

۸۷/۱۰/۱۱۸۱  
۸۷/۱۰/۱۸



University of Isfahan



Lulea University of Technology

Master Thesis

# Ecotourism Development in Isfahan: Challenges and Opportunities

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۱۳۸۷ / ۹ / ۲۴

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مستشار

Lulea University of Technology  
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December 2007

۱۰ DVNF

شوه نگارش پایان نامه  
رعایت شده است  
تیمسار... کنسلی دانشگاه اصفهان



پایان نامه ی کارشناسی ارشد توریسم و مدیریت هتلداری

شیماء کریمی

تحت عنوان

توسعه اکوتوریسم در اصفهان: چالشها و فرصتها

در تاریخ ۱۸ آذر ۱۳۸۶ توسط هیأت داوران زیر بررسی و با درجه..... به تصویب نهایی رسید.

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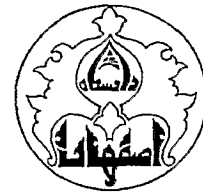
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۱۰۵۷۸۴



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## Approval

# Ecotourism Development in Isfahan: Challenges and Opportunities

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Degree: Master of Science

In

Tourism and Hospitality Management

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December 2007



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## ***Acknowledgements***

*First of all I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Professor Dr. Iran Ghazi and Dr. Joao Sarmiento for their intelligent guidance and helpful and essential advices and comments throughout the time I have been working on my thesis.*

*There are several people that I would like to thank for contributing to the quality of this research. I would like to begin with thanking Mr. Mirzaee at Isfahan Plan & Budget Organization," for his help. In addition, I would like to thank Mr. Moshiri, responsible for Plan for Land Society for his helpful guidelines related to Khafr village. I also would like to thank Mr. Al-Davood for his assistance in collecting data related to Garmeh village. I also would like to thank my dear friend, Mahshad Torkan for her helpful replies to my e-mails and her papers which were very helpful in my research.*

*Finally, I would like to thank my loved ones. I would specially thank my husband, for his support, love and bearing me during this whole while, my dear brother for his help and my mother and father for their endless helps and affection. Carrying on my study and passing the period of this research have never been possible without the help of one by one of them.*

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## ***Abstract:***

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the Isfahan ecotourism. This research describes the challenges of Isfahan ecotourism and explores the opportunities in this city. The research is a developing research. Data gathered through interviews, field work, using of different web sites, magazines, e-books, theses and scientific reports.

This research is worked on the basis of a model and described that there must be a governmental strategic plan and framework on the basis of this model.

The research is a qualitative and descriptive. Data gathered through archival records and interviews and direct observation.

From conducting this research some important findings explored. It seems that as a result of findings, Isfahan province enjoys appropriate situations and advantages for developing ecotourism but they have not been introduced in previous years in a proper manner and there is not desired spatial arrangement and planning and linkage between them.

Performed actions are limited to preservation and maintenance and restoration of a few historical constructions in Isfahan. According to this research there must be a comprehensive and spatial planning and framework for development of ecotourism in Isfahan.

Two case studies on rural tourism development in Garmeh and Khafr villages have been researched for which a comprehensive field work was carried out. This is the first attempt in evaluating rural tourism development in the province of Isfahan. The results obtained confirm the questions of this research are:

- 1- Government must have the sufficient capital for tourism development.
- 2- Private and public investment must be considered as well.

- 3- There must be a national spatial and strategic plan for ecotourism development for Iran which Isfahan is part of it.
- 4- With regard to that model that I've mentioned, all the stakeholders must be shared in this strategic plan.
- 5- Demand and supply must be analyzed.
- 6- A special organization which conducts ecotourism affairs must be created.
- 7- Participation of people also is needed for ecotourism development.
- 8- All the ecotourism potentials must be analyzed and it must show on tourism maps and also all the tourism paths must be distinguished.)

Key words: tourism, ecotourism, sustainable tourism, attractions, tourism planning

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1- Problem statement

According to the forecasting's, till 2020, about 1/6 billion of people will travel around the world and they will spend money about 2000 million dollars<sup>1</sup>. Potential ability of Iran in the field of attracting tourists is very high. According to the experts of Iranian tourist organization, Iran is one of the five countries that have the highest level of physical verity in the world and it's one of the ecotourism prominent poles in the world but at the present it is at the level of 120<sup>th</sup> among the other countries of the world.

In regard to this point that till next decade, the number of tourism travels will become 50% at all trips, the countries that emphasis their tourism development on the axis of ecotourism, they will have the most rate of growth and with regard to this point, Iran is the weak country in competence market of tourism attraction. So compiling a comprehensive program and strategy is necessary for Isfahan.

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1- Zirakbash, Diba (2007). Analysis for tourism markets of Isfahan city and its development strategies (foreign tourists). (Ph.D. Dissertation, Isfahan University)

Isfahan is prominent respect to natural and geographical situation and because it's placed in the center of Iran, it can have an easy communication with other parts of the country with the ability of air, land and rail way

Furthermore the variety climate of Isfahan and existing of Zayandeh Rood valley and Green lands around it, can attract unexpected population of tourists to this city.

But despite all of these conditions and facilities, Isfahan is required to develop in all aspects of life especially in tourist aspect that almost remained untouched.

Because ecotourism development is the background of economical growth, making job facilities, investing and etc. and all these aspects can cause to the regional development.

In regional development, creating tourism poles in the regions that have resources and enough attractions can help the development.

Development of tourism region that at the point of economy are going to stagnate with creating new jobs and developed and second resources can make it possible that the rural pastoralism can decrease and can provide the job opportunities in those rural areas.

Tourism with transferring shopping facility from urban and industrial places to rural places can make a balance between these two places and also it can change the local and regional business in regard to validity rate. Tourism in the region that has enough resources like tourist and cultural resources can help to the growth of economic equivalences. So if tourism development can cause to create rural job opportunities and rural area growth, as potentials of this activity is beneficial for the Isfahan. In this research at the first I want to study the economic aspects of tourism industry and then with identifying the place dimensions of it in Isfahan, recognize the development potentials of tourism in nature and society and evaluate these potentials.



## **1.2-Problem significance:**

The affair of development shall not only concentrate on industry or agriculture and in order to access to balanced growth we shall look at tourism as an important sector effective in the development in addition to considering other sectors.

The base of attracting tourist is existence and variety of attractions in the region and this category has widespread and various fields that it is only limited to historical works and buildings and on the basis of various need of human being each different space that indicates thought and culture of one tribe is regarded attractive.

In the scope of discussed area we confront with valuable treasures which are marvelous and their variety and beauty is extraordinary. Recognition and introduction of these treasures in each place and assessment of its potential and actual powers can result in directing a part of regional and local planning toward tourism, attraction of private capitals and providing the fields for developing this activity and finally to regional flourishing.

Although Isfahan is an industrial pole, but there has always been the problem of unemployment, and also eco-tourism problems have been ignored as well. In development plans for increasing income all the potentials including tourism and eco-tourism should be considered and essential studies for recognizing potentials and challenges and opportunities for one principal planning for eco-tourism to be performed.

Considering above problems is a determined reason for importance and value of this research and makes the necessity for its performance definite.

### **1.3- Literature review**

In the subject of tourism development in Isfahan, some researches and studies have done in this regard that each of them has pointed something about ecotourism. I supposed to find information about ecotourism in Isfahan five years' development plans (1983-1987, 1994-1998, 2000-2004, 2005-2009, 2010-2014) but there is not any especial plan for ecotourism development in Isfahan. In Provincial spatial strategy plan of Isfahan, there is a chapter which is partially pointed to ecotourism but in this chapter, there is not complete explanation about policies, plans and development of ecotourism in Isfahan and it appears that until now, there is not any comprehensive and complied study in this city and maybe doing this research is the first trying in this field. It shall be mentioned that recently some of the dissertations for Master Degree of Eco-tourism have been compiled in some cities of the province which have been used in this research.

### **1.4- Research Objectives:**

- 1- Identifying the development potentials of ecotourism in Isfahan.
- 2- Identifying the effects of ecotourism development and sustainable tourism on socio-economic development of Isfahan with concentration on facilities and opportunities.
- 3- Evaluating of ecotourism attractions in Isfahan

Fulfillment above purposes can provide the required grounds for a comprehensive, spatial planning in tourist and eco-tourist activities of Isfahan which have been considered in regional development plans including 5-year plans and also long-term 20-year perspective.

### **1.5-Hypotheses or questions of research:**

- 1- Isfahan Province has many tourism attractions and has capacity for attracting tourism.
- 2- Development of eco-tourism industry creates new occupational opportunities in rural, local and tribal regions.
- 3- Development of eco-tourism industry leads to further development of rural, local and tribal regions.

### **1.6-Research methods:**

This research is a developing research. The method used in this research is the combination of librarian and documental, descriptive and observation methods. The information gathered through primary and secondary data, interviews with tourism managers in Khafr and Garmeh villages, interviews with Mr., Moshiri the responsible for Plan for Land Society, interview with Mr. Al-Davood, the designer of Garmeh traditional guest house, interviews with the native residents of Khafr and Garmeh villages, from the presence in some tourism related conference which are held in Isfahan and also from using of different web sites, magazines and e-books, MA and PhD theses and scientific reports, use of online papers which are sent on behalf of Mahshad Torkan, using of maps, photos archive.

### **1.7-Application of Research Results**

Results of this research can be applied by organizations, agents and following individuals:

- Professors, researchers, experts and students
- Organization of Management and Planning for Regional Development
- Organization of Environmental Preservation
- Organization of Iran tourism and foreign tourism
- Companies and institutions of tourism
- Managers of tourism agencies specially tourism in natural environment and noble cultures
- Friends of the nature and supporters of noble cultures in the form of NGO formations
- Organization of Jihad Keshavarzi
- Organization of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and tourism

### **1.8- Research limitations:**

1-There is not a comprehensive research about the ecotourism of Isfahan so great effort was made to data collection considering the shortage of time.

2- Information must be primary data which needed extensive field work and it needs interview with all the stakeholders including officials involved, people, host community and ecotourists themselves.

3-There was limited documented data about Isfahan ecotourism in this province.

4- It seems some tourism managers had many information but they didn't put at my disposal easily.

5- It is not easy to access to Garmeh villages at all for the moment. Yet I went to Garmeh 400 kilometer of Isfahan located in desert area & Khafr located in mountainous area with