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ARMENIA

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN THE DILIJAN COMMUNITY



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Recommendations for Ecotourism Development Planning in Dilijan Community, Armenia

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Acronyms

AMD	Armenian Dram
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
EU4Environment	European Union Programme for Environment
GIS	Geographical Information Systems
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NTFPs	Non-Timber Forest Products
PA	Protected Area
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
ToR	Terms of Reference

Executive Summary

This Pilot should be understood first as a conservation-oriented territorial management initiative. Its purpose is to demonstrate how carefully managed ecotourism can contribute to biodiversity conservation, visitor-pressure management, local stewardship and compatible livelihoods in landscapes associated with protected areas and candidate Emerald Network sites. Dilijan has the strongest existing tourism base among the eight pilot communities analyzed, and the priority is therefore not to generate visitor growth as an end in itself, but to improve the quality, environmental management and local conservation value of an already established nature-based destination. The community combines the town of Dilijan and surrounding settlements such as Haghartsin, Teghut, Gosh, Aghavnavank, Hovk and Khachardzan with the forests and protected landscapes associated with Dilijan National Park. Its tourism offer already includes Parz Lake, Haghartsin and Goshavank monasteries, forest trails, Jukhtak and Matosavank, accommodation, gastronomy and established visitor services. The Pilot therefore focuses on managing existing and future use within ecological limits, improving connections between attractions and local services, and strengthening coordination between the Municipality, Dilijan National Park, tourism providers and other responsible actors.

The proposed ecotourism model is based on a network of controlled forest, heritage, gastronomy and environmental-education experiences. Priority products include guided forest and monastery circuits; Parz Lake and adjoining nature experiences; biodiversity and forest-interpretation walks; food and gastronomy experiences linked to local providers; and controlled transfers to trailheads or viewpoints where existing legal roads, environmental conditions and safety requirements permit. A connected two- to three-day Dilijan–Ijevan itinerary is also proposed as a future option, combining Dilijan’s established National Park and hospitality base with Ijevan’s forest, community and gastronomy offer. Each product requires a defined route, provider chain, visitor rules, operating season, local spending points and environmental safeguards before promotion.

Dilijan’s principal challenge is the mismatch between relatively high visitor use and uneven management of routes, services and environmental pressures. Gaps remain in trailhead organization, route marking, ecological interpretation, visitor orientation and coordination of access to environmentally sensitive areas. Water supply, sanitation and wastewater treatment are also important enabling issues because high visitor use adds pressure to systems that also serve local residents. Forest fire, erosion, habitat disturbance, waste and unmanaged movement require stronger preventive management. The Plan therefore gives priority to better route definition, signage, visitor information, environmental-service improvements, operating rules and monitoring before additional tourism construction is considered.

The governance model requires close coordination between Dilijan Municipality, Dilijan National Park, tourism and accommodation providers, guides, transport operators, local food businesses and other competent institutions. Public and project-based financing is expected to support route organization, visitor management, ecological interpretation and environmental-service improvements. Private investment can strengthen accommodation, gastronomy, guiding, tourism packaging and service quality. Public-private cooperation may be useful for route maintenance, signage, information and service delivery, but should remain tied to ecological and management conditions. Water and wastewater improvements are treated as part of the enabling infrastructure for sustainable tourism because they affect environmental quality, destination credibility and local living conditions.

Implementation is phased. The initial period should confirm routes and operating conditions, establish visitor and provider baselines, improve route-status and information functions and address priority environmental and safety issues. Product consolidation can then strengthen guiding, interpretation, gastronomy, local products and connections between the town, villages and protected-area

experiences. More selective infrastructure or institutional investments should proceed where monitoring demonstrates a clear need and acceptable environmental performance. The plan does not adopt a long-range visitor-growth projection based on the short Tavush hotel series; decisions should use observed Dilijan visitor, route, accommodation, service, local-value and environmental data as implementation progresses.

Success should therefore be measured primarily through conservation and management performance, not visitor growth alone. Key results include use concentrated on approved routes, reduced disturbance and safety problems, better visitor information, stronger participation by local providers, improved links between tourism spending and local stewardship, functioning environmental and visitor monitoring, and a clearer management relationship between the community, Dilijan National Park and the candidate Emerald Network context. The main lesson for Dilijan is that an established tourism destination can generate greater conservation and community value by improving the management and quality of existing use before pursuing additional physical expansion.

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¹ Since 2018, the “European Union for Environment” (EU4Environment) Action has helped the Eastern Partnership countries preserve their natural capital and enhance people’s environmental well-being, by supporting environment-related action, demonstrating and unlocking opportunities for greener growth, and establishing mechanisms to better manage environmental risks and impacts. The program was funded by the European Union and principally implemented over 2019–24 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), and the World Bank. Over 2025–26, the World Bank will finalize the implementation of the program’s Result 4 area.

1. Introduction

This Conservation-Oriented Ecotourism Management Pilot provides a structured framework for assessing and guiding visitor use and local economic activity in a way that supports biodiversity conservation at community level. It is based on a standardized ecotourism assessment tool that evaluates ecological conditions, socio-economic context, tourism assets, conservation sensitivity, and associated environmental and operational risks.

The Pilot is developed as part of a broader effort under the EU4Environment programme, implemented with methodological alignment to World Bank approaches and within the framework of the OIKO initiative. The overall activity focuses on selected communities where natural assets, protected areas and candidate Emerald Network sites create both conservation responsibilities and carefully bounded opportunities for local economic benefit. Accordingly, ecotourism is treated as a management instrument that can help organize access, interpretation, local stewardship and financing around conservation objectives, rather than as an objective of destination growth.

Within this context, the project includes the application of a unified assessment tool across target communities, stakeholder consultations to capture local perspectives and priorities, and the preparation of site-specific management plans. These plans are intended to translate assessment results into practical guidance, including zoning considerations, identification of suitable ecotourism products, infrastructure needs, governance arrangements, and basic management measures.

The purpose of this Pilot is to support decision-making on whether, where and under what conditions ecotourism can be used as a conservation-compatible activity. Tourism activities are therefore screened against conservation requirements, particularly in areas with sensitive ecosystems, habitats or species of concern, before opportunities for local economic engagement are promoted. The approach follows sustainable development principles by prioritizing ecological integrity, promoting low-impact visitor use, supporting local livelihoods, and encouraging the responsible use of natural and cultural assets without compromising their conservation status. It also aims to strengthen coordination between local authorities, communities, protected-area managers and other stakeholders involved in tourism and environmental management.

Conservation Rationale and Alignment with the Emerald Network

The conservation rationale of the Pilot is directly linked to the Emerald Network framework under the Bern Convention. The Emerald Network is an ecological network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest established to support the long-term survival of species and natural habitats that require specific conservation measures. Armenia is among the countries working through candidate Emerald Network sites, and several of the project communities occur within or close to this broader conservation geography.

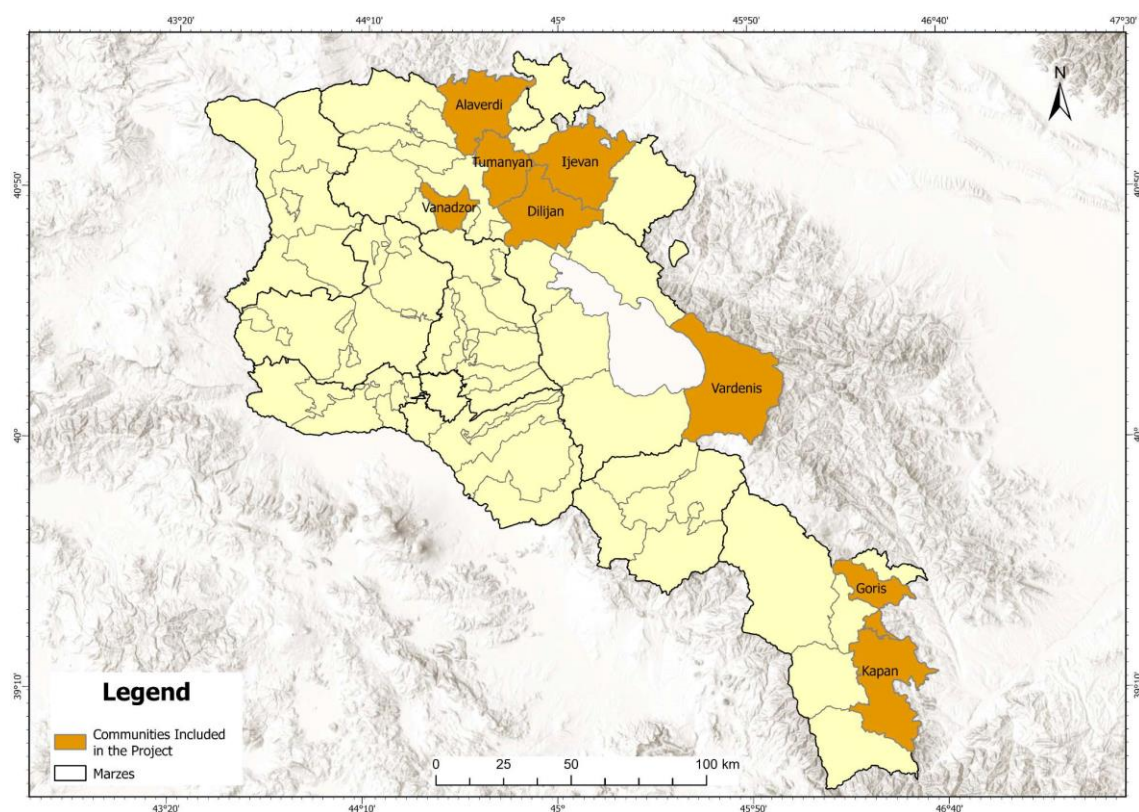
For this reason, the Pilot is not conceived as a conventional destination-development or marketing plan. It does not seek to maximize visitor numbers, open new areas to recreation, or justify tourism infrastructure because a site is attractive. Instead, it translates a conservation-first logic into practical tourism-management measures: ecological sensitivity screening; avoidance of sensitive habitats; route and access control; spatial zoning; visitor rules; biodiversity interpretation; clear institutional responsibilities; environmental monitoring; and mechanisms that connect local economic benefits with stewardship and conservation responsibilities.

The decision hierarchy applied throughout the Pilot is therefore: first, protect ecological values and maintain the integrity of habitats and species; second, determine what forms and levels of visitor use are compatible with those conservation conditions; and third, organize local services, products and investment around the compatible uses that remain. Where conservation information is incomplete, tourism development remains conditional on field, ecological and institutional verification. In this sense, ecotourism is used as a supporting instrument for conservation management and local stewardship, not as the primary purpose of the landscape.

This Pilot does not replace the statutory management plan of Dilijan National Park, the formal designation or management requirements of any Emerald Network site, or the responsibilities of the competent environmental authorities. Its role is complementary: to provide a practical community-level framework for ensuring that tourism-related decisions, investments and services are consistent with protected-area and Emerald Network conservation objectives.

The map illustrates the spatial distribution of the eight communities included in the project in Armenia: Alaverdi, Tumanyan, Vanadzor, Dilijan, Ijevan, Vardenis, Goris, and Kapan. Together, these locations create a broad territorial coverage across the northern, eastern, and southern parts of the country and reflect different ecological, landscape, and accessibility conditions relevant to ecotourism planning. The map helps situate the project within the national context and illustrates that the selected communities represent different types of mountain, forest, and protected area settings where ecotourism opportunities and management needs may vary.

Figure 1. Eight pilot communities



Source: REC Caucasus.

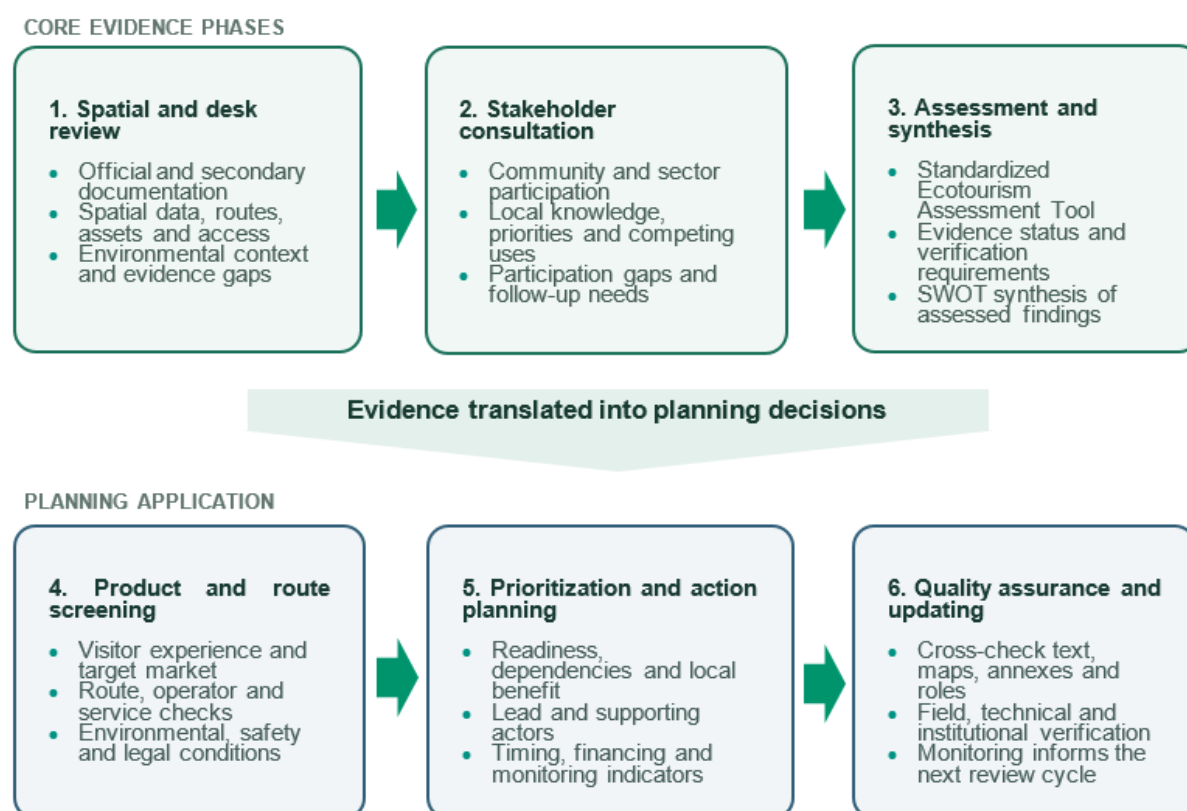
2. Methodological Approach

The Ecotourism Management Plan was developed through three complementary methodological phases: (i) spatial analysis and desk-based review; (ii) stakeholder consultation and participatory validation; and (iii) development and application of the Ecotourism Assessment Tool, followed by synthesis through SWOT analysis. Thus, these phases provide the evidence base for the Plan while distinguishing between information supported by available documentation and stakeholder inputs and aspects that still require field, technical or institutional verification.

The three phases form a connected and iterative process and thus posses an application logic and repeatability. Desk and spatial analysis establish the initial evidence base and identify gaps; consultation tests, corrects and supplements that evidence; and the Assessment Tool organizes the combined findings into a consistent community assessment. SWOT analysis then summarizes the assessed situation, while management recommendations translate the findings into actions, conditions and responsibilities. The same sequence should be followed when a Plan is prepared, reviewed or updated so that new evidence can be incorporated without changing the common analytical structure.

Additionally, these three phases are complemented with a follow up phases related to the planning application: (iv) product and route development, (v) prioritization and action planning and (vi) quality assurance and updating. The methodology sequence and its application to plan preparation, review and updating are summarized in Figure below.

Figure 2. Ecotourism development planning methodology



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Phase 1 – Spatial analysis and desk-based review

The first phase consisted of the review and consolidation of available project documentation, official and secondary sources, existing tourism and territorial information, and project-supplied GIS and spatial data. The spatial analysis was used to examine the community context, natural and cultural assets, settlement and accessibility patterns, protected-area and Emerald Network context, and the spatial relationship between potential visitor-use areas and environmentally sensitive features. The analysis applies a conservation-first screening lens: areas of higher ecological sensitivity are identified before products, routes or infrastructure are considered, and tourism opportunities are treated as conditional on compatibility with conservation objectives. The analysis provided the initial basis for screening ecotourism opportunities and constraints and for identifying information gaps requiring subsequent verification. Importantly, the GIS layers and maps used in the Pilot provide a planning and screening context; they do not in themselves confirm land tenure, legal access, ecological condition, route readiness or the suitability of individual sites for tourism development. Candidate Emerald boundaries and route relationships must therefore be confirmed before zoning or promotion.

Evidence classification and treatment:

Information used in the assessment is classified according to its source and level of confirmation. The principal categories are: information confirmed through official documentation; information supported by project or technical sources; stakeholder-reported information; findings derived from spatial analysis; experience transferred from another community; planning proposals; and matters requiring field, legal, ecological, commercial or institutional verification. A statement is not treated as confirmed merely because it appears in more than one secondary source. Where sources agree, the finding may be used with greater confidence; where they differ, the inconsistency is retained as an evidence gap and addressed through a verification requirement rather than resolved by assumption.

Minimum spatial review and data handling:

For each community, the spatial review should consider community and settlement boundaries; forests; protected areas and candidate Emerald Network areas; recorded tourism routes; natural and cultural attractions; roads and transport access; settlements and service locations; environmentally sensitive features; known hazards; and links with neighbouring communities. Route records from official and user-generated spatial data should be screened for duplicate or alternative alignments and, where possible, checked for start and end points, distance, elevation, surface condition, land and management status, seasonal accessibility and connection to visitor services. Every map should identify its purpose, source and limitations. Spatial proximity does not by itself establish legal access, ownership, environmental suitability, visitor readiness or management responsibility.

Phase 2 – Stakeholder consultation and participatory validation

Stakeholder engagement was undertaken through two principal consultation and capacity-building stages. The first took place in March 2026, when representatives of the target communities participated in introductory stakeholder engagement activities. This phase introduced the project and ecotourism planning approach, applied a structured 28-question consultation instrument, and used participatory discussion and group work to identify local opportunities, constraints, existing initiatives and priorities. The second stage took place in July 2026 and shifted from initial identification of issues towards capacity building, review and validation of the emerging EMP proposals. The July process enabled stakeholders to review proposed measures, question assumptions and discuss implementation

requirements, including responsibilities, financing, maintenance, visitor management and monitoring. The stakeholder evidence and its documentation status are summarized in Annex 2 – Stakeholders and Consultation Status, which also distinguishes confirmed community-level participation from stakeholder roles and responsibilities that still require actor-specific confirmation.

Minimum stakeholder-engagement standard:

Application or updating of the template should seek input, as relevant to the community context, from the community administration; forest and protected-area managers; tourism businesses, guides and transport providers; accommodation and food providers; cultural and heritage managers; local producers and community groups; environmental organizations; technical specialists; and groups whose views may otherwise be underrepresented. The purpose is not only to collect proposals, but also to identify existing practices, competing resource uses, management constraints, business capacity, maintenance needs, environmental concerns and the actors able to implement or verify proposed measures. Participation should be recorded by date, format, represented institution or stakeholder category and the subject of the input provided.

Consultation evidence, participation gaps and differing views:

Community-level participation is distinguished from confirmation by a particular institution, business or responsible authority. If a relevant actor did not participate, or if the available participant record does not establish the actor's identity, the gap is retained and a follow-up requirement is assigned. Stakeholder views are treated as local knowledge and planning input, not as substitutes for legal, technical or environmental approval. Where participants express different priorities or interpretations, the Plan should record the issue and identify the decision-maker or verification process needed to resolve it.

Phase 3 – Assessment and Synthesis

A standardized Ecotourism Assessment Tool was developed and applied to structure the assessment of each pilot community. The tool covers screening and eligibility; ecological and conservation characteristics; socio-economic and community context; tourism assets and baseline use; suitability and zoning; potential ecotourism products; infrastructure and services; governance; visitor management; benefit sharing; environmental and social safeguards; climate resilience; monitoring; investment and implementation considerations. The completed community assessment is provided in Annex 1 – Ecotourism Assessment Tool and forms the analytical basis for the management recommendations presented throughout the Plan. The findings were subsequently consolidated through a SWOT analysis, presented in Annex 3, which distinguishes verified or desk-supported strengths and weaknesses from indicative opportunities and potential risks/threats. The SWOT therefore serves as a synthesis of the preceding assessment rather than as a separate feasibility study.

The Tool is applied as an evidence and decision record. For each relevant topic, the assessment should identify the available evidence, current condition, evidence status, principal gap, proposed management response, further verification needed and the institution or actor expected to confirm or implement the response. Conclusions should be traceable to the corresponding assessment fields, consultation evidence or spatial finding. A numerical score should be used only where an agreed scoring method, evidence basis and interpretation have been applied consistently; otherwise, findings should remain qualitative and conditional.

The attractions needs to meet specific requirement in order to become an ecotourism product.

The identification of an attraction does not by itself establish an ecotourism product. A proposed product should have a sufficiently defined visitor experience; a usable and legally accessible route or site; an identifiable visitor segment; a capable operator or service provider; available or realistically achievable guiding, transport, food, accommodation or information services; acceptable environmental and social conditions; defined safety and maintenance responsibilities; and a reasonable mechanism for local economic benefit. Product proposals that do not yet meet these conditions should be presented as conditional opportunities, together with the checks, partnerships and service-development actions required before launch or promotion.

Phase 4 - Product route and screening

Where a route, attraction cluster or visitor itinerary extends beyond one community, it should be assessed as a shared product rather than assigned entirely to the community in which the analysis began. The Plan should identify the participating communities and site managers, route and visitor handovers, operator roles, maintenance responsibilities, information and booking arrangements, emergency coordination and the intended distribution of accommodation, meals, guiding, transport and product sales. Cross-community proposals remain indicative until these responsibilities and benefit-sharing arrangements are agreed.

Phase 5 - Prioritization and action planning

Recommendations are prioritized according to their evidence base, implementation readiness, environmental and social conditions, institutional ownership, dependency on other actions and likely contribution to visitor experience and local benefit. Actions may be grouped as immediate organizational or low-cost measures; measures requiring field or technical verification; pilot products suitable for testing; infrastructure requiring feasibility, design and environmental assessment; and longer-term measures dependent on financing, permits or institutional agreements. Each priority action should identify an indicative lead, supporting actors, sequence, timeframe, verification requirement and monitoring indicator. The absence of a confirmed owner or maintenance arrangement is treated as an implementation gap rather than left implicit.

Phase 6 - Quality assurance and updating

Before completion, the Plan should be checked for consistency between the main text, assessment annexes, stakeholder record, maps, SWOT analysis, product proposals, action plan and monitoring framework. Names, boundaries, route references, responsibilities and evidence status should be used consistently throughout. The Plan should be updated when field verification changes route information, protected-area or Emerald data are revised, responsible actors are confirmed, visitor and provider data become available, infrastructure is implemented, or monitoring identifies environmental, safety, service or management issues. Updates should record the source, date and consequence of the new information.

Methodological Limitations

Methodological scope and limitations:

The preparation of this Plan did not include a feasibility study, detailed technical design or systematic field/site verification of the proposed routes, tourism sites or investments. Consequently, identification

of a potential route, attraction, tourism product, visitor facility or investment in the Plan should not be interpreted as confirmation of its technical feasibility, environmental compatibility, legal availability, safety, commercial viability or implementation readiness. The assessment deliberately identifies these evidence gaps and converts them into requirements for subsequent implementation. The Plan itself already reflects this principle by requiring route/GIS validation, specialist ecological screening and route-specific technical design before particular investments proceed.

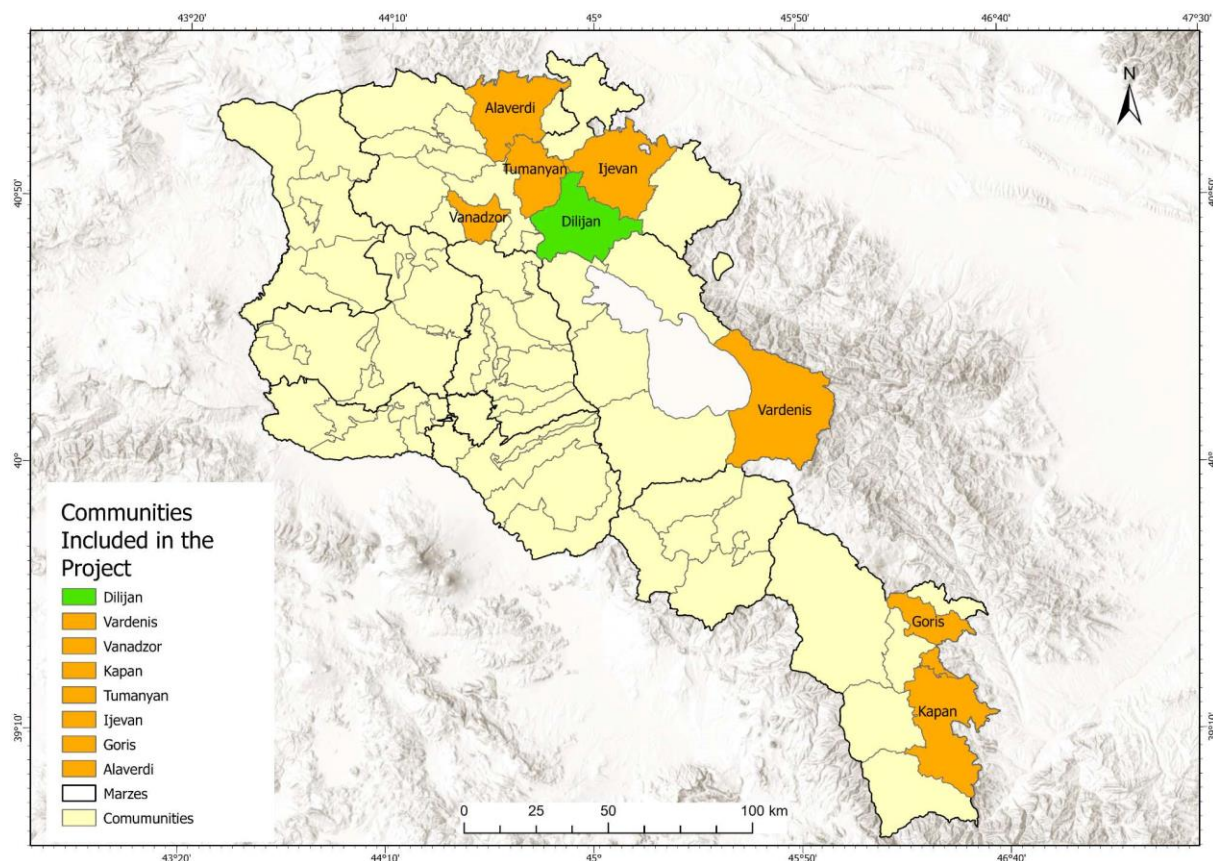
Additional evidence limitations:

Community-level tourism statistics, visitor profiles, household information and provider records may be incomplete or unavailable, and consultation participation may differ between communities and stakeholder groups. Consultation findings are therefore not treated as statistically representative survey results unless a representative sampling method is applied. Spatial data may vary in date, scale, accuracy and completeness, while route and site conditions may change seasonally or after the assessment period. These limitations should be stated wherever they materially affect a conclusion, target, product proposal or investment recommendation.

3. Site Profile

The community of Dilijan is located in Tavush marz in northeastern Armenia and represents one of the project's northeastern pilot communities. Its geographic setting is strongly shaped by surrounding forested mountains and by its close connection to one of the country's best-known nature and tourism landscapes.

Figure 3. Dilijan and other communities included in the project



Source: REC Caucasus.

Dilijan is located in Tavush marz in the north-eastern part of Armenia and functions as one of the best-known mountain and forest destinations in the country. The community combines the town of Dilijan with a wider group of surrounding settlements, including Haghartsin, Teghut, Gosh, Aghavnavank, Hovk and Khachardzan. As of 1 January 2025, the permanent population of Dilijan community was 23.1 thousand, of which 16.4 thousand lived in the town itself and 6.7 thousand in the surrounding rural part of the community. This confirms that the site should be understood not only as a resort town, but as a wider municipal area with both urban and rural functions.

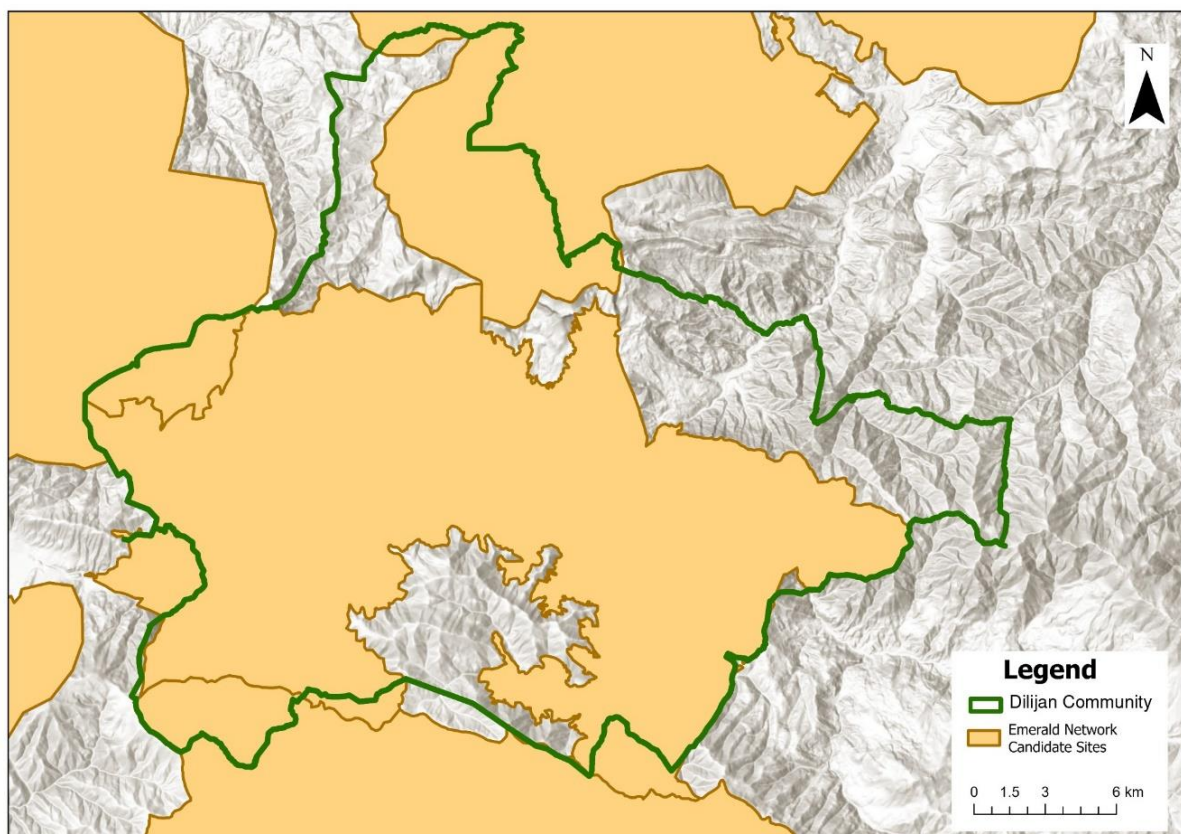
3.1 Location and Context

The location is also defined by its close relationship with Dilijan National Park and the wider protected-area system. In practical terms, this gives Dilijan a different planning profile from less tourism-developed communities. It is not an emerging nature destination, but an already established tourism node located within a highly sensitive environmental setting. This is consistent with the filled

assessment table, which identifies protected area, Emerald relevance, and community land within the same planning space, as well as qualitative high-flow, high-demand and easy-access categories that require site-level baselines.

Dilijan’s position within Armenia’s road network also supports its strong tourism role. The town is relatively accessible from Yerevan and already functions as a gateway to forest, monastery, lake, and trail-based attractions. This means that the planning challenge is not how to introduce tourism to an isolated area, but how to manage and improve a tourism destination that already attracts substantial visitor attention while remaining ecologically sensitive.

Figure 4. Dilijan Community and Emerald Network candidate sites



Note: The map confirms broad spatial overlap but does not yet show validated tourism zones, sensitive-habitat boundaries, approved routes or visitor-service points. These layers must be agreed with Dilijan National Park and Dilijan Municipality before implementation.

Source: Project GIS layers, 2026.

3.2 Ecological Characteristics

The ecological character of Dilijan is defined by forest dominance. Dilijan National Park covers 33,765 hectares and includes an additional buffer zone of 8,167 hectares. It stretches across the basins of the Aghstev and Getik rivers and ranges from about 1,070 to 2,900 meters above sea level. This altitudinal variation helps explain the ecological diversity of the site and the coexistence of forest and alpine elements already reflected in the assessment table. Forest ecosystems and mountainous landscapes are the core ecological asset of the site. Available descriptions of the park indicate that forests cover about 94% of its area and are mainly composed of oak, beech, and hornbeam communities, which is fully consistent with the table entry identifying mixed deciduous forest as the key

habitat type. The park is also known for river corridors, mountain lakes, and subalpine zones that increase habitat diversity and tourism attractiveness at the same time.

This combination of dense forest cover, varied topography, and high scenic quality is what makes Dilijan highly attractive for ecotourism, but it is also why its conservation sensitivity is high. The ecological importance of the area is not only structural but also biological. The park has been described as containing more than 900 plant species, including numerous rare species and multiple taxa listed in Armenia's Red Book. The park is home to the Red book fauna species, such as Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), Bearded vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*), Caucasian grouse (*Lyrurus mlokosiewiczii*), Black Woodpecker (*Dryocopus martius*), Semi-collared Flycatcher (*Ficedula semitorquata*), Rosalia longicorn (*Rosalia alpina*), Corn Crake (*Crex crex*) in subalpine meadows, and Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) in cliff habitats, Red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) and Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), home to 150 bird species. The filled assessment table does not reduce this to a single species list, but clearly records the presence of multiple Red Book species and assigns high conservation sensitivity. For planning purposes, this means that Dilijan should be treated as a biodiversity-rich forest landscape where tourism use must be compatible with habitat protection rather than simply superimposed on it.

3.3 Socio-Economic Context

The socio-economic profile of Dilijan is stronger and more diversified than in the more rural pilot communities. The population base of 23.1 thousand people at community level gives it a larger service and labour base than smaller ecotourism sites, while the town itself remains the clear urban center of the municipality. At the same time, the attached settlements provide the rural and landscape context that supports forest-based products, gastronomy, and community-linked tourism experiences.

At marz level, Tavush remains economically linked to agriculture and services rather than to a single dominant urban function. In 2024, gross agricultural output in Tavush reached 47.9 billion AMD, while the volume of services reached 35.1 billion AMD. Average monthly nominal wages in Tavush in 2024 were 156,787 AMD. These figures help explain why Dilijan's tourism economy should not be seen in isolation: it operates within a regional economy where agriculture, food systems, and local service provision still matter strongly. This fits well with the table, which identifies agriculture, livestock, and tourism together as the main livelihoods relevant to the site.

The local economic profile also supports the importance of non-timber forest products and gastronomy in the tourism offer. The assessment identifies honey, herbs, mushrooms, and berries as present, and this is fully consistent with the way Dilijan is already described in the file: local gastronomy is strongly linked to forest-based ingredients and mountain food traditions. This gives the site a clear advantage compared to locations where tourism products would need to be built almost entirely from scratch. In Dilijan, tourism already intersects with food, hospitality, nature, and local identity, which makes the socio-economic basis for ecotourism relatively strong. At the same time, this stronger socio-economic base also creates management pressure. Dilijan is not a low-use site where tourism can be added gradually without consequence. It already functions as a high-demand destination, and this affects land use, service intensity, and environmental risk. For that reason, the socio-economic context supports ecotourism development, but also reinforces the need for stronger organization, visitor management, and clearer links between tourism benefit and conservation responsibility.

Dilijan's distinctive advantage is the unusually close combination of a nationally recognized forest destination, protected-area biodiversity, lakes and river valleys, monastery landscapes, an established

hospitality base and forest-linked cuisine. The practical opportunity is therefore not a generic herb, honey or mushroom offer, but a 'forest-to-table and forest-to-heritage' visitor experience in which guided interpretation, local meals, accommodation and nearby settlements form one bookable product.

4. Stakeholder Insights & Local Priorities

Stakeholder inputs are particularly relevant for Dilijan because the community is not starting from zero. The discussions reflected a setting where ecotourism already exists in practice, but where the quality, structure, and ecological discipline of that tourism still need improvement. For Dilijan, the most relevant stakeholder messages relate to product enrichment, trail infrastructure, biodiversity interpretation, community-linked services, and more structured visitor guidance.

Among the most concrete opportunities raised during the stakeholder meeting was the tent-based eco-camp initiative implemented in Dilijan National Park by the “Contribution to Women and Children” NGO in cooperation with REC Caucasus Armenia. This example is especially relevant for Dilijan because it shows that the area already has experience with education-oriented and low-impact tourism formats. The initiative combines environmental education, hiking, forest clean-up activities, recreation, meals, and basic support services, which makes it more than a simple camp model. It demonstrates that ecotourism in Dilijan can be built not only around sightseeing, but also around active learning, ecological responsibility, and organized small-group experiences. Stakeholders also highlighted the importance of biodiversity content within tourism products. For Dilijan, this is directly relevant because tourism is concentrated in a forest-rich and ecologically sensitive setting. Participants emphasized that tourism packages should provide information on local flora and fauna, especially Red Book species, and explain why these ecosystems require protection. This is not only an environmental message, but also a product-development opportunity:

Birdwatching already occurs within Armenia’s nature-tourism market, and Dilijan can develop a clearer local offer around guided forest, subalpine-meadow and cliff-habitat observation. The Haghartsin Important Bird and Biodiversity Area/Key Biodiversity Area provides a credible biodiversity setting, while species such as Black Woodpecker, Semi-collared Flycatcher, Corn Crake and Peregrine Falcon create different habitat stories. For international wildlife watchers, the appeal is the combination of Caucasus biodiversity, compact access to several habitat types, cultural stops and local services. This product must be small-group, guide-led and seasonally reviewed; sensitive breeding locations should not be promoted publicly.

Dilijan is one of the few sites where biodiversity interpretation can realistically become a visible part of the visitor experience. Another important opportunity identified in the meeting is the strong role of community-based services around protected areas rather than inside them. Stakeholders emphasized that many ecotourists prefer to stay in nearby communities and use local guesthouses, food services, and other small-scale facilities, while visiting protected areas during the day. This is highly relevant for Dilijan, where the tourism economy already includes accommodation, gastronomy, and service provision linked to the surrounding park landscape. It supports a model in which ecotourism benefits are distributed through the town and nearby settlements rather than being concentrated only inside natural sites.

At the same time, stakeholders clearly identified a number of challenges. One of the most practical concerns was the poor condition or incomplete organization of trail infrastructure. Specific emphasis was placed on the need for marked starting and ending points, signage, trail markers, and additional visitor information tools such as QR codes. For Dilijan, where hiking is already one of the core activities, this is a significant issue. The challenge is not the absence of tourism movement, but the lack of sufficient structure around an already active trail and visitation system. The meeting also highlighted the need for stronger visitor guidance and behavior control. In Dilijan, where ecological sensitivity is high and visitor pressure already exists, stakeholders noted the importance of clear visitor conduct rules

and more explicit communication about environmental sensitivity. This directly supports the need for a more organized ecotourism model based on interpretation, marked access, and low-impact visitor management rather than free and unstructured recreational use.

Marketing and service integration were also raised as practical priorities. Stakeholders stressed that ecotourism promotion should not focus only on natural attractions themselves, but also on nearby guesthouses, accommodation options, and food providers. In Dilijan, this is especially important because the destination already has a broader tourism economy that can support ecotourism if it is linked more deliberately to local services and products. This suggests that one of Dilijan's priorities should be better integration of forest-based attractions with gastronomy, accommodation, and visitor information. The stakeholder discussions confirm that Dilijan's main priority is not to create ecotourism from the beginning, but to improve its structure, environmental quality, and community linkage. The key opportunities lie in eco-education, biodiversity-based interpretation, forest-linked gastronomy, and stronger use of local service providers. The main challenges lie in trail infrastructure, visitor guidance, and ensuring that growing tourism demand does not translate into unmanaged pressure on sensitive natural areas.

To turn this integration into an operating tool, the package proposes a voluntary Dilijan National-Park-Friendly service standard and scoring system. Participating accommodation, food, guiding and activity providers would be assessed against biodiversity safeguards, waste and wastewater practice, visitor information, local purchasing, staff competence and data-sharing commitments. Providers passing the threshold could use the local co-brand and receive priority inclusion in approved route information and joint promotion. The pilot is described below and would not replace any official state registration or certification requirement.

5. Tourism Baseline

Attractions

Dilijan has one of the most diverse attraction profiles among the pilot communities. Its tourism value is built on the combination of forest landscapes, protected-area biodiversity, well-known natural sites, cultural landmarks, and a strong food identity. In spatial terms, the main attraction system is organized around Dilijan National Park and its surrounding forest settlements, with the town functioning as the main service and access hub. The park covers 33,765 hectares, with an additional buffer zone of 8,167 hectares, and ranges from about 1,070 to 2,900 meters above sea level. Forests cover about 94% of the park area, creating the landscape character that defines Dilijan as a forest destination rather than simply a mountain town.

The natural attraction base is especially strong. The most prominent named sites include Lake Parz, Gosh Lake, the Haghartsin gorge, mineral springs in and around Dilijan, and the broader Aghstev River valley landscape. These are complemented by forest routes, panoramic viewpoints, monastery surroundings, and river-adjacent habitats. This attraction base is ecologically significant as well as scenic: the wider Dilijan National Park area contains more than 900 plant species and numerous Red Book species, which explains why tourism in Dilijan is inseparable from biodiversity and habitat sensitivity.

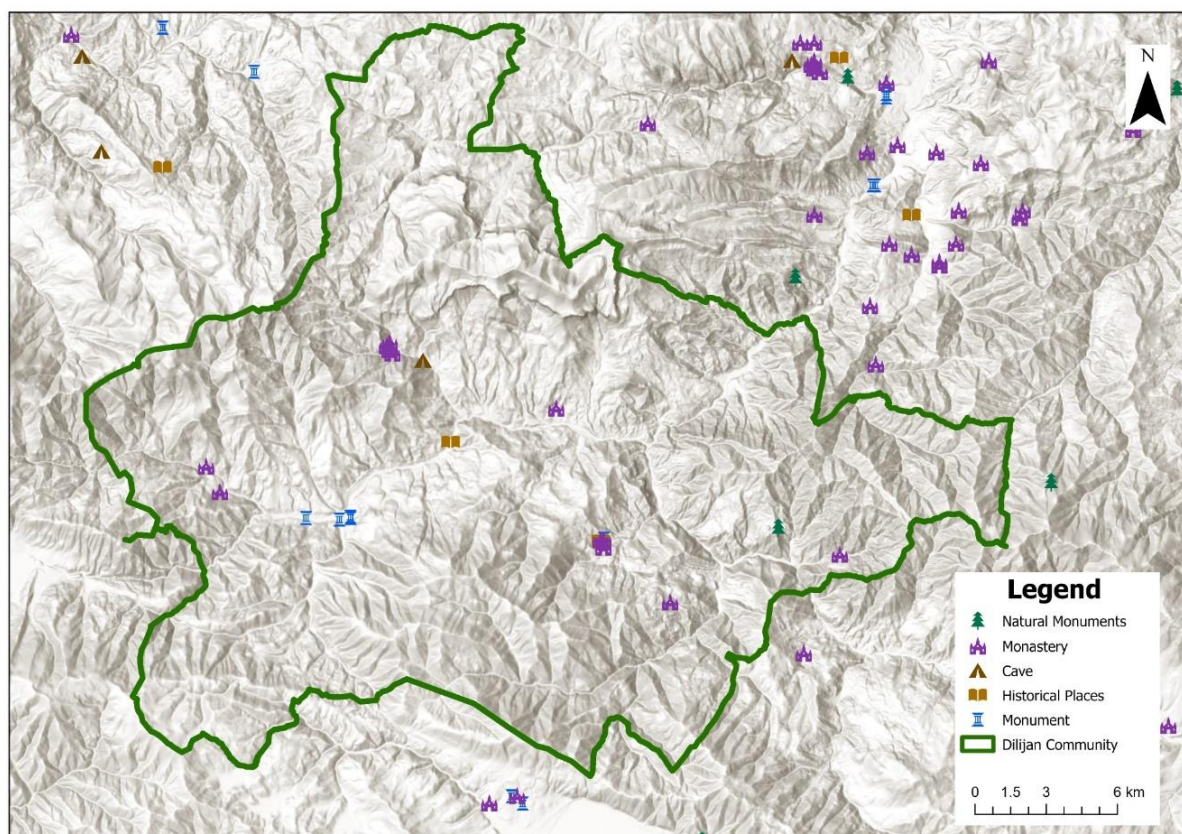
The main market for the named natural attractions comprises domestic same-day and one- to two-night visitors, international nature-and-culture travelers, specialized wildlife watchers and nature photographers, families and educational groups, and gastronomy-oriented visitors. Lake and monastery-linked sites serve broader leisure markets; sensitive forest, subalpine and wildlife locations should be packaged for smaller guided groups. This distinction allows high-use attractions to absorb general visitation while special-interest products create higher-value, lower-impact use.

Gastronomy is also a major part of the attraction profile and should be treated as a core tourism asset rather than a secondary service. Dilijan's cuisine is strongly shaped by the surrounding forest ecosystem and mountain food traditions. Wild herbs, mushrooms, berries, nuts, and fruits are widely used fresh, dried, or preserved, and appear in soups, salads, and main dishes. Clay-pot cooking in the kchuch tradition, khorovats, tolma, herb-based soups, mushroom dishes, and dishes such as aveluk are all relevant to the local tourism identity. In practice, this makes Dilijan one of the strongest examples in the project of a community where nature-based food systems already form part of the tourism experience.

What makes the gastronomy offer place-specific is its direct interpretation of the surrounding forest and mountain landscape, combined with Dilijan's established restaurants, guesthouses and nearby rural settlements. The product should show the origin, legal sourcing, seasonal use and cultural meaning of local ingredients, rather than simply list traditional dishes. No unsupervised commercial collection should be promoted inside restricted National Park zones.

Local traditions further strengthen the attraction base. Seasonal food-sharing practices, harvest-related celebrations, religious feasts such as Easter and Vardavar, and more recent food and artisan gatherings provide a cultural layer that supports ecotourism development. These are especially valuable because they connect tourism not only to places, but also to living community practices.

Figure 5. Indicative natural and cultural attraction categories in and around Dilijan Community

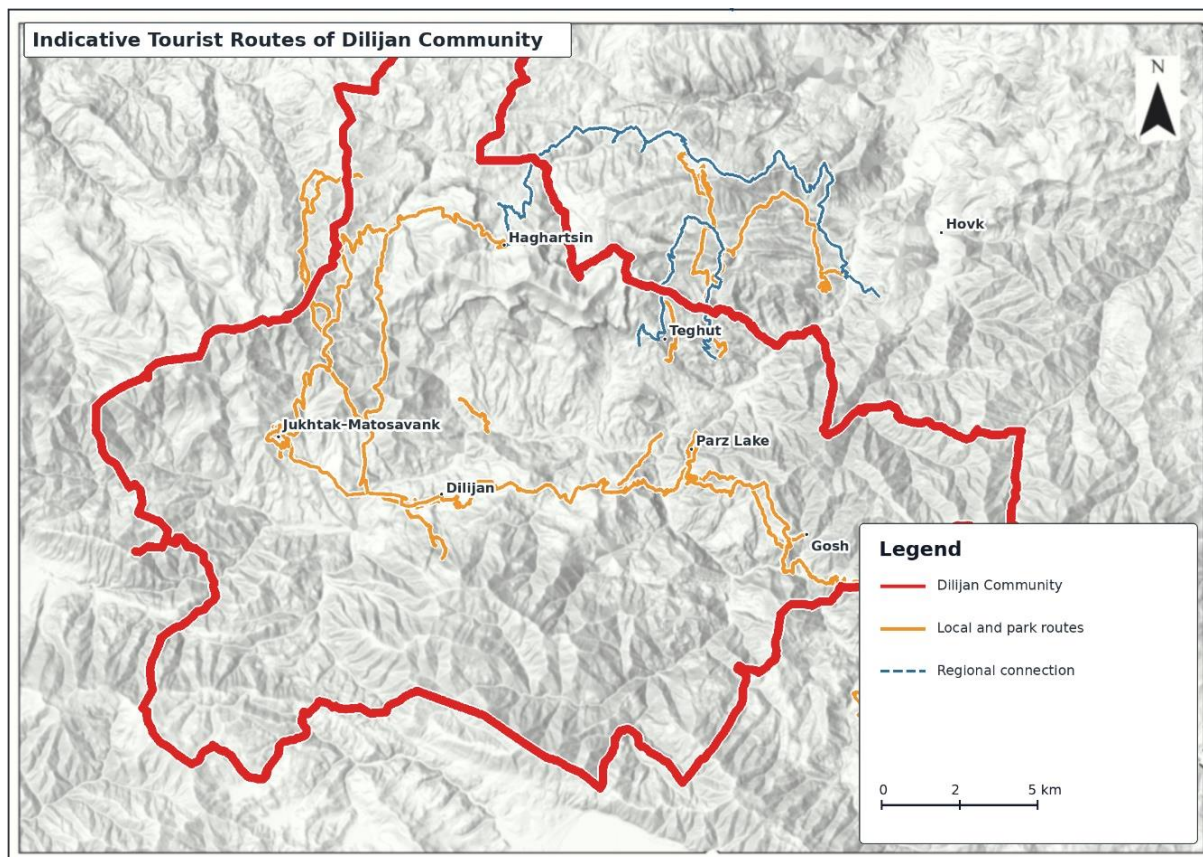


Note: Symbols outside the community boundary indicate nearby attractions that may support connected packages. The current map does not name individual points or show route status; numbered priority sites, access conditions and operator links should be added during route validation.

Source: Project GIS layers, 2026.

Analysis of available official and user-generated spatial data identifies a dense route system centred on Dilijan town, Jukhtak and Matosavank monasteries, Parz Lake, Gosh, Haghartsin, Teghut and adjoining forest ridges. Individual local and connector alignments are generally about 2-27 km, while the Transcaucasian Trail records form a longer corridor composed of several segments. The mapped network distinguishes local and National Park routes from regional connections towards Hovk and Ijevan; it is an initial spatial inventory rather than a publication-ready trail map.

Figure 6. Indicative tourist-route network in and around Dilijan Community



Note: Route alignments are indicative and require field and protected-area validation before publication or promotion.

Source: Analysis of available official and user-generated spatial data.

The network confirms that Dilijan can organize products around several clear gateways rather than promote every recorded alignment equally. Short routes around Jukhtak-Matosavank, Dilijan town and Parz Lake can support half-day walking and interpretation; Parz Lake-Gosh and Haghartsin-Teghut corridors can support full-day nature-and-culture products; longer ridge and cross-community connections require guides, seasonal controls and coordination with Dilijan National Park and neighbouring communities.

The mapped network is not automatically visitor-ready. Duplicate and alternative traces must be consolidated, and each selected route verified for legal access, National Park zoning, distance and elevation, surface condition, habitat sensitivity, fire and landslide exposure, emergency access, signage, operator and maintenance responsibility. Initial promotion should focus on routes with clear gateways, existing services and confirmed environmental conditions.

Activities

Dilijan already supports a relatively broad set of tourism activities. The filled assessment identifies hiking, camping, and guided tours as existing activities, and this is consistent with the destination's current profile. Forest trails, monastery-linked visits, lake visits, short and long walks, and general nature recreation are already established parts of Dilijan's tourism use. Hiking remains the strongest activity base, especially because the area combines accessible forest routes with well-known anchor attractions such as Parz Lake, Gosh, and Haghartsin. Camping and small-group outdoor recreation are also present, although these require stronger control in ecologically sensitive areas.

Motorized adventure activity requires a separate suitability test. Within Dilijan National Park, uncontrolled 4WD or quad-bike tours are inconsistent with the controlled-ecotourism model. The only potentially suitable vehicle product is a controlled transfer on an existing legal road to a validated trailhead or viewpoint outside sensitive/restricted zones, followed by a guided walking experience. If no route passes environmental, legal and safety validation, this product should not be offered in Dilijan.

Beyond general recreation, Dilijan also has strong potential for interpretation-based ecotourism. Forest and subalpine biodiversity, medicinal herbs, wild food ingredients, and local gastronomy create good conditions for guided ecological walks, food-linked experiences, herb and mushroom interpretation, and small educational programs. This is also consistent with stakeholder discussions, which pointed to eco-camps, biodiversity content, and stronger ecological interpretation as particularly relevant for Dilijan.

Cultural and religious tourism activities are also part of the baseline. Monastery visits, town-based tourism, and food-oriented travel are already integrated into how visitors use the destination. For that reason, ecotourism in Dilijan should not be treated as a completely separate market segment, but as a more structured and environmentally responsible layer within an already diverse tourism system.

Visitor Flow

Visitor flow in Dilijan is high in relative planning terms, even though there is no single site-specific visitor monitoring system that provides a complete official baseline for all ecotourism sites and routes within the community. The assessment classifies visitor flow as high, and this is supported by the overall tourism profile of the town as a major resort and nature destination. Dilijan is widely promoted as one of Armenia's main mountain tourism locations, it has an established accommodation base, and it concentrates several of the region's best-known natural and cultural attractions within an easily accessible area.

Available figures provide useful context but not a Dilijan market size. Tavush marz recorded 6,596 registered incoming tourists staying in hotel facilities in 2024; this excludes many domestic, same-day and informal-accommodation visitors and cannot be assigned to Dilijan alone. National demand evidence cited in the Scoping Report indicates that among leisure visitors nature/sightseeing accounted for 36.1% of motivation, historical/cultural heritage 29.6% and gastronomy 11.7%; a separate 2022 estimate identified 28,808 ecotourists among 1.67 million visitors (1.7%). These are national proxies, not community-segment estimates. Dilijan should establish its own visitor, overnight-stay, expenditure and segment baseline in the first implementation year.

Table 1. Visitor flow

Priority segment	Likely visit pattern	Best-fit products	Evidence status / baseline need
Domestic leisure visitors	Same-day or one- to two-night	Accessible forest walks, Parz Lake, monastery-landscape routes, gastronomy	Established segment; size and expenditure not available at community level
International nature-and-culture visitors	One to three nights within a wider Armenia itinerary	Guided forest routes, biodiversity interpretation, cultural landscape and local food	National nature/culture motivation provides an indicative proxy; Dilijan share not available
Specialized wildlife watchers and nature photographers	Small groups; longer guided sessions	Forest and subalpine birdwatching, habitat interpretation, low-disturbance photography	Niche product underdeveloped; route, season and demand baseline required
Families, schools and youth groups	Day visit or organized one- to two-day programme	Eco-camp, guided learning, forest conduct and clean-up activities	Existing eco-education example; annual participant data required
Gastronomy- and culture-oriented visitors	Meal/tasting combined with a route or overnight stay	Forest-to-table experience, demonstrations, preserves, honey and seasonal menus	National gastronomy motivation is an indicative proxy; provider sales baseline required

Source: Authors' elaboration.

This means that visitor pressure in Dilijan should be treated as real, even if exact ecotourism numbers are not available for each route or attraction. In planning terms, the key issue is not whether tourism exists, but how to manage already substantial tourism use in a setting with high ecological sensitivity. Compared to Vardenis and several other pilot communities, Dilijan is therefore a site where ecotourism planning responds to an existing tourism baseline rather than creating one from the beginning.

Accessibility

Accessibility in Dilijan is good and is one of the reasons why tourism pressure is already relatively strong. The town lies about 99 km from Yerevan and functions as an easily reachable resort and park gateway. This makes it different from more remote pilot sites, where access itself is a major limiting factor. Within the community, access to key attractions is also relatively favorable, especially around the main town, monastery routes, and the better-known lake and forest sites.

At the same time, good overall accessibility should not be confused with complete tourism readiness. The stakeholder process and the filled plan file both point to practical gaps such as incomplete signage, weak trail organization in some areas, and the need for clearer route entry and exit points. In other words, access to Dilijan is easy, but access management within the tourism landscape remains uneven. This is why accessibility is an advantage for the destination, but also one of the reasons why stronger visitor organization is needed.

6. Suitability Assessment & Zoning

Dilijan is suitable for ecotourism only under a controlled, conservation-led and spatially differentiated model. This conclusion follows from the combination of very high ecological sensitivity, already established tourism demand, good general accessibility, and the site's relationship with the protected-area and candidate Emerald Network context. The primary planning question is not how to expand tourism, but how to use visitor management, interpretation and local services to reinforce conservation while preventing additional pressure on ecologically sensitive forest landscapes.

Ecological sensitivity is high and is the main factor shaping the zoning logic. Dilijan lies within a forest-dominated protected area system, with mixed deciduous forest as the principal habitat and multiple Red Book species recorded in the area. The national park covers 33,765 hectares, with an additional 8,167-hectare buffer zone, and forest ecosystems occupy about 94% of the park area. This means that the site cannot be treated as a general recreation landscape. Tourism planning must start from habitat protection, not from unrestricted visitor use. In practical terms, this requires stronger control of movement, better route definition, and limits on tourism expansion in the most sensitive parts of the landscape.

Tourism demand is high. This is consistent with the site's established national profile, its concentration of well-known attractions, and the already active tourism economy of the town and surrounding settlements. The filled assessment correctly identifies Dilijan as one of the most popular destinations in Armenia. At the same time, high demand should not be interpreted as a justification for generalized expansion. Under Dilijan conditions, high demand increases the need for zoning because the ecological carrying context is more constrained than in less visited sites.

Accessibility is good and supports both the popularity of the destination and the need for stronger management. Dilijan is easy to reach from Yerevan and already serves as a gateway to forest, lake, monastery, and trail-based sites. Within the community, access to major tourism points is relatively favorable, particularly around the town and better-known attractions. However, good regional accessibility should not be confused with complete internal organization. Trail entry points, route signage, and visitor orientation remain uneven, which means that high accessibility can translate into unmanaged pressure if not matched by stronger site-level organization. The zoning result reflects this combination of factors. A strict conservation classification is not selected as a standalone management zone for the package, even though ecological sensitivity is high. This should be understood carefully. It does not mean that highly sensitive habitats are open for general tourism use. Rather, it means that the package is not designed around a separate strict-conservation tourism component, but around controlled ecotourism and sustainable development functions under existing protected-area conditions. Sensitive habitats, Red Book species areas, and the most vulnerable ecological zones still require protection-led treatment and should remain outside the main visitor-use space.

The selection of a controlled ecotourism zone is fully justified. This is the core operational zone for Dilijan and corresponds to the actual conditions of the site: high tourism attractiveness, strong ecological value, and the need for guided and better-structured use. In this zone, tourism can continue and improve, but only through marked routes, interpretation-based experiences, low-impact activities, and more effective visitor organization. Hiking, guided visits, nature observation, gastronomy-linked experiences, and limited camping are all compatible with this zoning logic when properly managed.

The sustainable development zone is also justified and is important in the Dilijan context. Because tourism in Dilijan is already linked to accommodation, gastronomy, local services, and town-

based visitor activity, part of the tourism system necessarily extends beyond ecologically sensitive forest space. The sustainable development zone is therefore the appropriate planning space for accommodation, food services, visitor facilities, information points, and other community-linked functions that support tourism without placing all pressure directly inside sensitive natural areas. This is especially important in Dilijan, where local economic benefit depends on stronger integration between the town, surrounding settlements, and the protected landscape. The site is not appropriate for open or uncontrolled tourism expansion, but it is fully appropriate for controlled ecotourism supported by selected development functions in lower-risk areas. In practical terms, this means that visitor-intensive and service-related functions should be concentrated where infrastructure and settlement context can absorb them, while forest habitats and biodiversity-rich zones should be approached through controlled access, route-based use, and stronger ecological discipline.

The proposed Dilijan National-Park-Friendly service standard and co-branding tool is an indicative local pilot to be jointly designed and adopted by Dilijan National Park and Dilijan Municipality with providers; it does not constitute official certification until the relevant authorities approve it.

Table 2. Dilijan National-Park-Friendly service standard and co-branding tool

Scoring area	Indicative points	Minimum evidence
Biodiversity and route compliance	25	Approved routes; no prohibited access or collection; wildlife-disturbance rules
Waste and wastewater practice	15	Waste separation/removal plan; lawful wastewater arrangement; no discharge to natural sites
Water and energy management	10	Recorded reduction measures and maintenance checks
Visitor information and conduct	15	Visible rules, biodiversity interpretation, emergency and fire information
Local procurement and employment	15	Documented use of local food/products and local staff/service providers
Guide competence and safety	10	Required registration/certification, route competence, first-aid and incident procedure
Monitoring and maintenance contribution	10	Visitor data reporting and agreed in-kind or financial contribution to route/interpretation upkeep

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Proposed threshold: at least 70/100 points and no critical failure involving unlawful access, wildlife disturbance, fire safety, unmanaged waste/wastewater or false environmental claims. Assessment should be annual, with a corrective-action period and public removal of the co-brand if compliance is not restored.

Immediate practical recommendations for Dilijan are to: (i) validate priority routes, zones and sensitive areas through GIS and field checks; (ii) sign a National Park–Municipality cooperation agreement and establish a local working group; (iii) create a guide training, certification and route-authorization system; (iv) pilot the National-Park-Friendly score and co-brand; (v) establish route-level visitor and environmental baselines; and (vi) launch only the product tools that have a named operator, booking channel, maintenance owner and environmental rules.

This zoning approach provides the spatial and environmental framework for the ecotourism products proposed in the following chapter: higher-use services and visitor functions should be concentrated in already developed or lower-risk areas, while nature-based experiences within sensitive landscapes should remain route-based, guided where necessary, and subject to ecological safeguards.

7. Ecotourism Product Development

The ecotourism product profile of Dilijan should be built around experiences that are already credible under current site conditions: forest-based recreation, biodiversity interpretation, local gastronomy, cultural landscape tourism, and small-scale nature experiences linked to well-known attractions. This is not a site where ecotourism needs to be invented from the beginning. It is a site where an already active tourism destination needs to be reshaped into a more structured, ecologically responsible, and higher-quality ecotourism offer. The product logic should therefore not aim at adding more volume, but at improving the type, quality, and organization of visitor experiences.

The most relevant visitor groups for Dilijan are relatively clear:

- The first group consists of domestic visitors and same-day and one- to two-night leisure travelers from Yerevan and other Armenian urban centers, who already use Dilijan as an accessible forest and mountain destination.
- The second group includes nature-oriented international visitors interested in hiking, scenic forest landscapes, and protected-area experiences, including hiking, birdwatching, biodiversity interpretation, nature photography, cultural-landscape visits and forest-based wellbeing experiences.
- The third group is made up of families, school groups, and youth groups, for whom Dilijan is particularly suitable because it already has examples of eco-education and organized camping formats.
- The fourth group includes gastronomy - and culture-oriented visitors who may not identify themselves primarily as ecotourists, but whose travel motivations can be connected to local food traditions, natural landscapes, and monastery-linked routes. These groups differ in expectations, but they can all be served within the same broad product framework if the experiences are structured around low-impact use and clear interpretation.

The strongest experiences in Dilijan are forest-based and route-based. Hiking is the core activity and should remain the backbone of the ecotourism product. This includes short and medium-length walks around accessible attractions such as Parz Lake, forest routes linked to Gosh and Haghartsin, and longer guided walks through selected parts of Dilijan National Park. The product should not treat every walk as simple recreation. In Dilijan, hiking can be enriched through interpretation of forest ecosystems, medicinal herbs, mushrooms, berries, habitat types, and Red Book species. This is particularly important because local stakeholders specifically emphasized that tourism packages should explain the ecological value of the area and not only show its scenery.

Wildlife and biodiversity observation should be treated as a primary, cross-cutting product line.

It is appropriate for Dilijan because the site has strong biodiversity value and because stakeholders explicitly pointed to the need for flora and fauna interpretation. At the same time, this experience has to remain carefully designed. It should focus on guided observation, landscape interpretation, birdwatching where suitable, and use of low-disturbance formats in selected locations rather than unrestricted wildlife-seeking activity. The key point is that biodiversity should become part of the visitor experience through knowledge and interpretation, not through intrusive access to sensitive habitats.

Cultural landscape tourism is also highly relevant and should be expressed through a combination of natural and cultural stops rather than as a separate tourism segment. In Dilijan,

the tourism experience is already shaped by the relationship between forest, monastery, river valley, traditional food, and town atmosphere. The most suitable product form is therefore a combined route model in which visitors move through landscapes where ecological, spiritual, and cultural value reinforce each other. Haghartsin, Gosh, forest lakes, springs, and town-based heritage elements are particularly suitable for this integrated product logic.

Dilijan also has stronger potential than most pilot sites for non-timber forest product-related experiences. The filled assessment identifies honey, herbs, mushrooms, and berries as present, and this fits naturally with the local food identity. These elements should not be turned into extractive or uncontrolled tourism activities. Instead, they should be interpreted and presented through food-based experiences, guided herb and mushroom interpretation where appropriate, tasting, local menus, preserves, teas, and culinary storytelling. In practical terms, this means that the ecotourism product can include forest-based gastronomy without encouraging unsupervised collection in sensitive areas. This is one of Dilijan's clearest comparative advantages. The gastronomy component deserves to be treated as a full product line rather than only as supporting hospitality. Dilijan's food identity is closely linked to its forest environment and mountain traditions. Clay-pot cooking in the kchuch tradition, mushroom dishes, herb-based soups, aveluk, tolma, khorovats, preserves, fruit-based preparations, and honey-related products give Dilijan the ability to offer ecotourism experiences that are rooted in place rather than generic restaurant services. This is especially important because many ecotourists do not seek only routes and landscapes; they also seek local food systems, local ingredients, and authenticity. In Dilijan, gastronomy can connect biodiversity, local livelihoods, and visitor experience in a way that few other pilot communities can match.

The eco-education dimension should also be treated as a real product opportunity. The tent-based eco-camp initiative in Dilijan National Park, developed with the "Contribution to Women and Children" NGO and involving students from Dilijan Secondary School No. 2, is particularly important here. It shows that Dilijan is already capable of hosting education-oriented and low-impact tourism formats that combine ecological learning, hiking, forest clean-up, recreation, meals, and basic services. This provides a strong basis for future products aimed at schools, youth groups, educational camps, and organized group experiences linked to environmental awareness. In Dilijan, this is not a theoretical possibility but an already demonstrated direction. The seasonal dimension of the product should also be clearly differentiated. Spring is particularly suitable for forest walks, herb observation, flowering landscapes, and eco-education activities. Summer is the main season for hiking, camping, guided nature experiences, family tourism, and higher general visitor flow. Early autumn is especially valuable for gastronomy-linked tourism, forest landscape viewing, berry- and mushroom-related interpretation, and harvest-linked cultural experiences. Winter should not be ignored, but under the current package logic it should remain secondary. Dilijan may continue to receive visitors in winter because of its established tourism role, but the ecotourism package itself is strongest from spring to autumn, when biodiversity interpretation, trails, and gastronomy can be used most fully.

A practical optional itinerary for Dilijan should therefore combine nature, gastronomy, and interpretation rather than trying to maximize the number of stops. A one-day format could begin in Dilijan town with visitor orientation and a short introduction to the ecological and cultural value of the area, and continue with a guided forest route toward a key attraction such as Parz Lake (Parz Lich) or a selected route linked to Haghartsin or Gosh villages, include interpretation on forest habitats, herbs, mushrooms, and protected species, and conclude with a community-based or town-based meal built around local products and traditional dishes. A two-day format could add an overnight stay in a local guesthouse, a second route focused on biodiversity or cultural landscape, and a stronger gastronomy

or educational component. This type of itinerary is realistic because it builds on what Dilijan already has, while reshaping it into a more coherent ecotourism product.

The product direction for Dilijan should therefore be defined by quality, interpretation, and ecological discipline. The site is not suitable for broad tourism expansion into all parts of the forest landscape, and it does not need artificial product multiplication. What it needs is a well-structured product family built around forest hiking, biodiversity interpretation, eco-education, cultural landscape routes, and gastronomy rooted in local nature-based food systems.

Based on the product opportunities and visitor segments identified above, the following table translates Dilijan's principal ecotourism strengths into a focused set of practical product and service tools. Instead of proposing additional tourism volume, the products are designed to improve the quality, interpretation and local economic value of existing visitor experiences. For each product, the table identifies the target visitor format, opportunities for local service provision and spending, and the principal environmental and operational conditions that should be met before implementation.

Table 3. Priority ecotourism product and service tools

Product / service tool	Visitor format and market	Delivery and local spending	Safeguards and launch conditions
Forest and monastery interpretation circuit	Three- to six-hour guided walk or one- to two-day package; domestic and international nature/culture visitors	Certified local guide; town/village meal; guesthouse option; booking through participating providers and destination information channels	Only validated routes linked to Parz Lake, Gosh or Haghartsin areas; group limit set per route; no off-route access; operator and maintenance owner named
Forest and subalpine wildlife watching	Small guided groups for birdwatchers, naturalists and nature photographers; season and timing set by scientific review	Specialist guide, local transport on legal roads, accommodation and early/packed meal; optional researcher-led interpretation	No nest-location promotion, playback, drone disturbance or habitat entry; annual route/season review with National Park and research partner
Forest-to-table Dilijan	Half-day or evening experience combined with a walk, tasting or cooking demonstration; gastronomy, family and culture markets	Local households, restaurants, beekeepers and producers; menus, preserves, teas, honey and demonstrations create several spending points	Legal and traceable sourcing; no uncontrolled collection in restricted zones; hygiene and truthful origin claims; seasonality explained
Eco-education camp and junior ranger-style programme	One- to two-day organized programme for schools, youth and families, building on the existing eco-camp experience	National Park/NGO facilitator, trained educator/guide, local meals and approved camping/service provider	Approved site and group plan; fire, waste, water, first-aid and supervision rules; learning and conduct outcomes recorded
Controlled 4x4 trailhead/viewpoint transfer — conditional	Bookable transfer plus short guided walk for visitors needing access support or a managed adventure format	Licensed local driver/operator; fixed route, timetable, passenger capacity and booking; spending linked to guide/meal/overnight services	Existing legal road only, outside sensitive/restricted zones; no cross-country driving; route, hazard, insurance and environmental validation required; do not launch if validation fails

Source: Authors' elaboration.

To complement the priority product and service tools identified above, indicative retail price ranges have been developed as a preliminary 2026 market benchmark. In Dilijan, where an established tourism and hospitality market already exists, these ranges are intended to help translate the proposed ecotourism products into potentially bookable offers and provide local guides, accommodation providers, food businesses and activity operators with an initial reference for product packaging and commercial positioning. They are indicative planning **ranges only and do not constitute recommended or approved tariffs.**

The ranges are expressed in AMD and reflect comparable publicly available tourism and activity offers in Armenia. Per-person prices assume the stated paying group size, while vehicle prices assume the stated capacity. Before launch, each product should have a confirmed itinerary, provider and supplier quotations, minimum group size, inclusions and exclusions, applicable taxes and commissions, cancellation conditions and any authority-set fees. Prices should be reviewed annually and adjusted to actual operating costs, market conditions and service quality.

Market benchmark: publicly available offers accessed on 8 September 2026, including ONE WAY TOUR day tours (AMD 8,000–13,500/person); Meet Dilijan and Yell Extreme Park activities (AMD 5,000–25,000); Armenian Explorer full-day 4x4 excursions (AMD 100,000/vehicle); and ExploreArmenia four-day specialist birdwatching tours (USD 460–910/person).

Table 4. Indicative product price ranges (2026 planning benchmark)

Product / service tool	Indicative 2026 retail range	Unit / base	Principal inclusions / exclusions
Forest and monastery interpretation circuit	15,000-30,000 AMD / 60,000-110,000 AMD	Per person; 3-6 hours or 2 days/1 night; 4-6 participants	Guide and interpretation included; overnight version also includes accommodation, breakfast and local transfers. Meals and paid-entry fees otherwise extra.
Forest and subalpine wildlife watching	20,000-45,000 AMD	Per person; half/full day; 3-6 participants	Specialist guide and approved route/viewpoint interpretation included; transport, meals and specialist equipment extra.
Forest-to-table Dilijan	18,000-35,000 AMD	Per person; half day/evening	Guided walk or producer visit plus tasting/cooking and meal included as programmed; take-home purchases extra.
Eco-education camp and junior ranger-style programme	20,000-35,000 AMD / 45,000-70,000 AMD	Per participant; one day or 2 days/1 night; group quotation	Facilitation, learning materials and meals included; overnight version includes basic accommodation. Transport quoted separately.
Controlled 4x4 trailhead/viewpoint transfer - conditional	25,000-60,000 AMD	Per vehicle, round trip; up to 4 passengers	Legal-road transfer and agreed waiting time included; guide, activity, meals and entry fees extra.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Indicative connected package: a two- to three-day Dilijan–Ijevan forest, biodiversity, culture and gastronomy itinerary could combine Dilijan's National Park and hospitality base with Ijevan-area forest and community experiences. The package requires a joint operator agreement, verified travel times and routes, compatible booking and cancellation rules, and a clear division of spending between communities before marketing.

8. Infrastructure & Service Needs

Dilijan has a stronger infrastructure base than most of the pilot communities, but this should not be confused with a fully organized ecotourism system. The destination already has road access, accommodation, visitor movement, and an established tourism reputation. At the same time, current site conditions and stakeholder discussions indicate several practical weaknesses that directly affect ecotourism quality and environmental management. The main issue is therefore not the absence of tourism infrastructure in absolute terms, but the mismatch between high visitor use and uneven site-level organization. This is especially visible in trail management, signage, visitor orientation, and environmental service systems.

A first priority is trail and visitor-route infrastructure. Dilijan already functions through forest walks, monastery-linked routes, lake visits, and guided nature experiences, yet the stakeholder process identified incomplete signage, weak route marking, and insufficiently organized trail entry and exit points as a major problem. Under Dilijan conditions, this is not a minor service issue. Because visitor pressure is already high, poor route definition can directly translate into off-route movement, habitat disturbance, and weaker control of visitor behavior. Practical improvements should therefore focus on clearly marked trailheads, route markers, directional signs, interpretation panels, and simple visitor information tools that make movement more structured without adding heavy infrastructure.

A second priority is visitor information and interpretation. Dilijan already has a visitor center function and tourism services, but the current system is still not strong enough for the volume and ecological sensitivity of the destination. The most realistic improvement is not to create additional large buildings, but to strengthen the quality and coherence of the existing system. This should include better ecological interpretation, information on rules of conduct, orientation toward official routes, and stronger presentation of biodiversity and local gastronomy as part of the visitor experience. In Dilijan, information infrastructure is not only a tourism service; it is also a management tool.

A third issue is environmental infrastructure, particularly water supply and wastewater management. This point is more serious in Dilijan than in several other pilot communities because the destination already has substantial visitor use and urban-service pressure. According to available local information, the city's drinking water is drawn from the Aghstev River at around 1,500 meters elevation, but spring flood-related turbidity creates operational problems by clogging filters. At the same time, poor condition of private-house pipelines, insufficient water quality, weak protection of sanitary zones, and lack of proper chlorination all indicate weaknesses in the current water service system. These are not abstract utility problems; under tourism conditions they directly affect destination quality, environmental safety, and visitor confidence.

Wastewater management is an even more critical issue. Dilijan currently does not have a functioning treatment facility. An earlier treatment system built with support from UNDP and Coca-Cola is no longer functioning, which means that the destination operates with a structural wastewater management gap. This is especially relevant for ecotourism planning because Dilijan's brand depends heavily on forest landscapes, springs, river valleys, and environmental quality. If wastewater and sewage systems remain weak, tourism growth risks undermining the very ecological image on which the destination depends. The importance of this issue is also reflected in current World Bank tourism and infrastructure planning for Dilijan, which includes interventions aimed at reducing pollution in the Aghstev River and improving urban environmental conditions. Accommodation should be treated as present and active, but not automatically sufficient in quality or sustainability terms. Dilijan already has one of the strongest accommodation bases among the pilot communities, which allows ecotourism products to build on

existing service structures rather than starting from zero. The practical focus should therefore be less on expansion of lodging volume and more on improving linkage between accommodation, route-based ecotourism products, local food, and visitor guidance. In Dilijan, the service challenge is not simply capacity, but coordination and quality.

The same logic applies to local services more broadly. Because Dilijan already has restaurants, guesthouses, guides, and tourism businesses, the next step is not to create a tourism economy, but to align it more clearly with ecotourism standards. This includes stronger integration of local gastronomy, better orientation toward official routes and sensitive areas, and clearer differentiation between high-volume leisure tourism and lower-impact ecotourism products.

For Dilijan, the practical infrastructure agenda should therefore focus on the following improvements:

- Stronger route organization through trailheads, signs, markers, and interpretation points
- Improved visitor information linked to biodiversity, conduct rules, and official access routes
- Upgrading of water-supply reliability and public-health-related water service conditions
- Rehabilitation or replacement of ineffective wastewater treatment and sewage management systems
- Better linkage between accommodation, gastronomy, guiding, and ecotourism product delivery
- Avoidance of new infrastructure placement in ecologically sensitive forest areas

Under Dilijan conditions, infrastructure planning is inseparable from environmental management. Because the destination already attracts substantial visitor use, even relatively basic gaps such as weak signage or ineffective wastewater treatment have larger consequences than they would in a low-use site. The practical goal is therefore to make existing tourism infrastructure more coherent, environmentally compatible, and capable of supporting controlled ecotourism rather than unmanaged growth.

A practical cooperation model between Dilijan National Park and ecotourism providers should include: validation of routes and seasons; provider access agreements where legally required; joint guide training; a shared visitor code; exchange of booking, visitor and incident data; National Park review of interpretation content; provider participation in route maintenance and monitoring; and joint use of the National-Park-Friendly co-brand by services that pass the agreed score.

9. Governance & Institutional Arrangements

The governance structure for ecotourism development in Dilijan is more complex than in the less tourism-developed pilot communities, because the site combines a protected-area landscape, an already active tourism economy, community land, and a strong service base in the town itself. In practice, ecotourism in Dilijan cannot be managed by a single institution. It requires clear division of responsibilities between conservation authorities, local government, tourism-related businesses, and supporting organizations already active in the area.

The main environmental and territorial management role lies with Dilijan National Park SNCO under the Ministry of Environment. This is the central institution for conservation-related oversight in the site, and its role is especially important because Dilijan's tourism profile is directly tied to forest habitats, Red Book species, lake and river systems, and the wider protected landscape. In governance terms, this means that the park is not only a background institution but a core actor in defining where tourism can take place, which routes and sites are suitable for visitor use, and what level of control is needed in ecologically sensitive areas. The fact that the site is linked to both protected-area and Emerald-related planning increases the importance of this role, because ecotourism in Dilijan must remain compatible with biodiversity protection rather than operate as a parallel and disconnected activity.

Dilijan Municipality should play the main coordinating role at community level. This is particularly important because the tourism economy of Dilijan extends well beyond the park boundary and depends heavily on town-based and community-based functions such as accommodation, gastronomy, local roads, public spaces, signage, and visitor support. The municipality is therefore the most suitable actor to convene local stakeholders, connect ecotourism planning with community development priorities, and link nature-based attractions with the service economy of the town and surrounding settlements. In the Dilijan context, municipal coordination is especially important because the site already has qualitatively high tourism use and demand, pending a documented site-level baseline, and unmanaged growth in service areas can directly affect the ecological quality of the destination.

Dilijan Municipality and Dilijan National Park should formalize this relationship through a memorandum of cooperation. The agreement should define the map and route-approval process, responsibilities for signs and waste, seasonal closures and emergency communication, provider engagement, data ownership and reporting, the co-branding committee, maintenance contributions, annual review and a process for resolving operational disputes.

The Tourism Committee under the Ministry of Economy also has relevance, although its role is broader and less site-specific than that of the national park or municipality. For Dilijan, the Tourism Committee is mainly relevant in relation to destination promotion, tourism standards, and broader tourism-policy alignment. This matters because Dilijan is already a nationally recognized destination, and ecotourism planning here should not be disconnected from the wider tourism system of Armenia. At the same time, the local package should avoid overdependence on general promotion and instead focus on improving site-level management and quality.

Civil society and support organizations are particularly important in Dilijan, and this is one of the areas where the site differs from more weakly organized communities. The stakeholder process and wider project context show that REC Caucasus Armenia has already supported practical ecotourism-related initiatives in the area, including the eco-camp model in Dilijan National Park (in 2022-2024, 2025, EU BSB 1138 "Anti-littering Partnership Project"). This demonstrates that facilitation,

training, and project-based support are not theoretical roles here, but already part of the local ecotourism landscape. In addition, organizations such as WWF Armenia and the Caucasus Nature Fund are relevant in the broader protected-area and conservation-finance context of Dilijan. Their role is not to replace the national park or municipality, but to strengthen conservation-sensitive planning, such as support the National park in terms of strengthening its eco-monitoring capacities, management quality, and help align tourism use with biodiversity priorities.

Community-level service actors also need to be treated as part of the governance system, not only as beneficiaries. In Dilijan, the private sector is more developed than in most other pilot sites and already includes guesthouses, hotels, restaurants, guides, tourism intermediaries, and food-related businesses.² Because tourism is already active, the governance challenge is not to create a tourism economy from scratch, but to organize it more clearly around ecotourism principles. This means that local service providers should be involved in route management discussions, visitor information, product packaging, and seasonal planning, especially where tourism use directly affects sensitive forest areas.

Coordination in Dilijan should therefore be more formalized than in low-use sites. A simple ad hoc approach would not be sufficient under conditions of high visitor demand, strong ecological sensitivity and the candidate Emerald Network context. The most suitable mechanism is a standing National Park–Municipality coordination arrangement that can review routes, visitor pressures, conservation restrictions, service standards, environmental monitoring and investment proposals. Tourism-sector participation should support this arrangement, but conservation authorities must retain the lead on ecological conditions and restrictions.

The coordination mechanism should also respond to growing urbanization and tourism construction at the forest edge. Its annual work programme should compare new permits and built-up-area GIS layers with National Park, Emerald, habitat and hazard information; identify encroachment or visual-pressure hotspots; and recommend siting, setback, rehabilitation or enforcement action. A quantified urban-expansion baseline is not currently available and should be established in the first year.

Public-private partnership is relevant, but it should not be understood only in terms of large investment. In Dilijan, PPP can operate at several levels. At the smaller and more realistic level, it can support trail maintenance, signage, visitor information, interpretation materials, and coordinated delivery of local ecotourism services. At a broader level, PPP is also relevant because Dilijan already has enough market activity and visibility to attract more structured collaboration between public actors and local tourism businesses. However, this should remain guided by ecological conditions. PPP in Dilijan should improve quality and management, not stimulate uncontrolled tourism expansion into sensitive forest areas.

A critical governance gap remains the absence of co-management, formal revenue-sharing arrangements, and structured benefit distribution directly tied to ecotourism use. Under Dilijan conditions, this is a more serious issue than in low-demand sites, because tourism is already producing value and pressure at the same time. Without clearer arrangements, the destination risks continuing with a model in which economic benefits are generated, but conservation responsibilities remain unevenly carried by public institutions alone. This is one of the areas where future governance improvement is most needed.

² <https://www.gotodili.com/en/plan-your-trip/where-to-stay>

For Dilijan, the most effective institutional arrangement is therefore one in which the national park leads on ecological conditions and conservation-sensitive tourism space, the municipality leads on local coordination and service linkage, private and community-based actors deliver the visitor experience, and supporting organizations strengthen quality, facilitation, and conservation alignment. Under current conditions, this is the only arrangement capable of matching the site's actual combination of high biodiversity value, strong tourism demand, and already active local tourism economy.

The governance arrangements described above require a clear allocation of operational responsibilities if they are to function in practice. Table 5 therefore translates the proposed institutional model into specific roles for the principal actors involved in ecotourism management and identifies the corresponding instruments through which these responsibilities should be implemented. The proposed division is intended to strengthen coordination between conservation management, municipal planning, tourism service delivery, scientific support and local economic participation, while avoiding overlaps or gaps in responsibility.

Table 5. Proposed division of responsibilities

Actor	Core responsibilities	Operating instrument
Dilijan National Park SNCO	Validate ecologically suitable routes, seasons and restrictions; approve interpretation; lead sensitive-site monitoring and enforcement	Route/season register; access agreement; annual ecological review
Dilijan Municipality	Convene the platform; coordinate land-use, signs, waste, public space, provider register and forest-edge growth monitoring	Memorandum; annual action plan; municipal GIS/permit review
Guides and tourism providers	Use approved routes; brief visitors; meet service standard; record visitors/incidents; support maintenance and local purchasing	Provider code; co-brand agreement; booking and monitoring log
DMO / Tourism Committee / guide bodies	Support market development, registration/certification alignment, joint promotion and quality improvement	Approved product directory; training and market feedback
Research or academic organization	Provide science-based habitat sensitivity, wildlife and seasonal advice; review monitoring design and results	Research partnership and annual technical note
Civil-society and funding partners	Facilitate training, pilot tools, inclusion, eco-education and conservation-linked finance	Project agreements with exit and maintenance arrangements

Source: Authors' elaboration.

10. Visitor Management System

Dilijan requires a more structured visitor management system than most of the other pilot communities because tourism pressure is already high and the ecological sensitivity of the site is also high. Visitor management here is not a future precaution only; it is a current operational need. The destination already attracts large numbers of visitors to forest routes, monastery areas, lakes, and recreation sites, but this use is not yet supported everywhere by sufficiently consistent route control, visitor orientation, and ecological discipline.

A core requirement is stronger spatial control of visitor movement. Not all parts of Dilijan can absorb tourism use in the same way. Forest habitats, Red Book species areas, river corridors, and the more sensitive natural zones of the national park should not be treated as open recreation space. Visitor use should be concentrated along clearly defined and signposted routes, with access to the most sensitive areas remaining restricted or limited to very low-impact formats. In practice, this means that ecotourism in Dilijan should be route-based and management-led, rather than open-access and dispersed.

Visitor limits should be understood in functional rather than purely numerical terms at the current stage. There is no complete site-wide monitoring system that would justify fixed carrying-capacity thresholds for all routes or attractions. However, current conditions already justify limits in practical form: limiting access to selected sensitive areas, avoiding uncontrolled group movement, discouraging concentration outside official routes, and preventing visitor overflow into habitats that are not designed for tourism use. Where pressure is already visibly high, management should begin with route-based concentration and group control before attempting more formal numerical caps.

Guiding is the first practical control tool before reliable numerical carrying-capacity thresholds are available. Dilijan should establish a guide development pathway covering required national registration/certification, National Park route authorization, biodiversity and species interpretation, group management, first aid, fire and weather response, visitor conduct, incident reporting and annual refresher training. A public register should show each guide's approved routes, languages and specializations.

Rules of visitor conduct should be much clearer than they are at present. In Dilijan, this is especially important because the site already combines general leisure tourism with ecotourism expectations. Visitors should remain on designated trails, avoid entering sensitive forest or wetland-adjacent areas outside permitted routes, and follow clear guidance related to littering, waste disposal, noise, wildlife disturbance, and campfire use. Camping should be allowed only in appropriate locations, and informal vehicle movement into natural areas should not be part of the visitor model. Because Dilijan already attracts mixed visitor groups, these rules need to be visible, simple, and repeated at entry points, trailheads, visitor facilities, and through guide services.

Guided access should play a stronger role in Dilijan than in lower-pressure sites. It does not need to be imposed everywhere, but it should be expanded in the areas where biodiversity interpretation, ecological sensitivity, or route complexity make unstructured movement inappropriate. In Dilijan, guided access is valuable not only for control but also for product quality. It allows tourism to shift from simple leisure use toward more informed ecotourism experiences built around forest ecology, local food systems, and biodiversity interpretation.

Zoning must be treated as a continuing management function rather than a one-time map. Dilijan National Park and Dilijan Municipality should review route and zone layers at least annually and after

major fires, landslides, habitat findings, infrastructure proposals or monitoring alerts. Changes should be recorded in a controlled GIS version and communicated to guides and providers before the next season.

Seasonal management is also important. Dilijan receives tourism throughout much of the year, but visitor pressure and ecological sensitivity do not remain constant. Some periods require more caution because of habitat vulnerability, fire risk, or the concentration of recreation activity. Seasonal regulation should therefore be built into the visitor management system through temporary route restrictions where needed, stronger fire-related controls during drier periods, and additional supervision in peak tourism seasons. Enforcement should be based on a combination of conservation oversight and local operational control. Dilijan National Park should play the leading role in environmentally sensitive areas, particularly where biodiversity protection and route compatibility are concerned. Dilijan Municipality should support local organization, communication of visitor rules, and coordination around town-linked and community-linked visitor areas. Guides, accommodation providers, and tourism businesses should also be treated as part of the practical enforcement system, because in a destination like Dilijan visitor behavior is shaped not only by official controls but also by the quality of orientation and service delivery. Under Dilijan conditions, the visitor management system should therefore be built around defined routes, visible conduct rules, selective restrictions in sensitive areas, stronger use of guided formats, and regular coordination between tourism and conservation actors. The main objective is not to reduce tourism presence as such, but to ensure that visitor use is directed into forms and locations that are compatible with the ecological and managerial limits of the site.

A research or academic organization with relevant biodiversity expertise should participate in this annual review. Its role should include defining sensitivity criteria, advising on indicator species and sampling points, reviewing wildlife-observation seasons and assessing whether route restrictions or temporary closures are scientifically justified.

11. Local Economy & Benefit Sharing

Dilijan has a stronger local economic base than the more rural pilot communities, and this changes the logic of benefit sharing. As of 1 January 2025³, Dilijan community had a permanent population of 23.1 thousand, including 16.4 thousand in the town itself and 6.7 thousand in the surrounding settlements. This larger urban-service base means that ecotourism benefits in Dilijan are likely to flow through a broader mix of accommodation, food services, guiding, local transport, and small-scale product sales than in smaller sites. At regional level, Tavush has a more diversified economy than several other marzes. In 2024, gross agricultural output in Tavush reached 47.9 billion AMD, while services reached 35.1 billion AMD, and average monthly nominal wages were 156,787 AMD. This is important for Dilijan because ecotourism here does not emerge in isolation; it operates within a regional economy where both agriculture and services already matter. In practical terms, this supports a model in which tourism complements existing economic activity rather than replacing it.

Jobs created through ecotourism in Dilijan are unlikely to be concentrated in a single sector. The most realistic employment channels are already visible: guesthouses and hotels, restaurants and cafés, local guides, outdoor activity providers, small transport services, and tourism-linked trade. Because Dilijan already receives substantial visitor flows, the economic effect of ecotourism is less about creating tourism from zero and more about improving the quality, environmental orientation, and local retention of income within an already active destination economy. This gives Dilijan an advantage over less developed sites, but it also means that benefit sharing needs to be managed more deliberately so that growing visitor use does not generate benefits only for a narrow group of businesses. Local products are one of the clearest channels for wider local benefit. Dilijan's tourism identity already includes forest-linked gastronomy and mountain food traditions based on herbs, mushrooms, berries, nuts, fruits, preserves, soups, and clay-pot cooking. This is especially important because the site does not need artificial souvenirs or imported tourism services to create value. It already has a recognizable local food base that can be integrated into meals, tasting experiences, guesthouse menus, artisan sales, and interpretation-based tourism products. In this respect, Dilijan has one of the strongest opportunities in the project for linking ecotourism to locally rooted products and services rather than to externally supplied tourism consumption.

Employment measures should be linked to the installation of service standards: provider coaching, guide training and certification, annual scoring, corrective-action support and public recognition of compliant businesses. This creates paid local roles in guiding, assessment support, interpretation, maintenance and monitoring while improving the quality of existing accommodation and food services.

Inclusion should also be treated as an economic issue, not only as a social principle. Tavush labour statistics show a clear gender gap⁴: in 2024, labor force participation was 68.0% for men and 50.5% for women, while unemployment was 3.3% for men and 5.5% for women. These figures suggest that tourism-related income opportunities should be designed in ways that are practically accessible to women as well as to men. In Dilijan, this is especially feasible because many tourism functions are compatible with household-based and small-enterprise activity, including guesthouse management, food preparation, sale of preserves or local ingredients, artisanal production, and interpretation-based services.

³ Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia

⁴ Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia

Youth inclusion is also realistic in Dilijan because the site already combines tourism, education, and service activity. The eco-camp and eco-education examples discussed through the stakeholder process show that environmental tourism can be linked to school-age and youth participation, not only as visitors but also over time as service providers, guides, organizers, and communicators. This is particularly relevant in a destination where ecotourism can be built around learning, biodiversity interpretation, and local identity rather than only passive recreation.

A formal revenue-sharing mechanism is not yet in place, and this remains a governance weakness. Under Dilijan conditions, this issue is more important than in low-demand sites because tourism already produces both value and pressure. Without clearer local arrangements, economic benefits can remain fragmented while conservation costs continue to be absorbed mainly by public institutions. For that reason, benefit sharing in Dilijan should gradually move beyond individual business gain toward more structured local arrangements around route maintenance, visitor services, and the contribution of tourism to environmental management. At the current stage, however, the most realistic benefit-sharing model remains one based on direct local participation in accommodation, food services, guiding, and locally rooted product sales.

A mutually beneficial pilot can connect contribution and co-branding. Participating providers could make an agreed annual or per-booking maintenance contribution, provide documented in-kind support, or sponsor an approved trail/interpretation action. In return, compliant providers receive the National-Park-Friendly co-brand, inclusion in the approved product directory, route information and joint promotional opportunities. The mechanism must have transparent accounts, an annual public activity summary and a clear legal basis before money is collected.

12. Environmental & Climate Considerations

Dilijan's environmental profile is defined by the direct overlap between an already active tourism destination and one of Armenia's most important forest protected areas. This is why environmental and climate considerations are not an additional layer of the plan, but one of its central planning conditions. Dilijan National Park covers 33,765 hectares and has an additional 8,167-hectare buffer zone. The park extends from about 1,070 to 2,900 meters above sea level and is dominated by deciduous forest ecosystems, especially beech, oak, and hornbeam. Available park-level descriptions indicate that the area contains 977 vascular plant species, including 29 species listed in Armenia's Red Book. This ecological setting is consistent with the site assessment, which classifies biodiversity disturbance risk as high.

In Dilijan, the main risk does not come from the absence of natural value, but from the fact that tourism already operates inside a biodiversity-rich forest and subalpine landscape. The most relevant pressure points are trampling outside designated routes, disturbance in forest and river-adjacent habitats, recreational use near sensitive sites, littering, noise, and gradual expansion of informal visitor movement into ecologically vulnerable zones. These risks are not theoretical. Wider project observations have already identified intensive tourism use in Dilijan and noted that adventure and off-road activities can reduce the attractiveness of nature-based tourism by causing habitat disturbance and landscape degradation. The biodiversity value of the site is strengthened by its ornithological importance. The Haghartsin area, which overlaps partly with Dilijan National Park and adjacent community lands, is recognized as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area / Key Biodiversity Area. The revised IBA material records 120 bird species there, including 110 breeding species. This confirms that Dilijan should not be treated only as a scenic forest destination; it is also part of a wider biodiversity landscape where bird habitats and breeding conditions must be considered in route planning and visitor use.

Community impact risk is assessed as medium, which is appropriate for current conditions. Dilijan already has an active tourism economy, and this creates both opportunities and pressures. The main social-environmental risk is not direct community opposition, but the possibility that tourism growth will continue without sufficient control over visitor behavior, infrastructure placement, and benefit distribution. Because the town and surrounding settlements already host visitors, weak coordination can result in uneven pressure on public space, forest-edge areas, and nearby communities while benefits remain concentrated in only part of the local economy. The relevant mitigation is therefore not limitation of tourism as such, but better route organization, stronger local coordination, and clearer integration of local services into the ecotourism system.

Cultural heritage risk is assessed as medium and should be taken seriously because Dilijan's visitor experience depends heavily on the interaction between forest landscapes, monasteries, springs, lakes, and town identity. The main issue is not isolated damage to a single monument, but cumulative pressure on the wider landscape where natural and cultural values are closely linked. Visitor overflow, weak signage, inappropriate small infrastructure, and unregulated activity near culturally important sites can gradually reduce the quality of both the heritage setting and the tourism experience. The appropriate mitigation is careful route design, visitor orientation, concentration of use along designated access lines, and avoidance of visually intrusive or poorly placed infrastructure.

Climate-related risk is also significant and must stay aligned with the assessment table. Drought risk is low and should not be overstated. However, fire risk is high and landslide risk is high, and both are supported by actual regional experience. In November 2025, severe wildfires in Armenia approached

Dilijan and spread to surrounding wooded hills, confirming that wildfire risk in and around the site is not abstract. In May 2024, heavy rains led the Government of Armenia to declare disaster zones in several communities of Tavush and Lori, and wider Dilijan-focused reporting has also pointed to active landslides and hydrological stress affecting the area. This broader evidence does not replace site-level hazard mapping, but it clearly confirms that fire and slope-related risks are materially relevant for tourism planning in Dilijan.

The practical mitigation approach for Dilijan should therefore be explicit and management-oriented:

- Keep visitor use concentrated on designated trails and official access routes.
- Avoid opening new tourism functions in forest habitats and other ecologically sensitive areas without validation.
- Improve visitor information and guidance on Red Book species, forest ecology, and visitor conduct.
- Prohibit uncontrolled vehicle movement, unmanaged camping, and open-fire use in sensitive natural areas.
- Introduce stronger seasonal caution during periods of elevated fire danger, hazards or unstable weather.
- Avoid placing new infrastructure on unstable slopes, near erosion-prone sections, or in visually and ecologically sensitive forest locations.
- Align tourism infrastructure decisions with protected-area management logic and biodiversity priorities.

Under Dilijan conditions, environmental mitigation is not primarily about restoration after damage occurs. It is about preventing unmanaged tourism pressure in a site that already has high demand, strong accessibility, and very high ecological value. That is why the correct model for Dilijan is controlled ecotourism with strict ecological discipline, not broader tourism expansion into all attractive forest areas.

13. Monitoring Framework

The monitoring framework for Dilijan should be more structured than in the lower-use pilot communities because tourism pressure is already high and ecological sensitivity is also high. At the same time, monitoring should remain practical and directly linked to management needs rather than becoming an overly technical reporting exercise. The purpose of monitoring in Dilijan is not only to record tourism presence, but to track whether tourism use remains compatible with forest ecosystems, biodiversity values, visitor management rules, and local economic benefit.

The specific monitoring objectives are to: establish a credible visitor and market baseline; keep use on approved routes; detect tourism-related habitat and wildlife disturbance early; verify compliance with service and visitor rules; measure local economic participation and inclusion; monitor forest-edge development; and trigger management action when conditions worsen.

To operationalize these monitoring objectives, Table 6 presents a concise results-oriented framework linking each management objective to measurable indicators, initial targets or directions of change, monitoring frequency, responsible actors, and the management response to be triggered by the findings. The framework is designed to establish the missing baseline during the first implementation year and progressively support adaptive management as site-level evidence improves.

Table 6. Proposed division of responsibilities

Objective	Indicator and baseline	Initial target / direction	Frequency and lead	Management response
Establish visitor and market baseline	Visitors/groups at priority sites; day/overnight split; origin, product and indicative spending. Baseline: not available	Baseline established in Year 1 and same method repeated	Monthly in season; annual summary. Municipality + National Park + providers	Adjust staffing, booking, routes and promotion to observed demand
Keep use on approved routes	Trail width/condition, informal paths and off-route incidents. Baseline: Year 1 inspection	No net deterioration; all priority routes inspected before and after peak season	Pre-/post-season. National Park + guides	Repair, reroute, add signs, guide-only rule or temporary restriction
Protect wildlife and sensitive habitats	Disturbance incidents and condition at science-selected observation points. Baseline: not available	No increase in recorded disturbance after baseline; zero deliberate breach by approved providers	Seasonal. National Park + research partner	Change season/group rule; suspend promotion; temporary closure
Improve service compliance	National-Park-Friendly score and critical failures. Baseline: no local scheme	Pilot cohort assessed in Year 1; corrective actions tracked annually	Annual. Joint scoring committee	Coaching, deadline for correction, suspension/removal of co-brand
Increase local economic participation	Number of local providers/products in packages and documented local purchasing. Baseline: not available	Provider register and procurement baseline in Year 1; maintain annual increase	Annual. Municipality/DMO	Product redesign, supplier matching and targeted training
Track inclusion	Women and youth among trainees, guides, owners and paid service providers. Baseline: not available	Sex- and age-disaggregated baseline and annual reporting; no unsupported fixed quota	Annual. Municipality + programme partners	Adapt outreach, timing, training and small-business support

Objective	Indicator and baseline	Initial target / direction	Frequency and lead	Management response
Control forest-edge growth	New built-up footprint/permits near protected, Emerald, habitat and hazard layers. Baseline: Year 1 GIS	No unauthorized expansion; all relevant proposals screened	Annual and permit-triggered. Municipality + National Park	Siting conditions, redesign, enforcement or refusal under applicable law

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Dilijan-specific monitoring priorities. The common indicators in Table 6 should be applied through fixed observation points and route records at Parz Lake, approved Parz Lake–Gosh and Haghartsin–Teghut corridors, the Jukhtak–Matosavank area and other validated National Park gateways and routes. Monitoring should record trail widening and informal paths, habitat or wildlife disturbance, litter and fire signs, off-route or unauthorized vehicle movement, marker condition, forest-edge development and water or wastewater problems at visitor nodes. Science-selected points and seasonal rules should be used for wildlife products so that sensitive locations are not disclosed or promoted through monitoring records.

Visitor retention and local value. Dilijan's distinctive performance question is whether its already high visitor use is converted into longer stays, bookable low-impact experiences and paid use of local accommodation, meals, guiding, transport and legally sourced gastronomy and forest-product services without increasing pressure on sensitive sites. Route, booking and provider records should therefore connect day or overnight status, stay length, product and service use and National-Park-Friendly compliance to named gateways and approved products. The same review should identify whether local enterprises and women- and youth-led providers are participating in the resulting tourism activity.

Review and management response. Dilijan Municipality and Dilijan National Park should review the combined results with tourism partners, participating providers and relevant research, utility, land and emergency actors before and after the main season and following significant incidents. Each review should record the decision taken, the responsible actor and the completion date, including whether a route, product or provider is maintained, repaired, adapted, restricted, temporarily suspended, removed from co-branding or considered ready for the next implementation phase.

14. Investment & Implementation Plan

The investment logic for Dilijan should be phased, management-oriented, and more selective than in lower-demand sites. Unlike Vardenis, where the main challenge is to build a modest ecotourism base, Dilijan already has an established tourism and service functions, while site-level visitor pressure remains to be measured. This means that investment should not be directed toward broad tourism expansion, but toward improving environmental control, visitor organization, service quality, and the connection between tourism benefits and conservation responsibility. This approach is also supported by the wider regional context. In Tavush, services reached 35.1 billion AMD in 2024, agriculture reached 47.9 billion AMD, and average monthly nominal wages were 156,787 AMD, showing that Dilijan operates within a mixed regional economy where tourism must work alongside agriculture and local services rather than displace them.

The first investment programme should be defined through concrete objects rather than a single aggregate budget. Costs remain ‘to be determined’ until route validation, technical design, procurement quantities and operating responsibilities are confirmed.

Figure 7 summarizes the common three-phase implementation sequence. The dates indicate planning periods rather than automatic progression; movement to the next phase depends on the monitoring evidence and readiness conditions stated below.

Figure 7. Phased investment and implementation sequence



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Phase 1

Accordingly, the investment priorities presented in Table 7 are derived from the management, infrastructure, governance and monitoring needs identified in the preceding chapters. At this stage, the table defines the minimum outputs, responsible actors and indicative sequencing required for implementation, while capital costs should only be established following route validation, technical design, feasibility assessment and confirmation of operating and maintenance responsibilities.

Table 7. Proposed division of responsibilities

Investment object	Minimum output	Lead / partners	Timing	Costing status
Route, zoning and sensitivity validation	Approved GIS route/zone layer, field sheets, seasonal rules and version-control procedure	National Park + Municipality + GIS/research support	2030–2032 priority	Technical scope required
Guide training, certification and route authorization	Curriculum, assessed training cycle, public guide register and refresher process	Guide body/Tourism Committee + National Park + trainers	2030–2032 priority	Price per cohort after needs assessment
Trailheads, signs and interpretation	Designed/installed priority trailheads, route markers, conduct and biodiversity panels with maintenance owner	Municipality + National Park + sponsors/providers	2030–2032	Bill of quantities after route validation
Visitor and environmental monitoring system	Counters/manual protocols, provider logs, inspection forms, database and annual report	National Park + Municipality + DMO/research partner	Start 2030–2032; ongoing	Equipment and staff time to be costed
National-Park-Friendly pilot	Final scorecard, assessor training, pilot provider cohort, directory/co-brand and annual audit	Municipality + National Park + providers	2030–2033	Pilot design and cohort size required
Wildlife product and science partnership	Habitat/season review, guide module, tested observation routes and disturbance protocol	National Park + research organization + guides	2031–2034	Research and fieldwork scope required
Water and wastewater enabling investment	Feasibility/design study followed by prioritized rehabilitation or replacement works	Municipality + utilities + competent national bodies/financiers	Study first; phased works	No capital estimate before feasibility

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Dilijan implementation should be phased, but the sequence must be driven by evidence rather than extrapolation from the short Tavush series. The 2022–2024 marz hotel figures provide regional context only; they do not establish Dilijan visitor flow, occupancy, expenditure, route pressure or future demand. The first implementation period should prioritize visitor management, environmental services, route quality, provider readiness and a common local baseline. Later investment depends on measured use, environmental and heritage condition, local value retained, service performance and funded maintenance.

For 2030–2032, the priority should be management correction rather than infrastructure expansion. This first phase should focus on the areas where current site conditions are already creating risk or inefficiency. The most important actions should include:

- Formal validation of priority ecotourism routes and zones in line with ecological sensitivity
- Improvement of trailheads, route markers, directional signage, and interpretation points
- Stronger visitor information systems linked to biodiversity, conduct rules, and official access routes
- Preparation of a practical visitor management package for high-use sites such as Parz lake, Gosh lake-linked routes, and Haghartsin-linked visitor movement
- Coordination between Dilijan municipality, Dilijan National Park SNCO, and local service providers on route use, visitor rules, and seasonal pressure

- Initial environmental-service actions linked to water and wastewater management in the tourism system

This phase should not be treated as a preparatory formality. In Dilijan, these actions are immediate investment priorities because the destination already receives substantial visitor use and already experiences ecological pressure.

Phase 2

For 2033–2036, the focus should shift to consolidation of ecotourism quality and stronger integration of local products and services. If the first phase succeeds in improving route discipline and visitor organization, the next phase should strengthen the actual ecotourism offer through:

- Improved biodiversity interpretation and eco-education products especially related to tourism/eco-tourism
- Stronger packaging of gastronomy, forest-based ingredients, and non-timber forest product identity within tourism experiences, Support to guides, accommodation providers, and food-service actors for ecotourism-oriented service delivery
- Better integration of town-based services with forest and park-based routes
- Pilot benefit-sharing arrangements linked to route maintenance, visitor facilities, or interpretation services
- Targeted improvement of visitor facilities within existing service areas rather than in new forest locations
- Strengthened marketing effort to highlight local attractions, natural, cultural assets, traditions.

This is the phase where Dilijan's comparative advantage becomes most visible. The destination already has enough visitors and enough service providers to support better ecotourism products; the challenge is to direct that capacity toward environmentally responsible and locally rooted experiences.

Phase 3

For 2037–2040, the site may support more selective strengthening of infrastructure and institutional arrangements, but only where earlier phases demonstrate that visitor pressure is being managed and that local benefit is being retained. This later phase should not be understood as open-ended scaling. Its role is to refine a working system. Recommended actions may include:

- Upgrading visitor-information functions within existing public or private buildings,
- More formal coordination arrangements between municipal, park, and service actors, with defined roles and responsibilities,
- Clearer maintenance and financing mechanisms for routes, signage, and interpretation points,

- Selective improvement of service-linked infrastructure in already-used and lower-risk areas,
- Stronger incorporation of monitoring results into seasonal and route-level management decisions.

Financing, Costing and Investment Review

Financing should follow the same logic. In the early phase, public and project-based financing will remain essential because the main needs are management, signage, visitor control, ecological interpretation, and environmental-service correction. These are not functions that can be left entirely to private initiative, especially in a protected-area tourism setting. Dilijan's existing tourism economy does create a stronger basis for private contribution than in low-use communities, but that private contribution should support quality and service improvement, not uncontrolled spatial expansion.

The financing mix for Dilijan is therefore best understood in three parts:

- Public financing for route organization, signage, visitor management, municipal coordination, and environmental-service improvements
- Donor or program-based financing for eco-education, biodiversity interpretation, pilot visitor-management tools, and conservation-sensitive tourism design
- Private and household-level financing for accommodation upgrades, gastronomy, guiding, tourism packaging, and service quality improvements.

Public-private partnership is relevant, but in Dilijan it should be used to improve management and service coherence rather than to stimulate major new tourism construction. The most realistic PPP forms are cooperation on route maintenance, signage, visitor-information support, interpretation infrastructure, and service delivery tied to official ecotourism routes and attractions. Because Dilijan already has an established tourism market, PPP must be guided by ecological and management conditions, rooted on local experiences, otherwise it may intensify tourism pressure instead of improving it.

A separate financing priority should also be recognized around water and wastewater systems. Dilijan already has structural weaknesses in this area, and under conditions of high visitor use this is not a secondary utility issue. It is part of the environmental credibility of the destination that affects the whole image of community. For that reason, investment in water-service reliability, sanitation quality, and effective treatment systems should be treated as enabling infrastructure for ecotourism rather than as a detached urban-service matter. It is also closely linked to the opportunity to improve the socio-economic and health conditions for the local society. At this stage, precise cost figures should not be fixed without feasibility assessment and site-level technical costing. The stronger planning approach is to define investment by function and sequence. Under Dilijan conditions, that sequence is clear: first improve control and route organization, then strengthen ecotourism quality and local linkage, and only after that support selective infrastructure and institutional refinement where monitoring and site conditions justify it.

Investment review and scaling should be based on observed performance rather than a predetermined long-term visitor-growth scenario. The available 2022–2024 Tavush marz hotel-based series provides useful regional context but does not measure Dilijan Community or site-level

ecotourism and is insufficient to support a defensible projection to 2040. No long-range visitor forecast is therefore adopted. Investment and scaling decisions should instead draw on the first-season Dilijan baseline and subsequent monitoring of visitor and route use, accommodation and service performance, local economic value, environmental condition and management effectiveness. This evidence should determine whether individual products and investments are maintained, adjusted, expanded or deferred, ensuring that further development remains compatible with protected-area objectives, environmental capacity and local management conditions.

15. Final Site Classification and Conclusions

Dilijan is classified as a conservation-oriented ecotourism pilot suitable for controlled protected-area visitor use, with accommodation, food, information and other service functions concentrated in the town and other established or verified lower-risk visitor nodes. This classification is explicitly conservation-led: the Pilot is intended to help manage tourism pressures and channel local economic benefits in ways compatible with Dilijan National Park and the wider candidate Emerald Network context, rather than to function as a conventional destination-growth plan. This conclusion consolidates the baseline, attraction, zoning, product, infrastructure, governance, environmental, monitoring and investment assessments.

The classification is supported by Dilijan's established destination and service base and the exceptional concentration of forest, lake, river, monastery, biodiversity and gastronomy assets associated with Dilijan National Park. Parz Lake, Gosh, Haghartsin, Jukhtak–Matosavank and selected town and forest gateways can support walking, interpretation, wildlife appreciation, education and food-linked experiences for domestic and international visitors. The main opportunity is to improve the quality, organization and local value of an already active destination; route-level visitor, spending, provider and environmental baselines still need to be established through consistent operation and monitoring.

The classification remains conditional and does not support open access or tourism-led construction across sensitive forest and habitat areas. Every promoted route, observation product, camping area, vehicle transfer or facility must pass National Park zoning and authority review, legal-access, habitat and species, fire, landslide, seasonal, safety, operator and maintenance checks. Forest-edge development, water and wastewater capacity and pressure at popular sites must also be monitored, while sensitive locations remain unpromoted or subject to guide, group, season or closure rules.

The planning conclusion is therefore a conservation, quality-and-control model for an established protected-area landscape. The immediate task is to validate priority routes and zones, establish route-level visitor and environmental baselines, formalize National Park–Municipality coordination, authorize and train guides, pilot the National-Park-Friendly service standard and strengthen locally rooted gastronomy and service links. Later product consolidation or physical investment should proceed only where monitoring demonstrates compatibility with conservation objectives and no unacceptable impact on sensitive habitats, species or ecological functions. The success of the Pilot should ultimately be judged by improved conservation management, reduced unmanaged pressure, stronger local stewardship and better-informed visitor behavior—not by the volume of tourism generated.

Annex 1: Ecotourism Assessment Tool

The following table presents the completed ecotourism assessment for the site, forming the basis for the management plan.

Component	Field / Criteria	Input / Selection	Notes / Logic
Screening & Eligibility	Critical habitat overlap	☒ Yes ☐ No	
	Endangered species presence	☒ Yes ☐ No	
	Land ownership unclear	☐ Yes ☒ No	
	Community opposition	☐ Yes ☒ No	
	Climate risks (fire, landslide, drought)	☒ Yes ☐ No	
	Access constraints	☐ Yes ☒ No	If multiple critical risks are present, the site requires controlled or restricted ecotourism development, subject to strict management measures.
Site Identification & Planning Context	Site name	Dilijan Community	
	Marz / Municipality	Tavush/Dilijan	
	Coordinates / GIS reference	Latitude: 40.7400° N Longitude: 44.8630° E	
	Legal status	☒ Protected Area ☒ Emerald Site ☒ Community Land ☐ Other	
	Link to existing plans	☒ PA Management Plan ☒ Community Development Plan ☒ Tourism Strategy	
Ecological & Conservation Profile	Ecosystem type	☒ Forest ☐ Grassland ☐ Wetland ☒ Subalpine ☐ Mixed	
	Key habitats	Mixed deciduous forest	
	Species of concern	Multiple Red Book species	According to the NP data and Dilijan NP management plan
	Conservation sensitivity	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☒ High	HIGH → Conservation priority, tourism strictly limited; MEDIUM → Controlled ecotourism; LOW → Potential for broader ecotourism development
	Population	23.1 thousand (1 January 2025)	

Recommendations for Ecotourism Development Planning in Dilijan Community, Armenia

Component	Field / Criteria	Input / Selection	Notes / Logic
Socio-Economic & Community Context	Main livelihoods	☒ Agriculture ☒ Livestock ☐ Forestry ☒ Tourism	
	NTFPs present	☒ Honey ☒ Herbs ☒ Mushrooms ☒ Berries ☐ Other	
	Cultural assets	Local gastronomy, traditions	
	Community willingness	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☒ High	
Tourism Assets & Baseline Use	Natural attractions	Forest Landscapes, Biodiversity, Natural Monuments	Yes (Rich biodiversity, beautiful landscapes, forest and natural monuments)
	Cultural attractions	Local gastronomy, traditions _____	Yes
	Existing activities	☒ Hiking ☒ Camping ☒ Guided tours ☐ None	
	Visitor flow	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☒ High	
	Accessibility	☒ Easy ☐ Moderate ☐ Difficult	
Suitability Assessment & Zoning	Ecological sensitivity	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☒ High	
	Accessibility	☒ Good ☐ Moderate ☐ Poor	
	Tourism demand	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☒ High	One of the most popular destinations in Armenia https://infokapan.am/
	Zone classification	☐ Strict Conservation Zone ☒ Controlled Ecotourism Zone ☒ Sustainable Development Zone	Zoning must be validated with spatial data (GIS, habitat maps, PA zoning where available)
	Hiking routes	☒ Yes ☐ No	

Recommendations for Ecotourism Development Planning in Dilijan Community, Armenia

Component	Field / Criteria	Input / Selection	Notes / Logic
Ecotourism Product Development	Wildlife observation	☒ Yes ☐ No	Avoid sensitive habitats
	Agro-ecotourism	☐ Yes ☒ No	Community participation required
	Cultural landscape tourism	☒ Yes ☐ No	
	NTFP-based experiences	☒ Yes ☐ No	
Infrastructure & Service Planning	Trails	☒ Yes ☐ No	
	Signage	☐ Yes ☒ No	
	Visitor centers	☒ Yes ☐ No	
	Accommodation	☒ Yes ☐ No	Only in development zones
Governance & Institutional Arrangements	Protected Area Authority role	☒ Assigned	
	Municipality role	☒ Assigned	
	Community groups role	☒ Assigned	
	Private sector role	☒ Assigned	
	NGO role	☒ Assigned	
	Co-management agreement	☐ Yes ☒ No	
	Revenue-sharing agreement	☐ Yes ☒ No	
	Public-private partnership	☐ Yes ☒ No	
Visitor Management System	Visitor limits	☐ Yes ☒ No	
	Seasonal restrictions	☐ Yes ☒ No	
	Guided-only access	☐ Yes ☒ No	
	Zoning enforcement	☒ Yes ☐ No	
	Max visitors per day	N/A	Not available at Dilijan route/site level; establish a verified baseline in Year 1
	Max group size	N/A	
Benefit Sharing & Local Economy	Local employment	☒ Yes ☐ No	
	Local product sales	☒ Yes ☐ No	
	Community revenue share	☐ Yes ☒ No	
	Women / youth inclusion	☒ Yes ☐ No	
Environmental & Social Safeguards	Biodiversity disturbance risk	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☒ High	
	Community impact risk	☐ Low ☒ Medium ☐ High	
	Cultural heritage risk	☐ Low ☒ Medium ☐ High	

Recommendations for Ecotourism Development Planning in Dilijan Community, Armenia

Component	Field / Criteria	Input / Selection	Notes / Logic
Climate Resilience	Drought risk	☒ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High	
	Fire risk	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☒ High	
	Landslide risk	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☒ High	
Monitoring Framework	Visitor numbers	Baseline ____ / Target ____ / Frequency ____	
	Local income	Baseline ____ / Target ____ / Frequency ____	Not available at Dilijan-community level; establish a provider, employment and local-purchasing baseline in Year 1.
	Biodiversity condition	Baseline ____ / Target ____ / Frequency ____	
Investment & Financial Structuring	Estimated investment	_____	
	Financing type	☒ Public ☐ PPP ☒ Private	
	Revenue sources	☐ Entry fees ☒ Services ☒ Products	
	Financial viability	☐ Low ☐ Medium ☒ High	
Implementation Plan	Action	_____	
	Responsible	_____	
	Timeline	_____	

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Annex 2: Stakeholders and Consultation Status

The stakeholder group meeting for the target communities took place on 9 March 2026 in Dilijan. The persons below are the Dilijan-relevant participants and contributors identified in the available meeting records. Contact details are retained in the project records and are not repeated in this package. Organizations listed separately as required implementation partners are not described as consulted unless the available records confirm their participation.

Required Implementation Stakeholders and Consultation Status		
Stakeholder category	Expected role	Evidence / next action
Dilijan National Park SNCO	Route/zone validation, biodiversity rules, monitoring and enforcement	Representatives consulted; formal institutional agreement required
Dilijan Municipality	Coordination, land-use, public services, signs, provider register and urban-growth monitoring	Representatives consulted; memorandum and designated unit required
Accommodation, food, guide, transport and activity providers	Deliver products, brief visitors, report data and meet the local standard	Some destination actors represented; complete provider mapping and individual commitments required
Tavush DMO / Meet Dilijan / tourism bodies	Packaging, booking/referral, market feedback and compliant promotion	Represented in consultation; operating roles to be agreed
Relevant forest-management authority/units adjoining proposed routes	Confirm tenure, forest-use conditions, NTFP rules and maintenance responsibilities	Direct consultation not evidenced for every proposed route; engage before route approval
Research or academic organization	Science-based sensitivity, wildlife seasonality and monitoring review	Partner not yet selected; terms of reference required
Civil-society and programme partners	Eco-education, training, inclusion, pilot finance and facilitation	Existing initiatives provide a basis; confirm project-specific roles and exit/maintenance plan

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Annex 3: Summary SWOT Analysis for Ecotourism Development in Dilijan Community

This concise matrix summarizes the principal internal and external factors identified through the assessment, project GIS outputs, available statistics and stakeholder inputs. It is a planning summary rather than a separate full SWOT study. “Verified” refers to information supported by the project materials; “Indicative” identifies a planning conclusion that still requires route-, site- or baseline-level confirmation.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
▲ [Verified] Forest-dominated National Park landscape with high biodiversity value – use biodiversity interpretation as a central visitor product. ▲ [Verified] Strong combination of lakes, forest routes, monasteries, town heritage and gastronomy – package several spending points in one visit. ▲ [Indicative] Established accommodation, food and tourism-service base – improve quality and coordination instead of expanding indiscriminately. ▲ [Verified] Active municipality, National Park, DMO and civil-society presence – a local management platform can be formed from existing actors.	▲ [Verified] No integrated community-level record of day visitors, overnight stays, route use, expenditure or segment size – establish a Year 1 baseline. ▲ [Verified] Uneven trailheads, signs, route marking and visitor rules – prioritize organization of existing routes. ▲ [Verified] Water-supply and wastewater weaknesses reduce the environmental credibility of the destination – complete technical assessment and phased improvement. ▲ [Verified] No formal local co-branding, maintenance-contribution or benefit-sharing mechanism – pilot a voluntary agreement and service standard. ▲ [Indicative] Wildlife tourism and specialized guiding remain underdeveloped – create trained, certified and science-supported services.
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
▲ [Verified/Indicative] Develop guided forest and subalpine wildlife observation around representative species and habitats, after route and seasonal validation. ▲ [Indicative] Launch the Dilijan National-Park-Friendly scoring and co-branding pilot for accommodation, food, guiding and activity services. ▲ [Verified] Build forest-to-table gastronomy and eco-education products on existing local practices without promoting uncontrolled collection. ▲ [Indicative] Link Dilijan and Ijevan in a multi-day forest, culture and gastronomy package to increase length of stay and spread visitor spending. ▲ [Indicative] Use booking records, guide logs, counters and annual GIS review to connect promotion with real management capacity.	▲ [Indicative] Expanding urban and tourism infrastructure at the forest edge can occupy natural areas and fragment the landscape – monitor built-up growth and enforce siting controls. ▲ [Verified] Uncontrolled 4x4/quad use, drones, off-route movement, litter, noise and fire can disturb habitats and reduce nature-tourism quality – restrict and enforce by route and zone. ▲ [Verified] Wildfire, landslide and extreme-rain risks can affect visitor safety and infrastructure – apply seasonal controls and hazard screening. ▲ [Indicative] Promotion before route, service and monitoring systems are ready can concentrate pressure at Parz Lake, Gosh- and Haghartsin-linked areas – phase marketing after management actions. ▲ [Verified] Sensitive wildlife and habitats can be disturbed by poorly designed observation products – use scientific review, certified guides and temporary closures where needed.

Source: Authors' elaboration.