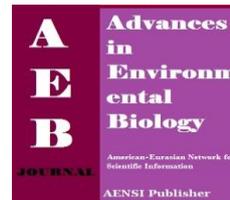




AENSI Journals

Advances in Environmental Biology

ISSN-1995-0756 EISSN-1998-1066

Journal home page: <http://www.aensiweb.com/aeb.html>

Ecotourism, Geopark in Persian Gulf, Challenges and Development Strategies (Case Study of Qeshm Island)

Marjan Kamyabi

M. A., Tourism Marketing, Kerman, Iran,

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 25 April 2014

Received in revised form

8 May 2014

Accepted 20 May 2014

Available online 16 August 2014

Key words:

tourism, ecotourism, geotourism, Qeshm, Geopark of Qeshm

ABSTRACT

Today tourism industry is used as one of the main important tools for economic development of the countries. Iran based on its history and climate has special tourists' attractions. Qeshm island is a special place in the middle of Persian gulf and has beautiful and untouched nature. So, it is one of the ecotourism and geotourism attractions with special places such as the valley of stars, Hara jungle which are unique all over the world. These natural and geotourism attractions along with the cultural and traditional heritage of the place make a valuable collection for tourism and long term plans can change the island into a special place for tourists. The present study tries to find the descriptive and analytical information by using field and library method to study the ecotourism and Geopark in Persian Gulf considering the challenges and strategies. The abilities and capabilities of the Qeshm Island are recognized in the present study and also the ecotourism and geotourism attractions are studied. The effect of tourism industry in economic development of the region is investigated, too. In this research, it is tried to emphasize the importance of tourism attraction in the region. The findings indicate that developing Geopark in order to develop ecotourism and geotourism is really effective and creating geoparks not only maintains the natural heritage, but also add scientific content of tourism along with economic advantages.

© 2014 AENSI Publisher All rights reserved.

To Cite This Article: Marjan Kamyabi., Ecotourism, Geopark in Persian Gulf, Challenges and Development Strategies (Case Study of Qeshm Island). *Adv. Environ. Biol.*, 8(11), 423-430, 2014

INTRODUCTION

In present century, tourism is one of the effective factors in developing the relationship between the nations but its development needs special facilities such as climate, historical and cultural monuments, natural attractions, customs, infrastructures and facilities. Different countries have realized the importance of tourism and provided facilities for attracting tourists.

Population increase and urbanism on one side and significant developments in transportations system, technology and other elements of human life increase the incentives for traveling and tourism.

Country of Iran with old history and various geographical features has a lot of tourist attractions including the biggest and most beautiful island of Iran that is Qeshm Island. Qeshm Island is one of the free ones which have capabilities and potentials to be used. Natural coasts and good climate in most of the seasons of the year are the features of this beautiful island. But unfortunately, most of the tourists come to the island for business and pay less attention to natural attractions. Ecotourism and geoparks are the main economic activities all over the world. Qeshm had natural attractions and due to special economic and political condition, its sustainable development depends on knowing ecologic aspects and special ecosystems of coral islands, Hara jungles, rare aquatic creations along with oil sources, huge oil ships and developmental plans of the mutually-interested countries and supervision on international standards, efficiency of the sources and environmental plans. Based on the above mentioned issues, this study tries to recognize ecotourism and Geopark and tourism capabilities of Qeshm and also recognizing the problems and obstacles in order to improve the region tourism.

Research Significance:

Tourism is one of the mostly developed service industries and for sure it will be developed faster in future. There is no doubt that all the countries of the world are closely competing to make use of economic, social and cultural advantages and receive higher share of employment due to improvements in tourism [9].

Qeshm is one of the capable places for developing tourism and has potentials and abilities in attracting the tourists in this region. So, there is need for a lot of research by use of new scientific methods in order to

Corresponding Author: Marjan Kamyabi, M. A., Tourism Marketing, Kerman, Iran,
E-mail: marjankamyabi@yahoo.com

determine the necessities of the region scientifically to have plans based on these needs. various studies have been done in Hormozgan state but since the ecotourism and geotourism attractions of Qeshm are rarely studied and a few proper strategies are suggested, so the present research can contribute more in this field.

Research Objectives:

The present study aimed at recognizing the ecotourism and geotourism capabilities focusing on Qeshm Geopark and introducing strategies for increasing development.

Research questions:

The present study tries to find the answer to the following questions:

1. Are the ecotourism and geotourism attraction able to increase tourists' attraction?
2. Is development of Geopark effective on economic development of the nearby regions?
3. Is creating geopark effective on increasing employment in nearby regions?

Research method:

Collecting the information for doing the present study was mainly based on library method and other data are collected through internet research and national and foreign data banks.

Research field:

The studied region has the geographical features of 56 degree and 16 minutes east length and 26 degree and 57 minutes north width from Greenwich and is at 22 kilometers from Bandar Abbas.

Theoretical bases:

Tourism in present century is one of the effective factors in developing the relationship between nations. One of the strategies for developing tourism industry is to recognize the proper and more capable points to have précis plans for feasibility of these regions for increasing tourism attraction. Accordingly, it is necessary to evaluate the condition scientifically and along with environmental issued. So, there is need to have basic plans for developing the tourism management [7]. Experiences have shown that development of tourism without special and precise framework brings more problems and challenges and its harms will be more than the advantages in long term [8].

In using the natural sources of the country and using the incomes of it for people's welfare, the proper chance in order to have sustainable development should be used. One of the most probable strategies for developing tourism in general and ecotourism and geotourism in special leads to huge income for the country. Increasing the population and its consequences due to industrial life has increased the needs of human being for having fun places and natural views to be relieved of the tiredness. All these studies show the fact that island are proper places for tourism due to being far away from the city and island. So, Qeshm Island with a lot of tourist attractions and natural coasts can become one of the tourism poles of Iran. In other words, it can be placed as one of the mostly profitable tourist attraction considering financial aspects.

Qeshm Island is a good place for relieving the pressures of life. Today, different aspects are effective in tourism development and most of the countries are aware of the tourism advantages. These countries have realized the importance of tourism and started to attract tourists. Iran has rich natural sources and a long term planning can help sustainable tourism development.

Iran is ranked as one of the tenth superior countries of the world considering natural sources which can use the effects of tourism development for increasing employment and solving economic problems. But based on the statistics, these changes are not used so that it is only at 10th rank among the Islamic countries in this regard [1]. One of the sources which can change the opportunities to chances is the sources in tourism which should be developed properly. So, Qeshm with diverse tourist attractions can be the main tourist pole of the country and have economic benefits with its special ecotourism and geotourism potentials.

Ecotourism:

Ecotourism or nature tourism is one of the most important aspects of tourisms which have the highest compatibility with development. Now, most of the world countries are in close competition and want to use the capabilities of their countries to specify the greatest share of tourism industry and make employment with simplest form the term ecotourism was first introduced in 1983 by Hector Larckson in describing his travel to nature and emphasizing on teaching aspects of this travel. Ecotourism is an environmental responsibility about the far away regions and using nature has less negative effects and activates the local population which is socially and economically important for them.

Four aspects of ecotourism are:

- Depending on nature
- Sustainability due to ecology (having less harm to nature)

- Teaching and training to introduce values for the region as the main element
- Community cooperation and hosting [3].

Geotourism:

One of the new forms of tourism is geotourism and is one of the branches of ecotourism and introduces different aspects of tourism with local identity. Geotourism is a subdivision of sustainable development and maintaining it is the main goal of tourism. That is leading the tourists in a way that the place is left undamaged and it is tried to have no intervention in nature by human being [10].

Geotourism is a fun activity for human being in nature and is traveling based on goal along with visiting and cultural and spiritual understanding and enjoying nature. Different natural and geological processes are the most interesting aspect of tourism and ecotourism. Geotourism has common benefits for local and tourists. Small local economics can be activated and the visitors know the collection of culture and different rituals which are created by environment. In addition, maintain the natural and pure sources is another advantage of geotourism and in other words it is the tourism with geographical identity to improve a place and does not only consider environment. But it also includes the culture and aesthetic welfare of the people [5].

Geopark:

Geopark is a new concept in tourism and naturalists pay more attention to it. The experience of the pioneer countries shows the importance of the issue that the income of geoparks can be more than other tourist sources.

Geopark is defined as a special geographical area which has one or some natural geological phenomenon and cultural and natural attractions. This collection should affect the economic development of the region and has plans and maintenance management plans.

The concept of geopark which is printed in practical suggestion is provided by UNESCO 2002. It follows three goals of maintaining a healthy environment, teaching geological science, sustainable economic development which is the final goals of developing geoparks. One of the advantages of geoparks is that they depend on an international plan which is supported by UNESCO. A person who visits the geoparks is informed about other geoparks all over the world and another advantage is that social-economic development is increases. Geopark can be the source of experiences and new tasks and the industry. Protecting the valuable geological places and it is necessary to form the local law for dealing with the issue. Geoparks facilitate tourism and specially ecotourism and play a significant role in country's economy and have a high effect on sustainable development.



Geopark Map (www.qeshmgeopark.org).

Geopark Features:

- Maintaining the geological heritage for next generation
- Enough space for future economic development
- Managing by the regional and local managers
- Training and research and teaching the concepts of environmental science (Zandmoghadam, 2013, p. 6)

Geographical location of the island:

Qeshm is the biggest island in the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf (Light District, 1362,255). The island is located at the entrance of the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea (Strait of Hormuz) between 26.5 and 27.10 and 56.40 degrees north latitude and 55.20 degrees east of the meridian in the azure waters of the Persian Gulf.

The islands are limited to the north of Bandar Abbas, the center of a piece of Bandarlenge city, northeast of Hormuz Island, East Lark Island, to the south and southwest of the island and are limited to Tunb large and small islands. (Light section 1369,62).

Rule of tourism in sustainable development of Qeshm:

Tourism has interactional rule in sustainable development and develops social justice. It will led to sustainable development of Qeshm if it protects the environment of the island and cultural heritage and respect the habitants. Following issues are suggested to have sustainable development:

1. Preservation of natural resources and the promotion of social and cultural resources can be achieved in the light of national and local strategic planning.
2. Support and development of local economic activities and crafts especially because it causes the cooperation of local community.
3. Good marketing and complete and comprehensive informing on a variety of natural attractions, cultural and economic Qeshm is an important strategy for sustainable tourism.
4. Carrying out a full investigation to preserve cultural values, environment and natural resources to attract tourists can be achieved in parallel with the basic and applied research in sustainable tourism objectives.
5. Teaching the local community and the staff to get international standards

Paying attention to these strategies by the tourism industry in Qeshm which includes development of infrastructures, hotel facilities, aqua restaurants, sea transportation, developing aqua sports and creating fun complexes are a function of maintain the environment and nature for host and tourists.

In addition, tourism can improve the life quality of people and help the host cultural structures to improve [2]. If there is a strong management system in tourism of Qeshm, all the natural, cultural, social and economic capacities of region are used in a way that they cause social justice and geographical justice and led to sustainable development.

Qeshm Island Ecotourism:

Persian Gulf and its coasts have a proper condition for developing the ecotourism in Qeshm. Based on the sensitive ecotourism of Qeshm and its development as the biggest Iranian island, its condition as an island has consequences for regional development. It shows the importance of the island and its potential. The first and most important ecotourism of the island is seen in the jungles of Hara. This jungle is one of the most beautiful and wonderful jungles in our country which is in the field of salty water with trees growing in sea. When the water goes up, most part of the trees are deep in sea water and when there is tide down, their bodies can be seen. It is believed that the trees have escaped the hot and dry water and took refuge in coast of the sea. These jungles are famous as Mangro and most of the trees are Hara and Chandrel.

Qeshm Geopark:

Qeshm geopark has an area of over 300,000 hectares and is located to the west of the island. Qeshm geopark is in the range and the length of the East Village, West Village, where the grave of mineralization, north to south and from the north coast to the south coast.

Geopark was recorded in 2007. Qeshm geopark has eight main and potential geo sites including: Strait Wells Mountains, valleys of falling star, Alli gorge, statues Valley, Saline Valley, salt cave, waterwheel and Kurkura mount. These geoparks also include a museum where pictures of wildlife and geological phenomena are exhibited.

Qeshm geopark has a diversity of geological phenomena, and has a variety of sites better position than other countries. Variety is present in phenomena such as ecological, archaeological, environmental, wildlife and other features of the geopark. It is located on the beautiful beaches on the sidelines of the geopark and the adjacent mangrove forests are the largest in the world.

Existence of more than 220 species of birds, 30 species of reptiles, 20 species of mammals in the park and surrounding area, Geo zoology and biology of these animals contribute to more development of Geopark (Haj Aliloo and Nekouei Sadri, 1390 , 67). As mentioned before, in addition to geological phenomena, various cultural and historical phenomena are presented in the area. A number of perspectives, including things that are within the geopark or those that are outside this range are: Cave Khurbas, shrines, castles, history, traditional architecture and others.

*Natural sites of Qeshm Island include:**Well Mount Strait:*

This gouge is in 84 kilometers of Chaho village and the walls are mainly lime stone. Due to the existence of red layers and limestone, there are sever erosion in this part. Nature and body and internal layers of the strait are in form of complicated halls and scones which make wonderful image. Human being has changed it a little by digging wells. These wells have been here for hundred years and it has been the main source of providing drinking water in this dry field and erosion factors have been effective in creating this strait (Ziari, 2008, p. 12).



Valley of Falling Star:

In north of the Berke valley, one of the most beautiful views can be seen. Star Valley is composed of different layers of milestones and it is the best place for erosion mechanisms and presence of needle columns, vertical walls and different holes added to the beauty of the valley.



Allie strait:

This strait is on the west part of the Chahoo village. Entrance of the strait is through the east of village and about 2 kilometer of north coasts and its opening of the valley is wide by gradually it is narrowed. Heavy vegetation and old trees shows the existence of enough money in the strait. The thin layers of clay at the bed of the valley create high stickiness and are other reasons for high humidity of this strait.



Status Valley:

Status valley is another sites of geopark which is mostly covered with cracks. Clay cracks are sedimentary structures which are dealt with the related discussions. Structurally it is same as the Valley of stars. However, it has more development and intensity is less. The stones of the valley are erased due to erosion and make a beautiful sight [6].

Salt Valley:

This strait is in the center of anticline. Local people call it How Baad strait. Salt valley is a name selected due to hard works of engineer Bigan Farhang. There are oldest layers of sedimental layers in the island. In addition, highest peak of the strait is about 400 meters and due to being in center of anticline, there are rich sources of gas here but it has two aesthetic features :

1. Geomorphology features have given it a dream view. The presence of a hundred beautiful streams surrounding the valley and lime hills makes every viewer calm.

2. Existence of the Sulfur springs made special pattern in the valley as an artist has drawn them. However, this is not the only feature of the valley and the therapy features of the valley have attracted many people.



A mushroom-shaped structure is created by wind erosion (Geotourism Atlas of Qeshm).

Saltshaker Cave

It is one of the rarest views of the world which is in the south west with an area of 46 kilometers between Salkh and Kuni village. Saltshaker cave is the only salt dome of the Qeshm Island. Existence of salt springs and white cover of the valley and the land has made a dream view for the valley. In south side of the valley the height of the caves is 20 meters and the heights of more than 6000 meters are known by the experts of Check and Shiraz Universities.

One of the advantages of salt cave is the potential of halo therapy.

One of the distinctive features of salt caves in Qeshm with the similar cases in German, Italy, Bulgaria, Armenia, Poland, Austria, Ukraine and Azerbaijan. It is healthier for breathing of the patients and so, it attracts more tourists.



Doulab (Wheelwater) Valley:

It is placed on the north piedmont of Doulab region. Seasonal rains make a system of streams in parts of the valley, the depth of which reaches 20 meters. Special feature of the region lithology is so that there are a lot of complexities in the system and most local people get lost there. It is seeable after raining.

Kurkura Mountain:

Kurkura is near the Giahdan village and this site is out of the main regions of geopark. But due to the beauty of the region, it is accepted as a beautiful site by UNESCO. General structure of the region includes hills which are created by valley streams.

Ecotourism challenges in Qeshm Valley:

Qeshm geopark is the only geopark in Middle East which is recorder 7 years ago. According to UNESCO guide, this organization should make sure about security of the region through every 4 year visits to the regions. But if a geopark does not follow the standards of UNESCO, it will receive yellow card which symbolizes chance to change and if it cannot meet the sustainability goals, it receives red and gets out of the UNESCO list. Qeshm geopark received yellow card in 2010 due to not-allowed buildings, mining, destroying the coast and using sands and no attention to planning for installing the signs and boards.

And now, it needs more care to stay in the list and needs international support. Financially or technically, it is expected that international organizations care about the regions and if our country cannot maintain the geopark and get out of the lists, there is no international support by UNESCO and other international organizations. The millennium is really the era of tourism and accepts the rules of tourist country like Iran. Today tourists have a special trajectory for its tourism and a condition of maintaining the veil cannot be caused for removal from the list of tourist countries.

Challenges of Tourism in Iran:

Although development of Iran tourism and world tourism is inevitable in order to use its advantages but problems and different obstacles could not be ignored. Some of the problems include:

- Fear of the destructive effects of tourism on culture
- Misconceptions of tourists from Iran
- Lack of proper advertising of tourist attractions in Iran
- Lack of knowledge about the tastes of tourists and foreign travelers
- Lack of research in this area

Coordination of cooperation between governmental organizations and contribute to the improvement of tourism

- Decisions separated organizations
- Lack of experts
- Lack of basic hygiene like proper Resorts
- having a multiplicity of advertising system and marketing unit
- Lack of an English-language satellite television network dedicated to the global promotion of tourism in Iran
- Lack of qualified experts familiar with the tourism industry
- Lack of active participation in international exhibitions abroad

Survival strategies for ecotourism in Qeshm Island:

- Allocation of funds for research projects aimed at identifying suitable as a geopark tourist complexes and their international identity through registration in UNESCO.
- Planning for sustainable development of local communities by - indigenous people's participation in projects ranging from tourism and recreational
- Develop and strengthen Iran's diplomatic and economic relations with other countries
- determine where to plan and develop tourism
- training of qualified staff, including managers, tourism agencies, hotels, Personnel and Guidance
- establish measures to attract more foreign tourists and assign them to certain parts of the beach

Conclusions:

Tourism is an industry that has many different benefits and its development requires adequate knowledge of the issues and social and cultural factors in the region.

Development of ecotourism and geotourism development of geopark is very effective. Creating and introducing geoparks is not only to maintain geological heritage, the optimization of the geological environment, the increasing popularization of science, and add content to tourism but it is also very important for the local economy and job creation.

The millennium is really the era of tourism and accepts the rules of tourist country like Iran. Today tourists have a special trajectory for its tourism and a condition of maintaining the veil cannot be caused for removal from the list of tourist countries.

By the same token registration and world regions as a geopark have a direct impact on tourism and economic recovery through the creation of new jobs. Iran has an attraction based on criteria and indicators of tourist country defined by UNESCO.

Normal tourist areas, along with interesting and unique archaeological and geological phenomena have created specific conditions for the development of tourism. Enclaves of historic and cultural attractions have been in close connection with natural and geology and are considered as the most suitable areas for planning Geotourism.

Accordingly, for increasing development of tourism in Iran, and the operation and use of the unique attractions in the country, we need the support of the authorities and the private sector. We hope that Iran will acquire true position in the tourism industry.

REFERENCES

- [1] Abolhassannezhad, B., 2004. the capabilities and limitations of climate and tourism Ramsar Branch, MS Thesis, Department of Geography, Tehran University.
- [2] Ayaft, A., 1997. Introduction to ecological tourism, Journal of Ecology, 2.
- [3] Fennel, D., 2000. A content analysis of eco tourism definition. current issues in tourism, 421.
- [4] Kazemi, A., 2007. Looking at the overall concept of geopark, heritage, geology and geotourism and review the position in this regard. Proceedings of the twenty-sixth annual Earth Sciences, Geological Survey and Mineral Exploration country.
- [5] Pereiara, D.G., Dias, 2008. Masterscourse on Geological Heritage Geo conservation European Geologist, 26-31.

- [6] Qeshm Free Zone Organization, 2000. Qeshm Geopark, Geopark is the first and only Middle East. Proceedings of the first conference tourism, Geological Survey and Mineral Exploration country.
- [7] Ranjbarian, B., 2004. national and regional tourism planning, publications, academic jihad, Isfahan
- [8] Ranjbarian, B. and M. Wilson, 2001. national and regional tourism planning, publications, academic jihad, Isfahan.
- [9] Sinai, V., 1998. Sustainable Development of Tourism, Professional Marketing Magazine, 4.
- [10] WWW.Aftab.ir.
- [11] www.gg-shariati.blogfa.com.