

THE ROLE OF RAILWAY BORDER CUSTOMS POSTS IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT (CASE STUDY OF THE “KELES” RAILWAY BORDER CUSTOMS POST)

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20027553>

Abstract: This article analyzes the role of railway customs control in the development of tourism using the example of the “Keles” border customs post. It examines the dynamics of international passenger flow, existing challenges, and the prospects for implementing a “transparent border” model based on API/PNR systems and artificial intelligence.

Keywords: tourism, railway customs, border control, API/PNR system, digital transformation, “Keles” post.

Introduction

Tourism is one of the strategic sectors of the economy, contributing to increased foreign currency inflows to the state budget, creating new jobs, and supporting regional development. In recent years, the development of tourism in Uzbekistan has become a priority area of state policy. In particular, the government of Uzbekistan is implementing a number of reforms aimed at improving tourism infrastructure, simplifying visa procedures, and expanding transport connections. In this regard, the Customs Committee is also providing various conveniences.

Moreover, the launch of international passenger train services has brought great satisfaction to citizens, especially foreign tourists entering the country, and contributes to increasing their number.

The “Keles” railway border customs post is the railway gateway of the country. Efficiency and service culture at the border play a decisive role in enhancing tourism potential. In today’s era of globalization, a country’s tourism attractiveness is determined not only by its historical monuments but also by how tourists are welcomed at the threshold—namely, at border customs posts. The “Keles” passenger railway border customs post, considered the main railway gateway of Uzbekistan, is becoming a strategic point in this process.

However, the efficient movement of tourist flows is directly linked to customs control procedures. Excessive bureaucratic procedures and lengthy inspection processes at railway border posts may negatively affect tourism attractiveness. In Uzbekistan, the only passenger railway border crossing point is the Keles railway customs post, which is also the sixth post under the Tashkent City Customs Administration.

Customs control carried out by customs officers is generally positively assessed by tourists. There are three main international train routes: Almaty–Tashkent, Moscow–Tashkent, and Kazan–Tashkent.

Analysis of passenger traffic on the Almaty–Tashkent inbound route over a one-month period (13.01.2026–13.02.2026) shows that foreign citizens from nearly thirty countries visit Uzbekistan. These include Kazakhstan (1670), Russia (112), China (69), India (48), Indonesia (31), Tajikistan (29), Korea (26), USA (25), Malaysia (13), the Philippines (12), and others, including even the Netherlands, Norway, and Brazil.

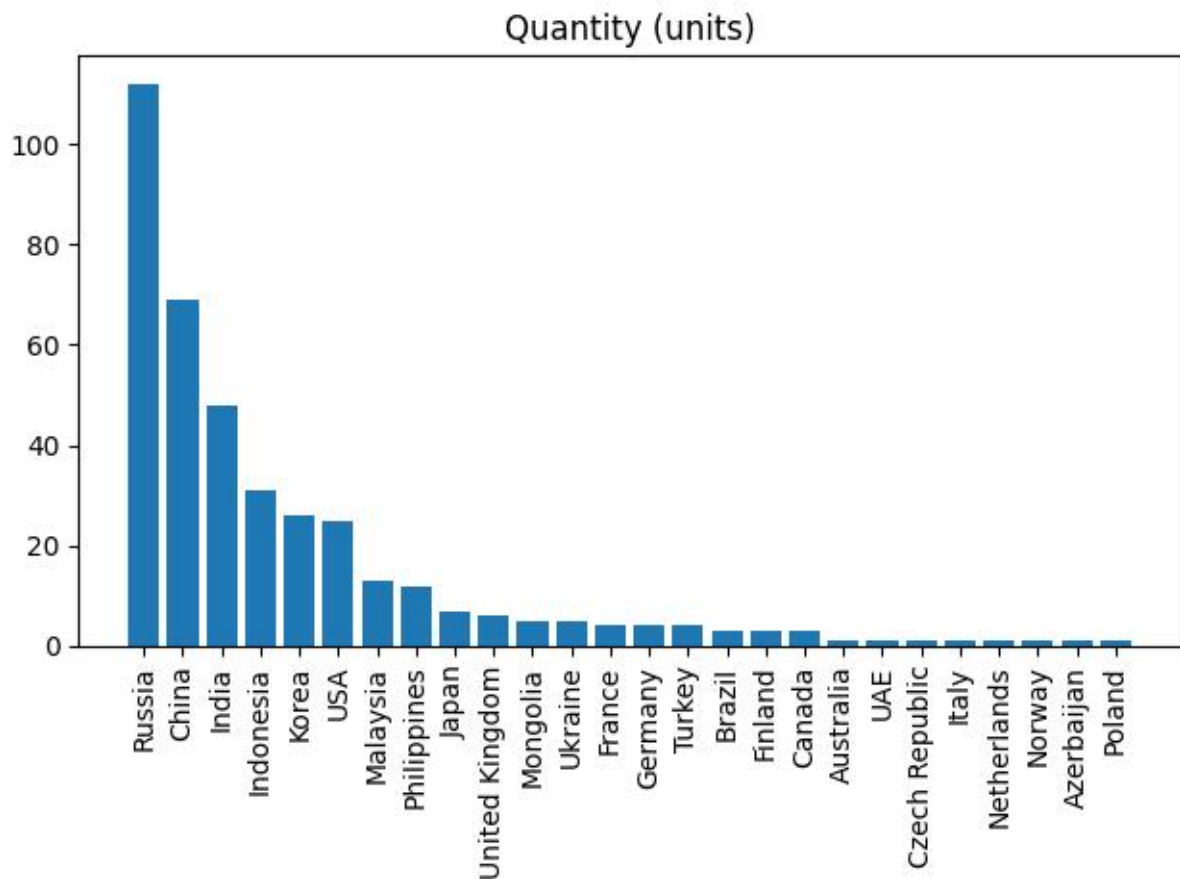


Figure 1: Foreign citizens visiting Uzbekistan (excluding neighboring countries, January 13, 2026 – February 13, 2026)

More than 50% of them are tourists, with the majority coming from Kazakhstan, mainly for recreation and travel purposes.

Passengers on other routes also include approximately 40% tourists, arriving from various parts of the world such as Indonesia, India, China, Japan, Germany, and others. During



interviews, they positively evaluate the opportunities and conveniences created by customs authorities.

| Number of people moving | 2024 January–December | | | | 2025 January–December | | | | Difference |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------|---------|--------|-----------------------|------------|---------|--------|------------|
| | Arrivals | Departures | Transit | Total | Arrivals | Departures | Transit | Total | |
| | 103521 | 108798 | 0 | 212319 | 113382 | 120291 | 0 | 233673 | 21354 |

“Figure 2: Histogram of passenger railway trains that passed through the ‘Keles’ customs post in 2024–2025.”

Statistical data also indicate that their number is increasing year by year.

It is well known that their purpose is not only to visit attractions but also to closely experience the traditions and customs of the Uzbek people. Currently, customs control carried out directly inside train wagons—by entering each carriage, interviewing passengers, and inspecting their luggage—takes a certain amount of time. As a result, this practice is one of the main factors causing delays in the border crossing process at the “Keles” railway border customs post.

In this regard, customs authorities are taking measures to transform the sector by introducing modern information technologies, including API/PNR systems, and implementing passenger risk segmentation based on artificial intelligence. This will enable the creation of a “transparent border” model, where the system remotely identifies “suspicious” passengers, while ordinary tourists can enter the country freely with minimal interaction with customs officers.

As an example of international practice, on the “Eurostar” trains—one of the busiest railway arteries in the world—border and customs control is almost imperceptible to passengers. This is achieved through the “Juxtaposed Controls” system, where passengers undergo checks of two countries before boarding, and the train makes no border stops during its journey.

The Eurostar system is based on API/PNR technologies. As soon as a passenger purchases a ticket, their data is analyzed by customs algorithms. As a result, only 1–2% of passengers identified as “suspicious” undergo in-depth inspection, while the rest pass through a “transparent corridor.” Implementing this model at the “Keles” post could transform Uzbekistan into a major railway hub in Central Asia. Additionally, suspicious passengers can be easily identified by their specific carriage and seat numbers, simplifying the work of customs officers. Currently, API/PNR systems are already used in airport passenger processing.

Passenger traffic is steadily increasing. In 2025, a total of 2,131 international train movements were recorded at the “Keles” railway border customs post, which is 19 more than in 2024.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the “Keles” railway border customs post is not only an important element of transport infrastructure but also a strategic point shaping the country’s tourism image. By implementing modern digital solutions such as API/PNR systems and artificial intelligence-based risk analysis, it is possible to increase the speed and efficiency of customs control while creating a convenient and transparent environment for tourists.

The experience of the “Keles” post demonstrates that optimizing customs procedures contributes to increasing tourist flows, strengthening the country’s international image, and enhancing Uzbekistan’s position as a regional transport, logistics, and tourism hub.

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