

Tourist Potential as a Factor of Rural Territories Development: Experience of the Russian Federation Regions

Polina Ananchenkova

Academy of labour and social relations

Russia

ananchenkova@yandex.ru

Abstract: *World experience shows that in Russia and other countries, the development of rural tourism can be a very effective activity aimed at environmental, economic, and social development.*

Today, about 20000 villages in Russia are on the verge of extinction. Consequently, rural tourism can and should become the very “locomotive” that will really pull out and revive the rural areas of Russia. The development of rural tourism is named among the priority area provided for in the “Concept of Sustainable Development of Rural Territories of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2020”, approved by Order of the Government of Russia in 2010.

Expert assessments based on studies conducted in the regions of the Russian Federation show that the approximate level of income from rural tourism activity per administrative region of the constituent entity of Russia may be about 30 million rubles (500 thousand US dollars) per year. In the case of the implementation of an integrated approach involving the joint development of agricultural activities and rural tourism, the effect can double – up to 50-60 billion rubles per year.

Rural tourism in Russia is a new socio-economic phenomenon oriented to the use of natural, cultural, historical resources of rural areas to create and supply a tourist product to a wide range of people. In this regard, it should be thought that the strategic priorities of the national policy aimed at stimulating tourism in rural areas should be the concentration of tourist resources and creation of destinations that include backbone tourist centers with high potential for the formation of rural tours, and territories adjacent to the borders. At the same time, the activation of rural tourism will allow developing territories that do not have promising industrial and agricultural organizations, and thereby improve the socio-economic situation of the country as a whole.

Keywords: *rural territories, development, tourism, Russian Federation*

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Introduction

World experience shows that in Russia and other countries, the development of rural tourism can be a very effective activity aimed at environmental, economic, and social development. At the end of XX and beginning of XXI century in the world a great interest to rural tourism has arisen, and different countries have excellent examples of organization and promotion of this type of tourism. At this, each country thanks to natural landscapes, traditions of agriculture and cattle breeding, specifics of cuisine, rural culture, architectural appearance and vernacular legacy of villages create own national model of rural tourism development. Rural tourism is slowly

becoming popular, fashionable and recreation in countryside already takes second place after seaside vacation. Russia does not remain aside from modern trends in this area. Today, about 20,000 villages in Russia are on the verge of extinction. Consequently, rural tourism can and should become the very “locomotive” that will really pull out and revive the rural areas of Russia.

Subjects of rural tourism services provision

According to data of monitoring of rural tourism development in regions of the Russian Federation, subjects of rural tourism services provision, in general, are:

- small businesses providing accommodation, catering, and excursion services;
- Peasant Farm Enterprises, Household Farms, farmers;
- food processing enterprises;
- administration of Specially Protected Natural Reservations (SPNR);
- institutions of culture and sports in rural areas, in some cases, schools;
- religious sites;
- rural residents and summer visitors.

Subjects of services provision have one thing in common, i.e. all of them are located at rural area, but due to organizational-legal stats and different departmental affiliation there is a certain discrepancy in interests.

List of services provided to tourists nowadays in almost each region is rather diverse, and depends on demand as well as on initiative and wishes of subjects providing services. Approximate range of services is as follows:

- services of temporary accommodation in guest rooms, rural guest houses, houses, inns, etc.;
- catering and tasting services;
- agro-tourist services (participation in agricultural operations: haymaking, shearing, milking, etc.);
- agro-tourist services (gathering of mushrooms, berries, vegetables, wild plants, etc.);
- sale of agricultural products, meat, dairy products, wild plants, crafts, etc.;
- riding horses, deer, camels, dogs, agricultural machinery;
- services of fishing, hunting;
- rental services, baths, bakeries, smokehouses, parking lots, etc.
- cultural and educational facilities (rural Museum, Club, library);
- training and teaching handicrafts and trades;
- participation in event activities and religious holidays;
- other.

Despite wide range of services to be provided within rural tourism subjects' activities are focused on three directions:

At first, services of temporary accommodation in guest rooms, rural guest houses, houses, inns, etc. One of the first regions of Russia to have achieved positive results in reception of tourists in private (rural) houses with “bed & breakfast” services as well as in teaching local residents the basics of tourism organization is the Republic of Karelia (<http://www.ticrk.ru>). Rural estates’ owners in Karelia were supported within frames of implementation of international project, Tacis, “Development of rural tourism on basis of rational use of natural and cultural resources” main result of which according to experts was establishment of Association of Rural Estates’ Owners “Estate” for coordination and support of activities of rural houses’ owners.

Second, tourist and tour services on basis of agricultural enterprises, farms, fishing facilities, facilities of food processing industry, and etc. It should be noted that National Standard of the Russian Federation GOST R 50681-2010 “Tourist Services. Design of Tourist Services” determines co-providers of tourist services:

Organizations and enterprises of tourist industry as well as private entrepreneurs rendering certain services (accommodation, catering, transport entities, exhibition complexes, museums, and etc.) under contracts concluded with tour operators at formation of tourist product. Obviously, objects of agricultural sector providing tourist and tour services refer to this list to the similar ones.

In many Russian regions tours to special agricultural farms/agricultural production facilities become rather popular, during which the visitor can get acquainted not only with production process but also can try and purchase ready products, can learn some recipes, etc. (cheese makers, wine makers, smokehouses, dairies, mushroom farms, etc.). Level of agriculture development in regions attracts attention of both farmers and manufacturers of agricultural products, and people interested in agriculture of the region.

Third, tourist and tour services rendered by rural cultural institutions (libraries, museums, cultural and recreational institutions), whereby we are talking not only about tours, acquaintance with life and traditions, visiting religious sites, eves, but also about teaching handicrafts and trades, singing and dancing skills, and etc.

In 2014, for the first, in federal budget there was allocated over three billion Rubles for renovation of material base of culture in villages and small towns. Mobile multi-functional cultural centers have been provided for rural area. Since 2016 till 2020 Federal Target Program “Sustainable Development of Rural Territories” where Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation is a state customer, for reconstruction of operating rural institutions of culture provides for 2.8 billion Rubles from Federal Budget. Today, outside culture it is impossible to ensure better quality and variety of services of cultural, -educational, ethnographic, rural, event, and social tourism. These are exactly the types of tourism that significantly contribute to education and moral improvement of society, civil patriotism and harmonization of inter-ethnic relations, development of tolerance and respect for cultures of different peoples.

State support of rural tourism in the Russian Federation

Nowadays, a great attention in the Russian Federation is drawn to state support of tourism development in general and rural tourism in particular.

Strategy of Tourism Development in the Russian Federation until 2020 under Federal Target Program “Development of Domestic and Inbound Tourism in the Russian Federation (2011-2018)” defines rural and ecological tourism as most promising for majority of regions of Russia. This involves a range of issues, i.e. creation of tourist product, rational use of natural and cultural heritage of the region, interests of local economy on basis of interaction and mutual benefits, full support of driving force of rural tourism, entrepreneurship, involvement of community in tourism development, linking interests of businesses and residents on basis of mutually beneficial cooperation. Today, in many Russian regions priority of rural tourism development has been confirmed by real actions and quite tangible results. And, and in light of modern realities in terms of imposition of sanctions, stimulation of interest in products and services of domestic tourism will increase business and investment activity in field of rural tourism.

In 2014, the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation and the Federal Agency for Tourism hosted a number of major events in field of rural tourism. These are international forum “Agrotourism in Russia” held at the Republic of Buryatia, Russian Conference on Conservation of Village Culture and Rural Tourism Development in Lipetsk, tourist forum “Rural Tourism in Russia” in the Orenburg region. Within each event there were discussed current trends and experiences of development of rural tourism in regions of the Russian Federation, especially organization of tourist activity in rural areas and problems of legislative, infrastructure, financial, personnel, informational support of development of rural tourism. Special attention was given to measures of state support for rural tourism development at federal, regional and municipal levels. Of vast interest there was experience of self-organization and coordination of agro-tourist activities within such projects as the “Association of Most Beautiful Villages of Russia”, and “Peasant Hospitality”. At presentation venues of Forums considerable part of space has been showcasing best regional projects in chosen areas of rural tourism development included in collection of materials reflecting best practices of subjects of the Russian Federation on development of rural tourism.

Concept of sustainable development of rural areas of the Russian Federation for a period until 2020, and Federal Target Program “Sustainable Development of Rural Territories of the Russian Federation for a Period till 2020” define objectives of stimulating increase in jobs in non-agricultural fields of activity in all possible organizational forms, especially, in field of recreational and environment protection activities, agro- and environmental tourism, rural hotel business. To improve cultural services for rural population, preservation and development of cultural heritage, and enhance creative capacity of rural inhabitants there was determined an objective of rebuilding, having cultural and historical significance farmsteads and other

architectural and natural monuments, creation of museums, manor-ethnographic complexes and other infrastructure of rural tourism as well as other activities.

By Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation as of February 2, 2015 No. 151-r there was adopted a strategy for sustainable development of rural territories for a period till 2030 aimed at creation of conditions for sustained improvements in quality and standard of living of rural population through benefits of rural lifestyle. Strategy states that rural tourism is one of major directions of non-agricultural types of activity as well as has important socio-economical functions of creation of attractive jobs including for rural youth and women; on development of rural territories; on complex use of natural and cultural potentials of rural areas. Most important for subjects of agricultural activities providing tourist services, for tourist companies organizing tours to rural areas, for regional and local governments is a need to implement measures aimed at formation of agro-tourist clusters; at holding educational events (advanced qualification courses, educational workshops, master-classes, and trainings) for owner of rural guest houses, representative of farms, private entrepreneurs, rural residents engaged in organization and provision of tourist services in rural areas; media coverage of best practice and most successful projects on development of rural tourism.

Analysis of measures of state support for rural tourism in regions has shown that more used measures are provision of subsidies and grants (for repair and reconstruction of rural guest houses, landscaping; participation in exhibitions; promotion; contests; training). Recipients of subsidies and grants are small enterprises (owners of guest houses, manors, ethnicity complexes, and farms in rare cases). In majority of regions state support of rural tourism is provided within frames of state programs on development of culture and tourism, development of agriculture, support for small businesses. Exception is Belgorod Region, where program of “Development of rural tourism in the Belgorod Region for 2011-2015” is being implemented.

The main problems of rural tourism development in the Russian Federation

Analysis of materials of conferences, forums, round tables on rural tourism determined key problems of rural tourism development in regions of the Russian Federation which hinder effective and dynamic development of this direction of rural population occupancy.

- 1) Existing federal regulatory-legal acts governing activities in field of tourism lack the concept of rural tourism. Regional practice for identification of discussed type of tourist activity widely apply following concepts: “agro-tourism”, “green tourism”, “farm tourism”, “village tourism”, and etc. However, nowadays, all those regulating this field of activity and those engaged in this type of activity, as well as supervisory authorities and consumers have to use single legal definition.
- 2) Currently in regions main means for accommodation in rural areas are "guest houses" whereas paragraph 3.3 of the national standard of the Russian Federation GOST R 51185-2008 “Tourist services. Accommodation. General requirements” approved by the

Decree of Rostechregulirovanie as of 18.12.2008 No. 518-st specifies only “guest rooms, chalets, bungalows, caravans”.

- 3) Significant problem for development of rural tourism is underdeveloped and in some municipalities missing transport and engineering infrastructure (roads, electricity, water networks, sewage treatment plants, bank protections, etc.), which is an obstacle to private investments in tourism industry. Lack of telephone communication, Internet is often an insurmountable obstacle for both, tourists and service providers. But above all, absence of roads to rural tourism sites which include guest houses, and farms.
- 4) In most regions, one of the most important motivations for recreation at countryside is visiting sites of cultural and historical heritage, religious sites, ethnographic and museum complexes, old houses, castles, estates, etc.

Tourism allows for drawing attention to unique historical and cultural values, discoveries of earlier unknown or unfairly forgotten historical settlements, sites and names.

Experts note inadequate involvement of values of the territory in tour programs.

- 5) In many Russian regions growing demand for rural tourism services enhanced investment activities in reconstruction and construction of guest houses, small hotels, manors, ethnicity complexes, catering, rural markets, trading pavilions, etc. Today it is quite difficult to obtain available loans for implementation of these projects in rural areas. According to experts, it is necessary to provide for small businesses in field of rural tourism concessional borrowings, as well as development of methodical recommendations and providing special advice for preparation and implementation of business project.
- 6) Significant problem is misunderstanding and sometimes ignorance by rural entrepreneurs of need to use market-based instruments for promotion of rural tourism services. In many regions there are formed information databases of rural tourism sites, and first of all, of accommodation facilities.
According to experts, there is a need in consolidated actions of rural tourism businesses and greater cooperation on part of authorities on organization of study tours, participation in exhibitions, advertising, website creation, etc. Experts recommend to regularly fill the portal www.naselo.ru, the first Russian social network designed to increase tourist flow to the countryside.
- 7) Serious and long-term challenge is staffing of rural tourism which shall be addressed comprehensively. To avoid mistakes and disappointments, it is necessary to know organization of tourist services, hotel and restaurant business, marketing rules, calculation of costs, cost recovery and funding strategy. In some regions of the Russian Federation (Altai Region, the Republic of Buryatia, the Republic of Karelia, Pskov, Ryazan, Sverdlovsk regions, etc.) there is ongoing large and coherent work on organization of training courses, development of methodological recommendations for development of rural tourism. With purpose of informational, legal and financial support it is proposed to establish informational-methodological centers for owners of rural houses and providers of accompanying services for rural tourism.

- 8) Insufficient level of coordination of activities in field of rural tourism, despite increased attention to creation of associations of rural tourism. At the federal level, there are such associations as the “Association for promotion of rural tourism”, “National association of rural tourism entities” which pay especial attention to issues of development of regulatory base for rural tourism; classification of objects of rural (agro) tourism, first of all, rural guest houses; development of mechanisms for address support of rural tourism subjects; informational and consultancy support of business entities; increase of role of local governments in development of rural tourism.

Experts of Associations are confident that success of rural tourism development largely depends on local governments, their ability to coordinate planning and management of tourism development, encourage participation of local people in arrangement of tourist services, advise and help those people who want to establish business, to support development of rural culture.

Conclusion

At the end of XX and beginning of XXI century in the world a great interest to rural tourism has arisen, and different countries have excellent examples of organization and promotion of this type of tourism. At this, each country thanks to natural landscapes, traditions of agriculture and cattle breeding, specifics of cuisine, rural culture, architectural appearance and vernacular legacy of villages create own national model of rural tourism development. Russia does not remain aside from modern trends in this area. Rural tourism is slowly becoming popular, fashionable and recreation in countryside already takes second place after seaside vacation.

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