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CREATION OF INNOVATIVE TOURISM PRODUCTS IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY OF KAZAKHSTAN

Abstract. *Kazakhstan's tourism industry, endowed with rich natural and cultural resources, is actively evolving in response to global trends. However, the development of innovative tourism products (ITPs) remains a critical challenge. This article explores the potential and necessity of introducing ITPs as a key driver for enhancing the country's tourism appeal and competitiveness. The study employs methods of generalization, statistical analysis, and comparative evaluation to identify existing gaps and benchmark Kazakhstan's performance against leading tourism destinations such as France and Turkey. Particular attention is given to current examples of innovation in the domestic tourism sector, including the "Digital Shymkent" project and the development of eco-tourism routes in national parks. The findings reveal structural and technological limitations that hinder the creation of unique and appealing tourism products. As a result, the article proposes strategic directions for developing ITPs in Kazakhstan, such as integrating digital technologies, leveraging intangible cultural heritage, promoting sustainable tourism practices, and enhancing marketing efforts. The study underscores the importance of innovation in attracting diverse tourist segments and achieving long-term growth in the tourism sector.*

Keywords: *tourism, innovation, tourism product, unique product, sustainable tourism, digitalization, competitiveness, Kazakhstan*

Introduction

In the contemporary global economy, the tourism industry serves as a powerful catalyst for socio-economic development, stimulating innovation, cross-sectoral integration, and sustainable growth. The dynamic evolution of tourists' expectations, digitalization processes, and global competition have significantly reshaped the landscape of tourism services, necessitating the creation of innovative tourism products that are adaptive, interactive, and experience-driven [1], [2].

Kazakhstan, possessing a diverse natural, historical, and cultural heritage, has witnessed

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growing attention toward the development of its tourism sector, particularly in light of its strategic objectives to diversify the national economy and increase inbound tourism. Recent government efforts to digitalize administrative services and integrate innovation into urban development, such as the initiatives by the Shymkent City Digitalization Department, highlight the importance placed on innovation at both regional and national levels [3]. These initiatives reflect a broader governmental commitment to enhancing Kazakhstan's tourism competitiveness.

Tourism innovation encompasses the application of new technologies, the design of personalized experiences, and the adoption of sustainable practices that align with global tourism trends [2], [4]. According to recent statistics, the influx of foreign tourists to Kazakhstan has been steadily increasing, indicating a positive trajectory in the industry's growth [7], [8]. However, in order to maintain this upward trend and compete with global leaders such as France and Turkey in terms of tourist arrivals [9], [15], Kazakhstan must prioritize the development of innovative tourism products tailored to the needs of both domestic and international travelers.

Moreover, the growing demand for creative and thematic tourism—ranging from eco-tourism and medical tourism to technology-based experiences—requires a holistic approach to innovation. For instance, the case of Korea's integration of green innovations and medical tourism can serve as a benchmark for Kazakhstan's policy frameworks [14]. Additionally, digital platforms and smart tourism technologies are reshaping service delivery and consumer interaction, particularly in urban centers and high-tech regions such as Silicon Valley [11].

An innovative tourism product (ITP) is a new or improved tourism product or service that offers unique experiences or meets specific consumer needs. It includes new tourist routes, technological developments, cultural or environmental initiatives that change or improve the tourist experience [1]. These innovations not only improve the tourist experience but also help attract new categories of tourists and diversify the tourism offer.

The development of ITPs is also intricately linked to sustainable tourism. As the industry evolves, the growing emphasis on sustainability ensures that new tourism products preserve natural and cultural resources, while contributing to the development of local communities. Factors such as economic shifts, technological advancements, and changing consumer preferences significantly influence the tourism landscape [2]. The introduction of new technologies, such as virtual reality and mobile applications, alongside enhanced service standards, creates more exciting and immersive experiences that attract a broader range of tourists.

Kazakhstan's tourism industry is rapidly evolving, with the country increasingly becoming a destination of choice for both domestic and international travelers. One of the critical aspects of this development is the creation of innovative tourism products that offer visitors unique, unforgettable experiences. These innovations not only enhance the tourist experience but also contribute to regional economic development by creating new jobs and stimulating infrastructure growth. Furthermore, the development of ITPs improves Kazakhstan's competitiveness on the global tourism map and strengthens its international image.

This article aims to examine the current state of innovation in Kazakhstan's tourism sector, analyze existing practices, and propose a framework for the creation of innovative tourism products. By drawing upon international case studies, statistical data, and government strategies, the study seeks to offer practical recommendations for enhancing Kazakhstan's tourism competitiveness in the global market.

Scientific novelty of the research lies in the systematization of international best practices of

innovative tourism products (ITPs) and the development of a framework tailored specifically for Kazakhstan's tourism market. This framework integrates digital innovation, sustainable tourism principles, and intangible cultural heritage in a unified strategic model.

Methodology

The research methodology combines various approaches to analyze and develop innovative tourism products (ITP) in Kazakhstan. The main method used is a comparative analysis of tourism indicators in Kazakhstan, France, and Turkey. This allowed the examination of the volume of services provided by accommodation facilities, hotel occupancy rates, and the number of tourists in different countries. Comparing these data helps identify the strengths and weaknesses of Kazakhstan's tourism industry and highlights what needs to be changed to increase the country's competitiveness in the global tourism market.

Statistical data on the number of tourists and the volume of services provided by accommodation facilities in Kazakhstan for the years 2021-2023 were used for the analysis. This approach helped trace the growth dynamics and identify trends in the tourism industry, as well as determine the impact of various factors, such as recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic, on the demand for accommodation services.

The study also examines international best practices. Successful innovative tourism products implemented in countries like the USA, Norway, South Korea, and Spain were reviewed. These countries actively use mobile applications for trip planning, virtual and augmented reality, and offer unique tourism routes focused on ecology and sustainable development. Analyzing these examples allowed for the development of proposals for implementing similar technologies and approaches in Kazakhstan, taking into account the specifics of the local market and the needs of tourists.

In addition to quantitative data analysis, significant attention was given to qualitative research based on expert opinions and the analysis of local data. This helped gain a deeper understanding of the barriers and prospects for implementing innovative tourism products and identifying the needs of both tourists and the industry as a whole. Expert assessments and interview results with representatives from the tourism sector helped clarify which innovations could be successful in Kazakhstan.

Although the study mentions expert interviews, it lacks a detailed methodological explanation. Future iterations should specify the number of experts involved, selection criteria, and thematic coding used for analysis.

However, the methodology of the expert interviews could be elaborated further. Providing details on sample size, selection criteria, and qualitative data analysis methods (such as thematic coding or content analysis) would enhance the credibility and replicability of the study.

The research methodology combines both quantitative and qualitative methods, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the current state and potential for the development of innovative tourism products in Kazakhstan, as well as proposing ways to improve the country's competitiveness in the global tourism market.

Results and discussion

Kazakhstan has a rich diversity of tourism resources, covering mountain ranges, steppe spaces, picturesque lakes, architectural monuments and the cultural heritage of both the Kazakh people and other ethnic groups living in the country. Tourism here is gaining momentum, attracting

both vacationers from neighboring countries and tourists from more distant corners of the world. Several ITPs have been implemented in Kazakhstan, one of which is the Digital Shymkent project [3]. It offers interactive tours of historical sites using mobile applications and augmented reality (AR) technologies. In addition, the Ecological Tourist Routes in National Parks initiative [4] includes the creation of excursion routes that have a minimal impact on nature. Today's tourists are becoming more diverse and demanding, sophisticated in their interests, they are no longer limited to traditional attractions, but strive for new and unusual experiences. Thus, the creation of ITPs is becoming the most important factor in attracting and retaining tourists [5].

ITP includes new approaches to organizing tourist routes, using modern technologies, developing environmentally sustainable tourism services and introducing innovative forms of marketing to attract the target audience. Kazakhstan, with its rich cultural heritage, diverse natural landscapes and historical sites, is rapidly developing its tourism industry. The introduction of innovative approaches to creating tourism products plays a key role in attracting the attention of tourists from all over the world and ensuring the sustainable development of regional economies [6,7].

However, what are the indicators of tourism development in Kazakhstan, we will consider in Figure 1.

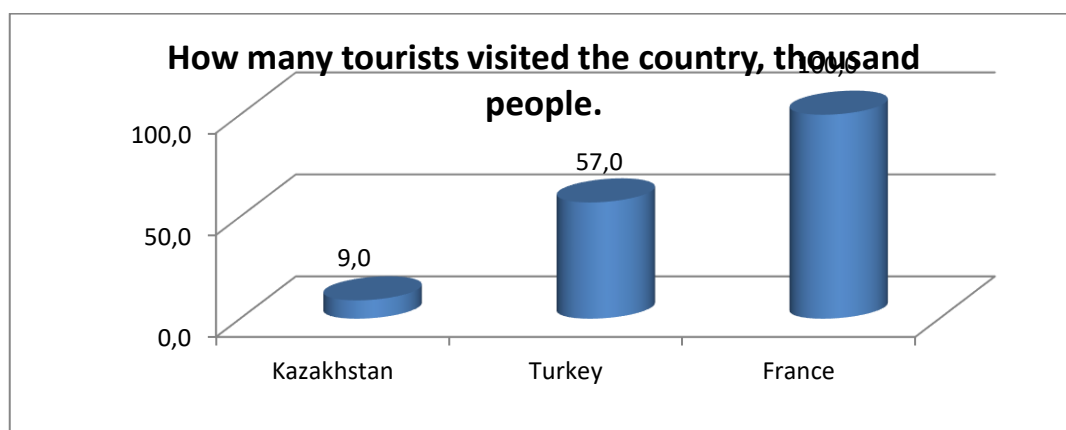


Figure 1 – Volume of services rendered in accommodation facilities in Kazakhstan in 2021–2023, tenge

Source: [8]

The data presented in Figure 2 illustrate a steady and substantial increase in the volume of services rendered by accommodation facilities in Kazakhstan over the period from 2021 to 2023. Following the significant downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism sector began to recover, resulting in a marked surge in demand for hospitality services. In 2022, the sector experienced a sharp rise of approximately 67% in service volume compared to the previous year. This positive trend continued in 2023, with an additional growth of 25%, indicating a sustained momentum in the sector's revival.

The increase in accommodation services directly correlates with the gradual return of both domestic and international travel, reflecting a broader pattern of economic recovery in the tourism industry. As restrictions were lifted and confidence in travel was restored, more tourists began to visit the country, thereby driving up the demand for lodging and related services.

However, when comparing Kazakhstan's figures with those of leading tourist destinations such as Turkey, the disparity becomes evident. In 2023, Turkey welcomed approximately 57

million international tourists, whereas Kazakhstan received only a few hundred thousand. This stark difference underscores the significant development gap in terms of international tourist inflows and global competitiveness.

One of the key indicators of the performance and efficiency of accommodation facilities is the occupancy rate. In Kazakhstan, the national average occupancy rate in 2023 was recorded at 25.6%, which is considerably low by international standards. To contextualize this figure and highlight the real state of tourism development in Kazakhstan, Figure 2 also includes comparative occupancy rates for several other countries. These international benchmarks provide insight into the extent to which Kazakhstan still lags in attracting and retaining tourists and emphasizes the need for strategic investments in hospitality infrastructure, marketing, and innovative tourism product development.

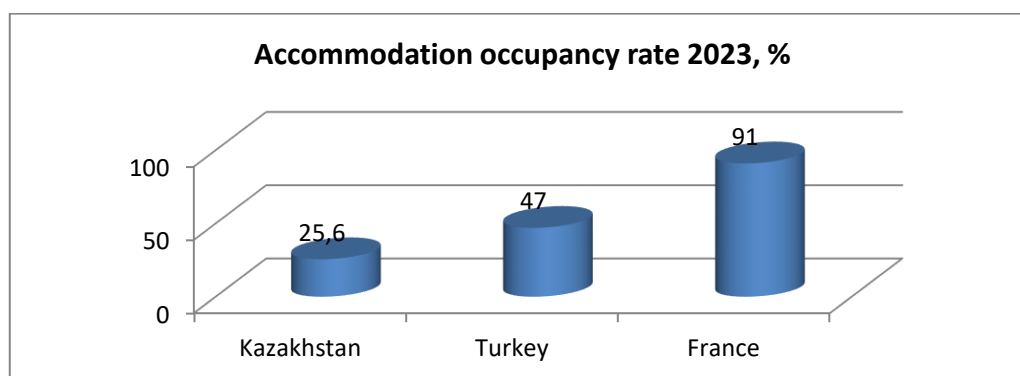


Figure 2 – Comparison of occupancy rates of accommodations in France, Turkey and Kazakhstan for 2023

Source: [8, 9]

As we can see in Figure 2, France is the leader with 91% occupancy, followed by Turkey with 47%. While Kazakhstan fills accommodations with only more than 25% of tourists. This means that it is important for Kazakhstan to create an ITP in the tourism industry in order to enter the competitive market and win a larger share of the world market [9].

Let's consider the number of tourists who visited these countries, figure 3.

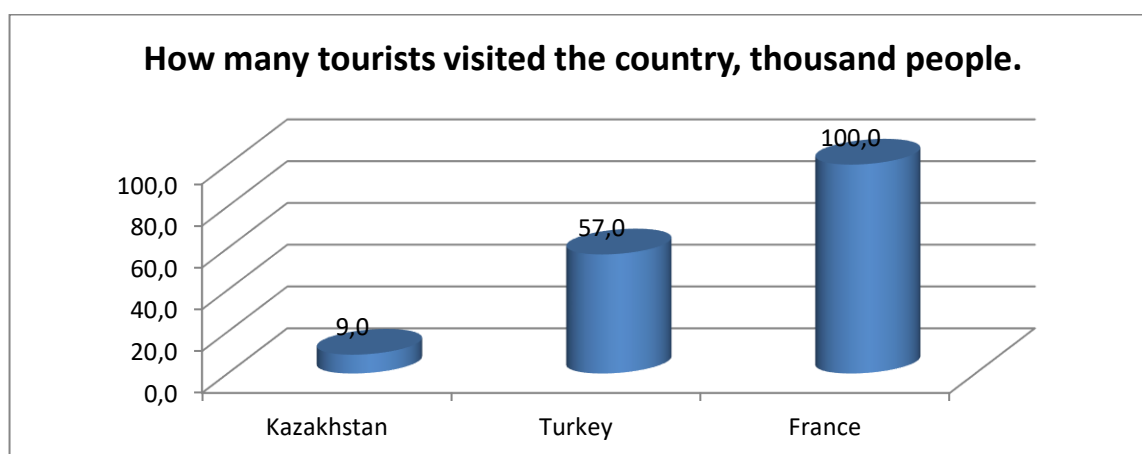


Figure 3 - Tourist attendance in different countries in 2023

Source: [8, 9, 10]

100 million tourists vacationed in France, more than 57 million people vacationed in Turkey in 2023, and in Kazakhstan, tourists make up only 9 million people, which indicates the need to

develop their own ITP. These international examples highlight the role of innovation in attracting large tourist flows. In particular, they use mobile applications for trip planning, virtual and augmented reality to create a unique experience, of course, an important focus on renewable energy sources, sustainable development and environmental protection. They include thematic tours, programs for immersion in local culture and traditions, inextricably linked with art, gastronomy, etc. For developed tourism in the country, these countries consider interaction with local communities and volunteers important. They develop personalized itineraries that travelers prefer to create unique experiences for tourists. What's also innovative is that they use artificial intelligence in the service, and also place them in trendy glamping or coworking spaces.

For the RK, it is necessary to apply all types of ITP in tourism to attract new customers and improve the quality of service in the tourism industry. ITP is necessary for the RK to achieve competitiveness, since in the rapidly changing world of the tourism industry, innovative products allow you to stand out from competitors, attract the attention of customers with interesting and unique offers. Innovations help improve the quality of service and convenience for tourists, which in turn leads to increased satisfaction and loyalty. ITPs are targeted at various market segments, including young people, families with children, older tourists and others who are looking for a unique experience.

In recent years, Kazakhstan has begun to explore the development of innovative tourism products (ITPs), though they remain relatively few in number. One promising example is the use of interactive ethnographic village tours, where tourists don't just observe from a distance but actively participate in the daily life of local residents. These experiences include traditional crafts, local rituals, and cultural exchanges, offering visitors a genuine and memorable immersion into Kazakh traditions.

Another notable direction is the growth of ecotourism, particularly in national parks. These tours offer travelers the chance to explore Kazakhstan's diverse natural landscapes and ecosystems while learning about native wildlife. Such experiences combine recreation with environmental awareness and contribute to sustainable tourism practices.

Kazakhstan is also taking steps toward digital innovation in tourism. For instance, interactive mobile guides and virtual reality (VR) experiences are being developed to allow users to explore historical events and architectural monuments in an immersive way. These tools make it easier for tourists to engage with Kazakhstan's cultural and historical heritage, even remotely [7].

However, despite these developments, Kazakhstan still has a limited number of ITPs, especially when compared to global tourism leaders. In countries like the United States, virtual tourism is widely used and advanced technological solutions are common. In regions like Silicon Valley, for example, tourism integrates cutting-edge innovations such as AI, AR, and smart tourism platforms to personalize and enhance the visitor experience [11].

Norway is another strong example. The country focuses on sustainable tourism, offering nature-based tours to preserved areas like the famous fjords. These experiences are not only environmentally friendly but also carefully managed to protect the natural landscape and promote responsible travel [12].

In Spain, many tourism services are designed around interactive technologies. Historical and cultural sites often use mobile apps, multimedia displays, and augmented reality tools to bring stories to life and engage visitors of all ages [13].

Meanwhile, South Korea stands out for its innovative use of technology in tourism. From

smart city tours to virtual K-pop and K-drama experiences, the country successfully combines digital innovation with cultural export. Tourists can explore historical palaces using VR or take part in gamified cultural events through mobile platforms [14].

These international examples show that innovative tourism products can succeed in any country, as long as they are aligned with the needs, preferences, and interests of modern travelers. Innovation in tourism should not be about technology for its own sake, but about creating richer, more engaging, and more personalized experiences.

The authors believe that Kazakhstan has strong potential to develop and expand its ITP offerings. To do this effectively, it's important to take a multi-faceted approach — integrating digital tools, working with local communities, improving infrastructure, and understanding the evolving expectations of tourists. Table 1 outlines the key strategic directions for implementing ITPs in Kazakhstan, based on international best practices and relevant research [12, 13, 14, 15].

Table 1 – Main directions of implementation of the Innovative Tourism Product (ITP)

Area of development	Proposals for the development of ITP
Development of unique tourist routes through picturesque places	- Research and promotion of many unexplored but potentially promising areas.
Use of digital and interactive technologies	- Development of mobile applications for visitors with interactive maps, audiovisual images, portable virtual reality devices, etc. - Implementation of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) to provide sustainable tourism and unique tourist experiences
Formation of environmentally sustainable tourism	- Support and development of ecotourism, including programs for the conservation of natural resources and ecosystems. - Attracting investment in infrastructure through creative and educational opportunities
Promotion of innovative hotel and entertainment programs	- Provision of sustainable non-standard forms of accommodation (e.g. eco-hotels, guest houses, campings). - Introduction of new forms of entertainment and active recreation (adventure games, extreme sports, etc.)
Working with local communities and stimulating entrepreneurship	- Support for domestic entrepreneurs and cooperation with local communities to develop tourism products based on local traditions and culture. - Development of training and consulting programs for the development of small and medium-sized businesses in the tourism sector
Marketing and promotion	- Accelerated promotion of ITP using digital and traditional marketing channels. - Participation in exhibitions of different countries and any other tourist events to attract foreign visitors

Note: This table was compiled by the authors based on the analysis of strategic documents, expert reports, and trends in tourism development in Kazakhstan.

The application of the above will help Kazakhstan not only to diversify its tourism offer, but also to take a certain position in the global tourism market, which will be based on the country's unique potential and cultural characteristics.

Conclusion

The analysis reveals significant growth in accommodation revenues in Kazakhstan. However, a comparative analysis highlights notable differences in the occupancy rates of lodging establishments across countries. For instance, France boasts an occupancy rate of 91%, Turkey stands at 47%, while Kazakhstan's rate is just over 25%. Additionally, the number of tourists visiting these countries varies considerably: France attracts around 100 million tourists annually, Turkey hosted over 57 million in 2023, and Kazakhstan welcomed approximately 9 million. This disparity is largely attributed to the more developed and effective approaches employed by France and Turkey in attracting tourists, particularly through the integration of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) elements across nearly all regions.

The creation and further development of ICH in Kazakhstan have the potential to play a crucial role in attracting new categories of tourists, meeting their diverse needs, and contributing to the overall growth of the country's tourism industry. Kazakhstan's leading position in ecotourism and its rich cultural heritage offer unique opportunities for developing tourism products that cater to both domestic and international markets. It is important to emphasize that the introduction of innovations in the tourism sector will help Kazakhstan achieve more competitive positions within the global tourism industry.

However, the development of ITPs also faces regulatory and institutional barriers. These include fragmented policy implementation, limited access to innovation funding for small tourism enterprises, and the absence of a national roadmap for integrating innovation across all tourism subsectors.

With its unique natural and cultural resources, Kazakhstan has the potential to successfully compete with global tourism leaders by offering travelers original and unforgettable experiences. In this way, innovations in tourism become a key element of Kazakhstan's strategy for positioning itself as a premier tourist destination, contributing to sustainable growth and strengthening the country's image on the world stage.

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ИННОВАЦИЯЛЫҚ ТУРИСТІК ӨНІМ ҚАЗАҚСТАН ТУРИЗМ САЛАСЫН ДАМУЫНЫҢ ЖАҢА ЖОЛЫ РЕТІНДЕ

Андатпа. Қазақстанның туризм саласы белсенді түрде дамып келеді және инновациялық идеялар мен технологияларды енгізу оның бәсекеге қабілеттілігін арттыруда маңызды рөл атқарады. Жаһандық бәсекелестік пен туристердің сұраныстарының өзгеруі жағдайында инновациялық туристік өнім (ИТӨ) әзірлеу өзекті мәселеге айналды. Мақалада цифрлық және интерактивті технологиялар, экотуризм, виртуалды және толықтырылған шынайылықты қолданудың сәтті мысалдары қарастырылады. Атап айтқанда, тарихи нысандар бойынша интерактивті турлар ұйымдастыруға арналған «Цифрлық Шымкент» жобасы талданады. Сонымен қатар, экологиялық туризм бағыттарын дамытудың маңыздылығы атап өтіледі. Қазақстан, Франция және Түркия туризмінің көрсеткіштеріне салыстырмалы талдау жасалып, отандық саланың әлсіз және күшті тұстары анықталған. Мақалада инновациялық туристік өнімдерді дамытудың бағыттары ұсынылады: қызметтерді цифрландыру, мәдени мұраны ілгерілету, тұрақты туризмді қолдау және бірегей маршруттарды әзірлеу. Елдің халықаралық тартымдылығын арттыру мақсатында материалдық емес мәдени мұраны туризмге интеграциялау қажеттігі көрсетіледі.

Кілт сөздер: туризм, инновация, туристік өнім, бірегей өнім, әлеует, жасау, тарту.

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ИННОВАЦИОННЫЙ ТУРИСТСКИЙ ПРОДУКТ, КАК НОВЫЙ ПУТЬ РАЗВИТИЯ ТУРИСТСКОЙ ОТРАСЛИ КАЗАХСТАНА

Аннотация. Туристический сектор Казахстана активно развивается, и внедрение инновационных идей и технологий становится ключевым фактором повышения его конкурентоспособности. В условиях глобальной конкуренции и изменяющихся запросов туристов особую актуальность приобретает создание инновационного туристского продукта (ИТП). В статье рассматриваются примеры успешного внедрения цифровых и интерактивных решений, экотуризма, технологий виртуальной и дополненной реальности. В частности, анализируется проект «Цифровой Шымкент», предполагающий использование мобильных приложений и AR-технологий для проведения интерактивных экскурсий. Также подчеркивается важность экологичных туристских маршрутов, способствующих устойчивому развитию. На основе сравнительного анализа показателей туризма в Казахстане, Франции и Турции выявлены сильные и слабые стороны казахстанской отрасли. Статья предлагает направления развития ИТП, включая цифровизацию услуг, продвижение культурного наследия, поддержку устойчивого туризма и разработку уникальных туристских маршрутов. Делается вывод о необходимости интеграции нематериального культурного наследия в туристские предложения для повышения международной привлекательности страны.

Ключевые слова: туризм, инновации, туристский продукт, уникальный продукт, потенциал, создание, привлечение.