THE CURRENT ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF UZBEKISTAN'S TOURISM POTENTIAL

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https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24412025

Annotation: This article examines the current economic importance of Uzbekistan's tourism potential and its contribution to the country's sustainable economic development. It analyses the role of tourism in increasing national income, attracting domestic and foreign investment, creating new employment opportunities, developing regional economies, expanding service exports and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises. Particular attention is paid to statistical indicators for 2025–2026, the growth of international tourist arrivals and tourism service exports. The article also highlights the importance of preserving historical and cultural heritage as a foundation for strengthening Uzbekistan's position in the international tourism market.

Keywords: tourism potential, economic development, international tourism, national income, foreign investment, employment, regional development, tourism service exports, small and medium-sized enterprises, cultural heritage, sustainable tourism, Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan is home to numerous architectural monuments that form part of the world's cultural heritage. The historic centres of Khiva, Bukhara and Shahrisabz, as well as the historical monuments of ancient Samarkand, have been included in UNESCO's World Heritage List. Furthermore, the folklore ensemble of the Boysun district has been recognised as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

In terms of developing tourism in Uzbekistan and raising it to new levels, cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Shahrisabz and Margilan are of particular importance, as they are rich in ancient cultural and architectural monuments. These cities contain historical landmarks that amaze and fascinate people from all over the world. People living in different countries across the globe dream of visiting these magnificent cities and witnessing their beauty with their own eyes. Uzbekistan is internationally renowned in many countries, particularly for these historically significant cities.

The economic importance of tourism is particularly evident in the growth of international tourist arrivals. According to the National Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan, approximately 11.7 million foreign citizens visited the country for tourism purposes in 2025, representing a 46.8% increase compared with 2024. This growth demonstrates the increasing international interest in Uzbekistan as a tourist destination. The largest numbers of visitors came from neighbouring countries, including Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, while significant numbers also arrived from Russia, Afghanistan, China and Türkiye. These international tourist flows contribute to the development of domestic markets and increase demand for various goods and services.

The positive trend continued in 2026. During January–October 2026, Uzbekistan welcomed 11,622,100 foreign visitors, which was 19.4% more than during the same period of 2025. This figure demonstrates that tourism demand remains strong and that the country continues to strengthen its position in the international tourism market.

One of the most important economic benefits of tourism is its contribution to national income and foreign currency earnings. International visitors spend money on accommodation, transportation, food, entertainment, excursions and shopping. As a result, financial resources enter the national economy and stimulate business activity. According to official statistics, Uzbekistan's tourism service exports reached approximately 4.88 billion US dollars in 2025, accounting for around 50% of total service exports. In January–October 2026, tourism service exports increased further to approximately 6.08 billion US dollars, representing a 49.5% increase compared with the corresponding period of 2025. These figures highlight the growing role of tourism as an important source of foreign exchange and a contributor to the country's export potential.

Another significant contribution of tourism is its ability to attract domestic and foreign investment. The expansion of tourism infrastructure requires the construction of modern hotels, guesthouses, restaurants, entertainment facilities, transport networks and recreational centres. These developments create favourable conditions for investors and entrepreneurs. According to the Tourism Committee of Uzbekistan, during January–November 2025, 421 investment projects were implemented in the tourism sector, creating more than 6,313 new jobs. During the same period, 954 new accommodation facilities began operating, increasing the total number of accommodation establishments to 6,861, with a combined capacity of 183,900 beds. Such developments demonstrate how tourism investment contributes to infrastructure modernisation, business expansion and employment growth.

Employment generation is another important economic function of tourism. The sector provides direct and indirect employment opportunities for thousands of people, including hotel employees, tour guides, drivers, restaurant workers, translators, travel agents and cultural specialists. Furthermore, tourism creates opportunities for young people and women to participate in economic activities and establish their own businesses. In regions where employment opportunities are limited, tourism can become an additional source of income for local communities. The expansion of accommodation facilities, restaurants, tourist attractions and travel services also increases the demand for qualified specialists, encouraging the development of professional education and vocational training.

Tourism also plays a significant role in the economic development of individual regions of Uzbekistan. Cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Shahrisabz and Margilan attract visitors through their historical monuments, traditional architecture, cultural heritage and national customs. At the same time, regions such as Kashkadarya, Surkhandarya, Jizzakh and the Fergana Valley have considerable opportunities for developing ecological, rural, adventure and cultural tourism. The growth of tourist arrivals stimulates regional trade, improves local infrastructure and increases demand for agricultural products, handicrafts, transportation and accommodation services. Consequently, tourism helps distribute economic activity beyond major urban centres and creates additional sources of income for rural communities.

The development of tourism also provides substantial opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises. Local entrepreneurs can establish family guesthouses, restaurants, souvenir

shops, craft workshops, transport services and specialised tour companies. Traditional handicrafts, including pottery, embroidery, carpet weaving, wood carving and silk production, can reach wider markets through tourist demand. For example, visitors to Bukhara, Samarkand and Margilan often purchase locally produced souvenirs and handmade products, providing additional income for artisans and supporting the preservation of traditional production methods. In this way, tourism strengthens entrepreneurship and connects local production with international markets.

Furthermore, international tourism contributes to the diversification of Uzbekistan's export structure. Unlike the export of physical goods, tourism involves the consumption of services within the destination country. Foreign visitors purchase accommodation, meals, transport, cultural experiences and other services, bringing foreign currency directly into the national economy. The growth of tourism service exports in 2025–2026 demonstrates that the sector has become an increasingly important component of Uzbekistan's international economic activity. The development of international air connections, improved transport infrastructure and the introduction of modern digital booking systems further strengthen the country's ability to attract international visitors.

An equally important aspect is the economic relationship between tourism and the preservation of cultural heritage. Historical monuments, museums, architectural complexes and traditional cultural practices represent valuable tourism resources. Their restoration and effective management increase the attractiveness of destinations and generate economic benefits through entrance fees, guided tours and related services. At the same time, tourism encourages local communities to preserve national traditions, traditional architecture, handicrafts and cultural values. Therefore, the protection of cultural heritage should be considered not only a cultural responsibility but also a long-term economic investment in the country's tourism industry.

In conclusion, Uzbekistan's tourism potential represents an important strategic resource for sustainable economic development. The statistical results of 2025–2026 demonstrate the sector's growing contribution to foreign currency earnings, service exports, investment attraction, employment generation and regional economic activity. The increase in international tourist arrivals and tourism service exports indicates that Uzbekistan has significant opportunities to strengthen its position in the global tourism market. However, achieving sustainable results requires further improvements in tourism infrastructure, service quality, international marketing, digital technologies, environmental protection and the professional training of tourism specialists. The effective use of historical, cultural, ecological and recreational resources will enable tourism to become an even more important source of economic growth, entrepreneurship and international cooperation in Uzbekistan.

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