

THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH RESULTS OF BUSINESS TOURISM DEVELOPMENT (CASES IN SAMARKAND REGION)

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Abstract

This article presents the results of a qualitative research study on the development of business tourism in the Samarkand region of Uzbekistan. The study was conducted through interviews with 14 tour operators with over 3 years of experience in organizing business and MICE tourism.

Keywords

Business tourism, MICE tourism, Uzbekistan, Samarkand, qualitative research

The qualitative research method will be discussed that has been chosen as the main research method for collecting data for this study. Data collection is needed for this study. The exact personnel criteria can be determined until the sampling framework is defined and the questionnaire planned and validated. The result of the research data that has been obtained from the individual interviews with the managers of touristic agencies and firms in Samarkand region has been analyzed. First, the recorded audiophiles have transferred into transcripts. Next, the method of thematic analysis was chosen as a main one. After reading these data we highlighted and combined common and similar comments and topics according to their relationships and as major and minor topics. Interview has been conducted with tour operators (n=14) of tourism firms whose experience is more than 3 years in organizing business and MICE tourism. Respondents of the interview were 5 females and 9 males with the average age were 32 and the average years of experience were 11.

Respondents	Name of touristic agency	Gender	Years of experience	Number of employees	Age	Occupation

William	"Shaherezada sam star r"	Male	17	2	50	Firm owner
James	"Doca tours"	Male	5	1	32	Tour operator
Balbir	"Trip orient"	Male	13	3	35	Tour operator
Mason	"Bo'ston travel"	Male	5	5	38	Firm owner
Evelyn	"Veres-vert"	Female	10	1	36	Firm owner
Ella	"Everest travel"	Female	12	1	42	Tour operator
Robert	"Tour emir"	Male	8	8	47	Tour operator
Victoria	"Azimut travel"	Female	3	7	33	Tour operator
Kevin	Marvarid tour	Male	14	1	49	Tour operator
Angela	"Creative tours"	Female	7	1	37	Tour operator
Jeffrey	Sophia travel and tourism"	Male	9	2	30	Tour operator
Catheri	"Golden road travel"	Female	12	2	45	Tour operator
David	"Shaxzod plaza"	Male	8	1	36	Tour operator
Victoria	"Silk road"	Female	14	1	43	Firm owner

During the analysis of the collected data, following major themes were used: Current situation of business tourism (1); The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on business tourism (2); The main problems and challenges of business tourism in Uzbekistan (3) The international corporation in business tourism (4).

THEME 1. The current situation of business tourism.

Business tourism is a niche tourism market in Uzbekistan and many touristic organizations have just started to organize MICE events. Many tour operators have organized only limited number of business tourism events during the year since business tourism in most organization is considered as an additional touristic destination. According to Evelyn (36) *"We only organize business tourism events according to demand from listed organizations. The scale of such events is usually limited because of the conditions of infrastructure. For example, we realized the first meeting for heads of tourism organizations from Commonwealth of Independent States which number of participants were close to 50"*. Almost all tourism organizations offer

the main tourism services including accommodation, catering, transport, and guides – interpreters. However, according to Mason (38) *“We need many experienced guides – interpreters during the conference, but in the market in Uzbekistan there is lack of such people”*. To organize business tourism market the main action to is preparing for the new season by organizing and making contract with other tourism service providers. James (32) says making contract as this way *“We make a contract with two different prices: seasonal and non seasonal. Our contract will be signed for 1 year and we will renew them every year. First of all, our employees analyze the market of restaurants by visiting and trying food and services. After this we are inspecting their prices and choosing the most suitable for us. We renew a contract every year. The same way we do with hotels. First of all we check the deficiencies of hotels we worked previously and analyzing if they improved or not. Foreign tour operators will send contract form for one year, if it is suitable for us we will make contact”*. At present time, most foreign business tourism customers have an interest in holding business tourism/MICE events in Uzbekistan. Because of the number of reasons, including low prices, cheap labor force, having a visa-free regime to many countries, having a different culture and tradition that allow business tourism customers to experience new places. Moreover, Ella (43) agreed that *“Uzbekistan has many undiscovered places to the world”*.

THEME 2. The impact of covid-19 pandemic on business tourism.

The impact of Koronavirus epidemic which started at the end of the year 2019 has been significant from locally to globally. Tourism business has been collapsed totally. As lockdown has happened during the whole year, almost all travels were cancelled. Most tour operators were ready for the next season by booking hotels, flights, etc. Touristic agencies and organizations have lost their 95% of their benefit because of Covid-19. Tour operators have stopped all their plans and actions. Like James (32) *“...we had been ordered new buss from China, going to build a new hotel in the city center, however ruined all these plans”* Coved-19 effected to the progress of tourism negatively. It could not been implemented any methods to finish economical crises. Victoria (43) mentioned that *“...our government granted a lot of companies with subside to support them during the crises, including some salary, closing the debits and decreasing the rate of debits. We paid salaries to our employees till august, 2020. However due to the depletion of funds in the firm’s budget, we had to stop giving salaries to our employees like before pandemic situation”*. The next main loss has happened with high quality guides, tour operators and other tourism sphere cadres. Furthermore, many guides and tour operators have changed their work since the need to earn money to the family to feed up. After the pandemic number

of employees in tourism operators. As Victoria said “we lost half of our professional guides and train”.

Tried to keep employees with governmental support, but it wasn't enough to cover all salaries of our employees. Governmental support, limitation. 55 % of them waiting to the end of pandemic situation, the others doing additional business to keep survive we are not doing any marketing since the pandemic situation hasn't finished yet. Keep following the rules of hygiene, do extra business so if one of them will collapse, the others will support them to survive. Hope the pandemic situation will finish soon so that we can continue our work, To continue our business that is planned , We are waiting for, Organizing domestic tourism. Organizing zoom meetings and discussions with foreign investors.

THEME 3. The main problems and challenges of business tourism in Uzbekistan.

Although many changes have been made in the development of tourism infrastructure in Uzbekistan, tour operators and touristic organizations have been encountering many problems and challenges. First of all, MICE events require adequate accommodation with high quality services for the delegates and participants of the events. David (36) emphasized that “*Insufficient quality of services in hotel is considered as one of the main factors why MICE tourism travelers hardly choose this destination*” and Jeffrey (40) “*...especially when it comes to time management, in some hotels visitors have to wait for receive services*”. Secondly, the lack of significant hotels cannot allow business event providers to organize MICE events. As Laura (33) stated “*we don't have complex of hotels with all services for business meetings, conferences. Overall, one of the main problems in business tourism is places to hold MICE meetings. If the participants will be 100-300 people, accommodating them in one hotel is impossible. We don't have huge conference halls except few universities' halls*”. Huge hotels/conference halls should be built in different regions with international standards. Usually business tourism customers make a short trip after their events. This is the main reason why they choose different places to hold their business events. The next main factor that hinders the organization of business tourism is lack of high quality of cadres (employees). 70 % of the respondents that tourism sphere need high quality cadres who have knowledge of two or more foreign international languages. According to William (50) “*...most of the high quality cadres are going to work in foreign countries including Europe and USA. However, the remaining staff should be trained regularly. We have planned to organize practices of students of International University of Tourism “Silk Road” and Samarkand technical school of tourism and service*”. Especially, conferences and congresses require professional

interpreters. Following that, most of the respondents said that the price of air transport should be decreased, since it impacts the overall price of the tour package. Furthermore, It should be presented the brand of Uzbekistan's tourism to the world so that tourists and business tourism customers will choose this destination for both travelling and business trip. Most people around the world have no image about Uzbekistan's tourism potential. Brand image should be expanded by touristic agencies, tourism development committee and should be supported financially by the government. Catherine (45) said that "*...available data about accommodation, transport, locations and price plays an important role in choosing the destination*". In addition, Business tourism mostly depends on the investment. For this reason, according to David (36) "*...we have to not only participate but also organize national and international trade fairs to attract international business tourism customers. Moreover, this trade fairs should not only organize in the capital city - Tashkent, but also in other regions such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Navoi, Karakalpak, Namangan, etc. Also, pavilions for fairs have to be built in the center of regions other than capital city. Because, Balbir (35) supported this point that "...delivering products in Tashkent city from other region generates many problems associated with cost of transport, accommodation and time*".

We have to set fixed dates and places to hold international trade fairs every year, according to each regions potential. For example, agricultural products, industrial products.

Secondly, because of these fair trades in regions, most tourism infrastructure will be improved as well. Organizers and businessmen try to present their potential to business travel customers. The lack of devices such as microphones, computers, vise screens and others . Although, some universities and institutes have such kind of places, mostly it is difficult to hire them when we need them. Higher educational institutions should make a contract with business tourism organizers so that institutes will also make additional profits. Fourth, before building and constructing congress and convention halls, we have to consider how we make a profit by using them. Fifth, we have few high quality translators and guides for business events. We can say that only 10 % of guides are able to become a translator or guide during the events. We have to improve business tourism systematic by using current potential, if we have good results and have more business travelers and events, and then we can expand and build new places.

THEME 4. The international corporation in business tourism

The development of international business tourism significantly depends on International Corporation and relationship. Most of the tour operators have

bilateral cooperation with tour operators of foreign countries including Asian countries, USA, Italy, Switzerland, Japan, China, Korea, Europe, UAE, Turkey, Russia and others. According to Angela (37) *“Although, we have corporations with foreign touristic agencies in foreign countries and participate at touristic product fairs which will be every year in different foreign countries. We are not a member of any international organizations”*. Almost all tour operators do not know about any MICE organizations including ICCA (International congress and convention association) and have not become a member of them, either. None of the respondents are the members of ICCA because 30 % of the respondents do not need to become a member of it, 26 % of them answered that they cannot meet the requirements of the organization and the others unaware of this organization. Following to the international standards of hosting and organizing MICE events plays vital role in the development of this sphere and improving the number of customers. However, these standards have not been introduced yet. 70 percent of respondents do not know about these standards. As Jeffrey (30) stated that *“Most international organizations/tour operators will send their own standards before the trip. We will search for example hotels according to questionnaires which is send by customers. Then we will check hotels to decide whether this hotel is suitable for us”*

The study found that business tourism is a niche market in Uzbekistan, with many tour operators just starting to organize MICE events. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on business tourism, with most tour operators losing 95% of their revenue. The main problems and challenges of business tourism in Uzbekistan include insufficient quality of services in hotels, lack of significant hotels, lack of high-quality cadres, high price of air transport, and lack of brand awareness for Uzbekistan's tourism. The study recommends that the following measures be taken to develop business tourism in Uzbekistan:

- Improve the quality of services in hotels
- Build more significant hotels with all services for business meetings and conferences
- Train tourism staff regularly, especially in foreign languages
- Reduce the price of air transport
- Promote Uzbekistan's tourism brand to the world.

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