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ARMENIA

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN THE IJEVAN COMMUNITY



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Recommendations for Ecotourism Development Planning in the Ijevan 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

Ijevan is well positioned to develop as a town-to-forest ecotourism gateway that connects an accessible regional centre with surrounding forest landscapes, conservation areas, outdoor activities and local products. The community combines the town of Ijevan with a substantial rural hinterland and benefits from relatively good road accessibility, an existing accommodation and service base, mountain forests and aquatic landscapes. Its environmental context includes the Arjatkhlenti Hazelnut State Sanctuary near Getahovit, Ijevan State Sanctuary and the wider Emerald Network context. The plan classifies Ijevan as suitable for gradual ecotourism development, provided that tourism use close to forests and sanctuaries is coordinated with the responsible forest and conservation authorities.

The development concept brings together forest walks, active recreation, biodiversity interpretation, culture, food and local production. Potential products include guided forest and landscape routes, hiking and camping experiences, nature interpretation connected with the sanctuary landscape, craft and local-food experiences and short active-tourism packages using Ijevan as the main information and service base. The community already has a tourism service foundation: official municipal information reviewed for the Plan identifies a range of hotels, resorts and guesthouses, although their room capacity, occupancy, prices, operating periods and willingness to participate in packages still require provider-level confirmation. A future Dilijan–Ijevan forest, biodiversity, culture and gastronomy itinerary could broaden the market if responsibilities, booking arrangements, routes and local spending distribution are agreed.

The principal barrier is that the forest-tourism system remains less organized than the underlying tourism potential. Existing outdoor use does not yet amount to a verified network of approved ecotourism routes with consistent trailheads, route status, signage, maintenance and environmental monitoring. Easy access to Ijevan town also does not confirm safe, legal or all-season access to individual attractions. Every proposed route therefore needs confirmation of surface and condition, ownership or manager, permitted use, forestry operations, seasonal closure, flood, landslide and fire exposure, emergency access and maintenance responsibility. Tourism close to forest-management areas must also avoid active logging, haulage or closed sections.

Local economic participation is a major opportunity. Ijevan can connect ecotourism with accommodation, guiding, transport, food, crafts and traceable forest-related or agricultural products, helping tourism expenditure reach rural settlements and small businesses. Environmental and commercial controls remain important: collection or sale of forest-related products should be legal, sustainable and traceable, and visitor experiences should not encourage harmful harvesting. Women and youth can participate through guiding support, food provision, product sales, hospitality and small tourism services. The Municipality should provide the coordination platform, with the relevant forest units, sanctuary managers, tourism providers and regional tourism actors contributing according to their mandates.

Initial investment should be management-led and relatively light: route and forestry-compatibility verification, a visitor and provider baseline, trailhead and wayfinding improvements, information and booking functions, provider readiness and monitoring systems. Subsequent phases can strengthen interpretation, local-product integration, route facilities and service quality where actual demand and environmental conditions support them. Public or project funding is appropriate for common route, information and environmental-management functions; private investment can address accommodation, food, guiding, transport and product improvements. Long-term scaling should be informed by observed route use, visitor satisfaction, local spending, provider participation and environmental condition.

The expected result is a coherent and manageable forest-linked destination built around Ijevan's existing role as a regional centre. Success would include an approved and maintained route network, clear coordination with forest and sanctuary managers, improved visitor orientation, stronger local service participation, sustainable product linkages and a monitoring system able to respond to trail damage, waste, fire risks, incompatible forestry use or other environmental pressures. The principal lesson is that Ijevan has an opportunity to establish these management systems while visitor pressure remains moderate, allowing the destination to shape growth before environmental and service problems become more difficult to manage.

The present document was developed with financial support from the European Union under the European Union for Environment (EU4Environment) program.¹

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 Ecotourism Management Plan provides a structured framework for assessing and guiding ecotourism development at the community level. It is based on a standardized ecotourism assessment tool that evaluates ecological conditions, socio-economic context, tourism assets, and associated environmental and operational risks.

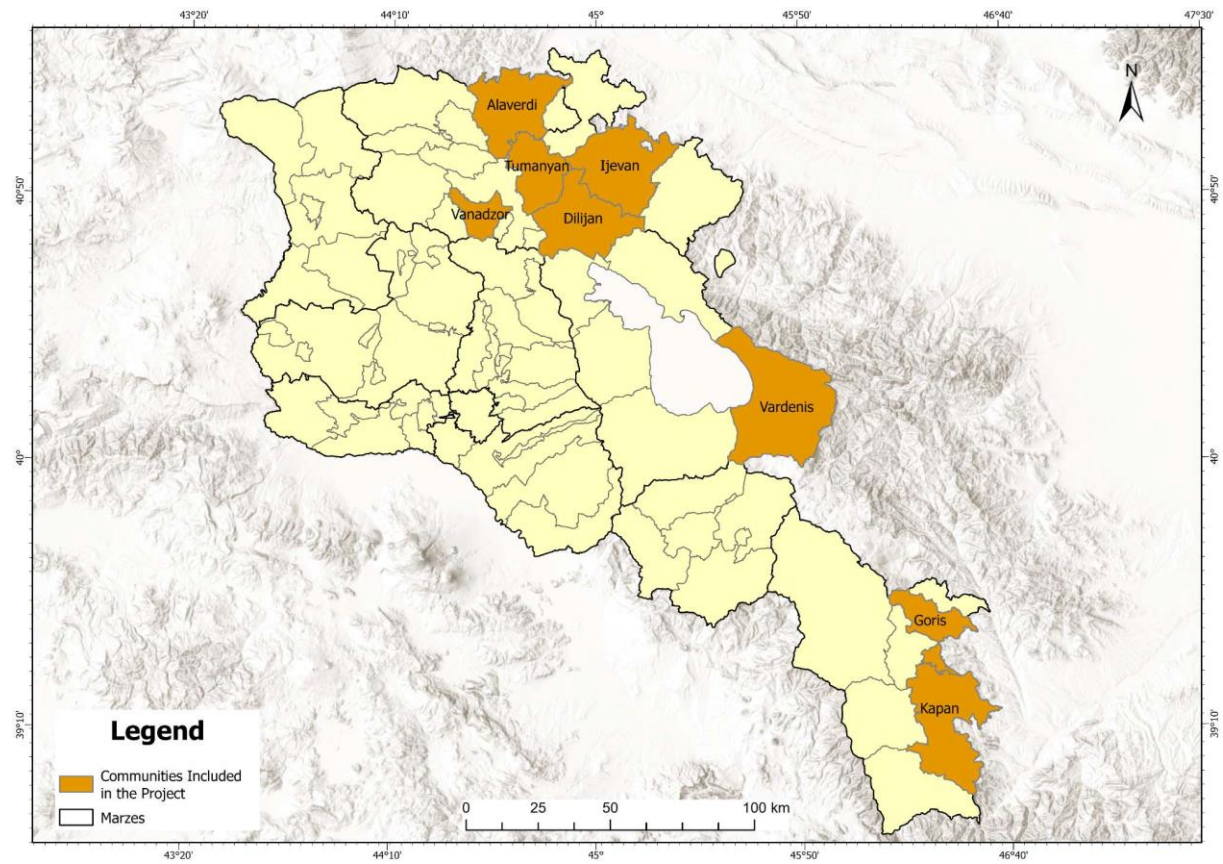
The plan is developed as part of a broader effort under the EU4Environment programme, implemented with methodological alignment to World Bank approaches and within the framework of the OIKO initiative. The overall activity focuses on supporting selected communities in identifying realistic and environmentally responsible ecotourism opportunities, while ensuring that development remains compatible with local ecological and socio-economic conditions.

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 plan is to support decision-making on whether and how ecotourism can be developed in a controlled and sustainable manner. It ensures that tourism activities are aligned with conservation requirements, particularly in areas with sensitive ecosystems or species of concern, while also identifying opportunities for local economic engagement. The approach follows sustainable development principles by promoting low-impact tourism, supporting local livelihoods, and encouraging the use of natural and cultural assets without compromising their integrity. It also aims to strengthen coordination between local authorities, communities, and other stakeholders involved in tourism and environmental management.

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.

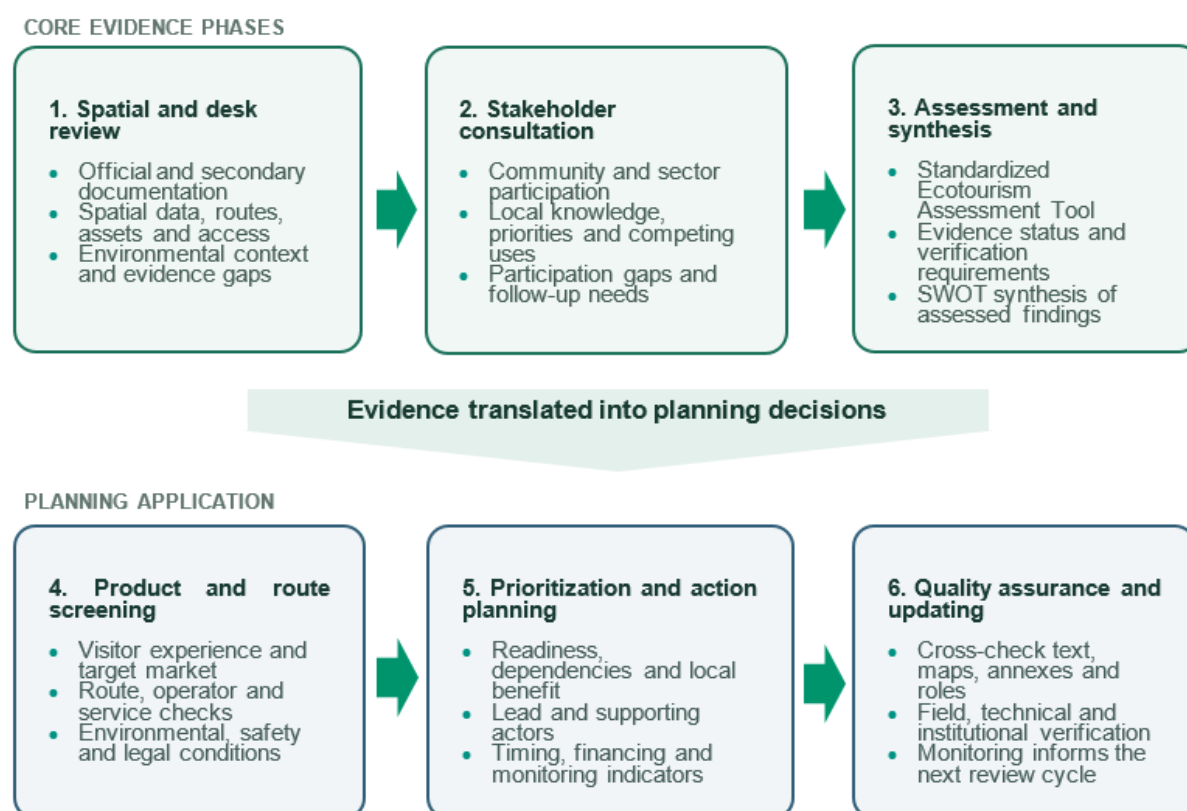
2. Methodological Approach

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 tourism areas and environmentally sensitive features. 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 Plan 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. This distinction is already reflected elsewhere in the Plan, including the requirement to confirm candidate Emerald boundaries and route relationships 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.

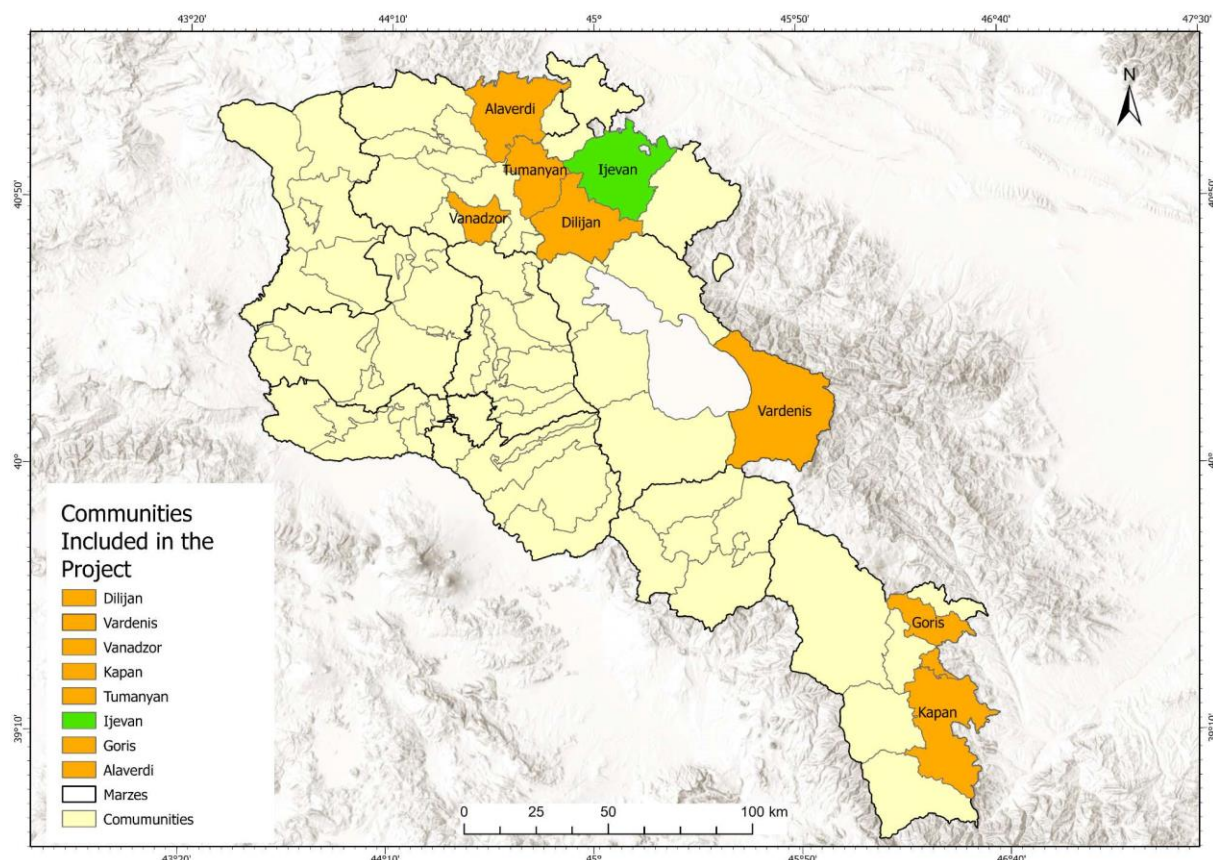
Additional evidence limitations:

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 Ijevan is located in Tavush marz in northeastern Armenia and represents one of the project's northeastern pilot communities. Its geographic position in a river valley surrounded by wooded mountain terrain gives it a clear landscape connection to the wider forested setting of the marz.

Figure 3. Ijevan and other communities included in the project



Source: REC Caucasus.

3.1 Location and Context

Ijevan is located in Tavush marz in the north-eastern part of Armenia and functions as the main administrative and service center of the marz. The community includes the town of Ijevan together with a wider ring of surrounding settlements, which is important for ecotourism planning because the tourism space extends beyond the town itself into forested and river-linked landscapes. As of 1 January 2025, Ijevan community had a permanent population of 45.1 thousand, including 19.5 thousand in the town of Ijevan and 25.6 thousand in the surrounding rural part of the community. This helps explain why the site should be treated not only as a town destination, but as a wider municipal landscape with both urban and rural functions. Its location gives the community a different planning profile from more remote or more strictly protected pilot sites. Ijevan is not itself classified in the package as a protected area, but it is closely connected to nearby protected and conservation-relevant spaces, including the Arjatkhlenti sanctuary near Getahovit and the broader Ijevan Emerald planning context developed under EU4Environment. This means that ecotourism in Ijevan should be understood as community-based

tourism in a forest-rich landscape influenced by nearby conservation areas rather than tourism taking place entirely inside a single formally protected site.

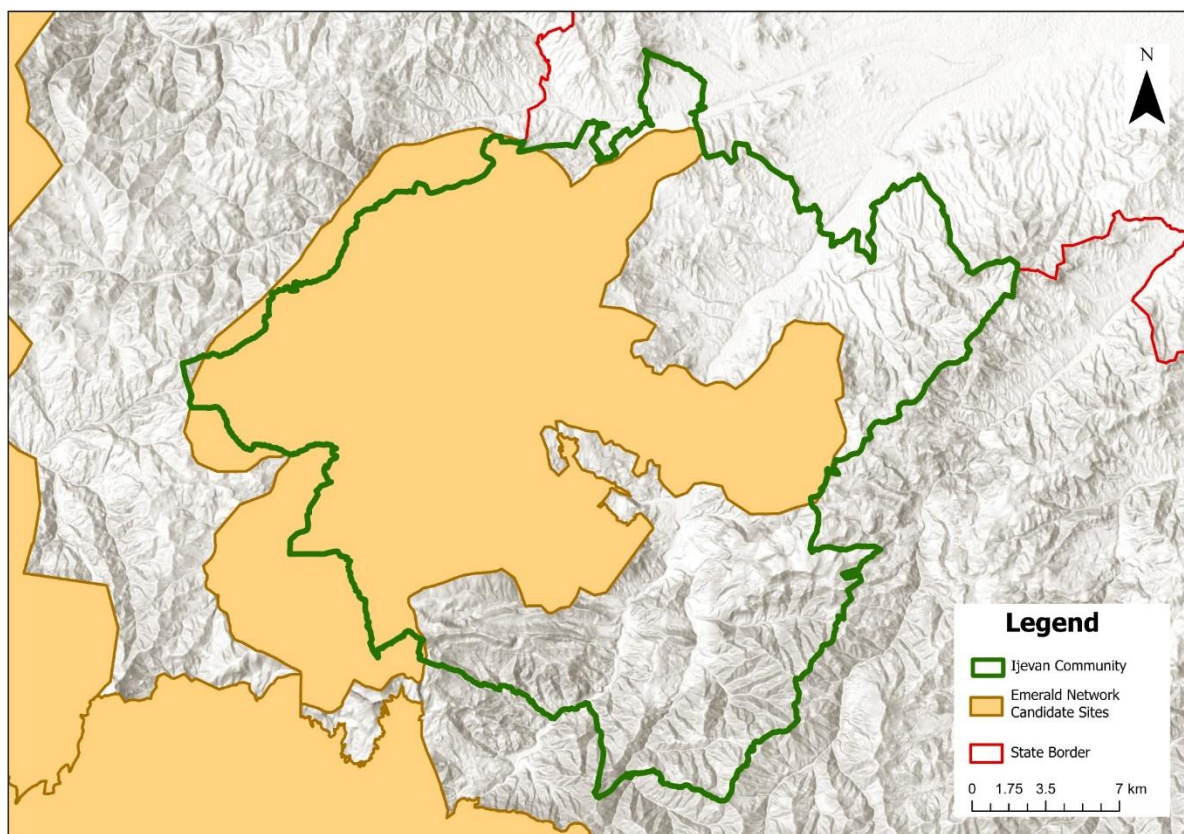
The community is also relatively well placed in transport and access terms. In comparison with more terrain-constrained sites, Ijevan is easier to reach and can function as a base for surrounding forest attractions, biodiversity-related experiences, and local product-based tourism. This is one of the reasons why the site is more suitable for gradual ecotourism development and service strengthening than for highly restrictive visitor control from the outset.

3.2 Ecological Characteristics

Ijevan's ecological identity is defined by mountain forest and aquatic ecosystems. An official conservation anchor is Arjatkhlendi Hazelnut State Sanctuary near Getahovit in the Khaghaghbyur basin on the Ijevan Mountain Range. The Ministry of Environment sanctuary register states that it was established in 1958, covers 40 hectares, protects bear-hazel and yew groves at approximately 1,500–1,800 metres, and is managed by Armforest SNCO. It should be treated as a conservation and interpretation anchor, not automatically as an open-access attraction; access and interpretation require the managing organization's approval.

The wider conservation landscape also includes Ijevan State Sanctuary. The Ministry of Environment register states that it was established in 1971, covers 5,908 hectares in the Aghstev basin on the Ijevan and Kayen ranges, protects forest landscapes and fauna, and is managed by Armforest SNCO. Project Emerald planning material further indicates overlap among community, forest-enterprise, sanctuary and biodiversity-interest areas. Exact route and land shares must therefore be confirmed in GIS with the competent authorities rather than inferred from the community boundary alone.

Figure 4. Ijevan Community and Emerald Network candidate-site context



Note: this map shows broad spatial context, not approved tourism routes or zoning. Forest ownership/management, sanctuary boundaries, sensitive habitats, logging compartments, hazards, legal roads, attractions and service points must be added and field-validated before implementation.

Source: Project GIS layers, 2026.

3.3 Socio-Economic Context

The socio-economic profile of Ijevan is stronger and more diversified than that of smaller rural pilot communities. The population of 45.1 thousand at community level and 19.5 thousand in the town itself gives Ijevan a much larger service base than sites such as Tumanyan, while still keeping strong rural linkages through surrounding settlements. This matters for ecotourism because it means that tourism benefits can potentially flow through a wider range of accommodation, food services, local products, transport, and guiding functions than in smaller sites with weak service depth. The local livelihood structure in the package is consistent with the wider Tavush economy. Agriculture remains important, but tourism and services are also present and can realistically expand through ecotourism if local products and forest-linked experiences are better organized. Tavush's average monthly nominal wages in 2024 were 156,787 AMD, which provides a useful indicator of the regional economic environment in which Ijevan's tourism and service economy operates. Under these conditions, ecotourism is best understood as a complementary economic activity that can strengthen local income channels rather than replace the existing economic base.

Ijevan's competitive position is broader than a generic non-timber forest-product offer. It combines an Aghstev river town and service gateway; the Yenokavan–Lastiver forest, canyon, cave and waterfall cluster; nearby sanctuary and Emerald-related forest landscapes; Makaravank and the Kirants heritage cluster; local crafts and Ijevan's stone-sculpture tradition; and forest-linked foods such as honey, herbs, mushrooms, berries, teas and preserves. These elements can create a distinctive

nature–heritage–local-product package. A Year 1 producer baseline should record a standard basket's production cost, farm-gate/wholesale/visitor price, packaging, transport, sales commission, volume and net margin, then test whether route-linked tasting, presentation and direct sales increase retained local value.

4. Stakeholder Insights and Local Priorities

The available consultation records do not demonstrate direct participation by Ijevan Forest Economy. This is recorded as a gap, not treated as completed engagement. Before route approval, the municipality should formally engage Armforest SNCO and the competent Ijevan and, where relevant, Sevkar forest-management units, together with sanctuary management and affected settlement representatives.

For Ijevan, the stakeholder discussions are most relevant where they reinforce the community's role as a forest-based and product-based ecotourism site rather than a high-profile destination with concentrated visitor pressure. The most useful message is that Ijevan does not need to compete through large attractions or intensive infrastructure. Its stronger opportunity lies in combining accessible forest landscapes, nearby biodiversity value, local food and non-timber forest products, and relatively easy access into a modest but well-organized ecotourism offer.

A Forest–Tourism Compatibility Register should be prepared and updated before each operating season. It should overlay proposed tourism routes with approved logging compartments, haulage roads and periods, fire restrictions, sanctuary limits, sensitive habitats, grazing/livestock movement and hazard closures. No visitor route should operate through active felling or haulage. The forest unit verifies legality, road condition, closures and product-collection rules; the municipality and providers communicate changes, manage bookings and maintain alternatives.

Two distinct local-product business models are relevant. Model A is on-site visitor spending: guided routes, clear booking, food/tasting points, accommodation links, hygienic presentation and traceable local products create sales in Ijevan. Model B is an external 'Ijevan origin' product for Yerevan or other markets: this requires a separate branding, quality-control, packaging, traceability, aggregation, distribution and marketing strategy and should not be presented as an automatic result of ecotourism. The price-and-margin baseline should test each model separately.

A second opportunity lies in the combination of relatively easy access with still-manageable visitor pressure. Unlike more remote or terrain-restricted communities, Ijevan can be reached and used without major access barriers. At the same time, tourism pressure remains low to medium rather than high.

This gives the community a practical advantage: route-based ecotourism, local-product experiences, and biodiversity interpretation can be introduced before visitor pressure becomes difficult to manage. Stakeholder discussions also emphasized the importance of better mapping, digital visibility, and clear presentation of attractions. In Ijevan, these are not secondary promotion tools. They are part of the basic opportunity to turn an already accessible but weakly structured site into a more visible and usable ecotourism location.

Biodiversity interpretation should serve defined audiences. General domestic and international visitors need a short forest-and-sanctuary story and visitor code; families and schools need guided learning activities; specialist bird, plant and nature visitors need science-reviewed content and small-group routes; guides and providers need operational rules on access, collection, fire, waste and incident reporting. Before signage is designed, Ijevan should complete a numbered attraction and route inventory, verify each point in the field, screen access and sensitivity, name the operator/maintenance owner and connect the point to services. The two project maps below support this work but do not replace it.

Another challenge is the weak organization of visiting conditions. Stakeholders pointed to the lack of standardized rules, insufficient coordination of visiting arrangements, and poor alignment between tourism development and environmental management. This is highly relevant for Ijevan because the community is not itself a protected area, yet it is closely linked to nearby conservation-sensitive zones. Without clearer route organization, visitor rules, and institutional coordination, even moderate growth in tourism could create avoidable pressure on forest habitats and nearby protected landscapes. The stakeholder discussions also pointed to weak cross-sector coordination and insufficient integration of climate-related risks into tourism planning. For Ijevan, this is particularly important because flood risk has already been identified as a relevant site condition. This does not make the site unsuitable, but it does mean that tourism planning should not treat climate and visitor management as separate issues. Routes, stop points, and service areas need to be planned with practical awareness of water-related and seasonal risks, even in a community that is otherwise relatively accessible.

Inclusion is another important local priority. Stakeholders raised the importance of involving women, youth, and individual entrepreneurs more actively in ecotourism-related value chains. In Ijevan, this is realistic because the site's most suitable tourism model is based on small and medium local participation rather than large investors. Food points, local product sales, guiding, interpretation, and small service functions are all areas where broader local participation can be encouraged if the ecotourism model is developed deliberately. The priorities that emerge for Ijevan are therefore clear. The community needs stronger route visibility, better mapping and visitor information, practical service points linked to local food and forest products, clearer biodiversity interpretation, and stronger coordination between tourism development and nearby conservation values. Its opportunity lies in becoming a well-organized forest-and-product-based ecotourism site with moderate demand and relatively easy access. Its challenge lies in the fact that tourism assets are already present, but the supporting system around them remains incomplete.

5. Tourism Baseline

Attractions

Ijevan's tourism baseline is not limited to an unnamed forest landscape. The working attraction system comprises: Ijevan town and the Aghstev river as the orientation gateway; the dendropark/urban green and stone-sculpture setting; the Yenokavan–Lastiver forest, canyon, cave and waterfall cluster with existing active-tourism and accommodation services; Makaravank; the Kirants heritage cluster; forest and river route candidates around surrounding settlements; and Arjatkhlani Hazelnut and Ijevan State Sanctuaries as conservation/interpretation anchors subject to management approval. Individual route status, access, safety, land manager and sensitivity must still be verified.

The municipal tourism pages reviewed for this revision also show a wider service and attraction base than the original assessment captured, including nature, heritage, craft/food experiences and accommodation linked to the Yenokavan–Lastiver area and other settlements. The attraction inventory below distinguishes evidence from next steps; sanctuary entries are not assumed to be freely visitable.

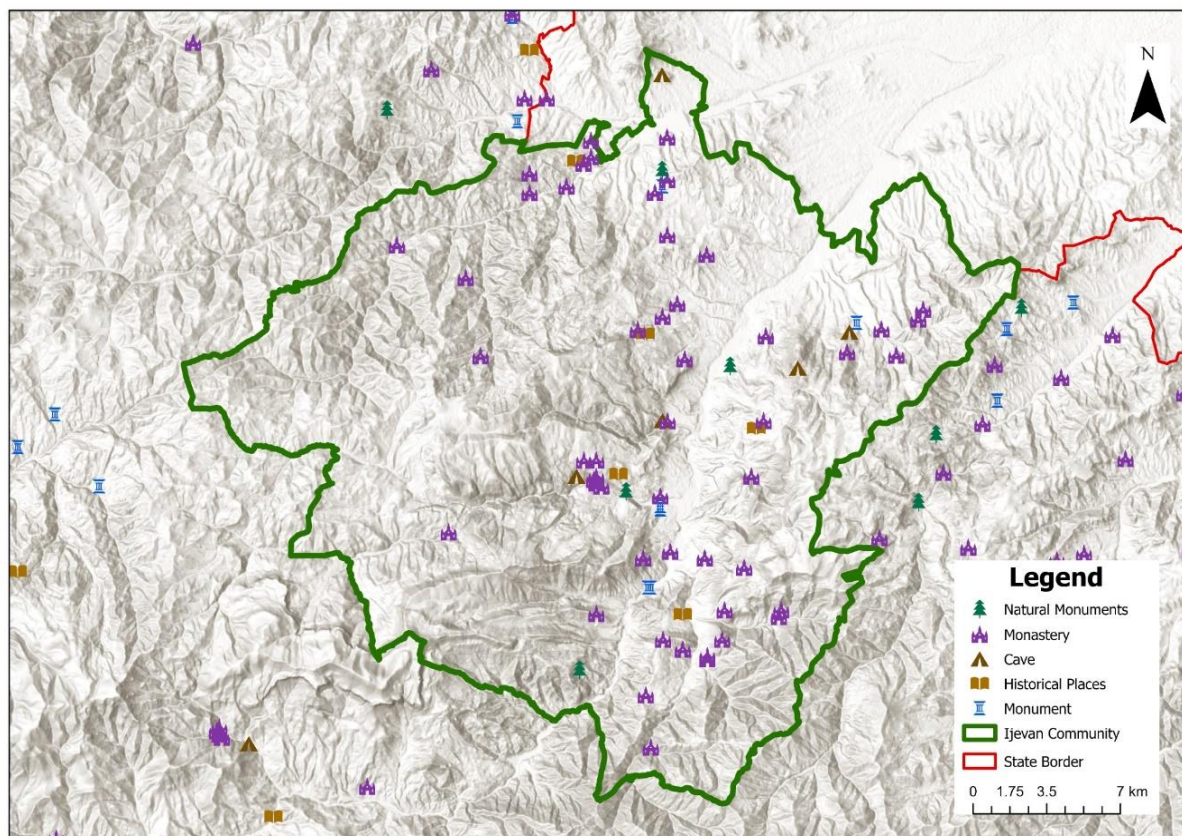
The expanded attraction inventory provides the basis for identifying the locations and clusters with the strongest potential to structure Ijevan's ecotourism offer. Table 1 brings these assets together according to their potential visitor role, while distinguishing established attractions from conservation areas and route candidates that still require further validation. The table should therefore be used as a prioritization framework: inclusion does not automatically imply that a site is ready for promotion or unrestricted visitor access, particularly where forest management, sanctuary regulations, safety or ecological sensitivity need to be confirmed.

Table 1. Priority attractions and clusters

Priority attraction / cluster	Potential visitor role	Evidence and validation needed
Ijevan–Aghstev gateway, urban green/dendropark and sculpture setting	Orientation, short walk, craft/stone story and service connection	Municipal tourism material; define safe route, interpretation points and maintenance owner
Yenokavan–Lastiver forest, canyon, caves and waterfall	One- to two-day active-nature anchor linked to existing operators and stays	Municipal provider/attraction material; validate trail ownership, hazards, capacity, season and environmental controls
Makaravank	Forest-and-monastery guided circuit	Municipal tourism material; verify approach, parking/transfer, interpretation and heritage safeguards
Kirants heritage cluster	Guided monastery/heritage and forest route	Municipal tourism material and project map; identify exact priority sites, roads, restrictions and local services
Arjatkhlani Hazelnut State Sanctuary	Conservation interpretation anchor; specialist small-group use only if approved	Official sanctuary register; Armforest authorization, route, season, group and habitat conditions required
Ijevan State Sanctuary	Forest-landscape and fauna interpretation anchor; controlled use only if approved	Official sanctuary register; Armforest authorization and sensitivity/access validation required
Surrounding forest/river route candidates	Hiking, bird/nature observation, food/craft and village-service links	Project map is indicative; complete numbered GIS/field inventory before promotion or signs

Source: Authors' elaboration.

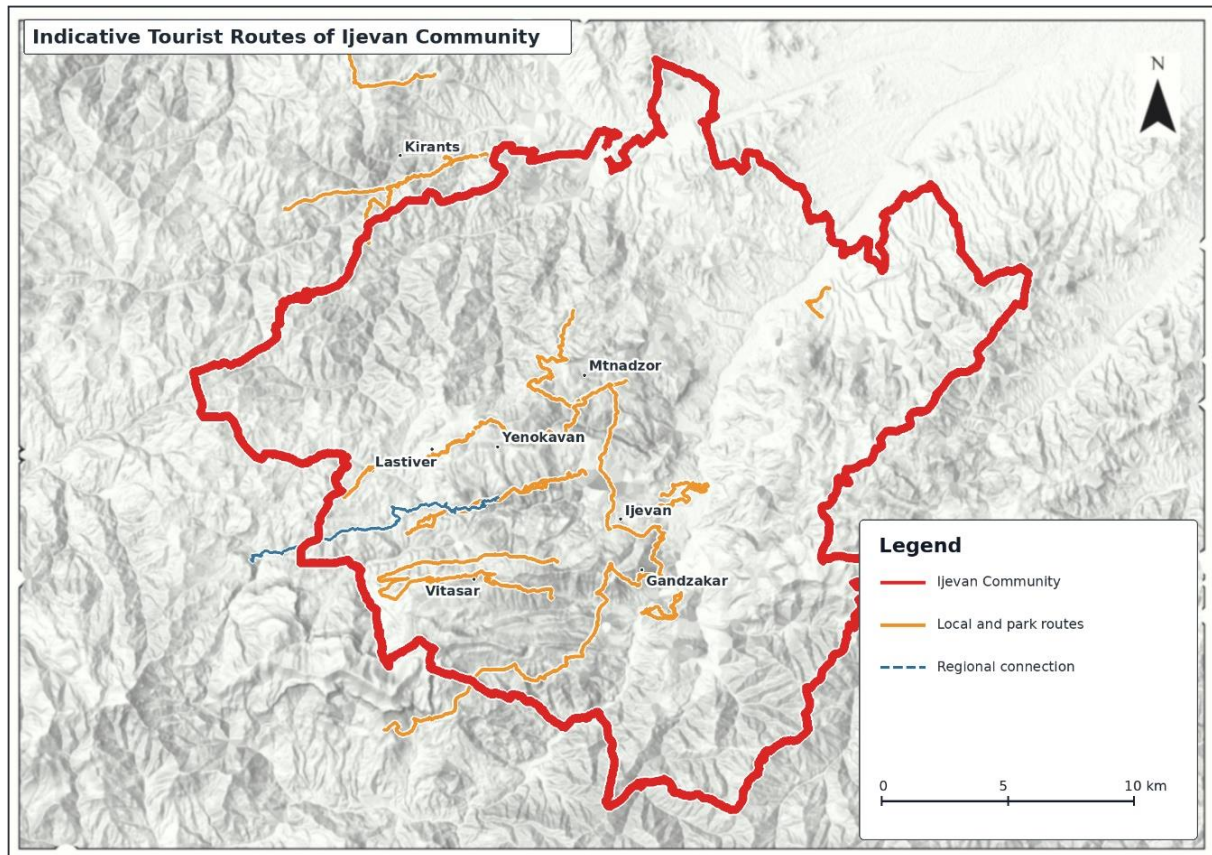
Figure 5. Indicative attraction categories in and around Ijevan Community



Note: the symbols are not named or numbered and do not show route status. Priority points, legal access, operator links, service nodes, hazards and sensitivity conditions must be added during field/GIS validation.
Source: project GIS layers, 2026.

Analysis of available official and user-generated spatial data identifies several partly overlapping route clusters: Ijevan-Gandzakar and Vitasar; Yenokavan-Lastiver-Okon; Mtnadzor gorge and cave routes; northern monastery and ridge routes towards Kirants and Deghdznut; and a regional connection towards Dilijan. Most individual alignments are approximately 5-27 km, although some records represent alternative traces or linked sections rather than separate products. The mapped network is therefore an initial spatial inventory.

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



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

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

The mapped network supports Ijevan's role as an accessible service base for forest, canyon and active-nature experiences. Ijevan-Gandzakar and Vitasar can support shorter and medium-length outings; Yenokavan-Lastiver-Okon is the strongest established adventure cluster; and Mtnadzor, Kirants, Deghdznut and mountain-ridge alignments require guided, seasonal and safety-controlled use. The Dilijan connection is a regional extension rather than a stand-alone Ijevan route.

The mapped network is not automatically visitor-ready. Duplicate and alternative traces must be consolidated, and each selected route verified for legal and forest-management status, distance and elevation, surface condition, river-crossing and gorge hazards, fire and landslide exposure, emergency access, signage, operator and maintenance responsibility. Initial promotion should prioritize routes linked to clear gateways and existing visitor services.

Activities

The site already supports a basic set of ecotourism-related activities. The assessment identifies hiking, camping, and guided tours as existing uses, and this is important because it shows that tourism in Ijevan is not only potential-based. Visitor movement and experience formats are already present, even if they are still limited and not strongly organized. Hiking is the strongest existing activity and fits well with the site's forest landscape and relatively easy access. Camping and guided tours also indicate that the area is already used as a low- to medium-intensity nature destination rather than simply as a pass-through landscape. Wildlife observation is also assessed as possible, while non-timber forest product-based experiences are explicitly supported in the product logic. This is particularly relevant for Ijevan because the local tourism baseline is stronger when forest access is combined with honey, herbs, mushrooms, berries, and other forest products. In practical terms, this means that the community's tourism profile is not limited to walking or forest views alone. It already contains the ingredients for guided interpretation, local-product-linked experiences, and modest biodiversity-based tourism formats.

Visitor Flow

'Low to medium visitor flow' is an unmeasured planning classification, not a numerical result. It means that tourism activity and services are visibly present but no verified Ijevan route/site count, overnight total, occupancy record or expenditure estimate was available to this assessment. Year 1 should establish monthly route/group counts, accommodation occupancy and guest origin where providers can share it, booking and guide logs, visitor purpose, length of stay and indicative expenditure. The same method should then be repeated annually.

This gives Ijevan a useful planning position. The community is not a no-tourism site, but it is also not under the kind of pressure already visible in more established destinations. In practice, this means that tourism development can focus on improving route structure, service visibility, and local benefit before stronger visitor growth begins to create more difficult management challenges.

Accessibility

'Easy accessibility' refers only to reaching Ijevan as a regional centre by the main road network and using it as a service base. It does not confirm all-weather, safe or legal vehicle access to each attraction. Every proposed route requires a field sheet covering road/trail surface, ownership and permitted use, seasonal closure, public-transport/taxi/transfer option, walking time, mobile coverage, emergency access, flood/landslide/fire exposure, parking or trailhead condition and accessibility for visitors with limited mobility.

The original statement that no accommodation was identified is not supported by the official municipal tourism pages. Pages reviewed for this revision list at least 13 hotels/resorts and 6 guesthouses in Ijevan Community and its tourism area. This is a service-base proxy, not a capacity estimate: room numbers, registration status, prices, occupancy, seasonality, accessibility, environmental performance and willingness to join the package must be verified through a provider survey.

6. Suitability Assessment and Zoning

Ijevan is suitable for ecotourism development under a development-oriented but environmentally aware model. This conclusion follows from the combination of low to medium ecological sensitivity at community scale, medium tourism demand, and generally favorable accessibility. Unlike Dilijan, where tourism pressure is already high, or Tumanyan, where terrain risk strongly limits movement, Ijevan is in a more flexible position. The site has real ecotourism potential, existing outdoor activities, and a strong forest-product base, but it does not yet face the kind of tourism intensity that would require more restrictive zoning as the main planning approach. Ecological sensitivity remains an important consideration, but it should be interpreted in a spatially differentiated way. Ijevan is not itself structured as a protected area in the package, yet it is closely connected to nearby protected and conservation-relevant spaces, especially the Arjatkhlendi reserve near Getahovit and the wider Emerald planning context of the area. The presence of mountain forest ecosystems, aquatic systems, and likely Red Book species means that the tourism landscape cannot be treated as ecologically neutral. At the same time, the site does not present the same level of uniformly high sensitivity found in protected forest destinations such as Dilijan. This is why the assessment reflects a mixed sensitivity profile rather than a fully restrictive one.

Tourism demand is assessed as medium, and this is one of the key reasons why the site is suitable for gradual development. Ijevan already has hiking, camping, and guided tours, which shows that ecotourism-related use is not hypothetical. However, visitor flow remains low to medium and demand is not yet strong enough to justify a more intensive destination model. In planning terms, this creates an opportunity: tourism functions can be improved and structured before stronger pressure develops. The site therefore benefits from being in a stage where development can still be shaped proactively rather than reactively. Accessibility is one of Ijevan's strongest enabling factors. The community is relatively easy to reach and can function as a base for surrounding forest landscapes, biodiversity-linked experiences, and local-product-based tourism. This makes it more suitable for sustainable tourism development than sites where access itself is a major limitation. At the same time, accessibility at destination level should not be confused with a fully functioning ecotourism system. Route information, signage, visitor orientation, and service support remain incomplete. This means that accessibility is an advantage, but also a reason to strengthen tourism organization before use increases further.

'Medium demand' likewise denotes an existing but unquantified market: hiking, guided activity and accommodation/services are present, yet no Ijevan-specific visitor, occupancy, booking or expenditure total has been verified. It supports a phased pilot, not a claim of bankable volume. Promotion and investment should be adjusted after the Year 1 baseline.

Operational zoning should map: (1) development/service areas in the town, settlements and lower-risk used sites; (2) controlled-use routes with group, guide, season or vehicle rules; and (3) no-go/sensitivity layers for sanctuary habitats, aquatic areas, active logging/haulage, fire closure and unsafe flood/landslide sites. The contextual project maps require joint GIS and field validation before use.

Because the package covers a mixed municipal landscape, no community-wide strict zone is adopted. Sanctuary/sensitive habitats, active forestry and unsafe areas remain no-go or controlled-use until the competent authority approves access.

7. Ecotourism Product Development

The ecotourism product profile of Ijevan should be built around forest-based recreation, biodiversity-linked interpretation, and non-timber forest product experiences rather than around a concentrated heritage or resort model. Unlike Dilijan, which already functions as a major tourism destination, or Tumanyan, where landscape and monastery access shape a canyon-and-heritage product, Ijevan is better suited to a quieter forest ecotourism model with relatively easy access and moderate demand. The product logic should therefore focus on strengthening experiences that are already compatible with current site conditions rather than trying to create a more intensive tourism offer. The most relevant visitor groups are relatively clear. The first group consists of domestic visitors and short-stay travelers from Tavush, Yerevan, and nearby urban centers who are looking for accessible forest landscapes, short outdoor trips, and low-intensity nature experiences. The second group includes small hiking and camping visitors who prefer less crowded environments than the better-known national park destinations. A third group includes nature-oriented visitors interested in biodiversity, forest habitats, and nearby reserve-related interpretation, especially in the wider Getahovit and Khachaghbyur basin context. A fourth group includes visitors interested in local products such as honey, herbs, mushrooms, berries, and other forest products, for whom the attraction is not only the landscape itself but also the connection between forest ecosystems and local livelihoods.

Quantitative market evidence is currently limited to transparent proxies. Official municipal pages reviewed for this revision list at least 13 hotels/resorts and 6 guesthouses, while Tavush hotel-based incoming-tourist counts provide regional context only. Ijevan should not assign these guests to ecotourism without evidence. The Year 1 market baseline should record provider capacity and occupancy, guest origin, stay length, bookings by product, route/group counts, visitor spending, local-product sales and prices/margins.

The strongest experience type in Ijevan is route-based forest tourism. Hiking should remain the backbone of the ecotourism product. The site already supports hiking, camping, and guided tours, and these activities are consistent with the ecological and tourism baseline. In Ijevan, hiking should not be framed only as general recreation. It should be connected to forest interpretation, biodiversity awareness, and the wider landscape identity of the community. This is especially important because the site's attraction base is not built around one dominant landmark, but around the quality of forest environments, nearby protected-area relevance, and a series of nature-based opportunities that become stronger when they are interpreted rather than simply visited. Wildlife and biodiversity observation should be treated as a secondary but important product line. The package supports wildlife observation, but this should remain carefully designed and compatible with the site's low to medium conservation sensitivity and nearby reserve context. In practical terms, this means guided observation, birdwatching where appropriate, forest ecology walks, and interpretation linked to habitats and nearby conservation areas rather than unrestricted wildlife-seeking activity. The ecological relevance of Arjatkhlenti near Getahovit makes this especially suitable for Ijevan, because biodiversity can become part of the visitor experience through explanation of forest structure, old-growth groves, aquatic systems, and species-sensitive areas.

Ijevan's unique product position is the combination of an accessible Aghstev gateway, the established Yenokavan–Lastiver active-nature cluster, nearby forest and sanctuary landscapes, monastery/craft/stone-sculpture heritage and forest-linked food products. Forest products should support guided interpretation, tasting, menus, craft or food masterclasses and traceable sales, not uncontrolled collection. Cultural assets are therefore supporting anchors within a nature-led package rather than excluded from the product identity.

The seasonal dimension is important and should be used to strengthen the realism of the product. Spring and early summer are well suited to forest walking, biodiversity observation, and herb-related interpretation. Summer is the main season for hiking, guided forest experiences, and camping, especially because the site is relatively easy to access and can absorb moderate outdoor use. Early autumn is particularly well suited to local-product experiences linked to berries, mushrooms, herbs, and food-based ecotourism. This season may be especially valuable for Ijevan because it strengthens the forest-product identity of the site. Winter should not be treated as a core ecotourism season in the current package, as the product base is not yet organized around winter use and the existing tourism logic is much stronger from spring to autumn. A practical optional itinerary for Ijevan should remain simple and forest-oriented. A one-day itinerary could begin in Ijevan town with visitor orientation and a short introduction to the ecological and tourism value of the surrounding forest landscape, continue with a guided route in the wider forest area or toward the Getahovit-side ecological context, include interpretation of nearby reserve-linked habitats and forest products, and conclude with a local food stop or tasting based on honey, herbs, mushrooms, berries, or other forest products. A slightly expanded version could include a second short nature stop or a guided camping-oriented route for small groups. This kind of itinerary is realistic because it builds on the activities already present and strengthens the local-product dimension without requiring heavy infrastructure.

The product direction for Ijevan should therefore be defined by accessibility, forest experience, and local-product depth rather than by tourism intensity. The community does not need a wide portfolio of disconnected products. It needs a coherent ecotourism offer built around hiking, wildlife observation in suitable areas, guided forest interpretation, and non-timber forest product experiences. That is the form of ecotourism most consistent with the site's actual demand level, ecological profile, and development potential.

Thus, these characteristics suggest that Ijevan's ecotourism offer should be developed as a limited portfolio of bookable experiences connecting nature, heritage, local products and existing tourism services. Table 2 translates this product direction into a set of priority ecotourism and service tools, identifying the intended visitor format, opportunities for local spending and the minimum operational and environmental conditions required for launch. The products are therefore proposed as phased options, with implementation dependent on route, operator, safety, land-use and ecological validation.

Table 2. Priority ecotourism product and service tools

Product / service tool	Visitor format and market	Operator and local spending	Safeguards / launch conditions
Ijevan–Aghstev nature, craft and sculpture gateway	Half-day orientation for domestic/international visitors, families and groups	Local guide; café/meal; craft/stone story; booking/referral to onward routes and stays	Safe urban/river alignment; flood and traffic check; named maintenance owner; accessible information
Yenokavan–Lastiver active-nature package	One- to two-day guided forest/canyon experience for active leisure and nature visitors	Existing licensed providers, guides, transport, accommodation and meals	Validated trail/season/group plan; hazard briefing; waste/fire/biodiversity rules; incident log
Makaravank–Kirants forest and monastery circuit	Full-day or overnight guided nature/heritage route	Guide, legal-road transfer, village food/craft stops and accommodation	Confirm exact sites, road/trail legality, heritage conditions, logging interface and emergency access
Forest-product tasting and masterclass	Two- to three-hour add-on for gastronomy, family and culture markets	Producer/household/restaurant ; tasting, preserves, tea, honey, craft or cooking activity	Traceable lawful sourcing, hygiene, truthful origin/season claims and recorded prices/margins

Product / service tool	Visitor format and market	Operator and local spending	Safeguards / launch conditions
Controlled 4x4 trailhead/heritage transfer — conditional	Fixed-route bookable transfer on an existing legal road, combined with a guided walk	Licensed operator/driver, guide, meal and overnight link	No cross-country driving or sanctuary/active-logging entry; route, insurance, vehicle, capacity, season and hazard validation; do not launch if any condition fails
Dilijan–Ijevan linked forest, culture and gastronomy itinerary	Two- to three-day package for longer-stay domestic/international visitors	Joint operators, stays/meals/guides in both communities and one booking channel	Verified travel times, handover, cancellations, spending split, route rules and compatible monitoring

Source: Authors' elaboration.

To complement the priority ecotourism products and service tools identified above, indicative retail price ranges have been developed as a preliminary 2026 market benchmark. For Ijevan, the ranges are intended to help translate the proposed town-to-forest, active-nature, heritage and local-product experiences into potentially bookable offers and provide guides, accommodation and activity providers, producers, food businesses and transport 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. Each product remains subject to the route, operator, forest-management, environmental and safety conditions identified in Table 2.

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, participating providers 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. This is particularly important for Ijevan because the current assessment confirms an existing tourism and accommodation base but does not yet provide verified community-level data on provider capacity and occupancy, bookings by product, visitor expenditure, or local-product prices and margins; these are therefore included in the Year 1 baseline.

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/person); Armenian Explorer full-day 4x4 excursions (AMD 100,000/vehicle); and ExploreArmenia four-day specialist birdwatching tours (USD 460–910/person).

Table 3. Indicative product price ranges (2026 planning benchmark)

Product / service tool	Indicative 2026 retail range	Unit / base	Principal inclusions / exclusions
Ijevan-Aghstev nature, craft and sculpture gateway	10,000-20,000 AMD	Per person; half day; 4-8 participants	Guide/orientation and one interpretation or workshop element included; meals, retail purchases and transfers extra.
Yenokavan-Lastiver active-nature package	25,000-45,000 AMD / 65,000-110,000 AMD	Per person; full day or 2 days/1 night; 4-8 participants	Guide and local transfer included; overnight version includes accommodation and breakfast. Park/activity fees and other meals specified at quotation.
Makaravank-Kirants forest and monastery circuit	25,000-45,000 AMD / 65,000-110,000 AMD	Per person; full day or 2 days/1 night; 4-8 participants	Guide and local transfer included; overnight version includes

Product / service tool	Indicative 2026 retail range	Unit / base	Principal inclusions / exclusions
			accommodation and breakfast. Meals and paid-entry fees otherwise extra.
Forest-product tasting and masterclass	10,000-25,000 AMD	Per person; 2-3 hours	Host/facilitator, tasting and workshop materials included; take-home purchases extra.
Controlled 4x4 trailhead/heritage 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.
Dilijan-Ijevan linked forest, culture and gastronomy itinerary	75,000-130,000 AMD / 120,000-200,000 AMD	Per person; 2 days/1 night or 3 days/2 nights; 4-8 participants	Accommodation, breakfast, guiding and corridor transfers included; other meals, entry fees and optional activities extra unless quoted.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

8. Infrastructure and Service Needs

Infrastructure planning should begin from the expanded attraction inventory above. The first infrastructure object is not a building: it is a verified route-and-service layer that identifies the exact attraction, legal access, land manager, operator, visitor format, hazard/sensitivity conditions, existing toilets/food/accommodation/transport, gap, maintenance owner and cost basis. Signs or construction should follow this validation, not precede it.

Ijevan is suitable for ecotourism development under a sustainable development-oriented model with selective ecological caution. This conclusion follows from the combination of low to medium conservation sensitivity, medium tourism demand, and generally favorable accessibility. Compared with more restrictive sites such as Dilijan or terrain-constrained sites such as Tumanyan, Ijevan is in a more flexible planning position. It already has a basic tourism presence, forest-based attractions, and relatively easy access, while still remaining below the level of visitor pressure that would require more intensive control as the main planning response.

Ecological sensitivity remains an important factor, but it should be understood as differentiated rather than uniformly high. Ijevan is not itself structured as a protected area in the package, yet it is closely connected to nearby conservation-relevant spaces, especially the Arjatkhlani reserve near Getahovit and the wider Emerald planning context of the area. The presence of mountain forest ecosystems, aquatic systems, and likely Red Book species means that tourism development cannot be treated as environmentally neutral. At the same time, the site does not show the same degree of ecological restriction as destinations where tourism takes place directly inside a major national park or in more unstable canyon terrain. This is why the sensitivity profile supports caution, but not a strongly restrictive zoning model. Tourism demand is assessed as medium, and this is one of the main reasons why the site is suitable for gradual ecotourism development. Existing activities such as hiking, camping, and guided tours show that tourism is already present in practice. However, visitor flow remains low to medium, and tourism pressure has not yet reached the level where ecological or infrastructural stress defines the destination. In planning terms, this creates an advantage. Ijevan has the opportunity to improve routes, services, and local product linkage before stronger demand produces more difficult management challenges. The current demand level is therefore high enough to justify investment in ecotourism development, but not high enough to justify broad infrastructure expansion or restrictive visitor-control systems as the central planning tool.

Accessibility is one of Ijevan's strongest enabling conditions. The community is relatively easy to reach and can function as a base for surrounding forest attractions, biodiversity-linked experiences, and local-product-based tourism. This supports a more development-oriented zoning logic than in sites where access itself is a major limiting factor. At the same time, accessibility at destination level should not be confused with a fully functioning tourism system. The absence of signage, visitor-center functions, and currently identified accommodation within the package means that easy access is not yet matched by strong on-site organization. This is precisely why the site is well positioned for structured development: access already exists, while tourism support systems can still be improved before pressure increases substantially. The zoning outcome is therefore appropriate. The selection of a sustainable development zone is justified because the most realistic ecotourism pathway for Ijevan is based on gradual strengthening of community-based tourism functions in lower-risk, accessible, and already used areas. In practical terms, this includes route improvement, visitor information, local-product integration, and support to small-scale tourism services linked to the town and surrounding settlements. The sustainable development zone is therefore the main operational space for ecotourism planning in Ijevan. The absence of a formal controlled ecotourism zone should be interpreted carefully.

It does not mean that ecological caution is unnecessary or that nearby sensitive habitats should be treated as open tourism space. Rather, it reflects the fact that the current package is more focused on sustainable development functions in community land and accessible tourism areas than on tourism planning inside the more sensitive forest and reserve-linked parts of the landscape. In other words, the package prioritizes a development-support model over a protection-led visitor zoning model, while still recognizing that nearby conservation values impose clear limits on where tourism should expand.

A strict conservation zone is also not selected, and this is consistent with the overall logic of the site. Ijevan is not being planned as a highly restrictive protected tourism destination with large areas excluded from use under the package itself. However, ecologically sensitive areas connected to nearby reserves, remnant forest groves, and aquatic habitats should still remain outside the main tourism-use space unless future spatial validation confirms that low-impact access is appropriate. This is particularly important because the attraction base of Ijevan depends on forest and biodiversity value, which would be weakened rather than strengthened by careless tourism expansion. In practical terms, the zoning result means that Ijevan is best suited to selective and sustainable ecotourism development in accessible and lower-risk areas, while nearby conservation-linked habitats continue to shape the limits of tourism planning.

Until the operational zoning map is approved, sanctuary habitats, sensitive Emerald-related features, aquatic buffers, active logging/haulage and unsafe hazard areas should be treated as exclusion or controlled-use layers. This precaution explains why strict site-level protection can apply even without designating the entire community as one strict conservation zone.

The site is therefore appropriate for route improvement, forest-based tourism activities, local-product experiences, and service strengthening, but not for unregulated expansion into all attractive natural areas.

9. Governance and Institutional Arrangements

Ijevan requires a layered operating model. Official Ministry of Environment records identify Armforest SNCO as the managing organization for both Arjatkhlani Hazelnut and Ijevan State Sanctuaries. Ijevan Municipality should convene the community package; Armforest and the competent forest/sanctuary units should validate routes, annual forestry compatibility, sanctuary conditions and ecological closures; providers should operate bookable services; and the Tavush destination-management structure, once a qualified DMO is selected and operational, should support packaging and promotion. Direct consultation with Ijevan Forest Economy is not evidenced and must be completed before approval.

At the local level, Ijevan Municipality should have the main coordinating role. This is consistent with the site assessment and with the fact that the community is the principal administrative and service center of the marz. The municipality is the most appropriate body to connect ecotourism planning with local roads, public space, visitor information, local business support, and community development priorities. It is also the actor best positioned to link tourism functions in the town and surrounding settlements with nearby forest attractions and route-based tourism experiences. In Ijevan, municipal leadership is especially important because the community is accessible and development-oriented, but the current tourism support structure remains weakly organized.

At the environmental and land-management level, the most important actors are linked to the Ministry of Environment and the forest governance system. The broader Emerald Site Ijevan management material shows that the relevant planning landscape overlaps with two forest enterprises, Sevkhar FE (forest enterprise) and Ijevan FE, as well as two sanctuaries, Arjatkhlani–Hazelnut and Ijevan State Sanctuary. Together, forest-enterprise land and designated protected areas account for more than 62% of the wider Emerald site area, while the remaining area is community land. This is a critical governance point for Ijevan: even where the package itself is framed around community land and nearby protected areas, the practical tourism landscape is already shared with forest-management and sanctuary-management structures. Under Armenia’s institutional framework, state sanctuaries on forest land are managed through the forest-governance system, and the Ijevan Emerald planning material notes ArmForest SNCO as the governing organization for the sanctuaries, while reform is ongoing.

This means that the “protected area authority” role assigned in the site package should not be interpreted as a single park administration governing the whole tourism area. In Ijevan, that role is better understood as conservation and forest-management oversight connected to nearby sanctuaries, forest-enterprise land, and Emerald-related biodiversity planning. In practical terms, this role is essential for reviewing where tourism routes can be encouraged, where biodiversity-sensitive habitats require caution, and how tourism development can remain compatible with forest and sanctuary management objectives. The Emerald pilot planning work is particularly relevant here because it already treats Ijevan as a case where visitor use, species and habitat conservation, and land-use management need to be assessed together rather than in isolation.

The broader conservation context also strengthens the need for coordinated environmental governance. Within and near the wider Emerald site are not only the Arjatkhlani and Ijevan sanctuaries, but also internationally recognized biodiversity references such as the Ijevan Hazel Grove Important Plant Area, partial overlap with the Dsegh–Haghartsin–Pombak chain and Dilijan National Park Key Biodiversity Area, and partial overlap with the Haghartsin Important Bird Area. These designations are not separate governance authorities in themselves, but they confirm that the tourism landscape is ecologically significant and that municipal tourism development should not proceed without

environmental review and route-level caution. This is exactly the type of background information that can easily be missed if governance is treated too narrowly as only a municipal issue.

The Tourism Committee under the Ministry of Economy also has relevance, but its role is broader and enabling rather than site-directing. In the Ijevan context, the Tourism Committee is most relevant in relation to tourism standards, destination promotion, tourism-resource registration, and alignment with the national tourism strategy. This matters because Ijevan is not yet a strongly branded ecotourism destination, and future development will benefit from being connected to wider tourism-policy and market frameworks. However, the main operational governance tasks for the package remain local and landscape-based rather than promotional.

The private sector role in Ijevan should also be understood in realistic terms. At this stage, the relevant actors are not large tourism investors but small and medium local businesses that can support ecotourism through food services, local-product sales, guiding, transport, and eventually accommodation or stop-based visitor services as the tourism offer strengthens. Because the package does not identify a strong existing visitor-service system, the private sector role is still emerging rather than fully established. This makes coordination especially important: Ijevan needs not only private participation, but better linkage between local services and the community's forest and biodiversity-related tourism assets.

The main governance weakness remains the absence of formal co-management, revenue-sharing arrangements, and public-private partnership. Under Ijevan conditions, this does not yet create the same pressure as in a high-demand site such as Dilijan, but it does limit the ability to guide tourism growth strategically. Without clearer coordination, visitor use may remain fragmented, benefits may stay weakly linked to local products and services, and environmental responsibilities may fall unevenly across institutions. For that reason, the most practical next step would be a local coordination platform or working group involving Ijevan Municipality, relevant forest and sanctuary actors, local service providers, and where needed broader tourism or environmental support actors. Its function should be practical rather than bureaucratic: route planning, visitor information, local-product integration, seasonal issues, and alignment of tourism development with nearby conservation values.

Public-private partnership is relevant, but only in a modest and practical form. In Ijevan, PPP should not be understood as a path toward major infrastructure or destination-scale tourism construction. The more realistic model is cooperation around route marking, signage, small visitor facilities, local food and product points, and service organization linked to official ecotourism routes. This is much more consistent with the site's medium demand, accessible setting, and still-developing tourism structure.

For Ijevan, the most effective governance model is therefore one in which the municipality leads local coordination, forest- and sanctuary-related institutions provide environmental oversight, small local businesses gradually strengthen the service economy, and broader tourism-policy actors provide enabling support rather than direct site management. This arrangement best matches the site's actual mix of community land, nearby protected and Emerald-related values, moderate tourism pressure, and development-oriented ecotourism potential.

The governance analysis therefore points to a shared operating model. Municipal coordination, forest and sanctuary oversight, tourism packaging, private service delivery and community participation perform different but complementary functions. Table 4 translates these roles into a practical operating model for Ijevan by identifying the core responsibility of each actor and the instrument through which

that responsibility should be implemented. This provides a basis for moving from general institutional coordination to route approval, product operation, monitoring and maintenance in practice.

Table 4. Proposed Ijevan operating model

Actor	Core responsibility	Operating instrument
Ijevan Municipality	Convene platform; connect land-use, roads/public space, local services, provider register, signs and community priorities	Annual action plan; GIS/service inventory; designated coordinator
Armforest SNCO and competent forest/sanctuary units	Confirm tenure/access, sanctuary rules, forestry/logging compatibility, closures, NTFP rules, road condition and ecological monitoring	Forest–Tourism Compatibility Register; route/season approval; closure notice
Tavush DMO / Tourism Committee	Support standards, destination packaging, booking/referral network, market feedback and compliant promotion	Approved product directory and annual market review; phased in with DMO establishment
Guides, accommodation, activity, food, transport, craft and product providers	Operate services; brief visitors; record bookings/incidents/sales; meet route and service rules; support maintenance	Provider agreement, visitor code, logs and maintenance commitment
Settlements and local producers	Provide local knowledge, guiding/support, food/products, access feedback and community benefit channels	Local service agreements; price/margin baseline; feedback meetings
Research/NGO/emergency partners	Support biodiversity criteria, interpretation, training, monitoring design and hazard/emergency readiness	Terms of reference, training plan and annual technical review

Source: Authors' elaboration.

10. Visitor Management System

Immediate visitor-management actions are to: (1) complete a numbered attraction and route inventory; (2) map legal access, land manager, sanctuary/sensitivity, active forestry and hazard layers; (3) approve a route-and-season register with closures and alternatives; (4) define each product's operator, booking channel, guide/group/vehicle conditions and local spending points; (5) issue a simple visitor code covering routes, waste, collection, fire, wildlife and emergencies; (6) install signs only after the route is approved; (7) use guide/provider logs, QR/booking records and selected manual counts; and (8) assign inspection, maintenance and incident-response owners.

Site-wide numerical limits should not be invented before a baseline exists. The route register may set route-specific group, vehicle, guide or seasonal limits where access, safety, habitat sensitivity or managing-authority conditions justify them.

A visible visitor code should cover approved routes, waste, fire and camping, wildlife disturbance, collection, vehicles, severe weather and emergencies. Guide-only use should be applied only where interpretation, safety or sensitivity requires it.

Compliance should use the approved route register, provider and guide agreements, visitor briefing, signs installed after validation, seasonal inspections and incident logs. Repeated or critical breaches should trigger correction, suspension, rerouting or closure.

The controlled 4x4 concept is a visitor-management tool only when it reduces informal access: a fixed, existing legal road; licensed operator; scheduled/booked departure; maximum passengers set by vehicle and route; guide or approved briefing; no cross-country travel; no sanctuary, sensitive habitat or active logging/haulage entry; seasonal and weather closure; insurance, first-aid and communications; and an incident/environmental log. If these conditions cannot be verified, the service should not operate.

11. Local Economy and Benefit Sharing

Ijevan has a broader local economic base than several of the smaller pilot communities, and this gives ecotourism a more practical platform for generating local benefit. The community already combines agriculture, tourism, and services as key livelihood areas, while the town of Ijevan functions as the main administrative, industrial, educational, and transport center of Tavush. Official regional statistics also describe the town's industry as particularly linked to food and wine production, with stone processing and textile production also present. This matters for ecotourism because it means that tourism does not need to create an economy from zero; it can build on an existing service and production base and connect visitor spending to a wider local economy.

At marz level, Tavush has a mixed economy in which agriculture and services both remain important. In 2024, gross agricultural output in Tavush reached 47.9 billion AMD, services reached 35.1 billion AMD, and average monthly nominal wages were 156,787 AMD. At the same time, officially registered unemployment in Tavush stood at 2,503 people at the end of 2023.² These figures suggest that Ijevan is not an economically marginal location, but also that additional local income sources still matter. In this context, ecotourism should be treated as a complementary source of employment and household income rather than as a replacement for the existing economic structure.

The jobs effect of ecotourism in Ijevan is likely to be broader and more service-oriented than in low-population sites such as Tumanyan. The most realistic employment channels are local guiding, camping support, food services, small transport services, visitor orientation, and sales of local products. Because Ijevan already has a stronger town-based service structure, tourism-related income can potentially move through a wider set of small businesses than in communities where the service base is very thin. At the same time, the current package also shows that visitor infrastructure is still weak, with no signage, no visitor center, and no accommodation identified within the present ecotourism form. This means that the main economic opportunity is not mass employment, but gradual strengthening of local service functions around a still-moderate tourism flow. Local products are one of Ijevan's clearest strengths. The filled assessment identifies honey, herbs, mushrooms, berries, and forest products as already present, and this aligns very well with the wider policy and forest-use context in Armenia, where non-timber forest products are recognized as a valid source of local income. In Ijevan, this gives ecotourism a strong identity that is rooted in the surrounding forest economy rather than in imported tourism services. The most realistic benefit-sharing pathway is therefore through local food and tasting points, sale of forest-based products, teas, preserves, and small interpretation-based experiences that connect visitors to the ecological and livelihood value of these products. This is especially important because Ijevan's comparative advantage lies in its combination of easy access and forest-product depth, not in a high-volume destination model.

Forest-management units and local communities have complementary roles. Forest units should verify legal access, annual work conflicts, forest-road conditions, fire closures and rules for any forest products. The municipality and settlements should organize guides, transport, food/tasting, craft/product sales, booking information, route upkeep and feedback. Participating providers can contribute a disclosed per-booking or annual in-kind/financial amount to approved route, interpretation or monitoring costs only after a lawful, transparent collection and reporting mechanism is agreed.

² Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia

Inclusion should be treated as a practical economic objective. In Ijevan, the types of tourism functions that are most likely to grow — food provision, local product sales, guiding support, interpretation, and other small service roles — are exactly the kinds of activities that can be opened more deliberately to women, youth, and individual entrepreneurs. Because the tourism model is development-oriented and still at a moderate scale, there is a real opportunity to shape participation early rather than trying to correct exclusion later. This also fits the stakeholder logic already discussed across the project, which emphasizes stronger involvement of women, youth, and local businesses in ecotourism value chains. A formal revenue-sharing mechanism is not yet in place, and this remains a governance weakness. In Ijevan, this is less urgent than in a high-pressure destination, but it still matters because tourism growth without structured local linkage can leave benefits fragmented and weakly connected to environmental management. For that reason, benefit sharing should gradually move beyond individual business gain toward clearer arrangements around local food and product points, route-based service provision, visitor support functions, and the contribution of tourism income to maintaining the ecotourism offer itself. At the current stage, however, the most realistic model remains one in which ecotourism creates modest but visible local value through services, forest-linked products, and broader participation in a growing but still manageable tourism economy.

12. Environmental and Climate Considerations

Ijevan's environmental profile is defined by a forest-rich municipal landscape that is not itself treated in the package as a protected area, but is closely connected to nearby sanctuaries, aquatic systems, and the wider Ijevan Emerald planning context. This is important because the site's ecotourism value comes from mountain forest ecosystems, biodiversity, natural monuments, and nearby conservation relevance, while the same features also define the limits of tourism development. In practical terms, Ijevan should be understood as a community-based ecotourism site located within a broader conservation landscape rather than as an ordinary forest destination with low environmental significance.

The environmental objective is to keep tourism on approved, safe and lower-risk routes while preventing habitat disturbance and unsafe overlap with forestry or water-related hazards. The main pathways are: off-route movement and trampling in forest/aquatic habitats; fire and unmanaged camping; vehicle use; illegal or excessive collection; active logging/haulage conflict; litter/waste; and flood or landslide exposure. Each proposed route should therefore have a land-manager approval, sensitivity and hazard check, route/season/group/vehicle rule, visitor code, inspection schedule and closure/repair response. Sanctuary access is conditional on Armforest approval, not assumed.

The site's wider ecological relevance also supports this cautious interpretation. In the broader Emerald planning context, the area overlaps with forest-enterprise land, nearby sanctuaries, and other biodiversity-relevant references such as the Ijevan Hazel Grove Area (also known as earlier mentioned Arjatkhlendi Hazelnut Sanctuary) and partial overlap with wider bird and key biodiversity planning spaces. These broader references should not be presented as if they were all direct tourism sites inside the package area, but they do confirm that Ijevan lies within a landscape where tourism decisions cannot be separated from conservation logic.

Community-related risk is also moderate. Ijevan already combines agriculture, tourism, and services, and it has a stronger service base than several of the smaller pilot communities. This reduces the likelihood that tourism will create sudden disruption simply by appearing in the area. At the same time, moderate risk remains because tourism growth could stay weakly linked to local participation and local products if the site develops without stronger coordination. In such a case, environmental pressure on nearby natural areas could increase while economic benefits remain limited or unevenly distributed. For that reason, the most relevant social-environmental issue is not opposition, but the need to ensure that tourism growth remains visibly connected to community-level benefit.

Cultural heritage is present in Ijevan mainly through local traditions, crafts, and the broader cultural character of the community, but it is not the dominant or most sensitive component of the ecotourism package. The site is not built around heavily visited monastery complexes, archaeological sites, or fragile heritage monuments that would face concentrated tourism pressure. Visitor use is expected to remain primarily forest-based and nature-oriented, which means that the main risks relate more to ecological conditions than to direct pressure on cultural assets. For that reason, cultural heritage risk remains comparatively low in the Ijevan package, provided that tourism development avoids visually intrusive or poorly placed infrastructure and remains compatible with local identity. Climate-related risk should remain closely aligned with actual site conditions. Drought is not a defining constraint here and should remain a secondary concern. Fire risk is more important because the site is forest-based and already supports outdoor uses such as hiking and camping. Even without high visitor numbers, dry periods can increase the consequences of careless campfire use, smoking, or unmanaged stop points in natural areas. Landslide risk is present, but not at the level seen in canyon-

dominated sites such as Tumanyan. In Ijevan, slope instability is better understood as a route-planning issue than as a site-wide barrier. Flood risk also deserves explicit attention. It is already flagged in the screening logic, and this makes sense because aquatic ecosystems are part of the habitat profile and some tourism movement may relate to stream- and river-linked landscapes. This means that seasonal water-related hazards should be considered when selecting visitor routes, stop points, and small infrastructure locations.

The most appropriate mitigation approach for Ijevan is preventive and practical:

- Keep visitor use concentrated on identified forest routes and accessible stop points.
- Avoid expanding tourism functions into nearby sensitive habitats, reserve-linked areas, and aquatic zones without validation.
- Strengthen visitor information on biodiversity, route discipline, campfire rules, and low-impact behavior.
- Prevent unmanaged camping, littering, and informal spread of visitor activity into forest and water-linked areas.
- Consider water-related seasonal conditions and local flood exposure when planning routes and small facilities.
- Locate new infrastructure only in lower-risk and already accessible spaces.
- Connect tourism development more clearly with local products and community-level services so that environmental pressure is matched by visible local benefit.

Under Ijevan conditions, environmental mitigation is not mainly about controlling overtourism. It is about ensuring that a relatively accessible forest destination with moderate demand does not remain weakly organized as visitor use gradually increases. That is why the appropriate model is sustainable and community-linked ecotourism with ecological caution, not unrestricted tourism growth across the wider forest landscape.

These environmental and climate considerations need to be reflected directly in the way routes and products are operated. Table 5 therefore converts the main risks identified for Ijevan into route- and product-level controls and defines the response to be taken when conditions become unsafe or environmentally unacceptable. The purpose is not to restrict ecotourism across the community as a whole, but to ensure that visitor use can be adjusted, rerouted or temporarily suspended where forestry operations, habitat sensitivity, fire, flooding, landslides, waste or other site conditions require intervention.

Table 5. Environmental and climate risk–response tool

Risk	Route/product control	Trigger and response
Sensitive forest, sanctuary or aquatic habitat	Validated route; small guided group where required; no off-route access/collection	Condition decline → suspend promotion, reroute or close with managing authority
Logging, haulage or forest-road work	Annual compatibility register; no use in active work area; alternative route	Work notice → close segment and notify operators/bookings
Fire and camping	Approved stops/camps; fire rules; seasonal control; briefing	High danger/unsafe behaviour → prohibit fire/camping or close
Flood, landslide and severe weather	Hazard-screened trailhead/works; weather check; emergency plan	Warning/damage → close, inspect and reopen after clearance
Litter, waste and service growth	Provider code; removal owner; validate before infrastructure	Repeated breach → correction, suspension or relocation

Source: Authors' elaboration.

13. Monitoring Framework

The monitoring framework for Ijevan is intended to support adaptive management by tracking whether ecotourism development remains compatible with environmental conditions, forestry and sanctuary management requirements, local economic objectives, and visitor expectations.

The main monitoring objectives are to measure visitor and market performance; verify that tourism use remains on approved routes and compatible with forestry and sanctuary rules; detect environmental, trail, fire, waste and hazard problems at an early stage; assess local service participation, product prices and margins, and visitor spending; monitor inclusion and visitor satisfaction; and trigger timely adjustments to routes, products, maintenance, closures or promotion where necessary. Table 6 translates these objectives into a practical monitoring framework by linking each objective to indicators, an initial direction or target, monitoring frequency, responsible actors and the corresponding management response.

Table 6. Monitoring framework

Objective	Indicator and baseline	Direction / initial target	Frequency and lead	Management response
Visitor and market baseline	Route groups/visitors; bookings, origin, stay, occupancy, product and indicative spending. Baseline: not available	Use one agreed Year 1 method and repeat	Monthly in season; annual summary. Municipality + DMO/providers	Adjust products, staffing, booking and promotion
Route/forestry compatibility and safety	Approved/open routes, logging/haulage conflicts, closures, incidents and alternative use	Zero operation in closed/active work areas; all routes reviewed	Pre-season and change-triggered. Forest units + Municipality	Close/reroute, notify bookings and correct operator practice
Environmental condition	Trail width/damage, informal paths, litter, fire signs, aquatic/sanctuary condition at selected points	No net deterioration after baseline	Pre-/post-season. Armforest/forest units + research support	Repair, restrict group/season/vehicle or temporarily close
Local price, margin and benefit	Provider/product register; cost, sale price, net margin, local purchase and employment	Baseline in Year 1; retain/increase local share without harmful collection	Six-month/annual. Municipality + producers/providers	Redesign sourcing, packaging, sales points or supplier links
Participation and inclusion	Active providers; women/youth among owners, workers, guides and trainees	Disaggregated baseline and annual participation review	Annual. Municipality/program me partners	Adapt outreach, training, timing and small-business support
Visitor quality and conduct	Satisfaction, complaints, rule breaches and guide/provider compliance	Improving satisfaction; no unresolved critical breach	Per product; annual review. Providers + Municipality/DMO	Coaching, corrective deadline, product suspension or rule change

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Ijevan-specific monitoring priorities: The common indicators in Table 6 should be applied through the approved route-and-season register and fixed observation points on validated forest, river, sanctuary-linked and product routes. Monitoring should record logging or haulage conflicts and closures, grazing or other established-use conflicts, trail damage and informal paths, litter and fire signs, off-route or unauthorized vehicle movement, aquatic or sanctuary condition, marker status and flood, landslide and severe-weather hazards. Findings should be checked with the competent forest and sanctuary units before routes are opened, rerouted or promoted.

Visitor retention and local value: Ijevan's distinctive performance question is whether accessible forest and town visits are converted into bookable routes, overnight stays and paid use of local guiding,

food, transport, accommodation, crafts and lawfully sourced forest-product experiences. Hub, booking, provider and producer records should therefore connect visitor origin, day or overnight status, stay length and service use to named products, while the price-and-margin review tracks local purchasing and the share retained by participating providers. The same review should identify whether women- and youth-led enterprises are participating without encouraging harmful collection.

Review and management response: Ijevan Municipality should review the combined results with Armforest and the competent forest and sanctuary units, the destination-management structure, participating providers and relevant research, emergency and road actors before and after the main season and following significant incidents or changes in forestry operations. Each review should record the decision taken, the responsible actor and the completion date, including whether a route or product is maintained, repaired, adapted, rerouted, restricted, temporarily closed or considered ready for the next implementation phase.

14. Investment and Implementation Plan

The investment logic for Ijevan should be modest, phased, and strongly linked to practical site conditions. Unlike Dilijan, where the main challenge is to manage an already active high-demand destination, or Vardenis, where the task is to open a more remote and underused site to carefully structured tourism, Ijevan is in an intermediate position. The community already has real tourism activity, easy access, a strong forest-product base, and a larger urban-service center than several other pilot sites. At the same time, the current ecotourism system remains weakly organized: there is no signage, no visitor center, no formal accommodation base within the package framework, and no structured governance or revenue-sharing mechanism. This means that investment should not be directed toward broad expansion, but toward building the basic conditions that allow an accessible forest destination to function as a coherent ecotourism site.

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

The investment priorities follow directly from the operational gaps identified throughout the Plan: attractions and routes first need to be validated, visitor products organized, institutional responsibilities established, and environmental and safety controls put in place. Table 7 translates these needs into specific investment objects and indicates the minimum output, responsible actors and appropriate sequencing for each intervention. At this stage, the emphasis is deliberately on investment readiness rather than fixed capital budgets; costs should be established only after route validation, technical design, quantities, operating requirements and maintenance responsibilities have been confirmed.

Table 7. Investment priorities

Investment object	Minimum output	Lead / partners	Timing	Cost status
Attraction, route, zoning and forestry-compatibility validation	Numbered GIS/field inventory, approved routes/zones, seasonal/logging/hazard rules and alternatives	Municipality + Armforest/forest units + GIS/research support	First priority	Scope and field days required
Trailheads, route markers and interpretation	Only for approved routes; design, quantities, installation and named maintenance owner	Municipality + forest/site manager + providers	After validation	Bill of quantities required
Information and booking hub in existing space	Reuse municipal/private space; product directory, maps, booking/referral and visitor code	Municipality + DMO/providers	Early pilot	Fit-out and staffing plan required
Guide and controlled-transfer pilot	Training, approved route register, operator agreements, booking/log system and safety/environmental procedure	Municipality + forest units + guide/transport bodies	Early pilot	Cohort and route design required
Local-product price, margin and market pilot	Producer baseline, lawful sourcing/quality criteria, tasting/masterclass prototypes and sales tracking	Municipality + producers/providers + business support	Year 1–2	Pilot cohort and support package required
Monitoring and data tools	Counts/logs, environmental inspection forms, provider/sales survey, database and annual summary	Municipality + Armforest/forest units + DMO/research partner	Start Year 1; ongoing	Equipment and staff time to be costed
Flood, fire, route and emergency safety	Hazard checks, closure/notification procedure, essential route safety works and emergency information	Municipality + forest/emergency/road actors	Before opening; ongoing	Technical assessment required

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The wider regional context supports this approach. Tavush already has a mixed economy in which agriculture and services both matter, with gross agricultural output reaching 47.9 billion AMD and services reaching 35.1 billion AMD in 2024. Average monthly nominal wages in the marz reached 156,787 AMD, while registered incoming tourists staying in hotel facilities in Tavush increased from 4,308 in 2022 to 4,191 in 2023 and 6,596 in 2024. These figures do not describe Ijevan alone, but they do show that the community is operating within an active regional economy and a growing tourism environment. At the same time, the site-level assessment records low financial viability. That point is important and should not be diluted. It means that, under current conditions, Ijevan should not be treated as a site where ecotourism can yet support major stand-alone investment or rapid commercial scaling. Early phases should therefore rely on relatively low-cost improvements that strengthen local value capture rather than on expensive destination-building measures.

For the period 2030–2032, the priority should be basic operational readiness. At this stage, Ijevan needs the minimum infrastructure and organization required to turn existing forest-based activity into a recognizable ecotourism offer. The main actions should include:

- Validation of the main ecotourism routes and access points in line with nearby conservation-sensitive areas
- Installation of trailheads, route markers, directional signs, and simple interpretation points
- Preparation of practical visitor information on forest ecosystems, nearby reserve relevance, visitor conduct, and campfire rules

- Identification of local service providers that can support food stops, guiding, and small visitor services
- Development of simple forest-product-linked tourism points based on honey, herbs, mushrooms, berries, and other local products
- Creation of a basic local coordination mechanism involving the municipality, relevant conservation-linked actors, and local service providers.

This phase should remain intentionally low-cost and management-oriented. Under current conditions, Ijevan does not need major construction. It needs clarity, visibility, and a first layer of service organization. Because accessibility is already good, even relatively small improvements in route marking, interpretation, and local service linkage can have a disproportionately positive effect on the visitor experience.

Phase 2

For the period 2033–2036, the focus should shift from basic setup to product consolidation and service quality. If the first phase succeeds in making routes and attractions more legible and locally linked, the next step is to improve the actual ecotourism offer. The main actions should include:

- Strengthening biodiversity interpretation and nearby sanctuary-related ecological messaging
- Improving the quality and consistency of local food and product presentation
- Supporting guide preparation for forest interpretation, wildlife observation, and ntfp-linked experiences
- Linking Ijevan town more clearly to surrounding forest routes and stop-based visitor experiences
- Improving small visitor facilities in already used and lower-risk locations
- Introducing regular seasonal review of route condition, visitor presence, and local service performance.

This second phase is where Ijevan's comparative advantage becomes more visible. The site is easier to reach than more remote communities, it has a larger service base than smaller rural sites, and it already has a strong forest-product identity. If these elements are better combined, Ijevan can become one of the clearest examples of a forest-and-product-based ecotourism model without needing heavy infrastructure.

Phase 3

For the period 2037–2040, the site may support selective strengthening of infrastructure and service organization, but only where earlier phases show that visitor use is increasing in a manageable way and that local benefit is actually being retained. This phase should not be treated as automatic scaling. Because financial viability is currently low, any later-stage strengthening should be based on evidence rather than assumption. The most relevant actions may include:

- Upgrading visitor-information functions within existing municipal or private facilities
- Supporting small accommodation or overnight functions where actual demand justifies them
- Improving route-support infrastructure in already used and lower-risk locations
- Creating clearer maintenance and financing arrangements for signage, route markers, and interpretation points
- Gradually formalizing local benefit-sharing arrangements where tourism use becomes regular enough to support them.

Financing, Costing and Investment Review

Financing should follow the same logic. In the early phase, public and project-based financing will be essential because the main needs are route organization, signage, visitor information, local coordination, and low-impact product development. These are not functions that can realistically be left to private initiative alone, especially in a site where demand is still moderate and financial viability remains low. This is fully consistent with the package, which identifies public and private financing as relevant, but does not support PPP at the current stage.

Private financing becomes more realistic in the second and third phases, but mainly at the level of households and small businesses. The most likely forms are investment in small food points, local product packaging, guide services, camping support, visitor assistance, and possibly accommodation improvement where the market becomes more stable. In Ijevan, private investment should therefore be understood as gradual service enhancement rather than large tourism construction.

PPP is not currently an appropriate central financing model for Ijevan, and the package is correct not to rely on it. Under present conditions, the most realistic financing mix is:

- Public financing for route organization, signage, visitor information, and local coordination
- Donor or project-based financing for interpretation materials, training, biodiversity-linked tourism design, and pilot product development
- Private and household-level financing for local product sales, food points, guiding, camping support, and small service upgrades

At this stage, precise cost figures should not be fixed without technical costing and route-level validation. The stronger planning approach is to define investment by sequence and function. For Ijevan, that sequence is clear: first make the site understandable and usable, then strengthen local products and services, and only after that consider selective improvement of facilities where real demand and local participation justify it.

Although an Ijevan-specific visitor baseline is not yet available, regional tourism statistics provide useful context for understanding the wider market in which the proposed ecotourism package would operate. As shown in Table 8, hotel-based incoming tourist numbers in Tavush increased in 2024 following relatively stable levels in 2022–2023. These figures should be treated only as regional context: they do not represent Ijevan ecotourism demand, exclude several important visitor

segments, and should not be used directly to estimate future visitor numbers or investment returns for the proposed products.

Table 8. Tavush hotel-based incoming tourist trends, 2022–2024

Year	Tavush hotel-based incoming tourists	Use in this package
2022	4,308	Regional context only
2023	4,191	Regional context only
2024	6,596	Regional context only

Source: Authors' elaboration.

15. Final Site Classification and Conclusions

Ijevan is provisionally classified as suitable for controlled, community-linked ecotourism development, with visitor and service functions concentrated in the town and other verified lower-risk nodes and controlled use of approved forest, river and sanctuary-linked routes. This conclusion consolidates the baseline, attraction, zoning, product, infrastructure, governance, environmental, monitoring and investment assessments and replaces the preliminary eligibility judgement previously presented near the beginning of the Plan.

The classification is supported by Ijevan's accessible regional-service role and its combination of wooded mountain and Aghstev valley landscapes, nearby nature and heritage clusters, local food and forest products, crafts and existing visitor services. These assets can support a town-to-forest offer built around approved walking, interpretation, guiding, local-product and stop-based experiences. The main opportunity is to organize fragmented attractions and services into bookable products that retain more value locally; route use, overnight stays, expenditure, provider performance and ecological condition remain evidence gaps to be established through pilots and monitoring.

The classification remains conditional and does not authorize unrestricted access across forest, aquatic or sanctuary-related landscapes. Every promoted route, controlled vehicle transfer, collection-related experience or facility must pass land-manager and legal-access review, annual forestry and haulage compatibility checks, sanctuary and habitat screening, fire, flood, landslide and seasonal-safety checks, operator readiness and maintenance assignment. Active work areas, sensitive habitats, unsafe routes and unverified access remain closed or outside promotion, and infrastructure should stay within established or otherwise verified lower-risk locations.

The planning conclusion is therefore a managed town-to-forest and local-product gateway model. The immediate task is to complete the numbered attraction and route register, secure forest and sanctuary validation, activate an information and booking function in existing space, test approved guide, transfer and local-product pilots, establish visitor, provider, price-and-margin and site-condition baselines and operate the monitoring and maintenance response. Later consolidation or investment should proceed only where monitoring confirms safe operation, acceptable site condition, visitor uptake, local economic benefit and the capacity to maintain the assets.

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	Floods
	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	Ijevan Community	
	Marz / Municipality	Tavush/Ijevan	
	Coordinates / GIS reference	Latitude: 40.8788, Longitude: 45.1485	
	Legal status	☐ Protected Area ☐ Emerald Site ☒ Community Land ☒ Other	Nearby Protected Areas
	Link to existing plans	☐ PA Management Plan ☒ Community Development Plan ☒ Tourism Strategy	https://tavushmedia.am/hy/nor-ughiner%D5%9D-ijevanum-turizmi-u-mshakuythi-zargacman-hamar/?print=print , https://ijevancity.am/Pages/Home/
Ecological & Conservation Profile	Ecosystem type	☒ Forest ☐ Grassland ☐ Wetland ☐ Alpine ☒ Mixed	
	Key habitats	Mountain forest ecosystems, aquatic ecosystems	
	Species of concern	Likely Red Book species`	Arjatkhlani reserve - This reserve is home to 120-150 year old trees, over 20 meters high and about one meter in diameter. The reserve is located near the village of Getahovit, in the basin of the Khachaghbyur River, on the northern slopes of the Ijevan mountain range. It was established in 1958. It was

Component	Field / Criteria	Input / Selection	Notes / Logic
Socio-Economic & Community Context			created to preserve remnant Arjatkhlani and berry groves.
	Conservation sensitivity	☒ Low ☒ Medium ☐ High	HIGH → Conservation priority, tourism strictly limited; MEDIUM → Controlled ecotourism; LOW → Potential for broader ecotourism development
	Population ~	45.1 thousand (community, 1 January 2025)	
	Main livelihoods	☒ Agriculture ☐ Livestock ☐ Forestry ☒ Tourism ☒ Services	
	NTFPs present	☒ Honey ☒ Herbs ☒ Mushrooms ☒ Berries ☒ Other	Forest Products
	Cultural assets	Local traditions, crafts	https://ijevancity.am/pages/DocFlow/Def.aspx?a=v&g=df7a277b-db51-4180-a0a6-3f885003efd6
Tourism Assets & Baseline Use	Community willingness	☐ Low ☒ Medium ☒ High	
	Natural attractions	☒ Forest Landscapes, ☒ Biodiversity, ☒ Natural Monuments	Expanded named attraction inventory and maps are provided in the package; field/GIS validation remains required.
	Cultural attractions	Local life, traditions	
	Existing activities	☒ Hiking ☒ Camping ☒ Guided tours ☐ None	
	Visitor flow	☒ Low ☒ Medium ☐ High	Unmeasured planning classification; establish route/site counts and provider data in Year 1.
	Accessibility	☒ Easy ☐ Moderate ☐ Difficult	Destination-level access is favorable; each attraction requires legal, all-weather, hazard and emergency-access validation.
Suitability Assessment & Zoning	Ecological sensitivity	☐ Low ☒ Medium ☒ High	
	Accessibility	☒ Good ☒ Moderate	

Component	Field / Criteria	Input / Selection	Notes / Logic
		☐ Poor	
	Tourism demand	☐ Low ☒ Medium ☐ High	
	Zone classification	☐ Strict Conservation Zone ☐ Controlled Ecotourism Zone ☒ Sustainable Development Zone	Map development/service, controlled-use and no-go/sensitivity layers jointly with Municipality and forest/sanctuary managers.
Ecotourism Product Development	Hiking routes	☒ Yes ☐ No	
	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	Official municipal pages list existing hotels/resorts and guesthouses; verify capacity, status, price, occupancy and package participation.
Governance & Institutional Arrangements	Protected Area Authority role	☒ Assigned	Armforest SNCO/competent forest and sanctuary units: route, forestry-compatibility, sanctuary and ecological oversight.
	Municipality role	☒ Assigned	Ijevan Municipality: local coordination, public-space/access/service integration, provider register and implementation tracking.
	Community groups role	☐ Assigned	Settlements/producers: local knowledge, guiding/support, food/products, maintenance feedback and benefit channels.
	Private sector role	☒ Assigned	Tourism providers: operate bookable services, meet route/visitor rules, report data and support maintenance.
	NGO role	☐ Assigned	
	Co-management agreement	☐ Yes ☒ No	
	Revenue-sharing agreement	☐ Yes ☒ No	
	Public-private partnership	☐ Yes ☒ No	
	Visitor limits	☐ Yes ☒ No	

Component	Field / Criteria	Input / Selection	Notes / Logic
Visitor Management System	Seasonal restrictions	☐ Yes ☒ No	
	Guided-only access	☐ Yes ☒ No	
	Zoning enforcement	☐ Yes ☒ No	
	Max visitors per day	N/A	
	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	
Climate Resilience	Drought risk	☒ Low	
		☐ Medium	
		☐ High	
	Fire risk	☐ Low	
		☒ Medium	
		☐ High	
	Landslide risk	☒ Low	
		☒ Medium	
		☐ High	
Monitoring Framework	Visitor numbers	Baseline: not available / Initial target: Year 1 route, booking and provider baseline / Frequency: monthly in season; annual summary	
	Local income	Baseline: not available / Initial target: Year 1 price, margin, local purchasing and employment baseline / Frequency: six-monthly/annual	
	Biodiversity condition	Baseline: Year 1 route and science-selected points / Direction: no net tourism-related deterioration /	

Component	Field / Criteria	Input / Selection	Notes / Logic
Investment & Financial Structuring		Frequency: pre-/post-season	
	Estimated investment	To be determined after route validation, technical design, quantities and operating/maintenance plan	
	Financing type	☒ Public ☐ PPP ☒ Private	
	Revenue sources	☐ Entry fees ☒ Services ☒ Products	
	Financial viability	☒ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High	
Implementation Plan	Action	Validate attractions/routes/zones; launch compliant product pilots; install only justified infrastructure; operate monitoring and maintenance	
	Responsible	Ijevan Municipality with Armforest/forest and sanctuary units, DMO/tourism bodies, providers, settlements and technical partners	
	Timeline	Year 1 baseline and validation; Years 1-3 pilots/basic readiness; later scaling only after evidence and approvals	

Annex 2: Stakeholders and Consultation Status

The available meeting records identify the Ijevan-relevant persons below. Contact details are retained in project records and are not repeated here. The separate implementation table lists organizations whose participation is required; they are not described as consulted unless the available records confirm it. Direct consultation with Ijevan Forest Economy is not evidenced and remains an action before route approval.

Name	Organization / role recorded	Relevance	Status
Davit Vurabyan	Ijevan Municipality	Municipal coordination and local planning	Consulted / meeting participant
Hrant Ghalumyan	Ijevan; role not specified in available record	Local Ijevan perspective	Consulted / meeting participant; role to verify

Required Implementation Stakeholders and Consultation Status		
Stakeholder	Expected role	Evidence / next action
Ijevan Municipality	Convene package, coordinate public/service actions and monitor implementation	Representative consulted; designate coordinator and annual work plan
Armforest SNCO; competent Ijevan/Sevkar forest units; sanctuary management	Validate routes, forestry/logging interface, sanctuary conditions, closures, NTFP rules and monitoring	Official management role identified; direct Ijevan Forest Economy consultation not evidenced — engage formally
Tavush DMO / Tourism Committee	Package and promote only approved products; support standards and market feedback	Confirm role as destination-management structure is established
Accommodation, activity, guide, food, transport, craft and product providers	Operate products, bookings, visitor briefing, data and maintenance commitments	Complete provider mapping, verification and written commitments
Affected settlements, producers, women/youth and community groups	Local knowledge, services, product supply, inclusion and benefit feedback	Hold route/product-level consultations and record decisions
Research/NGO/emergency/road actors	Biodiversity and hazard review, training, monitoring and emergency/access support	Select partners and define terms of reference

Source: Authors' elaboration.

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

This concise matrix is a planning summary, not a separate full SWOT study. “Verified” denotes information supported by project materials or official sources reviewed for this revision; “Indicative” denotes a planning conclusion that still requires site, route, market or baseline validation.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
▲ [[Verified] Aghstev river town, wooded mountain setting, Yenokavan-Lastiver nature cluster, monasteries, crafts and the stone-sculpture tradition create a varied destination story. ▲ [Verified] Municipal tourism pages list an established base of hotels, resorts and guesthouses, allowing product development to start from existing services. ▲ [Verified] Ijevan is an administrative and service centre with relatively straightforward destination-level road access. ▲ [Verified] Forest products, food, crafts and nearby sanctuary landscapes provide a clear nature-and-local-livelihood identity.	▲ [Verified] No verified Ijevan route-level baseline for visitors, prices, margins, occupancy, expenditure or seasonality is available. ▲ [Verified] Project maps show attraction categories but not named points, validated routes, tourism zones, sensitive habitats or service links. ▲ [Verified] No formal Municipality-forest/sanctuary-provider operating mechanism is documented for the proposed package. ▲ [Indicative] Attractions and services are fragmented; booking, interpretation, maintenance ownership and benefit-sharing are not yet organized as one product system.
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
▲ [[Verified] Ijevan is included in the officially declared Tavush tourist destination, creating a route to future DMO-led packaging and promotion. ▲ [Indicative] Bookable half-day and multi-day products can link the town, Aghstev, Yenokavan-Lastiver, Makaravank, Kirants and forest-product experiences. ▲ [Indicative] A producer price-and-margin tool can raise local value capture through quality, packaging, tasting, route linkage and direct visitor sales. ▲ [Indicative] A controlled legal-road 4x4 transfer and a Dilijan-Ijevan itinerary could diversify access and length of stay after route and operator validation.	▲ [Verified/Indicative] Active logging, haulage, forest-road condition and tourism routes may conflict unless they are reviewed together each season. ▲ [Verified] Sanctuary and Emerald-related habitats can be disturbed by off-route movement, uncontrolled collection, fire, litter and vehicle use. ▲ [Verified] Flood, fire, landslide and severe-weather conditions can affect route safety and small infrastructure. ▲ [Indicative] Promotion before route, zoning, capacity and maintenance validation could send visitors to unsafe or sensitive locations.

Source: Authors' elaboration.