

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS FOR ECOTOURISM IN PRIMORYE

"Проблемы и перспективы развития экотуризма в Приморье"

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Today the term "ecotourism" is often used by travel agencies and experts for defining activity connected with the use of natural landscapes and objects. It is possible to name some large-scale projects in this field: development of rural tourism, ecotourism in natural reserves, excursions of scientific conferences etc. The word combination «ecological tourism» began to apply widely in the world in the early eighties.

Ecotourism differs from traditional tourism in the following ways (by Petrasov I.N.):

- use of natural objects for tourism;
- smaller resource and power intensity;
- direct influence on social and economic development of territories;
- an essential role of ecological education and enlightenment of tourists;
- aiming at steady nature management.

In the conditions of development of the modern world ecotourism can and should become serious business. Tendencies toward it have already been observed. Experts on ecotourism counted that in 1988 there were from 157 to 236 million ecotourists in the world of which 79 - 157 million were ready for travel in the wild reserves and to national parks.

However in our country tourism development in Nature Reserves contravenes the legislation of the Russian Federation. Such tourism is possible only in natural and national parks. At the same time the quantity of reserves in Russia and their vast area make it quite possible to visit by curious tourists.

Nature Reserves have great financial difficulties; so ecotourism development could solve a number of problems, providing the salaries of employees, the purchasing of materials and equipment, and finally, protection from poachers. For inhabitants of regions where reserves are located, ecotourism would create conditions for additional earnings, the selling of souvenirs, foodstuff etc. to tourists.

Travel agencies of the Far East consider that the ecotourism is an unprofitable field of activity. Having compared these estimations with the WTO (World Trade Organization) data, we see that in 1988 ecotourism in the national income of the various member states brought in from 93 to 233 billion dollars.

Demand for ecotourism is quickly growing. In the next years territories in which virgin nature remains where the quality of the environment is guaranteed by its "wildness", the primitiveness of the natural landscapes become the centers of development of ecotourism. Primorsky Kray has many such landscapes.

Developing the ecology economically depends on authorities at every level. Only this can stop the uncivilized plunder of natural resources in the region which we observe today. Developing ecotourism it is incorrect to focus on the foreign tourist first of all. For a sustainable development of this kind of activity it is necessary to work actively on the domestic market and the market of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

Usually especially protected territories are noncompetitive, and therefore have a modest budget. In agricultural areas there is inefficient economic activity in agricultural areas. For example, in Lazovsky region of Primorye 30 % of land transferred to the possession of peasant farmers turned out to be abandoned because of the unprofitability of working it, - there is nobody to buy its production.

Today ecotourism has fallen to 10 % of world GDP (Gross Domestic Product). Meanwhile Russia is on one of the last places for this kind of activity. The priority in programs of many regions of our country including Primorsky Kray, should be ecotourism development. The main thing is to create a positive image of our region in the mass media, to publicize information about the sights of our region. All these will promote an increase of tourism. A similar strategy

has allowed the Botanical Garden in Vladivostok to increase visitors for the last three years by five times, and increase receipt in the off-budget fund by ten times.

Ecotourism can become an alternative to logging and poaching. With ecotourism the rate of deforestation should decrease and forests will revive. Now progress in the field of ecological tourism in Primorsky Territory is taking place. However this progress is still too slow to begin to solve this problem.

Ecotourism development can go in two ways:

- development of protected territories as objects of ecotourism;
- development of a network of ecological routes on the landscapes which have been not disturbed by economical activities.

Now ecotourism is developing in specially protected natural territories of Primorsky Kray. Nature Reserves appeal specially attention to foreign tourists. In this case they can be objects of a special kind of ecotourism - so-called scientific tourism for scientists.

Today travel agencies in Primorsky Kray offer more than 100 diverse routes using natural landscapes to some extent. However, it is impossible to call such tourism "wild" for the following reasons:

- There is no established way to get tourists or scientists to the territory where the routes are.
- There is no accurate planning of tourism; formation of groups occurs casually; they aren't yet organized very well by anybody.
- There is no exact calculation the costs involved in ecotourism, or the planned profit expected. Hereupon tour tariffs are either too low. And therefore are unprofitable, or overpriced, and therefore aren't in demand.
- There are no capital investments in ecotourism development, financial recourses aren't remitted either for the restoration of ecosystems, nor for infrastructure development.

Thereon it is possible to assert that ecological tourism in Primorye isn't a technologically advanced business; there is no efficient organization or economical management.

The general economic crisis of these years has essentially affected the structure and dynamics of tourism in Primorsky Kray: the demand for travelling in the country has gone down and the demand for foreign trips, mainly, to China and Korea has increased. Small private tourist firms have actively joined in the marketing and management of shopping tours both in big cities, and in provinces. Ecotourism stopped at the beginning of its formation, having been reduced to a small stream of foreign tourists in Primorsky Kray.

Thus, socioeconomic factors of the last years didn't promote development of ecological tourism.

But today Primorsky Kray has a complex of natural conditions helping out the region as a potential leader of ecotourism activity. Tourism resources of Primorsky Kray are distinguished by the high variety and aesthetic attractiveness of natural landscapes; various recreation resources and unique ecosystems.

The nature of Primorye is a unique contrast of relief and biodiversity. Primorsky Kray has 186 caves (this compares to Japan where there are only 79 caves), and more than 70 bays, which are good for diving and walks. There are a lot of sandy beaches and water areas for walks, sea crafts, the savage taiga, lakes and medicinal mineral spas here.

The global value of ecotourism has in its favour the protection of rare and disappearing ecosystems. This makes it possible for local communities to define ways of development and to receive benefit from tourism activity in the sphere of ecotourism. Tourism business is one of the most winning kinds of business. Primorye is a region of prospective tourism whose ecological potential isn't used.

Thus, today it is extremely necessary to work out an effective regional policy to develop and publicize tourism individually in each region. It is necessary to create special state and regional programs for the development of ecotourism and to finance its development. For our region with its unique natural and cultural tourism resources it is necessary to implement special government and regional programs of ecotourism development and at the initial stage to finance its development from the government budget.