

# Cultural Heritage as a Tourist Resource for the Development of Cultural Tourism in Georgia

Elena S. Bogomolova<sup>1,\*</sup> Ana Dovlatova<sup>2,a</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hotel Business and Tourism Institute, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), Moscow, Russia

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Philology, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), Moscow, Russia

<sup>a</sup>Email: ana.dovlatova1993@mail.ru

\* Corresponding author. Email: bogomolova\_es@rudn.ru

## ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to considering the features of the cultural heritage and cultural and historical values of tourist sites as a tourist resource for the development of cultural tourism in Georgia, which promotes the sustainable development of the country. Per the analysis of the structure of visits to Georgia, a significant part of inbound tourists is likely to introduce a cognitive element in their trip. This includes visiting and getting acquainted with the objects of the country's cultural heritage. Georgia's cultural tourism is studied, which is a type of tourism in which the cultural heritage enhances the tourist territory's attractiveness, which is reflected in the stimulation and motivation of new cultural experience and intercultural communication of tourists. The article examines the dynamics of the arrival of excursion tourists within the framework of international tourism and the structure of incoming international tourism in Georgia by regions of the world, in which Europe occupies 84.5%. The statement is confirmed that the country's cultural potential has a good resource base, which allows providing high-quality tourist services for cultural tourism. The article notes the main trends in the growth and strengthening of cultural tourism in the period 2014-2018, taking into account the formation of a unique, authentic experience of tourists based on familiarization with the objects of Georgia's cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** *cultural tourism, cultural heritage, intercultural communication, tourist resource, cultural objects*

## I. INTRODUCTION

At the present stage of development of world civilization, in the context of globalization of socio-economic relations, rapidly developing information technologies, communications, and the growth of the middle class, the tourism industry has become a prominent place in the structure of the world economy, which promotes, among other things, the development of cultural tourism.

Tourists while at rest almost always try to get acquainted with the host country's historical and cultural sights, history, and traditions of the peoples inhabiting the country of destination. According to the World Tourism Organization UNWTO, in 2018, 1.401 billion people traveled worldwide, which is 5.4% more than in 2017. Over the period from 2010 to 2018, the number of tourists in the world has increased almost 1.5 times from 952 million to 1.401 billion people. [1]. Among the countries with the fastest tourism growth was Georgia. From 2010 to 2018, the number of

tourists entering the country increased from 1.067 million to 4.757 million. [2].

According to the analysis of the structure of visits to the country, up to 30% of tourists include visits to and acquaintance with cultural sights. Georgia's rich history as an early Christian state, far-reaching cultural heritage, advantageous geographical location at the junction of Europe and Asia, and magnificent nature provide objective cultural tourism development opportunities.

Given the ongoing interest of the modern world community in the development of international and domestic tourism, given its cultural component, it can be argued that the cultural heritage of destinations is a severe resource for the development of cultural tourism and, at the same time, a resource for the socio-economic development of the tourist area. In this regard, there is a natural question about the involvement of available cultural resources in the territory's social and economic relations. UNESCO and the World Tourism Organization UNWTO pay great attention to the development of cultural tourism globally. A meeting was held in Muscat (Oman) in December 2017, at which the Muscat Declaration on Tourism and Culture:

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Fostering. Sustainable Development was adopted. The commitment to strengthen synergies between tourism and culture and promote cultural tourism's contribution to sustainable development until 2030 was reaffirmed.

**II. RELATIONSHIP OF CULTURAL HERITAGE AND DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL TOURISM IN GEORGIA**

In the modern period, Georgia pays special attention to cultural tourism, the main component of the host nation's culture in all its multifaceted manifestations and in historical retrospective. From the point of view of civilization axioms, cultural tourism of Georgia most fully contributes not only to meet the needs of visitors in learning the delicate spiritual matter of the people through tangible and intangible forms of its embodiment but also contributes to the spiritual enrichment of tourists, establishing new communications and cooperation. According to M.D. Sushchinskaya. "Cultural tourism is the movement of individuals outside of their permanent place of residence, motivated in whole or in part by the interest of visiting cultural attractions, including cultural events, museums, and historical sites, art galleries and music and drama theaters, concert venues and places of a traditional pastime of the local population, reflecting the historical heritage, modern artwork and performing arts, traditional values, activities, and everyday style" [3]. In this context, cultural tourism in Georgia is a type of tourism where culture is the basis for creating this tourist area (destination), stimulating and motivating tourist activities, and meeting the need for quality tourist services.

E.V. Moshnaga believes that at the beginning of the 21st century, cultural tourism "has become an umbrella term for a wide range of tourism: historical, religious,

pilgrimage, ethnic, ethnographic, folklore, anthropological, archaeological, event, art, museum, architectural, castle, palace, literary, musical and many others since all of them are united by common motivational aspirations of travelers (search for a new cultural experience and intercultural contacts) and common cultural and historical resources" [4].

Undoubtedly, cultural tourism in Georgia continues to have a significant stimulating effect not only on the development of social and economic relations but also performs a humanitarian and communicative function in international relations at the primary level of interaction between people from different countries, raises the credibility of the host country in the tourism industry, contributes to the preservation and careful treatment of cultural heritage, art, traditions, and customs of the Georgian people.

Thus, cultural tourism in Georgia includes visits to cultural sites searching for new cultural experiences and intercultural communications related to history, archaeology, religion, anthropology, ethnography, folklore, literature, music, and painting. The advantages of cultural tourism in Georgia are not only in the expansion of cultural opportunities but also in the use of new innovative models of tourism development that promote sustainable development, the interaction between host and guest, and comprehensive cultural exchange.

Cultural heritage is one of the basic foundations of cultural tourism development in Georgia. Georgia's cultural heritage is two multi-layered layers containing elements of tangible and intangible heritage that have been accumulated over the centuries and are of unique and outstanding value from the point of view of the country's history, science, art, aesthetics, ethnology, or anthropology ("Fig. 1").

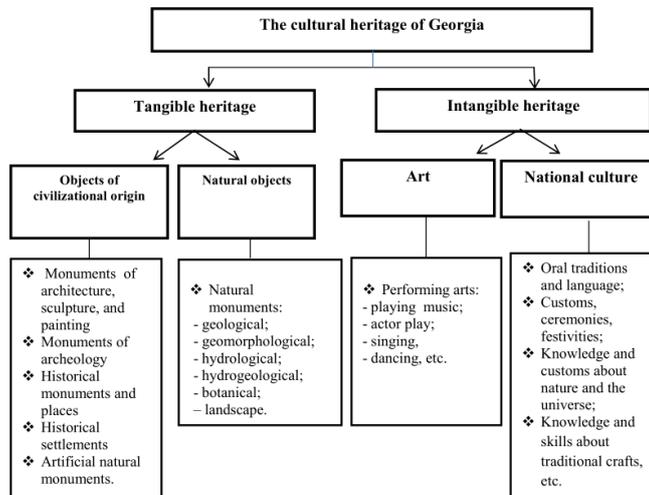


Fig. 1. Components of the cultural heritage of Georgia (compiled by the authors).

Georgia's cultural heritage shows the diversity and historical value of architectural monuments, archaeological sites, and movable monuments that contribute to the country's development of cultural tourism. A significant contribution to the preservation and management of cultural heritage was made by the Law of Georgia "On Cultural Heritage" dated May 08, 2007, which considers the regulation of legal relations arising in this area. The law defines the basic concepts, including tangible and intangible heritage, defines the procedure for accounting, protection, and management of cultural heritage introduces a classification of monuments by type "based on their typology, historical, cultural, artistic, aesthetic, memorial, spiritual, scientific and other values" [5].

The value of Georgia's cultural heritage is that it is the guardian of numerous monuments, from monuments of Iberian culture (from the 3rd century B.C. to the 6th century A.D.) to modern history monuments. The territory of Georgia is recognized as the place of origin of metallurgy and winemaking. Archaeological excavations on the territory of Neolithic settlements (10th century B.C.) conducted by the Academy of Sciences of Georgia in pre-war and post-war periods are the basis for this. The result of this work is the discovery of 50 monuments of the Neolithic period, located in the historical regions of Western Georgia, and then the discovery and monuments of the Chalcolithic period (Copper Age) [6]. The presence of these artifacts suggests that Georgia was part of the Eastern Mediterranean Neolithic culture.

The global community enjoy unique historical monuments of Georgia, beautiful natural landscapes and fertile climate, originality, and traditions of the nation, its heroic history. In 1994, UNESCO declared the historical monuments of Mtskheta (the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region) and the Gelati Monastery (Imereti region) to be World Cultural Heritage, and in 1996, the Upper Svaneti (Samegrelo-Upper Svaneti region). The list of non-material cultural heritage includes Georgian polyphonic singing (2008), the culture of the three writing systems of the Georgian alphabets Mrgvlovani, Nushuri and Mkhedruli (2016), and Chidaoba (wrestling), which is an ancient martial art form (2018).

The peculiarity of the historical formation of Georgian statehood is related to the relatively early adoption of the Christian Orthodox religion (half a century earlier than Greece), which during the centuries actively contributed to the development of architecture, art, education, and science, helped to preserve the customs and traditions of the people, brought up a whole cohort of famous scientists, writers, poets, artists, and politicians. Mtskheta's historical monuments, including the Jvari Monastery (temple), Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, and Samtavro Monastery, are outstanding examples of medieval Christian architecture in the

Caucasian region. From history, Mtskheta was the ancient capital of Kartli - the Eastern Georgian kingdom (the 3rd century B.C. – the 5th century A.D.). The Jvari Monastery is located on the top of the mountain, where, according to historical documents, the cross was erected by St. Nina, Equal of the Apostles, whose acts were described in Roman, Greek, Georgian, and Armenian sources. The monastery organically fits into the beautiful natural landscape and becomes its delightful logical conclusion. Even today, the Jvari Temple is a holy and sacred place for Orthodox Georgia.

The recent history of Georgia's development in the 20th and early 21st centuries has also served as a fertile ground for the continuation of the emergence of cultural values that shape Georgia's culture and traditions, including cultural tourism. According to the Newsletter on Current Trends in the World Economy, in 2018, Georgian exports of tourist services accounted for over 70% of all exports of all services [7]. This is explained by the fact that the country's cultural potential has a promising resource base that allows for practical tourism projects. Thus, with its historical, cultural heritage, Georgia has a tourist resource for the development of cultural tourism, the share of which in the world is continually growing.

**III. TRENDS OF CULTURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN GEORGIA**

Cultural tourism in modern Georgia plays a unique multifaceted role in the country's social and economic life, based on its rich and ancient history, national culture, tolerance, traditions, and customs.

According to UNWTO data, the total number of international tourism arrivals in 2018 has increased by 43.9% compared to 2014, and the number of tourists visiting Georgia for excursion purposes has increased by 18.4%. The annual increase was 8.8% on average ("Table I") [8].

TABLE I. INTERNATIONAL TOURISM (ARRIVALS), 2014-2018, THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE

Indicators	Year				
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total arrival, including	5 004	5 256	5 393	6 483	7 203
- overnight tourists	2 939	3 012	3 297	4 069	4 757
- excursionists	2 065	2 224	2 096	2 414	2 446

In 2018 the share of Europe in Georgia's inbound tourism was 84.5%, South Asia - 4.9%, other countries - 6.7%, and citizens living abroad - 6.69%. The growth of incoming European tourists in 2018 was 38.62% (to 2014), annual growth amounts to 7.72% ("Table II").

**TABLE II. INBOUND INTERNATIONAL TOURISM OF GEORGIA BY REGIONS OF THE WORLD IN 2014-2018, THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE\***

Region	Year				
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
In total, including:	5004	5256	5393	6483	7203
Africa	3	4	6	8	8
America	28	31	34	43	55
East Asia and the Pacific Ocean	24	30	43	61	91
Europe	4392	4667	4642	5441	6088
Middle East	34	46	71	132	126
South Asia	37	32	162	336	354
Others, including but not limited to	487	446	435	463	482
Citizens living abroad	482	441	429	456	476

<sup>a</sup>. \* UNWTO, World Tourism Barometer, International Tourism Highlights 2019 Edition URL: [https://tourlib.net/wto/WTO\\_highlights\\_2019.pdf](https://tourlib.net/wto/WTO_highlights_2019.pdf)

Such regions of the world as South Asia, East Asia, and the Pacific Ocean tend to increase tourists' number to Georgia. In the column "other," the main tourists are citizens of Georgia living abroad, so their number practically does not change from year to year. It should be noted that, apart from Europe, the share of other regions of the world in terms of the number of tourists to Georgia is minimal and totals 15.5% of the total number of guests.

Georgia adopted Tourism Development Strategy until 2025 that requires appropriate infrastructure support for the country's most visited cultural and historical sites [9]. The Strategy is an advanced platform for the economic and social development of cultural tourism based on existing cultural heritage sites. It is no coincidence that the Georgian National Tourism Administration is setting ambitious plans for the future. According to the developed Tourism Development Strategy, the country plans to welcome 11 million international tourists in 2025 and generate \$6.6 billion in revenues [10].

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Thus, further prospects for the development of cultural tourism are correlated with the Georgian Tourism Development Strategy and are conditioned by several factors and reasons, among which the following can be highlighted.

- Contemporary Georgia has a large number of cultural sites (about 120 000 historical and architectural monuments), including three sites included in the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List: the historical monuments of Mtskheta, the Gelati Monastery, and Upper Svaneti. A tentative list of 15 cultural sites of Georgia has been prepared for inclusion in the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List. This requires studying the peculiarities of cultural heritage and determining the cultural-historical

value of sites for developing cultural tourism in Georgia.

- The possibility of increasing the number of tourists visiting the country to learn about people's cultural heritage, traditions, and customs, recreation, and treatment. The results of 2019 point to a record number of tourists in Georgia - 9.3 million people, as well as the number of tourists who spent more than 24 hours in the country, the number of which increased compared to last year to 5 million people (6.8%) [11].
- Forming a positive image of the country, which originated in ancient times, preserving preserved its unique and distinctive culture, historical architectural monuments, language, writing, and traditions [12].
- The need to identify additional sources and reserves for the development of cultural tourism, taking into account the development of new business models with the use of modern digital technologies to organize cultural tourism in Georgia in order to more fully and accurately account the flow of tourists and improve the efficiency of the tourism industry in Georgia.

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