

THE ONE AND ONLY AFGHAN NATIONAL PARK



New Band-e-Amir national park is the only national park in Afghanistan. The aim of the park is to protect the wildlife as well as lure travelers.

Afghanistan is a world known country, but certainly not as a tourism destination. This big state is continuously a place where foreign powers fight their wars. There was the Soviet invasion in 1979 and recently the USA led military operations. Such a place surely is not a destination where tourists flock.

Nevertheless, local authorities in cooperation with foreign organizations decided to change the situation and make Afghanistan once more interesting for tourists. What is the draw that should do it? It is the first Afghan national park **Band-e-Amir**. The park is located a day drive west of Kabul in Hindu Kush Mountains and includes five high-altitude lakes separated by natural travertine dams. The new park should not only lure tourists; it is naturally meant to **protect local wildlife**. According to Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), much of it has been lost. For example, the last snow leopard was hunted down in the 1980s and hand grenade fishing is fairly common practice here.

Nevertheless, according to the WCS surveys, there are still animals worth protecting. The park is home to wolves, foxes, wild goats and also to a rare species of bird, the Afghan snow finch. The Afghanistan's National Environmental Protection Agency hopes the creation of the park will help the region to obtain UNESCO World Heritage Status.

United States Agency for International Development has invested approximately 1 million dollars for the foundation of the park. Local villagers set up small businesses for the possible tourists but not all of them are so eager to become part of the projects. They are dependent on natural resources and forced to change their behavior. Rangers are for example trying to limit overgrazing of the shrubs around the lakes. Also the hand grenade fishing has been prohibited. Naturally, Afghanistan needs more time to become a luring tourism destination. The major problem is the bad security situation and of course the lack of proper infrastructure.

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Date: 2009-05-18

Article link: <http://www.tourism-review.com/afghanistan-aims-at-tourists-now-news1612>