Evaluation Ecotourism Potential and Capacity of Desert region of Maranjab, Kashan

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1. INTRODUCTION

Iran, with a broad geographic diversity, is known as the land of four seasons. This geographical diversity has created a wide diversity of human, social, cultural, ethnic, and living environment. In terms of style and way of life three different communities; including urban, rural, and nomadic; have been lived together in Iran. Desert tourism and visiting attractions of desert areas, such as morphological forms, vegetation's and animals life, sports activities and to visit the other attractions, is a special kind of eco-tourism that is called desert tourism. Understanding desert potentials and capabilities of arid regions are the basic needs for social for social and economic development of the region. Eco tourism development has positives and negatives aspects, like all of kind of tourism, and has different effects on the environment, economy and culture of the host society.

Although the desert areas are high potential in fields such as manufacturing, mining, and tourism, but these areas have the ecological limits and low capacity. Again human interference and unsustainable exploitation of these regions can lead to the opposite conclusions.

This paper intends to identify and assess ecotourism potentials of different areas in Maranjab desert, Kashan region. The research is an applied one, and a descriptive-analytical research. Both documentary and field studies have been adopted for data collection and thus identification and prioritization of areas with the highest potential for ecotourism development within the desert district of Maranjab. The research aims to address some main questions concerning tourism development in the desert:
1. What are determining factors for attracting tourists to the desert of Maranjab?
2. What area of the desert district has the highest potential for tourism development?

2. METHODOLOGY

The Maranjab desert is located in the north Aran and Bidgol district as part of Kashan County in Esfahan province in arid zone center of Iran. The Maranjab desert is bounded with the salt lake from the north, the Hoaze sultan and Hoaze Moreh from the west, Band Reeg

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(sand dam) and desert national park from the east and Kashan area from the south. Maranjab desert climate characteristics in zone climate that is recognized with relatively cool winters and dry and very hot summers. Annual rainfall is about 125 mm, and humidity is about 2 to 5 percent. Wind conditions is formed to the natural landscape of the area is very impressive, the north wind and the Shahriari wind are recognize as favorable winds in the region, the Khorasan wind, the Qiblawind the black wind, the Toofan wind and especially Lovar wind are unfavorable in the region.

Maranjab desert attractions and potentials can be generally in 5 categories including historical attractions: karvansara Maranjab and Dastkan wells, Natural Attractions: Sandy Hills, the salt polygons, the Sargardani (wandering) island and morphological forms, gravity science: observing the stars, rare plant and animal species and Geotourism, potential of sports: Rally, Desert Marathon, sand riding and camel riding, treatment potential: sand therapy, water therapy and the peace and quiet of the desert divided.

Regarding research main questions, areas with the best potential for tourism development were determined using strategic planning method and Delphi technique. Selected relevant criteria, in order to evaluate research questions, include: existing land capabilities, area's geomorphology, infrastructures, and tourist attractions. Having the selected criteria and sub criteria scored and weighted according to their relative importance, map layers of the area, pertaining to these specified criteria and sub criteria, were prepared using GIS software, in 1:25000 scale maps. Adopting criteria such as slope, proximity to water sources and climate, the area with the best potential for tourism development were determined.

3. DISCUSSION

Physical carrying capacity of the area was determined based on the proposed area's expanse and the type of tourism is being developed and was estimated to be 67200 people. In addition, considering other limiting factors like vegetation, slope, and the space allocated to infrastructures, the real carrying capacity was calculated and estimated to be 43120 people per week. Results demonstrate that capacity of Maranjab desert for receiving tourists, in existing conditions, is still higher than the current number of visitors to the desert (2500 people per week). Considering the desirable situation of the desert, i.e. its proximity to some populous city centers, effective planning in tourism development could lead to significant job creation and economic prosperity of the area.

4. CONCLUSION

This study was made evaluated the potential of ecotourism, Kavir Kashan Maranjab. The results show that, desert Maranjab Kashan area has many natural and historical attractions which are unique or unique in its kind. But lack of suitable infrastructure for this type of tourism (such as lack of information about the attractions of the desert Perhaps the lack of attention or lack of knowledge of the relevant agencies and local authorities in relation to this type of tourism, lack of facilities for tourists, and...), yet don't have been taken major action in relation to tourism in the desert region. Due to the sensitive nature of tourism development in
fragile and vulnerable areas of desert and Priority conservation areas and the potential for long-term sustainable development, efforts should be focused on the identification and evaluation of potential tourism and ecotourism Maranjab desert, organized and presented. It could be based on the strategy of sustainable tourism, especially in desert regions.

**Keywords:** Ecotourism, Tourism attractions, Potential define, Carring Capacity, Maranjab Desert.

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