persons. The number of incomes from tourism made 966,3 thousand Azeri manat (about \$ 760 thousand) or 59,5% much more than that of 2010. The territory of Azerbaijan is of great interest for tourists not only due to natural condition but also cultural objects with long history. This paper is devoted to historical and cultural recreational reserves of Guba-Khachmaz, one of the most developed touristic regions of Azerbaijan.

Key words: recreational, cultural monuments, fortification, monument, excavations

The economic region of Guba-Khachmaz is considered to be the mostly concentrated place of tourists in Azerbaijan behind Baku city. Situated in the north-eastern part of the country, the territory includes the administrative units of Guba, Gusar, Khachmaz, Shabran, and Siyazan. The reason of relatively high development of tourism industry in Guba-Khachmaz region is connected with its geographical position, namely proximity to the cities of Baku and Sumgait, long border with the Russian Federation, rich recreational reserves, and economic reforms implemented in this area in recent years.

The main works carried out in Guba-Khachmaz area includes creation of new recreational centers, renovation of historical and cultural monuments, restoration of sacred places of pilgrimage, and others. The important components of product of tourism are natural and historical monuments. For the development of tourism in the Guba-Khachmaz region, it is necessary to study the natural and old cultural monuments of this area with evaluation of them. After this, new and more attractive territories must be defined on the basis of which the new tourism routes should be appointed. The economic region of Guba-Khachmaz is rich in both natural and historical monuments necessary for the development of tourism. The area have favorable geographical position, attractive landscapes, clean air, lakes, springs, beaches, forests, cultural objects, being rich in traditions of decorative- and applicative handicrafts, carpet-making, manual weaving, silk fabric making, and etc. as well. These large potential allows to develop mass tourism in the region.

The administrative region of Guba has a territory with 2,58 thousand sq.km, situated 168 km far away from Baku. The information about history of Guba is given based on ancient Albanian and Arabian sources. Having long history, Guba is rich in cultural places and monuments which takes their beginning from 15th century, and are dated up to 19th century. Many of them are officially being reserved. One of the famous places in the region in Khinalig village located at about 2500 m than sea level and covered by high mountains. The settlement is listed among historical and architectural monuments of world importance. Situated 53 km off Guba city, Khinalig is ethnographically unique place. The ancient language of Khinalig's population does not look like any contemporary languages in the world.

Maintaining their language, they also easily speak in Azeri language. The phenomenon of Khinalig is very interesting in the world history. In 2001, "Historical and ethnographic museum of Khinalig" was created. The sacred area and place of pilgrimage near the village also should be mentioned. It dates to 9th century, and is called Atashgah among the indigenous population because of the flame that naturally erupts here. Ancient archeological and ethnographic items such as carpets, clay- and copper plates, other homely using things, stone inscriptions, and etc. have been discovered in Khinalig. Newly-constructed highway to Khinalig village is 53 km long (as of 2006), allowing to receipt large number of tourists. The settlement is provided with electricity and phone stations.

Another unique village in the territory is Budug, 67 km west from the administrative center of Guba. About 350 people living here speak their own language. The ancient building called 'dakhma' has been found in Budug. Belonging to Zoroaster period, this building has been intended for funeral ceremonies. The building is called Sukut ("Silence") Tower. Improvement of social infrastructure is considered to be one of important problems in Budug because the village is very interesting place for visitors. The number of tourists can grow if the corresponding needed works will be done. Development of tourism in the village also would positively affect the living condition of indigenous population.

Main historical and cultural monuments in Guba includes Subaba Turba (16th century) in Alpan village, mosques and minarets in the Birinji Nugadi village (17th-19th centuries), Taghli bridge constructed on the Gudyalchay River, the Tower dated to 19th century in Mudju village, the tower and the Mosque of Sekkizgusheli in the village of Agbil (16th century), the mosques of Sekinekhanim, Haji Sefer and Juma Mosque, and Gumbazli bath-house in Guba city (19th century), the tower in the city's cemetery (18th century), the tower in Gultepe village (19th century), Alamu Tower and historical mosque in Rustov village, etc.

There are three historical centers of carpet-making in the studied area. The first center is a group of settlements, located at higher altitudes, including Gonagkand, Khashi, Jimi, Afurja, Yerfi, Budug, Griz, Jek, and Salmasoyud. The second carpet-making areal covers foothill territories, including Amirkhanli, Alikhanli, Khalfalar, Piramsan, Biliji, Shahnazarli, Pirabadil, Zeyva, Zohremi, Sumagobaq, Khirdagul-Chichi, Sirt-Chichi, and Dere-Chichi villages. The third group represents the villages of lowland plains such as Chay Garagashli, Haji Garagashli, Susenli, Garagashli, Devechi, Mollakamalli and others.

According to historical sources, the French writer and tripper Alexander Duma leaved Moscow in November 1858, making trip to Astrakhan, Gezler, Derbend, and later Guba. Being closely interested in learning the historical ethnography of Azerbaijan, A.Duma were familiar with lives of Azerbaijani population, and collected data for his book "Trip to the Caucasus", including legends related to mountains of Guba, Shahdag and others. The author highly appreciated carpet-making works in Guba.

The house-museum of famous writer and historian of Azerbaijan A.Bakhikhanov is one of the most interesting museums for tourists visiting Guba. The monuments of A.Bakhikhanov, S.Vurgun, V.Mayakovski, and other prominent public figures are in Guba as well. In April of 2007, human bones were found during excavations in the city of Guba. The study revealed that these human bones had belonged to civilians killed by nationalist Armenians in March 1918. This area as well as other places where Azerbaijanis were killed in mass the same year were restored and maintained as an open museum for visitors.

The administrative region of Gusar has a territory with 1,54 thousand sq.km of area. The region is located at foothills of the Greater Caucasus, covering the inclined plane of Gusar. The south-western part of the territory is mountainous, the central part is the inclined plain area, and the north-eastern part is the lowland Samur-Devechi plain, altitude of which is between 100 m and 4243 m (the peak of Shahdag). The favorable climatic condition of this territory allows to develop resorts, recreational centers and tourism areas.

There are ancient places of settlement with historical and cultural objects in the territory of Gusar. These ancient settlements dated to the second millennium BC include Mahmudtepe (Gedezeykhour), the Minsar hills, the Gavdishan hills (Badirgala), the Gafla hills (Hazra) along with settlements of the Middle Ages such as the Gizilgul and Agakhan hills (Ashagi Leger), the Galakhur hills (Hazra), and others. Besides these, the walls of fortresses and the mosque dated to 13th century near the Anik settlement as well as the Hazra village-based tomb of Sheykh Juneyd (16th century) which was the father of the founder of the Safevids Empire Shah Ismayil Khatai should be mentioned.

As a result of archeological excavations carried out in the village of Hazra, the kurgan dated to the first millennium BC and the ancient place of human settlement (9-16th centuries) named Galukhur have been revealed. The another excavations have revealed different remnants of the ancient- and the Middle Ages periods, including ancient settlements and cemeteries in the villages of Hil, Guruyel, and etc. The places of human living, tombs, and mosques dated to the different periods have been maintained in the villages of Anik, Gedezeykhur, Leger, Ashagi Leger, Badirgala, Kukhuroba, and Zindanmurug. Natural and historical monuments are of interest for tourists visiting Gusar. The tourism infrastructure and services should be improved here for the purpose of involving tourists to Gusar further.

The administrative region of Khachmaz is situated 157 km off Baku, and its territory area is 1,05 thousand sq.km. There are about 60 historical and construction buildings preserved in Khachmaz by the present. There are ancient cultural monuments in the region as well. As a result of the excavations, tombs, traces of ancient settlements, labor and hunting tools, household items dated to the Neolithic and Bronze Ages were found. Among them, ancient settlements and kurgans of world importance dated to the Bronze Age near Serkerli, Mollaburhan, Hulovlu, Garajik and Hasangala villages should be mentioned in particular.

The historical monuments and buildings of state importance in Khachmaz include ancient settlements of Shahardag (the Iron Age), Tapayatagi (the Bronze Age), Serkertepe (the third and the second millenniums B.C.) and Mugtadirtapa (9-13th centuries). The ancient places of living near Janakhir and Bostanchi villages dated to the Middle Ages should be mentioned as well. The historical buildings in Khachmaz are also: the mosques constructed in Morugoba, Galagan, Uzunoba and Tagaroba villages (20th century); Shah Abbas Mosque with religious school in Qaragurtlu village (15-16th centuries); and Sheykh Yusif Mosque and Altibujag Turba in Shikhlar village (15th century).

One of fascinating places attracting tourists in Khachmaz is the railway station built in 1898, and the water tower. Encompassing large territory, the railway station is situated at the center of the city. The office buildings of other six railway stations constructed in 1900-1903 are functioning, too. These seven stations bear the status of historical monument. As for the water tower, it was built in 1903, distinguishing itself for the architectural structure. Khachmaz region which is rich in springs, has been providing the Absheron peninsula and rapidly growing Baku city with drinking water in the beginning of the twentieth century.

At that time this water has been being transported by trains, and this water tower has been serving as water reservoir. The water storage of Shollar near Khudat city constructed by the well-known millionaire H.Z.Tagiyev in 1900-1903, and the water pipeline are included into the list of Azerbaijan's historical monuments as well. It is also notable to mention that the city of Khudat existing as fortification in the 13th century later has become the former capital of Guba khanate in the 18th century. There are also monuments of a number of famous Azerbaijani public persons, including N.Narimanov, Khurshudbanu Natavan, Nizami Ganjavi, S.Vurgun, Nasreddin Tusi, and others in Khachmaz. Traditional folk art carpet-weaving is being developed here.

The administrative region of Shabran (formerly Devechi) has a territory with 1,09 thousand sq.km, to south from Khachmaz region. There are numerous archeological objects founded in the territory and dated to III-II millennium BC. The most important findings are ruins of the ancient settlement of Shabran dated to 5-13th centuries. The ancient city of Shabran has been existing since 4th century. It was known as a large center of trade and craft in Azerbaijan during the Middle Ages. Particularly, silk production, the arts of pottery and glass-blowing were widely spread here. Fragments of a water pipeline built in the fourteenth century were found during archaeological excavations in the territory of Shabran. This water pipeline has been connecting Shabran and special spring located 14 km off.

The great poet and scholar of Azerbaijan A.Bakikhanov described Shabran as 'a place in the vicinity of Gaf Mount with extremely fresh nature, beautiful springs and fruit trees' in his work called 'Gulistani-Irem'. The Dutch traveler J.Streise noted in the 16th century that he saw the remnants of 'tandirs' – places where people baked bread for the armies of Alexander the Macedonian. The mosques of Afsar, Tokhmag Khan and Uzun Hasan constructed in Shabran also were a places of great interest for visitors at different times. The historian and traveler of the 17th century E.Chalabi describes Shabran as a settlement which has seventy living quarters with their own mosques. Regretfully, no trace is left concerning these historical monuments. The famous Azerbaijani poet A.Khagani wrote his well-known poem "Habsiyya" in the prison of Shabran to where he was exiled by the ruler of Shirvanids State Akhsitan in 1174.

In order to protect the historical and cultural monuments of Shabran for future generations, the President of Azerbaijan signed an order in 2003, according to which Shabran city was declared as a reserved area and included into the international tourism route. The another monument of historical and cultural importance in Shabran region is the barrier (fortification wall) constructed in Gilgilchay area and dated to the Middle Ages. With 120 km long, the Gilgilchay barrier is considered to be the second longest defensive fortification in the world after the Great Chinese Wall. Its height is from 5-7 m up to 7-11 km in some places, and its width is 30-35 m. The Gilgilchay walls lies from the Caspian Sea up to Babadag Mountain of the Great Caucasus.

Archaeological excavations revealed that the construction of Gilgilchay walls started BC, and was reinforced with additional construction later. Gilgilchay was one of the four largest defense lines in the Caucasus during the beginnings of the Middle Ages and played significant role in prevention of invasion of northern tribes to the territory of the Caucasian Albania in the 3-5th centuries. The walls ends at the grandiose Chiraggala fortification with tower constructed in the 5th century and served as a guard. Chiraggala has been being provided for a long time with drinking water due to secret underground channels. The historical complex of Chiraggala has been declared a reserved area and included into the international routes since 2003.

The other historical and architectural monuments of national importance Shabran region include: ancient settlement and the mosque of Agmul dated to the Iron Age in the village of Bash Amir Khanli; the place of ancient settlement and the mosque of Chaggali dated to the Bronze Age, south-east from the Aygunlu village; Khalfali Seyidahmad Tower at the north of Khalfalar village; the Albanian church in Gulvar village; the mosques in Zeyva, Lachadi, Duz Biliji, Shahnezerli, Dag Biliji and other villages. All these objects are captivating places and have recreational importance. In general, the region has numerous mosques and sacred places with long history.

The fifth administrative unit in Guba-Khachmaz region is **Siyazan**. It is located 103 km from Baku. Siyazan's territory is 0,70 thousand sq.km. Included into the list of the world's monuments, the Beshbarmag defensive fortification is located near the village of Zarat (4-6th centuries). This fortification combines the first defensive walls constructed in the territory of the Caucasian Albania. The Beshbarmag walls have been being elongated from the Beshbarmag Rock to the Caspian Sea. The distance between the Great Caucasus and the sea is much less here and that's why the area were favorable for construction of fortification against invaders. However, only a small part of this ancient building has been remained up to present. The defensive walls consist of stones at foothill areas, and of air-brick at plains.

It also should be noted that Beshbarmag Rock (540 m above sea level), namely the sacred place of Khidirzinda is also a pilgrimage area. Dated to the 7th century, Khidirzinda is considered to be one of the well-known places of pilgrimage in Azerbaijan. This place of worship was famous even at ancient times.

Conclusion

In recent years, many state orders and measurements were related to the preservation of historical and architecture monuments in Azerbaijan in order to keep them for future generations. The works in this area are underway as well. Guba-Khachmaz region of Azerbaijan has great recreational potential due to its rich history and ancient architectural buildings. However, in order to effective usage of this potential, the development of infrastructure, particularly reconstruction of highways in the region is very necessary. On the other hand, tourism will more successively developed in the region also due to rational organization and improvement of touristic routes to historical and cultural places as well as implementation of corresponding agitation works.

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