

## Article

# Prospects for Improving Tourism Infrastructure in Uzbekistan

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**Abstract:** This article provides a scientific analysis of the current state, development trends, existing problems, and future opportunities of tourism infrastructure in the Republic of Uzbekistan. The main objective of the article is to define strategic directions and develop scientifically grounded recommendations aimed at transforming the country's tourism infrastructure into a stable and competitive system. Throughout the research, both national and international sources were analyzed, and regional tables were used to demonstrate the disproportionate development of infrastructure across the country. Furthermore, the key components of tourism infrastructure - including transport, accommodation, information and communication technologies, sanitation, logistics, and digital infrastructure - were studied in detail. The scientific views of various scholars were critically examined, and pressing issues in infrastructure reform were highlighted. These include regional inequality, low quality of services, and the lack of adequate information support. This article presents a number of proposals to improve nationally-based strategies for the sustainable development of tourism in Uzbekistan.

**Keywords:** Tourism, infrastructure, transport system, hospitality industry, logistics, information and communication technologies (ICT), digital infrastructure, domestic tourism, international tourism, regional development, public-private partnership (PPP), service quality management, tourism policy, environmental infrastructure, smart tourism, tourism hubs, economic potential, competitiveness, investment climate.

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## 1. Introduction

Today, tourism has become one of the fastest-growing sectors globally. It plays a significant role in increasing export revenues, creating new jobs, stimulating local businesses, and enhancing a country's overall investment attractiveness. The complex nature of tourism is reflected in its close interconnection with the economy, culture, transport, communications, urban development, ecology, and information technologies. Therefore, the development of tourism in any country requires, first and foremost, the creation of a modern, efficient, and sustainable infrastructure [1].

In Uzbekistan, the existing tourism infrastructure potential has not yet been fully utilized. A shortage of hotel capacity, outdated transport and road infrastructure in certain regions, logistical inconveniences between regional tourism centers, and insufficient implementation of modern information technologies hinder the growth of the tourism sector. As a result, improving and comprehensively developing tourism infrastructure through innovative approaches has become a pressing issue for the country [2].

The development of tourism infrastructure is now one of the key priorities in shaping Uzbekistan's economic policy. In particular, the "New Uzbekistan" Development Strategy emphasizes the need to unlock the vast potential of tourism, ensure balanced regional

development, and boost foreign economic activity. In this context, tourism infrastructure is regarded not only as a technical foundation for the industry but also as a vital pillar for the country's overall economic growth [3].

First and foremost, the urgency of this issue is linked to global trends. Nowadays, tourism is not just a means of recreation but also an effective tool for attracting investment, improving social infrastructure, stimulating small and medium enterprises, and diversifying exports. According to data from the World Bank and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), each dollar invested in tourism infrastructure generates a multiplier effect in more than two sectors of the economy. This means that infrastructural reforms can yield significant benefits both domestically and in enhancing Uzbekistan's international image [4].

Secondly, the development of tourism infrastructure plays an essential role in reducing regional economic disparities. Currently, tourism in Uzbekistan is concentrated around major centers such as Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva. Although other regions possess unique natural and archaeological attractions, underdeveloped infrastructure limits their tourism potential. For example, in regions like Surkhandarya, Navoi, and Jizzakh, rare heritage sites exist, but due to poor logistics, a lack of accommodations, and insufficient services, the tourist flow remains low. Improving infrastructure would allow these areas to be included in both national and international tourism maps [5].

Thirdly, improving infrastructure is a decisive factor in the development of domestic tourism. During the COVID-19 pandemic, interest in domestic tourism increased worldwide. In Uzbekistan as well, people began to pay more attention to local attractions. However, to maintain sustainable domestic tourism, a safe and convenient environment for local travelers must be provided - including roads, sanitation, affordable and quality accommodation, internet connectivity, and navigation systems [6].

Fourthly, tourism infrastructure is a key determinant of competitiveness in the global tourism market. In today's environment, tourists choose destinations not only for historical or cultural value but also for convenience and service quality. International-standard airports, railway stations, modern hotels, multilingual information systems, environmentally friendly and safe environments all these factors define a country's position in the global tourism market. If Uzbekistan succeeds in modernizing its tourism infrastructure, it could become a major tourism hub in Central Asia [7].

Fifthly, infrastructure improvements also contribute positively to social stability and quality of life. When transport, sanitation, drinking water, internet, and other infrastructure projects are implemented near tourist attractions, not only tourists but also local residents benefit from these services. This increases social engagement in the area and strengthens public trust and participation in the tourism sector [8].

Therefore, improving tourism infrastructure is a critical issue for Uzbekistan from economic, social, strategic, and political perspectives. A scientific analysis of this topic, supported by concrete assessments and practical recommendations, could serve as a valuable resource for the effective implementation of state tourism policy.

### **Literature Review**

A number of national and international studies have been conducted on the issue of tourism infrastructure, which scientifically justify its critical importance in the development of the tourism sector. This section presents a critical analysis of existing literature to highlight the extent of research coverage, identified gaps, and prevailing analytical approaches.

Globally, E. Inskeep, in his renowned work *"Tourism Planning"*, emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to tourism infrastructure planning in order to ensure sustainable tourism development. He views tourism infrastructure not only in terms of transportation and accommodation, but also in connection with environmental protection, cultural heritage preservation, and the needs of the local population [9]. His

approach is based on the principle of “active regional integration,” which is particularly relevant for addressing regional imbalances in Uzbekistan.

In Uzbekistan, M. Abdurakhmonov has analyzed the current state, challenges, and development prospects of the country's tourism infrastructure. His research primarily focuses on the disparities in infrastructure across regions such as Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khorezm, highlighting the lack of effective mechanisms for attracting investments to underdeveloped areas [10]. However, his work gives insufficient attention to digitalization and the implementation of innovative approaches in infrastructure development.

In his research, A. Alimov stresses the need to improve transport infrastructure in order to enhance the efficiency of tourism logistics, particularly by establishing interregional connectivity. He argues that “tourism logistics corridors” that connect domestic and international tourism routes are still underdeveloped in Uzbekistan [11]. While Alimov extensively covers logistical issues, the importance of information infrastructure is addressed only marginally.

N. Ergashev provides a scientifically grounded analysis of the integration of digital technologies into tourism infrastructure. He proposes the application of artificial intelligence, mobile applications, and smart city concepts to transform tourism infrastructure. However, his work lacks a thorough examination of the legal and financial barriers to localizing and implementing these technologies.

According to reports by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the quality of infrastructure and services is one of the core decision-making factors for tourists. Specifically, the availability of modern airports, railway stations, hotels, sanitation, and information services directly affects the attractiveness of a tourist destination [12]. These views scientifically support the potential for a significant increase in both domestic and international tourist arrivals in Uzbekistan through infrastructure development.

The analysis of scholarly research on tourism infrastructure reveals that it is a multi-dimensional and strategically significant issue, closely linked with economic, regional, technological, and cultural factors. Both domestic and international studies have substantiated the influence of infrastructural development on tourism; however, several aspects remain underexplored.

On the international level, K. Gunnarsson and D. Hall consider infrastructure to be a “catalyst” for regional economic development through tourism. They argue that infrastructure investments not only increase tourist inflows but also stimulate the overall business environment in a region [13]. This perspective is especially important for countries like Uzbekistan that face notable regional disparities.

M. Sharipova analyzes the condition of hotel infrastructure in Uzbekistan and identifies gaps in standardization and quality control mechanisms. She contends that the development of tourism infrastructure should not focus solely on increasing the number of physical assets, but also on ensuring their competitiveness, service quality, and alignment with tourist expectations [14].

In his academic research, I. Kamilov regards tourism infrastructure as an economic instrument and emphasizes the need to strengthen institutional frameworks for public-private partnerships (PPP) to increase tourism's contribution to GDP. While critically evaluating excessive state intervention, he asserts that sustainable infrastructure development is impossible without active participation from a competitive private sector.

S. Safarov promotes the concept of “smart tourism infrastructure,” proposing the integration of digital services, mobile applications, and AR/VR technologies to modernize tourism facilities. His conclusions further underline the necessity of digital transformation in the current technological era.

D. Buhalis and R. Cooper, among the first scholars to introduce the concept of “e-tourism infrastructure,” stress that elements such as online booking systems, information

portals, interactive maps, and user platforms have become essential components of modern tourism infrastructure [15]. They advocate for recognizing infrastructure not only in physical terms but also as a digital ecosystem that enhances tourist engagement.

The literature reviewed above demonstrates that while the academic discourse on tourism infrastructure is relatively well-developed, there is still a lack of localized, comprehensive, and systematic approaches suitable for Uzbekistan's current competitive context. In particular, further in-depth research is needed in the areas of ICT implementation, reduction of regional infrastructure disparities, institutionalization of PPP mechanisms, and service quality management.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The research conducted in the current study takes the form of a mixed-method design, which makes use of a multifaceted analytical structure that integrates the qualitative and quantitative approaches to study the current state and the prospective development of tourism infrastructure in Uzbekistan. It relied on the methodology of systematic analysis, comparative evaluation, and historical-logical approaches so that to draw the temporal and spatial dynamics of the development of infrastructure. The sources of data included official statistics provided by the Tourism Committee, the national acts, and the international reports conducted by the agencies like the UNWTO. Induction and deduction processes helped to generalize conclusions about the noticed tendencies at the regional level, and synthesis allowed integrating transport, accommodation, digital services, and logistics into an effective difference/similarity evaluation system. The method of estimating the patterns of regional development was a monographic one with special focus on the unevenness of the hotel facilities development in the provinces. Tables and graphical representation were used to help see the changes in tourism earnings, number of tourists, and the growth of infrastructure thus allowing the recognition of trends, and constrained areas and areas of growth. To place the findings in their greater theoretical context, the research critically examined the views of foremost national and global researchers and scholars as well. The methods of classification were later applied to categorise infrastructure needs by economic and touristic potential in regions, which provided the grounds on which various regulations on policy could be recommended. The methodological strategy of an upcoming study ensures that studies do not only identify the current gaps but also provide evidence-based recommendations related to restructuring infrastructure, digitalisation, and inclusive development, thus boosting competitiveness in the international tourism market.

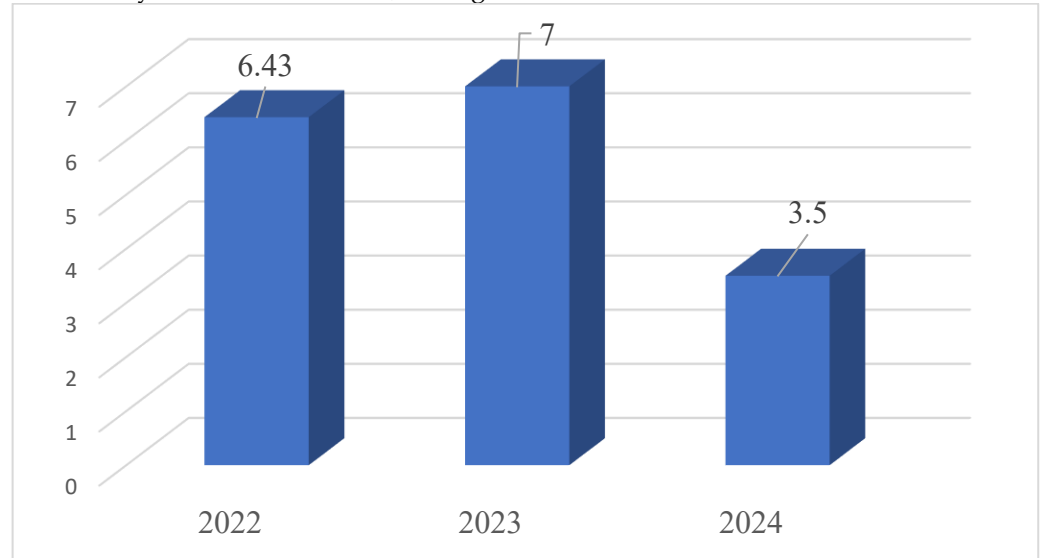
## 3. Results and Discussion

In recent years, tourism has emerged as one of the strategic priority sectors in Uzbekistan's economy, largely due to the consistency of state policy and the systematic implementation of practical reforms. Within the framework of major projects such as *"Uzbekistan – New Turkestan," "Silk Road Tourism," "Pilgrimage Tourism,"* and *"Ecological Tourism,"* both regional and international tourism routes have been actively developed. Notable initiatives include the expansion of hotel services, the training of professional tour guides, the digitalization of the visa system, the strengthening of tourism promotion agencies, and the introduction of public-private partnership mechanisms.

Nevertheless, the economic revival and further development of the tourism sector are inextricably linked to the state of tourism infrastructure. In order to attract tourists, a favorable and well-equipped environment must be created. This environment should not only be rich in cultural and historical landmarks but also be fully supported by essential infrastructure elements such as accommodations, transportation, communications, road signage, sanitation facilities, information technologies, and security systems.

Particularly in the context of global competition, it is not enough for infrastructure to merely exist - it must meet international standards. Only then can Uzbekistan effectively

position itself on the global tourism market and enhance the overall competitiveness and sustainability of its tourism sector, see Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Inbound Foreign Tourist Flow to Uzbekistan (in millions)

Source: Data from the Tourism Committee under the Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection, and Climate Change of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

According to the information presented in the image, the number of tourists visiting Uzbekistan in 2024 has seen a significant increase worldwide. This is directly related to tourism infrastructure reforms, including the reconstruction of airports and the introduction of a visa-free visit system, see Table 1.

**Table 1.** Revenue from Tourism Services

Year	Revenue (million USD)	Share in GDP (%)
2019	1679	2.81
2020	395	0.66
2021	679	0.98
2022	2469	1.56
2023	3500	2.98

Source: Data from the Tourism Committee under the Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection, and Climate Change of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

According to the data presented in the table, the tourism sector recovered in 2021 despite the impact of the coronavirus and achieved an even sharper increase in 2023 compared to the previous peak in 2019. This situation is related to the expansion of infrastructure and air connectivity, see Table 2.

**Table 2.** Infrastructure of Hotels Located in Regions of Uzbekistan

Region Name	Number of Hotels in 2022	Number of Hotels in 2023	Change (%)
Tashkent City	273	307	+12
Tashkent Region	76	97	+28
Samarkand	186	116	-38
Bukhara	204	180	-12
Navoi	44	37	-16
Jizzakh	33	33	0
Namangan	26	29	+12
Kashkadarya	43	46	+7
Khorezm	79	75	-5
Surkhandarya	64	50	-22



Syrdarya	20	14	-30
Andijan	26	22	-15
Republic of Karakalpakstan	44	30	-32

**Source:** TourCentralAsia, «Hotel Statistics in Uzbekistan», Uzbekistan Tourism Industry Statistics 2024

According to the data presented in the table:

1. Growth in the capital and surrounding regions (+12% and +28%) – The hotel infrastructure in Tashkent city and region is undergoing active reconstruction. This indicates that these major areas serve as economic centers and are a core part of the prioritized tourism directions.
2. Decrease of –38% in Samarkand – This may be explained by mismanagement of infrastructure reforms or demotivation caused by previously set requirements or subsidies for attracting the private sector. Unequal participation due to ideological reasons or limited investment opportunities in these areas also had an impact.
3. Decrease of –12% to –16% in Bukhara, Navoi, and others – This suggests limited initiatives in infrastructure reconstruction in these regions or that some facilities have not been adapted for mass tourism.
4. Stability in Jizzakh (+0%) – This indicates that the infrastructure in this region has not developed at all and the status quo has been maintained.
5. Small growth in Kashkadarya, Namangan, and Andijan (+7% to +12%) – This means that demand for tourist infrastructure is gradually developing in these regions, but the growth is still on a small scale.
6. Significant decline in Syrdarya and Karakalpakstan (–30% to –32%) – This highlights the urgent need to support infrastructure in these areas; there is a lack of strategic investments and public-private partnership mechanisms.

Based on the analysis of the data presented in the table, the following evidence-based recommendations were developed:

1. For the capital and its surroundings: To expand infrastructure with a focus on ensuring quality and competitiveness, it is necessary to implement high service standards and multilingual customer service.
2. For cultural centers such as Samarkand and Bukhara: It is necessary to introduce subsidies for the private sector, as well as self-regulating infrastructure and service control systems.
3. For regions with decline (Syrdarya, Surkhandarya, and Karakalpakstan): Infrastructure should be restored through strategic projects, creation of tourist routes, and integration of handicrafts and local services.

#### 4. Conclusion

The development of tourism infrastructure in Uzbekistan should be regarded not only as a sectoral issue but also as a crucial component of the national economy, regional development, investment policy, and a strategic direction shaping the country's international image. Currently, large-scale reforms underway in the country, visa-free regimes, restoration of historic cities, and infrastructural projects are causing significant positive changes in the tourism sector. However, existing infrastructure capacities are insufficient for sustainable tourism growth.

The conclusions drawn from the analysis in the article can be summarized into several key directions:

1. Issue of regional infrastructure inequality. Analysis of tables and sources shows that infrastructural facilities are mostly concentrated in major cities such as Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara. A decrease in the number of hotels, poor service quality, and logistical problems in regions like Karakalpakstan, Syrdarya,

Navoi, and Surkhandarya limit tourist flows. This imbalance necessitates a balanced revision of national tourism policy.

2. Problems in hotel and accommodation infrastructure. Despite a continued increase in the number of hotels in the regions, issues related to their quality, types of services, and compliance with standards remain unresolved. There is no balanced provision of affordable, mid-range, and high-segment accommodations that meet tourist needs. Therefore, diversifying hotel infrastructure through public-private partnerships is imperative.
3. Strengthening the role of transport and logistics infrastructure. Although airport modernization (Tashkent, Samarkand) has yielded positive results, internal logistics and access to rural areas remain limited. It is necessary to create "tourism logistics corridors" connecting tourist routes with villages, natural parks, and local handicraft centers.
4. Lack of information and communication infrastructure. Modern tourists demand not only physical comfort but also digital services. In Uzbekistan, multilingual information platforms, mobile applications, interactive maps, online guides, and AR/VR technologies are still insufficiently implemented. This poses an obstacle to creating a competitive tourism environment.
5. Sustainability and ecological approach to infrastructure. International experience shows that modern infrastructure should be not only technically efficient but also ecological, inclusive, and "smart." Steps in this direction (e.g., "green tourism," ecological trails) are only beginning in Uzbekistan. In the future, applying sustainable infrastructure standards will improve the quality of life not only for tourists but also for local residents.
6. Personnel and service quality as an integral part of infrastructure. No matter how advanced physical infrastructure is, if the service quality is low, tourists' perceptions will be negative. Therefore, developing infrastructure together with human capital in service provision is a strategic task.

To improve tourism infrastructure in the Republic of Uzbekistan, the following proposals have been developed:

1. Developing separate infrastructure development concepts for each region;
2. Expanding tourism infrastructure through public-private partnerships;
3. Prioritizing the introduction of information and digital services;
4. Enhancing personnel training and quality control in the service sector;
5. Forming tourism infrastructure based on ecological and inclusive approaches;
6. Establishing scientific-analytical centers and data platforms for infrastructure monitoring.

Thus, strengthening tourism infrastructure in Uzbekistan can become not only a means to realize tourism potential but also a tool to activate socio-economic development of regions, improve the investment climate, and advance the country to a new stage of national progress.

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