

## BEYOND BORDERS: WHAT IS STOPPING UZBEKS FROM TRAVELING THE WORLD?

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### Abstract

Although tourism activity is growing globally and travel information has become more accessible, a significant portion of the population of Uzbekistan remains on the sidelines of this trend. This article analyzes the main reasons for the low level of participation of Uzbeks in international tourism.

Key aspects are identified: low incomes, high costs of traveling abroad, difficulties in obtaining visas, lack of a stable travel habit, as well as the influence of cultural characteristics and social stereotypes. Particular attention is paid to the fact that for a significant number of citizens, trips outside the country are viewed not as tourism, but as migration, which creates a unique perception of travel as a necessity, and not as a way of recreation.

The positive trend in domestic tourism is also explored: an increase in domestic travel, improved infrastructure, and the emergence of a new generation interested in exploring unknown places. It is noted that Uzbekistan has significant tourism potential - both domestic and foreign - but its implementation requires a comprehensive development of tourism culture, increased accessibility of information, simplification of visa procedures, and an increase in the standard of living of the population. This article combines sociocultural and economic methods to explore the issue, drawing on contemporary examples, observations and statistics.

**Keywords:** International travel, domestic travel, Uzbekistan, travel behavior, tourism accessibility, economic factors, travel motivations, cultural attitudes, survey analysis, outbound tourism trends.

## Introduction

Opening any social media such as Instagram, TikTok or YouTube, it seems that the world has become small and accessible. Bloggers demonstrate breakfast with a view of the Eiffel Tower, the ability to bargain at Moroccan markets and walks along the rainy streets of Tokyo. People from different parts of the world share their experiences, and it seems that traveling is easy. Having bought a ticket and packed a suitcase, you can find yourself in a place where palm trees grow, the ocean roars or ancient streets are located. It seems that everything is possible. However, why do so many Uzbeks remain on the sidelines of this global process?

The issue of the level of international tourism in Uzbekistan deserves attention. The country has a population of over 37 million people, but statistics indicate relatively low tourist activity abroad. Of course, there are isolated cases when people share photos from their vacation at sea or in Europe, but this is more an exception than a trend. Most people prefer to stay at home or vacation within the country. Why is this happening in the era of open borders and globalization?

The reasons lie not only in the economic sphere, but also in cultural characteristics, habits, psychology and history. In Uzbek society, the concept of "vacation abroad" is still perceived as something unattainable or too complicated. For many, it is easier to go to relatives in a neighboring region than to visit another country.

This article seeks to understand what prevents Uzbeks from traveling abroad more often. What factors - obvious and hidden - limit access to new experiences? And most importantly - are there prospects for changing this trend in the future?

## Literature review

Financial affordability is a key concern, especially in less developed countries where income levels greatly influence the frequency of international travel, as noted by Richardson and Hayford (2017). According to the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan (2023), the average monthly income in Uzbekistan falls below the global median, rendering international travel unattainable for many citizens. A significant challenge is the issue of visa restrictions. Kazantseva (2021) discusses the psychological and administrative difficulties encountered by individuals from former Soviet republics when applying for visas to Western nations. She observes that long waiting periods, intricate paperwork, and frequent rejections often discourage individuals from pursuing travel opportunities. As per the Henley Passport Index (2024), individuals holding Uzbek passports encounter especially stringent obstacles, with their ability to travel internationally being heavily limited.

Cultural aspects were considered in the studies of Nazarova and Sadykova (2020), where it is emphasized that traditional family attitudes, collectivist values and focus on internal obligations lead to a low level of need for individual or spontaneous travel, especially among women. It is also important to mention the report of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2022), which shows that in Central Asian countries the level of international tourism activity remains consistently lower than in Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries. This is due to both the level of wealth and the lack of a “travel culture” that is beginning to develop among the younger generation.

However, domestic tourism is constantly being studied within the framework of national tourism development projects. According to the Uzbektourism report (2023), domestic tourism has increased by 18% compared to the previous year. The authors attribute this to the country's growing interest in its cultural and historical heritage, improved transport infrastructure, and digitalization of the industry. The growth of domestic tourism is also supported by government initiatives such as the “Travel Uzbek” program, which encourages citizens to discover the country's

rich cultural and natural heritage. Within the framework of this program, more than 11.4 million domestic tourist trips were made in 2023. Historical cities and cultural centers remain the most attractive destinations for domestic tourists. According to statistics, the leaders in terms of attendance are:

Samarkand region — 15.8%

Tashkent — 11.4%

Tashkent region — 10.6%

Bukhara region — 9.4%

Thus, the totality of existing studies confirms that the low popularity of international travel among Uzbeks is explained not only by economic factors, but also by mental attitudes, legal barriers and historical context. However, the growth of domestic tourism and the interest of young people in world experience create preconditions for future changes in the tourist behavior of the population.

### **Methods and Data Collection**

To assess the theoretical findings of this study and understand the current views on international travel among Uzbek citizens, an anonymous online survey was conducted as the main method of data collection. The survey aimed to delve into travel habits, perceived obstacles, social influences, and the motivations driving decisions related to international travel.

The survey consisted of 10 questions, 9 of which were closed and 1 open.

The final question asked participants to indicate the countries they would most like to visit. A multiple-choice format was used for some questions to reflect the complexity of motivations and constraints in the context of travel.

### **Results of the survey**

<b>Q1. How often do you travel outside of Uzbekistan?</b>	<b>Resps</b>	<b>%</b>
Several times in a year	4	11.4%
Once in a year	10	28.6%
Less than once in a year	12	34.3%
Never travelled abroad	9	25.7%
<b>Q2. Do you think international travel is common in Uzbekistan?</b>	<b>Resps</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes, it's widespread	15	42.9%
Some people travel, but not many	20	57.1%
No, it's rare	0	0.0%

### **Travel Frequency and Perceptions**

Only 11.4% of respondents reported traveling abroad several times a year. One trip per year is typical for 28.6% of respondents, while 34.3% travel less than once a year. It is also noteworthy that 25.7% noted that they have never left Uzbekistan. These data demonstrate relatively infrequent international travel, especially when compared with global mobility trends.

When asked about the prevalence of international travel in the country, 57.1% believe that only a small proportion of the population travels abroad, while 42.9% consider it relatively common. None of the respondents noted it as rare, indicating that there is some level of international travel, albeit within a limited circle of society.

<b>Q3. How would you rate the accessibility of international travel for Uzbekistan citizens?</b>	<b>Res ponses</b>	<b>%</b>
1 (very difficult)	0	0 .0%
2 (difficult)	4	11 1.4%
3 (moderately accessible)	21	60 0.0%
4 (easy)	10	29 8.6%
5 (very easy)	0	0 .0%

#### **Perceived accessibility**

Participants were asked to rate the accessibility of international travel on a scale from 1 (very difficult) to 5 (very easy). The most popular rating was 3 (moderately accessible), which was chosen by 60% of respondents. Next, 28.6% chose 4 (easy), and only 11.4% chose 2. No one chose either 1 or 5. This suggests that, overall, international travel is perceived as somewhat possible, but unaffordable for the average citizen.

<b>Q4. Do your family and friends consider traveling an important part of life?</b>	<b>Res ponses</b>	<b>%</b>
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Yes, they travel and support it	20	5 7.1%
They have a positive attitude, but don't prioritize it	14	4 0.0%
No, they think it's a waste of money	1	2 .9%

### Social influence and cultural attitudes

The majority of respondents (57.1%) noted that their family and friends support international travel, while another 40% believe that their environment has a positive attitude towards it, although travel is not their priority. Only one participant (2.9%) reported that travel is perceived as a waste of money. These data indicate that social and cultural norms are largely passively neutral or inert and do not act as an obvious constraint, especially in comparison with economic and bureaucratic barriers.

<b>Q5. What are the main reasons that prevent you from traveling abroad? (multiple choice)</b>	<b>Res</b>	<b>%</b>
High travel costs	22	6 2.9%
Visa restrictions	13	3 7.1%
Lack of time	6	1 7.1%
Family and work commitments	15	4 2.9%
No interest in traveling	1	2 .9%

## Barriers to International Travel

The study surveyed participants to determine reasons they refrain from traveling abroad. High travel costs emerged as the most prevalent barrier, affecting 62.9% of respondents. Family and work commitments were the second largest hindrance, impacting 42.9%, while visa restrictions concerned 37.1%. Less frequently mentioned obstacles included lack of time at 17.1% and a mere 2.9% citing a lack of interest in travel. These results align with earlier research, such as that by Richardson & Hayford (2017), which correlates travel frequency with affordability and available time.

Q6. Do you have any fears or concerns about traveling abroad? If so, what are they?	Res ponses	%
Language barrier	6	18.2%
Fear of getting lost	6	18.2%
Medical risks	5	15.2%
Risk of scam or fraud	9	27.2%
Other: No money will be left	1	3.0%
Other: No, I don't have fears	6	18.2%

## Psychological Barriers and Travel Anxiety

Survey participants were asked about their fears when traveling abroad. The primary concern was the risk of scams or fraud (27.2%), followed by language barriers, fear of getting lost, and medical risks, each at 18.2%. Interestingly, 18.2% expressed having



no fears, highlighting a group of confident travelers. These findings suggest that psychological readiness, though secondary, is still significant in influencing travel choices, particularly for those embarking on their first trip.

<b>Q7. Do you consider the visa process in Uzbekistan a serious barrier to traveling?</b>	<b>Res ponses</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes, it's the main problem	9	25.7%
Yes, but there are other factors as well	20	57.1%
No, visas are not a problem	6	17.1%

Further exploration of visa-related issues revealed that 25.7% of people saw the visa process as a major barrier, while 57.1% acknowledged it as a significant challenge among other issues. Just 17.1% did not see visas as a problem.

<b>Q8. How much are you willing to spend annually on travel (abroad)?</b>	<b>Res ponses</b>	<b>%</b>
Less than \$500	3	8.6%
\$500-1000	7	20.0%
\$1000-3000	18	51.4%
More than \$3000	5	14.3%

Other: No money, no travel	1	2 .9%
Other: I have never been abroad	1	2 .9%

### Financial Willingness and Motivation

When surveyed about their annual budget for international travel, a majority of respondents (51.4%) indicated a willingness to spend between \$1000 and \$3000. Meanwhile, 20% preferred a range of \$500 to \$1000, and 14.3% were prepared to spend over \$3000. Only 8.6% had a budget under \$500. These figures suggest a strong interest and potential financial capability among some consumers, especially if more economical or accessible travel options were introduced.

Q9. What factors would motivate you to travel more frequently?	Res ponses	%
Lower travel costs	14	4 0.0%
Easier visa procedures	10	2 8.6%
More information about travel opportunities	11	3 1.4%

In terms of motivation, lower travel costs (40%), simplified visa procedures (28.6%), and greater awareness about travel opportunities (31.4%) were identified as factors that would increase travel frequency. This suggests that policy reform and educational campaigns could have a positive impact on outbound tourism numbers.

### Q10. Which countries are you most interested in visiting?

Region	Countries Mentioned	Total Mentions
East Asia	Japan (9), South Korea (2), China (2)	13
Europe	Italy (6), France (4), Spain (3), Switzerland (1), Greece (1), Germany (1), UK (1), Norway (1), Iceland (1), Monaco (1)	20
North America	USA (6)	6
South America	Brazil (2)	2
Middle East	UAE (2), Turkey (3)	5
South Asia	Maldives (1)	1
South east Asia	Thailand (1)	1
Caucasus	Georgia (1)	1
Oceania	New Zealand (1)	1
Russia & CIS	Russia (1)	1
No preference	"Anywhere, as long as it's far away" (1)	1

**Travel aspirations and favorite destinations** were asked to participants in an open-ended question. France scored 4, Italy 6, Japan 9 and the US 6. These routes show a strong attraction to wealthy, culturally rich and often expensive countries. Other countries that were named included South Korea, Germany, Turkey and the UK, indicating a wide range of interests on the continent.

These results are consistent with broader regional data from national tourism organizations and UNWTO (2022), showing that although outbound tourism in Uzbekistan is still very young, it has room to grow due to the availability of information, ease of policy and economic development.

## Discussion

The survey results provide useful insights into how Uzbeks perceive and experience international travel. Although globalization and greater access to information have made international tourism more attractive, many Uzbeks still dream of traveling abroad.

**Trip types and general trends:** Most respondents reported either very rarely or not at all traveling abroad. While most people either travel only once a year or not at all, a few travel several times a year. This reflects a general national trend, as a relatively small proportion of the population engages in international tourism. Most people have no real experience of traveling abroad, although in urban centers or on social media, travel seems more common.

**Attitudes and social influence:** Despite these obstacles, travel is generally viewed positively. Most people in the study said that their friends and family either value travel or consider it a valuable part of life, even if they do not pay much attention to it. Few people thought that travel is pointless or useless. This gap is based on external circumstances, not cultural disinterest. When asked what would motivate them to travel more often, respondents pointed to things like lower costs, easier visa procedures, and

more information. This shows that while most people are open and curious about travel, many do not have the tools or opportunities to do so.

**Confidence and Fears:** While confidence and fears were lower, a significant portion of the survey identified psychological concerns. Some participants expressed concerns about getting lost, being scammed, or not speaking the local language. Such concerns are understandable in countries where international travel is not the norm. They also highlight the need for better travel education, language support, and preparation tools.

### Conclusion

For many residents of Uzbekistan, traveling abroad remains something distant, like scenes from a movie or pages from someone else's diary. The desire is great, the interest is enormous, but the reality speaks in the language of visa refusals, expensive tickets, family obligations and economic restrictions.

Nevertheless, surveys show that Uzbeks are not indifferent to the world. They dream of Japan and Italy, the streets of Paris and the skyscrapers of New York. Many have a desire to see, try and feel something new. The problem is not a lack of aspirations, but a lack of opportunities. Financial difficulties and bureaucratic barriers force even the most inquisitive to postpone their trips.

However, this story may have a happy ending. The development of domestic tourism is already opening people's eyes to the beauty of their native country. Support from the state and society in the desire of citizens to learn about the world - making travel more accessible, the visa process simpler, and restrictions softer - can help transform dreams into reality.

Travel is not only about tickets and hotels. This is an opportunity to broaden your horizons, find inspiration and gain freedom.

*The freedom to dream is definitely inherent to Uzbek citizens, all that remains - is to give them wings.*

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