

ADVANCEMENTS IN UZBEKISTAN'S TOURISM SECTOR: POLICIES, PROGRESS, AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

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Annotation. This article provides a comprehensive overview of tourism development in Uzbekistan, focusing on critical areas such as policy reforms, infrastructure enhancements, and international recognition. It highlights the significant progress made in attracting foreign tourists through initiatives like visa simplification and the creation of tourist-friendly policies. The article also discusses the economic impact of tourism, including job creation and revenue generation, underscoring its strategic importance for the country's overall growth. Furthermore, it outlines future plans and strategies to further boost tourism, including collaboration with neighboring countries and implementing targeted programs to diversify tourist offerings. Overall, the article presents a detailed analysis of Uzbekistan's tourism sector, showcasing its achievements and outlining a roadmap for future success in 2030.

Keywords: Tourism development, tourism industry, economic impact, international relations, tourism policy, visa regulations, tourism infrastructure, cultural heritage, tourism promotion, human capital development, tourist attractions, tourism statistics, tourism investments, sustainable tourism, tourism marketing, tourism education, tourism services, tourism trends.

Introduction

At present, the process of globalization is systemic, cooperation between countries is developing in various fields and the volume of information is increasing. Naturally, in such

conditions, people increasingly move freely to different parts of the globe, interacting with others. This, along with international relations, is also essential to tourism development.

Globalization has led to a systemic transformation, fostering cooperation among nations across various domains and facilitating an unprecedented surge in information exchange.

Consequently, individuals are increasingly traversing borders, engaging in cross-cultural interactions, which in turn, plays a pivotal role in the evolution of international relations and tourism development.

Methods

The resurgence of tourism post the COVID-19 pandemic can be attributed to concerted efforts by several nations worldwide. Notably, in 2022 alone, nearly a billion tourists embarked on international journeys, underscoring the sector's revitalization and economic significance.

Results

Experts highlight that tourism contributes substantially to income generation, with approximately 30% of tourism revenue allocated to wages, surpassing comparable figures in other industries. This underscores the imperative to innovate strategies for attracting international tourists, as many nations view tourism as a catalyst for economic recovery and social welfare enhancement, thereby intensifying global competitiveness.

Uzbekistan is implementing the necessary measures to develop the tourism industry. First of all, it should be said that the visa regime for visitors from other countries has been simplified. In particular, today, visa-free entry has been established for citizens of 93 states, an electronic entry visa for 56 states, a five-day transit visa-free entry for 47 states, and a simplified procedure for issuing tourist visas for 76 states.

A visa-free regime has been introduced for PRC, the USA, and Vietnam citizens who have reached the age of 55 and have come to our country for no more than 30 days for tourism purposes. New categories of visas for foreign citizens have also been introduced, such as Vatandosh, Student visa, Academic visa, Medical visa, and Pilgrim visa.

In addition, a tourist policy has been created to ensure the country's visitors' safety. To create favorable conditions for recreation, the number of places in accommodation facilities was increased to 142 thousand, 70 new tourist routes were opened, and six private airlines began operating.

The winter resort "Amirsoy" and the recreation areas "Afsonar Vodiysi," "Zaamin," and "Charvak" have become international tourism points that attract the attention of many foreign guests.

To ensure the development of the tourism sector, it is essential to create and improve a system for training qualified personnel. Today, higher educational institutions specialize in this field in our country. Every year, the number of students studying there increases, and the educational process is improved based on advanced foreign experience. As a result, qualified specialists are trained by international requirements, scientific research, and fundamental scientific and practical work is carried out in various areas.

Travelers are especially attracted to tourist villages: they are interested in seeing with their own eyes the traditional way of life of residents and their unique crafts. One of these is the village of Sentob in the Navoi region, located 120 kilometers from the center of the Nurata region and 180 kilometers from the regional center.

More and more tourists come to see the place where history and modernity merge. There is a beautiful lake, an ancient temple belonging to the Zoroastrian religion, several cultural heritage sites, ancient fortresses, and petroglyphs. The national customs and traditions of the residents also attract tourists.

Modern conditions in Sentobe also improve yearly, so tourists can relax comfortably and get acquainted with historical and natural monuments. Three hostels and 20 family guest houses

have been built, and 15 tourism services have been established. Last year, Sentob was included in the list of tourist villages of the World Tourism Organization. This event became a special recognition of the tourism potential of our country at the global level.

Favorable conditions are also being created to develop all types of tourism businesses in the country. Subsidies are allocated for the construction of hotels and the attraction of international brands, increasing the flow of tourists.

Another great historical event for the Central Asian region was holding the 25th session of the General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization in Samarkand last year. Representatives from over 140 countries took part in the international conference. During the event, intensive dialogue and meetings took place on issues of further tourism development.

Thanks to such large-scale events in our country, interaction with other countries is flourishing, and the tourism industry is developing. In particular, almost seven million tourists visited Uzbekistan in 2023. If we compare this with previous figures, 2016 1.3 million people came to us, and in 2022, 5.2 million.

The flow of tourists from distant countries has increased three to four times. For example, last year, more guests arrived from India - 3.5 times (25 thousand), Japan - five times (seven thousand), the USA - twice (14 thousand), Italy - 3.5 times (17 thousand). In 2017, the average amount spent by each foreign tourist in the republic, in addition to direct costs, was \$197; in 2022, this figure reached \$309, and in 2023 - \$330. Last year, tourists' average length of stay was four to five days, increasing by 1.5 times compared to the same period in 2022 (three days).

Over the past 6.5 years, tourism services have grown 2.5 times, and their exports have increased manifold, reaching 2 billion 143 million dollars in 2023.

Of course, these indicators are evidence of the rapid development of tourism, which is becoming one of the leading sectors of the domestic economy. As the head of state noted: "Frankly speaking, even in those years when everyone was forcibly mobilized to pick cotton in scorching heat and bitter cold, the export of cotton fiber from Uzbekistan did not exceed a billion dollars. Currently, tourism exports have exceeded this threshold. If we increase it three or four times, then, to put it simply, we will not even have to plant cotton."

In addition, these changes further enhance the global prestige of our country. Thus, according to the World Tourism Organization, Uzbekistan occupies a high position in the list of the fastest-growing countries in the tourism sector and is rated by the famous Gallup Sociological Research Center as "The safest state for tourism."

Our country won the "Discovery of the Year" and "Gastronomic Tourism" categories in the National Geographic Traveler Awards list. In 2022, we were recognized as the best-emerging tourism destination in the Global Muslim Tourism Index.

As part of the strategy "Uzbekistan - 2030", the benefits of tourism in the field have been defined. In particular, the total reimbursement of the value-added tax system, introduced on January 1, 2024, should become an essential pillar of the new stage of development of the industry. This will give tour operators and foreign tourists significant advantages and increase Uzbekistan's competitiveness in the international tourism market.

"Such opportunities are an important factor in further developing our activities and improving the quality of service for tourists," says Makhmadali Khakimov, general manager of the travel company Dilrabo Travel. - Our company is one of the largest tour operators in the Fergana Valley; its network has five structures. In particular, we have our transport network. Tourists have three buses and 15 minibusses at their disposal. The team consists of more than 20 young people, half of whom are students. Employees speak at least two foreign languages: English and Russian, Chinese, Arabic, and German. Therefore, we provide services to foreign tourists visiting our region based on modern technologies. We also contribute to the development of domestic tourism.

Discussion

Investments in tourism infrastructure promise substantial future returns, with each job created in the sector facilitating employment opportunities in ancillary industries. Consequently, nurturing tourism alongside other economic sectors emerges as a strategic imperative for national development.

Specifically, Uzbekistan has undertaken proactive measures to bolster its tourism industry, including simplifying visa procedures for citizens of numerous countries. Initiatives such as visa-free entry, electronic visas, and specialized visa categories for certain demographics aim to facilitate tourism influx. Additionally, the country has prioritized safety measures and enhanced tourism infrastructure, resulting in the establishment of international tourism hubs like "Amirsoy" winter resort and recreational areas like "Afsonar Vodiysi," "Zaamin," and "Charvak."

We plan to expand our activities further and create a tourism cluster. We want to build our hotel; in addition to the cities of the Fergana Valley, we organize branches in Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, Nukus, and Khorezm. We will develop our transport network. The conditions created by the state largely contribute to implementing the plans.

According to the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy, benefits have also been introduced for foreign tourists; in particular, a value-added tax refund has been established for goods purchased in Uzbekistan. This increases cash flow into the economy and encourages tourists to make more purchases in the country.

Tour operators are provided tax benefits for export services under contracts with foreign counterparties. This measure makes tour operators more competitive in the international market and helps attract more guests to the country.

Such changes further increase Uzbekistan's tourism potential and strengthen its global market position. This is one of the essential steps towards diversifying the economy and improving the prestige of our country at the international level.

Changes in the transport network play a unique role in tourism development. Reforms in this area in 2023 as part of the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy will take our republic's infrastructure and economic growth to a new level. For example, it is also essential that there are 14 resident airlines in the aviation industry, 11 of which are private. This will increase competition in the industry and help improve the quality of services.

The increase in the number of flights on local routes, intercity, and international flights is worth mentioning. In particular, increasing the number of flights on 13 domestic routes to 236 per week strengthens transport links locally and internationally.

From January 1, 2024, a waiver of the practice of state regulation of tariffs for the provision of freight cars and containers, transportation of passengers on high-speed and high-speed trains, and a transition to a mechanism for regulating them based on market principles was introduced.

Such developments in aviation and rail transport play an important role in strengthening domestic and international economic ties.

The Presidential Decree "On additional measures to accelerate the development of the tourism potential of the republic, as well as to increase further the number of local and foreign tourists," dated April 26, 2023, targets the development of tourism in the Republic of Karakalpakstan, regions and the city of Tashkent were approved. Important projects to implement the document have been carried out in all areas. In particular, over the past year, more than 30 accommodation facilities have been created in the Kashkadarya region, including five hotels, 15 hostels, and 12 family guest houses, and the number of tour operators has increased from 23 to 36.

A "Tourism Stop" has been created at the bus station in Shakhrisabz, one of the region's tourist centers. Seventy-four service facilities have been made on Nasaf Street in Karshi, and 35 on the street passing through the historical square of Shakhrisabz. They have been turned into 24-hour "tourism streets."

In addition, in collaboration with tour operators, tour packages have been developed in three languages (Uzbek et al.) in all regions with high tourism potential. Information tours, an international forum, festivals, entertainment events, and a tourism exhibition have been organized to attract foreign and domestic tourists.

For the Miraki mahalla in the Shakhrisabz region, which is planned to be transformed into a tourist mahalla, 108 billion sums have been allocated to improve infrastructure networks, roads, sewerage networks, drinking water, and electrical lines have been repaired. Construction and repair work worth 3.8 billion soums was carried out on internal roads leading to the Gilon SGM and internal roads leading to several shrine lighting systems at cultural heritage sites. To further develop these works, educational seminars on the development of tourism potential were organized with the participation of assistant khakis in mahallas, three language contents of the “tourist map” of the region, and 65 cultural heritage sites were created.

Particular attention is paid to the issue of local personnel training. For this purpose, the Shakhrisabz College of Tourism and Cultural Heritage was reconstructed. It became possible to train 330 specialists annually in tourism and related industries. As a result of such large-scale work, last year, the number of domestic tourists in the region reached 2.1 million, foreign tourists - 222.3 thousand, and exports of tourism services amounted to \$44.9 million. About 17.5 thousand jobs have been created in tourism and related industries.

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev put forward many relevant proposals and initiatives in the field of tourism development in his speech at the opening ceremony of the session of the General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization in Samarkand last year. Providing a guaranteed security system for tourists has been brought to the fore. After all, the conflicts that occur today in different parts of the planet not only pose a threat to peace but also negatively affect the development of tourism - an essential basis of the economy. The head of state, speaking from the international platform, called on everyone for solidarity and unity to avoid such sad situations and proposed to develop a Global Code of Safe Tourism within the UN to strengthen a robust legal framework in international tourism. In addition, it was proposed that an International Program of Action for the Development of Green Tourism in an Era of Increasing Climate Change be adopted.

Uzbekistan also proposes to establish the UNWTO nomination “Best City for the Implementation of Green Tourism,” declare 2025 the World Year of Inclusive Tourism and adopt a special declaration, create a Council of Historic Cities for Tourism under the World Tourism Organization, hold the World Youth Summit on Tourism in Tashkent, establish a Global a media campus that will bring together leading media outlets, the best journalists and travel bloggers. These initiatives will contribute to the development and prosperity of tourism worldwide.

It is possible to fulfill assigned tasks promptly and increase the country’s tourism potential. In particular, by 2030, it is planned to increase the number of foreign tourists to 15 million and domestic tourists to 25 million. Several programs and projects are scheduled to be implemented to achieve such heights. It is intended to create joint tourist routes with the region's countries and expand transport and logistics capabilities in Central Asia, particularly by implementing the “One Tour - the whole region” program. The focus is on developing medical, environmental, gastronomic, ethno, extreme, and other tourist destinations. Thanks to the implementation of such complex projects, it is planned to create at least a million jobs in the future. This will become an essential factor in the socio-economic development of our country, improving the lives of the people and ensuring employment for the population.

Moreover, investment in human capital through specialized education and training programs ensures a skilled workforce aligned with international standards, further enhancing the tourism sector's competitiveness.

Furthermore, efforts to promote tourism at the local level, such as developing tourist villages like Sentob, showcase the blend of historical heritage and modern amenities, appealing

to discerning travelers.

The continuous growth in tourist arrivals, coupled with increased spending per tourist and expanded tourism services, underscores Uzbekistan's burgeoning tourism potential and its strategic positioning in the global tourism landscape.

In conclusion, strategic policy interventions, infrastructure development, promotion of cultural heritage, and international collaboration are pivotal in unlocking Uzbekistan's tourism potential, fostering economic growth, and positioning the nation as a prominent player in the global tourism arena.

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