



Tourism Potential of the Republic of Uzbekistan and Opportunities for Its Development

Faridakhon Khamidova¹; Jakhongir Sayfullaev²

¹ Associate Professor, Tashkent Financial Institute, Uzbekistan

² Master's Student, Tashkent Financial Institute, Uzbekistan

Email: faridaxon.xamidova@mail.ru; jahon2830@gmail.com

<http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v7i3.1530>

Abstract

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors of the economy, and it plays an important role in increasing income and employment, as well as in the socio-economic development of the country. In the conditions of transition of the Republic of Uzbekistan to market relations, its economic position in the world economy has changed. This was facilitated by institutional and structural changes aimed at creating an open market economy. Much has been done to achieve this goal. The article considers the tourism industry as a new direction of development of the country's economy. Statistics of the tourism industry of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2019 are given and corresponding analyses are made. In addition, the article partially informs the reader about the tourist potential of the country. Comparative figures of tourism of the Republic of Uzbekistan and other CIS countries are given. Studies on the tourism potential of Uzbekistan by domestic scientists have been studied. The research methods were formed and the sources of information that were used in the article were completed. Based on the analysis of analytical data in the field of tourism over the past year, new directions of development of this industry have been formed.

Keywords: *PR Marketing; Religious Tourism; "Golden Ring" of Tourism; Media Personalities; Tourist Image of the Country, Low-Cost Airlines; Historical and Cultural Heritage of UNESCO*

Introduction

The current state of the tourism and hospitality industry in the CIS countries is not sufficiently studied and used for the development of a more economical and close both in mentality and traditionally for the Russian tourist. The lack of information about modern tourist resources created in recent decades could significantly change the views of not only potential tourists but also travel agencies and firms in presenting proposals for tourist products for tourists. The Republic of Uzbekistan has various tourist resources, but the citizens of other countries mind do not always reflect all their diversity (Table 1).

Table 1: Tourist facilities offered for foreign tourists (in %)

№	Types of objects	Share in the total volume of tourist objects
1	Tourist objects	33,0
2	Museums and exhibitions	14,0
3	Rural objects	18,0
4	Recreation facilities	11,0
5	Industrial facilities	1,0
6	Objects of folk art	18,0
7	Objects of nature	3,5
8	Railroads	1,5
	Total:	100,0

Source: State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Tourism development data

Uzbekistan is a country of the greatest cities with hundreds of architectural monuments of different eras. The historical cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Shakhriyabz, Termez and Kokand are known all over the world. Some of them the same age as Rome and Babylon were once also the largest centers of science and culture. The best human minds and artisans flocked to them. The world was amazed by the luxury and splendor of palaces, minarets, mosques, mausoleums created by famous architects of the past. The world-famous monuments of ancient architecture still remember the times of Alexander the Great and Genghis Khan's conquests.

Paradoxically, a few years ago in Uzbekistan, tourism was not perceived as a serious segment of the economy. This is despite the fact that the country has a huge number of unique historical monuments, original national culture, amazing cuisine, delicious organic fruits and nature.

With the arrival of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to the leadership of the country in 2017, obstacles that prevented the development of this sphere are removed, and tourism is named one of the priority directions of the national economy.

At the same time, experts point to the presence of such tourism destinations as educational (acquaintance with architectural monuments), religious (visiting the Holy places of Islamic and other religions), environmental, gastronomic, and so on.

Literature Review on the Topic

The tourism potential of the Republic of Uzbekistan has been studied by domestic researchers for many years.

For example, M. Narziev, A. Ermakov and A. Babakulov [1] analyzed the state of tourism in Uzbekistan until 2014 and made huge positive conclusions about the potential of this industry. In particular, drawing a conclusion about the prospects of tourism potential, the authors are confident that the active development of various types of tourism in Uzbekistan can increase the attractiveness of the country for foreign tourists. Familiarity with the culture, customs and traditions of the peoples of Uzbekistan will make the trip interesting and enjoyable; will expand the horizons of foreign guests. Original dishes of Uzbek cuisine and traditional Eastern hospitality will also cause a lot of positive emotions.

Sh. Ruziev in his research, focusing on the concept of historical and cultural tourism of the Republic of Uzbekistan, gives the following statements: "First, understanding the tourism potential as a

level of awareness of the need for a historical and cultural product is useful in terms of evaluating the planning and effectiveness of real parameters of tourism development, as opposed to the resource approach. Secondly, the tourism potential, in this case, is not understood as a fixed value but can be an object of development in itself. If the tourist resources of historical and cultural tourism are fixed in their content, then the tourist's impressions of the visit may vary and thus meet different needs." [2]

H. Musaev, studying new opportunities of tourism potential, cited the following facts that demonstrate the huge and possibly unused potential of tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan: "Uzbekistan has great potential in this area, has great opportunities because of the number and variety of tourism resources, compared to other countries: including convenient node location in the transport - geographical area, unique geography and natural attractions, there are 37 caves on the territory of the republic. Bioclimatic conditions allow tourists to be engaged actively in wellness and sports tourism, especially in winter. The historical and cultural heritage of Uzbekistan, which reflects a long history of the region, associated primarily with the history of the Great Silk Road (Fergana Valley-Tashkent-Samarkand-Bukhara-Urgench-Khiva) is one of the main factors of the country attractiveness. Uzbekistan is ranked ninth in the world by the number of historical and architectural monuments. The above gives reason to conclude that Uzbekistan has great potential for the development of tourism". [3]

In addition to the above-mentioned researchers, we can cite scientific works by a number of authors, which demonstrate different parts of the country's tourism potential. For example, N. Karakulov and others studied the national medical and health-improving potential of tourism in Uzbekistan, focusing on the sanatorium zones of the Republic [4]. S. Allayarov justified the importance of transport infrastructure in the country's tourism potential [5]. G. Umarova demonstrated in her research the importance of tourism in creating new jobs and reducing unemployment in the country [6].

In our opinion, Uzbekistan has a huge tourist potential. However, using all the opportunities requires a little time and the development of other sectors of the economy, so as the tourism industry itself cannot develop.

Data Source and Research Methodology

Analysis and synthesis, scientific abstraction deduction, classification, generalization, comparative, theoretical interpretation, and analytical methods were used in the methodology of this article, as a result of the bibliographic study, the problems of "tourism potential", the factors affecting them and the prospects for further development were identified.

The information used in the article is mainly obtained through two sources: the official web pages of the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Tourism development and the World Tourism Organization.

Analysis and Results

Main indicators of tourism

Undoubtedly, the tourist and recreational potential that Uzbekistan has are huge. This is more than 7 thousand cultural heritage sites, more than 200 of which are located in four cities-museums - Khiva, Bukhara, Shakhrisyabz and Samarkand. All of them are included in the list of UNESCO world heritage sites (Table 2). In addition, the country has 8 nature reserves, 2 natural and 1 national park, 6 natural monuments, 11 nature reserves, more than 50 water protection zones, which are also attractive tourist sites.

Table 2: The number of objects of historical-cultural heritage in the countries of the region

Country	Material objects	Non-material objects	Total
Uzbekistan	4	7	11
Turkey	17	16	33
Turkmenistan	3	3	6
Iran	21	13	34
Iraq	5	3	8
Jordan	5	1	6
Syria	6	1	7
Azerbaijan	2	11	13
Kazakhstan	3	8	11
Tajikistan	1	3	4
Kirgizstan	2	8	10
Afghanistan	2	1	3

Source: <https://ich.unesco.org/>, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>

The largest number of cultural heritage sites in the region falls on two countries - Turkey and Iran. They account for 46 % of the objects. Along with Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan is in the second group of countries with a share of 8% in the region's tourism potential. This share corresponds to 500 thousand tourists in the total tourist potential of the region. But the picture is even more favorable if you subtract countries that are at war, internationally isolated, or have other factors that characterize an extremely low level of security.

The number of tourists who come to Uzbekistan every year is growing: in 2005, the number of tourists who visited Uzbekistan was 240 thousand people from 117 countries, and in 2017, Uzbekistan was visited by more than 2.5 million tourists. The number of tourists in 2018 was 5.3 million, including 5 million from the CIS countries, 325 thousand from abroad. In 2019, this figure increased by 26.2 % compared to 2018 and amounted to almost 6.7 million people [7].

The growth trend is also observed in the overall indicators of the development of the sphere. In particular, the export of tourist services increased from 546 million dollars in 2017 to 1 billion 40 million dollars in 2018. In the first half of 2019, this figure increased by 28 percent to more than 590 million US dollars.

Simplification of visa and registration procedures

For 3 years, 86 countries have been granted visa-free entry to Uzbekistan, and this decision has significantly affected the results of tourism in 2019. In particular, the average growth in the number of tourists arriving from countries with a visa-free regime was 58 % of the total number of tourists arriving [7].

The country has also launched a system for issuing electronic visas (E-Visa). E-visa allows you to move away from the outdated procedure of defending queues at the Embassy. The introduction of this service also affected the overall statistics of tourism in Uzbekistan. So, at the moment, the number of countries whose citizens have the opportunity to obtain an electronic entry visa is 57. In 2019, more than 60 thousand electronic visas were issued.

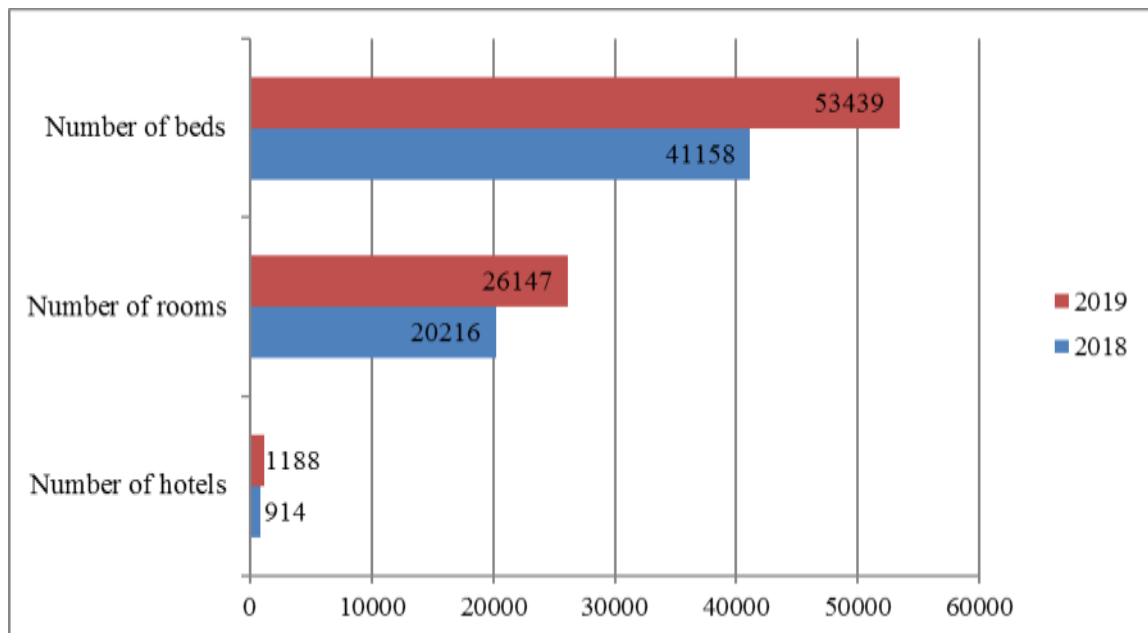
E-Visa is issued to foreign citizens at the country's airports on the basis of their written applications submitted during the process of processing documents. All payments for obtaining an E-Visa are made using the international payment systems Visa and MasterCard.

Development of tourist infrastructure

As a result of the ongoing reforms, the development of tourist infrastructure has been observed. Thus, with the increase in the length of stay of foreign tourists in Uzbekistan, there is an increase in the load of accommodation facilities, which positively affects employment in tourist infrastructure facilities.

In 2019, the number of hotels in the country increased by 274 units compared to 2018, and amounted to 1188 units. (Diagram 1)

Diagram 1: Comparison of created tourist accommodation facilities for 2018-2019



Source: Analytical report of the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Tourism development

If in 2017 and 2018, the growth of the number of rooms was 6 and 9%, respectively, the growth rate of the number of rooms was about 30 % in 2019.

The length of stay of foreign tourists in the country increased from 2.3 days in 2018 to 3.2 days in 2019.

The number of guesthouses has also increased. In 2018, there were 106 units; in 2019, this figure was 886 units, an increase of 780 units or 836 %. This increase affected the growth of the average annual load of placement facilities, which was 62 % in 2018 and reached 84 % in 2019.

The emergence of new types of tourism in Uzbekistan

Along with traditional cultural and historical tourism, such new types of tourism as a pilgrimage, ecological, educational, ethnographic, gastronomic, sports, health-improving, rural, industrial, business and other types of tourism are successfully developing in Uzbekistan.

Event tourism is developing in Uzbekistan: the country has preserved the holidays of the recent Soviet past and restored historical and religious holidays of previous years:

a) Public holidays:

- January 1-New Year;
- March 8 – International Women’s Day;
- March 21-Navruz (Central Asian New year);

- May 9-day of remembrance and honors;
 - * September 1-Independence Day;
 - * October 1-Teacher and Mentor Day;
 - * December 8 – Constitution Day;
- b) Religious holidays with varying dates: Ramadan Khait and Kurban Khait.

Tourists visiting the country during holidays will see many interesting folk rituals associated with national traditions.

In recent years, along with the “Golden ring” of tourism in Uzbekistan, special attention is paid to other regions such as Surkhandarya, Navai and the Republic of Karakalpakstan. The main privilege of the Golden ring is that almost all historical, cultural, religious and pilgrimage monuments and architectural objects of the country are located in the regions of this range. (Fig. 1)



Figure 1. Golden ring of tourism in Uzbekistan

PR-marketing of the country’s tourism potential

Uzbekistan plans to continue implementing its well-established practice of attracting well-known international media personalities to promote its own tourism potential.

The so-called Institute of Tourism Brand Ambassador (tourism Ambassador to foreign countries) is now actively used by the leaders of the world tourism industry – such as France, Spain, the United States, China, India and many other countries. Thus, Table 2 provides information about Uzbekistan’s tourism ambassadors in foreign countries:

Table 2: Tourism ambassadors of Uzbekistan in foreign countries

	Country	Tourism ambassadors of Uzbekistan	Scope of the Ambassador's activity
1	Indonesia	Eko Shri Margianti	Rector of the largest private Gunadarma University in Indonesia and Chairman of the Indonesia-Uzbekistan friendship society in Indonesia.
2	Russian Federation	Yuriy Stoyanov	Russian actor of theater, film and dubbing, musician. People's artist of the Russian Federation.
3	India	Rita Beri	Indian fashion designer, founder of the own brand Ritu Beri
4	Malaysia	1. Mohd Asri Bin Zaynul Abidi 2. Daler Yusuf	1. Mufti of the Malaysian state of Perlis, a doctor in Islamic theology, a prominent Islamic figure in Malaysia. 2. Malaysian actor and model.
5	Great Britain	Sophie Ibbotson	Founder and director of Maximum Exposure consulting firm
6	Japan	Maeda Acuko	Japanese actress and singer.
7	France	Gerard Departe	Famous French actor
8	Republic of Korea	Li Yon He	Famous South Korean actress and model

Source: State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Tourism development data

It is assumed that the next ambassadors of tourism of Uzbekistan in foreign countries will also be prominent representatives of political, business, cultural and sports circles.

The attention of potential foreign tourists is attracted by cultural events held in the country, which introduce the history and traditions of the Uzbek people, with its original culture, crafts and art. Such events include the traditional Silk and spices festival held in Bukhara, and the Sharq Taronalari international music festival held in Samarkand. International events such as the international music (maqom) art forum in Shakhriyabz, the ziarat tourism forum in Bukhara, the sports competition "Games of heroes" in Khiva, the electronic music Festival in Tashkent, the CIS Tourist fair in Samarkand and others are gaining popularity.

Adopted on August 15, 2019, the new Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On measures for further development of the tourism sector" is designed to increase the effectiveness of the ongoing reforms and dramatically increase the tourist flow to the country.

Based on this document, work will continue to address the existing problems of tourism infrastructure, improve the quality of services provided and actively promote the national tourism product on world markets, strengthen the human resources of the industry, as well as implement the Concept of tourism development in the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2019-2025.

The tourism potential of Uzbekistan is already well known abroad. This is largely facilitated by popular diplomacy and effective advertising using modern technologies.

Thus, in particular, the Institute of ambassadors of the tourism brand of Uzbekistan and ziarat tourism is being widely introduced abroad, which are well-known representatives of culture and other spheres involved in tourism in their countries.

A striking event was an advertisement for Uzbekistan's tourism opportunities placed during an English Premier League soccer game when the inscription "Life is too short not to visit Uzbekistan" was run as a running line around the perimeter of the playing field.

Conclusion

Of course, as a new direction in the country's economy, great attention is paid to the development of tourism. In particular, the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No.-4861 and Resolution No.-2666 of December 2, 2016, gave the tourism sector the status of a strategic branch of the national economy. In the future, it is designed to solve such important socio-economic tasks as creating new jobs, diversifying the economy and accelerating regional development, increasing foreign exchange earnings, improving the welfare of the population, improving investment attractiveness and image.

Using the available opportunities will lead to the development of this industry. Along with this, it is necessary to pay attention to the following issues that are very important for the development of tourism:

1. You should increase the volume of direct foreign investments in the tourism industry;
2. It is necessary to develop ecological, agricultural and medical and recreational tourism;
3. It is very important to develop tourism infrastructure, in particular transport infrastructure, which includes air, rail and roads.
4. It is necessary to launch a system of low-cost airlines in the country's aviation industry.
5. Develop new information and communication products and implement an innovative ICT system.
6. Encourage the population to domestic tourism.
7. Monitoring of tourism services according to international standards.

All this, of course, indicates that Uzbekistan in the near future will become one of the countries that are most attractive for tourists.

References

- Narziev, M., Ermakov, A. and Babakulov, A. (2015). Current state and development trends of the tourism and hospitality industry in Uzbekistan. *Service plus*, No. 2 (9), 42-43.
- Ruziev, Sh. (2018). Assessment of the tourism potential of historical and cultural tourism of the Republic of Uzbekistan. *Regional problems of economic transformation*, No. 4, 77-78.
- Musaev, H. (2016). Tourism in Uzbekistan: opportunities and new challenges. Section 17. Economics and management, 264-265.
- Karakulov, N., Amanbayeva, Z., Sultanova, N. and Khidirov, M. (2018). Development of tourism in Uzbekistan. *European Scientific review*, 13-15.
- Allayarov, S. (2019). The role of transport services in the tourism industry of regions is considered. *International scientific review*, 35-37.

Umarova, G. (2018). Tourism opportunities in Uzbekistan and its importance in increasing employment. *Symbol of science*, No. 7, 95-97.

Analytical collection of the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for tourism development. 2019. Retrieved from <https://uzbektourism.uz/en/research/index>

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).