

The Way for Tourism Revival in Uzbekistan

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ABSTRACT: *The article analyzes the world indicators of tourism development before isolation. The impact and consequences of the global coronavirus pandemic on the tourism industry of Uzbekistan are considered. Niche tourism is presented as the most promising direction for revitalizing and restoring the tourism industry in the country.*

KEYWORDS: Tourism, pandemic, coronavirus, lockdown, crisis, niche tourism.

I. INTRODUCTION

2020 was a year of trials and difficulties for the whole world and affected all sectors of the economy. Living in self-isolation during the pandemic has greatly influenced many areas, including the tourism industry.

Mass tourism has become a phenomenon of the XX century, while the XXI century promised to become the century of tourism according to the calculations of specialists. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) registered 1.5 billion international tourist trips around the world in 2019. The 4% growth over the previous year indicated that tourism was a leading and sustainable sector of the economy. All regions saw an increase in international tourism, with uncertainty surrounding Brexit, the collapse of tour operator Thomas Cook, geopolitical and social tensions, and a downturn in the global economy collectively contributed to a modest slowdown in 2019, compared to an exceptional pace in 2017 and 2018. The Middle East became the fastest growing region in terms of international tourist travel in 2019, nearly double the global average (+ 8%) (Figure 1).

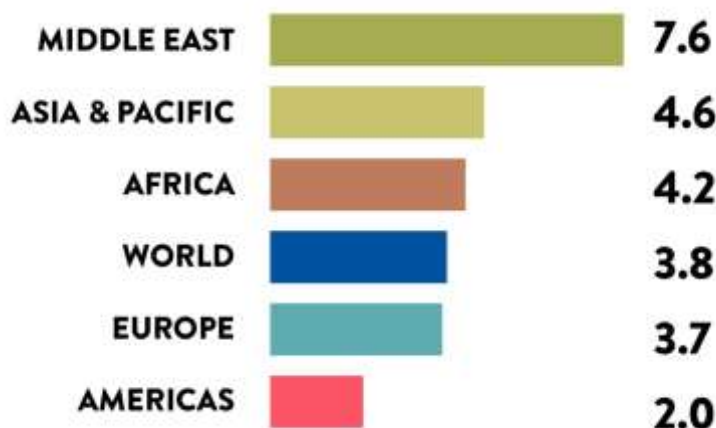


Figure 1. International tourist travel in 2019 - changes by region (%) (Source: (c) World Tourism Organization)

In 2020, the UNWTO Confidence Index predicted an increase from 3% to 4%, with major sporting events expected, including the Tokyo Olympics, and cultural events such as EXPO 2020 in Dubai [1].

However, the sudden announcement of the quarantine has broken the expectations of many countries, tour operators and travelers. Travelers stopped using transport, accommodation booking services, services of guides and translators, eating in cafes and restaurants, going to concerts and other public events.

Governments around the world have had a dual responsibility to prioritize public health while protecting jobs and businesses. The sharp drop in the tourism market has jeopardized the livelihoods of the population. The travel business found itself in a quandary.

II. METHODS

In carrying out the research in this article, comparative and statistical methods were used, as well as methods of analysis and synthesis of the given data in the publication of the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer and the State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for the tourism sector.

The consequences of Covid-19 for international tourism became visible after the report of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The data shows that spending as of May 2020 was already three times the costs associated with the 2009 global economic crisis. As the situation continues to evolve, a United Nations specialized agency has provided the first comprehensive view of the impact of the pandemic on both tourist numbers and lost income, ahead of the upcoming release of the latest information on travel restrictions around the world.

The 2020 edition of the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer shows that the near-total lockdown introduced in response to the pandemic resulted in a 98% decline in international tourists in May compared to 2019. The barometer also shows an increase of 56% year on year. This translates into a 300 million reduction in tourists and a loss of US \$ 320 billion in international tourism revenues, more than three times the losses during the 2009 global economic crisis [1].

Following the example of many, Uzbekistan has been closed to foreign and local tourists since March 16 2020. As a result, more than 1.5 thousand tour operators and 1.2 thousand hotels were forced to suspend their activities.

This seriously affected the incomes of more than 250 thousand people, including guides, translators, artisans, workers of architectural monuments and resort institutions, catering facilities, transport and others.

Table 1.

The number of foreign citizens who entered the Republic of Uzbekistan (for tourism purposes) in 2017 - 2020 (thousand people)

	2018 г.		2019 г.		2020 г.	
	thousand people	increase	thousand people	increase	thousand people	increase
Total arrived foreign citizens	5346,3	198,7 %	6748,5	126 %	1504,1	22,3%

According to official statistics, in the recent years of the introduction of the self-isolation regime, the tourism sector has developed rapidly. The increase in foreign tourists who entered Uzbekistan in 2018 amounted to 198.7%, that is, the number of tourists doubled. In 2017 and 2019 the growth of this indicator was about 30% (table 1). At the end of 2020, the number of tourists decreased by 4.5 times, which was a heavy blow for the entire tourism sector (Figure 2) [5].

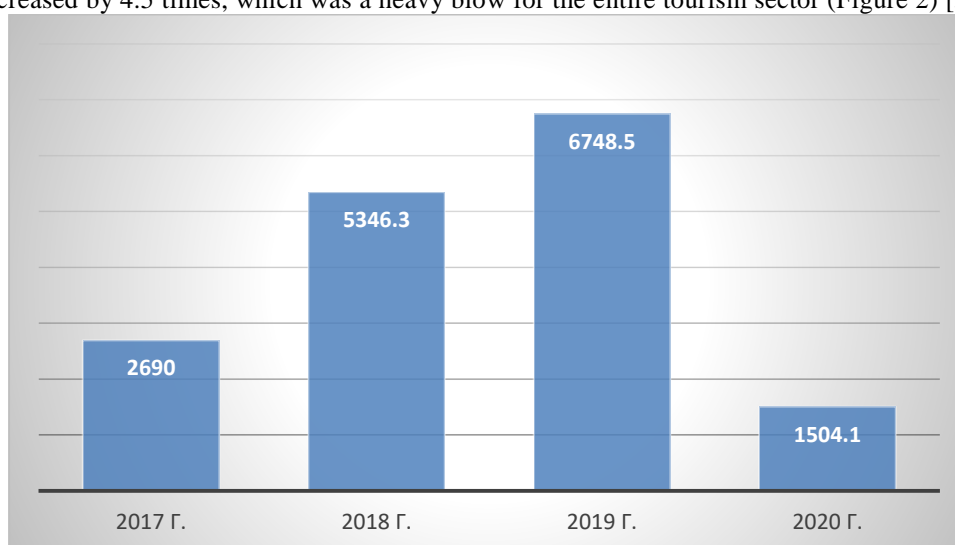


Figure 2. In total, foreign citizens entered Uzbekistan into the Republic of Uzbekistan (for tourism purposes) in 2017-2020. (thousand people).

To mitigate the effects of the pandemic, a number of preferences have been provided by the government to the tourism industry. In particular, 1,750 businesses were provided with privileges on property tax, land and social taxes in the amount of about 60 billion soums. But these benefits and preferences are temporary. Thus, for continuous sustainable development, business needs to learn how to work in a pandemic.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Today there is a question of resuming tourism as soon as it becomes safe. The UNWTO Confidence Index fell to record lows for both January-April 2020 and May-August prospects. Most members of the UNWTO Tourism Expert Group expect international tourism to recover by the second half of 2021.

To revitalize tourism, it is necessary to look for new ways and solutions, and here attention should be paid to niche tourism.

The potential future of world tourism is associated with the development of niche tourism, which occupies narrow segments of the travel market. The niche is primarily specialized tourism (special-interest tourism). Among the types of specialized tourism that have arisen or are already gaining momentum, one can name: photographic, film tourism (according to the filming locations of popular films), retro tourism, geotourism, transport, gastronomic, genealogical tourism. Any hobby can form the basis of specialized travel, generate demand in the tourism market and thus occupy its own niche (archaeological, botanical, sauna, wine, golf tourism, birdwatching or butterflies in their natural habitat, etc.)

A niche is a group of tourism types with a self-explanatory acronym SAVE-tourism (scientific, alternative - (green, soft), volunteer, expeditionary).

The prospects for the growth of niche tourism in the future, including the diversification of specialized travel, are linked to the development of an information society that “produces” more experienced, selective and demanding tourists. It is these tourists who shape the image and profile of the tourists of the future. They will strive for a more personalized experience and specialized tourism based on a specific hobby (special interest) or specific destination [4].

Of particular interest is the possibility of virtual travel. During normal times, Airbnb Experiences offers live tours, lectures, workshops and other host-led learning and entertainment activities, from a Roman grandmother's cooking class to a London-based Harry Potter tour.

The closure of borders, the inability to travel, the need to maintain self-isolation and social distance have led to the emergence of Airbnb Online Experiences: now you can make coffee with a professional barista, meditate with a Buddhist monk from Japan, meet penguins, train with Olympians - all online. There are 50 Airbnb virtual projects to choose from, spanning over 30 countries. All activities will be conducted through Zoom, and the cost of participation varies from \$ 1 to \$ 40 [3].

To reanimate the tourism industry, Uzbekistan needs to use the available resources: rich history and culture in the form of ancient monuments; varied and delicious national cuisine; natural resources in the form of mountains, deserts and protected areas of rare animals.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

A group of global experts point to a number of negative risks such as travel restrictions and border closures that are still in place at most destinations, major outbound markets such as the United States and China are dormant, travel-related security concerns, resurgence of the virus and the risks of new bans or curfews. In addition, concerns about the lack of reliable information and the deteriorating economic situation are cited as factors influencing consumer confidence. However, the gradual increase in the number of flights between the countries gives hope in the future for a revival of the tourism sector. And a possible solution in this situation is the development of special types of tourism to attract a new segment of travelers.

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