



DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF PILGRIMAGE TOURISM IN UZBEKISTAN

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Bobomurod RUSTAMOV

Head of Department, Committee on Religious

Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan;

Associate Professor, International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan

E-mail: bobomurod.rustamov0115@gmail.com

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Abstract. *The article examines the distinctive features of the development of pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan. It analyses the country's potential in this field, the state of the legal and administrative regulation of places of pilgrimage, and the problems arising from the absence of a unified register and of a single body of administration. On the basis of systems theory and a systemic approach, the systemic characteristics of the development of pilgrimage tourism are identified and an improved organisational and economic mechanism is proposed, whose principal structural components are an integrated marketing concept and the formation of a pilgrimage tourism cluster. The article also reviews the measures taken since 2017 to develop pilgrimage tourism, the international cooperation established in this field and the further directions of improving the sector, including the promotion of places of pilgrimage, the training of specialised tour operators, the simplification of visa and service procedures and the digitalisation of tourism.*

Keywords: *pilgrimage tourism, religious tourism, place of pilgrimage, cultural heritage, tourism cluster, integrated marketing, organisational and economic mechanism, digital tourism, Uzbekistan.*

INTRODUCTION

Our country has been famous throughout history in the Islamic world as a land of thinkers. A clear proof of this is that the rich scholarly and spiritual heritage of our scholars continues to serve, over the centuries, as an authoritative source of enlightenment not only for our own people but for the entire Muslim world. The comparison of the land of Transoxiana with “the fruitful branches of the tree of Islam” is a high recognition of the immense contribution made by our ancestors to the development of Islamic civilisation.

Our country possesses sufficient opportunities for the development of pilgrimage tourism. The attention devoted today in Uzbekistan to domestic and international tourism,

and the opportunities created for its development, have led to a manifold increase in the number of pilgrims visiting places of pilgrimage (Tourism in Uzbekistan: Before and After the Pandemic, 2023).

It should be noted that, since places of pilgrimage in the Republic are under the jurisdiction of various agencies, they have not to this day been included in a single relevant register. Places of pilgrimage are designated by the term “places of interest” and possess no definite legal or administrative foundations of governance. According to the analyses, it would be expedient to improve the mechanism of unified administrative governance of places of pilgrimage in the Republic and the corresponding system of registration. The improvement of the organisational and economic mechanism of the field, as a result of the present research, will serve the development of pilgrimage tourism.

MAIN PART

On the basis of the study of systems theory and systemic approaches, the distinctive systemic features of the development of pilgrimage tourism have been determined, and an improved organisational and economic mechanism of pilgrimage tourism based on a systemic approach has been proposed. As its principal structural components, an integrated marketing concept and a proposal for the formation of a pilgrimage tourism cluster have been substantiated in theoretical and methodological terms, and the stages of their formation have been elaborated. In the scholarly definitions given to the terms “tourism”, “pilgrimage tourism” and “religious tourism”, it has been established that these terms are interpreted both from the point of view of “demand” and from the point of view of “supply”.

Specialists emphasise the high potential for developing pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan. At the same time, there is no unanimity among specialists in the field of tourism concerning the concepts of religious tourism and pilgrimage tourism and their composition. In the opinion of the majority of specialists, religious tourism is a type of activity connected with satisfying the needs of, and providing services to, tourists who travel to holy places and religious centres situated outside their place of residence (Khristov, 2005:288).

In our country 4,308 archaeological monuments, 2,079 architectural monuments, 694 works of art and 395 places of interest belonging to various periods – 7,476 objects

of material and cultural heritage in all – have been taken under state protection. The Ichan-Qala of Khiva was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1991, the Historic Centre of Bukhara in 1993, the Historic Centre of Shahrissabz in 2000 and Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures in 2001. During the years of independence large-scale restoration and improvement works have been carried out at 1,004 historical sites. Research is being conducted each year at more than fifteen international archaeological heritage sites together with representatives of China, Japan, France, Poland and other states.

In recent years close cooperation in the field of pilgrimage tourism has been established with counterpart organisations in Türkiye, Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia, and memoranda have been signed. An International Forum on Pilgrimage Tourism has been organised in the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara. The Muslim Board of Uzbekistan holds the Forum of Graduates of the Mir-i Arab Madrasa, while the Imam Bukhari International Scientific Research Center and the Imam Maturidi International Scientific Research Center ensure the holding of the international conference “Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi and the Maturidi Teaching: Past and Present” and of the international forum “Central Asia – a Cradle of Islamic Art”.

The work carried out in the protection and use of objects of cultural heritage serves not only the study and promotion of history, but also the education of the rising generation in preserving the priceless historical heritage as the apple of its eye, in further strengthening the sense of national identity and in firmly establishing a high spirituality in society.

It is well known that in the East, together with remembering the departed and offering prayers for them, the frequent visiting of graves is a duty of every Muslim. The following noble hadith is related from Abu Hurayra: the Messenger of God said, “Visit the graves, for they remind you of death and of the hereafter.” Today the notion of “pilgrimage” encompasses two directions of tourism – pilgrimage tourism and religious tourism. The very fact that the Qur’an of the Ottoman caliph, the most precious monument of the religion of Islam, is preserved in the Baroqkhon Madrasa, which forms part of the Hazrati Imom complex in Tashkent, attracts many pilgrims and tourists to that place. Among the best factors for developing pilgrimage tourism are Shah-i Zinda in Samarkand, where Abu Ja’far Qusam ibn Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib

ibn Hisham al-Qurashi, the cousin of our Prophet and son of his uncle Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib, is buried; the mausoleum of Khoja Doniyor, with the longest grave in the world at eighteen metres; the mausoleum of Amir Timur; and, among the notable historical sites of the city of Bukhara, the shrines of Hazrati Bahouddin Naqshband and Hazrati Mir Kulol, the Mir-i Arab Madrasa, the Minorai Kalon complex, the Samanid mausoleum and the Seven Pirs; as well as the Sultan Saodat complex in Surkhandarya and the mausoleums of Shaykh Alouddin Attor, Iso Termiziy, Hakim Termiziy and Sufi Olloyor.

Taking into account that pilgrimage today is organised mainly by the citizens of our country, the potential of pilgrimage tourism may be further increased by organising lectures on the etiquette of pilgrimage in the mahallas and mosques; by producing feature and documentary films and video clips promoting the places of pilgrimage of Uzbekistan in Uzbek, Arabic, English and other languages; by creating websites for the places of pilgrimage in Uzbek, Russian and English; by training tour operators specialising directly in pilgrimage tourism; by opening departments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the historical cities so that tourists may obtain visas locally rather than through Tashkent; by reducing the price of air tickets; by improving services at airports and railway stations; and by introducing the use of international payment cards and currency exchange.

Uzbekistan is one of the countries richest in sacred sites on a world scale, and this sacred land is regarded as the country where many great figures renowned in the Islamic world found their eternal rest. During the years of independence, work has been carried out to study and improve the places where such persons, who won renown by their great deeds in strengthening the religion of Islam and the faith of the Muslim community, found their eternal rest, and these places have been turned into sites visited by people. Such places are held sacred not only by the people of our country but by the peoples of the entire Islamic world. The newly built Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan in Tashkent and the Imam Bukhari complex in Samarkand are clear examples of this.

From 2017 onwards systematic work began in Uzbekistan on developing pilgrimage tourism as a distinct branch of tourism and on presenting it to the world. In particular, on 16 August 2017 the Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On priority measures for the development of the tourism sector in 2018–2019” was published. This resolution approved the programme of priority measures

for the development of the tourism sector in 2018–2019, aimed at facilitating travel to Uzbekistan, developing tourism infrastructure and establishing new tourism facilities (Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2017:1).

Wide opportunities have been created by the state for the purpose of developing pilgrimage tourism. Accordingly, the Decree “On measures for the further development of domestic and pilgrimage tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan” was adopted and, on its basis, the procedure for granting subsidies for the development of tourism was established, and the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers “On additional measures for the development of domestic and pilgrimage tourism” was adopted.

As a result of the analysis of the literature relating to this field, it is our view that digital tourism requires the use of digital instruments in the processes of planning, organising, monitoring and enjoying a journey, and that in this connection the complex of electronic services provided to travellers before, during and after the journey acquires considerable importance (Xurramov, 2021:16).

Substantial work has been carried out in our country on developing pilgrimage tourism, and the most urgent problems of the field have been resolved. The recognition of Uzbekistan in the world community as one of the centres of pilgrimage tourism gives an impetus, in a general sense, to the development of the country’s tourism infrastructure and to a significant increase in the flow of tourists. For pilgrimage tourism, however, religious sites alone are not sufficient. In order to attract tourists, promotional work must be well organised, and convenient visa arrangements and proper conditions at airports and hotels must be in place. From this point of view, the improvement of the directions of pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan and of its competitiveness offers the possibility of ensuring the further development of pilgrimage tourism.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it may be said that from 2016 onwards the tourism sector was declared one of the important branches of the country’s economy in Uzbekistan. For this reason work has been carried out on developing tourism and one of its important directions, pilgrimage tourism, and on bringing it to the world scale. This, in its turn, has led to a significant increase in the number of pilgrims coming to Uzbekistan, and in particular to visit the sacred places of our country.

At the same time, the analysis shows that the further development of the field depends on resolving organisational and legal questions: the creation of a unified register of places of pilgrimage, the determination of a single mechanism of administration, the formation of a pilgrimage tourism cluster on the basis of a systemic approach, and the introduction of an integrated marketing concept remain tasks of the first order.

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