

YANOLJA RESEARCH BRIEF

Comparative Analysis of Seoul and Tokyo Accommodation Experiences Based on Chinese Tourist Reviews

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China remains a primary source market for South Korea’s inbound tourism sector. As such, a comprehensive understanding of Chinese tourists’ experiences and satisfaction levels is critical for the sustainable growth of the industry. Among various travel components, accommodation is a fundamental necessity, as it directly influences tourists’ overall travel experience and accounts for a significant portion of total expenditures. Given this context, satisfaction with accommodation extends beyond the evaluation of lodging facilities alone and plays a crucial role in shaping destination image and travel satisfaction.

This study aims to conduct a systematic analysis of Chinese tourists’ perceptions of accommodations in Seoul by examining user-generated reviews and ratings on Trip.com, a platform widely utilized by Chinese travelers¹. Additionally, a comparative analysis with accommodations in Tokyo—a competing destination with cultural and geographical similarities—is conducted. The objective is to identify key strengths and weaknesses of Seoul’s lodging sector and propose practical strategies to enhance accommodation quality, thereby increasing destination competitiveness and supporting long-term tourism growth in South Korea.

Methodology	
Data source	Trip.com
Accommodation Classification System on Trip.com	Hotels : classified into 5 levels (1 to 5 star) based on the information provided by third-party organizations or institutions
	Homes & Apartments : classified into 5 levels reflecting a comprehensive assessment of amenities, services, and other aspects, aligning with hotel classification standards
Data Collection Process	(1) Accommodations were classified into four levels: 2 stars and below, 3 stars, 4 stars, and 5 stars, following Trip.com’s classification criteria
	(2) Reviews(written in Chinese only) were collected from accommodations in Seoul and Tokyo ² , filtered by the highest number of reviews per level → The final dataset comprised 200 accommodations (100 in Seoul, 100 in Tokyo), with 18,318 reviews for Seoul and 30,327 reviews for Tokyo.

1 According to a survey conducted by the Korea Tourism Organization (survey period: October 31–November 17, 2023), Chinese travelers primarily use domestic OTAs such as Ctrip (Trip.com, 53.1%) and Qunar (37.9%) when planning their trips to South Korea.

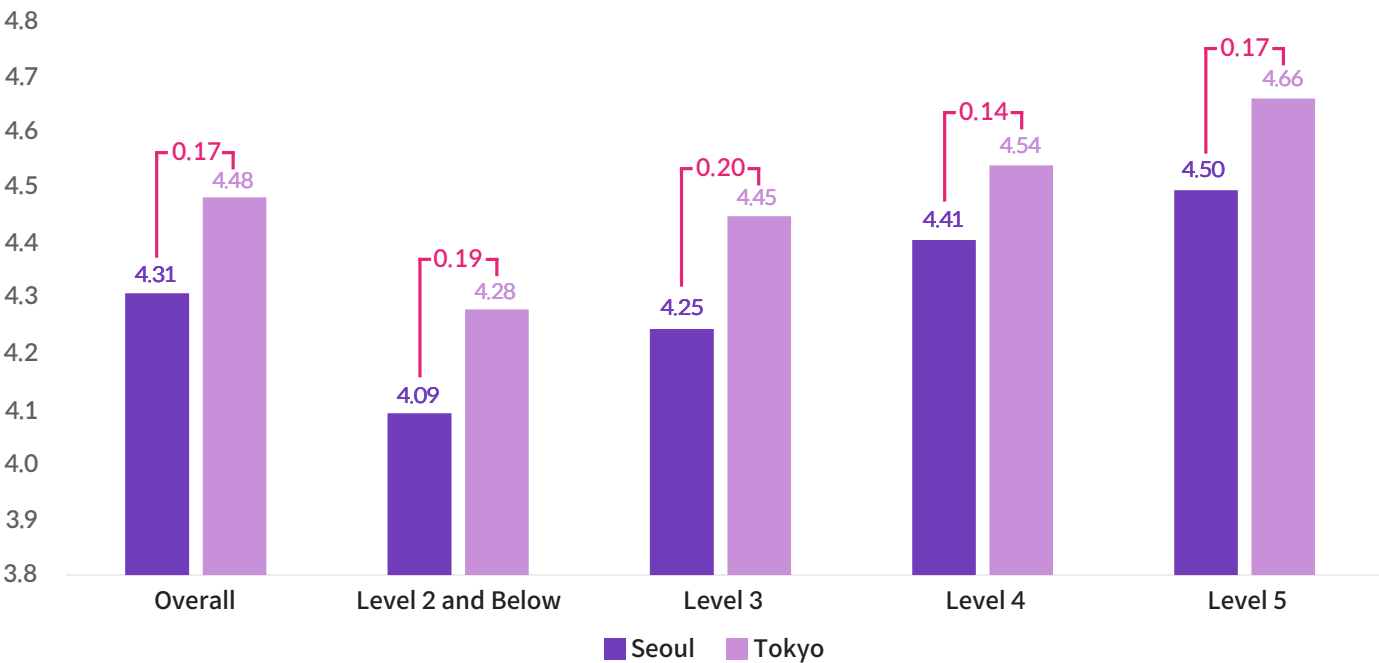
2 Seoul accommodations were defined based on their registered addresses within the districts of Seoul Metropolitan City, while Tokyo accommodations were limited to those within the districts of Tokyo Metropolis. As a result, accommodations with "Tokyo" in their names but located in neighboring areas such as Chiba Prefecture were excluded from the analysis.

Seoul Accommodation Quality Perceived Lower Than Tokyo: A Trip.com Review Analysis

Analysis of Trip.com reviews indicates that Chinese tourists rate accommodations in Seoul lower than those in Tokyo across all levels. The overall average rating on a 5-point scale was 4.31 for Seoul and 4.48 for Tokyo, a statistically significant difference of 0.17 points. A breakdown by accommodation classification reveals that Tokyo received higher ratings than Seoul across all levels: 0.20 points higher for Level 3 accommodations, 0.19 points higher for Level 2 and below accommodations, 0.17 points higher for Level 5 accommodations, and 0.14 points higher for Level 4 accommodations. Notably, Seoul’s Level 3 accommodations received ratings comparable to Tokyo’s Level 2 and below accommodations, Seoul’s Level 4 accommodations were rated similarly to Tokyo’s Level 3 accommodations, and Seoul’s Level 5 accommodations showed ratings on par with Tokyo’s Level 4 accommodations. This finding suggests that Chinese tourists perceive Seoul’s accommodations as being of lower quality than their Tokyo counterparts by approximately one level, highlighting the urgent need for quality improvements in Seoul’s lodging sector.

Furthermore, Seoul’s overall average rating was similar to that of Tokyo’s Level 2 and below accommodations, whereas Tokyo’s overall average rating was close to Seoul’s Level 5. These results indicate that to enhance global competitiveness, Seoul must focus on improving accommodation standards across all levels. Given the critical role that accommodation quality plays in shaping overall travel satisfaction and destination image, such improvements are expected to positively influence repeat visitation and long-term growth in inbound tourism.

Average Rating Comparison (Points) of Seoul and Tokyo Accommodations



* Rated on a 5-point scale (evaluated to the first decimal place)
* Results of a t-test show that the average differences between cities for overall, Level 3, Level 4, and Level 5 accommodations were statistically significant ($p < .05$)

Sentiment Analysis of Reviews for Seoul Accommodation Quality Improvement

To identify areas where Seoul accommodations need improvement, sentiment analysis was conducted on the collected review texts. Based on frequently mentioned words in these reviews, the accommodation experience was categorized into five main areas: hygiene, price, location, service, and facilities.

- Hygiene: Words related to hygiene and cleanliness, such as "hygiene," "clean," "dirty," "smell," "hair," were grouped here, reflecting the condition of cleanliness and sanitation.
- Price: Words related to accommodation cost and economic value, such as "price," "room rate," "value for money," "economical," "cheap," and "expensive," were included.
- Location: Words related to the location, geography, distance, surroundings, proximity, and transportation, such as "location," "neighborhood," "bus," "bus stop," "subway," "subway station," "airport," "shopping," "convenience store," and "store," were used. Specific place names from Seoul (e.g., Myeongdong, Dongdaemun, Sinchon) and Tokyo (e.g., Lawson, Shinjuku, Akihabara, Tawaramachi, Asakusa, Iidabashi, Kabukicho) were also included.
- Service: Words related to customer service and staff quality, such as "service," "attitude," "staff," "owner," "front desk," "counter," "enthusiasm," "kindness," "cold," "Chinese," "English," and "communication," were categorized here.
- Facilities: Words related to accommodations' facilities and amenities, such as "facility," "equipment," "interior," "design," "space," "bathroom," "bathtub," "shower," "curtain," "air conditioner," "cooling," "heating," "washing machine," "microwave," "hair dryer," "socket," "small," "old," and "worn," were included.

Sentiment Analysis Method

(1) Sentences are separated based on punctuation, and when a keyword from the category-specific list appears in a sentence, that category is assigned as the subject.

(2) Using the Chinese sentiment analysis library, snowNLP, each sentence is classified as positive (score of 0.6 or higher), neutral (score between 0.4 and 0.6), or negative (score below 0.4).

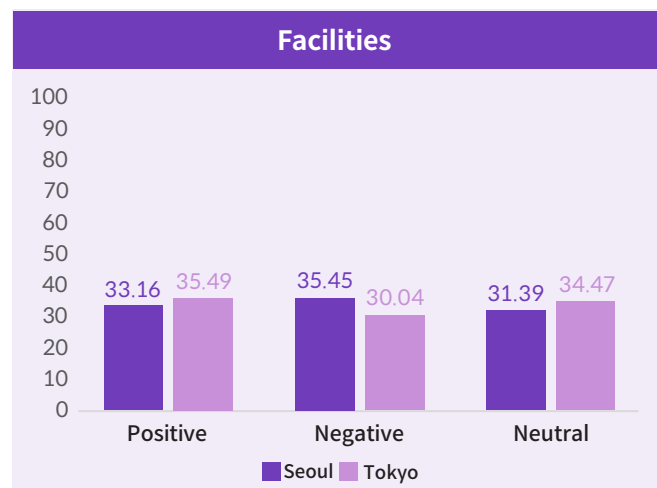
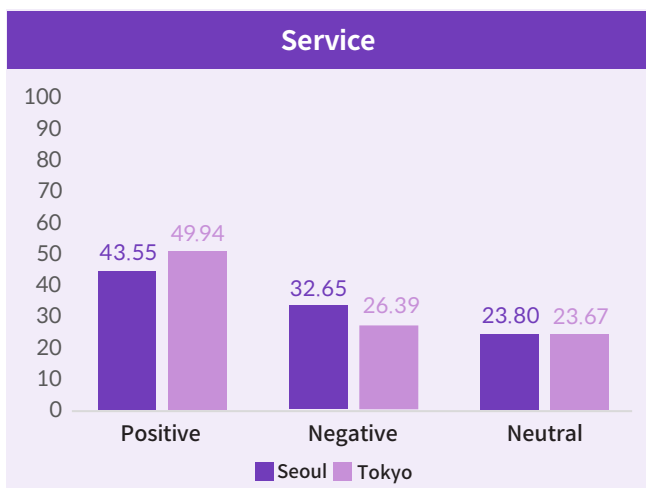
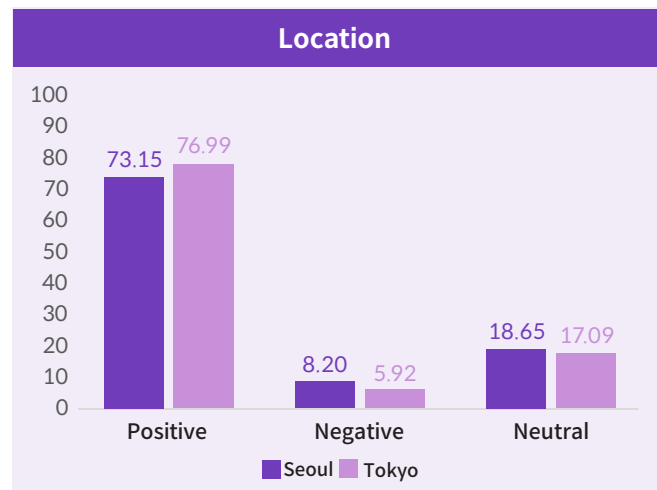
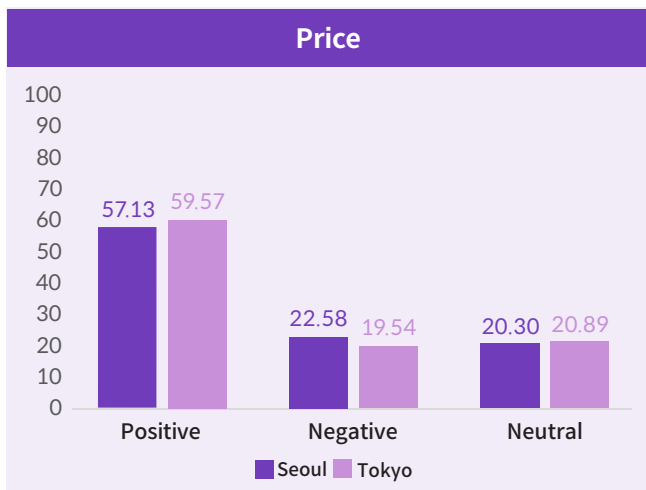
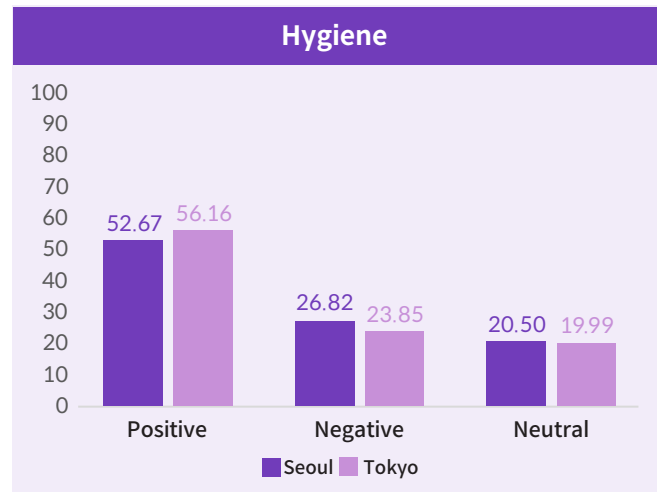
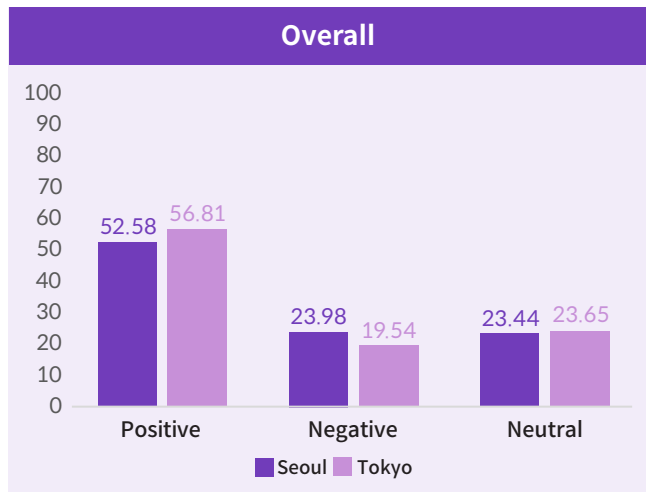
→ Each sentence is organized in the format 'Hygiene: Positive', and when these sentences are grouped, a single review can be summarized as 'Hygiene: Negative, Location: Positive'. This allows for easy identification of how each aspect of the accommodation was evaluated in the reviews.

Seoul Accommodation Experience: More Negative than Tokyo

By calculating the ratio of positive, negative, and neutral reviews for all sentences assigned to categories and comparing them by city, the positive-negative difference was 28.59%p for Seoul and 37.37%p for Tokyo. In other words, Seoul had a lower proportion of positive reviews and a higher proportion of negative reviews compared to Tokyo, resulting in a relatively smaller difference between positive and negative ratings. This clearly indicates that efforts are needed to increase the positive review ratio and reduce negative feedback for Seoul.

When examining by category, both cities showed the greatest positive-negative differences in the following order: location, price, hygiene, service, and facilities. Specifically, Seoul showed the following differences: location (64.95), price (34.55), hygiene (25.85), service (10.87), and facilities (-2.29). Tokyo showed the following differences: location (71.07), price (40.03), hygiene (32.31), service (23.55), and facilities (5.46). In all categories, Tokyo exhibited a larger positive-negative difference than Seoul, indicating that Tokyo generally received higher customer satisfaction ratings.

Average Sentiment Score Comparison (%) of Seoul and Tokyo Accommodation Reviews



Urgent Improvement Areas for Seoul Accommodations: Facilities, Service, and Hygiene

For both cities, the categories with the highest proportion of negative reviews were facilities, service, hygiene, price, and location, in that order. Specifically, in Seoul, the positive rate for facilities was 33.16%, while the negative rate was 35.45%, indicating that the most urgent area for improvement is the facilities. In terms of service, the difference between positive and negative rates in Seoul was 10.87%p, less than half of the 23.55%p difference seen in Tokyo. This highlights a significant gap in service quality between the two cities. Hygiene, which directly influences the perception of cleanliness and tidiness, is seen as a relatively easier area for improvement compared to location or price.

To derive specific improvement directions, negative reviews of Seoul accommodations were analyzed through morphological analysis, focusing on issues related to facilities, service, and hygiene. The results were used to identify key concerns mentioned frequently in the reviews, helping to pinpoint the main sources of dissatisfaction in each category. This approach can provide essential foundational data for devising practical improvement strategies.

[Facilities] Require Customer-Centered Design and Management

In the facilities category, common complaints included the inability to adjust temperature due to central heating and cooling systems, the inconvenience of shared bathrooms, broken showerheads or hairdryers, small room sizes that made it difficult to open suitcases, and inconvenient outlet locations for using devices on the bed. Notably, issues with broken facilities can be easily addressed through regular checks and maintenance, requiring urgent action.

Complaints about shared bathrooms were mostly found in Level 2 and below accommodations. However, where partitions or other space-dividing measures were well implemented, positive reviews were more common. This indicates the need for continuous efforts to improve customer convenience. The outlet location issue can likely be alleviated with simple solutions like power strips.

Although improving facilities may be challenging in existing structures due to structural limitations, new accommodations can be designed to address these issues upfront. For example, introducing individual heating and cooling systems, ensuring sufficient space for luggage, and placing outlets in convenient locations for electronic devices can significantly enhance guest comfort. Such thoughtful design efforts could substantially improve the overall quality of accommodations.

[Service] Small Gestures for Foreign Tourists Lead to Higher Satisfaction

In the Service category, common complaints included communication issues, lack of luggage storage services, and absence of front desk staff. Communication issues became an even greater source of frustration when guests faced difficulty communicating not only in Chinese but also in English. Regarding the absence of front desk staff, the biggest inconvenience was the difficulty of resolving issues immediately. Foreign tourists often struggle to contact staff or, even if they do, face language barriers, particularly if communication in Korean is not possible, which leads to increased frustration. Thus, a more thoughtful approach and systematic efforts are needed to address these issues.

On the other hand, accommodations offering self-check-in services frequently received positive reviews, likely due to clear instructions provided in manuals. Drawing from this, preparing foreign language guides for common phrases and nearby amenities, as well as creating a manual for handling issues in foreign languages, could greatly enhance the satisfaction of foreign tourists.

Additionally, considering that foreign travelers often carry a lot of luggage, offering luggage storage services before check-in could lead to significant improvements. These small gestures could elevate the overall accommodation experience and, ultimately, enhance both the Korean lodging industry and travel satisfaction.

[Hygiene] Let's Return to the Basics

Negative reviews in the hygiene category mainly focused on issues related to basic cleanliness, such as hair, stains on bed sheets and pillows, and moldy smells. In particular, some guests reported itching due to unclean bedding. Visible cleanliness issues, such as hair on floors, bedding, and in bathrooms, should be addressed with greater attention to basic hygiene management.

Even in older accommodations, positive reviews were often given when the space was well-maintained and clean. This highlights that proper maintenance is more important than the age of the building itself. Therefore, regular checks on cleanliness and the condition of provided amenities must be considered fundamental aspects of accommodation management.

By maintaining strict basic hygiene management and continuously improving it, Seoul accommodations can significantly enhance their ratings. This goes beyond merely addressing cleanliness issues—it serves as a key strategy for improving the overall image of accommodations and increasing customer satisfaction.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of reviews from Chinese tourists, this study confirmed that Seoul's accommodation facilities are receiving relatively lower ratings compared to competing cities like Tokyo, particularly in terms of facilities, service, and hygiene.

To improve Seoul's accommodation ratings, it is urgent to focus on systematizing and modernizing facility management to improve usability, enhancing service quality for foreign tourists, and strengthening basic hygiene practices. Facility issues may be difficult to resolve in the short term due to structural constraints, but gradual improvements can be made through regular inspections and careful design. Additionally, multilingual communication manuals and customer-oriented responses will be key factors in increasing foreign tourists' satisfaction.

For Seoul's hotel industry to strengthen its competitiveness in the global market, it must go beyond simple facility improvements and provide accommodations designed and operated with a guest-centered approach to achieve "differentiation in service and experience." This will allow Seoul to realize sustainable growth in its tourism industry based on high-quality accommodation experiences.



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