

# PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF PILGRIMAGE TOURISM IN UZBEKISTAN

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**Abstract:** this article discusses the potential and development of religious tourism in Uzbekistan, in particular, informs readers about the cities of Bukhara and Samarkand with many holy places for pilgrimage, such as 7 saints, each of which is described along the excursion route. Because nowadays religious tourism plays important role in the economy of country and sphere of tourism. Also, a number of examples and analysis of festivals, events, and events planned to promote this type of tourism in the destination were brought.

**Keywords:** religious tourism, pilgrimage, Uzbekistan, holly, Muslim, Bukhara, Samarkand, pray, mausoleum, mosque.

## ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ РАЗВИТИЯ ПАЛОМНИЧЕСКОГО ТУРИЗМА В УЗБЕКИСТАНЕ

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**Аннотация:** в этой статье обсуждается потенциал и развитие религиозного туризма в Узбекистане, в частности, рассказывается читателям о городах Бухаре и Самарканде с множеством святых мест для паломничества, таких как 7 пиров, каждое из которых описывается вдоль экскурсионного маршрута. Ведь сегодня религиозный туризм играет важную роль в экономике страны и сфере туризма. Также были приведены ряд примеров и анализ фестивалей, мероприятий и событий, запланированных для продвижения данного вида туризма в дестинации.

**Ключевые слова:** религиозный туризм, паломнический туризм, Узбекистан, святые места, Бухара, Самарканд, мавзолей, мечеть.

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Pilgrimage, a sphere of tourism, is becoming common among people recently. The number of people visiting various places for religious reasons is also increasing rapidly. For instance, as the Oficina de Acogira de Peregrinos (Pilgrims' Welcome Office) informs, the indicative demonstrates just over 50,000 travelers with religious purpose in 2000, while the pattern grew up to approximately 300,000 visitors in 16 years [4].

In the current time, tourism in Uzbekistan is rapidly developing as well. Especially, pilgrimage is becoming popular among tourists, such as pilgrimages in domestic tourism. In 2017 nearly 9 million Uzbek citizens performed a pilgrimage, as the deputy head of the Uzbekistan Tourism Committee, Abdulaziz Akkulov says. Alternatively, the number of foreign pilgrims visiting Uzbekistan was about 2 million in 2017.

Uzbekistan is not only known for pilgrimage, but also in the Islamic world, this country is widely-known with its activists who lived and created popular works [5]. According to the rating of Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) for 2019, Uzbekistan entered the top ten countries which are popular among the members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation [6].

Moreover, a number of projects have been held in order to increase the role of religious tourism in Uzbekistan. One of those is the first international forum on “Ziyarat” (Pilgrimage) tourism which was organized on 21-23 February 2019 in Bukhara, where Mr. Peter Debrine, UNESCO HQ specialist on Sustainable Tourism, attended the forum. There were more than 120 leaders of authoritative organizations of the Islamic world, and religious figures from more than 30 counties.

Uzbekistan owns over 7,000 tangible cultural heritage sites from different areas and periods, including historical centers in Bukhara, Samarkand, Khiva, Shakhrisabz, which are included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Obviously, this creates favorable condition to promote pilgrim tourism as one of the most perspective directions. Additionally, on May 24, International Scientific and Practical Conference: “The renaissance of the pilgrim tourism in the crossroads of the Great Silk Road” organized by the State Committee

for Tourism Development, Samarkand State University, and the “Silk Road” International University of Tourism, was held in Samarkand. According to the Tourism Committee, the number of tourists visiting from Muslim countries to Uzbekistan has sharply increased in 2018 compared to 2017. For instance, the number of Malaysian visitors grew by 66%, while this indicator is 88% for Indonesia [8].

That being said, one of the most popular places for religious tourism is Bukhara, which is also called a Holy place due to a great number of mosques and tombs of Muslim saints. In February 2019, the first international forum on religious tourism was held in Bukhara; subsequently, the Bukhara Declaration on the recognition of Uzbekistan as a center of breakdown was signed. In Bukhara region, there are seven burial places of great Sufi brotherhood of Naqshband -- one of the most influential Sufi brotherhoods in Uzbekistan. Hence, the most popular tour for pilgrims visiting Bukhara is seven sacred places of great Sufi brotherhood of Naqshband. According to the guideline, the tour begins visiting the grave of Sheikh Abdul Abd Al-Khalik Gijduvani who established a school of Sufi in Central Asia, and adhered to the rule that every imam should own a craft. Not far off the Gijduvani's tomb is the Ulugbek Madrasah, and next to that building is a new mosque where visitors can pray [9].

The next place is located in Shafirkan. The name of the saint is Khwaja Muhammad Arif Riwgari who stood on the path of Sufism at an early age, and at the age of 19 he became a teacher of philosophy. However, his “Nafahatul-uns” and “Arifnoma” are the only written evidences about the life of famous Sufi. After reading those books, it becomes clear that he was one of the honorable successors of traditions and practices of “Hajagana”.

The next destination for tourists is the grave of Khoja Mahmud Anzhir Fagnavy, who was a gardener and huge Sufi of his time. Fagnavy was the follower of spiritual Sufi tradition. He was a great master of carpenter's craft by which he made a living. Not far from the grave of the saint, a beautiful mausoleum was erected. The mosque has a well with holy water where pilgrims often come to pray.

The fourth saint is one of the most well-known spiritual mentors who is called the desires performer as well. That person's name is Khoja Azizan, also known as Ali Ramitani. Among people he is known as Azizan – Venerable Sheikh. He was born in 1195 in Kurgan and he was engaged in the craft of weavers. In consequence of him, the Mongol Khans accepted Islam, considering them as miracle craft workers.

The next destination is the grave of great Sufi Babai Samasi who predicted Bahauddin Naqshband's birth. Baba Samasi said about him: “It will take a little time when his fragrance will spread among the whole world and he will become “mushkilgusho” - revealing difficulties”. Today, the tomb of St. Babai Simashi is a place of worship for thousands of Muslims from around the world.

The sixth place is the mausoleum in honor of St. Said Amir al-Kulol that is located in Suhor village. This place has a mosque, a mausoleum and a garden with a flower garden. "Kulol" means "Potter", it was a craft that he owned perfectly.

The tour ends with a visit to the mausoleum of Bahauddin Naqshband, whose birth was predicted by Babai Samasi as well. Naqshband was born in 1318 in Ginduvan. As a spiritual teacher, he was a supporter of asceticism. In his opinion a Sufi must earn for life only by work. He owned several professions like weaver, potter and metal cutter. He became a role model for many vagrants, who following his example, began to earn a living by craft [1].

Additionally, in each place imams speak about interesting facts about the lives of saints. There are also various shops where tourists can find books and objects of religious content. Also, a special road with signs is being built, which leads pilgrims to the graves of seven saints.

On the other hand, Samarkand is another recognizable city in Central Asia which is known as the “Ring of the East” and “The Garden of Saints”. For centuries, this land has been given to the world by Islamic theologians, great scientists and philosophers, whose names are written in the history.

The main religious monument of Samarkand is the mausoleum in honor of al-Bukhari. His full name is Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ismail ibn Ibragim al-Bukhari. Ismail al-Bukhari is the greatest figure in Muslim world, a popular theologian of ninth century who has been respected among Muslims for over thousand years. He is the author of the hadis “Al-Jami as-salih” (“Credible”) which is the second Muslim book after Koran. He was born in Bukhara in 810, but he terminated his life path in Samarkand and was buried in a small village, Hartan, that is 30 km from Samarkand [2].

In addition, the mausoleum of Imam Bukhari in splendor is magnificent in the eastern architecture. The complex which covers a vast territory has a mausoleum, mosques, hotel for tourists, and shops selling souvenirs and religious literature. This place is one of the main pilgrimage monuments in Uzbekistan [10].

Shakhi-Zinda is the place of burial of royal nobility. However, the main mausoleum where the necropolis begins is considered to be the imaginary grave of the cousin of the Prophet Muhammad – Kusama ibn-Abbas. He was called “Shakhi-Zinda” which means “Alive King” in Persian. He was one of the believers who preached Islam in this province, and later this complex became an important pilgrimage site, revered among the people as a shrine. According to a legend, he came with a sermon to Samarkand in 610, where he spent 13 years and he was beheaded by Zoroastrians during prayer.

Kusama ibn-Abbas's burial is a purpose of the visit to Samarkand for many adherents of religious or spiritual tourism. In fact, in the Middle Ages, the pilgrimage to the grave of the "Alive King" was equated with hajj to Mecca. According to legend, the source, which is hammered at the grave of the saint, has healing power [11].

The Rukhabad mausoleum was built in 1380 by the order of Amir Temur over the grave of Islamic theologian and the mystic Sheikh Burhaneddin Sagaraji revered by the contemporaries of Temur. Saragaji made a significant contribution to the spread of Islam among the nomads of Eastern Turkestan. The Islamic theologian had a great influence at the court of the Chinese dynasty "Yuan" and was married to a Chinese princess. The exact date of his death is not established, but it is known that he died in China. After his death, according to Sagaraji's testament, his ashes were transported by his son Abu Said to Samarkand [11].

One of the reasons hindering the development of inbound religious tourism is the lack of awareness of Muslims - potential pilgrims of other countries about the noble places of Uzbekistan. I believe that not every Muslim knows about the shrine of Imam al-Bukhari, the founder of the science of hadith.

It also needs to be mentioned that holy places before gaining independence had been left unknown even for local people. For example, during official visit of Ethiopian President to The Soviet Union in 70th, the president requested to bring him to Imam al-Bukhari's tomb. Former higher Soviet administration wondered, "Who is it and where he was buried?" After an immediate order from the USSR Administration to determine a sacred place in the countryside with the help of local residents, a very modest headstone was found.

Until then, it had been used as the storehouse in one of the rural collective farms. Through the night they cleaned the territory and laid a new asphalt road. Consequently, the interest grew in the works of the Sultan of Hadith and the re-opened shrine respectively [12].

As a conclusion one can say that, the government of Uzbekistan is paying much of their attention to the development of tourism focusing on reconstruction of historic monuments. Currently, many mosques are being built next to the shrines in order to provide comfortable condition for prayers. Also, special tours are created where the main purpose of the visit is the pilgrimage. In addition, due to the rich history of Bukhara, which played a major role in the spread of Islam, there is a great potential for the development of religious tourism. For this reason, Bukhara was declared as the capital of Islamic culture in 2020. Subsequently, a logo was developed specifically for the first International Forum which is being held in Bukhara.

It is expected that this type of tourism will be one of the main sources for the budget of the republic in coming years. Currently, a new infrastructure is being created for the development of pilgrimage, but in order to attract a stream of visitors, it is necessary to pay attention to the state of religious attractions and, of course, to the quality of the service.

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