



IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGY FOR PROMOTING TOURISM IN UZBEKISTAN DURING THE YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE.

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***Abstract** The article talks about the role and development of the tourism industry in our economic and social life in today's globalization process. In the economy of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the tourism sector, like other production sectors, is one of the specialized industries and is of great importance as a means of economic development of the country. In this case, innovative activities should be carried out on a systematic basis and should take place as a necessary component of the strategic plans for the progress of tourism sector.*

***Keywords** Economy, tourism, global, innovation, social, decision, industry.*

Introduction

In the present phase of societal progress, the sector responsible for providing tourism services has emerged as a complex and multifaceted system that encompasses various interconnected dimensions, including social, economic, cultural-educational, and political aspects. Consequently, the connections between the parties involved in this domain are diverse, extensive, and intricate. It is a formidable task to accomplish the objective of fostering tourism without regulating these associations through well-defined, firmly established, and enduring legal standards. Within the realm of tourism services, all establishments that offer accommodations, public dining facilities, and transportation services to tourists must comply with the requirement of being officially registered and authorized to provide services to tourists. This necessitates the establishment of proper relationships between cultural and educational institutions, sports facilities, tourists, tour group leaders, tour guides, tourist safety personnel, and agencies and organizations responsible for protecting the rights of tourists.

Results

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, In 2017, the sector of tourism and hospitality accounted for 10.4% of global GDP, 11% of global investment, and 1 in 16 new jobs. The level of employment of the population in this sector also increased by 103% compared to 2016. In 2017, the field of tourism employed a total of 313.2 million people worldwide. Uzbekistan boasts a remarkably rich history and culture, making it a destination with significant potential for the development of its tourism industry. Due to its location on the "Great Silk Road," the region has historically gained fame among the countries of the world as a center of trade and cultural relations. The territory of the republic is home to approximately 4,000 architectural monuments, some of which boast a history spanning 2,500 years. Historical monuments in cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, and Shakhrisabz have always been the center of attention for world historians and tourists. In this respect, Uzbekistan has great tourism potential among the countries of Central Asia. Uzbekistan ranks among the top ten countries in the world in terms of the scale of tourism and the number of historical places.

During the years of independence, the growth and progress of the tourism sector in Uzbekistan has elevated to the level of a state policy. Uzbekistan is widely recognized as a country with immense potential in the field of tourism. It occupies a significant position in the Silk Road project initiated by the World Tourism Organization, and a significant portion of the tours offered under this project encompass the territory of Uzbekistan. Cultural tourism is particularly well-developed in Uzbekistan compared to other forms of tourism. «In the current global scenario, where tourism has become a priority sector across nations, the exploration of our country's potential for pilgrimage tourism, which is deeply rooted in our natural, spiritual, cultural, and historical heritage, holds immense significance in attracting both local residents and foreign tourists»[1]. Uzbekistan boasts over 7,000 to 8,000 historical monuments, with 209 of them listed as UNESCO World Heritage

Sites. It stands proudly at the 9th position worldwide for its rich Islamic cultural heritage and historical landmarks. «Uzbekistan is among the top ten countries globally in terms of the number of historical architectural monuments, with four major cities designated as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Architectural marvels alone account for 33% of Uzbekistan's tourist potential. Cities like Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva are unique open-air museums»[2]. In recent years, strategic measures and decisions have been implemented to develop innovative tourist facilities based on museumized sites within these historical cities. Among the cultural and historical objects, there are 545 architectural structures, 575 historical sites, 1,457 artistic pieces, and more than 5,500 archaeological artifacts. Furthermore, the country boasts 11 national parks and state reserves, 12 nature reserves, 122 museums, and numerous other attractions that have the potential to captivate tourists. However, despite this vast potential, it has not been fully utilized for many years.

During the period of 2011–2016, the average annual number of foreign visitors to the country experienced a mere 8% increase. However, in 2016, a significant transformation began in the tourism industry of Uzbekistan. Similar to other economic sectors within the country, the tourism sector has started to embark on a new developmental path. At the beginning of december 2016, the head of state set forth the objective of achieving "rapid development" in the tourism sector, which was followed by the signing of a relevant document. A comprehensive approach was adopted to foster the growth of the tourism sector. Consequently, the state committee for the development of tourism, an authorized state body, was established. «Decisions taken by the head of state and the government focused on providing tax incentives and preferences to entrepreneurs in the tourism industry, implementing tourism promotion strategies in both domestic and foreign markets, and introducing visa facilitation measures. Substantial liberalization of the regime was undertaken».[3]

All measures for the formation of infrastructure for the development of the tourism sector have been determined. Efforts were made to develop tourism based on the national model in order to develop international tourism. Attention was paid to this model as it takes into account the internal capabilities, the mentality of the Uzbek people, and the requirements that correspond to world standards. In particular, 1992 marked the initial formation period of national tourism in the republic. During this time, the establishment of "Uzbekturizm" National Company, recognized as a leader in tourism infrastructure, took place through the issuance of Decree No. PF-447 on July 27, 1992, by the first President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. This company was entrusted with the responsibility of implementing the tourism industry's development policy and creating a national model. Its activities included coordinating the efforts of the republic's tourist organizations, promoting various forms of tourism, attracting foreign investments, developing the industry's material and technical foundations, enhancing tourism infrastructure, and providing training for personnel in the field of tourism. By the years 1993–1995, the national tourism development model had been formulated. In 1993, contracts were signed with 15 foreign companies and three CIS countries, fostering positive relations with various tourism organizations worldwide, including Thailand, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Germany. Additional contracts were established with tourism companies in Syria, Egypt, and several European countries. During this period, significant efforts were directed towards expanding the volume of tourism services, establishing new tourist destinations in various regions, aligning tourism services with global standards, enhancing the material and technical infrastructure of the tourism sector, improving the organizational management system, and addressing other relevant issues. The National Company "Uzbekturizm" established direct communication with tour operators in Frankfurt-Main (Germany), London (England), New York (USA), and Sharjah (United Arab Emirates). Additionally, representative offices were established in Moscow (Russia). Starting from 1995 and

continuing until 1997, privatization processes were initiated in the field of tourist services, resulting in approximately 90 percent of the assets owned by the National Company "Uzbekturizm" being released from state control in 1996. This step created significant opportunities for attracting tourists, investments, and facilitating currency exchange. Extensive efforts were undertaken to elevate national tourism to global standards, adapt it to international requirements, and enhance tourism services, including improvements in border, customs, and airport services to welcome foreign tourists. Furthermore, endeavors were made to meet the increasing demand for guest accommodation and align hotels with international standards.

In order to attract foreign tourists, significant emphasis was placed on the development of national handicrafts right from the early years. «As a notable example, on October 24-25, 1995, the first republican fair of folk masters and craftsmen took place in Tashkent, in collaboration with the Ministry of Cultural Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the United Nations representative office in the country, and the Tashkent city administration».[4] This fair marked the first-ever event of its kind at a national scale. In addition to the residents of the capital and daily visitors, representatives from foreign diplomatic corps and international organizations actively participated in the event.

On March 31, 1997, the first President of the Republic of Uzbekistan issued a decree titled "On measures to support the further development of folk arts and crafts through state means." The purpose of this decree was to elevate the importance of folk art and applied art in the advancement of national culture, revive age-old traditions and unique forms of high-quality handmade artistic products, and provide state support to folk craftsmen. Measures included establishing a network of specialized stores and kiosks for the sale of finished products, organizing exhibitions and auctions, supplying local raw materials, materials, tools, and small mechanization equipment to folk craftsmen producing high-quality artistic products, providing training to young people in the skills of folk art masters, and offering

practical assistance in creating favorable conditions for education. These endeavors were deemed essential tasks for the republic, ministries, and offices of the regional, city, and district authorities of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Karakalpakstan. Effective from April 1, 1997, individuals engaged in self-employed work producing art crafts and applied art items at home, and who were registered in accordance with the prescribed procedures with the local authorities and tax offices, were exempted from paying income tax for a period of one year. Individual entrepreneurs involved in producing items related to folk art crafts and applied arts within their households determined the prices of their products based on market demand and independently set the prices accordingly. Additionally, customs duty for the items listed in the attached document was waived when sold outside the country.

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The "Uzbekistan" Hotel is one of the largest tourist facilities in the republic. It has been operational since 1974 and has accommodated over 3.5 million tourists. In 1995, the hotel hosted visitors from more than 70 countries worldwide, representing a significant increase of 127% compared to 1994.

Furthermore, the "Shodlik" Hotel in the capital underwent renovations in collaboration with the German company "INPRO" and was inaugurated in 1997.

The National Company "Uzbekturizm" played an important role in boosting diversified tourism in Uzbekistan, building the required material and technological infrastructure, and upgrading the quality of tourist services to worldwide standards, and ultimately contributing to the economic development of the republic by increasing foreign currency income.

Currently, approximately one-third of tourist services are provided by companies, commercial establishments, and the privatized non-governmental sector. The share of private companies in attracting and serving tourists has been steadily

increasing over the years. For instance, Tashkent witnessed the establishment of 79 such companies, while Samarkand saw the emergence of 18.

In 1994, "Uzsayohatbank" was established under the umbrella of the National Company "Uzbekturizm," with founding partners including "Gallabank," "Uzsanoatkurilishbank," "Uzbekturizm," and the Ministry of Finance. Subsequently, branches of "Uzsayohatbank" were opened in cities like Bukhara, Khiva, Samarkand, and other locations along the Great Silk Road. These initiatives culminated in an international conference held in Tashkent and Samarkand in October 1994, with the participation of the World Tourism Organization. The conference focused on the topic of "Development of the Great Silk Road and international tourism relations.

It is important to note that Uzbekistan holds unique significance as it offers a variety of world-class tourist facilities and places for relaxation and treatment, characteristic of the global tourism market. The Fergana and Zarafshan valleys, which are rich in recreational resources and ancient historical monuments, along with the Khorezm Oasis, occupy a special place among the tourist attractions in Uzbekistan. Despite being located far from the oceans and seas within the mainland, these oases and valleys have attracted tens and hundreds of thousands of local residents and visitors from near and far, engaging in various forms of tourism.

The country is home to a remarkable total of 7,400 cultural heritage sites, including 209 that have gained recognition as four museum cities: the Ichan Castle in Khiva, the historical center of Bukhara, the old part of the city, the historical center of Shahrisabz, and the territory of the ancient city of Samarkand. Uzbekistan, known as a cradle of diverse cultures, has been included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. The cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, and Shahrisabz, which played significant roles in the formation and development of ancient statehood, have contributed to the growth of educational tourism in the region.

However, studies indicate that tourist facilities, hotels, transportation, and other infrastructure are unevenly distributed across the country. Approximately 72.6 percent of tourists visited Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, and Tashkent, while 24.6 percent traveled to the Fergana Valley and three regions located in the south of the republic. Overall, tourists visiting Uzbekistan during the years of independence demonstrated different preferences based on the regions they explored. «The highest visitor numbers were recorded in the regions of Tashkent and Zarafshan, the city of Tashkent, and the regions of Samarkand and Bukhara».[6]

These days, the number of incoming and leaving visitors in Tashkent, Zarafshan, and the southern areas has climbed by 5.5 times, while in Fergana and Mirzachol, it has increased 3-3.5 times. Among the visitors to Uzbekistan, 39% expressed interest in historical and architectural monuments, while 24% were captivated by the culture, traditions, and lifestyle of the nation.

In 2013, a total of 550 tourist companies and tour operators served tourists in Uzbekistan. Almost half of them were located in the Tashkent region, one-third in the Zarafshan region, and only three percent in the Fergana region. However, despite the lower number of tourist companies, the relative number of tourists within the Fergana region was comparable to or even higher than the indicators of the Tashkent and Zarafshan regions.

Furthermore, in 2012, the export volume of tourist services in that direction was 231.1 million dollars, and by 2013, it had exceeded 615 million dollars. The country welcomed tourists from over 70 countries, with an annual number surpassing 2 million. Between 2012 and 2013, this figure experienced a remarkable growth of 43%. In the first half of 2014 alone, over 1 million foreign tourists visited the republic. During this period, the tourism sector employed over 200,000 people.

It is worth mentioning that the export of services experienced a significant increase of 16% and 9% respectively in 2012 and 2013. By 2015, there were 550 operating tourist companies and tour operators in Uzbekistan. Notably, the

Republican training and consulting center under "Uzbektourism" MK played an active role in training tour guides, restaurant and hotel business managers, chefs specializing in foreign cuisine, tour operators, and hotel staff.

The center organizes demonstration courses, as well as retraining and advanced training courses for tourism professionals. In 2014, the center provided retraining and advanced training courses for 796 professionals, with 342 participating in retraining, 344 in advanced training courses, and 110 attending international seminars and master classes.

More than 500 hotels and campsites, offering over 50,000 beds, provided services to tourists in accordance with international standards. By 2014, 40 percent of the investment in the material and technical infrastructure aimed at developing the tourism sector was directed towards the city of Tashkent and the Tashkent region. Another 37 percent went to the regions of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khorezm, while the remaining 16 percent was allocated to the valley cities of Ko'kan and Namangan, as well as the Andijan, Margilon, and Surkhondarya regions. The remaining 7% of the tourism's economic potential corresponded to the rest of Uzbekistan's territory.

Moreover, during this period, more than 214 companies from countries such as Italy, France, Japan, China, Great Britain, Russia, the Netherlands, Hungary, Singapore, and others operated in the republic.

Several events and activities were arranged to help Uzbekistan's tourist sector grow. «These included the Haj (pilgrimage) tourism forum in the Bukhara region, the "Bakhshi" art festival, the "Archeological forum" in the Surkhondarya region, the "Game of Heroes" in the Khorezm region, and a car rally (sport). Notable events included the "Muynoq" festival, the "Element" music festival in the Republic of Karakalpakstan, the CIS tourist exhibition in the Samarkand area, the "Geotourism Forum," the "Pomegranate Festival," and the Gastronomy Festival in Tashkent»[7].

Furthermore, 26 investment projects totaling 1.1 billion US dollars in value were successfully completed. These initiatives centered on the development of hotels, health centers, and sports leisure facilities.

In the southern regions of Uzbekistan, specifically Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya, there are numerous mausoleums and shrines of scholars who are recognized in the Islamic world. In today's world, where tourism has become a priority sector, the development of pilgrimage tourism centered around the graves of scholars, which hold cultural and spiritual significance in the southern oasis, has gained importance. Attracting foreign visitors to these sites plays a crucial role in shaping the country's perspective. The development of pilgrimage tourism in these regions is of great significance to internal, national, regional, and local tourism.

Despite the country's substantial tourism potential, it has not been fully and effectively utilized for many years. However, the attention given by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Sh. Mirziyoyev, to the development of tourism is evident in the acceptance of tourism-related documents. It is worth noting that 76 percent of foreign tourists entering the country express interest in visiting Bukhara, Samarkand, Khorezm, and Tashkent, while the remaining 24 percent travel to the Jizzakh, Kashkadarya, Surkhandarya, and Fergana regions. In recent years, particularly in 2020, the number of foreign visitors for tourism purposes from other countries reached 1.5 million people. Pilgrimage tourism has also developed in the Nurota, Karmana, and Khatirchi districts of the Navoi region.

The XVII International Festival "Silk and Spices 2018," held in Bukhara from May 25 to 27, 2018, has become one of the festivals that can attract tourists. The "Silk and Spices 2018" festival was organized in collaboration with the "Hunarmand" association, the State Committee for Tourism Development, and the Bukhara regional government. This festival serves to preserve the cultural heritage of the Uzbek people and has the main goal of developing national crafts and showcasing the achievements of the national economy on an international scale. It

also aims to expand cultural ties and establish Bukhara as one of the centers of world tourism.

The program of the 17th international "Silk and Spices 2018" festival included performances by national ensembles and an international exhibition featuring silk products and spice producers from all over the country. Additionally, more than 100 domestic and foreign artisans organized an exhibition sale of national handicraft products. The festival also featured various master classes, national games and entertainment activities, as well as exhibitions in the fine and practical art galleries. Within the framework of the festival, films dedicated to the history of Uzbekistan were also screened.

In addition to the "Silk and Spices" exhibition held in Bukhara in 2018, a total of 9 exhibitions and events were conducted throughout the country to support artisans, create favorable conditions for them, and showcase and sell their products in domestic and foreign markets. These events included the international exhibition "Golden Hand Craftsman" at the Palace of Youth Creativity in Tashkent, the "Young Craftsmen's Competition" exhibition in Samarkand held in April, the "Boysun Spring" exhibition in the Surkhandarya region also in April, the "Life Shines in Embroidery" exhibition in the Kashkadarya region in April, the "Independent Country Artisans" exhibition in Tashkent in July, the "Maqom" festival in Shahrisabz, Kashkadarya region, in September, the "Gifts of Uzbekistan" exhibition sale in Tashkent in September, and the 4th "Atlas Bayrami" festival in Margilon in September.

International tourist exhibitions and conferences held in many countries around the world have become crucial for the progress of tourism sector. In order to enhance the international visibility of the nation's cultural heritage, attract a greater number of foreign visitors, and stimulate domestic tourism, the tourism organizations of the country have orchestrated a series of exhibitions in key global cities, including Madrid, Riga, Berlin, Paris, Tokyo, London, Moscow, and Istanbul.

They actively participated in international exhibitions. These efforts have yielded positive results, leading to an increasing influx of foreign tourists to our country.

«Over the past years, following government orders, the development of tourism and its infrastructure in regions like Khorezm, Bukhara, Samarkand, Surkhandarya, Kashkadarya, Jizzakh, and Fergana has been prioritized»[8]. Projects aimed at establishing new tourism destinations and promoting tourism in these areas have been implemented. Notably, significant work has commenced in the cities of Bukhara and Samarkand to establish tourist areas known as "Ancient Bukhara" and "Samarkand City." These areas operate day and night to cater to tourists.

Comprehensive efforts have also been undertaken to develop rural tourism. Since 2018, the private company "Mehrigiyoh" in the Uchkoprik district of the Fergana region has organized activities for tourists, including participation in the collection of medicinal herbs and photo sessions in the lavender fields. In the Kashkadarya region, the village of "Varganza" in the Kitab district has been awarded the status of the first agro-tourist village, marking an important milestone in the development of rural tourism. Additionally, agro-ecotourism villages such as Konimekh, Sentob (Navoi region), Konigil (Samarkand region), Avval, and Vodil (Fergana region) have been established. Uzbekistan has been recognized as one of the most attractive tourist destinations in numerous prestigious foreign publications.

It is worth noting that significant efforts have been made to transform tourism into one of the strategic sectors of the Uzbekistan economy. These efforts have been recognized through various nominations and rankings. For instance, the World Tourism Organization under the UN has ranked Uzbekistan 4th on the list of rapidly promoting countries in the field of tourism industry. From 2017 to 2021, Uzbekistan consistently held the 46th position in the worldwide safety rating for tourists, securing the 1st place among the CIS countries. Additionally, Uzbekistan received the 1st place in the category of the best developing tourist destination at the Grandvoyage Tourism Awards in Madrid. Furthermore, in 2019, the "New York

Times" newspaper recognized Uzbekistan as the winner in the category of "fast-growing tourist destination." It also achieved the 8th position in the ranking of the best countries for Muslim women.

Conclusion

In conclusion, significant progress has been made in the further progress of the tourism sector, its legal regulation by the state, and the overall growth of the system. The key factor in the sector's development has been the creation of substantial privileges and opportunities for entrepreneurs to foster its growth. Pilgrimage tourism, historical-educational tourism, and MICE tourism have emerged as the primary areas of international cooperation. «Additionally, alongside traditional forms of tourism, new and promising directions such as gastronomic, medical, ethnographic, pilgrimage, business, film, educational, and transit tourism have been developing since 2017. However, some shortcomings, untapped opportunities, and issues remain evident»[9].

These encompass service of inadequate quality that does not meet the standards set on an international level, problems with transportation infrastructure, high airfare prices, underdeveloped roads, inadequate advertising for Uzbek tourism, the absence of a distinctive brand, high tax rates imposed on hotels and other businesses providing basic and additional services, and a lack of travel agencies in major foreign cities to offer tourist services. Addressing these challenges, eliminating them, and effectively leveraging the positive experiences of developed foreign countries is of great importance.

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