



## HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN UZBEKISTAN: LEGAL FRAMEWORKS, STATISTICAL OVERVIEW, AND STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

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**Abstract.** *Uzbekistan's cultural heritage represents one of the country's most significant national assets, playing a vital role in shaping collective identity, strengthening spiritual values, and supporting the development of the tourism sector. This article explores the legal and institutional framework established to protect and manage cultural heritage, while also outlining the key legislative reforms implemented since independence. Based on data from the Cultural Heritage Department of the Ministry of Culture, it is noted that 8,647 heritage sites are officially registered, including 3,013 architectural monuments, 4,763 archaeological sites, 615 monumental art objects, and 256 places of special significance. In addition, a national registry approved in 2019 includes 8,208 immovable cultural heritage objects distributed across all regions of the country. The article also examines the strategic importance of these sites within Uzbekistan's tourism development policies and emphasizes that their careful preservation, systematic study, and effective use are essential not only for economic growth but also for maintaining the nation's historical memory and spiritual continuity.*

**Keywords:** *cultural heritage, architectural monuments, state protection, tourism strategy, legal reform.*

### INTRODUCTION

Uzbekistan occupies a distinctive position in the landscape of world civilisation. Its territory preserves the physical traces of millennia of settled life along the Silk Road urban centres, sacred monuments, citadels, and burial complexes that testify to the depth and continuity of the region's cultural traditions. From the earliest years of independence, the scholarly investigation, protection, and intergenerational transmission of this legacy was elevated to a defining priority of state policy. That policy rests on a

clear recognition: cultural heritage is not merely a repository of historical memory but a living foundation of national identity, a resource for the moral formation of younger citizens, and a driver of economic activity through heritage-based tourism.

The institutional framework supporting this policy has been progressively strengthened. The Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan imposes on every citizen an explicit obligation to protect the historical, spiritual, and cultural heritage of the Uzbek people, and places all monuments under state protection (Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 1992, Art. 49). A dedicated legislative corpus including the Law on the Protection and Use of Cultural Heritage Objects, the Law on Museums, and the Law on the Protection and Use of Archaeological Heritage Objects provides the operational framework for these constitutional commitments (Law No. 269-II, 2001; Law on Archaeological Heritage, 2001). The following sections trace the institutional evolution of heritage management, present the current statistical profile of protected sites, analyse their strategic significance for tourism, and reflect on the broader civic dimensions of heritage stewardship.

## **MAIN PART**

The primary institutional actor in Uzbekistan's heritage sector was established in 1992, when the Scientific Production Main Directorate for the Protection and Use of Cultural Heritage Objects was created under the Ministry of Culture. Its mandate encompassed the protection, scholarly study, and productive utilisation of immovable cultural heritage across the republic architectural and historical monuments in particular. By Resolution No. 265 of the Cabinet of Ministers, dated 20 March 2019, the body was redesignated as the Cultural Heritage Department (Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 265, 2019), with an expanded portfolio of responsibilities for the conservation of tangible cultural heritage.

Parallel to these institutional developments, Uzbekistan has constructed a substantial body of normative legislation. The legislative instruments governing the sector include the Law on the Protection and Use of Cultural Heritage Objects (No. 269-II, adopted 30 August 2001) (Law No. 269-II, 2001), as well as corresponding laws on museums and on archaeological heritage. These laws are implemented through a series

of Cabinet of Ministers resolutions that translate legislative provisions into operational procedures. UNESCO cooperation has reinforced the international dimension of these efforts, enabling the inscription of key Uzbek sites including the historic centres of Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, and Shakhrisabz on the World Heritage List and promoting their recognition globally (Preservation of Crafts, n.d.).

Among the principal achievements of the post-independence period, the following deserve particular mention (Presidential Decree, 2017):

- significant expansion of the register of cultural heritage sites under state protection;
- inscription of historic urban centres and outstanding examples of national architecture on the UNESCO World Heritage List;
- intensification of international scholarly engagement with and promotion of Uzbekistan’s heritage;
- systematic integration of architectural and historical monuments into national tourism development programmes as instruments for raising the country’s social and economic potential.

Current data from the Cultural Heritage Department present a detailed picture of the scale and composition of Uzbekistan’s protected heritage. Of the 8,647 registered cultural heritage objects under state protection, the breakdown by category is as follows (Cultural Heritage Department, 2016):

- 3,013 architectural monuments;
- 4,763 archaeological sites;
- 615 monumental works of art;
- 256 places of particular interest.

A comprehensive national registry of immovable material cultural heritage objects was confirmed by Cabinet of Ministers Resolution of 4 October 2019, encompassing 8,208 entries. Of these, 4,748 are archaeological monuments, 2,250 are architectural monuments, 678 are monumental art works, and 532 are places of particular interest (Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 265, 2019). The regional distribution of the registered objects reflects the uneven but richly concentrated geography of Uzbekistan’s historical urban culture:

- Samarkand region: 1,607 objects (70 of national and 769 of local significance);

- Bukhara region: 660 objects (283 national, 377 local);
- Tashkent region: 509 objects (6 national, 503 local);
- Khorezm region: 225 objects (97 national, 128 local);
- Qashqadarya region: 204 objects (23 national, 181 local);
- Fergana region: 189 objects (9 national, 180 local);
- Namangan region: 109 objects (12 national, 97 local);
- Navoi region: 74 objects (11 national, 63 local);
- Andijan region: 67 objects (5 national, 62 local);
- Republic of Karakalpakstan: 60 objects (22 national, 38 local);
- Surkhandarya region: 38 objects (12 national, 26 local);
- Sirdarya region: 7 objects of local significance.

This distribution underscores the exceptional heritage density of the Samarkand-Bukhara corridor, which has historically served as the cultural and intellectual heart of Central Asia. It also reveals substantial heritage assets in regions such as Khorezm and Karakalpakstan whose archaeological and architectural riches have received comparatively less international attention.

Uzbekistan's Action Strategy for Further Development, adopted by Presidential Decree on 7 February 2017, explicitly identifies the accelerated development of the tourism industry including the diversification and quality enhancement of tourism services and the expansion of tourism infrastructure as a national priority, with particular emphasis on the productive use of historical and architectural heritage (Presidential Decree, 2017). This strategic orientation reflects a well-established international consensus: that the monetisation of cultural heritage through responsible tourism, when properly managed, can generate sustainable economic returns while simultaneously creating incentives for conservation.

The practical dimensions of this integration are visible across multiple domains. Organised excursions to historical sites have expanded access for both domestic and international visitors, acquainting ever-wider audiences with Uzbekistan's material culture. Local craftspeople weavers, ceramicists, woodcarvers, metalworkers continue to renew living heritage traditions through their production, and the export of traditionally crafted goods represents a form of cultural diplomacy alongside economic exchange. Tourism infrastructure development in heritage zones accommodation,

transport connections, interpretation facilities has created employment and stimulated local economies, particularly in cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva.

These developments are further supported by dedicated theoretical and methodological frameworks for the economic governance of heritage territories (Theoretical Foundations, n.d.). The integration of heritage-based tourism into regional development planning responds to the recognition that properly managed heritage sites function as anchors of place identity and drivers of multiplier effects across the wider economy.

## **CONCLUSION**

The evidence reviewed in this article supports a clear conclusion: Uzbekistan's historical and cultural heritage constitutes not merely a repository of past achievement but an active strategic resource for contemporary socio-economic development. The nearly nine thousand registered heritage objects distributed across the republic represent assets of pan-Turkic and universal human significance a treasury belonging not only to the Uzbek people but to humanity as a whole. Their protection, authentic conservation, and judicious tourism utilisation is accordingly both a civic duty of individual citizens and an institutional responsibility of state agencies at every level.

The reform trajectory of the post-independence period progressive legislative consolidation, institutional reorganisation, UNESCO partnership, and strategic integration of heritage into tourism development plans reflects a sustained and coherent policy commitment. The systematic study and promotion of this heritage serves, simultaneously, to raise Uzbekistan's international profile, to strengthen national identity, and to support the moral and intellectual formation of younger generations. The most urgent remaining task is to ensure that conservation practice and tourism development proceed in genuine balance that the very act of making heritage accessible does not compromise the integrity of what is being made accessible.

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