



## The Role of the Cities of the Great Silk Road of Uzbekistan in the Tourism of Uzbekistan

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**Abstract:** *The Silk Road cities in Uzbekistan are one of the most attractive destinations of the world in terms of hospitality, range of unique historical buildings, the lifestyle of locals and their traditional habits as well. The study investigated tourists' perceived overall attractiveness of Silk Road cities and perceived importance of destination attributes to tourists that contribute to its overall attractiveness. This study attempts to evaluate destination attractiveness of Silk Road cities, namely Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva from the perspective of local and international visitors to come up with an up-to-date reflection on international tourist assessments of Uzbekistan. A descriptive analysis is used to analyze the collected data for this thesis. According to findings, destinations attractiveness for all cities are average, not any construct mean showed outstanding or unacceptable results in all studied aspects. Although the scope of this research was limited, findings are showing that the full potential of tourism in Silk Road hasn't been used yet. Moreover, this also adds to the body of knowledge on the understanding of tourism product preference and perceptual attitudes held by tourists from specific geographical origins to the Central Asian country, specifically within Uzbekistan.*

**Keywords:** *Tourism of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, Khiva, Samarkand and Bukhara, international tourist destination, attractiveness, competitiveness.*

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### Introduction

Since these days numerous researchers have done several researches about the Great Silk Road but there are few works that you can find about the development of the tourism in the main cities of this road. This study aimed to introduce the crossroad of the Silk Road and the role of Uzbekistan in enhancing demand for travel to this heritage. Initially focus of my knowledge through activity indicating the Silk Road tourism has traditionally based on the Classic Silk Road from China to Rome and introducing the cities of Uzbekistan lying on this great road. This is reinforced by focus of my academic research, the essentiality of the Silk Road with a central Asia focus in historical filming and in the travel media by different cinema companies (UNWTO, 2017). Even modern tourism marketing has focused on the Classic Silk Road with its western and eastern limits being China and Rome. This road had become existence in 202 BC while Han Dynasty was ruling the Chinese empire and also this road was considered the most well-known trading route of ancient Chinese civilization (UNWTO, 2016). The famous person that firstly introduced this road was Chinese traveler Chan Ch'ien who made contact with the Central Asian tribes came up with the idea to expand the silk trade through this road and as the result of this idea the great Silk Road was born.

This road significantly grew with the rise of the Roman Empire since the Chinese initially gave silk to the European countries as a gift Kantarci, K. (2007) The silk road reality shows the movement of goods from the east took many directions across Central Asian also this road ended in diverse locations such as Russian Federation and Scandinavian countries. Obviously economic growing is related to new destinations emerging in the Silk Road countries. The Silk Road elements cover sustainable development, international cooperation, foreign direct investment with cultural understanding and exchange both travel and trade experiences. The physical implements of the modern Silk Road show not only political (Buranov,T 2009) challenges but also indicate technical issues and political differences around countries.

The destination attractiveness evaluation has been a hot topic that been investigated by many researchers (Salimov, 2002) Visiting tourists has gone through positive experiences when consuming a particular product, it influences to satisfaction and other human factors as well. Furthermore, Study of destination attractiveness have been analyzed several times and the assessment of those destinations loyalty factors impact on touristic behaviors with the significance of satisfaction on the desire to make visitor come again .( Werner, C. 2005). The present study covers the analyses of previous researches for the practical implementation of their conceptual approach. In addition, by this research, attractiveness, and competitiveness of Uzbekistan is going to be tested with a set of appropriate indicators, and the most important factors that measure destination attractiveness will be identified alongside developing strategies to check existent threats for expanding international visitors' number. Apart from that, the purpose of this research is examining how much and to what extent the chosen measurements can assist to shape the current state of Uzbek tourism by the vision of international tourists each year.

**The aims of the study consist of the following:**

1. To examine international and local tourists' perceived attractiveness of Silk Road Cities.
2. To investigate tourists' perceived importance of destination attributes, which contribute to the overall attractiveness of tourist destinations;
3. To investigate the relationship between the perceived overall attractiveness and the likelihood of repeat visitation by tourists;
4. To examine the relationship between tourists' perceived importance of destination

attributes and their psychological and socio-demographic characteristics such as travel motivation, trip purpose, and gender, age, education level, occupation, income, marital status, and family size.

Identify types of research that had already done on this topic and create own base using their researches as well. Try to find any possible ways that can improve the effort of tourism demands in Uzbekistan. Most countries do not have an idea about the tourism system of Uzbekistan so introduce the features of tourism facilities and places are important issue. Another big problem that should be find solution is amenities for newcomers of the country.

**Literature review**

The Great Silk Road coined in 1877 by the German Ferdinand von Richthofen, referring to the series of routes intertwining between Asia and Europe (Mintel, 2018). The great silk route regarded as a commercial highway that saw the exchange of goods, ideas, and cultures. Silk was a highly sought product during the time alongside other products like paper and porcelain. The Silk Road joined the two distinct cultures of the east and the west. However, it should be noted that the use of the Silk Road was affected by the emergence of sea trade routes by the Europeans Hassan SS (2000) The new approach of sea trade routes weakened the economic and political significance of the great Silk Road. The Europeans began to extensively use the sea for trade purposes with the

transport of raw materials from various parts across the world. The declining role of the Silk Road in Uzbekistan led to the collapse of the Timurid Empire in the 16th century (Mintel, 2018). The result of the collapse of the ruling empire resulted in internal strife and wrangles, which weakened the nation of Uzbekistan. Unsurprisingly, the vulnerable nation of Uzbekistan was invaded by the Soviet Union in 1865, bringing an end to the infamous trade route of the Silk Road. Uzbekistan is located at the heart of the Silk Road, which is the most famous trade and caravan routes ever found (Mintel, 2018). The nation of Uzbekistan attracted individuals as well as nations who anticipated territorial as well as commercial gains among other unique interests.

Consequentially, the Silk Road has been a source of conflict by rulers or nations seeking to gain the maximum from the great trade route. The scramble for Uzbekistan resulted in the nation being characterized by turbulence as various cultures and territories thought to have their share of the famous trade route Werner, C. (2005). The Great Silk Road has a rich history being used by conquerors such as

Alexander the Great, traders, and in recent year tourists who flood Uzbekistan to witness the outstanding trade route. The main hubs of the Silk Road in Uzbekistan include the contemporary cities of Khiva, Bukhara, and Sarmakand. It is typical for tourists to visit the three regions indicating the significance of the Silk Road in promoting tourism in the region. The UNESCO World Heritage List comprises of five historic sites from Uzbekistan, namely Bukhara historic center, Ichan Kala, Samarkand, Shakhrisabz, and Tien San natural heritage (Mintel, 2018). Uzbekistan boasts of the ancient cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva located on the great Silk Road. The cities continue to maintain the antique architectural designs and old mausoleums, palaces, tombs, and minarets that seem to grow more compelling as years go by Poon, A. (1993). Uzbekistan might be full of ancient historical sites, but tourists find serene and peaceful environment staying in the nation as enhanced by the modern hotels, transport means, and restaurants, among other factors that promote modern tourism. Bukhara was referred to as the shining pearl of the Silk Road, is more than 2500 years old and has deep cultural heritage ties with the Asian nation of China (Mintel, 2018). China played a central role in the development of the Silk Road and the economic significance of the trade route. When ancient China opened its borders for trade in 138 BC, the Silk Road gained more prominence being the major commercial route used by traders from all over the world. The strong links between Bukhara and Uzbekistan as a whole with China continue to be evidenced serving to promote the nation's tourism sector Poon, A. (1993). The Chinese and Uzbekistan governments pledged to continue with the ancient Silk Road spirit that fostered the relationship of the two neighboring nations as well as enhances their economies. Consider how the governments of China and Uzbekistan agreed on the establishment of the Silk Road economic belt project alongside other proposals aimed at promoting tourism and the nation's economy at large (Mintel, 2018). Additionally, more Chinese companies and investors have shown significant interest in Uzbekistan explaining why China is the second largest trading partner with the nation that lies at the center of the great Silk Road Poon, A. (1993).

The locals in Uzbekistan continue the ancient practices of hospitality, welcoming guests from various parts across the globe, which has had a significant boost on the development of the tourism industry Mihalic, T. (2000). The Silk Road cities have always been tourist attraction centers characterized by architectural masterpieces such as gilded ceilings, majolica tiles, and paintings, among others. The city of Samarkand is home to the earliest Islamic schools, also known as madrasas that date back to the 15th century. The old Islamic schools are located in Registan Square and hold immense religious as well as architectural significance.

The extensive use of modern technology has enhanced the portrayal of the great Silk Road and Uzbekistan as a tourist attraction center. The contemporary world is dominated by the use of the internet through such social media platforms as Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook, and Instagram, among

others. The power of social media has played a central role in promoting the image of Uzbekistan in the tourism industry.

The experience of tourists visiting Uzbekistan and the Silk Road is shared widely across the world with the help of social media Mihalic, T (2000). The spread of photos and videos of the Silk Road serve to attract more people to visit the great nation of Uzbekistan. The social media platform is an effective marketing platform that will further promote the tourism image of Uzbekistan. The use of social media platforms such as Instagram serves as a significant initiative reaching out to millions of users across the world within a short time. In the modern world, it takes a few minutes for an image or video to trend globally, attracting millions of viewers. The nation of Uzbekistan gained its independence in 1991 but has since faced difficulties in promoting the tourism sector Mihalic T (2000). The bad experiences in the post-world wars era had a negative toll on the nation, especially when it comes to attracting foreign tourists. Insecurity was a major issue in Uzbekistan that prevented the nation from emerging as a top tourist attraction center. The tourism sector in Uzbekistan did not thrive since those visitors afraid of the sociopolitical tensions evidenced in the nation. In efforts to promote the nation as a tourist attraction center, the government of Uzbekistan established Uzbek-tourism in 1992 as a tourist attraction company. The government of Uzbekistan was aware of the vital role played by tourism in promoting the nation's economy and therefore resolved on promoting the tourism sector.

Uzbekistan could become among the top tourist attraction nations across the world if more effort is put towards the creation and maintenance of tourism destination images across the globe Kim, A. (2013). The concept of destination image in the tourism sector has been used over the years to explain and influence the tourists' destination choices. Destination image, therefore, refers to the objective reality subjective perception consciously created by individuals or tourists for this case (Mintel, 2018). Tourists often have to decide on the places they desire to visit most, and the concept of the destination image influences the decisions. For instance, a tourist will not travel to Uzbekistan if they never heard of the Silk Road. However, the popularity and portrayal of the Silk Road will contribute to the tourist's decision to travel to Uzbekistan's Silk Road. The experience that such a tourist will have will also determine whether they will recommend the tourist attraction center to others or not Kim, A. (2013). As a result, it is always imperative for a tourist to have the best experience which will make them decide on revisiting the place as well as recommending it to others as well. Among the essential development priorities in Uzbekistan, the government was to conduct a comprehensive brand analysis of the Silk Road and its perception and values as a tourist attraction site. The perception of tourists about Uzbekistan and the Silk Road has improved in recent years with more people making return trips and recommending the region to others. The people of Uzbekistan have been applauded for being hospitable and friendly. Tourists feel safer and at home while in Uzbekistan, unlike during the past, when internal conflicts and foreign invasion characterized the nation. Uzbekistan tourism is based on the revival and sustenance of the traditional cultural heritage associated with the Silk Road. The nation could be said to be taking a long time to develop and catch up with the modern world in terms of rapid urban development and economic up-rise Kim, A. (2013). However, Uzbekistan might have been slow to recover, but for a good cause in that, the nation strives to sustain its cultural heritage. Uzbekistan was once a tremendous economic hub linking the west and east worlds and could attain its past glory since more with the help of tourism. Uzbekistan could be termed as an upcoming nation, but it has a rich history as enhanced by its strategic position on the Silk Road joining China and Europe. The Silk Road serves as the nation's tangible tourist attraction site which alongside other intangible cultural heritage like folklore, cuisine, and music fosters the tourism sector in Uzbekistan. In recent years Uzbekistan has heavily invested in the tourism sector as evidenced in the building of modern hotels to offer better quality services to visitors.

The Silk Road is undoubtedly a major tourist destination center, and in the past visitors had difficulties accessing the nation. However, improved means of transport such as modern airports and new aircraft purchased by the Uzbekistan government ensure the smooth flow of tourists in and out of the nation. That is why, Uzbekistan has now more international flights as opposed to the past, which has led to a significant increase in the number of tourists visiting the Silk Road. Hauteserre, A. M (2000).

**Research Methodology**

The field of this research related to the regional authorities particularly in attractiveness and competitiveness of Silk Road cities of Uzbekistan. Chon, K.S., & Mayer, K.J. (1995). This section presents the implemented methodology for the study a structured process for evaluating in a participative manner the potential for Uzbekistan Silk Road brand. The data collection process took into consideration different levels of geographic responsibility spanning from international to local. Gomezeli, D. O. & Mihalič, T. (2008).

The outcome was a very active and diverse participation, and the feedback received highlights the possible approaches that can be implemented but also the common themes upon which a SR brand can be developed. Considering that the unique characteristics of each researched level, a multi-method approach was considered appropriate. The data collection methods were both quantitative and qualitative in nature, including: an online survey; semi-structured interviews and analyses on a national level conducted by universities; and Focus Groups. The contacted participants were carefully selected regarding their relevance to Silk Road Tourism.

International tourists who visited at least one of the Silk Road cities in Uzbekistan have been participated for this survey. Silk Road cities are very famous touristic destination in Central Asia. All four locations have enough touristic attractions for international visitors, whereas the number of foreign tourists is significantly large in Tashkent and Samarkand rather than other regions. Tashkent is capital of Uzbekistan and all international tourist who want to visit Silk Road first land to this city as Tashkent has international airport of Uzbekistan.

**Analysis and results**

This chapter analyses various demographic information of respondent who took part in the survey. The data collected through the survey was analyzed by the use of software IBM SPSS version 25.0. By the help of this advanced program, a stunning range of features were analyzed, while some technical mistakes were detected and corrected. According to descriptive statistics, a frequency of the data was determined. To summarize the means and analyze measurement items of data, Independent Sample T-test conducted and results were interpreted. Using SPSS program, “Mean”, “Std. Deviation”, “Std. Error Mean” and P-value of all measurement items were summarized which are then reported on results and findings. Covering all required data information result can be discussed for further process of the research work.

**Table 1: Demographic characteristic of respondents**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
	Male	267	55.4
<b>Gender</b>	Female	215	44.6
	Total	482	100.0



	18-29 years old	165	34.2
<b>Age</b>	30-39 years old	124	25.7
	40-49 years old	95	19.7
	50-59 years old	64	13.3
	60- 69 years old	25	5.2
	70 and above	9	1.9
	Total	482	100.0
	Single	222	46.1
<b>Marital status</b>	Married	239	49.6
	other	21	4.4
	Total	482	100.0
	High school degree or less	115	23.9
	Associate's degree	102	21.2
<b>Education</b>	Bachelor's degree	181	37.6
	Graduate degree or more	84	17.4
	Total	482	100.0
	less than \$20,000	48	10.0
	\$20,000 - less than \$40,000	65	13.5

	\$40,000 -Less than \$60,000	98	20.3
<b>Household</b>			
	\$60,000 - Less than \$80,000	93	19.3
<b>income</b>			
	\$80,000 - Less than \$100,000	61	12.7
	\$150,000 - Less than \$200,000	19	3.9
	more than \$200,000	21	4.4
	Total	482	100.0
	New England	24	5.2
	Middle Atlantic	82	17.9
	East North Central	61	13.3
	West North Central	25	5.5
	South Atlantic	86	18.8
	East South Central	24	5.2
	West South Central	35	7.6
	Mountain	19	4.1
	Pacific	102	22.3
	Total	458	100.0
Missing	System	24	
<b>Total</b>		482	

This study was carried to investigate the destination attractiveness of Silk Road cities in Uzbekistan from the tourist perspectives who visited four main cities of this destination. Famous great Silk Road is strategically located at the heart of Uzbekistan, which gives the nation an advantage in the development of the tourism industry. Uzbekistan boasts of an elevated position since the ancient times as the region had the most prosperous cities throughout the Middle Ages as a result of the Thriving trade enhanced by the Silk Road. The Silk Road played a vital role in joining the east and the west, which saw the development of the region. The territory of Uzbekistan and the Silk Road were always targeted for control by other empires.

The region of Uzbekistan, therefore, suffered a negative blow with the invasion of the Soviet rule that brought an end to the trade route. Additionally, the significance of the Silk Road was affected by the innovative use of sea trade routes by the Europeans. After Uzbekistan attained, its independence, tourism was regarded as a significant economic boost and has since received maximum attention and investment. The government of Uzbekistan channeled its efforts towards rebranding the Silk Road and establishing the nation as a major tourist attraction hub. The government of Uzbekistan also formed close relations with the powerful neighboring nation of China for the sake of promoting the tourism industry. Such projects as modernizing the railroad system in Uzbekistan will boost the tourism sector through enhanced means of transport. The Silk Road also promotes the tourism sector as a result of its influence on the cultural heritage and national identity. Lastly, the nation of Uzbekistan has the potential of becoming the top tourist attraction centers in the future as enhanced by the presence of the invaluable great Silk Road alongside other ancient attraction sites and natural factors. While talking about the results, the result shows prior visitation is total 385 percent and missing value in the system shows 97 percent from the total visitation of international tourist to the destination. According to years cumulative visit from 2019 to 2021 completely different from other showings.

Most interviewers were very happy with their visits to these four cities; the ranking score for all destinations was average. This indicates that customer loyalty programs is working very well. It is a proven fact that to acquire new consumers is more expensive than retaining existing ones. At the same time keeping the “old” consumers is more predictable and profitable for any industry. This study provided important evidence on analyzed destination attractiveness as well. While evaluating all constructs that included several items itself, hospitality and cultural heritage in all cities showed an important role in attracting foreign visitors. Assessing this factor was higher than comparing it with others. Depending on this finding, it can be seen that historical heritage is one of the important points in the attractiveness of studied destinations. Although assessments of Silk Road cities in all construct items were perfect. Majority of visitors felt themselves more enjoyed with “natural parks and various entertainment activities” in Tashkent compared with other places of Uzbekistan. The price was stated as one of the important indicators of tourism destinations for being chosen among the alternatives (Dwyer & Kim, 2003).

The level of tourist safety and security was the second highly evaluated items in the findings. In the current study it can be seen that the “actions” of government for developing tourism infrastructures is coming into effect. Faulkner. B, (2016) cited that, the natural resources of the country are spectacular and could be one of the important assets for attracting visitors. While evaluation of four cities, the construct items names “infrastructure” such as “guidance information”, “accommodation quality/variety”, “local transport efficiency” and “food services” were expected to be assessed a little in two cities Tashkent and Samarkand as it was east to reach from capital to historical city. However, it can be explained with various reasons and justifications (such Samarkand, Bukhara and Kiva are more popular than Tashkent in tourism market, because of having unique history to attract visitors, Samarkand is one of the “hottest” touristic spots in Central Asia) that it is logical and Khiva has the biggest historical city in Uzbekistan. Tashkent has also important role in tourism

industry of Uzbekistan. First of all, it is a capital city, almost all international tourists visit Uzbekistan, through the Tashkent International Airport, then can travel to other cities by train, bus or using taxi services.

Collecting all findings and results above, it can be determined that the current study could be useful for future academics who wants to investigate the Great Silk Road cities of Uzbekistan and these four cities can be used as a literature for the researches who is willing to investigate further works about Silk Road tourism.

### Proposed research model

The following hypotheses introduced based on discussions mentioned above.

**H1** - Cultural heritage site has significant influence on both satisfaction and loyalty factors

**H2** - Hospitality has positive emotion on satisfaction and loyalty factors of the attractiveness

**H3** - Natural attractiveness of destination completely related to satisfaction and loyalty factors by gathering tourist groups for intended location

**H4** - Complement attributes related to satisfaction and loyalty factors too. **H5**-Satisfaction has influence on loyalty

**H6** - Loyalty factor has connection with other attractiveness factors.

**Figure 1: Proposed research model**



### Limitations and recommendations

As coin has two sides, certain limitations should be noted with regard to these research findings. Firstly, the survey was conducted in English as there are also a number of international tourists who speaks other languages as well. Secondly, survey questions only covered four cities of Silk Road while Uzbekistan has more tourism sources in its other regions as well. Not only Silk Road tourism but also tourism product for the Muslims can be introduced for the Muslim visitors of the world.



Moreover, travel motivation, destination attributes, and revisit intention of tourists had not been included in this research which can gain significant results on all tourism-related researches. As a tourist destination, Silk Road cities embraces tourism products or tourism supplies that designed to meet the needs of tourists. A number of common features attract tourists such as 'Natural Factors,' '40 Cultural Features,' 'Recreation and Shopping Facilities,' 'Accessibility,' 'Reception,' 'Services,' and 'Cost/Price.' As a consequence, the evaluation of the attractiveness of Silk Road cities made by tourists from foreign countries of origin may emerge from, and thus represent, their perceptions of only some of the potential tourist sites. As such, the findings of this study should be interpreted with full consideration of these limitations. Further research is required to investigate how tourism products should be designed, in order to meet the needs and challenges of such different market segments and respond to the fast-changing environment. To understand more about the product's quality, delivery, service, and price, a detailed study of this kind would also be worthwhile.

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