Prospects for the Development of Tourism and Hospitality Industry in Uzbekistan

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Abstract: In the 21st century, the development of tourism in the world has entered a new stage and is becoming a leading industry of the world economy. Today, tourism is a socio-economic sector of a booming industry in many countries. Today, one of every 16 jobs created in the world is in the tourism business. In the next decade, the tourism industry in European countries and a number of other countries will continue to be a major source of job creation. Since independence, Uzbekistan has set as its main goal to build a society based on a market economy. The tourism sector is also one of the leading sectors in this endeavour. Tourism is not only about exploring the past, getting to know other nations and peoples, enjoying the monuments of their culture, but also big business. Therefore, one of our priorities is to ensure the development of tourism in our country, improve the efficiency and quality of tourism services, and improve the range of services provided by hotel companies in accordance with international standards, the share of tourism in economic growth and the quality of hotel services.

Keywords: Tourism and Hospitality Industry, Hotel, Franchising, Uzbekistan. Safe Travel Guaranteed, Family Guest Houses, Pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

Today, tourism is a socio-economic sector of a booming industry in many countries. Today, every 16th job created in the world is in the tourism business [8, p. 28]. Tourism and hospitality business is one of the priorities of economic development both in our country and in developed countries. The availability of many natural, geographical, historical, cultural and other resources in the country indicates the possibility of turning this sector into a highly profitable type of business for the state and economic entities, thereby bringing it to the level of a powerful tool of economic development.

MAIN PART

Tourism is one of the most important sectors of the economy.

Uzbekistan is a country convenient both for travel and for pilgrimage. Because our ancestors, renowned and famous throughout the world, forever settled in our homeland. The rich spiritual and cultural heritage they left behind is of great interest in the international arena.

In the first nine months of 2017, around 1.8 million tourists visited our country. This is 17% more than in the corresponding period of 2016. Exports of tourism services to our country have also increased by 17% to $1 billion 86 million. By the end of the year, the number of tourists visiting our country is expected to exceed 2.5 million.

Also, new prospects for tourism have opened in our country and large-scale projects in various directions are being implemented. Especially in recent years, mountaineering, horse riding, camel riding, cycling, fishing, rafting, heliskiing, geotourism, educational tourism, medical
tourism and other popular tourist destinations are gaining popularity.

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's Decree of 2 December 2016 "On Measures to Accelerate Tourism Development in the Republic of Uzbekistan" [1] is an important factor in ensuring the rapid development of the tourism industry and giving tourism the status of a strategic sector of the economy.

Over the past period, on the instructions of our Head of State, programmes have been adopted to improve the tourism infrastructure in Khorezm, Bukhara, Samarkand, Surkhandarya, Kashkadarya, Jizzakh and Ferghana regions, create new tourist routes and develop the tourism potential of the regions.

A set of measures for organizing guest houses in Bostanlyk, Parkent and Ahangaron-Angren tourist clusters of Tashkent region has been developed and is now being implemented.

Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan of 16 August 2017. "On priority measures for the development of tourism for 2018-2019"[2] has raised the work in this area to a new level.

One of the prospects of modern tourism is unique natural habitats. Uzbekistan is the leading country in Central Asia in terms of ecotourism. Our country attracts tourists with its rich fauna and flora, unique landscape, national traditions and cuisine. Significant work is carried out in the Ugam-Chatkal State National Nature Park, the Chatkal State Biosphere Reserve which is a part of it, in the framework of development of tourism in the Aydar-Arnasay Lake System.

There are five higher educational institutions which train specialists in tourism, including the Singapore Institute of Management Development in Tashkent, and more than a dozen specialized secondary educational establishments. The State Tourism Development Committee provides assistance to young people studying in the tourism industry and to professionals working in advanced training at major tourism centres and educational institutions in Europe and Asia.

Another important aspect of the sector's prospects is the creation of a unified database of all the region's cultural and historical heritage sites, natural geography, and national reserves, the improvement of the regulatory framework for tourism, and the pooling of efforts by local authorities and the public to develop tourism in the regions.

Particular attention is being given to ensuring that the private sector is prioritised in the rapid development of our country's tourism industry. Hundreds of entrepreneurs and artisans are now engaged in the tourism industry, seafood production, hotel business, tourist services.

Tourism exhibitions and conferences in foreign countries play an important role in tourism development. This certainly bears fruit, leading to an increase in the flow of foreign tourists to our country.

Tourism has a significant economic growth in our country. During the period of reforms implemented in 2016-2017, Uzbekistan has achieved significant growth in inbound tourism. From 2016-2019, the number of tourists increased from 2.0 million to 6.7 million respectively. In the same year, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), Uzbekistan was ranked as one of the five fastest growing countries in the tourism industry, and The Guardian recognised the country as one of the best tourist destinations in the world [6].

In 2016-2019, the number of foreign tourists visiting Uzbekistan increased significantly. In comparison, while our country was visited by 2 million foreign tourists, in 2019 the number increased 3.3 times to 6.7 million. In 2018, the number of foreign tourists increased by 98% compared to 2017, while the number of businesses and organisations engaged in tourism activities increased by 131%. Notably, the growth in the number of tourists from different regions is uneven. For example, the number of visitors from Central Asia increased by an average of 22-25% per year, while the annual increase in the number of tourists from outside the CIS was 50% [5, pp. 3-5].
At the same time, positive results were seen in domestic tourism, with the number of local tourists almost doubling to 14.7 million in 2019 compared to 2016.

It should be noted that the tourism industry has been hit hard by restrictions imposed against the backdrop of the coronavirus pandemic and the effects of the global crisis. In particular, in 2020, the number of foreign tourists visiting Uzbekistan decreased by more than 4.5 times, i.e. by 1.5 million people, and the volume of tourist services decreased by 261 million dollars [6].

In 2019, when the pandemic began, total tourism services provided exceeded $1.5 billion and exports reached $1.3 billion, representing 38.2% of total services exports. Given the current situation with the coronavirus pandemic in Uzbekistan, "Uzbekistan. Safe Travel Guarantee" (Uzbekistan. Guaranteed Safe Travel) project has been developed. The project is a new system of sanitary and epidemiological safety for tourists based on international standards [7].

As the number of tourist arrivals increased, so did the number of accommodations. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the development of family homes, which are growing by leaps and
bounds. In order to ensure the implementation of Cabinet of Ministers Decree No. 631 of 7 August 2018 on the creation of family guesthouses [3], the programme envisages the creation of a total of 200 family guesthouses in Bukhara province in 2019. Since then, 74 family guest houses have been operating in the province and registered in the unified register.

A distinctive feature of the development of the tourism industry over the last decade has been increased competition in the national and international tourism markets. Today, modern technologies and solutions to attract foreign tourists to the tourism industry are being actively introduced, as well as innovative approaches to the development of tourist areas are being expanded.

In this regard, the Republic of Uzbekistan is one of the most economically stable and prosperous regions of Central Asia and has great investment attractiveness for potential investors. The important natural, cultural-historical, material, technical, human, innovative and infrastructural potential of the Republic allows for the development of a number of promising tourism areas.

Tourism interests in Uzbekistan include active recreation, such as sports tourism, skiing tourism, and study tours. In this case, the object of study is the country's archaeological and religious history.

Today, even the industrialised countries are investing in the development of various types of tourism. The main thing is the uniqueness of the country, which is one of the main attractions for tourists. In this regard, Uzbekistan has a number of undeniable advantages. These are more than 7,000 sites of material and cultural heritage of different periods and civilizations, the ancient cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Shakhrisabz and many other towns.

It is gratifying that the country now has a fully fledged national tourism industry that meets international standards. Uzbekistan has all conditions for tourism to become an important component of socio-economic development, as it will create new jobs, raise the population's welfare and increase foreign exchange earnings.

At the same time, there are some obstacles and problems in the sphere that hinder the rapid development of tourism services in the republic and the strengthening of the tourism and hospitality industry.

One of the main problems is that the development of infrastructure in the tourism sector is not at the level of increasing tourist flows to Uzbekistan. This is primarily due to the number of facilities for tourist accommodation. This, in turn, underlines the need for comfortable infrastructure (hotels, guest houses, etc.) meeting modern requirements. The lack of qualified personnel continues to hinder the development of tourism potential.

Lack of infrastructure, lack of housing in the main tourist centres of the country such as Samarkand, Bukhara, and Hiv.

There are also problems with the transport system. This applies not only to international flights but also to domestic flights. Local airlines are currently unable to provide seats for all tourists. The same applies to rail transport. For instance, during the high tourist season it is very difficult to get tickets for the Afrosiab high-speed train.

As for foreign flights, it is worth mentioning the high cost of air tickets.

However, despite existing problems, thanks to efforts made in our country. The flow of tourists visiting our country continues to grow.

Therefore, in accordance with the Presidential Decree No. PF-5611 dated January 5, 2019 [4], the Concept of Tourism Development in the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2019-2025 has been developed.

This concept is aimed at increasing the effectiveness of ongoing reforms to create a favourable economic environment, the development of priorities and objectives for the accelerated development of tourism.
CONCLUSION

Proceeding from the goals and tasks for the future in the sphere of tourism we consider it important to implement measures in the following directions:

1) Improvement of normative-legal base in the sphere of tourism;
2) Development of tourist infrastructure in all regions of the country taking into account the needs of tourists;
3) Development of transport logistics;
4) Development of new tourist programmes taking into account promising types of tourism (pilgrimage, cognitive, ecological, ethnographic, gastronomic, sports, health, rural, industrial, business, etc.).
5) Development of MICE-tourism.
6) Development of domestic tourism
7) Promotion of the Republic's tourism product on domestic and foreign tourism markets;
8) Development of a system for training, retraining, and advanced training of highly qualified specialists;

In short, it is necessary to change the tourism industry in Uzbekistan through innovation and digitalisation. As an untapped opportunity, market segments such as nascent agrotourism and ethno-tourism need to be developed.

The world practice of tourism development shows that in order to turn this industry into a highly profitable sector, it is necessary to unite and strengthen the efforts of all public and private sector actors. At that, the government's role is to ensure coordination and planning of development policy in the sphere of tourism at the international, public and private levels.

Prompt and 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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