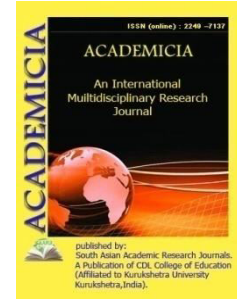




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**TOURISM POTENTIAL OF UZBEKISTAN AND WAYS OF ITS  
 EFFECTIVE USE, DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL TOURISM, WORLD  
 EXPERIENCE IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Republic of Uzbekistan is a budding tourist destination offering huge potential. The country lies on the famous Silk Road and boasts a wealth of heritage sites, making it a hugely attractive prospect for the global market. This article reveals aspects of the development of digital tourism and use of world experience and makes an overview of the current status of tourism industry in Uzbekistan. The purpose of this study is to identify effective ways of tourism development in Uzbekistan.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Digital Tourism, Tourism Potential, Innovative Technology, Tourism Destination, Tourism Infrastructure*

**INTRODUCTION**

There are many opportunities and conditions in Uzbekistan for the development of this sphere. Uzbekistan, as a unique country, has the vast tourism potential of its ancient civilizations and cultures that have been developed, developed and attracted by the world's best destinations for holidays and excursions. The country's national parks and national parks are the treasures of its rich and varied nature. The centuries-old traditions of national culture, arts and crafts are carefully preserved and developed in the country. Our world-renowned national cuisine and culinary traditions are a symbol of the hospitality of the East. According to Travel Wire News (2019), Uzbekistan has great potential for an expanded tourism industry. As one of the focus

areas for reform and economic expansion, tourism in the country has increased fivefold in over the last three years. While about 1 million tourists visited Uzbekistan in 2016, the figure rose to 2.7 million in 2017, and more than 5.3 million in 2018. The number of foreign tourists is expected to rise to 7 million by 2025, and the annual foreign currency earnings from foreign visitors will reach as much as \$2 billion.

At the present stage, one of the trends in the development of the world tourism industry is the development of Internet technologies, in other words, the modern development of tourism is taking place in the digital economy. That is, the digitization process has not bypassed the tourism industry, as in many other areas.

Digital tourism is the use of digital tools in the planning, organization, control and enjoyment of travel, with a set of electronic services provided to travelers before, during and after the trip (Khurramov (2020).

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this contribution to the subject, we will focus on Uzbekistan, the country with the greatest appeal in terms of heritage due to the prominence of its cities along the Silk Road. Let us remember that the Silk Road plays a dominant role in the country's cultural, historical and architectural appeal (Kantarci, 2007a) by bringing it closer to outsiders, seeing as though the vast route used to linked up Europe, and particularly the Turkish world, with China for many centuries. In fact, the Silk Road is currently one of the products the WTO is specifically promoting, as it involves the participation of numerous Governments and will ultimately help preserve and protect a rich architectural heritage.

Uzbekistan spans 447,000 km<sup>2</sup> and was home to 30,241,000 inhabitants in 2013. It boasts the most clearly defined and prestigious tourism image of the entire region since four of its cities are included on the UNESCO World Heritage list (Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva and Shakhrisabz), all of which lie on the ancient Silk Road route. The images and photographs of Uzbekistan included in the travel supplements of the leading western newspapers and magazines and also in the advertisements broadcast on certain global TV channels (CNN, Al Jazhira, Euronews, etc.) are nothing short of breathtaking. It can come as little surprise that this has aroused the interest of international tour operators (Kantarci, 2007a) and is doubtlessly shaping the political and economic priorities of the nation's Government in support of tourism. In this regard, Uzbekistan receives a significant contingent of foreign tourists estimated 975.000 for 2011 and 1.969.000 in 2013. It is of official statistic supported and published by the WTO, but that seem to be the result of estimates general and also express discontinuities in the series annual.

The results of our work in the country, it is worth pointing out that destination image is a fluid concept (Litvin and Mouri, 2009) because the different segments of the market appear to be affected by the individual and personal experience and by the efforts made by the destination to enhance self-satisfaction (Li et al, 2012). In this regard, it has been insisted that general travel conditions to Central Asia include barriers and decision influencers so as to shape the satisfaction of tourists with their experience (Kantarci, 2007a).

Destination image plays two important roles in behaviour: to influence destination choice in decision-making process and to condition the after-decision-making behaviours including participation (on-site experience), evaluation (satisfaction) and future behavioural intentions

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(intention to revisit and willingness to recommend) (Ashworth and Goodall, 1988; Mansfeld, 1992; Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert and Wanhill, 1993; Bigne et al., 2001; Lee et al., 2005). Those destinations with strong, positive images are more likely to be considered and chosen in the travel decision process (Goodrich, 1978; Woodside and Lyonski, 1989).

Focusing on the four main hubs of Uzbek tourism, namely Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva and the less internationally known Shakhrisabz, these can be interpreted using the two classical approaches to tourism in respect of historical centres to have risen in prominence in recent years (Chan, Milne, Fallon and Pohlmann, 1996). Thus, adopting a top-down approach to focus on these specific examples, we can discern a certain homogeneity between these cities and their scapes and scenery with other similar examples (Chan et al, 1996). The remnants of their medieval past can still be felt in these Uzbek cities, reflected in their main buildings and architecture, as can their intercultural ties (through the Silk Road), exoticism and the attributes of a secular community of inhabitants used to receiving curious visitors, pilgrims and, in a nutshell, tourists. On a different scale of things, the bottom-up approach focuses on describing the unique and attractive elements of each city (Chan, Milne, Fallon and Pohlmann, 1996). Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva are “unique”, where demand for the cities, their perception in the eyes of tourists before arriving there and their experience once at the World Heritage Site are all studied on-site from the information gleaned from tourists, so enabling local and national authorities to improve their tourism planning.

### **Methodology**

As a core aim this research which chosen the analyzing and diversifying the actual problems of the tourism industry and proposing the ways of further development. On this direction, we monitored the latest statistics based on reports of aforementioned tourism authority of Uzbekistan- “Uzbektourism”, research groups WTTC Travel and Tourism economic impact and “Euromonitor” with the prove of authors who had made investigations on Silk Road touristic destination and its role in Central Asian states commercial deployment („Declarations| UNWTO Silk Road Programme“, 2014). As a major Silk Road tourist destination, the country possesses exotic tourist potential, distinct monuments of prehistoric times with unique natural landscapes, which may focal role to become one of the principal tourist states on the globe. That is why much attention devoted in Uzbekistan to the development of tourism and expansion of corresponding infrastructure as one of the priority directions of the nation's socio-economic development (Knobloch, 2013). Acclaimed as the paramount route in the history of humankind, the ancient Silk Road formed the first connection between the East and the West and was an important vehicle for trade between the ancient empires of China, Central and Western Asia, the Indian peninsula, and Rome. The Silk Road was more than just trade routes; it symbolized the multiple advantages arising from cultural exchange. As a result, countless historical and cultural sites persist along the network of famous paths. There are significant opportunities for destinations along the Silk Road corridors to join efforts for building transnational tourism initiatives to promote and develop shared heritage under the Silk Road brand, particularly for developing states. By taking a collaborative approach to emerging tourism for the Silk Road corridors, it is underlined that:

- sustainable approaches to destination management will be applied across the region

- Dispersal of visitation across the region will improve
- The length of stay and yield will increase
- New opportunities for investment will open up
- International relations will be strengthened
- New opportunities for public-private sector partnerships will be realized
- Touristic services will be expanded, and flow of tourist will be enlarged

As well as , by 2020 it is predicted that China, Russia, India and the Middle East's trends will increase more than 200 million tourists annually visiting (Handbook on E-marketing for Tourism Destinations, 2008) . Therefore, as one of the main Silk Road tourism destinations, Central Asian countries will be able to attract a vast amount of visitors from all over the world. As Edgar Knobloch (2013) mentioned, countries of Central Asian undoubtedly have abundant resources and potential for development of tourism. However countries need integration and modernization to become competitive in these businesses.

### **Tourism potential of Uzbekistan and ways of its effective use**

With its great historical, archeological, architectural, and natural treasures, Uzbekistan has exceptional potential for tourism. The country's diverse ecology, ranging from deserts to glaciers, mountains to steppes, gives the country great eco-tourism potential. The eco-tourism opportunities in Uzbekistan are plentiful and distinct. These include its eight state reserves (201.7 thousand hectares), three national parks (598.7 thousand hectares), biosphere reserve (68.7 thousand hectares), natural wildlife breeding center (158.9 thousand hectares), and ten natural monuments (3.7 thousand hectares) (Obidjon Khamidov, 2017).

Located on the ancient Silk Road, Uzbekistan has more than 4,000 historical and architectural sites, (Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 2019) a carefully saved and precious spiritual heritage, and over 7,000 historical monuments (AzerNews, 2019). These include famous ancient cities on the UNESCO World Heritage list, such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, and Shakhrisabz. Moreover, Uzbekistan is a country with strong Islamic roots. There are more than 160 historically important Muslim sites located in the country, and dozens of historical sites related to Sufism. Among these are the Mausoleum of Sheikh Zaynudin Bobo, Sheihantaur, the Mausoleum of Zangiata in Tashkent, the Bakhauddin Ensemble in Bukhara, the Bayan-Quli Khan Mausoleum, the Saif ed-Din Bokharzi Mausoleum, and many others (Silk Road Destinations, 2019). In addition, Uzbek cuisine and wine can attract gastronomic-related tourism.

Tourism is one of the sectors Uzbekistan has sought to reform and revitalize since 2016. Its reform process aims to create jobs and new business opportunities; further the diversification and accelerated development of regions; increase incomes and living standards and quality of life, boost foreign-exchange earnings; and improve Uzbekistan's overall image and investment (AzerNews, 2019). Uzbekistan held its first International Investment Forum on November 19-21, 2018 to expand international engagement in the sector and disseminate information about the country's tourism potential.

Although Uzbekistan has made substantial efforts and launched numerous reforms to expand and improve its tourism industry as part of its program of economic growth, further actions are needed. The Uzbek government has addressed shortcomings inconveniences still connected with border procedures, transportation, and guest accommodations. Still, some support facilities and services require action by the government or private sector; especially given the role they play in attracting tourists or encouraging them to become repeat visitors.

The Uzbekistan International Visitor Economy Survey 2014 by the World Tourism Organization, showed respondents frequently noted inconveniences. These included problems with the payments system (especially lack of access to cash via ATM), Internet problems (little access to Wi-Fi and slow speed), limited English translation of signage and tourist information at tourist attractions, and electricity outages (Uzbekistan Tourism Insight. World Tourism Organization, 2014). Furthermore, as noted in an interview with a local tour guide conducted by Silk Road New Observation News Agency, concerns about the wholesomeness of food products, the availability and quality of medical services, and the lack of clean, modern public restrooms are frequently cited (Senior tour guides interpret Uzbekistan's tourism status, 2019). Because of the often poor medical services in outlying areas, tourists who fall ill in these locales need to be moved swiftly to Tashkent's international hospital. At the same time, the practice whereby a tour group will wait for the patient to recover and then depart the country all together can produce large costs and additional concerns for fellow tourists and their travel agency as they wait for the patient's treatment to end.

### **Development of digital tourism**

In accordance with global trends, the total number of Internet users in Uzbekistan has exceeded 22 million, and the number of mobile Internet users has exceeded 19 million (Khurramov O.K., 2020). In addition, the number of mobile base stations is increasing, and the throughput of the international data network is increasing. These indicators of digitalization in the economy of our country make it necessary to develop digital tourism in Uzbekistan.

Khurramov (2020) states that it is advisable to highlight the following priorities for the development of digital tourism in our country:

- a) Development of tourism info structure in combination with tourism infrastructure.
- b) In order to increase the current competitiveness of specialists and employees of tour operators and travel agents, hotels and restaurants, transport and other tourism enterprises of the country, it is necessary to regularly participate in the training seminars and trainings of local experts and foreign experts in digital knowledge and modern information technologies like digital marketing, opportunities e-business, Google Analytics, Yandex Metrica, social networks, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram, email marketing, mobile marketing (QR-code, mobile application), online advertising, and so on.
- c) To overcome the backwardness of economic enterprises and organizations in the field of economic relations and management in the country, it is necessary to transform its activities through communication with consumers, the introduction of new forms of electronic payments.
- g) Support for research, applied research, the development of textbooks, study guides and guidelines for the development of digital tourism in Uzbekistan will contribute to further improvement of this area.

The digitization in tourism makes the tourism business not only adapt to modern events, but also be more competitive in the developing “digital world”. Digitalization of the hospitality industry not only gives us convenience and benefits for our customers, but, in turn, helps to create a situation that allows owners of travel companies to earn more.

### **Using world experience in tourism development of Uzbekistan**

The Uzbek Government and the tourism stakeholders can exploit the experiences of European destinations in question and adopt some of their successful strategies. A recommendation for the achievement of sustainable tourism development in Uzbekistan, based on the research conducted and the observations made in the tourism sectors of the UK, Greece and the Czech Republic is that the Uzbek Government should formulate a long-term development framework for tourism (10-20 years) with emphasis on: proper policy, strategy and planning; institutional strengthening; new legislation and regulations; product development and diversification; effective marketing and promotion; improvement of tourism infrastructure and superstructure; increase of the tourism investments; human resources development; and, the expected socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism (Kapiki, S.T. and Tarikulov, M, 2014). Moreover, a short term (three-year) action plan is essential for priority actions to be undertaken so as to kick-start sustainable tourism development, and preparation of several demonstration projects for pilot areas.

### **CONCLUSION**

Building a bigger, more developed, more internationally competitive tourism market can help Uzbekistan’s economy grow, just as tourism has been an engine of growth in western European and other countries. It can also have domestic social, cultural, and education benefits in addition to boosting a country’s international reputation and identity. Uzbekistan has already made its national strategy, “Concept of the Development of the Tourism Industry — 2025,” a guide and framework. The government has approved its Action Plan for 2019 for implementing the Concept. The Action Plan contains 36 points, including improving the regulatory framework, further developing the tourism infrastructure, developing transportation networks, establishing a regular intercity bus service, and organizing protected zones. The infrastructure construction will lay a solid foundation for the tourism industry and thus provide better service for tourists from all over the world (Advantour, 2019).

Therefore, the Uzbek government should provide more space for the private sector, especially foreign partners who have more experience and capital. At the same time, foreign private sector actors should look at the opportunities they have — from facilities such as hotels, shopping centers, and restaurants, to services such as travel agencies, taxis, and online services for ride-sharing or hailing rides, and obtaining lodging reservations. Additionally, beautiful and varied Uzbek handicrafts and local agricultural and food products are very popular among foreign tourists. The private sector can, in addition to establishing and providing such goods and services, can also help provide a standardized system of marketing and sales channels to boost profits and foreign-currency receipts. A further benefit to a growing role for the private sector in Uzbekistan’s tourism industry is to help empower women and promote gender equality in Uzbek society.

Efficient and effective advertising and informational campaigns are also important for attracting tourists. The government can open accounts on social-media platforms or invite world-famous tourist programs/personalities to work in Uzbekistan and introduce the country to foreign-media consumers.

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