

Development of Social Tourism in Uzbekistan: Challenges, Mechanisms and Prospects

Rasulova Baxtigul To'ra qizi

SamIES - Master's degree student group MTM-224

Amriddinova Rayhona Sadriddinovna

SamIES, —Lecturer of the Department of Tourism, Ph.D., associate professor

Abstract: *Social tourism, as an element of national social policy, plays a crucial role in ensuring equal access to tourism resources for socially vulnerable groups. This article analyzes the prerequisites and current state of social tourism in Uzbekistan, identifies key challenges, and provides recommendations for the formation of organizational and economic mechanisms aimed at developing this sphere. The main focus is on legal regulation, infrastructure aspects, human resource provision, and financial support models.*

Keywords: *tourism in Uzbekistan, social tourism, government support, accessibility, inclusion, infrastructure, sustainable development.*

In recent years, Uzbekistan's tourism sector has shown dynamic growth. After a sharp decline in 2020 caused by the pandemic, the flow of travelers has been rapidly recovering. In 2023, Uzbekistan received about 7 million foreign tourists, making it one of the most successful years—nearly at the record pre-pandemic level of 2019 (6.7 million arrivals). For comparison, in 2020, due to global restrictions, inbound tourism fell to 1.5 million visitors, but by 2022 reached 5.2 million, and in 2023 nearly returned to the previous maximum (6.6 million arrivals). In 2024, the country welcomed 8.2 million foreign tourists, an increase of 1.6 million compared to 2023. Meanwhile, domestic tourism has also grown rapidly: according to the Tourism Committee, more than 21 million domestic tourists traveled across various regions in 2023. The industry's growth is supported by government initiatives to simplify visa procedures and promote Uzbekistan's rich historical and cultural heritage on the international stage.

Social tourism is a type of tourism activity aimed at providing travel and leisure opportunities for socially disadvantaged categories of citizens: pensioners, people with disabilities, large and low-income families, youth, and students. International experience shows that with active government support, social tourism can become an effective tool for integration, health improvement, and enhancing quality of life.

In Uzbekistan, where interest in tourism as a priority direction of socio-economic development is growing, social tourism remains underdeveloped. Despite the country's significant natural and cultural resources, this form of tourism has not received adequate institutional and legislative support.

Social tourism is based on the concept of social justice and equal access to resources. It includes the following characteristics:

- ensuring accessibility of tourism services;
- integration of socially vulnerable groups into public life;
- government subsidies for travel;
- development of inclusive infrastructure.

International organizations such as the UNWTO and the International Social Tourism Organization (ISTO) emphasize the need to develop the social component in tourism policy.

Currently, Uzbekistan's legislation lacks a clear definition and legal status of social tourism. The Law "On Tourism" (as revised in 2019) does not include provisions regulating social tourism. This complicates the development of subsidy programs and preferential conditions for target population groups.

According to the State Committee on Statistics, Uzbekistan is home to:

- more than 3.5 million pensioners;
- about 1 million people with disabilities;
- over 10 million young people.

These figures indicate a high potential demand for social tourism services.

Some non-governmental and regional initiatives (school excursions, discounted trips for pensioners) exist but are limited in scale and not systematized. There is no unified coordinating body responsible for developing this sector.

The main problems and barriers to the development of social tourism in Uzbekistan include:

- Legal uncertainty: lack of legal definitions and regulations;
- Financial limitations: absence of budgetary and extra-budgetary funding mechanisms;
- Infrastructure unpreparedness: limited access to tourist sites for people with disabilities;
- Information gap: low public awareness of existing opportunities;
- Personnel shortage: lack of specialists working with vulnerable groups.

To further develop social tourism in Uzbekistan, the following measures are proposed:

- Introducing the concept of "social tourism" into the Law "On Tourism";
- Developing by-laws and socially oriented programs;
- Providing subsidies for preferential categories;
- Implementing social tourism vouchers;
- Launching state co-financing programs;
- Attracting private capital through public-private partnerships (PPPs);
- Modernizing hotels, transportation, and attractions to meet the needs of people with disabilities;
- Creating barrier-free environments at tourist sites;
- Promoting rural and ecological tourism as forms of social tourism;
- Enhancing the qualifications of tour guides and organizers;
- Creating a national social tourism portal;
- Conducting information campaigns and working with NGOs.

With the implementation of a comprehensive state policy, within five years it is possible to achieve:

- increased social tourism coverage to 30% of the target population;
- 20–25% growth in domestic tourism;

- reduction in social inequality;
- development of local economies in the regions.

The development of social tourism will contribute not only to fulfilling a social function but also to expanding tourism infrastructure, increasing employment, and enhancing cultural exchange within the country.

Social tourism in Uzbekistan is an important resource of social policy that requires a systemic approach. Legislative, financial, infrastructural, and personnel reforms are necessary to create a sustainable model of inclusive tourism. Only through such an approach can the right to leisure, travel, and cultural enrichment be guaranteed for all citizens, regardless of their income or physical abilities.

REFERENCES:

1. Amriddinova Rayxona Sadriiddinovna. Amirova D. Mechanism of Financing Social Tourism by Trade Unions. Vol. 05 No. 03 (2025): EJBSOS. <https://inovatus.es/index.php/ejbsos/article/view/5299>.
2. Amriddinova Rayhona Sadriiddinovna, Umarova Fotima Umarjonovna. Types of Loyalty Programs for Airlines. Spanish Journal of Innovation and Integrity, 2024.
3. Umarova Fotima Umarjonovna Amriddinova Rayhona Sadriiddinovna. Air Travel Rules with Children of Different Ages. American Journal of Management Practice. <https://semantjournals.org/index.php/AJMP>