

Potential of Alborz Province for Eco-tourism Development: a SWOT Analysis

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Abstract

In most of the countries tourism is a well developed industry. In Iran, it is possible to develop this industry as natural tourism and eco-tourism. This study examined the natural potential of Alborz province in eco-tourism development by a descriptive analytical method. But Alborz province is facing many challenges in this regard which includes lack of knowledge on tourism; destruction and demolition of constructions of historical importance, and mountains; and waste resulted from tourism. Consequently, awareness about eco-tourism and cooperation of authorities can help in the development of eco-tourism.

1. Introduction

Today Iran is one of the world's most attractive tourist regions. One of the types of tourism is natural tourism or eco-tourism based on the natural environment. Its importance is increasing progressively in comparison to other kinds of tourism. Today, tourism institutions across the world are concentrating on eco-tourism and environment than ever before. Eco-tourism is a useful strategy for sustainable management of natural environment. Eco-tourism is related to tour in nature with responsibility. Having varieties of natural tourism attractions Iran can promote eco-tourism as well. This paper intends to study environmental potential of Alborz province to develop eco-tourism activities.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study area

Alborz province owes its name from Alborz Mountain which passes through north of this province. Karaj as capital of Alborz is located 20 km of north-west of Tehran. Alborz is located at 50°14'8.20" to 50°39'20.58" eastern longitude and 35°37'50.81" to 36°7'38.94" north latitude extending up to Mazandaran province in north, Tehran province in east and south-east, Markazi province in south, and Qazvin province in west. The area of this province equals to 5,833 km² (Figure 1).

2.2. Method of data collection

Research method includes documentary, library and electronic studies with field observations. It was intended to combine different methods to get reliable data. After that SWOT analysis was done. Computer software like Arc Gis, Excel, and Photoshop were used to draw maps and charts.

3. Results and Discussion

Climate, topography, water resources, soil, vegetation, powers and other natural resources were studied to analyze the eco-tourism potential of Alborz province. Understanding the precise environmental potential and applying appropriate guidelines will help in planning for development of environment. Understanding ecological potential of environment and other activities appropriate and compatible with the environment are necessary to meet the new needs of tourists (leisure-recreational) in dealing with nature. It can be possible to have a plan to achieve sustainable development, to determine the most proper kind and location of the development of tourist activities away from any pressure and in consideration of environmental considerations. This study identified the right type of tourism activities compatible with the natural environment to attract more tourists and long staying of tourists, and considered the protection of natural resources in order to achieve stability.



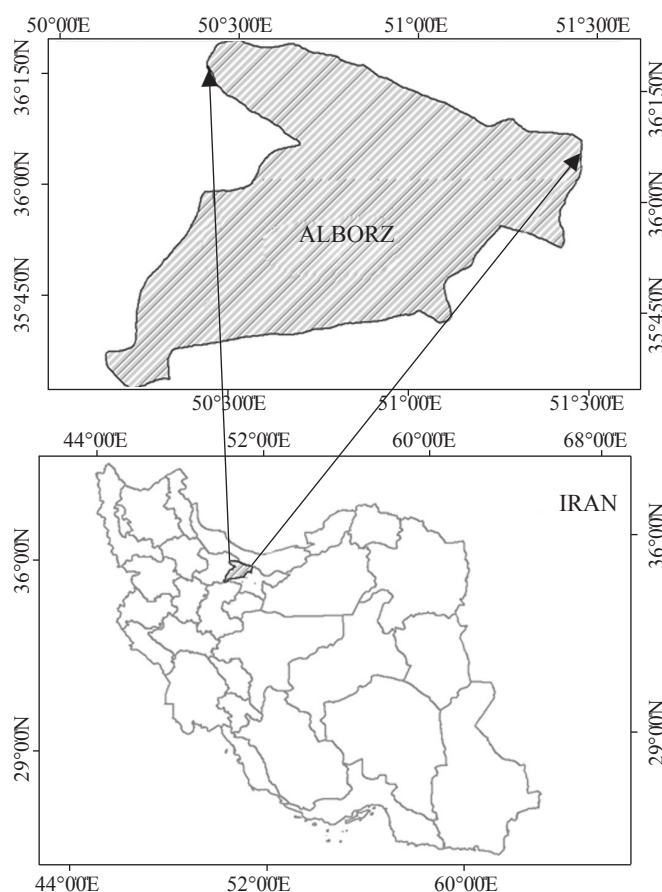


Figure 1: Location of Alborz province in Iran

3.1. SWOT analysis of eco-tourism

SWOT analysis is one of most important tools of strategic management to match the strengths and weaknesses within an organization (or system) with its external opportunities and threats. SWOT analysis systematically recognizes factors and strategies which reflect strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat to a system. In fact analyzing internal strengths and weaknesses and opportunities and threats in a systematic way supports for decision making and forming quality model of SWOT.

3.1.1. Internal factors

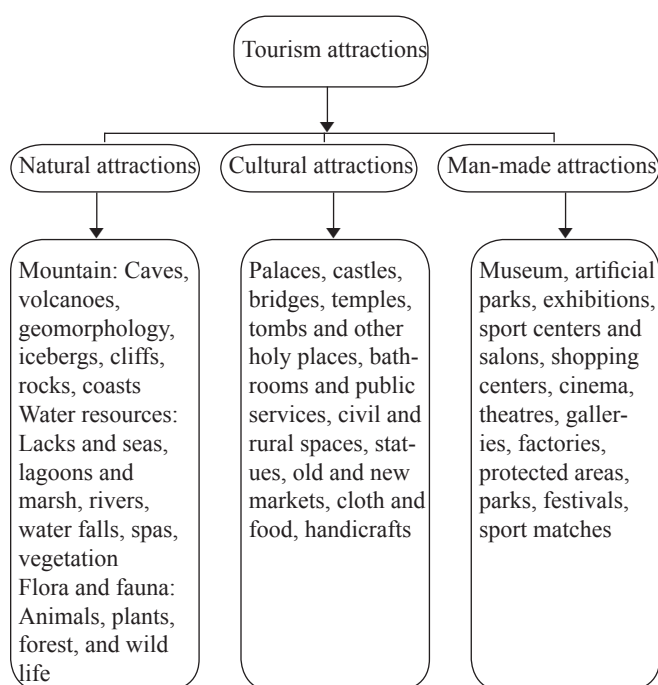
Strengths

- Moderate population
- Existing industrial, recreation, cultural centers
- Concerned department of the University in the area

Weaknesses

- Lack of skilled managers and experienced staff in eco-tourism sector
- Lack of research related to eco-tourism issues
- Lack of coordination between regional organizations related to tourism and people
- Lack of experienced tour guides

Dimensions of attractions



e. Lack of skilled and experienced staff in travel agencies

f. Lack of training centers for training required human resources for eco-tourism sector

3.1.2. External factors

Opportunities

- Encouraging people to travel and involve in nature tourism
- Planning of tourism organization to train personnel and professionals in tourism sector
- Creating employment opportunity and income in the region

Threats

- Negative attitude towards the issue of tourism among the people and authorities
- Wrong mentality of people
- Lack of willingness to invest in tourism
- Strategies and guidelines in resources and attractions

3.2. Competitive/aggressive (SO) strategies

- Involving University graduates in tourism sector
- Holding regular training courses to improve expertise for those involved in eco-tourism.
- Creating learning networks and educating them

3.3. Supporting researches

- Cooperation and consultation with authorities
- Establishment of training centers for the training specialists
- Holding conference to develop appropriate guidelines

3.4. Diversification of strategies (ST)

- Providing conditions for attracting private investment in

Segmentation of tourism attractions		
Attractions	Kind of attraction	Description
Natural	Climate	This attraction can be considered as principal or complementary and many people said that proper climate is basic for tourism activities
	Beautiful views	Can be a principal motivation in visiting
	Coasts and sea-shores	Most important attraction for tourism activities and other activities are associated with this
	Plants and animals	Zoos, aquariums and gardens are the most important collections
	Environment	Mountains, geographical particulars such as caves, water falls, spas, involving treatment and tourism activities
Cultural	Ancient, cultural and historical places	National and cultural relics, historical places, religious and holy places
	Cultural pattern	Traditions, clothes, feasts, celebrations which represent life styles to tourists
	Arts and artifacts	Folk arts such as dance, music and theater and painting, engraving which are the most important factors in attracting tourist
	Economic activities	Harvesting rice, tea, silk and traditional agricultural techniques which are the most important economic factors in attracting tourists
	Beautiful places of city	Squares, shopping centers, museums and other places which are appropriate for recreational activities
	Museums and other cultural places	Museums with different cultural and historical aspects are important factors to attract tourist
	Cultural festivals	Different kinds of these festivals are march, religious celebrations, and the like
Particular	Parks and circuses	Includes different subjects such as historical places, adventure, imagination and dream which involve different tourism activities
	Shopping centers	Shopping centers with goods and particular products supplied or imported are considered as the most important places for visitors.
	Meetings, conferences and gathering	Meetings, educational courses, seminars and educational workshops are the most important factors in tourism which can prolong stay of tourist.
	Particular events	Sport championships, festivals, exhibitions and kinds of natural and cultural events can attract tourist
	Sports and recreation	Sports and related activities can attract tourist

SWOT matrix

Weaknesses (W)	Strengths (S)
1. Lack of skilled managers and workers in the field of ecotourism	1. Having the proper population
2. Lack of research related to scientific and practical eco-tourism	2. Industrial, recreational, cultural, and centers of excellence
3. Lack of coordination between regional organizations and people related to tourism	3. Having a University degree in a related area
4. Lack of trained tour guides	
5. Lack of efficient and trained staff at travel agencies	
6. Lack of training centers for training human resources for eco-tourism sector	

Competitive/aggressive (SO) strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creating local networking and educating them 2. Use of university graduates in the tourism sector 3. Regular training courses aimed at enhancing expertise to work for those involved in ecotourism 4. Supporting research 5. Cooperating and consulting with authorities 6. Establishment of training centers for the training of specialists 7. Holding conference to develop appropriate guidelines 	<p>Increasing interest of people about tourism and natural tourism.</p> <p>Planning tourism organization to educate personnel of tourism.</p> <p>Providing job opportunity and income in the area</p>
Defensive strategies (WT)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Long-term planning for stable employment in tourism sector 2. Collecting rules and regulations in developing and reforming relevant institutions 3. Using professional management in decision-making and executive affairs 4. Cooperating and consulting with authorities 5. Proper investment in cultural and educational sectors for people to communicate with tourists 	<p>Negative attitude about tourism among people and authorities.</p> <p>Wrong mentality of people.</p> <p>Lack of interest to invest.</p>
eco-tourism sector	<p>Diversification of strategies (ST)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Providing conditions for attracting private investment in eco-tourism sector 2. Holding conference using opinions and theories of experts 3. Attending exhibitions and conferences 	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Long-term planning for stable employment in tourism sector b. Holding conference using opinions and theories of experts c. Attending exhibitions and conferences 	4. Conclusion	
3.5. <i>Defensive strategies (WT)</i>	<p>Eco-tourism is trip with responsibility to natural environments which in addition to protecting environment guarantees local societies. Eco-tourism is a concept which has been evolved along with natural tourism within past 20 years and in this regard authorities of protected areas and people in these areas have found their common interest in growth. Eco-tourism has led to the protection of the environment, local communities, generated income and created a new business. In this study it was observed that Alborz province has potential to develop eco-tourism due to its mountainous areas. Therefore, steps must be taken to develop eco-tourism in Alborz province of Iran.</p>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Long-term planning for stable employment in tourism sector b. Collecting rules and regulations in developing and reforming relevant institutions c. Using professional management in decision-making and executive affairs d. Engagement and consultation with authorities e. Proper investment in cultural and educational sectors for people to communicate with tourists 		