

THE ROLE OF THE ETHNIC COMPOSITION AND CULTURAL HERITAGE RESOURCES OF SURKHANDARYA REGION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ETHNOTOURISM

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Abstract: This study examines the changes in the ethnic composition of the population of Surkhandarya Region and analyzes the role of major ethnic groups in the formation of the region's culture, traditions, and customs. In addition, the territorial distribution of cultural heritage sites within the region and their tourism potential were assessed. The research findings indicate that Surkhandarya Region, owing to its ethnic diversity, rich historical and cultural heritage, and well-preserved traditional handicrafts, represents one of the most significant regions in Uzbekistan for the development of ethnotourism.

Keywords: ethnotourism, ethnic composition, cultural heritage, Surkhandarya Region, historical monuments.

INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, increasing attention has been devoted worldwide to the interrelationship between tourism and culture. Tourism contributes to the protection, enrichment, and promotion of cultural assets, while culture serves as a driving force for tourism development. In recent years, the revival of local identities, the rapid expansion of mass media, growing criticism of technological advancement, and increasing nostalgia for the past have collectively stimulated a renewed interest in cultural tourism, particularly in ethnic tourism. Ethnic tourism is often associated with alternative, rural, folklore, adventure, and sentimental forms of tourism. The term tourism was first introduced in the early nineteenth century.

Since anthropologists and sociologists began to examine tourism more systematically during the 1970s, numerous attempts have been made to classify its

various forms. Some scholars, including Valene L. Smith (1989), proposed more refined subdivisions within the broader category of cultural tourism. These include ethnic tourism (focused on visiting indigenous and local communities), historical tourism (centered on museums, monuments, archaeological sites, and the heritage of past civilizations), and cultural tourism as a distinct category, which Smith defines as travel undertaken to observe "the remnants of ancient and traditional ways of life that are gradually disappearing from human memory" [3].

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, scientific progress and social transformation, together with broader cultural and historical developments, stimulated the emergence of mass travel in Europe. Advances in shipbuilding encouraged Portuguese and Spanish explorers to undertake voyages to distant regions. The discovery of the Americas opened access to the "New World," while Africa, Asia, Australia, China, and India became destinations associated with exploration, adventure, and mystery for Europeans. Similar to the Portuguese, Spanish, and British adventurers, entrepreneurs, and fortune seekers who travelled to the Americas in search of gold, many Europeans journeyed to China, India, Australia, and other parts of Asia. These expeditions significantly expanded knowledge of different peoples, their customs, traditions, and ethnic identities. As geographical interests increasingly intersected with economic objectives, philosophical, sociological, ethnological, and ethnographic theories concerning diverse cultures, ethnic groups, religions, and traditions gradually emerged. These historical processes also laid the foundation for the development of what is now internationally recognized as ethnic tourism.

Adabiyotlar tahlili.

According to the classical definitions of ethnic tourism proposed by Valene L. Smith in *Hosts and Guests* (1977), Greg Richards in *Cultural Tourism* (1996), and V. Preobrazhenskiy in *Ethnic Tourism in Russia* (2001), ethnic tourism primarily involves visiting indigenous peoples, local communities, and tribal settlements; participating in festivals and folklore performances; attending certain religious

ceremonies; and exploring the cultural heritage, customs, traditions, and lifestyles of ethnic groups. The central concept of ethnic tourism is the pursuit of cultural authenticity, which is understood as moving beyond preconceived mental constructs, stereotypes, and the so-called "tourist illusion." Furthermore, ethnic tourism contributes to the preservation of local cultural elements by enhancing opportunities to safeguard traditional handicrafts, clothing, rituals, music, and architecture [5]. Travel motivated by ethnic affiliation or ancestral connections represents an important form of tourism in North America and the Australia–Asia region, where recent historical development has been strongly influenced by migration, and it also plays a significant role in many other parts of the world. Recognizing the economic potential of cultural resources, residents of both existing and emerging tourist destinations, together with other stakeholders, have increasingly collaborated to promote and support ethnic tourism as an important component of the service economy. The growing interest in this form of tourism is driven by both supply-side factors, such as economic needs and cultural revitalization, and demand-side factors, including tourists' desire for creative, cultural, and authentic experiences, as well as their interest in discovering the "Other" and experiencing different social environments [3]. Ethnic tourism is widely regarded as a viable strategy for promoting economic development in ethnic regions where alternative development opportunities are limited. Moreover, in some studies, ethnic tourism is considered a subtype of cultural or cognitive tourism [4].

While cultural tourism is a broader concept encompassing both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of a nation, ethnic tourism represents a more specific component of cultural tourism that primarily focuses on exploring the lifestyles, customs, traditions, rituals, and ethnocultural heritage of particular ethnic groups.

In the present study, we seek to clarify the conceptual differences between cultural tourism and ethnic tourism.

Table 1. Main Differences Between Cultural Tourism and Ethnic Tourism

Comparison Criterion	Cultural Tourism	Ethnic Tourism
Definition	A form of tourism aimed at introducing visitors to tangible and intangible cultural heritage, historical monuments, works of art, and cultural values.	A form of tourism focused on introducing visitors to the lifestyles, customs, traditions, rituals, and ethnocultural heritage of a particular people or ethnic group.
Origin	Emergед from the need to preserve, protect, and study historical and cultural heritage.	Developed as a result of growing interest in ethnic diversity and the traditional cultures of different peoples.
Object of Study	Historical monuments, architectural heritage, museums, theatres, works of art, and cultural landscapes.	Ethnic groups, nations, nationalities, tribes, their customs, traditions, and cultural practices.
Research Objective	To explore historical and cultural heritage and appreciate artistic and cultural achievements.	To study the culture of ethnic groups, understand national values, and experience the traditional lifestyle of local communities.
Main Resources	Historical monuments, museums, art galleries, libraries, historic cities, and cultural centres.	Folklore, oral traditions, traditional cuisine, handicrafts, rituals, and ethnographic villages.
Spatial Distribution	Predominantly developed in cities and historical urban centres.	Primarily developed in rural areas and traditional settlements.
Economic Significance	Contributes to the development of tourism infrastructure, cultural institutions, and the sustainable use of historical heritage sites.	Increases local incomes and supports the development of traditional handicrafts and the marketing of national products.

Source: Compiled by the author based on a review of the relevant literature

Methodology

This study employed a comparative approach to examine the scientific foundations of ethnic tourism by analysing definitions, theoretical perspectives, and empirical studies presented in both international and national scholarly literature. Furthermore, The ethnic composition of Surkhandarya Region in 2025 was analyzed based on official statistical data. The research methodology included the use of official statistical data obtained from the Statistics Department of Surkhandarya Region, as well as information provided by the Regional Department of Culture and Sports.

Results and Discussion

The Surkhan Oasis occupies a distinctive place in the history of the Uzbek people and statehood. As one of the most ancient inhabited regions, its history extends back to remote historical periods. The majority of archaeological monuments of exceptional importance to the history of Uzbekistan are located within this oasis, which is also recognized as one of the earliest areas inhabited by the ancestors of humankind. Furthermore, Surkhandarya Region represents an ancient historical and geographical area distinguished by its rich cultural traditions and material heritage. In particular, traditional handicrafts and cultural heritage monuments created by local communities have retained their historical and cultural significance to the present day [2].

During the 1950s, K. Najimov conducted historical and ethnographic research on the anthropology of the population of the Surkhan Oasis. His studies examined the anthropological composition of the local population, several aspects of their ethnogenesis, and, to a certain extent, their material and spiritual culture. Likewise, in his monograph devoted to the genealogy and dialects of the Uzbek people, Kh. Doniyorov analysed the ethnic characteristics and dialectal features of several tribal groups inhabiting the Surkhan Oasis. B. Kh. Karmisheva, who carried out ethnographic research in southern Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, investigated the

ethnic composition of the population, the settlement patterns of the Uzbek Qarluq tribe, as well as livestock farming and other aspects of local traditional life [2].

Table 2. Ethnic Composition of the Population of Surkhandarya Region (2025)

. Ethnic Composition of the Population of Surkhandarya Region	2025	
	Population number of persons	Share (%)
Total population of Surkhandarya Region	2945512	100
Uzbeks	2496896	84,7
Tajiks	365149	12,4
Turkmens	35480	1,2
Russians	20834	0,7
Kazakhs	2456	0,083
Karakalpaks	163	0,005
Kyrgyz	163	0,005
Tatars	322	0,01
Koreans	732	0,024
Ukrainians	3509	0,12
Other ethnic groups	14516	0,49

Source: Compiled by the author based on official statistical data obtained from the Statistics Department of Surkhandarya Region.

The analysis of the ethnic composition of Surkhandarya Region in 2025 demonstrates that the region is characterized by considerable ethnic diversity, which constitutes an important resource for the development of ethnic tourism. According to official statistical data, the total population of the region amounts to 2,945,512 people. Uzbeks represent the overwhelming majority of the population, accounting for 2,496,896 people (84.77%), followed by Tajiks with 365,149 people (12.40%) and Turkmens with 35,480 people (1.20%). Other ethnic groups, including Russians, Kazakhs, Ukrainians, Azerbaijanis, Koreans, Armenians,

Karakalpaks, Kyrgyz, Germans, and Luli communities, constitute relatively small proportions of the regional population. The coexistence of diverse ethnic communities has significantly contributed to the formation of the region's unique cultural landscape. Each ethnic group has preserved its own customs, traditions, handicrafts, cuisine, folklore, rituals, and elements of intangible cultural heritage, thereby enhancing the ethnocultural attractiveness of Surkhandarya Region. Such diversity creates favorable conditions for the development of authentic ethnic tourism products and experiences.

The findings also indicate that Surkhandarya Region possesses 562 cultural heritage sites, of which 153 are actively visited by domestic and international tourists. The highest concentration of heritage sites is found in Sherabad District (99 sites), followed by Denov (91), Boysun (70), Shorchi (61), Termez (44), Muzrabot (41), Sariosiyo (33), and Uzun (29) districts. Most of these monuments date from the 3rd–4th centuries BCE to the 15th–18th centuries CE, reflecting the region's long-standing historical and cultural significance. The combination of a diverse ethnic composition and a rich concentration of cultural heritage resources provides a strong foundation for the sustainable development of ethnic tourism in Surkhandarya Region. Integrating tangible cultural heritage with the living traditions of local ethnic communities can diversify tourism products, strengthen the regional tourism brand, increase local incomes, and contribute to the preservation of cultural identity.

Conclusion and Recommendations.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the stable ethnic composition of Surkhandarya Region, together with its rich concentration of cultural heritage sites, provides a solid foundation for the sustainable development of ethnic tourism. In addition to the Uzbek population, which constitutes the majority of the region's inhabitants, the customs, traditions, and cultural values preserved by Tajik,

Turkmen, Kazakh, and other ethnic communities significantly enhance the ethnotourism attractiveness of the region.

Furthermore, of the 562 cultural heritage sites located in Surkhandarya Region, 153 are actively utilized as tourist attractions. The particularly high concentration of historical and cultural resources in Sherabad, Denov, and Boysun districts demonstrates their considerable potential for tourism development. The effective utilization of these resources will strengthen the competitiveness of the region within the tourism services market and contribute to sustainable regional development.

Recommendations.

- It is recommended to develop specialized ethnic tourism routes based on the ethnic diversity and cultural heritage resources of Surkhandarya Region.
- The establishment of ethnographic tourism-oriented mini-hotels and family guesthouses should be encouraged, particularly in the districts of Boysun, Sherabad, and Denov.
- The promotion of traditional handicrafts, folklore, and national customs as tourism products is essential for strengthening the tourism brand of Surkhandarya Region.
- The digitalization of cultural heritage sites and the establishment of an integrated electronic database will improve information accessibility, enhance visitor experiences, and contribute to increasing tourist arrivals.

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