

Trends in the development of the pilgrim and modern types of tourism in Saudi Arabia

Ravshan Abdullaev¹, Gulnora Gulyamova²

ANNOTATION

The article examines the development of pilgrim tourism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which is associated with the performance of the Hajj rites by Muslims and Umrah. The place and role of the Kingdom in the world tourism industry assessed. The conditions that forced the Saudi leadership to diversify the economy by developing alternative types of tourism to weaken the country's dependence on oil are disclosed. The importance of implementing the ambitious project "Vision-2030" for the greatest attraction of foreign tourists, including Western countries, has been substantiated. A comparative analysis of trends in the development of the pilgrimage and traditional types of tourism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is carried out.

Keywords: Pilgrimage tourism, performing the rituals of Hajj and Umrah, tourism revenues, the share of tourism in GDP, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Vision-2030 strategy, the High Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Traditional Tourism, Recreation Tourism.

INTRODUCTION

According to the International Travel and Tourism Board (ITTB), since the beginning of this century, the annual growth rate of foreign tourists around the world had averaged more than 5 percent, while tourism revenues had grown at an average of 14 percent (The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019).

"As a result of the internationalization of all spheres in the life of nations, tourism has become the main means of establishing personal, cultural, political and economic ties that are important in the life of individuals and modern communities" (The Hague Declaration on Tourism, 1989). The Declaration, adopted at the International Conference of Tourism Leaders in Osaka, Japan, recognized tourism as a "modern economic phenomenon" given its significant contribution to national economies (Osaka Declaration on Tourism, 2001).

¹Doctor of Economic Sciences, Professor, Department of Islamic Economics and Finance, Pilgrimage Tourism, International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
E-mail: ravshan.v.abdullaev@gmail.com

²Candidate of Economic Sciences, Professor, Department of Islamic Economics and Finance, Pilgrimage Tourism, International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan, E-mail: ggulyamova@yandex.ru

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"Tourism in our country is often limited to our ancient cities, historical and cultural monuments. However, our country's unique nature, national reserves, great potential for the development of tourism in mountainous areas would be an additional advantage. In particular, the development of medical tourism, pilgrimage tourism, and ecotourism will give a great impetus not only to the development of the economy, but also the social sphere" (Mirziyoyev, 2021). The development of tourism in the country, attracting investment in the sector, creating new jobs, increasing human resources, and, ultimately, making tourism one of the economy's locomotive sectors was one of the most pressing issues countries faced with (Abdullaev, 2019).

This article provided a comprehensive analysis of pilgrimage tourism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its experience in the development of modern tourism today. Based on the statistics, the tourism potential of the Kingdom would be revealed, its place and role in the global tourism industry would be assessed. To alleviate the country's dependence on oil, conditions would be revealed that would encourage the Saudi leadership to diversify its economy by developing alternative forms of tourism. It is based on the importance of implementing a significant project, "Vision-2030," to attract more tourists from foreign countries, especially from the West. A comparative analysis of trends in the improvement of the pilgrimage and traditional tourism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is made.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

First of all, the basis for writing a scientific article is the urgency of the rapid development of tourism in the country, particularly pilgrimage tourism, and its emphasis by President Sh. Mirziyoyev. During the scientific analysis, relevant data were obtained from the International Travel and Tourism Board (ITTB), foreign and national scientists' scientific works, and Internet resources. The research process used the methods of identifying trends in economic processes and monographic research based on theoretical and methodological principles of systematization, comparative analysis, and systematic analysis of statistical data.

RESULTS

Saudi Arabia is one of the leading countries in the Near and Middle East in international tourism. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's status in the region and the world showed in Table 1, which is based on three leading indicators of international tourism. According to 2017 data, Saudi Arabia is considered the second-largest country in the region after Turkey. They considered that the table included 6 of the most advanced countries globally, namely France, Spain, the USA, China, Italy, and Turkey. Saudi Arabia was included in the list of 20 top countries in the world in 2017 international tourism. This year, more than 16 million pilgrims visited the country, earning 14.8 billion USD, and its share in GDP was 9.4%. Of course, pilgrimage tourism, or more precisely, Hajj and Umrah, is a type of pilgrimage unique to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Kaaba, the only sacred shrine of Islam, born in the Arabian Peninsula in the early 7th century AD, is located in Mecca.

**Table 1 Main indicators of international tourism (2017)
(Reports on economic development, 2021)**

№	Countries	Number of tourists, million people	Income, billion \$	GDP rate, %
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
13.	Jordan	3,8	5,54	9,3
14.	Iran	4,9	3,9	7,3
15.	Oman	2,4	2,7	6,6
16.	Karap	2,3	15,7	10,0
17.	Qatar	2,2	0,2	6,8
18.	Kuwait	0,4	0,64	0,5
19.	Yemen	0,37	0,12	5,2
20.	Uzbekistan	2,7	0,8	2,8
	(2025 y. forecast)	7,0	2,0	

Undoubtedly, one of the areas most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic is international tourism. The World Tourism Council noted that 50 million jobs were lost in the global tourism industry during 2020 due to the pandemic (Khudayarov, 2020). As a result, Hajj and Umrah had suspended in Saudi Arabia. Before the pandemic, the number of visitors coming here had a steady upward trend. In 2018 and 2019, the number of pilgrims during the Hajj season was 2.2 million, respectively, and 2.4 million people, with staff serving them almost 4 million people were around. The number of Umrah pilgrims was 11.8 million, and 10.6 million formed a person. This means that a total of about 16 million people visit Saudi Arabia annually one visits around.

The data obtained over the last 2-3 years¹ are also consistent with the table above figures. In particular, the number of visitors in 2017 amounted to 16.1 million per person and revenue of \$ 14.8 billion; we can conclude that the number of pilgrims visiting Saudi Arabia had hardly increased over the past three years. Naturally, the income is the same. These figures are, of course, much higher than in some countries that are taking their first steps in the field of tourism. However, compared to Turkey in the region, these figures are much lower. In Turkey, where traditional, recreational, and recreational tourism is booming, more than 38 million tourists visited the country each year, generated \$ 32 billion in revenue. These figures were almost 2.5 times higher than in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia, like Turkey, had beaches and historic sites, exotic flora and fauna, and modern buildings. It was only for many years that these opportunities were left out of the Kingdom's view (Tourism key for economic growth and diversification in the

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MENA region). In 2016, an unprecedented drop in oil prices, to \$ 27.5 per barrel, put the country's economy, which relies heavily on oil exports, in a precarious position. As a result, the government was forced to take measures to reduce even the state budget expenditures. By the royal decree, the monthly salaries of all ministers, deputies, and employees of other budget organizations were reduced by 20%. Service vehicles provided to many officials had been suspended. The problematic situation in the economy has forced the government to think differently, in other words, unconventional and innovative. It is becoming clear that it is time to take the first steps towards the world to get rid of the scourge of oil conviction that has been bothering the King for a long time. Therefore, Saudi Arabia plans to diversify its economy by 2030. The development of modern, cognitive (educational) recreational tourism, which is traditional for the whole world, is considered a priority.

Tourism Minister Ahmad Hotib recognized September 27, 2019 - Happy Friday as a historic day for Saudi Arabia. Since that day, tourist visas had been issued to citizens of 49 countries (Basic indicators of tourism development in Saudi Arabia, 2021). It should be noted that it was impossible to come to Saudi Arabia as a tourist until now. Non-Muslims were generally not allowed near Mecca and Medina, and obtaining business and other visas was also a significant problem.

The country's opening to tourists is a milestone in the economic reform program of Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman. The reforms would ultimately require the Kingdom to free its economy from dependence on oil significantly. According to the program, the official Riyadh hoped that by 2030 the number of foreigners visiting Saudi Arabia would reach 100 million a year. The tourism sector's growth expected to create about one million new jobs in the country (Aigina, 2011).

DISCUSSION

According to the Vision-2030 strategy adopted in 2016, Saudi Arabia's position in the world economy should increase from 20th to 15th due to an increase in the share of the non-oil sector in the economy from 15% to 50%. As a result, the share of women in the labor market would increase from 22% to 30%, and unemployment would fall from 11.6% to 7%. The government also planned to increase the number of pilgrims to 30 million and the number of other tourists to 22 million by 2025 by introducing several benefits for Hajj and Umrah (Tourism key for economic growth and diversification MENA region).

According to data provided by the US company "Knoema," which specializes in collecting and analyzing statistics, the growth trend in the Royal economy's tourism sector in the last three years before the pandemic 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%), 76.5 billion (9.3%), respectively USD. According to other data from the same source, from the number of visitors in 2016-2018, 13.4 billion, 15.0 billion, 16.9 billion, respectively net income in the amount of USD (Tourism key for economic growth and diversification in the MENA region). It should be noted that one of these indicators is a contribution to GDP, while the other reflects net income. Over the last 3-4 years, there had been an upward trend in both indicators. The cultural and natural attractions of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in particular ancient ruins and cities, national parks, wild forests, beaches on the shores of the Red Sea and the Persian

Gulf, exotic nature, and other modern buildings attract millions of tourists today. The High Council manages these facilities for Tourism and Antiquities, established in 2000 by the Kingdom, headed by Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdulaziz. Most of the country's cultural heritage sites are located in Asir, Tabuk, and El Baha provinces, covering the West and southwest coasts.

In recent years, Saudi Arabia has been pursuing an active policy of including its cultural and historical monuments in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Officials of the country are convinced that the granting of such an international status to national monuments will increase their value and importance and attract great interest among tourists, especially from Western countries. In 2009, the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Madain Salih, Al-Hijr, 300 km north of Madinah, was added to the UNESCO list. There are also five other destinations on the list: the historic center of Jeddah, the Hail rock inscriptions in the northwest, the At-Turayf historical region, the Al-Ahsa oasis near the border with Qatar, and the ruins of the ancient city of Al-Ula (Basic indicators of tourism development in Saudi Arabia, 2021).

The country also has modern attractions, including the 47-story Al Mamlaka skyscraper, a stadium in the shape of a giant Arab tent named after King Fahd, the famous 25-kilometer bridge connecting the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with Bahrain, and the world's tallest (312 m) in Jeddah. Many modern architectural objects, such as the King Fahd Fountain, are among them. In 2017, Er Riyadh announced a significant project in the field of tourism. According to him, it is planned to build expensive hotels on 50 islands in the Red Sea. The construction of an entertainment mega-complex "Kiddii," near the capital, which includes themed and natural parks and large sports complexes, has begun. The world's largest city park is planned to be built in Riyadh. According to the project, 7 million trees will be planted in the region, a modern theater, an open-air stage, an academy of fine, musical and dramatic arts would or be built. It is planned to build museums of aviation, aerospace, science, architecture, and modern technologies soon. Notably, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's government is striving to keep pace with the times and become a leader in the field of tourism, abandoning the old conservative thinking.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis in the course of our research provides the basis for the following conclusions and recommendations:

- Pilgrimage tourism in Saudi Arabia is mainly related to the performance of Hajj and Umrah by Muslims, which has a steady growth trend;
- As a result of the unprecedented fall in oil prices in 2016 and the difficult economic situation, Saudi Arabia will focus on the development of non-oil sectors;
- The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has rich potential for the development of modern tourism as an alternative to pilgrimage tourism;
- Adoption and implementation of the Vision 2030 program has created ample opportunities for the development of modern tourism in Saudi Arabia;
- As a result of the development of all types of tourism in the country, the dependence of the economy on oil is expected to decrease by 50%;
- It is expedient to study in-depth Saudi Arabia's experience in the field of pilgrimage and modern tourism and apply it in Uzbekistan.

In conclusion, the income from pilgrimage tourism to the economy of Saudi Arabia is somewhat limited, and as an alternative, the development of modern types of tourism will lift the country out of economic crisis and reduce its dependence on oil. The country's role in the world economy is also growing. We would recommend using the rich experience of Saudi Arabia in Hajj and Umrah's organization in the development of pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS AND CONTRIBUTION OF AUTHORS

The authors declare the absence of obvious and potential conflicts of interest related to the publication of this article and report on the contribution of each author.

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