



Article

The Current State of Improving Service Quality in Tourism Enterprises of the Samarkand Region

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Abstract: This article examines the development of the regional tourism market in Uzbekistan's economy, focusing on Samarkand region as a key case study and analyzing the dynamics of tourism infrastructure and core indicators over 2020–2024. Using official statistical data, it highlights the sharp growth in the number of inbound and domestic tourists, tourism revenues, employment, accommodation facilities, transport services, food-service establishments, and tourism service providers, alongside the increase in UNESCO World Heritage sites and new tourism routes.

Keywords: tourism, quality, service, sustainable, indicators

1. Introduction

In the context of ongoing globalization and intensifying competition, tourism is recognized as one of the fastest-growing sectors of the economy. In particular, the tourism infrastructure of the Samarkand region has been developing on a large scale, with rapid growth observed in the hotel industry, public catering services, transport and logistics, guiding services, and digital service segments. This process increases the need to enhance the operational efficiency of tourism enterprises, align service quality with international standards, and introduce innovative approaches into service delivery [1].

At the same time, the formation of competitive tourism products in the international market, along with the improvement of service culture, safety, convenience, prompt information provision, and the expansion of customer satisfaction, is becoming a strategic priority. This, in turn, necessitates the development of scientifically grounded management mechanisms aimed at improving the quality of tourism services [2].

However, analytical findings indicate that the quality of services in tourism enterprises of the Samarkand region continues to face a number of systemic challenges.

First, a stable and comprehensive system for monitoring service quality has not yet been sufficiently established, and noticeable disparities persist between employees' qualifications and applied service standards. The level of utilization of digital technologies in service delivery remains inadequate, customer feedback mechanisms are not fully institutionalized, and service diversification often lags behind evolving market demand. Moreover, insufficient integration and cooperation among tourism enterprises hinder the full realization of the "cluster effect."

Therefore, the development of scientifically grounded methodological frameworks for improving service quality in tourism enterprises, the establishment of a coherent system of quality indicators, the introduction of digital management models, and the adaptation

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of international service standards to local conditions are considered highly relevant and timely tasks [3].

2. Materials and Methods

Various theoretical approaches to the assessment and management of tourism service quality have been proposed by scholars. International academic literature extensively examines the interrelationship between service quality, customer satisfaction, and the competitiveness of tourism enterprises. For instance, the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry is widely recognized as a universal framework for evaluating service quality based on five key dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. In the studies of Ph. Kotler and J. Bowen, integrated marketing communications, a customer-oriented business model, and the continuous improvement of service standards are identified as the most critical factors in enhancing service quality. Furthermore, the experience of European countries emphasizes that the implementation of ISO 9001 standards in tourism enterprises enables systematic control and continuous improvement of service quality [4].

In the works of Uzbek scholars, tourism service quality has primarily been examined in connection with regional development, economic efficiency, and infrastructural factors. In particular, studies by R. Abdullaev, L. Sultonova, A. Mamatqulov, Sh. Jo'rayev, and others provide extensive analyses of issues such as monitoring service quality in tourism, improving service culture, enhancing workforce qualifications, implementing a cluster-based approach, and diversifying regional tourism infrastructure [5]. In recent years, state programs such as the "Uzbekistan-2030" Strategy and the "Tourism Development Concept – 2025" have outlined comprehensive objectives related to service quality indicators, tourist flows, hotel infrastructure, digital tourism services, and regional branding. The analysis of existing literature indicates that while the theoretical foundations for improving service quality in tourism enterprises are sufficiently developed, challenges related to their practical application, regional-level standardization, and the development of service quality assessment indicators remain highly relevant [6].

3. Results and Discussion

Under current conditions, the development trajectory of the economy of Uzbekistan is increasingly oriented toward activating its regional components. At the same time, the process of economic regionalization is gaining particular importance through the formation of sector-specific regional markets. These regional markets are becoming platforms where not only key issues of economic organization are addressed, but also new trends shaping economic development are concentrated [7].

According to the results of 2024, the number of foreign citizens visiting Uzbekistan for tourism purposes reached **8.2 million**. This figure is approximately **24 percent higher** than the **6.6 million** visitors recorded in 2023, demonstrating a stable growth dynamic in the country's tourism sector. This outcome placed Uzbekistan third in Central Asia in terms of tourist arrivals, following Kazakhstan (15.3 million) and Kyrgyzstan (8.6 million). Consequently, Uzbekistan succeeded in attracting nearly **28 percent** of the total regional tourist flow, which amounted to **28.6 million** travelers [8].

Over the subsequent five-year period, an analysis of the key indicators of the tourism services market across Uzbekistan reveals a phase of post-crisis recovery followed by rapid growth in the tourism sector.

Although a significant decline was initially observed due to the impact of the pandemic, in the following years the tourism services market expanded substantially as a result of state policy measures, infrastructure modernization, and the recovery of international travel Table 1.

Table 1. Key Indicators of the Tourism Services Market in Uzbekistan, 2020–2024

Indicators	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Growth Rate 2024/2020, %
Number of foreign tourists, thousand persons	1500	1880	5230	6620	8600	5,7 times
Number of domestic tourists, thousand persons	11200	12500	15000	20600	22670	2,0 times
Tourism revenues, billion UZS	4200	4800	17600	23100	38400	9,1times
Employment in the tourism sector, thousand persons	190	195	200	2200	3200	16,8 times
Number of UNESCO World Heritage sites, units	5	5	5	5	7	140%

An analysis of the data presented in Table 1 shows that in 2020 the consequences of the pandemic had a significant impact on the tourism sector of Uzbekistan. In that year, the number of foreign tourists amounted to only 1.5 million. However, in subsequent years this indicator demonstrated a steady upward trend. From 2021 onward, international tourism began to recover gradually, reaching 5.2 million visitors in 2022, 6.6 million in 2023, and 8.6 million in 2024. Such growth indicates the strengthening of the country's position and reputation in the international tourism market. The expansion of air and railway connections, the simplification of visa procedures, and the creation of more favorable conditions for foreign visitors played a crucial role in this process [9].

Following the pandemic period, interest in domestic tourism also increased sharply. Due to travel restrictions, citizens increasingly sought leisure opportunities within the country. At the same time, the development of new recreational facilities, family-oriented tourism zones, and the active promotion of national holidays and festivals stimulated domestic travel. As a result, by 2024 the number of domestic tourists reached 22.6 million. This figure reflects the growing travel culture among the population and the dynamic development of the domestic tourism market in Uzbekistan [10].

Tourism revenues also increased accordingly.

During 2020–2021, due to the impact of the pandemic, revenues in the tourism sector remained relatively low, amounting to 4.2 trillion and 4.8 trillion UZS, respectively. However, from 2022 onward the tourism sector entered a phase of accelerated growth, and by 2024 tourism revenues reached 38.4 trillion UZS. This substantial increase indicates the growing strategic importance of tourism within the national economy of Uzbekistan [11].

In the Samarkand Region, the dominant form of tourism is cultural and historical travel, which ensures a steady flow of both domestic and international visitors throughout the year. In addition, pilgrimage tourism, gastronomic tourism, ecotourism, and MICE (business tourism) are also developing actively in Samarkand. In particular, the ecotourism segment benefits from the natural landscapes surrounding the Zarafshan River, including desert areas, mountain foothills, and rural tourism destinations in the districts of Urgut, Jomboy, and Bulung'ur. From the perspective of pilgrimage tourism,

sacred sites such as the Imam Bukhari Complex, Shah-i-Zinda, and the Hazrat Khizr Mosque are particularly popular. Moreover, the Congress Center and the Silk Road Samarkand are capable of hosting international conferences and forums, thereby transforming the region into a competitive hub for business tourism as well [12].

The Table 2. below presents the main indicators of the tourism sector in the Samarkand region in recent years.

Table 2. Main Indicators of the Tourism Sector in the Samarkand Region

Indicators	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Growth Rate 2024/2020, %
Number of foreign tourists, thousand persons	152,0	119,0	1204,2	2153,0	2500,0	16,4 times
Number of domestic tourists, thousand persons	519,0	1943,0	4247,0	4500,0	4700,0	9,0 times
Tourism revenues, million USD	8,4	79,6	197,6	405,9	500,0	58,0 times
Number of hotels, units	160,0	112,0	128,0	164,0	173,0	108,10%

Due to the impact of the pandemic during 2020–2021, the number of foreign tourists visiting the Samarkand Region declined sharply from 152 thousand to 119 thousand.

However, from 2022 onward the tourism sector began to recover rapidly, and in that year the number of foreign visitors increased by more than **sixteenfold**. In 2023–2024, this growth stabilized, with the number of foreign tourists rising from **2,153.0 thousand** to **2,500.0 thousand**, respectively. In the post-pandemic period, domestic tourism also recovered at an accelerated pace; beginning in 2022, millions of Uzbek citizens resumed travel to the Samarkand region. This indicator has shown consistent year-on-year growth, reaching **4.7 million domestic tourists** in 2024 [13].

An analysis of accommodation facilities in the Samarkand region over the past five years indicates a significant increase in their number. In particular, the entry of international hotel brands has contributed to notable improvements in both the quality and level of services provided to domestic and foreign visitors within the hotel services system Table 3.

Table 3. Information on Accommodation Facilities in the Samarkand Region

№	Accommodation facilities	Unit of measurement	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Growth Rate 2024/2020, %
1	Hotels	units	160	112	128	161	172	107,5
		beds	6569	5136	7080	10792	11344	1,7 times
2		units	170	227	290	352	399	2,3 times

3	Family guest houses	beds	1611	2172	2759	3 317	3742	2,3 times
		units	7	29	52	91	109	15,6 times
	Hostels	beds	178	697	1 289	2 413	2854	16,0 times

An analysis of the data presented in Table 3 indicates that during the period 2020–2024, the number and capacity of accommodation facilities in the Samarkand Region increased significantly.

Growth was observed across almost all segments of accommodation infrastructure, reflecting the rapid development of the tourism sector and the continuous improvement of service quality. In particular, growth in the hotel segment was relatively stable. While 160 hotels were operating in the region in 2020, their number reached 172 by 2024, representing a growth rate of 107.5 percent. However, the most notable change occurred in accommodation capacity: the number of hotel beds increased from 6,569 to 11,344, i.e., a 1.7-fold rise. This trend suggests that newly constructed hotels are larger in scale and equipped in line with modern standards, functioning as contemporary tourist complexes [14].

During 2022–2024, significant positive changes were also observed in the main structural components of tourism infrastructure in the Samarkand region—namely, the number of tour operators, travel agents, guides and excursion leaders, as well as employment in the tourism sector Table 4.

Table 4. Number of Entities Providing Services to Tourists in the Samarkand Region

№	Accommodation facilities	Unit of measurement	2022	2023	2024	Growth Rate 2024/2022, %
1	Tour operators	units	189	272	301	159,3
2	Travel agents	units	15	32	61	4,0 marta
3	Guides and excursion leaders	units	410	450	520	126,8
4	Employment in the tourism sector	thousand persons	49,9	58,0	67,2	134,7

An analysis of the data presented in Table 4 indicates that the number of tour operators increased substantially over the period under review.

Specifically, while **189 tour operators** were operating in the Samarkand Region in 2022, their number rose to **301** by 2024, representing a **159.3 percent increase**. This growth reflects an expansion in tourism product development capacity, the establishment of new tour operating companies, and intensified competition within the sector.

Furthermore, during the **2020–2024** period, indicators related to the development of tourism infrastructure in the Samarkand region also demonstrated significant growth Table 5.

Table 5. Indicators of Tourism Infrastructure Development in the Samarkand Region

Indicators	Unit of measurement	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Growth Rate 2024/2020, %
Tourism infrastructure facilities	units	228	298	348	388	423	185,5
including: Wi-Fi access points	units	100	161	190	210	235	235,0
Tourist wayfinding signs	units	114	123	142	162	172	150,9
Information centers	units	14	14	16	16	16	114,3

According to the data presented in Table 5, the number of tourism infrastructure facilities increased from 228 to 423 during the analyzed period, corresponding to a growth rate of 185.5 percent.

These figures indicate a substantial increase in the level of attention and investment directed toward the tourism sector in the Samarkand Region. This growth is primarily associated with the implementation of comprehensive measures aimed at creating essential conveniences for tourists, improving service quality, and enhancing information support within the regional tourism infrastructure.

During the period 2020–2024, the number of tourist transport vehicles in the Samarkand Region demonstrated steady growth.

In particular, in recent years the rapid development of the tourism sector, the opening of new tourist routes, and the introduction of environmentally friendly transport solutions have contributed to the expansion of the tourist transport fleet.

The analysis indicates that in 2020 the region had 134 buses, 106 minibuses, 30 electric vehicles, 68 urban and interdistrict buses, and 4 other types of transport vehicles designated for tourists.

Although the number of certain types of transport remained unchanged in 2021, growth accelerated significantly starting from 2022. In particular, the number of tourist buses increased from **134 in 2020 to 161 in 2024**, representing a **20.1 percent increase**. Likewise, the number of minibuses rose considerably, reaching **155 units in 2024**, which corresponds to a **46.2 percent growth** compared to 2020. Since minibuses are especially suitable for domestic tourists, small-group excursions, and family tours, growth in this segment has been particularly pronounced.'

Overall, the sharp increase in the number of foreign tourists during the period 2020–2024 indicates that tourism policy in Uzbekistan has been implemented effectively. Cultural–historical and religious tourism have emerged as priority directions. At the same time, the rapid growth of the youth tourist segment suggests that the country's tourism image is increasingly perceived as "attractive for young travelers." In contrast, the relative decline observed in business tourism and the senior tourist segment indicates the need for additional incentive-based policies and targeted support measures in these areas [15].

Thus, the results of the analysis demonstrate that both national and regional tourism have experienced significant quantitative growth in recent years, while qualitatively undergoing a process of specialization focused on youth-oriented and purpose-driven segments. In the long term, this situation necessitates the diversification of tourism

infrastructure, the development of specialized programs for young and business tourists, and the further advancement of cultural heritage tourism.

4. Conclusion

The analyses presented above indicate that in recent years the tourism market of the Samarkand Region has achieved significant quantitative growth. Both foreign and domestic tourist flows have increased markedly, while the number of accommodation facilities, transport services, catering establishments, and tourism service providers has expanded substantially. However, from a qualitative perspective, a number of systemic challenges persist in service delivery, including insufficiently developed service standards, uneven staff qualifications, limited use of digital technologies, inadequate and irregular assessment of customer needs, and the absence of a comprehensive service quality monitoring system. These issues directly affect tourist satisfaction, the regional tourism image, and overall competitiveness.

As policy and managerial recommendations, first, it is essential to develop a unified system of indicators for evaluating service quality in tourism enterprises. Second, the introduction of regular professional development and certification programs for employees—along with international training initiatives for guides and service personnel—would be highly beneficial. Third, the adoption of digital management solutions, such as online rating systems, mobile applications, and tourist feedback platforms, can significantly enhance the effectiveness of service quality control. In addition, strengthening cooperation among hotels, transport providers, catering services, information centers, and tour operators based on a cluster approach, developing the “Samarkand tourism brand,” and adapting international service standards to local conditions represent key practical mechanisms for ensuring the sustainable development of tourism in the region.

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