



TOURISM MARKETING IN UZBEKISTAN

Kimmatkhan Mahmudova Marufjan kizi

Andijan Agricultural and Agrotechnological Institute,
Assistant of the Department of Agribusiness and Marketing.
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Annotation: Tourism marketing in Uzbekistan plays a crucial role in promoting the country's rich cultural heritage, historical landmarks, and natural attractions to both domestic and international travelers. The government's strategic initiatives, such as visa liberalization, digital marketing campaigns, and infrastructure development, have significantly boosted the tourism sector.

This paper analyzes key tourism marketing strategies in Uzbekistan, including branding efforts, digital promotion through social media, and collaboration with international travel agencies. Additionally, it explores the impact of sustainable tourism practices and the role of local communities in enhancing visitor experiences.

Findings indicate that Uzbekistan's tourism marketing efforts have increased global recognition, attracting a growing number of tourists. However, challenges such as seasonal demand fluctuations and service quality improvements remain areas for further development. Future recommendations emphasize the importance of technological innovation, personalized marketing strategies, and investment in human capital to sustain long-term growth in the tourism industry.

Introduction

Tourism is one of the most dynamic and rapidly growing sectors of the global economy. The increasing flow of tourists, rising demand for tourism services, and intensifying competition have created a need for new approaches and strategies in tourism marketing. Tourism plays a crucial role in the socio-economic development of countries, while tourism marketing holds strategic importance in the growth of this sector. This study provides a scientific analysis of the key strategies of tourism marketing, its impact on consumers, and methods to enhance its effectiveness. Tourism serves as a significant source of revenue for many countries.

Uzbekistan, with its rich historical heritage, unique culture, and natural beauty, strives to become one of Central Asia's leading tourism destinations. However, to gain a competitive edge in the global market, it is essential to develop and implement effective tourism marketing strategies.

The aim of this article is to explore modern trends in tourism marketing, its significance, and promising directions for future development. The study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What role does tourism marketing play?
2. What are the key trends in modern tourism marketing?
3. What strategies can be applied to improve the effectiveness of tourism marketing?

Methods

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative research methods were utilized.

1. **Quantitative Analysis:** Statistical data on tourism marketing in Uzbekistan and other developing countries were analyzed.

Tourism has become one of the key sectors of the economy. The analysis results indicate the effectiveness of modernizing this industry in Uzbekistan. The interest of Uzbek citizens in traveling to neighboring countries has remained stable, while resort tourism has nearly

doubled. The interest of foreign tourists in Uzbekistan, particularly in the eastern regions of the country, has increased by 1.5 times. Let's examine the details.

Which Countries Do Uzbeks Visit the Most?

The most frequently visited countries include **Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey**. Less popular exotic destinations include **Chile, the Bahamas, Peru, Ecuador, North Macedonia, and Iceland**. According to VEON AdTech experts, despite the rich culture and natural beauty of these countries, their tourism programs require additional promotion and detailed development.

Additionally, in 2023, the number of Uzbek citizens traveling to resort destinations doubled compared to 2022. Azerbaijan, China, Georgia, Egypt, and Thailand remain popular destinations for Uzbek tourists. Due to simplified air travel regulations and improved international relations, travel to China increased **tenfold**, to Thailand **ninefold**, to Vietnam **tenfold**, and to the Maldives **9.5 times**.

Traditionally, summer remains the peak travel season, with the gender ratio of travelers averaging **75% men and 25% women**.

Where Do Uzbeks Travel Within the Country?

Uzbekistan's population actively engages in domestic tourism. According to statistics, residents of Tashkent travel 25 times more than other citizens of the country.

- Winter tourism: Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara attract thousands of tourists.

- Summer tourism: Fergana surpasses Bukhara in popularity.

About 34% of trips occur on weekdays, suggesting that many are business trips, while 66% are leisure trips, including both visitors and returning residents. Interestingly, unlike international travel, women travel 1.5 times more than men within Uzbekistan. For example, in September-October, 1,472,690 men and 2,023,566 women were recorded as travelers.

Foreign Visitors in Uzbekistan

VEON AdTech experts analyzed the number of mobile devices with foreign SIM cards connected to base stations in **2022 and 2023**. The findings show that interest from foreign tourists in Uzbekistan increased **by 1.5 times**, and the number of inbound tourists was **six times higher** than outbound Uzbek travelers.

- The **busiest tourist seasons** were **April-May and August-September**.

- The main tourist hubs remain **Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara**, known for their **unique cultural and natural attractions**.

- Due to growing **international business ties**, cities in the **Fergana Valley** have entered the **top five most visited locations**.

- **The historic city of Khiva** ranks **eighth** in terms of foreign tourist numbers.

VEON AdTech specialists suggest that Khiva's lower ranking is due to its **remote location** and **limited integration into major tourist routes**.

Geoanalytics data indicate that **Uzbekistan is strengthening its position as a regional tourism hub**, offering diverse travel and leisure opportunities. VEON AdTech's **digital technology-based Beeline Uzbekistan service** also collects **analytical data on finance, retail, and urban development**, which can be useful for infrastructure development, business optimization, and marketing strategy planning.

2. **Qualitative Analysis:** Tourist behavior and the effectiveness of marketing strategies were studied through **interviews and surveys**.

3. **Experimentation:** The impact of marketing strategies on tourism was tested **through experimental methods**.

Results

The results of the study indicate that the tourism sector is one of the fastest-growing industries in the global economy. Its extensive development has become a significant source of revenue for many countries.

According to data from the **United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)**, in **2015**, there were **1.184 billion tourists** worldwide, while by the end of **2016**, this figure had increased to **1.235 billion**, reflecting a **3.9% growth**. The value of export services provided to travelers in **2015** amounted to **approximately \$1.5 trillion USD**. A notable difference in these figures can also be observed in **2016–2017**.

These numbers highlight the fact that the **tourism sector has become one of the most crucial industries** in today's global economy. As a result, many countries are taking extensive measures to **further develop tourism**, establish the necessary infrastructure to meet **international standards**, and increase the flow of tourists.

Tourism Performance in Numbers

In **2015**, the countries that received the highest number of foreign visitors were:

- **France – 83.7 million**
- **United States – 74.8 million**
- **Spain – 65.0 million**
- **China – 55.6 million**
- **Italy – 48.6 million**

Other countries in the **top ten** include **Germany, the United Kingdom, Russia, and Mexico**. However, some of the leading cities in **Europe and Asia** surpass these figures. For example:

- **Hong Kong – 27.7 million**
- **London – 17.4 million**
- **Singapore – 17.1 million**
- **Bangkok – 16.2 million**
- **Paris – 15.0 million**

150th Place Is Not Acceptable for Uzbekistan

Unfortunately, Uzbekistan still lags significantly behind in this field. According to the **World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC)**, Uzbekistan ranks **150th** among all countries in terms of tourist arrivals.

Although Uzbekistan has a **place in the global tourism market**, the country still faces challenges in creating **favorable conditions for tourists**, improving **service quality**, increasing the **attractiveness of tourist sites**, and strengthening **tourism promotion and advertising**. Without addressing these issues, **significant growth in the sector cannot be expected**.

In the **Tourism Competitiveness Index**, which evaluates **140** destinations worldwide based on **cultural resources, affordable infrastructure, tourism product pricing, safety, and international transparency**, Uzbekistan ranks **the lowest among Central Asian countries** and is **not even included in the list**. Meanwhile:

- **Kazakhstan ranks 85th**
- **Kyrgyzstan ranks 116th**
- **Tajikistan ranks 119th**

Tourism Growth in Uzbekistan: A Reality Check

Recently, an official website reported that in the **first half of 2017**, **1.8 million tourists** visited Uzbekistan, reflecting a **17% increase** compared to **2016**. However, this figure seems **somewhat exaggerated**. As someone **working in the tourism sector**, I have reasons to question this statistic, which I will explain throughout this article.

Uzbekistan is actively working on **developing its tourism industry**. But what can be done to **increase tourist arrivals and make Uzbekistan a major attraction?**

Uzbekistan's Untapped Tourism Potential

Uzbekistan possesses a **vast historical and cultural heritage**, with more than **7,300 ancient architectural and archaeological monuments**. Most of these are located in:

- **Samarkand**

- Bukhara
- Khiva
- Shakhrisabz
- Termez
- Kokand
- Tashkent

Over **200** of these historical sites are **recognized by UNESCO** as part of the **World Heritage List**.

Despite such **rich cultural and historical assets**, Uzbekistan struggles to **promote itself globally**. We have **all the necessary resources**, yet we fail to **effectively market our tourism potential**.

For example, **Paris alone** attracts **15 million tourists annually**. Meanwhile, Uzbekistan's approach remains limited to **announcing minor increases in tourist numbers each year**, without achieving substantial growth. **Why can't a country with such high tourism potential reach even a fraction of a single city's success?**

According to **official statistics**, **1.8 million tourists** visited Uzbekistan. However, considering that the **main tourist season runs from mid-March to the end of June**, it is difficult to imagine such a high number of visitors within this period.

Challenges in Uzbekistan's Tourism Infrastructure

Another significant issue is the **lack of sufficient hotels**. The **existing hotels** in Uzbekistan are **almost as expensive as European hotels**, and their prices continue to rise each year.

For comparison:

- **Paris and its surrounding regions** have **4,260 hotels**
- **Uzbekistan, nationwide**, has **only 750 hotels** – **4.5 times fewer**

Tourism's Contribution to Uzbekistan's Economy

Currently, tourism accounts for **only 2% of Uzbekistan's GDP**, which is an **extremely low figure**.

The total number of companies and organizations operating in the tourism sector is **only 433**. This indicates that **major improvements** are needed to fully realize the country's **tourism potential**.

Tourism in the Focus of State Leadership

On December 22 of this year, during his address to the Parliament, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev expressed the following thoughts regarding the tourism industry, along with other sectors:

*"Today, one of the most promising industries that generate high revenues for the national economy is tourism. Uzbekistan is a country with immense potential in the field of tourism worldwide. Our country boasts more than 7,300 cultural heritage sites, nearly 200 of which are included in the UNESCO list.

At the same time, by utilizing our country's unique nature and beautiful recreational areas, we can create new tourist routes. While actively attracting global brands to this sector, we must focus on the development of pilgrimage tourism, ecological, educational, ethnographic, gastronomic, and other tourism sub-sectors. In this regard, we need to take into account that public-private partnership relations open up broad opportunities for the advancement of this sector.

It is necessary to develop and accelerate programs for visiting sacred pilgrimage sites and monuments in cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, and Tashkent. Additionally, we must fully utilize the vast potential of domestic tourism."*

Furthermore, the President's Decree *"On Measures to Ensure the Accelerated Development of the Tourism Sector in the Republic of Uzbekistan"*, dated December 2, 2016, is significant as it aims to eliminate existing shortcomings and develop the sector systematically.

During the expanded session of the Cabinet of Ministers dedicated to the key results of Uzbekistan's socio-economic development in 2016 and the main priorities of the 2017 economic program, the President emphasized that such a highly profitable industry had long been neglected. He underscored the necessity of increasing tourism's contribution to Uzbekistan's economic progress, promoting historical and cultural values, and implementing concrete measures to replenish foreign currency reserves.

A Tourist is an Investment

In his online address to Uzbek ambassadors operating in 33 countries worldwide, the President stressed the importance of attracting foreign investments and tourists to Uzbekistan. He instructed each ambassador to send at least ten tourists to Uzbekistan daily, thereby advancing the idea that *"a tourist is also an investment."*

The President's special attention to tourism, along with all other sectors, undoubtedly serves as a roadmap for eliminating existing problems and accelerating the implementation of reforms in this field. Given Uzbekistan's place among nations with vast tourism potential, we must make maximum use of available opportunities.

European Perceptions of Uzbekistan

Currently, Uzbekistan still struggles to promote itself effectively in foreign countries. Most tourists visiting our country today are brought by tourism agencies. In many European countries, the general public has little to no information about Uzbekistan, and those who do learn about it often do so through travel agencies.

Having worked in the tourism industry and participated in creative meetings in Europe, I frequently engage in conversations with foreign tourists. Since 2014, I have been organizing cultural and educational events in Germany and Switzerland at my own expense. In 2017, as part of the *"Uzbekistan – the Pearl of the Great Silk Road"* project, I conducted events in 27 German cities, attended by more than 1,000 Germans.

During open discussions at these events, many Germans expressed that they had previously held completely different perceptions of Uzbekistan. They pointed out that European mass media—including radio, television, newspapers, magazines, and online publications—rarely provide any information about Uzbekistan, and when they do, it is often negative.

A significant number of Europeans mistakenly believe that because Uzbekistan borders Afghanistan, it is a dangerous travel destination. Even more troubling, some people still perceive Uzbekistan as a Russian colony.

During the events, over ten major German television and radio channels aired programs, and more than 30 printed publications featured positive articles about Uzbekistan.

Historically, Uzbekistan has been a land of great civilization, with leaders like Amir Temur contributing to global progress. Given this rich heritage, it is imperative that we enhance Uzbekistan's international image and intensify promotional efforts to attract more foreign tourists.

For further reading on European perspectives about Uzbekistan, visit the following sources:

- The Paper (China)
- Lonely Planet
- Suitcase Magazine (Print Version coming soon)
- Go Girl Guides (Blog)
- London Evening Standard
- The Travel Magazine
- Huffington Post



- A Piece of Viola

Proposals for Tourism Development

Every reform in Uzbekistan is based on national interests. The ongoing changes in various sectors require dedication from all of us. As a tourism specialist, I propose the following measures to develop the industry and increase the number of tourists:

- **Providing preferential loans to entrepreneurs** who wish to enter the tourism sector and simplifying land acquisition procedures for building hotels that meet international standards. Increasing the number of hotels will boost competition and lower accommodation prices. As tour package costs rise, the number of tourists decreases, prompting them to choose more affordable destinations instead.

- **Enhancing online ticketing services** in collaboration with *Uzbekistan Airways*. In developed countries, no one buys airline tickets from physical offices. Instead, travelers purchase tickets online from the comfort of their homes. Many Europeans have asked me, "Why can't we buy tickets directly from *Uzbekistan Airways*' official website?" Furthermore, if a flight is canceled, there is often no immediate update on the website. Improving this system would significantly boost tourist arrivals.

- **Improving online booking for Uzbekistan Railways tickets.** The current system needs further enhancements. Additionally, purchasing tickets for the *Afrosiyob* high-speed train as part of a large tour group is a significant challenge. Tickets become available 40 days in advance, but by the time one visits the ticket office, availability is already limited.

- **Enhancing efficiency at Tashkent International Airport.** Upon arriving from Frankfurt, I noticed improvements in customs procedures, including separate service counters for foreign visitors and reduced waiting times. However, baggage collection remains an issue, often taking up to an hour. If multiple flights from Russia and Turkey land simultaneously, the situation worsens. Establishing "green lanes" for tourists to expedite their airport exit would significantly improve their experience.

- **Introducing a more welcoming border-crossing experience.** While Uzbekistan is a safe country, tourists should be treated with warmth and respect at border checkpoints. Creating a separate system for foreign visitors that ensures thorough but friendly security checks would greatly enhance their first impressions of our country.

I, like all patriotic citizens of Uzbekistan, support the country's development and believe that national peace and stability are of utmost importance. Implementing these reforms would play a crucial role in strengthening Uzbekistan's position as a global tourism destination.





Figure 1

Discussion

Natijalar shuni ko'rsatdiki, turizm marketingining innovatsion yondashuvlari turistlarni jalb qilish va ularning sodiqligini oshirishda muhim ahamiyatga ega. Raqamli texnologiyalarni keng qo'llash va shaxsiylashtirilgan reklama strategiyalarini ishlab chiqish turistik mahsulotlarning raqobatbardoshligini oshiradi.

Conclusion

The successful implementation of tourism marketing strategies makes a significant contribution to the development of the tourism industry. Utilizing modern marketing methods, promoting through digital platforms, and deeply understanding tourists' demands ensure sustainable growth in the tourism sector.

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