

Eurasian
Research Bulletin

Development Of Domestic Tourism In Uzbekistan: Analysis And Strategic Approaches

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ABSTRACT

Scientific-methodological research is being conducted globally to develop domestic tourism in various countries. These studies address important issues such as identifying trends in the development of domestic tourism and strengthening collaboration between the government, organizations, and tourists.

Keywords:

domestic tourism, concept, infrastructure, tourism market, reforms, types of tourism, improvement, mechanism.

Numerous scientific studies are being conducted globally to improve the scientific-methodological foundations for developing domestic tourism. Priority areas of this research include identifying trends in domestic tourism development, creating a model for the development of domestic tourism in line with the national economy, evaluating the role of the government in domestic tourism development, strengthening collaboration between organizations and tourists in managing tourism activities, assessing the potential of domestic tourism, and improving the methodological foundations of the organizational-economic mechanism for its development.

It is not an exaggeration to say that Uzbekistan embarked on a new era in the tourism sector in 2016. Of course, the first steps in tourism were made after achieving independence in 1991. However, the tourism sector remained closed during that time, as tourists were prohibited from entering Uzbekistan for security reasons. In domestic tourism, due to the difficult

economic conditions, residents of the country were largely limited to traveling within regions to visit relatives. Today, by 2024, as a result of reforms implemented by the government, the opening of borders and the creation of new tourism opportunities have contributed to the growth of our economy. The development of domestic tourism and the increase in the number of local tourists are helping to further strengthen our economy.

The reforms being carried out to develop domestic tourism in Uzbekistan are yielding positive results. From 2016 to 2023, the number of domestic tourists exceeded 59.5 million (see Figure 1).

As seen in the figure above, the number of domestic tourists steadily increased from 2016 to 2019, and we can observe that the results did not decline significantly in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Restrictions, the prohibition on people leaving their homes, the halt in transportation, and other various reasons contributed to this.

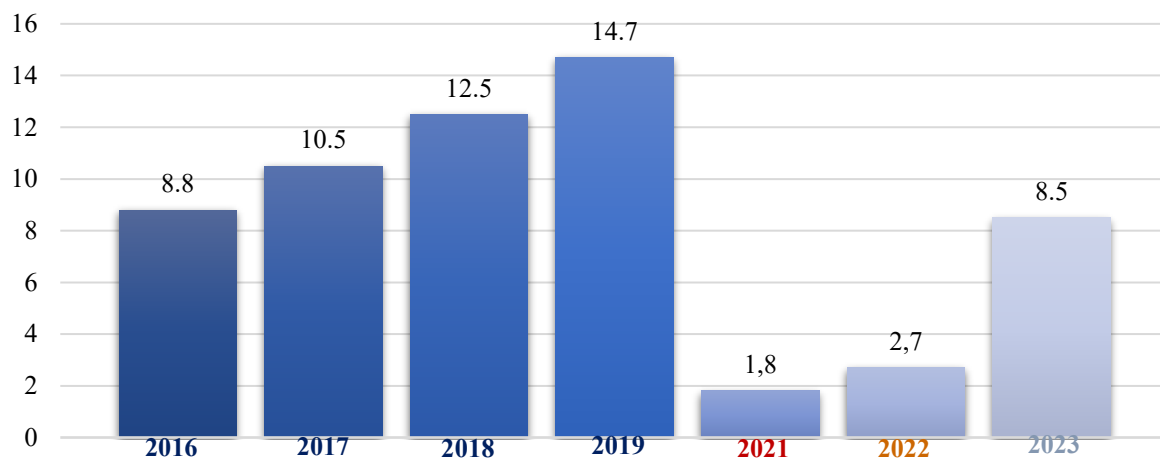


Figure 1. Statistics on the number of domestic tourists in Uzbekistan from 2016 to 2023

Looking at some indicators of the 2022-2026 concept for the development of the tourism sector in the Republic of Uzbekistan, analyses and forecasts show that the number of domestic tourists is expected to range from 10,000 to 15,000. The number of accommodation facilities (excluding family guest houses and hostels) is projected to increase from 1,210 to 1,771 (see Table 1).

Table 1

Target indicators of the concept for the development of the tourism sector in the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2022-2026

№	Indicators	2022 year	2023 year	2024 year	2025 year	2026 year
1.	Number of foreign tourists visiting Uzbekistan (thousand people)	3711,6	7000,0	7500,0	7959	9392
2.	Export of tourism services (million USD)	1 128	1 500	1 600	1 850	2 130
3.	Number of domestic tourists (thousand persons)	10 000	12 000	13 000	15 000	18 000
4.	Number of accommodation facilities (excluding family guesthouses and hostels)	1 210	1331	1464	1610	1771
5.	Number of rooms in accommodation facilities (thousand)	31,9	35,1	38,6	42,4	46,7
6.	Number of beds in accommodation facilities (thousand)	64,2	70,4	77,4	85,2	93,7

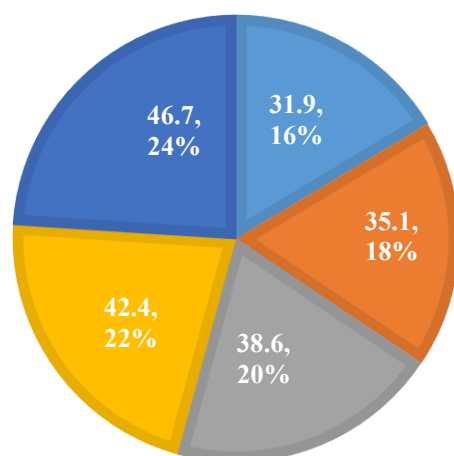


Figure 2. Target Indicators for the Number of Rooms and Beds in Accommodation Facilities in the Concept for the Development of the Tourism Sector in the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2022-2026

The analysis and forecasts presented in Table 1 and Figure 2 are shown in six dimensions, including the number of foreign tourists visiting Uzbekistan, the export of tourism services (in millions of U.S. dollars), the number of domestic tourists (in thousands), the number of accommodation facilities, the number of rooms in accommodation facilities, and the number of beds in accommodation facilities (in thousands).

The fact that the tourism reforms being implemented in our country are being analyzed and evaluated by international organizations indicates that Uzbekistan holds a significant position in the global community. For example, Uzbekistan was awarded first place in the nomination for "The World's Fastest Growing Countries in Tourism" by "The Wanderlust World Guide Awards" platform, and first place in "The Best Emerging Tourism Destination of 2019" by the "Grandvoyage Agencia de Viajeros" agency. Ranking highly on various agency platforms contributes to further improving attention toward tourism. In particular, we can see that Uzbekistan's fourth-place ranking among "The World's Fastest Growing Countries in Tourism" by the UNWTO is a result of the tourism policy led by our President. International rankings have evaluated our country's tourism potential across several other dimensions. For example, as of February 6, 2021, Uzbekistan was ranked fourth among the fastest-growing countries in tourism according to the UNWTO rankings (see Table 2).

Today, in the development of domestic tourism, President Shavkat Miromonovich Mirziyoyev has issued and implemented several decrees and resolutions. Examples include Resolution No. PQ-3514 from February 7, 2018, and Decree No. PF-6165 from February 9, 2021. In particular, Resolution No. PQ-232 from April 30, 2022, "On Additional Measures for Diversification of Domestic Tourism Services," serves as the foundation for the development of domestic tourism. The resolution outlines raising tourism to a strategic level in the national economy, diversifying domestic tourism services and significantly increasing their volume, creating the necessary conditions for introducing citizens to the tourism potential of our country, improving the quality of tourism services, enhancing their competitiveness in global markets, providing additional opportunities for entrepreneurial entities operating in tourism, rapidly developing modern service infrastructure, and expanding employment and income sources for the population.

Table 2

The evaluations given by international organizations on the tourism reforms of our country

Among the world's fastest-growing	«Tourist Safety Index»	"Attractive Tourist Destinations"	"Fastest-Growing Country in
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countries in the tourism sector		Tourism in 2021"	
Announced on February 6, 2020, in the UNWTO list, with:	The American Institute of Public Opinion	Titan Travel – the largest tour operator in the UK for attractiveness	The prestigious British newspaper "The Independent"
Uzbekistan ranked 4th in the rating.	Uzbekistan ranked 9th in the world for	Uzbekistan was included among the top 20 countries	With a growth rate of 27.3%, Uzbekistan ranked

Starting from June 1, 2022, as part of the "Travel Across Uzbekistan!" program, employers are required to create opportunities for employees to take a local trip once a year under collective agreements, with a portion of the travel costs being reimbursed from employers' off-budget funds and other sources not prohibited by law. Within the framework of the "Travel Across Uzbekistan!" program, several ministries, committees, and agencies have been assigned responsibility for developing domestic tourism. Ministries have also been tasked with promoting tourism for young people, especially students of educational institutions, focusing on various types of tourism such as historical-educational, cultural-entertainment, extreme, ecological, ethno- and beach tourism. Ministries will also promote business, extreme, ecological, agro-, ethno-, and gastronomic tourism for labor and community groups.

Several economic mechanisms have been developed to promote domestic tourism. For example: a) A system for reimbursing travel expenses and offering discounts under the "Travel Across Uzbekistan!" program has been established. b) Reimbursement for travel expenses will be made if the following conditions are met during the trip: Use of air, rail, and/or automobile transportation; Use of accommodation services; Visits to cultural organizations. c) Travel expenses will be reimbursed for each tourist as follows: 15% of the round-trip airfare cost, but no more than 150,000 soums; 15% of the round-trip train or bus ticket cost, but no more than 80,000 soums; 15% of the cost for an overnight stay in accommodation, but no more than 80,000 soums; 50% of the ticket price for each visit to theaters, museums, circuses, and art galleries, but no more than 20,000 soums.

The Tourism Committee, under the Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection, and Climate Change of the Republic of Uzbekistan, has developed a clear roadmap for promoting various types of tourism, focusing on domestic tourism, which includes: Active and extreme tourism; Business tourism; Cultural tourism; Eco-tourism; Pilgrimage tourism; Wellness tourism; Gastronomic tourism.

These are among the main directions being promoted. Taking active and extreme tourism as an example, Uzbekistan has great potential for this type of tourism.

Active and Extreme Tourism: This type of tourism involves activities that combine travel and sports, often associated with risk. Examples include skydiving, mountaineering, and rafting. Extreme tourism requires not only physical fitness but also courage. It is a type of tourism that has developed and spread widely in Europe and East Asia. Primarily, young people and middle-aged individuals are interested in extreme tourism, seeking real adrenaline experiences. For this reason, extreme tourism attracts more young people. Almost every type of extreme tourism requires prior preparation and skills. There are dozens of types of extreme tourism, with the most common being mountaineering, kayaking, diving, rafting, paragliding, and mountain tourism. Exotic forms of extreme tourism also exist. Extreme tourism is not only a form of recreation but also one of the promising sectors of business, attracting many people. New and unexplored places are emerging in the development of extreme tourism, along with new types of tourism. Extreme tourism requires not only high-quality experiences but also specific skills, appropriate equipment, experience, and a high level of professionalism.

Business Tourism: Also known as corporate tourism, this type of tourism involves organizing and managing business trips. Business tourism includes visits by company employees for collaboration or other business matters. It is closely associated with corporate events and meetings, commonly known as MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions). According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), the global business travel market exceeded 1.106 trillion dollars in 2015. By the end of 2016, business travel expenses rose to 1.150 trillion dollars, and preliminary forecasts indicated a 3.7% increase in 2017, reaching 1.192 trillion dollars. By 2026, the annual growth rate of the business travel market is projected to average 3.7%, amounting to 1.658 trillion dollars. According to the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA), 89% of all business travel expenditures, or a total of 984 billion dollars, are concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region, Western Europe, and North America. The Asia-Pacific region is the world's largest business travel market, accounting for 38% of the global market. Since 2000, its volume reached 392 billion dollars in 2013. The fastest growth is observed in three BRICS countries—China, India, and Russia. In 2013, the U.S. led the top five countries for business travel, followed by China. Japan, Germany, and the United Kingdom followed at a distance, while Russia ranked 11th. In 2014, Russia dropped to 14th-15th place in the global rankings, with business travel expenses decreasing by 4.5% compared to the same period of the previous year, totaling 21 billion dollars, despite a 5% increase in domestic business tourism.

Cultural Tourism: Cultural tourism is one of the best ways to experience the centuries-old history of a specific country or Uzbekistan and discover new cultures. It involves visiting various cultural heritage sites and museums located in all regions of our country. Uzbekistan is known for its rich cultural and historical heritage, unique architecture, and art. The ancient historical monuments of Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, Shahrizabz, Khiva, Urgench, Termez, and Karakalpakstan form the foundation of historical and educational tourism in Uzbekistan.

Eco-Tourism: Eco-tourism is nature-oriented tourism that includes environmental education and awareness programs and is carried out in accordance with the principles of ecological sustainability. "Eco-tourism involves travel to natural areas aimed at better understanding the environment without disrupting the integrity of local cultures and ecosystems, and it also benefits local communities through the protection of natural resources." "Eco-tourism can contribute to conservation and development. It involves positive synergetic relationships between tourism activities, biodiversity, and local populations, supported by the organizations and entities managing these activities."

Pilgrimage Tourism: Pilgrimage tourism involves travelers and pilgrims visiting sacred sites outside of their usual environment to gain religious (understanding the lives of saints), historical (learning about the history of holy places), and philosophical knowledge, and to derive spiritual and aesthetic pleasure from the architecture and art of sacred sites. Pilgrims in this tourism sector visit these sites with both religious and secular motives.

Wellness Tourism: This involves visits to wellness centers, resorts, and sanatoriums, and includes treatments with mineral and healing waters, medicinal mud, and other natural remedies.

Gastronomic Tourism: The main goal of this type of tourism is to explore national cuisine and familiarize oneself with the culinary traditions of a particular country. For a gastronomic tourist, food is primarily considered a cultural category. From this perspective, traditional cuisine is accepted as part of a country's or region's history, religion, economy, politics, customs, legends, and other factors that make up its uniqueness. A gastronomic tour, or gastro-tour, is a series of events centered around tasting dishes unique to local cuisine. "Culinary regional studies are conducted not only in restaurants but also in markets, farms, local kitchens, during festivals and harvest seasons, at dining tables, and even on the streets."

The tourism types mentioned above are among the key forms of domestic tourism, and the

development of these types is expected to increase the movement of our country's residents.

As part of the roadmap mentioned earlier, the digitalization of cultural heritage sectors has also been included, which entails the development of an electronic catalog of all museum exhibits located across the Republic, the creation of virtual-audio guide tours using PWA technology, VR 360 views of museums, and the development of an electronic visa processing platform (e-visa.gov.uz).

The development of an electronic catalog of museum exhibits is crucial, and the number of

existing exhibits can be seen in the following figure (see Table 3).

Starting with the statistics of all existing museum exhibits, information about what is available and the passports of exhibits can be obtained through the electronic catalog. This will create convenience for both local and foreign tourists and increase interest. Just as in developed countries, the process of digitalization is significantly growing in the tourism sector.

Table 3

Exhibits in the museums of Uzbekistan

Type of exhibit	Quantity
Works of art:	10636 items
Weapons	554 items
Numismatic items	43394 items
Ethnography and applied art items	38111 items
Ancient photographs and negatives	28919 items

One example is the e-mehmon.uz system, which is currently simplifying the operations of all active hotels and guesthouses. Through this platform, all information about local or foreign tourists can be registered and entered into a unified registry. From a security perspective, this allows the data to be sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (IIB) or collected by the Statistics Committee for their own use. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism can directly access information from this platform regarding the number of local or foreign tourists staying in guesthouses or hotels, the length of their stay, their age, gender, nationality, permanent residence, the purpose of their visit, and the type of tourism they are engaged in. Innovation and digitalization must encompass all forms of tourism. This, in turn, will provide convenience for tourists.

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