

## PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM AS A TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL REGIONS

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study was to examine the features of rural tourism development to ensure the sustainable growth of certain regions of the Kyrgyz Republic. To achieve this goal, a contextual analysis of the tourism segment in the republic was conducted using the PESTEL framework. Additionally, a survey of 250 (n=250) respondents with relevant experience was carried out. The contextual analysis revealed that despite advantageous geographical location, natural diversity, and rich cultural heritage, the Kyrgyz Republic has a poorly developed tourism network, which is attributed to political and economic instability. However, survey results showed that starting from 2021, 48% of respondents reported an increase in well-being; among them, 62% expressed willingness to invest part of their funds in domestic travel. Ecosystem fragility, climate change, and other factors have rendered some previously popular tourist routes less viable, shifting visitors' attention to alternative options including rural tourism. According to the study findings, advantages of such tourism include raising public awareness of national traditions, fostering national identity, and instilling a sense of pride in the nation. Activities such as tasting organic products, mastering traditional crafts, and exploring new routes increase rural tourism attractiveness, promoting job creation, infrastructure development, and sustainable regional growth. A conceptual model for rural tourism development in the Kyrgyz Republic was developed, including the following elements: infrastructure development, rational use of natural and cultural resources, support of local communities, marketing and promotion of specific tourist locations, ecological sustainability of rural communities, government support and private sector cooperation, as well as measures to improve social protection for citizens involved in rural tourism. The results may be used to facilitate sustainable development of rural communities and territories in Kyrgyzstan.

**Keywords:** infrastructure, national traditions, intergenerational connection, environmental issues, natural diversity, government initiatives, non-governmental organizations

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### INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the key sources of gross domestic product (GDP) in many countries worldwide, including Kyrgyzstan. A distinctive feature of the tourism sector economy is its diversity and the emergence of new types, including rural tourism. The development of green tourism draws public attention to particular problems of remote and rural regions of the country, promoting their sustainable development. Kyrgyzstan is at the early stage of developing rural tourism as a tool for the sustainable growth of its territories (Omirezakova & Wendt, 2025).

Soulard et al. (2024) explored the perspectives of rural tourism stakeholders, emphasizing the transformational potential of rural tourism in fostering local pride and community involvement. Their findings highlight the critical role of stakeholder engagement in shaping the future of rural tourism.

By presenting various stakeholder views, they underscore that the development of rural tourism can be a catalyst for regional economic growth and cultural preservation. However, the study also critiques the often-fragmented approach to tourism development in rural areas, where a lack of coordinated efforts among local governments, businesses, and residents can undermine long-term sustainability. In the context of Kyrgyzstan, this finding is particularly relevant, as the absence of a cohesive strategy and insufficient cooperation among local stakeholders remains a significant barrier, as noted by Momosheva et al. (2024) and Vujko et al. (2024). Similarly, Li et al. (2025) examined the relationship between tourist behavior and spatial characteristics in rural tourism, shedding light on how spatial attributes influence tourists' choices and experiences. Their study shows that spatial factors, such as accessibility, scenic beauty, and the availability of cultural and natural resources, are pivotal in shaping rural tourism's appeal.

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In Kyrgyzstan, where geographical diversity and natural landscapes are among the country's strongest assets, the findings of Li et al. (2024) align with the idea that Kyrgyzstan's natural features have a great potential to attract tourists, yet the challenge remains in ensuring proper infrastructure and marketing strategies to fully exploit these resources. As highlighted by Almeida & Machado (2020) and Kozhoshev et al. (2022), rural areas often lack the necessary infrastructure, which hampers their competitiveness and deters potential visitors.

On the other hand, Trisia et al. (2024) argue for a new materialist approach to rethinking rurality in rural tourism. This perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness between rural landscapes, local communities, and tourism practices, challenging traditional views of rurality as merely a backdrop for tourism.

Their approach stresses that the development of rural tourism should consider the material and socio-cultural conditions of rural areas to foster more authentic and sustainable tourism experiences. This idea resonates with the current challenges faced by Kyrgyzstan, where Toktoraliev et al. (2025) highlighted the socio-political and economic instability, which complicates the preservation of natural resources and the growth of green tourism.

Moreover, Dzhalilova et al. (2024) and Akyzbekova et al. (2024) emphasize the socio-economic benefits that rural tourism could bring to Kyrgyzstan, particularly in addressing economic stagnation, population decline, and infrastructure deficits. These benefits, such as job creation and economic diversification, are well-documented in the literature. Vujko et al. (2024) further underline the potential of rural tourism to empower marginalized groups, such as women, by providing new employment opportunities in rural regions. However, challenges related to strategic planning, resource management, and financial support remain significant barriers, as highlighted by Hu et al. (2025), who pointed out the limited financial capacity of rural communities to invest in tourism infrastructure.

The importance of digital solutions and innovative marketing strategies is also underscored by Bachtiar & Bernanthos (2024), who found that social media plays a crucial role in the promotion of rural tourism. Given that tourists are increasingly seeking unique, immersive experiences, the development of a digital presence could significantly enhance the visibility and attractiveness of Kyrgyzstan's rural tourism offerings. This aligns with the observations made by Abdelrehim & Bshair (2025), who advocate for the adoption of digital technologies to improve rural tourism promotion and engagement with potential tourists. Kyrgyzstan's vast natural and cultural resources could be better marketed through online platforms, drawing attention to local traditions, eco-friendly stays, and organic tourism experiences, all of which have gained popularity in recent years. However, despite these potential advantages, the findings from the literature highlight that rural tourism in Kyrgyzstan is not without its difficulties. Dou et al. (2024) point to regional development strategies and government programs that support the integration of tourism with agriculture, but the insufficient infrastructure and lack of coordinated efforts often limit their effectiveness. As Almeida & Machado (2020) note, the absence of proper transport, accommodation, and information infrastructure remains a critical barrier to rural tourism development in Kyrgyzstan. The rural tourism sector's limited reach can be attributed to these gaps in infrastructure, making it difficult for Kyrgyzstan to compete with other global tourist destinations.

Thus, while rural tourism holds great promise for the sustainable development of Kyrgyzstan's rural areas, it faces a number of challenges. A more strategic, coordinated approach is required, one that takes into account the socio-political context, engages local communities, and addresses the infrastructural gaps that hinder growth. The findings of the aforementioned sources provide important insights into how stakeholder engagement, spatial factors, and local conditions can shape rural tourism, and they suggest that Kyrgyzstan could benefit from adopting similar strategies. To fully realize the potential of rural tourism, however, Kyrgyzstan will need to invest in infrastructure, marketing, and digital solutions while fostering local and governmental collaboration to build a sustainable, thriving rural tourism sector.

The aim of this study was to explore the potential of rural tourism as a strategy for promoting the sustainable development of rural areas in the Kyrgyz Republic. The objectives of the study were as follows: to analyse the key factors influencing the development of rural tourism in the Kyrgyz Republic, with a focus on political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal aspects; to assess the role of rural tourism in enhancing the well-being of local communities, promoting cultural heritage, and supporting national identity; to develop a conceptual model for the sustainable development of rural tourism, encompassing infrastructure development, resource management, community engagement, and ecological sustainability; to provide recommendations for government policy and private sector initiatives aimed at fostering rural tourism and ensuring long-term sustainable growth in Kyrgyzstan's rural areas.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study included an analysis of key factors influencing rural tourism development in the Batken, Jalal-Abad, Issyk-Kul, Naryn, Osh, Talas, and Chuy regions of the Kyrgyz Republic. These regions, located in the central part of Central Asia, vary greatly in terms of their geographical features, cultural heritage, and economic conditions, providing a diverse landscape for rural tourism development. Batken, for example, is known for its mountainous terrain and agricultural landscapes, while Issyk-Kul boasts a large lake with great tourism potential. Jalal-Abad and Naryn are rich in cultural heritage and natural beauty, and Osh, often referred to as the "Southern capital," is known for its historical significance and scenic landscapes. The Chuy region, situated in the north, is known for its fertile valleys and proximity to the capital, Bishkek.

A PESTEL analysis of these regions was conducted to assess the political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal factors influencing rural tourism development. This analysis considered the following factors affecting ecotourism development in rural areas: political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal. The study was based on statistical data collected from 2019 to 2023, sourced from official channels including the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (2024). The analysed statistics enabled an assessment of the political context

and tactical directions that may impact the development of rural areas. Quantitative data from responses to open-ended questions in a conducted survey were also used. A comparative analysis of quantitative and qualitative data helped identify influential factors and particularities of rural tourism development across different regions of the country.

In addition to statistical data from official public sources, quantitative and qualitative data were gathered through a survey of 250 respondents who met the following inclusion criteria: age 18 years or older; residence in the Batken, Jalal-Abad, Issyk-Kul, Naryn, Chuy, or Osh regions for at least six months at the time of the survey; informed consent to participate in accordance with Code of Ethics by the American Sociological Association (1997).

The target sample included participants with experience in farming, tourism, or the social sector. These areas were selected due to the respondents' relevant experience allowing conclusions regarding features and prospects of rural tourism development in specific regions. The primary exclusion criterion was refusal to provide informed consent. Recruitment was conducted via social platforms WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and Telegram, which are popular among various demographic groups in the country. The survey was administered using the Google Forms digital tool, with a link posted in an announcement. By following the link, candidates confirmed they met inclusion criteria and voluntarily agreed to participate. The survey consisted of 16 questions divided into four semantic categories.

The first category – “Demographic Information” – asked participants about gender, age, education level, and work experience, and was used for additional filtering of respondents who did not meet inclusion criteria. The “Tourism Development Factors” section included 4 questions aimed at identifying key factors and trends in rural tourism development in the country. The “Challenges of Rural Tourism Development” section invited participants to discuss the main obstacles to tourism development in Kyrgyzstan's rural areas. The final research section – “Development Prospects” – contained questions focused on identifying pathways for further rural tourism development for sustainable development of specific regions. Responses to closed-ended survey questions were processed using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. Responses to select open-ended questions were analysed using thematic analysis.

## RESULTS

The PESTEL analysis identified key factors influencing the development of rural tourism in the Kyrgyz Republic. These factors are documented in Table 1. Based on the table, it was concluded that the development of rural tourism in Kyrgyzstan is determined by a combination of factors, control over which will ensure the creation of new jobs and the sustainable development of certain regions. In the political sphere, there is a movement towards the development of new types of tourism, including rural tourism. An example of this is the Sustainable Tourism Development Programme for 2025-2030 (2024), which envisages the promotion of ethno- and ecotourism. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of state support can be significantly reduced by internal and foreign political factors such as radical political changes and protests, conflicts on the state border, and visa regimes with certain countries that limit tourist flow.

Table 1. Factors determining the development of rural tourism in the Kyrgyz Republic (Source: Compiled by the authors based on Dooranov et al., 2024; Habibulloev et al., 2024; Nuraliev et al., 2024; Taranov & Kawabata, 2024)

Factor	Content
Political	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Government support for tourism.</li> <li>2. Stability of government.</li> <li>3. Border issues.</li> <li>4. International relations.</li> </ol>
Economic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. High unemployment rate in rural areas.</li> <li>2. Limited access to financing.</li> <li>3. Dependence on seasonality.</li> <li>4. National currency exchange rate.</li> </ol>
Social	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Limited access to internet and mobile communication.</li> <li>2. Low digitalization of tourism products.</li> <li>3. Potential for development through digital platforms.</li> <li>4. Growing interest in “smart tourism”.</li> </ol>
Environmental	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fragility of ecosystems.</li> <li>2. Inefficient waste management system.</li> <li>3. Increasing demand for ecotourism.</li> <li>4. Climate change.</li> </ol>
Legal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unclear standards for business entities.</li> <li>2. Lack of secure land lease rights.</li> <li>3. Insufficient legal support for microbusinesses.</li> <li>4. Difficulties with licensing and taxation for rural entrepreneurs.</li> </ol>

From an economic perspective, Kyrgyzstan is in a phase of stable growth, manifested, among other things, by a decreasing unemployment rate. According to the report of the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (2024), in 2023-2024, all regions of the country experienced a small but steady decline in unemployment compared to the previous reporting period. Among rural residents, unemployment levels are traditionally higher, leading to population outflow to cities or neighbouring countries. The development of certain aspects of rural tourism, such as the production of traditional yurts in the village of Kyzyl-Tuu, is one way to address employment problems and improve the

welfare of the local population. Social factors, including limited access to the internet and mobile communication, also significantly affect the development of rural tourism in certain areas of Kyrgyzstan.

For example, the tourism potential of the Jumgal district in Naryn region remains untapped due to weak internet signals, which make it impossible to search for information, promote tourism products, book guesthouses, and so on. Ecological factors influencing rural tourism development include the fragility of ecosystems in certain regions, such as Sary-Chelek or Ala-Archa. Some regions struggle to cope with the growing tourist flow due to a lack of sufficient garbage containers, untimely waste removal, or inefficient waste disposal. Melting glaciers and climate change also make it impossible to realize some tourism opportunities, such as trekking in certain zones. As an alternative, tourists may be offered rural tourism that combines opportunities for eco- and event tourism.

In addition to the factors mentioned above, legal aspects have a significant impact on rural tourism development, especially in cases where clear requirements and standards for implementing certain tourism initiatives are lacking. A conflict example is the operation of a guesthouse or yurt without obtaining the necessary permits. Some tourism projects close due to the absence of state support schemes for the tourism sector. Licensing and taxation difficulties can also be obstacles for rural entrepreneurs who have limited access to information and other resources (Chin et al., 2025).

According to the survey results, more than half (56%) of respondents agree that rural tourism is a promising sector for the sustainable development of certain regions of the country. For 37% of respondents, rural tourism is a key factor in regional development due to the creation of new jobs. About 29% agreed that rural tourism contributes to the diversification of the economy of certain districts, thus becoming an important tool for sustainable development. Rural tourism can become an alternative to traditional income sources in Kyrgyzstan, where most people depend on agriculture as their main livelihood. The development of tourism allows locals to build guesthouses, organize excursion services, and hold cultural and educational events, leading to new jobs and improved quality of life locally (Ostapenko et al., 2023). Several interviews revealed successful cases of green tourism development in Kyrgyzstan's rural areas. One such case is the jailoo-tourism in certain parts of Naryn and Issyk-Kul regions. The key feature of this tourism is tourists staying in yurts on summer pastures – jailoo – participating in livestock grazing, kumis production, and cooking over an open fire. Interviews noted that jailoo-tourism is most developed in places like Son-Kul, Tash-Rabat, and Kol-Suu. Based on interview materials, it can be concluded that tourists visit these places to get closer to nature, learn about biodiversity, and discover rural residents' lifestyles.

The study also shows that for 49% of respondents, rural tourism provides an opportunity to learn about the customs of different regions, preserve cultural heritage, and strengthen intergenerational ties. Kyrgyzstan has a centuries-old nomadic history, so travellers can find unique cultural practices and festivals related to nomadic life. This was confirmed in an interview mentioning guesthouses in Sary-Mogol, Arslanbob, Kochkor, and Tamga. According to interviewees, visitors are offered local products to prepare traditional dishes such as beshbarmak, kuurdak, chuchuk, kaymak, and suzmo. The interviewee noted that guesthouses are popular partly because tourists can observe and participate in the production of the ingredients used in these dishes. Tourists are also invited to participate in various workshops that help preserve generational ties through traditional crafts. According to an interview with a guesthouse owner, popular workshops include making felt carpets – shyrdak, woven partitions – alash, as well as textile production and embroidery. The research suggests that rural tourism creates ideal conditions for immersion in the atmosphere of national crafts.

More than half (58%) of respondents also agreed that rural tourism development is linked to preserving the country's natural diversity, known for its mountains, lakes, and reserves. This was supported by a case found in an interview about "Alay Craft" – a guest centre in Kochkor, Naryn region. Visitors to the centre are offered to learn the traditional craft of felting local wool. A distinctive feature of the workshops at "Alay Craft" is the use of eco-friendly methods, including the avoidance of synthetic dyes. Thus, the case indicates that rural tourism can be used to promote sustainable development ideas, manifested in the rational use of resources and conservation of biodiversity.

Despite the advantages listed, the vast majority of respondents (79%) agreed that rural tourism is underdeveloped in some regions of Kyrgyzstan. Insufficient infrastructure is one of the main problems, especially in remote and mountainous areas. Transportation issues, lack of basic utilities, and limited internet access can deter tourists from visiting these regions. An illustration of this obstacle is the case of Sary-Mogol, cited in one interview.

According to the interviewee, the village located at the foot of the Pamirs attracts not only mountaineers but also rural tourists. However, the development of the latter is hampered by the fact that 250 km of the road from Osh to Sary-Mogol is in very poor condition, and mobile and internet connectivity disruptions complicate booking. Given the small number of tourists, building new guesthouses and developing rural tourism in this region seems impractical. Another significant problem is the lack of trained specialists who can provide quality services to tourists.

According to the study results, more than half of the respondents (58%) do not know how to work with tourists, organize excursions, or manage hotel services. To address this issue, it is necessary to train local workers, create courses on tourism management and hospitality, and support private tourism initiatives.

Furthermore, promoting Kyrgyzstan as a tourist destination internationally is crucial for the growth of rural tourism. It is important not only to increase domestic tourism but also to attract tourists from other countries.

The further development of tourism will be supported by an increase in the overall welfare of the population. According to the survey, about half (48%) of respondents noted a trend toward rising personal wealth, with 62% of them demonstrating willingness to spend part of their income on domestic travel. These findings correspond with data from the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (2024), which show that the country's GDP per capita has demonstrated a stable upward trend – from 99,200 soms in 2019 to 187,900 soms in 2023. The report clearly indicates a significant increase in GDP – approximately 89 percent over five years.

This trend demonstrates growing economic activity and strengthening of the national economy, with noticeable improvements across various sectors that contribute to income growth per capita and opportunities for investment in segments such as rural tourism and sustainable development. The study of survey and interview results, along with subsequent comparative analysis of official statistical data, led to the conclusion that developing rural tourism is a viable strategy to ensure the sustainable development of certain regions in Kyrgyzstan. Based on this analysis, a conceptual model for the development of rural tourism was also developed, which is presented in Figure 1.

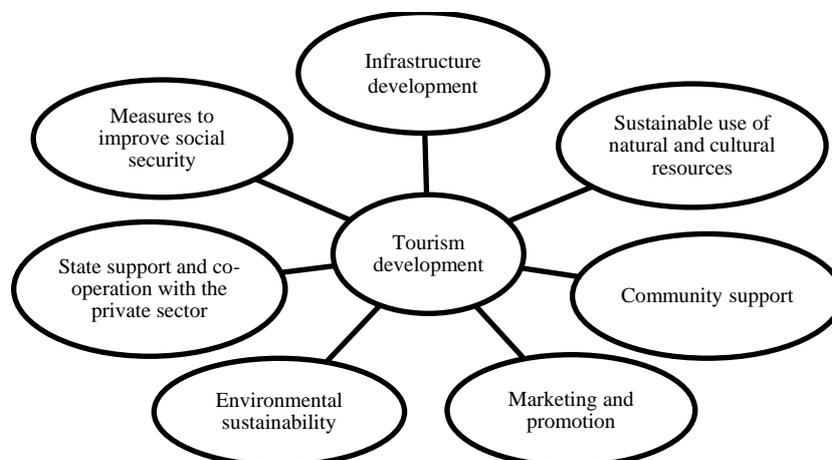


Figure 1. Conceptual model of rural tourism development in the Kyrgyz Republic (Source: compiled by the authors)

Based on the above figure, the development of rural tourism in the Kyrgyz Republic is influenced by a set of factors: political, economic, environmental, socio-cultural and others. The diversity of factors emphasises the need for interdisciplinary interaction in the development of rural tourism in the Kyrgyz Republic. Understanding of the factors of interdisciplinary interaction formed the basis of recommendations for the development of rural tourism in the country. The key recommendations are presented in Table 2. Based on Table 2, it was concluded that the development of rural tourism in Kyrgyzstan requires a comprehensive approach that takes many factors into account. These factors were considered when preparing recommendations for the development of rural tourism in specific regions of Kyrgyzstan.

Table 2. Recommendations for the development of rural tourism in the Kyrgyz Republic (Source: compiled by the authors)

Recommendation	Description
Infrastructure development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Repair and construction of roads, including gravel roads in mountainous areas.</li> <li>2. Support program for the construction and improvement of guesthouses (preferential loans, training in standards).</li> <li>3. Installation of mobile towers and development of alternative energy sources (e.g., solar panels).</li> </ol>
Sustainable use of natural and cultural resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Development of eco-friendly tourist routes with minimal environmental impact.</li> <li>2. Promotion of traditional crafts and local cuisine as part of the cultural tourism product.</li> <li>3. Organization of guided tours led by individuals trained in ecology and nature ethics.</li> </ol>
Support for local communities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Conducting training in hospitality, marketing, cooking, and foreign languages.</li> <li>2. Establishment of women's cooperatives, sewing workshops, and souvenir production.</li> <li>3. Implementation of fair income distribution systems from tourism activities.</li> </ol>
Marketing and promotion	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Creation of a national online catalogue of rural routes and guesthouses.</li> <li>2. Promotion of regions via YouTube blogs, Instagram, TikTok.</li> <li>3. Engagement of local and international NGOs; organization of photo contests and success story campaigns.</li> </ol>
Environmental sustainability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Installation of bio-toilets and waste containers.</li> <li>2. Introduction of solar panels, composting systems, and training in green practices.</li> <li>3. Launch of environmental awareness campaigns targeting children and youth.</li> </ol>
Government support and public-private partnerships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provision of grants and tax benefits for rural tourism enterprises.</li> <li>2. Development of partnerships between government, NGOs, and businesses.</li> <li>3. Introduction of a tourism tax, part of which is allocated to local infrastructure improvement.</li> </ol>
Measures to improve social welfare	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Allocation of tourism revenues for renovation of schools, medical posts, and roads.</li> <li>2. Involvement of tourists in volunteer and exchange programs (e.g., Teach &amp; Travel).</li> <li>3. Creation of multifunctional village centers (information, culture, healthcare).</li> </ol>

The country's natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and traditional way of life can create attractive routes for tourists (Li et al., 2025). Nevertheless, for this sector to thrive, improvements in infrastructure, support for local communities, and the implementation of environmentally sustainable practices are necessary. Furthermore, it is important to consider tourism seasonality, proper zoning of territories, and the creation of comfortable conditions for tourists without harming the environment. The creation of a competitive and sustainable rural tourism sector in Kyrgyzstan depends on effective cooperation between the government, businesses, and local residents. Human capital development is a key aspect, with education and training of local residents playing a decisive role (Ihnatenko et al., 2020). It is necessary to teach not only basic service skills but also specialized knowledge in tourism and ecology. Courses, training sessions, and seminars aimed

at improving service quality, ecotourism, and hospitality will help locals become more professional and improve conditions for tourists. The implementation of knowledge at all levels – from youth to older generations – is crucial, especially in rural areas where qualified personnel are often lacking. The integration of innovative technologies and digital solutions is also essential. Modern tourism relies on mobile applications and internet platforms that allow visitors to plan trips, book accommodation, and find local attractions (Ivashko et al., 2020). The tourist experience can be significantly enhanced through interactive maps and virtual tours, making travel more convenient and informative. To attract tourists, such technologies must be accessible not only in major tourist centres but also in small villages and settlements.

Environmental standards are critical for the sustainable development of rural tourism (Zhansagimova et al., 2022; Dyomin et al., 2021). Kyrgyzstan should maximize its natural potential. Preserving unique natural landscapes and increasing the country's appeal to tourists who prefer environmentally friendly destinations will be possible through the development and implementation of "green" tourism standards, such as waste minimization, the use of eco-friendly materials, protection of local flora and fauna, and adherence to sustainable use of natural resources. The integration of rural tourism into the country's economy fosters partnerships between various economic sectors. Rural tourism should not develop separately from other sectors. Tourism opportunities, such as gastronomic tours, participation in agricultural work, and the purchase of local products and souvenirs, expand thanks to connections with agriculture, handicrafts, food industry, and transport infrastructure.

To create long-term and profitable projects, cooperation with private and public organizations is vital. Sustainable growth of rural tourism depends on the creation and maintenance of an open system for monitoring and evaluation. Methods for assessing the impact of tourism on the culture, economy, and environment of the region must be introduced.

Regular surveys and studies involving local residents, entrepreneurs, and tourists help identify problems and find effective solutions. This will allow timely adjustments to growth plans and ensure the sector remains sustainable in the long term. Labelling and branding play an important role in attracting visitors. As of 2025, Kyrgyzstan has only one type of tourist object labelling – Community Based Tourism (CBT) labelling, indicating that a certain tourist object operates according to the "Community Based Tourism" philosophy (Sustainable Tourism Development..., 2024). The CBT logo, depicting blue mountains against a yurt background, has become well recognized among tourists not only from Kyrgyzstan but also from other countries. CBT signs are usually duplicated in English and include QR codes or links to the tourist site. These signs are placed on guesthouses, along tourist routes, or in national crafts centres. Translation into English helps promote the idea of rural tourism by attracting guests from other countries. Examples of CBT labelling in marketing include guesthouses in the villages of Arslanbob or Tamga. Upon seeing such a label, visitors understand that the tourist object meets basic quality standards and that its owners adhere to ecological responsibility norms and local community involvement.

In the future, it is proposed to expand the number of labelling types by introducing a unified national brand, the "green village." This label is recommended for entities practicing environmentally sustainable rural tourism. Use of the "green village" logo means that the tourist object operates in accordance with international eco-standards. Understanding that different rural tourism entities are at various stages of integration with international sustainable development standards, it is proposed to assign them categories – bronze, silver, or gold. For tourists, the assignment of a category to a tourist object will signal the quality of services provided. Information about tourist objects, their category, and ranking can be placed in a specially created national register of rural tourism entities.

In light of growing competition in the global tourism market, it is extremely important to properly position Kyrgyzstan as an attractive destination. The creation of a national brand associated with environmental friendliness, cultural heritage, and unique natural landscapes will attract tourists from all over the world. Participation in international tourism exhibitions and forums, creation of appealing promotional materials, and the development of marketing campaigns – all contribute to promoting Kyrgyzstan internationally. Rural tourism advantages are also crucial. Rural tourism can help build strong and sustainable communities if local residents actively participate in the development and implementation of tourism projects (Burlakovs et al., 2020). This includes involvement in the development and management of tourism products. It is important that tourism income is evenly distributed among local populations to encourage further participation. As a result, this not only contributes to economic growth but also strengthens social solidarity and respect. One of the most important aspects of rural tourism development is ecosystem sustainability support. Unlike mass tourism, rural tourism can be more environmentally sustainable if a strategy is developed to minimize negative environmental impact by using methods such as creating eco-friendly tourist routes, improving infrastructure for wildlife observation, and engaging local residents.

Sustainable rural tourism is based on balancing economic development with nature conservation (Giyasova et al., 2025). This can be achieved by creating environmentally safe routes for tourists, using local renewable resources, and regulating the number of visitors in certain natural areas. To avoid harm to ecosystems during peak seasons, it is important to consider tourism seasonality. Sustainable rural tourism development depends on the implementation of ecosystem conservation strategies (Zhao et al., 2025). For example, the creation of eco-friendly routes allows tourists to enjoy nature without damaging it, thereby reducing anthropogenic pressure. Developing infrastructure for wildlife observation is also important so that tourists can appreciate the beauty of nature without disrupting natural processes. Local residents also play an important role in rural tourism development and environmental protection.

Tourists and rural populations can become more responsible towards nature through educational programs and ecological events. Locals can offer guests eco-friendly products such as kurt, suzmo, chuchuk, tandoor bread, and others, demonstrate traditional farming methods, and organize excursions to show visitors the importance of nature conservation.

Moreover, the negative environmental impact can be significantly reduced using eco-friendly technologies in rural tourism, such as solar panels, rainwater harvesting systems, and waste recycling. Agri-ecotourism is a direction in which tourists can participate in agricultural activities without harming ecosystems (Ostapenko & Bryantsev, 2023).

Tourists are often poorly informed about the importance of ecological sustainability. They will be more considerate of the environment if information campaigns are conducted, signs with nature rules are placed, and “leave no trace” principles are applied. The likelihood of tourists adhering to ecological norms depends on how well they understand the importance of nature preservation. Thus, a comprehensive approach to rural tourism development, which includes ecosystem protection, responsible resource consumption, and local community involvement, helps preserve natural wealth and enhances its value for future generations. Environmentally sustainable rural tourism can foster harmonious interaction between humans and nature, promoting rural economic development and conservation of unique natural sites. Finally, rural tourism should become an important component of regional development strategic planning. Including this sector into long-term programs aimed at improving infrastructure, education, healthcare, and other social areas will create a balanced development model for the region. Rural tourism should be seen as part of a sustainable long-term development strategy rather than just a temporary trend. This will make rural areas more attractive for living and working.

## DISCUSSION

The key idea of the presented work is that the development of rural tourism serves as a prerequisite for the sustainable development of certain regions in Kyrgyzstan. This idea is supported by previous studies, including those by Akyzbekova et al. (2024), who argue that the growth of rural tourism enables communities to diversify their incomes, thereby reducing their dependence on traditional agriculture, which is increasingly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The cases presented in the study highlight Kyrgyzstan's rich tourism potential, the development of which will positively influence other economic sectors. This hypothesis aligns with the conclusions of Agarwal et al. (2024), who suggest that rural tourism development will help create “green” jobs that not only generate income but also reduce poverty levels. Due to Kyrgyzstan's abundant natural resources, tourism enterprises can be established with relatively low financial investments. To support this idea, the study examined examples of masterclasses on national crafts, cultivation of traditional crops, and biodiversity conservation. Nevertheless, challenges such as overcrowding in public places and potential increases in the cost of living must be addressed to enhance tourist inflow and improve service quality.

Based on the results of the PESTEL analysis, it was concluded that the development of rural tourism in Kyrgyzstan depends on the support of both the government and private investors. The importance of such support was also emphasized in other studies, particularly by Sabyrbekov (2019), who stressed that agritourism can stimulate investments in both public and private sectors, thereby accelerating development and improving living standards. According to the conducted research, state and private investment is primarily necessary for infrastructure modernization and improving accessibility to specific locations. Similar recommendations were found in the work of Saputro et al. (2023), who believe that stakeholders must collaborate to set priorities and achieve improvements. Furthermore, the analysis highlighted the government's responsibility to develop regulations and standards governing rural tourism operators.

The work also proposed that infrastructure development and increased tourist flows in certain regions could be part of broader efforts aimed at preserving biodiversity. This proposition is based on the idea that rural tourism is a means to increase community involvement in addressing environmental issues in the region. Thus, rural green traffic helps achieve broader goals such as environmental conservation, poverty reduction, and sustainable economic growth. This thesis is supported by earlier studies, including Nuraeni & Handayani (2024), who analysed the impact of green tourism on the economic development of various countries, including Costa Rica. According to these experts, despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and other external factors, the gross added value of tourism reached 43,645.1 million soms in 2023, significantly exceeding the 29,084.0 million soms planned in 2019.

Therefore, it can be argued that the tourism sector has considerable resilience and demonstrates potential for sustainable development despite external shocks. As an essential component of the green economy, rural tourism plays a crucial role in the country's sustainable economic development. Being closely connected to their land and environment, local communities prioritize nature conservation, seeking to preserve natural resources in their pristine state. This deeply rooted environmental concern harmonizes with state conservation programs, creating synergy that benefits both the land and its people. Conservation of natural resources ensures not only their current state but also their preservation for future generations. Additionally, fostering patriotism and environmental care among the local population strengthens ties to their native regions. Consequently, the younger generation is more likely to remain in rural areas, leading to changes in migration patterns and employment opportunities.

In the recommendations section, the study proposed that the prosperity of rural entrepreneurship and tourism depends on the availability of skilled labour within communities. A detailed analysis of this suggestion was found in the earlier research of Demidchik et al. (2021), who assert that studying successful global examples can help the Kyrgyz Republic develop a thriving and sustainable rural tourism sector that benefits its people and natural heritage. To enhance the attractiveness of rural tourism for target audiences, joint efforts by multiple stakeholders are necessary.

The idea of interdisciplinary collaboration discussed in this work aligns with the recommendations of Chen et al. (2023), who argue that creating a favourable environment for tourism development requires cooperation between entrepreneurs, government bodies, and local communities. Attracting investors to finance service and infrastructure improvements is also critical to transforming destinations into competitive and appealing places. This multifaceted strategy enhances service quality and ensures the long-term growth and sustainability of the sector. Providing high-quality tourist services requires attention to the unique preferences and expectations of each guest. This demands staff to demonstrate attentiveness, empathy, and the ability to create a safe and comfortable environment. According to the research, client-oriented rural tourism encompasses a wide range of services, from delicious meals made with locally

sourced organic products to entertaining activities highlighting the region's natural and cultural heritage. Similar strategies were found in the work of An & Alarcon (2021), who also emphasized that national policy should pay special attention to tourist safety, including comprehensive measures for visitor protection and increasing their trust.

The recommendations also included the idea of international cooperation aimed at creating easily recognizable labels and brands for rural tourism. The importance of such cooperation is supported by previous studies, whose authors emphasized the need to consider the entrepreneurial practices of rural residents and national development strategies (Deirmentzoglou et al., 2025; Pesic et al., 2025). Rural communities can become attractive tourist destinations by adapting international principles to local conditions. A key component of this process is the active involvement of the government and private sector, as well as deriving benefits from this cooperation. The unification of efforts among government bodies, local communities, and entrepreneurs is necessary to strengthen the country's image as an appealing tourist destination. To support rural tourism and promote sustainable economic growth in these regions, the state should provide a wide range of assistance, including financial incentives, promotional initiatives, and infrastructure development (López-Sanz et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021). The rapid development of digital technologies has made their integration into tourism services an important part of maintaining competitiveness in the modern market, offering reliable internet access at tourist sites and seamless payment systems for financial transactions.

These components make destinations more attractive and accessible to a broad and diverse audience, meeting the needs of tech-savvy travellers (Kintonova et al., 2022; Zeqiri et al., 2025). Thus, digital tools not only improve the conditions of tourists' stays but also significantly increase the productivity of hospitality businesses. Technologies such as automated image recognition, face mask verification systems, and real-time monitoring technologies not only comply with safety and occupational health standards but also enhance customer service. These advances provide two benefits: they give visitors a sense of security and confidence, and they meet regulatory requirements.

## CONCLUSIONS

The prospects for the development of rural tourism as a tool for sustainable development in specific regions of the Kyrgyz Republic were examined. Based on the results of the PESTEL analysis, it was concluded that the country is developing under conditions of political and economic instability, a partial overcoming of which is possible through the development of new types of tourism, including rural tourism. More than half (56%) of respondents agreed with the statement that rural tourism could become a driving force for the country's economic development by creating new jobs, reducing population outflow from certain regions, and attracting foreign investment. However, the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data indicated that despite favourable geographical location and natural diversity, the Kyrgyz Republic has not fully realized its tourism potential. The vast majority (79%) of respondents stated that the national tourism sector requires significant improvements in terms of accessibility, infrastructure, and quality of services. At the same time, about half (48%) of respondents noted an improvement in their own well-being over recent years and expressed willingness to spend part of their income on domestic travel. Thus, there is a demand for rural tourism in the Kyrgyz Republic, the functioning of which depends on the effectiveness of the chosen development strategies.

Relying on contextual analysis, quantitative survey data, and qualitative interview data, a conceptual model for the development of rural tourism in the Kyrgyz Republic was developed. This model implies interdisciplinary cooperation to achieve the following goals: development of infrastructure, rational use of natural and cultural resources, support for local communities, marketing and promotion, environmental sustainability, government support and cooperation with the private sector, and measures to improve social welfare in rural communities. Based on this model, groups of strategies for the development of rural tourism in specific regions of the Kyrgyz Republic were proposed. These strategy groups include: infrastructure initiatives aimed at improving accessibility of tourist sites; creation and operation of tourist locations and routes in compliance with national standards and international sustainable development recommendations; professional training and retraining of tourism sector personnel; enhanced presence of rural tourism facilities in national and international information spaces through online marketing; investment support for rural tourism entities; and international and interdisciplinary cooperation in the field of rural tourism.

The present study has certain limitations, including the relatively small sample size and the limited number of tourist locations analysed, which may affect the generalisability of the findings. Future research should expand the scope of surveyed locations and consider comparative analyses of rural tourism development strategies alongside other types of tourism to identify effective management solutions for enhancing economic growth in the Kyrgyz Republic.

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