



TOURISM AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN UZBEKISTAN

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Annotation: *this passage explores the growing significance of tourism in Uzbekistan and its role in strengthening the country's international relations. It highlights Uzbekistan's unique Silk Road heritage and the global interest attracted by historic cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, and Tashkent. The article emphasizes major tourism reforms introduced since 2017, including visa-free entry and e-visa systems, which have increased accessibility for foreign visitors. It also explains how tourism functions as a tool of cultural diplomacy through international festivals and cultural events that promote mutual understanding among nations. The passage further discusses the economic and political benefits of tourism, such as foreign investment, cooperation with international organizations, and improved diplomatic ties. Despite existing challenges in infrastructure and competition, the article concludes that Uzbekistan's tourism sector holds strong future prospects and continues to contribute significantly to the country's global image and regional cooperation.*

Key words: *Tourism development; International relations; Silk Road heritage; Cultural diplomacy; Visa-free regime E-visa system; UNESCO World*



Heritage; Foreign investment; Infrastructure modernization; Economic cooperation; International organizations; UNWTO / UNESCO ECO; Cultural exchange; Global partnerships; Regional cooperation; Ecotourism; Adventure tourism; Diplomatic relations Tourism reforms; Global image of Uzbekistan;

Introduction

Tourism in Uzbekistan has developed into one of the most dynamic sectors of the national economy and has become an important instrument for enhancing the country's international relations. Located at the crossroads of the ancient Silk Road, Uzbekistan possesses a unique historical and cultural heritage that attracts millions of visitors from around the world. Over the past decade, the government has made tourism a strategic priority and linked it closely with diplomacy, cultural exchange, and global cooperation. As a result, tourism not only contributes to economic growth but also strengthens Uzbekistan's image and influence on the international stage.

Uzbekistan's ancient cities

Uzbekistan's ancient cities—Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Shahrissabz—and its modern capital Tashkent form the core of the country's tourism potential. These cities are famous for their architectural masterpieces, including Registan Square, Ark Fortress, Kalon Minaret, and Ichan-Qala. Most of these sites are included on the UNESCO World Heritage List, which increases global interest in Uzbekistan and reinforces its cultural value. Tourists visiting the country gain a deeper understanding of its traditions, customs, and historical role in world civilization, which naturally promotes positive perceptions of Uzbekistan worldwide.

SAMARQAND

Samarkand is one of the oldest and most historically significant cities in the world, often called "*The Pearl of the East.*" Located at the heart of the ancient Silk Road, it has served as a major center of trade, culture, and science for more than 2,700 years. The city reached its peak during the rule of Amir Temur, who transformed Samarkand into the capital of his powerful empire. Under his leadership, the city became a place where scholars, architects, and artists gathered from many parts of the world. His grandson, the famous astronomer Mirzo



Ulug‘bek, also built one of the greatest observatories of the medieval era in Samarkand. Today, Samarkand is best known for its breathtaking architectural monuments such as Registan Square, the Gur-Emir Mausoleum, the Bibi-Khanym Mosque, the Shah-i-Zinda necropolis, and Ulug‘bek’s Observatory. These historical sites, decorated with blue domes and detailed mosaics, represent the rich artistic traditions of Central Asia and are recognized as UNESCO World Heritage treasures. Samarkand’s beauty, combined with its scientific and cultural legacy, attracts visitors from around the world and makes it one of Uzbekistan’s most important tourism destinations. The city continues to be a living symbol of ancient civilization, blending its glorious past with modern development.

Bukhara

Bukhara is one of Uzbekistan’s oldest and most historically rich cities, with a history spanning over 2,500 years. Located on the Silk Road, it has long been a center of trade, culture, and Islamic learning. The city is famous for its well-preserved ancient architecture, including madrasahs, mosques, bazaars, and caravanserais, which reflect the artistic and spiritual heritage of Central Asia. Bukhara’s most iconic sites include the **Poi-Kalyan Complex**, with its massive Kalyan Minaret and Kalyan Mosque; the **Ark Fortress**, which served as a royal residence and government center for centuries; the **Lyabi-Hauz Ensemble**, a historic square with a pool surrounded by madrasahs and tea-houses; and the **Samanid Mausoleum**, an architectural masterpiece of the 9th century. These monuments demonstrate the city’s long-standing importance as a hub of architecture, religion, and scholarship. Throughout history, Bukhara attracted scholars, merchants, and travelers from Persia, India, China, and Europe, making it a multicultural center of learning and trade. Today, it remains a major tourist destination in Uzbekistan, attracting visitors who wish to experience its unique combination of history, culture, and hospitality. Bukhara’s rich legacy continues to inspire both local and international admiration, making it a living symbol of Uzbekistan’s past.

Khiva



Khiva is one of Uzbekistan's most well-preserved historic cities and a remarkable example of Central Asian architecture and culture. Located in the Khorezm region, Khiva served as a major trading post on the ancient Silk Road, connecting merchants and travelers from China, Persia, and Europe. Its historic center, **Itchan Kala**, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is surrounded by well-preserved city walls, which enclose mosques, madrasahs, minarets, and palaces. The most famous monuments in Khiva include the **Kalta Minor Minaret**, the **Kunya-Ark Citadel**, the **Juma Mosque**, and the **Tosh-Hovli Palace**. The city is renowned for its unique architectural style, including intricate tilework, wooden carvings, and decorative patterns that reflect centuries of artistic tradition. Khiva has long been a center of Islamic scholarship and culture, attracting scholars, merchants, and artisans throughout its history. Today, Khiva remains a major tourist destination in Uzbekistan, offering visitors an immersive experience of the Silk Road era. Walking through its narrow streets, visitors can witness the city's historical charm, traditional craftsmanship, and the legacy of the Khorezm civilization. Khiva serves not only as a symbol of Uzbekistan's cultural heritage but also as an important site for education, tourism, and international cultural exchange.

Kokand

Kokand is a historic city in the Fergana Valley of eastern Uzbekistan and was once the capital of the **Kokand Khanate** in the 18th and 19th centuries. The city played an important role as a political, cultural, and economic center in Central Asia, especially during the era of the Khanate, when it was a hub for trade, craftsmanship, and governance. Its strategic location on trade routes allowed it to flourish and connect different parts of the region. The city is famous for its **architectural and cultural heritage**, including palaces, mosques, and madrasahs built during the Kokand Khanate. The **Palace of Khudayar Khan** is one of the most notable monuments, known for its grand design and intricate decoration. Other significant sites include the **Juma Mosque**, which showcases unique Central Asian architectural styles, and the **Madrasah of Norbut-Biy**, a center of learning and scholarship. **Kokand** has long been recognized for its traditional crafts, including



silk weaving, pottery, embroidery, and decorative woodwork. Today, the city attracts visitors interested in exploring its historical monuments, cultural traditions, and vibrant local markets. Qo‘qon serves as a symbol of Uzbekistan’s rich heritage in the Fergana Valley and plays a vital role in preserving the history of the Kokand Khanate while promoting tourism and cultural awareness.

Margilan

Margilan is a historic city located in the eastern part of Uzbekistan, in the **Fergana Valley**, and is renowned as one of the main centers of **silk production** in Central Asia. The city has a long history as a trade and craft center, dating back to the times of the Silk Road, when merchants from China, Persia, and other regions passed through and contributed to its economic and cultural development. Margilan is most famous for its **yarn and silk weaving industry**, particularly the traditional **Fergana silk** known for its high quality and vibrant patterns. The **Yodgorlik Silk Factory** is a major site where visitors can see the production of silk fabric using both traditional and modern techniques. In addition to its silk heritage, Margilan is known for its rich craftsmanship, including embroidery, pottery, and carpet weaving, which reflect the city’s artistic traditions. The city also has historical landmarks, including ancient mosques and traditional madrasahs, which highlight its cultural and spiritual significance. Today, Margilan attracts tourists interested in Silk Road history, traditional crafts, and cultural tourism. It continues to be a center of craftsmanship, preserving the legacy of Uzbek artisans while contributing to the country’s tourism and economic development.

Uzbekistan and the United Nations

The Republic of Uzbekistan joined the United Nations on **March 2, 1992**, becoming an equal member of the international community. Initiatives proposed by Uzbekistan’s former President, **Islam Karimov**, at the UN were widely supported by the global community. These initiatives focused on strengthening peace and stability, promoting socio-economic development, and preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons. On **September 28, 1993**, at the 48th session of the UN General Assembly, President Islam Karimov delivered his first address, proposing key



measures such as declaring Central Asia a nuclear-free zone and establishing a UN special commission on the Aral Sea crisis. In **October 1993**, the UN office in Tashkent began its operations. At Uzbekistan's initiative and under UN guidance, the **Tashkent Council-Seminar** on security and cooperation in Central Asia was organized in **September 1995**. On **October 24, 1995**, during the UN's 50th anniversary in New York, President Karimov emphasized that resolving tensions in Afghanistan required limiting foreign intervention. In **2000**, at the UN Millennium Summit (55th session), Karimov highlighted the need to enhance the UN's role in addressing regional and global issues, proposed including Germany and Japan as permanent members of the Security Council, and recommended expanding the Secretary-General's authority for rapid responses to global and regional threats. At Uzbekistan's initiative, in **2001**, the UN Security Council established a special committee to combat terrorism. In **2010**, President Karimov again drew the attention of the international community to complex issues in Central Asia during the 65th UN General Assembly session. Visits by UN Secretaries-General, including **Kofi Annan in October 2002**, **Ban Ki-moon in April 2010**, and **António Guterres in June 2017**, strengthened Uzbekistan's international standing. During Guterres' visit, he met President **Shavkat Mirziyoyev**, paid respects at Karimov's grave, and studied the situation in the Aral Sea region. Uzbekistan actively cooperates with several UN specialized agencies, including the **World Bank**, **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**, **World Trade Organization (WTO)**, **UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)**, and the **UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)**. It is also a member of organizations such as the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, **International Labour Organization (ILO)**, **UNICEF**, **International Olympic Committee**, and the **International Automobile Federation**.

Visa

Since 2017, a broad package of reforms has been implemented to modernize the tourism sector. One of the most impactful changes has been the introduction of a **visa-free regime** for citizens of more than 90 countries and an **electronic visa (e-**



visa) system for dozens more. These measures have significantly simplified travel procedures and increased the flow of international visitors. The government has also invested in transportation networks, airports, and tourism infrastructure, making travel within Uzbekistan more convenient and comfortable. As these reforms continue, Uzbekistan is increasingly positioned as an attractive and accessible destination for both cultural and adventure tourism.

Cultural diplomacy

Tourism has become an effective tool of **cultural diplomacy** for Uzbekistan. By showcasing its heritage, hospitality, and national identity, the country builds mutual understanding between nations. International festivals such as “Sharq Taronalari,” “Silk and Spices,” and various art, music, and craft exhibitions draw participants and guests from dozens of states. These events serve as platforms for dialogue, cooperation, and cultural exchange. Through tourism, Uzbekistan introduces its civilization to the world while learning from the experiences and traditions of other nations, promoting peaceful global interaction.

Economic relations

Furthermore, tourism strengthens **economic relations** by creating opportunities for international investment. Foreign companies and partners participate in hotel construction, transportation services, restoration of historical monuments, and development of ecotourism zones. Cooperation in tourism often expands into other sectors such as trade, education, and infrastructure. Thus, tourism acts as a bridge that connects Uzbekistan with global markets and enhances economic diplomacy.

Political relations

In addition to cultural and economic ties, tourism contributes to **political relations**. Uzbekistan collaborates with various international organizations, including **UNWTO, UNESCO, UNDP**, and regional associations such as the **Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)**. Joint projects, international forums, and multilateral agreements allow Uzbekistan to present its achievements, discuss challenges, and strengthen its role in regional and global tourism systems. Bilateral



tourism agreements also improve political relations with countries in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and the CIS.

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