

The Resource Potential of Medical Tourism in Mountainous Adjara

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Abstract

Tourism has an important place in the Georgian economy. For sustainable tourism development, inclusive development is necessary as an interdisciplinary complex and reasonable use of resources, especially natural ones. We consider it important to utilize the natural resources of the country for developing medical tourism. It is well known Georgia's Resorts and its places Attract numerous tourists and vacationers in health, medical, SPA, and WELLNESS tourism. According to the list and status of approved resorts, there are 103 resorts and 168 resorts in Georgia. Although this list also includes the resorts from mountainous Adjara, some new resources are not yet widely known and can be included. Today, the various field of tourism is developing rapidly in mountainous Adjara. Based on the above, we aim to explore issues related to medical tourism resources. Mineral waters, mud, healing bath, and other resources preserved in the historical memory of the local population, traditionally used for healing, were studied. We have thought according to saved information in the people, may find new medicinal waters are not included in the resolution of the Government of Georgia "On approval of the list and status of resorts." We hope that further study (using the laboratory and clinical trials) of the identified resources will significantly contribute to the development the medical tourism in the mountainous region of Adjara.

Introduction

In recent years, the tourism industry has made significant progress globally and has become a significant driver of sustainable socio-economic development. Especially in the last two decades, tourism has been one of the fastest-growing and growing destinations in the economy. Thus, sustainable tourism development needs to develop strategic approaches and the right

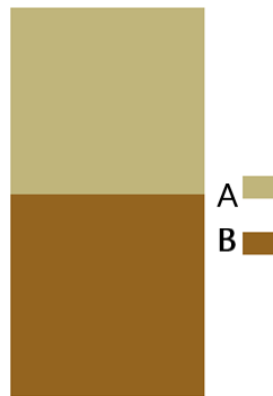
vision, which will be a prerequisite for all stages (for communities and nature) to be carried out without harming the environment (Tang, 2011) (Hwang & Kim, 2020). Currently, there is a widespread consensus that the tourism development strategy should focus on sustainability, hence forming a platform for sustainable economic development (Wakimin et al., 2018). Tourism is one of the world's strongest and fastest growing sectors (Gössling et al., 2005). One of the main challenges related to tourism and travel is the expansion of environmental problems in tourism development if the international standard is not met as much as possible. Therefore, restrictions on the use of resources may be on the agenda, which is also one of the preconditions for achieving sustainable tourism development. (Gössling et al., 2005). And last but not least, the identification of problems in the tourism industry that are significantly harmful to the environment, and in particular, raises many questions about the economic benefits (Gössling et al., 2005). Along with raising awareness of economic progress and especially human health activities, wellness tourism is considered as one of the priority segments of the tourism market that promotes a healthy lifestyle. Wellness tourism has received particular attention in recent decades, hence the growing interest from the scientific community (Hall, 2011). Current research focuses on improving wellness tourism, setting specific tasks by many regions (Huang & Xu, 2018). Access to therapeutic services for people from certain places, especially access to health services, is related to the relevant environment, which differs significantly in specific political and cultural contexts (Atkinson, 2013). Many issues (quality control of services, environmental measures such as pollution standards and appropriate measures for solid waste disposal, etc.) are essential for the development of mountain tourism.) (Dérioz et al., 2020) (Songling et al., 2019). In particular, unregulated, uncontrolled and predatory natural resources should be avoided in terms of resource utilization. In addition, many activities are specific to the mountain region. This requires the popularization of natural and cultural resources, taking into account the characteristics of the mountainous region such as fresh, cool air, the beauty of the mountains, the cultural characteristics of the region (local traditions), unforgettable Landscapes, and existing mineral resources and more. Despite the many opportunities, there are challenges. Thus, proper management of wellness tourism among them should be the main challenge, which will guarantee the attraction of more visitors. The tourism opportunities of the mountainous region, including the development of wellness tourism in accordance with international standards will

create a unique opportunity for the development of the country's economy. However, the central issue should be the introduction of complex approaches, which may be a prerequisite for joining international health organizations. (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) & European Travel Commission (ETC), 2018) Global Wellness Institute. Global Wellness Tourism Economy; Global Wellness Institute: Miami, FL, USA, 2018.

Especially the income of wellness tourism is growing day by day. It is expected to reach \$ 919 billion by 2022, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this forecast cannot be justified (by the World Tourism Organization). (UNWTO). For example, in 2017, the wellness tourism market grew by 5.4%, almost twice as fast as general tourism (3.2%). According to the data, it accounted for 17% of total tourism profits in the same year (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) & European Travel Commission (ETC), 2018). Thus, wellness that encompasses a variety of opportunities is a growing industry (Baloglu et al., 2019) (Adongo et al., 2017). In this context, the development of the wellness tourism industry is especially promising, of course under the right management conditions. (Rodrigues et al., 2020), Especially the demand in the resort market is growing (Koh et al., 2010) (Pesonen et al., 2011), Due to the results of many scientific studies (stress relief, preventive aspects, etc.), in addition, awareness of wellness tourism has increased, and the growth of the market has led to the emergence of new perspectives. Accordingly, we think that the benefits of wellness tourism should be enormous, but it is important to note that the demand for existing resources (baths, healing waters, natural foods) must be managed with the right management. First of all, it should be based on thorough research of the available resource and the expansion or reduction of the presented list, ie the correct assessment of the specific need in terms of medical purposes, therefore, the increase in efficiency requires the proper management of resort resources. Which will be crucial both for the success of companies and for the quality of services. Based on the above, the object of our research was the mountainous region of Adjara. To assess its tourism potential, we explored existing natural resources; In the modern trends of world tourism, there is an interest in the field of wellness. Therefore, we wondered whether there are more opportunities in the Adjara highlands to promote medical tourism, which will increase the number of visitors. Thus, it is essential to study the tourism resource, especially to study and define the healing water resource

as a tourist facility, which is important for strengthening further research or developing a tourism service.

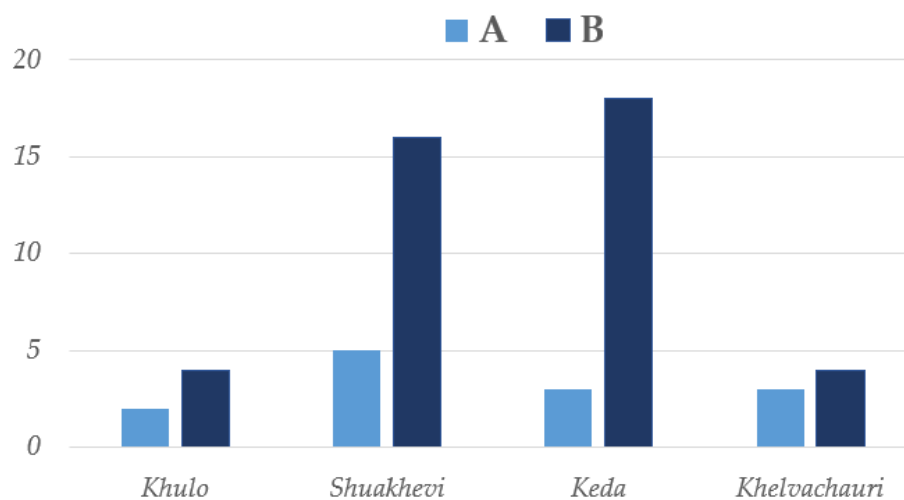
The study Methods: According to the above, a special questionnaire was prepared; 77 respondents participated at the current stage. When introducing a wellness service, it is essential to combine a special diet with different water procedures.



Picture 1. The total number of respondents
A - Woman (48%); B- Man (52%)

The results: Tourism has an important place in the Georgian economy. For sustainable tourism development, inclusive development is necessary as an interdisciplinary complex and reasonable use of resources, especially natural ones. We consider it important to utilize the natural resources of the country for developing medical tourism. It is well known Georgia's Resorts and its places Attract numerous tourists and vacationers in health, medical, SPA, and WELLNESS tourism. According to the list and status of approved resorts, there are 103 resorts and 168 resorts in Georgia. Although this list also includes the resorts from mountainous Adjara, some new resources are not yet widely known and can be included. Today, the various field of tourism is developing rapidly in mountainous Adjara. Based on the above, we aim to explore issues related to medical tourism resources. Mineral waters, mud, healing bath, and other resources preserved in the historical memory of the local population, traditionally used for healing, were studied. We also analyzed the most famous healing waters and baths according to the municipality of the mountainous zone of Adjara. It is noteworthy that according to our research, the healing waters and baths that are not found in the government decree have been identified. At the current stage,

most of the respondents are from Keda and Shuakhevi municipalities. Therefore, most of the healing water baths are represented in Keda and Shuakhevi. For this stage, it was essential for us to share the information protected in the community. In the second stage, an in-depth study is planned, which will allow us to make recommendations for the inclusion of resort sites in the list of relevant services. We think that our research is an important innovation that needs to be verified and appropriate measures taken, which may become a prerequisite for developing wellness tourism and the expansion of future prospects. *Thus, a prerequisite for the development of a wellness tourism strategy is a thorough study and utilization of existing resources under the right strategy.*



Picture 2. The number of Mineral Waters and baths in (based on the some regions)

A. Government Resolution on the approval of the list and status of Georgian resorts;

B. According our study

We have thought to find according to study new medicinal waters are not included in the resolution of the Government of Georgia "On approval of the list and status of resorts." We hope that further study (using the laboratory and clinical trials) of the identified resources will significantly contribute to the development the medical tourism in the mountainous region of Adjara.

Conclusions: According to our research, the following was revealed: New Medicinal waters and baths were revealed in the mountainous region of Adjara, which is not included in the list (in the Government Resolution on the approval of the list and status of Georgian resorts (№428, 03.07.2014)), which is a critical novelty and needs additional complex investigation to clarify our results. Additionally, one medical bath/water will be significant for developing medical tourism in our region.

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