CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN UZBEKISTAN'S HOTEL INDUSTRY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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Abstract
Tourism flows and hotel infrastructure in Uzbekistan have been developing rapidly in recent years. Along with economic benefits (employment, regional development, expansion of the service market), the expansion of tourism also increases environmental pressures (energy and water consumption, waste), social issues (working conditions, skills, inclusiveness), and governance challenges (transparency, standards, risk of "greenwashing"). This article examines how corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the hotel sector influences sustainable tourism, identifies practical barriers, and highlights opportunities in the Uzbek context. The analysis draws on the dynamics of tourist trips in 2020–2024, the structure of travel purposes in 2024, and the regional distribution of travel-company and hotel indicators, and proposes practical recommendations for hotels and policymakers.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility; CSR; sustainable tourism; hotel industry; ESG; green practices; regional development; Uzbekistan.

Introduction
The hospitality industry is one of the fastest-growing segments of the service economy, but it is also resource-intensive (energy, water, food, logistics). As tourism flows increase, the number of hotels and the volume of services expand. This growth boosts investment and employment, yet it also intensifies environmental and social responsibility requirements.

In Uzbekistan, inbound foreign tourist trips reached 7,957.2 thousand in 2024, while outbound tourist trips by citizens totaled 6,183.8 thousand (Table 2). In the same year, 2,383 hotels and similar accommodation facilities operated in the country and accommodated 2,864.3 thousand guests (Table 5). Under such conditions, CSR should not remain a purely voluntary initiative; it needs to become a management mechanism that supports competitiveness and long-term sustainability.

Theoretical Background:

The Essence of CSR and Its Application in the Hotel Sector

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is the integration of an organization's responsibilities toward society, employees, consumers, and the environment into its strategy and daily operations. In the hotel sector, CSR typically relies on three pillars:

✓ Environmental responsibility (E): energy efficiency; water conservation; reducing and sorting waste; cutting food waste; lowering the carbon footprint.

✓ Social responsibility (S): protecting employee rights and working conditions; skills development; gender equality; inclusive service (accessibility for persons with disabilities); supporting local communities.

✓ Governance responsibility (G): transparency; ethical standards; anti-corruption policies; integrity in procurement; protecting customer data.

✓ In the hotel business, CSR can simultaneously:

✓ increase the efficiency of resource use (reduce costs);

✓ strengthen brand reputation;

✓ build customer trust and loyalty;

✓ reinforce positive relationships with local communities.

Data and Methodology

This article is written using an analytical and conceptual approach. For the analysis, the statistical indicators for 2020–2024 from the provided tables and charts were systematized:

✓ dynamics of inbound and outbound tourism trips in 2020–2024 (Table 2);

✓ composition of tourism trips by purpose in 2024 (Table 1);

✓ indicators of travel companies in 2020–2024 (Table 3);

✓ regional indicators of travel companies in 2024 (Table 4);

✓ regional indicators of hotels and accommodation facilities in 2024 (Table 5).

Limitation:

The data primarily cover border-crossing trips and official accommodation statistics; domestic tourism and informal accommodation (e.g., staying with relatives) may not be fully captured.

Empirical Results and Discussion

Structure of Tourism Trip Purposes in 2024

Table 1 shows how tourist trips were distributed by purpose in 2024.

The largest share is attributable to visiting friends and relatives (VFR): 76.7% in inbound tourism and 82.9% in outbound tourism. This indicates that the VFR segment is particularly strong in Uzbekistan.

Implication: hotels should strengthen CSR approaches that build on community partnership and family-friendly services (family rooms, safe environments for children, and culturally appropriate service).

Leisure and recreation accounts for 14.9% of inbound trips and 15.3% of outbound trips. This segment is important for hotel revenues and service innovation.

Implication: if sustainable practices (energy and water efficiency, waste management, use of local products) become a standard part of service delivery rather than marketing claims, brand differentiation will increase.

Business trips represent 4.3% of inbound trips but only 0.2% of outbound trips.

Implication: to grow business tourism (MICE), hotels need strong governance (G) components such as transparent management, security, data protection, and ethical procurement.

Table 1. Distribution of tourism trips by purpose in 2024 (thousand trips).

Travel purpose	Inbound: foreign visitors to Uzbekistan (thousand)	Share (%)	Outbound: citizens of Uzbekistan (thousand)	Share (%)
Total	7 957,2	100	6 183,8	100
Business trip	338,5	4,3	13,7	0,2
Study (education)	25,1	0,3	35,9	0,6
Leisure and recreation	1 184,4	14,9	949,4	15,3
Visiting friends and relatives	6 105,3	76,7	5 123,9	82,9
Medical treatment	104,9	1,3	60,9	1,0
Trade (commerce)	199,0	2,5	—	—

Inbound and Outbound Tourism Dynamics (2020–2024)

Table 2 summarizes the values from the provided chart.

A sharp recovery is visible in 2022: both inbound and outbound tourism rose rapidly compared to 2021, reflecting post-pandemic reopening and restored mobility.

In 2023, inbound trips (6,626.3 thousand) exceeded outbound trips (4,787.4 thousand). The same pattern continued in 2024, with inbound trips reaching 7,957.2 thousand and remaining higher than outbound trips (6,183.8 thousand).

Implication: as inbound tourism grows, hotels' resource consumption and waste volumes also increase. Therefore, the environmental (E) component of CSR—energy, water, and waste management—becomes an operational necessity rather than an optional initiative.

Table 2. Number of tourism trips in 2020–2024 (thousand trips).

Year	Outbound tourism (thousand trips)	Inbound tourism (thousand trips)
2020	2 001,5	1 504,1
2021	2 194,8	1 881,3
2022	5 163,2	5 232,8
2023	4 787,4	6 626,3
2024	6 183,8	7 957,2

Travel Company Indicators (2020–2024)

Table 3 is based on the provided 'Key performance indicators…' chart.

Between 2020 and 2024, the number of travel agencies increased from 337 to 743 (+120%). The number of people served grew from 212.3 thousand to 1,972.9 thousand (approximately ninefold), and the number of tours sold also rose significantly.

This indicates market expansion; however, from a CSR perspective, service quality and consumer protection become more important: transparent contracts, clear refund policies, accurate information for customers, and responsible supply-chain selection when partnering with hotels.

Table 3. Key indicators of travel companies and organizations (2020–2024).

Year	Number of travel agencies/organizations (units)	Clients served (thousand people)	Tours sold (thousand units)
2020	337	212,3	78,2
2021	288	577,8	147,7
2022	348	673,7	95,3
2023	593	1 157,1	262,4
2024	743	1 972,9	601,5

Regional Activity of Travel Companies in 2024

Table 4 presents regional differences in travel-company activity.

The market is highly centralized: Tashkent City accounts for 52.5% of agencies, 63.5% of clients served, and 63.0% of tours sold.

A notable pattern is that Khorezm accounts for only 3.8% of agencies but 25.2% of clients served, suggesting the presence of large operators or mechanisms serving high flows.

CSR implication: if tourist flows are high in Khorezm, environmental pressure may also be high (waste, water, transport). 'Destination CSR' programs—joint initiatives by hotels, agencies, and local authorities—are needed.

Samarkand has a 19.4% share of agencies but only 3.1% of clients served, which may indicate many agencies with uneven volumes.

CSR implication: in highly competitive destinations, advantages in social (S) elements—staff skills, service quality, honest advertising—and governance (G)—transparent contracts—can differentiate businesses.

Table 4. Travel-company indicators by region in 2024.

Region	Agencies (units)	Share (%)	Clients served (thousand)	Share (%)	Tours sold (thousand)	Share (%)
Uzbekistan (total)	743	100	1 972,9	100	601,5	100
Karakalpakstan	9	1,2	18,3	0,9	17,9	3,0
Andijan	16	2,1	0,7	0,1	1,3	0,2
Bukhara	44	5,9	66,1	3,4	48,7	8,1
Jizzakh	16	2,1	30,1	1,5	10,5	1,7
Kashkadarya	9	1,2	8,6	0,4	6,4	1,1
Navoi	28	3,8	17,0	0,9	0,1	0,0
Namangan	8	1,1	2,6	0,1	1,9	0,3
Samarkand	144	19,4	61,7	3,1	71,7	11,9
Surkhandarya	14	1,9	1,8	0,1	1,8	0,3
Syrdarya	2	0,3	2,0	0,1	2,0	0,3
Tashkent Region	16	2,1	2,1	0,1	5,1	0,9
Fergana	19	2,6	11,9	0,6	12,0	2,0
Khorezm	28	3,8	497,5	25,2	43,2	7,2
Tashkent City	390	52,5	1 252,5	63,5	378,9	63,0

Regional Hotel Indicators in 2024

Table 5 summarizes regional hotel and accommodation indicators.

Tashkent City leads both in the number of hotels (844) and in guests accommodated (1,267.1 thousand), reflecting high capacity and demand.

CSR implication: in central markets, expectations are higher for energy and water efficiency, transport and waste management, and labor standards. Due to scale, the economic benefits of CSR (cost savings) may also materialize faster.

Samarkand (361 hotels; 428.4 thousand guests) and Bukhara (250; 267.2 thousand) follow as classic tourism hubs, where cultural-heritage protection and the risk of overtourism can become salient.

CSR implication: heritage conservation, protection of local community interests, seasonal flow management, and responsible tourism communication are critical.

Fergana has a high number of hotels (280) but relatively low accommodation volumes (81.2 thousand), which may indicate a predominance of small-capacity properties or weaker demand.

CSR opportunity: community-based tourism, local crafts, and agro/eco products can be linked with CSR to stimulate demand in the Fergana Valley.

Table 5. Hotels and similar accommodation facilities by region in 2024.

Region	Hotels and similar facilities (units)	Guests accommodated (thousand)	Rooms (units)	Beds (units)
Uzbekistan (total)	2 383	2 864,3	38 075	79 469
Karakalpakstan	52	38,4	691	1 579
Andijan	68	76,9	1 263	2 456
Bukhara	250	267,2	3 980	8 423
Jizzakh	47	66,3	689	1 544
Kashkadarya	79	71,3	1 207	2 366
Navoi	36	48,3	1 119	1 978
Namangan	44	66,4	809	1 449
Samarkand	361	428,4	6 603	13 827
Surkhandarya	80	91,6	1 260	2 464
Syrdarya	26	33,8	396	731
Tashkent Region	116	150,2	1 865	3 928
Fergana	280	81,2	1 541	5 421
Khorezm	100	177,2	2 441	4 955
Tashkent City	844	1 267,1	14 211	28 348

Challenges: CSR Barriers for Sustainable Tourism in Uzbekistan

Environmental challenges (E): the energy–water–waste nexus. Hotels continuously consume resources for heating/cooling, laundry, kitchens, lighting, and transport services. As volumes grow, water and energy use rises and waste (plastics, food, packaging) increases. Key practical barriers include:

✓ low efficiency of older buildings and equipment;

✓ uneven availability of waste sorting and recycling chains across regions;

✓ limited competencies for assessing ROI and conducting technical audits for green investments.

Social challenges (S): service quality depends on staff skills and motivation. High turnover leads to inconsistent service quality. Additional issues include:

✓ safe working conditions and fair incentives;

✓ employment and equal opportunities for women and youth;

✓ accessibility for persons with disabilities (ramps, lifts, signage, adapted bathrooms) as a core CSR criterion.

Governance challenges (G): transparency and the risk of greenwashing. If CSR becomes only a marketing message, trust declines. CSR must therefore be evidence-based, relying on KPIs, audits, internal controls, and public reporting. Without strong governance:

✓ environmental claims appear unreliable;

✓ ethical risks increase in procurement and contractor selection;

✓ risks to customer data security grow.

Opportunities

Cost reduction (eco-efficiency): quick-win measures such as LED lighting, sensors and automation, water-saving fixtures, and reducing heat losses can lower operating costs. This effect is likely to be strongest in Tashkent City and major tourism hubs due to scale.

Market differentiation and trust: certification (or internal green standards) and transparent digital reporting can strengthen hotel brands. In the leisure segment, sustainable practices may influence customer choices.

Regional development via a 'destination CSR' model: Tables 4–5 show substantial regional disparities. If CSR is organized not only within hotels but across the destination ecosystem (hotel–agency–transport–local producers–local government), local supply chains can develop, more income can stay in the region, and cultural and natural resources can be better protected.

A Practical CSR Roadmap for Hotels (Adapted to the Uzbek Context)

CSR directions and KPIs (metrics). The following table can be adapted as an internal management document.

Table 6. CSR directions, actions, and sample KPIs.

Area	Key actions	Minimum KPI (monthly/quarterly)
Energy (E)	LED, sensors, HVAC optimization, energy audit	kWh/guest-night; energy cost per guest
Water (E)	water-saving fixtures, laundry optimization	liters/guest-night; share of reused water
Waste (E)	sorting, reducing plastics, reducing food waste	share of sorted waste (%); food waste (kg)
Employees (S)	training, safety, incentive system	training hours/employee; turnover (%)
Inclusiveness (S)	ramps/lifts/signage, adapted rooms, service protocols	share of adapted rooms; number of complaints
Transparency (G)	code of ethics, procurement policy, grievance mechanism	complaint resolution time; number of audits

Phased implementation plan:

✓ Initial audit (energy, water, waste, HR)

✓ Goals and KPIs (12-month plan; for example, reduce energy intensity by 8–12%)

✓ Quick solutions (LEDs, sensors, water-saving fixtures, reducing plastics)

✓ Supply chain (increase the share of local, ethical, and environmentally responsible suppliers)

✓ Employees and service quality (create a 'Green Team', staff training, internal standards)

✓ Transparent communication (a 1–2 page annual CSR brief with figures and real outcomes)

Conclusion

The rapid increase in tourist trips in 2020–2024 and the rise in inbound tourism to 7,957.2 thousand in 2024 (Table 2) require CSR in the hotel industry to be elevated to the strategic-management level. The fact that a large share of trips in 2024 is driven by visiting friends and relatives (Table 1) highlights the need for a service model anchored in community engagement, cultural fit, and social responsibility. Regional disparities (Tables 4–5) indicate that CSR should be developed at the destination level through collaboration among tourism ecosystem participants.

The key principle is that CSR is not advertising; it is measurable performance (KPIs), audits, and real practices. This approach strengthens sustainable tourism, increases

resource efficiency, enhances brand trust, and improves hotels' long-term competitiveness.

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