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REFORMS IN THE TOURISM SECTOR AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TOURIST ROUTES IN NAVOI REGION DURING THE YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

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Abstract. This article examines the reforms implemented in the tourism sector of Navoi Region during the years of independence, the measures undertaken to develop the region's tourism potential, and the establishment of new tourist routes. It also highlights the role of historical and cultural monuments, natural attractions, and pilgrimage sites in tourism development, as well as the significance of initiatives aimed at attracting foreign tourists to the region.

Keywords: Navoi Region, years of independence, tourism, tourism potential, tourism sector reforms, tourist routes, historical and cultural heritage, Sarmishsay, Aydarkul Lake, Nurata, ecotourism, pilgrimage tourism, tourism infrastructure, foreign tourists.

Introduction. Following the independence of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the development of tourism became one of the key priorities of the country's socio-economic development. In this regard, Navoi Region holds particular significance due to its geographical location, rich historical and cultural heritage, and unique natural landscapes. The region's extensive tourism potential provides an important foundation for developing domestic and international tourism, establishing new tourist routes, and making effective use of local economic resources.

The distinctive natural landscapes of the Kyzylkum Desert, the Nurata Mountains, the Tudakul and Aydarkul water bodies, as well as ancient settlements, historical and architectural monuments, and sacred pilgrimage sites within the region provide extensive opportunities for the development of ecotourism, ethnographic tourism, pilgrimage tourism, and historical and cultural tourism. However, the region's tourism potential has not yet been fully realized. Systematizing existing resources, establishing new tourist routes, improving tourism infrastructure, and maintaining ecological balance remain among the key priorities.

The aim of this article is to analyze the reforms implemented in the tourism sector of Navoi Region during the years of independence, the measures undertaken to realize the region's tourism potential, and the process of establishing new tourist routes.

Results and Discussion. Navoi Region is located in the central part of Uzbekistan. The northwestern part of the region borders the Kyzylkum Plateau, while its eastern part is surrounded by the picturesque Nurata Mountains.[1]The Resolution №. Q-128 adopted by the Governor of Navoi Region in 2011 served as an important legal and organizational foundation for regulating and supporting the region's tourism potential. It contributed to the development of tourism infrastructure, the involvement of the private sector in the tourism industry, and the creation of employment opportunities.[2] The principles outlined in this resolution, including the development of roadside

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service facilities and the establishment of handicraft and service complexes around ethno-tourism and ecotourism sites, continue to provide a practical foundation for the development of the tourism cluster in Navoi Region.

Navoi Region occupies a distinctive geographical position on the map of Uzbekistan, extending across the central part of the country. A significant portion of its territory is covered by the Kyzylkum Desert. Historically, this oasis served as a vital corridor amid the vast and arid desert landscapes, facilitating cultural exchange between the East and the West, fostering interaction among different peoples, and strengthening their spiritual and intellectual ties. The Great Silk Road once passed through this region, connecting major cultural and economic centres of the East, including the historic cities of Bukhara and Samarkand. Karmana played an important role as a connecting point between these two cities, contributing to the development of trade, cultural relations, and intercultural exchange throughout the region.[3] The Great Silk Road entered the city from the southeast and passed through its southwestern part.

Extensive construction and landscaping works were carried out at the Sarmishsay Natural and Archaeological Complex Museum-Reserve, one of the main tourist attractions in Navoi Region. In addition, a set of measures was developed to improve tourism infrastructure in the Sarmishsay and Aydarkul areas, create new opportunities for visitors, and promote various forms of tourism. In accordance with this plan, the establishment of several new tourist routes was envisaged, including "Great Silk Road – Konimex – Aydarkul," "Navoi – Aydarkul Ecotourism," "Navoi – Nurata – Ruslan Eco Service," and "Navoi – Tudakul." These initiatives were aimed at expanding the region's tourism opportunities and enhancing its attractiveness to domestic and international visitors.[4] These initiatives are aimed at expanding the tourism potential of the region and increasing the number of visitors to the area.

In 2014, a total of 6,548 foreign tourists visited Navoi Region. The majority of these visitors came from Germany, Italy, France, England, and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Of the total number of tourists, 4,000 spent their holidays in the Aydarkul area, while 289 visited Sintob village. Furthermore, 90% of foreign tourists expressed a preference for visiting Sarmishsay Gorge. During that period, eight travel agencies operated in the region, and 14 hotels meeting international standards provided accommodation and services for tourists.[5]

In his Address to the Oliy Majlis on 22 December 2017, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev particularly emphasized the need to develop and accelerate the implementation of the "Minor Hajj" programme, which focuses on visiting sacred pilgrimage sites and historical monuments.[6]

Following the initiatives put forward by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, a number of measures were implemented to promote tourism development in Navoi Region. As a result, the number of visitors to the region increased noticeably. According to statistical data, 5,466 foreign tourists visited Navoi Region in 2016. In subsequent years, increased attention to the tourism sector contributed to a substantial rise in the number of foreign visitors. For instance, in 2024 alone, more than 420,000 foreign tourists visited Navoi Region [7], representing an approximately 76-fold increase compared with the figure recorded in 2016.

New tourist routes have been developed in Navoi Region, including a 340-kilometre tourist circuit connecting the districts of Nurata, Karmana, and Konimex. This route encompasses more than 60 tourist attractions in areas such as Nurata, Karmana, and Qiziltepa. In addition, the number of

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travel companies and tourist routes has increased significantly, contributing to improvements in tourism infrastructure and attracting investment to the sector. These initiatives, together with the establishment of wellness facilities and the development of an ecological tourism map, are strengthening Navoi Region's position as an important destination within Uzbekistan's tourism sector. They also contribute to regional economic development and generate growing interest among both domestic and international tourists.[7]

Particular attention has been paid to studying international experience and adapting advanced practices to local conditions in order to develop the tourism sector in Navoi Region. According to Farhod Ernazarov, the authorized representative of the State Committee for Tourism Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Navoi Region [4], international experience is being widely utilized to further advance the tourism industry. Alongside traditional tourism services, efforts are also being made to promote new tourist routes that reflect the region's distinctive natural, historical, and cultural characteristics.

The sacred pilgrimage sites, ancient historical monuments, and natural areas suitable for ecotourism within the region provide opportunities for developing various forms of tourism. Therefore, improving the quality of services provided to tourists and creating opportunities for them to become more familiar with local culture and traditions are among the key priorities. In particular, organizing masterclasses on traditional Uzbek cuisine enables tourists to explore the distinctive features of Uzbek culinary traditions and participate directly in the preparation of national dishes. Such initiatives contribute to promoting local cultural heritage, diversifying tourism services, and enhancing the tourist appeal of Navoi Region.

Conclusion. In conclusion, during the years of independence, various measures have been implemented in Navoi Region to develop the tourism sector, make effective use of existing tourism potential, and establish new tourist routes. The region's rich historical and cultural heritage, ancient archaeological sites, sacred pilgrimage destinations, and unique natural landscapes have served as important factors in tourism development. In particular, the tourism potential of areas such as the Sarmishsay Natural and Archaeological Complex, Aydarkul, Nurata, and Sintob has created favourable conditions for the development of historical and cultural tourism, ecotourism, and pilgrimage tourism in the region.

It should be emphasized that the development of tourism in Navoi Region is closely linked not only to the preservation and promotion of historical and cultural heritage but also to expanding the region's economic opportunities, creating new jobs, and increasing employment among the local population. In the future, further enhancing the region's tourism potential will require the protection of historical monuments, the maintenance of ecological sustainability, the development of modern infrastructure, improvements in service quality, and the effective promotion of the region's attractiveness in international tourism markets.

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