

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE BUKHARA REGION: A STRATEGIC ANALYSIS OF NON-TRADITIONAL TOURISM INITIATIVES FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

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Annotation. This article explores the potential for sustainable tourism development in the Bukhara Region through a strategic analysis of non-traditional tourism initiatives. The research aims to address the imperative of diversifying tourism offerings to foster economic growth, considering the historical significance of the region and its existing tourism landscape. The primary objectives of this study are to identify and evaluate non-traditional tourism initiatives that can contribute to the economic development of the Bukhara Region. Specific goals include understanding the key components of cultural and heritage tourism, eco-tourism, adventure tourism, agri-tourism, health and wellness tourism, educational tourism, digital and virtual tourism, and collaboration strategies. The research seeks to provide actionable insights for stakeholders involved in regional tourism development. A comprehensive research design, employing a case study approach, is utilized to analyze the Bukhara Region's current tourism landscape. Data is collected through a combination of primary methods, including interviews with key stakeholders, surveys distributed to tourists and local communities, and secondary methods involving the review of existing reports, literature, and relevant data sources. The research design allows for a holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with non-traditional tourism initiatives in the region. Furthermore, the analysis highlights the importance

of collaboration and partnerships in ensuring the success of these initiatives. The study identifies specific strategies and successful models from global examples that can be adapted to the Bukhara context.

The implications of this research extend to policymakers, businesses, and local communities involved in the regional tourism development of Bukhara. Recommendations are provided to guide the implementation of non-traditional tourism initiatives, emphasizing the need for sustainable practices, community involvement, and effective marketing. The study contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable tourism development, offering insights applicable to regions with similar historical significance and tourism potential.

In conclusion, this article provides a strategic roadmap for sustainable tourism development in the Bukhara Region, emphasizing the significance of non-traditional tourism initiatives for fostering economic growth. The research findings offer valuable insights to inform decision-making processes and inspire collaborative efforts toward the realization of a vibrant and economically sustainable tourism sector in the Bukhara Region.

Keywords: *Cultural and heritage tourism, eco-tourism, adventure tourism, agro-tourism, health and wellness tourism, educational tourism, and digital and virtual tourism emerge as viable options.*

Introduction

Tourism, as one of the most promising drivers of economic growth, plays a pivotal role in the transition towards a "green" economy and contributes to sustainable and inclusive development. In turn, the tourism sector, being an intersectional industry, implies that even minor improvements towards greater sustainability in this domain have a significant impact on economies of all scales: local, national, regional, and global. Investments and financing constitute a vital part of securing sustainability, stability, and "greening". Today, every country possesses real opportunities to support tourism through the attraction of both public and private investments, including investments in infrastructure, introduction of innovations and new business models, support for local communities as well as for micro, small, and medium-sized businesses as the cornerstone of economic development. President Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev has designated tourism as a strategic sector of the national economy. Uzbekistan, historically situated at the crossroads of civilizations, boasts impressive historical, archaeological, and cultural resources that hold significant value for international tourism. Within the country's borders, more than 8,000 historical and natural landmarks can be found, many of which are included in UNESCO's lists of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Today, Uzbekistan is an open country to the world, offering visa-free entry to citizens of 95 nations. By comparison, in 2017, residents of only 9 countries could visit Uzbekistan without the need for an entry visa. In a short span of time, due to the consistent policies pursued by the leadership and government, along with active promotion programs, an unprecedented growth in the number of foreign tourists visiting our country has been observed. While in 2017, Uzbekistan received 2.7 million tourists, in 2019, this figure reached 6.7 million. It is expected that by the end of 2023, this number will reach approximately 7.2 million, surpassing the pre-pandemic level by 7%. New opportunities in the sector are swiftly being seized upon by local and foreign investors. For instance, there has been a notable increase in the number of hotels operating in our country, yet as of 2021, the room capacity remained relatively low, with 29,000 rooms and 61,500 beds. By 2025, our goal is to provide facilities with more than 3,000 hotels offering 130,000 beds. To facilitate the broad attraction of investments to the tourism sector, a range of measures have been adopted to incentivize the private sector to invest in hotel construction and other infrastructure projects. This includes the introduction of simplified mechanisms for the registration and operation of tourism businesses, various customs and tax incentives, and mechanisms for cost compensation.

Uzbekistan has demonstrated remarkable growth in the last five years with an average economic growth of 5.32%. In defiance of the global challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the nation achieved a 2% increase in gross domestic product (GDP) in 2020, swiftly followed by a resurgent 7.4% rebound in 2021. According to preliminary estimates, in 2022, the GDP at current prices registered UZS 888,341 billion and, compared to 2021, increased in real terms by 5.7% as affirmed by The Agency of Statistics under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Looking at the economic performance of Uzbekistan in 2022 in more detail, the gross value added of the production of goods amounted to UZS 484,679.9 billion (USD 43.9 billion), and services UZS 343,374.3 billion (USD 31.1 billion), and net taxes on products UZS 60,287.5 billion (USD 5.5 billion)

Bukhara, a city with a rich heritage dating back over 2,000 years, stands as a testament to the intricate tapestry of Central Asian history. Nestled along the Silk Route, it is a preeminent example of a medieval city, with its urban fabric remarkably preserved. Key landmarks, such as the Ismail Samani tomb from the 10th century and an array of 17th-century madrasas, underscore its historical and architectural importance. The Historic Centre of Bukhara, a relic from the Silk Roads era, stands as a beacon of Islamic civilization from the 10th to the 17th centuries, exhibiting an urban fabric that has endured the test of time.

Bukhara has long been a focal point of economic and cultural endeavors in Central Asia. Originating as a prominent Persian city, it evolved into a major center of Islamic culture during the 8th century, establishing itself as a cultural nexus within the Caliphate. The city's historical trajectory, coupled with its geographic location on the Silk Route, contributed significantly to its standing as a hub for trade, culture, and intellectual pursuits.

Despite the tumultuous Mongol invasions of the 13th and 14th centuries, Bukhara's old town has endured, bearing witness to the urbanism and architecture of the Sheibani period of Uzbek rule. The citadel, reconstructed in the 16th century, has maintained its central role in the civic life of Bukhara since its inception. Architectural treasures from early times, including the Ismail Samani tomb and the Poi-Kalyan minaret, showcase the city's resilience and architectural prowess.

The true significance of Bukhara lies not merely in its individual monuments but in the cohesive townscape that emerged during the Sheibanid dynasty. This period, beginning in the early 16th century, laid the foundation for the city's high and consistent level of urban planning and architecture. The ensemble of landmarks, including the Poi-Kalyan group, the Lyabi-Khauz ensemble, and various medressehs, exemplifies the city's architectural prowess during this period.

The importance of Bukhara is underscored by its recognition under UNESCO criteria. Criterion (ii) acknowledges its profound influence on the urban layout and planning of towns across a vast region of Central Asia. Criterion (iv) affirms Bukhara as the most complete and unspoiled example of a medieval Central Asian town, preserving its urban fabric to the present day. Criterion (vi) recognizes Bukhara's historical role as the largest center for Muslim theology, particularly on Sufism, in the Near East during the 9th to 16th centuries.

Tourist behavior is a multifaceted and widely discussed topic, and the concept of tourist motivation does not have a generally accepted definition. A thorough understanding of specific tourism motivations is paramount for effective product and service planning, targeted marketing communications, and improving and developing visitor attractions. Many classifications, segments, and models have been proposed, reflecting a variety of thematic considerations (Li and Cai, 2012; Senkova et al., 2016). In the complex landscape of tourism, Witt and Mountain (1994) analyzed tourism as a distinct product comprising five main components: attractions, destinations, accessibility, image and prices. Their point of view highlights the changing preferences of the current generation, which contrast significantly with those of the past.

Moutinho (2011) identifies a new generation of novice travelers motivated by a desire for

discovery, cultural exploration and immersion in the fauna and flora of a particular destination, turning tourists into explorers. Explorers seek stimulating and even adventurous experiences to satisfy their curiosity, with optimal arousal balancing lifestyle stimulation and leisure stimuli (Stone, 2005). Holden (2005) adapted Maslow's hierarchical model specifically for the tourism sector, emphasizing the satisfaction of lower-level needs as a prerequisite for fulfilling higher-level requirements, culminating in self-actualization.

The main motives identified in the professional literature include regeneration (both active and passive, spa and healing), exploration (cultural, scientific, historical, educational, and personal development and exploration), and connections and connections (family, relatives, friends, religion). and business). Maslow's hierarchy further contextualizes these motives by encompassing self-actualization, esteem, love/belonging, safety, and physiological needs within tourism.

Zelenka and Paskova (2012) state that motivation combines internal incentives and external factors (e.g., marketing recommendations) that compel people to engage in a specific activity. The criterion for choosing a particular type of tourism significantly affects participants' satisfaction. Push factors, such as the desire to escape everyday life or relaxation, as well as pull factors that influence the choice and attractiveness of a destination, play a critical role in motivating participation in tourism (Chertik and Fischerova, 2009). Understanding these nuances is essential to deciphering the complex interplay of motives, preferences and satisfaction in the dynamic tourism industry.

Tourism continues to evolve and change, thus creating, in addition to the primary forms of tourism, new structures that meet the unique needs of various specialized tourism segments. Tourism is constantly changing; New forms of tourism or old ones adapt to the latest trends, responding to changes in lifestyle (Internet, individualization, independence, extension of active age). Specific forms of tourism arise from particular activities that motivate travel, ranging from special needs to the age of participants (Ryglová et al., 2011).

Table 1. Examples of unusual forms of tourism (Source: own research, according to available literature)

Examples of non-traditional forms of tourism	
Food tourism	The main motivation for tourism is gastronomy and food experiences (Jakubowska and Radzymińska, 2019). This may include participation in specialized gastronomic events or food experiences, preparation and presentation of meals, familiarization with gastronomic traditions in a given destination (Kotíková, 2013).
Health tourism	Tresidder (2011, p. 268) defines health tourism as "the medical treatment outside the country of tourist's residence where the therapeutic element is the main subject of activities in the visited country".
Adventure tourism	Adventure tourism is a form of tourism that entails a certain amount of risk (controlled), requires effort to overcome challenges (physical, emotional, psychic), requires a degree of skill and generates strong emotions" (Kotíková, 2013, p. 68).
Dark tourism	Dark tourism represents intermixture of history, heritage, tourism, and tragedies. We can argue that humanity has been interested in „death” since the time of pilgrimages (Švedová et al., 2018).
Event tourism	Events include cultural events, festivals, summer music festivals, village performances (musical, theatre, others), concerts, musicals, sporting events, folklore events, historical events, balls, religious events etc. (Kotíková, 2013).

Volunteer tourism	Volunteer tourism is one of the new forms of tourism. Many young people travel abroad to volunteer. The main reasons include the possibility to travel to exotic countries.
Wedding tourism	Wedding tourism combines all activities connected with wedding and honeymoon. Wedding tourism is one of the most dynamically developing branches of modern tourism. The most popular destinations are Greece, Italy, Mauritius, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Fiji, Cuba and Las Vegas (Syrovátková, 2013).
Space tourism	Space tourism means space travel organized by a highly specialized, high-tech organization (Kotíková, 2013).
Educational tourism	The main point here is further education, the desire to learn new things.
Rural tourism	It allows reviving traditional economic activities. It brings people together, strengthens the relationship with nature, consolidates health and develops the need of the urban population to "return to the roots" (Babinský and Bujna 2015; Arintoko et al., 2020; Akay, 2020).
Geocaching	Geocaching is a "treasure hunting" game that uses modern technologies.
Shopping tourism	The underlying idea is the joy of buying and the opportunity to browse new, unique goods (Syrovátková, 2013). Štefko and Steffek (2018) point to the main motive of this kind of tourism, a fashion-like art that reflects the uniqueness of time, place and culture.
Couchsurfing	Couchsurfing is an international project that brings together people from all over the world. On the one hand, there are those who are looking for a place to spend the night, and on the other, there are those who offer accommodation (Syrovátková, 2013).
Fair tourism	Fair tourism focuses on contractual and sales exhibitions of various products or services. Interest in this form of tourism is declining slightly (Syrovátková, 2013).
Religious tourism	It is clear from the title that this type of tourism is mainly based on the interest of visiting places of religious importance / pilgrimage places.
Hunting tourism	It is mainly associated with hunting wild animals or birds. The main motives of participation in this form of tourism include interest in hunting, wildlife, as well as psychological regeneration.
Ascetic tourism	It is connected with a denial of enjoyment and delight. This form is often associated with religion.
Film tourism	The main incentive is to visit places with which a particular film or other audiovisual work is associated, or to visit attractions and events related to film, series or other similar audiovisual works (Kotíková, 2013).
Caravan tourism and motorcycling	Caravaning is considered by many authors to be a lifestyle. We know two subgroups - those who use caravans only during holidays and others who have fully furnished caravans that are adapted to year-round traveling. Motorcycling is a specific form of tourism, the goal becomes a way. The focus is placed on the vehicle. The fans of this form meet all over the world on motorbikes (Syrovátková, 2013).

Source: *Author's development as a result of scientific research*

We will conduct a SWOT analysis and an analysis of SMTE (small and medium-sized tourism enterprises) for the development of non-traditional types of tourism in the Bukhara

region.

A SWOT analysis is conducted for non-traditional types of tourism in the Bukhara region and its SMTEs (small and medium-sized tourism enterprises) to assess their current and projected competitiveness based on strategic management. The relationship between SMTEs and destinations is clear, showing that the weaknesses and threats of a destination are reflected in the competitiveness of SMTEs and vice versa. As shown in Table 5, SWOT analysis focuses on the strategic, rather than operational, strengths and weaknesses of SMTE. Regarding the capabilities of Bukhara tourism and SMTE, their flexibility and ability to adapt products to consumer needs are of great importance to their existence. SMTEs can identify profitable niches in the market, establish their requirements, and attempt to meet specialized needs. Direct control entrepreneurs allow you to manage external activities quickly and efficiently. Fewer hierarchical levels allow for closer and more efficient control over the service delivery process, providing personalized customer service. In addition, archaeological heritage, natural and cultural resources, and local character are also important assets. As a result, tourists benefit from local resources that are ideally located for a special holiday. SMTE also benefits from personal relationships with customers, suppliers, labor and the tourism industry. Their size allows for individualization of all products supplied, and customers often become friends and are treated as such. Likewise, strong employee relationships support employee loyalty and low turnover. The owner's family is usually closely involved in all aspects of the business, responding effectively and promptly to any problem. Their involvement in the management of the enterprise provides significant benefits, especially due to the presence of a highly flexible, versatile and dedicated workforce that tolerates unsociable work schedules. Family members feel committed to the enterprise's long-term success and often make no distinction between their professional and family lives. In this way, a better match is achieved between tourism demand and SMTE supply.

Table 2. Non-traditional types of tourism in the Bukhara region and SMTEs' SWOT analysis

<u>Strengths</u> • <i>Flexibility</i> • <i>Delivery of products according to individual orders</i> • <i>Entrepreneurial activity</i> • <i>Family involvement</i> • <i>Natural and cultural resources</i> • <i>Strong local character</i> • <i>Personalized Relationships</i> • <i>Staff loyalty and low staff turnover</i>	<u>Weakness</u> • <i>Control</i> • <i>Marketing</i> • <i>Information technology illiteracy</i> • <i>Dependence on tour operators</i> • <i>Market support</i> • <i>No economies of scale</i> • <i>Human Resource Management</i> • <i>Education and training</i> • <i>Transport and accessibility</i> • <i>Financial management and resources</i> • <i>Seasonality</i> • <i>Lack of standardization</i> • <i>No quality guarantees</i>
<u>Opportunities</u> • <i>The increasing size of tourism demand</i> • <i>Trends in tourism demand</i> • <i>Low cost of living in the periphery</i> • <i>Information technology</i>	<u>Threats</u> • <i>Environmental degradation</i> • <i>Concentration and globalization</i> • <i>Oversupply</i> • <i>Lack of transparency in CRS</i> • <i>Infrastructure</i>

• <i>Infrastructure development</i> • <i>Transport</i>	• <i>Pandemic</i> • <i>Political interference</i>
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Source: *Author's development as a result of scientific research*

A detailed examination of the weaknesses of Bukhara tourism and SMTE is critical to understanding the industry's ability to compete globally. Although entrepreneurs are usually an asset, several management problems often arise. The lack of strategic and operational management know-how creates inconsistency in creating and delivering tourism products. This directly impacts customer satisfaction and the projected image of the industry. There is often a complete lack of strategic vision, and businesses are often seen as extensions of the owners' internal environment. Entrepreneurs hire family members and relatives as staff and suppliers even though more suitable/qualified alternatives are available in the market. Place. Therefore, the management of SMTE projects the family lifestyle of the owner and decision-making processes onto the enterprise. Marketing is another major shortcoming of most entrepreneurs and Bukhara resorts, as they are often entirely unaware of the methods available and, therefore, follow a product-centric rather than a consumer-centric approach.

Consequently, instead of a consistent and well-planned marketing campaign, uncoordinated, isolated troubleshooting marketing efforts are undertaken occasionally. The lack of market research weakens knowledge of consumer needs and makes identifying methods for improving services to meet consumer expectations difficult. Failure to finance and execute advertising campaigns and other promotional strategies reduces their market visibility. These shortcomings, coupled with the fact that many entrepreneurs are unfamiliar with information technology (IT), add to the challenges of SMTEs in effectively marketing themselves. Consequently, both Bukhara SMTEs and destinations suffer from over-reliance on tourism distribution channels to promote and distribute their products. In particular, intermediaries and tour operators have enormous power within the track and can determine the Bukharatourism product, marketing, distribution and pricing (Buhalis, 1995).

Consequently, the marketing campaign and visibility of Bukharatourism in key target markets are often determined by the reach, area, photographs and descriptions in tour operators' brochures. European tour operators also control the availability of Mediterranean and long-haul destinations, as they own the majority of charter airlines that provide direct, low-cost flights to these destinations. Since most resorts are located in peripheral areas, there is usually little economic development in the supply sectors. Thus, distant destinations must import required raw and construction materials from other places. At the same time, SMTE often faces transportation, delivery and procurement problems, as well as excessive transportation costs.

Moreover, lack of economies of scale in raw material procurement, low bargaining power and lack of advanced equipment are additional operational weaknesses. This means that SMEs have to pay higher prices for products than their larger counterparts. The lack of specialized personnel and inadequate training procedures mean that human resource management is a significant weakness of Bukhara tourism. Most SMTEs require staff to fill a wide range of positions, typically provide loose job descriptions, and require staff with varying qualifications. Labor turnover due to the seasonality of the tourism industry reduces the availability of qualified and experienced personnel. It makes the delivery of the tourism product inconsistent and unprofessional. The small size of the enterprise provides little opportunity for the division of tasks, professional staff, and adequate training. Because quality standards are not imposed, service delivery varies depending on occupancy, service provider, and time. Transportation and accessibility to remote destinations can also be weaknesses, as most businesses are in peripheral and often inaccessible regions. SMTEs tend to feel frustrated because they cannot attract consumers simply because they cannot provide convenient, reliable, affordable transportation.

The formation of air charter carriers in destination regions such as Turkey and Spain and emerging deregulatory policies in the European Union may reduce this problem shortly.

Conclusion

Emerging international tourism competition, still a massive tourism orientation of the industry, the transformation of demand, increase in the volume of tourist visits, dependence on intermediaries in the distribution of the tourism product in the primary target markets, lack of a wide range of management skills of Bukhara entrepreneurs engaged in non-traditional tourism; and the lack of a comprehensive tourism policy or master plan from the public sector has led to a decline in the competitiveness of non-traditional tourism in Bukhara. This has a number of adverse consequences for the profitability of the private sector and numerous negative economic, sociocultural and environmental consequences for the host population. As a result, the return on resources used to produce Bukhara's tourism services is insufficient, and Bukhara's sustainability as an important tourist destination is quickly becoming questionable. Based on strategic analysis, the article highlights the strategic weaknesses and structural problems of the private and public sectors. This shows that the rationalization of the tourism industry is urgently needed. Consequently, a grand strategy and a wide range of strategic directions, goals and objectives are proposed for Bukhara as a whole entity and its SMTE.

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