

УДК 379.85

Galyna Kish, senior lecturer

Uzhhorod National University,

Department of Tourism

Geotourism as a Way of Experiencing a Unique Destination

Abstract The article deals with the essence of the concept of geotourism, its basic principles and characteristic features, its object, subject and purpose. The author defines the main types of tourism that are based on the uniqueness of the territory and that form the basis of geotourism's formation

Key words: geotourism, geopark, geotourist, unique destination

The concept of geotourism is fairly new to the society, so it is rarely used by most of tourists; however it is quite well-known in the professional community. What is geotourism?

The history of the concept of geotourism (short for "geological tourism") is not complicated. Numerous books, research papers, reports were written on the subject of geology. The main feature of geology is that it studies the peculiarities of terrain of land surface which were formed by various processes. Along with scientists actively studying geology, other researchers have drawn their attention to the phenomenon of "tourism", though only a few of them have combined these two concepts together.

One of the first researchers who combined geology and tourism was Murray Gray in 2004. In his book " Geodiversity: Valuing and Conserving Abiotic Nature" he proved that the two concepts are clearly intertwined with each other. The researcher has drawn a parallel between geology and tourism, stating that the development of different areas is a major economic component, but it can cause damage to bio and geodiversity of that particular territory [1].

Other researchers like Ross K. Dowling and David Newsome interpret geotourism as something that can provide a better knowledge and understanding of the Earth, its unusual places, unique areas and cultures [2, 3, 4].

The term "geotourism" is often equated with the terms of "ecotourism", "sustainable tourism", "alternative tourism", associated with travelling for exploratory, educational purposes, but, in fact, it covers much more. Geotourism is a type of tourism that confirms the uniqueness of a geographical location – its environment, heritage, aesthetics, culture, features of the terrain, and the uniqueness of the local population. Geotourism is a kind of travelling aimed at conserving nature, cultural heritage, traditions; studying history, geography; promoting the uniqueness of a particular area; encouraging investments; developing patriotism. Thus, this type of tourism is aimed at experiencing the features of a territory, its natural, cultural or historical heritage.

The object of geotourism is the uniqueness of the area: unusual landscapes, rock formations, unique flora and fauna, coastlines, river valleys, waterfalls, caves, etc. Along with the natural features of the location, geotourism is aimed at familiarizing with the cultural characteristics of the territory: the unique folklore, crafts, clothing, customs, cuisine, etc.

The subject of geotourism is the geotourist, whose main purpose of travelling is to visit areas with unique natural and cultural resources. At the same time, the geotourist does not harm the environment, but benefits the local people.

Geotourism is a special kind of tourism which combines the most popular modern types of travel. Each of these types brings something unique, something that creates the uniqueness of geotourism itself. Therefore, various directions exist in geotourism, based on the preferences of tourists and formed due to the specific natural, cultural, human and other resources involved. (Fig. 1)

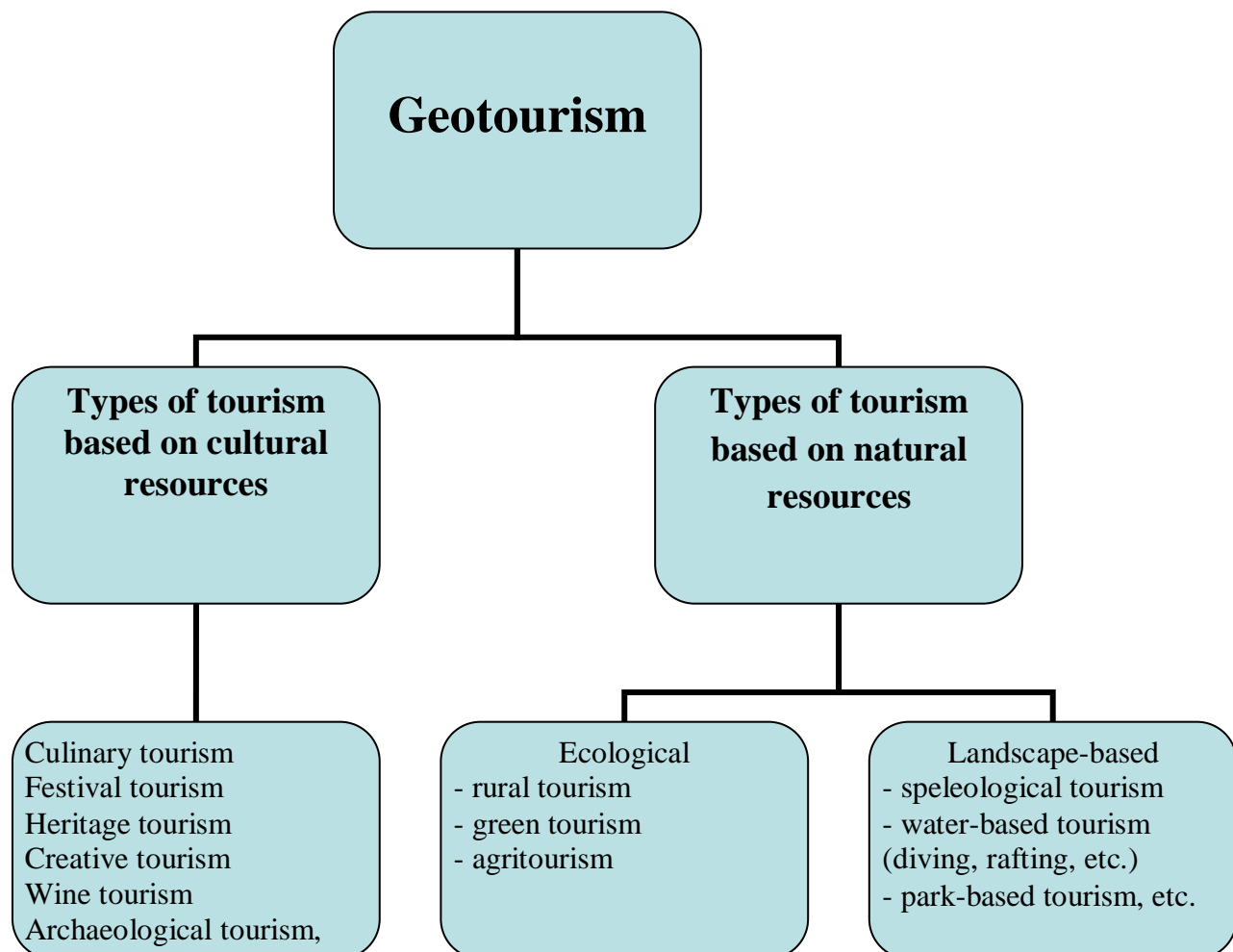


Figure 1. The main types of tourism that form geotourism.

It is suggested to single out two main tourism type sets that form the basis of geotourism. The first set includes those directions which are based on cultural resources. Undoubtedly, any kind of tourism involves cultural factor to some extent. The concept of cultural tourism was officially used internationally for the first time in the proceedings of the World Conference on Cultural Policy (Mexico City, 1982).

Ukrainian researcher N. P. Krachylo defines cultural tourism (or cultural and entertainment tourism) as tourist trips intended to get acquainted with historical, cultural, archaeological and architectural monuments, museums, galleries, theatres, festivals, sporting events and other cultural objects [6, p. 8].

Therefore, cultural tourism can be represented as:

1. *Culinary (food) tourism* – a form of tourism associated with learning and tasting national culinary traditions of certain destinations.

2. *Wine tourism* – a type of culinary tourism that comprises the tasting, consumption and purchase of wine directly from the manufacturer.
3. *Heritage tourism* – trips with the intention to get acquainted with places and activities that authentically represent history, nations, people of the past and present. This type is based on the irreplaceable historical, cultural and natural resources which are unique to certain areas.
4. *Festival tourism* – the activities that involve visiting festivals, competitions, exhibitions. This type of tourism allows the travellers to become live witnesses and participants of special events in the worlds of sport, culture and art.
5. *Creative tourism* – a new generation of cultural tourism, its most modern form, which involves familiarization with the culture and history first-hand. It stipulates interactivity, creativity and learning, the participation of visitors in the "living culture", and includes a closer educational, emotional and social interaction of the tourist with the place and people, it allows the travellers to become a part of the local culture, to learn it and to create it. This type of tourism foresees the participation of tourists in creative workshops, festivals, traditional ceremonies and celebrations.

The second set of tourism types is based on natural resources. Primarily, this group includes ecological tourism, which can be represented by green tourism, rural tourism, agritourism, and other types. Ecotourism is a form of travel, favourable to the environment. Ecotourism is aimed at protecting the natural and cultural environment of regions that are visited by tourists. It provides that participants of these trips are people with high environmental awareness.

Rural tourism is a type of leisure tourism, concentrated in rural areas. It provides for development of tourist routes, places for recreation, agricultural and folk museums, centres of tourist services with guides. The term "rural tourism" is often equated with "agritourism", although rural tourism is a much broader concept. Agritourism (farm tourism) is a type of leisure tourism that

involves the use of rural households (farms). Agritourism can occur in different forms but always involves renting a home.

Rural tourism and its variety – agritourism have much in common with ecotourism and often correspond to many of its priorities, including preservation of natural and cultural environment, the support of the local community's welfare, supply of food for tourists by local produce. A new concept has emerged in the literature, called ecoagritourism, which describes recreation at households of farmers who grow agricultural products by using ecological methods. Here agritourism is combined with ecological agriculture.

Despite the popularity and sophistication of all aforementioned types of tourism, the most important basis of geotourism is *landscape-based types of tourism*. One of these is *speleological tourism*, which is a kind of sports tourism. It means travelling to natural underground caves and overcoming various obstacles in them by using special equipment. Specific requirements are essential for the ethics of speleological tourists, their behaviour in caves and attitude towards underground nature.

Certainly very interesting and popular landscape-based types of tourism are *water-based tourist activities*, including: rafting, diving, kayaking, canoeing, catamaraning, etc.

However, the most popular variation of geotourism nowadays is travelling to *geoparks*. What is a geopark as a geodestination?

According to UNESCO's definition, a geopark is a territory encompassing one or more sites of scientific importance, not only for geological reasons but also by virtue of its archaeological, ecological or cultural value.

The first geoparks appeared in Europe, but today they can be found almost in every corner of the world; most of them are situated in China (140 geoparks). Geoparks are natural landmarks, but also major information resources. Geoparks are a part of the subsoil, but they are valued not by energetic properties, but for informational, scientific, educational, aesthetic qualities.

The very definition of all the aforementioned types of tourism is the basis in defining the term "geotourism", which was presented above. This means that

geotourism aims to support and enhance the unique geographical nature of an area. This type of tourism focuses on the authenticity of the territory which is important and interesting both for local people and tourists. This authenticity includes flora, fauna, national parks, shopping, food, rodeo, even places of accommodation, in other words – everything that makes a destinations unique.

As a new type of tourism, geotourism has its own characteristic features:

- Mutual strengthening of action (synergy) – all the elements of geographical nature work together to create a tourist destination that will be more attractive than its individual parts, thus attracting more travellers;
- Community involvement – local residents play a great role in tourism operations in geotouristic areas; local businesses and groups of people combine their efforts to create an excellent and authentic product for tourists;
- Informing both the visitors and the hosts – residents study the unique features of places and the culture of their territories in order to know how to attract geotourists; only when the majority of locals will be totally familiar with the area of residence, they can fully allow the tourists to get the most out of their trips;
- Economic benefits for local residents – in the process of developing an area for tourism, the tourist industry employs local labour force, uses local services and products. When the members of the public will understand the benefits of geotourism, they will take responsibility for managing the destinations on their territory, which will bring them not only economic benefits but also economic stability;
- Support for territorial integrity – conscious tourists give special preference to local characteristics, while residents who receive economic benefits from tourism, carefully treat places that are unique to the area;
- Excellent travel – tourists enthusiastically bring home new knowledge and experiences. Their stories are encouraging friends and relatives to explore the same places, to study the same culture;

- Conservation and protection of the destinations – encouraging businesses to preserve and protect places, attractive for geotourists, as it suits them from the economic point of view; to find business models that will minimally cause degradation of the territory, but rather would be beneficial to its development;
- Conservation of resources – it is important for businesses to minimize water pollution, energy consumption, water use, excessive night illumination, etc. Such measures should be widely propagandized to attract tourists who are environmentally conscious, and thus to take a great share of the market [5].

At a global level, both enthusiasts and professionals take efforts to develop and maintain geotourism. For example, five years ago the National Geographic Society has introduced the Geotourism Charter which promotes the idea of tourism that respects the interests of local people, the cultural and natural heritage of the area.

With regard to Ukraine, it is a new kind of tourism that has not gained such popularity as in other parts of the world and other European countries. Yet the territory of the country is suitable for the development of geotourism: the natural and cultural heritage, the varied identity of regions and features of different areas – all this creates a great foundation for the introduction of a new trend in the development of the country in the context of tourism – a geotouristic direction.

Conclusion. Geotourism is a new phenomenon in tourism with a growing popularity from year to year, since it is based on "building a relationship" with the place of visit – with the local culture, natural environment, with the people living in the area. Geotourism is a type of tourism, which is unique *per se*, as it offers the tourists the uniqueness of a geographical place – the environment, the heritage, the aesthetics, the culture, and the features of the territory's terrain and the individuality of the local population.

List of References

1. Murray Gray. Geodiversity, valuing and conserving abiotic nature. – Chichester: J. Wiley & Sons, 2004. - 434 p.
2. Ross K. Dowling and David Newsome. Geotourism. - Oxford; Burlington, MA: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, 2006. - 260 p.
3. Ross K. Dowling and David Newsome. Geotourism; The Tourism of Geology and Landscape. - Goodfellow Publishers Ltd, 2010. – 258 p.
4. Ross K. Dowling, David Newsome, Global Geotourism Perspectives. - Goodfellow Publishers Limited, 2010. – 266 p.
5. Center of Sustainable Destinations. – Retrieved from <http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/index.html>
6. Krachylo M. P. Krayeznavstvo i turizm: Navchalnyi posibnyk (*in Ukrainian*). – Kyiv: Vyscha Shkola, 1994. – 191 s.