

**DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO
THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY**

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Abstract. This article analyzes the development processes of the tourism industry in Uzbekistan, its impact on the country's economic growth and its place in the international arena. The state policy implemented in recent years to develop tourism, opportunities and existing problems in attracting foreign tourists are considered. The share of tourism in the gross domestic product, its role in creating new jobs and its contribution to improving regional infrastructure are also highlighted. The article puts forward recommendations for increasing the competitiveness of the tourism sector of Uzbekistan, expanding domestic and foreign tourism, and developing the export of services.

Keywords: tourism industry, economic growth, services market, investment, employment, export.

Introduction. Uzbekistan, as a country with an ancient and rich history, has always attracted the attention of tourists. However, in the early years of independence, the tourism industry was underdeveloped and was limited to domestic tourism. In recent years, the leadership of our state has paid special attention to the formation of tourism as an important sector of the economy. In particular, since 2016, the tourism sector has been elevated to the level of a strategic direction, and a qualitatively new stage has begun in its development.

First of all, favorable conditions have been created for the development of the sector. Visa procedures have been simplified, and citizens of many countries have been granted visa-free entry to Uzbekistan. As a result, the number of foreign tourists has increased sharply. For example, in 2016, the number of tourists visiting our country was around 2 million, but by 2019 this figure exceeded 6.7 million. Although there was a short-term decline during the pandemic, stable growth was again noted in 2022–2023.

Infrastructure has also been an important factor in the development of the tourism industry [1]. In recent years, modern hotels, tourist complexes, and transport and logistics centers have been built in Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva. The Silk Road Samarkand tourism complex built in Samarkand has created a great opportunity to promote Uzbekistan on a global scale. Also, the reconstruction of Tashkent and Samarkand airports, the increase in domestic and international flights are contributing to the development of tourism. Historical and architectural monuments play a key role in Uzbek tourism. The Registan complex in Samarkand, the Ark Fortress in Bukhara, the Ichan Fortress in Khiva, and the Amir Temur Monument in Shahrisabz are not only national heritage, but also world-renowned monuments. Therefore, the number of objects included in the UNESCO World Heritage List is increasing every year. However, in recent years, special attention has been paid not only to historical monuments, but also to the development of ecological, pilgrimage, gastronomic, and extreme tourism [2]. For example, ecotourism resorts are being established in the Chatkal and Hisar mountains, and gastronomic festivals are being held in Bukhara and Samarkand, presenting national dishes to foreign tourists.

The tourism industry is becoming increasingly important in the country's economy. According to statistics, this sector has a significant share in the gross domestic product and plays an important role in the export of services [3]. Most importantly, tourism creates thousands of new jobs. Hotel workers, guides, transport service providers, national craftsmen and many other representatives of the industry earn a stable income through tourism. In this regard, the development of tourism is becoming an effective tool for ensuring employment and increasing incomes of the population. At the same time, there are some problems. In some regions, the tourist infrastructure is not sufficiently developed, and the quality of service still lags behind international standards. One of the problems is the uneven distribution of tourist flows, i.e., their concentration mainly in Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva, and the underutilization of the potential of other regions. In addition, it is necessary to further strengthen international advertising and marketing activities. Because, despite the great potential of Uzbekistan, it has not yet reached the level of a fully recognized brand in the world market.

Uzbekistan is becoming one of the most attractive tourism centers not only in Central Asia, but also in the whole world. Our ancient history, rich culture, unique architectural monuments and national traditions are increasingly attracting the attention of foreign tourists. Therefore, in recent years, tourism has emerged as one of the important sectors of the country's economy and has begun to have a significant impact on its growth rates [4].

The impact of tourism on the economy is visible in several ways. First of all, this sector contributes to an increase in national income. When foreign tourists visit Uzbekistan, they use hotel, transport, catering, cultural and leisure services, and other services. This leads to an expansion of the services market, an increase in tax revenues, and the development of various sectors. For example, in 2019, the tourism sector contributed \$1.3 billion to the country's economy. Although there was a temporary decline during the pandemic, this figure began to grow again in 2022. Another important impact of tourism is an increase in employment. Today, thousands of people in Uzbekistan are employed in the tourism sector. Hotel employees, guides, artisans, transport service providers, chefs preparing national dishes, and many other specialists receive a stable income thanks to tourism [5]. Tourism is also giving impetus to the emergence of new business entities in the regions. For example, in Samarkand and Bukhara, small enterprises producing national souvenirs, ecotourism centers, and family guest houses have opened. The tourism industry, while contributing to economic growth, also increases the country's international prestige. Today, Uzbekistan is recognized worldwide as one of the centers of the "Great Silk Road Heritage". The inclusion of historical monuments of the cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, and Shakhrisabz in the UNESCO World Heritage List has further increased Uzbekistan's tourism potential. The "SCO Summit" held in Samarkand in 2022 also played a significant role in promoting tourism. The construction of the "Silk Road Samarkand" complex has also elevated Uzbekistan to the status of a center capable of hosting international conferences and major events.

Uzbekistan's position in the international tourism arena is increasingly strengthened. Today, our country has introduced a visa-free regime for citizens of more than 90 countries. This has made Uzbekistan an even more open and convenient destination for tourists. Uzbekistan is mentioned among the most recommended travel destinations in foreign publications, in particular, in The Guardian, Lonely Planet and National Geographic. This serves to strengthen not only tourism, but also the international image of our country. At the same time, the role of tourism in the international arena is not limited to economic interests. It is also becoming an important tool in the development of diplomatic and cultural relations [6]. Through tourists, Uzbekistan demonstrates to the world its rich history, national values and hospitality. This serves to increase international cooperation and investment attractiveness [7].

Uzbekistan has enormous tourism potential: rich history, unique architectural monuments, national culture, hospitality and natural beauty are taking the country to an important place on the world tourism map. However, additional measures are needed to increase competitiveness and sustainable development in this area. The following recommendations are recommended for increasing competitiveness:

- ✓ Bringing the quality of services to international standards, strengthening the training of professional personnel in the hotel, transport and catering sectors.
- ✓ Diversifying tourist products: along with historical tourism, developing ecological, gastronomic, sports, health and agro-tourism.
- ✓ Forming regional brands and strengthening marketing. For example, promoting the Fergana Valley as a center of handicrafts, Karakalpakstan as a region of ecological tourism.
- ✓ Using modern information technologies, widely implementing online booking, virtual guides and mobile applications.
- ✓ Reducing transport costs for domestic tourists, subsidizing train and air ticket prices to a certain extent.
- ✓ Developing tourist packages for the local population: introducing affordable and convenient services such as "one-day trips", "family vacations".
- ✓ Organizing special discount tour programs for students and pupils, thereby developing a tourism culture among young people.
- ✓ Increase the number of family guest houses in the regions and support them through preferential loans.
- ✓ Strengthen media campaigns promoting the image of Uzbekistan's tourism in foreign countries, actively participate in international exhibitions.
- ✓ Expand cooperation with foreign tour operators, develop joint tour packages.
- ✓ Ensure transport convenience by increasing the number of airlines and increasing international flights.
- ✓ Continue a favorable visa policy, introduce a visa-free regime for new countries.
- ✓ Develop "all-inclusive" tour packages for foreign tourists and actively advertise them on global online platforms (Booking, Airbnb, TripAdvisor).
- ✓ Increase export potential by including local handicraft products in the package of tourist services.
- ✓ Develop medical tourism and educational tourism: promote treatment and short-term training programs for foreign citizens.
- ✓ Promoting Uzbekistan as a center for hosting international sports and cultural events, thereby increasing the export of services.

Conclusion. In conclusion, the tourism industry in Uzbekistan has become one of the important factors of economic growth in recent years. The favorable conditions created by the state, the simplification of the visa regime, the development of infrastructure and the strengthening of international cooperation have brought tourism to a new level. The development of this sector not only makes a significant contribution to the country's gross domestic product, but also plays an important role in creating thousands of new jobs, improving regional infrastructure, expanding the export of services and increasing Uzbekistan's prestige in the international arena. At the same time, in order to fully utilize the potential of tourism, it is necessary to improve the quality of services, develop new types of tourism and strengthen marketing policies. If the existing problems are gradually resolved, the tourism sector will become one of the strategic sectors of the Uzbekistan economy in the future and will play an even greater role in ensuring the sustainable development of the country.

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