

Article

Development of religious tourism in Samarkand

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Abstract: This article examines the development of religious tourism in Samarkand, one of the most ancient spiritual centers of Central Asia. Particular attention is paid to the city's historical and religious potential, analyzing sacred sites and their role in shaping tourist demand. The socioeconomic significance of religious tourism is also explored, and prospects for its further development in the context of the modernization of the tourism industry are substantiated.

Keywords: Religious tourism, Samarkand, pilgrimage, ziarat tourism, Islamic culture, cultural heritage.



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Introduction

In the modern world, religious tourism occupies a significant place in the global tourism industry. It represents a special form of tourism activity associated with visits to sacred sites, religious centers, and monuments of spiritual culture. Growing interest in religious tourism is driven by people's desire for spiritual self-discovery, the preservation of traditions, and the study of historical heritage. Samarkand is a striking example of a city possessing a unique combination of religious, historical, and cultural resources. For centuries, it has been an important center of Islamic scholarship and spirituality, which determines its special role in the development of religious tourism not only in Uzbekistan but throughout Central Asia.

Methodology

Various scientific methods were used during the study to comprehensively examine the development of religious tourism in Samarkand. The primary research methods included literature review, statistical analysis, comparative analysis, and observation. Literature review allowed us to explore the theoretical foundations of religious tourism and determine its importance for the development of the tourism industry. Statistical analysis was used to study the dynamics of tourist flows and assess the impact of tourism on the regional economy. The comparative method allowed us to compare the development of religious tourism in Samarkand with other tourist destinations in Central Asia. In addition, observation was used to identify behavioral patterns of tourists and pilgrims visiting religious sites.[1]

Results

Religious tourism includes pilgrimages, excursions to religious sites, and participation in religious festivals and rituals. Scholarly literature considers this type of tourism an important tool for preserving cultural heritage and strengthening intercultural ties.[2]

Samarkand's historical and religious potential has evolved over many centuries. The city was home to renowned theologians and religious thinkers, which contributed to the spread of Islamic culture and education.

Some of the most significant religious sites include the Imam al-Bukhari Memorial Complex, the Shah-i-Zinda Complex, the Gur-e-Emir Mausoleum, the Bibi-Khanym Mosque, and the Registan architectural ensemble. These sites are not only architectural monuments but also important pilgrimage centers.

In recent years, government programs to develop tourism have been actively implemented in Samarkand. Particular attention is being paid to the restoration of religious monuments, improving tourism infrastructure, and creating comfortable conditions for pilgrims and tourists. The development of religious tourism contributes to increased employment, small business development, and the hotel and restaurant industries. Furthermore, religious tourism has a positive impact on social stability and cultural development in the region.[3]

Despite this positive trend, religious tourism faces a number of challenges, including the need to preserve the sacred nature of sites and improve the quality of tourism services. Prospects for development lie in the implementation of sustainable tourism principles and expanded international cooperation.

Discussion

More than 3 million foreign and 5.3 million local tourists visited Samarkand in 2025.

The length of stay of tourists increased from 2.5 days to 3 days, the export of tourism services increased to 606.0 million dollars.[4]

This year, 228 accommodation facilities with 3,789 beds were launched, including 17 guest houses with 1,001 beds, 42 hostels with 1,618 beds, and 170 family guest houses with 1,198 beds.

For information, there are 862 accommodation facilities with 21,459 beds, including 182 hotels with 12,169 beds, 166 hostels with 4,915 beds, 4,375 beds, and 514 family guest houses.

In the hotel sector, international hotel brands such as "HILTON" (USA), "MOVENPICK" (France), "WELNESS HOTEL" (Austria) and "MINYOUN" (China), which are among the TOP-50 in the world, were involved.[5]

Also, 466 tour companies, 725 guide-translators, 144 tourist-class buses and 150 minibuses provide services for tourists in the Samarkand region.

Also, 12 tourism information centers operate for tourists. New projects are being launched in the tourism sector every year.[6][7]

For example, in Samarkand, "SHIRIN SAYYOH" LLC has built a hotel worth 4.0 million. The projects of a 46-bed hotel by "VOLIDAM 777" LLC worth \$4.3 million, a 77-bed hotel by "EMILY TOUR" LLC worth \$7.2 million, and a 92-bed hotel by "EMILY TOUR" LLC worth \$7.2 million were launched.

In addition, the first stage of the "Culture Eco Tourism Cluster" family recreation center worth \$12.0 million was launched by "KBR Kattakurgan Beach Residence" LLC in the territory of the Kattakurgan reservoir.

(\$3.0 million) In the next stages, an aqua park, an amphitheater, a hotel, a sanatorium and other services are being organized in 2026-2027.

This will create 500 jobs, serve 1.5 million tourists annually, and provide services worth 300 billion soums.[8][9]

Foreign and local tourists visiting the region. Construction works of the bus station in "Chopon Ota" district of Rasadkhana neighborhood of Samarkand city have been completed. The project is 6.74 hectares, of which 17,000 square meters of buildings and structures will be built, the total cost will be 150 billion soums, 70 jobs will be created.

The project capacity can serve 50 buses, 80 minibuses, 400 taxis at the same time.[10][11]

The facility is a 12,000 square meter bus station administrative building, 76-bed hotel, 2 restaurants, 120 shops,

It consists of a 12-seat car service building, 4 city routes, 19 suburban routes, 7 connecting routes "Tashkent-

Samarkand" and inter-regional and inter-city routes connecting Karakalpakstan - Khorezm - Bukhara - Navoi - Kashkadarya-Surkhandarya have been organized through the bus station.[12][13] International bus routes Samarkand - St. Petersburg and Samarkand - Panjakent, which were suspended on international routes, have been restored and will be operated through this bus station. "Tersak", "Omonkoton" in Urgut district, which has high tourism potential, and "Oksoy" in Nurobod district have been granted the status of tourist villages.[14][15]

Conclusion

Thus, Samarkand has significant potential for the development of religious tourism. A comprehensive approach to utilizing its spiritual and cultural heritage will ensure the sustainable development of the tourism industry and strengthen the region's international image.

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