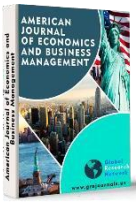

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Article

Foreign Experience in the Development of Agrotourism: A Comparative Analysis of Regional Models and Lessons for Uzbekistan

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Abstract: Agrotourism has become one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism industry and is increasingly recognised as an instrument for diversifying rural economies, sustaining employment, conserving cultural landscapes and promoting environmental sustainability. This study examines and compares the experience of leading agrotourism economies in Europe, North America and Asia–Oceania in order to identify transferable principles for the development of agrotourism in Uzbekistan. A comparative analytical approach was applied, drawing on secondary statistical data from international and national agencies (UNWTO, Eurostat, ISTAT, USDA and national tourism organisations) together with peer-reviewed scholarship covering the period 2018–2024. Quantitative indicators — the number of registered enterprises, annual revenue, employment, visitor numbers and growth rates — were combined with qualitative criteria describing the role of the state, the legislative base, certification, financing and marketing. The analysis identifies three distinct development models: a European model based on strict regulation, quality certification and public subsidy; a market-driven North American model with minimal federal intervention and pronounced regional diversity; and an Asian model characterised by strong state involvement and centralised planning. Across all three, success consistently depends on an authentic link to farming, a functioning quality-control system, regional specialisation, public support and effective branding. The Italian, Austrian, French, United States and Chinese cases each offer specific lessons that, adapted to local conditions, could allow Uzbekistan to capitalise on its agricultural traditions and cultural heritage and to emerge as a regional agrotourism leader.

Keywords: Agrotourism, Rural Development, Comparative Analysis, Development Models, Quality Certification, Regional Specialisation, Uzbekistan.

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1. Introduction

Agrotourism is among the most dynamically expanding segments of the world tourism industry, and over the past decade a large number of countries have recorded substantial achievements in the field. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the global agrotourism market reached USD 62.5 billion in 2024, growing at an average annual rate of about 12 per cent. The sector is widely regarded as a vehicle for diversifying rural areas, securing employment for rural populations, preserving cultural heritage and supporting ecological sustainability [1], [2], [3].

The territorial development of agrotourism rests on markedly different models across countries. In some states, government support and centralised planning predominate, whereas in others market forces and private initiative play the leading role.

These contrasts make cross-country comparison particularly informative: they reveal not a single optimal pathway but a set of regulatory, financial and organisational choices whose effectiveness is conditioned by local context. Understanding which arrangements have produced durable results, and under what circumstances, is a precondition for designing sound national policy [4], [5], [6].

Uzbekistan possesses rich agricultural traditions, a distinctive cultural heritage and a favourable geographical position, all of which create considerable potential for agrotourism. Yet the country lacks a consolidated body of evidence on how successful agrotourism systems abroad are organised and financed, and on which of their features are transferable. The present study addresses this gap. Its objective is to analyse and compare the agrotourism experience of leading economies in Europe, North America and Asia–Oceania on the basis of statistical indicators and the scholarly literature, and on that basis to derive practical lessons and recommendations for the development of agrotourism in Uzbekistan [7], [8].

2. Materials and Methods

The study employs a comparative analytical design. Rather than testing a single hypothesis on primary data, it synthesises and contrasts national agrotourism systems in order to abstract recurring success factors and policy mechanisms. This approach is appropriate to the research aim, since the phenomena of interest — legislative frameworks, certification regimes and financing instruments — operate at the level of national systems and are best understood through structured comparison [9], [10].

The evidence base consists of secondary sources of two kinds. The first is official statistical data published by international and national agencies, including the UNWTO, Eurostat, the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of China, and the national tourism organisations of Austria, France, Spain, Poland, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand. The second is peer-reviewed scholarship on rural tourism and agrotourism published in journals such as Tourism Management, the Journal of Travel Research, the Journal of Sustainable Tourism and Sociologia Ruralis, together with monographic literature. Wherever possible the most recent figures, covering the period 2018–2024, were used; figures for individual years are reported as published by the originating source.

The comparison combines quantitative and qualitative dimensions. The quantitative indicators are the number of registered agrotourism enterprises, annual revenue, employment generated, visitor numbers and the rate of growth over the reference period. The qualitative criteria describe the role of the state, the nature of the legislative base, the presence and stringency of certification, the dominant financing instruments, the prevailing marketing approach, the principal policy objective, the authenticity requirement imposed on operators and the typical enterprise size. Three macro-regions were selected for analysis — Europe, North America and Asia–Oceania — because together they account for the overwhelming majority of global agrotourism activity and because they exemplify contrasting governance approaches. Within each region, individual countries were chosen on the basis of market size, the maturity of their regulatory framework and the availability of reliable data [11], [12].

Two limitations of the data should be acknowledged at the outset. First, definitions of agrotourism differ across jurisdictions, so cross-country totals are indicative rather than strictly commensurable. Second, in several countries — notably the United States — a substantial volume of activity remains informal and is therefore under-recorded in official statistics. These caveats are taken into account in the interpretation of the results [13].

3. Results

3.1 The European model

The European Union is the global leader in agrotourism development. According to Eurostat, more than 500,000 officially registered agrotourism enterprises operated across EU member states in 2024, receiving some 180 million guest-nights annually and generating combined revenue of around EUR 45 billion. The development of European agrotourism rests on several interlocking factors: a robust legislative base, public subsidies, regional branding and systems of quality certification. Within the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), agrotourism is designated as an important avenue for the diversification of rural areas; of the EUR 95.5 billion allocated to rural development under the 2021–2027 CAP, an estimated 8–10 per cent is directed toward agrotourism-related projects, while the LEADER and EAFRD programmes provide farms with grants and concessional loans for the creation of agrotourism infrastructure [14], [15].

Italy occupies the leading position in the world agrotourism market and possesses the most developed agrotourism legislation. According to ISTAT, by the end of 2023 the country had 25,390 licensed agrotourism enterprises, 42 per cent more than in 2010, with combined annual revenue of EUR 1.65 billion, equivalent to 6.8 per cent of the gross income of Italian farms. The Italian model, known as agriturismo, is tightly regulated: under Law No. 730 of 1985, only holdings whose principal activity is agriculture and for which agricultural income constitutes at least 50 per cent of total income may register as agrotourism enterprises. This requirement is central to preserving authenticity and preventing the emergence of "false" agrotourism operations; legislation revised in 2006 granted regional authorities the power to impose additional requirements [16], [17].

Italian regional specialisation is particularly instructive. Tuscany is renowned for wine tourism and gastronomic agrotourism, hosting more than 4,200 enterprises with annual revenue of EUR 380 million; Sonnino (2004) shows that in Tuscany agrotourism functions not merely as an economic activity but as a means of forging a unified terroir brand uniting local produce, landscape and culture. Trentino-Alto Adige is associated with mountain agrotourism and dairy production (2,800 enterprises), while the southern regions — Sicily (1,950), Calabria (1,200) and Apulia (1,850) — specialise in agrotourism linked to citrus and olive-oil production.

Table 1. Agrotourism indicators in European countries, 2024.

Country	Enterprises	Revenue (€ bn)	Employment (000s)	Visitors (mn)	Growth 2018–2024 (%)
Italy	25,390	1.65	98.5	14.2	+28.4
Austria	9,850	0.78	42.0	8.5	+18.6
France	32,500	1.42	85.0	12.8	+22.1
Germany	22,400	1.15	68.0	9.6	+15.8
Spain	18,200	0.92	52.0	7.4	+32.5
Poland	8,950	0.35	28.0	4.2	+45.2
Romania	2,850	0.12	12.0	1.8	+68.4
Greece	4,200	0.28	18.0	2.6	+38.7
EU total	**~170,000**	**~8.5**	**~520**	**~85**	**+24.3**

Source: compiled by the author from Eurostat, ISTAT, Agriturist and national statistics (2024). EU totals refer to officially registered enterprises and differ from the broader population of operators.

Austria sets world standards for the quality and organisation of agrotourism. The national branding programme "Urlaub am Bauernhof" (Holiday on the Farm) has been implemented successfully since 1991; according to the Austrian Ministry of Agriculture, 9,850 farms engaged in formal agrotourism activity in 2023, representing 7.2 per cent of all

farms. A defining feature of the Austrian model is its rigorous quality-control system, in which every enterprise is graded on a four-level "flowers" scale ranging from basic amenities (one flower) to premium service (four flowers). More than fifty criteria apply to each level, and grading is verified every three years by independent assessors, allowing tourists to form precise expectations and stimulating competition on quality rather than price. Organic agrotourism is especially well developed: 22 per cent of Austrian agrotourism enterprises hold organic certification, three times the European average. Tyrol is the principal centre of mountain agrotourism (2,450 enterprises; EUR 185 million), while Salzburg specialises in dairy farming and cheese-production tourism (1,680 enterprises; EUR 124 million) and Carinthia in lakes and organic farms (1,120 enterprises; EUR 78 million) [18], [19].

In France, agrotourism is organised through national networks such as "Gîtes de France" and "Bienvenue à la Ferme". Founded in 1951, Gîtes de France is the largest rural-tourism network, today uniting more than 42,000 members and providing a single brand, a centralised booking system and common quality standards; in 2023 it recorded 12.8 million guest-nights. A distinctive feature of French agrotourism is the primacy of its gastronomic orientation: the "Bienvenue à la Ferme" network unites more than 10,000 farms, 65 per cent of which offer gastronomic agrotourism such as tastings, on-farm dining and cooking classes. Regional specialisation is strong — Bordeaux and Burgundy for wine tourism (3.2 million visitors annually), Normandy for dairy products and apple cider (1.8 million), and Provence for lavender and olive-oil tourism (2.1 million). Comparing farm tourism across Europe, Potočnik-Slavič and Schmitz (2013) identify the wide use of the concept of terroir in tourism marketing as the hallmark of the French model; instruments such as the AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) and IGP (Indication Géographique Protégée) certifications allow agrotourism products to be tied to a territorial brand [20], [21].

Spain has displayed the fastest growth of any European market over the past five years (+32.5 per cent), with 18,200 enterprises in operation in 2023 according to the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture. Its distinctive contribution is the integration of agrotourism with the state-owned "Paradores" hotel network — upmarket hotels housed in castles and monasteries — which organises gastronomic tours in cooperation with local agrotourism operators. Regional specialisations include La Rioja (wine tourism, 1,250 enterprises), Galicia (seafood and dairy farms, 2,100), Andalusia (olive oil and livestock, 3,400) and Catalonia (cava and confectionery tourism, 2,800). Sharpley and Vass (2006) show that, while Spanish farmers display strongly positive attitudes toward agrotourism (78 per cent), financial and managerial barriers remain widespread. Poland and Romania record the highest growth rates of all: Poland had 8,950 enterprises in 2023, a 45.2 per cent increase over 2018, its principal advantages being comparatively low prices (an average of EUR 35–50 per night) and a well-preserved traditional rural way of life concentrated in the Masurian Lake District, the Tatra Mountains and Podlasie [22].

Country	Relative scale	Enterprises (000s)
France		32.5
Italy		25.4
Germany		22.4
Spain		18.2
Austria		9.9
Poland		9.0
Greece		4.2
Romania		2.9

Figure 1. Number of agrotourism enterprises in EU countries, 2023 (thousands).

Source: compiled by the author from Eurostat and national statistics (2023).

3.2 The North American model

According to the 2022 Census of Agriculture published by the USDA, 28,575 United States farms provided agrotourism and recreational services — 31 per cent more than in 2017 — with combined annual revenue of USD 1.2 billion. This figure understates the true picture, since much agrotourism activity is not formally recorded; some researchers estimate the real scale at USD 2–3 billion. The defining characteristics of United States agrotourism are great regional diversity and minimal federal regulation, with each state operating its own legislative framework. California is the centre of wine tourism (Napa Valley, Sonoma), where 2,850 wineries receive visitors and generate USD 185 million annually; Vermont and Wisconsin are known for dairy and cheese-production tourism, Hawaii for tropical agriculture, and Texas and Montana for farm-and-ranch tourism [23], [24].

Studying motivations for agrotourism in Montana, Nickerson, Black and McCool (2001) found that farmers diversify primarily for additional income (89 per cent), to preserve the rural way of life (76 per cent), to create new opportunities for the future of the farm (68 per cent) and to establish community contact (54 per cent); notably, the profit motive does not always rank first, social and cultural motives often being more important. Comparing the sustainability of agrotourism with that of other farm entrepreneurial ventures, Barbieri (2013) concludes that farms engaged in agrotourism are financially more stable, create more jobs and maintain stronger links with rural communities, although agrotourism demands high investments of time and management capacity that can strain small family farms [25].

Table 2. Agrotourism indicators in selected United States states, 2024.

State	Enterprises	Revenue (USD mn)	Principal focus	Growth 2018–2024 (%)
California	2,850	185	Wine tourism	+28
Texas	2,420	98	Ranch tourism	+42
New York	1,680	72	Organic farms	+35
Pennsylvania	1,540	65	Amish farms	+22
Florida	1,280	58	Tropical farms	+48
Wisconsin	1,150	45	Dairy farms	+18
Vermont	980	42	Dairy and maple	+25
Oregon	920	52	Wine and beer	+38
US total	**28,575**	**1,200**	**—**	**+31**

Source: compiled by the author from the USDA Census of Agriculture (2024).

Comparing stakeholder perceptions in Missouri and North Carolina, Gil Arroyo, Barbieri and Rich (2013) demonstrate that farmers, tourists and policymakers understand agrotourism differently: for farmers it is chiefly a source of supplementary income, for tourists an authentic experience, and for policymakers an instrument of rural development. These divergent understandings, the authors argue, must be taken into account when designing effective policy and marketing strategies [26].

3.3 The Asian model

China has achieved the greatest gains in agrotourism over the past decade. According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, more than 300,000 rural-tourism enterprises operated in 2023, generating annual revenue of 1.2 trillion yuan (roughly USD 170 billion) — figures that make China by far the largest player in the global market, accounting for an estimated 65–70 per cent of world agrotourism. The Chinese model is distinguished by strong state intervention and centralised planning: under the "Beautiful Countryside" strategy announced in 2015, more than 100,000 villages were

modernised and equipped with tourism infrastructure, and the "Rural Revitalisation" strategy of 2020 designated agrotourism as a principal instrument of poverty reduction and of urban–rural integration. Examining peri-urban agrotourism in China, Yang, Cai and Sliuzas (2010) developed a periurban agrotourism model, concluding that agrotourism is developing not merely as a tourism sector but as an important element of multifunctional urban-adjacent agriculture — a configuration potentially relevant to areas surrounding large Uzbek cities such as the Tashkent region [27].

Chinese regional specialisation is pronounced: Yunnan for tea and coffee tourism (45 million visitors annually), Shandong for vineyards and apple orchards (38 million), Sichuan for bamboo and panda tourism (52 million), and Zhejiang for sericulture and green-tea tourism (35 million). The "Nongjiale" system of receiving guests in farmhouses is also widespread, uniting more than 150,000 enterprises and serving some 500 million visits a year.

Table 3. Agrotourism indicators in Asian countries, 2024.

Country	Enterprises	Annual revenue	State support model	Distinctive feature
China	~300,000	USD 170 bn	Centralised state programme	Poverty-reduction instrument
Japan	~18,000	USD 8.5 bn	Local-authority subsidies	Traditional rural culture
South Korea	~12,500	USD 4.2 bn	Public–private partnership	Farm-stay houses
Thailand	~8,200	USD 2.8 bn	Tourism-ministry programmes	Tropical agriculture
India	~6,500	USD 1.5 bn	State-level programmes	Tea and spice tourism
Vietnam	~4,800	USD 0.9 bn	Rural-development programme	Rice-terrace tourism

Source: compiled by the author from national tourism organisations and UNWTO data (2024).

Japanese agrotourism rests on the concepts of "Nōgyō taiken" (agricultural experience) and "Minpaku" (staying in private homes). According to the Japan National Tourism Organization, more than 18,000 enterprises operated in 2023, generating USD 8.5 billion. A distinctive feature is the emphasis on traditional rural culture and seasonality: spring brings rice-planting festivals and cherry blossom, summer fruit and vegetable harvesting, autumn rice-harvest festivals and momiji (autumn foliage), and winter sake-production tourism. The "Satoyama" concept — the traditional rural landscape in which people and nature coexist in harmony — serves as the theoretical foundation of Japanese agrotourism; the "Satoyama Initiative" presented at the 2010 UN Convention on Biological Diversity drew international attention to the conservation of such landscapes. Niigata Prefecture is known for rice agrotourism (2,100 enterprises), Nagano for apple and grape tourism (1,850) and Okinawa for tropical agriculture (1,200) [28], [29].

In South Korea, the "Nongchon" (farm villages) programme has been implemented since 2002; according to the Korea Tourism Organization, more than 12,500 farm-stay houses generate USD 4.2 billion annually. The Korean model is distinguished by the fusion of advanced technology with traditional farming — smart farms, drone-assisted viewing of fields, virtual-reality agricultural experiences and online booking and payment systems. The "Slow City" movement has further advanced agrotourism: since 2007, sixteen Korean towns have obtained international "Cittaslow" certification recognising their traditional way of life, gastronomy and ecological environment, and these towns rank among the most popular agrotourism destinations, attracting more than two million visitors a year [30].

3.4 Comparative synthesis of development models

Comparison of national experience yields a clear typology of three principal development models. The European model is grounded in strict regulation, quality certification and public subsidy. The United States model is driven by market forces, with minimal state intervention and great regional diversity. The Asian model is characterised by strong state involvement, centralised planning and large-scale investment. The principal axes along which these models differ — the role of the state, the legislative base, certification, financing, marketing, the dominant objective, the authenticity requirement and typical enterprise size — are set out in Table 4.

Table 4. Comparative analysis of agrotourism development models.

Criterion	European model	United States model	Asian model
Role of the state	High (subsidy, regulation)	Low (minimal intervention)	Very high (centralised)
Legislative base	Dedicated agrotourism laws	Varied state-level rules	National strategies
Certification	Mandatory or strongly incentivised	Voluntary, uncommon	State-controlled
Financing	EU funds, national subsidies	Private capital, bank loans	State investment
Marketing	National/regional brands	Individual marketing	State promotion
Principal objective	Diversifying farm income	Supplementary income, lifestyle	Rural development
Authenticity requirement	Strict (farm share ≥ 50%)	Variable, often low	Moderate
Typical enterprise size	Small (5–15 beds)	Variable (5–100 beds)	Medium–large (20–50 beds)

Source: compiled analytically by the author.

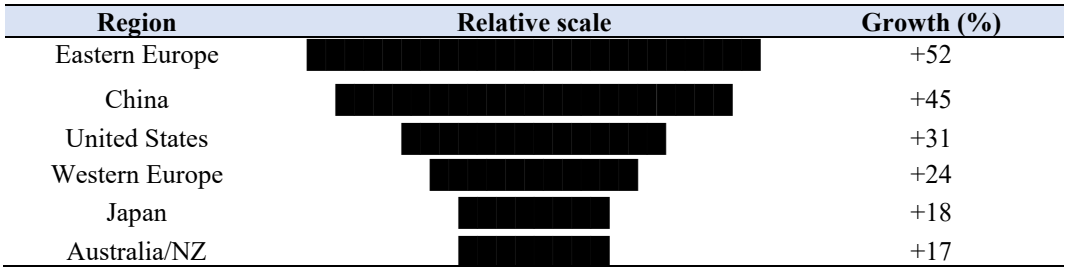

Figure 2. Agrotourism growth rates by region, 2018–2024 (%).

Source: compiled by the author from UNWTO, Eurostat and national statistics (2024).

4. Discussion

The comparative evidence supports several broader conclusions. The first concerns the existence of the three contrasting governance models identified above. None is intrinsically superior; each reflects the institutional and economic context in which it has evolved. The European model achieves quality and authenticity at the cost of regulatory complexity; the United States model maximises flexibility but tolerates uneven standards and substantial informality; the Asian model mobilises rapid, large-scale expansion through state direction but depends heavily on continued public investment. For a country designing policy from a relatively early stage, the practical question is therefore not which model to copy wholesale but which elements of each to combine [31].

A second conclusion concerns the factors common to successful agrotourism irrespective of model. Developing a typology of agrotourism, Phillip, Hunter and Blackstock (2010) identify the decisive conditions as a genuine connection to authentic agricultural activity, a functioning quality-control system, effective marketing and

branding, and the participation and interest of the local community. In defining the essence of rural tourism, Lane (1994) stresses the importance of territorial context, concluding that a model working successfully in one area cannot simply be transplanted to another — a caution directly relevant to any attempt to adapt foreign experience.

A third conclusion concerns regional specialisation as a determinant of success. As Fleischer and Tchetchik (2005) show in the Israeli context, the agricultural profile of an area shapes the character of its agrotourism product: enoturism (wine tourism) is most effective in wine-producing areas, farm tourism in dairy areas, and "pick-your-own" tourism in fruit- and vegetable-growing areas. In his concept of the new peasantry, Van der Ploeg (2008) emphasises the struggle of farmers for autonomy and sustainability and treats agrotourism as an important element of that strategy. Taken together, these contributions indicate that an agrotourism product anchored in a distinctive local agricultural identity enjoys a durable competitive advantage [32].

The analysis of foreign experience yields a set of concrete lessons for Uzbekistan. First, in drafting agrotourism legislation it would be advisable to draw on the Italian experience by establishing authenticity requirements and regulating the ratio of agricultural to tourism activity through clear rules; as Roberts and Hall (2001) note, strict regulation helps preserve the quality and reputation of agrotourism. Second, a quality-certification system should be introduced, with the Austrian "flowers" scheme or the French Gîtes de France standards serving as models; Busby and Rendle (2000) show that certification raises tourist confidence and stimulates competition on quality rather than price, and Wilson and colleagues (2001) likewise underline the importance of quality standards to the success of rural tourism. Third, regional specialisation should be developed: the silk and horticulture traditions of the Fergana Valley, the bread-baking and viticulture of Samarkand region, and the livestock-rearing and handicraft traditions of Bukhara region provide a basis for distinctive territorial brands, and McGehee and Kim (2004) find territorial identity to be the single most important competitive advantage in agrotourism.

Fourth, mechanisms of state support must be devised. The experience of the EU LEADER programme and the Chinese "Beautiful Countryside" strategy shows that public investment is necessary to launch agrotourism, but that in the long run enterprises must become self-financing; the OECD (2001) multifunctionality framework further suggests that investment in agrotourism should pursue agricultural, ecological and social objectives alongside the purely touristic. Fifth, the Chinese case offers the lesson of linking agrotourism to broad socio-economic goals — rural development, poverty reduction and rural employment — rather than treating it as an isolated tourism activity; as Tew and Barbieri (2012) observe, the social and cultural benefits of agrotourism deserve as much consideration as the economic. Sixth, as Ollenburg and Buckley (2007) demonstrate for Australia and New Zealand, operators' motivations are not solely financial: they also seek to preserve a rural way of life, continue family traditions and inform society about agriculture. Tourism New Zealand reports more than 2,800 agrotourism enterprises, 67 per cent of which cite "sharing the rural way of life" as a motivation — a finding that argues for policy designed around operators' values, not income alone. These recommendations are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5. Recommendations for Uzbekistan drawn from foreign experience.

Area	Source of experience	Recommendation	Expected outcome
Legislation	Italy (Law 730/1985)	Adopt a dedicated agrotourism law; require farm share ≥ 50%	Ensure authenticity; prevent false enterprises
Certification	Austria (four-flower system)	Introduce a national quality-certification system	Improve service quality; raise tourist confidence

Marketing	France (Gîtes de France)	Create a national agrotourism brand and single booking system	Increase international visibility; cut marketing costs
Regional specialisation	Italian regions	Define a distinctive agrotourism product for each province	Enhance competitiveness; enable visitor segmentation
Financing	EU LEADER programme	Establish dedicated grants and concessional-loan schemes	Increase enterprise numbers; improve quality
Human capital	Austria, Germany	Develop agrotourism training programmes	Raise service quality; embed innovation
Digitalisation	South Korea	Build online booking and marketing platforms	Improve accessibility for visitors

Source: compiled analytically by the author.

Two limitations qualify these findings. Because national definitions of agrotourism differ and a significant share of activity is informal, the cross-country totals should be read as indicative orders of magnitude rather than exact values. Moreover, the recommendations rest on the transferability of arrangements developed in very different institutional settings; consistent with Lane (1994), they should be regarded as principles to be adapted to Uzbek conditions rather than as ready-made prescriptions [33].

5. Conclusions

The analysis of foreign experience shows that the successful development of agrotourism depends on a set of essential conditions: a clear legislative base, a quality-control system, regional specialisation, state support and effective marketing. Although the experience of European, North American and Asian countries differs in its institutional details, their common lesson is that agrotourism can serve as an effective means of diversifying and revitalising rural areas. Italy provides a model of quality and authenticity, Austria of certification, France of gastronomic specialisation, the United States of regional diversity, and China of large-scale state support. With its rich agricultural traditions, distinctive cultural heritage and favourable geographical position, Uzbekistan has considerable potential for agrotourism development. By drawing judiciously on foreign experience and adapting it to local conditions, the country could, within a relatively short period, become one of the regional leaders in agrotourism.

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