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## Features of Rural Tourism as an Element of Kazakh Culture during the Pandemic Syndrome

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### Abstract

The article discusses the prospects for developing rural tourism as one of the tools for shaping the country's image during and after the pandemic period. The tourism sphere of Kazakhstan, in which there were noticeable changes during the pandemic, is analyzed. Areas infected with coronavirus infection were shown on the map. Also, separately studied the data of the tourism sector of the Akmola and Karaganda regions during the pandemic. Marketing and sociological surveys were conducted to find determine residents' opinion of holiday destinations during the pandemic. In the example of neighboring regions of Akmola and Karaganda regions, some tourist objects contributing to the formation of the image and development of rural tourism were highlighted and marked on the map.

The key strengths of rural tourism development for the Republic of Kazakhstan, which can contribute to the sustainable formation of the country's image, are identified and recommended. The article compares the effects of COVID-19 and its impact on tourism development. Thus, the pandemic allows the development of domestic tourism in the country, due to which the population began to choose and give preference to tourist sites and routes within the country.

**Keywords:** rural tourism; sustainable tourism; historical and cultural tourism; ecotourism; ethnotourism; COVID-19.

**JEL Classification:** Z32; Z10; R11; L83.

## Introduction

In developed European countries, rural tourism is widely regarded as a key tool for the development of a country's economy. As the results of studies show, the total number of nights spent by tourists in the EU, 45% accounted for rural tourism. The choice of the country of stay of the tourist is determined by the purpose of the trip, which includes rural tourism. A properly formed image of the country would be of great importance in attracting tourists from other countries to our republic.

It is known that Kazakhstan has the ninth largest territory in the world and is rich in all kinds of natural resources, has huge agricultural areas with a full range of agricultural directions. Thus, our country has all opportunities and resource potential for the development of rural tourism. In addition, today this type of tourism is recognized as one of the priority areas of tourism in many countries. To intensify rural tourism, in addition to the studied problems, it is necessary to stimulate its promotion in the international market, which, in turn, will fruitfully affect the image of the country as a whole.

Thus, the sustainable development of rural tourism can become one of the important tools not only to form a sustainable tourist image of the country, but also the sustainable development of rural areas, development of domestic agricultural production, reduction of rural unemployment, and increase in rural living standards, as well as increasing interest to the Republic of Kazakhstan in the international market of tourist services.

The important issues of today in the field of rural tourism promotion are the creation of the Legislative base of rural tourism, the Concept of sustainable development of rural tourism or the Concept of sustainable development of rural areas of the Republic of Kazakhstan, as well as Programs and projects for the development of rural tourism and their effective implementation. All this can promote not only the development of rural tourism but also the agro-industrial complex, as well as rural entrepreneurship and rural areas, both at the regional and at national level.

In the study of rural tourism, such theoretical research methods as comparison, generalization, scientific abstraction, and synthesis, as well as comparative system analysis were used. The practical value of the work consists in the fact that the theoretical provisions and recommendations for the formation of rural tourism in Kazakhstan will draw attention to the strengths and weaknesses in its development. The material of the research was the study of the dynamics of the current state of the tourism industry of different countries. In the present article, we relied on the materials and publications of leading scientists, reflecting the theoretical and methodological foundations of rural tourism development. In our study, there was a need to identify how the promotion of rural tourism will affect the development of rural areas during COVID-19. In addition, consideration of rural tourism is a tool to form a sustainable tourist image of Kazakhstan during and after the pandemic period.

## 1. Literature Review

In the context of globalization, the importance of the concept of sustainable development in solving the problems of the development of local tourist systems is increasing. The incredible challenges caused by the COVID-19 crisis in the tourism sector, on the one hand, have called into question the possibility of meeting Sustainable Development Goals and Sustainable Tourism Goals. On the other hand, the need for a balance between the three pillars of sustainability was noted both as an important tool for overcoming the pandemic crisis and as a solid foundation for long-term development in the post-pandemic period (Polukhina *et al.* 2021).

The principles of sustainable tourism development are applicable to all types of tourism. Thus, a sustainable hospitality industry is a key indicator of sustainable rural development. Sustainability in rural areas should combine important four factors environmental, economic, social and, cultural (Leković *et al.* 2020).

In addition, sustainable behavior is a new issue in tourism and can play a key role in solving various problems faced by rural areas. It also leads to the revival of rural areas by protecting the quality of life of residents, preserving traditional cultures, protecting the environment, creating jobs, and generating income (Hallaj *et al.* 2022).

Thus, rural tourism can be a strategy for the sustainable development of rural areas, as well as a tool for product differentiation for territories that are in the stagnation stage (Kantar and Svržnjak 2017).

So, sustainable rural tourism in the context of a pandemic can be marked as "right" or "necessary" tourism. Because in this situation, it became important for all people to be in a quiet, clean natural environment. Many began to prefer local rural tourism, which could provide safety from infection with a viral disease.

## 2. Rural Tourism Research Framework

The important issues of today in the field of rural tourism promotion are the creation of the Legislative base of rural tourism, the Concept of sustainable development of rural tourism or the Concept of sustainable development

of rural areas of the Republic of Kazakhstan, as well as Programs and projects for the development of rural tourism and their effective implementation. All this can promote not only the development of rural tourism but also the agro-industrial complex, as well as rural entrepreneurship and rural areas, both at the regional at national levels.

In the study of rural tourism in the work, such theoretical research methods as comparison, generalization, scientific abstraction, and synthesis, as well as comparative system analysis were used. In addition, the article was based on such marketing methods as a survey, questionnaire, and interviewing.

The practical value of the research consists of the fact that the theoretical provisions and recommendations for the formation of rural tourism in Kazakhstan will draw attention to the strengths and weaknesses in its development. The research material served as a study of the dynamics of the current state of the tourism industry of different countries. In the present paper, we relied on the materials and publications of leading scientists, reflecting the theoretical and methodological foundations of rural tourism development. In our study, there was a need to identify how the promotion of rural tourism will affect the development of rural areas in the period and post-pandemic. In addition, consideration of rural tourism is a tool to form a sustainable tourist image of Kazakhstan during the in-time and post-pandemic period.

### **3. Opportunities' Development for Rural Tourism in Kazakhstan. Case Studies**

So, rural tourism is a type of tourist activity that combines various types of tourism, organized in rural areas in order to improve the socio-economic situation of the village by promoting business and creating new jobs, as well as opportunities for additional income for local residents, where in rural areas tourists and visitors are provided with a range of services for accommodation, food, recreation, excursions to learn and learn about rural life, everyday life, national cuisine, local customs, folk traditions, and sports events (Gavrila-Paven *et al.* 2015).

Rural tourism is considered one of the promising types of WTO tourism. According to studies, "green travel" and rural recreation are increasingly in demand among mass tourist activities. In addition, rural tourism is such a unique type of tourism, which can be developed in combination with almost all types of tourism. This type of tourism can be promoted systematically in conjunction with several areas of tourist activity. It should be noted that in many cases, it is other types of tourism gave impetus to the development of rural tourism (Alexandrova 2012).

So, rural, "green", ecological, and ethnographic types of tourism, according to experts, are now becoming one of the main segments of the hospitality industry. The growth rate of these types of tourism, according to the WTO, is estimated at about 20-30% per year (Shostka 2015).

Kazakhstan has great opportunities for the promotion of the tourism sphere in general. In any sphere of tourism, it is possible not only to increase steady development but also to work off the constant image of Kazakhstan with unusual slogans. For this purpose, it is necessary to announce a contest for the best slogan and for the best video clips about Kazakhstan, where the best of the best can subsequently contribute to creating a favorable image of our country. Our national image can be recreated through the sustainable development of rural tourism. After all, all the national colors of the Kazakh people can be shown in the countryside, as the national image is revealed there most clearly.

Therefore, in our opinion, it is the village and rural tourism, in the first place, that needs support from the state. As it is known, private entrepreneurs in our country do business at their own expense, at their own risk. However, in times of crisis, businessmen seek help from the government, represented by the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs of the Republic of Kazakhstan "Atameken", JSC "Entrepreneurship Development Fund "DAMU", JSC "KazAgroFinance", JSC "Agrarian Credit Corporation", etc. These organizations mainly work on issuing certificates, where their help is free training of potential and real entrepreneurs, and not providing real assistance to those in need of financial and material support. The government usually aids if a potential business can start or maintain a real activity that will be sustainable in the future without further support. One such activity may be an investment in rural tourism, which is currently a trend. So, by investing in this type of tourism, it is possible to support the sustainable development of rural areas, which the villagers always need. Especially since in our republic, many farmers mostly rely only on their own strength, and support from outside is always needed. Since life in the countryside for farmers not only requires painstaking and labor-intensive work but also constant adaptation to natural and weather conditions against the background of frequent risk.

#### **3.1. Features of Rural Tourism in European Countries**

In many countries, in particularly, European countries, such as Cyprus, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, etc., special state programs for the development of rural tourism are developed. Thus, with the support of the authorities are

formed necessary for the functioning of this industry state, public or private organizational structures - associations of rural tourism farms. Such a policy on the part of the state is aimed at solving not only economic issues but also social and cultural ones, namely, to stop the outflow of population from rural areas, to raise the standard of living of rural residents, to stop the degradation of rural areas, to preserve and partly recreate the cultural heritage and national identity of regions (Iskakova *et al.* 2016).

It is worth noting that rural tourism is quite a young trend in Kazakhstan. Currently, this type of recreation is not yet as widespread among the Kazakh population as abroad, where rural tourism is very well known. Therefore, to promote rural tourism in our country, we need the support of both the Government and local authorities. In addition, it is very important for our country to form Associations for the development of rural tourism in developed countries, which would promote this type of tourism.

The main part of the funds allocated from the national and local budgets to carry out activities to promote the country's tourist image goes mainly to tourism fairs and exhibitions. The financing of delegations to foreign countries also accounts for most of the expenditures on the development of rural tourism. Despite the annual participation of Kazakhstan in the leading international tourist exhibitions and other tourist events as part of forming a favorable tourist image of the country and attracting more tourists to the country, the measures taken by the state to promote rural tourism in Kazakhstan are not effective enough. Rural tourism can develop equally successfully in any region of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and for donor regions, rural tourism can become one of the items of stable income and one of the main factors of rural population support (Yerzhanova 2011).

If we take the analogy with the European countries - there are a number of reasons, in addition to the well-known, which may be one of the positive sides for the development of rural tourism in Kazakhstan. And one of the reasons is the percentage ratio of people living in cities to the countryside. In Kazakhstan, despite the fact that most people in search of earnings move to cities, especially to Astana and Almaty, the rural population is 42%. In addition, it is important to note that there are cultural peculiarities of the Kazakh people, where almost every resident of Kazakhstan has relatives living in rural areas. As the world practice shows, rural tourism was primarily intended for compatriots and was designed to stimulate domestic tourist flows, only at a certain stage of development, and later agro-tours became attractive to foreigners.

In Czech Republic, for example, rural venues focused mainly on domestic tourism recorded only modest losses. In many cases, hotel occupancy at domestic rural tourism destinations appears to have increased. In some regions, tourist interest in these destinations exceeded 2019 levels. According to the CTA, 79% of Czechs planned a summer vacation to Czech Republic in 2020. They intended to spend 230 euros per vacation and 90 euros per trip and per person. This represented a potential of 2.75 billion euros. The direct restrictions had only a slight impact on rural tourism. Rural destinations for domestic tourists experienced increased interest in accommodation and other tourist services in the summer 2020 season. According to a June 2020 Institute for Politics and Society survey, people prefer to have a second home in the countryside or rural areas. In order to bike, hike, visit natural landmarks, water sports, and camp, while developing rural tourism in general (Vaishar and Štátná 2020).

Also in Portugal, the preference for tourism in rural areas increased significantly during the pandemic, and those regions best suited to rural accommodation experienced a stronger and longer recovery of domestic demand (Marques *et al.* 2021).

Several processes increase the risk of a pandemic. First, humanity is more urbanized than ever before, with more than half of the world's population living in urban centers. The greater concentration of people has increased the likelihood of spreading diseases through contact and proximity. Second, these urban centers are now more interconnected than ever before, as a result of transport links via airplanes, trains, sea roads, and highways. A passenger, and therefore an ill, can now travel from one urban center to another on the other side of the world in a day. Third, increasing consumer demand for animal products, encroachment on wildlife, and loss of biodiversity bring humans into closer contact with animal pathogens, which, once in urban populations, can then rapidly disperse (Hall *et al.* 2020).

That is, tourism plays an important role in the biotic exchange. It may become one of the most visible vectors of biological contamination on Earth. Due to the destinations visited, the actions taken, the modes of transport used, and other parameters, tourism can be an important pathway for biological invasions. Common vectors and pathways of biological hazards include luggage, food, footwear and clothing, modes of transport, etc. (Hall 2019).

However, the remoteness of rural and eco-tourism sites from cities reduces the risk of virus infection, as well as clean air, natural products, hiking, horseback riding, or biking all contribute to maintaining the tone, immunity, and overall health of people. Therefore, in many countries, including Kazakhstan, rural, ecological, and



health tourism were relevant during the pandemic. As people preferred rural fresh air to staying in urban floor houses. In addition, according to studies - infection with the virus in the "jaylaw" (pastures), which were far away from urban civilization was much less than in urban areas, where the percentage of infection was many times higher. According to the survey, some remote areas were not contaminated with the virus at all.

Rural tourism can be engaged both by individual owners and agricultural enterprises. It should be noted that in EU countries, rural tourism is treated as a branch of agriculture in the first place, not as a type of tourism. Rural tourism is understood as the provision of tourist services by peasants on their farms (Trukhachev 2016).

Although the subsoil of our country has almost the entire Mendeleev's table, we must bet on the development of agriculture, coupled with tourism, because, as we know, all resources are limited, and needs are infinite. The need for food will increase every year in the world and therefore the role of agriculture and tourism industry will also increase. Thus, modern agriculture and tourism are sectors of the world economy (Kurmangaliyev 2016). Consequently, it is important to promote these two important areas of the economy. Since the improvement of related and other sectors of the economy depends on their sustainable development. This is due to the fact that, firstly, our country is considered to be agrarian-industrial; secondly, it is very convenient for the development of tourism. Therefore, the tandem development of agriculture and tourism can lead both to the sustainable development of rural areas, and to the sustainable formation of the tourist image of our republic.

Nevertheless, today Kazakhstan is famous not only for its vast steppes and rich nature but also for its national culture, which despite the fact that this country has peculiarities depending on its territorial location. Each region of our republic is unique and each of them has its own customs, rituals, and unique gastronomic and behavioral characteristics, which, in turn, can be used as a branding of the territory of rural tourism. For this purpose, it is necessary for each region to define its identity in order to differentiate itself from other regions and to develop the concept of a rural tourism model for Kazakhstan as a whole on the example of EU countries, with a breakdown into separate regions so that a potential tourist could choose a specific model of rural tourism that is convenient and interesting for him. In addition, rural tourism can be developed in our country, combining it with almost all types of tourism.

Therefore, the only guarantor of the further restoration and preservation of many villages, national cultures, art, crafts, customs, traditions, ancient jewelers, and others in our country is the rural tourism that we offer for development. Moreover, we can make a surprise and meet foreign guests and tourists' expectations only with our unique traditions, crafts, art, national sports and games, customs, national holidays and celebrations and, rural life. And this can be achieved through the improvement of rural tourism (Tleubayeva 2019).

Promoting sustainable consumption and production (SCP) models is essential if the sector is to contribute effectively to sustainable development. UNWTO expects the number of international tourists to reach 1.8 billion by 2030, if not sooner. Since this sector is growing faster than the global economy or international trade, the need to decouple its growth from the use of natural resources is important (UNWTO 2019). UNWTO published a list of countries with the largest increase in tourist arrivals in 2019. First of all, experts note the success of the Central Asian countries. Thus, foreign tourist flow to Uzbekistan increased by 27.3%, to Azerbaijan - by 11.4%, and to Kazakhstan - by 10%. The observers attribute such dynamics to the facilitation of visa policies by these countries. For example, Uzbekistan was helped by the introduction in 2018 of visa-free entry for up to 30 days for citizens of 45 countries (Aviapages 2020). Thus, and this kind of relief for foreign tourists can increase the flow of tourists in the country. This will give many foreign people the opportunity to get acquainted with the cultural features of the Kazakh people.

### **3.2. Lessons of the Pandemic as Way Forward for Rural Tourism**

Pandemics and new diseases have long had transformative effects on the environment and society. Thus, the transformative actions and possibilities of modern pandemics are nothing new, they may just seem so because they affect the developed world and generations that have either not been exposed or are simply forgotten, given access to antibiotics and modern medicine, the consequences of pandemics and the important role in their mobility. Despite advances in medicine and public health, since the second half of the twentieth century, the threat of pandemics has gradually increased. The main reasons for this lie in the processes of globalization and global change, of which travel and tourism are an integral part (Hall *et al.* 2020).

Globalization entails a reduction in the size of the world as a result of political, socio-cultural, and economic processes. These processes have serious consequences for tourism, and tourism itself is one of the driving forces of globalization (Handbook of Globalisation and Tourism 2019).

## Pandemic in the World

Thus, the pandemic has become a challenge for the world economy and most of its sectors. According to UNWTO estimates, in January-August 2020 (Table 1) the number of international tourist arrivals in the world decreased by 700 million (by 70.0%). Among the world's regions, the APAC was the hardest hit: in January-August 2020, the number of international arrivals decreased by 79.0%, followed by the Middle East and Africa (-69.0% each) and Europe (-68.0%). Global tourism export revenues for January-August 2020 decreased by \$730 billion, followed by the Middle East, Africa (-69.0%) and Europe (-68.0%). This is more than 8 times higher than the losses in the crisis year of 2009.

Table 1. Dynamics of international arrivals by geographical region in annual terms (%)

| Countries           | Jan | Feb | March | April | May | June | July | Aug | Jan-Aug |
|---------------------|-----|-----|-------|-------|-----|------|------|-----|---------|
| America             | 0   | 3   | -50   | -94   | -93 | -92  | -88  | -88 | -65     |
| Europe              | 5   | 2   | -61   | -98   | -96 | -88  | -72  | -69 | -68     |
| Middle East         | 6   | -1  | -63   | -99   | -99 | -99  | -96  | -94 | -69     |
| Africa              | 2   | 1   | -43   | -99   | -99 | -99  | -96  | -94 | -69     |
| Asia-Pacific region | -9  | -54 | -82   | -98   | -99 | -98  | -96  | -96 | -79     |
| World               | -1  | -16 | -65   | -97   | -97 | -91  | -81  | -79 | -70     |

Source: *The impact of Covid19 on tourism (2020)*

The report also shows that tourism was hit particularly hard compared to other sectors in Norway, where seafood, oil and gas, shipping and other industries did not report major impacts. After tourism, services and retail reported the most pressure, temporarily laying off half of its workforce (Gössling *et al.* 2021).

However, despite the powerful decline of the industry, COVID-19 proved to be an unexpected catalyst for innovation and the integration of new technologies in the industry, WTTC experts state in the current forecast. They note that the acceleration of the digital agenda is one of the positive outcomes of this crisis, along with the development of new business models that embody sustainability goals, the introduction of eco-tourism, the involvement of different social segments in the sector, and the evolution of demand and rethinking of the role of safety and health (Katkova 2020).

## Pandemic in Kazakhstan

Thus, in Kazakhstan, there were noticeable changes in the sphere of tourism as well. According to the statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, we can also see a decline in tourism (Table 2).

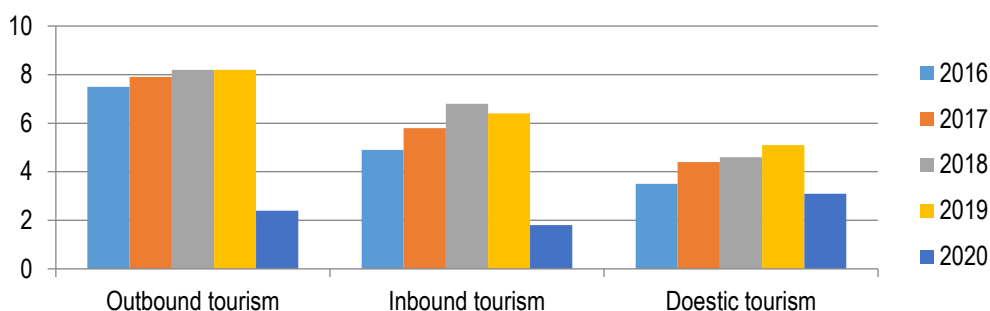
Table 2. Entry tourism indicator, million people

| № | Quarter     | 2019 | 2020 | Annual growth |
|---|-------------|------|------|---------------|
| 1 | I quarter   | 1,64 | 1,41 | -14,1%        |
| 2 | II quarter  | 2,20 | 0,13 | -94,0%        |
| 3 | III quarter | 2,60 | 0,24 | -90,7%        |
| 4 | IV quarter  | 2,07 | -    | -             |

Source: EnergyProm (2021)

As can be seen from Table 1 - in terms of inbound tourism, the annual growth rate of the tourism industry in the first quarter of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019 was -14.1%. The decline in the domestic tourism sector fell in the second and third quarters of 2020 to -94.0% and -90.7% compared to the same periods in 2019. And in the fourth quarter of 2020, the tourism industry was completely stagnant. This situation is directly related to the closure of interstate borders and the shutdown of the air transportation industry due to the COVID-19 pandemic. If 8.51 million people visited the country in 2019, then in 2020 this figure decreased to 1.78 million people or fell 4.8 times. If we analyze the rate of tourists served by types of tourism, we can see the following indicators (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Number of visitors served by type of Tourism, thousand people



Source: Gov.KZ (2021)

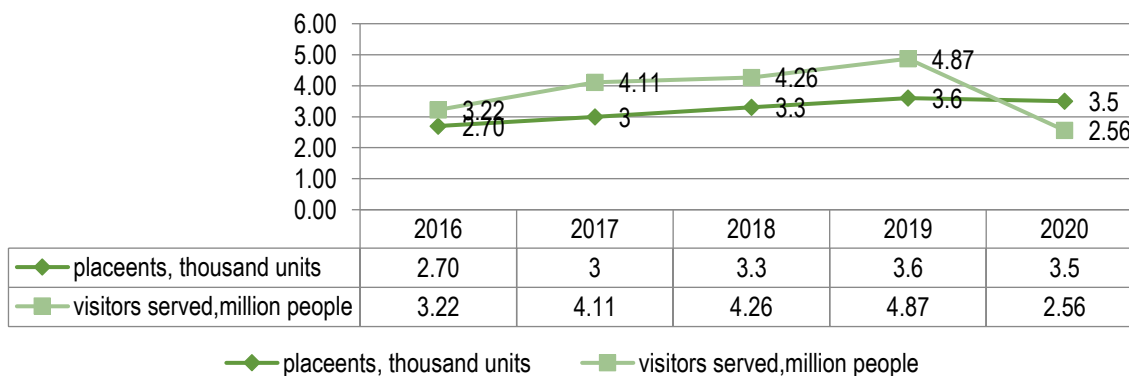
It can be seen that over the years, during the analyzed period, outbound tourism has become a priority. In 2019, compared to 2016, the number of types of outbound tourism increased by 109.3% or 8.2 million people who went to foreign countries. In 2020, this figure decreased by -70.7% compared to 2019, respectively, 2.4 million people went abroad as tourists.

As for inbound tourism, the influx of foreign tourists from foreign countries to the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2019 increased by 130.6% compared to 2016 or reached 6.4 million people. The arrival of foreigners to the republic for tourist purposes in 2020 compared to 2019 decreased by -71.9% or 1.8 million tourists arrived in the country.

There are also changes in the dynamics of domestic tourism development. If in 2016, the travel of citizens within the state amounted to 3.5 million people, then in 2019, according to statistics, 5.1 million people were registered as domestic tourists. And in 2020, compared to 2019, the rate of development of domestic tourism decreased by -39.2% or amounted to 3.1 million people traveling within the country.

Since the development of the tourist market directly depends on the activities of accommodation facilities, the analysis of current trends in the domestic hotel market is of great importance (Figure 2).

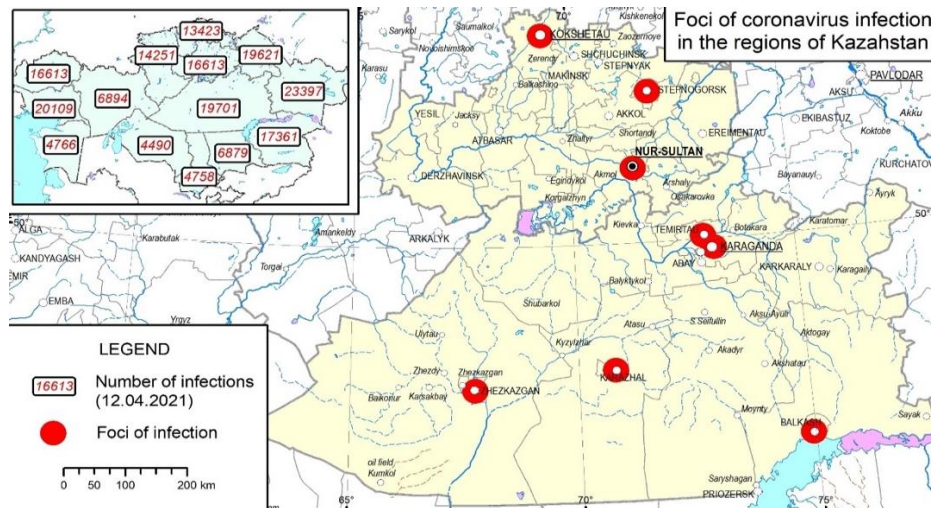
Figure 2. Main indicators of placements



Source: (Gov.kz 2021)

In the period between 2016 to 2020, there are changes in the main indicators of the hotel market. If in 2016 there were 2.7 thousand units of hotel facilities operating on the territory of the republic, in 2020 it amounted to 3.6 thousand units of hotels. But during this period, there is a small difference in the number of users of hotel services. If in 2016 3.22 million people were served, then in 2020 it was 2.56 million people, that is, the decline in this area reached 20.5 %. The map shows areas infected with coronavirus infection regions of Kazakhstan (Figure 3). Figure 3 shows that as of 12.04.2021 the most infected regions were Western, Eastern and Central Kazakhstan with the neighboring northern region of Akmola oblast, where there are large industrial cities, accompanied by large crowds of people.

Figure 3. Areas infected with coronavirus infection in regions of Kazakhstan



Source: Authors

Pandemic in Akmola and Karaganda regions of Kazakhstan

As a concrete example, we can consider the development of tourism during the pandemic in two nearby regions of Kazakhstan - Akmola and Karaganda regions (Table 3 and Table 4).

Table 3. Indicators of tourism development in resort areas, Akmola region

| Place name                                             | 2016    | 2017    | 2018    | 2019    | 2020    | 2021    | 2021 -2016 | 2021-2016<br>«-, +» |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|------------|---------------------|
| Visitors served in the places of accommodation, person |         |         |         |         |         |         |            |                     |
| Akmola region                                          | 300.439 | 341.399 | 338.698 | 394.935 | 237.671 | 327.754 | 9,1%       | 27.315              |
| Shortandy-Burabay resort area                          | 137.297 | 150.481 | 156.647 | 174.652 | 119.929 | 183.110 | 33,4%      | 45.813              |
| Zerenda resort area                                    | 52.341  | 48.085  | 44.985  | 46.949  | 10.877  | 14.172  | -72,9%     | -38.169             |

Source: (Gov.kz 2021)

Now we will analyze the development of the tourist market in the Akmola region through tourists who have used the services of accommodation facilities. So, in 2016-2021, there were positive trends in the development of the industry. Meanwhile, due to the pandemic in 2020, the industry fell by -56.5% compared to 2016. If in 2016, 300,439 people used the services of hotel facilities in the Akmola region, then in 2020 its level decreased to 169,633 people and amounted to 130,806 people. In 2021 there is an increase, the industry increased by 9.1% compared to 2016. In 2021 its level increased by 27,315 people and amounted to 327,754 people.

The development of tourism in the Akmola region is mainly evaluated in two main areas of activity. In the Shortandy-Burabay resort area, where the state national natural Park "Burabay" is located, the number of visitors in 2020 decreased by 12.6% compared to 2016 or decreased by 17,368 people, and 119,929 people left for tourist purposes. In 2021, compared to 2016, the number of visitors increased by 33.4% and amounted to 183,110 people.

In the resort area of Zerenda, which covers the territory of Lake Zerenda in the region, compared to 2016, in 2020, the number of visitors for tourist purposes decreased by 79.2%, or 10,877 people were served in accommodation facilities. In 2021, compared to 2016, there is a decrease in the number of tourists who used the tourist resources of the region, it decreased by -72.9%.

Table 4. Indicators of tourism development in resort areas, Karaganda region

| Resort areas                                           | 2016    | 2017    | 2018    | 2019    | 2020    | 2021    | 2021/2016 | 2021/2016,<br>«-, +» |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-----------|----------------------|
| Visitors served in the places of accommodation, person |         |         |         |         |         |         |           |                      |
| Karaganda region                                       | 241.260 | 292.509 | 280.699 | 319.663 | 199.891 | 272.290 | 12,95%    | 31.030               |
| Karkaraly resort area                                  | 25.761  | 49.628  | 23.818  | 22.665  | 16.209  | 18.499  | -28,2%    | -7.262               |
| Lake Balkhash coastal zone                             | 33.026  | 37.238  | 39.226  | 49.253  | 39.554  | 63.945  | 93,9%     | 30.919               |

Source: (Gov.kz 2021)

In the central Kazakhstan region (Karaganda region), there is also stagnation in the development of the tourism industry. In general, Hotel Enterprises located in the Karaganda region served 241,260 visitors in 2016, and 55,763 people consumed the industry's services in 2020. The decline in the industry due to the covid-19 pandemic is -76.9%. And if we consider the pace of this industry in the period from 2021 to 2016, 2021, compared to 2016, it showed an increase of 12.9%. If we analyze the situation in the largest tourist and resort areas of the region, where the Karkaraly state National Natural Park is located, the decline in the tourist segment in the Karkaraly resort area in 2021 decreased by -28.2% compared to 2016 (in 2020 decreased by -37.1% compared to 2016). Accordingly, the number of consumers of accommodation services amounted to 18,499 people (in 2020 to 16,209 people), see Table 4.

There are positive changes in the development of tourism in the coastal zone of Lake Balkhash, which is the second-largest tourist center in central Kazakhstan. If in 2016 - 33,026 visitors were served on the beach territory, then in 2021 - 63,945 people were consumers of beach tourism (in 2020 - 39,554 people). The dynamics of the industry's development increased by 93.9% or increased by 30,919 people compared to 2016 (in 2020 - 19.8% or increased by 6,528 people compared to 2016).

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and in order to increase sustainability in tourism, all actors in the tourism value chain need to join forces. In particular, governments, market operators as well as local communities have a responsibility to increase sustainability (Sharma *et al.* 2021).

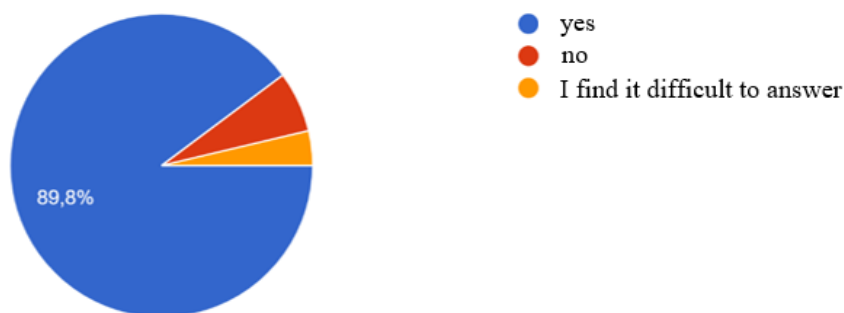
In the wake of the tourism crisis, government policies and interventions are needed to strengthen and further develop resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, government intervention should be seen as economic support in the form of subsidies and tax breaks to tourism businesses and employees. These types of economic support (subsidies or tax incentives) are considered to be the key factors of tourism recovery that lead to a more sustainable development of the industry (Ioannides and Gyimóthy 2020).

Regarding the restart phase of tourism, the interview results showed that the COVID-19 pandemic led to a rethinking of tourism towards more sustainable and responsible services. Moreover, respondents noted a shift in tourist behavior towards greater environmental awareness and more environmentally friendly behavior.

Hence, we can conclude that focusing on domestic tourism not only contributes to the recovery from the crisis but also stimulates more sustainable development in the long run. In this regard, specific policies can be developed to improve the recovery of tourism, for example, by implementing policies that promote domestic tourism, in which residents receive tourist vouchers for holidays in their country (Kuščer *et al.* 2021).

In this regard, rural tourism comes to the rescue, which can lead the entire tourism sphere to sustainable development. In the present conditions, people themselves have begun to prefer to rest in the countryside, because of the fresh air, natural food, and quiet from the bustle of the city - all this allows holidaymakers to forget their daily worries and problems. Thus, according to marketing surveys, of the 110 respondents surveyed, 89.8% would like to vacation and spend their vacations in the direction of rural tourism (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Respondents' desire to vacation in the direction of rural tourism

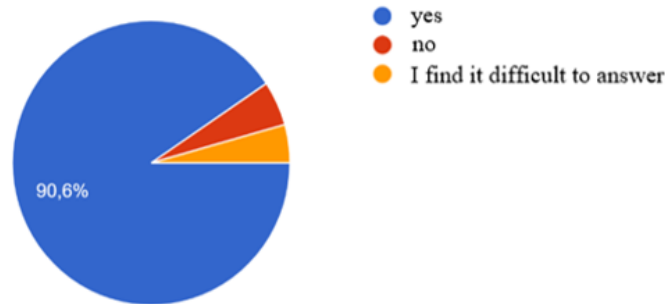


Source: The results of the social survey

According to social surveys, the residents of Kazakhstan during the pandemic chose domestic tourist destinations, namely the preference fell for rural and eco-tourism, away from the bustle of the city. For example, of the 110 respondents surveyed, 90.6% chose to vacation in the countryside (Figure 5). This was due to the fact that during the time of disease and protection from it - people realized that the Kazakh national products together with ecologically clean air on "jaylaw" (pasture) is much more efficient than a vacation in foreign hotels with their food, adapted mainly for locals. Thus, according to sociological surveys, in the nearby rural areas of Astana, the urban population stood in line from early morning for mare's milk. For example, this was observed in Akmola and Karaganda regions, where the survey was conducted. People, realizing that natural animal products, which our

ancestors (the Kazakh people) used for centuries - are very useful and contribute to improving the immune system and overall human tone, began to buy and use as a natural antiseptic, ready-to-use medicinal products.

Figure 5. Respondents' desire to rest in the village or in the city



Source: The results of the social survey

So, in the context of the pandemic, we noticed a change in the orientation of tourists. And also due to the pandemic, many families were left without income or with little income. In this regard, these families began to look for a cheaper type of holiday within the country. And here the rural type of tourism comes to the rescue. That is, in the current situation, people have become even more inclined to choose rural and ecological tourism. Because they realized that a person, being closer to nature and natural rural products, will be able to resist all kinds of viruses. Therefore, the ever-increasing trend toward rural tourism may become more sustainable. Many people in our country who previously chose overseas vacations may have discovered attractive rural local destinations within the country during the pandemic. People also began to realize the greater safety of inland rural areas in terms of a much lower risk of infection compared to cities, as well as better access to traditional Kazakh medical care, etc.

Analyzing tourist objects of our country, we concluded that rural tourism can be created and developed in any region of Kazakhstan. There is a great potential of natural, historical, cultural, material and other types of resources for this purpose. On the example of neighboring regions - Akmola and Karaganda regions - we considered some tourist objects, contributing to the formation of the image and development of rural tourism (Table 5, Figure 6).

Table 5. Main tourist sites in Akmola and Karaganda regions

| Tourist attraction                                                                      | Location                                                                      | Brief description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Akmola region - Historical and cultural potential</b>                                |                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| "Bogenbai soresi" - "Bogenbai's platform"                                               | 1.5 km from the village of Aksu in the Enbesilder district                    | During the resettlement at the tributary of the river Seleta Kiikbai at the age of 98 years old Bogenbai Batyr dies. At that time, Khan Abylai left for Omsk. Before the arrival of Khan's body was mutilated and placed on a high platform (sere) of logs. After that "Bogenbai soresi" ("Bogenbai's platform") was given this name in history.                         |
| Burial place Umbetey Zhyrau                                                             | Umbetei Tileuly buried 15 km from Korzhynkol station, Yerementau district     | Umbetei became famous as a skillful chronicler, akyn (poet), kobyz performer, and, according to legends, had the gift of divination. He was a brave and sharp-tongued storyteller. Umbetei was a faithful companion of his brother, the outstanding commander of the batyr Bogenbai. He chanted the feats of his contemporaries, feats of batyrs, and historical events. |
| Mausoleum of Uali Khan                                                                  | 2.3 km south-east of the aul "Kazakhstan", near the hill of Karakalpak        | Uali Khan (1781-1821) was the Khan of Middle Juz. He took part in campaigns against the Dzungars, leading the warriors of the Argyn clans, on behalf of Abylai Khan conducted diplomatic negotiations with ambassadors. The mausoleum of Uali Khan was erected in 2008 for its 270 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of Uali Khan.                                               |
| Architectural and memorial complex in honor of the Kazakh poet and composer Birzhan Sal | Opened September 14, 2012, town of Stepniak, the birthplace of the great poet | Birzhan sal was a unique poet, singer, and composer, whose brilliant works made his native Sary Ark famous. In the XIX century, there was no talent equal to his in the Great Steppe. Each of his works can be called a true musical masterpiece.                                                                                                                        |
| Baluan Sholak Complex                                                                   | A monument to Baluan Sholak. village of Vozdvizhenka, Bulandinsky district    | Nurmaganbet Baymyrzauly, known as Baluan Sholak (1864-1919) - Kazakh folk composer, singer, master of horseback riding, famous wrestler, and invincible strongman.                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Botay-Burabai Ethnomuseum                                                               | Along the Astana-Borovoye highway                                             | Museum of Ethnography and Archaeology, dedicated to the Botai culture of the Eneolithic period, "Botai-Burabay" in Burabay national park. The                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

| Tourist attraction                                          | Location                                                                                    | Brief description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Akmola region - Historical and cultural potential</b>    |                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|                                                             |                                                                                             | museum includes 7 dwellings of a bygone era, the dwellings vary in diameter from 8 to 10 meters. All of them are connected to each other by underground passages and each carries a certain meaning. The Botai people are the first to have domesticated wild horses, about 5.7-5.1 thousand years ago, made horses the main source of meat and dairy food and laid the foundations for horseback riding.                                                |
| "ALZHIR" Museum and Memorial Complex                        | 40 km from the town of Astana in the village of Akmol                                       | It is a notorious place where more than 18,000 women were held in different years. Women whose only fault was that they were simply the wives of innocently arrested, executed "enemies of the people," convicted through the fault of the Soviet authorities.                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Akmola region - Natural resource potential</b>           |                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Shortandy-Burabay resort area                               | Akmola (Zerenda district) and North Kazakhstan (Ayirtau district) regions                   | Kokshetau National Park. This land of blue lakes and blue mountains is located in two regions at once - Akmola and North Kazakhstan. The territory of the park is covered with low rocky hills, birch and pine groves, with many picturesque water bodies. One of them is a lake of tectonic origin called Zerenda.                                                                                                                                      |
| "Korgalzhyn" State Nature Reserve                           | Located 130 kilometers from the city of Astana (Akmola region)                              | The Kurgaldjin Nature Reserve was created in 1968 to preserve the rarest nesting bird, the pink flamingo. The northernmost nesting ground of the pink flamingo is on Lake Tengiz. One of only two in Kazakhstan on the UNESCO World Heritage List. In spring and autumn, going on an ornithological excursion, you can observe large clusters of flamingos.                                                                                              |
| "Burabay" National Park                                     | Located in Burabay district, Akmola region                                                  | Burabay is a unique oasis natural area. Its geographical name is Kokshetau Upland, and tourist guides around the world refer to it as the "Kazakh Switzerland" or the "Pearl of Kazakhstan. On its territory there are 14 lakes, including the famous Borovoye, Shchuchye, Big and Small Chebachye. The lakes are surrounded by mountains and evergreen forest. Here in Burabay resort there is a historical place - the throne and glade of Ablai Khan. |
| "Buiratau" National Park                                    | "Buiratau" is located on the territory of Akmola and Karaganda regions                      | "Buiratau" (translated from Kazakh as "Curly mountains") is located in the transition zone between moderately arid and dry steppe subzones, which makes the territory unique in combining steppe ecosystems with forest ones (birch knolls, black-alder forests). Here in the wilderness you can observe close up the red deer, which were brought here in the early 2000s.                                                                              |
| "Zerendy" National Reserve                                  | 50 km from the city of Kokshetau is the village of Zerenda                                  | Zerenda is a part of a vast territory, distinguished by mountains and hills covered with forest, small lakes and rivers, located on the Kokshetau Upland. This area is characterized by relative plains, above which rise individual hills and mountain systems. In some places, plains are crossed by river valleys, often bursting in their channel's deep canyons.                                                                                    |
| "Əuliye būlaq" - Holy Spring                                | The village of Uyaly with a healing spring is located at the foot of the Kaskatau mountains | It is called "Əuliye būlaq" because of its healing power, there is a holy spring in winter and summer. It forms a beautiful waterfall that flows into the Kyrozek river, on the banks of which there is an amazing set of birches, sprawling willows and on each tree - 10-15 nesting birds.                                                                                                                                                             |
| Tourist attraction                                          | Location                                                                                    | Brief description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Karaganda region - Historical and cultural potential</b> |                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| "Khan Ordasy" in Ulytau                                     | Located 20 km west of Ulytau                                                                | Ulytau is the historical and geographical center of Kazakhstan, the cradle of the Kazakh people. One of the epicenters of nomadic culture and steppe civilization. Mecca of the Turkic peoples. Center of the Great Eurasian Steppe. Here took place the great events of the national history, associated with the formation of the Kazakh khanate and statehood.                                                                                        |
| Mausoleums of Zhoshy Khan, Alasha Khan and Dombauly         | Located in the Ulytau district of Karaganda region, 50 km northeast of of Zhezkazgan        | These are important historical monuments of medieval architecture in Kazakhstan. The tomb of Zhoshy Khan (Jochi) was erected on the burial site of the eldest son of the great Genghis Khan. All three mausoleums are a true cultural, historical, and literary heritage of the Kazakh steppes.                                                                                                                                                          |
| Begazy cemetery                                             | 40 km southeast of the village of Aktogay                                                   | Begazy burial ground is an archaeological treasure of the Karaganda region. The complex of the burial ground includes a large number of burials of different times and natures. The archaeological treasure of the region is the Begazy burial ground, represented by a complex of structures made of huge slabs weighing up to three tons.                                                                                                              |

|                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Karazhartas burial ground - one of the megalithic monuments of Begazy-Dandybaevskaya culture of the Late Bronze Age | Located on the right side of the river Taldy, 2 km west of the aul. Zhanazhurt, 12 km east of the village of Taldy, on the territory of the Taldy rural district of Shet district | The Karazhartas burial site includes 41 structures from the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. In 2016-2017 the pyramidalstepped mausoleum with dimensions of 14x14,5 m, with the burial of a member of tribal nobility of Begazy-Dandybaev society was investigated at the monument. The grave structure has about 5-6 walls built by construction masonry. "Karazhartas" can be called an archeological object of the world scale. Scientists note that it resembles the Egyptian pyramids, in particular - of Pharaoh Djoser.                                                                                                                                                  |
| Karlag                                                                                                              | Located in the village of Dolinskoye, 45 km southwest of the city of Karaganda                                                                                                    | This is one of the largest correctional labor camps of the USSR in 1930-1959, where victims of political repression were exiled. The largest scientists who later laid the foundation for research work in the institutions and educational institutions of Karaganda served time in Karlag.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Koyandin Fair                                                                                                       | 50 km from the city of Karkaraly, on the bank of the Taldy River in Central Kazakhstan                                                                                            | Koyandinskaya Fair, which held annual bidding, was the largest market in Central Kazakhstan. From the middle of the 19 <sup>th</sup> century until its closure, the Koyandin Fair occupied a special place in the political, social, and economic formation of Kazakhstan. "The Koyandin Petition" became one of the important moments in the political life of Kazakhstan in the early 20 <sup>th</sup> century. For the first time the aspirations of the Kazakh people were stated programmatically in it and the requirements to the Russian tsarist government about equality, freedom of conscience, press, judicial procedure, and about curbing colonizers were exhibited. |
| <b>Karaganda region - Natural resource potential</b>                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| "Karkaraly" National Park                                                                                           | Located in Karkarala district of Karaganda region                                                                                                                                 | Karkaraly National Park is among the specially protected natural areas of Kazakhstan. There are health resorts, hotel complexes, a nature museum in Tas-Bulak tract, Buddhist monastery (Kzyl-Kent palace), excursions to the mystical Lake Shaitankol, archaeological monuments of different eras and much more.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Balkhash resort area                                                                                                | Located in Karaganda and Almaty regions                                                                                                                                           | Balkhash is one of the largest lakes in Kazakhstan. One part of it is filled with salty waters and the other is completely fresh, and it is surrounded by very picturesque and quite harsh places: the Betpak-dala desert, the Chulliy Mountain ranges, and the southern Taukum sands. Beach tourism is developed on the lake's shores.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Sands Zhetykonyr                                                                                                    | Located southeast of the city of Zhezkazgan                                                                                                                                       | "Zhetykonyr" is the ancient name for the still sand hills covered with drought-resistant vegetation. Nowadays, one can observe pictures here that are completely unusual for the central part of Kazakhstan: camels roam in the background of sand dunes, and round-headed lizards run across the sand, leaving trails of dots streaked behind them. Nearby is Akkense meteorological station, the few inhabitants of which are happy to see visitors and impress with their warm hospitality.                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Nature Museum and wild animal enclosure in the Tasbulak tract                                                       | Located in Karkaraly National Nature Park, in the Tasbulak tract.                                                                                                                 | The two-story wooden house museum consists of exhibition halls of flora and fauna of the Karkaraly region. In one of the halls of the museum, there is a model of the territory of Karkaraly National Park.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Shabanbai bi village in the Kyzylarai mountains                                                                     | Located in the Kyzylarai mountains of the Karaganda region                                                                                                                        | Shabanbai bi village is one of the places in Central Kazakhstan where ecotourism based on local communities is developing. In the homes of local residents, tourists are offered accommodation and an opportunity to get acquainted with simple rural life and taste Kazakh national cuisine. Shabanbai Bi is situated near the sights of Kyzylarai mountain oasis - archaeological monuments of the Bronze Age, Turkic period, and modern times, interesting natural formations like Yuliye cave or Tesiktas stone, and, of course, Aksoran peak itself. Here you can see the horse races – "Baige" or "Kekpar".                                                                  |

Source: Kazinform (2017), Ulyankina (2019), Strokova (2017)

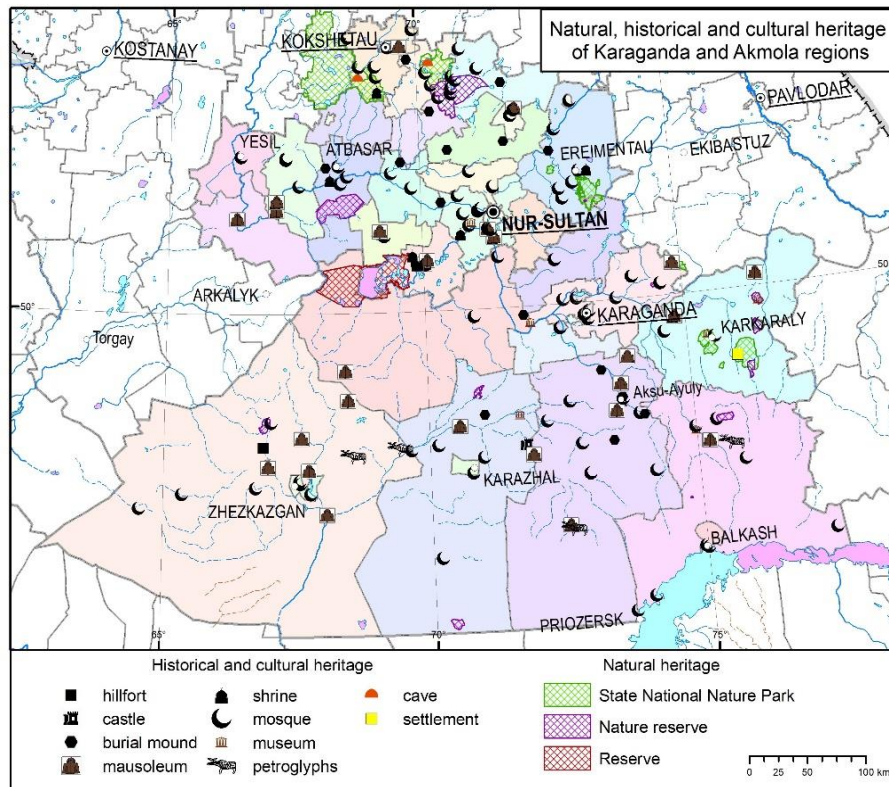
As can be seen from Table 9, the historical and cultural, and natural resource potential of the Akmola and Karaganda regions contributes to the sustainable development of rural tourism, and with it, other types of rural tourism are related. The map (Figure 6) shows the main places of natural resources and the historical and cultural potential of the Akmola and Karaganda regions.

According to experts, the Akmola region is one of the top five tourist regions of the Kazakhstan, rich in recreation areas. "There are more than 700 enterprises in the field of tourism in the oblast. According to preliminary data, more than 1 million tourists visited the Akmola region in 2019. As part of the development of



tourism infrastructure in the region in 2018, 32 investment projects worth 4.3 billion tenges were implemented and 340 jobs were created (Inform.kz 2019).

Figure 6. Natural, historical, and cultural heritage of Karaganda and Akmola regions



Source: Authors

Thus, to assess the potential for the development of rural tourism, we decided to use the well-known formula for determining the potential of each district of the Akmola region (Table 6). Scientists as Shumakova *et al.* (2015) came up with an indicator to assess the potential for the development of rural tourism and used it to assess the districts of a particular region. We used the same indicator for the Akmola region. To assess the potential for the development of rural tourism in the district, the final indicator is calculated by the following formula and the results of this indicator are presented in Table 6.

$$I_f = (I_1 + I_2) * I_3$$

where: ( $I_1$ ) represents availability of unique ethnic groups and folk crafts (handicrafts) in the area; ( $I_2$ ) is the number of cultural attractions in the area; ( $I_3$ ) is the share of agricultural producers (farms or peasant farms) in the area.

As can be seen from Table 6, in the districts of Birzhan sal and Zerendi the final score of the potential development of rural tourism in the district was 10.659 and 10.561. That is, among the districts of the Akmola region the highest rates were shown. This result was achieved due to the large number of cultural and historical monuments and peasant farms in these districts. In addition, the Zerendi district is an amazing resort area located in the center of the "eighty lakes" of Kokshetau oblast with unique nature. The area of Zerendi is the basis of the Kokshetau State National Nature Park. In general, any district of Akmola oblast is very rich in rivers and lakes, mountains, beautiful landscapes, land and air. In addition, there are many recreation areas in Zerenda, such as, "Sunjkar", "Zeren nur", "Qaragaily", "Tulpar", etc. A new family health center "Koktal Town" was opened in the district of Birzhan Sal. Here, at any time of the year, on the shore of Lake Zhukey, against the backdrop of nature, you can breathe fresh pine air (Uvp-akmo.gov.kz 2021).

Then come the districts of Zhaksy, Sandyktau, and Ereymentau, which have reached the potential assessment scores of 5.726.7, 5.460 and 3.895,5. These three districts are located in a picturesque area with a lot of small hills and jungles, mountain forests, and lakes. These areas are home to a wide variety of animals, fish in rivers and lakes, and minerals on the ground. At the same time, the districts of Birzhan sal, Zerendi, Zhaksy,

Sandyktau and Yereymentau are optimally developed centers of agriculture, where peasant and farm households are well concentrated.

Table 6. Assessment of rural tourism potential, Akmola region

| №     | District and/or town | Monuments in each district town* | Peasant or farm farms in region** | Share of agricultural producers (peasant or farms) of the district** | Craft workshops in area | Final indicator* |
|-------|----------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| 1     | Akkool               | 52                               | 209                               | 14,4                                                                 | 12                      | 921,6            |
| 2     | Arshaly              | 25                               | 364                               | 25,7                                                                 | 6                       | 796,7            |
| 3     | Astrakhan            | 43                               | 239                               | 19,7                                                                 | 14                      | 1.122,9          |
| 4     | Atbasar              | 144                              | 219                               | 8,7                                                                  | 11                      | 1.348,5          |
| 5     | Birzhan sal          | 246                              | 359                               | 41,8                                                                 | 9                       | 1.0659           |
| 6     | Būlandy              | 110                              | 176                               | 11,9                                                                 | 8                       | 1.404,2          |
| 7     | Burabay              | 85                               | 371                               | 6,4                                                                  | 12                      | 620,8            |
| 8     | Yegindikol           | 8                                | 237                               | 45,1                                                                 | 9                       | 766,7            |
| 9     | Yereymentau          | 134                              | 448                               | 26,5                                                                 | 13                      | 3.895,5          |
| 10    | Yessil               | 108                              | 186                               | 14,1                                                                 | 10                      | 1.663,8          |
| 11    | Jaksy                | 174                              | 275                               | 30,3                                                                 | 15                      | 5.726,7          |
| 12    | Jarkayn              | 51                               | 436                               | 35,7                                                                 | 9                       | 2.142,0          |
| 13    | Zerendi              | 273                              | 657                               | 35,8                                                                 | 22                      | 10.561,0         |
| 14    | Korgalzhyn           | 48                               | 183                               | 30,7                                                                 | 8                       | 1.719,2          |
| 15    | Sandyktau            | 173                              | 308                               | 30,0                                                                 | 9                       | 5.460,0          |
| 16    | Tselinograd          | 42                               | 401                               | 12,0                                                                 | 25                      | 804,0            |
| 17    | Shortandy            | 32                               | 145                               | 12,5                                                                 | 11                      | 537,5            |
| 18    | Kokshetau city       | 36                               | 100                               | 0,6                                                                  | 35                      | 42,6             |
| 19    | Stepnogorsk town     | 9                                | 64                                | 1,8                                                                  | 16                      | 45,0             |
| TOTAL |                      | 1.793                            | 5377                              | 403,7                                                                | 238                     | 50.237,7         |

Note: № 422, 19.08.2019; \* report on assessment of potential opportunities for the development of rural tourism in the district:  $I_f = (I_1 + I_2) * I_3$  developed by the author on the basis of the formula; \*\*town - History-akmola.kz. 2021; \*\*\* actually operating, as of 01.08.2019;

Source: Stat.gov.kz (2019)

Thus, these districts of Akmola oblast have all the potential for the wide development of rural tourism. Almost all rural areas of all districts of Akmola oblast can be adapted for the development of rural tourism. Moreover, many villages are located in close proximity to the capital city of Astana, which is one of the advantages. After all, many foreign visitors and tourists to Astana can be brought here to get acquainted with the ethnography, lifestyle, traditions, and national cuisine of the Kazakh people. In addition, young people and families in the city will be able to relax in the pristine nature and enjoy the life of the village.

It should be noted that the households (subsidiary farms) in the villages of Akmola Oblast, along with agricultural enterprises and farms, are engaged in agricultural production. For example, about 70% of livestock products are produced on household farms (stat.gov.kz 2019). Therefore, according to the foreign experience of rural tourism, it is possible to bring the household economy in these rural areas to such a level that they can receive tourists.

Thus, the research suggests that the promotion of rural tourism in Kazakhstan, including in the Akmola and Karaganda regions with the available potential resources can contribute to the development of rural areas in general. Since, according to surveys of residents of the urban population of these regions, people began to appreciate the quiet fresh air recreation in rural areas, precisely during the pandemic. According to surveys, many residents of Astana and Karaganda during the pandemic began to buy houses in villages close to the cities. People preferred rural houses with their own backyards rather than sitting locked up in urban apartment buildings in the midst of the pandemic. In addition, many young urban guys took the initiative to start farms in convenient rural areas close to the city. For the development of farming, it is necessary to have fertile land, availability of fresh water, rivers and lakes, pastures suitable for livestock breeding, and many others. Both Akmola and Karaganda regions have such natural resources. In addition, for the promotion of rural tourism in these areas there are all sorts of potential resources such as natural, historical, and cultural heritage sites.

It is worth noting that Karaganda region is famous for the most delicious qymyz (kumys) (Kazakh national drink, which is made from mare's milk), i.e., the national drink of the Kazakh people. Thus, in 2019, a qymyz festival was held in Zhanaarka district of this region, which is considered the home of the best qymyz in all

Kazakhstan. That is, 10 thousand liters of qymyz were simultaneously prepared in 1 thousand kubi (vessel for qymyz made of wood), with a thousand women whipping qymyz. And this event was officially registered in the Guinness Book of World Records. The event was held in celebration of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the district and the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the poet, writer, statesman, and public person Saken Seifullin. A representative of this organization Yudelkis Diaz specially arrived in the village of Karaganda region from Cuba to enter into the Guinness Book of Records. After fixing the record result, delicious qymyz were distributed for free to guests of the festival. In addition, there was a festival of boursak and plov, which ended with a great concert of creative groups (Abilda 2019, Bagrova 2019). In Zhanaarka district of Karaganda region 10 thousand liters of qymyz were cooked simultaneously on 1 thousand cubes (dishes for cooking qymyz), which is officially recorded in the Guinness Book of Records.

In addition, in 2021 the festival "Nomadic Culture of Saryarka" was held in all district centers and regions of the Karaganda region. It was held for the first time on the initiative of the regional department of culture, archives and documentation as part of the celebration of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the country's independence and the "Rukhani Zhangyru" program. The aim of the festival – is to show the culture of the Kazakh people and region through the creativity, music, crafts, games, and sports. Every region and town of the region for two months had an exhibition of Kazakh national crafts (harnesses, felt carpets, wood, bone, metalware, and jewelry). There were also demonstrations of national costumes and a fashion parade. Ethno villages were decorated. In these auls, dastarkan (table) with national Kazakh dishes were laid in yurts.

So, the exhibition of folk craftsmen "Town of Craftsmen" was presented to visitors in Balakash. Here you can see the felt carpets, tekemets, jewelry, national costumes, and other works of art. There was also an exhibition of national cuisine. Local athletes showed their skills in such national sports as "Kazak kuresi", "Asyk atu" and "Togyzqumalaq". Singers and aityskers took part in the theatrical performance "Sayyn Dalam - Saryarka" (Abilda 2021, Sarsenbayuly 2021, Mukhamedzhanova 2021, Strokova 2021, Sakenova and Khassenkhanova 2021).

Such festivals help to improve rural tourism, as well as attract guests and tourists from other regions of Kazakhstan and from abroad. In addition, these festivals contribute to the revival of the forgotten culture and traditions of the Kazakh people. They also help to awaken and remind young people of the historical development of our people and to form specific Kazakh cultural traditions and customs.

In Karaganda region, there is an annual regional show of dogs of national and hunting breeds, which can also support the improvement of rural tourism in the region. Thus, in this region in 2019 the 5<sup>th</sup> Regional Dog Show of National and Hunting Breeds was held, as well as a coursing championship among greyhound breeds. The event, organized by the Republican Association of Public Associations of Hunters and Hunting Entities "Kansonar" with the support of the akim of Osakarov district of Karaganda region, was attended by dog owners from Astana, Akmola, Pavlodar, and Karaganda regions. More than 50 owners brought more than 100 dogs. The purpose of the show is a demonstration of achievements and promotion of the development of national breeds of dogs, promotion of breeding of the Kazakh hunting dog breed "tazy", determination of quality and evaluation of breed population, and also demonstration, revealing, and selection of breeding manufacturers. It is also given the right to obtain a passport for a pet because of the opportunity for dog owners to get an expert evaluation (Qansonar.com 2019).

Rural festivals such as the National and Hunting Breed Dog Show also provide an opportunity to improve rural tourism. At such festivals, there is an opportunity for farmers to choose purebred dogs for the farm. As there are specially trained herding dogs that help farmers graze their pets in the pastures without the help of a shepherd. It is also worth noting that in Astana, regional agricultural fairs are held annually in the autumn. Residents and guests of the capital can buy here food products at low prices, namely meat products, vegetables, fruits, chicken, fish, honey, dried fruits, and much more. Such events can also promote rural tourism, in the sense that natural products are made in rural areas and can be sold to urban residents. And also, city residents in the summertime can work on the basis of rural tourism in rural areas and in the fall can sell their products at various fairs and retail outlets and thereby earn additional sources of income.

As can be seen from the research, opportunities, and prerequisites for the development of rural tourism in Kazakhstan, as well as in some regions, such as the analyzed regions of Akmola and Karaganda have great potential.

## Conclusions

Over the centuries of Kazakhstan's history, agricultural areas have contributed not only to economic growth but also served to form a tangible and unique ethnographic bridge of Kazakh people's traditions and customs,

expressing material and spiritual uniqueness. Rural areas are part of the country's national heritage. They can become the inseparable element of a unique tourist image. Rural tourism helps to see the national coloring and a variety of tourist opportunities in Kazakhstan. Also, this type of tourism can provide an impressive socio-economic contribution to the solution of problems of preservation and development of the country's many rural areas (Tleubayeva 2018).

Thus, despite the presence of vulnerabilities for the development of rural tourism in Kazakhstan, using the existing strong features, it is possible to use rural tourism as a tool for the formation of the image of the Republic on the international market of tourist services. The key advantages can be the following:

- The route of the Great Silk Road passed through the territory of modern Kazakhstan. This is an ancient international trade and diplomatic route that originally connected China with the countries of Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, the Mediterranean, and Western Europe. The northern, or so-called steppe section of the land, which ran through the territory of modern Kazakhstan in the VI-VII centuries served as the main artery of international communication, until the XIV century, which suggests that tourism has been developed in Kazakhstan since ancient times;
- the "guest" in Kazakh culture has been one of the respected and honored persons for centuries, in connection with which the main national trait of the Kazakhs is "hospitality";
- Primordial rural areas that can be used for the development of rural tourism in Kazakhstan;
- The Republic has rich natural resources in each region of the country, distinguished by its diversity and pristine nature, which contributes to the development of ecotourism;
- Kazakhstan has centuries-old history, culture, traditions, customs, and rituals, which is beneficial for the formation and development of historical and archeological, ethnocultural and ethnographic types of rural tourism. Thus, 17 historical places of Kazakhstan are included in the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List (El.kz 2020);
- The sphere of agriculture is well enough developed: the branch of plant growing and farming is flourishing successfully, which is relevant for the promotion of agrotourism; the country's livestock breeding activity is developed, which can be used as an attraction for tourists who are keen on equestrian sports;
- As one type of development, rural tourism can also be combined with event tourism (in the summer season you can visit "Ethno Fest", where such national equestrian sports games as "Alaman-baige", "Kekpar", "Tenge alu", etc. are held in Kazakhstan), which can also contribute to the prosperity of the tourist image of the Republic as a whole.

Given all the above, the development of a specific model of rural tourism, inherent only in our country, with its special history, culture, tradition, and everyday life, as well as its effective promotion using competent management and organization, can act as a tool for the formation of a sustainable tourist image of Kazakhstan. This, in turn, will have a positive impact on the flow of tourists to the countryside, both urban residents and foreign tourists.

To date, rural tourism providers have begun to realize their potential and focus on improving infrastructure, organization, and information preparation. Despite many challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic has created additional opportunities for the development of rural tourism, focused mainly on domestic tourists with the possibility of later expansion to foreign clients. In addition to greater safety, rural areas in Kazakhstan can offer many natural, historical, and cultural attractions. The dense network of cities and the frequency of public transportation create a favorable territorial base. Particular attention should be paid to improving infrastructure, institutional structure, marketing, and cooperation with stakeholders in this area.

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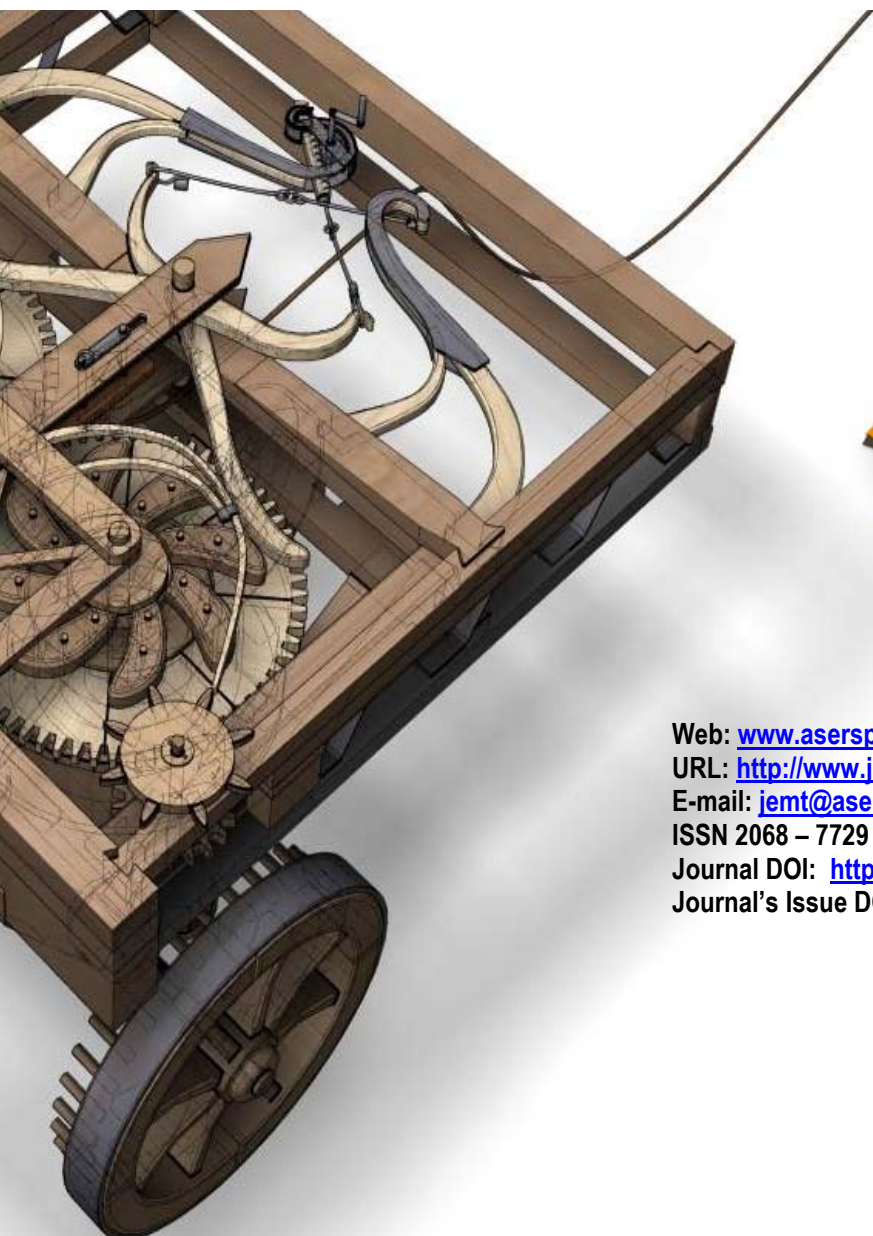
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