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FORMATION OF A SUSTAINABLE ECOTOURISM MODEL IN KAZAKHSTAN THROUGH INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND LOCAL PRACTICE

Abstract. *This study undertakes a critical examination of evolving tourism paradigms with a specific emphasis on the ecotourism sector in Kazakhstan, aiming to evaluate its present condition and strategic development potential. Central to the research is the formulation of the Kazakhstan Integrated Ecotourism Development Model (KIEDM), an original, context-sensitive framework that synergizes globally recognized ecotourism principles with Kazakhstan's unique environmental, cultural, and institutional landscapes. Adopting a rigorous mixed-methods approach, the study integrates qualitative data from expert interviews, fieldwork, and policy documents with quantitative analyses derived from international databases and governmental statistics. The PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle is employed as a dynamic operational tool to facilitate iterative evaluation, implementation, and refinement of ecotourism strategies. The research is further enriched by comparative case analyses from leading ecotourism destinations—New Zealand, Costa Rica, and Belarus—offering translatable insights into effective policy design, eco-certification regimes, and participatory governance mechanisms. Belarus, in particular, provides a compelling model for integrating ecological preservation with rural community engagement. Synthesizing these global lessons with local realities, the study delivers a coherent policy roadmap designed to enhance Kazakhstan's ecotourism infrastructure, regulatory coherence, and service quality. The findings underscore the imperative of aligning tourism development with ecological stewardship and sustainable development goals, advancing a vision of tourism that is economically viable, environmentally sound, and socially inclusive. Beyond its national scope, the study offers transferable methodologies and strategic guidance for other emerging ecotourism destinations across Central Asia.*

Key words: *ecotourism, tourism in Kazakhstan, sustainable tourism, development of tourism, global tourism experience*

Introduction

Ecotourism is among the fastest-growing sectors within the tourism industry globally. It is described by responsible travel to natural areas, which promotes conservation of the environment and improves the welfare of local people. According to the TIES definition, 2015, ecotourism is one of the fastest-growing tourism industry sectors worldwide, which is characterised by responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people. In Kazakhstan, there is huge potential for ecotourism because it has vast and various ecosystems, ranging from steppes and deserts to alpine regions, and more than 122 specially protected areas across the country [1; 2]. Research has documented that ecotourism development can provide a key tool for sustainable rural development through the conservation of the environment, economic diversification, and preservation of cultural heritage. In fact, there has been an increased demand for sustainable travel, which means a very positive trend in the stance of ecotourism development in Kazakhstan.

Ecotourism in Kazakhstan is still in its formative stages, especially compared to what happens in other parts of the world, for example in Costa Rica and New Zealand, Belarus where sustainable tourism has combined ecological enterprise with national policies. Despite the rich biodiversity and specific natural features, some obstacles for expanding the ecotourism sector of Kazakhstan include a lack of infrastructure and deficit, specifically trained personnel and adequate regulatory frameworks. Scientific research underlines that the overcoming of these shortcomings is included as a part of ecotourism development on sustainable bases, inasmuch as poor infrastructure and lack of involvement with the local community result in the degradation of natural resources and loss of tourist satisfaction. Improvement may be affected through the inclusion of appropriate international ecotourism practices that involve community-based tourism projects and environmental education programs [3; 4]. More specifically, Kenya's model of community involvement and Iceland's rigid controls on environmental impact are workable models to consider for effective eco-tourism development that forwards both biodiversity and community concerns. Implementation of these lessons could provide Kazakhstan with a model for sustainable ecotourism that balances tourism development with environmental protection, further enhancing its standing as an international destination for ecotourism.

For the sustainable development of ecotourism in Kazakhstan, it is important to integrate effective international practices. These include projects involving local communities, strict governmental regulations, infrastructural development, and increasing ecological awareness, as highlighted in the works of D. Turekulova et all [5], B. Thapa [6], and M. Rahimian, P. Pornprasit [7,8]. These studies emphasize the importance of a balanced approach between preserving nature and achieving economic gain for successful ecotourism.

Kazakhstan has significant potential for sustainable ecotourism development, but faces difficulties in implementation [9]. Key factors influencing ecotourism development include environmental sustainability, social costs, economic benefits, community engagement, and long-term planning [10].

In the model of sustainable tourism development in Kazakhstan, special attention is paid to environmental sustainability, social sustainability and economic efficiency [11]. To improve environmental management in the tourism sector, Kazakhstan can adopt international experience such as Australia's DEC, the UK's approach to mutually beneficial development, the New Zealand Ecosystem Protection Act, the Canadian model of tourism destination and community-based ecotourism in Botswana [12]. The implementation of these strategies could help Kazakhstan overcome current challenges and become a leader in sustainable ecotourism. The development of a

data-based approach that takes into account both subjective and objective factors can help create effective models for the sustainable development of ecotourism in various regions of Kazakhstan [10].

Recent research highlights the potential and challenges of sustainable ecotourism development in Kazakhstan. The country possesses abundant natural resources for ecotourism but lacks infrastructure, government support, and effective policies. Implementing environmental certification programs can enhance the image of tourist areas and increase their international appeal. Key strategies for development include designating ecotourism areas, simplifying visa policies, improving transportation networks, and launching marketing campaigns [13]. A proposed management model incorporates public-private partnerships, sustainable practices, community involvement, and monitoring systems. The introduction of environmental certification systems can provide stakeholders with valuable information and practical plans. However, challenges remain in modernizing and greening recreational and tourist infrastructure. Further research on specific regions and target groups is needed to aid the development of this promising industry [14].

New Zealand's experience in ecotourism, which focuses on ecosystem preservation and active community involvement, provides a valuable model for Kazakhstan. Despite its exceptional natural resources, such as Altyn Emel and Zharyn Canyon, these areas remain underutilized. Implementing strict regulations and cultural integration, could help Kazakhstan develop sustainable ecotourism that accounts for ecological and cultural aspects while creating unique tourism offerings.

Moreover, government-private partnerships and secure system monitoring, as practiced in New Zealand, could enable Kazakhstan to enhance its ecotourism sector. This approach would preserve cultural and natural values while contributing to economic growth in rural areas [15].

There are some gaps in all these studies, such as the relationship between ecotourism and sustainable tourism and how they differ from each other or are related to each other, the life cycle and sustainability of various ecotourism products in Kazakhstan, including factors contributing to their aging, the specific measures necessary to extend the life cycle of ecotourism products in Kazakhstan have not been studied. The study examined specific regions and target groups in Kazakhstan for the further development of the ecotourism industry, conducted a deeper comparative analysis of the ecotourism industry in Kazakhstan compared to other countries such as New Zealand, to identify best practices and areas for improvement, and explored additional modern management methods for the promotion and development of ecotourism in Kazakhstan.

This comparison study focuses on how Kazakhstan, Costa Rica, New Zealand, and Belarus handle sustainable ecotourism using various policy frameworks. Kazakhstan's ecotourism sector is still expanding, with obstacles in regulatory compliance, infrastructure, and global branding.

However, it has a lot of promise because of its unique scenery.

Costa Rica is a world leader in ecotourism, boasting strong environmental policies, large economic contributions, and well-developed community-based projects. New Zealand effectively blends indigenous Māori ideas into tourism through rigorous conservation rules and innovative eco-friendly infrastructure. Belarus operates within a conservative framework, with strong control over tourism, limited public access, and a focus on natural preservation rather than economic expansion.

Kazakhstan can strengthen its ecotourism by implementing Costa Rica's marketing methods, New Zealand's community participation model, and Belarus' controlled tourism strategy to balancing expansion and environmental conservation.

Moreover, Belarus is a useful case study for Kazakhstan since it provides a similar post-Soviet model, even though Costa Rica and New Zealand are the leaders in ecotourism worldwide.

Kazakhstan can create a plan for ecotourism that strikes a balance between policy control, environmental preservation, and economic growth by examining Belarus' conservative framework.

Materials and methods

To achieve the objectives of the study, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were applied. The research was conducted in several consecutive stages; each aimed at ensuring a systematic comparison of ecotourism development between Kazakhstan and New Zealand.

At the first stage, a comprehensive scientific research approach was adopted. This included collecting statistical and descriptive data on the current state of tourism in Kazakhstan and New Zealand. Comparative criteria such as tourist numbers, sectoral economic contribution, employment rates, and natural resource utilization were selected as key indicators.

At the second stage, data collection was carried out from multiple sources. Primary data were obtained from official government portals, such as national statistical agencies and tourism development departments. Additionally, reports from international organizations like the World Bank and UNWTO were used. Secondary data were derived from academic literature, research papers, and case studies related to ecotourism development and policy strategies.

At the third stage, content analysis and statistical methods were employed to process the collected data. Government reports and tourism-related websites were thoroughly reviewed to identify trends, growth patterns, and strategic initiatives. Comparative evaluation tools were then used to contrast the development trajectories of Kazakhstan and New Zealand's ecotourism sectors.

At the fourth stage, a detailed comparative analysis was conducted. The analysis focused on tourism infrastructure, environmental management practices, community engagement, and government support mechanisms. This helped in highlighting both best practices and structural weaknesses in Kazakhstan's approach when compared to New Zealand's more mature ecotourism model.

At the fifth stage, the challenges of data accessibility were evaluated. In the case of Kazakhstan, a major difficulty was the limited availability of in-depth and transparent tourism data from official sources. Much of the information was restricted to general statistics, such as the number of hotels and average length of stay. In contrast, New Zealand offered comprehensive and detailed datasets, including domestic and international arrival trends, sector contributions to GDP, and employment indicators, which facilitated a more complete and nuanced analysis.

At the final stage, the findings were synthesized to develop policy implications for Kazakhstan. The results highlight Kazakhstan's potential for ecotourism development and the need for improved reporting systems and policy frameworks. Recommendations were made on how Kazakhstan can adapt successful elements of New Zealand's ecotourism strategy to enhance its own tourism development sustainably.

Moreover, this study uses a comprehensive scientific approach to examine the current state of tourism in Kazakhstan and estimate its potential for growth within the context of ecotourism. We uncover major differences and similarities in ecotourism development between Kazakhstan and New Zealand by employing a systematic approach that includes data gathering, analysis, and comparative evaluation. The findings add to a better knowledge of Kazakhstan's tourist growth difficulties and prospects, and they provide insights that can be used to inform policy and strategy.

This study will make use of all these approaches and phases to help us to evaluate the present situation and opportunities of tourism in Kazakhstan. This will help us to develop efficient plans for managing ecotourism and properly modify foreign experience for the national setting.
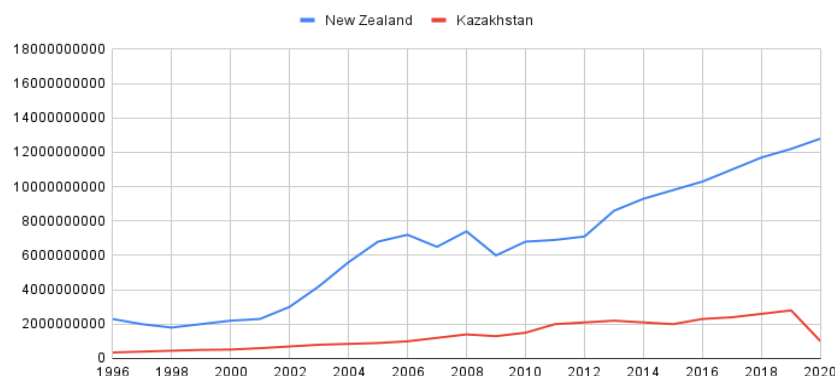
Gathering current information on the situation of tourism in every one of the investigated

nations marks the first stage. This information covers tourist count, economic statistics, natural reserves, and other pertinent elements as well as other pertinent data. A multifarious data collecting approach was applied in order to do a thorough study of tourism between Kazakhstan and New Zealand. Government reports from both nations served as the main sources of data, augmented by reports from several credible institutions and companies like the World Bank. Extensive research included a careful study of web platforms unique to every nation, therefore offering insightful data on the influence and initiatives connected with ecotourism. But during the study in Kazakhstan, there were clear challenges mostly related to the dearth of information accessible through official channels and government publications. Most of the information the Kazakh government sent on the travel sector concentrated on the quantity of hotels in every area and the length of stay, thereby lacking important data for a thorough comparison. New Zealand's reports, on the other hand, included a wider spectrum of crucial elements, including tourist arrivals, both domestic and international, contribution to GDP, percentage changes, the number of people employed in the sector, business sectors involved in the industry, and much more, so greatly increasing their value for in-depth study and comparison.

This structure summarizes the study approach and methodologies, emphasizing the essential steps of data gathering and analysis. It also discusses Kazakhstan's issues due to a lack of accurate data, as well as the importance of comprehensive reporting from New Zealand.

Results and discussion

Gathering current information on the situation of tourism in every one of the investigated nations marks the first stage. This information covers tourist count, economic statistics, natural reserves, and other pertinent elements as well as other pertinent data. A multifarious data collecting approach was applied in order to do a thorough study of tourism between Kazakhstan and New Zealand. Government reports from both nations served as the main sources of data, augmented by reports from several credible institutions and companies like the World Bank. Extensive research included a careful study of web platforms unique to every nation, therefore offering insightful data on the influence and initiatives connected with ecotourism. But during the study in Kazakhstan, there were clear challenges mostly related to the dearth of information accessible through official channels and government publications. Most of the information the Kazakh government sent on the travel sector concentrated on the quantity of hotels in every area and the length of stay, thereby lacking important data for a thorough comparison. New Zealand's reports, on the other hand, included a wider spectrum of crucial elements, including tourist arrivals, both domestic and international, contribution to GDP, percentage changes, the number of people employed in the sector, business sectors involved in the industry, and much more, so greatly increasing their value for in-depth study and comparison [16].
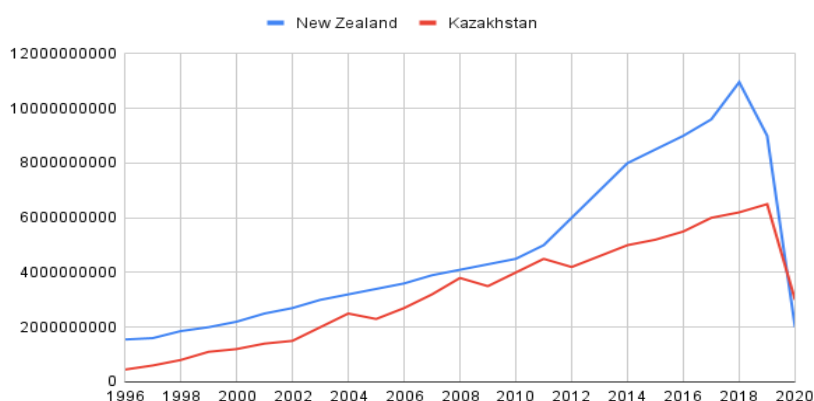

Source: compiled on the basis of data [18]
Figure 1 - International Tourism, Number of Arrivals

With 2,035,000 more foreign visitors than New Zealand (996,000), Kazakhstan welcomed in 2020. While New Zealand peaked in 2019 with 3,888,000 visitors, Kazakhstan achieved the highest number of foreign tourist arrivals in 2018—8,789,000. In the years after its peak, both nations had minimum numbers of foreign visitors. New Zealand's minimum value—996,000—was larger than Kazakhstan's (202,000), suggesting that, even in a recession, New Zealand drew rather more visitors (Fig. 1).

International tourism receipts in New Zealand were rather higher in 2018 and showed a more consistent growth over the past 23 years, ranging from $1,857,000,000 in 1998 to a peak of $10,961,000,000 in 2018. This disparity highlights New Zealand's better efficiency in drawing foreign travel expenditure and shows a more robust and consistent tourist sector than that of Kazakhstan during the corresponding times (Fig. 2).

Source: compiled on the basis of data [18]
Figure 2 - International Tourism and Receipts (Current US Dollars)

Comparing the potential of the tourism sector in two nations, Kazakhstan and New Zealand, requires first looking at the indicator "International Tourism Receipts%" which is a fundamental statistic.

This statistic shows how much foreign travel contributes to a nation's total exports, therefore indicating its economic influence. It shows the proportion of a nation's total exports derived from the expenditure of foreign visitors, including those on different goods and services consumed in the nation of destination. With variations over the previous 25 years from a peak of 6.70% in 1998 to a minimum of 1.13% in 2020, this indicator was 1.13% in Kazakhstan.

This suggests that international tourism's relative contribution to Kazakhstan's total exports was rather modest and that its share has since dropped. By contrast, this metric was much higher in New Zealand, rising to 18.81% in 2018 and varying over the preceding 18 years to peak at 20.16% in 2005 and minimum of 12.20% in 2000. Indicating its robust and steady contribution, New Zealand's tourism sector regularly accounted for a more major part of the nation's total exports. Therefore, given foreign tourist receipts considerably contribute to New Zealand's total exports, it may be inferred from comparing these percentage measures that New Zealand has a stronger and economically more significant tourism business than Kazakhstan. This comparison emphasises the industry's economic value and travel possibilities in any given nation (Fig. 3).

For our study, the indicator "International Tourism Receipts for Passenger Transport Services" is quite important since it helps us to grasp the expenditure patterns of foreign visitors especially connected to the travel industry's transportation services.

This statistic comprises passenger transport services rendered within the resident economy by non-resident carriers as well as expenses paid by foreign inbound visitors on services rendered by resident carriers. It covers "tourism receipts," excluding passenger transport services rendered for non-residents inside the residents' economy. Non-resident carriers Knowing this is essential for our comparison of the tourist sectors of Kazakhstan and New Zealand since it enables a better perspective of the economic influence of foreign travel on the passenger transport industry.

Comparatively, Kazakhstan recorded foreign tourism earnings for passenger travel services in 2020 at $130,000,000, with variations over the preceding 25 years ranging from a peak of $459,000,000 in 2019 to a minimum of $31,000,000 in 1999. This suggests a varied but somewhat little contribution to the tourism sector of the nation, particularly connected to passenger transport services.
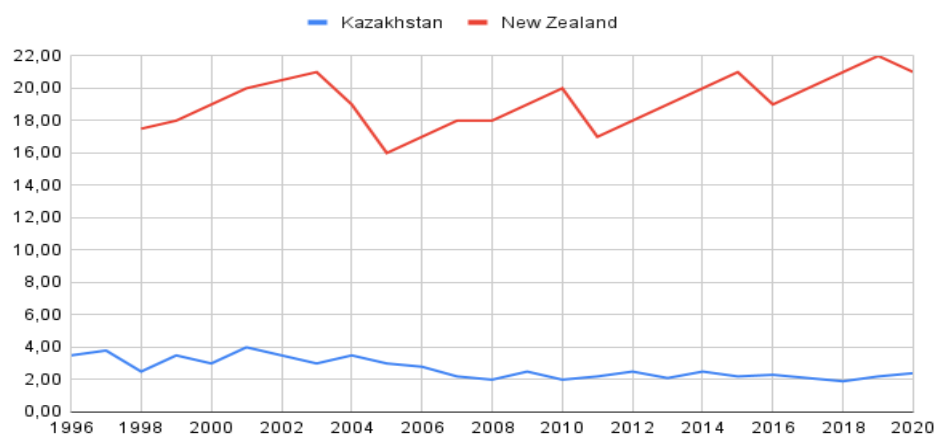
Source: compiled on the basis of data [18]
Figure 3 - International Tourism, Receipts (% of Total Exports)

On the other hand, foreign tourism earnings for travel services in New Zealand in 2020 came at $6,229,000,000, with swings over the past 25 years ranging from a peak of $10,961,000,000 in 2018 to a minimum of $1,857,000,000 in 1998. In terms of passenger travel, New Zealand's tourist sector showed a noticeably higher economic contribution, therefore highlighting a strong and active tourism sector relative to Kazakhstan (Fig. 4).
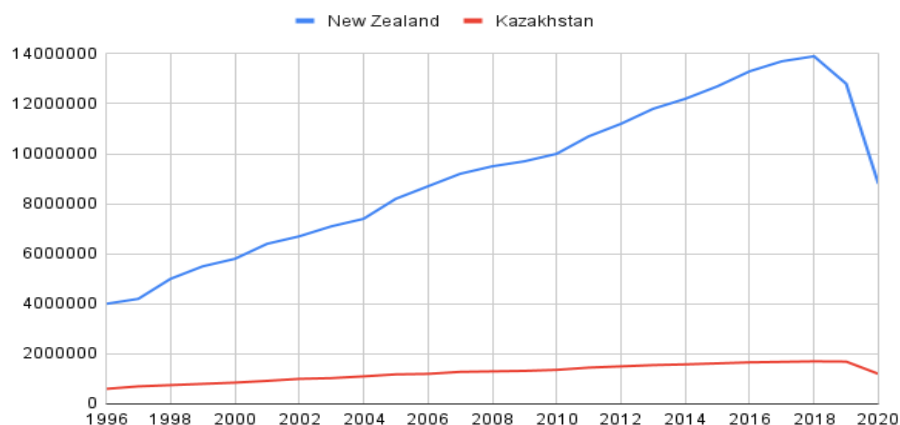
Source: compiled on the basis of data [18]
Figure 4 - International Tourism and Passenger Transport Revenue (Current US Dollars)

This comparison emphasises the different degrees of economic activity connected to travel between the two countries using foreign tourism transportation providers [17; 18].

Drawing on New Zealand's successful ecotourism model, this part of our study offers insightful insights and pragmatic advice for Kazakhstan. Aimed at building a sustainable and successful ecotourism industry in Kazakhstan, these suggestions address vital areas including marketing, management, training, local community involvement, and nature conservation.

First of all, our studies suggest that Kazakhstan should aggressively present its natural wealth on the international scene. This entails designing original nature and ecotourism-oriented marketing initiatives and taking part in international events and shows. Positioning New Zealand as a top ecotourism destination, the "100% Pure New Zealand" campaign has greatly raised its worldwide profile. This branding approach helped draw a growing number of environmentally concerned tourists, hence increasing yearly travel income above NZD 40 billion [17,18].

Emphasising its distinctive scenery, like the Tian Shan Mountains and Kolsai Lakes, Kazakhstan can implement similar policies to draw foreign visitors who respect pristine environment and cultural legacy. Second, our study suggests that local ecotourism businesses and guides should concentrate on certification and training. Programs like Qualmark Responsible Tourism Operations, which has been crucial in determining quality standards in New Zealand, might be carried out in Kazakhstan to create ethical travel methods. While stressing environmental responsibility, certification systems guarantee high standards of service and hence help to increase tourist satisfaction and repeat visit rates. By implementing such initiatives in Kazakhstan, not only will the quality of services improve but also international reputation and faith in the ecotourism present in the nation. Thirdly, Kazakhstan should create eco-friendly travel goods including local businesses and sensible use of natural resources. Community-driven tourism projects have substantially enhanced the authenticity of ecotourism experiences in New Zealand, therefore enabling both visitors and locals to profit economically and help environmental preservation [16,17]. Encouragement of comparable community involvement is absolutely vital for Kazakhstan. Including Kazakh cultural legacy—such as regional crafts, traditional cuisine, and folklore—into tourism operations can help create niche ecotourism markets with major economic advantages for rural areas. Programs like the Conservation Partnership Fund in New Zealand have shown the worth of funding community-based conservation projects with tourism income; Kazakhstan might follow such programs to directly connect tourism to local and environmental growth. Fourthly, local communities should be included in ecotourism; our studies confirm the need of teaching the locals about the advantages and responsible behaviour of this kind of travel. Training initiatives in New Zealand have enabled local communities—especially the Maori indigenous people—to actively engage in tourism projects, therefore improving both socioeconomic results and cultural preservation. To close knowledge gaps and enable residents to be guides, business leaders, and protectors of cultural legacy, Kazakhstan should start like-minded educational programs and training courses. This strategy will guarantee inclusive economic gains from tourism, therefore promoting community uplifting especially in economically deprived areas. Fundamental to ecotourism are nature preservation and the creation of protected areas. With about 30% of its area covered by national parks and marine reserves, which are kept under government assistance and public-private partnerships, New Zealand's success is based on its large network. By giving the creation and upkeep of national parks and reserves top priority, Kazakhstan should be modelling itself in terms of safeguarding its natural riches. As J. Higham and A. Carr emphasise, the execution of ecosystem monitoring projects would help to maintain ecological health, thereby guaranteeing long-term sustainability and responsible travel access.

Based on New Zealand's achievements, all these suggestions could greatly help Kazakhstan build a sustainable ecotourism industry. Supporting the economy, environmental preservation, and cultural legacy enrichment for next generations, ecotourism can become a key and sustainable component of Kazakhstan's tourism sector. Kazakhstan can attract both domestic and foreign guests by supporting distinctive natural and cultural assets, guaranteeing strict standards, involving local communities, and safeguarding of natural resources. Table 1 compares the ecotourism frameworks of Kazakhstan, Belarus, Costa Rica, and New Zealand, highlighting their respective strengths and weaknesses. Kazakhstan is in the early phases of promoting ecotourism, with insufficient government assistance, underfunded protected areas, and inadequate infrastructure. Belarus has a state-controlled tourist system with extensive forest reserves but little community participation and poor ecotourism growth. Costa Rica leads the way with strong legal backing, extensive conservation efforts, and community-based ecotourism, making it a big economic contributor. New Zealand excels in sustainable infrastructure, Māori-led conservation, and global ecotourism branding. However, it confronts issues in balancing tourism expansion and environmental preservation.

Table 1 – Comparative Analysis of Sustainable Ecotourism Frameworks: Kazakhstan, Costa Rica, New Zealand, and Belarus

Criteria	Kazakhstan	Belarus	Costa Rica	New Zealand
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Government policies and regulations.	Developing rules, but insufficient enforcement; minimal ecotourism-specific laws.	State-controlled tourism and restrictive restrictions for foreign tourism development.	Strong legal structure that supports ecotourism, large protected areas.	Māori-led conservation projects and stringent environmental laws.
Protected areas and conservation efforts.	National parks exist, but they are underfunded and managed poorly.	Large forest reserves; limited access for mass tourism.	25% of the land is protected; significant conservation programs.	large national parks and marine reserves; significant biodiversity preservation.
Economic contribution of ecotourism.	Ecotourism is an emerging market with untapped potential for expansion.	Domestic tourism is primarily nature-based, with a modest contribution.	Significant contribution to GDP, major economic engine.	Strong contribution to the economy and draws high-value travelers.
Community involvement and indigenous participation.	Limited local participation, possibility for expansion.	Minimal community-based initiatives, government-led projects.	Effective community-based ecotourism initiatives.	Māori-led tourism initiatives prioritize cultural sustainability.

1	2	3	4	5
Tourism infrastructure and accessibility.	Developing infrastructure and a shortage of environmentally suitable accommodation.	Government-controlled eco-tourism sites with moderate infrastructure.	Well-developed eco-lodges and sustainable tourism facilities.	Advanced eco-friendly infrastructure and sustainable transportation solutions.
Marketing and destination branding.	Limited global awareness, focusing on adventure tourism.	Less worldwide marketing, emphasis on nature reserves.	The global leader in ecotourism branding.	Nature-based tourism has a strong international reputation.
Environmental challenges.	Desertification, pollution, and the effects of climate change.	The expansion of ecotourism is gradual, despite the strictness of environmental control.	Overtourism and deforestation in specific regions.	Maintaining a balance between conservation and tourism expansion, as well as adequately administering the influx of tourists.
Note: The above table was created by authors				

Future research should explore specific regions and target groups in Kazakhstan to further develop the ecotourism industry, as well as additional modern management methods to promote and develop ecotourism in Kazakhstan, and conduct a deeper comparative analysis of the ecotourism industry in Kazakhstan compared to other countries to identify best practices and areas for improvement.

According to recent studies, incorporating successful international methods is crucial for Kazakhstan's ecotourism industry to grow sustainably. These techniques include increased ecological awareness, infrastructure development, community involvement, and strict government rules [18]. According to a scientometric review by Zhang et al., ecotourism research has progressed through stages that have focused on ecological services, sustainable development, and human disturbance, indicating the necessity of a thorough interdisciplinary approach [19].

Furthermore, research by Patil and Pattanshetti meticulously examined 250 studies conducted over a 20-year period, demonstrating the substantial contributions ecotourism makes to cultural preservation, economic expansion, and environmental conservation. Nonetheless, the study highlights that in order to guarantee long-term sustainability, good governance, community involvement, and policy development are essential [20].

These results are consistent with the research of Thapa, Rahimian, Pornprasit, and Turekulova et al., which highlights the fine line that separates protecting the environment from ensuring economic sustainability. According to their research, Kazakhstan should adopt the best ecotourism methods from the world's leading ecotourism companies while adjusting its regulations to fit its

own socioeconomic and environmental circumstances. Achieving sustainability and long-term success requires a well-organized ecotourism framework that integrates local tactics with global ideas [21, 22, 23].

Kazakhstan's tourism industry has shown high volatility. According to World Bank Open Data, international tourist arrivals peaked at 8.79 million in 2018, then fell dramatically to 0.202 million in 2020 due to the global pandemic [24]. In contrast, New Zealand maintained relatively stable and high-quality tourism demand (from 3.89 million to 0.996 million arrivals) and earned $10.96 billion in tourism receipts [25]. Tourism contributes only 1.13% to Kazakhstan's exports, while in New Zealand, this figure reaches 18.8%, highlighting the sector's underutilization in Kazakhstan.

Table 2 – Integrated Ecotourism Development Model "KIEDM"

Block	Key elements	Borrowed practices	Expected result
Government regulation and standards	Introduction of GOST (state standard)-like national ecotourism standard; differentiated attendance limits	National Eco-Standard of the Republic of Kazakhstan (The Astana Times); Tiaki Promise (NZ) system	Reducing anthropogenic pressure; strengthening the image of a «responsible destination»
Local community involvement	Joint administration of paths and yurt sites; income sharing.	Department of Conservation concessions (NZ) system; community-based tourism in the national parks of Belarus (ResearchGate)	Increased employment, less confrontations between tourists and pastures
Financing of nature conservation	The mechanism of payments for ecosystem services (PES); "green" bonds	Costa Rica's PSA Program (AP News)	A sustainable source of funds for protected areas
Product diversification	Winter steppe safari, trekking in Tien Shan, ethno festivals	The concept of the "long tourist season" (NZ)	Increase in the average length of stay
Smart marketing and monitoring	Unified digital dashboard of trail attendance and fitness data (IoT sensors)	MBIE data dashboard (NZ); interactive CR Wildlife maps	Flow forecasting and adaptive management
Note: The above table was created by authors			

Table 2 shows KIEDM (Kazakhstan Integrated Ecotourism Development Model) was created by authors about tourism in Kazakhstan contributes only 1.13% to the total exports annually, a modest figure compared to New Zealand's 18.8%, underscoring the underutilization of the sector's potential [25]. The KIEDM approach follows a five-step PDCA process: Plan-Do-Check-Act, with annual KPIs for biodiversity, community profitability, and the proportion of certified "green" tour operators. Thus, the selection of countries gives a transitive, trophic, and institutional variety of

techniques applicable to Kazakhstan's different natural and economic zones (steppe, mountains, desert). Table 2 summarizes the proposed five-component KIEDM model, which includes regulatory, socio-economic, financial, product, and information analysis blocks. Each block is correlated with borrowed foreign practices (New Zealand, Belarus, Costa Rica) and the predicted effects for Kazakhstan. The presented structure demonstrates the systemic nature of transformations: from the introduction of a national eco-standard to the creation of a single digital dashboard for monitoring visitor flows.

Together, the five interconnected pillars that make up the Kazakhstan Integrated Ecotourism Development Model (KIEDM) provide a complete framework for the advancement of ecotourism.

1. The Regulatory Foundation. The establishment of specialized laws and bylaws, the creation of capable bodies, and Kazakhstan's involvement in pertinent international accords are all included in this pillar, which covers the institutional and legislative underpinnings of ecotourism. An instructive example is provided by Belarus, where the Ministry of Natural Resources, local governments, the corporate sector, and non-governmental organizations collaborate to implement an overall environmental program and formalize ecotourism policy through a decree from the Council of Ministers. Similar national sustainability criteria are being pursued in New Zealand, which force the travel and tourist sector to lessen its carbon footprint. By example, KIEDM advocates for official responsibility for natural area protection and for the improvement of Kazakhstan's legal foundation, taking into consideration the newly enacted Subsoil and Subsoil Use Code as well as emerging ecological standards.

2. The socioeconomic pillar. Ensuring meaningful local participation and community development is the goal of the second pillar. As primary goals, "positive community outcomes" and "environmental restoration" are specifically highlighted in New Zealand's tourism strategy. In turn, Costa Rica runs large-scale rural and community-based tourism initiatives that incorporate handicraft businesses and farmers' cooperatives, bridging cultural heritage and the natural world while providing economic advantages to locals. This pillar within KIEDM suggests: focused training programs for community members (such as guest-house management, guiding, and hospitality); and a revenue-sharing system that reinvests a portion of tourism fees in local livelihoods and infrastructure.

3. The socioeconomic pillar. Ensuring meaningful local engagement and community development is the goal of the second pillar. As primary goals, "positive community outcomes" and "environmental restoration" are specifically highlighted in New Zealand's tourist policy. In turn, Costa Rica runs large-scale rural and community-based tourism initiatives that incorporate handcraft businesses and farmers' cooperatives, bridging cultural heritage and the natural world while providing economic advantages to locals. This pillar under KIEDM suggests: (i) focused training programs for community members (such as guest-house management, guiding, and hospitality); and (ii) a revenue-sharing system that reinvests a percentage of tourism fees in local livelihoods and infrastructure.

4. The Pillar of Product Development. The creation of superior ecotourism products is the subject of the fourth pillar. Costa Rica actively promotes "tradition-based tourism," which includes handcrafted goods, local cuisine, and rural excursions that combine biodiversity with culture. Similarly, New Zealand emphasizes high-end, eco-friendly travel experiences. By developing new trekking, water-based, and overland routes, eco-parks, and interpretive programs (wildlife observation, environmental camps), Kazakhstan should broaden its offerings under KIEDM. It

should also establish quality standards (e.g., eco-certification) and a single branding platform called "Green Kazakhstan." Visitors can enjoy the best possible balance between comfort and genuine nature experiences using this method.

5. Information and Analysis Pillar. The fifth pillar consists of efficient planning, knowledge sharing, and monitoring. A pertinent pattern for building statistics archives that include ecological, social, and economic variables is offered by the UNWTO Measuring Sustainability of Tourism (MST) effort. Through outreach initiatives, mobile applications, and online portals, KIEDM envisions extensive digitalization and public education. Adaptive management will be made possible by real-time data on ecosystem health and tourist flows. The model recommends an integrated national ecotourism analytics platform that is compatible with state statistical authorities, even though Kazakhstan now uses a few information systems for tourism statistics.

KIEDM offers a logical route for transforming Kazakhstan's tourism industry from a resource-extractive paradigm to a resilient, community-centered, and environmentally based ecotourism economy by integrating these five pillars.

Table 3 reveals the criteria for selecting comparative cases. New Zealand is represented as a mature ecotourist destination with high regulatory standards, Costa Rica as a pioneer of payments for ecosystem services, and Belarus as a post—socialist country with a comparable institutional base. The comparison makes it possible to identify transitive and institutional factors relevant to the natural and economic conditions of Kazakhstan. Such a sample provides a multidimensional extrapolation of other people's experience to the national strategy.

Table 3 – Argumentation of the Selection of Referent Countries

Criteria	Belarus	Costa-Rica	New Zealand	Relevance for the Republic of Kazakhstan
Post-socialist transit	Yes	No	No	Institutional transition similar to Kazakhstan [25].
Rich biodiversity and PES mechanisms	Limited	Partially	Expressed	Reference for PES implementation and funding models [26].
High standards of regulation and the visitor pledge	Being formed	Being formed	Mature system	Acts as a regulatory benchmark for national frameworks [23].
Comparability in terms of population and remoteness of markets	Comparable	Less	Less	A test of the sustainability of niche products (a long flight, like in the Republic of Kazakhstan)
Note: The above table was created by authors				

To address these gaps, the proposed KIEDM (Kazakhstan Integrated Ecotourism Development Model) offers a five-block framework: government regulation and standards, community involvement, nature conservation financing, product diversification, and smart monitoring. Each block incorporates best practices from international contexts, adapted to Kazakhstan's unique socio-ecological and institutional conditions. The model is rooted in the PDCA (Plan–Do–Check–Act) approach, emphasizing continual assessment through KPIs on

biodiversity, local income, and green certification.

The Kazakhstan Integrated Ecotourism Development Model (KIEDM) should be implemented in phases that are well defined and assign distinct roles to local communities, commercial sector players, and government agencies. The following sequencing is based on the UN Sustainable Development Goals and international best practices: in New Zealand, all tourism operators are legally obligated to implement sustainable practices by 2025, while in Belarus, similar milestones are enshrined in state programs involving businesses, non-profits, and public agencies (Table 4).

Table 4 – Phased KIEDM Model Implementation Plan

Phase	Core Objectives and Activities
1.Regulatory groundwork and strategic planning	Create regional "green clusters" and interministerial working groups; negotiate bilateral and international agreements (such as expedited visa processes and transportation links); and develop and implement a national ecotourism strategy along with relevant legislation.
2.Institutional capacity-building	Provide specialized training in sustainable tourism principles to tour operators, municipal administrators, and civil servants; establish regional expert councils; and conduct community-based workshops and consulting services to encourage local involvement.
3.Infrastructure and product development	Build and renovate hiking routes, eco-campsites, guest homes, and visitor centers; create new tour packages and itineraries with themes like nature, culture, and water sports; implement environmental performance standards and certification for service quality.
4.Marketing and promotion	Start national and international advertising campaigns; develop a single "Ecotourism Kazakhstan" brand; take part in media outreach and trade shows; and improve online presence via social media and web platforms.
5.Monitoring and analytics	Establish a comprehensive national database of ecotourism assets; carry out recurring visitor surveys and ecological impact assessments; and implement an integrated statistical and analytical system in line with the UNWTO Measuring Sustainability of Tourism (MST) framework.
6.Finance and incentives	Establish fiscal and credit incentives for green investment; secure budgetary allocations (such as subsidies for small eco-enterprises and protected-area management); and use private capital and international money (trust funds, grants) to diversify sources of income.
Note: The above table was created by authors	

In order to maximize the model's effectiveness and long-term sustainability, the phased approach makes sure that the introduction of legal foundations, institutional competency, physical infrastructure, market positioning, evidence-based oversight, and financial stimulation occurs in a logical order.

Furthermore, the rationale for selecting New Zealand, Costa Rica, and Belarus lies in their trophic, institutional, and transitional diversity. New Zealand serves as a model for mature regulatory ecosystems and sustainable practices, Costa Rica illustrates effective ecosystem service payment schemes, and Belarus provides a post-socialist comparison with similar administrative challenges. The study's key findings reinforce the urgent need to pivot from a quantity-driven

tourism strategy to one focused on sustainability and community outcomes. The introduction of Kazakhstan's National Eco-Standard in 2025 offers a critical window for reform. Pilot initiatives in regions such as Charyn-Kolsai and Ulytau-Saryarka illustrate the practical application of KIEDM through PES systems and community-led governance. These outcomes will support Kazakhstan's transition from a commodity-based tourism model to a resilient and inclusive ecotourism ecosystem. In summary, the integration of adaptive international practices into Kazakhstan's policy and planning landscape presents a strategic pathway for ecological preservation, socio-economic development, and global competitiveness in sustainable tourism.

Conclusion

From our comparison of travel, numerous significant conclusions may be made at last. Nations have special natural resources that draw visitors looking to savour the wonders of the earth and participate in ecologically friendly leisure. Still, the approach and effectiveness of ecotourism development varied greatly. Despite a lot of new visitors, Kazakhstan has not yet completely realised its possibilities in the field of ecotourism. Low international tourism income numbers and their variations over previous years point to the need of stepping up efforts to draw ecotourists and create environmentally friendly tourism products. Furthermore, crucial is paying attention to sustainable natural resource management and including nearby populations into tourism. This study has systematically explored the current state and growth potential of ecotourism in Kazakhstan through comparative analysis with referent countries such as New Zealand, Costa Rica, and Belarus. The findings highlight significant disparities in tourism development indicators, including export share, regulatory frameworks, and community integration. Kazakhstan's tourism sector remains underutilized, contributing only 1.13% to total exports, whereas New Zealand leverages ecotourism to support nearly 19% of its export economy. Specific findings of the study:

- According to the data, Kazakhstan is now lagging behind the top ecotourism destinations. While nature-based tourism contributed roughly 4.2 percent of Costa Rica's GDP and 4-5 percent in New Zealand, tourism alone only made for 3.9% of the country's GDP in 2022. Nonetheless, internal travel in Kazakhstan already exceeded pre-pandemic levels that same year, suggesting unfulfilled consumer demand. Given Kazakhstan's breathtaking landscapes and cultural assets, a well-thought-out ecotourism plan might greatly boost the country's competitiveness in the global tourism sector.

- The proposed KIEDM framework, tailored to Kazakhstan's institutional and ecological context, is expected to unlock this unrealised potential. According to empirical data from Costa Rica, programs promoting biodiversity and forest conservation driven by ecotourism can account for up to 23% of the country's GDP. In a similar vein, the introduction of KIEDM may boost foreign exchange profits, generate new jobs in rural regions, and diversify regional economies. Notably, if the strategy is implemented successfully, the government's Development Concept's national goal of increasing tourism's share of GDP to 8% by 2025 seems achievable.

- The foundation of KIEDM is an inclusive and green economy. Through regulated access to protected areas and specific support for environmental care, the approach encourages ecosystem protection while guaranteeing that local populations receive a predetermined portion of tourism-related income. The growth of protected areas and the empowerment of small tourism businesses are two UN Sustainable Development Goals that are directly advanced by such actions. Longer term, KIEDM has the potential to increase Kazakhstan's economic foundation and strengthen the ecological component of the country's growth strategy. As a result, the framework has strategic

significance as a driver of low-carbon, sustainable growth in addition to direct practical application.

Ultimately, the comparative study shows that the effective growth of ecotourism calls for a whole strategy including not only luring visitors but also preservation of the natural surroundings, local resident involvement, and marketing campaigns. Every nation can learn from the experiences of the others and aim to develop a successful and sustainable ecotourism industry with justifiable environmental and financial basis.

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ҚАЗАҚСТАНДА ТҰРАҚТЫ ЭКОТУРИЗМ МОДЕЛІН ХАЛЫҚАРАЛЫҚ ТӘЖІРИБЕ МЕН ЖЕРГІЛІКТІ ПРАКТИКА НЕГІЗІНДЕ ҚАЛЫПТАСТЫРУ

Аңдатпа. Бұл зерттеу Қазақстандағы экотуризм секторын қазіргі жағдайы мен стратегиялық даму әлеуетін бағалау мақсатында дамып келе жатқан туризм парадигмаларын сыни талдауды жүзеге асырады. Зерттеудің негізгі мақсаты – Қазақстанның ерекше экологиялық, мәдени және институционалдық ландшафтын ескере отырып, әлемдік деңгейде танылған экотуризм принциптерін біріктіретін Қазақстанның интеграцияланған экотуризмді дамыту моделін (KIEDM) құру. Зерттеу күрделі аралас әдіснамаға негізделген, онда сарапшылармен жүргізілген сұхбаттар, далалық зерттеулер және саясат құжаттарынан алынған сапалық деректермен қатар халықаралық дерекқорлар мен мемлекеттік статистикадан алынған сандық талдаулар біріктіріледі. PDCA (Жоспарлау-Іске асыру-Тексеру-Әрекет ету) циклі экотуризм стратегияларын үнемі бағалау, іске асыру және жетілдіру үшін динамикалық операциялық құрал ретінде қолданылады. Зерттеу сондай-ақ, экотуризм саласында көшбасшы болып табылатын елдерден – Жаңа Зеландия, Коста-Рика және Беларусь – алынған салыстырмалы жағдайларды талдау арқылы байытылады. Бұл елдер тиімді саясат әзірлеу, экожүйені сертификаттау режимдері және қатысушы басқару механизмдері туралы маңызды түсініктер береді. Беларусь, әсіресе, экологиялық сақтауды ауылдық қауымдастықтармен біріктіру жөніндегі тиімді моделін ұсынады. Әлемдік тәжірибелерді жергілікті шындықпен синтездеу арқылы зерттеу Қазақстанның экотуризм инфрақұрылымын, реттеуші үйлесімділігін және қызмет көрсету сапасын арттыру үшін coherent саясаттық жол картасын ұсынады. Зерттеу нәтижелері туризмнің дамуын экологиялық басқарумен және тұрақты даму мақсаттарымен үйлестірудің маңыздылығын көрсетеді, бұл экономикалық тұрғыдан тиімді, экологиялық жағынан орнықты және әлеуметтік тұрғыдан инклюзивті туризм көзқарасын алға тартады. Ұлттық ауқымнан тыс, зерттеу Орталық Азиядағы басқа да дамушы экотуризм бағыттары үшін қолдануға болатын әдіснамалар мен стратегиялық нұсқауларды ұсынады.

Кілт сөздер: экотуризм, Қазақстандағы туризм, тұрақты туризм, туризмді дамыту,

әлемдік туризм тәжірибесі.

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ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ УСТОЙЧИВОЙ МОДЕЛИ ЭКОТУРИЗМА В КАЗАХСТАНЕ НА ОСНОВЕ МЕЖДУНАРОДНОГО ОПЫТА И ЛОКАЛЬНОЙ ПРАКТИКИ

Аннотация. Настоящее исследование представляет собой критический анализ эволюционирующих парадигм туризма с особым акцентом на сектор экотуризма в Казахстане, с целью оценки его текущего состояния и стратегического потенциала развития. Центральным элементом исследования является разработка Казахстанской интегрированной модели развития экотуризма (KIEDM), оригинальной и контекстуально адаптированной концепции, которая синергизирует признанные на международном уровне принципы экотуризма с уникальными экологическими, культурными и институциональными ландшафтами Казахстана. Исследование использует строгий смешанный метод, интегрируя качественные данные, полученные из экспертных интервью, полевых исследований и политических документов, с количественным анализом, основанным на международных базах данных и государственных статистиках. В качестве динамичного операционного инструмента для итеративной оценки, реализации и совершенствования стратегий экотуризма используется цикл PDCA (планирование-исполнение-проверка-действие). Работа дополнительно обогащена сравнительным анализом кейсов ведущих экотуристических направлений — Новой Зеландии, Коста-Рики и Беларуси, предоставляющих переносимые идеи эффективного проектирования политики, экологических сертификационных систем и механизмов участия в управлении. Беларусь, в частности, представляет собой убедительную модель интеграции охраны экологии с вовлечением сельских сообществ. Синтезируя эти международные уроки с местными реалиями, исследование представляет согласованную политику развития, направленную на улучшение экотуристической инфраструктуры Казахстана, согласованности нормативных актов и качества обслуживания. Результаты исследования подчеркивают необходимость согласования развития туризма с экологическим управлением и целями устойчивого развития, предлагая концепцию туризма, которая является экономически жизнеспособной, экологически устойчивой и социально инклюзивной. Помимо национального масштаба, исследование предлагает переносимые методологии и стратегические рекомендации для других развивающихся экотуристических направлений Центральной Азии.

Ключевые слова: экотуризм, туризм в Казахстане, устойчивый туризм, развитие туризма, мировой туристический опыт.