

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TOURISM AND ECONOMIC GROWTH:
ANALYSIS USING UZBEKISTAN AS AN EXAMPLE**

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Annotation: This article provides an in-depth analysis of the interrelationship between the tourism sector and economic growth. The study highlights the role of tourism in the national economy, its impact on gross domestic product, its contribution to employment, and its importance in attracting investments. Furthermore, the paper examines tourism infrastructure, digital transformation processes, and sustainable development concepts using Uzbekistan as a case study. Based on statistical data, international experience, and analytical approaches, the article substantiates the role of tourism in economic diversification. The findings indicate the necessity of promoting tourism as one of the priority directions of economic policy.

Keywords: tourism economics, economic growth, investment, employment, digital transformation, sustainable tourism, Uzbekistan's economy.

Introduction. In recent years, tourism has become one of the fastest-growing and most profitable sectors of the world economy. International experience shows that the tourism sector not only increases foreign exchange earnings, but also enhances the country's investment attractiveness, creates new jobs, and stimulates infrastructure development. Therefore, in modern economic policy, the formation of tourism as one of the important drivers of economic growth is a priority. In today's era of globalization and digital transformation, the impact of tourism on the economy is becoming more complex and multifaceted. On the one hand, the expansion of the export of tourist services creates a stable source of income for the country's budget; on the other hand, it is closely related to ensuring social stability, regional development, and ecological balance. Especially for countries with a rich historical and cultural heritage, such as Uzbekistan, the development of the tourism sector is an economic driver.

Literature review. The issue of the relationship between tourism and economic growth has been widely studied in world economic literature. In the first studies (B. Balassa, 1965; D. Ricardo, 1971) formed an export-oriented model of economic growth, which later developed in the form of the "tourism-led growth hypothesis" (TLGH), i.e., the "tourism-based growth hypothesis." According to this theory, the expansion of tourism services exports accelerates the overall economic growth rate of the country, increases foreign exchange earnings, and stimulates investment activity.

In international studies (UNWTO, 2023; WTTC, 2024) notes that tourism accounts for an average of 9-10 percent of the gross domestic product worldwide and provides more than 7 percent of global employment. From this point of view, tourism, as a "multiplicative" branch of the economy, has a strong influence on other sectors. For example, an increase in demand for hotel and transport services will expand the volume of domestic production, stimulate the quality of services and technological renewal. In studies conducted using the example of developing countries (Seetanah, 2011; Brida & Pulina, 2010) emphasizes that tourism plays an important role in the structural transformation of the economy, in particular, in the expansion of the service sector. At the same time, the quality of infrastructure, political stability, and ecological balance are noted as important factors for the sustainability of tourism revenues.

In studies conducted by scientists of Uzbekistan (R. Mamatov, 2020; D. Karimova, 2022) studied the role of tourism in the national economy, in particular, its share in GDP and its impact on employment. In their opinion, investments in the tourism sector, the development of transport and hotel infrastructure in the country in recent years are leading to an expansion of service exports. In addition, in modern literature (Hassan & Lee, 2022; OECD Tourism Trends, 2024) it is noted that digital transformation creates new economic opportunities in the field of tourism, increases the efficiency of the industry through online booking, "smart tourism" technologies, and data analysis. This expands the economic impact of tourism not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively.

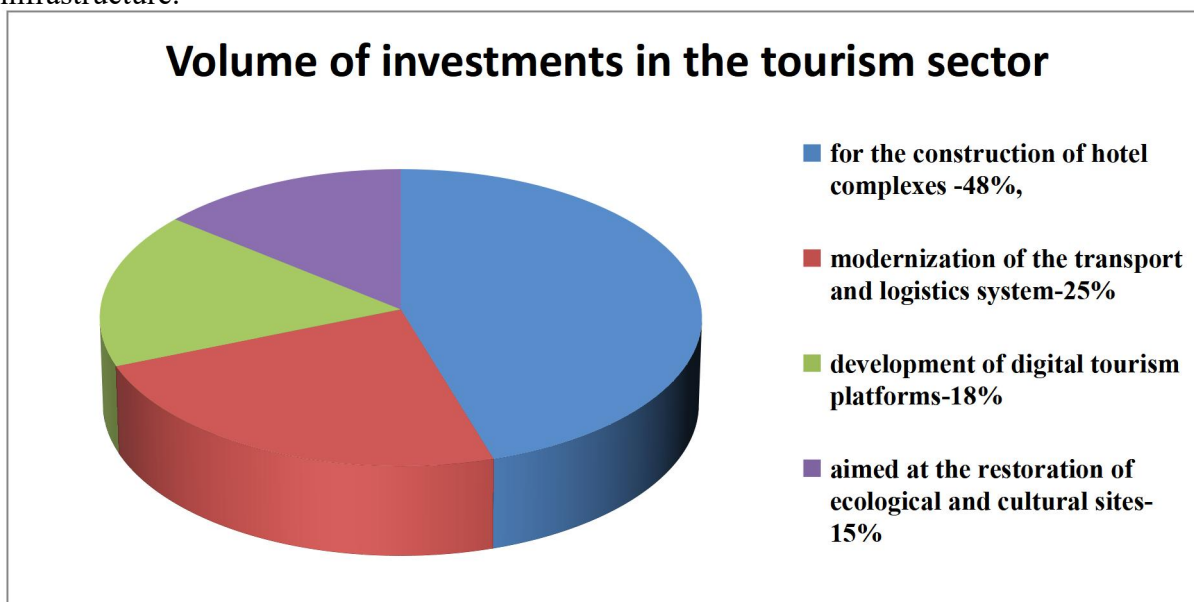
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The growth dynamics of the tourism sector in the economy of Uzbekistan have been developing at a noticeable pace in recent years. According to the State Statistics Committee, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), and the Tourism Committee of Uzbekistan, since 2017, tourism has become one of the most actively growing segments of the country's economy. In recent years, the share of tourism in the gross domestic product has been steadily growing. The table below shows this change.

1-table. The share of tourism in GDP and growth rates

Year	Number of foreign tourists (million people)	Export of tourism services (billion US dollars)	Tourism's share of GDP (%)
2018	5,3	1,3	2,3
2019	6,7	1,7	2,8
2020	1,5	0,4	0,9
2021	2,2	0,6	1,2
2022	3,4	1,0	1,9
2023	5,2	1,6	2,7

As can be seen from the data, although a sharp decline was observed in the tourism sector during the pandemic (2020-2021), in 2022-2023 the industry entered the recovery stage. In 2023, the share of tourism in GDP reached 2.7%, which indicates the strengthening of the service sector in the country's economy. The government of Uzbekistan has identified tourism as a priority sector of the economy and has been implementing large investment projects in recent years. During 2020-2024, more than 1 billion US dollars were invested in the industry's infrastructure.



1-diagramm. Share of total investments in the tourism sector for 2020-2024 (in percent)

As a result of these investments, more than 600 new tourist facilities have been commissioned in the country, more than 100 new routes have been opened, and 30 international hotels have started operating. In the context of the digital economy, improving the quality of tourism services and simplifying management has become a pressing issue. Since 2022, the digital platform "e-Tourism" has been implemented in Uzbekistan. This system allows foreign tourists to obtain a visa permit online, choose a route, book a hotel, and evaluate local services. According to statistics, in 2023, 60% of foreign tourists used tourism services online. This figure clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of digital tourism in the economy. In recent years, Uzbekistan has paid special attention to the development of the principles of "green tourism." In 2024, the "National Program for the Development of Ecotourism" was adopted, and measures were identified to expand tourist infrastructure in ecological zones, introduce a waste-free service system, and raise the environmental awareness of the local population. These initiatives, along with ensuring long-term economic stability, serve to strengthen the country's position in the international tourism ranking.

CONCLUSION

In our country, the tourism sector has become one of the factors of sustainable economic growth in recent years. The analysis shows that tourism not only increases foreign exchange earnings, but also improves employment, accelerates the development of small businesses and the service sector. According to statistics, after the pandemic crisis in 2020, the tourism sector began to recover rapidly, and in 2023 the indicators approached the pre-pandemic level. The positive impact of tourism on the economy is especially felt through the multiplicative mechanism in other sectors - transport, trade, IT, catering, and hotel services. Furthermore, digital transformation, online booking systems, and marketing innovations are increasing Uzbekistan's competitiveness in the international tourism market.

The research results show that for the development of tourism, it is necessary to strengthen the following strategic directions:

- Modernization of regional tourism infrastructure and improvement of the transport and logistics system;
- Rational use of natural resources through the development of the concept of sustainable (ecological) tourism;
- Expansion of tax and visa benefits to attract foreign investment;
- Improving the quality of services through the implementation of digital tourism platforms;
- Strengthening the participation of the local population, in particular, stimulating family and agritourism.

Thus, the tourism sector plays an important role in the direction of innovative growth and diversification of the economy of Uzbekistan. It is being formed as a strategic sector that contributes to strengthening economic security, creating new jobs, and improving the international image.

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