

The importance of developing tourism through cultural and mass events

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Abstract: This article analyzes modern trends in the development of the tourism industry in Uzbekistan through cultural and mass events, in particular, international festivals. Based on statistical indicators for the first quarter of 2025, the dynamics of economic growth in the sector, the role of festivals such as “Lazgi” and “Boysun Spring” in strengthening international branding and diplomatic ties are highlighted. The article also provides a comparative analysis of the processes of change in the global tourism market. Based on statistical data on the demographic characteristics of event tourism consumers in the Russian Federation and the geography of foreign trips of Uzbeks, the importance of event tourism in reducing seasonality and improving regional infrastructure is scientifically substantiated.

Keywords: event tourism, Lazgi festival, Boysun Spring, economic growth, cultural heritage, international cooperation, tourism statistics

The tourism industry in Uzbekistan is currently reaching a new intellectual and economic level, both in terms of numbers and quality. The fact that almost 3 million tourists visited our country in the first quarter of 2025, the growth rate in the sector increased by 37 percent, and the export of services increased by an astonishing 48 percent to \$ 1.1 billion is the practical result of these reforms. However, these results are only the beginning of the grandiose goals we are striving for. The reason is that, according to the strategic plans of our state, a firm goal has been set to increase the flow of tourists to 12 million by 2026, and to 20 million by 2030. To achieve these lofty goals, targeted programs are now being implemented based on the unique ethnographic image and potential of each region. Based on the principles of project management, it is expected that 31 master plans will be implemented in the regions during 2026-2027, creating more than 40 thousand new jobs. In order to create convenience for tourists, increasing the number of accommodation facilities to 8 thousand 250, and the number of tourist villages and neighborhoods, which are hotbeds of national traditions, to 84, will fundamentally strengthen the infrastructural foundation of the sector.

Undoubtedly, in the context of such rapid and positive reforms taking place in our country, the sphere of culture and art is being recognized as a mirror of spirituality, a great force driving the development of national tourism. Today, it is no exaggeration to say that the unique charm of our art and the deep roots of our cultural heritage serve as a strategic beacon in introducing Uzbekistan to the world. At the same time, new mechanisms for supporting entrepreneurial initiatives are a guarantee of a golden era in the sector. In particular, the state’s reimbursement of part of the costs of promotion aimed at attracting foreign tourists, and the encouragement of entrepreneurs who systematically organize cultural, mass and staged performances will ensure that the spirit of festivals such as “Boysun Bahori” or “Lazgi” will be attractive in every corner. The new generation of personnel being formed through training courses with the participation of local and foreign specialists will represent Uzbekistan in the world tourism market not only as a historical place, but also as a place of high-level service and modern services. In fact, the deep logic underlying today’s

reforms is to turn the heritage of our ancestors into a vital force of the modern economy and make Uzbekistan one of the most attractive destinations on the world tourism map.

Today, the tourism industry is becoming an important driver of cultural dialogue between peoples and economic stability. Especially for countries with a rich historical and ethnographic heritage like Uzbekistan, demonstrating the potential of tourism through cultural and mass events is of great importance. The trend of increasing the tourist attractiveness of regions through cultural events is gaining new meaning today. On the one hand, this process serves to restore and preserve ancient traditions and folk folklore, and on the other hand, it creates the basis for improving the regional economy through the development of the service sector, transport and infrastructure.

Khiva, the crossroads of ancient civilizations and a living museum-city, hosted another grand conference. The III International Dance Festival “Lazgi”, which beckoned the world with its magical charm in the last ten days of April, became not only a celebration of art, but also a large-scale diplomatic dialogue. In the midst of the festival, the III meeting of the Joint Commission, which took the cultural ties between the two great states of the Turkic world, Uzbekistan and Turkey, to a new level, took on a symbolic meaning. The exchange of experience between museums, joint film projects and the prospects for cooperation in theatrical art opened a new era in the field of culture and art. Events such as the Lazgi Festival, while strengthening Uzbekistan’s place on the world tourist map, once again proved the fundamental power of cultural mass events in shaping international relations. The sound of “Lazgi” resounding in the sky of Khiva and the signed agreements were an important step towards the common past and great future of the Uzbek and Turkish peoples, and were inscribed in history.

The “Lazgi” dance, which has a history of 3,000 years, was created on the land of Khorezm and has retained its charm for thousands of years, despite historical changes and different eras. It was also included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2019. In accordance with the resolution of our President Shavkat Mirziyoyev on the organization and holding of the “Lazgi” International Dance Festival, signed on September 28, 2020, the “Lazgi” International Dance Festival has been held every two years from April 25 to 30 in Khiva, Khorezm region, at the initiative of the Ministry of Culture, starting from 2022. The “Lazgi” III International Dance Festival, which is being held for the third time in 2026, was attended by more than 300 talented dancers, professional dance groups, masters of dance art, musicologists and art historians, famous artists, distinguished specialists, and honored guests from more than 30 countries of the world.

In short, this festival, which has become a tradition at the initiative of our President, has turned the UNESCO-recognized “Lazgi” dance into a competitive, attractive and unforgettable “calling card” of Uzbekistan in the world tourism market. Such cultural and mass events will remain one of the most important drivers of the grandiose goals of increasing the number of foreign tourists to 20 million by 2030.

Boysun is a sacred and mysterious land that has preserved the echoes of centuries, with history spoken in every stone. Today, this ancient place has once again become an international folklore center and hosts the “Boysun Bahori” festival that amazes the world. This grand event in the bosom of Surkhandarya is a living demonstration not only of our national culture, but also of the most ancient and rich folklore heritage of mankind.

The tourist complex, built in the lush green bosom of the Bibishirin neighborhood, has become a real place of legends these days. Here, unique examples of folk folklore, the playful and melancholic tales of the Bakhshis, and the ancient sayings of the old women are harmoniously combined with the spring freshness of nature. The splendor of courage in our national games and the exquisite examples of art coming to life at the fingertips of craftsmen convey to each guest the

depth of the Uzbek spirit. This festival is not just a spectacle, but a strategic bridge that serves to rediscover Baysun as an integral part of the world cultural civilization and to enhance its tourism potential on an international scale.

As the second day of the festival continues with its amazing brilliance, the scenery in the sky gives hearts endless pride. 35 colorful balloons, rising into the blue sky as a symbolic tribute to the 35th anniversary of our independence, are a link between the rich past and the bright future of Boysun. This balloon flight shows how harmoniously our ancient traditions are with today's progress, and the spirit of Boysun is proud not only on the ground, but also in the heights. Thus, "Boysun Spring" continues to glorify the spiritual wealth of our people to the whole world with its artistic charm and scientific depth.

The global tourism industry rose to a new record level in 2025. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the industry's contribution to global gross domestic product (GDP) increased by 4.1%. However, against the backdrop of this overall growth, the position of the United States, the world's largest tourism market, is showing some worrying trends. The United States still remains the world's number one country in terms of tourism volume. Its total contribution to the industry amounted to \$2.63 trillion, and the volume of domestic tourism increased by 14.3% compared to the pre-pandemic period. The fact that 20.4 million jobs were created in the industry is also a sign of economic stability. However, in terms of growth dynamics, North America, and in particular the United States, is lagging behind in the global race. Against the backdrop of a global upswing, the growth in US tourism was only +0.9%. The most painful point is the decrease in the flow of foreign tourists by 5.5% and their spending by 4.6% (up to \$ 176 billion). The United States maintains its scale due to domestic tourism, but loses its attractiveness in the international arena and loses in competition. While the share of the United States is decreasing, the Asian region is growing at an unprecedented pace. Today this region has become the fastest growing tourist region.

China has become a giant in terms of economic growth and employment, providing 84.6 million jobs in the tourism sector. The double-digit growth of countries such as Malaysia and the Philippines shows that global demand is shifting sharply from West to East. The main problem for US tourism is its decline in international prestige and competitiveness for foreign tourists. If the country does not invest in infrastructure and does not take strategic measures to encourage inbound tourism, it is unlikely that Asian leaders will dethrone the US from the top in the coming years. Nevertheless, the major global events expected in 2026 will open a huge window of opportunity for the US. According to forecasts, 1.24 million additional foreign tourists are expected to arrive during this period, which could be a significant turning point to stop the downward trend.

One of the fastest growing and promising areas of the travel industry. It includes trips to visit various entertainment, cultural, sports and educational events in other cities, regions or countries. The study of event tourism is especially relevant against the background of the growth of domestic tourism and changes in recreation formats. According to the Russian Union of Tour Operators, such tours are among the most popular tourist offers. Over the past year, six out of ten Russians (58%) have visited various events in their area of residence, which indicates a high interest in this type of recreation. The most active group is young people aged 18-24, 80% of whom have participated in events. Activity decreases with age, but even among those over 60, almost half (47%) have become participants in cultural and mass events. The level of income is also an important factor affecting activity: the better the financial situation, the more people "go out into society." In the high-income group, this figure is 68% (compared to 42% in the low-income group).

The level of education also has a positive effect: among citizens with higher or incomplete higher education, the figure reaches 69%, which is almost twice as high as among those without secondary education (39%). Urban residents (56-65%), and especially residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg (73%), visited events more often last year than residents of rural areas (47%). This can be explained by the abundance of entertainment and leisure facilities in cities. The most attractive destinations for Russians are:

- Theaters and cinemas: Every fourth person (26%) visited.
- City holidays: Every fifth person (21%).
- Concerts, shows, museums and exhibitions: 18% each.

So, Russians are paying more attention to entertainment events. Educational (excursions - 9%, conferences and workshops - 6%) and sporting events (matches - 9%, marathons - 4%) are less popular. Women are more likely to attend events, especially concerts (22% for women vs. 14% for men), museums (20% vs. 15%) and excursions (12% vs. 6%). The exceptions are sports matches and nightclubs, which are visited slightly more often by men. Young people aged 18-24, due to their high activity, attend almost all of the listed events more often. Theaters and cinemas are of particular interest to them (46% of young people compared to 26% of Russians in general). City holidays (27%), museums (25%) and nightclubs (23%) are also popular among young people. Excursions are the only activity that attracts older people (35-59 years old - about 10-13%) more than young people (5%). The general trend is that interest in all types of activities in the place of residence decreases with age.

In conclusion, in today's Russian reality, cultural and mass events have become not just a means of spending time, but an integral part of the daily life of the population. Different segments of society satisfy their vital needs precisely in these spaces of social communication. However, the general trend in this regard shows that the participation of the population is still more of a recreational and entertaining nature. Against the background of high activity in theater, cinema and city holidays, educational projects that provide systematic knowledge, scientific master classes and mass sports events remain areas of unexplored potential that are still waiting for their significant audience. Understanding culture not as a means of recreation, but as a means of personal growth and a healthy lifestyle will undoubtedly be the main direction of future social transformation.

Today, we can see that the enthusiasm of Uzbeks for traveling around the world has reached a new level. The fact that in the first quarter of this year, the number of trips made by our compatriots to foreign countries increased by almost 111.6 thousand people compared to the same period last year, indicates how high the desire of our people to discover the world is. On this year's travel map, the fraternal Kyrgyz Republic has become the absolute leader - 660,579 of our compatriots enjoyed the beauties of this ancient land. Also, the destinations of neighboring Kazakhstan (284,024) and Tajikistan (282,040) complete the top three, demonstrating the strength of mutual cultural and tourist ties. Saudi Arabia (136,060), a melting pot of spiritual aspirations, and Russia (88,267), our traditional partner, have also been in the spotlight of our tourists. Stretching from the magical shores of Turkey (52,199), to the modern wonders of the UAE (28,125), past the Great Wall of China (15,844), to the lands of Thailand (13,839) and mysterious Egypt (12,186), these caravans prove how the geographical horizons of the Uzbek traveler are expanding. In short, these numbers are not just statistics, but a living reflection of the growing prosperity of our people and their boundless interest in world civilization and culture.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that in the modern world, tourism has become a need to understand oneself through the world of others. Cultural and mass events in this process serve as a

golden bridge between ancient history and a bright future. The main trends observed during our research show that today's tourist yearns to become a living participant in ancient values.

Festivals such as "Boysun Spring" and "Lazgi" held in Uzbekistan are strategic drivers that stabilize our national brand in the world cultural arena and inject life-giving blood into the economies of regions. The growth rates hidden behind the numbers are proof of how well the philosophy of hospitality of our people is being combined with modern management and innovative approaches.

After all, if culture is the soul of tourism, then tourism is an act that spreads culture to the world. The harmonious development of these two areas guarantees not only economic prosperity, but also the preservation of our national heritage and its transfer to future generations in all its charm. Therefore, turning Uzbekistan into one of the most attractive destinations on the world tourist map through event tourism is a high victory of our economic goal and cultural diplomacy. The sounds of the tanbur resounding in the Khiva sky and the hot air balloons flying over the expanses of the Baysun today clearly speak of one truth: Uzbekistan is the eternal and ever-young center of cultural civilization to which humanity aspires.

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