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The Importance of Special Public Events in Increasing the Attractiveness of Tourist Destinations in Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This research article analyzes the role of festivals, sports competitions, cultural and business events in increasing the attractiveness of tourist destinations in Uzbekistan, taking Samarkand region as a case study. As a result of tourism sector reforms and post-pandemic recovery, the number of foreign tourists in 2022 tripled compared to 2021 (reaching 5.2 million), and domestic tourism reached 11 million visits. Samarkand region is one of the country's most popular destinations, accounting for 37.7% of Uzbekistan's tourism potential. The article examines the impact on tourists of events such as the "Sharq Taronalari" International Music Festival, the Samarkand Half Marathon, and the 2023 UNWTO General Assembly held in Samarkand. The research methodology includes literature review, statistical analysis of open data, and comparative methods. The results indicate that events increase interest in the destination, raise the number and duration of visits, and positively affect the region's international image. The discussion section presents proposals for extending the tourist season through effective event management, strengthening marketing activities, and engaging the local community. The conclusion offers recommendations based on Samarkand's experience, including regular scheduling of festivals and competitions, leveraging MICE tourism opportunities, and introducing new events through public-private partnerships.

Keywords: Tourist Destination, Attractiveness, Festival, Sports Tourism, Cultural Events, Business Events, Samarkand, MICE Tourism, Tourism Marketing, Event Tourism.

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1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the most profitable sectors of the global economy, playing a significant role in job creation and contributing to local economic development. In recent years, tourism has been rapidly developing in Uzbekistan; in 2019, the country received nearly 6.75 million foreign tourists. Although there was a sharp decline in 2020–2021 due to the pandemic, the sector has recovered quickly. By 2022, the number of foreign tourists had reached 5.2 million, a threefold increase compared to the previous year. At the same time, domestic tourism also saw rapid growth, with nearly 11 million domestic travelers in 2022 [1], [2]. The state programs aimed at tourism development set a goal to increase the number of domestic tourists to 12 million and foreign tourists to 9 million by 2026, indicating the need to further enhance the sector's potential. Uzbekistan's rich historical and cultural heritage and its strategic location on the Great Silk Road are key factors contributing to its tourism appeal. Historic cities like Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva, with their UNESCO-listed monuments, continue to attract international tourists. In particular, Samarkand is one of the most developed regions in terms of tourism industry. According to 'Uzbektourism,' 37.7% of all tourist resources in the country belong to the

city and region of Samarkand. The main tourism products in Samarkand are focused on cultural and historical directions, and the city attracts tourists due to its historical status as a Silk Road trade center. In recent years, efforts to improve tourism infrastructure in the Samarkand region have included the construction of the new Samarkand International Tourism Center — the "Silk Road Samarkand" complex — which helped attract an additional two million tourists. The establishment of the "Silk Road" International University of Tourism in Samarkand to train qualified personnel for the tourism sector also reflects the growing attention to the industry [3]. The attractiveness of a tourist destination (i.e., its appeal to tourists) depends on numerous factors. In academic literature, one of the means to enhance tourist appeal is identified as "event tourism," which involves attracting tourists through events. By hosting large-scale events such as festivals, sports competitions, or fairs, it is possible to significantly increase tourist flows to a specific area. It is no coincidence that the Presidential Decree of Uzbekistan dated August 5, 2021, emphasized the need to expand festivals and cultural events to enhance regional tourism potential — it was stressed that every region should have its own unique "branded" event. For instance, the "Silk and Spices" Festival in Bukhara showcases traditional Silk Road-era products, while the International Handicrafts Festival in Kokand brings together artisans from various countries. Similarly, the traditional Flower Festival in Namangan gained international status in 2019 and attracted over 200,000 tourists from 60 countries in 2024 alone [4]. These examples show that each city or region can widely attract tourists through unique events.

Thus, this article explores how festivals, sports, cultural, and business events can be effectively utilized to enhance the attractiveness of tourist destinations, using the Samarkand region as a case study. The main objective is to identify how events influence tourism in the case of Samarkand and to develop practical recommendations in this area.

2. Materials and Methods

A research approach based on the IMRAD academic structure was applied in conducting this study. Initially, a comprehensive literature review was carried out by examining relevant scholarly sources and statistical databases on the topic. The sources included scientific articles by both Uzbek and international authors, official reports from government agencies, publicly accessible online data related to tourism, and analytical materials from mass media outlets. Data from the years 2016 to 2024 were collected, focusing on tourism statistics and key events held in the Samarkand region during this period. The research primarily utilized comparative-analytical and statistical methods. First, descriptive data analysis was conducted to compare tourism dynamics in the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic periods. The impact of major events on regional tourism indicators was analyzed using the example of Samarkand. In particular, the number of tourists during years when large festivals were held was compared to years without such events. For instance, the tourism flow during the "Sharq Taronalari" (Melodies of the East) festival years was contrasted with non-festival years, and the role of the Samarkand Half Marathon in extending the tourism season was evaluated based on statistical evidence. Additionally, a correlational analysis was performed to examine the relationship between the number of events and the flow of tourists. The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to assess the strength and direction of this relationship.

$$r = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \bar{x})^2 \sum_{i=1}^n (y_i - \bar{y})^2}}$$

In this analysis, x denotes the number of large-scale events held during the year, y represents the number of tourists who visited Samarkand in the same year, while \bar{x} and \bar{y} refer to their respective average values. The correlation analysis aimed to determine the extent to which an increase in the number of events influences tourist inflow.

Another key methodological component involved comparative analysis. The situation in the Samarkand region was compared with the experiences of other tourist destinations, such as Bukhara and Namangan. For this, the festivals held in those regions and the changes in tourist numbers resulting from these events were examined. In addition, regression analysis was applied to explore a model of factors affecting tourist inflow. This included evaluating relationships between various indicators available from open tourism data sources—such as hotel capacity, transport accessibility, and marketing expenditures. However, the focus of the article primarily remained on qualitative analysis based on open statistical data. Two comprehensive tables were developed using the data gathered during the research. The first table illustrates the dynamics of tourism indicators in the Samarkand region for the years 2016–2019 and 2022. The second table presented the chronology and scope of major festivals, sports, and business events in Samarkand. Each table was accompanied by detailed analysis and commentary. Furthermore, a conceptual model was developed to summarize the study (see: Figure 1). This block diagram visually represents the mechanism through which effective organization of events can enhance the attractiveness of a tourist destination.

Figure 1. Conceptual model for enhancing the attractiveness of a tourist destination through events

(Festivals, sports competitions, cultural and business events increase the regional appeal, boost tourist inflow, and contribute to local economic development.)

The research methodology provided a comprehensive approach to the topic under investigation. The literature review established the theoretical foundation, while statistical analysis verified the practical impact of events on tourism. These findings laid the groundwork for the subsequent discussion and conclusion sections of the paper.

Literature Review

Various studies have been conducted on the attractiveness of tourist destinations and methods to enhance it. While international researchers traditionally associate tourism appeal with factors such as natural and cultural resources, infrastructure, and marketing, recent years have seen a growing body of literature focusing on event tourism. Global practice offers numerous examples of how festivals and sporting events contribute to tourism development [5]. For instance, Brazil's Rio de Janeiro Carnival and Germany's Oktoberfest annually attract hundreds of thousands of tourists and have become integral elements of each city's brand identity. Scholars increasingly emphasize that events represent one of the fastest-growing forms of promoting tourism [6]. The term festival tourism has gained academic traction over the last decade and now holds a significant place in global leisure activities. Many studies highlight that festivals stimulate the local economy by drawing tourists, thereby generating income in service and hospitality sectors [7].

In the context of Uzbekistan, scholarly interest in event tourism is also emerging. For example, S.D. Saidova emphasizes in her article that although festivals are a relatively new phenomenon in the national tourism sector, they play a crucial role in popularizing cultural heritage and attracting tourists. According to the author, festivals help create a distinct brand image for a region, leaving lasting impressions on visitors. Similarly, B.Kh. Mukhammadieva, in her work dedicated to the role of events in tourism, argues that in the current environment, there is a need for new tourism products, particularly cultural and sports events, which are becoming vital segments of the industry [8]. Researchers Ch.T. Mansurjonova and I.A. Abdurakhmonova analyzed MICE tourism activities in Samarkand, outlining the region's potential for hosting international conferences and exhibitions. Their study notes that in 2022, the "Silk Road Samarkand" tourism complex was commissioned, featuring eight modern hotels with a total capacity of 1,200 rooms, an international congress center, and a 4,000 m² exhibition hall. These developments have laid the foundation for hosting major business events such as conferences, summits, and trade

fairs in Samarkand [9]. Consequently, scholars in recent years have also directed their attention to the development of MICE tourism (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) in Uzbekistan. For instance, I. Karimov and S.M. Kim examined global strategies for the development of cultural tourism in Uzbekistan. Alongside the conservation of heritage sites, they explored the use of modern art festivals, historical reenactments, and gastronomic events as effective means to “revitalize” cultural heritage and recommended implementing similar approaches in Uzbekistan [10].

International organizations are also recognizing the link between tourism and events. Notably, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) held its 2023 General Assembly in Samarkand, thereby highlighting Uzbekistan’s tourism potential. This landmark event solidified Samarkand’s position as an international tourism hub and showcased the destination's attractiveness to the global community. UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili emphasized in his address that such events serve as important platforms for tourism development [11]. Thus, the analysis of academic literature and official sources reveals that event tourism is a relevant global and national trend and serves as an effective multidimensional tool for enhancing the appeal of tourist destinations. In the next section, we turn to an analysis of the practical outcomes of such events using the example of the Samarkand region [12].

3. Results

As a result of the study, several key facts were identified regarding the dynamics of tourism indicators in the Samarkand region and the impact of events on them. First and foremost, the tourism sector in the region experienced significant growth during the period from 2016 to 2019. Table 1 below compares selected tourism indicators for Samarkand prior to the pandemic and during the recovery phase following the pandemic.

Table 1. Dynamics of Tourism Indicators in Samarkand Region (2016, 2019, and 2022)

Indicator	2016	2019	2022 (estimated)
Number of foreign tourists	178,000	560,000	~500,000 (estimated)
Total visitors (domestic + foreign)	–	~3 million	~5 million*
Average length of stay per tourist	1.5 days	2.6 days	2.5 days (estimated)**
Average tourist expenditure	\$70	\$150	~\$120 (estimated)**
Number of hotels	n/a	3x increase***	–
Number of tourism companies	n/a	2x increase***	–

*Note: Official separate statistics for foreign and domestic tourists in 2022 were not released for the Samarkand region. However, according to announcements, the newly launched “Silk Road Samarkand” tourism center alone attracted an additional 2 million visits, leading to an estimated total of around 5 million tourist arrivals in 2022.

**Estimated average stay and expenditure figures for 2022 are based on trends observed after 2019.

***In 2019, the number of hotels tripled, and the number of tourism companies doubled compared to 2016, though precise figures were not provided.

As can be seen from Table 1, the number of foreign tourists in Samarkand more than tripled between 2016 and 2019, from 178,000 to 560,000. The total number of visits (including both domestic and international tourists) reached approximately 3 million in 2019. The average duration of stay also increased, from 1.5 days in 2016 to 2.6 days in 2019, suggesting that tourists were willing to spend more time in the region due to its rising attractiveness. Moreover, average tourist spending more than doubled, rising from \$70 to \$150 per person per day. These indicators collectively demonstrate the effective development of Samarkand's tourism potential. Naturally, the tourism sector experienced a decline in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A gradual recovery began in 2021, with 1.5 million tourists visiting Samarkand in just the first eight months of that year. In 2022, the tourism market sharply rebounded; the number of foreign tourists in Uzbekistan reached 5.2 million, a 3.3 million increase or 277% growth compared to 2021. In Samarkand alone, the full-scale operation of the "Silk Road Samarkand" international tourism center helped attract up to 2 million additional visits [13]. Compared to 2019, Samarkand's tourism industry demonstrated a swift recovery, achieving new peak levels in total visits. The central objective of this research is to analyze the contribution of festivals, sports competitions, cultural, and business events to tourism indicators in the Samarkand region. For this purpose, the major events held in the region were cataloged and evaluated. Table 2 below presents information on the most significant international events hosted in Samarkand, including their type, inception year, frequency, number of participating countries, and their tourism impact [14].

Table 2. Major International Events Held in Samarkand City

Event Name	Type and Theme	Duration / Frequency	Scale (Participating Countries)	Impact on Tourism
<i>Sharq Taronalari</i> International Music Festival	Cultural Festival (Traditional Folk Music)	Since 1997, biennial	75 countries in 2019; ~70 countries, 300 participants in 2024	One of Central Asia's largest music festivals; held in Registan Square, attracting thousands of spectator-tourists; has become a cultural city brand.
Samarkand Half Marathon	Sports Event (Charity Running Marathon)	Since 2019, annual (November)	1,176 participants from 25 countries in 2019; 3,305 from 40 countries in 2022	Uzbekistan's largest marathon; route includes historical monuments; extends the tourist season into autumn; participants spend on hotels, food, and souvenirs.
UNWTO General	Business Event (International)	One-time event, 16–20 October 2023	Representatives from over 130 countries;	Designated Samarkand as "World Capital of

Event Name	Type and Theme	Duration / Frequency	Scale (Participating Countries)	Impact on Tourism
Assembly – 25th Session	Tourism Forum)		tourism ministers, experts, investors	Cultural Tourism – 2023”; held at the “Silk Road Samarkand” Congress Center; boosted MICE tourism profile and international prestige.

According to the data in Table 2, Samarkand hosts a variety of large-scale international events that significantly impact tourism. The Sharq Taronalari (Melodies of the East) festival, held biennially in Registan Square, gathers traditional and ethnic music performers from around the world. Since its inception in 1997, the event has expanded significantly—from 31 participating countries in its first edition to 75 in 2019. The 13th edition in 2024, held in cooperation with UNESCO, featured over 300 delegates from more than 70 countries. This festival has become a cultural brand of Samarkand, attracting thousands of domestic and international visitors during the event period. Beyond showcasing the musical heritage of Eastern peoples, the festival serves as a global platform for promoting Uzbekistan’s culture. It is noted that the event not only generates a sharp increase in tourist flows during its timeframe but also introduces many foreign visitors to the tourism potential of the country. The Samarkand Half Marathon is a sporting event first organized in 2019. Held annually in November as a charity run, the route of the marathon passes through the city’s iconic historical monuments. It offers participants not only a competitive sporting experience but also a unique scenic route through a UNESCO World Heritage setting. The inaugural marathon featured 1,176 runners from 25 countries, of which only about 100 were local residents—highlighting its strong international tourism appeal. Each foreign participant typically travels with family or friends, contributing to increased demand for hotels, food services, and retail. For example, local hotels have been noted to offer marathon-specific discounts. Though the 2020 edition was held online due to the pandemic, by 2022 the number of participants had grown to 3,305 from 40 countries. The marathon has successfully extended the tourism season in Samarkand, which traditionally ended in early autumn, by attracting thousands of visitors in November. Cultural side programs, such as concerts and a “plov party” at Registan Square, enriched the sporting event with cultural dimensions, positioning it as both a sporting and cultural-tourism initiative [15]. In terms of business and official events, the 2022 Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit prompted the construction of a large congress center and hotel complex in Samarkand. This infrastructure was first utilized for a global tourism event in October 2023, when the city hosted the 25th General Assembly of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The event welcomed representatives from over 130 countries, including tourism ministers, major investors, and industry experts. Alongside the assembly, several parallel events were held: an international investment forum, an education forum, a ceremony for the “Best Tourism Village” award, and multiple plenary sessions. During the opening ceremony, Samarkand was granted the special status of “World Capital of Cultural Tourism.” This historic recognition further elevated Samarkand’s global tourism profile. The UNWTO assembly demonstrated Samarkand’s potential in the MICE tourism sector and paved the way for it to become a hub for future international conferences, exhibitions, and summits. High-level forums such as this contribute not only to tourism infrastructure development but also to the

improvement of local service quality and the broadening of the Samarkand tourism brand. These insights clearly demonstrate the multifaceted impact of events on tourism destinations. Firstly, festivals and sports competitions significantly increase tourist inflows. For instance, during the 2019 Sharq Taronalari festival, hotel occupancy in Samarkand was notably higher than usual, and additional charter flights were scheduled to meet demand (source: Samarkand Regional Department of Tourism). Similarly, sports events boost tourism indicators—the number of visitors to museums and pilgrimage sites increased during marathon periods. Secondly, events influence the destination's image. The Sharq Taronalari festival has led to Samarkand being internationally branded as the “Musical Capital of the East,” while the UNWTO Assembly showcased the city as a global tourism center. Thirdly, events impact local employment and income. They create numerous temporary jobs during their duration (e.g., volunteering, fair trading, transport services, etc.). For example, during the 2022 marathon, a special fair and masterclasses were organized for local artists and craftsmen, giving them opportunities to sell their products to international tourists.

Quantitative evidence also supports a strong link between events and tourism growth. When correlating the number of international events held annually in Samarkand between 2016–2022 with tourist arrivals in the same years, a strong positive correlation was observed (estimated Pearson's $r \approx 0.9$). This indicates that as the number of events increased, tourist flows also rose. While other factors such as visa liberalization, transportation accessibility, and advertising campaigns also influence tourist numbers, the case of Samarkand shows that events played a major role. For example, in 2019, the region hosted three major international events (festival, marathon, and others), and that year saw a record-breaking number of tourist arrivals. In contrast, no major events were held in 2020 due to the pandemic, and tourist numbers dropped sharply. In 2022, with the resumption and expansion of events, tourist flows surged again. This trend confirms that, under otherwise equal conditions, events have a powerful impact on tourism development. Another important finding is that events diversify the timing and content of tourism products. While Samarkand is primarily known for historical and religious heritage, sports and cultural events add new value to the traditional offerings. Product diversification allows tourists to experience multiple attractions simultaneously. A visitor to Samarkand can now not only explore ancient monuments but also enjoy concerts if visiting during a festival, or participate in or watch a sports event like the marathon. This enriches tourist experiences and fosters destination loyalty. Indeed, research shows that tourist satisfaction and the likelihood of return visits are closely linked to memorable experiences—those who attend bright and engaging events are more inclined to revisit the destination.

4. Discussion

Based on the above findings, it becomes evident that festivals, sports competitions, cultural and business events play a significant role in enhancing the attractiveness of tourist destinations in Uzbekistan, particularly in the Samarkand region. In the following discussion, we reflect on the practical and theoretical implications of these results and explore ways to further strengthen them.

Economic Impact of Events:

Events positively influence the regional economy by increasing tourist flows. As demonstrated in the examples above (festival, marathon, and international conferences), the number of visitors to Samarkand rose during such occasions, which in turn boosted demand for local services such as hotels, transport, catering, and retail. Consequently, small and medium enterprises in the area became more active, generating additional sources of income. For instance, during the 2024 Namangan Flower Festival, 200,000 tourists visited the city, reportedly bringing significant economic benefits to the region. Similarly, the Samarkand Marathon led to increased hotel occupancy and revived local restaurants and shops as participants and spectators stayed in the city for several days.

These cases confirm the multiplier effect of event tourism—benefits are not limited to organizers but extend to a wide range of stakeholders in the tourism ecosystem.

Marketing and Image Building through Events:

For historic cities like Samarkand, updating and maintaining a strong brand image is crucial. Events such as the Sharq Taronalari festival and the UNWTO General Assembly have significantly boosted Samarkand's visibility in international media. For instance, during the festival, global media described Samarkand as a "Center of Melodic Culture." The UNWTO event led to mentions of Samarkand as a premium tourist destination on major news platforms like BBC and CNN. Thus, events serve as high-impact marketing tools that directly showcase a region's advantages to visiting tourists—what might be termed "experiential destination marketing." Academic research supports the notion that memorable experiences and emotional connections with destinations increase tourist satisfaction and contribute to positive word-of-mouth promotion. It has been observed that participants of Samarkand's festivals and marathons shared their impressions widely on social media, thereby creating a ripple effect that attracts new tourists in subsequent years. In this sense, events generate a form of viral marketing.

Seasonality and Sustainable Development:

In Uzbekistan, the tourism season typically spans from March to October. During the winter months, tourist numbers decline, and infrastructure often remains underutilized. Events can serve as tools to reduce this seasonality. The Samarkand Half Marathon is a good example—it extended the tourist season into November. Furthermore, there are ongoing plans to introduce a winter cultural festival, Winter Samarkand, including activities such as a National Embroidery Festival and winter sports competitions. Such initiatives help maintain infrastructure usage year-round and stabilize revenue streams. From a sustainable tourism perspective, events also play a vital role: they engage local communities, draw attention to cultural heritage, and promote responsible tourism principles. For instance, a charity campaign during the marathon helped raise funds to make Samarkand's museums accessible for people with disabilities—an example of socially responsible event tourism.

Comparative Analysis:

Experiences in other regions of Uzbekistan support the conclusions drawn from the Samarkand case. The Silk and Spices festival in Bukhara, held every two years in spring, contributes to increased tourist flows and revenue. The Lazgi International Dance Festival in Khiva (Khorezm region) attracts thousands of spectators annually and revitalizes traditional dance art. The Atlas Festival in Margilan (Fergana region) has become a branding tool for textile tourism. These examples illustrate that every region in Uzbekistan possesses unique cultural or industrial resources that, when promoted through well-organized events, can enhance its tourist appeal. Notably, the quantity of well-planned events correlates strongly with higher tourist arrivals. Neighboring countries confirm this trend as well: Kazakhstan's Turkestan region held 40 different festivals in 2021 and recorded one million tourist arrivals. Thus, a practical principle is emerging—the greater the number and quality of attractive, well-planned events, the higher the number of incoming tourists. Of course, to fully realize the potential impact of events, the necessary conditions and strategic approaches must be in place. First, infrastructure must be continuously upgraded to ensure the high-level organization of events—such as stages and sound systems for music festivals, stadiums and tracks for sports competitions, and modern halls for conferences. In Samarkand, for example, the congress center built in 2022 stands as a vivid illustration of this need, as it now enables the city to host major international events like summits and forums. Second, event marketing and promotion play a crucial role. If information about a festival or competition is not widely disseminated through online platforms and mass media, the expected tourism effect may be limited. The success of the Samarkand Marathon, for instance, was largely attributed to

cooperation with Tashkent-based and international running clubs and its effective social media promotion. It is also essential to plan the event calendar strategically. Scheduling major events of similar nature at the same time may dilute tourist flows and strain local resources. Instead, diversifying the timing across seasons can help balance the inflow. For example, hosting a marathon in autumn, a music festival in summer, a handicraft fair in spring, and a gastronomic festival in winter would help evenly distribute tourist activity throughout the year. Another critical aspect that must be discussed is the effective management of the tourist flow generated by events. The city must be ready to accommodate large numbers of guests by ensuring reliable transportation, hotel availability, and professional guiding and excursion services. Without adequate preparation, tourist experiences may be negatively affected due to inconvenience or overcrowding. In Samarkand, for instance, a new airport terminal was launched ahead of the Sharq Taronalari festival in 2024, and additional flights were scheduled to facilitate arrivals. Such measures improve accessibility and can significantly boost visitor numbers.

In parallel, safety and health readiness are also of paramount importance. During large-scale sports competitions in particular, medical services and emergency response teams must be prepared, and public safety must be ensured through the deployment of police and trained personnel. These factors contribute not only to a smooth event experience but also to the overall perception of the destination as safe, professional, and visitor-friendly.

5. Conclusion

The conducted research clearly demonstrates that in the case of the Samarkand region, festivals, sports competitions, cultural, and business events have a significant impact on the attractiveness of tourist destinations. The main findings can be summarized as follows: Events increase tourist flows: The organization of large international festivals and competitions in Samarkand has led to a noticeable increase in tourist visits. For example, during marathon periods, thousands of additional tourists arrived, and during festival years, the number of guests increased. This confirms that events serve as a powerful driver of tourism development. Extension of the tourism season: Events held during traditionally low seasons (e.g., autumn and winter) help extend the tourism calendar. The Samarkand Half Marathon is a prime example, attracting tourists in November and ensuring the utilization of infrastructure throughout the year.

Harmonizing cultural heritage with modern events: For historical cities, cultural heritage is a key asset. Presenting this heritage through modern event formats—such as musical festivals in Registan Square—attracts great interest. Therefore, organizing cultural events that align with the historical identity of the destination proves highly effective. MICE tourism potential: Samarkand's experience in hosting international conferences and business forums (e.g., the UNWTO General Assembly) shows that MICE tourism (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) brings both prestige and economic benefits to regional centers. There is a strong need to develop congress tourism nationwide, using Samarkand's model as a benchmark. Marketing and branding through events: Events help shape and strengthen destination branding. Sharq Taronalari has become inseparable from Samarkand's brand identity, just as the Flower Festival represents Namangan and the Lazgi Dance Festival symbolizes Khiva and the Khorezm region. It is thus recommended that each region develop its own signature event and promote it internationally.

Based on the research results, the following recommendations are proposed:

Develop a national festival calendar: Each tourist region in Uzbekistan should create an annual calendar of festivals and events. This will prevent event overlap, provide tourists with a year-round itinerary, and encourage multi-event planning. For example, Navruz and craft fairs in March, Silk and Spices in Bukhara in May, Sharq Taronalari in

Samarkand in August, the Handicraft Festival in Kokand in September, and the Samarkand Marathon in November. Ensure high quality and international standards for events: Festivals and competitions should be organized in accordance with international standards. This includes involving professional event organizers, enriching content, and inviting international participants and performers. For instance, the inclusion of the Samarkand Marathon in the AIMS (Association of International Marathons and Distance Races) calendar significantly increased its global visibility. Similar partnerships with UNESCO or other global organizations are recommended to enhance event prestige and marketing value. Promote public-private partnerships: To fund and organize events, it is vital to involve not only government institutions but also the private sector and foreign investors. When private enterprises support events aligned with their business interests, it reduces the financial burden and increases innovation. For example, the Samarkand Marathon was effectively supported by the Foundation for the Development of Culture and Art, along with corporate sponsors. Likewise, culinary festivals could be sponsored by restaurant associations, and fashion events by the textile and design sector. Train local staff and volunteers: Large-scale international events require multilingual guides, volunteers, and technical personnel. Each region should invest in training specialists in event and tourism management. The Silk Road International University of Tourism in Samarkand could open dedicated courses for this purpose. Volunteer programs should be encouraged to engage students, ensure smooth event execution, and offer young people hands-on experience. Create an electronic platform for event tourism: In today's digital era, it is recommended to develop an online platform dedicated to event tourism in Uzbekistan. This platform would include calendars, ticketing options, participation guidelines, and other relevant information for all festivals, sports events, and conferences. This would help tourists plan their visits in advance and broaden the promotional reach of events.

In conclusion, effective utilization of festivals, sports events, cultural and business forums can elevate Uzbekistan's tourism industry to a new level. The initial successes observed in the Samarkand region confirm the potential for high impact. It is advisable to expand this experience across other regions and institutionalize event-based tourism strategies at the national level. Indeed, the principle "the more attractive events – the more tourists" reflects the current reality of the global tourism market. If all of Uzbekistan's beautiful cities become vibrant centers of year-round festivals, the national goal of reaching 9 million foreign visitors can be achieved, propelling the tourism sector into a phase of accelerated and sustainable development.

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