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CURRENT PROBLEMS OF IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF HOTEL SERVICES IN UZBEKISTAN AND WAYS TO SOLVE THEM BASED ON INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGIES

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Abstract
The paper examines current problems of improving the quality of hotel services in Uzbekistan amid the rapid growth of inbound tourism, which reached 11.7 million foreign visitors in 2025. Using official statistics for 2020–2024 and the SERVQUAL framework, it shows that hotel capacity has grown far more slowly than tourist flows and identifies four core constraints: human capital, standardisation, digital maturity and regional imbalance. A matrix of technology-based solutions and policy proposals for the national hotel industry is substantiated.

Keywords: hotel services; service quality; SERVQUAL; smart hospitality; digital transformation; artificial intelligence; revenue management; Uzbekistan.



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Introduction

Tourism has become one of the fastest-growing sectors of the economy of Uzbekistan. According to preliminary official data, the country received 11.7 million foreign visitors in 2025, which is 46.8% more than in 2024 [6]. Such dynamics shift the strategic agenda of the hotel industry from the quantitative expansion of the room stock to the qualitative development of services that determine guest satisfaction, length of stay and repeat visits.

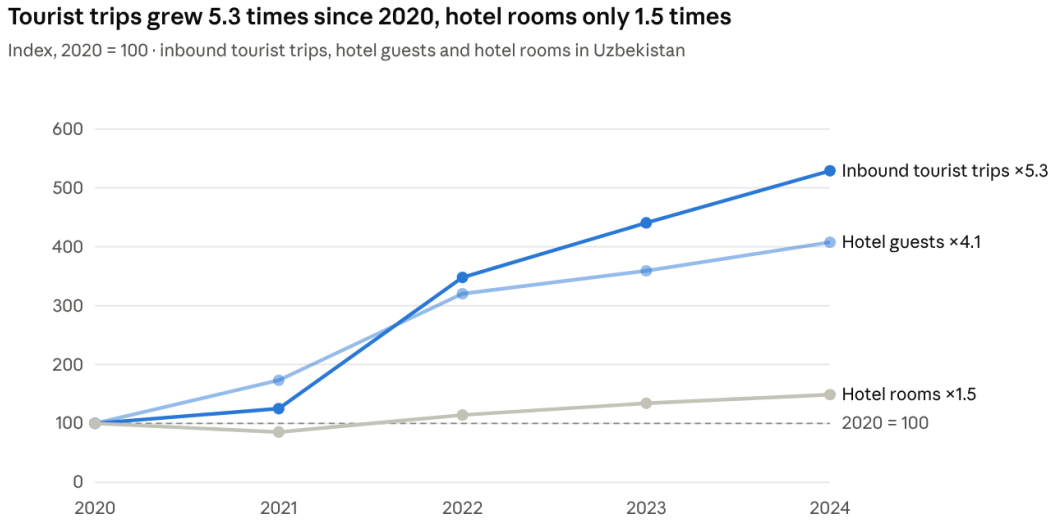
In service management theory, quality is interpreted as the gap between what a customer expects and what he or she actually perceives. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry operationalised this gap through five dimensions — tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy — which remain the most widely used basis for assessing hotel service quality [1]. Contemporary research adds a technological perspective: Buhalis and Leung argue that the competitiveness of a hotel increasingly depends on its integration into a smart hospitality ecosystem, in which interconnected and interoperable information systems serve guests, staff and partners in real time [2].

For Uzbekistan, the problem is especially acute. Safarov and co-authors note that the lack of qualified personnel and underdeveloped tourism infrastructure restrain the sector, and that high-quality accommodation services are needed to keep tourists in the country longer [3]. The aim of this paper is therefore to identify the current problems of hotel service quality in Uzbekistan and to substantiate ways of solving them on the basis of innovative technologies. The study uses statistical and comparative analysis of official data for 2020–2025, SERVQUAL-based problem mapping and the generalisation of international experience.

Main part

1. Current state of the hotel industry

In 2024, 2,383 hotels and similar accommodation facilities operated in Uzbekistan, with 38,075 rooms and 79,469 beds; they accommodated 2,864.3 thousand guests [5]. The number of facilities grew by 71.8% in one year, whereas the number of rooms grew by only 11.0% [5]. As a result, the average property shrank from 24.7 rooms in 2023 to 16.0 rooms in 2024: the sector is fragmenting into small, owner-managed hotels and hostels that rarely have formal service standards, trained managers or budgets for information systems. Including guest houses, hostels and other types, the total accommodation stock has reached about 6,921 establishments with some 185,600 beds [6].



National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, press release of 12.08.2025 · 2020–2024

Figure 1. Dynamics of inbound tourist trips, hotel guests and the room stock of hotels and similar facilities in Uzbekistan, 2020–2024 (index, 2020 = 100). Source: calculated by the author based on [5].

Between 2020 and 2024, inbound tourist trips increased 5.3 times and the number of hotel guests 4.1 times, while the room stock grew only 1.5 times (Figure 1). Existing properties therefore operate under a steadily growing load, which in peak months turns into overbooking, longer waiting times and less consistent service.

Three structural features deepen the quality problem. First, the sector is weakly standardised: at the end of 2025 only 40 hotels belonged to 25 international brands, with 5,191 rooms [6] — less than 2% of the hotel-type facilities registered in 2024 and about 14% of their room stock. Second, supply and demand are concentrated: Tashkent city and the Samarkand, Bukhara and Khorezm regions account for 65.3% of hotels and 74.7% of guests [5], leaving other regions with thin and often low-quality supply. Third, 76.7% of foreign tourist trips in 2024 were made to visit relatives, against 14.9% for leisure and 4.3% for business [5]; hotels thus compete for a relatively narrow segment of guests whose expectations are shaped by global brands and online reviews.

2. Current problems of hotel service quality

Mapping these findings onto the SERVQUAL dimensions [1] reveals five interrelated problems.

1. **Human capital deficit.** A shortage of staff with professional training and foreign-language skills, high turnover and seasonal hiring weaken responsiveness, assurance and empathy; this constraint is repeatedly identified as a key barrier to tourism development in Uzbekistan [3].
2. **Lack of standardisation and quality monitoring.** Most small properties work without documented service procedures, and quality control relies on occasional inspections rather than continuous measurement, which undermines reliability.

3. **Low digital maturity.** Manual front-office operations, weak integration of booking channels, limited online and contactless payment and the absence of systematic guest feedback lead to errors, waiting time and a lack of data for management decisions [4].
4. **Inefficient demand and price management.** Strong seasonality and pricing by intuition rather than by forecast produce overbooking in peak months and low occupancy off-season, so guests often perceive a mismatch between price and quality.
5. **Regional imbalance and ageing room stock.** Outside the main destinations, outdated equipment and high energy costs reduce the tangible quality of rooms.

3. Innovative technology-based ways of solving the problems

Each of these problems corresponds to a specific class of innovative technologies already proven in international hotel practice (Table 1).

Table 1. Problems of hotel service quality in Uzbekistan and innovative technological solutions

No.	Problem	SERVQUAL dimension affected	Innovative technological solution	Expected effect
1	Shortage and turnover of qualified staff	Assurance, empathy, responsiveness	VR/AR training simulators and mobile micro-learning; AI-based real-time translation at the front desk	Faster onboarding; consistent service scripts; lower language barrier
2	Inconsistent service standards	Reliability	Cloud property management system (PMS) with embedded standard operating procedures; digital housekeeping and maintenance apps	Uniform processes; every service failure recorded and traceable

No.	Problem	SERVQUAL dimension affected	Innovative technological solution	Expected effect
3	Weak guest feedback and reputation management	Responsiveness, empathy	QR-based in-stay feedback; AI sentiment analysis of online reviews; CRM	Service recovery before check-out; data-driven quality improvement
4	Manual booking, check-in and payment	Responsiveness, tangibles	Channel manager and booking engine integration; online check-in and digital keys; contactless and international card payments	Shorter waiting time; fewer booking errors
5	Seasonality and intuitive pricing	Reliability, perceived value	AI-based revenue management and demand forecasting	Higher occupancy and revenue per available room; no overbooking
6	Outdated rooms and high energy costs	Tangibles	IoT smart-room control and energy management systems	Greater comfort; lower utility costs; basis for green certification

Source: compiled by the author.

Three principles should govern implementation. First, interoperability: technologies create value only when the PMS, booking channels, payments, feedback tools and national e-services exchange data automatically; isolated tools merely digitise old problems [2]. For Uzbekistan, this means linking hotel systems through open interfaces with the electronic registration system for foreign guests (E-mehmon) and with tourism statistics. Second, gradualism: small properties should start with affordable cloud solutions (PMS, channel manager, online payment), then move to data-driven management (CRM, review analytics, revenue management), and only afterwards to smart rooms and AI concierge services. Third, the "high-tech, high-touch" balance: digital tools

improve the guest experience when they free staff for personal service rather than replace it [4]. In this way, technologies close the reliability and responsiveness gaps directly and create the time and data needed to strengthen assurance and empathy [1].

Conclusions and proposals

The study leads to three conclusions. First, the hotel industry of Uzbekistan is in a phase of quantitative growth that outpaces its qualitative development: tourist flows have grown 5.3 times since 2020, while the room stock has grown only 1.5 times, and the average property is becoming smaller and less standardised. Second, the problems of service quality are systemic — human capital, standardisation, digital maturity, demand management and regional imbalance reinforce one another and affect all five SERVQUAL dimensions. Third, innovative technologies are an effective way to solve these problems only when they are integrated into a single interoperable ecosystem and introduced in stages matched to the size of the property.

On this basis, the following proposals are put forward:

1. Launch a national "Digital Hotel" support programme that gives small hotels, hostels and guest houses preferential access to cloud PMS, channel managers and online payment services, with priority for regions outside the main destinations.
2. Introduce a digital hotel quality index that combines AI-based analysis of online reviews with mystery-guest audits, and link it to the hotel classification system and to state incentives.
3. Develop competency-based training jointly by universities and hotels, using VR simulators, micro-learning platforms and intensive foreign-language modules, so that service standards can be learned before staff meet guests.

4. Promote revenue management and demand forecasting tools, supported by open tourism data published regularly by the Tourism Committee and the National Statistics Committee.
5. Encourage IoT-based energy management in hotels through green certification and preferential credit, reducing operating costs while improving room comfort.
6. Create open interfaces between hotel information systems and national e-services (E-mehmon, e-visa, tourist tax collection) to eliminate duplicate data entry and shorten check-in.

Implementing these measures will help Uzbekistan convert record tourist flows into lasting competitiveness, measured not by the number of rooms but by the share of satisfied and returning guests.

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