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## **Ecotourism – an important factor in sustainable development and environmental protection: the experience of Uzbekistan**

**Abstract**

The aim of the abstract is to formulate favourable conditions and possibilities for development of ecotourism in Uzbekistan. Statistical data on the level of sustainable development of ecotourism in country is given. The authors make a comparative analysis of ecotourism in both the countries which are considered to be the leaders in this sphere, as well as in the emerging countries such as Uzbekistan. The relevance of this study is determined by the need to promote ecotourism as an important factor in sustainable development and environmental protection. In this article the recent status of ecotourism development and analyses of current economic overview in Uzbekistan are highlighted. As a Silk Road destination, Uzbekistan is underlined as one of the major tourist targets for developing and it has undergone many alters over a short historical period in terms of economic, environmental and social changes in ecotourism industry. On that basis, this work demonstrates the overall internal and external economic perspectives of Uzbekistan. This framework is experienced tests by means of a study to demonstrate the strength of the touristic destination of many historical and ecological touristic sites, which reflect the competitive reality of the United Nations World Heritage Tourism destination in Uzbekistan. The results serve to state out major trends and gaps, which focus on further research on this topic globally, and also, they might be useful in diversifying interventions to alleviate the impacts in ecotourism development. As the result of the research, scientific and practically significant recommendations have also been developed.

**1 Introduction**

Research problem is to analyse the development of ecotourism, sustainable development and environment protection current issues and trends which will highlight main tools of development ecotourism in Uzbekistan.

Main objective of the abstract is ecotourism in Uzbekistan and its development. The subject of the study is the perspectives and barriers to

**Keywords**

ecotourism, sustainable tourism, environment protection, Uzbektourism, Silk Road destinations, United Nations World Heritage Tourism destination

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development of ecotourism in Uzbekistan. For the study of the problem of ecotourism analysis and observation of statistical data is used.

Methodological basis includes the following methods: data analysis - used to assess the challenges and benefits of ecotourism in Uzbekistan, the system of relationships between suppliers of services and publics, official statistics of Uzbektourism State Committee, materials from individual and collective monographs of domestic and international researchers, and information

published by official websites of correspondent organizations. In research both theoretical and empirical methods of analysis were used.

**Research results:** the development stages of ecotourism were analysed, tools to accelerate sustainable development in tourism were offered.

**Research limitations:** limited access to information for a truly complex evaluation of sustainable ecotourism development in Uzbekistan.

**Originality/meaning:** research on ecotourism in Uzbekistan is virtually non-existent, particularly research relating to the technological aspects of fostering ecotourism. The results of this study indicate that two variables positively influence ecotourism: local population and resource, through the use of nature and social tradition. The perceived benefits of ecotourism were statistically significant.

Ecotourism – a form of sustainable tourism, focuses on visits to relatively undisturbed natural areas of human influence. Ecotourism is one of the fastest growing trends in world of travel. And Uzbekistan, at the heart of Central Asia, is fast becoming a hub of ecotourism and not just historical attraction.

Uzbekistan is one of the most dynamically developing countries and important partner of the

UNWTO. In recent years, ecotourism has become a segment of tourism and new area in tourism industry. Being developed by more than 115 countries globally, ECO- is therefore, considered to be one of the most indispensable conditions for tourism destination development as well as the key contributors to economy of the destination by generating income and sustaining full-time employment. (Haytem & Said, 2017).

As one of the world's largest economic sectors, Travel & Tourism creates jobs, drives exports, and generates prosperity across the world. The global economic impact of Travel & Tourism is to account for 10.4% of global GDP and 313 million jobs, or 9.9% of total employment, in 2017.

World travel and tourism council forecasts that the annual turnover of business tourism will increase by 3.7% over the next ten years and will grow from \$1.15 billion in 2016 to \$1.7 billion in 2027.

The total contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP was UZS 6,703.4bn (USD830.7mn), 2.8% of GDP in 2017, and is forecast to rise by 3.1% in 2018, and to rise by 6.0% pa to UZS 12,407.8bn (USD1,537.5mn), 2.7% of GDP in 2028. (Travel &

TABLE 1 Contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP (Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2018)

Uzbekistan	2017 USD mn <sup>1</sup>	2017 % of total	2018 Growth <sup>2</sup>	2028 % of total	Growth <sup>3</sup>
Direct contribution to GDP	275.1	0.9	4.5	0.9	6.0
Total contribution to GDP	830.7	2.8	3.1	2.7	6.0
Direct contribution to employment <sup>4</sup>	99	0.8	-0.1	0.8	1.2
Total contribution to employment <sup>4</sup>	305	2.4	-1.4	2.4	1.1
Visitor exports	93.3	1.5	4.5	1.7	6.9
Domestic spending	415.5	1.4	4.4	1.4	6.0
Leisure spending	426.8	0.8	5.5	0.8	6.1
Business spending	82.1	0.1	-1.0	0.1	6.1
Capital investment	144.8	2.1	0.9	1.8	4.6

Tourism Economic Impact 2018).

The direct contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP in 2017 was UZS 2,220.1bn (0.9% of GDP). This is forecast to rise by 4.5% to UZS 2,319.8bn in 2018. (Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2018).

This primarily reflects the economic activity generated by industries such as hotels, travel agents, airlines and other passenger transportation services (excluding commuter services). But it also includes, for example, the activities of the restaurant and leisure industries directly supported by tourists.

The direct contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP is expected to grow by 6.0% pa to UZS4,155.4bn (0.9% of GDP) by 2028. (Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2018).

## 2 Analyses of natural resources and potential of ecotourism in Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan has enormous potential for development of tourism and this sphere is considered as highly competitive and the sphere plays very important role in the process of reforms aimed at formation of market economy. From this point of view, Uzbekistan is a country which has unique, beautiful seasons, natural-climatic conditions, natural resources as well as hospitable population. At present, there are more than 7 thousand touristic objects in Uzbekistan which have historical-cultural, architectural and archaeological value and it has to be noted that majority of these objects are included into the

UNESCO World Heritage List and Uzbekistan is one of the top 10 countries of the world in terms of its touristic potential and historical monuments. Basing on statistical information, 545 of these objects are architectural monuments, 578 have historical value, 1457 of objects of art and more than 5500 have archaeological value. Moreover, there are more than 300 museums in our country as well as about 1200 organizations of folk arts. (Slavomir, 2014).

At present time, there are 17 natural reserves in Uzbekistan, including Baday-Tuqay, Kizilkum, Nurota, Zarafshon, Orol Paygambar, Hisor, Zomin and Chatqal and these reserve areas are mainly used as a place for protection of the endangered species and plants (Hoshimov, 2009) and besides them, Uzbekistan fauna consists of 97 types of herbivorous animals, 424 types of birds, 58 types of vermigrade animals, 83 types of fish, while the flora of Uzbekistan is made up by more than 4100 types of plants. About 9% of plants which grow in Uzbekistan are endemic, i.e. these plants grow only in these areas. Plains, desert, mountains, altitude zones, flood plain forests eco-tourism is very interesting and attractive for tourists are characterized by the landscape and biological diversity. More than 4100 species of flora, of which 9% Endemic. Of the fauna includes 97 species of mammals, 424 species of birds, 58 species of reptiles, and 83 species of fish, of which 8.8% endemic. The "Red Book", 184 kinds of animals, 305 species of plants. (Khamidov, 2017). That is why, there is an opportunity to elaborate special tours which would inform the visitors about the unique flora and fauna of Uzbekistan and these tours would provide foundation for further sustainable development of tourism. As it can be noticed, the issue of development of ecological tourism in our country remains very important.

The final results show that ecotourism in the regions of Uzbekistan has a great potential. In addition, the need for 36 natural resource areas in the future to increase by 29 and to reach 65, and increase the area from 2604.1 thousand hectares to 8,144.2 thousand hectares (10,748.3 thousand ha), ie by 4.2 times were justified. Based on the allocation of more than 10% of the area to recreation and ecotourism, it is recommended to reach the area of 1074.8 thousand hectares. Their ecotourism capacity is 1074.8 thousand people on an extensive (1/1 person-day), 10748.3 thousand persons on the intensive (intensifying basis - 1/10 person-day) route. (Khamidov, 2017). By implementing these recommendations, great opportunities for accelerated development of ecotourism in Uzbekistan will be created.

### 3 Ecotourism in Uzbekistan

According company of "Uzbektourism" defines ecotourism as:

- Nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas;
- Containing educational and interpretation features. Generally, but not exclusively, organized for small groups by specialized and small locally owned businesses. Foreign operators of varying sizes also organize, operate and/or market ecotourism tours, generally for small groups;
- Minimizing negative impacts on the natural and socio-cultural environment;
- Supporting the protection of natural areas by: generating economic benefits for host communities, organizations and authorities that are responsible for conserving natural areas;
- Creating jobs and income opportunities for local communities and increasing awareness both among locals and tourists of the need to conserve natural and cultural assets. (Mamatkulov, 2008)

Uzbekistan has carried out extensive measures to promote eco-tourism. This area allows you to significantly improve living standards, create new jobs and strengthen international relations. Successful implementation of set problems in this direction in Uzbekistan testifies the importance of a proper understanding of the scope and importance of the advancement, as a factor of sustainable development of the state as a whole.

It is gratifying that it has been already sufficiently developed in the country such types of tourism as ecotourism, geo-tourism, extreme, health and cultural tourism, auto tourism and mountaineering, as well as other modern leisure activities.

It should be noted that in Uzbekistan where is situated on the Great Silk Road, more than seven thousand historical and cultural monuments survived. In UNWTO meeting in Samarkand in 2010, 7 Priorities for development of the Great Silk Road were commenced:

- CONDUCT a comprehensive Silk Road brand analysis, identifying key market segments, perception and values
- DEVELOP a brand toolkit, tailor-made to the needs of varying Silk Road stakeholder groups
- PROMOTE the brand through targeted, collaborative promotional activities
- FOSTER community-based development projects, particularly focusing on enhanced cultural heritage management
- MAXIMIZE collaborative efforts with other United Nations agencies, NGOs, investment

institutions and donors

- ADDRESS travel facilitation issues, including border and visa formalities - working towards developing a Silk Road Tourist Visa
- ACHIEVE mission to raise the Silk Road's profile through achieving sustainable, responsible and internationally competitive tourism development. (Fifth International Meeting on the Silk Road (2014).

The main tourist centers of the country – Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Shakhrisabz, are included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. (UNESCO, 2019). As a member of the UNWTO since 1994, Uzbekistan has conducted a number of important international events dedicated to the development of tourism. Among them – the first meeting of the countries of the Great Silk Road (Samarkand, 1994), a seminar on the preservation of cultural heritage (Bukhara, 1996), the third seminar on the development of tourism on the Silk Road (Bukhara, 2002) and others. In 2004, the UNWTO office was opened in Samarkand.

Ecotourism approaches to enhance positive effects and minimize negative effects of tourism, include:

- careful planning, with controls to protect key biodiversity sites and sensitive areas from tourism development;
- involvement of locals take holders at all stages of tourism development and operation
- measures to reduce environmental impacts (e.g. Reduction and disposal of remaining wastes);
- measures to conduct tourism activities in ways that avoid or minimize damage to biodiversity and disturbance of wildlife;
- equitable local distribution of income and employment linked to tourism. (Martha, 2008).

#### **4 Liberalization of tourism industry in Uzbekistan**

Yet a number of barriers are hindering tourism development in Central Asian countries, including Uzbekistan. Visa and border crossing formalities, transport infrastructure, corporate governance and quality assurance some issues that underlined attention of Silk Road recommendations from global tourism organization (“Strategic Recommendations for enhancing Tourism with a Special Focus on Central Asia,” 2012).

The visa-free expansion was announced on January 5, 2018 year by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev and follows other moves to open the country to tourists and investors alike. The grand opening starts in Uzbekistan with the granting of visa-free access, for up to 30 days, as of February 1, 2018 for

travelers from 45 countries.

There were stumbles early on in Uzbekistan's effort to liberalize its visa policies. In December 2016, as Mirziyoyev formally assumed the presidency, he issued a decree that was set to roll back visa requirements for a number of countries. The surprisingly rapid opening, however, was within a month dealt a devastating blow: A new decree in early January 2017 punted visa changes to 2021, including not only expansion of the visa-free list but also an electronic visa system.

As of February 10, 2018 citizens from seven countries — Israel, Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Turkey, and Japan — were given visa-free access up to 30 days. Uzbekistan also, at that time, simplified visa procedures for citizens of 39 countries including those in the European Union, many in East Asia and the Middle East, as well as India and the United States by removing the requirement for a voucher or letter of invitation and shortening the timeline for issuing a visa. Also promised was the introduction of an electronic visa system in July 2018.

In March 2018, Uzbekistan abolished visa requirements for Tajik citizens — an important step in the rapprochement between the two countries that has been a core effort of the president's administration.

In mid-July 2018, Uzbekistan introduced an electronic visa system [www.e-visa.gov.uz](http://www.e-visa.gov.uz) as well as a scheme allowing visa-free entry for up to five days while in transit for citizens of 101 countries.

In October 2018, French citizens were given visa-free access for up to 30 days.

2019 years' visa liberalization project features the introduction of visa-free travel, for up to 30 days, for citizens of 45 countries as of February 1, plus Germany as of January 15. In addition, the list of countries whose citizens can apply for visas electronically has been expanded by 76 countries. While Canadians, Australians, and nearly all Europeans will soon be able to travel to Uzbekistan without a visa — as well as citizens of Mongolia, Brazil, and Chile among others — Chinese and Americans will still need a visa.

The next expected step is the introduction of a so-called Silk Road visa by Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The program, announced to reporters in on December 20, 2018 would enable travelers with a visa from either country to travel to both. (Diplomat, 2019).

In addition to these changes, in all international airports throughout Uzbekistan were established Green Corridors for tourists. This also simplifies passport and custom control at airports. Besides, tourist info centers have been working actively to ease the difficulties connected with finding destination and other tourist issues.

## 5 Conclusion

As tourism encourages infrastructure growth of the country, has a strong multiplication influence and helps diversify the economy, supports local culture and crafts and environmental protection, which is actual for the Republic of Uzbekistan with its transitional economy, what's more it is important as Uzbekistan is a country with huge proficiencies in tourism.

With enormous underused capabilities in tourism and diversity of tourist attractions represent the potential of tourism in these tourism destinations. Location of the area, corridors on the Great Silk Road, with cities, which were main points of trade, make destination attractive one for the flow of tourists internationally. Accessibility of several tourism types, different traditions and unique cultural background of Central Asia has considered as one of the leading key factor tourism and hospitality businesses.

To conclude with, on measures on ensuring rapid development of tourism industry in

Uzbekistan and for the purpose of providing the effective organization of activities of the State committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on tourism development need to determine the main objectives and activities of the State committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on tourism development. On this way, government ensures forming and implementation of the complete concept of tourism development directed to radical increase in tourist capacity of the country, giving to tourism of the status of the strategic sector of economy, carrying out single state policy in the sphere of tourism. Moreover, tourism infrastructure may implement marketing researches on external and internal markets of tourist services, sale of active promotional and informational policy in the sphere of tourism directed to broad promotion of historical and cultural heritage, preserving and development of tourist image of the Republic of Uzbekistan, promotion of national tourist products and brands for the international tourist markets.

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