THE HISTORY OF TOURISM IN AZERBAIJAN: THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

A HISTÓRIA DO TURISMO NO AZERBEIJÃO: O PASSADO E O FUTURO

LA HISTORIA DE TURISMO EN AZERBAIJÁN: EL PASADO Y EL FUTURO

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ABSTRACT

During the last four decades, tourism has become an important part of the Azerbaijan’s economy. Azerbaijan conducts the policy of expanding connection in South Caucasus in the field of tourism, delivering tourism services and increasing the number of foreign tourists. Today, tourism is one of the priorities areas in the non-oil sector of the Republic of Azerbaijan. This research is dedicated to the identification of the reasons for development of Azerbaijan tourism and is aimed to study the state policy and involvement of the private sector for the past years. It also analyses the structure of distribution related to tourism for the purpose of assessment of the capacity of Azerbaijan tourism in broader terms.

Keywords: tourism, history, development, Azerbaijan.

RESUMO

Durante as últimas quatro décadas, o turismo tornou-se uma parte importante da economia do Azerbaijão. O Azerbaijão está empreender uma política de expansão do turismo em conexão com o Sul do Cáucaso, entregando serviços de turismo e registando um aumento do número de turistas estrangeiros. Hoje, o turismo é uma área prioritária não associada ao sector do petróleo da República de Azerbaijão. Esta pesquisa pretende identificar as razões para continuar a defender o desenvolvimento do turismo no Azerbaijão e tem por objectivo estudar as políticas do Estado e o envolvimento do sector privado nos últimos anos. Também analisa a estrutura de distribuição relacionada com o turismo para a avaliação da capacidade de resposta turística do Azerbaijão, em termos mais amplos.

Palavras-chave: turismo, história, desenvolvimento, Azerbaijão.
RESUMEN

Durante las últimas cuatro décadas el turismo se ha convertido en una parte importante de la economía de Azerbaiyán. Azerbaiyán emprende la política de expansión del turismo en conexión con el Cáucaso del sur, entregando los servicios de turismo y con aumento del número de turistas extranjeros. Hoy el turismo es un área prioritaria en un sector diferente del petróleo, en la República de Azerbaiyán. Esta investigación se dedica a la identificación de razones para el desarrollo de turismo de Azerbaiyán y con el objetivo de estudiar la política del estado y la participación del sector privado en los últimos años. También pretende analizar la estructura de distribución relacionada con el turismo para una evaluación de la capacidad de respuesta turística de Azerbaiyán en términos más amplios. Palabras clave: turismo, la historia, el desarrollo, Azerbaiyán.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an essential sector of economy. Most countries of the world are interested in the development of this sector already for a long time. Tourism holds leading positions in the world economy, competing only with oil production. The role of international, regional and national tourism organizations that contribute to the development of world tourism and undertake protectionist policy within certain countries and regions is important.

Tourism has a significant influence, from a social point of view, on regions’ life of the country: development of tourism provide thousands of new jobs, development of communication systems, increase of literacy and world-outlook of local population, etc., in a number of regions, far from industrial and cultural centers. Tourism alone can fulfill these functions.

Modern tourism is a stable developing sector of the economy with a serious impact on to the social and economical development of many countries around the world. In 38% of world countries tourism is the main source of income, whereas for 83% it is one of most important five sources of income. World tourism gained a particular success during last 35 years, when the total number of international tourists had increased at four times, leading to 25 times raise to foreign exchange income. This sector covers more than 10% of world GDP, more than 6% international investment, every 10th job and 12% of world consumer expenditures (Gulyayev, 2003).

2. POTENTIAL FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The Republic of Azerbaijan has a huge possibility for tourism development. First of all, Azerbaijan is in a favorable geographic location - the junction of two continents – Europe and Asia – a junction of two world civilizations – European and Asian – and it is located in the heart of Trans-Caucasus air corridor, sea, highway and railway connection between Europe and the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Occupying rather small territory - 86,6 thousand sq. km - with a population of about 9 million, the Republic of Azerbaijan has unique natural - climatic features. Mountain tops leaving in a height, Bazarduzu, Shahdagh, Babadagh, numerous falls of the rivers of the
southern slope of the Big Caucasus, transparent as crystal turquoise smooth surface lakes, Goy-gol and Maral-gol, severe and at the same time picturesque mud volcanoes of Gobustan, unique reserves as in Lenkoran – this is how Azerbaijan appears to the eye of tourist.

From 11 climatic zones of our planet, eight, in this or that kind, are present in the territory of Azerbaijan: from subtropics to high-mountainous Alpine meadows. The flora amazes with the brightness and colorfulness. Here are almost all versions of flora of the Caucasus. Te Pinus eldarica, which has resisted before relief and climatic changes, taking place on the Earth for last 13 million years, was preserved in natural conditions of Azerbaijan. An Iron Tree (Parrotia persica) also grows here.

The fauna is various and rich. More than 12 thousand vertebrates and invertebrates inhabit in Azerbaijan. These are axis deer, gazelle, mouflon, Caucasian goat, leopard, bear and other, as well as rare bird species. There are 8 national parks in the country with natural and historical reserves.

There are more than 1200 small and big rivers flowing in Azerbaijan. Many mountain rivers form noisy and majestic falls. The real pearl of Azerbaijan land is mountain and lowland lakes, with Goy-gol and Maral-gol being the most famous of them. Waters of the Caspian and basin rivers are inhabited by valuable fish species: sturgeon, salmon, trout.

Thermal and mineral springs are of great value - Badamii, Tursh su, Isti su, and the equal famous Karlovy Vary springs. Natural mud's, with medical oil "Naftalan" being special among them, are effectively used for the treatment of locomotive and nervous systems, skin, gynecological and other diseases for more than 100 year (Mammadov e Bilalov, 2003).

Azerbaijan is called sunny and it is not accidentally. With number of clear days in a year the republic can be comparable to Italy, Spain and Greece, and the sea coast of the Caspian Sea stretched on the territory of Azerbaijan for 825 km, has all preconditions for transformation into a continuous rest zone. Sand beaches of peninsular Absheron, within Baku urban area, as well as Yalama-Khachmaz beaches of north-east of the country (220 km away from Baku) are already popular for a long time, attracting with cool shade of forest right along the sea shore.

Azerbaijan has been recognized as land of health and perfect resort area for a long time. The climate conditions are exceptionally
favorable. That is why this country holds one of the leading positions in the world in terms of the number of long-livers. At last, but not the least, healthy food and right nutrition is of great importance here too.

Another favorable condition for the development of all types of tourism in our country is the sincere warmth and traditional hospitality of the people of Azerbaijan. No matter where the foreign tourist is in the country, he or she will be surrounded by care and attention, generosity and friendly support of the people that live here.

Azerbaijan is a country of rich history and ancient culture. The remains of the Neanderthal man which have been found out in the Azyhk cave, testify that the primitive man lived here for about 250 thousand years ago during an epoch of an early Paleolithic. There are more than 6 thousand historical-architectural monuments on the territory of our country, most of which are located along the route of ancient caravan ways of Great Silk Way, still causing admiration.

One speaks here about petroglyphs of primitive people of Gobustan (60 km from Baku), ruins of antique cities, religious construction of before Islam era: Zoroastrian fire temples, towers, Christian churches and chapels high in mountains, solid fortress wall and castles, as well as vast caravanserais, magnificent palatial, memorial and religious and other construction of Islam era.

Architectural monuments of Azerbaijan of XII-XVIII c., were included to the golden fund of world architectural heritage. These are Baku fortress “Icheri Sheher” (an internal city) of XII c., where on the territory of 22 ha, surrounded by fortress wall, 44 unique middle-age monuments are located: Palace of Shirvanshahs (XV c.), Sinik-gala minaret (XI c.), Maiden Tower (XII c.), minaret Juma- mosque (XV c.). They created in different centuries, yet they reflect, like in morrow, the peculiarities of own time and impress spectators with monumentality, magnificence and completeness (Mammadov e Bilalov, 2004).

The Ensemble “Palace of Shirvanshahs”, the former resident of Shirvan rulers, is the dominating master piece in Icheri, Sheher. It deserves to be called “Acropolis of Baku”. This ensemble consists of 9 constructions, which, from different perspectives, create impression of independent pieces without shielding each other. These is the Divan-khana with its beautiful portal; prayer hall with cupola, burial vault; double-cupola mosque with elegant minaret; mausoleum of middle-age mathematician and astronomer Seyid Yakhya Bakuvi; Eastern gates; ovdan and the baths. All that
impresses with perfection of composition and fine stone-works. Indeed, it's worth of forth travelling thousand miles just to see this palace.

The only Azerbaijani carpet museum is located on the territory of Icheri Sheher. It contains big number of exhibits, characterizing the diversity of the artistic legacy of Azerbaijani people. Azerbaijan carpets, fleecy and not, are unique pieces of art in terms of their beauty and expressiveness, peculiar with original technical and artistic features.

The fire worshiper's temple, Ateshgah (XVIII c.) – the monument of zoroastrism, symbolizing the religion of fire – is located 30 km away from Baku. According to ancient and middle-age written sources, there were a number of such construction on the territory of Azerbaijan, that were destroyed by Arabic conquerors at the time of dissemination of Islam in Azerbaijan in VII-VIII c.. Only ten centuries later traders - fire worshipers from India had constructed present Atehsgah at the place of the temple in Surakhani settlement where natural gas comes on to the land surface. Today, a museum, talking about life of fire worshipers is exhibited in the cells of the temple.

Fortress wall, lonely towers, destroyed caravanserais, temples, mosques and even ruins of antique and middle-age cities that used to be centers for crafts and culture of states located on the territory of Azerbaijan at that time can be found along the Baku-Shamakhi-Sheki-Zakatala-Balakan-Georgia and Baku-Shamakhi-Ganja-Gazakh-Georgia highways. These are Ganja, Shamakhi, Barda, Habala, etc. Still the magnificent monuments of architecture of the time of Caucasian Albania, which used to exist on the territory of Azerbaijan thousand years BC and VII centuries AD are still conserved along these ways: temple ensembles in villages Lekit and Kum of Gagh district, in the villages Kish and Orta Zeyzit of Sheki district, near village Yukhari Eskipara of Gazakh district, etc.

In VII c. AD Azerbaijan was conquered by Arabs and the population converted to Islam. A new type of religious building started to be constructed since that time - mosques. The most ancient of them are located in towns Shamakhi, Ganja, Sheki, Zakatala, Ismayilli, Kuba and other districts.

Since XII the development of state building and the development of cities were taking place on the territory of Azerbaijan. These were centres of architecture schools, organically combining local traditions and high level professional skills. Architectural monuments, created by the masters of these schools are located in
many cities of the country along the Silk Way route. Among them there are fortresses, rich decorated palaces, mausoleums, mosques, bridges, caravanserais, baths and other objects of culture and community services. These monuments are enrolled to the golden fund of architectural monuments of Azerbaijan and are main touristic products along Silk Way route (Mammadov e Bilalov, 2004).

Memorial constructions of Middle Age along the Silk Way are represented by mausoleums: mausoleum of Diri-Baba XV c. in Maraza town, “Yeddı Gunbaz” (“Seven cupola”) of XVIII c. in Shamakhi city, complex of mausoleums of XVII c. in Kolakhani settlement of Shamakhi district, the mausoleum of Sheikh Dur-sun, constructed in 1457 in Aghsu city, the complex of mausoleums of XV-XVI c. in the settlement Khazra of Ismayilli district, complex of mausoleums of XIX c. in the settlement Poylu of Gazakh district and complex of mausoleums “Imam-zade” of XVII-XIX c. in Ganja city.

During feudal atomism Khan’s palaces and citadels were constructed in Azerbaijan. The most prominent and preserved one is the magnificent palace of Sheki khans of XVIII c. in Sheki town. Fortress “Gelersen-Gorersen” (“You can see only if you come”) of XVIII c. in Sheki, Fortress of Shamil of XVIII c. in Zakatala, “Keroglu gala” fortress in Shemkir district, ruins of a huge fortress “Gulistan” in the vicinity of Shamakhi where the scientists believe the palace of Shirvanshakhs was located, are very interesting monuments.

As Azerbaijan was located on the junction of important trade routes, caravanserais – hotels were constructed in many of its cities. They are still a lot preserved in Baku and in the surrounding areas of Sheki, Ganja, Shamakhi, Fizuli and other districts.

Important for that time were bridges across Mountain Rivers, requiring not only special engineering knowledge, but also skills to combine the architecture composition of the bridge with surrounding environment. Such bridges can be found in the town Goygol, near Ganja – Agh korpu bridge of XII c.; in Aghsu town, on the way to Sheki the bridge of XVI c. and in Shamakhi town – the bridge constructed in 1826. Durability of these bridges, preserved until our times stands out for the high level quality of Azerbaijan architects.

Azerbaijan is the land of rich artistic traditions. Already in the past all types of folk decorative arts peculiar to the South Caucasus, especially carpet making, were well developed here. In each of them we see an elegant style of work, typical to craftsmen of Azerbaijan. In
decorative and applied arts of Azerbaijan a special place is held by ceramic.

Among the exhibits of the Museum of History of Azerbaijan, named after Nizami in Baku one can find a unique enrobed glaze ceramic, painted with high art skill. Copper stamped, filigree and engraved metal products of Azerbaijani masters of different time can be found in Baku museums, as well as in museums of Kremlin (Orujeynaya Palata), Istanbul, London, Paris, Philadelphia.

Decorative metal work is very popular and distinctive in Azerbaijan and has centuries of history. Already in the I c. B.C. metal goods of iron, copper, silver and gold, distinct with virtuosity of mastery were made in the land of Azerbaijan. Even the famous adventurer Marco Polo (XII c.) a son of family of jewelers, was admired by luxurious pieces of artistic metal work.

Almost all types of artistic metal work art - chasing, engraving, stamping, plotting, filigree, incrustation and enameling were preserved in modern Azerbaijan. Traditional masters have not just preserved the best features of national distinctive art, but also gave them a new life, developed and made them stronger (Mammadov e Bilalov, 2003).

Azerbaijan is famous with its carpet weaving from the earliest times. The virtuosic fingers of carpet weaving women turn carpets into artistic-portrait pieces. World famous Azerbaijan carpets decorate museums of the USA, the United Kingdom, etc. In Baku the museum of carpet and applied art is the first of a kind. Tourists get to know the master pieces of carpet weaving; the process itself is introduced to them in shops in Icheri Sheher.

Our country had great capacity in meeting demands of tourists in the field of culture and art. Tourists get exposed to the rich musical legacy in the Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet, where performance and rich repertoire amaze imagination. Baku has the State Philharmonic Theatre and the Republican Palace where folk song and dance bands and actors playing on tours show their performances.

Azerbaijan is also famous with it cuisine. Plenty of fruit and vegetables, aromatic herbs and spices always inspired culinary experts of Azerbaijan, leading to a great diversity of dishes. It is hard to mix them with other national dishes. Even the most experienced gourmets from all over the world admire unique taste and flavor of Azerbaijan national cuisine.
3. TOURISM DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Naturally, these opportunities attracted foreign tourists. The analysis of the tourist flow dynamics shows us that the peak of the flow was in 1970 to 1988. Tourism in this period was massive, popular and thus more democratic, gained new types and forms became equipped with new excursion programs, lodging and service, meeting different tastes and wishes of a great variety of people.

The established system allowed expanding the scale of tourism-exursion movement in the country. Tourism organizations had developed very many programs, including, first of all activities attributed to different significant dates of the country, secondly, aimed at formation of progressive union of youth and working people and thirdly, different tours and routes to historical and cultural monuments of the country.

Tourism development activities were based on socio-economic, geographic, industrial and transport, climatic, demographic and other researches. In order to identify efficient location of touristic hotels and basis, the preliminary flow of tourists, tourism service demands and other conditions were assessed, including labor force capacity and infrastructure availability.

Tourism became one of the most important means of active leisure, recreation and health improvement. Improvement of sector tourism-exursion positively influenced on the economic development of the society as well. Upgrading of area of visits of tourists throughout the country had directly contributed to the increase of revenues of the state.

Tourism-exursion services have pronounced social orientation that is why dealing with leisure time of population was becoming more and more typical. This had led to new forms of employment and business, for example, family tourism, new methods of work started to be employed while setting up tourism and excursion services. This was contributed by trade union activities, leading to reduction of price of mass tourism: reduced fare travels, group excursions, free tourist vouchers, as well as simplification of document processing.

The first stage of the development of tourism organization structure in the USSR was launched in May 1969 by the Decision of
the CC CPSU (Central Committee of the Communist Party of USSR), Cabinet of Ministers of the USSR and All Unions Center for the Board of Trade Unions (AUCBTU) «On Activities for Further Development of Tourism and Excursions in the Country», which set targets of transforming the tourism-excursion industry into a huge service area for the population (Decision of CC CPSU, 1969).

AUCBTU was appointed to run tourism industry. CST (The Central Soviet on Tourism) was changed Central Soviet on Tourism and Excursions, which was based mainly on the idea of organization trips all over the USSR, guided the development of active tourism, was having exchange programs with foreign tourism trade unions and managing tourism and excursions organizations at the level of republics of the USSR.

The same year, by the initiative of the leader of the Azerbaijan Republic Mr. Heydar Aliyev, a similar decision was made by the SCCP of Azerbaijan, Council of Ministers and Azerbaijan Board of Trade Unions (ABTU). This decisions prescribed ministries, committees and organizations to facilitate the development of tourism-excursion industry and improve the performance of tourism-excursion organizations. Based on this decision new tourism hotels, tourism bases and camping site, etc. were envisaged to be constructed over 1971-1975 (Murvatov, 2009).

This decision was a ground for construction in 1970 of tourist bases in towns Zakatala and Shusha for 100 tourists each. In 1973 in Baku the “Azerbaijan” hotel for 1040 visitors was constructed. In 1975 the tourist base “Gafgaz” (The Caucasus) was constructed in the town Gutkashen (now Gabala), base “Dostluq” in Nabran for 400 visitors and the Hotel “Tourist” in Baku for 342 visitors. In 1978 the “Moscow” Hotel for 200 visitors was launched (Bilalov, 2008).

In 1970 a number of regulations on safety of tourists were adopted. Forming tourist groups, development routes, etc. were regulated. Tourists complying with all requirements were awarded with grade and title of “Master of Sports” of the USSR.

The legal framework on tourism was mostly established during the second half of the seventies. The Constitution of the UUSR of 1977 (Articles 20, 24 and 41, as well as Article 24 of the Constitution of Azerbaijan SSR) covered for the first time goals and objectives of the development of physical culture, sports and tourism. There were a lot of relevant normative documents, especially at the organization level, within the general legal framework of the country. Legislative bodies were looking at tourism as part of
activities to improve and protect health of the population (Decision of CC CPSU 1981).

The population in Azerbaijan are satisfied the network of the tourist organizations extended. So, in 1969 in Sumgayit and Naftalan, in 1971 in Khankendi, in 1972 in Mingachaure, in 1978 in Nahichevane, 1980 in Lenkarane excursion bureaus were opened.

On December 27, 1980 the CC of CP of Azerbaijan, the Council of Ministers of the Azerbaijan SSR and ABTU adopted a joined decision «On Development and Improvement of Tourist-Excursion Activities on the Republic». Based on this decision, in Ali-Bayramli town (now Shirvan town), as well as in towns Gazakh and Shamakhi the Bureaus of Travels and Excursions started operating. In the same year in the resort settlement Zagulba (Baku) the International Youth Center was created, as well as the “Absheron” Hotel for 940 visitors was launched (Bilalov, 2009).

To improve the delivery of tourism services to foreign tourists, the Department of Foreign Tourism was established in 1978 under the Council of Ministers of Azerbaijan SSR. The Baku branch of VAO “INTURIST” had in 1978 in its books hotels for total 1500 visitors. In 1982 camping bases of ABTU had already 2364 beds.

In April 28, 1983 the Council of Minister of UUSR adopted the Decision 375 «On Activities Aimed at Setting up All-UUSR level Resort Area in the Caspian Sea in Azerbaijan SSR». This decision had the purpose to transform Azerbaijan in to an all-UUSR resort area. In October 2, 1984 based on this document the Council of Ministers of Azerbaijan SSR approved the "Master Plan for Development of Tourism in Azerbaijan for 1985-1990 and till 2000". According to this program it they constructed 21300 tourism facilities for visitors (Murvatav, 2009).

Over the reference period, the country level tourism, tourism abroad also started to develop. One of factors contributing to this was the development of international tourist-excursion relations. These were directions of tours of friendship, mutual tourist groups’ tour to twin cities, sites related to some event of revolution, war and labor achievements of Soviet nation.

Touristic relations were mostly established with socialist countries. In 1970, for example, the republic had a total of 4739 visiting tourists, out of which 3227 were from socialist countries; in 1971 total 5992 tourists with 4136 of them from socialist countries (Gasimli, 2005). The reducing of international tension allowed
growing the international touristic relations. This was contributed by signing bilateral agreements between different countries, signing Helsinki Act and having Belgrade meeting. Touristic relations became one of important ways of communication of the Azerbaijan SSR with capitalist countries. In November-December 1971 in Paris the “Week of Tourism in Azerbaijan” was organized. This was an exhibition and a meeting between tourism companies. The French press published series of materials on tourism in Azerbaijan (SAPPMPRA, dc.1, L.59, u.i.150, p. 60-65.)

In 1972, 7026 foreign guests visited the Azerbaijan SSR, which was 13.9% more than in 1971. Foreign tourist were travelling mostly from GDR, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, as well as France, FRG, India, Holland, Sweden, Canada, Austria, UK, etc – total 33 countries (SARA, document collection.28, list 12, unit of issue.75, p.32; SAPPMPRA dc.1, L.59, u.i.176, p.88-91).

The total number of foreign tourists visiting Azerbaijan during 1971-1972 was 13533 people. In 1973 this number was 10 114 with 7064 of them from socialist countries (Gasimli, 2005).

Leaders of the republic, Mr. Heydar Aliyev personally, paid a great deal of attention to the development of international tourism. In May 21, 1974 the Decision on “Activities for Further Development of Tourism in the Republic” was adopted (“Bakinskiy rabochiy” newspaper, 1974). In February 11, 1977 the other Decision on “Serious Gaps in the Performance of the Department for International Tourism” was adopted as well (“Bakinskiy rabochiy” newspaper, 1977). These decisions helped to overcome a number of shortcomings on the way of the development of international tourism.

Certain revival in tourist groups exchange was observed as well. In 1974 there were 18605 visiting tourists, (of which 15100 from socialist countries), in 1975 - 27550 tourists (20800), in 1976 – 24740 (17690), in 1977 – 24322 (19919), in 1978 – 20590 (13762), in 1979 – 21426 (13 946, Gasimli, 2005).

In September 1979, the exhibition “Romania – the country of tourism, the country of friends” was held in Baku (SARA dc.28, L.12, u.i.75, p.32; SAPPMPRA dc.1, L.59, u.i.176, p.88-91). In December there was an exhibition in Baku, with participation of representatives of tourism ministries of Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, GDR (SARA dc.28, L.12, u.i.75, p.32).

It should be mentioned that the volume of invitation of foreign tourists during 1976-1979 was significantly less than potential capacity of the republic. One of the leading reasons for
that was the narrow geography of foreign tourism in the republic and absence of car routes INTOURIST to connect Baku with other tourism centers of the country.

In 80-ies tourist flow continued growing: in 1980 - 17994, in 1981 - 28680, in 1982 - 31698, in 1983 - 43177, in 1984 - 41979, in 1985 - 47898 (Gasimli, 2005). The geography of tourism expanded on the account of Cuba, New Zealand, Brazil and Luxemburg. The number of journalists from Switzerland, Japan, Greece, France and Italy had increased as well. In 1983 for the first time, although in small number, tourists from Kuwait, Pakistan, Israel and Syria visited Baku. The arrival tourism agents from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Turkey in Baku was speaking about growing tourism interest with regards to Azerbaijan (Gasimli, 2005).

Sovereignty of union republic, announcement by the international community of the end of the "cold war" contributed to the development of tourism relations. Besides the Main Department for Foreign Tourism under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan, ABTU, «Sputnik», Society of friendship and cultural relations with foreign countries, touristic organizations like "Veten" and others were contributing as well for this tourism flourishing. New relations and forms of these relations were coming.

The total number of foreign citizens visiting our republic in 1986 was 50575 in comparison to the 52315 in 1985, including 45924 tourists against 47898 in 1985. Thus, the flow of foreign tourists in 1986 was 95.8% of that of in 1985, including from socialist countries - 90.3%. Total number of visitors from capitalist countries increased from 15903 to 17023 people, meaning 107.0% of that of 1985. That year the representatives of more than 50 countries visited our republic (Gasimli, 2005).

In February 1986, in Paris National Center for Technical Information the Second Saloon of Tourism and Travel was held. More than 710 tourism, transport and advertisement companies from more than 100 countries of the world took part in it ("Bakinskiy rabochiy" newspaper, 1986). French community showed a great interest about the exhibition of Azerbaijan. It was held on the development of international tourism and achievements of Azerbaijan in this field.

In April 1986 people of Baku were captured by the exhibition "Bulgaria— the country of tourism, the country of friends",
organized by Tourism and Leisure Association of Bulgaria, jointly with the Department for Tourism of Azerbaijan Republic ("Bakinskiy rabochiy" newspaper, 1986).

The total number of foreigners visiting our country in 1987 was 63133 against 50575 in 1986, including 59861 tourists against 45924 in 1986. Thus, the inflow of foreign tourists to our republic in 1987 was 130.3% compared to 1986, the inflow of tourists from socialist countries was 69.8%, from Western and developing countries 18077 people against 17023 or 30.2%. These tourists represented 50 countries of the world (Gasimli, 2005).

In 1989 the agreement between Turkish "Esin" and "Azinturservice" was signed. It was a contract on foreign exchange free tourist groups exchange ("Vishka" newspaper, 1989). In 1990, tourists from 40 countries of the world, including the United States of America (USA), Canada, Japan, France, Finland, Western Berlin, Italy, Mexico, Australia, etc."(Baku workmen" newspaper, 1990). For ten years (1980 -1990) the number of foreign tourists visiting Azerbaijan had increased four times. In turn, thousands of citizens of our country had spent their vocations in different countries of the world ("Baku workmen" newspaper, 1990).

Since the beginning of 1989 the "Intourist" was reorganized, and a single self-sustained organization – "Azintour" was created. Its objective was the development of tourism both under the State Committee on Tourism, as well as based on direct contracts. "Azintour" offered more than 10 types of tourism in 1990 – group, individual, by professions, hunting, transit through the USSR, business tours for businessmen, congress tours, art festivals, trips to twin cities of Azerbaijan and other countries, etc.

After the collapse of the USSR the tourism industry of Azerbaijan faced the challenge of finding such ways to build effective ways of management that would allow strengthening market positions of every organization, dealing with service delivery to tourists, and thus facilitating the further development of the entire tourism business sector.

Only the clearly formulated development concept for the sector could ensure the relevant level of quality of tourism services, compliant with international standards, making the tourism sector of the Republic of Azerbaijan competitive and lead to significant increase of incoming and outgoing tourism. Given this condition, based on the recommendation of the national leader Heydar Aliyev,
the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Tourism was drafted and adopted.

The Law on Tourism N674 IG, from the 04.06.1999 defined tourism as temporary departures (travels) of the citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan, foreign citizens and people without citizenship and permanent residence, for health, cognitive, professional and business, religious and other purposes without engaging in paid labor activities in the country (place) of temporary residence (Bilalov, 2006).

Depending on the services delivered and services category of population, tourism is divided into domestic and international.

Domestic tourism is the temporary departure of citizens of a specific country from the places of constant residence within national borders of the same country for the purpose of rest, provision of own cognitive needs, sports and other touristic purposes.

International tourism is systematized and targeted activities of the entities of tourism sector, related to delivery of tourism services and tourism products to foreign citizens on the territory (incoming tourism) and the delivery of tourism services and tourism products abroad (foreign tourism).

The Law on Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan N674 IG, from the 04.06.1999 provides for following definitions of domestic, foreign and incoming tourism:

"Domestic tourism" is the travel of citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan and people without citizenship within the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan;

"Foreign tourism" is the travel of citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan and persons without citizenship to other country;

"Incoming tourism" is the travel of non-resident of the Republic of Azerbaijan and persons without citizenship within the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Bilalov, 2006).

Literature also gives the definition of a domestic tourist. This is a temporary visitor, staying overnight(s), i.e. visiting a place for at least one night, constantly living in a certain area and travelling for the purpose of tourism to other territory within own country, but outside of the place of residence for the period not exceeding 12 months and not engaged in to paid labor in the places of temporary residence (Kvartalnov, 2003).

On April 18th, 2001 by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan the Ministry of Youth and Sports was
transformed in to the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Tourism. The new Ministry started active international cooperation for integration of Azerbaijan into international tourism market. This was also eased by the establishment on July 6, 2001 of a public organization – The Union for Development of Tourism Industry of Azerbaijan (ATSII), aimed at facilitating the establishment of highly efficient tourism industry.

On September 25, 2001, Azerbaijan became a member of this international organization General Assembly of World Tourism Organization (WTO) held in Seoul, South Korea. The access of Azerbaijan into WTO, which unites 150 countries of the world, first of all would help the integration of Azerbaijan as a country with high tourism potential, in the world tourism market (Ragimov, 2007). One of WTO areas is the analysis of tourism capacity of countries, collecting a statistic data on all types of tourism. WTO periodically sends the Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan different guidelines reflecting detailed analysis of different regions of the world from tourism capacity perspectives. WTO organized several time trainings for the staff of the Ministry on human resource training in the field of tourism.

A lot of hopes were about the implementation of the international project “Great Silk Way” as Azerbaijan was included into the trans-continental touristic route, rehabilitated on the account of the cooperation between the World Tourism Organization and UNESCO. “Great Silk Way” is very important for economy, transport communication and tourism development. It is well known that Azerbaijan has rich cultural heritage and ancient monuments directly related to the Silk Way, which is a very attractive resource for cultural and cognitive tourism. In the country there are more than 6 thousand monuments of archeology, architecture and culture interest that are protected by the state. A lot of them are dated BC (Ragimov, 2007).

The Azerbaijan International Tourism Exhibition (AITF) first held in 2002, was not just supported by WTO, but also was included in the general catalogue of the organization. The objective of the yearly conducted AITF is the clear visual and bright demonstration of the tourism capacity of Azerbaijan; develop beautiful parts of the country and to serve as an active and efficient tool in pushing tourism offers into the world service market.

In 2002 WTO conducted an assessment of tourism capacity of Azerbaijan, however fast improvements in the market require more frequent reviews. According to the experts, positive factors in the
tourism sector of the republic create opportunity for raising the competitiveness of national tourism industry at the international level.

By the Decree 1029 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Mr. Heydar Aliyev, from August 27, 2002, the State Program on the Development of Tourism in Azerbaijan for 2002-2005 and the relevant Plan of Actions for its implementation were approved. The whole range of tourism activity consisted of 30 types of activities, approved in the regulations "On Improvement of Certain Types of Activities", approved by the Decree 782 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, dated September 2, 2002 (See. http://www.izvestia.ru/azerbaijan/article30560/).

The basis of the adopted State Program on Tourism Development in the country was the establishment of the most favourable environment for attraction of investors in to construction of tourism infrastructures. In parallel, the legal framework was developed, tourism information dissemination and support centers were created both within country and abroad. Over the entire period of implementation of the first State Program, the state had chosen the policy of minimal intervention in this sector and the level of quality development and price parameters in the sector were regulated by market demand and supply. Such approach partly facilitated the achievement of the targets set – attraction of investors in to the development of tourism infrastructures.

The Decree of the President Ilham Aliyev "On Activities for Acceleration of Social and Economic Development in the Republic of Azerbaijan", dated November 24, 2003 and "The State Program on Development of Regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan" from February 11, 2004 were important steps for the further development of the country. It is pleasant that these documents cover issues of the development of tourism in the regions of the country. These circumstances show that tourism related issues are in the center of attention of the head of the state.

The year 2006 remains in the history as the year of the determination of the direction for the development of culture and tourism in Azerbaijan. Based on the Decree of the President Ilham Aliyev, from January 30, 2006, the Ministry of Culture was abolished and a new unit – the Ministry of Culture and Tourism – was established (Bilalov, 2008). Thus, tourism became an indicator of social-cultural development of the country. The licensing of hotels
and other lodging facilties became the responsibility of the new ministry.

Based on the initiative of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, on December 22, 2006 the Azerbaijan Hotel Association was established. This association is aimed at development of hotel business, improvement of quality of services, development of relevant legal framework, projects and programs.

In 2006 the first students were admitted into Azerbaijan Tourism Institute. No doubt, those new specialists with high education will greatly contribute to the development of tourism infrastructure of Azerbaijan. The students of the new education facility get education based on the curriculum from the Krems University of Applied Sciences (Austria). This Institute pays a special attention to mastering new technologies in this field and to learning foreign languages.

Given the significant value of very rich natural and medicinal resources for the protection of health of population, the President Ilham Aliyev, on February 27, 2007 signed an Order on the State Program “Resorts of Azerbaijan”. Relevant bodies were instructed to ensure domestic and foreign investments to develop resort areas in Azerbaijan, deliver services up to international standards and draft a phased strategy for the development of health and recreation centers.

In 2008 the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On Resorts, Natural-Medical Resources and Treatment-Recreation Sites” was adopted. “Regulations on Tourism-Recreation Areas were approved by the Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, from June 20, 2008. Regulations comprehensively cover issues of where, when and what kind of facilities should be launched for full-scale use of tourism potential of the country. Parallel to the development of huge regional and local recreation areas there also must be relevant transport and engineering infrastructure, advertisement boards and well as ancillary infrastructure for the relevant tourist routs. In February 2009, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan approved the “State Program on the Development of Resorts in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2009-2018”.

It is important to emphasize that the number of hotels and lodging facilities keeps growing every year. If in 2001 there were 86 hotels in the country, in 2008 the number of registered hotels was 374. According to the Minister of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan Abulfas Garayev “the Azerbaijan tourism has
taken a worthy place in the world tourist industry. The last four years in Azerbaijan are annually put in operation about 30 hotels. As the minister said, in 2008 54 hotels started operating in Azerbaijan, it is expected to have additional 56 hotels in 2009 and total number of beds in hotels and lodging facilities by the year 2013 will be 80 thousand («Medeniyyet» newspaper, 2009).

The total number of foreign citizens, visiting Azerbaijan in 2008 was 1,898,939, which is 42.5% more than in 2007. According to surveys of specialists from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, out of them 1,408,988 are tourists, which is 39.4% more than in 2007. From among of CIS countries the most frequent visitors are from the Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Georgia. From Muslim countries – Iran, Jordan, Bahrain; from Europe – Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, etc. A lot of tourists also come to Azerbaijan from South America; only from Columbia there were 364 tourists in Baku in 2008 (http://life.trend.az/index.shtml/newsid=1426164).

Since the development of multi-lateral relations is one of the priority direction of the policy of international tourism, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism continues own activities on setting up cooperation with UNWTO, Islamic Conference Organization, Black Sea Economic Organization, GUAM, Tourism Council of CIS, joining existing tourism projects, ensuring active participation in international events, developing new proposals and projects and signing agreements on cooperation.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism takes part in projects like “Wine Routes”, “Alexander Dumas in the Caucasus”, implemented under the Kiev Initiative of the Council of Europe, in the project “German Settlement in Azerbaijan” under UNWTO.

The draft agreement, to be signed between Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Iran, Russia and Turkmenistan on cooperation for the development of cruise routs in the Caspian Sea, has already been prepared.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has drafted and submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers the “State Program on Development of Tourism in Azerbaijan”. One of the most important components of the program is the development of hotel capacity. Besides, the main emphasis will be made on the upgrading of hotel capacity up to international standards of safety, hygiene and service quality. Another problem requiring attention is overcoming the seasonality of Azerbaijan tourism, when the main flow happens in
summer times and during the rest of the year, the sector is in a state of anábiosis. The program envisages learning the experience of advanced touristic countries on attracting tourists during low season, establishing relevant infrastructure in the country and developing new types of leisure and touristic routes.

By the initiative of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in January 2009 the Association of Tourism Companies of Azerbaijan was established. Main goals of ATCA is the development of tourism in all regions of the country, protecting the rights of citizens that use touristic services, assisting in the introduction of reduced taxation and developing legal framework, organizing trainings for upgrading the skills of personnel from the sector, delivering practical assistance to tourism companies of the country in accessing international market, by improving the image of Azerbaijan as a tourism country.

There are eight National Parks in the country ("Shirvan", "Ordubad", "Aghgol", "Hirkan", "Altiaghaj", "Absheron", "Shakhgagh" and "Goygol"). The purpose for the establishment of such parks is the preservation of endemic flora and fauna. National Parks is a new phenomenon for Azerbaijan, but they are attractive for tourism organizations from the perspective of attractiveness of local nature. By creating National Parks, we can develop ecological tourism in the country and increase the awareness of population on nature preservation.

One of the priorities of the government of Azerbaijan in the field of tourism is the construction of Summer/Winter Sports-Tourism Complex "Shakhdagh". It is envisaged to build hotels, a Central Square of the town, two main lifting stations, eight lifting stations, and install equipment for artificial snow, build an internal road and infrastructure system during 2009-2010. At the beginning of the project, it is envisaged to set one out of three lifts and build the first hotel station and skiing routes. The first four lines are expected to be built next winter. The state investments will be used for the development of infrastructures and lifts, all the other facilities (hotels, catering, and entertainment) will be tendered for investors. According to the assessment, the total cost of the project is about 1.5-2 billion dollars (http://gusarnews.ucoz.ru/news/2009-04-24-334).

All of the above proves that significant positive changes in the field of tourism are observed in Azerbaijan in the last several years. According to the World Economic Forum the rating of Azerbaijan in the last several years has improved three positions. This time, Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index for Azerbaijan was 3.84 points.
The first one in rating is Switzerland (5.68 points). Among Asian countries, Brunei and Sri-Lanka are ahead of Azerbaijan (13-14 places). Azerbaijan is the third of CIS countries after Russia and Georgia. In terms of the quality of legal framework in the tourism sectors Azerbaijan in in the 47th position, infrastructure and environment – 84th, human, culture and natural resources – 111th position. We have to note that experts assessed 133 country based on 70 criteria. According to WEF, the volume of tourism business in Azerbaijan in 2008 was 509 million USD. The number of people employed in this field reached the level of 39 thousand. According to forecasts, the average annual growth on tourism in the country for 2009-2018 will be 8.8% (http://turegypt.ru/content/view/4059/2/).

4. CONCLUSION

So, tourism-excursion companies have conducted a significant work during the analyzed period. It should be mentioned that the planning of activities of tourism-excursion companies, the volume of service and quantity of tourists covered by services and sightseers was made in accordance with annual and five-year plans. In the 70's-80's, of the last century, a lot of attention started to be paid to development of a new and rich recreation area of the Republic of Azerbaijan. On the account of a purposeful policy of the state in the field of tourism, Azerbaijan was transformed into the leisure centre of The Soviet people.

Documents, evidence that organization-technical activities were regularly developed and implemented in the country for the purpose of receiving and servicing foreign tourists and increasing their awareness. The program of foreign tourists arrival in the country was constantly improved, including visits to historical monuments of Azerbaijani people, industrial, agricultural and other sites and facilities, organization of theatre, sports and other mass show performances, round table meetings, friendship evenings, demonstration of documentary and advertisement films. Tourism has become a serious factor of international cooperation in Azerbaijan.
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