

IMPORTANCE OF SPECIAL INTEREST TOURISM AND ITS MICRO-SEGMENT DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract. Special interest tourism has grown as a profitable niche market for tourism destinations during the last decade. This perspective research letter addresses these questions in the context of outbound tourism. Based on prior study, the authors' opinions, and continuing research in this field, knowledge gaps are identified, and research objectives are proposed for researchers interested in special interest tourism. This research aims to analyze the potential of special interest tourism as a tool to strengthen the tourism and hospitality business in Uzbekistan.

Keyword. Special interest tourism, tourism, hospitality, tourist, market segment, niche.

Introduction. Uzbekistan has rich natural resources and prospects for tourism development. Uzbekistan benefits greatly from its abundant natural resources, magnificent scenery, diverse flora and fauna, and historical and cultural heritage. Tourism consumption trends, as well as the emergence of “**special interest tourism**” (SIT), are regarded to represent the late-modern leisure society's constantly expanding diversity of leisure interests. As a result, the tourism sector is gradually taking on the identity of a “experience industry”, with travelers’ eager to pay tourism organizers to assist them select the best experiences within the limited time available. Furthermore, travelers seek emotional stimuli; they prefer to buy feelings rather than items. They aspire to personally experience immaterial aspects such as ambiance, aesthetics, and atmosphere, as well as an experience rich in intimacies, intensities, and complexity. The nature of the tourism experience resides within a dynamic local to global environment, so “successfully providing the creative space for the consumer’s aesthetic personal projects to unfold is surely the challenge facing the late-modern entrepreneur”.

The special interest tourist market is considered to be particularly unique. Over the last decade, special interest tourism has emerged as a profitable niche market for multiproduct destinations and a core activity for single-product destinations. This type of tourism addresses the needs of niche audiences by emphasizing varied experiences and activities that lie outside the scope of general interest tourism. The rising market for special interest tourism also helps to distinguish unique products offered in certain areas, allowing them to compete more successfully. An accurate understanding of

special interest tourism is consequently critical for predicting and profiting from developing market trends, both academically and practically.

This research paper uses the Uzbekistan tourism market as an example to discuss special interest tourism and tourists. The Uzbekistan tourism market and visitor behavior have gained popularity in contemporary literature for a variety of reasons. As a result, the purpose of this study is to examine unique markets and special interest tourism as a micro-segment, which will provide significant relevant knowledge for the local community, as well as academics and practitioners.

Literature review. Special interest tourism refers to specialty markets that have grown in popularity among tourism industry actors. While there is no limit to these specialized industries, some have become more sustainable and are now classified as special interest tourism. Here are the main categories and brief descriptions of each:

- Adventure tourism;
- Rural Tourism;
- Cultural tourism;
- Pilgrimage tourism;
- Ecotourism;
- Gastronomic tourism;
- Heritage tourism;
- Medical tourism.

Although **special interest tourism** has been operationalized in a variety of ways in the tourism literature, some scholars have evaluated the topic in terms of visitor motivation. According to Jin (2017), the desire to pursue a leisure-based interest or discover a new interest in a certain area is critical in identifying special interest tourism. As a result, an increasing number of studies have been conducted to investigate the motivations and behaviors of special interest visitors. According to research, travelers frequently visit areas for specific reasons, such as culture tourism or film tourism. They also visit unusual or growing tourist locations.

Ecotourism - Ecotourism and adventure tourism is a type of travel that is gaining popularity with travelers being more conscious of their carbon footprint. In this presentation, we look into some of the latest ecotourism and adventure tourism statistics, and see how they are changing the travel industry in 2024. The global ecotourism market size has increased by 13.5% to \$249.16 billion in 2024, and is predicted to reach \$428.97 billion in 2028¹.

Ecotourism is often replaced by other terms such as natural tourism, sustainable tourism, green tourism, responsible tourism, and social tourism. Ecotourism is a type of natural tourism. It may include some parts of nature tourism, adventure tours such as horseback riding or canoeing. The following definition of ecotourism is more

¹ <https://www.fortunebusinessinsights.com/ecotourism-market-108700>

commonly used. Regarding to Berdiyev B.S. research that Ecotourism is natural tourism, which involves creating and understanding the natural environment. Its goals are carried out management that resulting the activity is ecologically, socially and culturally sustainable, and includes the “natural environment”, “cultural contents”, “ecological sustainability” significant income for the local population and the long-term protection of the resources (2010).

Ecotourism, like any other type of tourism, should be ecologically sustainable, give pleasure to tourists and bring income to local residents. In addition, it should “fit in” with the natural and cultural environment. The meaning of the word “fit” is that the style, size and variety of ecotourism activities should correspond to the scale and character of the landscape and the culture of the local population (2024).

Therefore, Khalilov S. Sh. research that Ecotourism refers to sustainable development practices of tourism industry, it is an aspiration for the impacts of all forms of tourism. Accordingly, Sustainable development means taking into account the needs of future tourism development in the use of existing resources and their consumption within the rational approach. In other words, it means optimal use of natural resources by the interests of socio-economic development (2021)².

The concept of sustainable tourism means a set of forms, methods and means of tourism development, tourism management that do not conflict with the environment, cultural heritage, and the value of the local population’s lifestyle.

Ecotourism development should undoubtedly become a leading factor in the preservation of biological diversity. Ecosystem of tourist destinations requires only careful attitude from local and foreign tourists (2021).

The construction of separate plantations for the care of unique specimens of flora and fauna prevents the disruption of the natural resources and domestic ecosystem. Creating conditions for the regular expansion of the destination that represent the animal world is considered one of the important directions and main goals of sustainable tourism concept.

In addition, Sayfutdinov Sh. S highlighted that ecotourism is an introduction of rich and unique nature of the landscape, flora and fauna that provides opportunity for traveler to get to know local culture and ecosystem.

ecotourism in the protected areas by implementing national natural parks, geo-parks that can meet world requirements of preserving the unique fauna and flora that are on the verge of extinction in the territory (2019)³.

Ecotourism destinations are regions of unique nature, the biological diversity resources and conditions of the countries with constant spring and summer climate ensure the increase of the flow of tourists throughout the year in these regions and

² Amonboyev M., Xalilov S. Barqaror turizm rivojlanishi. O‘quv qo‘llanma – T.: Iqtisodiyot, 2021-yil, 110 b.

³ Sayfutdinov Sh., Nurfayziyeva M., Xalimova F. Turizm: nazariya va amaliyot. O‘quv qo‘llanma – T.: Iqtisodiyot, 2019-yil, 146 b.

create entrepreneurship opportunities.

Ecological tourism consisting presence of endemic species in natural landscape, bio-diversities, which have their main resources and seasons of nature within ecological systems.

Adventure tourism - According to travel-industry-dictionary adventure tourism is “recreational travel undertaken to remote or exotic destinations for the purpose of exploration or engaging in a variety of rugged activities”. Programs and activities with an implication of challenge, expeditions full of surprises, involving daring journeys and the unexpected. Climbing, caving, jeep safaris are examples of adventure tourism. The adventure tourism market size has grown exponentially in recent years. It will grow from \$292.68 billion in 2023 to \$351.57 billion in 2024 at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 20.1%. The adventure tourism market size is expected to see exponential growth in the next few years. It will grow to \$739.56 billion in 2028 at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 20.4%⁴.

Base on Tilovmurodov D.F. (2024) research, Adventure tourism encompasses both internal and external sources of motivation, including contrasted emotions, nature views, sightseeing, danger and risk management, interpersonal challenge, health benefits, recreation, novelty, stimulation and thrill, escapism and separation, exploration and discovery, and absorption and focus. Accordingly, Adventure tourism offers opportunities for travelers who wish to explore these three aspects: cultural awareness, emotional development, and physical activity⁵.

Adventure tourism considered passive and active leisure activity that occurs in a remote, exotic, uncommon, or wilderness destination. It is typically linked to ecotourism activities, the majority of which take place outdoors including horseback riding, rafting, trekking, hiking, and bush craft.

The term “adventure tourism” describes the climate and time of year when travelers partake in winter adventure sports including snowboarding, skiing, ice climbing, snow tubing, and snowmobiling. The thrill of adventure travel is mostly derived motivation for travelers to escape their comfort zone.

Cultural Tourism - “Cultural tourism is a genre of special interest tourism based on the search for and participation in new and deep cultural experiences, whether aesthetic, intellectual, emotional, or psychological”. This definition incorporates a variety of cultural forms, including the history, religion(s), art, architecture and other elements that have contributed in forming of the specific culture of the visited region.

Special interest tourists love nature-related activities, such as seeing wildlife in their natural habitat, exploring, finding, and learning, as well as conquering hurdles. Additionally, they enjoy learning new skills such as map reading, river navigation,

⁴ <https://www.adventuretravel.biz/>

⁵ <https://webofjournals.com/index.php/1/article/view/1553>

climbing, diving, horseback riding, canoeing, cattle driving, and backpack packing. For some tourists, the physical exertion is worth it to appreciate the view of a mountain, camp next to a clear lake, or watch an eagle fly. Most importantly, sharing experiences with loved ones is enjoyable.

Research methodology. The paper applies a qualitative research methodology, including case studies, literature reviews, and data collection for analysis. This study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of tourism development in a certain location. Case study analysis is a continuous process that aids in the identification of both issues and solutions. Three different case studies were chosen to represent three different perspectives, stages of development, and outcomes.

Result and discussion. A review of studies on special interest tourism reveals that the notion of special interest tourists is always evolving. Initially, these tourists were serious leisure participants with very specific interests. Nonetheless, various commercial goods have been developed during the last decade to entice inexperienced tourists to informal leisure activities. The scope of special interest tourism has thus expanded from targeted leisure pursuits and continuing involvement to more casual, situational participation.

Foreign and local visitors are classified into seven types: **eco-seeker, adventurous, casual, incidental, deliberate, serendipitous, and sightseeing**. Among these five categories, only purposeful cultural tourists, who were initially motivated to visit cultural sites and had deep cultural experiences while travelling, would be considered “serious” leisure participants; however, the other segments are equally important to the sustainable development of cultural tourism.

Conclusion. The examples above provide only a snapshot of the Uzbekistan tourism market for special interest tourism; much more research is needed - in regions and elsewhere - to determine the full breadth and depth of this sort of tourism. According to the literature on special interest tourism, academics and industry practitioners will continue to investigate how unique special interest tourism is and how unique special interest visitors are by identifying what makes this segment 'special.' Other lenses, such as trip quality and quantity, travel reasons, and the economic and behavioral implications of special interest tourism, can be used to gain a more comprehensive understanding of special interest tourism and tourist behavior.

This research letter presents an overview of the Uzbekistan tourism market in order to demonstrate the inherent difficulties of special interest tourism as a sector of hospitality and special interest tourists as a consumer group, hence encouraging relevant research on this expanding and important market. The rapid growth of Uzbekistan inbound tourism, as well as these travelers' participation in special interest tourism, has implications for destinations looking to attract this travel segment, such as partnering with other emerging markets for service provision (e.g., Kazakhstan,

Russia, India, or South Asian and Arabian countries). When dealing with foreign markets, cultural considerations must be taken into account, as special interest tourist conventions tend to influence individuals' consumption behaviors.

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