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ASSESSING THE SPATIAL CONCENTRATION OF TOURISM AND OVERTOURISM RISKS IN UZBEKISTAN: A SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study examines the spatial concentration of tourism and the potential risks of overtourism in Uzbekistan from the perspective of sustainable tourism development. The study aims to assess the spatial distribution of tourist flows across the country's regions and identify potential overtourism risks in major tourist destinations. The research is based on official data published by the Tourism Committee and the Statistics Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan for the period of 2024–2025. Descriptive statistical, comparative, and systematic analysis methods were employed to evaluate recent tourism development trends. The findings indicate that Uzbekistan has experienced steady growth in key tourism indicators; however, tourist flows remain highly concentrated in major destinations, particularly Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent City, and the Khorezm region. Such spatial concentration may increase pressure on transport infrastructure, accommodation facilities, and cultural heritage sites, thereby creating conditions that could lead to overtourism in the future. Based on these findings, the study proposes practical recommendations aimed at diversifying

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tourist flows, developing alternative tourism destinations and routes, and improving destination management to ensure a more balanced distribution of visitors. The results contribute to the development of evidence-based sustainable tourism policies and provide a conceptual framework for preventing overtourism risks in Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Overtourism; spatial concentration of tourism; sustainable tourism development; tourist flows; tourism pressure.

Introduction

In recent years, tourism has become one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global economy, making a significant contribution to service exports, employment, and regional development. According to the UN Tourism World Tourism Barometer, international tourist arrivals reached approximately 1.4 billion in 2024, indicating an almost complete recovery to pre-pandemic levels (UN Tourism, 2025). While the rapid expansion of international tourism has stimulated economic growth in many countries, the excessive concentration of tourist flows in specific destinations has also created new challenges for sustainable destination management.

One of the most widely discussed issues in contemporary tourism research is overtourism. The concept refers to situations in which the number of visitors exceeds the environmental, social, and infrastructural carrying capacity of a destination, generating negative impacts on local communities and tourism resources (Milano et al., 2019). Overtourism may lead to congestion in transport systems, deterioration of residents' quality of life, degradation of cultural heritage sites, and increasing environmental pressures (Goodwin, 2017). Consequently, assessing not only the economic benefits of tourism but also the spatial distribution of tourist flows has become an essential prerequisite for achieving sustainable tourism development.

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Currently, overtourism has become a major concern in internationally renowned destinations such as Barcelona, Venice, Amsterdam, Prague, and Dubrovnik. In these cities, the high spatial concentration of visitors has encouraged local authorities to introduce measures aimed at regulating tourism demand, managing visitor flows, and promoting alternative destinations (UNEP & UN Tourism, 2023). International experience demonstrates that an uneven spatial distribution of tourists may negatively affect the long-term sustainability, competitiveness, and resilience of tourism destinations.

Uzbekistan has also experienced rapid growth in its tourism sector during recent years. The modernization of tourism infrastructure, the expansion of visa-free travel arrangements, and improvements in international transport connectivity have contributed to a steady increase in international tourist arrivals. Nevertheless, the spatial distribution of tourist flows remains highly uneven. The majority of international visitors are concentrated in historically significant destinations such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent City, and the Khorezm region, whereas several regions with considerable tourism potential continue to attract relatively few visitors. This imbalance suggests that tourism development across the country remains spatially uneven.

Despite extensive reforms aimed at developing the tourism sector, relatively little research has examined the spatial concentration of tourism and the potential risks of overtourism in Uzbekistan. Existing studies have primarily focused on tourist arrivals, tourism service exports, infrastructure development, and investment, while limited attention has been paid to the territorial distribution of tourist flows and its possible negative consequences. In particular, empirical assessments of tourism concentration and its implications for sustainable tourism development remain scarce.

Against this background, the present study aims to assess the spatial concentration of tourism in Uzbekistan and identify potential overtourism risks in the country's major tourist destinations. The research analyses key tourism

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indicators together with the spatial distribution of tourist flows and the factors contributing to tourism pressure. The findings are expected to provide evidence-based recommendations for promoting a more balanced spatial distribution of tourism and strengthening sustainable tourism policy in Uzbekistan.

Literature Review

The concept of overtourism has emerged as one of the most important and rapidly developing research topics in contemporary tourism studies. Although the term gained widespread academic recognition during the second half of the 2010s, its theoretical foundations are rooted in the concepts of tourism carrying capacity and sustainable tourism development. One of the earliest theoretical explanations was proposed by Butler (1980) through the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model, which argues that destinations reaching the maturity stage of development may experience excessive tourist growth, resulting in declining resource efficiency, environmental degradation, and reduced destination quality. This model has subsequently become one of the principal theoretical foundations for overtourism research.

Goodwin (2017) defines overtourism as a situation in which visitor numbers exceed the level considered acceptable by local communities, generating adverse social, economic, and environmental impacts. According to the author, the primary concern is not the absolute number of tourists but rather their uneven distribution across space and time. Consequently, similar visitor volumes may produce substantially different impacts depending on the characteristics, carrying capacity, and management practices of individual destinations.

Milano, Cheer, and Novelli (2019) identify overtourism as one of the major challenges associated with the rapid expansion of global tourism. They argue that the growth of low-cost airlines, digital booking platforms, and mass tourism has intensified visitor concentration in internationally renowned destinations. Such concentration places considerable pressure on transport systems, housing

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markets, environmental resources, and cultural heritage sites, thereby threatening the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of tourism destinations.

The spatial concentration of tourism has also attracted increasing attention in tourism research. Yang and Wong (2013) consider the spatial distribution of tourist flows to be an important indicator of destination competitiveness and sustainable tourism development. They emphasize that the excessive concentration of tourists in a limited number of destinations often results in the underutilization of tourism resources in other regions, reducing the overall efficiency and balance of regional tourism development.

Several quantitative indicators have been proposed to assess tourism concentration and tourism pressure. Among the most widely applied measures are the Tourist Intensity Ratio (TIR), which relates tourist arrivals to the resident population; the Tourism Density Index (TDI), which measures tourist density per unit of geographical area; and the Accommodation Pressure Ratio (APR), which evaluates tourism pressure on accommodation capacity (Peeters et al., 2018). These indicators provide an effective analytical framework for identifying spatial imbalances in tourism development and assessing potential overtourism risks.

International experience demonstrates that overtourism is primarily associated with highly popular destinations. In cities such as Venice and Barcelona, rapid growth in visitor numbers has generated conflicts with local communities and encouraged governments to introduce policies aimed at regulating tourism demand and protecting urban environments (UNEP & UN Tourism, 2023). Similar destination management strategies have been implemented in Amsterdam and Dubrovnik, where visitor flows have been dispersed through the promotion of alternative attractions and destinations in order to reduce tourism pressure and improve destination sustainability.

Compared with Europe and other mature tourism regions, overtourism has received relatively limited scholarly attention in Central Asia. Existing studies have mainly focused on tourism potential, tourist arrivals, and tourism service

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exports, whereas issues related to the spatial concentration of tourism remain largely unexplored. Similarly, tourism research in Uzbekistan has primarily examined tourism infrastructure, investment, tourist arrivals, and tourism service exports, while limited attention has been devoted to the geographical distribution of tourist flows and its implications for sustainable tourism development.

Although tourism service exports and regional tourism development in Uzbekistan have recently attracted increasing scholarly interest (Bakhromov, 2025a; Bakhromov, 2025b), comprehensive studies evaluating the spatial concentration of tourism and overtourism risks remain scarce. Furthermore, empirical assessments based on internationally recognised indicators have not yet been sufficiently developed for the Uzbek tourism sector.

Against this background, the present study addresses this research gap by assessing the spatial concentration of tourism and potential overtourism risks in Uzbekistan using internationally recognised indicators, including the Tourist Intensity Ratio (TIR), Tourism Density Index (TDI), and Accommodation Pressure Ratio (APR). Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on tourism growth, tourism service exports, or infrastructure development, this research emphasises the spatial dimension of tourism development by examining the geographical concentration of tourist flows and its implications for overtourism risk. By integrating internationally accepted analytical indicators with official tourism statistics, the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on sustainable destination management and provides an evidence-based framework for tourism policy and regional planning in Uzbekistan.

Research Methodology

This study employs a quantitative analytical approach to examine the spatial concentration of tourism and assess potential overtourism risks in Uzbekistan. The research focuses on the country's principal tourist destinations, including Tashkent City, Samarkand, Bukhara, and the Khorezm region. For comparative

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purposes, the regions of Fergana, Namangan, Surkhandarya, and the Republic of Karakalpakstan were also included in the analysis to provide a broader perspective on regional tourism development.

The study primarily adopts a descriptive quantitative research design, supported by comparative and conceptual analysis. The empirical analysis is based on official statistical data published by the Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Tourism Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and regional statistical reports for the period 2024–2025. The primary dataset includes information on international tourist arrivals, resident population, territorial area, and accommodation capacity, which collectively provide the basis for assessing tourism concentration and tourism pressure (Statistics Agency of Uzbekistan, 2025).

To establish a conceptual framework for evaluating the spatial concentration of tourism and potential overtourism risks, the study adopts three internationally recognised indicators that are widely used in tourism research.

Tourist Intensity Ratio (TIR)

The Tourist Intensity Ratio (TIR) measures the relationship between tourist arrivals and the resident population of a destination. It provides an initial indication of tourism pressure imposed on local communities.

$$TIR_i = \frac{T_i}{P_i}$$

where:

(T_i) = number of tourist arrivals in region i ;

(P_i) = resident population of region i .

Higher TIR values indicate a greater concentration of tourists relative to the local population and may therefore signal an increased risk of overtourism (Peeters et al., 2018).

Tourism Density Index (TDI)

The Tourism Density Index (TDI) measures tourist concentration relative to the geographical area of a destination.

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$$TDI_i = \frac{T_i}{A_i}$$

where:

(T_i) = number of tourist arrivals in region i ;

(A_i) = total area of region i (km²).

Higher TDI values indicate a greater density of tourist activity within a limited geographical area and may result in increased pressure on transport systems, public infrastructure, and tourism resources.

Accommodation Pressure Ratio (APR)

The Accommodation Pressure Ratio (APR) evaluates tourism pressure on accommodation facilities by comparing tourist arrivals with the accommodation capacity available within a destination.

$$APR_i = \frac{T_i}{C_i}$$

where:

(T_i) = number of tourist arrivals in region i ;

(C_i) = accommodation capacity (number of bed places) in region i .

Higher APR values indicate more intensive utilisation of accommodation facilities and may suggest the need for additional investment in tourism infrastructure to ensure sustainable destination development.

The analytical process further examined the spatial distribution of tourist flows and the principal factors contributing to tourism pressure across different regions of Uzbekistan. In addition to analysing official tourism statistics, the study draws upon international experience in overtourism management to evaluate the potential implications of increasing tourism concentration for sustainable tourism development.

The selected indicators constitute the conceptual analytical framework of this research. Owing to the limited availability of fully comparable regional statistics on tourist flows and accommodation capacity, these indicators were applied primarily as conceptual tools rather than for comprehensive quantitative modelling. Nevertheless, they provide an appropriate methodological basis for

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interpreting spatial tourism concentration, identifying potential overtourism risks, and formulating policy recommendations aimed at promoting a more balanced and sustainable distribution of tourism across Uzbekistan.

Results and Discussion

Uzbekistan's tourism sector demonstrated strong growth in 2025, confirming the country's increasing role in the regional tourism market. According to the Tourism Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the country welcomed 11.6 million international tourist arrivals during the year, while tourism service exports reached USD 4.8 billion. In addition, 23.7 million domestic tourist trips were recorded, reflecting the continued expansion of domestic tourism. These indicators demonstrate the growing economic importance of the tourism sector and its increasing contribution to national economic development (Tourism Committee of Uzbekistan, 2025).

Table 1. Key indicators of tourism development in Uzbekistan (2024–2025)¹

Indicator	2024	2025	Growth (%)
International tourist arrivals (million)	10,3	11,6	12,6
Tourism service exports (USD billion)	3,5	4,8	37,1
Domestic tourist trips (million)	23,4	23,7	1,3
Number of accommodation establishments	6 570	6 921	5,3
Accommodation capacity (thousand bed places)	170,0*	185,6	9,2

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that the growth rate of tourism service exports (37.1%) substantially exceeded the increase in international tourist arrivals (12.6%). This suggests that tourism revenue has expanded not only

¹ Compiled by the author based on data from the Tourism Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan (2025).

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because of higher visitor numbers but also due to increased average tourist expenditure and improvements in the quality and value of tourism services. Furthermore, the steady growth in accommodation establishments and bed capacity reflects continued investment in tourism infrastructure and strengthens the country's ability to accommodate future visitor growth.

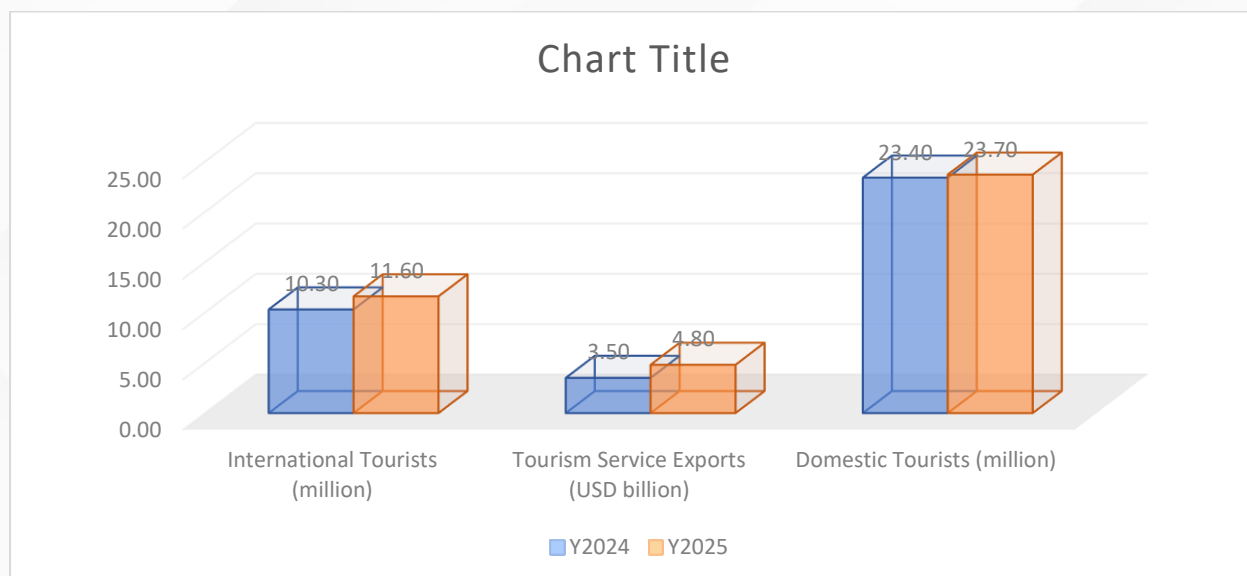


Figure 1. Growth dynamics of Uzbekistan's tourism indicators (2024–2025)

Figure 1 illustrates the positive dynamics of tourism development between 2024 and 2025. Although international tourist arrivals increased steadily, tourism service exports recorded significantly faster growth, indicating improvements in tourism expenditure and the overall economic performance of the sector. Domestic tourism also remained stable, demonstrating the growing importance of internal tourism demand alongside international tourism.

Despite these positive trends, the spatial distribution of tourist flows remains uneven. International visitors continue to concentrate primarily in Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent City, and the Khorezm region, whereas several regions with

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considerable tourism potential attract comparatively fewer visitors. Such spatial concentration may increase pressure on transport infrastructure, accommodation facilities, and cultural heritage sites within the country's principal tourist destinations.

From the perspective of sustainable tourism development, the spatial concentration of tourist flows represents a critical factor in assessing potential overtourism risks. Although Uzbekistan has not yet experienced overtourism at the level observed in major international destinations, the continuing concentration of tourism activities in a limited number of regions suggests that tourism pressure may increase in the future if visitor flows continue to expand without effective destination management.

International experience indicates that excessive visitor concentration is one of the principal drivers of overtourism (Milano et al., 2019). Similar patterns have been observed in destinations such as Barcelona, Venice, Amsterdam, and Dubrovnik, where high visitor density has generated significant pressure on urban infrastructure and local communities. Consequently, the Uzbek tourism sector has an important opportunity to adopt preventive management strategies before overtourism becomes a critical issue.

Table 2. Factors contributing to overtourism risk in Uzbekistan²

Factor	Level of impact
Rapid growth in tourist arrivals	High
Limited accommodation capacity	Moderate
Concentration of cultural heritage sites	High
Tourism seasonality	Moderate
Transport infrastructure pressure	High
Limited regional diversification	High

The findings suggest that tourism growth has generated significant economic benefits for Uzbekistan. Nevertheless, the continued concentration of visitor

² Author's own elaboration.

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flows in destinations such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, and Tashkent City may increase long-term pressure on transport systems, accommodation infrastructure, and cultural heritage resources. Therefore, tourism policy should increasingly focus on spatial diversification, the development of alternative tourism destinations, and the promotion of new tourism routes in order to achieve a more balanced distribution of tourist flows.

Compared with many mature tourism destinations worldwide, the current level of tourism concentration in Uzbekistan has not yet reached a critical stage. However, the rapid increase in visitor numbers to the country's principal historical destinations indicates that overtourism may emerge as a future challenge. Consequently, Uzbekistan is currently in a favourable position to implement preventive destination management measures that can mitigate potential negative impacts before they become irreversible.

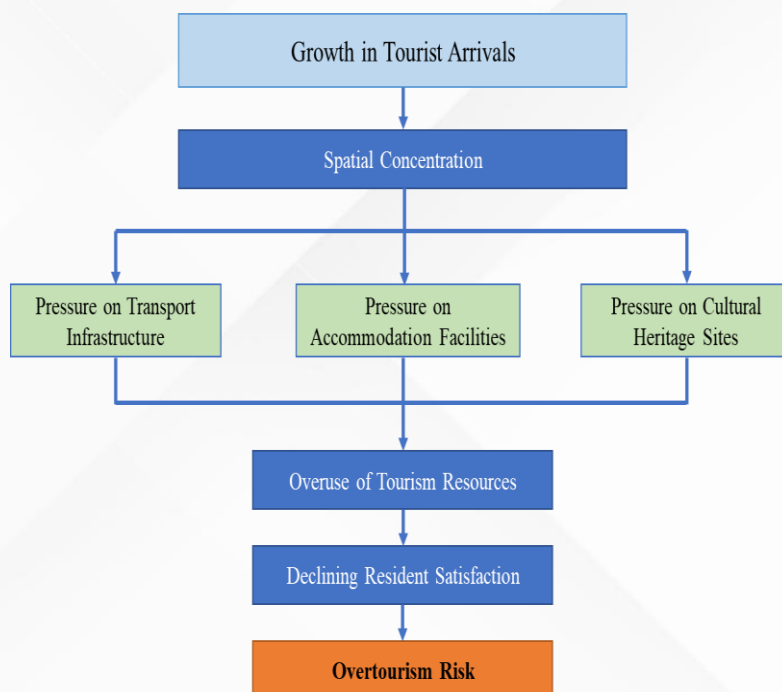


Figure 2. Conceptual model of overtourism risk formation³

³ Developed by the author.

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The conceptual model presented in Figure 2 illustrates the sequential development of overtourism risk. An increase in tourist arrivals initially results in a higher spatial concentration of visitors. This concentration subsequently generates additional pressure on transport infrastructure, accommodation facilities, and cultural heritage sites. Continuous pressure leads to the intensive utilisation of tourism resources, reduces the satisfaction of both residents and visitors, and ultimately increases the likelihood of overtourism. This conceptual framework is consistent with the theoretical perspectives proposed by Butler (1980), Goodwin (2017), and Milano et al. (2019).

One limitation of this study is the limited availability of detailed regional statistics on tourist flows, accommodation capacity, and visitor mobility. Future research should calculate the Tourist Intensity Ratio (TIR), Tourism Density Index (TDI), and Accommodation Pressure Ratio (APR) at the regional level to provide a more comprehensive quantitative assessment of tourism pressure and overtourism risks across Uzbekistan.

Conclusion

This study examined the spatial concentration of tourism and the potential risks of overtourism in Uzbekistan from the perspective of sustainable tourism development. The findings confirm that the country's tourism sector has experienced substantial growth in recent years. In particular, the increase to 11.6 million international tourist arrivals and USD 4.8 billion in tourism service exports in 2025 demonstrates the growing importance of tourism within the national economy. However, the analysis also revealed that tourist flows remain unevenly distributed, with the majority of visitors concentrated in Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent City, and the Khorezm region.

The literature review and empirical findings indicate that overtourism is determined not only by the total number of visitors but also by the excessive spatial concentration of tourist flows within particular destinations. International

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experience demonstrates that high visitor concentration may generate considerable pressure on transport systems, accommodation facilities, environmental resources, and cultural heritage sites. Although Uzbekistan has not yet experienced overtourism in its classical form, the continuing concentration of tourism activities in major historical destinations suggests that similar challenges may emerge if tourism continues to expand without effective destination management.

The results further suggest that future tourism policy should focus not only on increasing tourist arrivals but also on achieving a more balanced spatial distribution of tourism activities. Diversifying tourism products, promoting emerging destinations, improving regional transport connectivity, and strengthening destination management practices would contribute to reducing tourism pressure while supporting more inclusive and sustainable regional tourism development. Furthermore, monitoring visitor flows at cultural heritage sites, implementing digital destination management tools, and balancing seasonal tourism demand would enhance the long-term sustainability of Uzbekistan's tourism sector.

The scientific contribution of this study lies in its integrated assessment of tourism spatial concentration and overtourism risks within the context of Uzbekistan. Unlike previous studies that have primarily focused on tourism growth, tourism service exports, or infrastructure development, this research highlights the geographical dimension of tourism development and demonstrates the importance of considering spatial concentration as an essential component of sustainable tourism policy.

Overall, the findings indicate that the spatial concentration of tourism will become an increasingly important strategic issue for Uzbekistan in the coming years. Effective management of tourist flows, balanced regional tourism development, and the sustainable use of tourism resources will be essential for enhancing the country's long-term tourism competitiveness while preventing

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potential overtourism risks. The methodological framework proposed in this study may also serve as a useful reference for future research on tourism concentration and destination sustainability in other emerging tourism destinations.

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