

## PILGRIMAGE TOURISM IN UZBEKISTAN: EXISTING PROBLEMS AND THEIR SOLUTIONS

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### ARTICLE INFO.

**Keywords:** tourism, economy, pilgrimage tourism, tourist, electronic platform, hotel, pilgrimage, flight, movie.

### Abstract

This article analyzes the development of tourism, the number of tourists, existing problems and shortcomings in the field of tourism. Also, suggestions and recommendations have been developed for the further development of pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan and the improvement of the quality of tourism services for tourists.

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Tourism is currently one of the main sectors driving world development. According to experts, tourism is becoming the most profitable industry of the 21st century. The share of tourism services in the gross domestic product of the developed countries of the world, such as France, Italy, Spain and Turkey, occupies a significant place. Also, the development of tourism has a positive effect on ensuring the employment of the local population, increasing the volume of production of goods and providing services.

In recent years, great attention has been paid to the development of tourism in Uzbekistan. Our government has established a number of measures to support the industry and developed regulatory documents. A number of activities are being carried out to increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of the tourism market, diversify tourism products and services, and strengthen the image of our country as a safe area for tourism. The decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated February 9, 2021 "On measures to develop domestic and pilgrimage tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan" was adopted. In the decree, tasks were defined for the development of pilgrimage tourism as well as all types of tourism.

Pilgrimage tourism is the most ancient and historical type of tourism industry among the directions of modern tourism. This is because "Hajj" and "Umra" pilgrimages have been developing since 1000 years ago. Today, Uzbekistan has 784 Islamic shrines, 19 Christian shrines in the regions, and 8 Buddhist cultural heritage sites in the regions. Advertising these places of pilgrimage and cultural objects through the mass media, showing them to foreign and local tourists, and improving the quality of tourism services for them are urgent tasks.

The government is paying great attention to the development of a strategic plan for the development of Uzbekistan's domestic tourism, as well as the development of pilgrimage tourism, among other types of tourism.

The tourism industry is one of the main factors in the development of the national economy, and its development has a significant impact on the growth of the gross domestic product, the reduction of the

unemployment rate, the further development of national crafts, the provision of employment and the development of transport infrastructure.

Tourism plays a key role in the development of the country and affects all sectors and sectors, including political, economic, cultural, educational and social sectors. It also has a stimulating effect on the main sectors of the economy, that is, forces them to restructure, introduce new innovative technologies, actively participate in competition in the world market, and increase the flow of investments. The tourism industry can be considered as a complex forming industry based on the effective use of the potential of economic, cultural, natural and labor resources of the regions.

One of the important advantages of the development of tourism in the modern sector of the economy is the development of Internet technologies. Today, all aspects of our life, as well as various spheres of economic activity, are continuously digitized.

“In recent years, we have been implementing a program of large-scale, irreversible reforms in Uzbekistan. In it, we focus on strengthening the institutions of democratic society, liberalizing the economy, and raising the standard of living of our people. In our “open doors” policy, we are giving priority to the tourism network,” said President Sh.M. Mirziyoev in his speech.[1]

In recent years, a simplified electronic visa procedure has been introduced for citizens of about a hundred countries, including visa-free entry to Uzbekistan for citizens of 55 countries. Favorable conditions for conducting all types of tourism business were created, tax and customs benefits were provided, credit and financial support were strengthened.

As a result, the number of foreign tourists coming to Uzbekistan has doubled in recent years (Table 1). Tourism export earnings have quadrupled in the last two years.

The task of increasing the number of domestic tourists from 12 million and increasing the number of foreign tourists visiting the republic to 9 million within the framework of the “Travel around Uzbekistan” program was set as the 35th goal of the Development Strategy for 2022-2026.

Based on experts' calculations, it is planned to increase the number of foreign tourists coming to our country to 15 million by 2030, and the flow of domestic tourists to 25 million.

**1- Table The number of tourists visiting Uzbekistan in 2019-2023 by foreign countries (person)**

r/p	States	2019 year	2020 year	2021 year	2022 year	2023 year
1	Tajikistan	1473684	337505	288211	1447826	1969652
2	Kyrgyzstan	1454907	508019	652166	1356857	1708415
3	Kazakhstan	2261094	424145	565334	1551138	1561456
4	Turkmenistan	574795	60631	1156	5968	88083
5	Afghanistan	62580	20072	34000	3037	3207
6	Azerbaijan	12367	2213	2890	10403	13677
7	Armenia	1740	336	739	1390	1804
8	Belarus	7411	1632	4254	13635	14260
9	Moldova	4601	1033	1109	2193	3082
10	Russian Federation	455470	81592	190493	567725	675803
11	Other countries	439863	66948	140982	272608	583232
<b>Total visitors</b>		<b>6748512</b>	<b>1504126</b>	<b>1881334</b>	<b>5232780</b>	<b>6635671</b>

As can be seen from the table, the number of tourists visiting Uzbekistan by the end of 2023 is 6.6 million people, which has increased by 27% compared to 2022 (5.2 million people in 2022). The neighboring Republic of Tajikistan is leading in the number of visiting tourists.

By the end of 2023, the country's export of services amounted to 5.8 billion dollars, or 21.2% of the

total trade export volume, and increased by 16.2% compared to 2022[2].

In 2023, Uzbekistan received more than 2.4 billion dollars from the export of tourism services, and its share in the gross domestic product is 2.6%[2].

The share of tourism in the gross domestic product of developed countries is on average 10-12 percent. According to the data, this indicator was only 2.6 percent in Uzbekistan. If the income from tourism in our country is increased to 10-12% in the future, this figure will be 13-15 billion. is a dollar. Also, the employment of the unemployed part of the population, especially the youth, will increase and the standard of living will improve.

The potential for the development of foreign and domestic tourism in Uzbekistan is high, especially the opportunities for the development of pilgrimage tourism are very wide. Because there are places worth visiting, sacred shrines of our thinkers who made a great contribution to world civilization.

If you look at modern times, there are few generals who partially conquered the world and established great empires in the history of the world. For this reason, the interest in them is high in the countries of the world. There is very little information about our great grandfather in the press sources of foreign countries, where there is a high interest in the personality of Amir Temur. If our directors make a serial film about the glorious path of our great grandfather Amir Temur, how he saved Europe from the Ottoman occupation, the arrival of ambassadors from European countries to Samarkand, the establishment of diplomatic relations with them, and the writing of letters, this film will be watched with great interest by the whole world. As a result, the interest of foreigners in the cities of Samarkand and Shahrisabz has increased, millions of tourists visit Uzbekistan to visit the mausoleum of Amir Temur and the buildings built by his descendants[3].

Also, if foreign media cover Imam Al-Bukhari, his great contribution to the development of Islamic culture and religion, and to the science of hadith studies, this will in turn give a great impetus to the development of pilgrimage tourism.

In addition, if the video film about our great poet and general grandfather Muhammad Zahiriddin Babur is further improved and his journey from Andijan to India, his contribution to the development of architecture and crafts in the Indian country is covered in detail, the interest of foreign tourists to the country where he was born and raised would increase.

Also, within the framework of Turkic-speaking countries, the concept of "Tabarruk ziyarat" tourism is based on the great potential of the pilgrimage tourism of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the wide involvement of sister nations and peoples in the cultural heritage of our country, increasing the love of the young generation for the history and national-cultural heritage of our people, member states of the Organization of Turkic States opportunities to further expand cooperation in the field of tourism, jointly promote national cultural heritage to the world, diversify tourist products and services aimed at different segments of the market, increase their competitiveness, create a favorable environment for domestic and international pilgrimage tourism.

Today, most of the local and foreign tourists do not know about many interesting historical places in our country, that is, the mosques and mausoleums built in the name of our great grandfathers. As an example, it is possible to cite Hazrat Langar father shrine, one of the founders of "Ishqiya order" in the Islamic world, located in Qamashi district of Kashkadarya region, Hazrat Sultan and Hazrat Bashir shrines in Kitab district. These great people have left an indelible mark in history and served to maintain the balance of stability, peace and harmony among the population while promoting religious and secular sciences.

Dargahs of Islamic enlightenment - sheikhs and holy saints have found their place in these blessed places, you can find unique lessons for the spiritual maturity of today's youth. Also, by inviting tourists from Turkish countries to these places, there will be an opportunity to provide employment to local

residents and further develop pilgrimage tourism.

In recent years, a number of commendable works on the development of tourism have been carried out in our country. But there are also a number of problems that need to be solved in terms of further development of the tourism industry. In particular, if the number of existing hotels in Samarkand, Shahrisabz and Khiva cities doubles, the problem of providing accommodation will arise. Lack of qualified specialists who provide marketing services to attract foreign tourists, relatively high prices of air tickets in national airlines, lack of guides with deep knowledge of foreign languages, etc.

Also, tourists from distant foreign countries cannot come directly to Uzbekistan, that is, they come using the services of airlines of 2 or 3 countries, that is, the geography of flights of national airlines is small. An integrated electronic platform providing complete information on pilgrimage tourism has not been created in the country.

In order to develop pilgrimage tourism in our country, it is necessary to implement tasks such as the development of the necessary infrastructure facilities in the regions - hotel systems, ensuring that the waiting rooms for tourists at airports and train stations meet the standards of pilgrimage tourism, gathering information resources, summarizing the description of the spiritual and material resources available in the country.

Based on the above, in order to further increase the number of foreign tourists visiting our country and to increase the share of income from tourism in the gross domestic product, the following measures should be implemented by the relevant bodies:

to create an online platform in Uzbek, Russian and English based on the introduction of new innovative technologies for pilgrimage tourism in our country;

simplifying the system of obtaining permission for national and foreign flights, attracting low-cost carriers, expanding the geography of flights through the principle of "connecting";

expansion of inter-provincial bus routes, organization of new routes, as well as taking measures to quickly solve existing problems in this area;

further improvement of infrastructure of tourism objects, development of cultural and entertainment infrastructure, restoration and beautification of cultural heritage objects;

training of qualified specialists with a deep knowledge of foreign languages, pilgrimage sites and the history of cultural heritage objects in order to improve excursion activities in pilgrimage tourism.

In conclusion, it can be noted that we consider it appropriate to implement the above-mentioned tasks in order to increase the number of foreign tourists visiting our country, to increase its share in the volume of the gross domestic product, and to further raise the image of Uzbekistan at the world level.

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