



PILGRIMAGE AND RELIGIOUS SHRINES OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN: TYPOLOGY, FEATURES AND STATE PROTECTION POLICY

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Annotation

This article examines the pilgrimage and religious sites of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the context of their role in the development of the tourism industry. Using a confessional approach, a classification of monuments relating to the Islamic, Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, and Zoroastrian traditions, which form the country's unique multi-confessional heritage, is conducted. Particular attention is paid to state policy for the preservation of religious monuments: the current legal framework is analyzed, key institutional governance mechanisms are identified, and forms of international cooperation are considered. It is established that a number of Uzbekistan's sites are included on the UNESCO World Heritage List, enhancing their international tourist appeal. The study identifies the characteristic features of Islamic shrines, including their connection with the tradition of "scholarly pilgrimage" and Sufi spiritual heritage. It is concluded that confessional diversity is an important competitive advantage for the country in the global religious tourism market.

Key words: religious tourism, pilgrimage, Uzbekistan, Islamic heritage, shrines, UNESCO, state protection, Sufism, multi-confessionalism.

Introduction

Religious tourism is currently considered one of the most rapidly developing segments of the global tourism industry. According to international organizations, the annual number of trips driven by spiritual and religious motives amounts to hundreds of millions, and the economic impact of this trend reaches significant levels [1]. In scientific literature, religious tourism is defined as a type of travel aimed at satisfying spiritual, religious, and cultural-educational needs, including pilgrimage and visits to sacred sites [2]. The Republic of Uzbekistan occupies an important place in the system of international religious tourism. The country's historical location at the intersection of key trade routes in Eurasia has contributed to the formation of a space for interaction



between various religious traditions. Outstanding Islamic thinkers—Imam al- Bukhari , Imam at-Termizi , and Bahauddin— lived and carried out their scholarly work on its territory. Naqshband , whose spiritual heritage continues to attract pilgrims from various countries [4]. Current statistics indicate an increase in tourist flows: a significant proportion of foreign visitors arrive in the country specifically for religious pilgrimage purposes [3]. The relevance of this study is determined by the growing role of religious tourism in the country's economy, as well as the insufficient development of issues related to the analysis of the multi-confessional nature of pilgrimage resources. The purpose of this article is to systematize the religious shrines of Uzbekistan and analyze state policy for their protection.

1. Islamic pilgrimage sites of Uzbekistan: typology and characteristics

The spread of Islam in the territory of modern Uzbekistan dates back to the 7th–8th centuries. By the 9th–12th centuries, the region of Maverannahr had become one of the leading centers of Islamic science and culture, exerting a significant influence on the development of theological thought [4]. A distinctive feature of pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan is the prevalence of the tradition of ziarat , which involves visiting places associated with the life and work of religious scholars and righteous people. Unlike classical forms of pilgrimage, such as Hajj and Umrah , the spiritual and educational aspect dominates here. Among the most significant sites is the memorial complex of Imam al- Bukhari , the author of one of the most authoritative collections of hadith [5]. The Bahauddin complex also plays a significant role Naqshband , associated with the development of the Sufi tradition. In Tashkent, an important center is the Hazrati Imam complex, which houses one of the oldest copies of the Quran. Several aspects stand out among the key features of Islamic shrines. First, the predominance of "scholarly pilgrimage," associated with the veneration of theologians. Second, the close connection with Sufism, which had a significant influence on the spiritual life of the region. Third, the high architectural value of the monuments, reflecting the artistic traditions of various historical eras [6].



Object	Location	Historical significance	Visitors/year
Imam al- Bukhari Memorial	Samarkand region	The great hadith scholar of the 9th century.	500–700 thousand
Bahauddin Complex Naqshband	Bukhara region	Founder of the Naqshbandi order	200–250 thousand
Hazrati Imam (Hast -Imam)	Tashkent	Koran of Osman 7th century.	300-400 thousand
Zinda complex	Samarkand	The burial of Kusam ibn Abbas	300+ thousand
Al-Hakim at- Termizi Memorial	Termez	Sufi theologian of the 9th century.	50–80 thousand
Ichan-Kala (Khiva)	Khorezm region	Historic Islamic city	400–500 thousand

Source: State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Tourism (2023); author's estimates.

2. Multi-confessional religious heritage

In addition to Islamic shrines, Uzbekistan possesses a significant heritage of other religions, shaped by its historical location on the Silk Road. Buddhist monuments, concentrated primarily in the southern regions of the country, particularly in the Termez region, attest to the important role of Central Asia in the spread of Buddhism [7]. The Christian tradition is represented by both early communities and later



architectural structures, including Orthodox and Catholic churches. The Jewish heritage is linked to the history of Bukharan Jews, as well as functioning synagogues with a centuries-old history [8]. Zoroastrian cultural elements, dating back to the pre-Islamic period, are represented by archaeological finds and museum collections. Thus, the confessional diversity of the religious heritage contributes to the country's attractiveness to tourists and its image as a space for intercultural interaction.

3. State policy in the field of protection of religious shrines

The system for protecting religious heritage in Uzbekistan is based on a set of legal and regulatory acts governing the preservation of cultural values and ensuring freedom of religion [9]. A key area of state policy is the development of religious tourism, enshrined in strategic documents. The institutional system includes a number of government bodies responsible for the management, oversight, and promotion of religious sites. Their interaction ensures a comprehensive approach to the development of this area. Of particular importance is international cooperation, particularly with UNESCO, whose list includes key historical and cultural sites in the country [10]. The state also actively invests in the restoration of monuments and the development of tourism infrastructure, which contributes to an increase in tourist flow [3].

Conclusion

The analysis shows that Uzbekistan's pilgrimage and religious sites form a complex system spanning various historical eras and religious traditions. Islamic shrines associated with the work of prominent theologians occupy a special place, creating a unique model of "intellectual pilgrimage." The confessional diversity of its religious heritage expands the potential for attracting various categories of tourists and strengthens the country's position in the international market. State policy aimed at preserving and developing religious sites creates favorable conditions for the further growth of religious tourism. Prospects for further research lie in an in-depth analysis of tourist flows and the development of specialized tourism products for various pilgrim segments.



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