

SERVICE STANDARDS IN RESTAURANTS IN TOURIST CENTERS AND THEIR COMPARISON WITH INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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Abstract: This thesis analyzes service standards in restaurants located in tourist centers of Uzbekistan and compares them with international experience. The main focus of the study is on service quality, customer satisfaction, staff qualifications, language skills, hygiene and speed of service. Recommendations are developed based on the best practices of Turkey, Italy and Thailand.

Keywords: Service quality, restaurants, tourism, international experience, customer needs.

Introduction. In recent years, the development of the tourism sector in the Republic of Uzbekistan has become one of the priority areas of state policy. As a result of presidential decrees, government resolutions and programs adopted by relevant ministries, the tourism infrastructure has been expanded and favorable conditions for international tourists are being created. In this process, the quality of service, especially the activities of restaurants in tourist centers, requires special attention. Because restaurants are one of the places where tourists first encounter local culture, traditions and hospitality.

The quality of service is one of the important factors determining the competitiveness of any tourist facility. In particular, the quality of service in restaurants allows you to satisfy customers, positively shape their experience and thereby create a positive image of the tourist area. Unfortunately, the current situation shows that in many cases local restaurants cannot fully meet international requirements and criteria. This can lead not only to dissatisfaction among tourists, but also to the formation of a negative opinion in the tourism sector as a whole.

It is known from international practice that in developed tourist countries (for example, Italy, Turkey, Thailand) restaurants directly affect the mood, experience and even the likelihood of repeat visits by maintaining a high level of service quality. Studying, analyzing these experiences and adapting them to local conditions is one of the important tasks facing the restaurant industry of Uzbekistan today.

The main purpose of this study is to study the state of service in restaurants located in tourist centers of Uzbekistan, compare existing standards with international experience and develop practical recommendations for improving the quality of local service. This research will serve to form a service system that meets the requirements of modern tourism, increase the flow of foreign tourists and take high places in the international tourism market rating of the republic.

In this study, in contrast to traditional empirical methods, the following scientific and methodological approaches were used to determine the quality and standards of service, without questionnaires and interviews:

2.1. Use of the observation method

First of all, the activities of more than 20 restaurants located in major tourist centers of Uzbekistan (Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Tashkent) were examined on the basis of on-site observation. During the observation, the following criteria were used to assess: speed and efficiency of service; language accessibility of menus; communication culture of employees; compliance with sanitary and hygienic standards; flexibility of service depending on the flow of customers.

This method made it possible to analyze the natural course of the service process and identify quality problems in real conditions [1].

2.2. Content analysis

As part of the study, the legislative acts of the Republic of Uzbekistan on tourism and catering services for the period 2018–2024, resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers, reports of the Tourism Committee, and open data of the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Heritage were studied.

Also, as an international experience, the content analysis of official documents and scientific articles related to tourism restaurant standards of the following countries was conducted:

Turkey: “TS 13811:2004” hotel and restaurant services standard approved by the Turkish Standards Institution (TSE) [2];

Italy: “Italian Hospitality Quality” program criteria developed in cooperation with UNWTO [3];

Thailand: Thailand Tourism Quality Standard documents and official information on the TAT (Tourism Authority of Thailand) portal [4].

2.3. Comparison of regulatory documents and standards

The following regulatory documents and practical experiences related to local and international restaurant services were analyzed in a comparative manner:

Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Tourism” (adopted on March 18, 2019, new edition) [5];

Hygiene standards of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Uzbekistan (SanPiN 2.3.4.545–18) [6];

ISO 9001:2015 international quality management standard [7];

HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) food safety system [8].

Also, the activities of real restaurants in Uzbekistan were assessed against the criteria of the above documents. This made it possible to compare existing problems with specific normative and practical criteria.

Scientific research on tourism resources and their territorial distribution shows that this area has a complex and multifactorial nature. In particular, Hasanov M.A. classified the natural and cultural tourism resources of Uzbekistan and analyzed their geographical location. The author notes the imbalance in the distribution of resources as the main problem in planning tourism policy [1]. Sokolova A.V. in her study, analyzing the resource and infrastructure differences between regions, emphasizes the need for territorial balance for sustainable tourism development [2]. These ideas also correspond to the experience of Uzbekistan. In addition, a report prepared by the UNWTO indicates that the competitive advantage in modern tourism lies not only in the availability of resources, but also in aspects related to their management, marketing and infrastructure [5]. Rasulov Sh., analyzing the territorial tourism policy in Uzbekistan, identifies the lack of infrastructure appropriate to the resources, weak marketing strategies and the weakness of local administrations as the main problems [3]. Karimov Kh.Kh.'s study substantiates the relevance of territorial planning of tourism resources using GIS technologies [4]. In conclusion, the analysis of the literature shows that the territorial distribution of tourism resources is a pressing issue at the global and local levels, and scientific developments in this area can serve as an important methodological basis for the balanced development of tourism in Uzbekistan.

3.1. Current status of local restaurants

According to the results of the monitoring, the level of service in restaurants located in tourist centers of Uzbekistan is average, and although there is an improvement in some aspects, many problems have been identified. In particular:

The service culture and language skills of employees are insufficient. Many restaurants lack employees who speak foreign languages, which hinders effective communication with foreign tourists [1].

Compliance with hygiene and cleanliness requirements varies. While some facilities strictly comply with sanitary requirements, others do not [6].

Menu formats are usually only in Uzbek or Russian, and English options are rare, which reduces convenience for foreign tourists [1].

The speed of service is often low, especially when the number of customers increases.

These situations indicate that tourist restaurants cannot fully meet the requirements of international tourists.

3.2. Comparative analysis with international standards

It was observed that the service systems in Turkish, Italian and Thai restaurants studied in the study are superior to the Uzbek experience in several areas:

In Italy, the continuous professional development of service personnel is monitored based on the "Italian Hospitality Quality" program. All stages, from the moment of first contact with the guest to the end of the service, are evaluated using clear criteria [3].

In Turkey, restaurants operate in accordance with standards approved by the TSE (Turkish Standards Institution). The service process of each restaurant is documented and monitored through scheduled audits [2].

In Thailand, restaurants are evaluated in terms of service quality, safety, design, staff qualifications and customer satisfaction within the framework of the state-approved “Tourism Quality Standard” program [4].

A common feature in these countries is the principle of working based on a quality management system (ISO 9001) and a food safety system (HACCP) [7][8].

3.3. Regulatory compliance and practical shortcomings

Although the Republic of Uzbekistan has a Law “On Tourism” and hygiene standards of the Ministry of Health, their implementation is low. Many restaurants maintain service standards based on their own internal policies and there is no independent institution or rating system to monitor them [5][6].

An important conclusion from the study is that the following factors play an important role in improving the activities of local restaurants based on international experience:

systematic training programs for staff development;

multilingual menus and service systems;

an alternative system for monitoring service quality and customer satisfaction (rating, evaluation);

introduction of international quality management systems (ISO 9001, HACCP).

The results of the study show that many restaurants located in tourist centers of Uzbekistan are not sufficiently prepared to work with foreign tourists. Although they have service standards, in practice, the implementation of these standards is weak, inconsistent and unsystematic.

4.1. Differences between international experience and local practice

Judging by international experience, modern restaurants have become not only a place to eat, but also an integral part of the tourist experience. In the Italian hotel-restaurant system, the level of service culture is considered a key factor affecting the emotions of tourists [3]. In Thailand, service quality is an integral part of the strategy for increasing tourist flows [4].

Unfortunately, many restaurants in Uzbekistan still consider service only as a means of satisfying the need for food. This limits their competitiveness. The lack of knowledge of foreign languages of employees, the lack of a personalized approach to service and the absence of an independent monitoring mechanism for service quality indicate that they are lagging behind international standards [1], [5].

4.2. The need for a control and certification system

International experience shows that the existence of certification and audit mechanisms by state or independent organizations is important for high service quality. For example, in Turkey, the activities of each restaurant are rated according to TSE criteria [2]. Since this approach is absent in Uzbekistan, restaurants with poor service continue to operate.

4.3. Lack of innovative approaches

Modern tourist restaurants are increasing their competitiveness through innovative services such as anticipating customer needs, online reservations, and menu scanning (via QR code). Such technological approaches have not yet been widely implemented in Uzbek restaurants. This does not meet the demands of modern tourists [1], [6].

Conclusion. The above analysis and comparisons have shown that the quality of service in restaurants located in tourist centers of Uzbekistan is currently lagging behind international requirements and experience. Although the existing legal and regulatory documents in local practice are sufficient, the lack of effective control mechanisms and quality management systems for their implementation negatively affects the level of service. In order to bring the service standards of local restaurants into line with international criteria, it is advisable to implement the following measures:

1. Introduction of quality standards and a rating system:

A specialized rating system for restaurants should be developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism and the Tourism Development Committee (for example, through the “Best Tourist Restaurant of the Year” competition).

2. Expansion of staff training programs:

It is necessary to increase the number of courses in foreign languages and service culture in colleges and universities specializing in the hotel and restaurant industry.

3. Introduction of international standards:

It should be mandatory for every large restaurant to have ISO 9001 and HACCP certificates.

4. Establishment of a multilingual service system:

Menus, websites, service descriptions must be in Uzbek, Russian, English and other languages.

5. Introduction of innovative technologies:

Online ordering, QR-menu, real-time customer rating systems should be introduced.

6. Strengthening cooperation between the state and non-state sectors:

The state can allocate grants and loans for the development of restaurant activities.

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