

THE IMPORTANCE AND ATTRACTIVENESS OF HANDICRAFT PRODUCTS FOR TOURISTS

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Khushnazarova Makhzuna Gulamdjanovna

Tashkent State University of Economics

Lecturer at the department of Tourism and hotel business

mahzunahonim22@gmail.com

Annotation. *Handicraft products play a crucial role in the development of tourism due to their importance and attractiveness to tourists. This article analyzes the cultural and historical significance of handicraft products, their impact on the local economy, and the factors that make them appealing to tourists. Additionally, it discusses the promotion of handicrafts, marketing strategies, and their place in the tourism market. Through handicraft products, tourists gain a deeper understanding of local culture and traditions, contributing to the further development of the tourism sector.*

Keywords: *handicraft, tourism sector, handicraft products, tourist, souvenir, traditional crafts, cultural heritage*

Introduction. This article focuses on the handicraft and tourism sectors in the Republic of Uzbekistan, highlighting the current role of handicrafts and their significance in tourism. The research provides an in-depth analysis of the history of handicrafts, their various types, and the demand and interest of tourists in handicraft products. Through this study, we gain insights into the role of handicrafts in tourism development and the importance of preserving traditional manual craftsmanship.

Literature Review. It is well known that handicrafts have existed since ancient times and are considered an important part of cultural heritage. The Republic of Uzbekistan has a deep historical connection to the field of handicrafts.

Handicrafts represent history, cultural heritage, artistic creativity, patience, time, and, most importantly, manual labor.

There are numerous definitions of handicrafts in various academic sources. In the process of writing this article, several studies related to handicrafts and tourism have been analyzed.

For example, the article “Tourist focus on handmade souvenirs: two market cases of acapulco” defines handicrafts as follows:

“Handicraft products are created by manual labor by people from different corners of the world. These products express uniqueness, traditions, and cultural values, as well as their connection with nature.”

This article examines the handicraft industry in Mexico, including its history, various types of handicrafts, the diversity of souvenirs, tourist visits, the significance of handicraft products in tourism, and the extent to which natural raw materials are used in their production. As we know, Mexico is famous for its natural resources, and local artisans primarily utilize coconut trees, water lilies, and fish scales to create handmade souvenirs.

Similarly, Alfredo Conti's article "Developing handicrafts through creative tourism" explores the role of handicrafts within the creative industry, the connections between tourism and creative industries, the concept of creative industries, and how creative development in tourism can support handicrafts. This study includes examples from Brazil, Finland, and Thailand to illustrate how handicrafts can be integrated into tourism development.

Additionally, studies such as Greg Richards' "Developing and Marketing Handicraft Tourism", Gianni Cave's "Souvenir vendors and authenticity perceptions: retail sellers in Hoi An, Vietnam", and David L. Hume's "Tourism art and souvenirs: The material culture of tourism" were analyzed.

Methodology. The methodology of this study involved conducting surveys. The surveys were divided into three sections:

1. The perceptions of local residents regarding handicrafts and tourism
2. Tourists' attitudes toward handicrafts and tourism
3. The challenges, achievements, and perspectives of artisans on the development of the handicraft industry

In addition to the surveys, interviews were conducted with craftsmen to gather insights into the role of handicraft products in the development of tourism. A SWOT analysis was also performed to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats within the sector.

Results. Currently, there are **43 types of handicrafts** in the Republic of Uzbekistan. The Handicraft Association has 106,988 registered artisans, out of which 1,326 are actively engaged in production. The primary forms of handicrafts in Uzbekistan belong to folk applied arts and visual arts.

- Folk applied arts include textile weaving, ceramics, wood carving, and similar crafts.
- Visual arts include painting, sculpture, and traditional decorative arts.

Tourism is a rapidly developing sector, with a steadily increasing flow of visitors. In the first nine months of 2024, Uzbekistan received 5.7 million tourists, representing an increase of 825,800 visitors (16.8%) compared to the same period in the previous year.

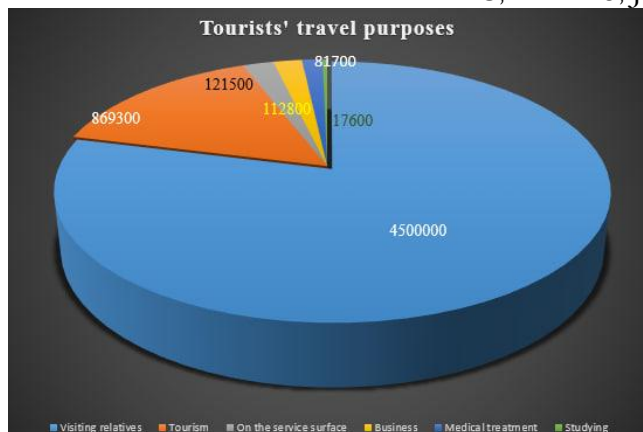


Fig-1. Tourists' travel purposes

During the first nine months of 2024, the 5.7 million tourists who visited Uzbekistan came for various reasons:

- 4.5 million visited relatives
- 869,300 traveled for tourism purposes
- 121,500 came for business trips
- 81,700 visited for medical treatment
- 17,600 arrived for educational purposes

These statistics indicate that the majority of visitors to Uzbekistan come primarily to visit their relatives.

Every tourist who travels to a foreign country usually purchases a souvenir as a reminder of their trip. A survey was conducted on the role of handicraft products in the development of tourism in Uzbekistan. One of the key questions asked tourists:

“Do you enjoy purchasing handicraft products?”

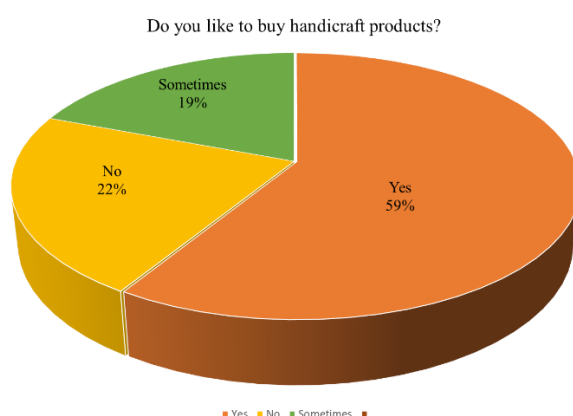


Fig-2. Analysis of the survey conducted for the research

The survey results revealed that out of more than 200 tourists who participated:

- 59% responded “Yes”, they enjoy purchasing handicraft products.
- 22% responded “No”.
- 19% responded “Sometimes”.

Another survey was conducted among local residents regarding the importance of handicraft products in domestic tourism. Participants were asked: "How important is it for you to purchase handicraft products when traveling within Uzbekistan?"

Among nearly 200 local respondents:

- 37% considered it **very important**.
- 22% found it **somewhat important**.
- 25% considered it **moderately important**.
- 16% stated that it is **occasionally important**.



Fig-3. Analysis of the survey conducted for the research

In a survey conducted among craftsmen regarding the role of handicraft products in tourism development in Uzbekistan, participants were asked:

"Who buys your handicraft products?"

Among 100 surveyed artisans:

- 68% stated that both tourists and local residents purchase their products.
- 12% reported that only local residents buy their handicrafts.
- 20% indicated that foreign tourists are their primary customers.



Fig-4. Analysis of the survey conducted for the research

Apart from these surveys, Uzbekistan currently has numerous handicraft centers aimed at attracting tourists. These centers host skilled artisans who actively showcase their craftsmanship to visitors.

For example, an interview with Anvar Shavkatovich Isroilov, a craftsman from Suzuk Ota Mahalla, provided insights into the current state of the handicraft industry, innovations, and creative products. He emphasized the need for dedicated workshops for artisans and the importance of engaging and training young people in handicrafts.

Similarly, Akmal Akramovich Azlarov, a craftsman at the Khast-Imam Handicraft Center, has been engaged in wood carving for many years. He highlighted that the key to preserving traditional crafts is continuous creativity and innovation.

At Abulkosim Madrasa, a metal engraver expressed concern that if young people are not encouraged to learn handicrafts, certain traditional crafts, such as metal engraving, may face the risk of extinction.

Discussion. Three different surveys were conducted on the role of handicrafts in tourism, involving artisans, tourists, and local residents. The analysis of the results indicates that there is strong attention toward the handicraft industry, especially in the tourism sector. The establishment of specialized handicraft centers has provided artisans with dedicated spaces to practice and showcase their skills.

The government of Uzbekistan places great emphasis on both tourism and handicrafts. This is evident in the country's participation in international exhibitions, where Uzbekistan's pavilion cannot be effectively represented without its artisans and their craftsmanship.

A theoretical study by Ra'no Gafurovna Abdullaeva, submitted as a Ph.D. dissertation in economic sciences, analyzed the development of handicrafts through entrepreneurship expansion. The study highlights several key areas where government support and incentives are needed:

1. Establishing and developing the organizational infrastructure of handicrafts
2. Encouraging the creation of new jobs in the handicraft sector
3. Developing and improving market infrastructure for handicrafts
4. Stimulating demand for innovative handicraft products
5. Strengthening the social infrastructure supporting artisans
6. Enhancing the innovative potential of the handicraft industry
7. Promoting the production of innovative handicraft products
8. Creating a competitive environment for artisans

These findings emphasize the need for continuous investment in handicrafts, particularly in their integration with tourism to ensure long-term sustainability.

The analysis indicates several critical challenges facing the handicraft industry:

- Gradual decline of traditional handicrafts
- Lack of interest among younger generations in learning handicraft skills
- Replacement of manual craftsmanship with modern technology

- Commercialization of handicrafts, where artisans prioritize mass production over artistic creativity

Despite its thousand-year history, the handicraft sector is experiencing misrepresentation, with many entrepreneurs branding themselves as artisans without truly practicing traditional craftsmanship. Unlike entrepreneurs, true artisans are creators, and their work cannot be mass-produced identically.

The creation of a handicraft product is not a one- or two-day process - it requires significant time and effort, depending on the complexity and type of craft. Preserving this authentic craftsmanship is essential to safeguard cultural heritage and maintain the uniqueness of Uzbekistan's handicrafts.

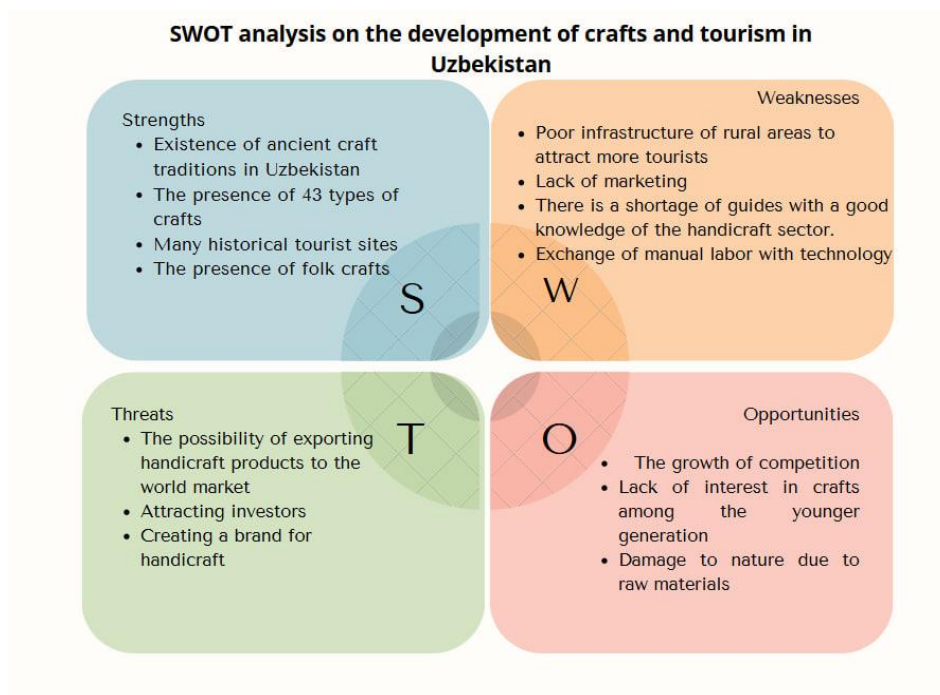


Fig-4. SWOT nalysis of handicraft development in Uzbekistan

A SWOT analysis was conducted to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with the development of the handicraft industry in Uzbekistan.

Strengths

- ☐ Rich history and strong handicraft traditions
- ☐ Diverse types of handicrafts practiced across the country
- ☐ Numerous historical and cultural tourism sites, attracting visitors interested in authentic craftsmanship

Weaknesses

- ☐ Poor infrastructure in some regions, limiting accessibility for tourists
- ☐ Lack of marketing and promotion for handicraft products
- ☐ Shortage of knowledgeable tour guides specializing in handicrafts
- ☐ Gradual decline of manual craftsmanship due to modernization

Opportunities

- ☑ Expansion into international markets, boosting exports
- ☑ Attracting investors to support handicraft businesses
- ☑ Creating and promoting an “Uzbek Handicraft Brand” to enhance global recognition
- ☑ Increasing economic efficiency by integrating handicrafts with tourism

Threats

- ☐ Rising competition from mass-produced and machine-made products
- ☐ Declining interest among younger generations in learning handicrafts
- ☐ Environmental concerns, as excessive raw material usage may harm nature

Conclusion from SWOT Analysis

The findings emphasize the urgent need to develop strategies to preserve and promote the handicraft industry in Uzbekistan. It is crucial to:

- ✓ Strengthen infrastructure and marketing efforts
- ✓ Encourage youth participation in handicrafts through education and training
- ✓ Ensure sustainable use of raw materials to protect the environment
- ✓ Support artisans with business opportunities while maintaining the authenticity of craftsmanship

By addressing these issues, Uzbekistan can preserve its rich cultural heritage while positioning its handicrafts as a valuable asset in the global tourism and creative economy.

Conclusion. The key findings of this study indicate that Uzbekistan’s centuries-old handicraft industry requires significant state support to ensure its survival and sustainable development. To prevent the decline of handicrafts, the following measures must be taken:

- Educating the younger generation in traditional craftsmanship
- Providing more opportunities for artisans to expand their businesses
- Preserving ancient and endangered handicraft traditions
- Increasing the number of handicraft centers across the country
- Integrating handicraft centers into tourism routes to enhance visibility and accessibility
- Prioritizing manual craftsmanship over mass production by establishing a distinctive handicraft brand
- Developing incentive programs to encourage artisans and sustain their craftsmanship
- Enhancing media coverage to raise awareness of artisans and their contributions to cultural heritage

By implementing these recommendations, Uzbekistan can safeguard its traditional handicraft industry, ensuring that its rich cultural heritage continues to thrive and is passed down to future generations.

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