

AN ORGANISATIONAL-ECONOMIC MECHANISM FOR DEVELOPING MICE TOURISM THROUGH FAMILY ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN UZBEKISTAN

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Background: Uzbekistan has established ambitious targets for its tourism sector, including attracting 15.8 million foreign visitors and generating USD 4 billion in tourism export revenues. Achieving these targets requires addressing a structurally significant challenge: the pronounced seasonality of tourist arrivals, which concentrates economic activity and employment in a narrow peak period while leaving substantial human and physical resources underutilised for the remainder of the year. **Objective:** This study investigates the potential of MICE tourism (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) — pursued through family-based entrepreneurial ventures — as a strategic mechanism for extending the tourism season, expanding employment, and strengthening the competitiveness of Uzbekistan's tourism sector in international markets. **Methods:** The study draws on a review of national tourism statistics covering visitor arrival patterns from 2016 to 2024, an analytical synthesis of domestic and international scholarly literature on business and MICE tourism, and the development of an original organisational-economic mechanism for promoting family-based MICE tourism enterprises in Uzbekistan. **Results:** Seasonal analysis confirmed that visitor arrivals fall markedly from October to March, identifying a clear off-peak window during which demand-side diversification is most needed. Review of the literature established that MICE tourism — encompassing corporate meetings, incentive travel programmes, professional conferences, and trade exhibitions — is widely recognised as a season-independent form of travel uniquely suited to generating year-round demand. The paper presents a structured organisational-economic mechanism through which family enterprises can be systematically integrated into MICE tourism delivery, coordinated by government regulatory bodies and supported by targeted incentive frameworks. **Discussion:** MICE tourism represents a high-value, low-seasonality segment that aligns well with Uzbekistan's strategic objective of diversifying its tourism product and increasing its share of international business travel markets. Family-based operators, when properly organised and supported, are well positioned to serve the accommodation, catering, excursion, and logistical needs of MICE visitors. **Conclusion:** Developing a coherent organisational-economic framework for family entrepreneurship in MICE tourism is a viable and necessary pathway toward resolving Uzbekistan's tourism seasonality problem and creating stable, year-round employment in the sector.

Keywords: MICE tourism; family entrepreneurship; business tourism; tourism seasonality; Uzbekistan; organisational-economic mechanism; labour market.

1. INTRODUCTION

The global tourism industry is widely recognised as one of the most dynamic drivers of economic growth, employment, and foreign exchange earnings. For transition economies, and particularly for countries in Central Asia, developing a robust and diversified tourism sector represents both a significant economic opportunity and a complex policy challenge. Uzbekistan, endowed with extraordinary historical heritage, diverse natural landscapes, and a rich tapestry of cultural traditions, has rightly identified tourism as a strategic pillar of its national development agenda.

In recent years, Uzbekistan has pursued an ambitious programme of tourism liberalisation and promotion, resulting in a rapid rise in international visitor numbers. The country has set concrete targets: attracting 15.8 million foreign tourists and generating USD 4 billion in tourism export

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revenues are among the headline goals guiding sectoral planning. Achieving these targets requires not merely increasing the volume of visitors but also fundamentally transforming the structure and quality of tourism services — expanding their geographic reach, deepening their economic impact within local communities, and broadening their appeal across different traveller segments and seasons.

One of the most persistent structural weaknesses in Uzbekistan's tourism sector is its pronounced seasonality. Analysis of visitor arrival data from 2016 to 2024 reveals a consistent pattern: tourist flows peak during the spring and summer months of April through September, while the autumn-winter period from October through March sees substantially lower levels of activity. This seasonal concentration creates inefficiencies across the entire tourism value chain. Hotels, restaurants, transport operators, guides, and other service providers face alternating periods of acute overdemand and prolonged underutilisation. The financial volatility this creates is particularly damaging for small and family-based enterprises, which lack the capital reserves to sustain themselves through extended lean periods.

Addressing tourism seasonality is therefore not merely a technical planning question; it is a prerequisite for building a stable, equitable, and internationally competitive tourism economy. Seasonal fluctuations depress wages, discourage investment in skills and infrastructure, and limit the sector's capacity to provide reliable year-round employment — a goal of central importance to Uzbekistan's broader social development objectives.

Among the various strategies available for extending the tourism season, the promotion of business travel — and specifically MICE tourism (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) — has gained increasing recognition internationally as one of the most effective and sustainable approaches. MICE activities are, by their nature, largely independent of seasonal weather patterns. Corporate meetings, professional conferences, incentive travel programmes, and trade fairs are scheduled according to business and organisational calendars, not tourist seasons. As a result, MICE tourism has the potential to generate substantial demand during exactly those periods when leisure tourism is at its weakest.

This paper examines the case for developing MICE tourism through family-based entrepreneurship in Uzbekistan and proposes an original organisational-economic mechanism for doing so. It situates this analysis within the broader context of Uzbekistan's labour market dynamics, national tourism policy goals, and the international literature on business tourism — drawing on both Russian-language scholarship and leading Western sources on MICE tourism development.

2. METHODS

2.1 Analytical Approach

This study employs a qualitative-analytical research design, combining three principal methodological elements: statistical analysis of historical tourism data; systematic review of academic and professional literature on business and MICE tourism; and normative institutional analysis leading to the construction of an original organisational-economic mechanism.

2.2 Tourism Seasonality Data

To characterise the seasonal distribution of tourist arrivals in Uzbekistan, the study drew on official visitor statistics for the period 2016–2024. Monthly arrival data were analysed to identify peak and off-peak periods, establish the magnitude of seasonal variation, and define the temporal scope of the problem that MICE tourism is expected to address. This analysis informed the strategic

rationale for promoting season-independent forms of tourism and provided an empirical basis for the proposed intervention framework.

2.3 Literature Review

A structured review of scholarly and applied literature was conducted to clarify the conceptual relationship between business tourism and MICE tourism, examine the definitional debates in the field, and identify best practices in MICE tourism development from comparable international contexts. Sources consulted included Russian-language academic texts — in particular the foundational contributions of Balabanov and Balabanov (1999) and Aleksandrova (2002, 2018) on tourism economics and international tourism — alongside international English-language research, including Davidson and Rogers (2016) on marketing for conferences and business events. Uzbek-language policy documents and national development strategies were also reviewed to ground the analysis in the domestic regulatory context.

2.4 Mechanism Design

Drawing on the findings of the statistical and literature analyses, the study developed an organisational-economic mechanism for promoting family-based MICE tourism entrepreneurship in Uzbekistan. This mechanism was designed according to principles of institutional coherence, stakeholder coordination, and practical implementability. It specifies the roles of central government bodies, local authorities, non-governmental organisations, and family enterprises, and identifies the policy instruments — regulatory, financial, and promotional — required to make the mechanism operational.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Seasonal Patterns in Uzbekistan's Tourism Sector

Analysis of visitor arrival data from 2016 to 2024 confirmed a pronounced and consistent seasonal pattern in Uzbekistan's inbound tourism. The April–September period concentrates the majority of annual visitor flows, driven by favourable climatic conditions and the compatibility of this period with the cultural and heritage tourism activities that dominate Uzbekistan's current tourism product. By contrast, the October–March period — constituting approximately half of the calendar year — records markedly lower visitor volumes.

This seasonal asymmetry has direct and damaging consequences for the tourism labour market. Skilled workers — including tour operators, guides, hospitality staff, specialist drivers, and catering professionals — are typically employed only during the peak season. Labour market theory (Balabanov & Balabanov, 1999) confirms that under conditions of pronounced seasonality, the practical response of employers is not to reduce wages during the off-peak period but to shed staff entirely, as maintaining a year-round workforce is economically untenable. This pattern perpetuates a cycle of intermittent employment, skill loss, and underinvestment in human capital that limits the long-term productivity of the sector.

The data thus establish a clear and quantifiable structural problem: Uzbekistan's tourism season, as currently constituted, is too narrow to support a stable and professionally skilled workforce or to achieve the sector's ambitious growth targets through volume-driven strategies alone.

3.2 Conceptual Framework: Business Tourism and MICE Tourism

The academic literature draws a distinction — contested but analytically useful — between the broader category of business tourism and the more specific segment known as MICE tourism. Business tourism, in its widest sense, encompasses any travel undertaken for professional or

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commercial purposes, where the traveller does not anticipate earning income at the destination. It includes routine corporate travel, client visits, trade missions, and participation in professional events of all kinds.

Within this broader category, MICE tourism constitutes the most structured, high-value, and organisationally complex segment. The term is an acronym for four distinct but related activity types, each of which generates specific service demands and economic multiplier effects:

Meetings (M) — Business meetings, bilateral negotiations, corporate presentations, and professional consultations conducted in a travel context.

Incentives (I) — Motivational and reward travel programmes organised by corporations for employees or business partners, combining professional recognition with leisure and cultural experiences.

Conferences (C) — Large-scale professional gatherings including academic and scientific conferences, industry congresses, international forums, and policy summits.

Exhibitions (E) — Trade fairs, product launches, press tours, festivals, and exhibition events that attract business-oriented participants from multiple sectors and geographies.

As Davidson and Rogers (2016) observe, MICE tourism and business tourism are related but not synonymous concepts: MICE tourism represents the institutionally organised, multi-stakeholder dimension of business travel, characterised by complex logistical requirements, high per-visitor expenditure, and demand patterns driven by organisational rather than individual decision-making. Sorokina (2015) similarly notes that MICE constitutes the largest and most strategically significant segment within the broader business tourism category.

For Uzbekistan's purposes, the critical characteristic of MICE tourism is its seasonal independence. Corporate calendars and professional event schedules operate year-round, with major conferences and exhibitions often deliberately scheduled outside of peak leisure travel periods to avoid logistical bottlenecks. MICE tourism therefore offers a structurally different demand pattern from leisure tourism, making it a natural complement to existing seasonal offerings.

3.3 MICE Tourism as a Strategy for Family Entrepreneurship Development

The development of MICE tourism in Uzbekistan offers particular opportunities for family-based enterprises, which currently constitute the primary delivery mechanism for tourist accommodation, catering, and excursion services in much of the country. Family enterprises possess several inherent advantages in the MICE context: they offer personalised service levels that larger commercial operators often cannot replicate; they can adapt flexibly to the specific requirements of corporate clients; and they tend to reinvest a higher share of revenues within local communities, amplifying the sector's regional economic impact.

However, family enterprises also face specific constraints that limit their ability to participate in the MICE segment without structured support. These include limited awareness of MICE-specific service standards, restricted access to international booking platforms and corporate procurement networks, insufficient physical infrastructure for hosting meetings and small conferences, and a lack of marketing capacity to reach the corporate travel market.

Addressing these constraints requires a systematic organisational-economic mechanism — one that coordinates the regulatory, financial, promotional, and capacity-building interventions needed to enable family enterprises to serve MICE clients effectively and competitively.

3.4 Proposed Organisational-Economic Mechanism

Based on the analysis described above, this study developed an organisational-economic mechanism for promoting family-based MICE tourism entrepreneurship in Uzbekistan. The mechanism is structured around four interdependent pillars, as summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Pillars of the Organisational-Economic Mechanism for Family-Based MICE Tourism Development

No.	Pillar	Key Elements	Primary Actors
1	Regulatory Framework	Licensing standards for MICE facilities; quality certification for family-run venues; data collection and monitoring requirements	State Tourism Committee; Ministry of Economy; Local Governments
2	Financial Incentives	Tax concessions for MICE-oriented family enterprises; micro-credit and grant programmes; co-financing of infrastructure upgrades	Ministry of Finance; Development Banks; Local Authorities
3	Capacity Building	MICE-specific vocational training; hospitality and language skill development; integration with international tourism platforms and corporate procurement systems	Tourism Training Institutes; NGOs; Private Sector Associations
4	Promotion and Marketing	National MICE destination brand development; participation in international trade fairs; digital marketing support for family enterprises; B2B networking facilitation	National Tourism Board; Chambers of Commerce; Industry Associations

The mechanism assigns the state a central coordinating and regulatory role, while distributing operational responsibilities across local government, civil society organisations, and the private sector. Its design reflects the principle that effective MICE tourism development cannot be achieved through isolated interventions — it requires coherent, multi-actor coordination sustained over time.

The proposed mechanism is also intended to address the data deficit that currently constrains evidence-based decision-making in Uzbekistan's tourism sector. A key regulatory requirement embedded in the framework is the systematic collection of MICE-specific data — on event volumes, delegate numbers, sectoral origins of visitors, per-event expenditure, and employment generated — to enable ongoing monitoring and adaptive management of the initiative.

3.5 Expected Outcomes

Implementation of the proposed mechanism is expected to generate measurable outcomes across three dimensions. Table 2 summarises the anticipated results under each outcome category.

Table 2. Expected Outcomes of the Organisational-Economic Mechanism

Outcome Dimension	Expected Results
Economic	Increased year-round revenue for family tourism enterprises; higher per-visitor expenditure from MICE delegates compared to leisure tourists; expanded foreign exchange earnings from tourism services.
Employment	Reduction in tourism sector seasonality; creation of stable, year-round employment in hospitality, event management, catering, translation, and transport services; improved labour market retention of skilled workers.
Competitive Position	Enhanced visibility of Uzbekistan as a MICE destination in regional and international markets; integration of Uzbek family enterprises into global corporate tourism supply chains; strengthened national tourism image.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 MICE Tourism and the Seasonality Challenge

The findings of this study reinforce the growing international consensus that MICE tourism represents one of the most effective instruments available to destination managers seeking to mitigate the economic and employment costs of tourism seasonality. Unlike leisure tourism — which remains strongly conditioned by climate, school holidays, and cultural event calendars — MICE activity is governed by corporate and organisational decision-making cycles that are largely season-neutral. International evidence from established MICE destinations such as Singapore, Vienna, Barcelona, and Dubai demonstrates that a well-developed MICE sector can sustain substantial and relatively stable economic activity throughout the year.

For Uzbekistan, this potential is particularly relevant given the width of the identified off-peak window (October through March) and the scale of the employment and revenue losses associated with it. The transition from a primarily leisure-focused tourism product to one that integrates a significant MICE component is not a radical reimagining of the sector's identity — Uzbekistan's historical cities, modern conference infrastructure, and improving international connectivity already provide a credible foundation for MICE tourism development. What is currently missing is the organisational and institutional architecture needed to activate this potential systematically.

4.2 The Role of Family Enterprises

A distinctive feature of this study's approach is its emphasis on family-based entrepreneurship as the primary delivery vehicle for MICE tourism services, rather than large corporate hotel chains or specialised event management companies. This emphasis reflects both the structural reality of Uzbekistan's tourism sector — in which family enterprises constitute the dominant form of business — and the growing international evidence that locally owned, community-embedded businesses can offer competitive MICE services when appropriately supported.

Family enterprises in Uzbekistan's tourism sector already serve as the primary providers of accommodation, food, guiding, and local transport services for leisure tourists. Expanding their role into the MICE segment requires targeted investment in their physical premises, service standards, and marketing capacity, but it does not require the wholesale construction of a new tourism infrastructure. The proposed mechanism is designed precisely to leverage existing family enterprise assets while

systematically addressing the gaps that currently prevent their participation in higher-value business tourism markets.

4.3 International Integration and Platform Connectivity

One of the most critical enablers of MICE tourism development — and one that has been given insufficient attention in Uzbekistan's tourism policy discourse to date — is the integration of domestic service providers with international tourism marketing and procurement platforms. Corporate travel buyers increasingly use centralised digital platforms to identify, evaluate, and book MICE services. Family enterprises that are invisible on these platforms cannot compete for international corporate business, regardless of the quality of their facilities or services.

The proposed mechanism's promotional pillar explicitly addresses this gap, calling for structured support to help family enterprises register and maintain profiles on major international MICE platforms, and for the development of a national MICE destination brand capable of positioning Uzbekistan competitively in regional and global business travel markets. This work requires close collaboration between the State Tourism Committee, the national Chamber of Commerce, and sector associations — a tripartite model that has proven effective in comparable destination contexts.

4.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study is subject to several limitations. The mechanism proposed is analytical in character and has not yet been field-tested; its implementation would require further stakeholder engagement, legal analysis, and institutional readiness assessment. The cost and revenue modelling required to fully substantiate the economic case for the mechanism lies beyond the scope of this paper and represents a priority for future research.

Additionally, while the study draws on a broad range of domestic and international literature, the specific characteristics of Uzbekistan's MICE market — including the composition of potential demand, the pricing sensitivity of target client segments, and the competitive positioning of Uzbekistan relative to other Central Asian MICE destinations — have not been empirically assessed. Dedicated market research addressing these questions would substantially strengthen the evidence base for the proposed framework.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the potential of MICE tourism — pursued through family-based entrepreneurship — to address one of the most persistent structural challenges in Uzbekistan's tourism sector: the pronounced seasonality of tourist arrivals and its damaging consequences for employment, income stability, and sectoral competitiveness.

Through analysis of visitor arrival patterns spanning 2016 to 2024, a systematic review of domestic and international literature on business and MICE tourism, and the development of an original four-pillar organisational-economic mechanism, the study has established that MICE tourism represents a strategically sound and practically viable pathway for extending Uzbekistan's tourism season, creating year-round employment, and positioning the country more competitively in international business travel markets.

The proposed mechanism assigns the state a central coordinating role while mobilising the complementary contributions of local government, civil society, and the private sector. Its four pillars — regulatory framework, financial incentives, capacity building, and promotion — are mutually reinforcing and designed to address the full range of constraints that currently limit family enterprises' participation in the MICE segment.

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Achieving Uzbekistan's ambitious tourism growth targets — including attracting 15.8 million foreign visitors and USD 4 billion in tourism export revenues — will require not only expanding the volume of leisure tourists but also fundamentally diversifying the tourism product. The development of family-based MICE tourism entrepreneurship, supported by the organisational-economic mechanism proposed in this study, is an essential component of that diversification. Future research should focus on empirical testing of the mechanism's components, detailed market analysis of Uzbekistan's MICE potential, and longitudinal assessment of employment and revenue outcomes as the sector develops.

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