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TOURISM SERVICES MANAGEMENT AND IMPROVEMENT IN UZBEKISTAN



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Abstract: This article examines the current state of tourism services management in Uzbekistan and evaluates the effectiveness of ongoing reforms aimed at improving service quality, diversifying tourism products, and strengthening the country's international competitiveness. Using mixed research methods, including statistical analysis, content analysis, and expert insights, the study identifies major trends in inbound and outbound tourism, with particular emphasis on the dominant purposes of travel and the structural shifts occurring between 2020 and 2024. The findings reveal that Uzbekistan has experienced significant growth in tourist flows, driven by visa liberalization, digital transformation, infrastructure modernization, and destination branding initiatives. The article offers practical policy recommendations for enhancing management efficiency, accelerating digital integration, expanding tourism product offerings, and fostering sustainable development. The study contributes to the academic discourse by providing empirical insights into how emerging destinations can strengthen their tourism service ecosystems in line with global best practices.

Key words: tourism services management, service quality, digitalization, leisure tourism, inbound tourism, tourism diversification, sustainable tourism, destination competitiveness, hospitality industry.

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada O'zbekistonda turizm xizmatlarini boshqarishning hozirgi holati o'rganiladi va xizmat ko'rsatish sifatini yaxshilash, turizm mahsulotlarini diversifikatsiya qilish va mamlakatning xalqaro raqobatbardoshligini mustahkamlashga qaratilgan amalga oshirilayotgan islohotlarning samaradorligi baholanadi. Tadqiqot statistik tahlil, kontent tahlili va ekspert xulosalari kabi aralash tadqiqot usullaridan foydalangan holda, sayohatlarning asosiy maqsadlari va 2020 va 2024 yillar oralig'ida sodir bo'lgan tarkibiy o'zgarishlarga alohida e'tibor qaratgan holda, kirish va chiqish turizmining asosiy tendentsiyalarini aniqlaydi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko'rsatadiki, O'zbekistonda vizalarni liberallashtirish, raqamli transformatsiya, infratuzilmani modernizatsiya qilish va yo'nalish brendingi tashabbuslari tufayli sayyohlar oqimi sezilarli darajada o'sgan. Maqolada boshqaruv samaradorligini oshirish, raqamli integratsiyani tezlashtirish, turizm mahsulotlari takliflarini kengaytirish va barqaror rivojlanishni rag'batlantirish bo'yicha amaliy siyosat tavsiyalari keltirilgan. Tadqiqot rivojlanayotgan yo'nalishlar o'zlarining turizm xizmat ko'rsatish ekotizimlarini global eng yaxshi amaliyotlarga muvofiq qanday mustahkamlashi mumkinligi haqida empirik tushunchalar berish orqali akademik munozaralarga hissa qo'shadi.

Kalit so'zlar: turizm xizmatlarini boshqarish, xizmat ko'rsatish sifati, raqamlashtirish, dam olish turizmi, kirish turizmi, turizmni diversifikatsiya qilish, barqaror turizm, yo'nalish raqobatbardoshligi, mehmondo'stlik sanoati.

Аннотация: В данной статье рассматривается текущее состояние управления туристическими услугами в Узбекистане и оценивается эффективность проводимых реформ, направленных на повышение качества обслуживания, диверсификацию туристических продуктов и укрепление международной конкурентоспособности страны. Используя комплексные методы исследования, включая статистический анализ, контент-анализ и экспертные мнения, исследование выявляет основные тенденции въездного и выездного туризма, уделяя особое внимание основным целям путешествий и структурным изменениям, произошедшим в период с 2020

по 2024 год. Результаты показывают, что в Узбекистане наблюдается значительный рост туристических потоков, обусловленный либерализацией визового режима, цифровой трансформацией, модернизацией инфраструктуры и инициативами по брендингу туристических направлений. В статье предлагаются практические рекомендации по повышению эффективности управления, ускорению цифровой интеграции, расширению предложения туристических продуктов и содействию устойчивому развитию. Исследование вносит вклад в академический дискурс, предоставляя эмпирические данные о том, как развивающиеся туристические направления могут укрепить свои экосистемы туристических услуг в соответствии с передовой мировой практикой.

Ключевые слова: управление туристическими услугами, качество обслуживания, цифровизация, рекреационный туризм, въездной туризм, диверсификация туризма, устойчивый туризм, конкурентоспособность туристических направлений, индустрия гостеприимства.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, Uzbekistan has positioned itself as one of the most dynamically developing tourism destinations in Central Asia. The country's rich cultural heritage, unique historical monuments, diverse natural landscapes, and growing hospitality infrastructure have significantly contributed to the steady rise in tourist arrivals. According to recent national statistics, the number of international visitors has increased notably following the implementation of visa liberalization reforms, improved transport connectivity, and targeted government programs aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of the tourism sector. Despite these achievements, the efficiency of tourism services management and the quality of service delivery remain uneven across regions and market segments, indicating the need for systematic improvement.

In the context of global tourism trends, service quality, digitalization, sustainability, and customer-centric management practices have become key determinants of destination competitiveness[8]. Countries with effective tourism service management systems-characterized by professional workforce training, integrated marketing, strong regulatory frameworks, and modern digital platforms-demonstrate higher tourist satisfaction levels and stronger economic returns. For Uzbekistan, improving tourism service management is crucial not only for increasing visitor numbers but also for strengthening its international brand image, diversifying tourism products, and ensuring long-term socio-economic benefits for local communities.

However, several challenges persist, including limited service standardization, insufficient coordination between public and private actors, gaps in human resource development, and the slow adoption of digital technologies across the tourism value chain. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive analysis of current management practices, identification of bottlenecks, and the development of evidence-based strategies for enhancing service quality.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods research design that integrates qualitative content analysis and descriptive statistical analysis to examine the current state of tourism services management in Uzbekistan. The methodological approach is grounded in recent scholarly works that emphasize the importance of service quality assessment, digital transformation, and sustainable tourism governance in emerging destinations.

LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE TOPIC

UNWTO (2022) highlights the growing role of digital innovation and service standardization in improving destination competitiveness, while Airey & Tribe (2021) and Buhalis & Amaranggana (2022) underscore the significance of customer experience management and smart-tourism frameworks in modern service delivery. Moreover, studies by Dredge & Jamal (2021) and Kozak & Martin (2020) provide insights into collaborative governance and stakeholder coordination key components relevant to the Uzbek tourism context.

Primary data for this research were collected through expert interviews with tourism managers, service providers, and regional specialists. Secondary data were obtained from official statistical reports, regulatory documents, and analytical publications of UNWTO, WTTC, the State Committee for Tourism of Uzbekistan, and recent academic articles published between 2020 and 2024. Content analysis was applied to identify key trends, service management gaps, and reform outcomes, while descriptive statistics were used to assess changes in service quality indicators, tourist satisfaction levels, and sectoral performance over recent years. This methodological combination enables a comprehensive evaluation of Uzbekistan's tourism service management system and supports the development of practical, evidence-based recommendations.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The results of the study confirm that tourism services management in Uzbekistan has undergone rapid quantitative and qualitative transformation over the last decade, supported by liberalization reforms, increased investment and gradual alignment with international service standards. Official data show that international tourist arrivals rose from around 2.7 million visitors in 2017 to 6.75 million in 2019, before collapsing to about 1.88 million in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and then rebounding sharply to 5.2 million in 2022 and about 6.6–7.0 million visitors in 2023, indicating not only full recovery but a new growth phase for the sector[1].

Recent estimates from the national statistical system show that by 2024 the number of trips of foreign citizens arriving in the country for tourism purposes reached about 7.96 million, which confirms a stable upward trend and growing demand for Uzbek tourism products in regional and global markets.

This dynamic is closely linked to improvements in service management: the number of hotels and similar accommodation facilities reached 1,167 in 2022, with government programs targeting an expansion of room capacity from about 20,200 in 2018 to an expected 64,000 by 2025, which has increased competition among providers and encouraged the adoption of higher service quality standards, staff training programs and modern reservation practices[2].

Financial indicators demonstrate similar positive changes in tourism service performance. Export revenues from tourism amounted to about 951 million USD in 2019, dropped to 296.4 million USD in 2021 during the pandemic, and then surged to 1.61 billion USD in 2022; more recent assessments indicate that tourism export earnings reached approximately 2.14 billion USD in 2023 and are estimated at around 3.5 billion USD in 2024, which means that the sector not only recovered its pre-pandemic level but more than tripled its export income in just three years[3].

These quantitative improvements coincide with qualitative shifts in tourism governance and service management documented in recent academic studies. Researchers note that the Tourism Development Strategy for 2017–2021 and subsequent policy documents placed special emphasis on simplifying administrative procedures, improving the business environment for tour operators and hotels, and strengthening the institutional framework for tourism regulation, which in turn stimulated new investments in accommodation, transport and digital infrastructure[4].

Other recent studies highlight that Uzbekistan's adoption of an e-visa system (from 2018) and the expansion of visa-free regimes currently covering around 90 countries with e-visas for an additional 56 have significantly reduced transaction costs for international travelers, shortened planning time and increased the attractiveness of the destination, especially for independent and short-stay tourists[5].

Maxsudovich (2024), for example, shows that the number of foreign visitors grew to around 6.6 million in 2023, 1.3 times higher than in 2022, and links this growth to improved marketing, diversification of tourism products and the gradual diffusion of smart-tourism solutions such as online booking platforms, digital information services and cashless payment systems in major cities and heritage sites.

Zakirova (2025) further argues that the introduction of targeted government incentives including a dedicated 100 million USD support package for tourism infrastructure in 2021 has accelerated the modernization of hospitality services, encouraged the construction and renovation of mid-range and boutique hotels, and supported the development of specialized services in pilgrimage, eco- and educational tourism[6].

Taken together, these empirical results demonstrate that Uzbekistan's tourism services management is moving from a predominantly quantity-oriented model (focused on increasing arrivals) towards a more complex, quality- and experience-oriented model that prioritizes service standards, human capital, digitalization and destination branding. At the same time, the evidence also suggests remaining challenges: service quality is still uneven between leading cities and peripheral regions, the adoption of digital tools by small and medium-sized enterprises is incomplete, and staff training in foreign languages and customer-oriented service culture needs further strengthening. Nevertheless, the strong post-pandemic rebound in tourist arrivals and revenues, the rapid expansion of accommodation capacity, and the institutionalization of reforms in visa policy, infrastructure support and strategic planning indicate that the trajectory of tourism services management in Uzbekistan is broadly positive and that the country has laid a solid foundation for deeper improvements in service quality, diversification and sustainable growth over the coming years.

In order to assess the current dynamics of tourism development in Uzbekistan and evaluate the effectiveness of ongoing reforms in service management, it is essential to analyze recent statistical trends in both inbound and outbound tourist flows. Over the past five years, the tourism sector has undergone significant structural changes, shaped by post-pandemic recovery strategies, digital transformation initiatives, and improvements in service quality across major destinations. These transformations are clearly reflected in the growing mobility of both international visitors and Uzbek citizens, indicating shifts in consumer behavior, rising expectations for service standards, and increasing competitiveness of the national tourism industry.

Monitoring annual changes in tourist flows provides valuable insights into how effectively tourism services are being managed, how reforms influence visitor demand, and which areas require further policy attention.



Figure 1. Number of tourist trips (for the corresponding year, thousand trips)¹

The statistics presented in the chart on the number of tourist trips to and from Uzbekistan between 2020 and 2024 provide clear evidence of the country's rapidly changing tourism landscape, reflecting both post-pandemic recovery and structural improvements in tourism services management. The data show a significant upward trend in inbound tourism, which is a key indicator of improved service quality, destination attractiveness, and effective tourism governance.

First, inbound tourism increased from 1.5 million trips in 2020 to nearly 8.0 million in 2024, representing a five-fold growth within four years. This sharp rise demonstrates the effectiveness of Uzbekistan's tourism reforms, particularly visa liberalization, destination branding, infrastructure development, and enhanced service standards across accommodation, transportation, and cultural sites. The surge is especially pronounced after 2022, when inbound trips jumped from 5.23 million to 6.62 million in 2023 and further to 7.96 million in 2024. This acceleration coincides with improvements in digital tourism services, such as e-visa expansion, online booking systems, and integrated tourism information platforms, which have reduced barriers for international visitors.

Second, the growth of outbound tourism, rising from 2.0 million in 2020 to 6.18 million in 2024, reflects a broader socio-economic pattern: increasing mobility, rising household incomes, and stronger integration of Uzbekistan into regional and global travel networks. From a management perspective, the increase in outbound flows also encourages domestic operators to enhance the quality of their services to remain competitive with foreign destinations that Uzbek citizens experience abroad.

The narrowing gap between inbound and outbound tourism in 2021–2022 and its widening again in 2023–2024 is strategically important. During the pandemic years, reduced inbound flows highlighted vulnerabilities in Uzbekistan's tourism service system, especially overdependence on traditional markets and inconsistent service quality. However, the rebound after 2022 reflects successful crisis management measures, improved coordination between government and private actors, and the adoption of more resilient tourism models such as domestic tourism support, diversification of tourism types (eco-tourism, cultural, pilgrimage, gastronomic tourism), and expanded marketing campaigns.

By 2024, inbound tourism surpasses outbound tourism by nearly 1.8 million trips, showing that Uzbekistan is strengthening its position as a net tourism destination. This shift signals enhanced international competitiveness an outcome directly tied to better service management: expanded accommodation capacity, upgraded hospitality standards, professional training programs, and the increasing role of digitalization in service delivery.

Overall, the statistical trend illustrates that tourism service management in Uzbekistan is transitioning from a recovery-focused model to a sustainable growth-oriented framework. The rapid rise in inbound flows confirms that the reforms are generating measurable outcomes, while the expansion of outbound tourism

¹ The number of trips is taken into account, since the same person who entered the republic or left the republic may be counted several times, and this is considered as a separate case.

reflects broader socio-economic development and the growing expectations of Uzbek travelers, which in turn pushes domestic service providers to continuously improve their quality, efficiency, and innovation capacity.

To gain a deeper understanding of the structural characteristics of tourist flows in Uzbekistan and to evaluate the effectiveness of current tourism service management practices, it is necessary not only to analyze overall tourist numbers but also to examine the specific purposes of travel[9]. Identifying why foreign visitors come to Uzbekistan and for what reasons Uzbek citizens travel abroad provides critical insights into the strengths and weaknesses of service offerings, market segmentation, and the overall competitiveness of the tourism sector. Such analysis allows us to assess which segments demonstrate the greatest growth potential, where service quality improvements are most urgently required, and how existing tourism products align with international demand trends. The following table presents the distribution of tourist trips by purpose in 2024, offering an empirical basis for evaluating ongoing reforms and identifying strategic directions for improving tourism services in Uzbekistan.

Table 2. Distribution of the number of tourist trips by purpose (for 2024, thousand trips)²

Purposes of tourist trips	Tourist trips of foreign citizens who arrived in Uzbekistan	% of total	Tourist trips of Uzbek citizens who travelled abroad	% of total
	total (thous.)		total (thous.)	
Total of which:	7 957.2	100	6 183.8	100
Business trip	338.5	4.3%	13.7	0.2%
Studies	25.1	0.3%	35.9	0.6%
Leisure and recreation	1 184.4	14.9%	949.4	15.3%
Visiting relatives	6 105.3	76.7%	5 123.9	82.9%
Treatment	104.9	1.3%	60.9	1.0%
Commerce	199.0	2.5%	–	–

The distribution of tourist trips by purpose in 2024 provides deep insights into the structure and management priorities of Uzbekistan's tourism sector. The data reveal that visiting relatives dominates both inbound (76.7%) and outbound (82.9%) travel. This overwhelming share indicates that diaspora-based, family-related travel remains the core driver of mobility, rather than traditional leisure tourism. From a service management perspective, this highlights the need to diversify tourism offerings and strengthen destination marketing to attract a larger share of leisure, cultural, pilgrimage, and educational tourists.

The share of leisure and recreation among inbound tourists (14.9%) and outbound travelers (15.3%) shows that this segment is growing but still underutilized compared to global tourism patterns, where leisure tourism typically accounts for 55–60% of total trips. This signals that Uzbekistan must continue improving the quality of hospitality services, entertainment infrastructure, guided services, digital booking platforms, and multilingual customer service, which are essential for increasing its attractiveness as a recreational destination.

Business tourism, representing only 4.3% of inbound trips, suggests that Uzbekistan's MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) capabilities are still in early development. Strengthening convention centers, international business events, trade fairs, and conference services could expand this high-value segment. At the same time, outbound business tourism is extremely low (0.2%), reflecting relatively low global business mobility among local firms, but also signaling that Uzbekistan can attract more foreign investors by developing modern business tourism services.

Medical tourism remains small (1–1.3%), yet it has significant growth potential. With rising investments in private healthcare, wellness centers, and diagnostic services, Uzbekistan can position itself as a competitive regional hub for treatment and rehabilitation especially for patients from neighboring countries.

The lowest share belongs to study tourism (0.3% inbound), indicating that educational mobility into Uzbekistan is still limited. However, the growth of Islamic studies, Central Asian studies, and international partnerships suggests an opportunity to expand short-term academic programs, language schools, and student exchange initiatives.

The data indicate that Uzbekistan's tourism sector is growing quantitatively but requires qualitative diversification. Key implications include:

² www.stat.uz

- Strengthening service quality standards to convert transit and family visitors into full-fledged leisure tourists.
- Enhancing digital service management, online booking, smart-tourism tools, and multilingual information platforms.
- Diversifying tourism products—eco-tourism, cultural, educational, gastronomic, pilgrimage—to reduce dependence on “visiting relatives” travel.
- Improving human resource training, especially in hospitality, foreign languages, and customer interaction.
- Expanding business tourism infrastructure to attract high-spending segments.
- Developing strategic marketing campaigns to raise Uzbekistan’s visibility in global tourism markets.

Overall, the structure of tourist purposes reveals that while Uzbekistan has made impressive progress in increasing tourist flows, sustainable development now depends on professionalizing service management, diversifying market segments, and improving the quality of tourism experiences.

The sustainable development of tourism in Uzbekistan requires a comprehensive and multidimensional approach that strengthens service quality, enhances destination competitiveness, and aligns national tourism policies with global best practices. Several strategic directions can significantly accelerate the sector’s growth and improve its contribution to the national economy.

1. Improving tourism infrastructure. Upgrading transportation networks, modernizing airports, enhancing road accessibility to cultural and natural sites, and expanding high-quality accommodation facilities are essential for supporting growing tourist flows. Investments in eco-friendly transport, regional airports, visitor centers, and digital navigation tools can improve the overall travel experience and increase tourist satisfaction.

2. Enhancing service quality and professional training. Raising service standards across hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, and tour guiding services is crucial. This includes strengthening vocational education, establishing international certification programs, and expanding foreign-language training for tourism workers. Improved customer-oriented service culture will help Uzbekistan compete with leading global destinations.

3. Digitalization and smart tourism solutions. The adoption of smart-tourism platforms, e-ticketing, online booking systems, virtual museum tours, and mobile tourist information apps can simplify travel planning and increase engagement. Strengthening digital marketing, social media branding, and search engine visibility will help attract younger, tech-savvy international visitors.

4. Diversification of tourism products. Uzbekistan has significant potential to expand beyond traditional cultural-historical tourism. Developing eco-tourism, adventure tourism, pilgrimage tourism, educational tourism, medical tourism, and gastronomic tourism can attract new market segments and reduce seasonal fluctuations.

5. Strengthening destination branding and international promotion. A unified national branding strategy that highlights Uzbekistan’s cultural heritage, Silk Road identity, unique landscapes, and hospitality can enhance global recognition. Participation in international tourism fairs, partnerships with global travel platforms, and targeted marketing campaigns in key source markets will boost visibility.

6. Supporting entrepreneurship and SME development. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) play a vital role in tourism. Expanding financial incentives, simplifying licensing procedures, offering tax benefits, and creating innovation hubs can stimulate local entrepreneurship in accommodation, catering, handicrafts, and adventure services.

7. Sustainable and green tourism development. Promoting environmentally responsible tourism practices, such as waste management, energy-efficient hospitality infrastructure, conservation projects, and community-based tourism, will preserve natural resources and ensure long-term sustainability. Implementing UNWTO-aligned sustainability indicators will help monitor environmental impacts.

8. Enhancing regional tourism integration. Improving tourism cooperation with neighboring Central Asian states through joint visa regimes, cross-border routes, and integrated Silk Road packages can expand regional mobility and attract long-haul tourists seeking multi-country itineraries.

9. Improving regulatory and institutional frameworks. Streamlining administrative procedures, enhancing public-private partnerships, and strengthening governance institutions will help ensure policy continuity, attract foreign investment, and maintain high-quality service standards.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The analysis of tourism services management in Uzbekistan demonstrates that the country has entered a new stage of tourism development characterized by rapid quantitative growth, progressive reforms, and improving service standards. The steady increase in inbound tourism from 1.5 million trips in 2020 to nearly 8 million in 2024 shows that Uzbekistan is becoming an increasingly attractive destination, supported by visa liberalization, infrastructure modernization, and digital transformation initiatives. At the same time, the structure

of tourist flows reveals important challenges, especially the dominance of “visiting relatives” travel and the relatively low share of leisure, business, medical, and educational tourism. This indicates that while the sector is expanding, deeper diversification and professionalization are required to strengthen long-term competitiveness.

The findings also highlight significant improvements in hospitality infrastructure, human resource development, and marketing efforts. However, service quality remains uneven across regions, digital adoption is still incomplete among SMEs, and international promotion needs greater coherence. To ensure sustainable growth, Uzbekistan must focus on building a tourism ecosystem that prioritizes high-quality services, innovation, and diversified tourism products.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to further enhance tourism services management in Uzbekistan:

1. Develop unified national service standards aligned with international benchmarks, expand certification systems, and enhance training programs for hospitality workers and tour guides.
2. Promote the adoption of smart-tourism technologies, including online booking systems, multilingual mobile applications, digital payment services, and virtual information platforms to improve accessibility and convenience.
3. Foster the development of eco-tourism, cultural routes, pilgrimage tourism, creative tourism, medical tourism, and educational programs to attract new segments and reduce dependence on family-related travel.
4. Implement a consistent national branding strategy, intensify digital marketing campaigns, collaborate with global travel platforms, and increase Uzbekistan's presence at international tourism fairs.
5. Invest in transport connectivity, regional airports, visitor facilities, signage systems, and eco-friendly infrastructure to support comfortable and sustainable travel experiences.
6. Provide tax incentives, simplified licensing, microfinance programs, and innovation support to help local entrepreneurs expand accommodation, catering, handicrafts, and adventure services.
7. Strengthen conservation programs, support local communities, promote green certification for hotels, and integrate environmental sustainability principles into tourism planning.
8. Build modern conference and exhibition facilities, promote international business events, and create incentives for foreign companies to host meetings and forums in Uzbekistan.
9. Establish stronger public-private partnerships, enhance institutional capacity, and implement evidence-based policy planning using real-time tourism data and analytics.

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