



THE ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF HANDICRAFTS AND MUSEUM-WORKSHOPS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL TOURISM (on the Example of the Rishtan School of Ceramics)

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Abstract

This article examines the role of tourism in the socio-economic life of the country and the importance of handicrafts in the development of this sector, with particular attention to the Rishtan school of ceramics and the museum-workshops of the Fergana Valley. Furthermore, the paper discusses the opportunities provided by the state for the development of handicrafts and tourism, as well as the contributions of master potters who play an active role in advancing the sector.

Key words: Rishtan, tourism, crafts, pottery, museum-workshops, artifact.

Introduction

Tourism is one of the most rapidly developing, socially and economically significant, and highly profitable sectors of the global economy. Many countries around the world are paying special attention to developing their national economies through tourism. In this regard, France currently leads the global tourism industry. The United Kingdom, Germany, and Italy in Europe, as well as Thailand, Turkey, and China in Asia, occupy high positions in world rankings as



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countries visited by the largest number of tourists. In these countries, tourism destinations attract visitors not only with their historical cities, ancient handicraft traditions, national gastronomy, and natural parks, but also with their modern tourist attractions.

Tourism infrastructure, while being a lucrative sector, also strengthens international relations and promotes cultural exchange among different nations. Uzbekistan is considered one of the cradles of human civilization. The country is home to the ancient sites of Teshiktosh, Selungur, Obirahmat, Afrosiyob, and Varakhsha, and the regions where the ancient states of the Kushans, Ancient Khorezm, Bactria, Sogd, and Kang existed. Every region of Uzbekistan possesses unique tourism potential. After gaining independence, the nation created distinctive tourism brands for each region, city, and district.

During the years of independence, all necessary legal and regulatory documents for the development of the tourism industry were adopted, and this process continues to evolve [2]. Currently, the historical destinations and cultural heritage sites of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva remain the leading tourism centers of the country. In 2023, Uzbekistan welcomed 6.6 million foreign tourists, representing a 26.6% increase compared to 2022. In 2024, the number of international visitors exceeded 10 million for the first time [3]. Tourism and service infrastructure in the regions is developing at a very fast pace.

Today, tourism is advancing globally across several directions such as historical tourism, ecological tourism, cultural tourism, and gastronomic tourism. In the context of modern globalization, handicraft products have become not only a part of cultural heritage but also export goods of economic significance. Moreover, the integration of handicrafts with the tourism sector enables these products to enter international markets. In particular, the harmony between handicrafts and tourism–excursion activities contributes to preserving, developing, and internationally promoting national culture. Handicrafts are one of the most significant sectors reflecting national culture and historical heritage. The traditional handicraft products of every nation serve as important indicators of its cultural uniqueness.

Since the 2nd century BCE, the Great Silk Road played an important role in the trade of handicraft products. In the Middle Ages, goods produced in the Eastern



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countries—steel in the Arab Caliphate, silk, porcelain, and paper in Central Asia and China—were highly valued in European markets. In India, fine textiles were produced from cotton; in China, looms for weaving silk fabrics emerged; and in China and Central Asia, glassmaking technologies continued to improve. In the 9th–10th centuries, major handicraft centers appeared in Central Asia. Silk and textile production, carpet weaving (Urgench, Shosh), silk manufacturing (Merv), copper and iron weaponry and tools (Fergana), silk products such as Margilon atlas and adras fabrics, and glassware production (Bukhara) flourished. The Mongol invasion in the 13th century severely damaged the development of handicrafts. However, the establishment of the Timurid state and favorable socio-economic conditions later had a positive impact on the revival of handicraft production [4, 337].

Museums play an important role in the exhibition and promotion of handicraft products. Today, the world is home to many specialized museums, among which the Palace Museum in Beijing stands out with its large collection of ceramics. The museum contains 697,490 exhibits, 25,555 of which are ceramic items [5]. In addition, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York occupy leading positions in terms of the size of their ceramic collections. It has become a tradition for enterprises or workshops producing handicrafts to establish small museums within their studios or nearby locations showcasing their products. This serves not only as a space for promoting and marketing their goods, but also transforms the museum into a unique tourist destination.

In Uzbekistan, there are regions specialized in various types of handicrafts, and these areas are among the main destinations frequently visited by tourists. Margilan is renowned for its silk fabrics (atlas, adras), Bukhara and Samarkand for gold embroidery, Chust for knife-making, Surkhandarya for embroidery, and Rishton for ceramics—each becoming the brand identity of their respective regions. Today, Rishton district of Fergana region has become not only Uzbekistan's but the entire Central Asian region's center of ceramic production. In recent years, ceramics—particularly Rishton ceramics, which represent an important branch of traditional handicrafts—have attracted considerable attention from art historians, ethnographers, and historians. Similarly, the number of



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tourists visiting this region specifically for its ceramic tradition has been steadily increasing. This, in turn, contributes to the socio-economic development of the area and to improving the living standards of its population. The development of tourism also plays a vital role in addressing regional employment issues. According to statistical data, every 20 foreign tourists visiting a country help create one direct job in the tourism sector and two additional jobs in related sectors of the national economy. At the same time, tourism positively influences the development of local regions as well as the trade of agricultural, local industrial, and national handicraft products. Tourism is an essential component of many national economies, ensuring employment, hotel occupancy, restaurant activity, entertainment services, and the influx of foreign currency. The internal economic nature of tourism requires visitors to spend a certain amount of money in the destination they visit. Tourism is based on the exploitation of local tourism resources, thereby expanding the region's or country's opportunities to generate economic income.

Significant attention to the development of folk applied arts and handicrafts has been raised to a new level since 2017, and several legal documents related to the sector have been adopted by the government [6]. On September 10–15, 2019, the first International Handicraft Festival was held in Kokand under the auspices of UNESCO. The festival, organized every two years under the leadership of the World Crafts Council, awarded the city of Kokand the honorary title of the “World Crafts City” in 2019. This became a high-level international recognition of Uzbek folk applied arts. Within the framework of the festival, a scientific-practical conference titled “Prospects for the Development of Handicrafts and Folk Applied Arts” was also held. Starting from 2023, the first “Ceramics Forum” has also been scheduled to take place in the Rishton district as part of the International Handicraft Festival [7].

The choice of Kokand as the venue for this global event was not accidental. Historically, Kokand has been one of the cultural centers where handicrafts have flourished. Various branches of handicrafts and folk applied arts—paper production, woodcarving, metalwork, and ceramics—have reached a high level of development in this region. Master-apprentice traditions and hereditary artisan



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dynasties have preserved and transmitted these crafts from generation to generation.

In 2020, the Presidency of the World Crafts Council – Asia Pacific Region for the years 2021–2024 was awarded to Uzbekistan. Relocating the regional office of this international organization to Uzbekistan and holding prestigious events in the country have greatly contributed to the further development and increasing recognition of handicrafts. At the second “International Handicraft Festival,” 200 foreign participants from 70 countries took part. In addition, participation of 100 ceramists from 14 regions of the republic was planned. Within the framework of the festival, a series of events have been organized, including ceremonial parades of participants, exhibitions and fairs of local and foreign artisans’ products, a scientific-practical conference, press conferences on the festival’s organization and outcomes, fashion weeks, folk festivities, performances by cultural departments, culinary competitions, and master classes by local and international artisans [8].

One of the important aspects of organizing handicraft festivals is that international exhibitions and festivals provide an effective platform for widely promoting local artisans’ products and expanding their access to global markets. At the same time, such events allow foreign and local visitors to become acquainted with the history, national culture, customs, and traditions of the Uzbek people.

In Rishton district, in order to develop both domestic and international tourism, special tourist neighborhoods and streets have been established, and existing opportunities for attracting tourists are being utilized. As of 2023, tourism development programs have been created in 12 citizens’ assemblies (mahallas) of the district. Within the concept of establishing a “tourism street,” Burhoniddin Roshidoni Street in the A. Navoiy mahalla was selected as the main tourist street. Along this street, facilities have been developed to enable tourists to purchase national handicrafts and souvenirs, enjoy traditional cuisine through gastronomic services, and spend their leisure time in an engaging and culturally enriching environment. The area possesses high tourism and gastronomic potential, and creating conditions for meaningful and enjoyable tourist experiences has been identified as a priority goal.



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Many major cities around the world are known for their famous streets. For instance, Broadway and Wall Street in New York, the Champs-Élysées in Paris, the Hollywood Walk of Fame, and Barcelona's La Rambla boulevard are some of the world's most visited tourist destinations. Establishing similar iconic streets and locations is essential for enhancing tourism potential.

In Rishton, several project initiatives and development programs have been prepared by the regional tourism department and the district administration to increase the attractiveness of Burhoniddin Roshidoni Street, expand the types of services offered, raise household incomes, and create new jobs. The street has been beautified with landscape trees and flowers, shops for the sale of souvenirs and handicrafts, stalls offering national and international cuisine, seating areas, and separate lanes for pedestrians and cyclists. In addition, the street is illuminated with decorative lighting on both sides, making it accessible and comfortable for visitors even at night.

In Uzbekistan, with the aim of preserving national heritage and developing cultural tourism, the Mamadali Topivoldiyev mahalla of the district was officially granted the status of a "tourist mahalla" in July 2025. At the opening ceremony of the Tourist Mahalla, the head of the World Crafts Center, Saad al Kadumi, praised the contribution of Rishton ceramics and local artisans to national tourism and handicraft development. During the visit, members of the delegation familiarized themselves with the Crafts Center and the home-workshops of several ceramists in the area. The newly constructed International Crafts Center is also located in this mahalla. The center consists of 20 two-story ceramic workshops, where the ground floors house studios and retail shops, while the upper floors provide residential space for artisans and their families. The workshops belong to renowned master ceramists who have been engaged in pottery for many years.

The favorable conditions created by the government for master ceramists are yielding positive results. At the Alisher Nazirov workshop located within the center, a six-room guest house is also available, providing tourists with the opportunity to observe and learn about the ceramic production process.

At the request of Rishton master ceramists, on January 28, 2025, a government resolution titled **"On Establishing the Museum of the History of Traditional**



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Rishton Ceramics” was adopted. Previously, in 1991, the Museum of Ancient Varakhsha and the History of Ceramics had been established, and it is currently located inside the Nodir Devonbegi khanaqah in Bukhara city [9].

Museums are among the most frequently visited destinations by tourists and play an important role in the development of both domestic and foreign tourism. For example, the **Louvre in Paris**, the **British Museum in London**, and the **State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg** serve not only to promote tourism but also to introduce visitors to the host country’s history, traditions, cultural heritage, and customs.

The first home museum in Rishton was established in the Chinnigaron mahalla at the residence of the renowned master ceramist, People’s Artist of Uzbekistan, Ibrohim Komilov. Today, several artisans have set up home museums and workshops, attracting tourists from various countries around the world.

Among the ceramists who have introduced Rishton pottery to the world, master Alisher Nazirov welcomes numerous visitors annually to his workshop museum. He personally acquaints guests with the museum, the workshop’s activities, and the history of ceramics, explaining the production technologies of Rishton pottery and its distinctive features compared to other ceramic schools. The museum collection includes artifacts created in the traditional Rishton style, as well as works by renowned master ceramists. Most foreign visitors to the museum are artists, researchers, and enthusiasts of traditional craftsmanship. The fact that the ceramic products are made entirely from natural materials, free from chemical additives, and coated with an alkaline glaze leaves a strong impression on tourists. Works created by A. Nazirov have been included in the collections of the **Museum of the Orient in Moscow**, museums in **Saint Petersburg**, and several other foreign museums.

Another significant home museum in Rishton is located in the Jalloyer village and was established by the master commonly known as “**Tohir Sopol**”—Tohir Haydarov. The museum was officially opened on August 27, 2017, and has become one of the district’s key tourist destinations. Today’s demands require artisans not only to master their craft but also to demonstrate creativity and innovation. This enhances the appeal, popularity, and marketability of their products. The ceramic works in T. Haydarov’s workshop-museum showcase such



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creativity; they reflect themes of history, literature, poetry, religion, art, national identity, and traditional customs. Using a simple needle, he creates intricate engraved designs. Every tourist visiting this museum not only views ceramic works but also gains broader insight into the country's history, literature, and art. Another ceramic home museum in Rishton belongs to **Sharofiddin Yusupov**, an academican of the Academy of Arts of Uzbekistan and an Honored Artist of Uzbekistan. The museum features the finest ceramic works created by the master over the years and was opened to the public in October 2024. Here, master classes for local and foreign tourists are held, and visitors can directly observe the production process. Additionally, the museum includes a unique library, where visitors can explore literature on fine arts, ceramics, and the artist's creative works. As the seventh-generation representative of the Rishton ceramic school, Sh. Yusupov's creations are preserved in some of the world's most renowned museums, including the **Louvre in Paris**, the **Hermitage in Saint Petersburg**, and museums of Oriental Studies and World Cultures in Moscow. His works have also been exhibited internationally in countries such as Japan, the USA, Russia, Italy, and Turkey [10].

Another museum-workshop located on Ar-Roshidoniyy Tourism Street is "**Art Ceramik**", owned by ceramist-artist Rustam Usmonov. The exterior of the museum is decorated with blue tiles characteristic of Central Asian architecture. Most of the ceramic items produced in this workshop are purchased by foreign tourists and are primarily made for export.

In order to further develop national tourism and entrepreneurship, a museum was established in 2012 under the "Koron-Plus" enterprise in Rishton. This museum, decorated in a national architectural style with traditional tiles, attracts tourists from more than fifty countries every year. Among the museum exhibits are ceramic products featuring the iconic blue-turquoise tones unique to Rishton, as well as modern interpretations infused with national motifs in various colors. The museum is listed as an official UNESCO tourist destination.

Since 2017, Rishton ceramics has entered a new stage of development. Owing to the opportunities provided to entrepreneurs, a large museum-workshop named "Shokir Mingboshi," based on a major ceramics business, was launched in the Alisher Navoiy mahalla of the district. Today, this museum-workshop has become



one of the primary destinations for both local and foreign admirers of art and ceramics. The museum houses more than one thousand types of ceramic products. In conclusion, handicrafts and museum-workshops play a crucial role in the development of both domestic and international tourism. As a result of the government's attention to tourism development, several museum-workshops and home museums have been established in Rishton. This, in turn, has enabled artisans to fully showcase their products, expand promotional opportunities, and strengthen their business prospects in a market-economy environment.

Home museums and museum-workshops have become key destinations for local and international tourists visiting Rishton. Tourism has also contributed to the expansion of several service sectors, including hotels, gastronomic services, and leisure facilities.

In recent years, the growth of ceramic production in Rishton, the increase in export volume, the steady rise in the number of local and foreign tourists visiting the district, and the expansion of service sectors catering to them have all contributed to effectively addressing employment-related issues in the region.

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