



PILGRIMAGE AND TRADITIONAL TOURISM IN UZBEKISTAN: INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 7 th March 2026 Accepted: 6 th April 2026	This article analyses the development trends of traditional and pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan during 2020-2025. It examines the stages of crisis, recovery, and rapid growth of the tourism industry, as well as changes in tourist flows and tourism service exports. Particular attention is given to infrastructure development, expansion of visa-free regimes, and the introduction of new tourism types (pilgrimage, eco, and MICE tourism). The study also highlights the cultural and spiritual significance of pilgrimage tourism, its integration with information technologies, and future strategic directions for the sector's development.

Keywords: Tourism industry, pilgrimage tourism, traditional tourism, tourism service exports, infrastructure, visa-free regime, MICE tourism, ecotourism, information technologies, cultural heritage

ПЕРСПЕКТИВҚ РАЗВИТИЯ ПАЛОМНИЧЕСКОГО И ТРАДИЦИОННОГО ТУРИЗМА В УЗБЕКИСТАНЕ

Аннотация

В статье анализируются перспективы развития традиционного и паломнического туризма в Узбекистане в 2020-2025 гг. Рассмотрены этапы кризиса, восстановления и ускоренного роста туристической отрасли, а также динамика туристического потока и экспорта туристических услуг. Особое внимание уделено развитию инфраструктуры, расширению безвизового режима и внедрению новых видов туризма (паломнический, экологический, MICE). Также раскрыта культурно-духовная значимость паломнического туризма, его интеграция с информационными технологиями и перспективы дальнейшего стратегического развития отрасли.

Ключевые слова:

Туристическая индустрия, паломнический туризм, традиционный туризм, экспорт туристических услуг, инфраструктура, безвизовый режим, MICE туризм, экологический туризм, информационные технологии, культурное наследие

INTRODUCTION

World Tourism Organization According to statistics from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), "...tourism is the third largest economy in terms of income and the fourth largest in terms of exports of goods and services, accounting for an average of 10.0 percent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) ..." [1] According to the International Labor Organization, today, 284 million of the world's working-age population are employed in the international tourism sector. [2] In addition, one new job created in this sector costs 20 times less than in the manufacturing sector. [3] Every 30 tourists visiting a country directly creates one new job or indirectly creates two new jobs.[4] Therefore, it can be concluded that, compared to other sectors of the global economy, the tourism sector serves to create more jobs and ensure economic stability at lower costs.

In recent years, the tourism sector in Uzbekistan has been emerging as one of the strategic sectors of the economy. In particular, in the period 2020–2025, this sector went through the stages of pandemic crisis, recovery and rapid growth. This article analyses the development trends of traditional and pilgrimage tourism, their economic and social significance.

MAIN PART

Between 2020 and 2025, the Uzbek tourism industry experienced a period of severe challenges and subsequent unprecedented growth. This period can be conditionally divided into three stages: the pandemic crisis (2020–2021), recovery (2022–2023) and rapid development (2024–2025). In recent years, the number of foreign tourists has grown at a record pace. If in 2020 the industry "stood still" due to the pandemic, by 2025



Uzbekistan had become one of the fastest-growing tourist destinations in the world.

Tourist interest in our country is growing day by day. In recent years, the flow of tourists amounted to 1.5 million people in 2020, 5.2 million in 2022, 6.7 million in 2023, 8.0 million in 2024, and 11.7 million in 2025. Exports of tourism services in Uzbekistan (\$) amounted to ~400 million in 2020, and by 2025 amounted to approximately ~4.5 billion. It is no exaggeration to say that the basis of such development trends is the effectiveness of the economic reforms being carried out in our country.

also worth noting that as of 2025, Uzbekistan has introduced a visa-free regime for citizens of more than 90 countries. The introduction of a bilateral 30-day visa-free regime with China starting in June 2025 was a strategic step. This set the goal of increasing the number of tourists from China from 74 thousand in 2024 to 1 million.

Of course, to ensure such growth rates, it is necessary to improve infrastructure and logistics services. In this regard, our government is carrying out reconstruction work on the relevant transport infrastructure in accordance with international requirements, and new facilities are being built. In particular, the capacity of Tashkent International Airport has been increased from 7 million to 13 million passengers. The new airport ("Airport-hub") in Samarkand has become a regional centre. At the same time, the hotel industry is expanding. In particular, boutique hotels have been established in cultural heritage sites within the framework of the "Heritage Hotels of Uzbekistan" program. In 2024 alone, the number of hotels and accommodation facilities increased by 25%.

In order to further develop and diversify the sector, significant work is being carried out to introduce new types of tourism. Now Uzbekistan is not limited to the historical cities of the "Silk Road" (Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva):

- Pilgrimage tourism: The country ranked 17th in the Global Muslim Travel Index 2025.
- Eco and mountain tourism: "Arashan" in Namangan and new recreation centres in the Tashkent region have been opened.
- MICE tourism: Samarkand (Silk Road Samarkand) is leading the way as a centre for international conferences and events.

If we look at the geographical flow of tourists visiting our country in 2025, the following figures will be revealed.

1. Kyrgyzstan (3.3 million)
2. Tajikistan (2.7 million)
3. Kazakhstan (2.7 million)
4. Russia (984 thousand)
5. Afghanistan (476 thousand). Also, China , Turkey , India and South Korea. The

flow of visitors from these countries has grown noticeably.

Specific features of pilgrimage tourism.

One of the main influencing factors in this is that Uzbekistan, with its rich cultural and spiritual heritage, memory and fine arts, historical monuments, as well as many world-famous and great ancestors such as Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, Muhammad Musa al-Khwarizmi, Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Ahmad al-Farghani, Abu Ali ibn Sina, Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, Ahmad Yassawi, Abu Isa al-Termizi, Mirza Ulug'yek, Bahauddin Naqshband, Abdulkhaliq G'ijduvani, Khoja Ali Romitani, Amir Temur, Alisher Navoi, Babur, attracts world scientists and tourists. This, in turn, shows our unique place and influence in international tourism markets.

It is worth noting that the "Uzbekistan - 2030" strategy for the socio-economic development of the republic, adopted in 2023, also aims to further accelerate the results achieved in the sector and the large-scale reforms being carried out, increasing the number of foreign tourists by 15 million, domestic tourists by 25 million, and pilgrim tourists by 3 million, creating 30 large tourism clusters by attracting private investment, increasing the number of guest places by at least 2 times, building 25 roads in mountainous regions, increasing the number of tourist neighborhoods to 175, and increasing the export of tourism services to \$ 5 billion. This is intended to use the multiplicative effect of tourism to ensure economic growth in the country and, ultimately, to achieve an increase in the well-being of the population.

Among the incomparable tourist attractions of our country, every inch of Bukhara has become a place of pilgrimage thanks to the saints. We all know that pilgrimage sites have made a huge contribution to humanity, to the widespread dissemination of the first ideas in the world of Sufism and the world of tariqa in its consciousness. In particular, together with the seven pirs who attract people from all over the world, we can list the shrines of Sayfiddin Boharzi, Mog'aki Attori, Abu Hafis Kabir, Khoja Ka'bul Ahbor Vali, Boboyi Poraduz , Ismail Somoniy mausoleum, Bibi Orifa mausoleum, Mir Arab madrasah and many other shrines.

We are convinced that it represents the highest expression of humanity's spirituality, culture, consciousness, and talent, expressed at an unparalleled level of art in the evolution of the architecture of the historical monuments, mosques, madrasas, and shrines it built.

In connection with the declaration of Bukhara as the "Cultural Capital of the Islamic World" in 2020, it is significant that 7 monuments in Bukhara - the Ismail Somoni Mausoleum, the Chor Bakr, the Bahauddin Naqshband complexes, the Magoki Attar mosque, the Poi-Kalon ensemble, the remains of the ancient city of Poykent, and the Tosharoy madrasahs - have been



included in the ICESCO List of the Heritage of the Islamic World.

Religious pilgrimage is a complex and diverse spiritual and socio-cultural phenomenon in the lives of many people. Pilgrimage as a type of religious activity arose in ancient times and is associated with the emergence of developed forms of religion and a high level of socio-cultural relations in society.

Today, it is necessary to form a database of the scientific and cultural role and significance of existing shrines in terms of their cultural and spiritual heritage, the history of the origin of Islamic architecture, the origin of secular-religious-philosophical views, and their historical evolution, through research and study. Studying the existing shrines and shrines in our country, while widely introducing traditional and modern methods of collecting data and effectively using them, will serve to expand the flow of national and international tourists.

The role of information technology

Today, scientific work is being carried out and implemented in practice by researchers of many relevant scientific research centres and higher educational institutions in the collection and analysis of information related to pilgrimage sites. Since the beginning of the 21st century, information technologies have been widely used in the development of socio-humanitarian and religious-educational spheres. In particular, scientific research on tourism, pilgrimage tourism, the study of historical events based on virtual reality, the creation of a digital resource base of ancestral heritage, and other studies can be cited.

Information technology has its own role and characteristics in the collection and analysis of information related to pilgrimage sites in the tourism sector. For example, the production and service sectors of pilgrimage tourism have achieved an increase in production volume and improved quality of accounting mechanisms by using automated accounting systems. Examples of such accounting systems include SAP, Scala, CRM, and 1C systems, which are recognised by global economists. [5]

In pilgrimage tourism, information on tourist resources is collected and analysed using information technologies, and the processes from receiving an order for production to the production of a finished product or service and its delivery to the customer or buyer are under control. There are opportunities for horizontal and vertical analysis of activity results. According to the results of the analysis, there are opportunities for operational correction of production or service plan graphs in tourism. Such opportunities allow us to bring production or service provision to new stages of development.

CONCLUSION

Today, in a market economy, the success of the tourism industry, based on a modern information system, directly depends on the speed of mutual exchange and delivery of analysed necessary information, the relevance, completeness, and timely transmission and reception of information. The effective development of the tourism industry in world markets also requires the introduction of modern information and communication technologies into each process related to the stages of developing tourism products and their timely delivery to consumers.

As a result, the strategic goals we have set for ourselves until 2030 are:

- Foreign tourists number 15 million to deliver .
- Internal tourists number to 25 million released.
- Tourism services exports are worth \$5 billion. It aims to achieve goals such as :

2020-2025, between the Uzbekistan tourism area " quantity" to " pass " to the quality stage started . The industry's gross internal share in GDP is increasing, and that has become an economic driver in the fields.

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