

Protection, Sharing and Management in the Area of Cultural Heritage and in the Field of Digital History

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Cultural heritage features for digital tourism development in Central Asia (the case of Uzbekistan)

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Abstract

The subject of this article is the rise of the tourism industry in Uzbekistan, focusing on the digital transformation of the tourism sector. Measures in the law documents regarding the digitisation of tourism in the country are discussed. The support provided for startup businesses and new business ideas in the tourism industry is highlighted. Analysis of the online booking of hotels, plane, train and bus tickets, and automobiles for hire, as well as the organisation of virtual tours, was a necessary step in the process of digitising the infrastructure of the industry. The conclusions offer some recommendations for improving the digitisation system in order to increase the tourism potential of Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Central Asia, digital tourism, Uzbekistan, cultural heritage Introduction

1. Introduction

Cultural heritage features play a significant role in promoting tourism development in Central Asia, particularly in countries like Uzbekistan, which boasts a rich historical and cultural legacy. *Historic Cities and Architecture*: Uzbekistan is renowned for its ancient cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara or Khiva, which feature stunning Islamic architecture, including mosques, madrasahs and

mausoleums. Digital platforms can offer virtual tours, interactive maps and detailed information about each architectural marvel, allowing tourists to explore these sites remotely before visiting in person. *Silk Road Heritage*: As a prominent stop along the historic Silk Road, Uzbekistan holds immense cultural significance. Digital tourism initiatives can highlight the Silk Road routes, archaeological sites and trading posts scattered across the country, offering insights into the vibrant exchange of goods, ideas and cultures that occurred along this ancient trade network [1].

Digital tourism development in Central Asia holds significant potential for promoting the region's diverse cultural, historical, and natural attractions while enhancing visitor experiences and stimulating economic growth.

Digital Platforms and Infrastructure: Invest in robust digital platforms and infrastructure to support tourism initiatives, including user-friendly websites, mobile applications and online booking systems. These platforms should offer comprehensive information about tourist destinations, accommodations, transportation options and local attractions.

Virtual Tours and Experiences: Develop virtual tours and immersive experiences that allow travellers to explore Central Asia's cultural heritage sites, historic landmarks and natural wonders from anywhere in the world. Utilise technologies such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and 360-degree videos to provide interactive and engaging experiences.

Multilingual Content and Localisation: Ensure that digital tourism platforms offer multilingual content and localisation features to cater for diverse audiences and facilitate seamless communication with international travellers. Translate website content, navigation menus, and essential information into major languages spoken by tourists worldwide.

2. Digital tourism development in Uzbekistan

During this time of globalisation, our country is going through considerable reforms, the primary focus of which is on digitising a variety of different industries. In particular, the tourism industry is not an exception to this rule. The researchers O. Kononova et al. highlight the significance of digital transformation models in the tourism industry. These models combine contemporary digital technologies such as databases, artificial intelligence, virtual reality and information technology [1]. Uzbekistan is considered in a number of legal texts that address issues related to tourism development. On July 18, 2019, [2]

the law titled *On Tourism* was approved by the Republic of Uzbekistan. During the course of the global spread of the coronavirus pandemic, there was a discernible increase in the propensity toward programming, digitisation and activities that take place in virtual environments across a number of different industry sectors. A directive was issued by the President of the Republic in order to provide assistance to the tourism industry during the pandemic. This directive also lays the legislative groundwork for the digitisation of the tourism sector. Extra subsidies amounting to 1.5 billion soums, [3] will be provided to tour operators in order to encourage the development of new projects and innovative business ideas within the tourism industry. These subsidies will be allocated exclusively for information programmes and services that are intended to improve the convenience of tourists. In accordance with the process of establishing a technology park for software products and information technologies, this is in keeping with the trend. The foundations for support have been laid. Another important legal document concerning the digitisation of the tourism industry in Uzbekistan is the decree prepared by the President on April 26, 2023 [4]. It was titled “On additional measures to rapidly develop the tourism potential of the Republic and further increase the number of domestic and foreign tourists.” Within the realm of the implementation of contemporary information technologies and the digitisation of the sector, the following rules and regulations have been established in accordance with this decision:

- Creating a fully digital system for visitor evaluation using QR codes to establish a unified electronic registry for certifying tourist services and classifying tourism industry facilities and accommodation options.
- Displaying the precise locations of tourist attractions in the Republic, together with their accurately spelled names in Uzbek, Russian and English, as well as providing concise information about them on extensive interactive maps and web apps.
- Non-governmental non-profit organisations and local initiators in the tourism sector can receive up to 5 billion soums annually for projects that involve creating interactive electronic platforms (mobile applications) for trip planning, forming tourist packages and exploring new travel opportunities through a grant allocation system [4].

According to the legal documents that were quoted, the tourism industry is currently undergoing electronic development as part of start-up and innovative projects. Using such technological facilities on their own, without the assistance of specialised travel firms or trip providers, is a very convenient option for travellers. In order to assist the pre-booking of aircraft tickets,

transportation vehicles, hotels and restaurants in Uzbekistan, we have investigated an assortment of electronic platforms and mobile applications that have been specifically built for the country.

Online booking of hotels

Uzbek, Russian and English are the three languages that are supported by the Mybooking.uz website (<https://mybooking.uz/uz>), which provides accessibility to relevant information. The website has information about 725 hotels and gives customers the ability to search for specific accommodations in Uzbekistan based on location, length of stay and room capacity. The online booking system offered by Booking.com supports 45 different languages; however, Uzbek is not one of them. It was determined that there were 395 results for hotels in Samarkand, and these results were classed as such. Through the use of the Mybooking.uz website, 115 hotels were encountered. It is of the utmost importance to improve the effectiveness of the national search system and to include new information into the database.

Reservation of transport vehicles

Multiple smartphone applications have been developed for taxi services in Uzbekistan. Commonly used programs include YandexGo, MyTaxi, Uklon, Milliy Taxi Driver, Taxi Millenium and others. There are limited simple apps available for pre-booking vehicles tailored for cross-country travel. The TravelCars application is one of these electronic advancements. TravelCars is a smartphone application designed for booking transportation services such as cars with drivers, minibuses and buses for travel throughout Uzbekistan. The application contains information in Uzbek, Russian and English, with a total of 32 vehicles available for booking, including 12 cars, 6 minibuses, 3 vans, 3 buses and 8 VIP cars. Another benefit of this electronic advancement is that the program displays information like weather, exchange rates and the most popular destinations by region.

Participate in a virtual tour

United Arab Emirates-based information technology professionals are responsible for the development of the Izi.Travel Guide smartphone application. There are 18 audio-recorded excursion itineraries that cover tourist sites in four cities in Uzbekistan: Tashkent, Bukhara, Samarkand and Nukus. These itineraries contain information about travelling to Uzbekistan. The material consists of audio recordings in both Russian and English. The Uzbek language and other foreign languages that are not identical, but have similarities are being incorporated into practical undertakings in our country. Due to the fact that the projects are still in an incomplete state, it is difficult to obtain information on them.

Airline, train and bus ticket booking

Mobile applications such as EASYBOOKING.UZ, UzBUS, Uzrailway tickets, and Uzbekistan Airways are examples of mobile applications. These platforms are the most popular ones for making reservations for tickets in Uzbekistan.

3. Conclusions

Sustainable Tourism Practices: Promote sustainable tourism practices and responsible travel behaviours through digital platforms and educational campaigns. Raise awareness about environmental conservation, cultural sensitivity and community empowerment to ensure a long-term viability of tourism development in Central Asia. By embracing digital tourism development strategies, Central Asian countries can unlock new opportunities for economic diversification, cultural exchange and sustainable growth while showcasing the region's rich heritage and natural beauty to the world. Collaboration among governments, tourism stakeholders, and technology partners is essential to realising the full potential of digital tourism in Central Asia.

Firstly, for the development of the tourism sector within the framework of the Digital Silk Road, it is advisable to accelerate the joint projects “Silk Road visa”, “One trip – the whole region” carried out by the countries of the region, as well as to create a portal that will combine the history and cultural heritage of Central Asia. In order to further develop economic and cultural ties, implement the concepts of “sustainable tourism” and “smart tourism” in Uzbekistan.

Secondly, *Develop User-Friendly Websites and Apps:* Create user-friendly websites and mobile applications that offer comprehensive information about tourist destinations, accommodations, transportation options, and cultural attractions in multiple languages. Ensure that these platforms are accessible to a wide range of users, including those with disabilities.

Thirdly, *Promote Virtual Tours and Experiences:* Collaborate with tourism stakeholders, cultural institutions and technology partners to develop high-quality virtual tours, 360-degree videos, and immersive experiences that allow travellers to explore Uzbekistan's cultural heritage sites and landmarks remotely. *Offer Multilingual Content and Localisation:* Translate digital tourism content, navigation menus and essential information into major languages spoken by tourists worldwide to cater for international visitors and facilitate seamless communication. *Promote Sustainable Tourism Practices:* Raise awareness about such practices as environmental conservation and cultural

preservation through digital platforms and educational campaigns. Encourage responsible travel behaviour, support eco-friendly initiatives and highlight destinations that prioritise sustainability and community empowerment.

By implementing and improving these proposals, Uzbekistan will be able to strengthen its digital tourism infrastructure, expand its online presence and attract a wide range of travellers interested in exploring the country's rich cultural heritage, historical sites and natural landscapes.

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