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# Investigation of Rural Tourism in East Azarbaijan Province of Iran Utilizing SWOT Model and Delphi Technique

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## ABSTRACT

**The main purpose of this study was to investigate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of rural tourism in East Azarbaijan Province of Iran. To fulfill this objective, SWOT model analysis with Delphi technique was used as a method of refining group opinions and substituting computed consensus for an agreed-upon majority opinion. Findings indicated that favorable climate conditions, environmental potential, natural, historical and cultural tourism zones are the most important strengths, while lack of information and promotional activities to introduce rural tourism attractions and limited education and training of the villagers in how to deal with the tourists are the main weaknesses. Also, the most important opportunities include an increasing tendency to use nature for calmness and recreational activities, a growing attention by province management toward rural tourism, and investment in folklore such as music, local and traditional dress, Cultural Heritage, Handicraft, and Tourism Organization's efforts to rehabilitate and repair historic and cultural buildings, an increasing interest to visit the rural tourism areas, employment in tourism-related activities in rural areas, and appropriate legislation for the development of rural tourism. On the other hand, destruction and gradual extinction of plant and animal species caused by tourists' intervention, demolition of historic villages, lack of attention to rural tourism by extension and rural sector in the Ministry of Jihad-e-Agriculture, lack of or limited service providers or travel agents to visit rural areas, waste emissions and environmental damages are the main threats in this study.**

**Keywords:** Development, Economic diversification, Group opinions, Tourism industry, Tourism planning.

## INTRODUCTION

The world is faced with challenges such as diversified economy, increasing productivity of human resources, employment, culture and environment interactions, and sustainable development. Countries at all levels of development are trying to find answers to these problems. Those countries that are turning to the economic diversification and seek recognition of the potential and benefits of new development have been much more successful than other countries. One of these components is expanding tourism industry and most of the countries that are enjoying these advantages have included this in their national development (Shamsoddini, 2009). Tourism has become one of the largest and fastest growing industries and it is a social phenomenon of major importance in many countries.

In developing countries, inequalities in the distribution of resources between rural and urban areas have caused problems in the rural areas (Shamsoddini, 2009). Over the past three decades, these inequalities and decline in traditional economic activities such as agriculture have required many rural communities to employ new strategies to

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strengthen their economic base (Byrd *et al*., 2009). One of these strategies is the development of rural tourism as part of tourism in villages which have the natural and historical capacity to expand the industry (Shamsoddini, 2009). Rural tourism is seen not only as a potential tool for change of status, but also an integral factor of rural development strategy (Sharpley, 2002). With tourism's expansion has come a realization that it can bring various benefits to the communities where it is developed. Tourism offers a wide range of opportunities for rural communities such as economic growth, socio-cultural development, improvements in quality of life, and protection, and improvement of natural and cultural resources. Tourism can attract foreign investments and fairly distribute employment and income. (Gursoy and Rutherford, 2004; Jurowski *et al*., 1997). Some of the benefits of rural tourism development are as follows: job retention, job creation, new business opportunities, opportunities for youth, service retention, community diversification, preservation of rural culture and heritage, increase in arts and crafts sale, landscape conservation, and environmental improvements.

There are different perspectives and ideas about the development of tourism in rural areas. Many researchers believe that tourism is the way to remove many problems in rural areas and it is recognized as essential factor for reconstruction of these areas. Some researchers believe that rural tourism is a part of the tourism market and believe that it can be compared with other forms of tourism. Some also believe that rural tourism can be considered as a philosophy of rural development. This aspect has three approaches. The first approach is to use tourism as a strategy for rural development. In the second approach, the tourism is a policy for reconstructing the rural areas. In the third approach, rural tourism is considered as a tool for sustainable development and natural resources conservation (Rokn Aldin Eftekhari and Ghaderi, 2002).

Regarding the issues mentioned, it is crucial to conduct an investigation on rural tourism, identifying tourism potentials and limitations of rural areas that can have a constructive effect on tourism planning. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of rural tourism in East Azarbaijan Province. Accordingly, in order to improve development in rural areas, especially the study area which has structural, ecological, and environmental advantages, it is necessary to adopt appropriate strategies for rural tourism with regard to attractions and environmental conditions. To fulfill this objective, SWOT model for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis with Delphi technique were used as a method of refining group.

In this study, some questions on potentials and limitations of tourism development as well as solutions and strategies available for tourism development that can lead to rural and national development are studied and analyzed. Finally, appropriate solutions and strategies are presented using SWOT analysis for optimum, effective utilization of strengths and opportunities and removing weaknesses and threats in order to achieve tourism and rural development.

The SWOT method has been used in many planning situations as a tool for organizing information. Many researches have been undertaken about rural tourism using SWOT analysis. An example of such use in rural tourism research is the study of Sayyed *et al*. (2013) who used the SWOT analysis for Tandooreh National Park in Iran. They show that the strengths of this well-established tourism destination is the presence of a variety of natural attractions and unique culture of local people having ancient culture, while lack of infrastructures and fundamental facilities are the major weaknesses. Another example is that of Millan *et al*. (2013) analysis of sustainable rural tourism in Andalusia. Also, Danesh Mehr *et al*. (2012) examined the effects of ecotourism using SWOT analysis. The results showed that, in the study area, beautiful landscapes of the village and gardens and green areas were the main strength, while



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lack of government planning and investment were the main weaknesses, more attention to planning and funding by authorities was the most important opportunity, and lack of management knowledgeable about ecotourism issues was the main threat. Zhang (2012) uses the method of SWOT analysis to make a comprehensive evaluation and analysis on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the development of rural tourism in Suzhou. Khatoon Abadi and Rast Ghalam (2011) investigated four pillars of rural tourism using SWOT analysis: case study in targeted villages of Chahar Mahal va Bakhtiari Province. In this study, establishment of tourism centers elsewhere was recognized as the most important threat. In another study, Fazelnia and Hedayati (2010) use the method of SWOT analysis to make appropriate Strategies for tourism development in Zaribar Lake. The results showed that the vulnerability threshold of this lake was very high on account of its tourist position in the region and it required reforms, appropriate policies and management.

The main purpose of the present study was to investigate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of rural tourism in East Azarbaijan Province of Iran, using SWOT model analysis with Delphi technique.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

SWOT analysis is a strategic planning and marketing tool used for regional assessment. In fact, it is an instrument which is generally used to place the result of analysis of external pressure (opportunities and threats which are offered by the outside region) beside the internal capacities (strong and weak points inside region) (Pahl and Richter, 2009).

The appropriate SWOT analysis is designed in the form of tables and its stages are performed as follows:

- Providing a list of opportunities, threats, strengths and weaknesses in the form of tables.

- Explaining and interpreting each of opportunities, threats, strengths, and weaknesses.

Finally, SWOT is used to provide a matrix of strategies. Table 1 schematically illustrates the framework of the SWOT model.

This qualitative study used Delphi technique to identify effective factors in SWOT model.

Helmer (1966) described the Delphi technique as a method of refining group opinions and substituting computed consensus for an agreed-upon majority opinion. Delphi technique is a major method used in program planning, need assessment, development of curriculum, political decisions and resource utilization (Ludwig, 1994; Hsu and Sandford, 2007). According to the literature, the Delphi technique has several advantageous features including: (1) Anonymity; (2) Writing responses, and (3) Controlled feedback (Delbecq *et al*., 1975). In total, this panel consisted of 25 professionals and experts of rural tourism in East Azarbaijan Province (Figure 1 shows a general map of Iran illustrating the location of the study area). Twenty two of the 25 panel members responded. The expert panel consisted of three groups including

**Table 1.** SWOT matrix.

| | Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---|---|---|
| Opportunities | S-O Strategies [a] | W-O Strategies [b] |
| Threats | S-T Strategies [c] | W-T Strategies [d] |

[a] What strengths do we have and how can we use them to take advantage of new or existing opportunities ?, [b] What strategies are needed to overcome weaknesses so that we can take advantage of opportunities ?, [c] What strengths can be used to minimize threats ?, [d] What strategies will minimize weaknesses and help us to cope with threats?



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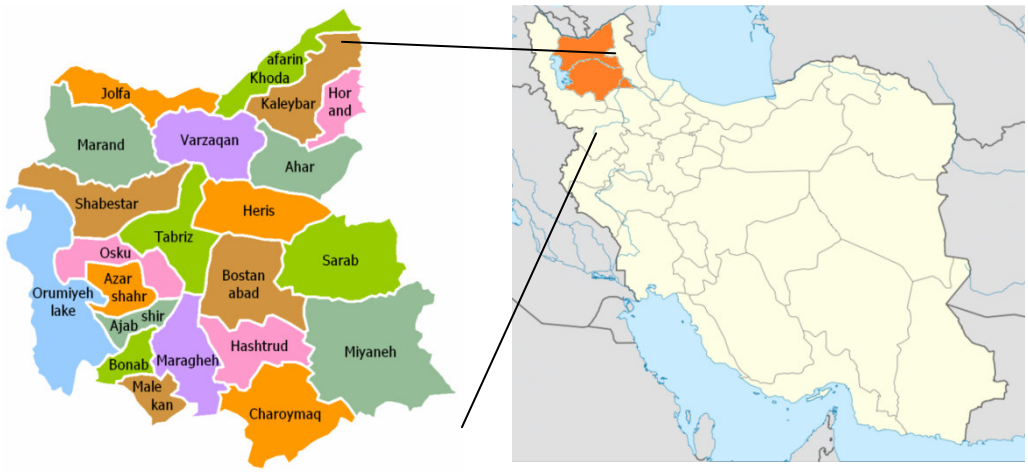


East Azerbaijan counties  Location of East Azerbaijan within Iran

**Figure 1.** A general map of Iran illustrating the location of the study area.

executive staff in the Ministry of Bonyadmaskan in East Azarbaijan Province, rural tourism experts, executive staff in the cultural heritage and tourism organization in East Azarbaijan Province, rural development and extension experts, and executive staff in the Ministry of Jihad-e-Agriculture in East Azarbaijan Province.

The researchers used a series of three steps questionnaires. The first round asked two open-ended questions: What are the most important strengths and weaknesses of rural tourism in East Azarbaijan Province?, and "What are the most import opportunities and threats of rural tourism in East Azarbaijan Province"? These questions were used to generate an array of response categories that were used to produce items for a second round questionnaire.

In the second round, panel members were asked to rate each of the characteristics identified in the first round using a five point Likert-type scale (1= Strongly disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Uncertain; 4= Agree, 5= Strongly agree).

From the results of the second round and comments listed by respondents, a third round was developed that separated and expanded the list of factors. The third round sought to arrive at consensus. During this round, panel members were presented individual and group results from the second round and were asked to indicate if they agreed or disagreed.

The researchers set the agreement level a priori at 66.66%. All items which did not receive agreement from 66.66% of the panel respondents were removed from the list of factors. Literature indicates that consensus in Delphi method can be reached in three rounds and, most commonly, three rounds proved sufficient to attain stability in the responses (Caldwell, 2005). To produce more usable results, the factors were divided into categories.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first objective of this study sought to identify the factors affecting rural tourism in East Azarbaijan Province. The first round asked two open-ended questions. Results of round one are displayed in Tables 2 and 3. Fifty four factors were identified from the 22 respondents.

In the second round, panel members were asked to rate each of the characteristics identified in the first round using a five point Likert-type scale. Results of round two are displayed in Tables 4 and 5. According to Table 4, favorable climate conditions, environmental potential, and strong spiritof hospitality in rural areas have been known as



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**Table 2.** Round one: Strengths, weaknesses of rural tourism (n= 22).

| | Rank | Factors | Responses |
|---|---|---|---|
| Strengths | 1 | Favorable climate conditions | 21 |
| | 2 | Environmental potential | 21 |
| | 3 | Variety of animal species | 18 |
| | 4 | Natural, historical and cultural tourism zones | 18 |
| | 5 | Strong spirit of hospitality in rural areas | 17 |
| | 6 | Variety of local foods and souvenirs | 16 |
| | 7 | Active work force | 15 |
| | 8 | Local traditions and culture in rural areas | 14 |
| | 9 | Water, electricity and gas infrastructure | 12 |
| | 10 | Reasonable geographic distance from the province center | 10 |
| | 11 | Security in rural areas | 9 |
| | 12 | Local partnerships to enhance the quality and quantity related to tourism affairs | 3 |
| | 13 | Variety of handicrafts in rural areas | 2 |
| | 14 | Appropriate local management system | 1 |
| Weaknesses | 1 | Poor rural infrastructure (Especially transportation, road infrastructure) | 21 |
| | 2 | Limited education and training villagers in how to deal with tourists | 19 |
| | 3 | Lack of financial resources for investment | 19 |
| | 4 | Lack of market driven products in tourism, craft and food products | 17 |
| | 5 | Lack of professional and highly skilled human capacities | 17 |
| | 6 | Weakness in the culture of the host society to achieve suitable conditions | 17 |
| | 7 | Lack of information and promotional activities to introduce rural tourism attractions | 13 |
| | 8 | Poor IT and electronic infrastructure in rural areas | 4 |
| | 9 | Low quantity and quality of resources available in the village, such as drinking water, proper lighting and etc. | 3 |
| | 10 | Low level of linguistic ability | 2 |
| | 11 | High percentage of old rural population | 1 |

**Table 3.** Round one: Opportunities and threats of rural tourism (n= 22).

| | Rank | Factors | Responses |
|---|---|---|---|
| Opportunities | 1 | An increasing tendency to use nature for calmness and recreational activities | 20 |
| | 2 | Urban expansion causing pollution in urban environments | 17 |
| | 3 | An increasing interest to visit the rural tourism areas | 12 |
| | 4 | An increased advertising and marketing of rural tourism by tourism agencies | 12 |
| | 5 | Employment in tourism-related activities in rural areas such as: Working in office, service units, public parking, etc. | 11 |
| | 6 | Appropriate legislation for the development of rural tourism | 10 |
| | 7 | An increasing attention by province management toward rural tourism | 10 |
| | 8 | Investing in folklore such as music, local and traditional dress | 9 |
| | 9 | Tourists awareness of the cultural characteristics of the host community | 9 |
| | 10 | Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism Organization's (CHHTO) efforts to rehabilitate and repair historic and cultural buildings | 7 |
| | 11 | The boom of the handicrafts with the help of CHHTO | 6 |
| | 12 | Identification of target villages and preparation of tourist development plan by | 6 |
| | 13 | Increasing the appropriate advertising to promote positive cultural interactions between local people and tourists | 1 |
| | 14 | Willingness to travel to visit relatives and friends | 1 |
| | 15 | Strong link between rural and urban communities | 1 |

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**Table3 Continued.**

| | Rank | Factors | Responses |
|---|---|---|---|
| Threats | 1 | Demolition of historic villages | 21 |
| | 2 | Waste disposal and environmental damages | 19 |
| | 3 | Lack of tourists responsibility in protecting the environment | 16 |
| | 4 | Lack of interaction between the agencies and the lack of efficient and coordinated management in province | 13 |
| | 5 | Destruction and gradual extinction of plant and animal species caused by tourists' intervention | 12 |
| | 6 | Lack of or limited service providers or travel agents to visit rural areas | 12 |
| | 7 | Vulnerability to natural hazards such as earthquakes, floods, etc. | 11 |
| | 8 | Planning and projecting out of the village and the lack of attention to the needs and realities of rural | 10 |
| | 9 | Lack of state financial support for rural economic activities | 9 |
| | 10 | Local traditions and cultural changes to cope with culture of tourists | 9 |
| | 11 | Lack of attention to rural tourism by extension and rural development sector | 5 |
| | 12 | Mismatch between the needs of rural people and infrastructures status | 3 |
| | 13 | Negative publicity about the behavior of villagers | 2 |
| | 14 | Lowering the threshold of acceptance of rural areas for tourists | 1 |

**Table 4.** Round Two results: Level of agreement with the strengths and weaknesses of rural tourism (n= 22).

| | Rank | Factors | *M*[a] | *SD* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strengths | 1 | Favorable climate conditions | 4.5 | 0.6 |
| | 2 | Environmental potential | 4.09 | 0.68 |
| | 3 | Strong spirit of hospitality in rural areas | 4 | 1.25 |
| | 4 | Security in rural areas | 3.86 | 0.83 |
| | 5 | Natural, historical and cultural tourism zones | 3.77 | 1.07 |
| | 6 | Variety of local foods and souvenirs | 3.68 | 1.13 |
| | 7 | Variety of animal species | 3.6 | 1.14 |
| | 8 | Reasonable geographic distance from the province center | 3.55 | 1.01 |
| | 9 | Active work force | 3.51 | 0.96 |
| | 10 | Water, electricity and gas infrastructure | 3.5 | 1.06 |
| | 11 | Local traditions and culture in rural areas | 3.36 | 0.79 |
| | 12 | Local partnerships to enhance the quality and quantity related to tourism affairs | 3.27 | 1.12 |
| | 13 | Appropriate local management system | 3.23 | 1.02 |
| | 14 | Variety of crafts in rural areas | 3.05 | 0.79 |
| Weaknesses | 1 | Lack of information and promotional activities to introduce rural tourism attractions | 4.59 | 0.67 |
| | 2 | Lack of market driven products in tourism, craft and food products | 4.32 | 0.77 |
| | 3 | Limited education and training villagers in how to deal with tourists | 4.18 | 0.91 |
| | 4 | Lack of financial resources for investment | 4.14 | 0.94 |
| | 5 | Poor rural infrastructure (especially transportation, road infrastructure) | 4.1 | 0.75 |
| | 6 | Lack of professional and highly skilled human capacities | 4.09 | 0.68 |
| | 7 | low level of linguistic ability | 3.91 | 1.02 |
| | 8 | Poor IT and electronic infrastructure in rural areas | 3.86 | 1.15 |
| | 9 | Weakness in the culture of the host society to achieve suitable conditions | 3.82 | 0.66 |
| | 10 | Low quantity and quality of resources available in the village, such as drinking water, proper lighting and etc. | | |
| | 11 | High percentage of old rural population | 3.45 | 1.06 |

[a] 1= Strongly disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Uncertain; 4= Agree, 5= Strongly agree.



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**Table 5.** Round Two results: Level of agreement with the opportunities and threats of rural tourism (n= 22).

| | Rank | Factors | $M^a$ | *SD* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Opportunities | 1 | An increasing tendency to use nature for calmness and recreational activities | 4.32 | 0.72 |
| | 2 | An increasing attention by province management toward rural tourism | 4.18 | 0.73 |
| | 3 | Investing in folklore such as music, local and traditional dress. | 4.14 | 0.89 |
| | 4 | CHHTO's efforts to rehabilitate and repair historic and cultural buildings | 4.1 | 0.97 |
| | 5 | An increasing interest to visit the rural tourism areas | 4.09 | 0.61 |
| | 6 | Employment in tourism-related activities in rural areas such as: working in office, service units, public parking and … | 4.05 | 0.99 |
| | 7 | Appropriate legislation for the development of rural tourism | 4.04 | 0.95 |
| | 8 | An increased advertising and marketing of rural tourism by tourism agencies | 4 | 1.02 |
| | 9 | Identification of tourism target villages and preparation tourist development plan by CHHTO | 4 | 0.82 |
| | 10 | Urban expansion to cause pollution in urban environments | 4 | 1.19 |
| | 11 | An increasing the appropriate advertising to promote positive cultural interactions between local people and tourists | 3.73 | 1.20 |
| | 12 | Tourists awareness of the cultural characteristics of the host community | 3.69 | 1.04 |
| | 13 | The boom of the handicrafts with the help of CHHTO | [illegible] | [illegible] |
| | 14 | Willingness to travel for visit relatives and friends | 3.5 | 1.01 |
| | 15 | Strong link between rural and urban | 3.5 | 1.18 |
| Threats | 1 | Destruction and gradual extinction of plant and animal species caused by tourists' intervention | 4.14 | 0.71 |
| | 2 | Demolition of historic village | 4.09 | 0.92 |
| | 3 | Lack of attention to rural tourism by extension and rural development sector | 4 | 0.84 |
| | 4 | Lack of or limited service providers or travel agents to visit rural areas | 4 | 0.87 |
| | 5 | Lack of interaction between the agencies and the lack of efficient and coordinated management in province | 4 | 0.9 |
| | 6 | Waste emissions and environmental damages | 4 | 0.97 |
| | 7 | Lack of tourists responsibility in protecting the environment | 3.9 | 0.71 |
| | 8 | Lack of state financial support of rural economic activities | 3.86 | 1.12 |
| | 9 | Planning and projecting out of the village and the lack of attention to the needs and realities of rural | 3.82 | 0.96 |
| | 10 | Negative publicity about the behavior of villagers | 3.6 | 1 |
| | 11 | Vulnerability to natural hazards such as earthquakes, floods and etc. | 3.73 | 0.83 |
| | 12 | Lowering the threshold of acceptance of rural areas for tourists | 3.73 | 1.03 |
| | 13 | Mismatch between the needs of rural people and infrastructures status | 3.6 | 0.91 |
| | 14 | Local traditions and culture changes for accommodating with culture of tourists | 3.5 | 0.8 |

[a] 1= Strongly disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Uncertain; 4= Agree, 5= Strongly agree.

the first three prior strengths, while lack of information and promotional activities to introduce rural tourism attractions, lack of market driven products in tourism, craft and food products, and limited education and training villagers in how to deal with tourists have been known as the first three prior weaknesses. According to Table 5, an increasing tendency to use nature for calmness and recreational activities, an increasing attention by provincial management toward rural tourism, investing in folklore such as music, local and traditional dress ranked the highest opportunities and destruction and gradual extinction of plant and animal species caused by tourists' intervention, demolition of historic villages and lack of attention to rural tourism by extension and rural



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development sector ranked the highest threats.

Based upon responses in the third round, panel members were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with each of the identified factors. All of the respondents agreed on the followings as being the main strengths: favorable climate conditions; environmental potential; natural, historical and cultural tourism zones; security in rural areas; and variety of local foods and souvenirs. Also, all of the respondents agreed on the followings as being the main weaknesses: lack of information and promotional activities to introduce rural tourism attractions; lack of market driven products in tourism, craft and food products; limited education and training of villagers in how to deal with tourists; poor rural infrastructure (especially transportation and road infrastructure); and lack of financial resources for investment.

All of the respondents agreed on the followings as being the main opportunities:

An increasing tendency to use nature for calmness and recreational activities;

CHHTO's efforts to rehabilitate and repair historic and cultural buildings

An increasing interest to visit the rural tourism areas

Eemployment in tourism-related activities in rural areas such as: working in office, service units, public parking, etc.

Appropriate legislation for the development of rural tourism

An increased advertising and marketing of rural tourism by tourism agencies

Identification of tourism target villages and preparation of tourism development plan by CHHTO

Urban expansion causing pollution in urban environments

Increasing the appropriate advertising to promote positive cultural interactions between local people and tourists.

Also, all of the respondents agreed on the followings as being the main threats:

Destruction and gradual extinction of plant and animal species caused by tourists' intervention

**Demolition of historic villages**

Lack of attention to rural tourism by extension and rural development sector

Lack of or limited service providers or travel agents to visit rural areas

Waste emissions and environmental damages

Lack of tourists responsibility in protecting the environment

Lack of state financial support for rural economic activities

Negative publicity about the behavior of villagers.

As mentioned in Tables 6 and 7, challenges identified in round three were categorized into economic, social-cultural, environmental, and organizational-policy challenges.

Finally, SWOT was used to provide a matrix of strategies for the development of rural tourism. SWOT matrix assesses strengths and weaknesses against opportunities and threats.

## Suggested Strategies for Tourism Development

**S-O Strategies:** In offensive strategies, there is a focus on the strengths and external opportunities. The following points are suggested for use of the positive points for the tourism development in rural areas.

- Emphasis on development of rural tourism for tourism potentials
- Trying to hold seasonal festivals and markets for the sale of agricultural products and handicrafts in villages
- Efficient and targeted use of incentive tourists for travel to rural areas in order to create employment and income
- Benefit of the human resources in rural areas to form public institutions in order to increase the success rate in attracting tourists

**S-T Strategies:** In the so-called variety strategies, there is a focus on the internal strengths and the external Threats. The following points are suggested for use



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**Table 6.** Categorized strengths and weaknesses of rural tourism in East Azarbaijan Province.

| | Category | |
|---|---|---|
| Strengths | Environmental | Favorable climate conditions |
| | | Environmental potential |
| | | Natural, historical and cultural Tourism zones |
| | Social – Cultural | Variety of animal species |
| | | Security in rural areas |
| | | Variety of local foods and souvenirs |
| | | Strong spirit of hospitality in rural areas |
| | Economic | Active work force |
| | | Reasonable geographic distance from the province center |
| | | Water, electricity and gas infrastructure |
| Weaknesses | Social – Cultural | Limited education and training villagers in how to deal with tourists |
| | | Lack of market driven products in tourism, craft and food products |
| | | Weakness in the culture of the host society to achieve suitable conditions |
| | | Lack of professional and highly skilled human capacities |
| | | Lack of information and promotional activities to introduce rural tourism attractions |
| | | Low level of linguistic ability |
| | Economic | Poor rural infrastructure (Especially transportation, road infrastructure) |
| | | Lack of financial resources for investment |
| | | Poor IT and electronic infrastructure in rural areas |
| | | Low quantity and quality of resources available in the village, such as drinking water, proper lighting and etc. |

**Table 7.** Categorized opportunities and threats for rural tourism in East Azarbaijan Province.

| | Category | |
|---|---|---|
| Opportunities | Social – Cultural | An increasing tendency to use nature for calmness and recreational activities |
| | | An increasing interest to visit the rural tourism areas |
| | | An increasing the appropriate advertising to promote positive cultural interactions between local people and tourists |
| | | Tourists awareness of the cultural characteristics of the host community |
| | | Willingness to travel for visit relatives and friends |
| | | Strong link between rural and urban |
| | Organizational – Policy | Appropriate legislation for the development of rural tourism |
| | | An increasing attention by province management toward rural tourism |
| | | Identification of tourism target villages and preparation tourist development plan by CHHTO |
| | | The boom of the handicrafts with the help of CHHTO |
| | | CHHTO's efforts to rehabilitate and repair historic and cultural buildings |
| | Economic | Investing in folklore such as music, local and traditional dress |
| | | Employment in tourism-related activities in rural areas |
| | | An increased advertising and marketing of rural tourism by tourism agencies |
| | Environmental | Urban expansion to cause pollution in urban environments |

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**Table7 Continued.**

| | Category | |
|---|---|---|
| Threats | Social - Cultural | Demolition of historic villages |
| | | Negative publicity about the behavior of villagers |
| | | Local traditions and culture changes for coping with the culture of tourists |
| | Organizational – Policy | Lack of attention to rural tourism by extension and rural development sector |
| | | Lack of or limited service providers or travel agents to visit rural areas |
| | | Lack of state financial support of rural economic activities |
| | | Lack of interaction between the agencies and the lack of efficient and coordinated management in province |
| | | Planning and projecting out of the village and the lack of attention to the needs and realities of rural |
| | Economic | Vulnerability to natural hazards such as earthquakes, floods and etc. |
| | | Lowering the threshold of acceptance of rural areas for tourists |
| | | Mismatch between the needs of rural people and infrastructures status |
| | Environmental | Destruction and gradual extinction of plant and animal species caused by tourists' intervention |
| | | Lack of tourists responsibility in protecting the environment |
| | | Waste emissions and environmental damages |

of the advantages for the tourism development in rural areas.

- Giving variety to the methods of advertisement in order to introduce the attractions of the rural areas
- Giving variety to tourism activities and services in order to attract tourists
- Emphasis on coordination between various organizations involved in the development of rural tourism, in particular the formation of a coordination team

**W-O Strategies:** In reviewing strategies, there is a focus on internal weaknesses and it tries to make use of the external opportunities to remove the weaknesses. The following points are suggested:

- Education and increasing awareness of villagers in the field of rural tourism
- Reviewing the planning and rational use of rules and laws to improve the facilities and services of tourism in the rural areas
- Development of suitable type of plans and promotional programs
- Preparing plans for improving the infrastructure and equipment of tourism in the rural areas

**W-T Strategies:** In defensive strategies, there is a focus on the removal of vulnerability to threats in the area and the following points are suggested:

- Efforts to promote the empowerment of rural people
- Protection of the environment and attractions
- Development and organization of infrastructure
- Promoting rural tourism through training and various meetings with local people
- Coordination between various government organizations, people, and entrepreneurs by holding meetings

## CONCLUSIONS

East Azarbaijan Province had high potentials for rural tourism in terms of strengths and opportunities. Considering the results of this study, strengths and limitations were recognized in the area using SWOT analysis in order to present strategies and solutions for rural tourism development



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and practical responses and appropriate strategies were provided for tourism development. Forty nine strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats were identified.

The results show that favorable climate conditions; environmental potential; natural; historical and cultural tourism zones are the main strengths. Studies by Khatoon Abadi and Rast Ghalam (2011) and Rokn Aldin Eftekhari and Mahdavi (2006) support this finding. Limited education and training of the villagers in how to deal with tourists are the major weaknesses. This result is also confirmed by Madhoushi and Naserpour (2003). Lack of information and promotional activities to introduce rural tourism attractions is one of the major weaknesses. In this regard, the establishment of information centers is required in rural areas. Results from the present study and similar ones (Ashley, 2000; Bartsch, 2000) have shown that the following are the major opportunities:

An increasing tendency to use nature for calmness and recreational activities

An increasing attention by the provincial management toward rural tourism

Investing in folklore such as music, local and traditional dress

CHHTO's efforts to rehabilitate and repair historic and cultural buildings

An increasing interest to visit the rural tourism areas

Employment in tourism-related activities in rural areas such as: working in office, service units, public parking and etc.

Appropriate legislation for the development of rural tourism

An increased advertising and marketing of rural tourism by tourism agencies

Identification of tourism target villages and preparation of tourist development plan by CHHTO

Urban expansion causing pollution in urban environments

An increase in the appropriate advertisement in the fields of reinforced cultural promotion through the establishment of positive cultural interactions between local people and tourists.

Tourism development in the study area can be achieved at two levels of short term and long-term.

Long-term programs includes :

To create and develop infrastructures such as welfare, catering and service facilities .

To prepare a comprehensive tourism plan that is proportional to the conditions of the region and prevents environmental degradation.

To provide a suitable ground for private sector investment in regional tourism activities.

Short-term programs includes:

Giving variety to the methods of advertisement in order to introduce the attractions of rural areas

Holding training classes for the rural people

Revival of handicrafts and production of handicrafts for offering to tourists using the experiences of people with skills.

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# بررسی گردشگری روستایی در استان آذربایجان شرقی با استفاده از مدل SWOT و روش دلفی

**ف. کاظمیه، ح. صدیقی و م. چیذری**

## چکیده

هدف اصلی این مطالعه، بررسی نقاط قوت، ضعف، فرصت‌ها و تهدیدهای گردشگری روستایی در استان آذربایجان شرقی بود. برای تحقق این هدف، مدل SWOT جهت تجزیه و تحلیل نقاط قوت، ضعف، فرصت‌ها و تهدیدها و روش دلفی، به عنوان روشی برای پالایش نظرات گروهی و دستیابی به اجماع استفاده شد. نتایج نشان داد که برخورداری از آب و هوای مطلوب؛ وجود قابلیت‌ها و پتانسیل‌های زیست‌محیطی و وجود پهنه‌های گردشگری طبیعی، تاریخی و فرهنگی مهم‌ترین نقاط قوت و ضعف اطلاع‌رسانی و فعالیت‌های تبلیغاتی و معرفی جاذبه‌های گردشگری روستا؛ عدم آموزش روستاییان و عدم آشنایی آن‌ها در نحوه برخورد با گردشگران نقاط ضعف اصلی بودند. هم‌چنین افزایش تمایل برای استفاده از طبیعت به منظور کسب آرامش؛ افزایش توجه مدیریت استان به گردشگری روستایی؛ سرمایه‌گذاری در زمینه ساختارهای فرهنگی از قبیل موسیقی، پوشش و البسه بومی و سنتی روستا؛ تلاش سازمان میراث فرهنگی و گردشگری برای بهسازی، مرمت آثار و ابنیه‌های تاریخی و فرهنگی؛ افزایش تمایل به بازدید قابلیت‌های گردشگری روستایی؛ اشتغال در فعالیت‌های مربوط به گردشگری در مناطق روستایی و تدوین قوانین مناسب برای توسعه گردشگری روستایی مهم‌ترین فرصت و تخریب و انقراض تدریجی گونه‌های گیاهی و حیوانی بر اثر مداخله گردشگران؛ تخریب آثار تاریخی روستا؛ عدم توجه بخش ترویج و توسعه روستایی به گردشگری روستایی؛ فقدان و یا محدود بودن عرضه کنندگان خدمات و یا آژانس‌های مسافرتی برای بازدید از نواحی روستایی و انتشار زباله و تخریب محیط تهدیدهای اصلی هستند.



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