Some aspects of alternative tourism development in the world and Latvia

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the development of alternative tourism in the global economy. An attempt is made to explain the growth of demand for specific tourism products in the post-industrial society. The prospects of development of this direction of tourism in Latvia are considered.

Keywords: alternative tourism, tourism product, tourism industry, sustainable tourism.

1 Introduction

A specific feature of the modern postindustrial society is mobility, the desire for regular movements for cultural, educational, recreational and other purposes. Increasing growth rate of tourist migrations are a motivating factor for international tourism business in its search for new forms of effective and sustainable development of tourism. This takes into account such trends in consumption as the saturation of typical scenarios of mass tourism, the desire to maximize their impressions and adventures, the transition from rational to emotional approach to travel. The expansion of cognitive tourism, the emergence of its new types and forms was facilitated by the surge of interest in their own and other people's identities, communication with the native speakers of another languages and cultures. These trends have predetermined the introduction of the term “alternative tourism” into scientific turn. Next, let`s focus on some feature of this type of tourism, and also consider the opportunities and limitations for its development in Latvia.

2 Overview

As with many definitions that related to the scientific glossary of tourismology, alternative tourism does not have an unambiguous interpretation in the literature. With a narrow approach, this type of tourism is understood as traveling on original and traditional routes without using the services of travel companies. In other words, it should be a self-organized (independent) trip, realizing the need for a person in an unusual holiday, non-systemic character. It is pertinent to note that modern high-tech products, such as Google Glass, SMART ATCH, currently make planning and management of trips much easier for tourists. From the motivational point of view, distinctive features of such trips are the maximum rapprochement with natural and cultural environment of the destination, aesthetics of observation, non-interference, respect for the local people, study of their customs.

In the broad sense of the word, alternative tourism is an umbrella term that unifies all non-mass types of leisure tourism. In this case, alternative tourism includes as quite traditional types of tourism - educational, health, sports, religious, special-interest tourism, and became popular relatively recently ones - adventure, ethnographic, special-event, ecotourism, agrotourism etc. Specific forms of alternative tourism can be very unusual: survival tours, tours for lovers of watching exotic birds / butterflies in their natural habitat, disasters tourism etc.

A common feature for all of these quite different, in terms of motivational-targeted approach, types of tourism is the personalization of tours, offer unusual schemes and products. In most cases, alternative tourism develops in the format of so-called "soft" tourism and is based on the principles of responsibility, accessibility and sustainability. Its effects directly or indirectly contribute to the nature protection [1].

Tourism is traditionally one of the most important strategic parts of the Latvian economy. The substantial recreational potential of the country is quite well studied by science, so we will not focus here on its assessment. It can be only noted, the total contribution of tourism to GDP (including wider effects from investment, the supply chain and induced income impacts) was EUR 2,4 in 2017 (9.2% of GDP) and 85.1% of these revenues were provided by leisure tourism. In 2017, the total contribution of tourism to employment, including jobs indirectly supported by the industry was 8.9% of total employment (79,500 jobs) [2]. Still, it is below the European average, although close to them. The stability of the Latvian tourism business is negatively affected by geopolitical, demographic, seasonal and some other factors.

Problems of diversification of tourism products and flows have long been discussed in the expert environment, at the level of both the state and business. In addition to other tools and mechanisms, new opportunities for the sustainable use of available recreational resources can be realized as a result of the integrated development of alternative tourism. As the experience of some European countries suggests, one of the most important effects in this case is the minimization of seasonal and territorial imbalances, as well as the
economic revival of the most underdeveloped areas.

It should be noted the undoubted success of some Latvian companies in the promotion of alternative tourism products. Interesting projects are implemented in the field of medical, environmental, rural, event tourism. However, the European market in these segments is highly competitive [3]. Unlike mass tourism, the competitive advantages of alternative tourism are more complex. It is difficult to attract travellers, whose trips are based on specific motivation, simply by low prices and stereotyped products.

Expansion of alternative tourism services market in Latvia requires high expenses for creation and improvement of infrastructure (including the use of modern ecological technologies), marketing and innovations. It is new ideas, creative approaches and a package of effective marketing activities that make attractive destinations in the format of alternative tourism.

In this regard, there is a need for system approach to training of qualified specialists capable of designing, advertising and promoting specific products on the domestic and global market.

Another mechanism to stimulate the development of alternative tourism is the improvement of marketing strategies of Latvian parishes. It is necessary to work out and use modern, high-tech methods of microbranding, including the marketing of image, attractions, events, ethnic. In the case of small-sized destinations, there are often problems of domination of point tourist sites and products, and as a consequence - the difficulties of forming complex tourist tours. One of the business solutions here is the formation of tours linking different territories, or even countries. Such experience is applied in the field of cultural and educational tourism: most often international cooperation takes place with other Baltic States, Belarus and Russia. At the same time, there is also a great potential for cooperation in the field of alternative tourism.

3 Conclusion

Finally, it should be noted that alternative tourism and its basic principles are in the best interests of the Latvian economy, its residents, the preservation of ethnic and ecological environment. Life and traditions of the local population are naturally in harmony with the ideas of slow, contemplative tourism. However, in order to gain international competitiveness in this segment of the tourism market, management, marketing and organizational innovations and more interesting, relevant products are needed.

References

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