



## **Gastronomy tourism in Uzbekistan**

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**Annotation.** The article objectives on tourism in Uzbekistan, its importance in employability and creating additional job vacancies; the introduction of gastronomy tourism and its reasons for development; the significance of Uzbek cuisine and its history

**Key words:** employability, job opportunities, gastronomy tourism in Uzbekistan, Uzbek cuisine, Samarkand, Silk Road, plov, soma, non, real-world and virtual information, gastronomic heritage.

**Аннотация.** В статье рассматриваются вопросы туризма в Узбекистане, его значение в трудоустройстве и создании дополнительных рабочих мест; гастрономического туризма и причины его развития; значение узбекской кухни и ее истории.

**Ключевые слова:** трудоустройство, рабочие места, гастрономический туризм в Узбекистане, узбекская кухня, Самарканда, Щелковый путь, плов, самса, хлеб, информации в реальной и виртуальных жизнях, гастрономическое наследие.

**Introduction.** Tourism is an integral part of development throughout the world, leading to the promotion of job opportunities and boosting demand for local goods and services. It also promotes cultural preservation by raising awareness of historical sites and cultural heritage through tolerance between nations and improved infrastructure. Additionally, sustainable tourism can lead to environmental conservation by creating incentives to protect national heritage sites and traditions for future generations

**Tourism in Uzbekistan.** Tourism represents a substantial and rapidly growing sector of Uzbekistan's economy. The government under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has invested heavily in developing tourism as a high-growth potential industry, resulting in an increase in international arrivals from approximately 1 million in 2016 to 7 million in 2023.[1] Uzbekistan's most-visited tourist sites are associated with the history of the Silk Road, particularly the cities of Bukhara, Khiva, and Samarkand. The Registan ensemble in Samarkand, a complex of three madrasahs dating from the 15th to 17th centuries situated around the city's historic central square, is one of Uzbekistan's most-visited landmarks, attracting more than 1 million visitors in 2022.[2] While most visitors showed interest in Uzbekistan's historical-architectural sites and culture, the



government of Uzbekistan and tourism organizations are also working to develop other tourism areas, such as ecotourism, pilgrimage tourism, and gastronomy tourism.

**The development of gastronomy tourism in Uzbekistan.** Gastronomy tourism is a travel centered on experiencing a destination's local food and drink, which serves as a primary motivation for the trip and reflects the area's culture and heritage. It goes beyond just eating; it offers educational and authentic experiences, cooking classes, and visits to local markets, festivals, and farms to experience the atmosphere in real-life actions. At the heart of this culinary journey lies a remarkable array of traditional dishes, each with its own history and significance. From the beloved plov, a fragrant rice dish often considered the national treasure, to the savory manti and the smoky shashlik, Uzbek food offers a feast for the senses. The use of unique ingredients and time-honored cooking techniques, such as the tandoor oven, further enriches this culinary landscape, making it a treasure trove for those eager to experience authentic flavors.[3]

Samarkand, with a history spanning over two and a half millennia, is one of the oldest and most significant cities in the world. Renowned for its architectural marvels and its vital role on the Silk Road, it was a flourishing center of culture and trade. In modern times, Samarkand also attracts countless visitors and pilgrims, drawn by its spiritual significance and vibrant heritage. Samarkand's gastronomy tourism is a growing sector that takes advantage of the city's rich cultural heritage to attract visitors through its unique and traditional Uzbek cuisine, which includes iconic dishes like osh (plov) and mantı. To promote this, recent festivals like the "Samarkand Plov" festival have been held, and the city offers diverse culinary experiences, from participating in cooking classes with local families to dining at modern restaurants with a creative mix of both traditional and international menus. The three most popular dishes among tourists and culturally recognized by UNESCO are plov, somsa, and non. Plov is a national rice dish with a UNESCO designation as an intangible cultural heritage. At the same time, somsa (savory meat-filled pastries) and non (a type of flatbread) are also central to the region's cuisine.

- Plov – a hearty and flavourful dish made with rice, meat, onions, and carrots, seasoned with local spices. Plov was inscribed on UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage in 2016, reflecting its importance to Uzbek culture and cuisine. Different regions in Uzbekistan have their own variations, and specialists often claim the best plov is made in Samarkand. This may seem repetitive, but in fact it is not: there are over sixty different plov recipes in Uzbek cuisine. In every area, it is cooked specially, and an experienced gourmet would easily recognize the origins of a given plov, whether Samarkand, Fergana, Tashkent, Kashkadarya, Bukhara, or Khorezm. Plov also differs according to the occasion: a wedding plov is the most magnificent, a holiday plov is a bit less exotic, and there is even an everyday plov. These vary both in cooking technique and ingredients: plov is usually made with mutton, but it is sometimes replaced with



kazi (horse meat sausage), sheep tail fat, chicken, pheasant, or quail. Sometimes even the rice is replaced by buckwheat, wheat, mung beans, or even vermicelli. Most types of plov include a similar set of ingredients: mutton, rice, carrots, and spices, and the classic technique involves three main stages: the preparation of zirvak (liquid plov base), the addition of the rice, and the final cooking.[5]

- Somsa – savory pastries filled with meat and onions. These are cooked in a traditional clay oven (tandoor), giving them a unique texture and flavor that makes them a popular street food and restaurant dish. Today's somsa is usually filled with meat (mutton, chicken, or beef), vegetables (pumpkin, potato, or onion), mushrooms, eggs, peas, herbs, or even sweet substances. However, as in most of the Uzbek dishes, it is the spices, such as zira, black and red, hot pepper, and sesame (covering the top of the somsa), that make the taste of the pasties really unique. In the past, somsa was cooked only in a tandir oven (a Central Asian clay oven), on coals. [6]

- Non is a traditional Uzbek flatbread that appears at every meal. Samarkand's version of this bread is especially famous—many believe its distinctive flavor and long-lasting freshness come from the city's unique water and clay, which cannot be duplicated elsewhere. In Samarkand, non is considered an essential part of the local cuisine. Bread holds a special place in Asian cultures, and children are taught from an early age to show great respect for it. In Uzbekistan, many customs are connected to bread. For example, before someone leaves on a long journey, they bite off a small piece of bread, while the rest is kept at home until they return safely. Each of Uzbekistan's 12 provinces has its own bread varieties. Samarkand Non is typically medium-sized, thick, and heavy, with shiny sides and a small center decorated with black sesame seeds. Locals say that true Samarkand bread can only be baked in Samarkand, as even the city's air contributes to its flavor. Kokand bread, in contrast, is thin and wide—about 32–35 cm across—with its entire surface covered in intricate patterns. These breads stay soft and tasty for a long time, making them ideal souvenirs for travelers. Tashkent is known for its light, airy non, which has crisp, delicate bubbles on its surface.

As the demand for travel and hospitality services increases, we are seeing a growing interest in AR and VR tourism. Travel and tourism companies are investing in AR and VR development to increase bookings and provide more engaging experiences to their customers. Apps are being developed to help customers access real-time versions of the destinations they want to visit. In recent years, the concepts of "virtual reality (VR)" and "augmented reality (AR)", which are important components of technological developments in the reality-virtual dimension, have offered many new applications in gastronomy. Before exploring these applications, it is important to understand the meaning and specifics of the two concepts mentioned. VR is a technology that recreates three-dimensional digital images and videos to create an authentic visual experience for users. VR is defined as a three-dimensional (3D) system



that allows people to be present in an environment through the use of various imaging devices, including 3D glasses, immersive cabin environments, and laptop or desktop computers. The aim is to make people feel as if they are in a 3D environment, thanks to 3D glasses, and learn by exposure to new experiences. AR, on the other hand, enriches the user's perception and provides a vivid view of the real world with digital information. The concept of AR involves combining real-world and virtual information. AR is defined as "any scenario in which a real environment is enhanced through the use of virtual (computer-generated) objects." In this real-world connected environment, data and images can be added to real-world images, allowing real and virtual objects to be perceived simultaneously in the same environment. Using a screen or projector, virtual objects are combined with the current environment to visually transform them into physical reality.[4] AR and VR are definitely worth adopting in the tourism industry as they can do a lot to enrich the traveler's experience. From virtual reality tours to virtual hotel tours, test drives, and immersive navigation, there are many exciting ways to use the technology.

Rich in history and culture, the city of Samarkand is now focusing on developing gastronomic tourism to showcase its unique culinary heritage. Combining traditional Central Asian and modern influences, Samarkand cuisine offers visitors colorful and delicious dishes. To enhance this offering, the city is turning to technology to create engaging experiences for tourists. **Augmented reality (AR)** is emerging as a key technology for enhancing gastronomic tourism in **Samarkand**. By overlaying digital information onto the physical world, AR offers interactive and educational experiences tied to the city's culinary traditions. Tourists can explore local food destinations while learning about the region's history, traditional recipes, and unique cooking methods. In addition to AR, **virtual reality (VR)** is also being explored to enrich visitor experiences. VR can transport users into immersive kitchen environments, allowing them to explore Samarkand's culinary heritage virtually. Through these digital experiences—such as virtual tours of traditional markets, cooking classes, and historic restaurants—tourists gain a deeper appreciation of the city's food culture and traditions. **Samarkand is actively integrating digital technologies to enhance its gastronomic tourism sector.** Mobile applications are being developed to guide tourists through culinary tours, provide interactive maps of local dining spots, and offer access to digital content related to Samarkand's food culture. These apps serve as essential tools for visitors, delivering real-time information and helping them navigate the city's culinary landscape. In addition, **interactive exhibitions** in museums, cultural institutions, and culinary venues are being used to showcase Samarkand's gastronomic heritage. These exhibits often include multimedia content, virtual cooking demonstrations, and interactive storytelling, allowing visitors to engage more deeply with the region's culinary traditions. **Online platforms**, including websites and social media, also play a crucial role in promoting Samarkand's gastronomic tourism. They offer users access to



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recipes, cooking videos, and virtual experiences that help broaden understanding and appreciation of local cuisine. By adopting these innovative technologies, **Samarkand is creating a dynamic and immersive gastronomic tourism experience**—one that honors its rich culinary heritage while appealing to modern travelers. With this combination of traditional flavors and digital innovation, Samarkand is well-positioned to emerge as a unique destination on the global culinary tourism map. As development continues, the city is likely to become a key location for food enthusiasts seeking an authentic and memorable gastronomic journey. Using the above information, several suggestions can be made:

- To increase the interest of tourists in our food and drinks by using VR and AR applications in restaurants based on foreign experience in organizing a gastro tour, according to Samarkand.
- AR and VR tours: Create virtual tours of Samarkand's gastronomic attractions, such as local markets, restaurants, and food festivals, allowing users to experience the sights and sounds of the city's cuisine from anywhere in the world.
- Interactive cooking classes: development of AR and VR cooking classes showcasing traditional Samarkand dishes, allowing users to virtually participate in the cooking process and learn about local ingredients and cooking techniques.
- Storytelling through AR and VR: Developing interactive narrative experiences that illuminate the history and cultural significance of Samarkand gastronomy, allowing users to engage with the city's culinary heritage in a dynamic and immersive way.
- Partnering with local businesses: partnering with local restaurants, food producers, and artisans to help promote Samarkand's gastronomic offerings to a global audience, creating AR and VR experiences showcasing their products and services.

In conclusion, gastronomy tourism has become a vital dimension of modern tourism development, offering travelers meaningful ways to connect with a destination's cultural identity. By engaging with traditional dishes, local ingredients, and regional cooking methods, visitors gain insight into the history, lifestyle, and values of the community. Moreover, gastronomy tourism encourages sustainable practices by supporting local farmers, small producers, and family-run businesses, helping to preserve culinary heritage for future generations. As global interest in authentic and experience-based travel continues to grow, gastronomy tourism is expected to play an increasingly significant role in enhancing destination competitiveness, promoting cultural preservation, and enriching the overall travel experience.



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