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**INTEGRATING GLOBAL TOURISM TRENDS  
INTO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF THE  
ALAKOL REGION**

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**Abstract.** This article examines how post-pandemic global tourism trends such as digital transformation, wellness tourism, and ecotourism can be integrated into a sustainable development strategy for Kazakhstan's Alakol region. The study employs content analysis and comparative analysis, drawing on secondary data from official statistics, regional administrations, national tourism institutes, international organization reports. The analysis confirms rapid tourism growth. Approximately 1,5 million tourists visited Lake Alakol in 2023, increasing economic benefits but also increasing recreational pressure and environmental risks. Alakol's advantages include its mineralized water, therapeutic mud, and the nearby Barlyk-Arasan hot springs, which facilitate the expansion of wellness services beyond the peak summer season. However, the region faces limitations in infrastructure quality, destination management, and digital readiness. Key gaps include poor online visibility, limited integration with international booking platforms, and patchy 4G coverage. This article examines national digital tools such as the eQonaq tourist registration system and the Kazakhstan.travel portal, arguing that Alakol requires digital services at the destination level. This includes reliable visitor information, interactive maps, cashless payments, and coordinated promotion, including offerings for remote workers and the "working holiday" segment. For ecotourism, Alakol's biodiversity and protected area status allow for birdwatching and environmental education, particularly for rare species. However, uncontrolled visits to protected islands and littering require clearer regulations, patrols, and ranger-led alternatives. Overall, this article proposes a practical package of measures linking digitalization, healthcare infrastructure, and regulated nature-based tourism to reduce seasonality, improve service quality, and mitigate environmental pressures, with lessons learned applicable to other resort regions in Kazakhstan.

**Key words:** Alakol region, tourism digitalization, wellness tourism, ecotourism, sustainable development, smart tourism, workation, health tourism, biodiversity conservation

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### **Introduction**

The relevance of the topic of sustainable tourism development in the Alakol region is determined by both global and national trends. The UN 2030 Agenda attaches great importance to tourism development as one of the key sectors contributing to sustainable development: tourism creates new jobs, increases GDP, stimulates trade and preserves cultural diversity. According to the World Tourism Organization, the tourism industry provides about 10% of the world's GDP and every eleventh job, generating over USD 1.5 trillion in revenue annually; at the same time, before the pandemic, tourism was one of the few industries that demonstrated stable growth [1]. After the recession caused by COVID-19, international tourism is actively recovering. By the end of 2023, its volume reached 87% of the pre-pandemic level [2]. The pandemic has simultaneously changed the priorities of travelers and the industry. There is increased attention to safety, health, environmental friendliness and digital services in travel. These international trends are creating a demand for sustainable tourism that combines economic benefits with environmental and social well-being.

Kazakhstan, with its unique natural destinations, follows global trends and pays special attention to the development of domestic tourism based on the principles of sustainability. In 2019, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution initiated by the Central Asian countries. It emphasized the importance of joint efforts to achieve sustainable development goals and attract investment in the region's tourism sector [1]. At the national level, the Concept of Tourism Industry Development aimed at ensuring safe and sustainable tourism was adopted [3]. In particular, it notes the need to develop tourist routes and infrastructure in resort areas to reduce the burden on ecosystems. The Alakol region is included in the number of priority tourism clusters: the development of the resort on Lake Alakol is carried out within the framework of a special state program, which indicates the national significance of this territory.

Alakol is one of the unique lakes in Kazakhstan, famous for its healing mineralized waters and rich biodiversity. Located on the border of Zhetisu and Abay regions, this reservoir is the “pearl” of domestic tourism. In recent years, the region has demonstrated dynamic growth in tourist flow. Thus, in 2023, about 2 million tourists visited the Zhetisu region, of which 1.5 million rested on the shores of Lake Alakol [4]. These indicators reflect the high socio-economic significance of the effective use of the tourism potential of Alakol for the region and the country. At the same time, such rapid growth brings new challenges to sustainability. Cases of exceeding the recreational load and violating environmental standards have already been recorded. For example, the intensive development of the resort is accompanied by increased anthropogenic pressure on the lake's ecosystem, increased water pollution and more frequent cases of

non-compliance with environmental requirements. Given the lessons of the Aral Sea environmental disaster, it is extremely important to prevent a similar scenario at Alakol. Thus, the challenge is to balance the economic development of the tourism cluster with the preservation of the unique natural environment and the sustainability of local communities.

The *goal* of this study is to develop approaches to ensuring sustainable tourism development in the Alakol region, taking into account international trends. To achieve this goal, the following *objectives* are addressed in the work:

(1) to analyze modern global trends in tourism (eco- and cultural tourism, wellness, digitalization, etc.) and assess their relevance for the Alakol region;

(2) to study the current state of the tourism industry in the region, to identify the main problems and limitations of sustainable development (environmental, infrastructural, managerial);

(3) to study the experience of implementing state programs and initiatives for tourism development in this area, as well as the best foreign practices applicable to the conditions of the region;

(4) to offer recommendations for government bodies and businesses on the implementation of sustainable tourism principles, including measures to protect the environment, develop infrastructure and improve the tourism cluster management system.

The *theoretical significance* of the study lies in the development of scientific ideas about sustainable tourism at the regional level. The work contributes to the theory by connecting global concepts of sustainable development with the specific case of the Alakol region, which is considered a developing tourist destination. The intensification of scientific research on this topic (for example, recent works devoted to the prospects of “green” development in the Balkhash-Alakol basin) [5] confirms the relevance of scientific understanding of sustainable tourism. Our analysis complements the existing literature with new data on the relationship between the greening of tourism, transport accessibility and climatic factors in the context of Kazakhstan. The *practical significance* is due to the fact that the results of the study can be directly used in planning and managing the development of the Alakol tourism cluster. The proposed recommendations will serve as a basis for improving the state policy of regional development - in particular, for adjusting tourism support programs and regulatory measures to protect natural complexes. From an economic point of view, the implementation of sustainable tourism approaches will increase the industry’s returns by extending the tourist season, diversifying services (eco- and health products) and improving the quality of service, which ultimately contributes to the growth of the local economy and employment. This approach is in line with the priorities outlined in national strategies and will ensure interaction between government bodies, businesses and the local community in implementing sustainability principles.

### **Description of Materials and Methods**

Modern research in the field of sustainable tourism demonstrates the rapid expansion of an interdisciplinary approach to studying the industry, covering aspects of digitalization, greening, wellness practices and social engagement. In recent years, the global COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a powerful trigger for rethinking tourism development models. This is reflected in the academic agenda and international statistics.

Thus, the analytical report of the World Tourism Organization emphasizes that by the end of 2023, international tourism has almost reached pre-pandemic volumes. This is evidence of the high recovery potential of the industry and emphasizes the importance of high-quality and sustainable growth [2].

Particular attention in the scientific literature is paid to the digital transformation of tourism as a fundamental factor in the competitiveness of destinations. The work by Madzík P., Falát L., Copuš L., Valeri M. [6] records a stable development trajectory in the areas of big data, intelligent tourism platforms, digital marketing and “smart” management of tourist flows. Another study emphasizes the importance of augmented and virtual reality (AR/VR) technologies for increasing customer engagement in the hotel sector [7].

One of the most discussed innovative models has been the development of the workation format - a combination of tourism and remote work. The concept has received wide coverage in the works of Wilkesmann M., Bassyiouny M., who associate it with changes in consumer motivations and destination marketing [8]. There is also growing interest in “digital nomads” as a new category of mobile tourists. Against this background, government initiatives to create favorable conditions for attracting such groups, including visa and digital services, are of particular importance.

In parallel with digitalization, the direction of health tourism is developing. According to the Global Wellness Institute report [9], the wellness segment is growing at twice the industry average, and the pandemic has only increased the demand for health-oriented tourism products. Clerici A.P., Murphy C., Castanheira Almeida N.M. expand the theoretical basis for the development of wellness tourism, highlighting the multifaceted nature of this segment - from physical and emotional recovery to spiritual experience [10]. National and regional governments, in particular India and the countries of Southeast Asia, are developing programs for the certification and promotion of wellness destinations [11].

Thus, the analysis of modern literature shows the consolidation of research efforts around the topics of digitalization, wellness models and ecotourism as cornerstones of the future of sustainable tourism. However, there are still gaps in the study of the integration of these models into local and border recreational areas, especially in developing countries. This forms a justified research interest in the transformation of the tourist space of regions with high natural potential, including the Alakol region of Kazakhstan, in the context of global trends.

A qualitative methodological framework was applied, including content analysis and comparative analytical methods. We have used secondary data sources, that consist of official statistical data from national and local governmental bodies (the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kazakh Tourism National Company, Zhetysu Regional Administration, Abay Regional Administration), academic literature, and reports from international organizations (UNWTO, World Travel & Tourism Council, UNESCO, IUCN, Global Wellness Institute).

The following key tourism development trends in the Alakol region as explored as a distinct thematic block: digital transformation, wellness tourism, and ecotourism. The analysis for each block involved the detailed description of trends, comparison with global best practices, and the evaluation of their adaptability to the specific context of the Alakol region.

Data gathered through content analysis was systematically structured to ensure clarity and comprehensiveness. Additionally, comparative methods were used to examine the infrastructural and recreational characteristics of the Alakol region relative to analogous tourism regions.

Statistical data analyzed in this research include dynamics of tourist flow, number of recreational facilities, volume of investment projects, and details regarding ongoing infrastructural initiatives.

## **Results**

The research results were aimed at identifying the specific manifestations of the main global trends emerging in the current tourism industry in the Alakol region, as well as the possibilities for their implementation at the regional level. This section analyzes how three major trends that have determined the direction of global tourism development in the post-pandemic period are reflected in the region. Each trend is analyzed separately, and the adaptation opportunities and institutional constraints based on regional characteristics and resource potential are comparatively considered. The results show how the current infrastructural, social and natural conditions of the region are in line with global trends.

The main trends in the tourism industry after 2020 can be divided into three main areas:

*1. Digital transformation.* Even before the pandemic, the tourism industry was undergoing rapid digitalization. However, in the context of COVID-19, digital technologies have become the main condition for maintaining the viability of the industry. The main focus has been on contactless services that allow minimizing physical contact. Airlines and airports have introduced electronic boarding passes, biometric verification. Hotels have started using online check-in, mobile room keys, and QR menus in restaurants. Planning and booking trips via smartphones has become the norm. Nowadays, tourists expect all services, from purchasing tickets to choosing excursions, to be available via mobile applications [6].

The concept of “smart tourism” is rapidly developing. This is the use of

big data, navigation systems, electronic guides, and other IT solutions to improve the tourist experience. Virtual and augmented reality technologies (VR/AR) have found new applications [7]. While virtual tours were popular during the lockdown, they have now become a marketing tool that allows visitors to “try out” experiences before they travel. For example, museums and national parks are offering online 3D tours to increase visitor interest. Another important trend is “workation” (work + vacation) [8], i.e. combining remote work and travel. During the pandemic, office workers have become accustomed to working from home. As a result, many people have become convinced that they can do their work from anywhere in the world. This has led to the emergence of a new type of tourist, called “digital nomads” [12]. They travel to different countries and work remotely. In response to this trend, countries such as Georgia, Estonia, the UAE, and others have begun to introduce special visas for long-term remote workers [13]. As a result, a new segment of tourism has emerged, combining comfortable conditions for work with leisure infrastructure, such as high-speed Internet and co-working centers. Hoteliers immediately supported this trend and coined the term “workspitality” (work + hospitality) [14]. Special workplaces have been created in hotels for tourists who work while traveling. Studies have shown that such flexible conditions increase the competitiveness of hotels and allow them to extend the tourist season due to the presence of remote workers throughout the year.

*2. Development of wellness tourism.* A particularly noteworthy area is health tourism, which is currently developing rapidly. The main goal of this tourism is to improve a person’s physical and mental health. In this regard, A. Clerici, S. Murphy and N.M. Castanheira Almeida [10] distinguish the following areas of health tourism:

- 1) Physical aspects - massage, therapeutic baths, diet programs, health-oriented hotels and resorts, clinics, SPA centers and restaurants offering organic or natural food;
- 2) Social aspects - pilates centers, fitness clubs and gyms;
- 3) Ecological aspects - active recreation in nature, such as walking, hiking and mountaineering;
- 4) Emotional aspects - recreational activities such as music and art classes;
- 5) Spiritual aspects - visiting temples and churches, praying, spiritual enrichment;
- 6) Mental aspects – meditation and yoga classes, activities aimed at harmonizing the body and mind.

Even before the pandemic, wellness tourism was one of the most rapidly developing segments of the industry. According to the Global Wellness Institute, in 2017-2019, the size of the wellness tourism market grew by more than 6% annually, which is twice the growth rate of the tourism industry as a whole [9]. The pandemic gave this industry a new meaning: people began to pay special attention to strengthening immunity and increasing stress resistance. As a result,



in 2021-2022, wellness tourism recovered faster than other tourism destinations in the global market, showing growth of more than 8%.

Currently, both medical tours and preventive and recreational wellness tours are equally popular. For example, demand for yoga retreats in rural areas, mountain and seaside SPA resorts has increased. Such resorts offer programs aimed at post-COVID rehabilitation, respiratory gymnastics, and elimination of the effects of hypodynamia. In addition, a new generation of sanatorium-resort products that combine the achievements of medicine and the SPA industry, including comprehensive medical examinations, has become a trend.

Many countries are developing health tourism as a promising export activity. For example, Thailand and Indonesia are actively promoting their health resorts for foreigners, especially for remote workers. While India is traditionally known for its yoga and Ayurveda centers along with medical tourism [11], Hungary and the Czech Republic are known for their thermal resorts. Recently, post-Soviet countries have also been actively entering this market. While Georgia offers a quiet health vacation in the mountainous regions and the Borjomi resort, Uzbekistan is opening modern sanatoriums based on oriental medicine.

An important feature of health tourism is that the average stay of tourists is long and their expenses are higher than in other types of tourism, which means it is economically profitable for the regions. In addition, health tourists often travel not during the high season, but during the off-season, for example, in the spring and autumn months. This, in turn, helps to reduce seasonal fluctuations. Therefore, many resort regions of the world, if they have healing natural resources, strive to develop health tourism.

3. *Ecological tourism (ecotourism) and biodiversity conservation.* Ecological tourism is a type of responsible tourism that involves visiting natural areas, exploring them, and protecting them. This segment, which began as a small tourist destination in the 1980s and 1990s, has now become one of the main trends in tourism.

According to research by the World Tourism and Travel Council, sustainable practices are becoming the norm. According to this organization, three quarters of travelers say they are ready to choose sustainable tourism in the future, and about 60% have chosen more environmentally friendly and safe forms of travel in recent years [15].

Ecotourism is closely related to the participation of local communities and the conservation of biodiversity. The experience of Costa Rica is particularly noteworthy in this regard. Through ecotourism, the small country has transformed almost 30% of its territory into protected natural parks, part of which is financed by tourist revenues. Ecotourism accounts for up to 5% of the country's GDP, which is estimated at \$3.4 billion per year [16]. As a result, nature is preserved, tourists come, and the money from it is directed to nature conservation. This mutually beneficial cycle is becoming an example for other regions.

After the pandemic, ecotourism has focused on the conservation of rare

species and environmental education among tourists. For example, in Africa, domestic ecotourism to national parks has increased dramatically. This trend has helped to offset the income from foreign tourists during the pandemic and support the funds spent on wildlife conservation. In European countries, volunteer tourism programs in reserves are becoming increasingly popular. Here, tourists are directly involved in environmental projects, such as bird watching, cleaning nature trails, and helping scientists.

Another trend is the development of the concept of “regenerative tourism,” which goes beyond the concept of sustainability. This tourism is aimed at actively restoring nature, not just not harming the environment. For example, tourists plant trees and finance the restoration of ecosystems.

At the same time, great importance is attached to the preservation of cultural and natural heritage. UNESCO World Heritage and other unique sites encourage many countries to develop careful tourism strategies. Similar strategies are being developed in African countries regarding world heritage sites after COVID-19 pandemics.

Thus, ecotourism has become an integral part of the global sustainability trend today. It combines economic goals with environmental interests, generates income through the use of natural capital and ensures the protection of this capital. For regions rich in nature, ecotourism allows you to attract not only a comfortable vacation, but also a new generation of tourists who want to get acquainted with nature and contribute to its protection. The relevant trends and traveler preferences are summarized in Table 1, which highlights key tendencies that shapes tourism demand.

Table 1. Global Post-COVID Tourism Trends and Traveler Preferences

| Trend                                  | Description                                                                                             | What Travelers Want                                                                       |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>D i g i t a l Transformation</i>    | Rapid digitization of tourism services (contactless check-in, mobile bookings, digital passes).         | Seamless mobile access, cashless payments, real-time info, easy digital interaction.      |
| <i>Wellness and health focus</i>       | Surge in wellness tourism: mental, physical, and emotional well-being prioritized after the pandemic.   | Safe, clean environments; spa, nature retreats; immunity-boosting and relaxation options. |
| <i>Sustainable travel</i>              | Travelers increasingly choose destinations with low environmental impact and community-based practices. | Eco-friendly lodging, ethical experiences, nature immersion, local involvement.           |
| <i>Workation and digital nomadism</i>  | Growth in remote work enables combining travel with productivity (“work from anywhere”).                | High-speed internet, coworking spaces, flexible stays, peaceful + stimulating locations.  |
| <i>Personalization and flexibility</i> | Shift from mass tourism to tailored experiences and flexible booking/cancellation policies.             | Customizable itineraries, off-season options, last-minute changes without penalties.      |

Discussion

The tourism trends described above are also reflected in Kazakhstani



tourism at various levels. In particular, the Alakol region, as a rapidly developing resort region, should effectively use these trends. In this regard, let us consider how the current situation in Alakol meets new tourism standards and demands, as well as the opportunities and limitations of implementing trends.

*1. The level of digitalization of the Alakol tourism sector.* Although the region has begun to introduce digital technologies, this process lags behind leading tourist centers in the world and neighboring countries. Positive examples in the region include the personal websites and social media pages of some resorts and hotels. Some of them are also connected to major international online booking platforms. For example, currently only 5 hotels and resorts from the Alakol region are listed on the Booking.com platform [16], while 14 accommodations are listed on TripAdvisor [17]. For comparison, neighboring Kyrgyzstan's Issyk-Kul has 229 accommodations on Booking.com [18], and 786 tourist facilities on TripAdvisor [19].

In 2022, Kazakhstan launched the eQonaq information system for collecting and registering tourist flow and migration data [20]. Some hotels in Alakol have joined this system, simplifying reporting on tourists.

There is also a mobile application "Kazakhstan Travel" and a website that provides information on tourist attractions [21]. The site provides general information about Alakol, as well as instructions on how to get to the southern and eastern shores of the lake. However, there is almost no information about tourist resorts, hotels and bases. In this regard, it would be appropriate to include detailed information about tourist accommodation, online booking options or links to international booking platforms. It is also important to provide an interactive map of the tourist infrastructure on the shore. Such measures would increase the accessibility of information for potential tourists and facilitate the process of planning a trip to Alakol.

The digital ecosystem of the region is still not sufficiently developed. There is no single information resource or mobile application specifically for Alakol. For example, services equipped with a map of the region, a transport schedule, a poster of events, and the ability to leave comments have not been developed. Many small hotels and resorts require advance payment via bank transfer, as they are not integrated into international booking systems. Communication and the Internet are available in the resort areas, but the 4G network is not everywhere, and there are Internet network instability due to increased load, especially in the summer season. In order to attract modern tourists, especially foreigners and young people, it is necessary to carry out systematic work on the digitalization of the region.

Taking into account the above issues, it would be appropriate to implement the following specific measures to accelerate the digitalization of the tourism infrastructure of the Alakol region:

1) Introduce convenient and contactless services in local areas. That is, electronic payments and settlements through bank applications via QR codes,

organize an electronic queue system at popular facilities such as a catamaran, and install interactive information kiosks.

2) It is necessary to increase the digital reputation of the Alakol region by actively publishing information about tourist facilities and services on international and domestic platforms, conducting targeted advertising on social networks, and creating visual content (photos, videos, virtual tours).

3) Attract digital nomads to the region, provided that the appropriate infrastructure is in place. Kazakhstan has already introduced a long-term “Digital Nomad Visa” for remote workers at the state level [22]. With its unique healing climate, Alakol could become an attractive destination for such guests, especially IT specialists and freelancers. This requires providing stable internet access, coworking spaces, or at least quiet work areas in hotels. Although such services are not currently available, their future emergence is crucial for increasing the region’s competitiveness.

2. *The potential of wellness tourism.* The Alakol region has unique natural healing resources for the development of wellness tourism. First of all, this is the water of the lake. Alakol is a salt lake rich in mineral salts and has unique healing properties. According to studies, the lake water contains many useful elements, such as bromine, iodine, radon, sodium, potassium salts, which have a very positive effect on the human body. As stated in the Kazakh Tourism investment proposal, in terms of radon concentration and activity, Alakol water is comparable to the thermal waters of the world-famous resorts of Baden-Baden (Germany) and Tskaltubo (Georgia) [23].

According to Kazakhstani researchers, the natural and recreational conditions of Alakol provide unique opportunities for wellness tourism. The lake shores are rich in silicon, and the purity and mineral composition of the water are comparable to the waters of the Black Sea, the Dead Sea, and the famous resorts of Kazakhstan “Saryagash”, “Alma-Arasan”, “Zhanakorgan”. The favorable climate, mineral springs and healing muds here help to treat skin diseases (eczema, psoriasis), allergies, diseases of the respiratory tract, digestive system and musculoskeletal system [24].

The second important factor is the healing mud and clay resources near the lake, especially in the puddle areas. They can be effectively used for mud therapy.

The third factor is the thermal mineral springs in the region. About 20 km from Alakol, at the foot of the Barlyk ridge, are the hot springs of Arsan (Barlyk-Arasan). The temperature of these springs is about +42°C, the composition is silicic acid (50 mg/l), chloride-sulfate, calcium-sodium, weakly mineralized (1.7 g/l) and rich in fluorine [25]. These springs are widely used by local residents and tourists as a therapeutic measure for bathing, showering, drinking. Arsan waters are recommended for the treatment of musculoskeletal, nervous system, digestive and skin diseases. Thus, Alakol, which combines swimming in the lake and thermal springs, has a very high attractiveness as a balneological resort.

In addition, the clean, dry steppe air of the region, rich in salt ions, plays the

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role of a natural inhaler for people suffering from asthma and allergies.

Thus, the unique natural healing factors of Alakol create a favorable base for the development of wellness tourism. However, this potential is not yet fully realized. The region is mainly dominated by simple types of recreation, and medical infrastructure and specialized health complexes are insufficient. Only a few health resorts offer such services.

For the development of wellness tourism in Alakol, it is important to form a special medical and health infrastructure. This requires the opening of modern sanatorium complexes and the use of mineral lake water and healing mud at a professional medical level. In addition, there is potential for integrating the resource of Arsan thermal springs into health programs. These measures will allow the region to attract a new audience - middle-aged and elderly tourists from other regions of Kazakhstan, Central Asia, and Russia for the purpose of medical tourism.

In addition to classic sanatorium services, health retreats (yoga, detox, kymyz therapy, treatment programs based on local cuisine) may be in high demand in the region. If the traditional health practices that have long been established in the region (herbal treatment, kymyz treatment, bathhouse) are systematically offered under the supervision of medical specialists, Alakol's tourist attractiveness will be stable throughout the year.

This direction can also be beneficial for investors, since its development will be supported by the state. According to the investment proposal submitted by Kazakh Tourism [23], the construction of tourist infrastructure facilities in Alakol will be actively supported by the state. Support for investors is carried out in three main areas.

Firstly, as to tax and customs benefits – investors are exempted from corporate income tax and land tax for the first 10 years, from property tax for the first 8 years, as well as from paying customs duties and VAT on imported equipment and materials. Secondly, the possibility of co-financing by the state is provided - investors are offered to jointly invest in capital with the AIFC Direct Investment Fund or receive a subsidy of up to 30% of the costs of construction and installation work and the purchase of equipment. Third, additional support measures are implemented. Foreign investors will be provided with services on a “one-stop shop” basis, as well as state grants in kind in the amount of 30% of the amount of investments in fixed capital [23].

3. *Ecotourism potential.* Alakol is an object that is distinguished not only by its beaches, but also by its unique nature, which should be carefully protected. There is a great opportunity to develop ecological and natural-cognitive tourism in the region. First, birdwatching tourism can be organized. Every year, tens of thousands of birds nest and stop over on the lake during migration, including rare species. It is possible to attract foreign nature lovers by installing special observation towers along the shore, placing information stands about birds, and providing ornithologist-guide services. For example, the relict gull, a rare bird

species that world ornithologists dream of seeing, nests only here and on several lakes in Mongolia and China [26].

Secondly, the development of scientific tourism and environmental education is of interest. Together with the reserve, it is possible to organize educational tours for tourists, demonstrate ecosystem monitoring programs. Schoolchildren and students could take part in summer ecological camps, combining vacation with education. This format is successfully implemented in reserves in Russia and the USA.

Thirdly, it is possible to develop the direction of adventure eco-tourism: kayaking along quiet reedy streams, jeep or horse safaris in the semi-desert landscapes near Balkhash, trekking in the mountains of the Dzhungar Alatau, ending with swimming in Alakol. These activities will complement the traditional beach holiday with activity.

Of course, the development of ecotourism is closely related to the preservation of biological diversity. In this regard, the region has both advantages (biosphere reserve, state reserve status) and difficulties. The advantage is the presence of nature protection structures that can serve as the basis for the development of sustainable tourism. As for the weaknesses, the weak material and technical base of the protection service and the lack of control mechanisms. According to eyewitnesses, some tourists rent speedboats, go to protected islands, organize picnics or entertainment events, leave garbage, and disturb bird nests.

Such actions directly harm nature and damage the reputation of ecotourism. Therefore, when introducing this direction, it is necessary to consider specific rules and regulatory mechanisms. It is necessary to prohibit unauthorized entry into protected areas and organize patrols. Even more effective is to offer alternative options, ecotours led by rangers. For example, several times a season, excursions to the islands with elements of environmental education can be organized, and at the end of them, a format can be introduced where participants themselves take part in garbage collection. Such “tourism with elements of volunteering” is successfully implemented in many reserves.

In addition, it is possible to create ecological trails along the coast, open nature museums or visitor centers. There, tourists should be offered documentary films about the peculiarities of Alakol, geology, flora and fauna, exhibits (birds, minerals). This will increase the value of the object and form the responsibility of visitors.

The participation of local residents in nature conservation is very important. If local people understand that natural resources attract tourists and can be a source of income, they will be more interested in protecting them. For example, villagers can be trained as birdwatching guides and encouraged to open eco-lodges equipped with ecological trails.

## **Conclusion**

The conducted research was aimed at identifying the opportunities for

adaptation of the main global trends in the modern tourism industry - digital transformation, health tourism and ecotourism - in the Alakol region. The results of the study show that the natural and recreational potential of the region has sufficient prerequisites for the development of these areas. In particular, healing mineral water sources, biological diversity and unique ecosystems, as well as geographical accessibility, can ensure the long-term tourist attractiveness of the region.

In addition, infrastructural, digital and institutional limitations prevent the full realization of these opportunities. In this regard, concrete steps are needed in the region to digitize tourist services, develop health infrastructure, form ecotourism on an orderly basis and increase its popularity at the international level.

The models and approaches proposed in the case of Alakol can serve as a basis for adaptation to other resort regions in the areas of digitalization, health and ecotourism. With the coordination of state policy and investment support, the tourism potential of the Alakol region will be fully revealed. This allows it to be presented as a regional development model based on sustainable development.

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## АЛАКӨЛ ӨНІРІН ТҰРАҚТЫ ДАМУ ТРАГЕДИЯСЫНА ЖАҒАНДЫҚ ТУРИСТІК ТРЕНДТЕРДІ КІРІКТІРУ

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**Аңдатпа.** Бұл мақалада пандемиядан кейінгі жаһандық туризм трендтерін, атап айтқанда цифрлық трансформацияны, сауықтыру туризмін және экотуризмді Қазақстандағы Алакөл өңірінің тұрақты даму стратегиясына кіріктіру мүмкіндіктері қарастырылады. Зерттеуде контент-талдау және салыстырмалы талдау әдістері қолданылып, ресми статистика, өңірлік әкімдіктердің, ұлттық туристік институттардың деректері мен халықаралық ұйымдардың есептері пайдаланылды. Талдау нәтижелері туризм ағынының қарқынды өскенін көрсетеді. 2023 жылы Алакөлге шамамен 1,5 миллион турист келген. Бұл экономикалық тиімділікті арттырғанымен, рекреациялық жүктеменің күшеюіне және экологиялық тәуекелдердің ұлғаюына әкеліп отыр. Алакөлдің басты артықшылықтарына минералданған суы, емдік балшығы және жақын орналасқан Барлық-Арасан ыстық бұлақтары жатады, бұл сауықтыру туризмін тек жазғы маусыммен шектемей, жыл бойы дамытуға мүмкіндік береді. Сонымен қатар, өңірде инфрақұрылым сапасына, туристік бағытты басқаруға және цифрлық дайындық деңгейіне қатысты шектеулер бар. Негізгі мәселелер қатарында онлайн көрінудің төмендігі, халықаралық брондау платформаларымен интеграцияның шектеулі болуы және 4G байланысының тұрақсыздығы атап өтіледі. Мақалада eQonaq туристерді тіркеу жүйесі мен Kazakhstan.travel порталы сияқты ұлттық цифрлық құралдар талданып, Алакөл үшін бағыт деңгейіндегі цифрлық сервистердің қажеттілігі негізделеді. Оларға сенімді туристік ақпарат, интерактивті карталар, қолма-қол ақшасыз төлемдер және қашықтан жұмыс істейтін туристерге арналған ұсыныстар кіреді. Экотуризм тұрғысынан алғанда, Алакөлдің биологиялық әртүрлілігі мен қорғалатын аумақ мәртебесі құстарды бақылау және экологиялық ағарту туризмін дамытуға мүмкіндік береді. Алайда қорғалатын аралдарға бақылаусыз бару мен қоқыстану нақты ережелерді, бақылауды және орманшы-гидтер жүргізетін балама турларды қажет етеді. Жалпы алғанда, мақалада цифрландыруды, сауықтыру инфрақұрылымын және реттелген табиғи туризмді үйлестіретін практикалық шаралар ұсынылып, олардың маусымдықты азайтуға, қызмет сапасын арттыруға және экологиялық жүктемені төмендетуге ықпал ететіні көрсетіледі. Бұл тәжірибе Қазақстанның басқа да курорттық өңірлеріне қолдануға болады.

**Тірек сөздер:** Алакөл өңірі, туризмді цифрландыру, сауықтыру туризмі, экологиялық туризм, тұрақты даму, ақылды туризм, воркейшн, сауықтыру туризмі, биологиялық әртүрлілікті сақтау

**Қаржыландыру.** Бұл мақала Қазақстан Республикасы Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігінің Ғылым комитетінің BR24992981 бағдарламасы аясында «Алакөлдің табиғи, тарихи және мәдени ландшафтық әлеуетін кешенді талдау және рекреациялық туризмнің тиімді тетіктерін әзірлеу» тақырыбы бойынша қаржылық қолдауымен дайындалды.

## **ИНТЕГРАЦИЯ ГЛОБАЛЬНЫХ ТУРИСТИЧЕСКИХ ТРЕНДОВ В СТРАТЕГИЮ УСТОЙЧИВОГО РАЗВИТИЯ АЛАКОЛЬСКОГО РЕГИОНА**

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**Аннотация.** В статье рассматриваются возможности интеграции постпандемийных глобальных туристических трендов, таких как цифровая трансформация, оздоровительный туризм и экотуризм, в стратегию устойчивого развития Алакольского региона Казахстана. В исследовании применяются методы контент-анализа и сравнительного анализа, а также используются вторичные данные официальной статистики, региональных органов управления, национальных туристских институтов и отчёты международных организаций. Результаты анализа подтверждают быстрый рост туристского потока. В 2023 году регион Алаколь посетили около 1,5 млн туристов, что способствует экономическому развитию, но одновременно усиливает рекреационную нагрузку и экологические риски. К ключевым преимуществам региона относятся минерализованные воды озера, лечебные грязи и расположенные поблизости термальные источники Барлык-Арасан, что создаёт условия для развития оздоровительных услуг за пределами летнего туристского сезона. Вместе с тем регион сталкивается с ограничениями в качестве инфраструктуры, системе управления туристской дестинацией и уровне цифровой готовности. Основные проблемы связаны с низкой онлайн-доступностью, ограниченной интеграцией с международными платформами бронирования и нестабильным покрытием сети 4G. В статье рассматриваются национальные цифровые инструменты, такие как система регистрации туристов eQonaq и портал Kazakhstan.travel, и обосновывается необходимость развития цифровых сервисов на уровне дестинации, включая достоверную туристскую информацию, интерактивные карты, безналичные платежи и скоординированное продвижение, в том числе продуктов для удалённых работников и формата «рабочий отпуск». В сфере экотуризма подчёркивается потенциал биоразнообразия и охраняемых территорий Алаколя для развития орнитологического туризма и экологического просвещения, особенно в отношении редких видов. Вместе с тем неконтролируемые посещения

охраняемых островов и проблема мусора требуют введения более чётких правил, усиления контроля и развития экскурсий под руководством инспекторов. В целом в статье предлагается комплекс практических мер, сочетающих цифровизацию, развитие оздоровительной инфраструктуры и регулируемый природно-ориентированный туризм, что позволяет снизить сезонность, повысить качество туристских услуг и уменьшить экологическую нагрузку. Полученные выводы могут быть использованы и в других курортных регионах Казахстана.

**Ключевые слова:** регион Алаколь, цифровизация туризма, оздоровительный туризм, экологический туризм, устойчивое развитие, умный туризм, воркейшн, оздоровительный туризм, сохранение биоразнообразия

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