



Uzbekistan–Turkey: cooperation in the field of pilgrimage tourism

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Abstract. Since 2016, in the era of New Uzbekistan, cooperation relations with the Republic of Turkey, along with those with other countries, have risen to a new stage. Pilgrimage tourism occupies an important place in Uzbekistan–Turkey cooperation. As a result of the measures implemented in this field, significant achievements have been attained. In particular, in recent years the number of visitors coming from Turkey to our country for pilgrimage purposes has increased considerably. This article discusses the cooperation established between the two countries in the field of pilgrimage tourism and the outcomes of these efforts.

Keywords: pilgrimage tourism, tourism infrastructure, sacred sites, international cooperation, visa simplification.

Uzbekistan is one of the countries richest in sacred sites in the world, as this holy land is the eternal resting place of many great figures renowned throughout the Islamic world. At present, there are a total of 622 cultural heritage sites in our country suitable for pilgrimage tourism, of which 595 are related to Islam, 19 to Christianity, and 8 to Buddhism¹. This indicates that Uzbekistan has great potential for the development of pilgrimage tourism.

In order to make effective use of such opportunities, special attention has been paid to the development of pilgrimage tourism in New Uzbekistan. In particular, in August 2017, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan announced the Resolution “On Priority Measures for the Development of the

¹ <https://uzembassy.org.tr/news/1521?language=uz>

Tourism Sector in 2018–2019.” This resolution approved a program of measures aimed at facilitating travel to Uzbekistan and developing tourism infrastructure for the years 2018–2019².

Within the framework of cooperation in pilgrimage tourism in New Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan–Turkey relations have played an important role. During this period, visits of the heads of state of the two countries were carried out. In particular, in October 2017, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan paid a state visit to Turkey, while on April 29 – May 1, 2018, the President of Turkey paid a state visit to our country. During these and other visits, along with agreements in other fields, a number of documents were also signed to promote the development of pilgrimage tourism.

Within the framework of the abovementioned visit of the President of the Republic of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to our country, a memorandum on the development of pilgrimage tourism was signed between the State Committee for Tourism Development, the Committee on Religious Affairs under the Cabinet of Ministers, and the Presidency of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey. This memorandum envisaged large-scale activities to promote pilgrimage tourism in the media, increasing the number of religious and educational events in the tourism sector, as well as organizing international events aimed at conveying the true humanitarian essence of Islam to the global community and preserving and studying Islam’s rich heritage.

In addition, within the framework of the memorandum, it was envisaged to organize familiarization trips between Uzbekistan and Turkey and to present information about their tourism potential, as well as to promote tourism-related information during religious events³.

Within the framework of these agreements, numerous activities were carried out. In particular, in October 2022, the next meeting of the Uzbekistan–Turkey Joint Tourism Commission was held in the city of Antalya, Turkey. At this meeting, representatives of the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Heritage delivered presentation-lectures on the following topics: “Attracting Investments into the Tourism Sector and Turkey’s Experience in Establishing Tourism Zones, Developing Tourist Areas in the Republic,” “Proposals for Cooperation in the Field of Restoration with the Aim of Using Historical Monuments as

² Ўзбекистон Республикаси Президентининг “2018-2019 йилларда туризм соҳасини ривожлантириш бўйича биринчи навбатдаги чора-тадбирлар тўғрисида”ги қарори. <https://lex.uz/docs/3311817>

³ <https://kun.uz/kr/57813270?q=%2F57813270>

Tourism Sites in the Republic of Uzbekistan,” and “The Activities of the International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage ‘Silk Road’”⁴.

During this period, various decrees and resolutions were also adopted in our country to develop pilgrimage tourism. Of particular importance was the Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated February 9, 2021, “On Measures for the Further Development of Domestic and Pilgrimage Tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan.” This decree set out numerous tasks aimed at advancing the sector. In cooperation with the Ministry of Transport, the State Committee for Tourism Development, “Uzbekistan Airports” JSC, and “Uzbekistan Railways” JSC, it was instructed within one month to launch new flights on the routes Fergana–Urgench–Fergana, Termez–Urgench–Termez, and Karshi–Urgench–Karshi, as well as to increase the number of Andijan–Khiva–Andijan railway trips. Furthermore, by April 1, 2021, measures were to be taken to establish permanent railway services along the routes Termez–Karshi–Khiva, Khiva–Urgench–Nukus, and Termez–Karshi–Samarkand, among others⁵.

In these years, efforts were made to promote Uzbekistan’s pilgrimage tourism potential abroad in a targeted manner. In particular, Annex 3 of the aforementioned Presidential Decree approved a plan of measures for the targeted promotion of the pilgrimage tourism potential of the Republic of Uzbekistan in foreign countries. Within this plan, a specific list was drawn up for visitors coming from the Republic of Turkey for pilgrimage purposes. The “Seven Pirs” pilgrimage site, the mausoleums of Imam Maturidi and Abu Muin Nasafi, the mausoleums of Imam Bukhari and Imam Termizi, the Hazrati Imam Complex (Quran of Uthman), as well as the Zangiota and Suzuk-ota pilgrimage sites, were included in the list of routes and pilgrimage tourism destinations to be promoted among tourists from Turkey⁶.

In order to ensure the implementation of this decree, on February 24, 2021, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan adopted the Resolution “On Additional Measures for the Development of Domestic and Pilgrimage Tourism.” On the basis of this resolution, a number of programs aimed at advancing the sector were approved. Among them are: a list of cultural heritage sites with high tourism potential where conditions are planned to be created for visitors; a program for the priority restoration of cultural heritage sites to be included in pilgrimage tourism routes for the years 2021–2025; a “Roadmap” for receiving foreign tourists from distant countries and neighboring republics and creating favorable conditions for them; a list of films about scholars and

⁴ <https://yuz.uz/news/ozbekiston--turkiya-turizm-qoshma-komissiyasining-navbatdagi-yigilishi-bolib-otdi>

⁵ <https://lex.uz/docs/5283956>

⁶ <https://lex.uz/docs/5283956>

pilgrimage sites to be translated into foreign languages and widely promoted; and a regulation on reimbursing part of the expenses of socially significant travel routes across Uzbekistan from the state budget of the Republic of Uzbekistan, among others⁷. The implementation of these documents played an important role in attracting a larger number of tourists, including from the Republic of Turkey, as well as from other countries⁸.

At the same time, on July 29, 2022, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan announced the Resolution “On Measures for the Rapid Development of Cooperation with Turkic States in the Field of Tourism.” On the basis of this resolution, the “Tabarruk Ziyorat” (Blessed Pilgrimage) tourism concept and an action plan for its implementation within the Turkic world were approved. The resolution outlined the organization, once every two years in the city of Margilan, of an exhibition and scientific conference on the topic “The Importance of Margilan Silk Fabrics in the International Market,” as well as the “Lavender” Festival, and the International “Turkic-speaking Youth” Festival for higher education institutions and young people in cooperation with the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY). In addition, it was determined to organize the international media tour “Tabarruk Ziyorat” for entrepreneurs, media representatives, journalists, and bloggers from Turkic states, along with B2B format meetings within its framework⁹. The inclusion of these and other tasks in the resolution played an important role in further developing cooperation in the field of pilgrimage tourism with the countries of the Turkic world. A number of efforts were also undertaken to introduce this concept more closely to partner organizations in Turkey. In particular, as a result of negotiations with the management of “TRT-Avaz,” a television channel considered prestigious not only in Turkey but throughout the entire Turkic world, an agreement was reached to create a series of programs titled “Tabarruk Ziyorat – The Golden Chain” to widely highlight our country’s historical contribution to the spiritual world of the Turkic peoples. Within the framework of this program, it was planned that one of Turkey’s leading Islamic scholars, Professor Cevat Akşit, would participate as the host and, while narrating in detail the lives of the great scholars born in the cradles of Tashkent, Samarkand, Termez, and Bukhara, present to Turkish audiences the issues reflected in the “Tabarruk Ziyorat” tourism concept¹⁰.

⁷ <https://lex.uz/docs/5315060?ONDATE=09.01.2023>

⁸ Lex.uz

⁹ <https://lex.uz/uz/docs/6137065>

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https://uzbekembassy.com.my/uzb/news_press/sayyohlik/uzbekistonning_tabarruk_ziyorat_turizm_konepiyasi_turkiyada_katta_qiziqish_uygotmoqda.html

Thanks to these and other measures, the promotion of Uzbekistan's pilgrimage tourism potential in Turkey was carried out on a wide scale. In particular, during the holy month of Ramadan, broadcasts about the historical cities of our country were organized on Turkey's "TRT-Avaz" channel and Uzbekistan's "Samarkand-TV" channel. On "TRT-Avaz," the program *"The Essence of the Word in Turkestan"* was aired, while on "Samarkand-TV," the programs *"Saharlik Majlisi"* and *"Before Iftar"* were broadcast during prime time throughout the entire month of Ramadan. These programs provided information about our country's historical and sacred pilgrimage sites, the renowned scholars of the Islamic world who emerged from Mawarannahr, as well as the recent efforts made in preserving and improving Uzbekistan's ancient pilgrimage destinations¹¹. The broadcasting of these television projects played an important role in promoting Uzbekistan's pilgrimage tourism potential in Turkey. In addition to well-known television channels, daily newspapers also contributed to the promotion of our country's pilgrimage tourism potential. In particular, in July 2021, Turkey's prestigious newspaper *Turkiye* published an article titled "Uzbekistan is Becoming a Tourism Star." The article discussed the reforms carried out in Uzbekistan between 2016 and 2021, the measures taken to turn the country into a leading state in Asia's tourism sector, and the outcomes achieved. At the same time, the article emphasized religious and historical aspects, noting the development of routes designed for tourists from Islamic countries, the creation of new tourism projects and products, and in particular, the introduction of tourism packages called "Seven Pirs," which include the pilgrimage sites of seven great spiritual mentors whose mausoleums are located in Bukhara, among other initiatives¹². Such initiatives served as an important factor in presenting Uzbekistan's pilgrimage tourism opportunities to the wider public. As a result of the work carried out in recent years, significant achievements have been made. In particular, during these years, Turkish specialists were involved in the development of pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan. Among the countries with Muslim populations, citizens of Turkey showed the greatest interest in Uzbekistan's cultural, historical, and ancient landmarks. Consequently, in 2023, more than 100,000 tourists from Turkey visited Uzbekistan.

These efforts continued in the following years. In particular, in February 2025, a meeting was held in Turkey between Mehmet Nuri Ersoy, Minister of Culture and Tourism of Turkey, and Aziz Abdukhakimov, Minister of Ecology, Environmental Protection, and Climate Change of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

¹¹ <https://islom.uz/maqola/23370>

¹² <https://mirarabmadrasa.uz/uz/news/23>

During the meeting, the “Memorandum of Understanding and Action Plan in the Field of Tourism between the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey and the Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection, and Climate Change of the Republic of Uzbekistan” was signed. According to this agreement, it was planned to increase the number of flights between the two countries and to raise the number of tourists to 1 million¹³.

In conclusion, it can be said that in New Uzbekistan, tourism has been declared one of the key sectors of the national economy. For this reason, efforts have been made to develop pilgrimage tourism, one of the important branches of tourism, and to promote it on a global scale. In this regard, cooperation with the Republic of Turkey has been of great importance. In particular, in recent years, Uzbekistan–Turkey cooperation in the field of pilgrimage tourism has been further strengthened, Turkey’s experience in tourism development has been studied, and scientific cooperation in this area has also expanded. At the same time, significant work has been carried out to promote Uzbekistan’s pilgrimage tourism potential in Turkey. These and other factors have led to a significant increase in the number of visitors coming to the sacred sites of our country.



¹³ <http://m.xabar.uz/siyosat/turkiya-va-ozbekiston-ortasida-turizm-sohasida>