

## AN ASSESSMENT OF THE GROWTH AND TRENDS IN UZBEKISTAN’S DOMESTIC TOURISM

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**Abstract:** Uzbekistan possesses significant potential for both international and domestic tourism, driven by its rich material and cultural heritage, diverse natural landscapes, unique national cuisine, and renowned hospitality. This article aims to analyze the development of internal tourism within the republic, capitalizing on these inherent opportunities.

**Key words:** internal tourism, service, opportunities of tourism, recreation, infrastructure

Tourism can be regarded as a social, cultural and economic phenomenon related to the movement of people outside their usual place of residence. Internal tourism consumption includes the tourism consumption of both resident and non-resident visitors within the economy of reference. It is the sum of domestic tourism consumption and inbound tourism consumption. Domestic tourism is an excellent opportunity to learn more about Uzbekistan, traveling through the most diverse and unique natural, historical, archaeological, ethnographic and iconic cultural attractions, go on an unforgettable journey to attractive places of antiquity, relax surrounded by pristine nature, see many interesting and exciting places truly ancient beauty, unique monuments of history and architecture, visit objects of national and world cultural, historical and spiritual heritage, which are also very popular among foreign guests.

Book any of the many interesting tours, with tourist routes and thematic excursion programs, designed in accordance with the individual characteristics of each traveler, designed for individual, family, corporate or group holidays, depending on the preferences and wishes of the tourist.

Look at the top-rated tourist offers in Uzbekistan - the most complete list of guides, tour operators, restaurants, cafes, as well as places of accommodation. Take advantage of a comfortable atmosphere and convenient conditions of stay, a well-built tourist infrastructure and quality service.

In recent years in Uzbekistan, along with traditional forms of travel, ecotourism, geotourism, agritourism, medical tourism and gastronomic tourism have also developed. Uzbekistan places particular emphasis on the modernization of the tourism industry, the development and improvement of the regulatory framework for the sustainable development of the industry, and the organization of tourist services in

accordance with international standards. Government policy is aimed at developing tourism, so that this area in the future should become one of the drivers for accelerating the integrated development of regions and their infrastructure, helping to solve such important socioeconomic tasks as creating hundreds of thousands of new jobs, ensuring diversification and accelerated development of regions increasing incomes, the level and quality of life of the population, increasing the volume of foreign exchange earnings, improving the image and investment attractiveness of the country.

An important milestone in the history of tourism in Uzbekistan was the entry of the republic in 1993 into the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The presence of more than seven thousand objects of the material and cultural heritage of different eras and civilizations, including the historical centers of Bukhara, Khiva, Samarkand and Shahrissabz, included in the UNESCO World Heritage List of UNESCO testify to the highest potential of Uzbekistan. The world-famous historical monuments, modern cities, the unique nature of Uzbekistan, the unique national cuisine, as well as the unsurpassed hospitality of the Uzbek people attract travelers.

In the framework of cooperation with the UNWTO in 1994, the Samarkand Declaration on Tourism along the Silk Road was adopted by 19 countries of the world. In 20.08.1999, the Law No. 831-I “On Tourism” was enacted by the Decree of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The purpose of this Law is the legal regulation of relations in the field of tourism, the development of the market of tourist services, as well as the protection of the rights and legitimate interests of tourists and subjects of tourist activities.

In 1999, the Khiva Declaration on Tourism and the Preservation of Cultural Heritage was adopted, supported by UNWTO, UNESCO and the Council of Europe. In 2002, the Bukhara Declaration on Tourism along the Silk Road, which emphasizes the benefits of sustainable tourism and identifies concrete steps to promote cultural and ecological tourism in this direction. In recognition of the special place of the republic in the global tourism industry in 2004 in Samarkand, a regional UNWTO office was opened to coordinate tourism development on the Silk Road. Today, such an office exists only in two countries - in Japan and Uzbekistan. The main function of the office is to designate directions in the development of not only regional, but also international tourism. In Uzbekistan, a new stage of significant progress in the field of international tourism began from the beginning of 2017. In 2018, a visa-free regime was established for citizens of Israel, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Turkey, Japan, Tajikistan and France. In addition, the procedure for issuing visas to citizens of 39 countries has been simplified. Tourism has become a strategic pillar of Uzbekistan's national economy. This Central Asian country welcomed in 2016 2.1 million visitors and before the pandemic, in 2019, 6.7 million. 2020 was a disastrous year, as anywhere in the world: 1.5 million tourists visited the country.

As the data presented for eleven months (January-November) of 2020-2021 compared, the number of foreign tourists was 4,896,397 people and exceeded the figures for the same period.

**Regions of arrival of tourists entering the Republic  
of Uzbekistan (for the 11 months of 2020-2021)**

| Regions           | 11 months 2020 |               | 11 months 2021 |               |
|-------------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|
|                   | Total          | In % to total | Total          | In % to total |
| CIS countries     | 2 342 317      | 93,2%         | 4 590 740      | 93,8%         |
| Foreign countries | 171238         | 6,8%          | 305657         | 6,2%          |
| Drove just        | 2 513 555      |               | 4 896 397      |               |

Uzbekistan has been modernizing its airports, air fleet, railroads and roads. Some big projects include modernization of the Tashkent’s airport infrastructure, the works associated with the modernization of the regional airports.

The standards include the best international guidelines for the provision of safe services to tourists in order to ensure the safety of their health during their stay. As for the expansion of geography, in 2022, based on the epidemiological situation around the world, there are plans to add flights specifically to cater to pilgrimage tourism. These include 1500 flights from Indonesia, Turkey, Pakistan, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Iran and India, 240 flights from Israel, the USA, France and Russia, and 200 flights from Japan, India, Korea, China, Thailand and Buryatia. In 2021, we increased the number of flights to 18 per week from Turkey, quadruple the number from Indonesia, triple the number from Malaysia, and open connections with five new destinations in the Middle East.

At present, citizens of 86 nations can come to Uzbekistan without a visa, and work in this direction will continue in the coming year. The availability of transport is key in this, so from this year, we will reduce prices for aviation fuel and air tickets, launch additional railway routes from the Fergana Valley regions to the rest of the country, as well as continuing to improve highways and roadside infrastructure from Khonobod in the Andijan region to Termez in Surkhandarya and Moynaq in Karakalpakstan. Standardised service areas and service points are also being introduced along highways.

Tourism industry in Uzbekistan was granted tax exemptions, simplified and liberalized system of licenses to engage in tourist activities. Those companies providing tourist and excursion services are exempt from paying value added tax (VAT)<sup>1</sup> ; licenses are issued without time limitation . These measures have contributed

to a sharp increase in activity of tourism sector representatives and outlined the increasing role of the sector in the development of the service industry.

For the analysis of the prerequisites and dynamics of the development of inbound tourism in Uzbekistan, information from official sources, statistical reporting data of the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for the development of tourism for 2015-2017 were used. To identify preferences and expectations of foreign tourists from abroad, a survey was conducted. For questioning tourists, some fragments (elements) of the questionnaire developed by the State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the State Tourism Development Committee of Uzbekistan were used based on the consultations of an expert from the UNWTO. This questionnaire was previously tested and used in Uzbekistan to carry out such studies. The survey was conducted among foreign tourists from foreign countries who arrived in the Kashkadarya region by railway transport (theroute of the train “Afrosiyab” Tashkent-Karshi) for the period 15-25 August 2018.

The industry of tourism was not considered as a significant factor contributing to the economic development of Uzbekistan. Nevertheless, considering the geographic position of the country and resources of tourism, it was seen that the industry could be important contributing component towards economicdevelopment (Golisheva , 2012). Since gaining its sovereignty in 1991, Uzbekistan started to construct and re-organize its infrastructure of the industry. The initial stage related to the issues of tourism industry was establishment of National Committee „Uzbektourism“ which is the leading body in terms of controlling tourism activities throughout the country. The Committee provides all the needed changes and modernizations to the industry in the area of Uzbekistan. After the foundation of the Committee, the country has been reforming its local air fleet and roads. Tax exemptions were installed and the system of taking tourist activity licenses were modernized. The private and government-controlled companies, which provide tourist services, were exempted from paying VAT (Value Added Tax). These factors contributed to a significant growth in the tourism sector of Uzbekistan. The geographic location along the Great Silk Road provides the growth in the number of international arrivals. Furthermore, rich heritage of culture, ancient traditions and history draw attention amongtourists who are interested in the sphere of religion, culture, archeology and ethnography. Uzbekistan has valuable spots of Islam, Christianity and Buddhism, which provides the development of pilgrimage tourism. Moreover, access to attractive natural spots (mountains, desserts, lakes,) can be considered a remarkable factor in the way of the advancement of adventure and eco-tourism. Nevertheless, only 5-8% part of natural and cultural heritage is used for tourism activities which indicates that the potential of tourism is not fully used. (Golisheva ,2012) Introducing Uzbekistan into the market of global tourism, the agenciesinvolved in the tourism industry use the link of Uzbekistan

and Silk Road. The agencies provide information of culture, architecture and ancient history and alongside with above mentioned components of the industry, hiking, natural reserves, less-known spots have been promoted as well, with the helicopter tours from 2018. The international channel „Euronews“ held an advertising campaign in 2013 which was devoted to the economic and investment field. Before airing the prime time programs, promotional-advertisement video dubbed as “Welcome to Uzbekistan” in Russian and English languages have been aired three times a day from October to December in 2013, featuring the Silk Road spots in Uzbekistan – Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva. This factor, also triggers the growth of international visits in Uzbekistan

In conclusion the research carried out of available materials allowed us to draw the following conclusions of the tourism development in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan has long been considered to have a great deal of potential as a popular tourist destination. For at least a decade, the industry has been expected to boom, and in many ways the country has prepared itself for this potential to be realised, but tourism is developing at only a relatively slow pace. Today tourism in Uzbekistan has low income into the GDP of the country. However, since independence the increase of tourist arrivals was recorded in the country. Compared with some other countries located in the same region and offering similar tourism products, Uzbekistan has more variety and number of tourist resources, and more precisely, it has an advantage geopolitical location, rich cultural, historical and natural heritage. Meanwhile, today Uzbekistan has a very modest place in the global tourist market. Objective assessment of Uzbek tourist resources has shown that, having the exotic and unique attributes, they loose to foreign offers in level of service, access and promotion. Tourism could easily become the most important Uzbek industry in terms of incomes, job creation and number of people benefiting from its direct and indirect impacts. Nevertheless, today it doesn't have its right place in the economy of Uzbekistan.

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