

**RURAL TOURISM IN THE AKMOLA REGION OF KAZAKHSTAN:  
ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS**

**ҚАЗАҚСТАННЫҢ АҚМОЛА ОБЛЫСЫНДАҒЫ АУЫЛДЫҚ ТУРИЗМ:  
АУЫЛДЫҚ АУМАҚТАРДЫ ДАМУДАҒЫ РӨЛІ**

**СЕЛЬСКИЙ ТУРИЗМ В АКМОЛИНСКОЙ ОБЛАСТИ КАЗАХСТАНА:  
РОЛЬ В РАЗВИТИИ СЕЛЬСКИХ ТЕРРИТОРИЙ**

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**Abstract.** *The goal* – is to study the current situation in development of rural tourism in the Akmola region of Kazakhstan. *Methods* – review of the works of foreign and domestic scientists, comparisons, generalizations, SWOT analysis. To select the most effective business models of tourism business in the region, the TOPSIS method was used, based on questionnaire and expert assessment. *Results* – based on international and Kazakhstani practice regarding the concept of tourism industry, the author's definition of this category is given. The potential of agritourism is highlighted and its role in modernization of agricultural sector of the region is shown, resource opportunities of rural settlements included in its administrative territories, as well as for the spread of other types of tourism, are identified. To date, there are factors that hinder the increase in the volume of eco-tourism services in the republic: low living standards of the rural population, comfortable and high-quality conditions for tourists; limited external communications in rural areas, lack of necessary transport links, sites for leisure activities. To solve the problems of tourism sector, the State is taking a set of measures aimed at increasing the amount of funding, developing new programs, and creating effective mechanisms for public support. Ecotourism has significant reserves for support and growth of small and medium businesses. The authors note that in order to expand the scale of ecotourism, external investments are required, as well as the effective tax system and legal mechanism. *Conclusions* – as the experience of countries with a developed agritourism sector shows, tourism industry affects the systemic solution of a number of socio-economic issues: improving the welfare and income of rural residents, weakening internal migration processes, creating new jobs and ensuring investment activity.



important is rural tourism. With this type of tourism, it is possible to solve various problems of the rural area, for example, employment of the population, increase of their income, development of rural infrastructure and market, rapid growth of the economy of the whole region, etc.

Tourism can stimulate the development of other types of economic activity, such as agriculture, local food and handicraft production, and contribute to increased income. Today, as a result of the experience of developed countries, rural tourism is one of the priority areas that contribute to the sustainable development of the economy. Among the problems put forward by the countries of the world is the question of achieving the "Sustainable Development Goals". The Sustainable Development Goals are important for all poor, middle and rich developed countries. It is aimed at improving and protecting the well-being of our planet.

States recognize the need to solve a number of issues in the field of increasing economic growth, education, health care, social protection, employment, as well as combating climate change and environmental protection in their measures to eliminate poverty. Among the goals of sustainable development, the most important ones are to increase jobs, eliminate hunger, ensure the sustainable development of agriculture, etc. These problems can be realized through sustainable development of rural tourism [1, 2].

In the world experience, rural tourism has been developing for about 50 years. According to statistical studies, the share of foreign (EU) tourist services in the total tourist flow is from 35 to 75%. That is why rural tourism is becoming an important sector of the tourism industry in the world tourism market. According to the WTO, rural tourism is one of the strategic areas of tourism development until 2030 yr. [3].

**Material and methods of research.** As research methods: a review of the works of foreign and domestic authors was carried out using the method of bibliographic analysis within the framework of the issue under consideration. The conditions of the formation and development of rural tourism were considered, and the role of rural tourism in the organization of various business models was determined; the development of rural tourism in Akmola region was described using the SWOT-analysis method. The way to choose the most effective models of rural tourism development in Akmola region was imple-

mented according to the TOPSIS method - survey and expert assessment.

Today, there is no universally accepted precise definition of the definition of "rural tourism". It is difficult to see the optimal definition to explain "rural tourism", because it is not always taken in the same sense in different countries. In the tourism industry, there are many definitions and classifications depending on the model of a particular country. Nevertheless, we have tried to offer the author's interpretation of the definition of "rural tourism".

Thus, rural tourism is a type of tourism that can be developed in harmony with various types of tourism organized in rural areas in order to promote business, create new jobs and create additional income opportunities for local residents, improve the social and economic conditions of the village, and ensure the sustainable development of rural areas, a set of tourist services in which tourists and visitors are offered a range of tourist services (introduction to village life, lifestyle, national cuisine, local customs, folk traditions, guided tours), as well as national holidays and sports events.

**Results and their discussion.** We analyze the conditions of formation of the industry by defining the possibilities of development of rural tourism in Akmola region in order to determine the characteristics and degree of progress of rural tourism in Akmola region, we differentiated the activities of several recreation areas located near the city of Astana (table 1). According to the results of the analysis, it is necessary to ensure the affordability of the prices of the services offered in the "Kulager" and "BalQaragai" tourist facilities. This is because, according to some people's comments on the site, there are very few opportunities for middle-income people and students to visit due to the high price of vacation places.

But since these resorts do not have the same number of clients in all seasons, some social groups are forced to charge prices that cannot be afforded. And "Bakhtibai village" is not long before the opening of the health center with saumal, but it is developing its work and plans to expand the types of services in the future. "Kulager" family recreation center and "BalQaragai" recreation area have purchased and imported different services. In these tourist facilities, it is possible to tame a horse and prepare kumys from its mare's milk and sell it to tourists at a reasonable price. According to research, these tourist organizations are equipped with all necessary resources and equipment for rural tourism.



Table 1 - A brief description of analyzed tourist facilities in Akmola region

Name	Location	List of services offered	Features of tourist facilities
Saumal recreation center "Bakhtibai village"	10 km from Astanacity	Cycling. Horse riding. Sleigh rides (in winter). Drinking mare's milk, saumal and kombucha. National kitchen.	Breeding of horses, sheep and turkeys. Sale of mare's milk, saumal and kumyz. Sale of turkey meat and eggs.
Family recreation center "Kulager"	10 km from the city of Astana, International village, Zhagalau street 84	Yurts, pavilions, tents, hotels, restaurants and cafes with Wi-Fi, billiards, shooting range, swimming pool, baths and saunas, small zoo, table tennis, children's playground and trampoline, sports games and equipment. equipment, horse and pony rides, summer and winter entertainment, photo shoots, fishing, holidays and corporate events.	Horse breeding. It is equipped with a special stage, a dance floor and a sports field. Swimming pool, playground and trampoline are free for guests and visitors. There are 4 cottages, 4 student houses, 5 yurts, 13 huts, tents and tents. Possibility of fishing outside the resort area.
Recreation area "Bal Qaragai"	20 km from the city of Nur-Sultan, near the village of Akkayin	Etnoaul (Kazakh village made of yurts), huts, tapshans, wooden houses, hotels, cafes, restaurants with European and Eastern cuisine, baths and saunas, swimming pool, karaoke; petting zoo, horse and pony rides, sports games and equipment, summer and winter entertainment, forest walks, opportunities for celebrations and corporate events.	Universal tourist complex works all year round. There is a horse stable with an outdoor arena and an indoor winter arena. The nearby mountains have a tubing trail for winter fun. On special occasions, masters of folk crafts are invited (on major holidays). There are specially equipped sports fields for football (volleyball, tennis courts). There is a heated swimming pool. Forest walk.

Note: prepared by the authors based on interviews with representatives of tourist facilities and business owners [4].

We, applying the qualitative method of research - interviewing, have questioned about the mutual relations between the interested parties directly involved in the development of rural tourism, the main participants of rural tourism, their role and perception of the development of rural tourism, as well as the general problems of promoting rural tourism. Based on the results

of the answers, we made certain conclusions (table 2). As we can see from table 2, four groups of stakeholders in the development of rural tourism were selected for the interview. The problems and obstacles considered during the interview became the reason for the justification of the weaknesses and threats (SWOT-analysis) of the development of rural tourism in Akmola region.

Table 2 - The main stakeholders involved in the development of rural tourism as a source of data

Stakeholders and their role in rural tourism	Method of data collection	Direction of questions
Group 1: state and local officials responsible for tourism development	Personal interview	Ways to develop tourism in the region. The potential of tourism development in rural areas. Compatibility of rural tourism with general tourism policy. The role of local communities in tourism. Rural tourism success opportunities and barriers to business start-up. Nature protection measures. Tourism marketing policy. External factors affecting rural tourism. Interaction between stakeholders.
Group 2: tour operators (attracting tourists)	Have a conversation	
Group 3: employees of non-governmental organizations (business development organizations and tourism associations)	Personal interview	The potential of tourism development in rural areas. The role (goals and objectives) of rural communities in the tourism industry. Gender roles in the development of rural tourism (goals and tasks of men and women). The potential for rural tourism to succeed. Nature protection measures. Tourism marketing policy. Problems and obstacles that are common in the development of rural business and may be encountered in the future.
Group 4: local residents (population providing rural tourism products and services)	Conduct in-depth interviews and follow-up	

Note: on the part of the authors was developed on the basis of literature [5]



So, the data and materials obtained from the results of the research were found as a source for SWOT-analysis. This method made it possible to visually assess the priority directions and obstacles of the development

of rural tourism (figure). SWOT-analysis showed that, in general, it was found that there are all opportunities, including resources, for the sustainable development of rural tourism in Akmola region.

<b>Internal environmental factors</b>	<p><b>Positive factors</b></p> <p><b>S-strengths</b>                      Akmola region is an agrarian-industrial region;                      The region is rich in natural resources and historical places;                      Availability of transport and communication networks in region;                      The wealth of Kazakh national culture and traditions;                      Expression of desire of city residents and foreign citizens to rest in quiet rural areas;                      Lack of competition due to underdevelopment of rural tourism;                      Ability to participate in different levels of agricultural support programs;                      The possibility of creating a rural tourism business on the basis of a farm and a private secondary farm;                      Absence of periodical factors in case of proper organization and development of rural tourism;                      The possibility of cluster business development.</p>	<p><b>Negative factors</b></p> <p><b>W-weaknesses</b>                      Lack of literacy in rural tourism business;                      Lack of qualified specialists in the field of rural tourism;                      Comprehensive underdevelopment of the tourist product;                      Slow development of marketing (weakness and high cost of advertising);                      The service is not fully developed;                      Lack of contact with specialists in the field of tourism;                      Lack of cooperation among agricultural holdings (lack of cooperation or association);                      Lack of legislative framework for rural tourism;                      Non-allocation of funds from the state for special rural tourism.</p>
	<p><b>Positive factors</b></p> <p><b>O-opportunities</b>                      Development of empty lands and revitalization of fading villages;                      Expansion of the market for local agricultural products and the possibility of organizing processing production;                      Demand for cultural and historical resources in the region;                      To attract people from other cities and abroad to our capital;                      Creating a positive tourist image;                      Expanding the range of tourism products to satisfy a wide range of customers;                      Possibility of development of rural tourism;                      Creation of new jobs;                      Improvement of infrastructure quality;                      Filling the regional tax treasury from this type of tourism;                      An additional source of income for villagers;                      Increasing tourist flows in the country from year to year;                      Increasing attention of the state in the development of agriculture;                      Availability of infrastructural developments in our republic;                      The holding of major equestrian events (one of the factors that will increase the attractiveness of rural tourism in the future);                      The presence of various events (national holidays) held at the international level.</p>	<p><b>Negative factors</b></p> <p><b>T-threats</b>                      Emergence of competitors;                      Development of other types of tourism;                      Existence of systematic problems in rural (weak development of infrastructure, shortage of labor force among rural population, insufficient supply of food and medical services);                      Lack of interest of local travel agencies in the domestic market;                      Lack of specific government programs to support the development of rural tourism.</p>
<p><b>Note:</b> developed by the author according to research</p>		

Figure - SWOT analysis of rural tourism development in Akmola region

During the research, it was found that there are complex problems of a systematic nature that inhibit the development of tourism in this area. However, experiences have proven that it is possible to eliminate any obstacles and carry out positive actions due to the fact that the positive side prevails. In order to increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of rural areas, it was determined that

special target programs should be developed and implemented optimally.

In order to determine the future of rural tourism and the direction of development, a survey was conducted across Kazakhstan, including in Akmola region. The survey included questions about the extent to which rural tourism has spread across the country today, how people want to relax in this type of tourism, what type of rural tourism model they

prefer, where support for the development of rural tourism should be implemented, and other problematic questions.

This study was conducted on local residents of Astana and Karaganda cities and some villages of Akmola and Karaganda regions, respondents were selected as tourists and people from different socio-economic categories of society. 127-139 domestic and 30 foreign respondents participated in the survey.

Two main methods were used to conduct this study. They are a control method and cumulative analysis methods. It was done to collect and systematize the data and ensure that the same questions were asked to all respondents. Questionnaires were developed with open and closed questions. The survey was conducted with respondents in person and through social networks. The vast majority of respondents who answered the survey were students, workers and teachers. At the same time, almost 80% of the respondents are women, 42% of respondents were 35-55 years old.

56% of the respondents indicated that they have heard about rural tourism, while 67.6% stated that they had never experienced rural tourism. However, it was determined that 89.8% of the respondents mostly want to rest with their families (63%) in the direction of rural tourism.

If we support and develop rural tourism, we have made sure that the number of people coming to rest in rural areas will be increased through domestic consumers. This is a factor contributing to the socio-cultural and economic development of rural areas. It also leads to the growth of domestic tourism. In rural areas, respondents expressed their desire to participate in local folk holidays (49.5%). This trend is to celebrate the traditions of the Kazakh people by organizing seasonal holidays such as "Nauryz", "Kymyzmuryndyk", "Sabantoy" and "Sogymbasy" [6].

47.7% of respondents expressed their desire to ride a horse. This will undoubtedly lead to the development of horse tourism; 37.4% of the respondents expressed their willingness to participate in the economic life of rural areas. This will influence the development of the labor tourism type of rural tourism; considering that 32.7% of people choose to collect berries, this situation supports the agrotourism direction of rural tourism; 32.7% choose an excursion in rural areas - it helps to develop educational and excursion tour of rural tourism.

According to the results of the survey, we noticed that people want to have a vacation even once a year. Most of the public like clean air (72.9%), use of natural products (66.4%),

peace (53.3%), natural environment (48.6%), beach (49.1%), horseback riding (47.7%), recovery (45%) and others. We found out during the analysis of the survey that among the tourism destinations, the respondents chose health and wellness, ecological, equestrian, rural, cultural-historical, beach, etc. He noticed that he needed to rest due to tourism. In addition, 83.4% of respondents indicated that they like to cook traditional Kazakh food. This indicator clearly shows that there is a possibility of development of the gastronomic type of rural tourism, as well as Kazakh national cuisine.

Since rural tourism is the cheapest form of tourism, it was found that the income of the respondents is enough to rest in rural areas and they are ready to spend their money.

61.6% of the respondents in the survey about the popularity of the districts of Akmola region said that they want to rest in the Burabay district. After that, the districts of Zerendy district (37.4%), Kokshetau region (25.3%), Korgalzhyn (24.2%) and Ereymentau (12.1%) were selected. The point to be mentioned here is that the people do not know much about domestic tourist areas due to the lack of advertising. This is because Ereymentau, Sandyktau, Akkol and other districts of this region, which have gathered little results, are rich in cultural and historical factors as well as natural and geographical resources. Therefore, in order to develop domestic tourism, it is necessary to increase the popularity of districts.

80.8% of the respondents answered that the development of rural tourism should be supported by the state. In the opinion of the people, if the state supports it with the right level of attention, there will be an opportunity for sustainable development of rural tourism.

According to the survey of foreign tourists, we achieved the following results: choice of rural tourism and ecotourism destinations - 96%; acquaintance with the natural and geographical resources of Kazakhstan with the help of rural tourism and ecotourism - 94%; getting to know the culture, traditions and lifestyle of the Kazakh people within the framework of rural tourism - 97%; study of cuisine of the Kazakh people - 89%; getting acquainted with the cultural and historical monuments of Kazakhstan for educational purposes - 87%.

So, according to the survey-expert results, foreign tourists who have traveled to Kazakhstan - mostly prefer to rest in rural areas of the country. They expressed that they want to get acquainted with the lifestyle, national cuisine, traditions, culture, arts and crafts of the Kazakh people by visiting the

countryside. Today, the exchange of information in the field of tourism is going on intensively. According to the results of the survey, we noticed that tourists go to tourist services mostly through the Internet. Because 95.4% of 131 respondents use the Internet; 41.2% of respondents said that they turn to tourism sites and 35.1% to other search engines.

Summarizing the survey, we made sure to pay attention to the following questions: development of rural tourism in rural areas; identification of many types of rural tourism; use of all possibilities of rural tourism; establishing ways of promoting rural tourism; development and implementation of rural tourism marketing policy.

In addition, we made the following conclusion as a result of finding correlations by entering the survey answers into the Portable Statistics Package for the Public (PSPP) program [7, 8]. Here, we considered the dependence of the interest of men (male) and women (female) on rural tourism from the conducted survey. During the survey, 97.3% of men and 91.97% of women said that they are interested in and want to relax in rural tourism. According to Pearson's x2 measurement, the correlation of respondents' interest in rural tourism was equal to 0.331. This is an optimal response rate. It is proof that there is

a reason to form and develop rural tourism in our country.

According to the Pearson x2 correlation, it was shown that there is a relationship between respondents' "desire to vacation in rural areas" and "frequency of going on vacation abroad" (size - 0.13), 65.94% of the respondents have never vacationed within the framework of rural tourism, 49.26% have never vacationed abroad. It is determined from the number of indicators that it is necessary to launch special recreation facilities in villages for the residents of this country through the sustainable development of rural tourism. There is also a relationship between "interest in rural tourism" and "frequency of going on holiday abroad" (size - 0.11).

For example, if the percentage of those who want to rest in the framework of rural tourism is 90%, the number of respondents who have not traveled outside of Kazakhstan is about 50%. As we can see from table 3, 63.77% of respondents (88) want to rest with their families, the Pearson x2 correlation of this indicator is 0.104, which means that there is a correlation with the answers of the professionals who gave each answer. Based on this result, rural tourism can be formed and developed as a family vacation tourist center (table 3).

Table 3 - The result of respondents' desire to rest in what environment (%)

In what environment (with whom) to spend the holiday	Representatives of each field									Effective indicators		
	Pupils	Young people	Workers	Retired people	Teachers	Entrepreneurs	Management positions	Doctors	Other professions	Conclusion	Frequency	Percent
With parents	0,0	3,0	0,0	0,0	7,0	2,0	1,0	0,0	2,0	15,0	15	10,8
With family members	0,0	28	25	0,0	17	8,0	2,0	3,0	5,0	88,0	88	63,7
With colleagues	0,0	0,0	1,0	0,0	1,0	1,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	3,0	28	20,2
Alone	0,0	1,0	1,0	0,0	0,0	1,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	3,0	3	2,1
Total	1,0	39	31	2,0	31	12	7,0	3,0	11	137	3	2,1

Note: developed by authors using the PSPP program (137 participants (99.3%); total 138 (100%); Pearson's x2 test equals 0.104 (positive indicator)

The way to choose the most effective models of development of rural tourism in Akmola region was implemented according to the Technique for Order of Preference by Similarity to Ideal Solution (TOPSIS) method - survey and expert assessment [9, 10]. According to the TOPSIS method, a survey was conducted regarding the resource possibilities of rural tourism and the selection of rural tourism models. The results of the survey (127 respondents) showed the following indicators in order to determine which factors are suitable for the development of rural tourism:

resource potential (B1=24.4%); possibilities of development of the tourist object (B2=23.6%); road infrastructure potential (B3= 44.1%); opportunities to form the tourist market (B4=31.5%); tourist attraction (B5=32.3%); possibility of participation of tourists (participation in festivities, employment) (B6=22.8%); legal environment (B7=13.4%); ability to attract investment (B8=24.4%); safety measures (B9=27.6%); economic efficiency (B10=26%); social productivity (B11=14.2%); positive effect on ecology (B12=33.1%).



According to the results of the survey, the respondents and experts considered road infrastructure (B3=44.1%), tourist attraction (B5=32.3%), positive impact on the environment (B12=33.1%), tourist market as the most favorable factors. It was clarified that formation possibilities (B4=31.5%) and security measures (B9=27.6%) belong. And the indicators of social productivity and legal environment received a low score, that is, we were convinced that more attention should be paid to the resource potential of this rural tourism.

According to the method of Topsis, in the period of determining the value of "B" indicators, experts and respondents were able to evaluate the potential of developing rural tourism models. After the experts and respondents gave their evaluations for each tourism potential indicator, the total evaluation is compiled. Cumulative ratings of "A" sorting value indicators in selected models are shown. The following conclusions can be drawn based on the results of the evaluation given to the survey by scientists working in the field of tourism and geography, industry workers of the tourism industry, heads of travel agencies, heads of agricultural and farm farms, experts-specialists.

### Conclusions

Summarizing rural tourism and its development models, we concluded as follows: the range of rural tourism is wide, there are many models; on the basis of the potential possibilities of Akmola region, there are opportunities to achieve in the development of all rural tourism models; the development of these models in the region is suitable and the number of potential tourist clients who want it is sufficient.

As shown during the research, the services that can be offered within the framework of rural tourism of Akmola region can be divided into three directions: historical, religious and prayer (archaeological monuments, ancient mausoleums, myths and legends, graves of famous people); cultural and ethnographic (local village lifestyle, lifestyle, cuisine (food), crafts, art, festivals and traditions); natural and ecological (wildlife and animals; rural landscape; local, natural agricultural products; ecological trip to rivers and lakes, mountains and caves; medical and wellness tours).

Based on this, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The potential for full implementation of all tourist destinations in this region, the package of services that can be offered is very extensive.

2. Assessment of the socio-economic situation and condition of tourism in Akmola

region made it possible to determine the main factors of its development.

3. The agro-industrial complex and industries are the basis of the economy with a suitable structure for ensuring the rapid growth of the region and sustainable development of the region.

4. Tourism is one of the priorities of regional development, and the unique natural and cultural potential of Akmola region creates a number of favorable conditions.

Thus, currently, tourism is a developed segment of the region's economy, but its resources and potential are not fully utilized. Territorial inconsistency of the structure of the tourist market, incomplete development of the material and technical base of tourism, lack of investments in modernization of its infrastructure, low availability of information on the tourist potential of the region are observed.

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