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ECO-TOURISM

The contemporary world is confronted with unparalleled environmental issues, ranging from climate change to the decline of biodiversity. In this light, tourism, as a major sector of the global economy, must be integrated into the framework of sustainable development. Eco-tourism, a responsible and environmentally conscious form of travel, is gaining increasing relevance. It offers travelers an opportunity to explore unique natural landscapes and cultural heritage while contributing to the preservation of the environment and improving the well-being of local communities [1].

Eco-tourism refers to responsible travel to natural areas that contribute to the conservation of the environment and improve the welfare of local people. Unlike mass tourism, it is characterized by small groups of travelers, minimal impact on the environment, and a focus on educational and nature conservation aspects. One of the key aspects of eco-tourism is the protection of nature and biodiversity. Tour operators strive to provide opportunities for observing and studying natural phenomena while minimizing their impact on these ecosystems.

The main principles of ecotourism include several key aspects. First, it involves reducing negative impacts on the environment, which means minimizing the carbon footprint, using renewable energy sources, and respecting nature, including the protection of vegetation and wildlife. Second, ecotourism should provide economic benefits to local communities by leaving a significant portion of the income in the region to create jobs and promote economic growth. The third aspect is raising awareness about the need for nature conservation. Ecotourism should serve an educational function, informing tourists about the importance of preserving nature and cultural heritage. Finally, involving local communities in the planning and management of ecotourism allows for consideration of their needs and interests, supporting the sustainable development of the region.

However, despite its noble goals, ecotourism faces a number of challenges. One of the main issues is «greenwashing», where companies advertise their services as environmentally friendly without actually mee-

ting those standards. Another problem is the excessive development of infrastructure, which can lead to the degradation of natural landscapes. Uncontrolled influx of tourists into vulnerable ecosystems can negatively impact local flora and fauna, cause soil erosion, and pollute water resources. Therefore, it is crucial to carefully balance economic and environmental interests, paying special attention to the preservation of cultural heritage and traditions. Effective mechanisms are needed to control tourist flows, prevent excessive pressure on ecosystems, and ensure the preservation of their biodiversity. Only in this way can ecotourism fully realize its potential as a tool for sustainable development [2].

Only strict adherence to the principles of environmental responsibility, active engagement with local communities, and continuous monitoring can ensure that ecotourism becomes a truly effective tool for nature conservation and improving the quality of life for people. This requires a comprehensive approach that includes not only compliance with environmental standards but also the active participation of local residents in decision-making processes. Sustainable development of ecotourism is only possible if all stakeholders work together to create a harmonious coexistence between tourists and nature, as well as to ensure a fair distribution of economic benefits among the local population.

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DIGITALIZATION TECHNOLOGIES IN TOURISM

Digitization in tourism is actively developing, and many companies are already implementing advanced technologies such as blockchain and artificial intelligence (AI) to improve their services and increase efficiency.

Blockchain is a special technology for storing data on a set of nodes (computers) connected to a network, and it is based on four principles:

- 1) a distributed database to which all participants have access and no one has full control;