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TOURISM POTENTIAL OF THE ZHETISU REGION: SCIENTIFIC BASIS OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Abstract. *The article analyzes that the tourism industry is a very complex sector that serves to meet the tourism and recreational needs of society. It also analyzes whether tourism and recreational resources are a unique sector that requires consideration of the resources of the entire tourism industry. The article comprehensively examines the concept of tourism and recreational resources and determines that their volume is also an essential structure for the tourism system, region, resort, and tourist destination.*

The purpose of the study is to explore the relationship between cultural tourism and excursion and educational activities at the theoretical and practical level, and to demonstrate the achievements of tourism in the economy of the Zhetysu region. The study will also propose specific solutions to promote cohesion and tourism development in the Zhetysu region.

The practical significance of the study lies in the scientific and practical justification of the mechanisms for the growth of tourism in the Zhetysu region. The study used methods of abstraction and analysis of tourism in the Zhetysu region.

Keywords: *tourism, Zhetysu region, economy, development, trends.*

Introduction

In the contemporary global context, where technological advancements have rendered nearly every region of the planet accessible to travelers, the paradox remains that only a limited fraction of the world's potential tourism resources is effectively utilized [1]. Despite the expansion of international transportation networks, digital mapping systems, and real-time information platforms, the geographical distribution of tourism activity continues to display significant spatial asymmetry [11].

At the same time, the environmental context in which tourism operates is undergoing unprecedented transformation. Anthropogenic impacts, driven by industrial activity, urban expansion, deforestation, and pollution, have initiated processes of environmental degradation that

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directly affect the sustainability of tourism systems [2]. Natural resources—forests, freshwater ecosystems, biodiversity-rich habitats—are being exploited at rates that outpace regeneration, creating long-term risks for tourism-dependent regions [3]. Climate change, manifested in rising global temperatures, altered precipitation patterns, and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events, is particularly consequential for tourism development [12].

Scientific research into contemporary climate change trends has underscored the global scale of the phenomenon. Since the late 19th century, average global temperatures have risen substantially, with pronounced effects in the Northern Hemisphere [3]. Rising surface water temperatures in inland seas and lakes have altered aquatic ecosystems and coastal environments, influencing tourism attractiveness and resource capacity [4]. While some regions benefit from longer tourist seasons, others experience water scarcity, increased wildfire risks, and biodiversity loss [11]. Fluctuations in the Caspian Sea level illustrate the complexity of climate–environment interactions affecting regional tourism systems [2].

Tourism resources must therefore be re-conceptualized not merely as physical spaces or natural attractions, but as socio-ecological assets with intrinsic, economic, and cultural value [6]. The economic significance of tourism resources is historically and socially constructed. For example, the transformation of coastal areas into mass tourism destinations followed changes in social attitudes toward leisure and health in the early twentieth century [12]. Conversely, modern health and environmental discourses increasingly reframe certain tourism environments as risk zones, demonstrating the contextual nature of tourism value [1].

Moreover, tourism frequently competes with other forms of land use such as agriculture, forestry, water management, and residential development [9]. In regions where tourism is not the primary economic sector, it must coexist with traditional land users, resulting in multipurpose land use systems [5]. This coexistence requires coordinated governance mechanisms and inclusive planning approaches to balance tourism growth with environmental conservation and local community interests [7].

Within this context, the tourism development of the Zhetysu (Semirechye) region has attracted increasing scholarly attention. Studies on Lake Alakol emphasize the ecological consequences of anthropogenic pressure and violations of environmental legislation linked to tourism infrastructure development [4]. Research on ecotourism in Altynemel National Park highlights both the sustainability potential of protected areas and the attitudes of local communities toward tourism activities [5]. Analyses of the Semirechye Alatau region focus on recreational resources such as mineral springs and therapeutic landscapes, underscoring their role in health and wellness tourism [10]. Comprehensive studies of ecological and rural tourism development across Kazakhstan confirm the strategic importance of regions like Semirechye for sustainable tourism diversification [5]. Recent publications in the *Bulletin of the International University of Tourism and Hospitality* further identify key tourist destinations in the Zhetysu region, including Altynemel National Park, the Dzungarian Alatau, Lakes Alakol and Balkhash, and balneological resorts such as Kapal-Arasan and Zharkent-Arasan [7].

A key challenge in managing tourism resources lies in their fragility and temporal sensitivity. Certain tourism phenomena—seasonal wildlife migrations, flowering periods, or cultural festivals—cannot be postponed or stored, and once disrupted may be irreversibly lost [8]. Excessive visitor pressure accelerates environmental degradation, particularly in ecologically sensitive destinations with insufficient infrastructure [4]. This leads to the phenomenon of tourism overexposure, where

intensive visitation undermines the very resources that attract tourists, threatening long-term sustainability [11].

Materials and Methods

This study explores the tourism potential and its development trajectory within the Zhetysu region through a multifaceted research approach. A mix of qualitative and analytical techniques, including abstraction, comparison, content evaluation, and structural modeling, was employed. Information was sourced from official tourism reports, strategic plans, and statistical data provided by Kazakh governmental institutions and international entities. The methodology was organized around four key focus areas:

1. Analyzing Mechanisms for Tourism Development: The study delved into existing theories and practical models that drive tourism growth in Zhetysu. Particular attention was given to assessing innovation within the tourism sector and the broader national innovation ecosystem. The aim was to understand the role of technological advancements and organizational reforms in enhancing regional tourism competitiveness.

2. Establishing a Framework for Tourism Service Quality: The research emphasized the importance of quality standards and effective management practices in shaping tourism services. It examined benchmarks for service delivery, customer experience optimization, and destination branding strategies. Additionally, the study investigated cluster development models and methodologies for creating advanced infrastructures to support tourism expansion in the region.

3. Modernizing the National Tourism Industry: Efforts were directed toward identifying strategies to update Kazakhstan's tourism sector in line with global technological progress. This included examining ways to diversify tourism offerings, boost its economic contribution, and integrate smart technologies for operational efficiency. Comparative analyses with international practices formed a crucial part of this investigation.

4. Integrating Tourism-Related Sectors: One of the primary objectives was to propose an integrated framework that unites tourism-linked sectors such as transportation, hospitality, culture, environment, and agriculture into a cohesive ecosystem.

Using systems analysis and intersectoral modeling tools, the study assessed how these sectors could work synergistically to strengthen the regional economy. It emphasized promoting sustainable development and fostering balanced growth through tourism-driven initiatives. The research methodology was underpinned by the principles of sustainability, inclusive economic planning, and innovation-driven progress.

Qualitative Analysis

This study applies a qualitative research approach to examine the tourism potential of the Zhetysu region through the lens of natural and cultural resources. The qualitative analysis is structured around three methodological components: conceptual content review, thematic analysis, and expert-based evaluation.

1. Conceptual Content Analysis

A systematic content analysis was conducted to explore the theoretical foundations of tourism and recreational resources. Academic literature, national tourism strategies, and regional planning documents related to the Zhetysu region were reviewed. This analysis enabled the identification of core conceptual categories such as *tourism and recreational capacity*, *cultural tourism dynamics*, *regional tourism structure*, and *resource-based tourism development*. The material was coded to

detect recurring themes and to understand how tourism resources shape the structure of regional tourism.

2. Thematic Analysis of Tourism Development Trends

Using qualitative thematic analysis, the study examined trends in cultural tourism and excursion-educational activities within the Zhetysu region. The themes extracted from the documents and regional reports included:

- the growing role of cultural heritage sites in shaping regional tourism identity,
- the integration of excursion-based educational routes into tourism products,
- the economic contribution of tourism to regional development,
- challenges and limitations in infrastructure and resource management.

These themes were compared with the region's tourism policy directions to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement.

3. Expert Evaluation and Interpretation

The qualitative assessment included interpretive analysis based on insights from regional tourism specialists, local guides, and cultural heritage managers (as secondary, published sources). Their perspectives were used to clarify how natural and cultural tourism resources function in practice, the current state of tourism services, and the factors influencing the economic contribution of tourism in the region.

4. Data Sources and Analytical Basis

The analysis relied on:

- regional economic and tourism development reports,
- scientific literature on tourism systems and recreational resources,
- analytical summaries of cultural tourism projects in the Zhetysu region,
- explanatory notes and strategic documents of regional tourism authorities.

The triangulation of these sources strengthened the interpretive depth of the findings.

5. Study Limitations

As a qualitative study, the findings reflect interpretations based on available documents and expert opinions; thus, they may not fully capture the quantitative dynamics of tourism flows or seasonal variability. Also, some regional tourism data are generalized at the macro level, limiting the precision of micro-scale analysis.

Results and Discussion

The primary objective of this investigation was to identify key tourism development opportunities within the Zhetysu region based on existing tourism and recreational resources [5]. This objective involved using the current natural, cultural, and socio-economic potential of the region to formulate strategic frameworks and practical recommendations for sustainable tourism development [6]. To achieve this goal, several specific research tasks were defined.

The first task focused on clarifying the concept of tourism through an analysis of various scientific interpretations and theoretical approaches relevant to regional tourism systems [1]. The second task involved analyzing tourism types and forms, as well as selecting the most appropriate directions in accordance with the specific natural and recreational characteristics of Zhetysu [9]. Special attention was paid to the role of tourism in addressing socio-economic challenges in rural areas, particularly in terms of employment, income diversification, and infrastructure development [5; 7]. In addition, the study examined successful international practices of rural tourism development

that may be adapted to regional conditions [8]. The final task assessed the current state of tourism infrastructure and tourism-related resources in the Zhetysu region [12].

Over recent decades, tourism has acquired global economic importance and has become one of the leading sectors of the world economy [1]. The combined direct and indirect contribution of tourism to economic growth, employment creation, and regional development has been widely recognized in scientific literature [11]. Tourism stimulates a wide range of related industries, enhances regional investment attractiveness, and promotes balanced territorial development [6]. Forecasts presented in contemporary research indicate that global tourism demand will continue to grow, with developing regions increasingly participating both as destinations and as tourist-generating areas [8].

At the same time, scholars emphasize that tourism should not be perceived as an exclusively positive or environmentally neutral sector [2]. Numerous studies confirm that uncontrolled tourism development may lead to environmental degradation, social tension, and cultural commodification [3]. As a response to these challenges, the concept of sustainable tourism has emerged as a key theoretical and practical framework aimed at balancing economic benefits with environmental protection and social responsibility [12]. Sustainable tourism development seeks to minimize negative impacts while preserving natural and cultural resources for future generations [11].

The concept of sustainability in tourism is closely linked to the notion of resilience, which reflects the ability of tourism systems and destinations to adapt to external pressures and maintain long-term stability [6]. In the context of Zhetysu, sustainable tourism development is particularly relevant due to the region's ecological sensitivity, cultural heritage, and rural settlement structure [5]. Innovation plays a crucial role in enhancing the competitiveness of tourism destinations, encouraging the creation of new tourism products and services tailored to changing market demands [9].

Tourism occupies an important place in international economic relations and increasingly contributes to global economic integration [1]. In the conditions of globalization, tourism has become a significant factor of cultural exchange and socio-economic sustainability, strengthening its role within the global economy [7]. For tourism to generate long-term economic benefits for local communities and national economies, its development must follow principles of sustainability and environmental responsibility [11].

The tourism sector contributes to economic growth, employment generation, preservation of natural and cultural heritage, and intercultural dialogue [6]. As a dynamic and fast-return industry, tourism stimulates the development of transport, healthcare, hospitality, and recreational infrastructure [12]. However, the success of nature-based and rural tourism directly depends on the preservation of natural landscapes, historical monuments, and cultural identity [10]. The degradation of these resources inevitably reduces the attractiveness of tourist destinations, which justifies the need for targeted investments in environmental protection and heritage conservation [2].

Despite its economic advantages, tourism has often been criticized for prioritizing short-term financial gains over environmental and social considerations [3]. This imbalance has heightened public concern regarding the ecological and socio-cultural consequences of tourism development [11]. As a result, sustainable tourism has become a dominant paradigm in tourism research since the late twentieth century, providing an integrated approach to managing interactions between tourists, host communities, and the environment [12].

In this context, the present research aims to examine the challenges of sustainable tourism development in the Zhetysu region and propose practical solutions based on regional characteristics

and international best practices [5]. The scientific novelty of the study lies in its comprehensive assessment of sustainable tourism issues in Zhetysu, as well as in the development of recommendations that consider both regional resource potential and current socio-economic needs [7]. The theoretical significance of the research is reflected in its contribution to the understanding of sustainable tourism development at the regional level, while its practical value lies in the proposed tools for assessing tourism service quality and improving destination competitiveness [6].

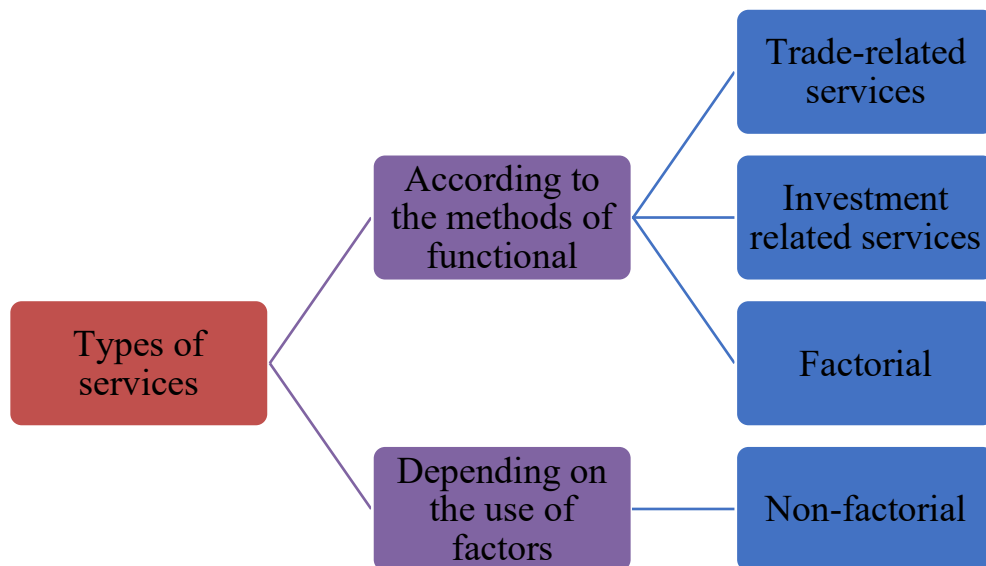


Figure 1 – Classification of services

Implementation of Sustainable Development Principles in Tourism

Here are the rewritten paragraphs, aiming for different phrasing while retaining the original meaning:

The foundation of modern tourism planning rests on the unwavering adherence to sustainable growth ideals. With mounting human impact on natural and heritage sites, embedding sustainability into tourism directives is no longer a choice but a necessity. Implementing these ideals requires a multi-pronged approach involving established structures, governing rules, and the widespread sharing of successful methods throughout the sector.

Tourism's inherent cyclical nature leads to intense strain on visitor amenities during peak periods. This surge results in overburdened infrastructure and excessive use of attractions, accommodations, and services.

Consequently, mitigating tourism's seasonal fluctuations plays a crucial role in tackling environmental challenges and is viewed as a vital environmental conservation effort.

Beyond these overarching concepts, concrete actions are implemented to lessen or manage tourism's ecological footprint:

This includes the deployment of robust engineering solutions for utilities like water, power, waste management, and sanitation. The adoption of economical strategies, such as treating and recycling wastewater, and harnessing renewable energy sources like solar power, is also a common practice. These initiatives yield advantages not only for the specific tourist destination but also for the broader local community.

Developing transportation networks that prioritize eco-conscious options for both tourists and the general public is essential. For instance, destinations might incorporate electric shuttles or bicycle-powered rickshaws. Furthermore, ensuring that tourist vehicles are properly outfitted or kept in excellent working order is paramount.

Open spaces and parks should be planned and developed in tourist areas.

In tourist areas, environmentally acceptable principles of land use and planning of tourist facilities should be applied, and zoning, building, and architectural and planning regulations should be followed. The placement of advertising boards and signs should be regulated [4].

Here's a rephrased version of the text, focusing on clarity and avoiding direct translation:

Tourist destinations need careful planning.

Areas popular with tourists should include open areas and parks. Development in these areas should follow environmentally sound practices. This includes how land is used, how tourist facilities are designed, and adherence to specific rules about land use, construction, and architectural design. The placement of advertisements and signs should also be controlled.

Understanding Tourism's Limits

The idea of "carrying capacity" is now used in tourism. It comes from managing agriculture and forestry. Originally, it meant how much land could handle farming or forestry without needing extra help. In tourism, it means how many visitors a place can handle before it gets damaged or visitors stop enjoying it.

Carrying capacity is about the relationship between a place's natural resources and how many tourists visit. A common definition says it's the most visitors a place can handle without causing serious damage to the environment or making the experience worse for those visiting[5].

Here's a rephrased version of the provided text, focusing on clarity and avoiding direct translation:

Carrying capacity, as defined here, hinges on two key principles:

- **Relative and Situational:** A location's carrying capacity isn't a fixed, absolute value. Perceptions of overcrowding are subjective and depend heavily on the specific environment. A population density considered excessive in a sparsely populated area might be perfectly acceptable in a more concentrated setting. Therefore, evaluations must be tailored to the unique geographic, ecological, and cultural characteristics of each location.
- **Manageable:** Unlike unchangeable environmental constraints, carrying capacity is not a static limit. It can be actively shaped and modified through strategic planning, policy interventions, infrastructure development, and the management of visitor traffic.

The development of tourism and recreation is fundamentally resource-dependent. The feasibility of tourism and recreational activities in a given area is directly tied to the availability of suitable tourist and recreational resources.

While considerable research has been dedicated to identifying, evaluating, and describing these resources, a clear and comprehensive understanding of the concept of "tourist and recreational resources" remains elusive. A scientifically rigorous definition of "resource," particularly in the context of tourism and recreation, is often lacking.

Different researchers approach the identification of specific recreational resources from varying perspectives, both in geographical studies and within the tourism industry. One perspective defines them as:

"Natural, economic, and historical data that play a specific role in terms of the specific consumer value of tourism organizations."

However, this definition lacks specificity, failing to clarify which aspects of nature, economics, and history qualify as tourist and recreational resources.

Another perspective focuses on:

"Impressive landscapes, beautiful and decorative organisms, i.e., cultural and aesthetic resources." Here's a rephrased version of the text, avoiding direct translation and focusing on clarity:

Core Environmental Factors:

- The environment is shaped by geology, landforms, weather patterns, water resources (both above and below ground), plant life, and soil composition. Climate is the most influential of these.

Landscape Qualities:

- The landscape's variety, its visual appeal, and how easily it can be seen and experienced.

World's Variety:

- The world's richness, stemming from unique geographical characteristics, unusual elements, distinctiveness, contrasting features, and the patterns found within it.

Defining Tourist Resources:

- The term "tourist and recreational resources" is complex and open to interpretation. A key question is how natural, historical, and cultural occurrences become valuable for tourism.

The Subject-Object Relationship:

- The core of understanding these resources lies in the interaction between a person (the tourist) and something that can be used (the resource).

Context is Key:

- The concept of "tourist and recreational resource" is only meaningful when considered within the context of tourism and recreational activities. It's not relevant outside of this framework, such as when considering the interests of a single tourist or a group.

Tourism Industry Focus:

- The tourism industry is a broad sector designed to fulfill society's needs for travel and leisure. Therefore, when discussing tourist resources, we are primarily concerned with resources that benefit the entire industry.

Resource Specificity:

- The tourism industry is diverse, with many different types of tourism and a fragmented market. This means that the definition and scope of "tourist and recreational resources" will vary depending on the specific tourism system, region, resort, or attraction.

Defining Tourism and Recreation Resources:

- In essence, tourist and recreational resources are the natural and cultural environments, including their individual components, that can be utilized by the tourism industry. As the definition suggests, all those involved in tourism management deal with two distinct groups of resources: natural resources and socio-cultural resources.[6].

As tourism systems continue to grow in complexity, it becomes increasingly necessary to evaluate carrying capacity through an integrated lens. This includes not only quantitative metrics but also qualitative factors such as visitor satisfaction, local resident sentiment, and long-term ecosystem health.

In sum, the sustainable development of tourism depends on a multifaceted set of interventions, underpinned by sound scientific methodologies and inclusive governance. The concept of carrying

capacity, while rooted in environmental science, has emerged as a strategic planning tool in tourism. It compels destination managers to balance economic benefits with environmental stewardship and social responsibility. Only through such an integrative approach can tourism contribute to long-term regional development without jeopardizing the integrity of the very resources that attract visitors in the first place.



Figure 1 – Map of the Zhetysay region

From the Perspective of the Host Community

From the perspective of the host community, the concept of “social potential” reflects the collective capacity of local populations to adapt to, manage, and benefit from tourism development processes [7]. This concept, which has gained increasing attention in contemporary tourism research, is now considered a key criterion for assessing the long-term sustainability of tourism systems [11]. One of the fundamental principles of sustainable tourism is the active involvement of local communities in tourism planning and decision-making processes [12]. However, in practice, local residents often lack sufficient awareness of current tourism trends, innovative technologies, and the acceptable scale of socio-economic transformation, which in turn affects the pace and quality of tourism development [6]. Consequently, addressing these gaps in knowledge and participation is essential for effective tourism planning [5].

Modern tourism planning has gradually shifted away from rigid, infrastructure-centered approaches toward more flexible, inclusive, and adaptive models that respond to economic and social change [1]. This transformation underscores the necessity of balancing economic efficiency with the maximization of social and environmental benefits while acknowledging the complex and globalized nature of contemporary tourism [11]. Effective tourism planning therefore requires the application of multi-level strategies that simultaneously ensure visitor satisfaction and the rational use of tourism and recreational resources [9].

Under optimal conditions, tourism development is guided by empirical research, community-based goal setting, and integrated cooperation between public authorities and private stakeholders [6]. It is widely recognized that the economic prosperity of states is largely determined by the effectiveness of their key economic sectors. In this context, tourism functions not only as a source of income but also as a multidimensional driver of broader socio-economic transformation [1]. Numerous countries in Europe and Asia, despite limited reserves of extractive natural resources, have successfully leveraged their natural landscapes and cultural heritage to position tourism as a strategic national priority [8]. Kazakhstan, endowed with diverse yet underutilized tourism resources, demonstrates similar potential for tourism-led development [5].

Kazakhstan possesses significant tourism opportunities and occupies a strategically important geographical position [9]. Government involvement in tourism regulation, strategic planning, and the effective use of national tourism assets plays a decisive role in shaping competitive and profitable tourism industries [7]. The successful implementation of tourism development strategies contributes to attracting foreign investment, diversifying the national economy, generating employment, and improving the overall quality of life [6]. According to international assessments, Kazakhstan has substantial and growing potential for attracting international tourists due to its rich natural, cultural, and historical resources [8].

The country's favorable geographical location and abundance of ecologically and historically valuable sites further enhance its tourism attractiveness [10]. The inclusion of multiple sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List underscores Kazakhstan's global tourism significance [8]. Tourism development stimulates related sectors such as transport, construction, trade, and entertainment, thereby strengthening regional infrastructure and supporting balanced territorial development [12].

Within the framework of the national tourism development strategy for 2019–2025, ten priority tourism zones have been identified across Kazakhstan [7]. Among them, the mountainous tourism cluster of the Almaty region occupies a central position, with ambitious targets to increase annual tourist flows from 500,000 to 2.5 million visitors [9]. Achieving such growth requires the implementation of comprehensive economic, institutional, and administrative measures to ensure sustainability and prevent excessive pressure on natural and social systems [11].

An analysis of tourist and recreational facilities in the Zhetysu region reveals a predominance of strong natural and recreational assets [5]. Nevertheless, insufficient infrastructure development remains a significant constraint, limiting the region's ability to fully realize its tourism potential at a competitive level [6]. This imbalance highlights the necessity of integrated planning approaches that combine infrastructure development with environmental protection and community involvement [12].

The SWOT and STEP analyses presented below further illustrate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and external factors influencing the development of tourist and recreational facilities in the Zhetysu region [9].

An additional dimension of host community involvement in tourism development is the issue of social equity and benefit distribution. In many destinations, the economic gains from tourism are unevenly distributed, leading to social stratification and reduced local support for tourism initiatives [7]. When local residents perceive tourism as a source of rising living costs, environmental pressure, or cultural dilution rather than shared prosperity, resistance to tourism development increases [11]. Therefore, sustainable tourism planning in regions such as Zhetysu must incorporate mechanisms that ensure fair access to employment, support for small and medium-sized local enterprises, and

opportunities for community-based tourism initiatives [6]. Strengthening local entrepreneurship and enhancing human capital through education and training programs can significantly improve the social acceptance of tourism while reinforcing its long-term economic resilience [5; 12].

Table 1 – Table 1. SWOT and STEP Analysis of Tourist and Recreational Facilities of the Zhetysu Region

S – Strengths	W – Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rich natural and recreational potential, including major attractions such as Lake Alakol, Lake Balkhash, the Zhetysu Alatau Mountains, and proximity to the Charyn Canyon. • Presence of several national parks, notably <i>Altynemel National Park</i> and <i>Zhetysu Alatau National Park</i>. • Strong balneological resources, including mineral springs and wellness resorts such as Kapal-Arasan and Zharkent-Arasan. • Favorable landscapes for adventure tourism, including mountaineering, trekking, and eco-tourism. • Suitable climate for summer beach tourism, especially around Lake Alakol. • Rich historical and cultural heritage, such as the Zharkent Mosque, Besshatyr burial mounds, and archaeological sites of ancient Zhetysu. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underdeveloped infrastructure, including road quality, public transportation, and tourist navigation systems. • Uneven quality of accommodation and service, with some areas lacking modern facilities. • Insufficient branding and marketing at the international level. • Shortage of qualified tourism professionals, especially multilingual guides. • Seasonality issues, most notably the heavy concentration of tourists around Alakol only in summer months. • Environmental pressure in popular destinations due to increasing tourist flow.
O – Opportunities	T – Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing demand for eco-tourism, agri-tourism, and ethnic tourism in Kazakhstan and globally. • Potential to develop the Alakol–Balkhash coastal zone as an international tourism cluster. • Expansion of mountain tourism, including trekking, cycling routes, camping, and adventure sports. • Opportunities for public-private partnerships and investment in new resorts and infrastructure. • Revival of Silk Road cultural routes, which can enhance historical and educational tourism. • Regional integration with neighboring areas, including Almaty city, East Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan’s Issyk-Kul region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental degradation risks, particularly around Lake Alakol and national parks. • Climate change impacts, including fluctuations in water levels and increased natural hazards. • Competition from other tourism regions, such as Almaty Region, East Kazakhstan, and Issyk-Kul. • Natural disaster risks, including earthquakes, floods, wildfires, and landslides in mountainous areas. • Administrative or investment delays, which may hinder the implementation of key tourism projects.

Table 2 – STEP Analysis of Tourism Development in the Zhetysu Region

S – Social Factors	T – Technological Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing interest in nature-based and eco-friendly tourism among both domestic and international travelers. • High cultural and ethnic diversity, providing opportunities for ethnographic, culinary, and cultural tourism. • Local communities increasingly involved in tourism services (guest houses, agri-tourism, handicrafts). • Positive attitude toward tourists and a traditionally welcoming local population. • Rising youth participation in adventure tourism, hiking, and ecological activities. • However, shortages of trained specialists (guides, hospitality workers, multilingual staff) remain a challenge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gradual introduction of digital tools in the tourism sector (online booking, digital maps, mobile information services). • Advancements in transportation technologies, improving access to major destinations like Alakol and national parks. • Potential for Smart Tourism solutions, such as virtual tours, AR/VR in museums, and digital route navigation. • Growing use of GIS and GPS mapping for trekking routes and protected areas. • Limited digital infrastructure in remote mountainous zones, reducing safety and navigation reliability for visitors. • Insufficient promotion through modern digital marketing platforms compared to competing regions.
E – Economic Factors	P – Political Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism is recognized as a priority sector in regional development programs. • Significant investment opportunities, especially in accommodation, wellness resorts, eco-lodges, and transport infrastructure. • Tourism stimulates local employment, particularly in rural and mountainous areas. • Seasonality of income, primarily due to dependence on summer tourism at Lake Alakol. • Varying economic capacity among local communities can limit the development of tourism-related businesses. • Potential for cross-border tourism, creating new economic corridors with neighboring regions and countries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive national and regional policies, including strategies for tourism development and infrastructure improvement. • Regulations governing national parks and protected areas, which aim to balance tourism growth with environmental protection. • Stable political environment that encourages domestic and foreign investment. • Government initiatives to develop transport connectivity (roads, railways, and airports). • However, bureaucratic processes or lengthy approval procedures can slow down new tourism projects. • Environmental legislation may impose restrictions on construction near lakes, mountains, and protected zones.

The STEP analysis shows that Zhetysu Region has strong social support, growing technological opportunities, and favorable economic and political conditions for expanding its tourism sector. However, infrastructure gaps, digital limitations, and seasonality still need to be addressed to ensure sustainable and long-term tourism development.

The SWOT analysis of the Zhetysu Region demonstrates that the area holds significant potential for tourism development due to its rich natural landscapes, diverse ecosystems, national parks, healing mineral springs, and strong cultural–historical heritage. These strengths provide a solid foundation for positioning the region as a leading destination for eco-tourism, wellness tourism, and adventure travel in Kazakhstan.

Despite these advantages, a number of structural weaknesses remain, including insufficient infrastructure, uneven service quality, inadequate marketing, and a shortage of qualified tourism professionals. Addressing these challenges is essential for improving the visitor experience and ensuring sustainable growth.

The region is also presented with numerous opportunities, such as the expansion of eco-tourism, agri-tourism, mountain and adventure tourism, as well as the development of cross-regional and international tourism routes. Increasing investment interest and government support further enhance these prospects.

At the same time, threats such as environmental degradation, climate-related risks, rising competition from neighboring regions, and potential delays in project implementation require careful management and strategic planning.

Overall, the SWOT analysis indicates that the Zhetysu Region has the capacity to become a highly competitive and sustainable tourism destination if it effectively leverages its strengths and opportunities while systematically addressing its weaknesses and mitigating potential threats. A balanced and well-coordinated development strategy will be key to achieving long-term success in the regional tourism sector.

Conclusion

To ensure long-term success, tourism growth should adhere to established global standards of sustainability, comprehensive planning, and coordinated management. This approach aims to generate economic benefits while protecting natural and cultural heritage. Short-sighted tourism practices that lack proper oversight can lead to environmental damage and a decline in the appeal of destinations. Kazakhstan should therefore adopt UNWTO guidelines, incorporating environmental, economic, and socio-cultural considerations into a unified policy. A holistic view of the tourism sector is crucial, considering both the resources and services available (supply) and the needs and desires of travelers (demand). Here's a rephrased version of the text, focusing on conveying the same ideas with different wording:

A deep knowledge of the Zhetysu region's existing and untapped assets is crucial. However, current scholarly and governmental writings lack a clear, practical definition of "tourism and leisure resources" tailored to this specific area. While some academics propose general categories, there's no widespread agreement on which natural and human-made attractions should be prioritized for tourism growth. For instance, in Zhetysu, aspects like its geology, climate, water bodies, diverse life forms, and scenic beauty offer substantial potential for nature-based and heritage tourism.

Regional tourism should be viewed as a fluid economic component influenced by a range of social and economic forces. Its enduring prosperity hinges on pinpointing and refining these elements, including market desires and the development of supporting facilities. The paper identifies the primary drivers of tourism success in Zhetysu, stressing the vital importance of local visitor demand in shaping strategies for long-term viability.

In conclusion, the Zhetysu region possesses a rich combination of natural, cultural, and recreational resources, making it one of Kazakhstan's most promising tourism destinations. However,

to fully unlock this potential, the tourism sector requires coherent planning, coordinated governance, and the integration of sustainability principles aligned with UNWTO guidelines. The findings of the study reveal that although the region has strong assets—geological formations, diverse landscapes, cultural heritage sites, and favorable climatic conditions—these resources remain underutilized due to limited infrastructure, weak marketing strategies, insufficient regulatory mechanisms, and low service quality. To ensure long-term, sustainable development of tourism in the Zhetysu region, the following specific and actionable recommendations are proposed:

1. Infrastructure Development

- Construct and modernize roads leading to major natural and cultural attractions (e.g., Alakol Lake, Charyn-like canyons of Zhetysu, Tekeli waterfalls).

KPI: 150–200 km of improved access roads by 2027.

- Develop visitor centers at key destinations with maps, guides, rest areas, and basic services.

KPI: At least 5 visitor centers built by 2026.

- Expand accommodation options by supporting eco-lodges, family guesthouses, and mid-range hotels through grant programs.

KPI: Increase accommodation capacity by 25% within three years.

- Improve digital infrastructure, including online booking systems, QR-coded information boards, and virtual tours.

KPI: 100% of major attractions to have QR-information access by 2025.

2. Marketing and Branding Strategy

- Develop a unified brand “Discover Zhetysu” highlighting unique natural and cultural features.

KPI: Launch regional branding campaign by early 2026.

- Target specific tourism markets (eco-tourists, adventure travelers, cultural tourists, domestic families) through tailored campaigns.

KPI: 20% increase in domestic tourist arrivals annually.

- Promote Zhetysu at international tourism fairs, including ITB Berlin, MITT Moscow, and China Outbound Tourism Fair.

KPI: Participation in at least 3 major fairs per year.

- Enhance digital marketing through social media influencers, YouTube travel series, and collaboration with international travel platforms.

KPI: Double online visibility metrics (website traffic, social reach) within two years.

3. Ecotourism and Environmental Standards

- Introduce ecotourism certification for tour operators and accommodations (aligned with UNWTO and GSTC standards).

KPI: 30 certified eco-friendly businesses by 2027.

- Establish carrying capacity limits for sensitive natural areas (e.g., Kolsai, Kaindy-like sites, protected gorges).

KPI: Carrying capacity assessments completed for 10 sites by 2026.

- Implement waste management infrastructure, including recycling stations at tourist zones.

KPI: Reduce litter in tourist hotspots by 50% within 3 years.

- Create eco-trails with proper signage, safety elements, and educational boards.

KPI: At least 20 km of eco-trails developed annually.

4. Community Engagement and Local Capacity Building

- Train local residents in hospitality, guiding, safety, and eco-management.

KPI: 500 locals trained by 2026.

- Promote community-based tourism (CBT) through grant programs for rural homestays and cultural workshops.

KPI: 50 new CBT enterprises launched within three years.

- Develop cultural tourism routes, including artisan centers, local cuisine workshops, and historical site tours.

KPI: Introduce 10 new cultural-educational routes by 2025.

5. Governance, Policy Reform, and Regulation

- Create an integrated regional tourism management council, aligning local, regional, and national strategies.

KPI: Council established by 2025.

- Simplify investment procedures for private companies and foreign investors in tourism.

KPI: Reduce bureaucratic processing time by 40%.

- Strengthen legal protections for fragile landscapes and heritage monuments.

KPI: Updated conservation regulations adopted by 2026.

Achieving sustainable tourism growth in the Zhetysu region requires not only identifying its natural and cultural assets but also implementing precise, measurable development strategies. Improved infrastructure, strong marketing, environmental safeguards, community involvement, and consistent policy coordination will collectively ensure that tourism becomes a resilient economic driver for the region. Through these targeted actions, Zhetysu can transform its existing potential into long-term prosperity while preserving its unique natural and cultural heritage.

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ЖЕТІСУ Өңірінің туристік әлеуеті: табиғи және мәдени ресурстардың ғылыми негізі

Аңдатпа. Мақалада туризм индустриясының – қоғамның туристік және рекреациялық қажеттіліктерін қанағаттандыруға қызмет ететін өте күрделі сала екені сарапталады. Сонымен қатар, туристік және рекреациялық ресурстар бүкіл туристік индустрияның ресурстарын қарастыруды қажет ететін бірегей сала екені талданады. Мақалада туристік-рекреациялық ресурс ұғымы жан-жақты зерттеліп, оның көлемі де туристік жүйе, аймақ, курорт, туристік объект үшін аса маңызды құрылым екені айқындалады.

Зерттеудің мақсаты: теориялық және практикалық деңгейде мәдени туризм мен экскурсиялық-танымдық қызмет арасындағы байланысты зерттеп, Жетісу облысындағы туризмнің экономика саласындағы жетістіктерін айғақтап көрсету. Сондай-ақ, Жетісу өңірінде туризмнің дамуына ықпал ететін ұйымшылдықты қалыптастыру үшін нақты шешімдер ұсынылады.

Зерттеудің практикалық маңыздылығы Жетісу облысындағы туризмнің өсу тетіктерінің ғылыми-практикалық негіздемесі болып табылады. Зерттеу барысында Жетісу облысындағы туризмді абстракциялау және талдау әдістері қолданылды.

Кілт сөздер: туризм, Жетісу облысы, экономика, даму, үрдістер.

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ТУРИСТИЧЕСКИЙ ПОТЕНЦИАЛ РЕГИОНА ЖЕТИСУ: НАУЧНАЯ ОСНОВА ПРИРОДНО-КУЛЬТУРНЫХ РЕСУРСОВ

Аннотация. В статье анализируется, что индустрия туризма – очень сложная отрасль, которая служит для удовлетворения туристских и рекреационных потребностей общества. Кроме того, анализируется, являются ли туристические и рекреационные ресурсы уникальной отраслью, требующей рассмотрения ресурсов всей туристской индустрии. В статье всесторонне изучается понятие туристско-рекреационного ресурса и определяется, что его объем также является важнейшей структурой для туристской системы, региона, курорта, туристского объекта.

Цель исследования: изучить взаимосвязь между культурным туризмом и экскурсионно-познавательной деятельностью на теоретическом и практическом уровне, продемонстрировать достижения туризма в области экономики области Жетісу. Также будут предложены конкретные решения для формирования сплоченности, способствующей развитию туризма в Семиречье.

Практическая значимость исследования заключается в научно-практическом обосновании механизмов роста туризма в области Жетісу. В ходе исследования были использованы методы абстрагирования и анализа туризма в Семиреченской области.

Ключевые слова: туризм, область Жетісу, экономика, развитие, тенденции.