

Analysis of the Demand for Religious Tours at the Regional Level in the Republic of Uzbekistan

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Abstract: The article provides and investigates the demand for religious tours at the regional level. The tourist flow of pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan is directed to the largest cities of the country and centers of spiritual culture: Tashkent, Bukhara, Samarkand, Khiva. The relevance of the research topic is due to the growing interest in religious tourism and its form of pilgrimage. Given the centuries-old Islamic heritage of Uzbekistan, the growth of religious tourism has great outlook for the country. By 2026, the number of pilgrim tourists in the world will reach 230 million. The objective of this article is to identify factors affecting the demand for religious tours in our country and to identify problems and outlooks for the growth of pilgrimage tourism in the region.

Keywords: tourism, religious tourism, pilgrimage, specialized tours, religion

Introduction. In recent years, there has been a rapid development of religious tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan due to the rich history and cultural heritage of the country, especially the Islamic faith. Uzbekistan is home to many historical and religious sites, including mosques, madrassas, mausoleums and other important religious sites.

The scientific and theoretical significance of the work is determined by the potential opportunities for realizing the tourist potential of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the regions with the greatest demand, defined in the work.

The practical significance of the work is determined by the possibility of using research materials for the development of religious tours in the regional market of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The research methodology includes general scientific and special methods of cognition of phenomena and processes in the tourism sector, including methods of analysis, classification, comparison, expert assessments, forecasting.

Results of the study. The article determines that some of the main religious attractions of Uzbekistan include Registan Square in Samarkand, where three magnificent madrasahs are located, the Bukhara fortress, which houses several mosques, the ancient city of Khiva, which houses many historical monuments and mausoleums, and the city of Tashkent, in which Uz is located. bey Islamic academy, university and numerous mosques. In recent years, the Uzbek government has taken steps to develop religious tourism, including the creation of new tourism infrastructure, the restoration of historic sites, and the organization of new religious festivals and events. In addition, Uzbekistan is making significant efforts to improve its tourism industry as a whole, including simplifying visa requirements, improving transport infrastructure and promoting the country's cultural and historical attractions.

The author's contribution and the value of this study lie in determining the capacity of religious tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan, identifying the main factors contributing to the development of religious tourism in the region.

The growth of tourists for the purpose of religious tourism continues to increase every day, more and more international countries and organizations cooperate with the republic in this field of tourism. The Uzbek government is promoting tourism in order to achieve sustainable economic growth. Taking into account other competitive destinations and their easy accessibility, new rules have been developed to facilitate visa procedures that were previously required for every traveler. Traditionally, visitors had to apply a few months before departure by visiting the nearest consulate of Uzbekistan. In 2018, only 9 countries had visa-free

permits to enter Uzbekistan, however by February 2019 this was extended to 76 countries. A relatively large number of visitors come from countries with a high Muslim population, such as Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Turkey, and this number is expected to increase after the introduction of the visa-free regime. that most of these countries will send potential travelers to Uzbekistan for both "religious tourism" and "pilgrimage" [1, 3].

The development of religious tourism in recent years is devoted to the works of many modern researchers. The article by S.A. Lebedeva examines the current views of foreign and domestic scientists to the awareness and study of the idea of "pilgrimage tourism", as well as its relationship with the related term "religious tourism" [2, 326-329]. The study of the development of religious tourism during the COVID pandemic is devoted to an article by A.M. Chapanova, A.A. Petunina, E.V. Ermolaeva, which examines the types of religious tourism and the impact of quarantine restrictions on travel with religious purposes [3, 563-566]. Issues of legislative regulation of religious tourism and pilgrimage are touched upon in the article by S.A. Chernyakova, who notes significant shortcomings in the terminological apparatus; problems of compliance consumer rights (tourist and pilgrim), protection of the rights and interests of a person organizing pilgrimage and religious tours [4, 44-48]. The specifics of the organization of religious tours are considered in the article by I.V. Borisenko, where the reasons why a large number of pilgrims choose to use the services of non-tourist organizations are clearly defined [5, 3-9]. A.P. Makhmudova considers in her article the main forms and trends in the development of pilgrimage tourism in the world [6, 139-145]. The influence of religious tourism on the development of international relations is considered in her article by Yu.E. Limonov. This author explores the regions of the world in which the largest flows of pilgrims are observed and considers the developing projects in the field of religious tourism and pilgrimage [7, 121-123].

M.S. Oborin pays attention to statistical indicators of the development of religious tourism in the Central Black Earth region [8, 147-156]. S.V. Saraykina in her study provides an analysis of statistical indicators, on the basis of which Asian countries are identified in terms of the most active visits to the largest religious sites, the largest and most visited temple complexes; and also reveals the main problems that arise when visiting temple complexes as objects of tourism [9, 47-55]. Quite a lot of research is devoted to the development of religious tourism in the Russian Federation, among them can be identified T.N. Lustina, A.G. Panova, E.V. Bokareva, E.G. Smirnova, T.S. Kezikova (the potential of the Leningrad region as a center for the development of religious tourism is considered on the example of the Orthodox religious organization "Assumption Compound of the Vvedensky Stavropegial Monastery "Optina Pustyn") [10, 10-17], S.V. Saraykina (the potential of the Republic of Mordovia as a center for the development of religious tourism is considered) [11, 114-121], T.G. Grigorenko (the potential of the Rostov region in terms of the development of pilgrimage tourism is investigated, on the example of the Military Resurrection Cathedral in Starocherkasskaya, the Patriarchal Ascension Military All-Cossack Cathedral in Novocherkassk, the Rostov Cathedral of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary) [12, 156-164].

At the same time, there is a lack of research on the development of religious tourism in the post-Soviet countries. Thus, the article by S. Yilmazel examines the holy places and relics in the southern part of Kyrgyzstan, as well as their contribution to tourism in Kyrgyzstan from the point of view of religious tourism [13, 33-36]. Researchers of the development of religious tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan are devoted to the works of B.N. Navruz-Zoda, N. Ibragimov, A. Rakhmanova [14, 11]. In this article, the authors propose measures in the field of infrastructure development, as well as meeting the consumer preferences of religious tourists in food in order to intensify the development of this type of tourism. In the article Z.Y. Pavlichenko, M.V. Davydenko examines the cultural policy of the state in the field of promoting the organization of pilgrimage and religious tourism on the example of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan [15, 136-139]. The article by G.R. Tovmasyan is devoted to the peculiarities of the development of religious tourism in the Republic of Armenia, where a brief history of Christian religious tourism, the main prospects for the development of religious tourism in the Republic of Armenia are discussed. the basis of the history of religion and churches in Armenia. The articles of these authors deal mainly with co-historical issues of the development of religious tourism, but do not pay enough attention to the problematic issues of development and demand for religious tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Body. Uzbekistan is a country with a rich cultural and religious heritage, and it is home to many important historical and religious sites. The country is particularly known for its Islamic heritage, and every year it

attracts many visitors who come to see its mosques, madrassas, and other Islamic monuments. Some of the most popular religious sites in Uzbekistan include the Bibi-Khanum Mosque in Samarkand, the Kalyan Minaret in Bukhara, and the Hazrat Imam complex in Tashkent.

In recent years, the Uzbek government has made significant efforts to develop religious tourism and has put forward several initiatives to improve infrastructure and equip religious sites throughout the country. These efforts have borne fruit as the number of tourists visiting Uzbekistan has been steadily increasing in recent years. In February 2019, the Bukhara Declaration was signed, which clearly states that Uzbekistan is one of the main centers of ziyorat tourism. After a while, the international rating Global Muslim Travel Index included the Republic of Uzbekistan in the top ten most exciting destinations among the member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

In 2022, quotas for Uzbek pilgrims were increased from 7200 to 10,865 people. The main routes for pilgrimage in the republic in 2022 were: Tashkent-Medina, Bukhara-Medina, Namangan-Medina, Samarkand-Medina, Karshi-Medina, Urgench-Medina, Nukus-Medina.

According to the State Committee of Uzbekistan for the Development of Tourism, in 2021 Uzbekistan received about 2,700,000 tourists interested in religious tourism (Fig. 1) [16, Electronic resource].

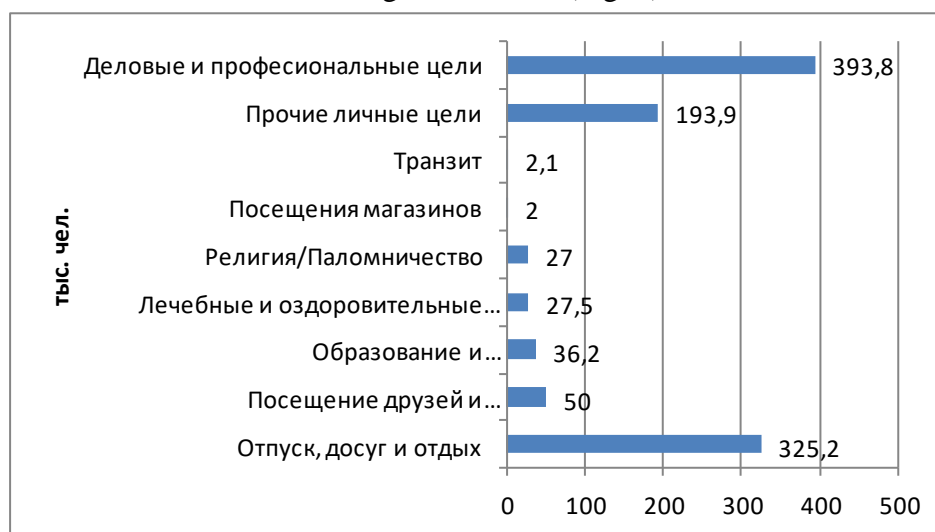


Figure 1 – Distribution of tourists in the Republic of Uzbekistan by purpose of visit in 2021, thousand people.

This represents an increase of 23% compared to 2020. The most visited religious sites in Uzbekistan include the Registan complex in Samarkand, the Shah-i-Zinda complex in Samarkand and the Ark fortress in Khiva. The share of religious tourism in the total structure of visits was only 2.5% of the total tourist flow in 2021. To analyze the demand for religious tours at the regional level in the Republic of Uzbekistan, it is necessary to consider the number of religious sites and the level of tourist activity in each region (Table 1).

Table 1 – Religious sites in the regions of the Republic of Uzbekistan [17, Compiled by the author].

Region	Characteristics of the potential of religious tourism	Tourist flow, thousand people.	Estimation of the tourist flow with religious purposes, thousand people.
Tashkent	Tashkent is the capital of Uzbekistan and has a rich Islamic heritage, with many important religious sites such as the Hazrat Imam complex and the Tilla Sheikh Mosque. The city is also developing a tourism industry with many hotels, restaurants and cultural attractions.	92252	2306
Samarkand	Samarkand is one of the oldest cities in Central Asia and has a rich history and cultural heritage, including many	5121	128

	important Islamic attractions such as Registan and the Bibi-Khanum Mosque. Samarkand is a popular destination for religious tours and annually attracts a large number of tourists		
Bukhara	Bukhara is another important historical city in Uzbekistan, with many important Islamic attractions such as the Kalyan Minaret and the Bukhara Ark. Bukhara is also a popular destination for religious tours and annually attracts a large number of tourists.	1744	44
Khiva	Khiva is a small town located in the western part of Uzbekistan and known for its well-preserved historical center, including many important Islamic attractions such as Ichan-kala and the Madrasah of Muhammad Amin Khan. Khiva is a popular destination for religious tours and attracts a significant number of tourists every year.	24496	612

Continuation of Table. 1

Andijan	Andijan is a city located in the eastern part of Uzbekistan and known for its Islamic heritage, including the Juma Mosque and the Babur Memorial Complex. Even though Andijan is not as popular for religious tourism as other regions, it is still an important destination for those interested in Islamic history and culture.	30	1
Total		123643	3091

From Table. 1 follows that the potential capacity of religious tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan is about 3 million people. per year.

Among the key factors contributing to the development of religious tourism in Uzbekistan are:

1. Historical and cultural heritage. Uzbekistan is home to many historical and cultural sites, such as the Registan in Samarkand, which are recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. These places are of great importance for the Islamic faith and attract tourists from all over the world.
2. State support. The Government of Uzbekistan has recognized the potential of religious tourism and is taking steps to promote and develop the sector, including the establishment of the National Committee for Religious Tourism.
3. Improved infrastructure. The government is also investing in infrastructure development, such as the construction of new hotels, airports and other facilities to support the growing number of tourists.
4. Growing demand. There is a growing demand for religious tourism around the world, especially in the Muslim community, which gives Uzbekistan the opportunity to attract more visitors.
5. Cultural and educational exchange. Religious tourism provides an opportunity for cultural and educational exchange, promoting mutual understanding and respect between different cultures and religions.

Given these factors, there is significant potential for the growth of religious tourism in Uzbekistan. However, it will be important for the country to continue to invest in infrastructure and advancement to realize this full potential.

Conclusion. Uzbekistan has a rich history of religion, with many important religious sites and landmarks scattered throughout the country. Religious tourism is an important growing sector of Uzbekistan's tourism industry, and the government continues to invest in the promotion and development of this area of the tourism industry. The development of religious tourism in Uzbekistan has great potential to contribute to the country's economy and cultural exchange. With continued investment in infrastructure and promotion, Uzbekistan can become a leading link in the direction. religious tourism in Central Asia. The demand for religious tours in Uzbekistan is growing, especially in regions with a rich Islamic heritage, such as Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva. Thanks to constant investments in infrastructure and promotion, Uzbekistan can further develop its religious tourism sector and attract more visitors from all over the world.

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