



Pilgrimage Tourism: On The Path To Transforming Uzbekistan Into A Global Cultural Center

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Abstract. This article analyzes the development processes of pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan, its significance at national and international levels, and the possibilities of shaping the country's image as a global cultural center based on cultural heritage sites. The study comprehensively covers not only the religious aspects of pilgrimage tourism but also its spiritual, educational, and economic dimensions. Additionally, the article presents practical proposals for leveraging international experience, improving infrastructure, branding, and developing in harmony with educational tourism. This research serves to widely promote Uzbekistan's tourism potential in the international arena.

Keywords: pilgrimage tourism, Uzbekistan, spiritual heritage, international image, tourism potential, cultural diplomacy, global cultural center, world heritage sites, branding, tourist infrastructure.

Introduction

There are more than 200 types of tourism in the world, among which pilgrimage tourism is one of the fastest-growing and most promising directions. Uzbekistan has great potential to develop pilgrimage tourism and enhance the country's international image by increasing attention to this tourism sector.

"Turning tourism into a strategic sector of the economy remains a priority for us," says President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. "One of the most important tasks for the Government is to increase the number of tourists coming to our country to 7.5 million.... It is necessary to rapidly develop pilgrimage and medical tourism, which have great potential. In our country, there are more than 8,200 cultural heritage sites, of which only 500 are included in tourist routes. The Government should, within three months, establish measures to increase the number of sites on routes where pilgrimage and traditional tourism can be developed to 800" [1:28-29].

Today in Uzbekistan, great attention is being paid to the development of pilgrimage tourism, specifically religious tourism. Many religious and cultural pilgrimage sites are being restored and transformed into tourist attractions. Pilgrimage tourism is one of the most active types of tourism with great potential for development. Consequently, increased focus is being placed on establishing new infrastructure around existing pilgrimage sites in Uzbekistan.

Pilgrimage tourism is a secular journey or act of worship by travelers and pilgrims to sacred places located outside their usual living environment. Its purpose is to obtain religious (lives of saints) and historical (history of sacred places) information, broaden philosophical worldviews, and



gain spiritual and aesthetic pleasure from architectural and artistic works at pilgrimage sites. In this form of tourism, pilgrims visit for both religious and secular purposes[2].

Research Methodology

In order to develop pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan, great attention is being paid to the development and acceleration of the "small hajj" program, which involves visiting holy sites and monuments in the cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Tashkent. In Uzbekistan, significant work is being carried out to develop a new tourism brand related to pilgrimage tourism, create all necessary conditions for pilgrims, and improve existing tourist routes, taking into account the needs of pilgrims.

The first international forum on pilgrimage tourism was held in Bukhara on February 21-23, 2019, where it was emphasized that Uzbekistan has been an integral part of world civilization and one of the centers of Islamic culture for centuries. The forum highlighted that Uzbekistan, as the homeland of great scholars who made significant contributions to the development of Islam, such as Imam Al-Bukhari, Imam At-Termizi, Abu Mansur Moturidi, Abdulkhaliq Gijduvani, Bahauddin Naqshband, and Burhaniddin Marginani, as well as scientists and thinkers who left an indelible mark on the history of world science, including Muhammad Khwarizmi, Ahmad Fergani, Abu Nasr Farabi, Abu Rayhan Beruni, Abu Ali Ibn Sina, Mahmud Zamakhshari, and Mirzo Ulugbek, continues to attract tourists from all over the world as one of the important centers of Islamic civilization. The First International Forum on Pilgrimage Tourism was organized at the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, with the aim of enhancing Uzbekistan's position in the international arena for pilgrimage tourism. This event was organized and conducted in cooperation with the State Committee for Tourism Development, the Committee for Religious Affairs under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan and the "Waqf" Charity Foundation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the administration of Bukhara region, ISESCO (Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), and UNWTO (World Tourism Organization).

Analysis and results

"The collection 'Al-Jami as-Sahih,' recognized as a reliable source of the hadiths of our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the Islamic world, is the result of many years of dedicated research by Imam Bukhari, the teacher of all hadith scholars," says President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. "For twelve centuries, this work has remained the second most reliable written source about Islam after the holy Quran in terms of significance. It is no coincidence that thousands, even millions of Muslims, not only from our country but also from other countries, strive to visit Bukhara, where this blessed person was born, and to pay respects at his grave in Samarkand. The Maturidi doctrine, founded in the 10th century by the Samarkand thinker Abu Mansur Maturidi, known as 'Imam al-Huda' (Imam of the Path of Guidance), has spread widely throughout the Islamic world. The Maturidi doctrine emphasizes the role and importance of human intellect based on the idea of tolerance in the process of acquiring knowledge. This, in turn, has played a crucial role in the widespread popularization of this doctrine. Humanity still feels a great need for such ideas today. In the course of great history, nothing disappears without a trace. It is preserved in the blood of peoples, in their historical memory, and manifested in their practical deeds. That is why it is powerful. The preservation, study, and transmission of historical heritage from generation to generation is one of the most important priorities of our state's policy" [3: 28-29].



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The Center of Islamic Civilization of Uzbekistan and the International Islamic Academy, Mir Arab Higher Madrasah, and international research centers such as Imam Bukhari and Imam Termizi are serving to study and promote the rich scientific and historical heritage of Uzbekistan. To develop pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan and increase its attractiveness, attention is being focused primarily on creating a tourist map of holy sites in Uzbekistan, establishing favorable conditions for pilgrims, organizing promotional efforts, improving transportation services, and training guide-interpreters.

On December 2, 2016, the President of Uzbekistan issued a decree "On Measures to Ensure the Accelerated Development of the Tourism Sector of the Republic of Uzbekistan." In line with consistent efforts aimed at developing the tourism sector in Uzbekistan, the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan has also made a significant contribution to developing pilgrimage tourism. The "Muslim-tour" travel agency, operating under the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, organizes large-scale visits by local and foreign citizens to holy sites, pilgrimage sites, and sacred places in our country, while creating suitable conditions for pilgrims. In developing pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan, great attention is being paid to creating and expanding pilgrimage tourism routes. The importance of the "7 pir" tourist route in Bukhara is growing, as well as the role of mausoleums and shrines in Samarkand, including those of Imam al-Bukhari, Shah-i-Zinda, Khoja Ahror Vali, Makhdumi A'zam, Abu Mansur Moturidi, Khoja Ishaq Vali, Khoja Daniyal, Sheikh Burhaniddin Sogharji, Khoja Abdu Darun, and Khoja Abdu Berun. Efforts are being intensified to improve, restore, and repair these shrines, as well as to develop appropriate infrastructure for tourists. In the field of pilgrimage tourism, significant attention is being given to organizing tourist routes that connect not only sacred sites within Uzbekistan but also those in neighboring countries. The establishment of a tourist route from Uzbekistan to the "Hazrat Sultan" mausoleum of Ahmad Yassavi, located in the city of Turkestan, South Kazakhstan, along with the allocation of vehicles for tourist routes, the signing of interstate agreements, and the development of necessary infrastructure, all serve to enhance our country's international image.

The development of pilgrimage tourism is of significant importance in ensuring peace and stability in Uzbekistan, improving specific regions, and providing employment opportunities for the population. Today, not only followers of Islam but also representatives of other religions are undertaking pilgrimages to Uzbekistan. In the Surkhandarya region of southern Uzbekistan, there are monuments related to Buddhism, such as Fayaztepa, Karatepa, Ayrat, and Dalvarzintepa. Currently, tourists from countries like Japan, Korea, and China are showing great interest and attention to the Buddhist monuments and temples located in this area. Additionally, Uzbekistan has sacred sites revered by followers of religions other than Islam, such as the shrines of Hazrat David and Hazrat Daniel. These shrines contribute to fostering interethnic harmony and interfaith tolerance in Uzbekistan. Many citizens from countries around the world use Uzbekistan as a transit point during their travels to other nations. Developing the necessary infrastructure for pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan, increasing efforts to promote existing sites, improving service systems, and creatively utilizing advancements in information technology will help increase the flow of tourists to Uzbekistan and enhance the quality of services provided to them. The fact that one of the exemplary copies of the Holy Quran in the Islamic world - the *Mushaf of Hazrat Uthman* - is preserved in Uzbekistan, along with the country being the birthplace of Muhammad al-Bukhari, the teacher of



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hadith scholars, and many prominent followers of the Naqshbandi order, as well as the presence of several religious centers, all indicate Uzbekistan's high potential for pilgrimage tourism.

Today, Uzbekistan is becoming increasingly recognized worldwide as a country that offers new opportunities, is developing sustainably, and is safe for pilgrimage and tourism. This is leading to an enhancement of Uzbekistan's international image in the field of pilgrimage tourism.

On January 28, 2022, the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev No. PF-60 "On the Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022-2026" was adopted. The 35th goal in Appendix 1 to this Decree states: "To increase the number of domestic tourists to over 12 million and the number of foreign tourists visiting the republic to 9 million within the framework of the 'Travel around Uzbekistan' program" [4].

On July 29, 2022, Presidential Decree No. PP-338 "On Measures for the Accelerated Development of Cooperation with Turkic States in the Field of Tourism" was adopted. The decree approved the "Tabarruk ziyorat" (Blessed Pilgrimage) tourism concept within the framework of the Turkic world. As part of this concept, seminars, symposiums, conferences, and scientific-practical forums on the scientific and cultural heritage of great scholars will be held in Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Shakhrisabz, Margilan, Kokand, Termez, and other historical cities. Through mutual cooperation within the Organization of Turkic States, the "Tabarruk Ziyorat" brand will be established [5].

Appendix 1 to the Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PP-338 dated July 29, 2022, was adopted. Chapter 2 of the appendix outlines the activities to be implemented in the field of international cooperation to enhance the potential of pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan. These include: Establishing cooperation on transport logistics within the framework of the Organization of Turkic States; Developing an online platform and mobile application for the Concept on the web portal of the Organization of Turkic States; Facilitating exchange of experience with pilgrimage tourism specialists from the authorized tourism bodies of member and observer states of the Organization of Turkic States; Organizing mutual presentations, exhibitions, and "B2B" format meetings, as well as arranging screenings of films dedicated to the lives and scientific heritage of our great scholars, to widely promote the pilgrimage tourism potential of our country among the member countries of the Organization of Turkic States; Establishing regular cooperation with authorized bodies and specialists from member and observer states of the Organization of Turkic States on the conservation and restoration of common Turkic cultural heritage sites; Establishing cooperation with the competent tourism authorities of member and observer states of the Organization of Turkic States on conducting scientific research in the field of tourism [6], among others.

On September 16, 2022, a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was held at the Congress Center of the "Great Silk Road" International Tourist Complex in Samarkand. At this meeting, it was proposed to declare 2023 the Year of Tourism Development in the SCO region to give new impetus to cooperation in the field of tourism. During the meeting, the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev emphasized that Samarkand has long been a center of spiritual, economic, cultural, and scientific exchanges between peoples living in the area stretching from East Asia to North Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. Consequently, he put forward the Samarkand Solidarity Initiative for common security and prosperity. Its goal is to engage in a global dialogue all those who are not indifferent to our shared future, who are ready to seek



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coordinated approaches and solutions despite disagreements, and who share the principles of the "Samarkand spirit." To discuss the implementation of this initiative, the Samarkand International Forum will be held next year with the participation of influential representatives from political leadership, the public, business, academic, and expert circles[7]. This forum will be of great importance in developing pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan and enhancing its international image.

At the same time, at the XI session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation held in Baku in 2022, Khiva was declared the "Tourism Capital of the Islamic World" for 2024. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) particularly acknowledged the consistent reforms implemented by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev in areas such as the policy of openness in the field of tourism, simplification of the visa regime, preservation of cultural heritage, and beautification of historical cities.

Khiva is included in UNESCO's World Heritage List as an invaluable treasure of humanity, and the flow of tourists coming from all corners of the world to see it does not stop during all four seasons of the year, - says Botir Saidov, Deputy Governor of Khorezm region for tourism, culture, cultural heritage and mass communications, - The eternal monuments of Ichon Kala, built with the wisdom of ancestors, and Khiva's museums, rich in unique artifacts that can compete with the Hermitage and Louvre museums, continue to amaze world tourists. In recent years, as a result of programs implemented at the initiative of our President to increase the tourism potential of the Khorezm region, the infrastructure of the industry in ancient Khiva has been radically renewed[8:4].

Currently, it is planned to increase the number of pilgrims from countries with high potential for pilgrimage tourism, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey, and Arab countries, visiting the historical cities of our country, particularly Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, and Shakhrisabz.

Among the major pilgrimage tourism sites in the Republic of Uzbekistan, there are the "Sultan Uvays Bobo" shrine in the Republic of Karakalpakstan, the "Qutayba ibn Muslim" mausoleum in Andijan region, the "Seven Pirs" shrines in Bukhara region, the shrines of the seven perfect pirs of the Naqshbandi order - Abdukholiq Gijuvoni, Orif Revgariy, Anjir Fag'naviy, Ali Romitaniy, Boboyi Samosiy, Amir Kulol and Bahouddin Naqshband, and the "Poyi Kalon" complex. Additionally, there are shrines associated with the Prophet and his descendants (Ayub alayhissalom, Dovud alayhissalom, Hazrat Khoja Ubon), Sufi scholars (Jeloni, Zinda fil Ahmadi Jomiy, Sayfiddin Bokharziy, Khoja Ismatulloh Bukhoriy, Shohi Aksiy Fayzobod), craftsmen (Khoja Asbgardon, Boboyi Poradoz, Khoja Bulg'or, Burqi Sarmast), women (Bibi Orifa, Bibi Makhsumai Pok, Qiz Bibi, Childukhtoron), and those with healing properties (Khoja Zafaron, Sarichashma, Tuya ovul spring, Qo'tirbulok, Bibi Kabudposh). In the Jizzakh region, there are pilgrimage sites such as "Novqa ota" shrine and mosque, "O'smat ota" shrine, "Sa'd ibn Abu Vaqqos," "Sayfin ota," "Sovruk ota," "Khojai Sarob ota," and "Sayyid Burhoniddin Qilich" shrines. In the Kashkadarya region, there are "Abul-Muin an-Nasafiy," "Khoja Imkonagiy," and "Darvesh Muhammad Vakhshivoriy" shrines. The Navoi region features the "Chashma" complex, while the Namangan region has the "Sulton Uvays Qaraniy" complex. In the Samarkand region, there are numerous significant sites including the "Imam Al-Moturidiy" mausoleum, the "Imam Al-Bukhari" complex, the "Shohizinda" mausoleum complex, the "Khoja Ahror" mausoleum, the "Hazrati Ruhobod or Shaykh Burhoniddin Sog'arjiy" mausoleum, and the tombs of Khoja Abdu Darun, Khoja Abdu Berun, Burhoniddin Marg'inoniy, Abu Mansur Moturidiy, and Khoja Ishok Vali. Other notable sites include the Khoja Doniyor



mausoleum, Hazrati Khizr mosque, Hazrat Khoja Zudmurod mosque, and Namazgoh mosque. In the Syrdarya region, there are the "Guliston" Jome mosque, Mustafoqul ota turbat, and To'ra Sulayman turbat. The Surkhandarya region features the shrines of "Abu Iso Muhammad imam at-Termiziy," "Hakim at-Termiziy," "Alouddin Attor," and "Mavlono Muhammad Zohid." The Tashkent region has the "Zangiota" complex, while the Fergana region boasts the "Burhoniddin Marg'ioniy" memorial complex. In Khorezm region, there is the "Pahlavon Mahmud" mausoleum, and in Tashkent city, the "Hazrati Imam" complex. These sites play a crucial role in developing both domestic and international pilgrimage tourism and enhancing Uzbekistan's international image in the field of pilgrimage tourism development.

From November 1 to 3, 2022, the International Week of Pilgrimage Tourism was held in the cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, Khorezm, and Tashkent of Uzbekistan. The main goal of this "International Week" was to unlock the potential of pilgrimage tourism in the country, promote Uzbekistan as one of the important centers of world civilization, gain recognition from the global community and international organizations, as well as diversify pilgrimage tourism services and increase tourism exports"[9].

At a video conference on measures to further enhance the potential of domestic and foreign tourism, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev emphasized the need to fully utilize the country's pilgrimage tourism opportunities. He tasked the Ministry of Tourism with increasing flights from Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Arab countries, which have high pilgrimage tourism potential, to Samarkand, Bukhara, and Tashkent. Officials were instructed to approve a program to fully leverage the potential of over 1,200 pilgrimage sites in the country and attract at least 1 million tourists annually. It was highlighted that considering the diverse religious denominations, orders, and approaches of pilgrimage tourists, it is essential to adopt scientific methods in determining appropriate food offerings for representatives of different religions or sects, as well as in equipping hotels and places of worship. A shortage of specialists and guides capable of providing information about holy sites, saints, and spiritual leaders was also noted. In response, the Islamic Academy and the "Silk Road" University were tasked with developing scientifically-based approaches for countries with significant pilgrimage tourism inflows[10].

Conclusion

In general, pilgrimage tourism today plays a crucial role in enhancing Uzbekistan's international image in the tourism sector, promoting a deeper understanding of Islamic history and culture, elevating the country's tourist prestige, and establishing it as a center for pilgrimage tourism. Attention is being given to utilizing foreign expertise in implementing pilgrimage tourism initiatives, as well as involving experienced specialists and scholars conducting research in the field of pilgrimage tourism. Developing the pilgrimage tourism sector based on scientific approaches is proving to be of significant importance in enhancing Uzbekistan's international reputation in the realm of pilgrimage tourism. The establishment of the pilgrimage tourism sector based on scientific approaches plays an important role in enhancing Uzbekistan's international image in the field of pilgrimage tourism.

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