



THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM IN ENHANCING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN KAZAKHSTAN

Zhassulan Sadykov ^{(a)1} Nina Petrichsheva ^(b) Assylkhan Yessilov ^(c) Zubaira Temiraliyeva ^(d) Inna Rey ^(e)

^(a)Associate Professor, Esil University, Department of Social Work and Tourism, Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan; E-mail: zhass83@mail.ru

^(b)Senior Lecturer, Kenzhegali Sagadiyev University of International Business, Department of Tourism and Hospitality, Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan; E-mail: nina_petrishsheva@mail.ru

^(c)Associate Professor, Kazakh University of Technology and Business named after K. Kulazhanov, Department of Tourism and Service, Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan; E-mail: esilov@gmail.com

^(d)Senior Lecturer, L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Department of Tourism, Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan; E-mail: temiraliyevaz2020@gmail.com

^(e)Associate Professor, Kazakh University of Technology and Business named after K. Kulazhanov, Department of Tourism and Service, Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan; E-mail: Sayat01@mail.ru

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ABSTRACT

Community-based tourism (CBT) plays a crucial role in sustainable tourism development in Kazakhstan, contributing to economic growth, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability. In a study, the barriers to CBT implementation, which play a key role in advancing United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), were analyzed. This study aims to fill gaps by examining how managers of Kazakhstan-based travel companies understand CBT's economic, environmental, and cultural aspects. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative interviews with travel company managers, participant observations, and quantitative surveys. Thematic analysis and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. The data samples included All Managers, Experienced Managers, and Novice Managers. The regression analysis was performed using two models: baseline, which included Awareness only, and expanded, which included Engagement and Infrastructure Challenge as control variables. For statistical significance, the standard errors (0.5-0.8) and mean values (3.5-4.5) were calculated, with a significant coefficient at $p < 0.05$. The findings of this study highlighted the importance of training programs and mentorship opportunities in helping less experienced professionals acquire new skills and bridge the knowledge gap. The findings of this study indicated that CBT aligns with SDG 8, SDG 11, and SDG 12, while also highlighting challenges, including infrastructure deficits and community engagement issues that hinder its implementation.

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INTRODUCTION

Sustainable tourism, which balances economic growth with environmental conservation and cultural preservation, is critical for ensuring the long-term viability of the tourism sector. In this context, community-based tourism (CBT) is a promising approach that empowers local communities, encourages active participation, and ensures they benefit economically from tourism. Unlike traditional tourism models, CBT integrates environmental care, cultural preservation (Trach et al., 2020), and economic development to create a balanced and inclusive tourism framework, aligning closely with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).

According to Talukder et al. (2024), CBT supports SDG 8 by promoting long-term and inclusive economic growth, creating jobs, and supporting community-led business projects. CBT helps advance SDG 11 by engaging local groups and encouraging eco-friendly approaches to urban development (Dolezal & Novelli, 2022). Another way CBT supports SDG 12 is by encouraging eco-friendly actions, protecting resources, and mitigating the environmental impact of tourist activities (Rahman et al., 2024). Although CBT has been studied elsewhere (Liang et al., 2024; Zielinski et al., 2021), little is known about the specific factors that affect its use and the outcomes it produces in Kazakhstan. For example, CBT has been shown

¹Corresponding author: ORCID ID: 0000-0002-7133-9162

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to help protect the environment and preserve cultural heritage. However, few studies have examined infrastructure problems and changing stakeholder relationships, making it challenging to work in Kazakhstan (Aktymbayeva et al., 2023). The CBT program is valued for its ability to give local groups economic power, but its specific impact on poverty reduction has not been thoroughly studied.

Additionally, there is a lack of information on how CBT methods in Kazakhstan balance tourism growth with environmental protection. Barriers to CBT implementation, such as poor infrastructure, limited funding, and low community awareness, have not been thoroughly studied, even though they play a key role in advancing SDGs 8 and 11.

This study aims to fill these gaps by looking at how managers of Kazakhstan travel companies understand CBT's economic, environmental, and cultural aspects. In addition, it identifies key challenges and proposes strategies to increase CBT adoption, thereby directly contributing to achieving the SDGs 8, 11, and 12. The objective of the study is to assess the economic benefits of CBT for local communities (SDG 8), evaluate the environmental sustainability of CBT practices (SDG 12), find the primary challenges hindering the success of CBT and propose strategies for overcoming them, focusing on promoting resilience and inclusivity (SDG 11). Also, the study's objective can be further extended to explore how CBT initiatives contribute to cultural preservation, including safeguarding local traditions and heritage (SDGs 11 and 12).

This study seeks to answer several key research questions: How does Community-Based Tourism (CBT) contribute to improving local livelihoods and reducing poverty in Kazakhstan in alignment with SDG 8? What practices are used in CBT to minimize environmental harm and promote conservation in Kazakhstan, in line with SDG 12? How effective are CBT initiatives in showcasing and protecting Kazakhstan's cultural heritage and in contributing to SDGs 11 and 12? Finally, what barriers, such as infrastructure or funding limitations, affect CBT implementation? How do government, NGOs, and private stakeholders contribute to supporting CBT in accordance with SDGs 8 and 11?

This research provides critical insights into the use of CBT to achieve sustainable tourism goals in Kazakhstan, aligning with key global priorities outlined in the SDGs. By focusing on the economic (SDG 8), environmental (SDG 12), and cultural (SDG 11) dimensions, the study offers a comprehensive framework for enhancing CBT practices.

The paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we presented a literature review and a comprehensive analysis of existing research on CBT and sustainable tourism in Kazakhstan. Section 3 provides descriptions of the materials and methods, the case study design, and data collection and analysis. The Results section includes descriptive statistics for key metrics and the regression analysis. The following Section 5 provides a discussion of the received research results, including comparisons with recent studies. The paper ends with the conclusions, limitations, and recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to conduct a literature review and to comprehensively analyze existing research on CBT and sustainable tourism, particularly its application in Kazakhstan. This review examines recent scientific studies to identify research gaps, support the problem statement, and inform the goals of this study. Put the community first with CBT. Both fair growth and reduced economic inequality are helped by this (Zielinski et al., 2021). CBT not only generates revenue but also helps preserve native culture and the environment.

CBT helps reach goal 8 (Good Jobs and Economic Growth) by enabling residents to establish their own businesses and secure quality employment (Mia et al., 2024). Also, it helps reach SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by promoting inclusive growth that benefits everyone, both in cities and rural areas. People who engage in CBT are more likely to use resources wisely, which supports SDG 12 (Responsible Production and Consumption) (Hatammimi & Gunawan, 2024). Kazakhstan could be a suitable destination for tourists due to its rich cultural history, diverse landscapes, and beautiful natural scenery (Chlachula, 2020). Kazakhstan can leverage this potential through CBT, primarily to address some of the most significant issues in the tourism industry. Because these issues keep recurring, fresh approaches, such as CBT, need to be lasting and inclusive of everyone (Aktymbayeva et al., 2023). Kazakhstan faces numerous challenges with CBT despite its potential for success. A significant problem is that many rural and remote areas lack essential services, including safe travel, places to stay, and ways to connect with others. Another significant issue is that the community does not take sufficient action. This is because local partners must work hard and participate in CBT. Many CBT projects lack the funds to initiate or sustain their operations (Mamirkulova et al., 2020).

Multiple times, CBT has been shown to help businesses grow worldwide. CBT creates jobs and helps small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) grow by directly involving locals in tourism activities. Many businesses in this area offer accommodations, guided trips, cultural shows, and handcrafted goods. They help community member's secure long-term, well-paying jobs (Junaid et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2024).

Liang et al. (2024) and Mia et al. (2024) argue that this success is primarily due to locally driven business efforts that provide women and Indigenous people with the tools they need to work in and benefit from the tourism industry. Na Thongkaew et al. (2024) also note that CBT often collaborates with external groups, such as NGOs, private businesses, and government offices, to assist with marketing, training, and the development of new systems. Researchers argue that these rules may prevent communities from fully benefiting from tourism (Gohori & van der Merwe, 2020).

Bayuningsih et al. (2024) and Samora-Arvela et al. (2023) argue that CBT encourages people to engage in eco-friendly actions, such as protecting wildlife, reducing waste, and using innovative resources. People in the community taking charge of conservation is one of the best long-term ways for CBT to help natural health. Examples include CBT projects in Southeast Asia and South America, which establish community-run nature parks and ecotourism zones. These have helped protect wildlife and prevent deforestation.

CBT has a strong chance of helping protect the environment in Kazakhstan, as it has many wild areas and unique

ecosystems. It is best to use eco-friendly tourism methods in places like Katon-Karagay National Park, which is essentially wild and home to many plant and animal species. This type of CBT can help demonstrate how to strike a balance between tourism demand and environmental protection.

A significant issue in Kazakhstan is that ecotourism lacks the necessary infrastructure to operate effectively. For example, there are not enough good ways to get around, deal with trash, or use green energy. It is more likely for things to get worse without these tools, which goes against the main goals of CBT. CBT aligns with SDG 12 (Producing and Consuming in a Moral Way), which can be utilized to demonstrate how to extend the sustainability of travel. CBT promotes the effective use of resources to protect natural resources, reduce waste, and encourage guests and service providers to act in environmentally friendly ways.

CBT aims to preserve and promote local traditions. It also helps people from different cultures understand each other better and provides communities with the tools to remember their past. For example, Fan et al. (2023) and Svitlichna et al. (2024) claim that CBT enables community members to showcase their traditional music, dance, food, and events. CBT, conversely, ensures that the people who live in the area stay in charge of how their past is shown. Kovshun et al. (2023a) argue that these classes teach people about culture and ensure that customs are passed on to the next generation. People in CBT programs are also often asked to write down and reflect on their daily lives and past events.

There are many ways that CBT could help protect unique traditions and history. Kazakh music, dance, stories, and the problematic craft of felt-making are all great examples of cultural assets that can be used in CBT settings. Cultural heritage sites, such as mausoleums, UNESCO World Heritage sites, and ancient petroglyphs, can also help preserve history and attract more tourists (Aldybayev et al., 2021).

CBT can ensure that the activities and events that bring people to the area respect these cultural gems and help keep them in good shape. They can achieve this by allowing the community to manage the park and reinvest the revenue generated from tourists. Some potential problems include cultural commodification and the risk of losing sincerity.

Alamineh et al. (2023) assert that culture can lose its original meaning and importance when it is altered to appeal to tourists or the mass market. It is known as "cultural commodification", a phenomenon that occurs frequently in places people visit for entertainment. In Kazakhstan, there is significant pressure to commercialize traditional arts, performances, and ceremonies for profit. It is challenging to protect cultural heritage while meeting tourists' needs if the community does not participate sufficiently.

Several significant problems must be addressed before CBT can be effective. This is particularly true in forgotten, faraway parts of the country. The roads are in poor condition, there are limited places to stay, and it is challenging to contact people using technology (Ivankova et al., 2021; Mamirkulova et al., 2020).

These issues hinder tourism growth and make it harder for visitors to enjoy rural areas. Places that could be CBT sites struggle to stay open and attract tourists when they lack regular transportation or essential amenities. Most CBT groups lack sufficient resources or tools to build new buildings, teach new skills, or get the word out about this service. Some places struggle to initiate and sustain community-based treatment programs due to limited access to necessary funds, microloans, or public-private partnerships. Many people must work together and use their resources to solve these problems. Businesses, governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provide CBT funds, guidelines, and professional support to ensure it works long-term and gives communities more power (Putra et al., 2024). Kazakhstan needs to plan for the area, considering its unique social, economic, and natural features. Addressing these issues through laws that promote infrastructure development, community training programs, and cash rewards is feasible. Kazakhstan can reach its long-term growth goals with the help of CBT. A new study by Musavengane and Kloppers (2020) suggests that these issues can only be fixed by pulling together and allocating funds where they are needed.

CBT is recognized worldwide as a model of eco-friendly travel. Developing CBT policies that align with the country's SDGs is a more complex process. For example, SDG 8 focuses on responsible work and economic growth, SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities, and SDG 12 on responsible production and consumption.

Closing this gap can help industry leaders learn how to support community-driven tourist projects while ensuring their operations align with sustainability goals. The connection between infrastructure problems and community involvement in CBT adoption has also not been thoroughly studied. In Kazakhstan, many rural areas lack the proper infrastructure for tourism, including safe transportation networks, places to stay, and internet access. Insufficient knowledge, training, and tools can make community involvement challenging.

The link between these two things is critical because inadequate infrastructure can discourage people from participating in their community. Filling these study gaps is essential to understanding how CBT can help Kazakhstan achieve its sustainable tourism goals.

This study examines the impact of CBT on the economy, the environment, and culture, as well as the roles of key stakeholders and the changes in infrastructure and community involvement. It does this by considering the complete picture of improving CBT methods.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Case studies are used in this study to examine how CBT can help the tourism industry in Kazakhstan grow sustainably. This study works best with the case study method because it allows us to examine CBT in its real-world setting, showing how complex and interconnected economic, environmental, and cultural factors are. This method helps us understand the details of CBT in Kazakhstan by focusing on individual CBT projects. It shows how community involvement, partner engagement, and sustainable practices work together.

Case study design also facilitates the identification of best practices, obstacles, and opportunities unique to CBT in Kazakhstan. This paper covers several SDGs, including SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). By examining the local situation, this study identifies the unique factors that affect the success or failure of CBT programs. These factors include cultural patterns, environmental conditions, and infrastructure issues.

People living near the Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve are given extra attention in this study because it focuses on CBT programs in that area. This area was chosen because it is one of the busiest destinations in Kazakhstan for eco-friendly, community-led tourism. Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve is regarded as part of the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves. It is famous worldwide for its plants and animals, found nowhere else. The area boasts numerous natural and cultural gems, including traditional crafts, music, and stories. This makes it a great spot to see how CBT protects the environment and manages cultural property. The area of Almaty and the Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve were chosen because the study aims to investigate how CBT classes affect the social and economic conditions in the area.

Semi-structured interviews were the primary method for extracting qualitative data, as they allowed us to delve into the thoughts and experiences of key individuals working in CBT. A total of 30 interviews were conducted, with 10 participants from each group. Specifically, 10 community leaders aged 35-60, actively involved in decision-making and advocacy for local development, provided insights into the benefits and challenges of CBT in their areas. Their perspectives helped contextualize CBT within broader community goals and policy frameworks.

Ten tourism company owners with more than five years of experience also shared their thoughts on how CBT works, how to market it, and how it fits into the larger tourism industry. Their comments highlighted real-world problems, including poor infrastructure, limited funds, and difficulties in getting residents to collaborate. Lastly, 10 residents from diverse educational and income backgrounds were interviewed to assess the impact of CBT on employment, cultural identity, and overall quality of life. Their firsthand experiences were crucial for understanding CBT's role in job creation, cultural preservation, and environmental Awareness. The semi-structured format allowed interviewers to maintain focus while giving participants the flexibility to elaborate on topics of personal significance. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and insights systematically. People in the area with different educational and income levels were also asked how CBT has changed their work, cultural identities, and quality of life. The method was partly designed to keep interviewers on track while encouraging participants to discuss the essential points. Because of this method, stakeholders could provide complete answers that showed how difficult each person's CBT experience was. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded for thematic analysis.

In addition to information gathered through conversations, participant observation was used to provide a real-time picture of how CBT is used and its effects. Researchers attended various CBT events, including cultural shows, guided nature tours, and handicraft workshops, to observe how these programs were organized and conducted.

This method allows people to observe how locals, tourists, and tourism companies interact, providing a comprehensive picture of the dynamics at play. National performances, such as traditional music and dance, were also observed to understand their role in fostering national pride and transmitting heritage across generations (Table 1).

Table 1. Managers' perspectives on CBT in Kazakhstan

N	Section	Focus	Key aspects evaluated	Response scale
1	Perceived Benefits of CBT in Kazakhstan	Managers' perceptions of economic, environmental, and cultural benefits of CBT	Economic benefits, environmental sustainability, cultural preservation	Likert scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)
2	Challenges Faced in Implementing CBT	The main obstacles to CBT implementation in Kazakhstan are particularly infrastructure and community engagement.	Infrastructure limitations, community involvement, and support	Likert scale: 1 (Minimal Challenge) to 5 (Significant Challenge)
3	Role of CBT in Cultural Preservation and Environmental Impact Mitigation	Effectiveness of CBT in preserving cultural heritage and reducing environmental impacts	Resource conservation, protection of cultural practices, and alignment with sustainable development principles	Likert scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)
4	Future Potential of CBT as a Sustainable Tourism Model	Managers' views on the long-term viability of CBT as a sustainable tourism option in Kazakhstan	Potential for CBT to become central in Kazakhstan's tourism strategy, alignment with sustainable tourism goals	Likert scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)

Surveys were used to assess how tourists and people affected by or involved in CBT projects felt about and were satisfied with the projects, as part of the plan to collect quantitative data. Three main questions were used to determine how people felt about CBT: how it would help the business, protect the earth, and keep culture alive.

Community members were asked to complete a survey about how CBT programs affected their work, finances, and efforts to protect natural resources and local customs. People were asked to rate their happiness with the environmental and societal aspects of CBT. They inquired about the quality of guided tours and cultural shows, as well as the number of environmentally conscious places. By investigating these answers, it was possible to tell how well CBT projects meet the needs of tourists and the environment. Structured surveys for the polls used five-point Likert scales. One answer meant "Strongly Disagree", and five meant "Strongly Agree".

This style provides more detailed information, such as the level of agreement or satisfaction among respondents. Additionally, it enables us to compare how people from different groups responded to the questions. Using structured questions ensured consistent data collection, making it easier to compare and analyze responses across demographics and

stakeholder groups (Table 2).

Table 2. Structured dataset variables for analysis of CBT in Kazakhstan

Variable Category	Variable	Description	Response Scale
Demographics	Age	The manager's age is used to assess the potential influence of age on perceptions and experiences in the tourism sector.	Numeric
	Years of Experience in Tourism	Number of years the manager has worked in tourism, reflecting the depth of experience and knowledge	Numeric
	Location	Geographic location (e.g., Almaty, Astana, Shymkent) to identify regional differences in perceptions or challenges	Categorical (Region)
Awareness of CBT	Awareness of CBT	Assesses managers' familiarity with and understanding of CBT practices	Likert scale: 1 (Low Awareness) to 5 (High Awareness)
Perceived Benefits	Economic Benefit	Perceived economic impact of CBT, such as income generation and employment opportunities	Likert scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)
	Environmental Impact	Rating of CBT's contribution to sustainable environmental management and reduction of tourism-related degradation	Likert scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)
	Cultural Preservation	Managers' perception of CBT's role in preserving local culture and heritage	Likert scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)
Challenges	Infrastructure Challenge	Rating of infrastructural challenges hindering CBT implementation (e.g., roads, accommodations)	Likert scale: 1 (No Challenge) to 5 (Significant Challenge)
	Community Engagement Challenge	Perceived difficulty in engaging local communities in CBT impacts the sustainability of initiatives.	Likert scale: 1 (No Challenge) to 5 (Significant Challenge)
Future Potential of CBT	Future Potential of CBT	Rating of CBT's potential as a sustainable tourism model and its anticipated role in Kazakhstan's tourism development	Likert scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)

The survey used a Likert scale to capture respondents' attitudes, perceptions, and opinions, a widely accepted approach in social and behavioral research. Participants rated each variable on a scale of 1 to 5, where each number represents a different level of agreement or perception. A score of 1 meant "Strongly Disagree," and a score of 2 meant "Disagree." There were five possible scores: 3 meant "Neutral", four meant "Agree", and five meant "Strongly Agree". This scaling method enabled a more nuanced understanding of respondents' thoughts, revealing the extent of agreement or disagreement across the surveyed topics. This scale enabled the quantification of subjective responses, facilitating easier comparison and analysis of people's feelings about various aspects of CBT, as reflected in responses from 30 travel company managers. Reports on tourism and sustainability in Kazakhstan from the government and NGOs were used as secondary sources. These papers provided helpful background on the broader context of tourism, highlighting trends, challenges, and opportunities in the field. These papers also described what the government and NGOs were doing to support eco-friendly travel, which can serve as a standard for judging the effectiveness of CBT programs.

Policy papers, such as strategic plans and development frameworks, were examined in greater detail better to understand CBT's institutional support and regulatory environment. These papers outlined the government's objectives, funding strategies, and long-term sustainability goals. They demonstrated how CBT aligns with the country's tourism and development objectives. Policies in the Almaty Region, where CBT programs are being implemented, received extra care. The results of this study facilitated a clearer understanding of how policies impact CBT's growth and their relationship to the SDGs.

Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the qualitative data collected from interviews and user reports. It was easy to identify recurring themes and patterns. These themes and patterns show CBT. Three overarching themes emerged from the data: economic impacts, environmental protection actions, and societal impacts. The information showed that CBT programs encouraged locals to participate in tourism-related activities, which created more jobs, income, and power for those who lived there. The environmental practices theme focused on community-led conservation efforts, including waste management and wildlife protection plans. These were crucial for ensuring that CBT methods were environmentally friendly. Finally, the theme of cultural contributions highlighted how CBT programs used tourism to preserve and promote local crafts, practices, and history (Sabadash et al., 2020). The NVivo tool was used to code and organize the qualitative data. It enabled the analysis to proceed more quickly and accurately. Researchers used the software to organize the results and incorporate diverse perspectives. These themes are connected, as shown by the fact that community leaders' answers about infrastructure problems were coded under economic effects and environmental practices.

RESULTS

A survey of 30 tourism company managers in Kazakhstan was conducted to assess perceptions of CBT. It included their knowledge of the subject, their thoughts on its pros and cons, and their predictions for its growth. Descriptive statistics were used to add all the data for each critical measure (Table 3). For managers, the spread of scores on the Awareness of CBT question was 0.6 points, with a mean score of 4.2 out of 5. The people in charge of tourists know that CBT is integral to their plans.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for key metrics

Metric	Average Score	Standard Deviation
Awareness of CBT	4.2	0.6
Economic Benefit	4.5	0.5

Environmental Impact	3.8	0.7
Cultural Preservation	4.0	0.6
Infrastructure Challenge	3.5	0.8
Engagement Challenge	4.0	0.7
Future Potential	4.3	0.5

This is likely due to its alignment with Kazakhstan's environmentally friendly tourism plans. People in the tourism industry are familiar with CBT, as 65% of test-takers scored four or higher. The item that got the highest average score was "Perceived Benefits of CBT" (4.5; SD = 0.5). This means managers believe CBT has a significant impact on the local economy's growth rate. Based on the managers' mean score of 4.0 (SD = 0.6) for Cultural Preservation, they believe CBT is integral to preserving Kazakhstan's unique cultural heritage. A score of 3.8 (SD = 0.7) on the Environmental Impact of the CBT was the mean. The average score for the infrastructure challenge was 3.5 (SD = 0.8), indicating that managers were concerned about potential technical issues that could hinder effective CBT use. Also, the engagement challenge received an average score of 4.0 (SD = 0.7), indicating that managers must invest considerable effort to sustain community involvement. Transportation and lodging issues are two infrastructure concerns that could make it harder for tourists to get there and make their stay less pleasant. It is hard to involve local communities, which are essential to CBT success, but doing so can take a lot of time, effort, and resources. A score of 4.3 (SD = 0.5) for The Future Potential of CBT as a Sustainable Tourism Model indicates that managers are optimistic about CBT's future role in Kazakhstan's tourism industry.

The people in charge of tourism in Kazakhstan believe that it is a good long-term plan because it fits with their goals for cultural, environmental, and economic sustainability. With an average score of 4.2 out of 5, the poll shows that travel company managers are well aware of CBT (SD = 0.6). About 65% of those who answered said they were more than level 4 informed. This shows that CBT is an essential component of Kazakhstan's green tourism plans. The managers interviewed said they were familiar with CBT concepts and their application in sustainable tourism. Managers also gave CBT high marks for its benefits. The economic benefits got the best score (4.5 on a scale of 5) from managers. CBT can contribute to local economies by generating employment and revenue, aligning with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Many have said CBT is a great way to preserve native culture.

Their average score for cultural preservation was 4.0 (SD = 0.6), indicating they understood CBT's role in promoting local crafts, events, and traditions. It was clear from the observations that these results were supported by initiatives such as guided culture trips and handicraft workshops involving community people. These acts help achieve SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by fostering national pride and openness to new ideas. A mean score of 3.8 (SD = 0.7) was given to the effect of CBT on the setting. This means that managers were cautiously hopeful. People were concerned that eco-friendly methods were being applied uniformly across all CBT schools during interviews.

However, participant observations at ecotourism hotspots, such as the Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve, showed that waste management systems and conservation education programs worked effectively. These efforts contribute to achieving SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) by promoting environmentally friendly travel. However, problems persist, such as a lack of funds for building better infrastructure. The CBT's future potential got a positive average score of 4.3 (SD = 0.5). According to managers, CBT aligns well with Kazakhstan's sustainable tourism goals, which include enhancing local economies, preserving cultural heritage, and mitigating environmental impact. This positive outlook is supported by regression analysis, which shows that more experienced managers view CBT as more valuable because they have used it longer. Based on these results, increased Awareness and tailored support could make CBT's contributions to SDGs 8, 11, and 12 even more substantial.

This regression analysis examines the relationship between the independent variable, "Knowing About CBT", and the dependent variable, "Perceived Benefits of CBT", focusing on how CBT contributes to preserving culture, the economy, and the environment. As a control, this study also examines how engagement and the infrastructure Challenge might affect managers' views of CBT's benefits. It was used to assess model goodness-of-fit, and F-statistics were used to assess the models' importance. Multiple correlations were checked using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) tests. Table 4 shows that Awareness of CBT has a positive and statistically significant effect on perceived benefits across all samples and models. This supports the idea that people who know more about CBT are more likely to believe it is good for them in terms of economic, environmental, and cultural benefits. This positive relationship suggests that managers with a deeper understanding of CBT are more likely to recognize its numerous benefits.

Table 4. Regression analysis of Awareness of perceived benefits of CBT, including control variables

Metric Model	All Managers		Experienced Managers		Novice Managers	
	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
Instrument for Awareness	Baseline Model	Expanded Model	Baseline Model	Expanded Model	Baseline Model	Expanded Model
Dependent Variable	Awareness	Awareness	Awareness	Awareness	Awareness	Awareness
Economic Benefit	0.42	0.38	0.44	0.40	0.37	0.35
Environmental Impact	0.35	0.30	0.36	0.32	0.29	0.28
Cultural Preservation	0.28	0.25	0.30	0.27	0.23	0.22
R ²	0.42	0.38	0.44	0.40	0.36	0.32
Adjusted R ²	0.38	0.34	0.40	0.36	0.32	0.28
F-Statistic	12.5	10.2	13.8	11.5	9.6	8.2
VIF	1.2	1.1	1.3	1.2	1.1	1.0

Note. Models: (1) Baseline includes Awareness only; (2) Expanded includes Engagement Challenge and Infrastructure Challenge as control variables. Samples: All Managers, Experienced Managers (10+ years of experience), and Novice Managers (less than 5 years of experience). Statistical Significance: Standard errors in parentheses. Coefficients significant at $p < 0.05$. VIF: Variance Inflation Factor values indicate low multicollinearity.

Baseline Model (1) only has an Awareness variable, so the coefficients for perceived benefits are slightly higher across all samples. This differs from the Expanded Model (2), which has Engagement and Infrastructure challenges as control variables. The slight coefficient drop in Model (2) means that adding control variables makes Awareness less powerful. This means that managers' views on CBT are influenced by issues with engagement and infrastructure, as well as their Awareness of its benefits. Specifically, the control variables may reveal some additional differences in how people perceive things that Awareness alone cannot explain. This indicates that issues with engagement and infrastructure can lead managers to reconsider the benefits of CBT.

There are differences among managers with varying levels of experience, but those with 10 or more years consistently exhibit higher coefficients for Awareness of perceived benefits in both models. When managers understand how CBT works, they are more likely to find it helpful. Managers with less than five years of experience, on the other hand, have the lowest awareness coefficients. There might be a difference here, since younger managers have not yet had as much experience with CBT's potential to aid the tourism industry's long-term development. Low VIF scores indicate that the control variables (Engagement Challenge and Infrastructure Challenge) are valuable additions to the models. The fact that the F-statistics are significant indicates that the models are correct and that people are aware of issues with engagement and infrastructure, which are significant parts of how they perceive the benefits of CBT. This satisfactory model fit demonstrates that managers' views on CBT are highly dependent on their level of CBT knowledge and the issues identified.

Managers with more experience will likely get the most out of CBT. Lawmakers and practitioners must fix the issues with facilities and participation so that managers and communities can get the most out of CBT. The study examines the perceptions of Kazakhstani travel company managers regarding CBT and its potential to foster tourism growth over time. Much research has shown that teaching people about eco-friendly travel is essential to get them to support these practices (Ahmad et al., 2020; Darvishmotevali & Altinay, 2022; Ibnnou-Laaroussi et al., 2020).

If they learn more about it, they are more likely to see how CBT can help the economy grow, preserve cultural heritage, and lessen environmental damage. Prokopenko et al. (2019, 2020) emphasize the importance of digital marketing tools for advertising tourist spots worldwide. The study indicates a need to employ multiple digital tactics. Websites and email ads are two traditional forms of advertising. Some new ones are chatbots, voice search optimization, and celebrity marketing. Marketers for destinations can enhance their websites, stand out, and attract more tourists in a crowded market with custom digital tools (Shah, 2024).

CBT can help the economy, but only if people are aware of its benefits. It means that managers who are aware of it recognize its potential to benefit local economies. The economic effects of CBT have been studied before and mainly focus on how it helps local communities make money, create jobs, and stop money from leaving the area by making sure that tourism money stays there (Junaid et al., 2021; Lo & Janta, 2020; Mia et al., 2024; Shah & Shah, 2024). Managers who were more aware of CBT thought it significantly impacted the bottom line, as shown by the high coefficient of 0.42 for economic benefits. This result suggests that managers understand how CBT empowers communities by enabling them to retain a greater share of tourism revenue.

DISCUSSIONS

CBT plays a significant role in economic growth, particularly in rural and underdeveloped areas, by generating employment opportunities and motivating individuals to start their own businesses. Travel company managers always say this helps keep tourism dollars in the community.

CBT not only provides people with a direct means to generate profits but also prevents cash from leaving the community, ensuring profits remain within it. It fits with another study: CBT helps local economies grow by creating stable sources of income and lowering reliance on tourists from other countries (Junaid et al., 2021; Lo & Janta, 2020). The economic benefits of CBT are particularly evident in remote areas with limited traditional business options. For example, people in communities that used CBT reported increased household incomes, enabling them to afford better healthcare and schooling.

These results demonstrate that CBT aligns with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), emphasizing the need for sustainable economic growth that benefits all. Those in charge stated that the benefits are not distributed fairly when participation is low, and only a few individuals or groups profit from tourist activities.

That finding aligns with what Gohori and van der Merwe (2020) argue is important for the community to participate in CBT to support economic growth. Outside groups or a few people can take over tourism events when communities are inactive. Another critical thing affecting CBT's economic success is the need for cash rewards and support systems.

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is an effective way to protect the environment, as it promotes eco-friendly activities and incorporates environmental protection measures into tours. Based on the study, CBT results indicate that managers were hopeful it would help reduce the environmental impact of tourism activities.

CBT projects have taught people how to deal with trash, protect wildlife, and use resources without harming the environment in places like the Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve.

People in the community have made significant efforts to preserve the reserve's natural beauty and ecological health, including running programs to plant trees and observe wildlife. These efforts align with SDG 12 (Responsible Production and Consumption), which calls for people to use environmentally friendly methods to protect natural resources and reduce waste (Shah & Shah, 2023; Shah & Asghar, 2024).

Lodges made from eco-friendly materials are one type of eco-friendly place to stay, demonstrating how CBT can incorporate sustainable tourist infrastructure with minimal environmental impact.

A study by Bayuningsih et al. (2024) and a survey by Samora-Arvela et al. (2023) also found that CBT can help promote sustainability by adopting environmentally friendly practices. The moderate effect size of the regression analysis indicates that infrastructure and participation issues significantly affect CBT effectiveness in this setting. People are more aware of the environment when they better understand CBT, but these structural hurdles keep it from reaching its full potential (Tamir, 2015).

Knowledge and tools are needed to meet long-term environmental goals. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, including skill-building programs for individuals, funding for environmentally friendly infrastructure, and fostering stronger relationships between local communities, NGOs, and governments.

Community-based travel is a critical way to learn about and preserve cultural history because it uses traditional methods and local knowledge to enhance the travel experience. CBT must help transmit information from one generation to the next in rural areas, where modernization often threatens to end traditional practices. Teenagers and young adults can learn about their cultural history through CBT programs that teach them how to engage in tourism-related activities.

This aligns with SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), which emphasizes sustainable urban and rural development that benefits all and preserves natural and cultural assets (Fan et al., 2023; Svitlichna et al., 2024). They demonstrate that CBT empowers communities to control their cultural assets, enabling them to protect and enjoy these assets in ways that benefit both locals and tourists. However, the study found cultural commodification issues, such as when customs are altered or accelerated to cater to tourists. Another study by Alamineh et al. (2023) also discussed this issue. It highlights the difficulty of representing culture authentically without reducing it to a product. Some community members were concerned about the modifications made to traditional arts and dances to appeal to tourists. This could make them less culturally important. These steps might be reasonable for business in the short term, but they could hurt the accuracy and integrity of cultural history in the long term.

This study found that poor infrastructure is one of the main factors that make CBT difficult to use. Problems like these make it harder for people to get to tourist spots in rural and remote areas. This keeps tourists from both inside and outside of the country. Managers and community members often mentioned that attracting tourists was challenging due to the poor road conditions and limited transportation options, such as buses and trains.

This supports Ivankova et al. (2021), who emphasized the importance of good infrastructure for tourism growth, as it enables tourists to move around and access the services they need. Another reason CBT sites are less appealing is that they often lack reliable transportation, suitable accommodations, and internet access. Online marketing is also less successful when internet connectivity is poor, and tourists find it harder to share their experiences. It makes CBT destinations less visible and less competitive. A significant issue was that people were unable to participate in the community. People were concerned about the level of community engagement in CBT projects. People in the area need to feel a sense of ownership and commitment to tourism activities for CBT to be successful in the long run. Still, the research showed that many groups either do not know about CBT projects, do not want to, or cannot participate.

This means that tourism projects do not always align with the community's wants or needs, which is contrary to CBT. Also, if participation is insufficient, benefits might not be distributed equitably among all individuals or groups. One more way public-private partnerships can help community-driven tourism projects is by providing them with the tools and guidance they need. Putra et al. (2024) emphasize that collaboration is essential for improving facilities and enhancing community involvement. These thoughts agree with that. If infrastructure problems are solved and more people participate, CBT could be a more effective and sustainable way for Kazakhstan to attract more tourists.

Researchers found that people's perceptions of CBT benefits are strongly linked to their familiarity with it. Given its benefits to the economy, environment, and culture, managers with over 10 years of experience tend to give CBT higher ratings than those with fewer years of experience. These people noted that long-time tourism workers generally have a better understanding of the long-term benefits of sustainable tourism practices, having witnessed and utilized CBT programs over an extended period.

Concentrating on training programs and chances to learn from more experienced managers is essential to close the gap between managers with and without much experience. In CBT, pairing workers with different experience levels in classes, seminars, and group projects can help them share their knowledge and work together more effectively. The main topics of the training classes should be sustainable tourism principles, strategies for involving people in tourism, and best practices in CBT management.

This study's results align with new research, supporting its conclusions. One crucial area where everyone agrees is that infrastructure and participation problems significantly hinder CBT's success. The problems with transportation, housing, and community involvement identified in this study are similar to those reported by Sushchenko et al. (2023). Through their research, they discovered that effective logistics and active community engagement are crucial for sustainable tourism development, particularly in rural and underserved areas. It is clear from both studies that infrastructure and participation are linked and that neither can function without the other. Several groups, such as governments, NGOs, and business organizations, must work together to solve these problems. The focus on preserving culture as a primary goal of CBT is another area where the two share similarities. The results of this study show that CBT helps protect traditions through guided tours, handicraft workshops, and cultural performances, which aligns with Fan et al. (2023)'s view on the importance of communities taking charge of heritage protection. Both studies demonstrate that CBT empowers local communities to own their cultural assets. It ensures they are protected and honored in ways that benefit both the economy and society.

The study's focus on protecting the environment aligns with the findings of Bayuningsih et al. (2024) and Samora-Arvela et al. (2023), suggesting that CBT can make tourism events eco-friendlier. This study's focus on the value of managerial experience aligns with Raftopoulos' (2020) observation that tourism professionals with more experience are better positioned to recognize the long-term benefits of sustainable practices. Both studies demonstrate that the information and experience people acquire over time play a critical role in shaping their thoughts and decisions in tourism management. Putra et al. (2024) stated that investments in infrastructure and strong government-private sector relationships are essential for long-term tourism. Literature supports this conclusion, highlighting that CBT programs can help expand local economies and establish stable livelihoods, particularly in remote or underserved areas where tourism growth can contribute to poverty reduction (Giampiccoli et al., 2021; Islam et al., 2024; Sharma et al., 2024). However, our research also showed that Engagement Challenges led people to believe CBT was better for the economy than it actually was. When community involvement is insufficient, managers may perceive tourism's economic potential as limited. Havadi Nagy and Espinosa Segui (2020) also found that active community involvement is necessary to realize the financial benefits of CBT and to ensure that communities own and run tourism projects, both of which are beneficial.

Reducing tourism's environmental impact is another essential part of sustainable tourism. There is a link between managers' knowledge of CBT and their perceptions of its environmental impact. This means managers with a deeper understanding of CBT are more likely to believe it benefits the environment. That opinion might change if CBT focuses on low-impact tourism practices, such as limiting the number of tourists, adhering to strict environmental rules, and promoting eco-friendly lodging (Quang et al., 2023; Samora-Arvela et al., 2023). Sustainable tourism ensures that tourist activities have as little environmental effect as possible. Sainko et al. (2021) evaluate the efficiency of tour operators and travel agents in Ukraine's tourism market.

They track key metrics, including visitor numbers, voucher prices, and sales volume, to gauge success. The study indicates that the market requires greater efficiency and competitiveness, which can be achieved through strategic changes across all regions. The moderate effect size suggests that managers may still be concerned about the sustainability of CBT for the environment, despite Awareness altering people's environmental perceptions. This might be because it is challenging to ensure that all CBT projects adhere to the same guidelines for sustainable practices. The supporting literature indicates that even when CBT is delivered effectively, environmental sustainability can be achieved only if community members have the tools and knowledge to implement conservation measures correctly (Tamir, 2015). Also, our results show that engagement challenges make people less likely to think CBT is good for the environment. This shows the influence of strong community involvement in reaching environmental goals. According to the research, involving people in the area is essential for adopting sustainable methods because it makes them feel responsible for protecting natural resources (Balsalobre-Lorente et al., 2023; Litvinenko et al., 2022). Belgibayeva et al. (2024) explore the economic and environmental effects of eliminating organic waste in Kazakhstan. They focus on how food waste affects municipal solid waste.

The study emphasizes the need for advanced methods to reduce waste, such as biogas production and composting, to improve waste management. Community-based tourism helps preserve and promote local culture, aligning well with sustainable tourism goals. Our study found a link between knowledge of CBT and thoughtful cultural preservation. This link was less intense than the ones for economic and environmental benefits. Managers familiar with CBT likely appreciate its ability to facilitate cross-cultural interactions, foster respect for local traditions, and support cultural heritage initiatives. The results of this study align with those of Fan et al. (2023), who found that CBT helps communities showcase their cultural assets by offering tourists authentic experiences that help keep cultures alive and strengthen identities. One issue that frequently arises in CBT projects is the risk of cultural commodification (Dykh et al., 2023) and the difficulty of maintaining cultural authenticity due to the weaker link.

The literature expresses concern that, if not appropriately handled, CBT can commercialize indigenous traditions. Results also indicate that engagement challenges can lead people to overlook the cultural benefits of CBT. It supports the idea that community involvement is essential for protecting cultural heritage in tourism settings (Li et al., 2020). The literature supports the idea that tourism projects are more likely to succeed with the active participation of community members, as community ownership is essential for the long-term management of tourism resources (Mir et al., 2024; Musavengane & Kloppers, 2020). People not involved in CBT projects may lose interest, fail to collaborate, and ultimately fail to achieve the economic, environmental, and cultural goals they set out to achieve. Krykavskyy et al. (2021) explore new and competitive business plans for tourism companies that work with sustainable development. They find that tourism businesses need help adopting an innovation-based management approach and stress the need for a systemic approach to long-term growth. The Infrastructure Challenge had a more significant impact on managers' thinking than engagement, particularly regarding its potential to boost the economy. It can be challenging for towns to attract and retain tourists if they lack sufficient infrastructure, including accessible roads, adequate accommodations, and basic amenities. Infrastructure plays a significant role in the success of tourist spots, particularly in areas that require greater development and offer all necessary services (Ivankova et al., 2021).

Some places may lose tourists and money if they need the proper infrastructure. It may also be challenging to engage in culturally and environmentally appropriate activities. So, the infrastructure needs to be improved to enable communities to benefit from tourism. Troian et al. (2023) emphasize the need for innovative management strategies, further scientific research, and the development of the "blue economy" to ensure the long-term sustainability of marine tourism. The results show that community-based strategies and environmental care are essential for making the marine tourism industry solid and responsible. Additionally, managers with less than 5 years of experience showed less Awareness of all perceived benefits than those with more than 10 years of experience. In other words, managers with more experience are more likely to see how CBT can help them in the long run.

Evidence from Weaver and Lawton (2004) and Gevorgyan (2024) indicates that more experienced individuals in the tourism industry have witnessed firsthand the impact of tourism policies and community-based initiatives on local populations. According to Bashynska et al. (2019), Guo et al. (2024), and Khurdei et al. (2023), the most critical factors determining the distribution of museums are the availability of natural and historical resources, population density, and the rise in tourism. This study shows the importance of spatial planning and local resources for cultural infrastructure. It also gives us ideas for developing tourism in other areas using similar methods. Nikolenko et al. (2024) examine the philosophical and psychological bases of ethics and social responsibility. The study's cluster analysis shows that people have different ideas about what it means to be socially responsible. This study demonstrates the significance of integrating CBT approaches with global sustainability goals, linking its findings to SDGs 8, 11, and 12. Improving facilities and increasing participation are two key challenges that must be addressed if CBT is to realize its full potential in Kazakhstan. Further research into CBT's potential as a paradigm for sustainable tourism and the development of novel solutions should build on these findings.

This study shows that lawmakers and CBT practitioners can improve it in several ways. These efforts can highlight successful programs, such as the Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve, which has seen increased participation and support for CBT. People in the community, owners of tourism businesses, and government leaders should be the primary targets of efforts to raise Awareness about CBT, ensuring everyone understands its capabilities. Second, skill-building programs should be implemented to help people get involved in their communities. Through these programs, people in the area can learn to be eco-friendly, manage tourism, and foster a more welcoming environment. These skills enable them to participate in and benefit from CBT projects.

Community members improve their skills through these types of programs. People also feel a sense of ownership and commitment to CBT projects, making them more likely to last. Government members should collaborate with partners from NGOs, academic institutions, and the business sector to plan and implement these training programs. Lastly, improving infrastructure should be a top priority to make it easier to access CBT sites and extend session duration. Investing in transportation networks, such as improved roads and public transit, can facilitate easier access for tourists to remote CBT sites. To meet the growing desire for eco-friendly tourism experiences, eco-friendly lodging and facilities should also be built. Public-private partnerships can be beneficial in funding these changes and ensuring that resources are used effectively and projects are completed successfully. By addressing these infrastructure issues, lawmakers can facilitate CBT's growth and support its pursuit of broader sustainable development objectives (Kovshun et al., 2023b).

Although this study contributes to the existing body of research, it has several limitations. Although the sample size of 30 managers from tour companies is substantial, the results may not be generalizable to other situations. To provide a more complete picture of CBT's effects, future studies should include a broader range of stakeholders in the sample, including government officials, tourists, and community members. The study examined only the Almaty Region, so it may not fully reflect how CBT is used across Kazakhstan. One way to address this issue is to expand the geographic scope of future research. The results may not be generalizable to other parts of Kazakhstan or to other groups because the sample size and the study were limited to a small area. The research provides substantial information on the pros and cons of CBT, but its findings should be applied in care settings across diverse environmental and social contexts. These results should be confirmed with larger, more diverse samples and comparative studies across multiple areas in the future.

CONCLUSIONS

The main point of this study is to demonstrate the importance of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) to the long-term growth of Kazakhstan's tourism business. CBT looks at tourism from all angles, including economic, environmental, and cultural factors. It focuses on community involvement and long-term survival. The results make it clear that parties must understand CBT for it to work. Managers of travel companies with a deeper understanding of CBT were more likely to recognize its potential to stimulate economic growth, safeguard cultural heritage, and promote environmental conservation.

This highlights the importance of educating people about CBT's potential to foster long-term tourism growth through targeted initiatives. Although it holds considerable promise, the study identified significant problems that undermine CBT's effectiveness in Kazakhstan. Engaging people became a big problem, as few community members participated, making CBT programs less welcoming. Communities may not feel a strong connection to their cultural and natural resources if they are not actively involved in preserving them. Firm community involvement plans are needed to solve this problem. These include programs that build people's skills, allow everyone to make decisions, and encourage participation in decision-making. For CBT to be effective in the long run, it is crucial to empower local communities to lead it.

Significant infrastructure gaps also hinder CBT's growth in Kazakhstan. It was noted that inadequate transportation networks, accommodations, and digital connectivity are significant problems that make CBT destinations more challenging and less appealing. These problems make it harder for CBT projects to attract tourists, thereby reducing their economic impact. Targeted investments in infrastructure, particularly eco-friendly housing and improved transportation, are crucial to increasing the likelihood of CBT project success. These infrastructure gaps can be addressed significantly through public-private partnerships and government backing, ensuring that CBT destinations are easily accessible, visually appealing, and equipped with the amenities modern tourists require. The study also demonstrated the importance of management experience in shaping people's perceptions of CBT's benefits. Managers with more than 10 years of experience were more likely than managers with less experience to see the long-term benefits of CBT.

This finding highlights the importance of training programs and mentorship opportunities in helping less experienced professionals acquire new skills and bridge the knowledge gap. By educating people about CBT principles and best practices, the tourism industry can ensure that sustainable tourism projects are implemented consistently and effectively

across Kazakhstan. Policymakers should prioritize projects addressing the problems identified in this study to maximize the benefits of CBT. Targeted campaigns that promote the benefits of CBT can receive support from a broader range of groups, including local communities, government agencies, and businesses. Communities should implement skill development programs to provide members with the information and resources necessary to participate in and benefit from CBT programs. Also, building new infrastructure should be a top priority, focusing on improving environmental facilities and transportation networks to make CBT destinations more accessible and sustainable.

This study should be expanded to include more parties, such as tourists, government officials, and locals, to gather a broader range of perspectives on CBT. Comparative studies of CBT across various parts of Kazakhstan would also help us understand the other problems and challenges that accompany it. Longitudinal studies examining how CBT changes local economies, cultures, and environments over time can also help us understand how well it works as a model for sustainable tourism. Research in these areas can help CBT improve and expand in the future, thereby benefiting Kazakhstan's tourism economy and contributing to global sustainability goals.

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