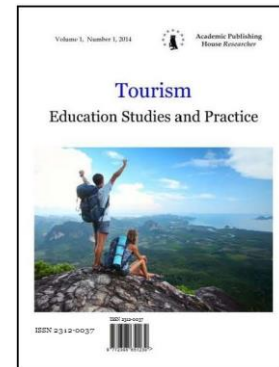


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Articles and Statements

Analysis of Tourism Potential and Transport Infrastructure of Khorezm Region, Uzbekistan

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Abstract

The following paper attempts to analyze statistical data regarding tourism industry in Khorezm region, Uzbekistan based on statistical database provided by regional committee of statistics of Khorezm region. The study also attempts to reveal the existing issues in transport provision by investigating the results of Uzbekistan *International Visitor Economy Survey* conducted by UNWTO in 2014. The main conclusion is that to increase the number of visitors adequate tourism infrastructure should be provided in the region. The findings of the paper provide useful information for destination planners of the region.

Keywords: tourism, infrastructure, air transport, railway transport, public transportation.

1. Introduction

Tourism has become a strategic sector of economy as a wide range of reforms has been carried out in this field starting from simplification of visa procedures and ending with efforts to increase the quality of service in accommodation, transportation and restaurants.

After opening up the country to the world by simplifying the visa formalities, the number of tourists who visited the country in 2017 exceeded 2,52 million and increased by 24,3 % in comparison with 2016, while the export of tourist services went up by 24 percent compared with 2016 reaching 1 billion 557 million US dollars ([Committee on development of tourism, Uzbekistan, 2018](#)).

It's forecasted that as a result of new reforms in tourism industry to develop tourism infrastructure, the figures are to soar significantly.

It is undeniable fact that Uzbekistan is becoming a popular tourist destination due to the fact that in this country a large number of world-famous architectural monuments are situated in cities such as Khiva, Bukhara and Samarkand which were the main stops along the Great Silk Road.

Khiva is the only fully preserved ancient city on the Great Silk Road. By the number of historical and architectural monuments preserved in its original form, it occupies one of the leading places not only in Uzbekistan, but also in the world.

Tourism in Khiva, specifically in Khorezm region has become an integral part of the regional economy.

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However, minimal information exists on tourism potential of Khorezm region and there is a significant gap in literature regarding the transport infrastructure of Khorezm region which is one of the integral elements of tourist product.

The paper aims to analyze the current condition of tourism industry and available transportation infrastructure for tourism in Khorezm region. The author also attempts to reveal existing issues in provision of transport services to tourists by investigating the results of Uzbekistan *International Visitor Economy Survey* conducted by UNWTO in 2014 where 281 respondents were found eligible for analysis. Furthermore, research efforts may provide valuable knowledge to policy makers in transportation planning and destination management.

2. Discussion

Tourism in Khorezm region

Khorezm region is situated in the north-western part of the territory of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The territory of Khorezm region occupies 1.4% of the total area of the Republic of Uzbekistan, which is equal to 6.1 thousand km². The administrative center of the region is the city of Urgench (Main indicators..., 2017).

As of the beginning of 2018, the population of the region is 1,815 mln people, of which the prevailing number is rural residents (66.7 %), and the rest (33.3 %) are urban (The regional committee of statistics of Khorezm region, 2018).

Khorezm Region is divided into 10 administrative districts. The capital is Urgench (pop. est 135,000). Other major towns include Xonqa, Khiva, Shovot, and Pitnak.

The climate is a typically arid continental climate, with cold winters and extremely hot, dry summers.

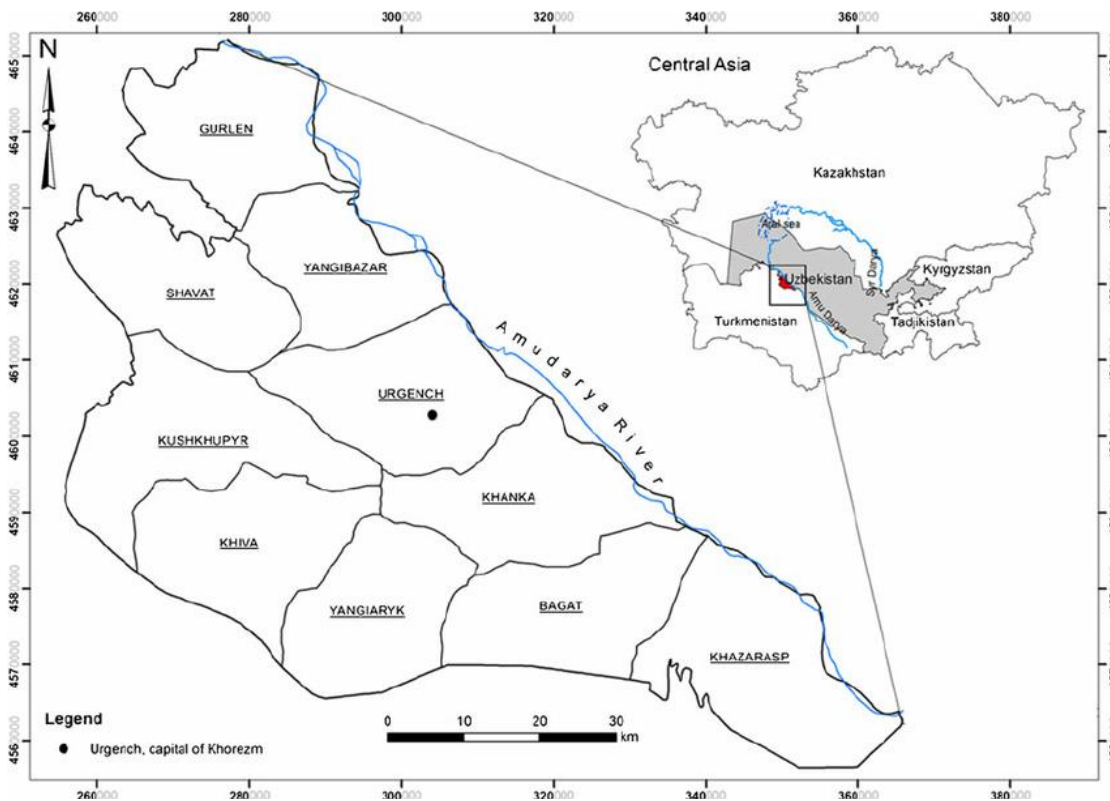


Fig. 1. The geographical map of Khorezm region

The city of Khiva stands out among other cities of the country with its rich cultural heritage. The fortress of Ichan-Kala was enlisted on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Table 1. The number of visitors to Khorezm region between 2013-2016

No	Years	Europe	Asian countries	CIS countries	America	Africa	Foreign visitors	Local tourists	Overall number of visitors
1	2013	41 980	7510	1731	1875	204	53300	20000	73300
2	2014	35102	7496	1942	1552	128	46200	21500	67700
3	2015	28094	7936	2669	1978	148	40825	22800	61625
4	2016	32314	9408	3049	1658	171	46600	29200	75800
Total		137490	32350	9391	7063	651	186925	93500	278425

Source: Statistical office of Khorezm region ([Main indicators..., 2017](#))

As it can be seen from the table above the tourism figures of Khorezm region witnessed a downfall in 2014 and 2015. In 2014, the number of visitors went down by 8 percent compared to previous year. Due to significant reforms in tourism industry in 2016, the situation changed and the numbers increased again. Foreign tourists expressed more interested in the destination than local tourists since they outnumber local visitors.

Table 2. The number of tourists who visited 'Ichan-Kala' fortress in Khiva city during 2013-2017

No	The name of the attraction	Types of tourists	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
1	Ichan kala: the state museum-reserve	Total	728 665	735 004	737 801	741 614	905603
		Local	687 628	698 079	707 526	708 229	859416
		Foreign	41 037	36 925	30 275	33 385	46187

Source: Statistical office of Khorezm region ([Main indicators..., 2017](#))

Almost every tourist who paid a visit to Khorezm region came to see Ichan Kala fortress in Khiva. The interesting point is that the number of visitors grew rapidly in 2017 in comparison with earlier periods. The total number of visitors to Ichan Kala went up by 24 percent in 2017 compared to 2013.

Transportation infrastructure of Khorezm region

Transport infrastructure has come to have a rather confused role related to economic development, particularly regional development. There is a popular view that the provision of more and better infrastructure is not only a desirable instrument of regional development but is a sufficient instrument ([Masson, Petiot, 2009](#)).

Buses, taxis, and trolleybuses and mini buses the main transport means heavily used by local users and visitors. As its shown in the Table 1, the amount of passengers serviced by automobile transport is 85,4 mln, whereas electrified transport serviced only 0,1 mln passengers during the first three months of 2018.

Table 3. The number of passengers serviced and types of transport in Khorezm region

The number of passengers serviced and types of transport in Khorezm region 2018 January and March	
Passengers services, <i>in mlns.</i>	85,4
<i>From this:</i>	
Automobile transport	85,3
Electrified transport	0,1

Source: Statistical office of Khorezm region ([Main indicators..., 2017](#))

Many tourist companies offer transportation services for overseas visitors that include mini-buses, buses, car rental with drivers and car rental (self-drive).

This option is preferred by tourist since it provides most comfort during the trip to other regions of Uzbekistan.

Public transportation service in Khorezm region mainly provided by ISUZU buses, produced at Samarkand Automobile Plant are used by companies to carry commuters within the city and outskirts of the city. For shorter distance between towns you will find 11- to 14-seat Russian-made ‘Gazelle’ vans. For shorter suburban trips you’ll find cramped seven-seat “Damas” minivans.

Trolleybuses produced delivered by the Czech company Skoda operates mainly between the city of Urgench and Khiva. Urgench trolleybus system became the only one in operation in the country after the closure of Tashkent trolleybus system in 2010. The main purpose of keeping the trolleybus system was to make the public transport available for tourists.

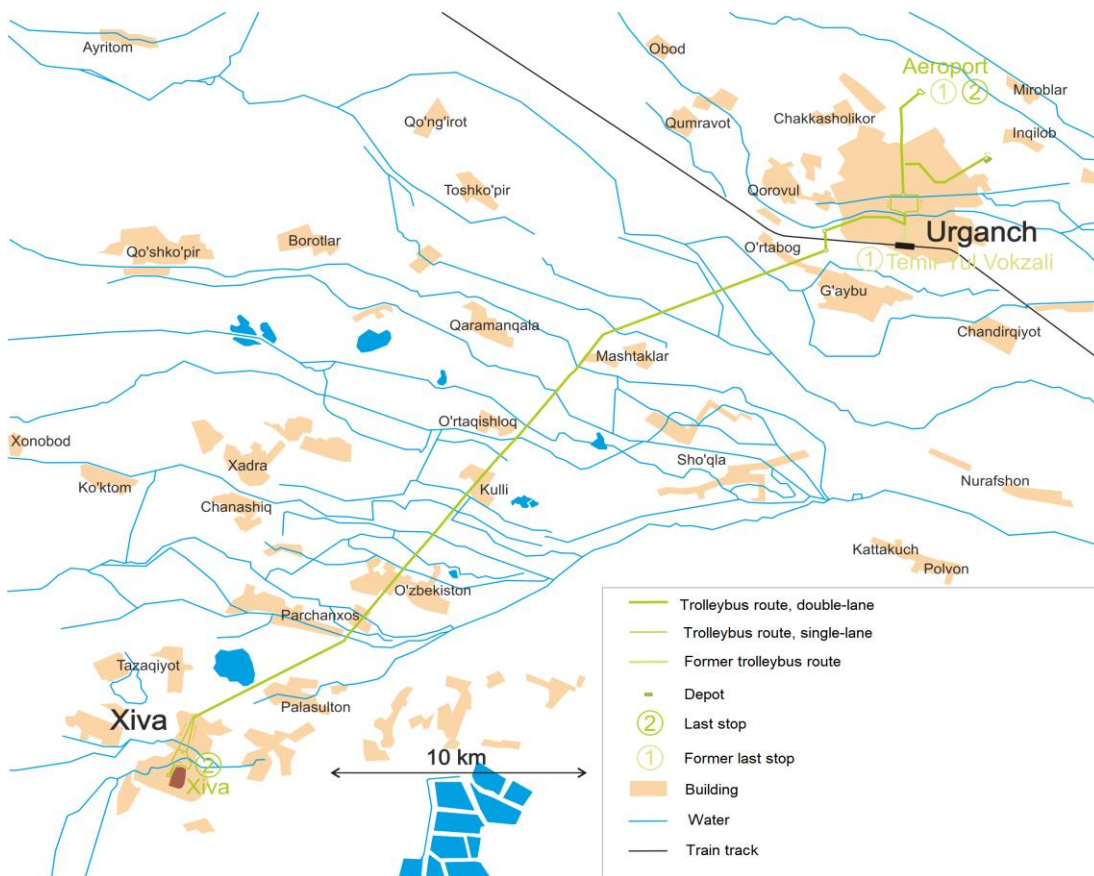


Fig. 2. The scheme of trolleybus routes of Urgench-Khiva
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trolleybuses_in_Urgench

The contribution of long-distance air transport to the growth of tourism has been well documented (Page, 1994). Air transport is widely used by foreign visitors to reach Uzbekistan and even to travel within the country.

From Urgench International Airport regular flights to Tashkent and also to several cities of Russian Federation together with charter flights to other European cities such as Rome and Paris during the tourist season are realized. In 2017, Urgench International Airport provided service to 282136 passengers, including 43848 foreign visitors.

Second mostly used transport to travel to different destinations in Uzbekistan is regional railway system.

Overall distance of railway line within Khorezm region is 128, 7 km. There is central railway station in Urgench that has reconstructed recently and capable of providing service to 500 passengers per hour. The central railway station is well-equipped with modern facilities to provide high quality service to passengers.

3. Methodology

A survey that consists of 29 questions was administered to overseas visitors in main tourist cities such as Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva by UNWTO in 2014. A total of two hundred and eighty one surveys were eligible for analysis.

The survey was designed using a range of question styles including multiple choice, open-ended questions and Likert scales. To be eligible, respondents must have stayed one night in the Republic of Uzbekistan and be a resident of a country other than Republic of Uzbekistan.

4. Analysis and results

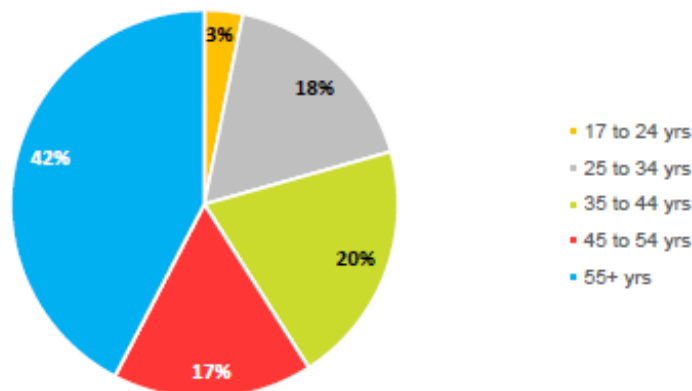


Fig. 3. Age of survey respondents

Source: Uzbekistan Visitor Economy Survey 2014(UNWTO)

Survey results show that the biggest group of visitors is people aged 55 and over. This explains the fact that most tourists visiting Uzbekistan are attracted by its culture and heritage that are interesting for older generation.

Style of travel	Respondents (%)
I prefer to go on a complete package holiday for a set period that I purchase before I leave home, with all accommodation and tours pre-booked.	28%
I prefer to go on a package holiday for a set time period that I purchase before I leave home, but I like to have some choice about where to stay and what tours to do.	24%
I like to travel independently, making all travel decisions myself, meeting and interacting with locals as much as possible, using a traveller's guidebook for reference, but preferring to stay in comfortable accommodation.	32%
I like to travel independently, making all travel decisions myself, totally involving myself in local culture, living as locals do, and mostly avoiding other travellers.	17%

Fig. 4. Age of survey respondents

Source: Uzbekistan Visitor Economy Survey 2014 (UNWTO)

Survey results reveal that most visitors (32 %) prefer to travel independently and they attempt to contact with local people, however they indicated that rely on traveler’s guidebook for information and also like to choose comfortable accommodation.

Another outstanding fact in this table is that half of the respondents’ travel behavior is totally opposite to those who prefer to plan their trip independently, thus they prefer to go on holiday based on package tours where most activities are planned ahead.

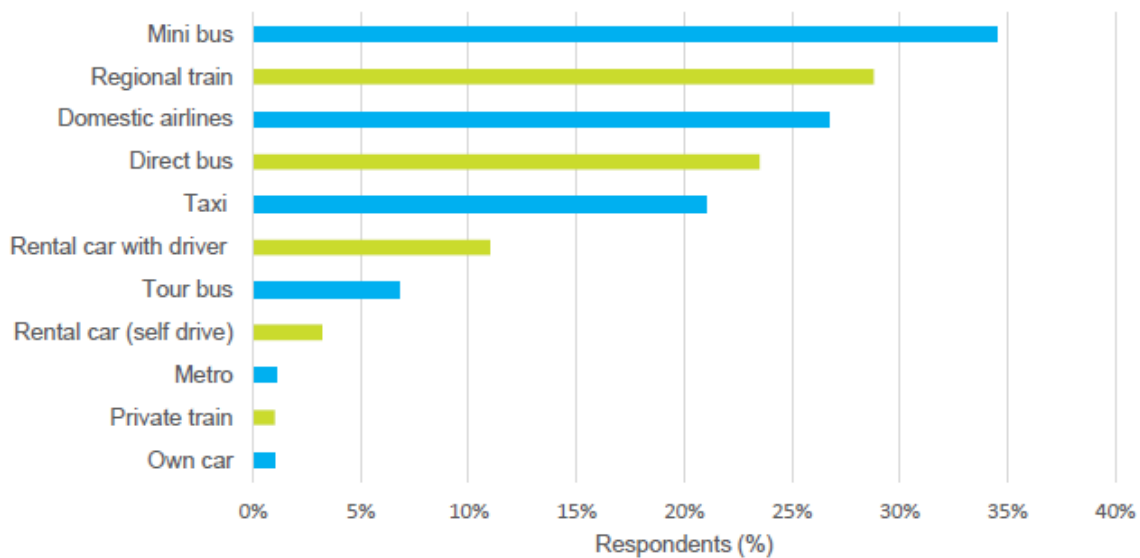


Fig. 5. Age of survey respondents

Source: Uzbekistan Visitor Economy Survey 2014

The most preferable mode of transport to travel in Uzbekistan among the visitors was mini buses. These minibuses are offered by local tour companies. Second mostly used mode of transport is regional train with 29 percent. Domestic airlines are also popular among visitors. The findings show that tourists prefer mini buses to other types of transport because most of them are modern and well-equipped and able to provide comfortable ride. Even though direct regional buses, trains are cheaper in price visitors avoid using them because most of the regional buses are unsafe and do not meet international standards. Due to lack of information provision in railway system visitors experience with this mode of transport can sometimes be stressful.

Online reservation system that exists in Uzbekistan Railways JSC (O‘zbekiston Temir Yo‘llari) can not be called tourist friendly. It mainly targeted at satisfying the needs of local residents.

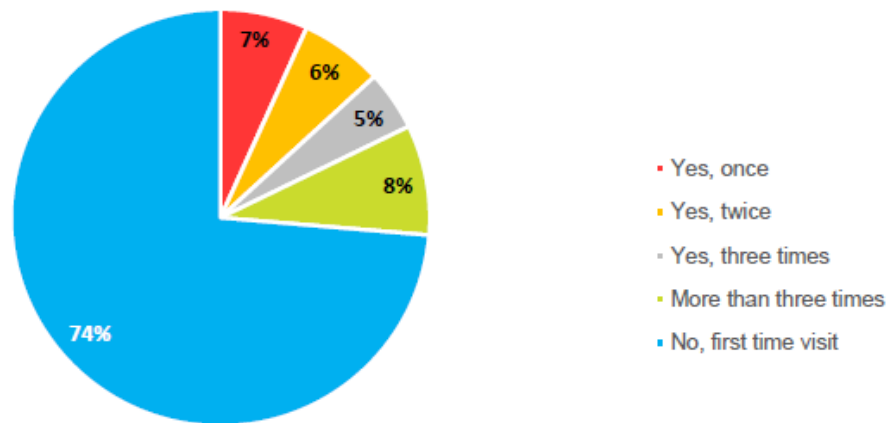


Fig. 6. Age of survey respondents

Source: Uzbekistan Visitor Economy Survey 2014(UNWTO)

It is also important to note is that majority tourists visiting Uzbekistan and Khorezm region specifically for the first time. This means much effort should be put in order to provide high quality service to visitors, so probability of re-visitation will be high in the future.

5. Conclusion

The findings show that overseas visitors were predominately older people aged 55 years and older who visited Uzbekistan for the first time. Most of them were travelling as part of a pre-purchased tour.

It is essential to note that majority of visitors indicated that they prefer flexibility when travelling within the Republic of Uzbekistan, whether this be as a packaged holiday or independently, however many tourists are seeking tourism products and experiences that provide a level of comfortability and familiarity.

Successful tourism development in Khorezm region requires more intensive investment in modernization of infrastructure. Since majority of foreign visitors motive to come to Khorezm region is to be familiar with culture and heritage. Taking in account the age group of visitors high quality service is a necessity for them to feel comfortable.

These findings provide useful information for destination management in developing further strategies to develop tourism sector in Khorezm region.

From the results of this paper, some aspects can be pointed out for further research. First, specific role of transportation system in Khorezm region in tourism development and also the influence of transportation system on overall destination satisfaction would be of great interest.

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