

## TRENDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PILGRIMAGE AND TRADITIONAL TOURISM IN SAUDI ARABIA

Abdullaev Ravshan Vaxidovich

International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan

Department of " Islamic Economy and Finance,  
Pilgrimage Tourism" Doctor of Economics, Professor

Email: ravshan.v.abdullaev@gmail.com

Tel: (99)495-05-55 mobile,

House 218-70-14, work 244-00-56.

### Abstract

The article examines the development of pilgrimage tourism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, associated with the Hajj in the lunar month of Zulhijjah and the Umrah throughout the year. The main indicators of the world's leading countries in international tourism and the countries of the Middle East are presented using statistical data. The place and role of the Kingdom in the global tourism industry are assessed. The conditions that prompted the Saudi leadership to diversify the economy by developing alternative types of tourism to reduce the country's dependence on oil are revealed. The importance of implementing the large-scale project " Vision-2030 " is substantiated to attract more tourists from foreign countries, especially Western countries. A comparative analysis of trends in the development of pilgrimage and traditional tourism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is made.

**Keywords:** Pilgrimage tourism, Hajj and Umrah, tourism revenue, tourism contribution to GDP, COVID-19 pandemic, Vision 2030 strategy, High Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, UNESCO World Heritage List, traditional tourism, recreational tourism.

### Introduction

The tourism industry, which occupies a significant place in the world economy, is currently one of the most dynamically developing sectors in international trade in services. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), since the beginning of this century, the annual growth rate of the number of foreign tourists worldwide has been more than 5 per cent, and tourism revenues have been growing by an average of 14 per cent [1]. The Hague Declaration describes tourism as follows: "Tourism, as a result of the internationalization of all spheres of the life of nations, has become a major means of establishing personal, cultural, political and economic ties that are essential to the life of individuals and modern communities." [2] Also, the Declaration adopted at the International Conference of Tourism Leaders in Osaka, Japan, recognized "tourism as a

modern economic phenomenon," given the significant contribution of this industry to national economies [3].

"In our country, tourism is often limited to our ancient cities, and historical and cultural monuments. However, there is great potential for the development of tourism in the unique nature of our country, national reserves, and mountainous regions. In particular, the development of medical tourism, pilgrimage tourism, and ecotourism will give a great impetus not only to the economy but also to the development of social sectors" [4]. The issue of developing tourism in our republic, attracting investments to the sector, creating new jobs, increasing human resources, and ultimately, turning tourism into one of the locomotive sectors of the economy is one of the most urgent tasks today [5].

### **Aims and Objectives:**

In this article, the experience of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the field of pilgrimage tourism and the development of traditional tourism is comprehensively analyzed. Based on statistical data, the tourism potential of the Kingdom is revealed and its place and role in the world tourism industry is evaluated. To soften the country's dependence on oil, the conditions that encourage the Saudi leadership to diversify the economy through the development of different types of tourism will be revealed. It is justified that the implementation of the " Vision-2030 " project is of great importance to attract more tourists from foreign countries, especially from the West. The trends in the development of pilgrimage and traditional tourism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are comparatively analyzed.

### **Materials and Methods**

In writing a scientific article, the basis is, first of all, the relevance of the rapid development of tourism, in particular pilgrimage tourism, in the republic, and its emphasis by President Sh. Mirziyoyev. In the process of scientific analysis, relevant information was obtained from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), scientific works of foreign and republican scientists, as well as Internet resources. In the research process, methods of identifying trends in economic processes and monographic research were used, based on theoretical methodology, systematization principles, comparative analysis, and systematic analysis of statistical data.

### **DISCUSSION**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is one of the leading countries in the Middle East in terms of international tourism. The position of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia within the region and in the world in general is visible in Table 1 below, which is compiled according to the three main indicators of international tourism. According to 2019 data, Saudi Arabia ranks second among the countries of the region after Turkey. Considering that the table includes six of the most advanced countries in the world, namely France, Spain, the USA, China, Italy and Turkey, Saudi Arabia was among the top 20 countries in the world in terms of

international tourism in 2017. This year, more than 16 million pilgrims visited the country, earning them 14.8 billion dollars, and its share of GDP was 9.4 per cent.

Of course, pilgrimage tourism, or more precisely, the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage, is a type of pilgrimage unique to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This is because the Kaaba, the only holy place of Islam, which originated on the Arabian Peninsula in the early 7th century AD, is located in the city of Mecca.

As is known, the Hajj pilgrimage is one of the five pillars of Islam and is an obligatory act for every Muslim. Therefore, every Muslim believer living on earth, when he reaches the financial threshold during his lifetime, rushes to Mecca and Medina to perform the Hajj. Thus, the history of pilgrimage tourism in Saudi Arabia dates back to the early 7th century. Since then, the number of pilgrims has been increasing steadily. While the Hajj season is held once a year and during one period, namely in the month of Dhul-Hijjah of the Hijri calendar, Umrah is a type of pilgrimage that can be performed almost throughout the year.

**Table 1 Key indicators of international tourism (2019) [6]**

| No. | Countries    | Number of tourists, million people | Income, billion \$ | Share in GDP, % |
|-----|--------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1.  | France       | 86.9                               | 69.9               | 8.9             |
| 2.  | Spain        | 81.8                               | 68.4               | 14.9            |
| 3.  | USA          | 76.9                               | 251.4              | 7.7             |
| 4.  | China        | 60.7                               | 32.6               | 11.0            |
| 5.  | Italy        | 58.3                               | 44.5               | 13.0            |
| 6.  | Turkey       | 37.6                               | 31.9               | 11.6            |
| 7.  | Saudi Arabia | 16.1                               | 14.8               | 9.4             |
| 8.  | UAE          | 15.8                               | 20.0               | 11.3            |
| 9.  | Bahrain      | 11.4                               | 3.8                | 9.7             |
| 10. | Tunisia      | 8.3                                | 1.3                | 8.0             |
| 11. | Egypt        | 8.2                                | 8.6                | 11.0            |
| 12. | Morocco      | 11.35                              | 9.09               | 8.3             |

Without a doubt, one of the sectors that has suffered the most from the COVID-19 pandemic is international tourism. The World Travel and Tourism Council notes that 50 million jobs were lost in the travel and tourism industry worldwide in 2020 due to the pandemic [11]. As a result, the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages have also been suspended in Saudi Arabia. Before the pandemic, the number of pilgrims visiting the country had been steadily increasing. According to data from 2018 and 2019, the number of pilgrims during the Hajj season was 2.2 million and 2.4 million, respectively, and almost 4 million people, including service personnel. The number of Umrah pilgrims was 11.8 million and 10.6 million, respectively. This brings the total number of pilgrims visiting Saudi Arabia for pilgrimage to around 16 million per year.

At this point, it is also worth mentioning the number of pilgrims from Uzbekistan who go to Saudi Arabia for Hajj and Umrah. During the years of independence, more than 130

thousand pilgrims from Uzbekistan went to Hajj, and almost 176 thousand went to Umrah. Over the past 10-15 years, 5,200 people went to Hajj annually, and 6,000 to Umrah. In 2018-2019, these numbers increased significantly, from 7,200 to Hajj annually, and from 10,000 to 48,000 to Umrah.

The data obtained over the past 2-3 years also correspond to the figures presented in the table above. In particular, given that the number of arrivals in 2017 was 16.1 million people and the income was \$14.8 billion, we can conclude that the number of pilgrims visiting Saudi Arabia has almost not increased over the past 3 years. Naturally, the income was the same. These figures are, of course, much higher than some countries that are taking their first steps in the field of tourism. However, we must admit that these indicators are much lower when compared to the country of Turkey in the region. In Turkey, where traditional, recreational (restores the physical and mental state of a person), and many types of entertainment are increasingly developing, more than 38 million tourists spend their holidays annually, and the country receives \$32 billion in income from this. These figures are almost 2.5 times higher than those of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia, like Turkey, has beaches, historical sites, exotic flora and fauna, and modern facilities. However, for many years, these opportunities have been overlooked by the Kingdom.

The unprecedented drop in oil prices in 2016, to \$27.5 per barrel, has put the country's economy, which relies on oil exports, in a difficult situation. As a result, the government was forced to take measures to reduce even the state budget. By royal decree, the monthly salaries of all ministers, deputies and employees of other budget organizations were reduced by 20%. The service cars provided to many officials were discontinued.

The difficult economic situation forced the government to think differently, that is, if I may say so, unconventionally and innovatively. It became clear that it was time to take the first steps towards the world to get rid of the scourge of oil dependence, which had long tormented the heart of the King. Therefore, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia plans to diversify its economy by 2030. The development of modern, cognitive (enlightenment), recreational types of tourism, which are considered traditional for the whole world, is considered a priority direction of this policy.

Tourism Minister Ahmed Hatib described Good Friday, September 27, 2019, as a historic day for Saudi Arabia. Since then, tourist visas have been issued to citizens of 49 countries [6]. It is worth noting that before this, it was impossible to visit Saudi Arabia as a tourist. Non-Muslims were generally not allowed to enter the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, and obtaining business and other types of visas was also a major problem.

Opening the country to tourists is part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's economic reform program. The reforms are intended to significantly wean the Kingdom's economy from its dependence on oil. According to the program, Riyadh hopes to attract 100 million foreign visitors to Saudi Arabia annually by 2030. The growth of the tourism sector is expected to create about a million new jobs in the country [6].

The Vision 2030 strategy adopted in 2016, Saudi Arabia's position in the global economy should increase from 20th to 15th place by increasing the share of the non-oil sector in the

country's economy from 15 per cent to 50 per cent. As a result, the share of women in the labour market will increase from 22 per cent to 30 per cent, and unemployment will decrease from 11.6 per cent to 7 per cent. The government also plans to introduce several incentives for Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages, aiming to increase the number of pilgrims to 30 million and other tourists to 22 million by 2025 [7].

According to data provided by the US company Knoema, which specializes in collecting and analyzing statistical data, over the past three years before the pandemic, the growth trend in the tourism sector of the Kingdom's economy is visible. From 2017 to the beginning of 2020, the total contribution of the tourism sector to the country's GDP amounted to 65.2 billion (9.0%), 70.6 billion (9.2%), and 76.5 billion (9.3%), respectively. According to other data from the same source, net income from pilgrims visiting in 2016-2018 amounted to 13.4 billion, 15.0 billion, and 16.9 billion. US dollars, respectively [8]. It should be noted that one of these indicators is the contribution to GDP, while the second reflects net income. Over the past 3-4 years, both indicators have shown an upward trend. The cultural and natural attractions of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, including ancient ruins and cities, national parks, wild forests, beaches on the Red Sea and Persian Gulf coasts, exotic nature and other modern facilities, attract millions of tourists today. All of these objects are under the control of the Supreme Council for Tourism and Antiquities of the Kingdom, established in 2000 and headed by Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdulaziz. The majority of the country's cultural heritage sites are located on the western and southwestern coasts of Asir, Tabuk and Al-Baha [9].

In recent years, Saudi Arabia has been actively pursuing a policy of including its cultural and historical monuments in the UNESCO World Heritage List. The country's officials are confident that granting such an international status to national monuments will, first of all, increase their value and importance, and arouse great interest among tourists, especially from Western countries. In 2009, the Al-Hijr site - the Nabataean city of Madain Salih, located 300 km north of Medina, was included in the UNESCO list. In addition, five other destinations included in this list, namely the historic centre of Jeddah, the rock inscriptions of Hail in the north-west of the country, the historical region of Et-Turaif, the Al-Ahsa oasis near the border with Qatar, and the ruins of the ancient city of Al-Ula, are sure to attract the attention of tourists [7].

In addition, the country has many modern architectural landmarks, including the 47-story Al Mamlaka skyscraper, the King Fahd Stadium, built in the form of a huge Arab tent, the famous 25-kilometre bridge connecting the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with the State of Bahrain, and the world's tallest (312 m) King Fahd Fountain in Jeddah. In 2017, Riyadh announced a major project in the tourism sector. According to it, it is planned to build luxury hotels on 50 islands located in the Red Sea. Also, construction of the Kiddi entertainment mega-complex, which will include theme and nature parks and large sports complexes, has begun near the capital. It is planned to build the world's largest city park in Riyadh. This project is planned to plant 7 million trees in the area, to build a modern theatre, an open-air stage, and an academy of visual, musical and dramatic arts. Shortly,



the museums of aviation, cosmonautics, science, architecture and modern technologies are also planned to be established.

Importantly, the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is moving away from old conservative thinking and is striving to keep pace with the times and be a leader in the tourism sector.

## RESULTS

The analysis carried out in the course of our research is the basis for making the following conclusions and suggestions:

- Pilgrimage tourism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has a long history and is associated with the Hajj and Umrah rituals, which are considered pillars of Islam;
- The number of pilgrims performing Hajj and Umrah has been steadily increasing over the years. The revenue generated from this has also increased accordingly;
- In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, there are rich opportunities for the development of traditional types of tourism as an alternative to pilgrimage tourism;
- The adoption and implementation of the Vision 2030 program have created vast opportunities for the development of traditional tourism in Saudi Arabia ;
- As a result of the development of all types of tourism in the country, it is expected that the dependence of the economy on oil will be reduced to 50%;
- It is advisable to study in more depth the experience of Saudi Arabia in the field of pilgrimage and traditional tourism and apply it to the conditions of Uzbekistan.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that the income from pilgrimage tourism to the economy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is somewhat limited, and the development of traditional types of tourism, on the other hand, will help the country overcome its economic difficulties and reduce its dependence on oil. In addition, the country's position in the world economy will continue to grow.

We would recommend making good use of the rich experience of Saudi Arabia in the field of organizing Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages in our country.

## REFERENCES

1. WTTC статистик маълумотлари асосида.
2. Гаагская декларация по туризму (Принята Межпарламентской конференцией по туризму в Гааге (Нидерланды) 14 апреля 1989 г.) <http://www.unwto.org>
3. Осакая декларация современности (Принята Конференцией лидеров туризма Тысячелетия 30 сентября-1 октября 2001. в г. Осака, Япония) <http://www.unwto.org>
4. Ўзбекистон Республикаси Президенти Ш.Мирзиёевнинг Олий Мажлисга Мурожаатномасидан, 28.12.19й.

- 
5. Абдуллаев Р. Туризм Яқин ва Ўрта Шарқ мамлакатлари иқтисодиёининг устувор йўналиши сифатида. SHARQSHUNOSLIK. №3, 2019. Б.135.
  6. Международный туризм knoema.ru маълумотлари асосида тузилган.
  7. <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news>
  8. <https://lenta.ru/articles/2019/11/13/tourisminsaudi Arabia/>
  9. <https://knoema.ru/atlas>
  10. Аигина Е.В. Саудовская Аравия: рождение новой туристской дестинации. Туризм и рекреация: фундаментальные и прикладные исследования.
  11. Худояров А.А. Ўзбекистонда зиёрат туризми бозорининг ривожланиш хусусиятлари ва тенденциялари. Монография. – Тошкент: Complers Print, 2020.