

UZBEKISTAN PLANS TO BECOME ‘THE CENTRE OF HALAL TOURISM’



Halal tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors of the tourism industry. Many countries are trying to attract Muslims from all over the world offering facilities and activities in accordance with their religion.

According to reports, 2017 brought the growth of 11.8% for halal tourism, almost double the growth of the global tourism industry. **The number of Muslim tourists in the world amounted to 131 million people that year and is expected to increase to 160 million by 2020.** The expenditure of Muslim travelers is also growing constantly and reached \$177 billion two years ago. According to forecasts, the predicted figure is \$274 billion by 2023.

Uzbekistan as the center of halal tourism?

Uzbekistan has taken several measures to attract Muslims from all around the world to their country. The State Committee on Tourism of Uzbekistan is holding negotiations with CrescentRating on the inclusion of hotels and restaurants in the republic in the rating of Muslim hospitality.

Other measures are being taken by the officials to develop the segment. A special website dedicated to halal tourism is being prepared. It will contain a database of hotels, catering establishments, and other organizations in this field. Moreover, an advertising and information campaign of “7 reasons to celebrate Ramadhan in Uzbekistan” is being thought out.

Continuous promotion measures

Uzbek officials are building on the measures they have presented in previous years. Last year, local restaurants and cafes began introducing the ‘halal standards’, while airports opened special namaz rooms (prayer rooms). Moreover, Uzbekistan Airways launched a flight between Tashkent and Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) in order for the people to have it easier to visit the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

In addition, Uzbekistan has been introducing favorable visa-free regimes. Since February 2018, visa-free regimes have been established for citizens of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Turkey. In March 2019, the United Arab Emirates were added to this list, with Iranian citizens also being able to issue electronic visas. From the beginning of this year, a special pilgrim visa has been introduced, which is valid for two months.

What will the real effect be?

According to official data, last year, **Uzbekistan was visited by 5.3 million foreigners**, of which 4.6 million were citizens of Central Asian countries, 406 thousand from other CIS countries and about 326 thousand tourists from foreign countries.

The exact effect of the measures to support halal tourism are not yet known. Local authorities hope to develop the sector and boost the economy.

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