

THE HISTORY OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: Uzbekistan, located in the heart of Central Asia, stands out with its ancient historical cities, rich cultural heritage, and stunning natural landscapes. The history of tourism development in this region spans centuries and continues to evolve to this day.

Keywords: Uzbekistan tourism, Tourism development, Historical cities of Uzbekistan, Samarkand tourism, Bukhara and Khiva monuments, Great Silk Road, Tourism reforms, Tourism in the independence era, UNESCO heritage in Uzbekistan, Ecotourism and gastronomic tourism, Preservation of cultural heritage, Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Heritage, Pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan, Natural landscapes and tourism, International tourism in Uzbekistan.

INTRODUCTION

Formation of Tourism in Ancient Times

Due to its location at the crossroads of the Great Silk Road, Uzbekistan has long been a center of trade and cultural exchange. Cities like Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva were major hubs along ancient caravan routes, attracting not only merchants but also travelers and scholars. During this period, the initial forms of religious, scientific, and trade tourism began to take shape.

Tourism During the Soviet Era

During the Soviet Union era, tourism development in Uzbekistan underwent significant changes. Restoration and preservation of historical monuments began, with many landmarks in Samarkand and Bukhara being renovated. Tourist routes in natural areas such as the Tien Shan Mountains and Zarafshan Valley were established. However, tourism during this period was primarily focused on domestic needs, with limited international engagement.

Independence Era and New Opportunities

After Uzbekistan gained independence in 1991, vast opportunities for tourism development emerged. The country began hosting international forums and events to showcase its historical and cultural heritage. During this period, specialized government institutions, including the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of the Republic of Uzbekistan, were established to manage the tourism sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

Tourism infrastructure in Uzbekistan was initially developed during the Soviet era. However, revenue distribution issues were centrally managed by the Soviet Union. From 1985 to 1989, the volume of domestic and regional tourism in Uzbekistan ranged from 1.4 to 1.6 million people, with only 130,000–180,000 being international tourists. By comparison, Turkey attracted 1.5 million tourists in 1985, 7 million in 1992, and 11 million in 2003. Hungary, which received 14.2 million tourists in 1981, increased this number to 19.1 million by 1991. In 1992, Uzbekistan offered only 27 types of services for international tourists, which increased to over 50 by 2003. Countries like Turkey, Italy, and Spain, however, offered 250–400 services.

Following independence, tourism became a priority area under the direct initiatives of the President. The development of tourism infrastructure in Uzbekistan can be divided into five phases.

In 1999, the cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva were included in UNESCO's World Heritage List, marking a significant step in attracting international tourism. Additionally, domestic and international air connections were expanded, and airport and railway infrastructure were modernized.

Modern Tourism Development

Currently, the Uzbek government identifies tourism as one of the strategic sectors of the economy. Since 2016, large-scale reforms have been implemented to develop tourism, including the introduction of a visa-free regime for foreign citizens, the creation of new tourist routes, and the construction of numerous hotels and recreational facilities.

In 2022, the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Heritage of Uzbekistan was established. This organization actively works on developing tourism, preserving cultural monuments, and promoting them globally. Various types of tourism, such as gastronomic tourism, ecotourism, pilgrimage tourism, and sports tourism, are being developed.

In 2023, during the 25th session of the UNWTO General Assembly held in Samarkand, the village of Sentob in Navoi region won the "Best Tourism Village 2023 Awards" nomination. Additionally, the international publishing company "Lonely Planet" awarded Uzbekistan as the "Best Travel Destination for 2024," presenting a special certificate to the country. Being included in the list of the best countries to visit in 2024 by "World of Statistics" is expected to increase the number of foreign tourists and boost tourism exports. These developments further contribute to the country's recognition on the global stage.

Overall, the current state of the tourism sector in Uzbekistan and its development trends demonstrate positive outcomes. The measures being taken to further develop tourism and future prospects confirm the strategic importance of this sector. Moreover,

the tasks outlined in the "Uzbekistan-2030" strategy for tourism development aim to increase incomes, create new jobs, and ensure public welfare.

CONCLUSION

Uzbekistan's rich historical and cultural heritage, along with its natural attractions, makes the country one of the most appealing destinations for tourists worldwide. Consistent reforms and initiatives in the tourism sector are contributing to its further development. Uzbekistan is striving to solidify its position as the tourism hub of Central Asia on the global stage.

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