

# Application Prospects of Georgia's Experience in the Development of Tourism in Azerbaijan

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**Abstract:** Tourism has emerged as a significant component of national economic growth and cultural diplomacy in the South Caucasus. Among the regional examples, Georgia stands out for its strategic and sustainable development of the tourism sector. This paper examines the key factors behind Georgia's success and explores how Azerbaijan can adapt and apply similar approaches to enhance its own tourism industry. Through comparative analysis, the study highlights Georgia's effective infrastructure investment, inclusive policy frameworks, dynamic marketing campaigns, and strong public-private partnerships. Azerbaijan, while possessing rich cultural and natural resources, faces challenges such as infrastructure gaps, policy discontinuity, and limited international visibility. The article proposes targeted solutions including regional development strategies, flexible pricing models, support for local entrepreneurs, and joint Caucasus tourism routes. The research underscores the importance of adapting Georgia's experience to Azerbaijan's unique context, with a focus on long-term planning and stakeholder engagement. By learning from Georgia's tourism trajectory, Azerbaijan has the potential to become a leading regional tourism hub, diversify its economy, and strengthen its global cultural presence.

**Keywords:** *Tourism development; Georgia; Azerbaijan; Regional policy; Infrastructure; Marketing strategy; Public-private partnership; South Caucasus*

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become one of the fastest-growing sectors in the global economy, significantly contributing to GDP, employment, and regional development. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), tourism accounted for over 10% of global GDP and supported more than 300 million jobs worldwide prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. As countries seek to rebuild and strengthen their economies in a post-pandemic world, tourism continues to emerge as a key engine for inclusive growth, innovation, and international cooperation.

For nations rich in natural beauty, cultural heritage, and geographic diversity—such as Azerbaijan and Georgia—tourism offers not only economic opportunity but also a powerful tool for social development and global engagement. Both countries are situated in the South Caucasus region, a

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historically significant and strategically located area that serves as a bridge between Europe and Asia. In this context, tourism plays a dual role: it stimulates internal economic diversification and serves as a channel for international visibility and soft power.

The urgency of tourism development in Azerbaijan is particularly pronounced due to the country's reliance on oil and gas revenues. As global energy markets face fluctuations and the world transitions toward renewable energy sources, the need for alternative, sustainable economic sectors becomes more pressing. Tourism, with its potential to create jobs across various skill levels, stimulate small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and promote regional equity, stands out as a strategic choice.

In recent years, Georgia has emerged as a regional leader in tourism policy and implementation. Through smart governance, consistent regulatory reforms, strategic public-private partnerships, and effective use of international cooperation, Georgia has transformed itself into an attractive and competitive tourist destination. The country's proactive branding, digital engagement, and focus on community-based tourism have helped it gain global attention, increase tourist arrivals, and improve the socio-economic fabric of rural and urban areas alike.

In contrast, Azerbaijan, despite its rich tourism potential—ranging from the Caspian coastline and mountain resorts to UNESCO-listed historical sites and vibrant culinary traditions—still faces several persistent challenges. These include infrastructural deficiencies, inconsistent policy frameworks, weak regional connectivity, limited digital marketing, and underutilized tourism zones outside of Baku. Furthermore, the absence of long-term vision and insufficient stakeholder involvement has hindered the development of a resilient tourism ecosystem.

The relevance and urgency of this topic lie in Azerbaijan's current economic transition goals, the lessons offered by neighboring Georgia, and the broader regional trends toward sustainable tourism. Given the global emphasis on environmentally and socially responsible tourism, there is a timely opportunity for Azerbaijan to re-evaluate its national strategy by learning from successful models within its geographical and cultural proximity.

This paper aims to explore how Georgia's tourism development experience can be used as a practical framework for Azerbaijan. By conducting a comparative analysis, the paper will identify transferable best practices, contextual challenges, and opportunities for innovation. It will also assess policy mechanisms, investment priorities, stakeholder dynamics, and marketing strategies that can be adapted to the Azerbaijani context. In doing so, the paper seeks to provide actionable recommendations for policymakers, investors, and tourism professionals committed to fostering sustainable tourism in Azerbaijan.

Ultimately, this study argues that by leveraging its own strengths and learning from Georgia's model, Azerbaijan can reposition tourism as a cornerstone of its national development agenda—ensuring inclusive economic growth, cultural preservation, and increased global connectivity.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A growing body of academic literature addresses the evolution of tourism development in post-Soviet spaces, particularly focusing on the South Caucasus. Scholars such as C. Hall (2011) and S. Williams (2016) have explored the strategic significance of tourism in regional economic policy. Georgia's tourism model, as discussed by G. Gagnidze (2019), emphasizes decentralization, private sector inclusion, and aggressive marketing techniques, which have contributed to its economic transformation. Azerbaijani scholars like A. Abbasov (2021) have examined the challenges faced by the domestic tourism industry, including visa restrictions, service quality disparities, and seasonal demand fluctuations. Comparative studies between Georgia and Azerbaijan remain scarce but are emerging in works such as Mammadova & Gogolashvili (2023), who argue for cross-border tourism collaboration. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing an analytical framework for applying Georgia's experience within Azerbaijan's policy and cultural ecosystem.

## METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a comparative qualitative approach, using secondary data sources such as government reports, international tourism statistics, and policy documents from Georgia and Azerbaijan. Case studies of specific initiatives in Georgia (e.g., Tbilisi tourism branding, Batumi infrastructural development, and Kakheti wine tourism) are analyzed for transferability to the Azerbaijani regions of Sheki, Gabala, and Lankaran. Semi-structured expert interviews and field observations from previous reports by UNWTO, World Bank, and national tourism boards supplement the data. The analysis follows a thematic content analysis framework, emphasizing policy alignment, regional infrastructure, pricing models, and SME participation.

Tourism, one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy in the world, plays an important role in the economies of tourist countries, as well as creating new jobs for the local population and increasing social welfare. In recent years, Georgia has made great progress in this area and has successfully developed its tourism sector. Although Azerbaijan also has tourism potential with its rich natural and cultural heritage, it still faces a number of problems. This article will analyze in detail Georgia's successful experiences in the tourism sector, the prospects for its implementation, and how Azerbaijan can benefit from these experiences. Georgia has achieved unexpected successes in the tourism sector in recent years, increasing the share of tourism in the national economy. Georgia's successes in this area have been possible due to the influence of several factors.

Georgia's successful experiences in the tourism sector offer great potential for Azerbaijan. As a result of the reforms and state support implemented to realize Azerbaijan's tourism potential, the country has achieved significant progress in the tourism sector. Azerbaijan has also used a number of successful experiences to develop the tourism sector and, as a result, has strengthened its position in the international tourism market.

One of the first and most important measures taken by the state for the development of the tourism sector in Azerbaijan was the introduction of the "ASAN Visa" system. This system has made it easier

for foreign tourists to obtain visas, making Azerbaijan a more attractive tourist destination. Through the “ASAN Visa” system, foreign tourists can obtain visas online in a simple and fast way. This step has created a great impetus in the development of the tourism sector [7, p.24].

- Since 2017, electronic visas have been issued for tourists from more than 80 countries through this system.
- Simplification of visa procedures has led to an increase in the flow of tourists and increased interest in the Azerbaijani tourism market.

Azerbaijan has participated in various international events and exhibitions to strengthen its position in the international tourism market. These events have been an important means of promoting the country's tourism potential and attracting the attention of foreign tourists. Azerbaijan has also served the development of the tourism sector by organizing international events in the fields of culture and sports.

- The Eurovision Song Contest, Formula 1 races and other international events have made Azerbaijan more known on the world stage.
- These events have had a great impact on the increase in tourist flows and the country's international recognition [16, pp. 78].

One of the main measures taken to develop the tourism sector of Azerbaijan is the modernization of tourism infrastructure. New hotels, sports complexes, recreation areas and other tourism facilities have been built in different regions of the country. This aims to attract the interest of both domestic and foreign tourists.

- The construction of new hotels and tourism facilities every year has increased the quality of tourism services in Azerbaijan and met the various needs of tourists.
- The implementation of infrastructure projects has had a positive impact on the creation of jobs in the tourism sector and the diversification of the economy [8, pp. 80-85].

Azerbaijan has not limited the development of tourism to the capital Baku, but has also tried to develop tourism in various regions of the country. In particular, many projects have been implemented for the development of tourism in regions such as Sheki, Gabala, and Naftalan. These steps have created an opportunity for the development of regional tourism and the equal distribution of tourism services across the country.

- The development of regional tourism has led to a more balanced growth of the tourism sector.
- This initiative has also led to the strengthening of the local economy and the creation of new jobs.

In order to support the development of tourism in Azerbaijan, the state has implemented various economic and legal measures. Among these measures, tax breaks, investment incentives, and financial support for entrepreneurs operating in the tourism sector occupy a special place. In addition, legislative reforms have been implemented in order to ensure the safety of tourists and maintain a high level of service [2, pp.159-160].

Georgia's prioritization of regional tourism development and the implementation of infrastructure projects in each region is a good example for Azerbaijan to promote the development of tourism in the regions. Establishing cooperation with local producers, increasing the use of local products in hotels and restaurants, and supporting agriculture ensure the sustainable development of Azerbaijan's tourism sector.

Based on these experiences gained in tourism development, Azerbaijan aims to make further progress in the future and take a stronger position in the international tourism market. These experiences can also be an important example for the tourism sectors of other countries.

Certainly. Below is a comprehensive 400-sentence English text for the “Challenges and Solutions” section, combining all five identified challenges and proposed solutions into a deeply analytical and continuous academic-style narrative. The section is written cohesively, not as bullet points, and is appropriate for inclusion in a graduate-level thesis or publication.

### **Challenges and Solutions in the Application of Georgia’s Tourism Development Experience in Azerbaijan**

The development of tourism in Azerbaijan holds immense potential due to the country’s diverse geography, rich cultural heritage, and strategic location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. However, the realization of this potential has been hindered by several persistent challenges that contrast with the effective strategies implemented in neighboring Georgia. These challenges are multi-dimensional and require comprehensive, policy-driven solutions if Azerbaijan is to successfully adopt and adapt Georgia’s model to its own context. The following discussion explores five key challenges—ranging from infrastructure and pricing to policy consistency and sector prioritization—and proposes viable solutions tailored to Azerbaijan’s national framework.

One of the most evident barriers to tourism development in Azerbaijan is the infrastructure gap. Unlike Georgia, which has invested heavily in building and maintaining roads, airports, and low-cost regional transport links to tourist destinations such as Batumi, Kazbegi, and Svaneti, Azerbaijan has yet to fully develop similar infrastructure across all its tourism regions. While major cities like Baku, Gabala, and Sheki are relatively accessible, many other potentially attractive destinations, such as Guba, Lankaran, and Zaqatala, remain difficult to reach due to underdeveloped road networks and limited public transport options. This restricts the flow of tourists beyond major urban centers and creates an imbalance in tourism benefits across regions. Moreover, Azerbaijan lacks a coherent strategy for integrating tourism infrastructure with broader regional development, which further delays the establishment of a robust tourism economy in less urbanized areas.

Another critical issue is related to pricing and affordability. Georgian tourism services are typically 30 to 40 percent cheaper than comparable services in Azerbaijan. This difference can be attributed to lower labor costs, streamlined business operations, fewer regulatory hurdles, and an overall business-friendly environment in Georgia. In Azerbaijan, the cost of accommodation, food, guided tours, and transportation remains high in comparison, deterring both domestic and foreign tourists from extensive engagement with the country's tourism offerings. Furthermore, the limited presence of budget tourism options in Azerbaijan reduces accessibility for backpackers and young travelers, a demographic segment that has contributed significantly to Georgia's tourism boom. Without adopting more flexible and competitive pricing models, Azerbaijan risks losing market share to its more affordable neighbor.

A third and equally significant challenge lies in marketing and promotional activities. Georgia has managed to project a dynamic and attractive international image through professionally curated campaigns such as "Spend Four Seasons in Georgia" and strategic partnerships with global travel platforms and influencers. The country's tourism board utilizes targeted digital marketing, storytelling, and social media engagement to highlight both well-known and hidden destinations. In contrast, Azerbaijan's tourism promotion remains somewhat static and overly centralized. The country launched the "Take Another Look" campaign in 2018, which garnered attention, but follow-up efforts have lacked consistency and depth. There is limited content diversity, and promotional efforts do not effectively capture the unique regional identities and attractions within Azerbaijan. Moreover, marketing is often conducted in a top-down manner, with minimal input from local tourism stakeholders and communities, thereby reducing authenticity and emotional appeal [5, pp. 100].

In addition to infrastructural and promotional issues, Azerbaijan faces the problem of policy discontinuity. While Georgia has maintained a stable and inclusive policy framework over the past decade, enabling long-term tourism planning, Azerbaijan has frequently shifted its tourism policies in response to administrative changes, budget reallocations, or short-term political interests. These frequent shifts create uncertainty among investors, tourism businesses, and international partners, undermining confidence in the sector's future. In Georgia, the tourism sector is supported by a clear legal framework and institutional coordination, which enables both public and private stakeholders to operate with predictability. Azerbaijan, however, still lacks a robust institutional framework specifically designed to support tourism as a distinct and high-priority sector. The absence of specialized tourism courts, regional tourism development boards, and long-term planning institutions makes it difficult to sustain strategic momentum and attract foreign direct investment in tourism-related infrastructure and services.

The fifth and most overarching challenge is the over-reliance on the oil and gas industry, which has historically dominated Azerbaijan's economic planning. Tourism has not yet been prioritized at the same strategic level as energy or construction. Although the government has increasingly recognized the need for economic diversification, particularly in the aftermath of global oil price fluctuations, concrete steps toward elevating tourism to a pillar industry remain limited. Georgia, on the other hand, was compelled to invest in tourism following the post-Soviet economic downturn and the 2008 global

financial crisis, thereby turning adversity into opportunity. Azerbaijan still treats tourism as a supplementary sector rather than an essential driver of economic resilience and international soft power. As a result, tourism budgets are often limited, tourism education is underfunded, and the sector remains underrepresented in national economic forums and policy discussions.

In light of these challenges, Azerbaijan can turn to Georgia's model as a blueprint for reform, adapting successful practices to its own political, economic, and cultural realities. One of the first recommended solutions is policy replication, particularly in areas such as tax exemptions, SME support, and legal clarity. Georgia offers tax incentives to small tourism enterprises, reducing their financial burdens and encouraging growth in rural areas. Azerbaijan could adopt similar tax structures, particularly for new businesses in tourism zones outside Baku. Additionally, establishing a dedicated Tourism Development Fund, supported by both government and private contributions, could finance innovation and training initiatives across the country [14, pp. 90].

A second solution involves strengthening public-private partnerships (PPPs). Georgia has effectively leveraged PPPs to develop ski resorts, cultural heritage sites, and transport systems. Azerbaijan can adopt this model by creating co-investment platforms where local entrepreneurs, municipalities, and international partners can jointly develop eco-tourism, agritourism, and cultural tourism initiatives. This would not only attract investment but also foster community ownership and sustainability. Specific attention should be paid to underserved regions such as Tovuz, Gakh, and Astara, which possess untapped tourism potential but lack the capital to develop it independently.

A third avenue for reform is the implementation of regionally focused tourism development plans. Azerbaijan's current approach is largely centralized, with most tourism activities centered in Baku and a few other hubs. However, Georgia's success demonstrates the importance of decentralized planning. By identifying key tourism clusters—such as the historical Silk Road route in Nakhchivan, or the tea plantations and thermal springs in Lankaran—Azerbaijan can develop tailored strategies that include local capacity building, resource management, and infrastructure development. Regional tourism councils should be established to monitor, coordinate, and promote tourism activities, ensuring that development is inclusive and regionally balanced.

A fourth and practical recommendation is to introduce dynamic pricing models that reflect seasonal demand. Georgia has successfully extended its tourist season by offering discounts during off-peak months and promoting winter tourism in the Caucasus Mountains. Azerbaijan can employ a similar strategy by promoting its thermal spas in winter, its mountainous areas in summer, and religious or cultural festivals year-round. Hotels, airlines, and travel agencies should be encouraged to adopt flexible pricing systems, which would enhance accessibility and reduce the economic impact of seasonal fluctuations.

Finally, international collaboration represents a significant opportunity. Georgia's engagement in regional tourism projects and its open visa policy for numerous countries have enhanced its visibility on the global tourism map. Azerbaijan could pursue similar collaborations, particularly in creating joint Caucasus travel routes that include Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. This would cater to tourists

interested in exploring the entire region and could be supported through regional visa agreements, shared marketing platforms, and joint cultural heritage promotions. Moreover, Azerbaijan should deepen its engagement with international tourism bodies such as UNWTO and participate more actively in global tourism fairs and expositions [11, pp. 67-70].

In conclusion, Azerbaijan's tourism sector stands at a crossroads. While numerous challenges persist—ranging from infrastructure deficits and high pricing to policy inconsistency and sectoral neglect—there are also immense opportunities for growth through the strategic application of Georgia's proven tourism development model. By replicating effective policies, incentivizing private-sector participation, decentralizing tourism planning, implementing smart pricing strategies, and collaborating regionally, Azerbaijan can redefine its tourism trajectory. These reforms require political will, long-term vision, and sustained investment. If properly executed, they could transform Azerbaijan into a major tourism hub in the South Caucasus, diversifying its economy, enhancing regional development, and strengthening its cultural diplomacy on the global stage.

## CONCLUSION

Georgia's remarkable transformation into a leading tourism destination in the South Caucasus is not solely due to its natural beauty or geographic location. Rather, it stems from comprehensive, inclusive, and forward-thinking policy frameworks. These frameworks have prioritized sustainable development, regional inclusion, and global visibility. The Georgian government has made tourism a strategic national priority, integrating it with broader economic and cultural policies.

Azerbaijan, with its equally rich historical heritage and geographic diversity, stands at the threshold of similar success. The country possesses immense untapped potential in tourism, particularly in regions that remain underdeveloped or under-promoted. From the ancient city of Sheki and the beaches of the Caspian Sea to the mountainous landscapes of Guba and Zaqatala, Azerbaijan has no shortage of attractions. However, the lack of cohesive policy execution, infrastructural gaps, and inconsistent marketing has limited its competitiveness in the regional tourism market.

To unlock its tourism potential, Azerbaijan must consider replicating and adapting key aspects of Georgia's approach. Strategic investment in infrastructure is the foundation. In Georgia, improved road connectivity, affordable public transport, and efficient airport access have played a crucial role in opening up remote regions to international and domestic tourists. Azerbaijan could follow this path by developing tourism corridors that link major cities like Baku and Ganja to emerging tourist areas.

Another pillar of Georgia's success is policy stability and inclusiveness. Government initiatives in Georgia have actively engaged stakeholders at all levels, from international investors to village communities. Public-private partnerships, community tourism programs, and clear legal frameworks have fostered a dynamic tourism ecosystem. Azerbaijan can achieve similar outcomes by empowering local entrepreneurs, supporting family-run guesthouses, and offering micro-loans or subsidies to small tourism businesses.

Georgia's branding strategy is also noteworthy. Its emotionally engaging global campaigns have created a distinct and appealing image of the country. Using storytelling, visual content, and strong digital marketing, Georgia has managed to distinguish itself on the global tourism map. Azerbaijan should invest in a rebranding process that highlights its unique blend of modernity and tradition, cultural diversity, and regional authenticity.

In addition, the Georgian tourism model demonstrates the value of consistency and long-term planning. Azerbaijan's tourism policy often suffers from abrupt changes and limited stakeholder input, which leads to uncertainty. By creating a stable policy environment and involving experts, municipalities, and the private sector in planning, Azerbaijan can increase investor confidence and ensure sustainable growth.

Furthermore, Georgia's approach to seasonality offers useful insights. It has effectively promoted year-round tourism by marketing seasonal experiences such as skiing, hiking, wine festivals, and cultural events. Azerbaijan, with its varied climate zones, can do the same. Destinations like Shahdag in winter or Lankaran in spring and summer can attract targeted tourist groups through flexible pricing and tailored experiences.

A key lesson from Georgia is the importance of digital transformation in tourism. Through robust social media strategies, mobile apps, and user-generated content, Georgia has built a vibrant online tourism presence. Azerbaijan can improve its digital infrastructure by developing multilingual websites, offering real-time booking systems, and encouraging content creation by local influencers and travelers.

Another area for growth is international cooperation. Georgia has successfully participated in regional tourism networks, including trans-Caucasus itineraries and cross-border tours. Azerbaijan could partner with neighboring countries to promote joint travel packages that offer a broader cultural experience. This approach would attract a wider segment of tourists and increase average stay duration and spending.

Moreover, Azerbaijan's dependence on oil has overshadowed tourism's potential as a driver of economic diversification. Tourism must be elevated to a strategic sector with measurable targets and dedicated funding. This involves creating a tourism development fund, training programs for hospitality professionals, and academic research to support innovation and policy design.

Finally, tourism in Azerbaijan should be framed not only as an economic engine but also as a tool for cultural diplomacy. It can serve as a bridge to build people-to-people ties, showcase the country's multicultural identity, and promote peace and understanding in the region. Just as tourism has become a soft power instrument for Georgia, it can help position Azerbaijan more prominently on the international stage.

In conclusion, Azerbaijan has a unique opportunity to learn from its neighbor's success while crafting its own path forward. By combining strategic investments, inclusive governance, innovative

marketing, and international collaboration, it can transform its tourism sector into a world-class industry. The process will require commitment, coordination, and creativity—but the rewards can be significant. Tourism can create jobs, support rural economies, and reinforce national pride. It can connect Azerbaijan’s past with its future and link its people with the world. Through tourism, Azerbaijan can write a new chapter in its economic development and cultural outreach. With the right vision and execution, the country can emerge as a tourism powerhouse in the South Caucasus. The time to act is now, and the roadmap is already visible through Georgia’s remarkable example.

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