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Article

The Current State and Development Trends of The Tourist Services Market in The Samarkand Region

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Abstract: This article examines the current state and key development trends of the tourist services market in the Samarkand region. Special attention is paid to the dynamics of tourist flows, the structure and quality of tourism services, their competitiveness, and the role of digital technologies in the development of regional tourism infrastructure. In the study, the work analyzes the demand and supply in the market of tourist services and the factors affecting them, including support through the state, investment activity and the development of small businesses in the field of Tourism. Based on the data collected on statistics and analysis of regional development programs, the main problems and development directions of further improvement of the tourist services market in the Samarkand region were identified. The results of the study can be used to form a regional strategy for the development of tourism and to improve the efficiency of managing tourism services.

Keywords: Tourist services, tourism market, Samarkand region, tourism infrastructure, service quality, competitiveness, digital tourism, regional development.

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1. Introduction

As In the current context, the development vector of Uzbekistan's economy is focused on activating its regional components. At the same time, the process of economic regionalization is gaining particular importance through the formation of regional markets by sectors. Regional markets are becoming not only a platform for addressing pressing issues of economic organization, but also a space where new trends reflecting economic development are concentrated. Therefore, local regional markets that encompass macro- and microeconomic issues, as well as regional policy challenges, deserve special attention and are of significant importance[1].

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the development of domestic and inbound tourism as one of the stable development trends. This process is reflected both at the regional and national levels. In particular, this is evidenced by the objectives set within the framework of the **"Concept for the Development of Tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2019–2025"** and the **"Uzbekistan–2030" Strategy**, which aim to transform tourism into one of the leading sectors of the national economy. In addition, initiatives by state and local authorities to support domestic tourism, the implementation

of infrastructure projects, and cooperation with the private sector are of particular importance[2].

As of the end of 2024, the number of foreign citizens visiting the Republic of Uzbekistan for tourist purposes has reached 8.2 million people. This figure is almost 24 percent higher than the 6.6 million visitors recorded in 2023, demonstrating a steady growth trend in the country's tourism sector. As a result, Uzbekistan ranked third in the tourist flow in Central Asia behind Kazakhstan (15.3 million) and Kyrgyzstan (8.6 million). Thus, Uzbekistan succeeded in attracting approximately **28 percent** of the total regional tourist flow of **28.6 million visitors**.

Over the past five-year period, an analysis of the key indicators of the tourism services market across Uzbekistan shows that the tourism sector has undergone a phase of recovery from crisis followed by rapid growth[3].

2. Materials and Methods

Identifying the principles applied in improving the quality of tourism services, as well as conducting an in-depth analysis and systematization of their theoretical and methodological foundations, constitutes an important stage of scientific research in this field.

In particular, studies conducted by J. Kandampully emphasize that innovative approaches are recognized as a key strategic factor in improving service quality. The author substantiates that the continuous enhancement of service quality is closely linked to digital solutions, technological advancement, and the modernization of service delivery processes[4].

M. Brady and J. Cronin propose a comprehensive approach to the concept of service quality, interpreting it not only through the technical or functional aspects of services, but also as a system of enduring principles associated with customer loyalty and consumers' willingness to make repeat choices.

According to the conceptual approach put forward by P. Williams, taking regional characteristics and cultural context into account is an important methodological principle in improving service quality. The author argues that tourism services can ensure genuine functional and emotional satisfaction only when they are shaped not by a standardized approach, but in accordance with local needs, social values, and cultural traditions[5].

In studies conducted by S. Tsaur and Y. Lin, the management of emotional values and personal experiences is highlighted as an important methodological principle in enhancing service quality. The authors justify that service quality is formed not only through technical or functional indicators, but also through consumers' individual experiences, subjective evaluations, and emotional connections.

Research by M. Kozak substantiates that aligning service quality with international standards is a factor of strategic importance.

In S. Ali's study, the integration of service quality principles with sustainability is presented as a relevant methodological approach in tourism. According to the author, service quality should serve not only as a means of satisfying customer needs, but also as a strategic system that ensures environmental, social, and economic sustainability[6].

3. Results

An analysis of the main indicators of the tourism services market across Uzbekistan over the past five-year period shows that the tourism sector has experienced a phase of recovery from crisis followed by rapid growth. Although a significant decline was initially observed due to the impact of the pandemic, in subsequent years the tourism services market expanded considerably as a result of government policies, infrastructure modernization, and the recovery of international travel Table 1.

Table 1. Key Indicators of the Tourism Services Market in Uzbekistan in 2020–2024

Indicators	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Growth Rate in 2024 Compared to 2020, %
Number of foreign tourists, thousand people	1500	1880	5230	6620	8600	5,7 times
Number of domestic tourists, thousand people	11200	12500	15000	20600	22670	2,0 times
Tourism revenues, billion UZS	4200	4800	17600	23100	38400	9,1times
Employment in the tourism sector, thousand people	190	195	200	2200	3200	16,8 times
Number of UNESCO heritage sites, units	5	5	5	5	7	140%

An analysis of the data presented in **Table 1** shows that in 2020 the consequences of the pandemic had a significant impact on Uzbekistan's tourism sector. In that year, the number of foreign tourists amounted to only **1.5 million people**; however, in subsequent years this indicator increased steadily. From 2021 onward, international tourism began to recover gradually, with **5.2 million visitors in 2022**, **6.6 million in 2023**, and **8.6 million tourists in 2024[7]**. Such growth indicates the strengthening of the country's position in the international tourism market. In addition, the expansion of air and railway connections, the simplification of visa procedures, and the creation of more favorable conditions for foreign visitors played an important role in this process. After the pandemic period, interest in domestic tourism also increased sharply.

Tourism revenues also increased accordingly. In 2020–2021, due to the impact of the pandemic, revenues in this sector remained relatively low, amounting to 4.2 trillion and 4.8 trillion UZS, respectively. However, starting from 2022, the tourism sector accelerated significantly, and by 2024 tourism revenues had reached 38.4 trillion UZS[8].

Analyzing the current state of regional tourism using the example of the Samarkand region, it can be noted that this region is one of the most important historical and cultural centers of Uzbekistan and is internationally recognized as a major tourist destination. The Samarkand region is home to ancient architectural monuments and cultural heritage sites—including Registan Square, the Bibi-Khanym Mosque, the Shah-i-Zinda complex, the Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum, and many other landmarks—that are included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. For this reason, Samarkand is recognized as one of the most significant tourism centers not only in Uzbekistan but also in the entire Central Asian region. Cultural and historical tourism constitutes the main focus of tourism in the region, which ensures a steady flow of both domestic and international visitors throughout the year.

From the perspective of pilgrimage tourism, sacred sites such as the Imam al-Bukhari Complex, Shah-i-Zinda, and the Hazrat Khizr Mosque are particularly popular. In addition, the Congress Center and the Silk Road Samarkand congress complex are capable of hosting international conferences and forums, thereby transforming the region into a competitive center in the field of business tourism as well. The table below presents the main indicators of the tourism sector in the Samarkand region in recent years. In addition, the simultaneous development of pilgrimage and business tourism creates a synergistic effect, which contributes to the diversification of the tourism product of the region. While

pilgrimage tourism provides a steady flow of visitors throughout the year, business tourism attracts high spending segments and encourages demand for modern accommodation, transport and service facilities. This Table 2. The combination will not only increase tourism revenues, but also stimulate investment, job creation, and modernization of tourism infrastructure, thereby strengthening the overall sustainability and competitiveness of the tourism sector in the Samarkand region.[9].

Table 2. Main Indicators of the Tourism Sector in the Samarkand Region

Indicators	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**	**Growth Rate in 2024 Compared to 2020, %**
Number of foreign tourists, thousand people	**152,0**	**119,0**	**1204,2**	**2153,0**	**2500,0**	**16,4 times**
Number of domestic tourists, thousand people	**519,0**	**1943, 0**	**4247,0**	**4500,0**	**4700,0**	**9,0 times**
Tourism revenues, million USD	**8,4**	**79,6**	**197,6**	**405,9**	**500,0**	**58,0 times**
Number of hotels, units	**160,0**	**112,0**	**128,0**	**164,0**	**173,0**	**108,10%**

In 2020–2021, as a result of the pandemic, the number of foreign visitors to the Samarkand region declined sharply from 152 thousand to 119 thousand people. However, starting from 2022, the tourism sector began to recover rapidly, and in that year the number of foreign tourists increased by more than 16 times. In 2023–2024, this growth stabilized, with the number of foreign visitors rising from 2,153.0 thousand to 2,500.0 thousand people, respectively[10].

An analysis of accommodation facilities in the Samarkand region over the past five years shows a significant increase in their number. In particular, as a result of the entry of international brands, the quality and level of hotel services provided to both domestic and foreign tourists have improved considerably Table 3[11].

Table 3. Information on Accommodation Facilities in the Samarkand Region

№	**Accommodation facilities**	**Unit of measurement**	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Growth Rate in 2024 Compared to 2020, %
1	**Hotels**	**units**	160	112	128	161	172	107,5
		beds	6569	5 136	7 080	10 792	11344	1,7 times
2	**Hostels**	**units**	170	227	290	352	399	2,3 times
		beds	1611	2172	2759	3 317	3742	2,3 times
3	**Family guest houses**	**units**	7	29	52	91	109	15,6 times
		beds	178	697	1 289	2 413	2854	16,0 times

An analysis of the data presented in **Table 3** indicates that during the period **2020–2024**, both the number and capacity of accommodation facilities in the Samarkand region increased significantly[12].

During the **2020–2024** period, indicators related to the development of tourism infrastructure in the Samarkand region also demonstrated substantial growth (Table 4). This positive trend reflects the growing demand for accommodation services driven by the increasing number of tourists visiting the region. The expansion of hotels, family guest houses, and hostels, along with the growth in their capacity, has improved the availability and diversity of lodging options for different categories of visitors. At the same time, the Table 4. parallel development of tourism infrastructure has enhanced the overall quality of services, improved accessibility to tourist sites, and created more comfortable conditions for travelers, thereby supporting the sustainable development of the tourism sector in the Samarkand region[13].

Table 4. Indicators of Tourism Infrastructure Development in the Samarkand Region

Accommodation facilities	**Unit of measurement**	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Growth Rate in 2024 Compared to 2020, %
Tourism infrastructure facilities	**units**	**228**	**298**	**348**	**388**	**423**	**185,5**
including: **Wi-Fi access points**	units	100	161	190	210	235	235,0
Tourist signposts	units	114	123	142	162	172	150,9
Information centers units	units	14	14	16	16	16	114,3

According to the data presented in **Table 4**, the number of tourism infrastructure facilities increased from **228 to 423** during this period, representing a growth rate of **185.5 percent**. These figures indicate a sharp increase in attention and investment directed toward the tourism sector in the region. This growth is primarily associated with comprehensive measures aimed at creating essential amenities for tourists, improving service quality, and enhancing information support[14].

In addition, the expansion of tourism infrastructure has contributed to improving the overall attractiveness and accessibility of the Samarkand region for both domestic and international visitors. The increase in the number of Wi-Fi access points, tourist signposts, and information centers has enhanced the quality of tourist experiences by facilitating navigation, access to information, and digital connectivity. These improvements have also supported the integration of modern digital solutions into tourism services, strengthened the region's competitiveness, and created favorable conditions for the sustainable development of tourism in the long term[15].

4. Conclusion

The conducted analysis shows that over the past five years the tourist services market in the Samarkand region has entered a phase of stable recovery and rapid growth. Following the sharp decline observed during the pandemic period, the steady increase in both foreign and domestic tourist flows, the significant growth in tourism revenues, and the expansion in the number of accommodation facilities and infrastructure objects indicate the region's high tourism potential. In particular, the balanced development of cultural-historical, pilgrimage and business tourism has made the Samarkand region an important tourist center not only on a nationwide scale, but throughout Central Asia. At

the same time, despite the measures taken, the need to further improve the quality and competitiveness of services in the tourist services market remains. In particular, it is important to expand the use of digital technologies in the provision of tourism services, integrate tourism information systems, improve the professional skills of Service Personnel, Support Small Business and family entrepreneurship in the field of Tourism. Moreover, diversifying tourism products in order to reduce the negative effects of seasonality remains one of the key challenges.

Based on the above, a number of recommendations can be proposed to further develop the tourist services market in the Samarkand region. These include the introduction of digital tourism platforms in the development of comprehensive regional tourism programs, wider application of ecological and sustainable tourism principles, and increasing the share of services that meet international tourism standards. In addition, strengthening cooperation between the public and private sectors, further improving the investment climate, and actively promoting the tourism brand of the Samarkand region in international markets will contribute to ensuring the long-term sustainable development of the tourism services market.

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