

## **THERMAL TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES AND DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS IN UZBEKISTAN**

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**Annotation:** This article analyzes the existing opportunities, regional resources and development prospects of thermal tourism in Uzbekistan. During the study, the republic's natural hot water sources, mineral-rich springs and the opportunities for developing health tourism based on them were studied. The issues of regional infrastructure, quality of services, marketing and sustainable development were also considered. The results of the study show that the development of thermal tourism not only has a positive impact on the regional economy and employment of the local population, but also allows Uzbekistan to become an internationally competitive health tourism center.

**Keywords:** Thermal tourism, Uzbekistan, hot springs, mineral waters, resort, wellness, health tourism, infrastructure, sustainable development, marketing, regional development.

### **Introduction:**

The Republic of Uzbekistan has identified the tourism sector as a strategic direction of the country's economic and social development. According to the words and decrees of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, tourism should be developed not only as a means of enhancing the international image, but also as a means of effectively using the natural resources of the regions and increasing employment of the local population. In particular, Decree No. PF-6091 dated May 29, 2019 established "Measures to develop tourism and improve the quality of services", which set out the tasks of modernizing regional tourism infrastructure, implementing new tourism projects, and bringing the quality of services to international standards. Also, Resolution No. 450 of the Cabinet of Ministers dated April 15, 2020 indicated the issues of developing regional tourism, attracting private investment, and widely involving the local population in tourism processes. Uzbekistan is rich in natural mineral springs and hot water sources, which creates great opportunities for the development of thermal tourism. The President's instructions on the development of health tourism emphasize that through the rational use of mineral waters and

natural resources of nature, it is possible to strengthen the health of the population, develop the regional economy, and create new jobs in the tourism sector. In this regard, the article analyzes the resources of thermal tourism in Uzbekistan in 2024-2025, their development opportunities and promising directions. The results of the study are aimed at modernizing regional infrastructure, improving the quality of services, strengthening marketing and branding strategies, as well as developing practical recommendations for the development of thermal tourism, taking into account sustainable development and environmental requirements.

**Literature review:** Scientific literature and international experience in the field of thermal tourism largely highlight the economic, social and environmental significance of this area. Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2016) analyzed the issues of improving the quality of services of wellness and spa tourism, developing marketing strategies and diversifying tourism products. Medlik (2012) emphasizes the need for an integrated approach to tourism management, including monitoring the quality of infrastructure and services. Reports of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2022) note the growth of wellness and thermal tourism in the international market and its role in improving the health of the population. In the Uzbek context, Sharipov (2020) and Usmanov (2019) emphasize the need to use mineral springs in the development of regional tourism, ensure environmental sustainability and involve the local population in the tourism process. Presidential Decree No. PF-6091 of 2019 and Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 450 indicate that attention is paid at the state policy level to the development of regional tourism and improving the quality of services. The analysis shows that for the successful development of thermal tourism, it is necessary to comprehensively develop natural resources, infrastructure, quality of services and marketing. It is this approach that will make thermal tourism in Uzbekistan internationally competitive and have a positive impact on the local economy.

**Research methodology:** This study used a comprehensive methodological approach to identify the potential and assess the prospects for the development of thermal tourism in Uzbekistan. The subject of the study is the existing resources and services in the field of thermal tourism; the object is the areas of the republic with mineral springs and hot water sources. At the first stage of the study, the analytical analysis method was used. National and international scientific sources, presidential decrees, decisions of the Cabinet of Ministers, statistical data and regional tourism reports were studied. This method made it possible to assess the quality of thermal resources, infrastructure and services in the region. Empirical research methods were also used. Through questionnaires and interviews, the opinions of local residents, entrepreneurs and tourists were studied, the need for thermal tourism services and existing problems were identified. This

information served as the basis for developing practical recommendations for the development of regional tourism. The study also used comparative analysis. The potential of thermal tourism in different regions of Uzbekistan was compared, strengths and weaknesses, as well as development prospects were identified. In addition, mineral springs, hot water sources and regional infrastructure were mapped using geographical and cartographic methods. This made it possible to develop a tourism development strategy taking into account regional characteristics. At the end of the study, a SWOT analysis was used to systematically assess the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats of thermal tourism. As a result, effective ways and practical recommendations for the development of thermal tourism in Uzbekistan were developed. As a result, the set of methods used created a reliable scientific basis for the development of thermal tourism and its positive impact on the regional economy.

**Results and Discussion:** The results of the study showed that Uzbekistan has significant development opportunities in the field of thermal tourism. The hot springs and mineral-rich thermal resources located in the Fergana Valley, Navoi, Samarkand, Bukhara, Surkhandarya and Karakalpakstan regions of the republic have great potential for health and recreational tourism. At the same time, the tourism infrastructure of the regions is not sufficiently developed, and high-quality and modern solutions are required in transport and hotel services. Based on the results of empirical research, questionnaires and interviews, the opinions of local residents and tourists were studied. The study showed that the involvement of local residents in the tourism process is low, and marketing and branding strategies are not sufficiently developed. Therefore, it is difficult to increase the attractiveness of thermal tourism and increase tourist flows. SWOT analysis showed that the strengths of the region are natural mineral springs, an ecologically clean environment and a wealth of health-improving resources; weaknesses are the quality of infrastructure and services, and weak marketing and branding. Opportunities include government support, private investment, and the growth of the wellness tourism market; threats include environmental impact, climate change, and increased competition. Thus, the development of thermal tourism requires the modernization of the regional infrastructure, improvement of service quality, strengthening marketing and branding, creation of new types of products, and attraction of the local population. This approach will allow Uzbekistan to become an internationally competitive center of wellness tourism.

**Conclusion:** Uzbekistan has a rich territory in terms of thermal tourism resources, and mineral springs and hot water sources create great opportunities for health and recreational tourism. The results of the study showed that, although the quality of infrastructure and services

in the regions is not sufficiently developed, the tourism sector can be significantly developed through strategic development and modernization of existing resources. The development of thermal tourism will not only have a positive impact on the regional economy, but will also increase local employment, attract investments and make Uzbekistan an internationally competitive tourism center. At the same time, ensuring environmental sustainability, developing marketing and branding, and diversifying new types of products are also important. In conclusion, through the development of thermal tourism, Uzbekistan can become an attractive country in the field of health, ecotourism and wellness. The success of this direction depends on the effective combination of regional infrastructure, service quality, environmental sustainability and marketing strategies. As a result of this approach, thermal tourism contributes to the sustainable development of the republic's economy and increases competitiveness in the international tourism market.

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