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DEVELOPING EVENING TOURISM IN

BUKHARA REGION: CHALLENGES, PROSPECTS, AND STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS

ABSTRACT

This article presents a systematic scholarly examination of the prospects, structural impediments, and resolution strategies pertaining to the advancement of evening tourism in the Bukhara region of Uzbekistan. The theoretical foundation of this study draws upon large-scale empirical research conducted in China regarding nocturnal tourism safety (Huang et al., 2023) as well as scholarly contributions addressing the cultivation of after-dark tourism experiences in India (Dhakad & IITTM, 2018). The findings confirm that Bukhara's exceptional historical heritage, favourable climatic conditions, and pre-existing tourism infrastructure collectively constitute a robust basis for the sector's development. Nonetheless, the analysis identifies persistent challenges including safety-related vulnerabilities, regulatory constraints, insufficient public awareness among residents, and deficiencies in nighttime lighting infrastructure. The article proposes a multi-dimensional framework encompassing policy reforms, infrastructural enhancements, and community engagement measures as an integrated approach to overcoming these obstacles.

Keywords: evening tourism, historical monuments, public safety, 4M theory, tourism risk management, social network analysis (SNA).

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, evening and nocturnal tourism has emerged as one of the most dynamically expanding segments of the global tourism industry. Broadly defined as any form of tourist activity conducted between 18:00 and 06:00, this sector transcends its role as a supplement to daytime experiences and has progressively become a strategic instrument for stimulating urban economic vitality and generating employment opportunities.

Bukhara, one of Central Asia's most ancient urban centres with over two millennia of documented history, possesses a collection of extraordinary heritage sites inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, including the Kalyan Minaret, the Po-i-Kalyan ensemble, the Ark Citadel, and the Lyabi-Hauz architectural complex. These monuments attract tens of thousands of domestic and international visitors during daylight hours. Yet by nightfall, these majestic landmarks and the historic alleyways surrounding them largely remain deserted. This temporal gap represents a substantial and as yet underutilised opportunity for the development of after-dark tourism experiences.

International precedents demonstrate that renowned evening tourism destinations such as Las Vegas (USA), Hong Kong, Singapore, and Thailand's major urban centres contribute significantly to their respective local economies. Similarly, the experience of Indian cities like Jaipur and Indore—where evening illumination programmes, nocturnal markets, and cultural events have been successfully implemented—offers relevant insights applicable to Bukhara's context.

Nevertheless, evening tourism introduces its own set of distinctive risks. A comprehensive study analysing 8,787 adverse incidents in China found that nocturnal periods witness a concentration of hazardous occurrences: critical accidents accounted for 53.19% of cases, public health incidents for 28.81%, social security incidents for 9.05%, and natural disaster-related events for 8.95%. A proactive risk mitigation framework must therefore accompany any strategy to develop this sector in Bukhara.

The primary objective of this article is to conduct a scholarly assessment of evening tourism development opportunities in Bukhara, identify the prevailing structural barriers, and formulate evidence-based recommendations for overcoming them.

Tourism development has been elevated to a priority on Uzbekistan's national policy agenda. The comprehensive reform process initiated in 2017 produced a sharp increase in inbound tourist arrivals, rising from 2.7 million international visitors in 2017 to 6.7 million in 2019. Following a period of deceleration during the 2020–2022 pandemic, growth resumed, with annual international arrivals surpassing the seven million threshold from 2023 onward.

Bukhara region occupies a distinguished position within this upward trend. As the custodian of one of Uzbekistan's four UNESCO World Heritage Sites (inscribed in 1993), the city annually receives in excess of 500,000 international visitors. In 2025, Uzbekistan as a whole recorded 11.7 million tourist arrivals, with projections for 2026 indicating a further increase to between 12 and 14 million. According to data compiled by the Bukhara Regional Tourism Administration and the national Tourism Committee, 2025 marked an unprecedented surge in visitor flows to the Bukhara region. The figure represented a 46.8% increase (approximately 3.7 million additional visitors) compared to 2024, and Bukhara captured a substantial share of this growth, consolidating its standing as a principal destination for cultural and heritage tourism.

Peak performance indicators merit particular attention. During the International Contemporary Art Biennale held between 5 September and 15 October 2025, the Bukhara region received 1,224,200 visitors, comprising 570,800 international and 653,400 domestic tourists—a figure 1.6 times higher than the corresponding period in the previous year, demonstrating the impact of strategic event marketing. The economic contribution of this influx was reflected in services rendered to international visitors, amounting to USD 155.6 million over this six-week period, itself 1.6 times greater than the prior year's equivalent. Hotel occupancy rates across the region fluctuated between 84% and 92% during this interval, signalling that accommodation infrastructure was operating at or near its designed capacity.

Despite this impressive visitor volume, the average length of stay in Bukhara remains constrained at 1.5 to 2 days. The absence of compelling evening activities prompts many visitors to depart for the next destination—Samarkand or Khiva—thereby preventing the city from fully realising its economic potential.

Were evening tourism to be meaningfully developed, it is estimated that the average duration of stay could be extended to three or four days. This would effectively double per-visitor revenue and could generate an additional USD 50–80 million annually. Furthermore, the development of evening tourism infrastructure would stimulate employment across the restaurant, transport, and hospitality sectors, directly improving the livelihoods of local residents.

The Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 5 January 2019, on further measures for tourism development, designated the enhancement of tourism infrastructure, service quality improvement, and the creation of diversified tourism products as state policy priorities. Uzbekistan's Tourism Development Strategy to 2030, adopted in 2023, explicitly identified the diversification of evening tourism products as a distinct strategic objective. To date, however, no dedicated scholarly investigation focused on the systematic development of evening tourism using Bukhara region as a case study has been undertaken. This article seeks to provide the scientific foundation for that policy mandate.

A review of the international literature on evening tourism reveals that existing research has concentrated predominantly on East and Southeast Asia (China, South Korea, Thailand), Europe (Hungary, Spain), and the United States. Central Asia—and Uzbekistan's historic cities of Bukhara, Samarkand, and Khiva in particular—remain largely unexamined within the nocturnal tourism research paradigm. This article therefore represents a pioneering attempt to establish the scholarly foundations of evening tourism development for the Central Asian context, while the application of 4M theory to a historically and culturally significant destination in this region constitutes a theoretical contribution in its own right.

The Bukhara Regional Governor's Office and the city's tourism administration are reportedly developing a programme to position Bukhara as 'Uzbekistan's evening tourism capital' by 2030. This article is designed to serve as the scientific rationale and methodological reference document for that initiative.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analytical frameworks. Secondary data analysis served as the primary methodological basis, integrating available primary data pertaining to Bukhara. Sources consulted included publications from MDPI—International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, UNESCO, the Uzbekistan Ministry of Tourism, and the Bukhara Regional Administration, as well as materials drawn from the Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar academic databases. The following analytical methods were employed:

- SWOT Analysis — to assess Bukhara's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the context of evening tourism;
- Comparative Analysis — to examine international precedents in relation to Bukhara's specific conditions;
- 4M Theory-based Risk Analysis — to systematically classify risk factors inherent in evening tourism;
- Literature Synthesis — to derive overarching conclusions from existing scholarly contributions.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Within contemporary tourism science, evening tourism—variously referred to as night tourism or noctourism—has crystallised into a distinct scholarly research domain, encompassing all tourist activities conducted between 18:00 and 06:00. According to the framework advanced by Huang et al. (2023), evening tourism is understood as an organic extension of daytime tourist activity, offering visitors a qualitatively distinct atmospheric environment, heightened sensory engagement, and opportunities for cultural enrichment beyond what is accessible during daylight hours.

In the international academic literature, this phenomenon appears under a range of terminological designations—noctourism, nocturnal tourism, night-time economy, and evening tourism—each reflecting a particular dimension of this multifaceted concept. This terminological diversity underscores both the complex nature of evening tourism and the variety of scholarly perspectives applied to its study.

Existing literature on evening tourism encompasses several principal research directions, as systematised by Huang et al. (2023):

- Psychological-behavioural direction: examining tourists' perceived value systems, travel motivations, and satisfaction indicators;
- Economic-behavioural direction: investigating behavioural intentions such as willingness to pay and revisit intention, thereby assessing the long-term economic sustainability of evening tourism;
- Destination attachment direction: exploring tourists' emotional bonds with specific destinations and processes of destination identification.

Evening tourism encompasses a distinctive array of products and activities, which may be organised into the following categories:

- Cultural-historical tourism: nocturnal visits to heritage sites, archaeological attractions, and illuminated architectural monuments;
- Gastronomic tourism: night markets, culinary festivals, and guided food-tasting itineraries;
- Entertainment tourism: cultural performances, theatrical and musical events, and open-air festivals;
- Experiential-ecotourism: night nature excursions, astrotourism, and underwater night diving.

At the global level, evening tourism is expanding rapidly across North America, Europe, Australia, and the Asia-Pacific region. Cities such as Las Vegas, Hong Kong, Singapore, and various Thai urban centres have attained worldwide recognition as leading nocturnal tourism hubs (Dhakad & IITTM, 2018), attracting millions of domestic and international visitors annually through night markets, artisan showcases, interactive cultural events, and gastronomic experiences.

In Asia, India in particular has recognised substantial potential in this sector. Research by Dhakad and the Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management indicates that the introduction of nocturnal illumination programmes at historic sites in cities such as Jaipur and Indore, the formalisation of night markets such as Indore's Sarafa Bazaar, and the organisation of cultural events have significantly expanded visitor numbers. This experience offers directly applicable practical lessons for Central Asian cities, including Bukhara.

Evening tourism increasingly performs a central role in modern urban economies. As Huang et al. (2023) note, it fulfils the following economic functions: first, it activates consumer demand in markets where daytime tourist expenditures are supplemented by evening spending, positively contributing to urban GDP; second, it generates new business opportunities, creating employment in nocturnal restaurants, entertainment venues, transport services, and security operations; third, it accelerates cities' transition toward a 24-hour economy, enabling more efficient utilisation of urban infrastructure.

The rapid growth of evening tourism has simultaneously generated characteristic safety challenges. Data cited by Huang et al. (2023) indicate that between 2010 and 2019, China recorded 28,800 nocturnal tourism safety incidents resulting in 41,200 casualties. This statistical reality emphasises the necessity of placing safety considerations at the centre of any evening tourism development strategy. Temporal analysis reveals that the greatest concentration of incidents occurs between 18:00 and 22:00, with peak frequency recorded at 18:00 and 20:00. A notable increase in sudden illness episodes is observed between midnight and 02:00, a pattern directly linked to the dynamics of physical and cognitive fatigue among visitors during late-night hours.

The 4M theoretical framework—comprising Man, Management, Medium, and Machine—is widely applied to systematically account for the causal factors underlying evening tourism incidents. Based on comprehensive empirical research conducted by Huang et al. (2023), the distribution of risk factors is as follows (see Table 1):

Table 1. Application of 4M Theory to the Systematic Classification of Evening Tourism Incident Causes

Risk Factor Category	Share (%)	Principal Components
Personnel risk (Man hazard)	33.97	Professional preparedness, situational alertness, stress tolerance
Managerial risk (Management hazard)	24.29	Regulatory frameworks, monitoring systems, emergency preparedness
Environmental risk (Medium hazard)	24.16	Lighting conditions, surface quality, meteorological factors
Equipment risk (Machine hazard)	17.58	Technical reliability, power supply continuity, navigation systems

These data indicate that more than half of all risk factors are attributable to managerial and human-factor dimensions, underscoring the strategic imperative of investing in qualified personnel training and the implementation of effective management systems.

Huang et al. (2023) identify two primary mechanisms specific to evening tourism risks:

- Sensory-cognitive factor: the physiological reduction of visual acuity at night, compounded by cumulative physical and mental fatigue from daytime activities, heightens visitors' vulnerability to concealed hazards and reduces their reaction speed.

- Social-behavioural factor: risk-taking behaviour observed among young adults in nocturnal venues—including excessive alcohol consumption and illicit substance use—statistically and significantly elevates the probability of injury, illness, and sudden fatalities.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Evening tourism constitutes one of the most promising avenues for enhancing the tourist attractiveness of a region and diversifying its service offering. While Bukhara's rich cultural-historical heritage and climatic characteristics provide a compelling foundation for sector development, a rigorous examination of both internal and external factors influencing the effective mobilisation of available resources is warranted. The SWOT analysis presented in Table 2 systematically charts the region's evening tourism potential, the infrastructural constraints impeding its realisation, and the strategic opportunities and latent risks associated with sector modernisation.

Table 2. SWOT Analysis of Evening Tourism in Bukhara Region

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNESCO-listed heritage monuments • Arid and temperate climate (favourable for summer evenings) • Rich national cultural and culinary traditions • Existing tourism infrastructure • Established international visitor flows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate nighttime lighting infrastructure • Limited evening services and restaurant provision • Low awareness among local residents regarding evening tourism • Insufficient evening public transport services
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicability of Samarkand's precedent • Emerging market for cultural and gastronomic evening tourism • Astrotourism potential (favourable skies) • Extending average visitor length of stay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of safety incidents • Legal restrictions on evening access to heritage monuments • Light pollution (threat to astrotourism) • Difficulties in attracting foreign investment

Drawing on international experience and Bukhara's distinctive characteristics, the following evening tourism directions are assessed as the most strategically promising:

The first direction—historical and cultural evening tours—would centre on professionally illuminated guided walking tours of Bukhara's heritage sites, theatrical 'living history' performances featuring actors in period costume, and evening historical spectacles at the Ark Citadel and other key monuments. The experience of Jaipur, where the professional illumination of palaces and fortresses produced a measurable increase in visitor numbers, is directly relevant in this regard (Dhakad & IITM, 2018).

The second direction—national culture and performing arts evenings—would feature traditional Uzbek music and dance performances at Lyabi-Hauz square, presentations of Shashmaqom classical music, and live demonstrations by master calligraphers, embroiderers, and jewellers, thereby rendering Bukhara's intangible cultural heritage accessible to evening visitors.

The third direction—culinary night tourism—would comprise an evening national bazaar, Uzbek cuisine festivals, culinary master classes for visitors, and traditional teahouse tea ceremonies. The precedent of Indore's Sarafa Bazaar demonstrates that exclusively nocturnal markets can become significant tourist attractions in their own right (Dhakad & IITM, 2018).

The fourth direction—astrotourism—draws on Bukhara's proximity to desert terrain and its generally favourable atmospheric conditions, which produce exceptionally clear nocturnal skies. This environment is well suited to organised stargazing evenings with telescope facilities, as well as camping and open-fire events beyond the city's boundaries.

4.1 Comparative Analysis: International Barriers and Bukhara's Context

A comparative examination of the international literature—particularly the experiences of China and India—yields findings of direct practical relevance to Bukhara's evening tourism development. Structural challenges observed in these precedent cases closely resemble conditions present in the Bukhara context, particularly regarding safety provisions, regulatory frameworks, and public awareness. Table 3 presents the results of this comparative analysis.

Table 3. Comparative Analysis of Evening Tourism Barriers: International Experience and the Bukhara Context

Barrier Type	Parallel in International Experience	Manifestation in Bukhara
Safety	Critical accidents 53.19%, social security incidents 9.05% (China)	Insufficient lighting and security provision during evening hours
Legal constraints	Heritage authority restrictions on evening access to protected sites (India)	Limited operating hours at cultural heritage sites in the evening
Infrastructure	Correlation between deficient nighttime lighting and incident rates (China)	Inadequate lighting and transport around heritage sites
Awareness	Personnel risk factor at 33.97% (China)	Low level of knowledge among residents and local businesses

The comparative analysis confirms that barriers to evening tourism development in Bukhara extend beyond external infrastructure and are intrinsically linked to internal governance and safety management systems. In particular, indicators related to safety standards and personnel competence point to the need for deeper systematic examination of operational risks. To address these challenges and create a secure environment at tourism sites, a comprehensive situational assessment is essential.

Applying the 4M theoretical framework (Man, Machine, Medium, Management) to Bukhara's context on the basis of Huang et al. (2023):

- **Man (Personnel):** The finding that personnel-related risk factors account for 33.97% of all incidents in China underscores the critical need for visitor safety literacy and a robust security culture among staff. Should safety awareness remain deficient in Bukhara, evening tourism incidents are likely to increase.
- **Machine (Equipment):** Equipment-related risk at 17.58% is particularly salient for Bukhara given the underdevelopment of nighttime lighting infrastructure. Chinese data show that incident rates rise following the deactivation of infrastructure after 21:00—a pattern that warrants dedicated attention during the same period in Bukhara.
- **Medium (Environment):** Environmental risk at 24.16% is relevant to Bukhara's summer context: elevated temperatures (heatstroke risk), periodic strong winds (dust storms), and occasional rainfall may render evening events hazardous.
- **Management:** Managerial risk at 24.29% reflects the attenuation of oversight and patrol intensity during evening hours, highlighting the necessity of strengthening police presence and security services in Bukhara during this period.

4.2 International Precedents and Their Applicability to Bukhara

Samarkand's Registan Square evening illumination programme has already demonstrated considerable success. Bukhara is well positioned to adopt an analogous approach and may, in fact, benefit from a competitive advantage owing to its broader and more intimate historic environment. Unlike the nocturnal markets of Hong Kong and Singapore, a Bukhara evening market could be

positioned as a uniquely cultural experience by integrating traditional Uzbek handicraft demonstrations and national cuisine presentations.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Synthesising the findings of this study, the following principal conclusions may be drawn:

Bukhara region possesses among the most favourable conditions in Uzbekistan for the development of evening tourism. Its UNESCO-inscribed heritage monuments, temperate climate, rich cultural legacy, and established international visitor base collectively constitute a strong foundation for sector growth.

The average length of visitor stay remains constrained at 1.5–2 days, representing a missed economic opportunity. The development of evening tourism infrastructure holds the potential to extend this to 3–4 days, substantially increasing per-visitor revenue and generating an estimated additional USD 50–80 million in annual income.

International evidence—particularly from China and India—demonstrates that safety, legal and regulatory frameworks, awareness, and infrastructure are the four primary barrier categories that must be systematically addressed in order for evening tourism to succeed.

Application of the 4M theory to the Bukhara context reveals that personnel-related (33.97%) and managerial (24.29%) risk factors together account for over half of all identified risks, indicating that capacity-building and governance improvements are at least as important as physical infrastructure development.

On the basis of these findings, the following strategic recommendations are advanced:

- Develop and implement a dedicated Evening Tourism Development Programme for Bukhara Region to 2030, designating Bukhara as Uzbekistan's primary evening tourism destination;
- Introduce professional illumination of key heritage sites—Po-i-Kalyon, the Ark Citadel, and Lyabi-Hauz—and extend their authorised operating hours to 22:00;
- Establish a permanent evening cultural and gastronomic zone in the historic district, incorporating national cuisine events, live music and performing arts, and artisan demonstrations;
- Strengthen security and patrol coverage across heritage zones during evening hours, and introduce a dedicated tourist safety service with multilingual capability;
- Launch a comprehensive public awareness and community engagement programme to involve local businesses and residents as active stakeholders in the evening tourism ecosystem;
- Develop astrotourism infrastructure in areas surrounding the city, exploiting Bukhara's proximity to the desert and its favourable atmospheric conditions for nocturnal sky observation;
- Establish dedicated evening tourism transport links—shuttle buses and guided walking routes—connecting the principal heritage sites.

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