Analysis of the Stages of Reforming the Tourism Industry Uzbekistan

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Abstract: Currently, Uzbekistan has launched a process of cardinal reform of the tourism industry. Its goal is to transform tourism into a strategic direction for the development of the national economy, which will ensure its diversification and accelerated development of the regions. In order to increase the efficiency of the ongoing reforms and a radical increase in foreign citizens entering the republic, by solving the existing problems of the tourism infrastructure, improving the quality of services provided and actively promoting the national tourism product in world markets, strengthening the human resources of the tourism industry, as well as in accordance with the main directions of the Concept development of the tourism sector in the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2019–2025, the necessary measures are being taken.

Key words: Research, tourism, industry, reforms, concept, regulations, results, potential.

Introduction

Uzbekistan has resources for the development of many types of tourism. A rich cultural and historical heritage, ancient traditions of crafts and art could attract fans of cultural, educational, archaeological and ethnographic tourism to the country. The presence of places of worship that are significant for the followers of the three largest world religions (Islam, Christianity and Buddhism) serves as the basis for the development of pilgrim tourism; it also has a large number of unique natural objects (lakes, mountain peaks, river floodplain forests, steppe and desert landscapes), and this could serve as a basis for the development of ecological and adventure tourism.

The Republic of Uzbekistan, as a country located at the crossroads of the Great Silk Road, played a historically important role in the development of trade relations and cultural exchange between East and West. Cities such as Samarkand, Buhara, Khiva were centers of culture and education, making an invaluable contribution to the development of ancient civilizations. Today, the masterpieces of architectural monuments that have survived from those times are increasingly attracting tourists from all over the world. According to a world-class expert, SadikBadak, “Uzbekistan is the pearl of the Central Asian region”

The Government of Uzbekistan, in order to increase the efficiency of the ongoing reforms, to dramatically increase the number of foreign citizens entering the republic, to improve the quality of services provided, as well as to actively promote the national tourist product in world markets.

Uzbekistan has serious potential for the development of tourism. There are over 7.4 thousand cultural heritage sites in the country, of which 209 are included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. In addition, the republic has 11 national natural parks and state reserves, 12 wildlife reserves, 106 museums and many other objects - which can attract tourists [1]

Advisor to the chairman of the state committee for tourism development SadikBadak said that when creating the necessary tourism infrastructure in Uzbekistan, budget revenues will reach $15 billion. He further noted that the republic can receive tourists all four seasons, other countries
in the region do not have such potential. [2]

An important point of the reforms of President ShavkatMirziyoyev was the promise to turn tourism into one of the leading strategically important sectors of the economy of Uzbekistan, which entailed a number of measures to increase the tourist flow to the country [3]

First of all, the Concept of Tourism Development for 2019-2025 was adopted. This document shows an analysis of the current state of the tourism industry, sets the main goals, identifies the stages and directions of the industry's development, creates favorable conditions for the development of the tourism industry, ensuring the efficient use of economic resources to increase the role of this industry in the economy, including ensuring growth in 2025 tourism exports from 951 million to 2.2 billion US dollars, increasing the share of tourism in the country's GDP to 5% [4].

The next stage of tourism reform is the fact that in 2019 three more important documents were adopted on the development of tourism in Uzbekistan - the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated January 5, 2019 No. DP-5611 "On additional measures to accelerate the development of tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan", Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated January 5, 2019 No. DP-4095 "On measures for the accelerated development of the tourism industry" and the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated August 13, 2019 No. DP-5781 "On measures for the further development of the tourism sector in the Republic of Uzbekistan." [5]

On the basis of the above documents, the State Committee for Tourism Development has adopted a number of decisions on the provision of tax incentives and preferences to entrepreneurs in the tourism sector, as well as on the liberalization of the visa regime. The measures taken to liberalize the visa regime are as follows:

- Additionally, a visa-free regime has been introduced for citizens of 86 countries, as of January 1, 2020. As a result of the measures taken, the number of tourists from countries with a visa-free regime increased by an average of 56% (27% of the total tourist flow) [7]
- the number of countries for whose citizens a simplified regime for obtaining entry visas from 12 to 50 is applied. Citizens from 77 countries can obtain an electronic visa;
- Requirements for hostels have been simplified and 22 requirements have been canceled;
- opportunities for accommodation of foreign tourists in private apartments have been created;
- a simplified procedure for organizing guest houses in rural areas was approved with the abolition of the certification requirement and the establishment of minimum requirements for their creation;
- additional (non-electronic) categories of entry visas have been introduced for certain groups of foreign citizens:
  1) "Vatandosh" - a 2-year visa for natives of Uzbekistan and their family members;
  2) "Student visa" - a one-year visa for foreign students studying in educational institutions of Uzbekistan;
  3) "Academic visa" - a visa for a period of 2 months to 2 years for foreign citizens wishing to conduct research and teaching activities in Uzbekistan;
  4) "Medical visa" - visa up to 3 months for foreign citizens entering for treatment;
  5) "Piligrim visa" - a pilgrim visa issued for a period of up to 2 months to foreign citizens at the request of tourist organizations and the Committee on Religious Affairs under the Cabinet of Ministers.

To meet the target parameters for the development of tourism, travel companies, together, use innovative processes in the field of tourism management, such as:
- diversification of tourism services focused on various segments of the tourism market, aimed at the use of innovative marketing tools to form the offer of tourism services in accordance with the needs of the real and target audience;
- creation of favorable conditions for investors for doing business by including the tourism sector in the List of sectors of the economy that are subject to benefits provided to foreign investors
- the introduction from October 1, 2019, in accordance with international legal norms, of the "Open Skies" regime at the international airports "Karshi", "Nukus" and "Termez", as well as "Bukhara", with the use of the "fifth freedom of air" when transporting foreign citizens states.

(Initially, five "air freedoms" were proposed:
- two for aircraft operations;
- three for traffic.

The three freedoms associated with transport, namely the "third", "fourth" and "fifth" freedoms, cover the full range of possibilities for international transport by air. Later, the scope of commercial activities was supplemented by the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth "freedoms of the air". ICAO characterizes all "freedoms" beyond the fifth as "so-called", since only the first five "freedoms" have been formally recognized in an international treaty. [8]

But the beginning of 2020 was marked by the emergence of a serious threat to the world community - the coronavirus pandemic. Analysts of the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) have estimated the possible losses of the global tourism industry from the coronavirus pandemic at 80 billion $. The coronavirus pandemic, along with devastating results, has positive trends as well. In this regard, the digital transformation of the tourism industry in Uzbekistan is actively continuing in 2020-2021.

Tourism, a strategic sector of the economy of Uzbekistan, has been hit hardest by the coronavirus crisis. In 2019, the industry reached the highest rates in its entire history, and Uzbekistan, according to the World Tourism Organization at the UN, was in the top five countries with the most dynamically developing tourism industry. COVID-19 interrupted the meteoric rise of Uzbek tourism.

Due to the systematic work on reforming and improving the tourism industry in the republic, it was possible to achieve noticeable results and, first of all, to increase the tourist flow, modernize the tourist infrastructure and simplify the visa regime, thanks to which Uzbekistan took the second place among the CIS countries in the ranking of the most open visa regimes.

It is planned to increase the number of foreign tourists by 2025 - 9 million people, and the export of tourism services to 2.2 billion $, that is, it will more than double from current levels. Much attention is paid to pilgrim tourism, because Uzbekistan is the leader in the number of pilgrims visiting the country among the countries of Central Asia [8]

Uzbekistan is unique in terms of Ziyorat tourism due to its geographical location. The country is located in the center of the Great Silk Road and at the intersection of cultures, civilizations and religions. On its territory, not only unique monuments of oriental architecture have been preserved, but also Islamic, Christian and Buddhist shrines - Christianity and Buddhism were widespread in the region before the arrival of Islam.

The most famous of them are the mausoleums of the authors of collections of hadiths venerated in the Muslim world - Imam al-Bukhari and Imam at-Termizi. The tomb of the founder of the famous in the East Sufi order Bahauddin Naqshbandi is located in Bukhara. The Tashkent ensemble Khastrati - Imam and the MuyiMuborak madrasah (16th century), where the hair of the Prophet Muhammad is kept, is also one of the world famous pilgrimage sites.

The museum of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan houses the world's only original Koran of the
Caliph Osman of the 7th century, which Muslims from all over the world come to see.

Both Muslims and Christians revered the spring of the prophet Ayub (identified with the biblical Job) in Bukhara and the mausoleum of Khoja Doniyor near Samarkand (it is believed that the ashes of the biblical prophet Daniel are buried here).

Among the monuments of Buddhist culture in Uzbekistan are the oldest Buddhist temple complexes on the territory of old Termez of the Surkhandarya region: Fayaz Tepa (dates back to the 1st – 3rd centuries BC), Kampion Tepa and Karatepa. These monuments have already become a place of pilgrimage for tourists from Japan, South Korea and other Asian countries where Buddhism is practiced. [10]

Given the potential of tourism in Uzbekistan, especially the development of pilgrim tourism, it is planned to dynamically develop infrastructure for the tourism industry by 2026, improve the regulatory framework for tourism in order to increase the number of foreign tourists from 5 million to 12 million and at least double the number of hotels. Consequently, the share of tourism in GDP will be 824 million $. [11]

Based on our research for the revitalization and development of the tourism industry in Uzbekistan, we offer the following recommendations:

1. It is necessary to stimulate the consumer activity of the population for the consumption of tourist services and create conditions for the employment of those segments of the population who have lost their jobs;
2. All travel companies need to move their activities to digital platforms;
3. Disseminate information about tourism events, innovations through websites, social networks, video / teleconferences, as well as mobile applications, this will balance costs and guarantee the participation of busy top managers in the events.
4. Travel agencies, using digital economy technologies, can offer virtual types of tourism.

The forecast for 2021 by the government of Uzbekistan is to attract 1.7 million foreign visitors, and 7.5 million local tourists, therefore, the export of tourism services is expected to reach 370 million $. The leadership of the republic intends to do the work in 2021 based not on general figures, but on clear plans and detailed calculations for flights. [12]

In conclusion, it should be noted that in order to achieve a high profitability of tourism, as world practice shows, it is necessary to consolidate the efforts of all participants in the tourism market, public and private sectors. And the role of the government is to ensure coordination of development policy and planning in the tourism industry at the interstate, public and private levels. Prompt and high-quality solution of existing problems will play an important role in the development of tourism opportunities in Uzbekistan in the post-pandemic period.

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