



Section 4. Marketing

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OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF PILGRIMAGE TOURISM IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

This study explores the development possibilities of pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan, a country with a rich spiritual heritage and significant potential as a destination for religious and spiritual travelers. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and document analysis, the research examines visitor demographics, motivations, economic impacts, and stakeholder perspectives on challenges and opportunities in the sector. Findings indicate a strong foundation for pilgrimage tourism, driven by a diverse visitor demographic and a shared interest in sustainability among stakeholders.

Keywords: *pilgrimage tourism, cultural heritage, sustainable development, economic impact, demographic characteristics of visitors, marketing strategies, preservation of religious places*

Introduction

The development of pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan provides a unique opportunity to stimulate economic growth and cultural exchange using the country's rich historical, cultural and spiritual heritage. Located in the heart of Central Asia, Uzbekistan is home to a number of ancient cities that played a crucial role in the spread of religions and cultures along the Silk Road, including Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva. These cities contain many architectural wonders and sacred sites of great importance to various religious traditions, including Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity.

Uzbekistan's strategic location and presence of its venerable shrines make it a potential center for pilgrimage tourism. This type of tourism not only serves the spiritual needs of individuals, but also promotes intercultural understanding, promotes peace, and stimulates local economies.

Despite this potential, pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan is still in its infancy, with the country only beginning to unlock its potential as a leading destination for religious and spiritual travelers. The introduction of new policies to promote tourism, investment in infrastructure and marketing shows a

growing recognition of the value of pilgrimage tourism. However, in order to fully realize this potential, it is necessary to solve the problems related to infrastructure, access, preservation of sacred places and ensure the sustainability of tourism development.

This study aims to explore the possibilities for the development of pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan, examines the current state of the sector, identifies key opportunities for growth, and addresses issues that may hinder development.

Through an in-depth analysis of the potential of pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan, this study informs strategic initiatives that will help position the country as a leading destination for spiritual and religious travelers, thereby increasing its visibility on the global tourism map.

Research methodology

The contribution of Uzbek scholars to the development of Islamic religion and science, their scientific and spiritual heritage, their role in the formation of Islamic civilization in Central Asia, their rich history and the hospitality of their people are the basis. to develop travel tourism in the country. Famous pilgrims such as Ismailini, Chor Bakr, Chashmai Ayub, Shahizinda, Ruhabad, Imam Al-Bukhari, Bahauddin Naqshband, Ghur Amir, Khoja Ahrur, Pahlavon Mahmud, Hazrat Imam, Zangi ata, Sultan Saadat, Hakim at-Tirmizi are proof of this opinion. . There are world-famous pilgrimages and shrines in the country, the visit of which is equivalent to a small pilgrimage of Islam. In particular, in Central Asia, visiting the tomb of Qusam ibn Abbas in Samarkand is equated with visiting the Kaaba. In order to facilitate pilgrims in Uzbekistan, mobile applications on holy sites and pilgrims have been developed (Jurakhonovich, Khashimov Sherakhon, 2020).

According to Mirzahid Koriyev, pilgrimage sites in Namangan region, which is one of the richest areas for pilgrimage in Uzbekistan, need to be improved, repaired and reconstructed based on world standards (Koriyev, Mirzohid, 2023).

According to the research conducted by Dzharfarova Nigina Alisherovna and Abdurakhimova Sevara Tulkin, Uzbekistan is famous not only for pilgrimage, but also for its ac-

tivists who lived and worked in the Islamic world. According to the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) rating for 2019, Uzbekistan entered the top ten popular countries among the member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. In addition, a number of projects were implemented to increase the role of religious tourism in Uzbekistan. The first international forum on tourism "Ziyarat" organized in Bukhara on February 21-23, 2019 was one of them, in which Mr. Peter Debrin, an expert of the General Directorate of Sustainable Tourism of UNESCO, participated. There were more than 120 leaders of influential organizations in the Islamic world, religious figures from more than 30 regions. There are more than 7,000 tangible cultural heritage objects of different regions and periods in Uzbekistan, including historical centers in Bukhara, Samarkand, Khiva, and Shahrisabz, which are included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Of course, this creates favorable conditions for the development of pilgrimage tourism as one of the promising directions. Also, on May 24, an international scientific-practical conference was held on the topic of "Revival of pilgrimage tourism at the intersection of the Great Silk Road" in cooperation with the State Committee for Tourism Development, Samarkand State University and "Silk Road" International University. Tourism took place in Samarkand. According to the Tourism Committee, the number of tourists from Muslim countries to Uzbekistan in 2018 increased sharply compared to 2017. For example, the number of arrivals from Malaysia has increased by 66%, while for Indonesia this figure is 88% (Djafarova Nigina Alisherovna, Abdurakhimova Sevara Tulkin Kizi. 2020).

According to Gulnara Gulyamova's research, Uzbekistan has a high potential for the development of various types of tourism. According to the Ministry of Tourism and Culture Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan, indicators of tourism development in our country are growing steadily in 2016-2019 (Fig. 1). In 2016-2019, the number of tourists who came to our country increased by 3.2 times and reached 6.7 million people. Despite the financial, organizational and economic measures taken to improve the situation in 2020, 1.3 million tourists visited our country, that is, the number of visits

decreased by 5 times. 2021 was a period of tourism recovery, 1.9 million foreign tourists visited Uzbekistan during the year. Despite the fact that the number of tourists who came to the country increased by 2.7 times compared to last year and reached 5.8 million people, in 2022 the figure of 2019 was not reached. In 2020, the closure of external borders completely stopped the arrival of foreign tourists. In addition, the introduction of quarantine restrictions across the country has almost stopped domestic tourism. As a result, the direct income from the export of tourism services in our country decreased more than 4 times compared to 2019 (Gulyamova, Gulnora. 2023).

In addition to the method of theoretical analysis and scientific abstraction, the questionnaire method was also used in the research process.

100 foreign tourists aged 18 to 65 participated in the survey conducted by the researcher. Analysis and results were formed based on their answers. In particular, the survey investigated the motivation of visitors, the average cost and its distribution, and the main problems for interested parties.

Analysis and results

Research shows that pilgrimage tourism attracts the over-60 demographic segment, which is interested in spiritual and cultural exploration. The main motivation for visiting shrines was found to be spiritual enrichment (60%), followed by cultural exploration (25%). This creates a solid foundation for the development of pilgrimage tourism around Uzbekistan's rich spiritual heritage and cultural landscapes.

Table 1. Demographics and motivations of visitors

Demographic characteristic	in percent (%)
Age 18-30	25%
31-45 years old	15%
46-60 years old	20%
People over 60 years old	40%
Motivation for the visit	in percent (%)
Spiritual enrichment	60%
Cultural research	25%
Academic studies	10%
Other	5%

**the table was compiled by the author based on the results of the survey*

Table 2. Economic Impact of Pilgrimage Tourism

Element	Average cost per visitor (\$)
Accommodation	600
Food and drinks	150
Local transport	50
Souvenirs and other purchases	75
Total	875

**the table was compiled by the author based on the results of the survey.*

An economic impact analysis has shown that visitors spend a large amount in various categories, particularly accommodation and food. On average, visitors spend \$875 per

trip, indicating that pilgrimage tourism can be an important source of income for local hotels and restaurants, especially in areas surrounding pilgrimage sites.

Table 3. *Situations identified as the main problem*

Situations	Cases identified as the main problem (%)
Infrastructure development	75%
Marketing and advertising	60%
Conservation of the tourist area	85%
Sustainable tourism practices	80%

**the table was compiled by the author based on the results of the survey*

Stakeholders identified a number of problems in the development of pilgrimage tourism. Among them, preservation of tourist areas (85%) and infrastructure development (75%) were noted as the main problems. These problems require careful repair planning and investment to avoid damaging the cultural and natural assets that attract visitors to Uzbekistan.

There is a great potential in the development of pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan, but it is necessary to solve problems such as the preservation of infrastructure, areas without damage, and the introduction of sustainable tourism practices. Together with strategic investments and targeted marketing efforts, the development of sustainable tourism offers (Collins-Kreiner, N., 2020), can make Uzbekistan a leading destination for pilgrimage tourism globally. It can also be noted that there are still problems that prevent the development of pilgrimage tourism in the country. Including:

As for the language, there are still few people who speak English outside the capital. Foreign visitors may have difficulty in simple communication. This can be a communication barrier, especially for the older generation who want to stay in rural areas for a long time. This can cause discomfort and misunderstandings for the locals. In Uzbek culture, it is customary to offer food and drink to any guest. If communication is poor, guests may reject the hospitality of the locals and offend them.

Encourage public-private partnerships between local tourism operators and international travel agencies. Promotion of joint venture business relations between local and international tourism enterprises. To promote regional tourism by developing tourism routes and destinations based on special interest and culture, especially including countries such as Afghanistan, India, Iran,

Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

Pilgrimage tourism increases the demand for jobs in various sectors. Countries that are popular with tourists increase demand for local goods and services, such as agricultural products. It is a major area of tourism job creation (Djuraeva D.D., Berdiyeva Z.M., 2016), with increased tourism demand creating jobs in areas such as public and private infrastructure, airport facilities and hotels.

Sustainable development of pilgrimage tourism includes ensuring environmental protection. Pilgrimage and religious tourists often visit culturally and environmentally sensitive sites, and their visits can have both positive and negative effects on the site.

Conclusions and suggestions

The development of pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan creates a great opportunity to use the country's rich cultural and religious heritage for economic and social benefits. The study found that interest in pilgrimage tourism is primarily characterized by a younger and more diverse demographic of visitors concerned with spiritual enrichment and cultural exploration. Economic analysis shows that significant spending by visitors increases the industry's ability to stimulate the local economy and support small businesses. Stakeholders identified several development challenges, including the need for improved infrastructure, better protection of tourist destinations, and overcoming cultural and language barriers. More importantly, there is a strong inclination towards sustainable tourism practices among visitors and service providers, which points the way for future development in line with global sustainability trends.

Strategic marketing efforts, partnerships with international organizations, and the de-

velopment of culturally sensitive tourism offerings are critical to entering the global pilgrimage tourism market. In addition, solving the identified problems through inclusive planning and policy development can make Uzbekistan a leading destination for pilgrim-

age tourism. By creating an environment that values the preservation of religious monuments and promotes sustainable and respectful tourism practices, Uzbekistan can leverage pilgrimage tourism for long-term cultural, economic, and environmental benefits.

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