



## DEVELOPMENT OF ZIYARAH TOURISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION

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**Annotation:** This paper examines cooperation of the Republic of Uzbekistan for development of pilgrimage (Muslim) tourism in the framework of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The author analyzes functioning of the OIC in the sphere of tourism by proposing implementation of organization's member states' practices for perspective development of pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan. Therefore, the article highlights the signing of a special Memorandum of understanding between the members of the OIC for the development of Islamic tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan.

**Keywords:** Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), pilgrimage tourism, Uzbekistan, ziyarah (Muslim) tourism.

**Аннотация:** мазкур мақолада Ўзбекистон Республикасининг Ислом Ҳамкорлик Ташиқоти доирасида зиёрат туризмни ривожлантириши бўйича ҳамкорлиги тадқиқ этилмоқда. Муаллиф туризм соҳасида ИХТнинг фаолиятини таҳлил этиши билан бир қаторда ташиқотга аъзо мамлакатларнинг амалиётини Ўзбекистон Республикасида зиёрат туризмнинг истиқболли ривожланиши учун татбиқ этилишини тақлиф қилмоқда. Шунга мувофиқ, мақолада Ўзбекистон Республикасида зиёрат туризмни ривожлантириши учун ИХТ аъзолари ўртасида ўзаро англашув меморандуми имзоланиши таъкидланмоқда.

**Калит сўзлар:** Ислом Ҳамкорлик Ташиқоти (ИКТ), мусулмон туризми, зиёрат туризми.

**Аннотация:** в данной статье рассматривается сотрудничество Республики Узбекистан по развитию паломнического туризма в рамках Организации Исламского Сотрудничества. Автор анализирует функционирование ОИС в сфере туризма, предлагая внедрение практики стран-членов организации по перспективному развитию паломнического туризма в Узбекистане. В связи с этим, в статье освещается подписание специального Меморандума о взаимопонимании между членами ОИК по развитию паломнического (исламского) туризма в Республике Узбекистан.

**Ключевые слова:** мусульманский туризм, Организация Исламского Сотрудничества (ОИС), паломнический туризм, Узбекистан.

Tourism is the opportunity for the states to progress their economy by using existent resources and implementing foreign investments. With this regard, the Republic of Uzbekistan focuses on enlargement of using potential on various spheres of tourism, in particular pilgrimage (Muslim) tourism. Moreover, President Shavkat Mirziyoev emphasized that, "Development of pilgrimage tourism influences on not only progress in economy, also on social spheres' development" [1], which lead us research current aspect of tourism in Uzbekistan.

The OIC is the largest and most influential Intergovernmental Muslim organization. Initially, it consisted of 25 states of Asia and Africa and the Palestine Liberation Organization. Currently it unites 57 countries with a population of about 1.5 billion people [2].

The 57 Members of the OIC are the major source market for the global Islamic tourism industry. With estimated tourism expenditures of over \$100 billion, these countries account for around 82 per cent of the total tourism expenditures made by the Muslim tourists in 2013-2014. Tourism has been defined as one of the ten priority areas of cooperation in the OIC Plan of Action to Strengthen Economic and Commercial Cooperation among the Member Countries which was adopted in 1994 [3, P.2]. The proof could be found from statistics, particularly, the number of international tourist arrivals in the OIC countries, for which the data are available, grew by 3.3 per cent and increased to 174.7 million in 2013, corresponding to a 16.1 percent share in the total international tourist arrivals worldwide [4, pp. 10-12] (See the Figure 2 and Figure 3.). Furthermore, this sector occupies remarkable position in the GDPs of OIC states [5, P.14].

The role of the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (COMCEC) which also influences on developing tourism sector in the OIC states is important in realizing this sector. It has been functioning as the responsible body within the OIC for

enhancing economic and commercial cooperation among the 57 Member States of the OIC. COMCEC has initiated cooperation in various sectors including finance, transport, agriculture, tourism, and poverty alleviation to enhance economic relations among the member countries. These efforts have also yielded various important projects and forums such as the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum, the OIC Stock Exchanges Forum, and the COMCEC Capital Markets Regulators Forum [6, P.15].

The Republic of Uzbekistan was admitted to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) as an observer at an extraordinary meeting of the foreign ministers of the member states in New York in October 1995. Uzbekistan became a full member of the Organization on October 2, 1996. Since 2003, Uzbekistan is a member of a specialized institution of the OIC - Islamic Development Bank. The Republic signed the new OIC Charter on December 14, 2015. In April 2016, the Statute of the organization was ratified by the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan [7].

It should be emphasized that, for the development of tourism Uzbekistan preferred to organize bilateral partnership with the OIC member states. Particularly, cooperation with Kuwait is developing plentifully. The agreement “On cooperation in the field of tourism”, which signed on July 21, 2008, entered into force since 28.05.2009. These type of agreements were signed with other OIC member states, as the Sultanate of Amman, The Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Malaysia, the Republic of Turkey and the United Arab Emirates [8]. There is an Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation between Uzbekistan and the United Arab Emirates. Pilgrims are traveling to Arabia for religious purposes, and not just for tourism. Tourists from Saudi Arabia come to Uzbekistan, however very few [9].

According to national researchers, it is necessary to continue deepening cooperation with these countries. The main areas of cooperation can be: transport and infrastructure; trade and investment facilitation; agriculture, agribusiness and rural infrastructure development; tourism, art, science and technology [10, pp.88-91].

We should notice that, with tourism and especially Muslim tourism potential of Uzbekistan and considering 57 member states of the OIC, before counted agreements are not enough. From 2017 in the practice of Uzbekistan’s bilateral cooperation on tourism has been enlarged by including there a new type of agreement for Uzbekistan- agreement for development of religious or “pilgrimage” tourism (“diyosat turizmi”) with Muslim countries. Namely, with the states as Pakistan and Turkey the agreements have already been signed on Pilgrimage tourism, which regulate the mutual relations in organizing special tours for religious purposes in the territory of Uzbekistan.

Muslim tourism is considered to be a recent phenomenon in the theory and practice of not only global tourism, also in the OIC countries and tourism industry of Uzbekistan. Traditionally Islamic tourism was often associated with Hajj and Umrah only. However, recently there has been an influx of products and services designed specifically to cater the business and leisure related segments of Muslim tourists across the globe. The Muslim tourism market has witnessed rapid growth over the years and emerged as one of the fastest growing segments of the global tourism market. According to the latest estimates, Muslim tourism market (excluding the Hajj and Umrah expenditures of \$20 to \$25 billion) has increased from around \$80 billion in 2006 to \$145 billion in 2014, corresponding to an impressive increase of 81 per cent [11, P.29].

Islamic tourism as a concept has been used with different names and connotations in the tourism theory and practice. Halal tourism, Sharia Tourism and Muslim-friendly tourism are the most common terms, which are used alternatively. However, none of these terminologies has a universally understood definition [12, P.29]. Due to the development of Muslim tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan, the legal strengthening is expedient on introduction of international standards and special terms and conditions for development of religious tourism (Halal tourism) in Uzbekistan. In particular, creation of legal and financial foundation for introduction of tourist business in the field of Halal tourism (religious tourism) according to Muslim rules (Sharia Law) and international standards in Uzbekistan.

There, we should underline that, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has prepared a draft strategic Roadmap for the development of Islamic tourism among the OIC member states. The project provides a methodological framework for enhancing cooperation among member states in the field of tourism in order to develop and identify the necessary resources, in addition to defining main themes of the future of tourism in member countries through Islamic tourism standards and quality control project. Cooperation in Islamic tourism comprised five areas — including data and monitoring, policy and regulation, marketing and promotion, destination and industry development, and capacity development to promote inter-Islamic cooperation as well as improving the ecosystem of Islamic tourism in OIC member states. The roadmap contains a matrix of activities for implementation including developing national Islamic tourism indicators, to collect, process and disseminate relevant data; strengthening national

statistical systems; formulating and implementing of national policies and regulations for Islamic tourism market development; promoting Islamic tourism hotels and agencies in the OIC countries [13]. Particular document is considered to be the continues of the Resolution on tourism development among the OIC member states, which could also be used in the practice and theory of pilgrimage tourism development of Uzbekistan as the member state of the OIC.

*Amendment by adding the term of “ziyarah (pilgrimage) tourism”* for further development of tourism in the “Law on tourism” of Uzbekistan would be the first step in creation of legal foundation for Muslim tourism development in our country. Namely, *it is suggested to add Muslim-pilgrimage tourism as a variety of tourism* in the Article to the new draft of Law on tourism of the Republic of Uzbekistan regarding to “forms and varieties of tourism”.

In this case, it is preferable to analyze the case of Malaysia, which was listed as the top 10 destination in the world [14]. A good image of Islamic environment for halal food has made the Muslim tourist feel safe to consume Islamic products. Branding as Islamic and halal hub has brought Malaysia to move into the halal matter in this recent year. The rules made to ensure the safety and control the behavior of the tourist which is forbidden in Islam as long they staying in Malaysia [15]. However, our country is not Islamic and in terms of implementation “halal” conditions for tourism we should focus on Malaysia’s practice on legal regulatory basis and organizing this infrastructure only for Muslim tourists.

The main legal Acts are considered to be Food Act (1983) and Food Hygiene Regulation (2009), that stated in legal interpretation that food handler is the one that directly involved in preparing, direct contact with food, handles packaged or unpackaged food in food premises. In addition, in Clause number 33 it also concerns on personal hygiene of food handler while handling, preparing, packing, carrying, storing, displaying and serving food to consumers [16]. Afterwards, in 2011 Trade Description Act was adopted, which was aimed to overcome the fraudulence of Halal certification and Halal logo in related industries. Here, it should be noted that, Halal certification is very important issue for countries with Islamic tourism products.

Moreover, legal basis on halal tourism conditions in Malaysia are based on other several Acts as:

Malaysia Standard 1500:2009, which includes the various aspects of personal hygiene, clothing, devices, utensils, machines and processing aids and the premises for processing, manufacturing and storage of food (Clause 3.4) [17];

Manual Prosedur Pensijilan Halal Malaysia (MPPHM) 2014. In this manual procedure for hotel kitchen and restaurant (premise) focus on the need to establish an internal committee member. Point 6.2.2.4 mention that to comply with Halal requirement organization need to appoint at least 2 Muslim people for each kitchen/ premise and develop Halal Assurance System guideline [18];

Halal Assurance System (HAS) 2012. More precaution is taken with Halal control activities and assurance activities in logistics transport business procedures or methods [19].

From above mentioned it could be observed that, the process of implementation and realization of this variety of tourism in Uzbekistan is complicated and institutional-legal related chain. Solution of this issue depends on not only the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for tourism development, moreover other governmental and non-governmental bodies as the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Architecture, Committee of religious affairs, Ministry of agriculture, “Uzbekozikovkatholding”, hotels etc., should function together. For this purpose, this process demands coordination of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan by its Coordination Council for tourism development. Beforehand, *it is suggested to adopt Bylaws (Decree) of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan on “Measurements for establishment of Halal (Muslim) tourism conditions in the Republic of Uzbekistan”*, which maintain:

- Adoption of Halal certification and halal logo in the Republic of Uzbekistan in the related institutional mechanisms’ functioning;
- Uzbekistan Standard for controlling Halal food and utilities’ manufacturing and transportation;
- Enhancing qualification of personal in halal tourism working areas;
- Functioning of Halal Internal Committee under the State Committee for tourism development and Committee of religious affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

And it is known that, the Islamic world possesses enormous economic and investment potential, as well as energy resources to maintain high rates of sustainable socio-economic development and also tourism development. In this regard, of particular importance is the need to improve cooperation mechanisms and expand mutually beneficial trade and investment relations within the framework of the OIC, also between the states of the OIC zone.

Moreover, considering before mentioned factors and important geostrategic position of Uzbekistan in Central Asia, it would be advisable to sign *Memorandum of Understanding between the OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) and the Republic of Uzbekistan for the Development of Muslim (pilgrimage) tourism in Uzbekistan*. Consequently, this document would determine:

- role of Halal tourism in Uzbekistan;
- maintain legal regulatory framework for establishing of “halal” Muslim friendly supply chain in Uzbekistan;
- regulate the implementation of international standards in this sphere and certainly, would maintain investments in order to realize “Halal” conditions for Muslim tourists;
- it would effect on establishing employment for population of Uzbekistan.

From our point of view, the implementation of analogue of this type of Project like “Halal Friendly” or “Muslim Tourism” in Uzbekistan in the framework of the Committee for Tourism Development of Uzbekistan with the investments of the OIC or IDB (Islamic Development Bank) would influence on tourism growth from potential Islamic countries to Uzbekistan.

Meanwhile, a big segment travelling globally is also seeking options that address their religious considerations [20]. With this regard, the OIC should pay more attention on the issues of further development of intellectual, scientific- technic and religious potential of our government. In this context, the study and popularization of the achievements of our great ancestors - thinkers of the Islamic world, their invaluable contribution to the development of world civilization is of particular importance.

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After being determined and analyzed the existent issues in the sphere of pilgrimage tourism and its international-legal and institutional development in Uzbekistan, following conclusions and proposals are being suggested:

- due to the development of pilgrimage tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan and considering important geostrategic position of Uzbekistan in Central Asia, it would be advisable to sign special Memorandum of Understanding between the OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) and the Republic of Uzbekistan for the Development of Ziyarah (pilgrimage) tourism in Uzbekistan; Consequently, this document would determine the role of Halal tourism in Uzbekistan, regulate the implementation of international standards in this sphere and certainly, would maintain investments in order to realize “Halal” conditions for Muslim tourists (probably, from IDB), consequently it would effect on establishing new jobs for population of Uzbekistan.
- establishment of institutional mechanism for the realization of Memorandum of Understanding between the OIC and the Republic of Uzbekistan in the form of Working group or Special Commission would also solve the misunderstandings concerning the implementation of the best practices in “Halal” tourism as of Turkey, Malaysia, UAE etc.;
- elaboration Amendments for “Law on tourism” of the Republic of Uzbekistan regarding adding varieties of tourism (such as pilgrimage tourism);
- Adoption of bylaws (Decree) of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan on “Measurements for establishment of Halal (Muslim) tourism conditions in the Republic of Uzbekistan”.

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4. *Ibid.*, pp.10-12.
5. *The economic role of the international tourism sector in the economies of the OIC countries is neither a function of the size nor the level of affluence of the economy. With an average of 66.7 per cent of GDP during 2009 through 2013, international tourism is the major economic activity in the Maldives. International tourism reached 10.9 per cent of GDP in Jordan. Ibid*, P.14.
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*See: Сотрудничество между Узбекистаном и Организацией Исламского Сотрудничества (ОИС)* <https://mfa.uz/ru/cooperation/international/10497/> Last seen: 27.09.2018.
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