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# DEVELOPING HEALTH TOURISM ON THE BASIS OF NATURAL-RECREATIONAL RESOURCES (THE CASE OF THE ZAAMIN NATIONAL NATURE PARK)

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**Abstract.** Using the example of the Zaamin National Nature Park, the paper analyzes the development of health (wellness) tourism based on natural-recreational resources. It examines the essence and types of health tourism and the natural-recreational resources of the area (climate, juniper forests, medicinal plants, water). Directions for the sustainable development of tourism in harmony with the conservation regime, as well as its significance for the socio-economic development of the territory, are substantiated.

**Keywords:** health tourism, natural-recreational resources, Zaamin National Nature Park, climatotherapy, juniper forests, sustainable tourism, regional development.

**Introduction.** Health tourism is one of the fastest-growing tourism segments in the world. International research confirms this: according to the Global Wellness Institute, wellness tourism grew by 13.8% in 2023–2024, becoming one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global wellness economy, and its market volume is projected to reach 1.4 trillion US dollars by 2029 [5].

People's aspiration toward a healthy lifestyle, together with the need to escape chronic fatigue and the urban environment, is increasing the demand for recreation in natural settings. This makes the use of the natural-recreational resources of mountain areas a pressing task. The Zaamin National Nature Park, in the south of the Jizzakh region, is one of the most promising areas for developing health tourism in Uzbekistan, distinguished by its therapeutic mountain climate and rich natural resources. This paper examines the health-tourism potential of the area and the issues of its sustainable use.

**Health tourism: its essence and types.** Health tourism is a type of tourism aimed at restoring and strengthening human health and preventing disease through natural factors (climate, air, water, and plants). Its main forms are the following: climatotherapy – treatment through the effect of a favorable mountain climate; aerotherapy and phytoncide therapy – the use of clean air rich in phytoncides; phytotherapy – treatment with medicinal plants; landscape therapy – the positive psychological and physical effect of natural scenery; and terrainkur (terrain cure) – therapeutic walking along designated paths. Owing to their clean air, solar radiation, and landscape diversity, mountain areas are especially favorable for these forms. This type of tourism is based on the principles of recreational geography and balneology (health-resort science) [2; 3].

**The natural-recreational resources of the Zaamin National Nature Park.** The Zaamin National Nature Park was established in 1976 to protect natural juniper forests and to enable their use for recreation, tourism, and scientific and cultural purposes [6]. It is located on the northern slope of the Turkestan Range, in the Zaamin and Bakhmal districts; it covers 23,429.2 hectares, with elevations ranging from 1,000 to 4,033 m above sea level [6]. This wide altitudinal range gives rise to diverse climatic zones and landscapes, enriching the area's health-tourism opportunities.

The main natural-recreational resources that determine the area's health-tourism potential are the following. Therapeutic mountain climate and clean air – thanks to its mild climate and pure air, Zaamin is popularly known as the "Switzerland of Uzbekistan". Juniper forests – by enriching the air with phytoncides, they create a therapeutic environment beneficial for the respiratory and nervous systems. Medicinal plants – of the more than 1,216 plant species within the park, over 107 possess

medicinal properties [6]. Mineral spring waters – therapeutic springs such as Sherbulak, as well as mountain streams flowing into the Zaaminsuv reservoir.

In addition, the area has high biodiversity: more than 282 invertebrate species, over 30 mammals, more than 102 birds, over 14 reptiles, 2 amphibian species, and 1 fish species are found here. Of these, 3 mammal species and 12 bird species are listed in the Red Book of the Republic of Uzbekistan [6]. Ecotourism and natural-historical sites such as Boboyongok, Uriklisoy, Sharshara, Sherbulak, the "Thousand-Year-Old Juniper", and the Mik Fortress make it possible to enrich health programs with nature and culture.

**Opportunities for developing health tourism.** The area has the essential infrastructural foundations for developing health tourism: the Zaamin sanatorium and a number of recreation centers operate within the park, and 456 hectares have been allocated to the "Suffa 2400" tourism directorate [6]. If the existing base is expanded in line with modern requirements, the area could become a major health-tourism center.

These opportunities are also supported at the level of state policy: the regional program for 2026–2027 envisages the construction of large tourism complexes in the region's tourism-oriented districts and the development of tourism services and facilities in a total of 25 mahallas (neighborhoods), including the establishment of a tourism zone on a master-plan basis on 81.7 hectares in the Zaamin district [1]. These measures create a legal and investment basis for expanding the existing sanatorium-and-resort base and bringing health services to a new level.

The following can be identified as promising directions: establishing integrated treatment-and-prevention programs that combine climatotherapy, phytotherapy, and active recreation; organizing terrainkur (therapeutic walking paths) and ecological trails; opening phyto-bars and phyto-teahouses based on medicinal plants; and combining summer treatment with winter recreation in order to reduce seasonality, while aligning service quality with international standards. The relationship between the area's natural-recreational resources and the corresponding directions of health tourism is summarized in Figure 1.

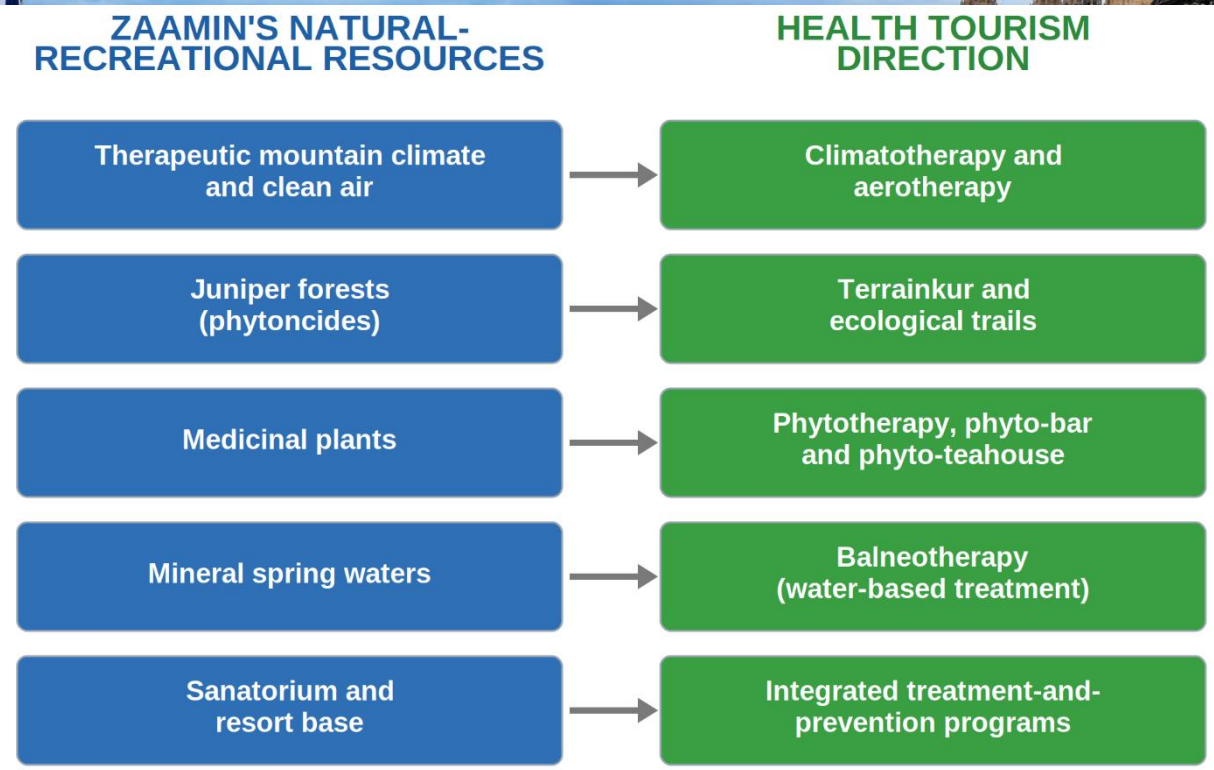



**Fig. 1.** The natural-recreational resources of Zaamin and the corresponding directions of health tourism

Source: compiled by the author on the basis of [2; 4; 6].

As shown in Figure 1, each natural-recreational resource of Zaamin serves as a basis for a specific direction of health tourism. The therapeutic mountain climate and clean air are favorable for climatotherapy and aerotherapy, while the phytoncide-rich environment of the juniper forests creates suitable conditions for terrainkur and ecological trails. The rich range of medicinal plants makes it possible to organize phytotherapy, phyto-bars, and phyto-teahouses, and the mineral spring waters serve as a basis for balneotherapy. The existing sanatorium and resort base helps to integrate these directions into unified, comprehensive treatment-and-prevention programs.

**The balance between conservation and tourism.** Since Zaamin is a protected area, the development of tourism must not conflict with its ecological regime. Therefore, health tourism should be developed in a sustainable and regulated form – outside the strict protection zones, in specially designated recreational areas – taking into account the recreational capacity, that is, the number of tourists the area can accommodate without harming nature. Otherwise, excessive anthropogenic load may damage natural resources, including the unique juniper forests [4]. In this sense, the balance between conservation and use is the fundamental principle for developing health tourism in Zaamin.

**Economic significance.** Health tourism can make a significant contribution to the socio-economic development of the Zaamin district and the region as a whole. As a high-value-added service, it increases tourists' average spending and length of stay, thereby stimulating the activity of other sectors as well – transport, trade, catering, and handicrafts – and producing a multiplier effect. As a result, new jobs are created, the incomes of the local population rise, and the area, becoming a specialized health-tourism destination, strengthens its tourism competitiveness. In this way, health tourism becomes an effective economic instrument for the socio-economic development of a mountain area.

**Conclusion.** The Zaamin National Nature Park has high potential for developing health tourism in terms of its natural-recreational resources – its therapeutic climate, juniper forests, medicinal plants,

and biodiversity. Making effective use of this potential requires a sustainable and integrated approach that harmonizes tourism with the conservation regime. Such an approach, while preserving the area's unique nature, also serves its socio-economic development, thereby reconciling the goals of ecological protection and economic growth.

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