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TRAVEL IN THE DIGITAL ERA: NEW OPPORTUNITIES OF MODERN TOURISM IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract
This article analyzes the impact of digital technologies on modern tourism and the new opportunities they create for Uzbekistan. It examines how online platforms, digital marketing, and artificial intelligence can improve tourism services and help travelers plan their trips.

Keywords: Digital tourism, modern tourism, artificial intelligence, unified national tourism platform, online platforms.

Introduction

RAQAMLI DAVRDA SAYOHAT: O'ZBEKISTONDA ZAMONAVIY TURIZMNING YANGI IMKONIYATLARI

Annotatsiya
Ushbu maqolada raqamli texnologiyalarning zamonaviy turizmga ta'siri va ularning O'zbekiston uchun yaratayotgan yangi imkoniyatlari tahlil qilingan. Onlayn platformalar, raqamli marketing va sun'iy intellektning turistik xizmatlarni takomillashtirish hamda sayohatni rejalashtirishdagi yangi imkoniyatlari yoritiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: raqamli turizm, zamonaviy turizm, sun'iy intellekt, yagona milliy turizm platformasi, onlayn platformalar.

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ПУТЕШЕСТВИЕ В ЦИФРОВУЮ ЭПОХУ: НОВЫЕ ВОЗМОЖНОСТИ СОВРЕМЕННОГО ТУРИЗМА В УЗБЕКИСТАНЕ

Аннотация

В данной статье проанализировано влияние цифровых технологий на современный туризм и новые возможности, которые они создают для Узбекистана. Освещаются новые возможности онлайн-платформ, цифрового маркетинга и искусственного интеллекта в совершенствовании туристических услуг и планировании путешествий.

Ключевые слова: цифровой туризм, современный туризм, искусственный интеллект, единая национальная туристическая платформа, онлайн-платформы.

INTRODUCTION

In the first quarter of the 21st century, the tourism industry almost completely abandoned the traditional model and moved to the stage of digital (smart) tourism. Previously, organizing a trip required visiting physical travel agencies, using paper maps and spending a long time collecting information. Today, however, the B2C (business-to-consumer) model dominates the sector. In other words, global algorithms have taken the place of the traditional intermediaries between tourism enterprises and customers. This process has universalized the tourism market and increased the speed of service delivery several times over. According to UN Tourism, in 2025 the number of international tourists grew by 4% to approximately 1.52 billion people, with Europe remaining the largest destination with 793 million tourists. International tourism receipts amounted to approximately 1.9 trillion US dollars, an increase of 5% compared to 2024. Foreign visits to Uzbekistan have also grown significantly in recent years. While in 2020 visits fell to 1.50 million due to the pandemic, by 2024 they had reached 7.96 million, that is, they increased approximately 5.3-fold in four years. In 2025, the number of visits amounted to 11.68 million. Such growth increases the demand for digital services, online booking and promotion in the tourism sector. Digital technologies are increasingly becoming a decisive factor in the development of the industry. UN Tourism member states have decided to

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celebrate World Tourism Day 2026 under the theme "Digital Agenda and Artificial Intelligence". Digital tools are also changing tourist behavior. According to a Booking.com survey of 37,325 travelers in 33 countries, 89% of respondents want the help of artificial intelligence in planning a trip, but only 12% are ready to entrust the decision to it independently. In practice, AI is also becoming a management tool: Brazil's Smart Tour platform analyzes tourist flows, helps manage crowding at destinations, and won the UN Tourism artificial intelligence competition. Digital technologies in tourism did not appear all at once. In a scientific article, Tashov divides the formation of modern tourism infrastructure into six stages. The first stage (1840–1914) is associated with the name of Thomas Cook of Great Britain, who laid the foundation stone of international tourism and started planned travel in 1841. The author cites as Cook's innovations mass travel that included transport, hotel and catering costs, travel on credit, and currency exchange services. Today's online platforms also offer transport, accommodation and other services in one place; in this sense, it can be said that digital technologies are continuing the idea of organized travel through a new medium. According to the author's work, the Computer Reservation System and reservation systems in air transport were created in 1950–1970, and information and communication technologies and the Global Distribution System were widely introduced in 1970–1990. The author describes the last stage, from 2010 to the present, as the period when digital innovative technologies began to be introduced into tourism.

Currently, attention is also being paid to the digitalization of the tourism sector in Uzbekistan. According to official data, Decree No. PF-102 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh.M. Mirziyoyev dated 18.07.2024 "On additional measures aimed at improving tourism infrastructure and further increasing the flow of foreign tourists in the Republic of Uzbekistan" was approved. This direction serves to present information about tourism services in a single system and to make their use more convenient. In addition, the issue of tourism development in Uzbekistan is defined in a number of state documents. Decree No. PF-5611 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh.M. Mirziyoyev dated 05.01.2019 "On additional measures for the accelerated development of tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan" approved the Concept for the development of tourism in 2019–2025. The decree sets out the tasks of

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diversifying tourism services, developing infrastructure, promoting tourism potential and improving statistical record-keeping. Although this concept covered the specified period, its directions concerning infrastructure, service quality and promotion serve as an important context for analyzing tourism. Decree No. PF-87 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh.M. Mirziyoyev dated 15.05.2025 "On measures to increase the role and importance of tourism in the economy by sharply increasing tourist flows and rapidly expanding the scope of tourism services in 2025–2026" presents the digitalization and diversification of tourism services as a separate direction. The adopted decrees define the goals and tasks for tourism development. However, the fact that a task is recorded in a document does not mean that it has been fully implemented in all regions or has produced the same results in practice. Therefore, digital tourism should be assessed not only by the availability of technologies, but also by the convenience of services, the reliability of information and the practical benefit for tourists.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of the study is to analyze the opportunities that digital technologies create for modern tourism on the basis of statistical data, using Uzbekistan as an example. A comprehensive scientific approach was applied in carrying out this research. Analysis (analytical method), comparison (comparative method), the study of documents and the systems approach were chosen as the main methods. In this article, the concepts of modern and digital tourism were examined theoretically, the recent dynamics of global and Uzbek tourism were analyzed, digital infrastructure and tourism platforms were assessed using indirect indicators, and opportunities and risks were identified and proposals were developed. No new survey or interview was conducted for this article. Therefore, the results of the analysis are based not on responses collected from local tourists, but on the content of selected scientific literature and official documents.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In 2025, the number of international tourists was approximately 1.52 billion (+4%), and tourism receipts were approximately 1.9 trillion US dollars (+5%). The growth rate was 34% in 2023, 11% in 2024 and 4% in 2025.

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Table 1. Dynamics of foreign citizens' visits to Uzbekistan

Year	Visits, thousand	Growth compared to the previous year, %
2020	1,504.1	-
2021	1,881.4	+25.1
2022	5,232.8	+178.1
2023	6,626.3	+26.6
2024	7,957.2	+20.1
2025	11,680	+46.8

As can be seen from this table, from 2022 to 2025 the number of foreign visits to Uzbekistan increased every year, rising from 5.23 million to 11.68 million.

Table 2. Inbound tourism consumption and GDP generated in tourism, 2019–2024

Year	Inbound tourism expenditure, million UZS	Growth, %	GDP generated in tourism, billion UZS	Growth, %
2019	11,639,256.2	–	22,293.5	–
2020	2,489,966.3	-78.6	3,469.8	-84.4
2021	4,492,937.0	+80.4	8,208.9	+136.6
2022	17,776,691.7	+295.7	16,064.2	+95.7
2023	25,169,190.0	+41.6	16,330.9	+1.7
2024	34,037,552.0	+35.2	38,139.6	+133.5

As can be seen from the table, in 2020, due to the pandemic, inbound tourism expenditure decreased by 78.6%, and GDP generated in tourism decreased by 84.4%. In 2022, expenditure increased by 295.7%, reaching 17.8 trillion UZS and exceeding the 2019 level. In 2024, expenditure amounted to 34.0 trillion UZS, an increase of approximately 2.9 times compared to 2019. GDP generated in tourism reached 38,139.6 billion UZS in 2024, an increase of 71.1% compared to 2019.

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Table 3. Distribution of visits by country in 2025

Country	Visits	Share, %
Kyrgyzstan	3.3 million	28.3
Tajikistan	2.7 million	23.1
Kazakhstan	2.7 million	23.1
Russia	984.4 thousand	8.4
Afghanistan	476.7 thousand	4.1
Turkmenistan	370 thousand	3.2
China	278.9 thousand	2.4
Türkiye	174.9 thousand	1.5
India	80.8 thousand	0.7
Republic of Korea	46.3 thousand	0.4

As can be seen from the table, the bulk of visits to Uzbekistan come from a few neighboring countries. Kyrgyzstan (28.3%), Tajikistan and Kazakhstan (23.1% each) together account for approximately 74.5%, while the total share of neighboring countries equals 81.8%. Russia ranks fourth with 984.4 thousand visits (8.4%). The share of each of the more distant markets, such as China, Türkiye, India and the Republic of Korea, does not exceed 2.4%, which indicates that the structure of markets is one-sided.

Table 4. Digital and tourism development indicators of Uzbekistan

Indicator	Value
Internet use (share of population), 2025	89.0% (33.1 million people)
Mobile internet download speed (over 12 months), 2025	+53.4% (as of August 2025)
UN E-Government Development Index (EGDI), 2024	0.7999; 63rd place (2022: 0.7265, 69th place; 2020: 0.6665, 87th place)
Telecommunication Infrastructure Index, 2024	0.8769; 68th place (2020: 123rd place)
Online Services Index, 2024	0.7648; 59th place (2020: 46th place)
WEF Travel & Tourism Development Index (TTDI), 2024	78th place / 119 (2019: 94th place)

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Strengths according to the TTDI: price competitiveness (25th place), safety and security (26th), socio-economic impact (33rd), demand sustainability (40th); weak indicators: prioritization of tourism (105th), openness to travel (111th), non-leisure resources (113th). The "Digital Uzbekistan – 2030" strategy envisages Uzbekistan entering the top 30 countries in the UN E-Government ranking by 2030.

Table 5. Digital platforms and AI tools used in tourism

Group	Examples	Function
AI planners	Mindtrip, Layla, Wanderlog	Route planning, booking
Online travel agencies (OTA)	Booking.com, Expedia, Airbnb, Tripadvisor	Booking, prices and reviews
General-purpose AI assistants	ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude	Information, translation, content
AI for business	Dynamic pricing, chatbot, CRM, analytics	Management efficiency
National platform	Unified national tourism platform	Visa, booking, tickets, eSIM, digital guide

The unified national tourism platform was initially planned to be launched in 2025; later, by a presidential resolution, the introduction of the platform and its mobile application was set for 1 July 2026. It envisages a single ticket system, an interactive map, audio and video guides, online booking, an electronic SIM card and integration with the "Safe City" platform. In cooperation with "Mobiuz", it is planned to enable foreign tourists to obtain an eSIM before arrival. In Uzbekistan's hotels, AI is being used to manage occupancy, prices and costs. According to a report of the Ministry of Digital Technologies dated 26 September 2026, First Deputy Minister O. Pekos took part in the "Digital Silk Road" conference organized in partnership with Meta and CoobX. The conference discussed how artificial intelligence, social networks and short videos are changing approaches to promoting tourist destinations. It was noted that travelers' first impression of the country is increasingly formed in the digital environment. Technology alone is not enough to increase tourist flows; developing the digital skills of industry specialists is also important. On 30 March 2026, in Stockholm, representatives of the Embassy of Uzbekistan held a working meeting with Tamer Khayri, CEO of the Swedish company "Your Brand Travel" (Xbrandify). The

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meeting discussed the prospects for developing branded tourism programs along the "Silk Road", including the use of artificial intelligence on the "Xbrandify" platform. At the end of the meeting, the parties agreed to organize a working visit of the company's representatives to Uzbekistan and to jointly develop the "AI Travel" pilot project.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that tourism in Uzbekistan is developing at two different paces. On the one hand, foreign visits rose from 5.23 million in 2022 to 11.68 million in 2025, i.e., they increased approximately 2.2-fold in three years. This growth is much higher than the global figure (+4% in 2025). However, it should be taken into account that 2022 was a low base year. On the other hand, there is no official indicator that expresses the level of digital development of tourism as a single percentage, so the assessment relied on indirect indicators. Internet use has reached 89.0%, the country ranks 63rd in the E-Government Development Index, and its telecommunication infrastructure has risen from 123rd place in 2020 to 68th place. At the same time, the country's position in the Online Services Index fell from 46th to 59th, and in the Local Online Services Index from 56th to 95th. Hence, infrastructure has developed faster than the quality of services, and the main task is not to increase the amount of technology, but to improve the convenience of its use and its quality in the regions. It should also be remembered that the E-Government Development Index evaluates public services rather than tourism, so it reflects only the general digital environment.

These international results confirm that the issue of security is of particular importance in Uzbekistan, where identification via MyID and the integration of multiple information systems are planned within the unified national platform. According to the Booking.com survey, 89% of travelers want AI assistance, but only 12% are ready to entrust the decision to it; that is, AI is perceived as an auxiliary tool rather than a substitute for humans. Since international results cannot be directly applied to tourists in Uzbekistan, they are presented for comparison only.

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