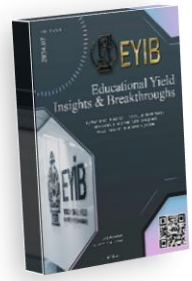
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Why Are So Many Tourists Coming to Uzbekistan? An Analysis of 2025 Figures

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Annotatsiya

The amount of tourists in Uzbekistan in 2025 were 11.7 million, the highest seen in Uzbekistan's history. This article looks at what is causing this increase in tourism using official statistics. The results showed that this is a genuine trend, with around 1.7 times more tourists in 2025 than 2019. But the majority of this increase is due to VFR's, with 67.3% of tourists coming to see family. Only 16.5% came for leisure. Around 3/4 of tourists came from the surrounding 3 countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. The average spending per tourist stayed the same between 2025 and 2024. Overall the amount of tourists isn't the best way to measure how well Uzbekistan is doing. They should include how long they stay for and how much they spend.

Kalit so‘zlar: Uzbekistan, Tourism Statistics, Inbound Tourism, VFR, Visa-Free

Introduction

The tourism industry is flourishing in Uzbekistan. In 2025 there were 11.7 million foreign citizens who visited Uzbekistan for tourism reasons. This is up by 46.8% compared to 2024 [1]. In 2021 there was only 1.9 million visitors [2] and in 2019 this figure had increased to around 6.7 million [3]. The aim of the government is to increase tourism to 20 million visitors by 2030. They also want to increase exports from tourism by over 6 billion US dollars [4]. However, some experts argue that just because there are more tourists, doesn’t mean there is better quality. Some experts have commented that people visiting from neighbouring countries are still classed as international tourists [5]. This is important for hotel companies, tour guides and restaurants to know. There are 11.7 million visitors but does that really mean 11.7 million guests? The UN and UNWTO (World Tourism Organization) define tourists as people who stay overnight in a country for one or more nights. Their purposes of travel could be for leisure, business, visiting friends and family or other [6]. Visiting friends and family is classed as part of the tourism industry. Also, statistics show the number of journeys rather than people. For example if one person entered the country three times that would be three entries in the statistics. Backer explains that VFR

(visiting friends and relatives) travel is journeys whose purpose or type of accommodation is for visiting friends and family [7]. She comments that this can cost around the same amount of money as others as the costs of the hosts are included [7]. However, as people often stay in private accommodation the hotels and tourism companies won't really gain much money from them. Neumayer has identified that visa restrictions have been found to decrease the number of people travelling between countries [8]. This shows that having visa free entry can help increase tourism. However, this study does not specify how much of the increase in Uzbekistan can be attributed to the visa free entry. As early as 2019 representatives from the tourism industry in Uzbekistan were asking if relatives from neighbouring countries should be classed as tourists [9]. From the literature above we can see that visiting friends and family is a valid reason for people to be included in the tourism statistics. These people could also bring less money to hotels and tourism companies. However, visa restrictions have been found to decrease the amount of people travelling between countries. It is not clear how much of the increase in Uzbekistan is due to tourism that can be used by commercial operators and how much is due to family travelling from neighbouring countries. The aim of this article is to identify who these visitors are, where they are coming from, why they are travelling and how much money they are bringing. This will be analysed by answering the following questions:

How many foreign visitors and tourism service exports have increased since 2019?

Where are the visitors coming from?

Why are they travelling?

How much money are they bringing in? Are the figures reliable?

Methodology

This is a qualitative study. There were no particular surveys taken, but information was taken from published data. There were no human participants in this research. The data provided covers from 2019 to 2025, however reports were also taken from 2024 to 2026. The data was collected in October 2026 using the internet. Data was collected from four different sources; first, statistics from the National Statistical Committee. Second, reports from the Tourism Committee. Third, publications from international organisations. Fourth, expert opinions from news media. Where possible primary data has been used. If there were no statistics available for the data, but it could be found in news articles, the institution that provided the data has been acknowledged. Not many academic articles were found about this topic, therefore news articles and official documentation were used. The percentage calculations and spending per tourist were done by me. This is an estimate. The following calculations were made: first, a total percentage of the top 3 countries providing the data. Second, the growth of leisure trips and family trips. Third, growth of tourists from China. Fourth, spending per tourist. This was calculated by dividing the export of tourism by the number of tourists. As the data comes from different sources over different timeframes, the comparisons are approximate.

3. Results

International visitor numbers have risen to around 6.6 million in 2023 [11], 8.0 million in 2024 [10] and 11.68 million in 2025 [2]. Exports of tourism services have also increased. In 2023 exports were valued at $2.14 billion [11], $3.52 billion in 2024

[10] and the Tourism Committee report they were $4.4 billion between January and November 2025 [4].

Table 1 Key indicators

Indicator	Value	Source
Foreign visitors, 2019	6.7 million	[3]
Foreign visitors, 2021	1.9 million	[2]
Foreign visitors, 2024	~8.0 million	[10]
Foreign visitors, 2025	11.68 million (+46.8%)	[1], [2]
Export of tourism services, 2023	2.14 billion US dollars	[11]
Export of tourism services, 2024	3.52 billion US dollars	[10]
Export of tourism services, January–November 2025	4.4 billion US dollars	[4]

Most tourists come from nearby countries. In 2025 Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan contributed the most, with Kyrgyzstan contributing 3.3 million, Tajikistan 2.7 million and Kazakhstan 2.7 million, to give a total of around 8.7 million foreign visitors. This accounts for roughly 74% of all the visitors. (Calculated using [1]). The main non-regional market is China who contributed 278,900 visitors.

Table 2 Top 10 countries in 2025

Rank	Country	Number of visitors
1	Kyrgyzstan	3.3 million
2	Tajikistan	2.7 million
3	Kazakhstan	2.7 million
4	Russia	984,400
5	Afghanistan	476,700
6	Turkmenistan	370,000
7	China	278,900
8	Turkey	174,900
9	India	80,800
10	Republic of Korea	46,300

Table 3

Purpose of visit. In 2025 67.3% of visitors travelled for VFR reasons, 16.5% travelled for leisure purposes and 11.3% travelled for business purposes [2]. Between January to September 2019 67.3% travelled for VFR reasons and 12% travelled for leisure purposes [9]. This shows there has been a slight increase in the percentage of visitors travelling for leisure purposes but overall it is similar. (Note 2019 data is only for 9 months so not precise.)

Table 3 Foreign visitors (Purpose) 2025

Purpose	Number of trips	Share
Friends & Relatives	7.86 million	67.3%
Leisure & Recreation	1.92 million	16.5%
Business related	1.32 million	11.3%
Other (estimated)	~0.58 million	~4.9%

Source: bne IntelliNews [2] (data from National Statistical Committee)

Leisure purposes have grown faster than family purposes. Visitor numbers increased from around 1.18 million in 2024 to 1.92 million in 2025 (around 62% increase). Family visitors increased by around 29%. (Calculated using [2]). Uzbekistan

has made it easier to enter the country. Citizens from 91 countries can enter without a visa as of April 2024 [11]. The Tourism Committee have announced that by the end of 2025 this will increase to nearly 100 countries [12]. Chinese citizens can now enter with a visa free stay of 30 days (June 2025) [10]. Visitor numbers from China have increased from 74,300 in 2024 [10] to 278,900 in 2025 [1], this is an increase of around 3.8 times. (Calculated). According to the Tourism Committee in the first nine months of 2025 compared to 2022 visitor numbers from the UK have increased by 2.6 times, visitor numbers from the US have increased by 3 times and visitor numbers from Germany have increased by 2.5 times [13]. However, these increases are from a low base year as 2022 was still in recovery. The number of flights has also increased. In 2025 the number of flights increased by 14% and international flights increased by 15.2% [14]. If we divide the value of tourism services exported by the number of visitors, in 2024 the average spend per visitor was around $442 (calculated using $3.52 billion divided by nearly 7.96 million visitors). Between January to November 2025 the average spend per visitor was around $411 (calculated using $4.4 billion divided by 10.7 million visitors). (Calculated). An economist has calculated that between January to July 2025 the average spending per tourist was $403 [5]. This is a rough comparison as the data is from various sources and different periods. When going through sources I noticed that some data does not match up. For example, the guide on the US market mentions that the number of visitors in 2024 was around 8.0 million [10]. However, this is mentioned in a news article as 10.1 million [15]. Also between January to September 2025 one source mentions that there was a 49.3% increase [16]. Another source mentions there was a 112.5% increase [13].

Discussion

There are four trends in the data. Firstly, there has been an increase in the number of foreign visitors. It has increased to 11.68 million in 2025. This is roughly 1.7 times more than 2019. There has also been an increase in tourism service exports. Secondly, the market is very concentrated as the majority of visitors are from three neighbouring countries (74%). The majority of visits were made to see family (67.3%). Thirdly,Whilst there has been an increase in the number of leisure visits, there has not been an increase in the number of family visits. Only 16.5% of visits are leisure. Finally, there has not been an increase in the amount of revenue generated for each visitor. There has been an increase in leisure visits which is a positive. However, the real market for hotels and tourism services is much smaller (1.9 million). Family visits are an important part of tourism statistics [6]. People going to see family often spend similar amounts to other visitors when taking host costs into consideration [7]. However, they often stay in private accommodation so may not generate much revenue for hotels and tourism services. There is also an issue with the statistics as they are based on visits. This means there may be less unique visitors (11.7 million). The percentage of family visits (67.3%) is the same in 2019 and 2025. However, 2019 only covers 9 months of data meaning the data isn’t completely accurate. Neumayer found that there are visa restrictions stopping people travelling between countries [8]. This can be seen as there has been an increase in Chinese visitors since the 30 day visa free regime. It cannot be confirmed that it caused the increase as there were many factors that changed at the same time. It is difficult to determine how much of an increase was due to the visa free regime. There were more flights, promotions and the starting point

in 2022 was low. This means there has been an increase in the number of visitors but not the amount of revenue generated for each visitor. This means there has mainly been an increase in visitors and not money spent. As the government have targeted a certain amount of visitors and tourism service exports [4], it would be useful to look at the amount of money spent. These figures are very rough estimates. They have been gathered from different sources at different times. As far as possible I tried to use the data from the National Statistical Committee. This highlights how important it is to look at the primary sources. The difference in the numbers (8.0 million in 2024 compared to 10.1 million) could be due to different definitions or time frames. This couldn't be confirmed from the source. More detailed statistics should be given by Uzbekistan. This could include how long tourists stayed for, where they stayed and how much they spent. Hotels and tourism services should consider how many tourists they have and whether they are leisure or business. This study has limitations. All the data was taken from published sources (some were from news sources). There wasn't any specific data for individual cities such as Samarkand. More research could be done by carrying out surveys with tourists in Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva. The per visitor data was taken from different sources at different times. The reason for visiting in 2019 only covered 9 months.

Conclusion

There has been a lot of growth in the tourism industry in 2025. Firstly there has been a clear increase in tourists and tourism exports. Even though there was an increase in tourists of 11.7 million people it doesn't mean that they all went on holiday. Two third of tourists went because of family reasons. Three quarters of these were from three nearby countries. Secondly there hasn't been an increase in money earned per tourist. It is difficult to know how much of the growth was due to the fact that there was no visa to enter. There was more flights and marketing. Overall looking at the number of tourists isn't the most useful indicator. In the future we could look at how many tourists there were, why they visited, how long they stayed and how much they spent.

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