

**FORMATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY AND SPIRITUAL VALUES IN STUDENTS  
THROUGH PILGRIMAGE TOURISM**

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**Annotation:** This article explores how pilgrimage tourism contributes to the spiritual enrichment of students. It argues that pilgrimage tours serve not only as a form of spiritual engagement, but also as a meaningful avenue for deepening national identity and reinforcing cultural values. Drawing on the example of Bukhara's historical pilgrimage destinations—especially the tradition of the “Seven Saints” (“Yeti pir”)—the study demonstrates how such journeys nurture students' patriotism, national consciousness, and moral beliefs. The research also compares theoretical perspectives of different scholars on religious tourism and supports its practical importance by highlighting its positive influence on students' spiritual and ethical development.

**Introduction**

At the current stage of New Uzbekistan's development, one of the priority tasks is to educate the younger generation as individuals with a strong sense of national identity, high spiritual maturity, and active civic engagement. Spirituality, as a powerful force encompassing the ideological, cultural, ethical, and religious dimensions of society, enables a morally mature person to contribute meaningfully to the progress of the nation [7]. Therefore, since the early years of independence, great attention has been paid to strengthening national and spiritual education. The development of the Concept of Continuous Spiritual Education and the introduction of an effective system aimed at fostering loyalty to national ideas and values at all levels of education clearly reflect this approach. This concept plays an important role in shaping the worldview, social activity, and moral development of young people.

One of the key priorities of the state youth policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan is ensuring the spiritual maturity of young people and cultivating respect for national and universal values. In this context, nurturing students through the legacy of their ancestors, historical monuments, sacred sites, and pilgrimage destinations has become an important requirement of the time. From this perspective, pilgrimage tourism serves as an effective means for strengthening national identity, reviving historical memory, and fostering high spiritual consciousness among students.

**Methodology**

A number of scholars and specialists have conducted extensive research on strengthening the spiritual upbringing of youth. Their philosophical, pedagogical, and psychological studies emphasize the importance of educating the younger generation on the basis of national independence ideals, national and universal values, and the rich spiritual heritage of our ancestors. In our research, definitions of the concept of pilgrimage tourism provided by various authors were comparatively analyzed. V. S. Senin classifies religious tourism into three main types: pilgrimage, religious-themed excursions, and special tours [8, 66–68]. His classification demonstrates that students' spiritual knowledge and impressions can be enriched through diverse forms of religiously oriented travel. S. Yu. Jitenev, meanwhile, regards religious tourism as one of the fastest-growing sectors of modern tourism, noting that its key purpose is to bring together representatives of different confessions, encourage communication and cooperation, and thereby help ease religious and social tensions in society [5, 3–6]. This approach highlights the role of

pilgrimage tourism in fostering tolerance and a culture of dialogue among students. A. V. Babkin defines pilgrimage tourism as a set of journeys carried out by adherents of various confessions to sacred sites. According to him, pilgrimage is associated with the desire of believers to visit holy places and perform acts of reverence [3, 6–8]. This definition aligns with the educational aim of strengthening students' appreciation of spiritual values through visits to sacred destinations. T. Khristov describes religious tourism as travel undertaken for up to one year beyond one's usual environment to sacred places and religious centers [10, 4–5]. His interpretation presents students' spiritual journeys as time-limited but deeply meaningful and beneficial experiences. Through the comparative analysis of these scholarly perspectives, the conceptual framework of pilgrimage tourism was methodologically refined. This analysis provides a theoretical basis for understanding how pilgrimage tourism contributes to the development of national identity and spiritual values among students, thereby laying a scientific foundation for the practical outcomes of the research.

### **Results**

Spirituality is generally understood as a set of beliefs, customs, and traditions that nurture the moral and cultural elevation of individuals and society. Therefore, cultivating spiritually mature youth requires shaping their worldview through national values, helping them develop a sense of national identity while internalizing universal human virtues. Pilgrimage tourism refers to journeys undertaken to sacred sites, through which visitors seek spiritual nourishment and inner transformation. The term *ziyārat*, originating from Arabic, conveys the meaning “to visit.” In Islamic tradition, pilgrimage involves visiting the shrines of saints and revered figures, performing devotional acts, and engaging in supplication. In essence, pilgrimage represents a temporary departure from one's habitual environment to a sacred place for spiritual purification [9]. Unlike mass tourism, which primarily offers physical recreation, pilgrimage tourism provides spiritual recreation, helping individuals attain emotional balance and inner elevation. As a result, it is recognized as a significant component of sustainable tourism, strengthening both national ideology and social cohesion.

The socio-spiritual value of pilgrimage is exceptionally significant. Visiting sacred sites allows modern individuals to engage in deep personal reflection, encouraging self-examination, contemplation, patience, and emotional resilience. Pilgrims often detach from daily concerns, experiencing profound inner calm. Research shows that participants in large-scale religious gatherings frequently undergo collective emotional uplift—what É. Durkheim termed “collective effervescence”—a shared state of spiritual excitement that fosters solidarity, reduces feelings of isolation, and enhances psychological well-being.

Pilgrimage contributes to personal development in multiple ways.

First, it strengthens family bonds, as pilgrimages are often undertaken collectively, reinforcing affection and unity.

Second, it promotes social cohesion and fraternity: people from diverse regions and backgrounds worship side by side, reinforcing the ideals of equality and brotherhood.

Third, pilgrimage plays a transformative role in moral growth: at sacred sites, individuals reassess their actions, seek repentance, and strive toward virtue. As a result, qualities such as humility, patience, gratitude, and sincerity deepen [10]. Many pilgrims report feeling spiritually renewed, gaining a fresh outlook on life, and becoming more drawn toward moral values upon returning home [3, 13].

Sacred sites also function as centers of cultural education. Studies indicate that pilgrimage destinations serve as “open-air museums” and “schools of spirituality” [2]. Here, visitors learn about the nation's history, religious tradition, and cultural heritage, absorbing lessons of morality and reverence. Pilgrimage also reinforces the tradition of honoring ancestors, maintaining

cemeteries, and preserving heritage—values deeply rooted in local culture.

Importantly, such sites help reinforce national identity and patriotism. Honoring the resting places of historical figures who devoted their lives to the freedom and prosperity of the homeland instills pride and loyalty in young people. Visiting the shrines of Najmiddin Kubro, Zangi Ata, Amir Temur, and others enables students to draw inspiration from their courage and devotion. Thus, pilgrimage sites serve as powerful educational spaces that instill love for the homeland, national pride, and moral strength.

National identity refers to a person's deep sense of belonging to their nation—its history, language, culture, and traditions. It fosters pride, self-awareness, and continuity with one's cultural lineage. Since independence, strengthening national identity has become a key state priority. It is reflected in the national idea, which emphasizes patriotism, national interests, dignity, and cultural heritage.

Spiritual values—ethical norms, moral conduct, and principles of justice and goodness—form the centuries-old moral foundation of the Uzbek people. Hospitality, respect for elders, honesty, compassion, modesty, purity, and patience are among the core virtues transmitted through generations via oral and written literature and cultural traditions.

The formation of national identity and spiritual values among young people is a continuous educational process beginning within the family and later reinforced by schools, higher education institutions, and society. In the family, children initially learn their mother tongue and traditions. Educational institutions further strengthen these foundations through subjects like history, literature, and ethics, while extracurricular activities cultivate patriotism and moral awareness. At the same time, shielding youth from harmful ideological influences requires developing strong faith, cultural immunity, and independent thinking [4].

Studying historical monuments and pilgrimage sites—especially those in Bukhara—plays a significant role in this process. Sacred places help young people connect directly with the legacy of their ancestors. A student visiting Imam Bukhari's memorial complex or the Shah-i Zinda ensemble witnesses firsthand the intellectual and spiritual contributions of their predecessors. A visit to Bukhara introduces students to the wisdom and teachings of the “Seven Saints” (Yeti pir), enriching their inner world and deepening their national consciousness.

Bukhara has long been one of the great centers of Islamic scholarship and spirituality. From the 8th–9th centuries onward, it produced towering figures such as Imam al-Bukhari, Abu Bakr Narshakhi, and Abu Mansur Maturidi. By the 10th–16th centuries, the region became a major hub of Sufi thought, especially for the Naqshbandiyya order. The seven great pirs associated with this tradition form a spiritual chain stretching from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and their shrines are located in and around Bukhara [6].

Each of these saints contributed significantly to Islamic mysticism and moral philosophy:

Abdulkhaliq Ghijduvani emphasized purity of the heart, self-discipline, and righteous conduct; his teachings are preserved in works such as *Risolai Sohibiya* and *Vasiyatnoma*. Orif ar-Revgarī highlighted overcoming the ego, moral purity, and constant remembrance of God.

Mahmud Anjir Faghnawi advocated good manners, knowledge-seeking, and moral communication; his work *Tuhfat az-Zoirin* reflects these ideas. Ali Romitani stressed sincerity, gratitude, and moral vigilance. Mohammad Boboyi Somosi focused on compassion, care for orphans, and ethical conduct.

Sayyid Mir Kulol taught adherence to Shariah, labor, and divine love.

Bahouddin Naqshband, the founder of the Naqshbandiyya order, emphasized self-purification, adherence to the guidance of a teacher, and his famous principles—*wuquf zamani*, *wuquf adadi*, and *wuquf qalbi*—centered on discipline, mindfulness, and constant remembrance of God. These saints were not only spiritual leaders but also social reformers, contributing to public welfare,

moral discipline, and community development. Their shrines are still revered today and attract pilgrims from around the world.

The “Seven Saints” pilgrimage holds deep spiritual significance. Pilgrims do not simply visit tombs; they encounter a profound legacy of ethics, humility, and devotion. The Naqshbandiyya motto, “Dil ba yor, dast ba kor” (the heart with God, the hands at work), encapsulates the integration of spiritual and practical life—a message highly relevant for today’s youth.

For students, each shrine offers moral lessons:

Ghijduvani teaches spiritual purity, Revgari inspires humility, and Naqshband emphasizes learning and spiritual awareness. Thus, the pilgrimage functions as an informal curriculum, shaping youth in patriotism, moral integrity, and devotion.

Scholarly studies confirm that pilgrimage has strong psychological effects. Students—who are in a critical phase of identity formation—experience pilgrimage as a transformative “school of life.”

Psychological studies show that:

Pilgrimage reduces stress and induces deep spiritual calm similar to “mindfulness.”

It triggers motivational renewal, prompting students to make positive life changes—known as the “fresh start effect.”

Group pilgrimages create collective emotional energy, strengthening friendship, empathy, and social unity. Travel broadens students’ perspectives, enhances cultural appreciation, and fosters tolerance. Overcoming the challenges of pilgrimage builds resilience and self-discipline, increasing emotional stability.

These findings demonstrate that pilgrimage tourism has a comprehensive and multifaceted influence on students’ psychological and spiritual development. It acts simultaneously as spiritual therapy, a school of moral education, and a form of social experience. Accordingly, properly organized pilgrimage programs can play a highly effective role in fostering morally resilient and spiritually mature youth.

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

Based on the analyses presented above, we offer the following practical recommendations for integrating elements of pilgrimage tourism into the educational process:

1. Higher education institutions should include specialized topics on the lives and teachings of Bukhara’s pirs within courses such as history, philosophy, literature, and religious studies. For example, a module titled “Heritage of Bukhara’s Saints” could be introduced. Supervisors should encourage student research and graduation projects on themes like “The Contemporary Significance of the Yetti Pir Teachings”, thereby linking academic study with spiritual education.
2. Universities should offer elective courses such as “Personal Spirituality and Pilgrimage Culture” designed according to students’ interests. These courses ought to employ interactive, technology-enhanced methods (virtual tours, video lessons, quizzes). Establishing regular spiritual-educational clubs (seminars, debates on historical shrines) will provide deeper means for students to explore spiritual heritage and find answers to their questions.
3. Organize institutional tabarruk ziyorat expeditions to historical-spiritual centers (Bukhara, Samarkand, Khiva) during the academic year, led by experienced historians and religious scholars. Seasonal events such as a “Spiritual Travel Week” in spring or summer would be especially beneficial. Psychologists should be involved to conduct group reflection and processing workshops during or after trips, helping participants articulate and integrate their experiences.
4. Develop accessible materials about pilgrimage tourism and the history of the pirs for youth: story collections (“Stories of the Seven Saints”), popular science booklets (“Bukhara’s Seven Saints”), photo albums, podcasts, and short videos. Create a dedicated Pilgrimage Shelf in

university libraries and a Spiritual Heritage section on institutional websites with articles, e-books, and virtual 3D tours. Engage historians, imams, and museum specialists in content creation, and incentivize scholarly work on the topic through grants and competitions.

5. Effective implementation requires cooperation among departments (e.g., pedagogy, religious studies, Uzbek history) to develop integrated syllabi and coordinate thesis topics. Assignments should encourage interdisciplinary approaches rather than single-discipline treatments, fostering students' ability to analyze phenomena from multiple perspectives. Responsibility for spiritual education should be shared across faculty, since every subject contains elements that can support national and moral education.

6. As digital natives, today's students benefit from tech-forward approaches. Develop mobile applications presenting maps, historical data, photos, and audio guides for each shrine (e.g., an app about the Yetti Pir). Gamified elements—online quizzes, leaderboards, and contests—can motivate engagement (for instance, awarding winners a sponsored pilgrimage). Such initiatives will tightly link tourism, education, and spiritual upbringing.

7. Establish regular monitoring to assess program effectiveness—annual surveys and tests measuring students' spiritual values and attitudes, with year-to-year comparison. If integration of pilgrimage elements yields measurable improvements (stronger commitment to national values, reduction in harmful habits, etc.), the practices should be scaled. Otherwise, methods must be revised. Organize an annual scientific-practical conference on “Spirituality and Pilgrimage” where educators, sociologists, psychologists, and religious scholars evaluate outcomes and produce methodological recommendations for broader implementation.

If these recommendations are implemented, the educational and upbringing process will become more holistic, helping to form well-rounded, morally mature citizens. The synergy of pilgrimage tourism, scholarly inquiry, and spiritual education will significantly contribute to achieving the strategic goal of nurturing spiritually conscious and patriotic youth in New Uzbekistan.

### **Conclusion**

The analyses and evidence presented above clearly demonstrate that pilgrimage tourism is an important mechanism for fostering national identity and spiritual maturity among the younger generation. Through pilgrimage, students reconnect with historical memory and the legacy of their ancestors, drawing inspiration from their nation's proud past and deepening their sense of patriotism and national pride. At sacred sites, they also undergo meaningful stages of inner growth—self-reflection, reassessment of personal behavior, and clarification of life goals. Existing scientific studies likewise confirm that pilgrimage experiences lead to positive transformations, such as increased compassion, emotional balance, harmony with nature, and a reduced attachment to materialism.

The example of Bukhara's “Seven Saints” tradition illustrates that pilgrimage can effectively complement formal educational and upbringing practices. Survey results indicate that young people view this heritage with great interest and respect, yet they also express a desire for stronger integration of such content within the educational system. Students reported that they are ready to consider the “Yetti Pir” pilgrimage as an essential part of their spiritual development and expect greater institutional support in the form of learning resources, organized trips, and access to materials.

In conclusion, national identity and spiritual values take root more deeply in the hearts of young people when reinforced through practical educational tools such as pilgrimage. Pilgrimage tourism strengthens their connection to cultural heritage, enriches their spiritual world, and encourages them toward moral goodness. For this reason, implementing the proposed measures for integrating pilgrimage and spiritual education into the academic environment will contribute significantly to raising a future generation of well-rounded, morally mature individuals. As our

ancestors wisely stated, “Travel is the gate of knowledge, and pilgrimage is the treasury of faith.” The sacred sites of our homeland constitute a powerful school of moral and intellectual formation, and making effective use of this resource is a shared responsibility.

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