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Analysis of Tourism Services in Uzbekistan

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the development of the tourism industry in Uzbekistan in the post-COVID period. The main focus is on staffing issues and the need for professional development of specialists. The active efforts of the government to support and develop domestic tourism, the introduction of innovative technologies, and collaboration with international partners are highlighted. The importance of quality education, tailored to modern requirements and standards, is emphasized. Analysis of the data obtained from the research suggests that a systematic approach involving the collaboration of all stakeholders is essential for the sustainable development of tourism in Uzbekistan.

Keywords: tourism, post-COVID period, staffing, education, innovations, domestic tourism, international cooperation.

Introduction. In the XXI century, one of the most rapidly developing sectors of the world economy is international tourism, which has become a socio-cultural phenomenon that influences the development and functioning of countries and peoples. However, the situation has changed dramatically after the pandemic that began in late 2019 and was caused by the COVID-19 virus, which had a negative impact on the entire world economy, especially on tourism.

The tourism industry in Uzbekistan faces a number of problems, one of which is the lack of qualified personnel. The shortage of professionals in areas such as hotels, restaurants and tourist and excursion services has a negative impact on the quality of services and the competitiveness of the tourism industry in Uzbekistan. One of the reasons for this problem is the limited number of specialized educational institutions offering educational programs in the field of tourism, as well as the insufficient number of qualified teachers. Due to the lack of a training system, many workers in the tourism sector in Uzbekistan have insufficient professional training, do not have sufficient communication skills with tourists, do not have knowledge of international standards in this industry, and the service often does not meet world standards of quality and service.

Analysis and results.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2020 saw a huge decline in international tourist travel, primarily due to restrictive measures such as border closures, changes in visa requirements, etc., designed to prevent the spread of the pandemic. Thus, if in 2019 the number of visits/trips reached 1.5 billion, then in 2020 it sharply decreased by 72%, amounting to 409 million. A similar situation was observed in 2021. When comparing UNWTO

data by month on international travel over 4 years, it can be revealed that tourist flows in 2022 almost doubled compared to the previous year, when the number of visits amounted to 917 million.

It is worth dwelling separately on the analysis of existing tourism enterprises in Uzbekistan.

According to the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for the Development of the Tourism Industry, at the beginning of 2022, about 870 travel agencies and tour operators were registered in the country. When compared with previous years, it can be noted that the number of travel agencies in Uzbekistan has slightly decreased in recent years: in particular, in 2019 their number was more than a thousand, and in 2020 - about 950. At the moment, in 2023, there are about 1800 licensed travel agencies and tour operators operating in the country. Despite this, in general, the tourism sector in Uzbekistan continues to develop with the active support of the government. In particular, as part of the implementation of the National Program for Tourism Development until 2025, a number of measures were taken to improve tourism legislation, improve the system of obtaining licenses and certificates.

The most important data showing the role of tourism in the economy of countries of the world are expenses and income from the tourism industry. Thus, based on the results of the analysis of information from the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Tourism Development and the World Tourism Organization, we compiled a table of expenses for international tourist trips. In 2019, tourist spending in Uzbekistan amounted to \$2.3 billion, with the third quarter being the most profitable for host countries. In 2020, due to restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, spending amounted to \$0.8 billion, which is \$1.5 billion less than in 2019. For the first three quarters of 2022, international tourist spending amounted to \$1.9 billion, which is \$0.9 billion more than in 2021 for the same period.

In terms of revenue, 2019 was the most profitable year for Uzbekistan, with tourism revenues amounting to \$1.4 billion, up 77% from 2020. In 2021, revenues amounted to \$0.5 billion. This indicator has already reached high results in the first three quarters of 2022, amounting to \$0.8 billion. Thus, we can conclude that tourism revenues in Uzbekistan and international tourist spending are increasing, indicating a sustainable recovery in the industry after the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government of Uzbekistan continues to work to improve conditions for tourists, and in the coming years plans to attract even more investment in the tourism sector, expand tourism infrastructure and improve the quality of tourism services, which, in turn, will lead to an increase in tourism revenues in the future.

A major problem in the tourism sector in Uzbekistan is the lack of incentives for professional growth. Limited career development opportunities and a lack of training and advanced training programs limit the motivation of tourism workers to develop professionally. This can lead to an outflow of qualified personnel abroad and an insufficient number of experienced specialists within the country. Lack of information about career opportunities, low attractiveness of tourism professions, and negative public perceptions may influence young people to choose other industries, which may exacerbate the problem of personnel shortage in the tourism industry. Attention should be paid to cooperation and coordination of educational institutions with tourism enterprises. Improving the interaction between these organizations, that is, for example, creating internship programs or organizing practices on their basis will allow students to gain practical knowledge and experience of real work in this industry.

The Government of Uzbekistan pays special attention to the development and support of entrepreneurship in the tourism industry, providing financial and consulting support to young entrepreneurs who want to start their own business. The programs they have developed include training on the creation and management of tourism infrastructure, consultations on business planning, access to financial resources and other support measures. And the introduction by the state of such digital and innovative technologies as electronic visas, online booking, online payment, virtual tours and excursions help to reduce contact interaction and increase the efficiency

of service provision.

Conclusion:

The results of the study show that in the post-COVID period, the tourism industry faced serious challenges, international and domestic tourist flows decreased, foreign exchange earnings decreased, which negatively affected the economies of many countries. Uzbekistan, as one of the important tourist destinations in Central Asia, before the COVID-19 pandemic attracted tourists from all over the world with its rich cultural heritage, modern infrastructure, original ethnic traditions and unique customs of the people. However, the introduction of travel restrictions, border closures and reduction of international flights in early 2020 had a negative impact on the tourism sector of Uzbekistan. The Government of Uzbekistan is taking the following measures to support the tourism industry: promoting domestic tourism, introducing digital innovative technologies in the work of travel agencies (electronic visas, online booking, virtual excursions, etc. have become possible), providing various financial and tax incentives, as well as loans and grants to support entrepreneurs. However, to attract and retain the number of tourists, it is necessary to ensure high quality of tourism services, which includes the development of professional skills of workers and the training of qualified personnel. At the moment, professional education in the field of tourism in Uzbekistan faces a number of problems, the solution to which can be the following: updating educational programs, introducing modern teaching methods, developing partnerships between educational institutions and travel companies, improving the qualifications of teachers and developing soft skills in students. It should be noted that the solution to the problem of personnel in the tourism sector requires a long-term and systemic approach, including cooperation between the state, educational institutions, tourism companies and other stakeholders. Only in this way can we achieve sustainable development of the tourism industry in Uzbekistan and ensure its competitiveness at the international level.

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