Journal of International Economics Research

♦ ISSN: 3070-5665 Vol: 02 No.01, 2025 ♦ PP. 01–04

♦ Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.54216/JIER.020101



FULL LENGTH ARTICLE

# Provision of Excursion Services in Tourism

**Freshta Qauomy**[1,*]

[1] Tourism Department, Tashkent State University of Economics (TSUE), 49 I. Karimov Street, Tashkent 100003, Republic of Uzbekistan

**Email:** freshtaqayoumi@gmail.com

Received: May 14, 2025 Revised: June 28, 2025 Accepted: August 07, 2025 ⋆ Corresponding author

## ABSTRACT

Excursion services—organized tours and guided visits to cultural, historical, natural, and recreational sites—play a central role in the tourism industry. In Uzbekistan, rising international arrivals, expansion of accommodation infrastructure, and growing demand for cultural and heritage experiences make high-quality excursion services increasingly important. This article explores the concept and types of excursions, analyses recent Uzbekistan tourism data, and discusses how excursion services can contribute to sustainable growth, visitor satisfaction, and economic benefits. It also reviews modern trends such as digitalization, customization, and responsible tourism in the Uzbek context.

**Keywords:** Excursion services ▪ Tourism ▪ Uzbekistan ▪ Tour guiding ▪ Cultural tourism ▪ Sustainable tourism ▪ Tourism statistics

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is among the fastest-growing sectors globally, and for Uzbekistan—with its rich Silk Road legacy, historic cities, and growing connectivity—excursions are a vital gateway for visitors to explore, understand, and appreciate its heritage. Excursion services give structure and value to travel: rather than merely arriving and wandering, tourists can enjoy curated, informative, and often immersive experiences.

The sharp rise in tourist arrivals to Uzbekistan in recent years underscores the growing importance and potential of excursions within the national tourism industry. With adequate planning, professional guides, and well-designed tours, excursions can significantly enhance visitor experiences, promote cultural heritage, encourage longer stays, and deliver economic benefits to local communities. Table 1 summarizes recent visitor figures reported in the source article.

By the end of 2023, the number of hotels and tourist lodging establishments had risen from 767 in 2017 to 5,526—more than a seven-fold increase. This growth in visitors and in-frastructure signals increasing demand for well-organized heritage sightseeing, cultural tourism, ecotourism, and other excursions.

**Table 1.** Recent tourism trends in Uzbekistan

| Year / period | Number of foreign visitors / key statistic |
|---|---|
| 2019 | Approximately 6.75 million foreign tourists |
| 2020 | Approximately 1.50 million foreign visitors (pandemic drop) |
| 2022 | Approximately 5.2 million foreign tourists |
| 2023 | Approximately 6.6–7.0 million foreign visitors |
| 2024 | Approximately 8.2 million foreign visitors (record) |
| January–March 2024 | 1.519 million arrivals |

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## 2. CONCEPT AND IMPORTANCE OF EXCURSION SERVICES

### 2.1 What Are Excursion Services?

Excursion services are organized, guided trips to points of interest, including historical monuments, architectural heritage, cultural sites, natural landscapes such as mountains, deserts, and nature reserves, museums, urban areas, and thematic destinations focused on gastronomy, local crafts, or traditions. Excursions may last half a day, a full day, or several days.

### 2.2 Why Are They Important?

- **Cultural and heritage appreciation:** Excursions help tourists understand the history, significance, and context of monuments, architecture, and local traditions. In Uzbekistan, tours to medieval cities, mosques, madrasas, and historic districts offer insight into the country's Silk Road heritage.
- **Visitor satisfaction and experience quality:** A well-guided, thoughtfully designed excursion can improve satisfaction, encourage longer stays, and generate positive word-of-mouth.
- **Economic impact:** Excursions generate demand for tour guides, local transport, hospitality, crafts, food, and other services, spreading economic benefits beyond hotels.
- **Destination branding and competitiveness:** Distinctive cultural, nature, and adventure tours can make Uzbekistan more attractive internationally and help it stand out among competing destinations.

Professional provision of excursion services is therefore crucial for maximizing these benefits and ensuring sustainable tourism development. Table 2 presents key excursion types and examples relevant to Uzbekistan.

**Table 2.** Types of excursions and their relevance to Uzbekistan

| Type of excursion | Description / examples in Uzbekistan |
|---|---|
| Cultural / historical | Tours of ancient cities (Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva), heritage monuments, mosques, mausoleums, and Silk Road landmarks. |
| Urban | City walks and tours in capitals or regional centers, such as modern and historic Tashkent, bazaars, local life, and architecture. |
| Nature / eco-tours | Trips to deserts, mountains, and valleys; ecotourism in remote areas, rural villages, and scenic locations. |
| Adventure / outdoor | Hiking, trekking, desert tours, and rural excursions that combine adventure with culture. |
| Thematic / specialized | Religious pilgrimage, craft and artisan, culinary, cultural immersion, and educational tours. |
| Customized / small-group | Tailored tours for specific interests, including heritage, photography, students, and researchers. |

Uzbekistan's rich heritage, varied geography, diverse culture, and growing tourism demand give all these excursion types substantial potential.

## 3. ORGANIZING EXCURSION SERVICES: KEY PRINCIPLES

For excursion services in Uzbekistan and elsewhere to succeed, several fundamental principles should be followed:

1. **Professional tour guiding and interpretation:** Guides should know the history, culture, and environment and provide accurate, engaging, and culturally sensitive interpretation. Good storytelling, historical context, interactive discussion, and multilingual guiding can all contribute to the experience.
2. **Route planning and logistics:** Routes should account for travel times, seasonality and climate, accommodation, transport, safety, rest stops, and visitor capacity.
3. **Diverse offerings and flexibility:** Heritage, nature, urban, and thematic tours should serve different visitor segments. Standard group tours can be complemented by small-group, private, and customized itineraries.
4. **Quality and visitor experience:** Excursions should provide comfort, clear schedules and explanations, safety, and appropriate support, including food and flexible guidance where needed. Post-tour feedback can support continuous improvement.
5. **Sustainability and responsible tourism:** Services should respect cultural and historical sites, avoid overcrowding, protect the environment on nature tours, and support local communities through the involvement of local guides, artisans, and businesses.
6. **Modern tools and technology:** Digital booking systems, online platforms, mobile applications, audio guides, and augmented reality can improve accessibility for international tourists and help services scale.

## 4. ROLE OF EXCURSION SERVICES IN UZBEKISTAN'S TOURISM GROWTH

The recent increase in tourist arrivals to Uzbekistan—reaching 8.2 million in 2024—creates demand for structured, high-quality excursions. These services can support tourism growth in several ways:

- **Absorbing increased tourist flows:** Organized excursions can manage visitor movement in heritage areas, distribute visitors among destinations, and reduce pressure on individual sites.
- **Extending stays and spending:** Engaging tours can encourage longer stays and more spending on accommodation, food, transport, and souvenirs, benefiting local economies.
- **Diversifying tourism offerings:** In addition to city-based historical tourism, excursions create opportunities for cultural, nature-based, ecotourism, and adventure experiences.
- **Promoting regional development:** Tours to less-visited regions, rural areas, and natural landscapes can extend economic activity beyond major cities.
- **Encouraging sustainable and responsible tourism:** With appropriate management, excursions can support heritage preservation, environmental protection, and community involvement.

Excursion services are therefore not merely an add-on; they are integral to the future of tourism in Uzbekistan. Figure 1 shows recent arrivals.




**Figure 1.** Tourist arrivals to Uzbekistan, 2017–2023.

**Table 3.** Approximate foreign tourist arrivals

| Year | Approximate arrivals (millions) |
|---|---|
| 2019 | 6.75 |
| 2020 | 1.50 (pandemic) |
| 2022 | 5.2 |
| 2023 | 6.6–7.0 |
| 2024 | 8.2 (record) |

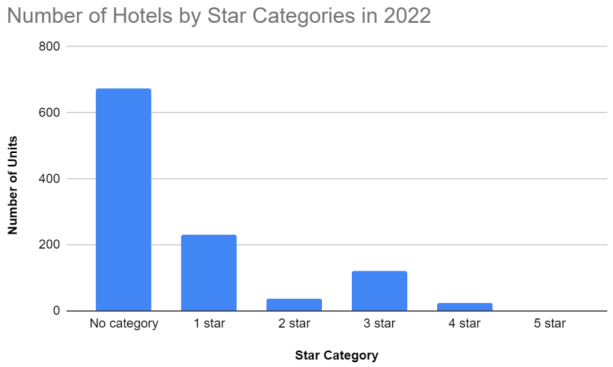



**Figure 2.** Hotels by star category in Uzbekistan, 2022.

**Table 4.** Hotels and tourist lodging establishments in Uzbekistan

| Year / period | Number of establishments |
|---|---|
| 2017 | 767 |
| 2023 | 5,526 (more than seven times the 2017 level) |

The expansion in lodging infrastructure supports increasing tourism demand and enables excursion-based tourism to reach more destinations.

The source article also proposes the following illustrative distribution of excursion types; these percentages are presented as an example, not as measured market data:

- Cultural / historical: 50%.
- Urban / city: 20%.
- Nature / ecotourism: 15%.
- Adventure / outdoor: 10%.
- Thematic / specialized (crafts, religious, or culinary): 5%.

Figure 3 illustrates a route linking several major Uzbek cities.




**Figure 3.** Map illustrating a route through Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, Urgench, and Khiva.

## 5. CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR EXCURSION SERVICES IN UZBEKISTAN

Despite the opportunities, several challenges must be addressed to ensure excursions remain sustainable, high quality, and beneficial to tourists and local communities:

- **Overcrowding at heritage sites:** Frequent visits can endanger fragile historical monuments as tourist numbers grow. Site management, group-size limits, and regulated access are needed.
- **Need for skilled tour guides:** Growing demand requires qualified, multilingual, and culturally aware guides. Training and certification systems should be strengthened.
- **Infrastructure gaps in remote and nature areas:** Some attractive natural or rural areas lack adequate access, accommodation, or other infrastructure, limiting excursion opportunities.
- **Balancing mass and sustainable tourism:** Without careful planning, mass tourism can harm local culture, the environment, and community well-being. Responsible tourism practices are essential.
- **Seasonality and weather:** Uzbekistan has strong seasonal variation; summers can be hot, winters cold, and some areas less accessible at certain times. Tour planning must account for these conditions.
- **Diversification and innovation:** The industry should avoid over-reliance on heritage tours and develop ecotourism, adventure, rural tourism, cultural exchange, events, and other experiences for different visitor segments.

## 6. STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING EXCURSION SERVICES IN UZBEKISTAN

1. **Invest in guide training and certification:** Develop a national tour-guide training program covering history, languages, cultural sensitivity, and environmental awareness.
2. **Develop diverse excursion portfolios:** Expand beyond city and heritage tours to include nature tours, rural village stays, adventure and ecotours, cultural and craft workshops, culinary tours, and pilgrimage tours.
3. **Promote sustainable and responsible tourism:** Limit group sizes at sensitive sites, support local communities and artisans, encourage environmentally friendly practices, and integrate cultural preservation into tour design.
4. **Leverage technology and digital tools:** Use online book-

ing, mobile applications, audio guides, virtual and augmented reality at historic sites, interactive maps, and multilingual support.

5. **Distribute tourism geographically:** Encourage tours beyond Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, and Tashkent to less-visited regions, spreading economic benefits and reducing pressure on major sites.
6. **Offer flexible and customizable tours:** Provide small-group, family, and thematic tours for different interests, budgets, and durations.
7. **Monitor impacts and feedback:** Implement visitor-feedback systems, site-impact monitoring, and community-impact assessments to support sustainable development.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Excursion services are a cornerstone for realizing Uzbekistan's tourism potential. The article reports a rapid increase in foreign tourists, reaching 8.2 million in 2024, alongside a substantial expansion in lodging infrastructure. This momentum creates both opportunity and responsibility: well-organized excursions can deliver cultural enrichment, diversified tourism offerings, economic benefits, and sustainable development.

By investing in professional guiding and infrastructure, diversifying experiences, promoting sustainability, and adopting modern tools, Uzbekistan can develop a tourism sector offering memorable and meaningful excursions. Growth in tourist arrivals must be matched by quality, responsibility, and innovation so that the benefits are lasting and widely shared.

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