

## **Promising measures for the development of sustainable tourism in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic**

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### **Abstract**

The growth of tourism is of great economic importance for the least developed countries. In about half of these countries, tourism accounts for over 40% of GDP and is the most important source of foreign exchange. In addition to the source of foreign exchange for destinations and job creation, the tourism sector has other positive direct and indirect impacts on the global economy, such as providing incentives to trade for small, medium and micro-sized enterprises, income growth and entrepreneurship (especially in the service sector). These activities also generate new public infrastructure, preserve and finance the preservation of natural and cultural heritage. Practical flagship projects around the world demonstrate the positive changes that can be achieved through sustainable tourism practices, making tourism an exemplary sector for the green economy. Greening the tourism sector strengthens its employment potential with increased recruitment of local personnel and increased opportunities for tourism oriented towards local culture and natural environment. The impact of tourism on the country's economy can be considered, in addition to the positive aspects of tourism growth, there are significant risks in terms of the deterioration of the socio-cultural, economic and environmental assets of destinations around the world.

**Keywords:** tourism sector, tourism growth, destination, socio-cultural, economic, sustainable methods of tourism, tourist destinations, greening, indirect impacts, employment potential.

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## Introduction

Today, tourism is one of the most profitable industries. From year to year in the world there is a steady trend of growth in the number of international tourists. For example, in 2018, this figure reached 1.4 billion, and tourist exports amounted to 1.7 trillion US dollars. [2] Thus, a country with tourism potential is simply obliged to develop the tourism industry. Uzbekistan, of course, is one of such countries. The adopted resolution emphasizes the importance of the efforts made by the Central Asian countries to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, various international events for the further development of sustainable tourism in the region, as well as the measures taken by the Central Asian States to widely attract international finance and investment to their tourism sector. According to the document, the passage of the Great Silk Road through Central Asia and the efforts of the Central Asian countries to promote tourism in the world markets contribute to the growth of interest of foreign tourists to the region. [3]

In addition, in the resolution, the Member States welcome the significant practical contribution of the Central Asian countries to strengthening regional stability and sustainable development, and express their full support for the efforts and initiatives aimed at strengthening economic cooperation in the region. It is noteworthy that the UN General Assembly invites Member States, other stakeholders and the World Tourism Organization to support the activities carried out by the countries of Central Asia in order to promote the development of sustainable tourism in the region and in this regard. The document encourages Member States to participate in major events held in the field of sustainable tourism in Central Asia, which can contribute to its development in the region. The unanimous adoption of this resolution by the UN General Assembly is a clear indicator of the full support of the international community for the state policy of the leadership of Uzbekistan on the development of tourism, strengthening good-neighborly relations between the countries of Central Asia on the basis of deepening ties in the fields of science, technology, innovation and tourism. [2]

## Main part

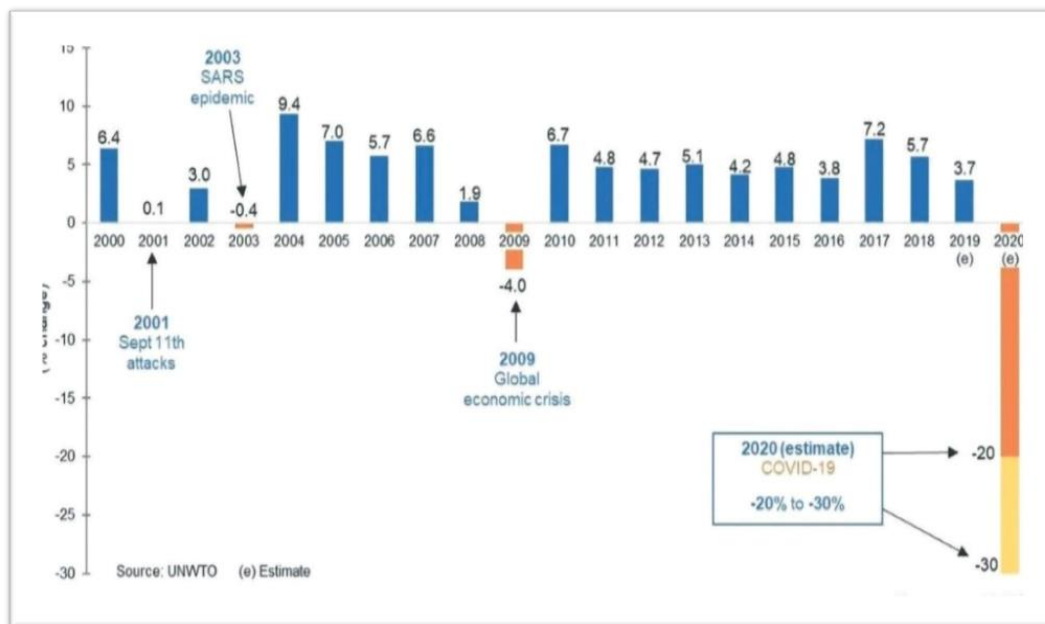
UNWTO Secretary General invited Uzbekistan to join the new tourism campaign UNWTO invites Uzbekistan to join the gastronomic company by presenting the country's traditional dish and make a special contribution to the development of the company involving a large number of countries and tourist destinations around the world. This is stated in the letter of the Secretary General of UNWTO (World Tourism Organization) Zurab Pololikashvili to the Chairman of the State Tourism Committee Aziz Abdukhakimov. The letter states that: "Gastronomy is much more than just cooking, just as tourism is much more than just traveling. I invite you to join the gastronomic company by presenting one of the traditional dishes of your country." As the UNWTO Secretary-General points out, this will provide an opportunity to remind the world of the key values that determine the resilience of tourism: from discovering and respecting different cultures, to protecting the environment, promoting decent jobs and contributing to sustainable development. [2]

According to him, among these values, gastronomy occupies a high position as a reflection of culture, heritage, traditions and conveys a sense of community. "While millions of people are sitting at home, we can help them get closer to the tourist destination of their dreams through the taste of local dishes. This is a new project planned by UNWTO to be launched within the framework of the company "Journey of Tomorrow", - the letter says. Since tourism is one of the sectors most affected by the crisis, it is important at this time to address the problems associated with the coronavirus together together and in solidarity, paying special attention to the human

resources of the industry. This is the main goal of the company "Journey of Tomorrow", which will be launched at the end of April. It should be noted that this is the second letter from the UNWTO Secretary-General, Z. Pololikashvili A. Abdulkhakimov during the pandemic.

The first letter contained recommendations for mitigating the consequences of the situation. This demonstrates the close and reliable relations between the World Tourism Organization and the State Committee for Tourism Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The parties regularly exchange views on mitigating the effects of the coronavirus and further developing cooperation during this period. This cooperation will certainly be effective in a new approach to the concept of tourism in the context of the pandemic and its consequences, the development of new tourist products in our country, the development of certain types of tourism. [2]

In the current conditions of the global coronavirus pandemic, there is no doubt that all sectors of the national economy are experiencing numerous economic difficulties associated with the inability to function fully due to an unprecedented drop in consumer demand. Tourism is by far the industry most severely affected by border closures and restrictions on movement between countries. According to the forecasts of the World Tourism Organization (WTO), the number of tourist arrivals in 2020 will decrease by 20-30%, which, in the worst case, will lead to a loss of 1/3, or 300-450 billion. US dollars of global income from international tourism. Although in January of this year, there was a forecast of growth of this indicator by 3-4%.



**Figure 1. Change in the number of international arrivals 2000-2020 y<sup>1</sup>**

Over the past 20 years, there have been only 3 years with a noticeable decrease in the relative value of the number of tourist arrivals: in 2001-due to the terrorist attacks of September 11, in 2003 – due to the SARS epidemic, and in 2009 – due to the global economic crisis. But even in the aggregate, the previous crises did not lead to such economic consequences as the 2020 pandemic will bring. In general, according to the WTO, the negative impact of the coronavirus was reflected in a reduction in international tourist arrivals in the first quarter of 2020 by 67 million and export losses in the amount of 80 billion. US dollars. The leading countries of the tourism

<sup>1</sup> Source: UNWTO

business have already begun to calculate the losses. So, in Italy, their total amount exceeds 20 billion rubles. According to the forecasts of the Ministry of Tourism, the industry will need 1 or even 2 years to return to the pre-crisis level. In view of the rather impressive losses, the tourism industry needs to be restored, and in accordance with the requirements that have arisen in the context of the fight against the pandemic. Many countries have already begun to develop and implement a system of certification of tourist facilities for safety from the epidemic. For example, Spain was one of the first countries to develop and adopt new health protocols for tourism at the state level.

Thus, tourism is beginning to function in the context of a new reality, which involves strengthening control over the strictest possible compliance with sanitary standards to avoid the possibility of a repeat of the pandemic outbreaks. Uzbekistan and its tourism industry have also fully experienced the negative impact of the pandemic. Since the quarantine was announced, more than 1,500 tour operators and 1,200 hotels have suspended their operations, which has reduced the income of more than 250,000 people. The state has taken a number of priority measures to support the industry. In particular, 1,750 economic entities used the privilege of exemption from property and land taxes, which allowed them to avoid spending 60 billion soums. Due to the continuing restrictions on international travel in many countries, WTO experts concluded that domestic tourist demand will recover much faster than international demand.[4]

To the question, what works are being carried out in the field of tourism and sports during the coronavirus pandemic? What new approaches are used in the development of these areas? What new projects are planned? what is being done for the development of tourism and sports at a time when, due to the global pandemic, our country is also taking measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19. It can be safely noted that the State Committee for Tourism Development is currently working on the development of online tourism, support for entrepreneurs and startups, and the Ministry of Physical Culture and Sports has already begun work on the active development of distance sports and promotion of a healthy lifestyle. Also, in cooperation with the Association of Private Tourism Organizations of Uzbekistan (ACTO), the Association of Chefs, the Gastronomic Association, free online courses and webinars are organized to improve the skills of staff and specialists. A number of representatives of the tourism business contribute to the fight against coronavirus and participate in various charity events. In addition, the State Committee for Tourism Development, together with the APTO and the National PR Center, develops a strategy for promoting the national product abroad. According to him, after the end of the quarantine period, it is planned to organize a Road-show in Europe and the CIS. Currently, the State Committee for Tourism Development and the National PR Center under it are working on the launch of the website [online-tourism.uz](http://online-tourism.uz), which will allow you to make virtual tourist trips around Uzbekistan. This will be the first platform offering virtual travel in our country. [5]

In the current difficult period, it is important to strengthen the promotion of tourism in Uzbekistan. This will allow tourists to plan their trips in advance without leaving their homes. The new site is expected to be launched in the coming days. What kind of directions does the site include? [Online-tourism.uz](http://Online-tourism.uz). - According to the concept, this site will mainly work in three directions: 1. For tourists. That is, it will allow you to make virtual tours throughout Uzbekistan. To date, cooperation has already begun with museums and other tourist sites to launch virtual tours. [4]

We would like to take this opportunity to engage our talented specialists working in this field and organize online tours together. At the same time, we encourage the owners of cafes, restaurants and other tourist sites to take the necessary measures to launch a virtual tour, as this will allow tourists to choose the most suitable place for them right now. If representatives of the tourism business have some difficulties in this regard, the necessary tips and recommendations

will be presented on the website [online-tourism.uz](http://online-tourism.uz). For representatives of the tourism sector, cooperation with hotel owners and managers, tour operators, guest houses, guides, etc. will be strengthened, and work will continue on the further development of the industry. The platform will host webinars covering the latest global trends and news, online observations, and online travel guides. Their employment will be ensured during and after the crisis. For startups who want to implement new tourism projects. Information about new tourism development projects and startups will be collected here, online consulting will be launched, and so on. It is planned to allocate grants for the implementation of creative projects.

During the quarantine period, the tourist business is going through difficult times. A lot of support is provided by the state. President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. M. Mirziyoyev, in such a difficult period, does not leave any entrepreneur without attention. In accordance with Presidential Decrees No. 5969 of March 19, 2020 and No. 5978 of April 3, 2020, enterprises, including those in the tourism sector, were granted a number of benefits during the pandemic.[1] Tour operators, travel agents, accommodation facilities are exempt from land tax and property tax until December 31, and pay social tax at a reduced rate (1%); for accommodation facilities, restaurants and other entities with property, the accrual of penalties for property tax, land tax and water use tax has been suspended, and no measures will be taken to collect tax arrears; for individual entrepreneurs associated with the tourism sector (family guest houses, guides, artisans), the income tax levied on individuals has been reduced by 30%, and the calculation of a fixed amount of income tax and social taxes for those who were forced to stop activities during the quarantine period is suspended. [3]

In this case, entrepreneurs can notify the tax authorities online from home about the termination of their activities. Outstanding credit payments (hotels, tour operators, transport and logistics companies) were deferred. In addition, privileges were granted for export-import operations (if the accounts receivable do not exceed 10% of the total annual export, it is allowed to export goods without securing a guarantee payment, one-time import of technological equipment and raw materials in exchange for repayment of accounts receivable for foreign trade operations); the application of a fine for overdue accounts receivable for foreign trade operations (for tourist services sold to foreign partners) was suspended; tax audits were canceled.

The measures taken by the government will prevent further deterioration of the financial situation of business entities, freeing them from tax and credit payments in today's difficult economic conditions. This will help to preserve the activities of enterprises, and at the same time jobs and employment, which is the main goal - to preserve jobs and improve the standard of living of the population. - What is planned to be done after the end of the pandemic. - The State Committee for Tourism Development has developed and sent to the Cabinet of Ministers urgent measures to reduce the negative impact of the emergency situation in the world tourism market on the tourism sector of the country [4].

### **Discussions**

According to them, after the end of the quarantine in Uzbekistan related to the prevention of the spread of coronavirus, it is planned to subsidize start-up projects in the field of tourism, including innovative business ideas, especially those of young people, and their programs aimed at creating amenities for tourists. Uzbekistan has approved a new aid package for the tourism sector affected by the pandemic. This is provided for by the government decree "On the support of tourism industry entities and the development of tourist infrastructure in the economic situation caused by the coronavirus pandemic". In accordance with the document, a part of the following interest expenses on loans of tourism industry entities that exceed the main rate of the Central

Bank, but not more than 10 percentage points, will be reimbursed:

- interest expenses for the period from June 1, 2020 to January 1, 2022 on previously issued loans for the construction of accommodation facilities;
- interest expenses on loans issued to bring them into compliance with the new sanitary and hygienic standards;
- interest expenses for the period from June 1 to December 31, 2020 on loans issued to replenish working capital in the amount of up to 1 billion sum. [1]

Also, interest expenses for the period from March 1 to June 1, 2020 on previously issued loans for the construction of accommodation facilities will be reimbursed in full. These compensations are allocated regardless of the number and volume of loans to tourism industry entities, as well as the number of compensations that were previously issued and / or are being issued. The resolution also approved the Regulation on the temporary procedure for granting subsidies to cover part of the expenses of tour operators, travel agents and accommodation facilities. In accordance with the regulation, subsidies are allocated:

- \* to tour operators-for reimbursement of part of the costs of air and railway tickets;
- \* to tour operators and travel agencies-for each foreign tourist brought to Uzbekistan;
- \* accommodation facilities - for accommodation services (hotel services).

Also, within the framework of the Open Your Land project, it is planned to involve the local population in the process of collecting audio, photo and video materials, and on this basis to expand the register of settlements with the status of "Tourist Village", "Tourist mahalla"and "Tourist aul". At the same time, it is planned to hold the campaign "Plan a trip" and together with the subjects of the tourism sector, measures have been taken to encourage electronic systems to widely promote offers and accept online applications related to travel in Uzbekistan after the pandemic. [5]

### **Conclusions**

It is planned to hold an online contest "New business ideas for tourism", hold social media campaigns " Impressions of Uzbekistan "among foreign tourists and" My Journey " - among local tourists. In cooperation with the National TV and Radio Company, with the involvement of guides, guides and other specialists, programs will be prepared in the areas of "Local History" and "Young Tourist". In addition, it is planned to introduce new benefits to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic.

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