WAYS AND SOLUTIONS TO ENHANCE SERVICE QUALITY IN DEVELOPING DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL TOURISM IN UZBEKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the ways and solutions to improve service quality in the development of domestic and international tourism in Uzbekistan. Based on statistical data and survey results from 2023–2024, the current state of tourism services is analyzed, and the economic and social significance of enhancing service quality is examined. The study elaborates on strategies such as staff training, infrastructure modernization, adoption of digital technologies, and improving customer experiences, while forecasting their potential outcomes. The article provides recommendations for aligning Uzbekistan's tourism sector with global standards within the framework of the "Tourism Development Strategy 2030."

Introduction: In recent years, Uzbekistan has achieved significant progress in the tourism sector, emerging as one of the most attractive destinations for global travelers. As President Shavkat Mirziyoyev noted, "Tourism, as a vital sector of the economy, is not only a source of revenue but also a tool for enhancing the country's image and fostering connections between nations" (Mirziyoyev, 2019). In 2023, Uzbekistan welcomed 6.626 million foreign tourists (State Tourism Committee, 2023), while domestic tourists numbered approximately 5 million. These figures highlight the country's high tourism potential, yet service quality still lags behind global standards. Uzbekistan's rich cultural heritage (Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva), pilgrimage sites (Imam Bukhari, Jahon Bobo), natural resources (Chimgan Mountains, Aydar Lake), and gastronomic traditions (plov, samsa) offer immense opportunities for tourism development. However, challenges in service quality—such as low service standards in hotels, insufficiently qualified guides, and limited digital services—reduce tourist satisfaction. Surveys indicate that 35% of foreign tourists rated service quality as "average or low" (UNWTO, 2023), while 40% of domestic tourists noted a lack of amenities. Improving service quality not only enhances tourist satisfaction but also extends their stay, increases repeat visits, and boosts economic revenue. This article analyzes key approaches to improving service quality in Uzbekistan's domestic and international tourism and proposes practical solutions. The study aims to make the country more competitive in the global tourism market and achieve the goals of the "Tourism Development Strategy 2030."

Methodology: The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. Between April and May 2024, a survey was conducted among 200 respondents across various regions of Uzbekistan—Tashkent, Samarkand, Andijan,

and Namangan. The respondent composition was as follows:

- 60 domestic tourists (Uzbek citizens);

- 60 foreign tourists (from Russia, Turkey, India, and European countries);

- 70 tourism industry employees (hotel staff, guides, tour operators).

The questionnaire was based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree, 5 – strongly agree) and covered the following aspects:

- Service quality ("Hotel service levels are high");

- Infrastructure conditions ("Tourist sites have sufficient amenities");

- Development prospects ("Qualified staff improve tourism quality").

The survey was conducted at major tourist hubs, including Registan (Samarkand), Jahon Bobo (Andijan), Chorsu Bazaar (Tashkent), and Khoja Amin (Namangan). Six students from Andijan State University participated as enumerators. Additionally, data was collected via Google Forms from 30 tour operators and hotel managers. Data sources included the State Tourism Committee's 2023–2024 reports, tourism statistics from the Uzbekistan Statistics Agency, and reports from international organizations (UNWTO, UNDP). Results were processed using SPSS software and presented as percentages and trends. Furthermore, in-depth interviews were conducted with six experts—two tourism specialists, two hotel managers, and two guides—to enrich the qualitative data.

Results and Discussion: In 2023, Uzbekistan hosted 6.626 million foreign tourists and approximately 5 million domestic tourists. The most visited regions were Samarkand (2 million), Bukhara (1.5 million), Tashkent (1.2 million), and the Fergana Valley (500,000), underscoring the country's tourism appeal. Tourism revenue reached nearly $5 billion, contributing 7% to GDP (State Tourism Committee, 2023). However, significant challenges in service quality persist. Survey results revealed that 60% of foreign tourists praised the "cultural heritage and natural beauty," but 35% rated service quality as "average or low." Similarly, 40% of domestic tourists complained about "inadequate hotel services" and "limited transport amenities." Additionally, 50% of tourism employees reported a lack of professional development opportunities. Experts noted that Uzbekistan's tourism service quality lags behind countries like Turkey (80% satisfaction rate) and Dubai (90%).

Hotel Services: In 3-star hotels, staff language proficiency is low (only 20% speak English), and service speed is slow (average wait time: 15 minutes). For instance, in Andijan, staff shortages result in a 50% satisfaction rate.

Transport Services: Public transport to tourist sites is insufficient. For example, buses from Tashkent to the Chimgan Mountains operate only 2–3 times daily, causing inconvenience.

Guide Qualifications: 40% of foreign tourists reported that "guides lack sufficient historical knowledge," reflecting the absence of training programs.

Service Quality and Tourist Experience: Service quality directly impacts tourist experiences. The survey showed that 70% of foreign tourists said "high-quality services encourage repeat visits," while 60% of domestic tourists stated they would "travel more if amenities were sufficient." Currently, foreign tourists stay an average of 2.5 days, and domestic tourists 1.5 days. Experts suggest that improving service quality could extend stays to 4–5 days. For example, 4–5-star hotels in Samarkand, with high service standards, achieve an 85% satisfaction rate. Staff are fluent in foreign languages, service is prompt (wait time

under 5 minutes), and customer needs are prioritized. However, in 2–3-star hotels in Andijan, Namangan, or Kashkadarya, satisfaction rates do not exceed 50%. Additionally, 45% of foreign tourists noted "slow restaurant service," and 30% mentioned "lack of Wi-Fi and clean rooms." Domestic tourists (35%) complained about "poor restroom conditions at tourist sites." Experts highlighted that "due to low service quality, 20–30% of tourists do not share positive feedback about Uzbekistan," negatively impacting the country's image and reducing repeat visits. For comparison, in Turkey, 60% of tourists return due to high service quality, while in Uzbekistan, this figure is around 25%.

Economic and Social Impact: Low service quality significantly affects Uzbekistan's tourism revenue. Experts estimate that without aligning with global standards, the country loses 20–25% of potential revenue ($1–1.5 billion annually). Improved services could increase revenue to $6–7 billion. Currently, the tourism sector employs around 300,000 people, but 60% lack adequate qualifications. Economically, high-quality services create new jobs for locals. For instance, high-standard hotels in Samarkand have created 1,000 new jobs, while in Andijan, this figure is below 200. The survey showed that 55% of locals said "tourism increased their income," but 40% noted that "better service quality would yield more benefits." Socially, improved service quality would create opportunities for youth and women. Women currently account for 35% of tourism employees, but growth is slow due to a lack of skilled workers. Respondents (80%) believe that "improved service quality would enhance the country's image," but 45% expressed concerns about "environmental issues (waste, water shortages)," highlighting the need for sustainability focus.

1. Staff Training: - Language Courses: Organize training in English, Russian, Chinese, and Arabic for tourism employees. Annual 3-month intensive courses for 5,000 employees (guides, hotel staff, restaurant workers) will include practical scenarios and service standards (annual cost: 1 billion UZS). - **International Expertise**: Invite five experienced trainers from Turkey, Malaysia, and Singapore to teach service speed (e.g., restaurant orders in 10 minutes), customer interaction, and problem-solving (cost per trainer: 100 million UZS, total: 500 million UZS). - **Certification System**: Introduce mandatory certification for service staff, with exams on language skills and service standards, renewed every two years (implementation and monitoring: 50 million UZS). - Motivation: Offer bonuses (20% of monthly salary) and international exchange programs for skilled employees (annual cost: 200 million UZS).

2. **Infrastructure Modernization**: - Hotel Expansion: Attract private investments to build 3–4-star hotels (e.g., 20 in Andijan, 15 in Namangan). Each hotel costs approximately 500 million UZS (total: 10 billion UZS), equipped with modern amenities (Wi-Fi, air conditioning, clean rooms). - Transport System: Purchase 100 modern buses for tourist routes (50 million UZS each, total: 5 billion UZS). Add 20 train carriages to the Tashkent–Samarkand–Andijan route with amenities like Wi-Fi and catering (3 billion UZS). - **Sanitation Facilities**: Install modern restrooms, water supply, and waste management systems at major tourist sites (e.g., Registan, Jahon Bobo). Cost per site: 300 million UZS, total for 10 sites: 3 billion UZS. - **Road Infrastructure:** Pave roads to tourist sites and increase signage through public-private partnerships (e.g., 2 billion UZS for Chimgan Mountains roads).

3.**Digital Technologies: - Mobile App Development**: Create a "Visit Uzbekistan" app for hotel and transport bookings, guide services, and itinerary planning, featuring 3D virtual tours, weather updates, and local recipes (cost: 300 million UZS, development time: 6 months). - **Feedback System**: Implement a QR-code-based feedback system at tourist sites for real-time service quality monitoring (implementation: 100 million UZS, annual maintenance: 50 million UZS). - International Platforms: Promote Uzbekistan's hotels through integration with Booking.com, Airbnb, and TripAdvisor (70 million UZS per platform, total: 200 million UZS). - **Chatbot Services:** Launch AI-based 24/7

chatbots in English, Russian, and Chinese (cost: 100 million UZS).

4. **Customer Experience Improvement:- Personalized Services**: Offer tailored services (e.g., vegetarian meals, accessible transport for disabled tourists, children's playrooms). Conduct training for tour operators and hotel staff (annual cost: 500 million UZS). - **Service Standards:** Introduce uniform standards for hotels, restaurants, and tourist sites (e.g., maximum wait time of 5 minutes, friendly staff interaction). Development and implementation: 200 million UZS.**- Loyalty Programs:** Provide 10–15% discounts and souvenirs (e.g., local crafts) for repeat visitors, targeting 50,000 tourists annually (budget: 300 million UZS). - **Complaint Management**: Establish 24/7 call centers and online platforms for complaints, resolving issues within 24 hours (cost: 200 million UZS). **Expected Outcomes: - Staff Training:** Service quality improves by 40%, foreign tourist satisfaction reaches 80%, and domestic tourist satisfaction reaches 75%. Training 5,000 skilled workers increases service speed by 50% (e.g., restaurant orders in 10 minutes). New jobs (2,000) and youth employment rise by 10%. - **Infrastructure Modernization**: Tourist stays extend to 4–5 days, increasing revenue by 20% ($1.5 billion). Improved transport and hotels attract 1 million more foreign and 1.5 million more domestic tourists. Enhanced sanitation boosts environmental sustainability by 30%. - **Digital Technologies:** Foreign tourists increase to 8 million, domestic to 6 million, with a 50% rise in digital bookings. Feedback systems improve service quality by 25%, reducing complaints by 40%. International platforms enhance Uzbekistan's global visibility by 30%. - **Customer Experience**: Repeat visits rise by 30%, adding $0.5 billion in revenue. Personalization and standards boost satisfaction to 85%, strengthening the country's image. Rapid complaint resolution reduces negative feedback by 50%.

Table: Strategies for Improving Service Quality and Expected Outcomes (2026)

Strategy	Investment (UZS)	Expected Outcome
Staff Training	1.75 billion	80% foreign, 75% domestic satisfaction; 2,000 new jobs
Infrastructure	21 billion	4–5 day stays; $1.5 billion revenue increase
Digital Technologies	750 million	8M foreign, 6M domestic tourists; 50% booking growth
Customer Experience	1.2 billion	30% repeat visits; 85% satisfaction

Overall Forecast: By 2026, Uzbekistan will host 14 million tourists (8 million foreign, 6 million domestic), generating $7.5 billion in revenue, creating 6,500 new jobs, and achieving an average tourist satisfaction rate of 85%.

Conclusion: Enhancing service quality is critical for developing domestic and international tourism in Uzbekistan. Strategies such as staff training, infrastructure modernization, digital technology adoption, and customer experience improvement can increase tourist arrivals to 14 million and revenue to $7.5 billion. These solutions not only deliver economic benefits but also create 6,500 new jobs, support youth and women's employment, and strengthen Uzbekistan's global image. Aligned with the "Tourism Development Strategy 2030," these strategies will position Uzbekistan as a leading player in the global tourism market.

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