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Innovative Pilgrimage Route “Ziyarah in the Footsteps of Imam al-Bukhari”

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Abstract: This article presents the development of an innovative pilgrimage route, “Ziyarah in the footsteps of Imam al-Bukhari” (Bukhara - Samarkand): the concept is substantiated, the principles of formation and selection of objects are described, a ready-made three-day tour program and key economic parameters (cost calculation and conditions for commercial launch) are proposed. It is shown that the route is a practice-oriented and replicable tourism product with potential for scaling up, provided that digital support, service improvements, and logistics development are in place.

Keywords: Pilgrimage Tourism, Innovative Route, Imam Al-Bukhari, Bukhara, Samarkand, Tour Program, Economic Parameters, Cost Calculation, Digital Support, Service, Logistics

1. Introduction

In modern times, pilgrimage tourism is not only a religious and spiritual practice, but also an important direction for the socio-economic development of regions[1]. Its growth is supported by institutional programs, the expansion of international cooperation, the development of service infrastructure, and changing expectations of travelers: pilgrims are increasingly seeking structured knowledge about the destination, high-quality organization of travel, and cultural and educational formats.

In Uzbekistan, the accelerated development of pilgrimage tourism [2] correlates with the objectives of increasing the attractiveness of sacred sites and developing competitive tourism products. In this context, the Tabarruk Ziyorat initiative, enshrined in Resolution PQ-338 of July 29, 2022, which aims to create a favorable environment for domestic and international pilgrimage, development of joint tourism projects, and promotion of cultural heritage [3].

One of the practical problems facing the industry is the “gap between resource and product”: the existence of sacred sites does not guarantee a steady flow of tourists if there are no clear routes, visit scenarios, service standards, multi-channel information, and economically viable tour packages. As a result, tourists either limit themselves to a short visit or choose alternative destinations where the experience is organized and predictable [4], [5].

The following are particularly important for pilgrimage routes: (a) authenticity and accuracy of interpretation; (b) logistics that ensure comfort and safety; (c) a cultural and educational component that helps to make sense of the visit; (d) price transparency. These requirements justify the need to develop a new type of route - “pilgrimage + knowledge +

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experience”, where spiritual meaning is not replaced by entertainment, but is enhanced by accurate educational and cultural presentation [6].

The purpose of this article is to present the development of an innovative pilgrimage route, “Ziyarah in the footsteps of Imam al-Bukhari” (Bukhara-Samarkand), as a product: (1) to describe the conceptual elements; (2) to systematize the core objects of the route; (3) to present a 3-day tour program; (4) to show the economic parameters and marketing tools for promotion [7], [8]. The object of the study is the route as an organizational and economic model of a tourist product, and the subject is its structure, visit scenario, and cost calculation.

Literature Review

In Uzbekistan, the development of tourism and specifically domestic and pilgrimage tourism is shaped by a formal legal and strategic framework. The Law “On Tourism” defines the general regulatory field for tourism activity and serves as a baseline for organizing tourism products, service provision, and sector governance [9]. The policy emphasis on expanding domestic and pilgrimage tourism is further reinforced through presidential decrees aimed at accelerating development mechanisms and strengthening institutional support [10]. In parallel, international cooperation and route-based tourism products are stimulated through initiatives such as “Tabarruk ziyorat,” which positions pilgrimage tourism as a priority direction linked to heritage promotion and joint projects with partner states [11]. Collectively, these documents establish the enabling environment in which pilgrimage routes can be designed, standardized, and promoted as competitive products [12], [13].

A core strand of regional research also explores pilgrimage tourism in terms of cluster creation, where cooperation between sites, service providers and the wider infrastructure (transport; hotels; guides; culture) is key. Navruz-zoda envisages various ways of organising pilgrimage tourism as a cluster, such as the need for integrated planning and developing cohesive solutions-product-routes that transforms sacred sites from “resources” to a market ready product [14]. The research on territorial competitiveness of tourism also confirms that destinations gain strength when they institutionalize collaboration, enhance service quality and create more coherent tourist attractions [15]. From this perspective, pilgrimage should not be seen as a series of one-off experiences but as a managed network where governance, partnerships, and standardized visitor management become critical to issues of sustainability and development.

As shown in the bibliography compiled here, the digital and virtual set of activities/forms makes it possible to develop an effective lever to enhance incoming tourism. Navruz-Zoda and Ibragimov identify measures to enhance the virtual activity in urban tourism - a model that is directly applicable to pilgrimage contexts where trust, information clarity, and route visibility are essential for decision-making. Regarding pilgrim routes, digitalisation acts as follows: (a) information security (no proper descriptions; multilingual accessibility), (b) marketing amplifier (online presence; storytelling) and c) service coordination (timetables; navigation; guest services). This line of literature supports the argument that destinations that invest in digital channels and structured information environments can reduce uncertainty for visitors and improve competitiveness.

A route centered on Imam al-Bukhari requires a credible resource and interpretation base. Background information about Imam al-Bukhari’s life and legacy is commonly summarized in encyclopedia-style sources that help structure the narrative layer for visitor interpretation and educational modules. At the same time, destination-specific resources describing the Imam al-Bukhari Memorial Complex contribute to identifying the flagship attraction and clarifying the visitor context for itinerary design. For pilgrimage route development, these materials support the content layer-biographical logic, sacred

geography, and the “meaning” component that differentiates pilgrimage travel from general cultural sightseeing.

In addition to policy and theoretical works, the literature base includes applied materials that present route concept development, program structure, and economic calculations as an integrated product-design task. This highly practical perspective is in line with cluster and digitalization perspectives by showcasing how a pilgrimage route can be shaped into a reproducible tourism product which is stage-based, includes services and operates on price logic. Local investigation dissertational research also serves for clarifying the organizational-economic institutes of formation of pilgrim tourism in region (in object, in Bukhara region), a more solid methodical ground concerning to definition occlusions and offer connecting with new mechanisms. Taken together, the referenced sources indicate three converging pillars for pilgrimage tourism development: (1) institutional support and regulation, (2) cluster-based destination organization and competitiveness, and (3) digital/virtual activity as a promotion and service tool. Meanwhile, the heritage content base (Imam al-Bukhari narrative and core visitation complex) supports route interpretation and product positioning, and applied design materials demonstrate how to operationalize routes and costs.

A key gap implied by this body of sources is the need to connect these pillars into a single operational model: a pilgrimage route that is simultaneously policy-aligned, cluster-supported, digitally visible, and economically packaged-especially for regional destinations seeking scalable, market-ready products.

2. Methodology

The study was conducted using a design-based approach: the route was developed as a prototype tourist product with sequential stages-content collection and systematization, site selection, route logic development, itinerary development, resource requirements assessment, and economic calculation.

The design procedures included: (1) forming a “tourist profile” of Imam al-Bukhari as the central figure; (2) identifying the starting point of the route in Bukhara and specifying related locations; (3) selecting sites based on biographical, cultural, and educational relevance; (4) putting together a three-day program with transportation and logistics hubs; (5) calculating costs for the main items and figuring out the final price of the tour package; (6) putting together a set of marketing tools for promotion. The economic information is given in a transportation tour package industry bid format by item, e.g., transport cost, meals (lunch), guide fee, etc., and the sum totals + the Iy'site Markup. Markup is established at 20% as the relative average commercial service package. The results are shown for three cases: individual tourist (1 person), small group (4 people) and group (20 people). Prescribed Prices in the preliminary estimate are effective not later than 12 August 2025. When developing the route, the basic principles of quality pilgrimage service were taken into account: respect for religious norms, price transparency, management of visit times (time slots), minimization of fatigue through rational logistics, and ensuring the availability of information (multilingual texts, clear navigation, offline materials). These principles are important both for visitor satisfaction and for reducing operational risks.

3. Results and Discussion

The “Ziyarah in the footsteps of Imam al-Bukhari” route is being developed as an innovative pilgrimage product based on a synthesis of three components: (a) sacred geography (birthplaces, teachers, places of study, memorial complex); (b) educational interpretation (museum, library, lectures on the legacy of “Al-Jome' as-sahih”); (c) cultural and event module (theatrical performance), which enhances emotional involvement and increases the value of the route.

The value proposition of the route is that pilgrims receive not a series of disjointed visits, but a holistic experience.

Table 1. Key route attractions and recommendations for service development.

Nº	The Object	Location	Role in the route	Recommendations for improving the experience
1	Place of birth (mahalla near the Khoja Zainuddin Mosque)	Bukhara	Start of the route, symbolic point of “origins”	Commemorative plaque, landscaping, QR description in 3–5 languages
2	Places associated with early teachers (burial sites of scholars)	Bukhara	Educational line: “mentors and the school of hadith”	Navigation, brief biographies, audio guide, visiting regulations
3	The Kalon Mosque (Great Foot)	Bukhara	Educational hub and sacred landmark	Route signs, themed tours “study and theology”
4	Memorial Museum of Imam al-Bukhari	Bukhara	Material representation of memory and heritage	Multimedia stands, mini-exhibitions of manuscripts (copies), souvenir line
5	Regional library: manuscript and book collection, lecture (80 minutes)	Bukhara	A profound interpretation of the legacy of Al-Jome’ as-sahih	Advance registration, interpreter, printed materials, master classes
6	Drama and musical theater: a production about the life of Imam al-Bukhari	Bukhara	Event module, enhancement of emotions and length of stay	Integration into tour package, fixed schedule, photo zones
7	Imam al-Bukhari Memorial Complex (Khartang village)	Samarkand Region	The highlight of the route, a spiritual and educational center	Queue optimization, navigation, service area, tours of the complex

3-day tour program (example). Basic parameters of the program example: location - Bukhara and Samarkand; duration - 3 days; group size - 20 people; estimated price - 3,322,200 sum per tourist (for a group format). The program can be adapted to the season, the interests of the group, and the availability of individual cultural modules.

Table 2. Summary itinerary for 3 days.

Day	Key activities	Logistics / notes
Day 1 (Bukhara)	Start at 10:00. Birthplace; Poyi Kalon; teachers' quarters; museum. In the afternoon - library, collection display, introductory lecture. In the evening - options (Labi House, crafts).	City transfers; lunch break; optional modules depending on the season and group requests.
Day 2 (Bukhara)	Continuation of the educational block (lecture/discussion). Excursion around the historic center. In the evening - theatrical performance.	Advance booking of theater tickets and time slots for the library block is recommended.
Day 3 (Samarkand)	Early departure/train journey (Afrosiab). Imam al-Bukhari Memorial Complex in Khartanga. Completion and transfer.	Check train schedules; allow extra time for travel and possible queues at the site.

Economic indicators of the sight-seeing package trip. The estimated package per person is available in 3 types Market, 2 people min and group of 20 people. The most important factor explaining the price per participant is the impact of scale: some costs are spread over a greater number of tourists (the guide, other organisational expenses).

Table 3. Calculation of the cost of a tour package by format (data as of August 12, 2025).

Format	Transportation, sum	Meal (lunch), sum	Guide, sum	Other expenses, total	20% markup, sum	Total, sum
Individual (1 person)	1 496 000	195 000	3 000 000	2 905 000	1 519 200	9 115 200
Small group (4 people)	2 484 000	780 000	3 000 000	8 920 000	3 036 800	18220 800
Group (20 people)	6 420 000	3 900 000	3 000 000	42 050 000	11 074 000	66444 000

For a group format (20 people), the estimated cost is 66,444,000 sum per group, or 3,322,200 sum per tourist. The calculation does not include some additional services (snacks, souvenirs, individual purchases, etc.), which depend on the preferences and financial capabilities of the participants. In practical terms, this means that it is advisable for the operator to offer two levels of product: a basic package (as in the estimate) and an extended package (with dinners, cultural master classes, a translator, and additional excursions).

Marketing positioning and promotion tools

It would be reasonable to promote this route by a clear positioning “spiritual and educational pilgrimage to the heritage sites of Imam al-Bukhari in Bukhara and Samarkand” focusing on comfortable logistics, trustworthy interpretation, cultural educational formats. Target audience of the Project can be divided as follows: (1) domestic pilgrims - families, believers` brotherhoods and communities; (2) foreign groups that come to pilgrimage on religious programs; (3) cultural and cognitive tourists interested in the history and spiritual heritage of Islam in Central Asia. The marketing “package” for the route should include: a description of the concept, a map of sites, a daily schedule, included services, cost and transparent terms and conditions, as well as multilingual materials (Russian, Uzbek, English and priority market languages).

Table 4. Marketing tools for promoting the route.

Tool	Message/content	Channel	Key performance indicators (KPIs)
Pricing policy	Reasonable price and transparent estimate; 2 levels package (basic/extended).	Tour operator website, partner price lists, presentations.	Conversion to application; share of group sales.
Digital marketing	Storytelling about the route, short videos, reviews, maps, and FAQ.	Social media, targeting, context, messengers, CRM mailings.	Reach; cost per lead; engagement; subscriber base growth.
Partnerships	Joint packages with hotels, museums, libraries, theaters; support for local institutions.	B2B negotiations, memoranda, travel exhibitions.	Number of partners; share of sales through partners; repeat groups.

Brand and souvenirs	Uniform visual style, logo, “pilgrim's memory” souvenirs.	route Souvenir shops, museum, online store.	Average check; share of additional sales; brand awareness.
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What distinguishes the proposed hiking path from the usual pilgrimage scheme is that it would not just create a program of sacred sites to visit, but also contain content regarding interpretation and cultural-event. Through an assemblage of library and lecture block,”to provide a methodically framed interpretation on Imam al-Bukhari and his legacy; museumed block for historical memories, and theatrically created ambiance full of emotions. This type of model enables tourists to stay longer in the city and broaden their cultural environment spending, service and so on. The calculation demonstrates that the group offer is the most price competitive considering per participant. Thus can be advised sales through tour operators, religious organizations or thematic clubs - groups join themselves there logically. To earn more without scaring off less solvent customers, it’s a good idea to create a product line, provide some extra services (translator, dinners, the second tour and others). The main constraints of the project come under: (1) absence of reliable official statistics on the number of visitors at specific sites, which makes estimates of visitor flows and revenues for the region difficult and (2) necessity to correctly define the starting point in Bukhara so that it is scientifically accurate and based on historical evidences. Other risks: Demand is seasonal; transportation and ticket prices fluctuate, there are mgmt risks from scheduling b/w sites.

Table 5. Main risks and measures to minimize them.

Risk	Probability	Impact	Minimization measures
Inaccuracy of flow data	Medium	Medium	Collection of proprietary statistics: counters/questionnaires, partner reporting, seasonality monitoring.
Schedule disruptions (train/theater/facilities)	Medium	High	Reserve windows; time slot agreements; alternative activities.
Price/tariff increases	High	Medium	Quarterly budget updates; dynamic pricing; “minimum” and “premium” packages.
Reputational risks of interpretation	Low–medium	High	Expert verification of content, text approval, accurate formulation of historical information.

Priority areas for implementation include digital route support, logistics optimization, and marketing enhancement. The digital component (mobile application) should include a route map, descriptions of sites, multilingual content, offline access, and integration with booking services. The logistics component involves establishing transport links, time slots, and service standards. The marketing component includes a unified brand, partnerships, and presence on international platforms.

Table 6. Roadmap for route implementation (example for 6 months).

Period	Key actions	Result/output
0–1 month	Refining content and maps of objects; coordinating partners (museum, library, theater).	Content package and time slot agreements.
2–3 months	Pilot groups (2–3 rounds), gathering feedback; adjusting the program and budget.	Verified program and updated price list.

4–6 months	Launching a digital prototype (landing page/mini-app); scaling sales through partners and social networks.	Stable flow of applications and brand development.
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4. Conclusion

The developed route “Ziyarah in the footsteps of Imam al-Bukhari” is a methodically designed and economically calculated pilgrimage product, suitable for commercial launch and replication in a group format.

The competitive coverage of the route is determined by unification of sacred sites of Bukhara and Samarkand with training and cultural-communicative modules, which enhances the value of tourist product as well as its attractiveness.

The more efficient use of this route will to a great extent determine the success of its implementation, depending on standardization of service management, sustainability of Bukhara-Samarkand's transport and logistic channels, and systematic brand promotion including digital channels.

Create a digital support for the route (Mobile App/Digital Guide) with multilingual content, offline navigation, audio guide, QR marking of objects, online booking and feedback analytics.

Approve operational standards for the implementation of tours: rule on times of visits, quality checklists, requirements for guides and partner company providers, package rates in packs for groups at different prices.

Strengthen the Bukhara-Samarkand transport, logistics and marketing chain: meet on sustainable routes for transport and find hours of work, service points along them were created in a single brand and promoted the routeway to concentrate through special activities and partnership channels. Route “Ziyarah on the path of Imam al-Bukhari” is a universal novelty pilgrimage product that brings together GE in Bukhara and Samarkand to educational and cultural-interactive modules. The existence of three-day format for immediate implementation and economic calculations allow readying the product for commercialization, scaling in groups. Topics for additional work are: digital support of the route (mobile application), improved links in transport and logistics, development of consistent times when it is good to visit and branding.

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