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Potential of tourism services in the Irkutsk region

The strategic goal of the tourism industry in the Irkutsk region is to develop regulations aimed at creating a modern, efficient and competitive tourist complex. This will create opportunities to meet the needs of Russian and foreign citizens in a variety of tourist services. The initial object of control are potential tourist areas that have the most favorable conditions for expansion of tourist flows.

The system ensures the implementation of recreational activities on the resource chain to the user through the planning, management and control over the use of resources. The main direction of activity is the development of recreational infrastructure, also in the cases when consumers are interested in unspoiled nature. First, accommodation, mobility, nutrition and safety, etc., must be provided. Quality of service constitutes the special resource of development of recreational activities in the region. The quality of management of recreational activities in the region depends largely on the development of the prevailing international practice standards and requirements concerning the quality of recreational services.

The economic activities of municipalities in the region concerning tourism are being developed (as in the country as a whole). Existing areas designed for tourism and recreation developed largely spontaneously. In the past five years, the situation has changed significantly in connection with the development of entrepreneurial activity in the tourist areas. Increasingly complex situation requires a systematic analysis of resources, materials and technical prerequisites for the development of tourism in the territories of different types.

With the creation of material and technical means for the development of tourism and recreation, begins the process of economically significant recreational land development. Let us consider the concept of recreational development. The recreational development—a means of local recreation—constitutes the current level of logistical arrangement of territory and the level of social and economic benefits of local recreational activities.

The government of the Russian Federation pursues an active policy of supporting and developing tourism in the country, and according to the Federal Law of July 22, 2005 № 116–FZ “On special economic zones in the Russian Federation”, and also in the Federal Law of June 3, 2006 № 76–FZ of the Russian Federation Government

Resolution dated February 3, 2007, № 68, 72 “On establishment of a special economic zone of tourist-recreational type” and the RF Government dated September 8, 2010 N 692 “On Special Economic zone of tourist-recreational type established in the territory of the Irkutsk Region”, manages the establishment of special economic zones of tourist-recreational type in the territories of the Republic of Buryatia and the Irkutsk region.¹ In order to attract investors to the tourism sector, the federal target program “Development of domestic tourism” for the period from 2011 to 2018 has been adopted. The basic principle of activities provided for by this program is based on the mechanisms of public-private partnership.²

The boundaries of the tourist-recreational special economic zone “Gate of Baikal” in Slyudyanskij area were defined in the document that has been approved by the Ministry of Economic Development of Russia, and a supplementary agreement concerning those boundaries has been signed by former Governor Dmitry Mezentsev and mayors of the Slyudyanka and Irkutsk regions. Resolution of the Russian government of September 2010 concerning the territory included parts of the TRZ mountain skiing resort “Sable Mountain” and the countryside “Mangutay”. This will ensure the creation of about two thousand job posts in the company town of Baikalsk in the Irkutsk region owing to the special economic zone of tourist-recreational type “Gate of Baikal”.

The potential of the Slyudyanka area lies in the presence of mountain ranges that are suitable for the organization of a world-class resort. The most accessible peaks are: Mangutay (1856 m), Gold (1603 m) and Taltsinsky Peak (1806 m). The advantage of this site is that it is visited by 250 thousand tourists a year. The basic infrastructure includes a railway station, road and a power line. The volume of investments in the SEZ is estimated at 18 billion rubles, 9 billion of which has been provided by the state. According to the plan, the construction of nine hotels and 434 villas, with the total capacity of 3.6 thousand people at once, will be carried out on the territory of the special economic zone.

Supplementary Agreement (№ 16162–EN/F7) was signed on October 19, 2007 and it defined the boundaries of special economic zones: “Baikal-Kultushnaya Surf” and “Lemasovo” in Kabansky district, “North-Baikal” in the Severobaikalsk area and “Barguzinskaya shores of Lake Baikal” in the Barguzinsky area, where, once they reach their full potential, the expected number of tourist arrivals will exceed 180 thousand (185 040) per year (including day visitors), and the number of hotel rooms will be 350.³

The global experience of creating special economic zones, such as educational ones, allows us to consider it one of the most effective forms of regional development and cooperation of state and business. The implementation of these projects will increase the share of tourism sector in the economy of the Baikal region, attract foreign tourists to Russia and create new high quality recreational facilities that meet international standards.

¹ http://www.rosez.ru/?news_id=3393 Российские особые экономические зоны

² <http://президент.рф/transcripts/14745> Совещание по вопросам развития туристического кластера на Северном Кавказе

³ http://www.rosez.ru/?news_id=726

One of the positive aspects of the creation of tourist-recreational special economic zones is the reduction of the share of unorganized tourism in the region, that currently is at the rate of 60%, due to the construction of new accommodation facilities, supply of tourism products, and improvement of service levels. This in turn will reduce and considerably eliminate anthropogenic stress on the unique natural landscapes of Baikal.

Opportunities in the region providing tourist services are determined by the level to which it can adapt its tourist resources and services to the needs of consumers. Therefore, the region in the short and medium term should undertake the task of forming infrastructural and institutional conditions for the development of modern tourist products that meet the needs of foreign tourists.

The current state of infrastructure, readiness to serve diverse groups of tourists, unresolved issues with the land acquisition, the transparency of the tourist business at large, undeveloped image of the Baikal region as a hospitable area and the state of training for the tourism industry make it impossible to put in place all the territories having tourism resources and develop all forms of tourism simultaneously.

Some features of the original object of the control action are distinguished tourist areas that have the most favorable conditions for the expansion of tourist flows. The development of designated areas is carried out to obtain incremental revenue from tourism. Based on this priority, resources are allocated into various forms of tourism tailored for the consumers.

The main consumers of tourism services come from the central regions of Russia, which is surprising, considering the relatively high solvent demand for quality services. The next group of consumers includes tourists from regions near Siberia, who are attracted by the relatively available areas of Lake Baikal for summer recreation and the availability of medical rehabilitation services.

According to statistics, the Irkutsk region in 2010 was on the third place of tourism areas in Russia with regard to the number of visitors.

Let us analyze the current situation in the market of tour operators in Irkutsk.

Tab. 1. The basic indicators of tourist activity

| Year | 2000 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 |
|---|-------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Number of travel companies | 39 | 90 | 112 | 130 | 95 |
| Detailed information about ownership of travel companies: | | | | | |
| state | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| municipal | 1 | - | - | - | - |
| private | 29 | 84 | 107 | 125 | 91 |
| other | 8 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 |
| Average number of employees | 240 | 497 | 511 | 570 | 405 |
| Income from tourist services in thousands of rubles. | ... | 284987.9 | 351008.7 | 493082.0 | 482147.3 |
| Number of tourists served. | 22353 | 36085 | 57540 | 76410 | 70865 |

| | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Detailed information concerning: | | | | | |
| foreign tourists and | 8415 | 4822 | 9190 | 5211 | 2373 |
| domestic tourists | 13938 | 31263 | 48350 | 71199 | 68492 |

As we can see in the Table 1, the average number of employees, the income from tourist services, the amount of travel companies and the number of tourists served increase every year, except for the year 2008 when the world bank crisis negatively affected the abovementioned indicators.

The region possesses a number of educational institutions, leading training facilities in the field of tourism (Irkutsk Institute of International Tourism, BGUEiP, ISU and 3 schools of secondary vocational education), and cooperates with about 50 companies producing souvenirs.

In the Irkutsk region in 2010 there were 241 collective accommodation facilities, including 175 general-purpose units (hotels, lodging houses, motels, hostels for travelers and other recreation facilities) and 66 specialized units (sanatoriums for adults and children, leisure and recreation homes). In comparison to 2009, their total number increased by 12 units.

Almost all collective accommodation facilities (91.8%) operated all-year-round, and the remaining 8.2%, including mainly specialized accommodation facilities (recreation, camping, hiking base), operated seasonally. The greatest number of hotels and furnished apartments is located in the center of the region, namely in the cities of Bratsk, Angarsk and the Irkutsk region. The majority of the hotels are low-standard and there are only 8 renown four and three star hotels. 6 of those hotels are located in Irkutsk, one in the Irkutsk region and one in the Ekhirit Bulagatskom region (Ust-Orda).

The number of tourists served in 2010 was 614.4 thousand persons (23% more than in 2009), of which the general-purpose facilities hosted 420.2 thousand persons (an increase of 20%) and specialized facilities hosted 194.2 thousand persons (an increase of 30.1%). The majority of tourists (94.4%) served were Russian citizens. The main objectives were personal trips of citizens: 63.7%, and business and professional trips: 36.3%. Of all personal travel purposes, touring vacation, leisure and recreation constituted 56.4%, medical and health treatment constituted 20.9%, and vocational training constituted 14%.

Consequently, one of the priorities of the state regional policy concerning tourism development is to optimize the spatial distribution of tourist facilities and support infrastructure. Taking into account the development of a competitive environment from local products for tourists to global markets and the differentiation of tourism development in the region on the basis of differences in the regional specialization, the application of the principles of the tourist complex and cluster development tools proved successful.

Based on the analysis of the tourism industry in the region, we can conclude that there is a favorable situation for the formation of several tourist and recreational clusters: Irkutsk and the Listvyanka village (the Irkutsk region), The Small Sea Strait (Olkhon district), the Baikalsk site (Slyudyanskiy district), and the Olkhon Island (Olkhon district).

Primary forms of tourism in the region of Irkutsk-Listvyanka involved cultural, educational and recreational activities throughout the whole year, and adventure activities in winter. This is connected, firstly, to the creation of proper conditions for reducing seasonal variation, and secondly, to the effective use of implemented tourism and recreational resources for the preservation of the existing tourist flows, and thirdly, to the creation of infrastructure and institutional framework for a significant enhancement of the flow of foreign tourists at a later stage.

Recreation, medical and health tourism in the area adjacent to the Baikal highway, has been developing due to the presence of reliable resources and balneological infrastructure. Moreover, to overcome the seasonal focus, the emphasis should be put on the development of health tourism. In the Olkhon region recreational tourism is the primary form of all-season tourism because of the tourist potential of the area.

In 2010, the Irkutsk Region ranked 15th in the country among the two regions of the Siberian Federal District with regard to the number of persons hosted in collective accommodation facilities and just behind Krasnoyarsk (Krasnoyarsk Territory in 2010 was visited by 777 000 tourists, and the Irkutsk area was visited by 614 000 tourists). The Republic of Buryatia hosted 400 000 tourists and was on the 7th place in the Siberian Federal District (<http://4tyr.com/tour-logistika-turizm/12-ponyatie-logistiki-v-turizme.html>).

Nevertheless, at the same time there are serious problems impeding the development of tourism and recreation industry:

- the lack of development of basic infrastructure, which is a major obstacle to attracting private investment in tourism infrastructure facilities;
- the restrictions concerning business activities imposed on attractive location for tourism and recreation sites in the Central Ecological Zone of the Baikal Natural Territory with the exception of the tourist-recreational special economic zone;
- the low level of service across all sectors of the tourism industry due to an insufficient number of qualified junior staff and line management;
- the lack of promotion of the Baikal region on the domestic and international tourism markets;
- short tourist season in the region;
- insufficient amount of reserved lands destined for recreation in areas attractive for tourism development;
- high tariffs for passenger air and rail transportation between the central part of Russia and Irkutsk .

Due to the high complexity of the abovementioned problems, decisions concerning the issues have to be accompanied by adequate efforts in other areas.

Effective collaboration among all stakeholders (public authorities, tourist business, scientific and public organizations) in the form of public-private partnership should use the cluster approach to develop a set of activities.

- The formation of economic clusters in the tourism sector that implies a systematic campaign on a regional level, should give priority to the following tasks:
- the creation of a regional legal framework for the development of tourist and recreational complex;

- the creation of investment projects for development of recreational infrastructure aimed at constructing accommodation facilities and transportation networks;
- the organization of marketing branding activities, creation of tourist information centers;
- the development of a characteristic image of the main regional tourism products; conducting market research to effectively promote tourism products on international, national, interregional, regional and municipal levels;
- the development of small business in tourism; improvement of the legal, investment, financial, credit and property support for small business, and creating a system of social protection; conducting modern statistics of recreational activities in accordance with international requirements under the decision by WTO committee on statistics;
- the creation of economic incentive mechanism for the development of recreational activities affected by a large number of environmental constraints.

Using the cluster approach to the development of the tourist complex of the Irkutsk region in the designed increase in tourist flow will create the best conditions for the development of tourism infrastructure and related services, will improve training in a balanced and effective advertising policy, and will satisfy the need for quality tourist services.

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