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## The start-up of tourism in Central Asia Case of Uzbekistan

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### ABSTRACT

The paper aims to investigate the status and progress of tourism in Central Asian countries using the example of Uzbekistan tourism industry with special reference to country's tourism infrastructure sectors. As a Silk Road tourism destination and unique cultural, historical, archeological, and natural attractions, Central Asian States (CAS) (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) present important interest and potential for tourists from all over the world. This article makes an overview of the status of tourism industry with the aim of finding out the strategy for developing a program that enhances the strengths that these countries have in the international arena. The results serve to point out key trends and gaps in which to focus future research on this topic and also they might be useful in formulating public policies and strategies for tourism industry development.

**Keywords:** Tourism development, Central Asia, Silk Road tourism, Tourism destination

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the decades, tourism has experienced, continued growth and deepening diversification to become one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. Modern tourism is closely linked to development and encompasses growing several

new destinations. Tourism has become one of the major players in international commerce, and also represents at the same time one of the main income sources for many developing countries. Moreover, the contribution of tourism to economic well-being relies on the quality and the revenues of the tourism offer ("UNWTO Annual Report 2013", 2014). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, the total contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP (Gross Domestic Product) was \$6,630.4 billion (9.3% of GDP) in 2012, and is forecast to rise by 4.4% in 2023. Furthermore, in 2012, the total contribution of Travel & Tourism to employment, including jobs indirectly supported by the industry, was 8.7% of total global employment and this is expected to rise by 2.4% to 337,819,000 jobs in 2023 (*Yearbook of Tourism Statistics.*, 2014).

Over the past several decades, international tourism has been steadily increasing, as well as the importance of the tourism industry for the economy of many countries. Today, the business volume of tourism equals or even surpasses that of oil exports, food products or automobiles. Tourism has become one of the major players in international commerce, and represents at the same time one of the main income sources for many developing countries (Xu, 2013).

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, the former Soviet Asian States (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) present important opportunities to become a major tourist destination in the way of unique cultural, historical, archeological, and natural attractions. After becoming independent, the policy and model of tourism development in these countries was mainly based on improving tourism infrastructure (Coulibaly et al., 2012).

Well-located World Heritage sites of Central Asian States, amusing history of medieval scientists, and undiscovered nature of people make attractive for visitors from all over the world. A vital factor in the history of the southern part of the region was its location astride the most direct trade route between China and Europe, the so-called Silk Route which began to be developed in the Roman times (Kemal Kantarci, Muzaffer Uysal, & Vincent P. Magnini, 2014).

Countries like Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan contain a marvelous and rich untapped tourism interest that has great potential to organize different type of uncommon accomplishments ("Central Asia: Problems and Perspectives of International Tourism: Slavomír Horák," 2014).

As a major Silk Road tourist destination, country possesses exotic tourist potential, distinct monuments of prehistoric times with unique natural landscapes, that may main role to become one of the principal tourist states on the globe. That is why much attention is devoted in Uzbekistan to the development of tourism and expansion of corresponding infrastructure as one of the priority directions of the nation's socio-economic development (Knobloch, 2013).

As independent country, Uzbekistan needs to foster its magnetism as a medieval center and intellectual origin due in part to scholars, philosophers and cultural leaders such as Al-Farabi, Avicenna, Ulugbek, Navoiy, Baburshah and Tamerlane. They have a great contribution to world culture and sciences of mankind which vividly shown in numerous and included works, such as "Canon of Medicine" of Avicenna, "Fundamentals of Astronomy" of Alfraganus, "Baburnama" of Baburshah, and "Divans" of Navaiy which provide imagination of education in the history of the Middle Age's lifestyle, culture, tradition and so on.

In addition, Uzbekistan maintained trade, intellectual and religious contacts with South Asia, the Middle East and Europe. The oasis towns of Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, and

Tashkent mark the famous "Silk Road" over which caravans took the products of Europe to exchange for those of Asia. The 2500<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the ancient cities Bukhara and Khiva and 2750<sup>th</sup> of Samarkand that once was capital city of great Tamerlane make interest of tourists globally.

Moreover, infrastructural proximity such as highways, railways and airports also provides relatively comfortable and ease accessibility to global world through the CA region. There appears to be sufficient resources to expand opportunities for investment in tourism infrastructure at all levels ("The World Factbook," 2014).

"Uzbektourism" as National Tourism Company believes that the flow of tourists are growing ominously, nevertheless this goes hand in hand with an increasing diversification and integration among services, infrastructures and modernization become major tourism destination ("National Company 'UzbekTourism'", 2014).

In this context, the general purpose of this paper is to undertake a review of the potential of tourism and its related industry sectors, with the specific purposes of describing and analyzing the strengths that Uzbekistan and other Central Asia countries can have to develop a global tourist product based on the Silk Road magnet, identifying major past trends, as an approach to better comprehend the existing knowledge of tourism in the region of Central Asia.

## **2. THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN AND ITS POTENTIAL ATTRACTIVENESS**

Since its independence, Uzbekistan has begun to structure and organize its tourism industry. As a result of organizational and structural changes implemented, a new system of state regulation and control was established, preconditions for infrastructure development were created and mechanism of preservation and restoration of cultural and historical attractions were ensured. It is noticeable that, the new institutions and relations at the world tourism market were established almost from scratch.

During these years of independence, the government has done a great job on the revival of the unique heritage of local people, has created the conditions for the development of traditional arts and folk and has restored monuments of history and culture. Thanks to these measures, every year, the tourism potential in the country and requirements for development of tourism and its infrastructure has improved radically and positively.

Globally, tourism, as one of the highlands dynamically developing area of the world economy, plays an important role in strengthening the economic, cultural and political ties between states. Furthermore, Central Asian countries have wonderful opportunity of exploiting their unique cultural and historical heritage, which form the basis of the main resources for the development of tourism. For example, Uzbekistan has more than 4,000 historical and cultural monuments, of which 140 are included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Routes of the Silk Road on the territory of the country are also part of the potential attractions for international tourists.

As the main trade network which considered as the "Supreme route of mankind history", the Silk Road formed the first link between the Asia and Europe and was a crucial trade originator between China, India, Persia and Roman empires. Formed more than 2200 years ago, the route was served as a connection between people and cultures, stimulating the mobility of dialogue, art, religion, ideas and technology. With its significant diversity of

cultural heritage and its treasure of natural tourism attractions covering across 12,000 kilometres of ancient trade network, the Silk Road tourist destinations today offers travellers the opportunity to experience a exotic adventures, following the paths of Alexander the Great and Marco Polo and other world renowned surveyors.

It is noticeable that, in 1993, Uzbekistan joined the World Tourism Organization (WTO). Subsequently in 1994, the WTO meeting held in Samarkand, and “Samarkand declaration” was adopted on tourism in 1999. “Khiva declaration”, which proposed by honoured international organizations, such as UNESCO, UNWTO , Council of Europe and others, calls upon the countries of Central Asia to preserve their cultural and natural heritage. Ongoing establishments stress the benefits of sustainable tourism and outlines specific steps to stimulate cultural and ecological tourism to Silk Road destinations.

Additional issues include an invitation to local and international stakeholders to invest in Silk Road tourism and the endorsement of country’s offer to host a Silk Road Support Office in Samarkand that began operations office of the World Tourism Organization to promote tourism along the Silk Road in 2004 (“Declarations | UNWTO Silk Road Programme,” 2014)

Current programs and investigations by The World Tourism Organizations and other World Heritage Institutions like UNESCO, ICOMOS and UCL have been addressing to maintain the quality and shape of the whole destination through some suggestions for the sides and routes as a part of the transitional Silk Roads World Heritage. The role of this project has involved unprecedented collaboration among member of the destination. The main target of the program is dedicated on specific Silk Road Heritage Corridors crossing Kazakhstan , Kyrgyzstan and China and another one between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan with some proposals (“UNWTO Silk Road Programme,” 2013).

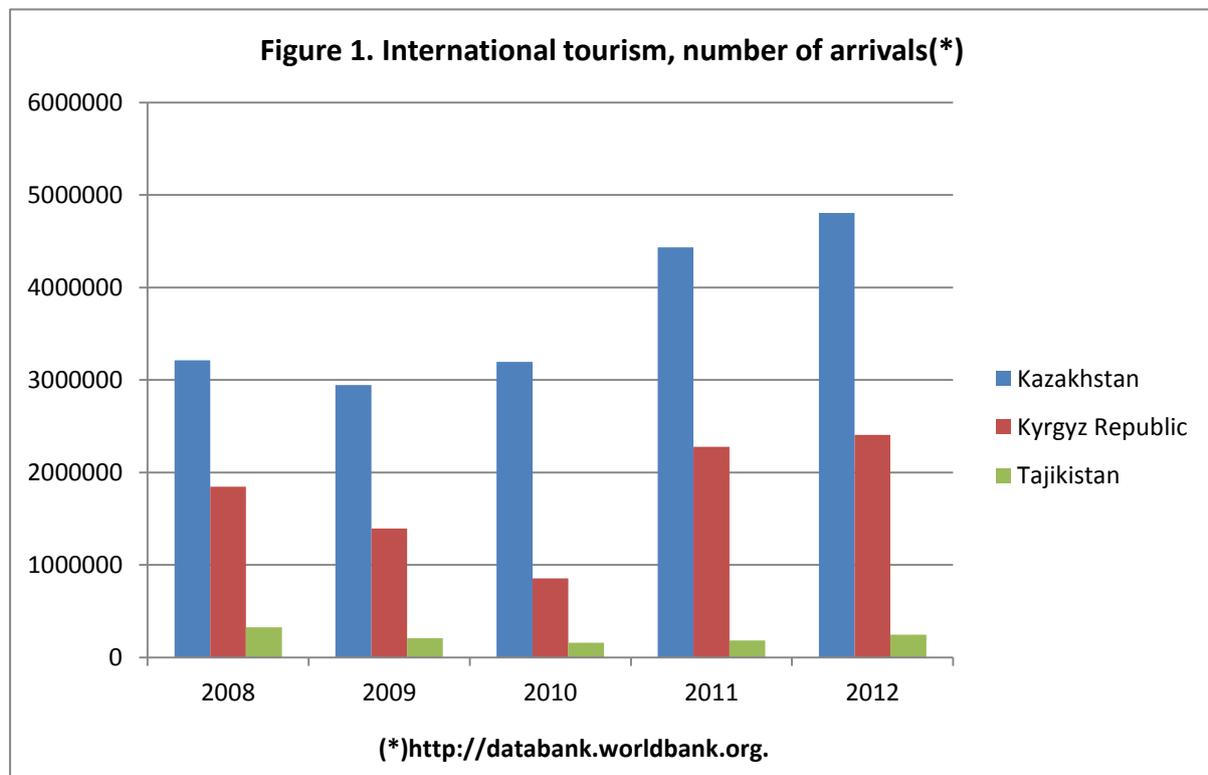
The collaboration of World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the Government of Uzbekistan continued on 8-9 October 2010 when a conference was held with the presence of delegates from over 25 countries in the historic “Registan” Square that (Samarkand). In the conference, there was a debate of the key issues relating to the development of tourism along the Silk Road (“Fifth International Meeting on the Silk Road.,” 2014). Excepting Silk Road tourism destination, Central Asia possesses tourism attractions and resources, there is potential for the development of different types of tourism products. As a main part of tourism packages, following types of tourism are well known among tourism suppliers in country:

- ✓ Ecotourism
- ✓ Extreme tourism
- ✓ Recreational tourism
- ✓ Culinary tourism
- ✓ Sustainable tourism
- ✓ Business tourism
- ✓ Sport tourism
- ✓ Safari
- ✓ Religious tourism
- ✓ Adventure tourism
- ✓ Archaeological tourism
- ✓ Ethnographical tourism
- ✓ Cultural tourism

More and more, in the country located unique sacred places that are valuable for people professing religions such as Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism. These resources could provide an opportunity for further development of religion tourism sector in the area.(Faranda & Nolle, 2011; Kantarci, 2007; UNWTO, 2012b) Also, the availability of a large number of natural treasures like mountains, lakes, rivers, meadow woods, deserts and national gardens can help to develop ecological and adventure tourism in these countries. Furthermore, an increasing number of tour operators are including sport, business and recreational tourism packages to diversify tourism supply (Anthony, Appari, & Johnson, 2014).

Moreover, Culinary Tourism has grown considerably and become one of the most dynamic and creative segments of tourism in recent years. Both destinations and tourism companies are aware of the importance of gastronomy in order to diversify tourism and stimulate local, regional and national economic development (UNWTO, 2012a). As traditions, the unique culture and lifestyle of people, national cuisine of Central Asian countries have great interest for professionals.

With the support of the World Tourism Organization UNWTO, Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and the Association of Private Tourism Organisations and "Uzexpocentre" annually occurring International Uzbek Tourist Fair (IUTF) "World of rest" spring exhibition (UNWTO, 2012a) Even if organized solely in 2013-2014 year, it has already received high praise from the tourist community.



The information confirms high interest of professionals and potential buyers. Total number of exhibitors IUTF "World Holiday 2013" was 45 tourist organizations from 12 countries, while it was more in 2014 with more than 50 exhibitors and visitors that covered

more than 3,000 people (“The World of Leisure’ - 2014,” 2014). Moreover, in order to develop this sector, “World Food Uzbekistan” the country’s largest food exhibition and an ideal professional meeting place for the 5,000 industry figures who visit every year: suppliers, producers, traders, and big names in the domestic and international food industry. (“Food Industry – WorldFood Uzbekistan,” 2014).

In the Central Asian tourism destination rate and quantity of tourism investigation for the development countries are increasing respectively.

The government of Uzbekistan pays great attention for the development of the tourist industry: the development of services is defined as one of the top priorities of socio-economic development of the country. However in 2010 the number of tourists was 975000, totally international tourism arrival tendency of Uzbekistan illustrates overall upward trend since 2000 up today. Based on tourism “National Company” data, a quantity of tourists in Uzbekistan were 1,977,600 in 2013 (Figure 2).



In order to make enhancement of tourism industry, administrative offices of this sector have been conducting lots of job to retrieve and make developments. On this basis, in the short period modified totally, signed agreements with different governments and institutions. From a list of the contracts, it is visible that talks with Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Turkey to Uzbekistan, which considered collaborating in number of aspects of integration in tourism between Uzbekistan and Turkey.

During the meeting, the Turkish side suggested opening direct flights between Turkey and the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara, along with existing routes, also pointed to the need to increase the frequency of Uzbekistan Airways Tashkent-Istanbul flight to intensify tourist

exchange. Both delegates noted that 75 million people in the past year departed from Turkey to different destinations of the world.

According to the fact that both of Uzbek and Turk nations have a same historical roots, culture and inseparable traditions and Silk Road projects, alliance between these states and service providers have some interests on Uzbekistan tourism potential. Furthermore, it is estimated that, even 1% of them was directed to Uzbekistan, this would highly rise tourist circulation between Uzbekistan and Turkey (“UzReport.uz,” 2014).

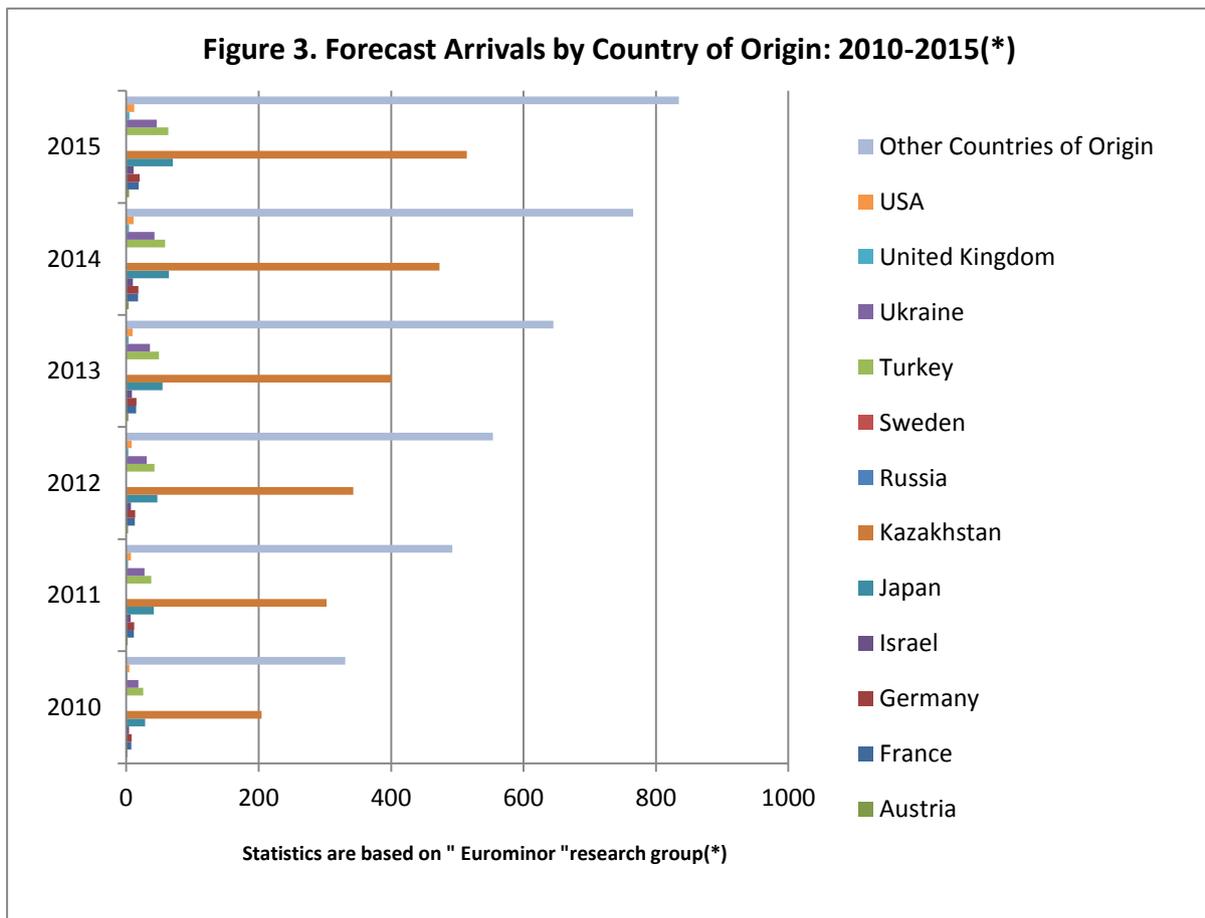


Figure 3, which demonstrate arrivals by country of origin that mostly has visited this destination. The rate of arrivals is obviously revealed upward trends; mainly in the case of Kazakhstan and other unlisted countries of origin from all over the world have expected great deal of tourists in the near future expectation. Furthermore, the number of tourists from Japan, Turkey and Russia have picked up gradually during this period and relatively expected to sharp steadily in the future.

As well as, by 2020 it is predicted that China, Russia, India and the Middle East’s trends will increase more than 200 million tourists annually visiting (Handbook on E-marketing for Tourism Destinations, 2008) . So, as one of the main Silk Road tourism destinations, Central Asian countries could appeal a great deal of visitors from all over the world. As Edgar Knobloch (2013) mentioned, Central Asian countries have great resources and potential for

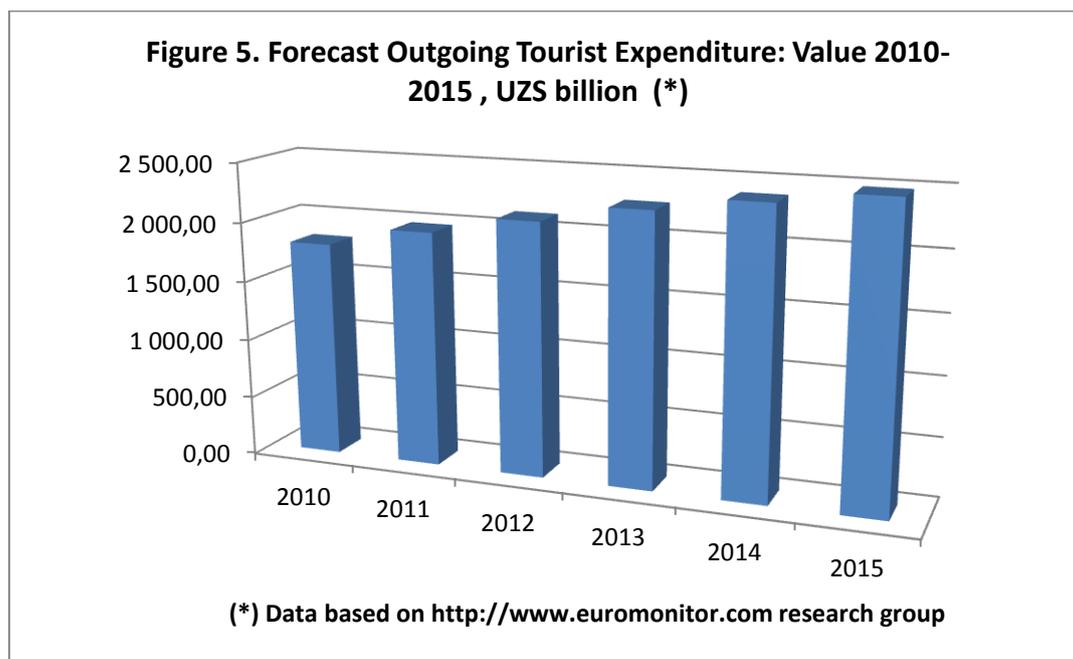
development of tourism, however countries need integration and modernization to become competitive in tourism businesses. The analytical procedures and the results obtained "Tourism Satellite Account" (TSA), tourism exports in January-March 2012 was \$ 119.5 million, while this travel index has totalled \$ 155.5 million the first quarter of 2013, which 30.2% increase compared to the same period in 2012. The table below indicates the volume of tourist services and export of services in Uzbekistan for the first half of 2012-2013 that showed positive difference in both categories.

**Figure 4.** Tourism services indicators of “UzbekTourism” national company

<i>Number</i>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Data for the 1st half of 2012</b>	<b>Data for the 1st half of 2013</b>	<b>Difference +/-</b>
<b>1</b>	The volume of tourist services (UZS)	106836,7	118398,9	+11562,5
<b>2</b>	Exports of services (thousand dollar U.S.)	74020,2	107306,6	+33286,4

Research institution “Euromonitor” that conducts extensive network of strategic analysts in 80 countries and provides the depth of global, national and local business information required in today’s increasingly international business environment conducted analysis of tourism business in Uzbekistan in other Central Asian countries as well.

According to “Euromonitor” and “Uzbektourism” research, future trends of tourist expenditure will probably go up considerably in the near future. The below mentioned data reveals the expenditure of tourist is anticipated to rocket up to 2.481.90 annually by the end of the period. The proliferation of this index in the five -year period from 2010-2015 has known one of the main positive indicator of tourism in country.



### **3. TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE**

Today, international tourist arrivals grew by 5% in 2013 to 1.087 billion, 6% of world exports, 9% of GDP and great deals of employees are in sector of tourism in globally. The role of tourism is a worthwhile prerequisite for the Uzbekistan tourism industry to prepare country for more intensive development.

For this reason, a vast amount of attention is dedicated in Uzbekistan to the tourism advancement and expansion of corresponding infrastructure as one of the priority instructions of the socio-economic deployment of the state. After endorsed in 2013 of the Programs of Tourism Development in Khorezm, Surkhandarya, Tashkent and Kashkadarya provinces, begins new era in the development of national tourism. It is noticeable that, more than US \$260 million is invested to implement in these regions which have a considerable tourist potential.

Hence, directions provided by these programs highlight main ways of organization of projects in order to enhance infrastructure of tourism industry, for instance improvements of engineering facilities by the reconstructing of roads which connect most popular tourist zones all over the state and establishing hotels, restaurants for tourists of different economic prosperity. Remarkably, public and private support in hospitality sector, foresee it's results a sophisticated package of honours for project stakeholders.

Yet, a specific proportion of job is being done to this direction. A series of new accommodations, restaurants and other tourist centres have been erected and number existing ones have been reassembled entire of the country. Besides, the foundation of many new sides is in the creation, and a variety of cultural programmes are introduced for both local and foreign visitors. Wi-Fi communication is implemented in majority of centres of tourism in the state's historical towns and main tourist sightseeing places. Following the current popular tourist routes, many new one are formed in the Republic.

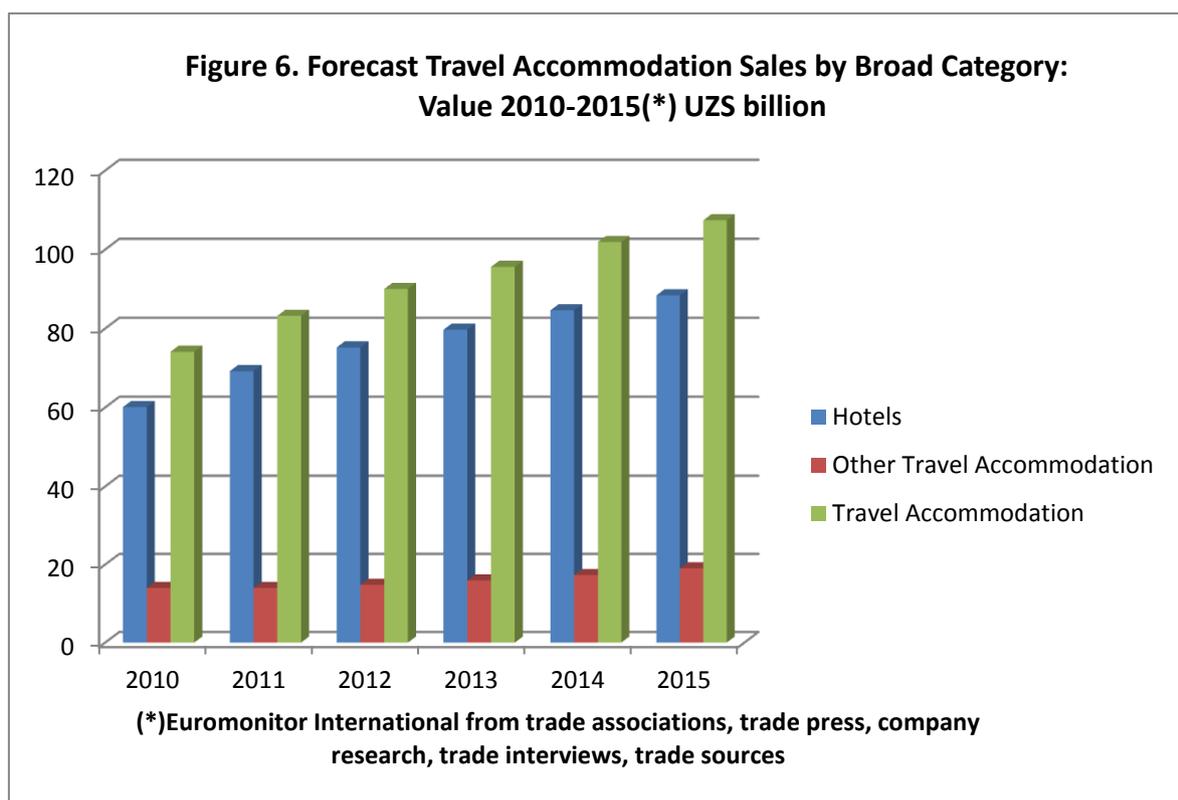
Objectively assessing the situation, it should be noted that government pays considerable attention to the development of tourism. During the years of independent development in Uzbekistan established a legal framework and tourism infrastructure. Today, in the tourism operate more than 900 organizations and companies that have a license for tourist activity (subjects of tourist activity), of which 500 hotels, 371 - travel agencies (tour operators and travel agents), with about 90% of tourism organizations and companies related to the private sector, that affects the formation of a competitive environment in the tourism system to provide tourist services. Air gateway international airports are operating in Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, Urgench, Nukus and Navaiy.

### **4. ACCOMMODATION SERVICES**

Accommodation facilities constitute a vital and fundamental part of tourist supply and important feature of total tourist image of a country. A lot of countries have recognized a vital importance of hotel industry in relation to tourism and have coordinated their activities with the industry by way of providing attractive incentives and concessions to suppliers of tourism accommodation which have resulted in the building up various types of hospitality services. (Bhatia, 2006; Go & Jenkins, 1997; Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011)

Recognizing the key point of accommodation sector in the tourism industry, Uzbekistan hotel industry have established different hospitality facilities and it consists of more than 500 hotels with different forms of ownership. Prior to the annual meeting of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, due to the insufficient number of hotels to accommodate all foreign delegates in Tashkent, the Uzbek government started the development of hotels, which involved the construction of new hotels and the reconstruction of old style hotels.

As a result, a number of luxury international standard hotels appeared in almost all regions of country. Nowadays, the level of privatisation in travel accommodation sector in Uzbekistan is around 97%, whereas at the beginning of independence all properties were fully state-owned. A large number of luxury hotels are either fully-owned or partially owned by the state. For the last three years the government has failed to sell its shares in the hotels Dedeman Silk Road (39%), Grand Mir (35%), Hotel Uzbekistan (58%) and Hotel Markaziy (100%). Due to need of modernization and integration of new way of management, Hotel Registan (Samarkand), Hotel Afrosiyob Palace (Samarkand), Bukhara Palace (Bukhara) and Hotel Shakhrisabz Star (Shakhrisabz) has made modifications both in technical and industrial way.



The common trend in recent years in hotel accommodation in Uzbekistan was the growth in the number of small, privately-owned hotels. Today, the majority of such hotels have on average 50 or more rooms. The attractiveness of building small-sized hotels for the private sector is the amount of investment required to build, the high occupancy rate and relatively low cost of operation. These outlets initially appeared as an alternative to their

international standard counterparts with its traditional design, modern administrative style, cosy and sizeable rooms. Despite the competition from private hotels, luxury hotels are also gaining popularity amongst business travellers. Uzbekistan, by becoming more open to international trade and investment, runs quite a large number of MICE events, the majority of which take place in Tashkent. During the tough times and high competition, such hotels learned to provide additional services such as spas, fitness and MICE facilities, transportation services, tours and many others. According to “Uzbektourism”, the occupancy rate increased throughout 2010 and made up 55%, 2013 it was under 63% annually.

A summary of the main findings and of the principal issues and suggestions which have used from data of different official trade press, company researches and others reveal that the main hospitality services are hotels and travel accommodations in country. The expectations for the future are also projected in upward trends. However, other types of hospitality services are increasing considerably, their distribution in volume of sales is only 19 billion UZS while hotels and travel accommodations show 107.4 and 88.4 billion UZS relatively.

## **5. TRANSPORTATION**

The rapid development of the economic share and foreign trade of Uzbekistan made the rapid improvement of the transport system and the intensification of the transit potential and diversification of the international transport corridors that also vital factor for tourism sector as a main. Over the past 23 years, since Uzbekistan gained its independence, the regularity of main transport facilities, such as air and railway systems, by the formation of costs, have increased exponentially number of visitor for both inner and outer purposes. On this basis, implementing of new technologies on transport facilities, such as commencement of Afrasiab high-speed train, produced by Spanish “Talgo” and operating between Tashkent and Samarkand as well as Afsona train which challenge individual requests from tourist agencies, has facilitated by latest equipment and make arduous work to improve transport system.

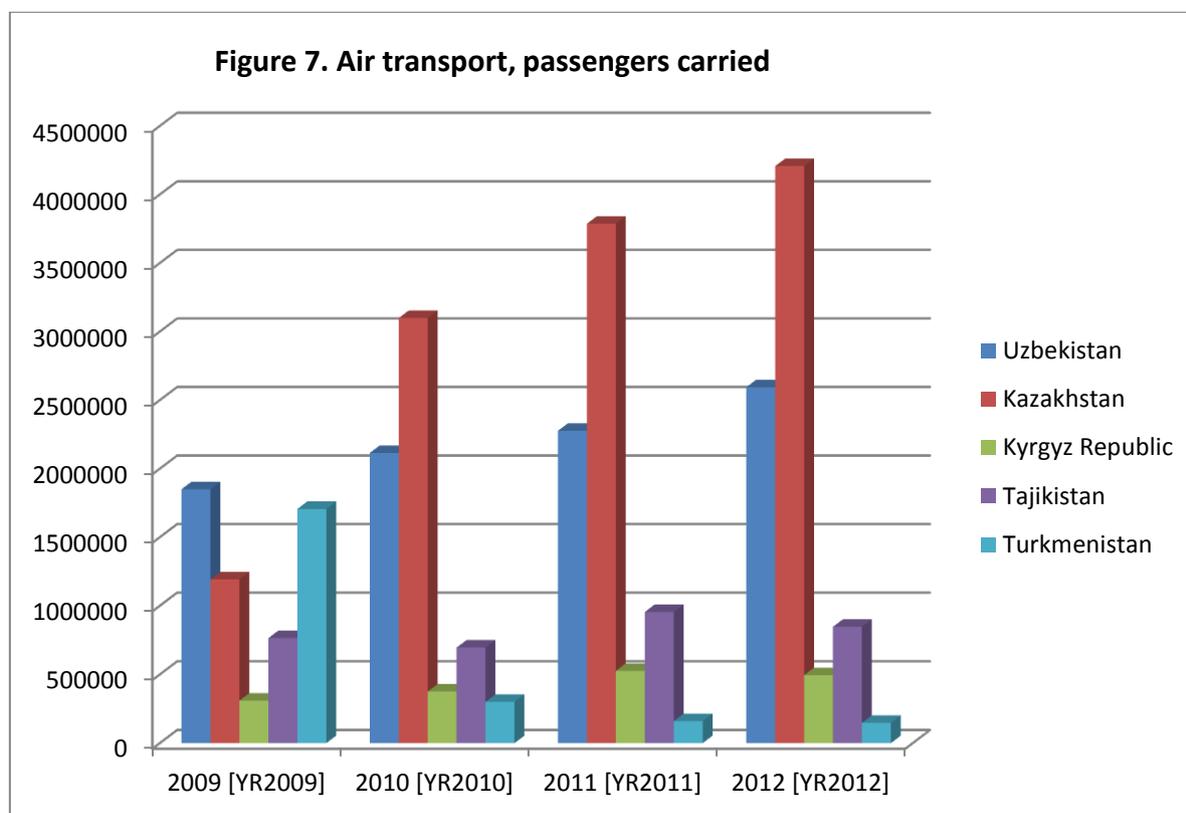
As the first high-speed line in Central Asia, it has contributed to the modernisation and economic deployment of the country. Furthermore, according to plans proposed by the national railway company of Uzbekistan, in the nearer future will extend to some other regions of country, such as Bukhara and Khiva, as a result of the project which mentioned above, main ancient cities of Uzbekistan will be connected with contemporary transport system and will served as a promotion of new tour products for traveller of all range. From information provided by head of Uzbekistan Railways, it can be noticed that State will spend US \$4 billion for further advancement of railway system in country by 2015 and as one of the major railway corridor of Asia Uzbekistan has started to establish 230 km of railway which connect Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran with Republic.

The main step of implementing this project has done in October 2012, when two competent bodies of Uzbekistan and Iran on this sphere signed a memorandum of cooperation in developing existing and establishing new railway links between two countries. In addition to this, Uzbekistan will electrify about 1,000 km of railways, according to the Investment Plan 2011-2015. In August 2011 finally has considered the 75 km railway line which connect Uzbek Hairatan city with Mazar-i-Sharif in Afghanistan. Developed by Uzbekistan Railways, this line was focused only on freight traffic and anticipated organizing passenger carrying in the short-term perspective.

Moreover, Uzbekistan Railways plans to build railways to link the national network to other two Afghan cities, Kabul (the capital) and Kandahar. Moreover, the modernisation of the 356-km line to allow trains to run at higher speeds has required investments of USD 100 Million (EUR 71 Million). The project has also included investments in the modernisation of railway stations. The new trains reduce three times the current 3.5-hour travel time that could be replaced with other tourism products in Uzbekistan. It is obviously can be faced that, in the Republic of Uzbekistan up-to-date means of transport industry, such as cars, buses and taxis, trams, trolleys, subways, monorails are underlined as an some example of them.

## 6. AIRPORTS

It is noticeable that, international airports are operating in provinces such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Urgench, Nukus and Navaiy , but Tashkent international airport, considers as primary arrival point for foreign visitors to Uzbekistan. UNWTO analyses that, international airports of country have been renovated and now operate with new navigation equipment and passenger terminals. According to the rules settled by government, all the airports are regulated and supported by Uzbekistan Airlines National Air Company.

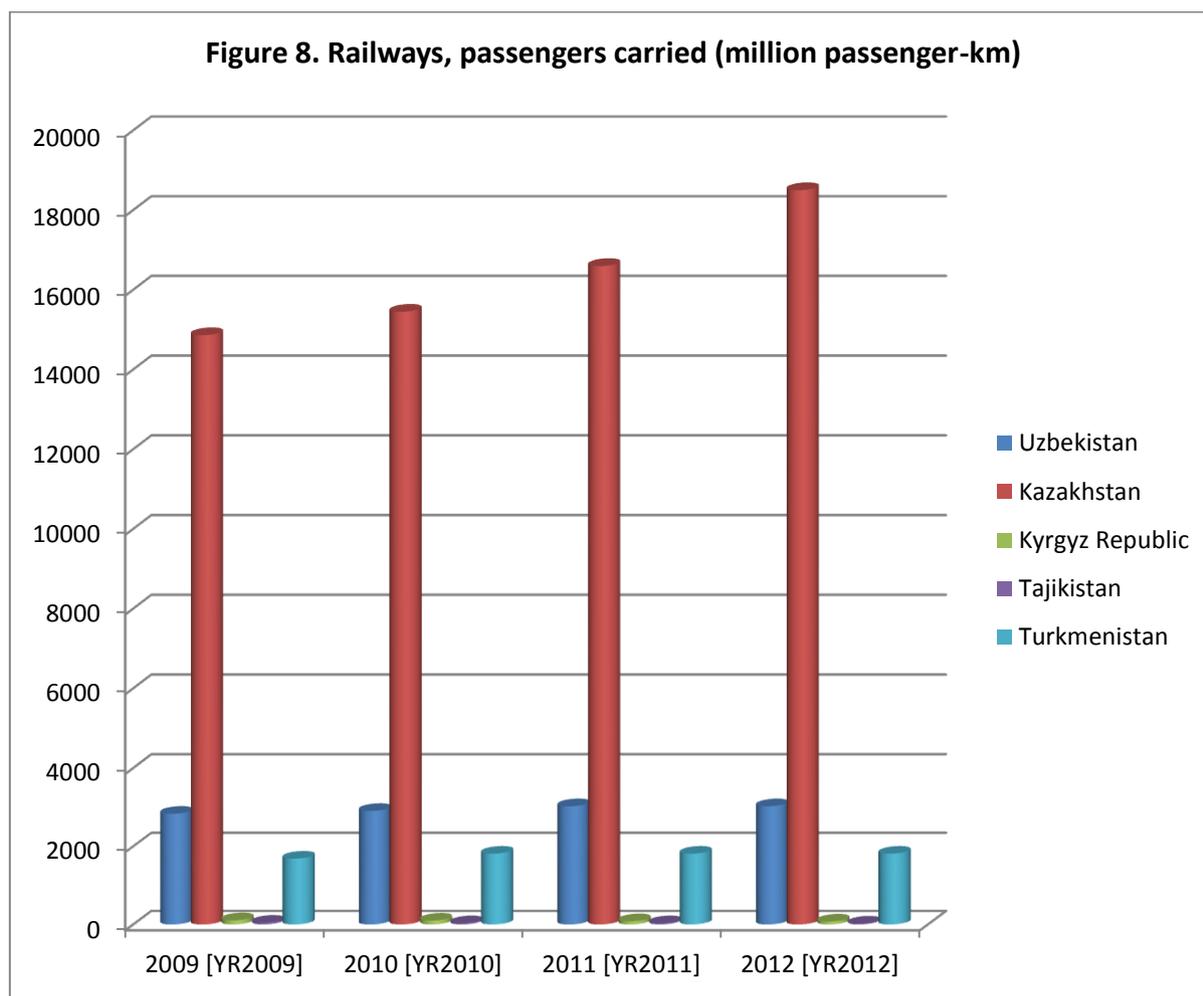


As a result of diversifying the airlines, Uzbekistan is become is a long –haul destination, Through which, it is rather accessible to main European tourism markets due to regular international flights to/from some economic and political centres of many countries all around

the world, for instance London, Paris, New York , Amsterdam, Frankfurt , Istanbul, Moscow, Delhi, Tel Aviv, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Seoul and Beijing, Madrid and etc. Furthermore, beside Uzbekistan Airlines the world renowned airway companies such as British Airlines, Air France, Turkish Airlines, Iran Air, Asiana, Aeroflot and Transaero airlines fulfill flight to Tashkent.

The modernization and integration of Central Asian countries have led to development of airline transport in the territory. From the below mentioned graph it could be seen that, passengers carried by air transport in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan showed upward trends, however other neighbor countries has unstable rates during the given period. It is noticeable that the number of passengers who used air transport has increased gradually from 1192714 to 4206794, while as Uzbekistan improved the trend steadily.

The frequency of air and rail services, together with a flexible price formation system, has boosted a number of visitors arriving in Uzbekistan from abroad. Commencement of the operation on the Tashkent-Samarkand route of the Afrosiab high-speed train (made by the Spanish firm, Talgo) and the Afsona train, which deals with individual requests from tourist agencies, has facilitated the frequency of visits.



## **7. TOURISM MODERNIZATION**

Globally the challenges that countries are facing in the tourism industry are numerous and complex. However, addressing these challenges require a high level of collaboration and coordination to marshal the resources that possesses Uzbekistan.

Speaking about the development of tourism in the country, we should note the importance of tourism deployment model of government and the steps of modernization, systematisation of services and integration of tourism infrastructure suppliers in worldwide tourism market, foreign investments and credits in the industry could be underlined as a main. Commercial interest in the region has grown considerably over recent years, with ancient connectors between the Middle East and Asia being revitalized in a surge of investment and trade in energy, infrastructure and manufacturing. According to UNWTO, government need to improve infrastructure and make easy its connectivity, advancement of Information Computer Technologies (ICTs) and enhancement mobility could make more opportunities for tourism industry of country.

Yet a number of barriers are hindering tourism development in Central Asian countries, including Uzbekistan. Visa and border crossing formalities , transport infrastructure, corporate governance and quality assurance some issues that underlined attention of Silk Road recommendations from global tourism organization (“Strategic Recommendations for enhancing Tourism with a Special Focus on Central Asia,” 2012). In addition, experts and specialists of tourism emphasized the importance of modernization and integration of sector and industry due to create better business opportunities and deployment of tourism destination in territory.

In order to tackle these issues following proposals on *Marketing & Destination Management, Destination Management & Investment, Travel Facilitation* could be addressed as a main key point for the development of tourism sector in the Central Asian tourism destination.

## **8. DESTINATION MANAGEMENT& MARKETING**

The Silk Road is a destination brand which has huge potential for growth. Investigations made by UNTWO researchers demonstrate that the Silk Road motivates more online discussions than any trade networks, accounting for approximately 30 % of international discussions<sup>1</sup>. Yet, very minor part Silk Road destinations are exploiting the marketing and promotional potential of their historic and cultural connections with the travel route. Applying market inquiry and better recognizing travel inspirations and the strength of this brand will allow destinations to be more intensify and develop competitiveness in their strategies of national marketing (“Policy and Practice for Global Tourism - World Tourism Organization,” 2012). In order to tackle this issue, specialists have listed following concepts as crucial key factors;

- Inaugurate devoted section on the official websites of the Silk Road destination and its partner
- Classify and use unique selling points and hallmarks of own Silk Road of countries

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<sup>1</sup> Source: UNWTO, Social Media Research Silk Road Project (2010)

- Involve purchasers and travellers under the same brand name by diffusing ICT as well as crowdsourcing and social media channels

According to historical facts, almost 30 countries was united The Ancient Silk Road and shared their culture, tradition and customs as well as history to one another. The legacy of the Silk Road can be vividly shown at architecture , gastronomy , religion, ideology and technology of these countries (*Handbook on E-marketing for Tourism Destinations*, 2008). These factors should be used by DMOs and focused on cooperating together pooling resources and executing alliance marketing that celebrate this shared history and motivate travel to the Silk Road.

- Diversify key partners and innovative approaches for joint Silk Road marketing operations
- Integrate and unite resources on market intelligence's gathering
- Collaborate with tour operators, airlines, and other enterprises which engaged with this sector in cross-marketing creativities and product deployment

Enhancement countries' common product offering and stimulate more 'word of mouth' promotion to contribute to a stronger, more globally familiar with Silk Road destination brand would be done by working together and developing new trans-boundary thematic routes and experiences based on the Silk Road destinations (*Handbook on E-marketing for Tourism Destinations*,2008).

## **9. INVESTMENT DESTINATION & MANAGEMENT**

As the Silk Road destinations comprise of the complete network of overland and nautical routes, retracing the steps of some most renowned explorers of all times. Yet a general drawback of data available and the compound logistics of travelling these roads prevent many prospective travellers from selecting to visit the Silk Road.

Destinations need to pay much more attention on developing tour operators by assimilating audits and diversifying problem areas that recently hinder the connection of Silk Road routes. Private sector players of international and national scale should be engaged in the long-term vision of the destinations' competitiveness and sustainability aspects. Commitment and investment from local small businessmen will help guarantee the involvement of the local community.

Undoubtedly, investments in sustainable infrastructure are paramount for the long-term perspective and survival of the Silk Road. Following measures could make better performance of above mentioned factors in country:

- advancement of road system
- enhanced air connectivity via regular flight to main cities in globe
- inauguration of low-cost airlines for domestic or Central Asian tourism business
- By the way of railway enhancement develop of high speed trains among major Silk Road destinations of Central Asia
- Creating tourism office centres online visitor and destination

- Improve amount of investments created by foreigners and governmental bodies
- Make accessible internet by Wi-Fi availability in major sightseeing sides

In order to help guarantee a ‘bottom-up’ method to destination management, establishments should empower local societies and stakeholders by providing relevant training and volume building across all phases of destination management, principally in regional areas.

Developed skills and services in the tourism sector are obligatory to ensure review while transparency in business is main feature to building strong business relations and attracting direct foreign investment

- Improvement of diffusing of Information and Communication Technologies
- Language skills among service specialist
- Applying of management systems world-renowned hotel networks
- Well-organized governance and transparency in international business
- Enrich natural and heritage resources by establishing sustainable management

## **10. TRAVEL FACILITATION**

In order to simplify visa procedures for tourists, government and responsible officials should make optimize process of issuance as well as make some reforms of legislature system in terms of visa periods, apply online access to visa applications.

As one of the Silk Road’s main merits is that it is as a marvellous network of destinations, multiple barriers to the smooth cross-border movement of tourists recently make it virtually impossible for travellers to undertake multi-destination tourism. Information provided by authorities on visa processes needs to be accurate and simple to acquire, available online and up-to-date.

- Improve the system of visa provision on arrival and electronic visa accessibility
- Standardization of single, double and, multiple entry visas
- Optimization of visa periods to 30,60,90 days
- Enlarge more nationalities not requiring letters of invitation

By the way border crossing advancement procedures and services for tourist’s state should modify the potential for economic incentive and environmental enhancement by taking an inventive approach to cross-border rules.

Proposals for further improvement of services for tourists:

Upgrading level of the English speaking staff at the borders; tourist information; shopping; money exchange; transit accommodation; guided service through buffer zones (for guides, drivers with badges); regular working hours signage; food and beverage services; restrooms and first aid facilities.

Suggested innovative methods to cross border administration:

- mutual tourism development plans;
- unique and marvellous package tour services;

- local handicraft markets
- integrate e-tourism frameworks
- cross-border job exchange and mobility
- cultural and traditional events;
- worldwide multidisciplinary joint programs

To sum up, Uzbekistan as a major partner of Silk Road tourist destination program could tackle various issues with the support of some international and non-governmental organizations. Therefore, some drawbacks of tourism industry will be prevented and some privileges could be provided for small businesses and entrepreneurship.

## **11. CONCLUSIONS**

As tourism stimulates infrastructure development of the country, has a strong multiplication effect and helps diversify the economy, supports local culture and crafts and environmental protection, it is very actual for the Republic of Uzbekistan with its transitional economy, moreover it is important as Uzbekistan is a country with vast capabilities in tourism. The travel and tourism industry is a leading export industry in worldwide, Central Asian countries could contribute considerable as well.

Moreover, with vast underused capabilities in tourism and diversity of tourist attractions represent the potential of tourism in these tourism destinations. Location of the area, corridors on the Great Silk Road, with cities which were main points of trade, make destination attractive one for the flow of tourists globally. Accessibility of various tourism types, distinct traditions and unique cultural background of Central Asia has considered as one of the main key factor tourism and hospitality businesses.

After have been establishing and implying global experience, the attractiveness of tourism estimated to become as one of the crucial one in the Central Asian destination. Furthermore, the optimization of visa facilities has listed as one of the main advancement of tourism policy by the UNWTO research group. As one of the main Silk Road tourism destination, Central Asian states have great potential to advance sector of hospitality and tourism that create a lot of promotions for different spheres. In the other perspective, tourism sector in Central Asia has already established and its policy has led to some fundamentals improvements in the last 20 years. Further investigations and explorations may be addressed to identify obstacles of the industry by learning all its sub-sectors.

In briefly, Central Asian states, such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have great potential of tourism deployment as whole. Established policies and conducted measurements in countries have made already its results. Upcoming diversifications and modernizations in the industry may contribute exponentially for the economies of the Central Asian countries.

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