

The Role of Adjara Sightseeing in Tourism

Ermile Meskhia

Professor, Doctor of Historical Sciences, Batumi Art State University, Georgia

Роль достопримечательностей Аджарии в туризме

Эрмиле Месхиа

Профессор Батумского государственного университета искусств, доктор наук, Грузия

Abstract: Social-economic reforms implemented in Georgia in recent years have supported to develop touristic infrastructure, transport and routes, tourism resources have been totally or partially changed, well-equipped high class hotels, restaurants, cafes and bars, entertainment and leisure centers have already been in function, rehabilitation works have been carried out on cultural sites (monuments, museums, theatres, concert and sport centers, squares, recreational sites, etc.)

Adjara takes a leading place in terms of tourism infrastructure among the regions of Georgia. Rich cultural heritage of this region, diverse nature, various geographical reliefs, curative qualities of climate and mineral waters, well-equipped beaches, distinguished city and village daily life, delicious cuisine and industries create the best conditions to develop all type of tourism throughout the year. Therefore, Adjara after the capital Tbilisi is a leader (31%) among Georgian regions according to international visits (www.gnta.ge).

Among various tours in Adjara, visitors are most of all interested in city, agrarian and family tourism. Cultural, historical and natural sightseeing of the region play a significant role in any type of tourism. According to statistics, most of international visits (47.1%) were carried out for entertaining, relaxational and recreational purposes (www.gnta.ge).

Keywords: tourism, economics, touristic infrastructure, reforms, Georgia, Adjara, Batumi, sightseeing.

Introduction

Georgia with its geographical location, fascinating nature, numerous historical monuments, diverse culture, distinguished folklore and hospitality traditions has always been the subject of interest for foreign visitors.

Travelling history in Georgia has passed all the stages typical to world tourism history.

The development of tourism with its classical meaning started in the XIX-XX cc. In fact, it achieved larger scales in the 2nd half of the XX c. Well-equipped touristic bases and hotels have started to function in recent years. Adjara used to be one of popular touristic regions throughout former Soviet Union. In spite of the country’s big touristic potential, tourism infrastructure was not developed enough and existing recourses didn’t meet with international standards.

The country’s tourism policy has significantly changed in recent period. With the help of implemented infrastructure projects, educational, marketing, advertising and informational means, touristic market has been developing year by year. “Foreigners consider Georgia as a quite new, still unknown country and each traveller and tourist find it interesting to discover Georgia” (History of tourism development in Georgia).

Tourism potential in Georgia is determined by the following:

1. The Black Sea coastline. It is the main base for the development of massive tourism;
2. Caucasus Mountains. Highlands of Georgia create extremely good conditions for the development of skiing tourism and alpinism;
3. Material cultural and natural monuments;
4. Resorts and resort places (M. Metreveli, 2011: 404p.)

Besides that, Georgian regions with completely distinguished culture, lifestyle, traditions, national cuisine, etc. represent important tourism resources.

The history of Georgia has developed beside ancient Asian civilizations and it represents the part of world civilization.

There are registered 35 000 historical monuments in Georgia, among them 5 000 are protected by the state, 3 of them are included in the UNESCO World Heritage List and 15 have a status of tentative sites. The earliest Pleistocene hominid cranial remains (1.7 - 1.8 million years) discovered on the territory of Georgia called Dmanisi have extremely increased tourists' interest to Georgia in recent years (G. Khomeriki, 2008:141).

In 2017, Georgia hosted 7.9 million visitors, total amount of expenditure spent by international visitors reached 5.8 billion GEL and average expenditure for a visit reached 889GEL. The most percentage of expenditure was on food and drinks (26% of the whole expenditure) and accommodation (23%). Also recreational and cultural activities took a significant percentage (18%) and visiting sightseeing got 37% among other popular activities of tourism. (www.gnta.ge).

Touristic Sightseeing of Adjara

Adjara is one of distinguished regions of Georgia. It's popular not only with its diverse nature but also material cultural monuments, cultural sightseeing and distinguished cuisine.

Adjara touristic sightseeing includes nature monuments, material culture monuments, cultural and art institutions, traditional spiritual cultural things and cuisine.

Adjara nature monuments are coastlines, caves, reserves, parks, fascinating sites and wild nature.

Adjara material culture monuments are the following:

Historical constructions – castles, temples, various cult buildings and places, palaces;

Cultural and art institutions – museums, art galleries, exhibition and entertaining centers, theaters, festivals, etc.;

Traditional spiritual cultural things of Adjara – public holidays, folk music and choreography; Adjarian traditional cuisine.

Adjara comprises 1 town and 5 municipalities. The history of Batumi starts from Antic times (IV c. BC). Formation of Batumi as a modern city has started since the 80s of XIX c. Turning Batumi from a little Asian type of settlement to a small European city was conditioned by its special status (Porto Franco) declared by the Congress of Berlin (1878) after Adjara became free from three-century-rulership of Ottomans.

Since 2005, as a result of the development of touristic infrastructure, rehabilitation of old city suburbs, well-equipment of new settlements, opening of new world known brand hotels (Sheraton, Radisson, Hilton, etc.) and renovation of cultural and leisure centers Batumi has become a real Black Sea touristic center.

One of attractive sites for tourists among Batumi sightseeing is the seaside park or Batumi Boulevard, which was arranged in 1884. It has all conditions for leisure and entertainment. The territory of Batumi Boulevard increases day by day. There is French dancing fountain in New Boulevard. The boulevard also includes 6 May Park. Next to the park one can find famous Batumi dolphinarium and aquarium.

Batumi Botanical Garden, which history starts from 1881, is located 9 km. from Batumi. It is distinguished by specific physical-geographical conditions and diverse species of plants brought from different continents of the world (<http://www.bbg.ge>). The number of visitors comparing with

previous years is significantly increased not only in the botanical garden but also dolphinarium. However, the number of visitors in Batumi Boulevard is unknown, because it’s free of charge to visit the site.

There are 4 reserved areas in Adjara: Mtirala National Park, Kobuleti Protected Areas, (Kobuleti state reserve and managed reserve), Machakhela National Park, Kintrishi protected Areas.

Kobuleti Protected Areas (Kobuleti state reserve and managed reserve) was established in order to save unique waterfowl habitat wetland ecosystems of international importance, as natural heritage of high values, which have been recognized by the Ramsar Convention. The mentioned wetlands are located in the Autonomous Republic of Adjara and include north-eastern part of Kobuleti coastal plain and are distinguished by diversity of birds and plants. Kobuleti Protected Areas include sphagnum peat of Ispani 1 - and Ispani 2, with arranged trails where visitors can carry out educational-scientific tours. Visitors’ center is combined into the administrative building. It is also possible to rent special skis and walk along sphagnum peat. (<http://www.ajaraforestry.ge/Kobuleti Protected Areas>).

Kintrishi Protected Areas is located in a picturesque valley of Kintrishi river (Kobuleti municipality). Kintrishi Reserve has a good touristic potential. It is situated 20km away from Kobuleti resort, where numerous hotels, restaurants and guest houses are located. (Protected Areas of Georgia, 2007:102). Kintrishi PAs offer their visitors two tourist trails, both on foot and by horse. Tourist trails are located 300-2,000 meters above the sea level. Picnic and camping places are arranged along trails, fire spots are also allocated. Visitors can visit the area at any time of the year. Visitors’ center of PAs will help you to organize guide, horse and local transport. (<http://www.ajaraforestry.ge/Kintrishi Protected Areas>). Tourist can also visit arch stone bridges, which represent architectural monuments of IX-XI cc. and unique Colchi-type boxwood growing (*Buxus Colchica*).

Mtirala National Park is located near Batumi. The park is located between Municipalities of Kobuleti, Khelvachauri and Keda. There are exhibition and presentation halls in the visitors’ center where visitors have the opportunity to become familiar with the specifics of the National Park, services, tariffs and choose the desired option. Tourist trails of Mtirala NP are one or two-days. The trails are marked and well-arranged. Picnic and camping places are arranged, fire spots are allocated as well as tourist shelter is 9 km away from the beginning of the trail. National park offers hiking, horsing, scientific and eco-tours. The best season for visit is spring, summer and early autumn. Visitors’ center of national park will help you to organize guide, horse and local transport (<http://www.ajaraforestry.ge/Mtirala National Park>).

Machakhela National Park is located in Khelvachauri municipality. In the National Park area there are historical and cultural monuments: Arch bridges of different periods, fortresses, limestone wine presses and cellars. There are 2 easy, driving roads integrated with pedestrian trails. Tourist routes can offer visitors to see alder groves, beech and chestnut forests. From the “Mtavarangelozhi” mountain visitors can enjoy the spectacular view of Batumi, Machakhela River gorge and delta of Chorokhi River and the Black sea. Active tourist season lasts from May to October (<http://apa.gov.ge/ge/Machakhela National Park>).

The number of visitors to protected areas and national parks has been significantly increased since last year. (www.gnta.ge).

Protected Areas	January-May 2017	January-May 2018	Difference	%
Kobuleti Protected Areas	2 097	2 321	223	11
Kintrishi Protected Areas	1 030	1 255	225	22
Mtirala National Park	7 738	11 587	3 849	50
Machakhela National Park	735	1 620	885	120

Goderdzi Alpine Garden in “Shkernali” territory of Goderdzi Resort has been started to arrange since 2016. It’s planned to build visitor’s center, parking and picnic places. Invited

representatives of Munich Botanical Garden and France Alpine Botanical Garden give consultations for the development of arrangement process.

Adjara with its mountainous resorts, fascinating nature, climate, medicinal waters and guest houses attracts the tourists tired with urban lifestyle who prefer relaxing in cozy environment. Winter ski resort “Gomarduli” is very popular with its skiing trails in winter.

Adjara museums are interesting cultural sightseeing for tourists, where they can find important collections describing not only Adjarian but also Georgian history, culture and lifestyle. Some of them represent world heritage. Totally there are 18 museums in Adjara (<http://www.georgianmuseums.ge>).

The most popular sightseeing in Adjara is material culture monuments: fortresses, cult buildings, medieval arch stone bridges, Adjarian houses typical to Georgian lifestyle, etc.

Theatres, musical centers and cinemas in Adjara offer various cultural programs to tourists. There are 3 state theatres functioning in Adjara and one of these theatres is located in the most mountainous region of Europe (Khulo). The Batumi Musical Center combines opera, orchestral and choir directions. The center often hosts concerts by foreigner and local performers, operas, musicles, show-performances, exhibitions, cultural events, festivals, competitions, etc.

Entertaining centers are the summer theatre, disco clubs, aquarium, zoo, dolphinarium, cable way, aqua park, ice palace, attractions, modern, well-equipped closed and open swimming pools. Tourists can also hire water transports and a helicopter.

Adjarian state and private ensembles who have astonished foreign audience many times with their virtuous art at foreign festivals abroad offer interesting programs to Georgian folk music and choreography lovers.

Old and contemporary ethnography is very well represented at public holidays such as “Shuamtoba”, “Kolkhoba”, “Batumboba”, Summer season ceremonial opening, “Fridonoba” (commemoration day of famous Georgian poet Fridon Khalvashi), etc.

“Adjarian cuisine is distinguished by its diversity and peculiarities, wide range of dishes and cooking methods, table laying traditions and specific rituals about it” (Adjara, Touristic-Regional Resources, 2016:157). Local cuisine is popular not only among Georgians but also foreign tourists. Tasting Adjarian dishes is possible in restaurants as well as in local families. The following restaurants “Adjarian House”, ”Wine House”, “Megrul-Lazuri” and many others offer high quality assortment of food to Georgian dish gourmands.

Important infrastructure projects have been implemented recently for the development of tourism in Adjara. Rising state financing to the Department of Tourism made it possible to take part in international tourism exhibitions, markets and pavilions, open tourism information centers, train hundreds of specialists with the help of academic and short term educational programs. In spite of that some fields of tourism suffer from shortage of qualified staff, there are also some problems about well-equipment of museums, club institutions and creation of English web-sites. One of problems is preparation of guides and language barrier in service field.

Conclusion

Tourism Department of Adjara, tour companies and travel agencies in cooperation with foreign colleagues popularize tourism potential of Adjara and its leisure and entertainment conditions in different countries, that significantly increases number of tourists year by year. In case of preserving the increased rate of tourist arrivals, Adjara will become one of visited regions among the other famous regions of Europe in the nearest future.

Bibliography

1. Adjara. Touristic-Regional Resources, Batumi, 2016
2. M. Metreveli, Business of Tourism, Touristic Resources of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2011
3. Protected Areas of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2007
4. History of Tourism Development in Georgia, <https://sites.google.com/a/iliauni.edu.ge>

5. G. Khomeriki, Tourism, Tbilisi, 2008
6. <http://www.bbg.ge>
7. www.gnta.ge, Statistics
8. <http://apa.gov.ge/ge/eco-tourism/servisebi-da-tarifebi/machaxelas-erovnuli-parki>
9. <http://www.ajaraforestry.ge>
10. <http://www.georgianmuseums.ge>