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Ulker Hasanzadeh

Nakhchivan State University
<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7869-1106>
ulker.hasanzade89@gmail.com

Historical-Cultural Tourism in Nakhchivan: Keeping the Heritage Alive

Abstract

Tourism is one of the areas that has multifaceted development directions and attracts the most attention in the modern era. At the same time, it influences the formation of interstate relations and socio-economic development.

Socio-economic development, high living standards, stability and successful implementation of adopted state programs have ensured the development of tourism in all fields of Nakhchivan. The Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, being one of the oldest settlements in Azerbaijan, has great potential in terms of tourism with its rich historical and cultural heritage. Monuments, religious shrines, architectural examples and museums located in the region turn Nakhchivan into a historical and cultural tourism center. Nakhchivan is one of the interesting and unique places for both local and foreign tourists in terms of historical and cultural tourism. Here, the traces of the past are well preserved and transported to the present day, offering a rich tourism experience both scientifically and aesthetically.

Keywords: *Nakhchivan, tourist, historical and cultural monument, Alinja Fortress, Gamigaya monuments*

Ülkər Həsənzadə

Naxçıvan Dövlət Universiteti
<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7869-1106>
ulker.hasanzade89@gmail.com

Naxçıvanda tarixi-mədəni turizm: irsin yaşadılması

Xülasə

Turizm çoxşaxəli inkişaf istiqamətlərinə malik olan və müasir dövrdə ən çox diqqət cəlb edən sahələrdən biridir. Eyni zamanda, dövlətlərarası münasibətlərin formalaşması və sosial-iqtisadi inkişafa təsir edir.

Sosial-iqtisadi inkişaf, yüksək həyat şəraiti, sabitlik və qəbul edilən Dövlət proqramlarının uğurlu icrası Naxçıvanda bütün sahələrdə olduğu kimi turizmin də inkişafını təmin edib. Naxçıvan Muxtar Respublikası, Azərbaycanın ən qədim yaşayış məskənlərindən biri olmaqla, zəngin tarixi və mədəni irsi ilə turizm baxımından böyük potensiala malikdir. Bölgədə yerləşən abidələr, dini ziyarətgahlar, memarlıq nümunələri və muzeylər Naxçıvanı tarixi-mədəni turizm mərkəzinə çevirir. Naxçıvan tarixi-mədəni turizm baxımından həm yerli, həm də xarici turistlər üçün maraqlı və unikal məkanlardan biridir. Burada keçmişin izlərinin yaxşı qorunaraq bu günə daşınması həm elmi, həm də estetik baxımdan zəngin turizm təcrübəsi təqdim edir.

Açar sözlər: *Naxçıvan, turizm, tarix və mədəniyyət abidəsi, Əlinca qalası, Gəmiqaya abidələri*

Introduction

The geographical position of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, examples of national cuisine, traditions of hospitality, the availability of medical facilities, the richness of historical and cultural heritage are the main elements of interest to foreign tourists. The number of measures taken to expand the use of tourism opportunities in the autonomous republic is growing every year.

Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic is one of the ancient human settlements. Evidence of this ancient history is examples of history and culture created by our ancestors at different times.

There are more than 1,200 historical and cultural monuments in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. Of these monuments, 57 are of world importance, 485 are of national importance and 660 are of local significance.

Among the historical cultural monuments of Nakhchivan, Gulistan Tomb, Momina Khatun Tomb, Garabaghlar Tomb, Yusif Kuseir oglu Tomb were included in the list of UNESCO World Heritage temporary candidates since 1998.

Research

Nakhchivan has an ancient history. This place is also called The Land of Noah. Tourists visiting this ancient land are eager to see Noah's tomb. This is stated in the article "Nakhchivan city and Nakhchivan province" written by the Russian enlightener K.A. Nikitin, who lived in Nakhchivan in the 80s of the XIX century: "Noah's tomb is located on the south side of Nakhchivan, near the remains of an ancient fortress". The current appearance of the tomb was restored in the 8th century. In its present form, the tomb resembles a small tomb that rises from the ground. First there was a temple here, it collapsed. The current tomb consists of the remains of the lower floor of the former temple. The interior of the temple, which requires descending stairs, is round, reinforced with stone poles in the middle, and is of the type of a tomb. Noah's funeral is located under that pole. According to the legend, Noah's ark touched Ilandag in Nakhchivan, and anchored in Gamigaya in the upper reaches of the Gilanchay (Jabbarov, 2021).

Noah's tomb was discovered during archeological excavations in the area called Kohnagala on the south side of Nakhchivan. The architectural monument of the VIII-XII centuries was originally a temple. The remains of the lower floor of the collapsed monument were later restored and turned into a tomb. The height of the tomb is 15 meters 50 centimeters and the width is 7 meters 50 centimeters.

As in other tombs, it consists of two parts-an underground tomb, an octagonal surface part inside and outside.

Among the monuments that have survived in Nakhchivan to this day, the Tomb of Momina Khatun is one of the most beautiful and perfect architectural works of the Nakhchivan-Maragha school of architecture. The mausoleum was built by Eldaniz Shamsaddin in the center of Nakhchivan in honor of his wife Momina Khatun. Dedication of this magnificent work of art to the beloved woman is met with interest by tourists.

The original state of the monument, which was tenured from outside and rounded from inside, was 35 m. Then the upper side of it fell and the present surface height is 25 meters. The faces of the tomb are covered with Kufic inscriptions. A. Alasgarzade, who read these inscriptions, determined that all the faces of the ten-faced tomb were framed from the edges with the text of Surat Yasin (Bakhshaliyev, 2017).

The Garabaghlar Tomb Complex also occupies a special place among the material and cultural monuments of our people. The world-famous complex is located in Garabaghlar village of Kangarli region. It is considered an example of medieval Azerbaijani architecture. The monument is noted as a continuation of the Ajami Nakhchivani School of Architecture due to its architectural structure and similar features. The architectural complex consists of a tomb, two double minarets and the remains of a religious building located between them (Məmmədov, 2019; İsmayılov, 2020).

According to research, the tomb was built in the early 14th century. The shape of the towering tombs in Nakhchivan can also be observed in the Garabagh tomb. A tomb was built on a stone pedestal as a result of the combination of 12 semi-cylinders.

It is noted that this architectural monument was built during the reign of the Elkhaniids. It is believed that the tomb was dedicated to Guti Khatun, the wife of Hulaki khan, the ruler of Elkhani.

According to historical sources, Garabaghlar was one of the main cities of Azerbaijan in the Middle Ages, which was considered an important center of trade and crafts. The discovery of large medieval settlements and caravanserais around Garabaghlar was due to its location on the historical Silk Road. Castle-type settlements of the 3rd millennium BC were discovered in Garabaghlar village. At present, there are defense fortifications registered in the territory of this village under the names I Bezekli, II Bezekli, Galajik, Garabaghlar fortress, I Suzgunlar, II Suzgunlar fortress. The study of these monuments confirms the development of architecture in Garabaghlar since the Middle Bronze Age.

One of the examples of medieval architecture of Azerbaijan is the Gulustan Tomb. The architectural monument is located near Gulustan village of Julfa region. It belongs to the group of tower tombs of Azerbaijan. The difference from other tombs is that the tomb is located on the surface. Some sources state that the “Cut Dome” mentioned in Evliya Chalabi’s “Travelogue” is a Gulustan tomb.

The vault part of the tomb has a form of cube with cut corners on the outside and a cylindrical structure on the inside. The upper part consists of twelve faces decorated with delicate patterns and ornaments. The patterns on the Gulustan Tomb can be seen only in the Tomb of Momina Khatun.

According to observations, the patterns on the Gulustan tomb were found to be more delicate and elegant. The architect designed the monument so skillfully that when looking at the monument, people notice different ornaments on the niches. Repetition of ornaments on niches can be seen only when observing the monument from above.

One of the historical and cultural monuments witnessing the history of Nakhchivan is Alinjagala located in Julfa region. Some sources state that the Alinja fortress, located in the village of Khanagah and attracting attention along with the Alinja River, belongs to the Seljuk period and was built by Gutbaddin Shah. As a result of research, the fortress, which dates back to the I-VI centuries, was built in the form of steps from the foot of Mount Alinja to the peak.

In the highest part of the mountain there is the inner tower of Alinja Castle at a height of 1700 meters. This inner fortress was called “Shahtakht” by the locals. Researchers have determined that it was called Shahtakhti because the rulers were located in this part of the fortress. The fortress is also mentioned in the epos “Kitabi-Dada Gorgud”, which is one of the main sources proving its antiquity. During the reign of the Eldeniz, the position of the Alinja fortress increased and the fortress became the main fortification to ensure the security of the ruling family. During Amir Teymur’s attack on Azerbaijan, Alinja Fortress served as a 14-year-old stronghold in the attack and defense against Teymur’s troops (Jabbarov, 2022).

In connection with the implementation of the Order dated December 6, 2005 “On the organization of protection and certification of historical and cultural monuments in the territory of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic” historical and cultural monuments in the territory of the autonomous republic were registered and certified. Information about Alinja fortress was also collected and this monument was included in the list of monuments of world importance in 2007. This historical fortress was restored in accordance with the order “On the restoration of the historical monument of Alinjagala”, dated February 11, 2014. During the restoration, the original form of the castle walls, towers and entrance gates, ancient dwellings, farm buildings, pools and tandoors, trenches and protection places were preserved to preserve the history of the fortress.

Proving that Nakhchivan is one of the ancient settlements, the Gamigaya monument is a world-famous historical and cultural pearl. The paintings of Gamigaya, which bring the traces of history to the present day, reflect the beliefs and labor activities of our ancestors. The Gamigaya monument is a collection of rock paintings reflecting the religious, ideological, mythological and political views of ancient people. The rock paintings depict human drawings in solo and compositional scenes, animal drawings in solitary and flock form, and pictographic signs. Therefore, natural temples visited by people have appeared here (Bagirov, Ismayilov, Guliyeva, 2020).

Research has been carried out here since 1968 to study the paintings of Gamigaya in detail. In accordance with the order “On the study of the Gamigaya monument in the Ordubad region”, dated April 26, 2001, the paintings of Gamigaya were studied on a scientific basis and as a result of this research dozens of scientific articles and books were written. In 2005, an international expedition was organized to the monument of Gamigaya and ethnographic and folklore materials were collected by conducting research at the archeological monuments around Gamigaya. In 2001, the Gamigaya Historical and Artistic Reserve was established. In 2014, a building was built for the Gamigaya Historical and Artistic Reserve and Museum. Gamigaya is considered to be one of the rare reserves and museums in the world located at an altitude of 3700 meters above sea level.

Gamigaya is located in the Ordubad region, in Gapichig, the highest peak of the Lesser Caucasus. According to the Gamigaya rock monuments located northeast of Tivi and Nasirvaz villages, it can be found more widely in Garangush and Nabiyrdu plateaus at an altitude of 3000-

3500 meters (Bakhshaliyev, 2017). The locals consider the territory of Gamigaya, associated with the legend of Noah, sacred.

The “Ashabi-Kahf” shrine, visited by pilgrims from the regions of Azerbaijan and other Muslim countries in recent years in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, plays an important role in the development of religious tourism. This Religious-Cultural Monument Complex attracts tourists not only for religious purposes, but also for acquaintance and understanding (Aliyev, 2005).

The shrine, located between Hachadag and Nahajir Mountain, is located 12 km from Nakhchivan. This information is reflected in Surat al-Kahf of the Holy Quran. There are similar shrines in Turkey, Palestine and other countries. According to the research, the similarity of the “Ashabi-Kahf” mentioned in the “Holy Quran” with the shrine in Nakhchivan was confirmed.

The legends associated with “Ashabi-Kahf” tell how seven young people who believed in God fled from people of different faiths and what happened to them afterwards (the legend also mentions their loyal dog).

The “Ashabi-Kahf” was renovated in 1998 on the instructions and under the auspices of national leader Heydar Aliyev and tourists were able to visit comfortably. The construction work carried out in 2007 was further expanded and buildings were built to provide various services to tourists.

Conclusion

Thus, we can note that the integration of historical and cultural resources into the tourism industry will support the high-level development of cultural tourism with the application of the correct planning and marketing strategy. While implementing this process, a number of works are being carried out to develop cultural tourism, take measures to promote historical and cultural resources, ensure the protection of these resources, and appropriately evaluate the rich historical and cultural wealth of our country and other countries. Factors such as establishing new cooperation models, applying a comprehensive approach to tourism planning, developing cultural tourism routes and creating new routes, integrating sustainable tourism principles into tourism promotion and marketing efforts, and supporting the contribution of cultural tourism to urban development can have an impact on the further development of historical and cultural tourism in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.

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