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Ethno-Cultural Aspects of Tourism Development in the Republic of Kalmykia

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Abstract

The problem under study is topical and significant because of the needs of modern man in the development of different types of leisure activities and travel in spare time with a rational use of all available tourist resources. The purpose of the article is to identify ethno-cultural aspects of tourism development in the Republic of Kalmykia. The leading method of study is marketing analysis of the recreational areas in the Republic of Kalmykia which allows us to identify ethnic and cultural aspects of tourism development based on Buddhist local colour of the region. The main results of the article present the thorough data analysis of domestic and foreign scientific and methodical literature on the problem of tourism development in Russia and abroad. These results allowed us to draw conclusions about the the tourism development as an environmentally safe form of recreation and travel in the international trade in services. The article has practical value for solving economic, social, demographic and cultural challenges in tourism development. The article also provides knowledge of the folklore and ethnographical traditions of the Kalmyk people.

Key words: economy; education; tourism; culture; traditions; vacation; region

JEL Classification: L80; L83.

Introduction

Tourism is one of the most important spheres of the modern economy–aimed at meeting human needs and improving the quality of life of the population. The specific nature of tourism is connected to the international character and a wide range of relations that people have to be involved in. Tourism influence all spheres of the modern society, including economy, culture, and social sphere of the state. It is also one of the most dynamically developing spheres in the international trade in services (Blanke 2011, Bukher 2016, Carneiro, Lima and Silva 2015, Frolova and Kabanova 2017, Gurova and Ratilainen 2015, Guzman-Parra, Quintana-García, Benavides-Velasco and Vila-Oblitas 2015, Kulachinskaya 2012, Látková and Vogdt 2012, Látková and Vogdt 2012, Leiper 2004, McLaren 2003, Park and Santos 2017, Stefko and Nowak 2014, Teng-Yuan and Chung-Ming 2016, Kruzhalin and Alexandrova 2008, Walle Alf 1998, Wolf, Ainsworth and Crowley 2017, Zorin and Kvartalnov 2007, Zaliznyak

2011, Zhukova 2007). Improvement of living standards and increased opportunities for free movement around the world contributed to the emergence of millions of new travelers. Researcher P. Arceo (P. Arceo) defines tourism as a journey from one place to another with a purpose of subsequent return to the permanent place of residence (Carneiro, Limam and Silva 2015, Dwyer and Kim 2003, 107).

Tourism as a leisure-time activity exists in Russia for many centuries. Since the dawn of time human curiosity has been the driving force for people to travel without any specific purpose. Nowadays tourism is being actively developed; people have begun to travel consciously for the educational, religious, and recreational purposes.

According to the researchers Stefko R.A. and Nowak S.B., the combination of proximity and simultaneous promotion of the region contributes to an increase in interest from tourists to the history and culture of the country and provides an impetus for the economic recovery and development of the necessary infrastructure for tourism development in the region (Jamal and Robinson 2009, 210).

1. Methodology

The research methodology is based on the analysis of ethnocultural aspects of tourism development in the Republic of Kalmykia. Tourism has become a unique large-scale global industry and tourist resources are the most important part of the national wealth of many countries (Carneiro, Lima and Silva 2015). The choice of tourism as one of the priorities for the economy of the Republic of Kalmykia is not only determined by the unique complex of tourist resources, but it is also conditioned by the rational use of the recreational areas while preserving the environmental and cultural heritage. The Republic of Kalmykia is located in the extreme Southeast of the European part of Russia. The length from North to South is 458 km, and from the West to the East it is 423 km. Extreme coordinates of the Republic are 41°38' and 47°34' Eastern longitude and 48°15' and 44°45' North latitude.

The region is located in zones of steppes, semi-deserts and deserts and it occupies a territory with the total area of 75,9 thousand sq. km. The population of Kalmykia, according to Goskomstat of Russia on January 1, 2013, is 286689 inhabitants, including urban population – 127425 people (44,45 %).

Having a great variety of flora and fauna, a convenient location, a large number of ancient burial mounds and favorable travel opportunities, Kalmykia could take its rightful place in the tourism market. Today the Republic of Kalmykia has developed a realistic approach to the development of inbound tourism as the priority direction and an important component of anti-crisis measures. The main factors in determining the future of tourism in the Republic should include such factors as the presence of a pronounced Buddhist character. During the positioning of tourism product of the region there is an active promotion of the information that Kalmykia is the threshold of the East, the unique islet of Asia in Russia, the only Buddhist Republic in the Europe.

Rare monuments of nature and protected areas are located in the Republic. Unique oriental flavor and traditions of the Kalmyk people attract guests from various cities of the Russian Federation. It is natural that the people of Kalmykia were assimilated into the European habitat but retaining their ethnic and cultural peculiarities.

In view of the financial crisis and an unstable political situation around the Middle East countries, there is an increase in domestic tourism (Herrero-Prieto and Gómez-Vega 2017). In particular, there is a growing interest in domestic tourism products and a number of Russian regions are ready to develop their own branding policy directed at forming investment attractiveness, the image and recognition of the region. This situation should be used for the appropriate reorientation of mass tourism flows to domestic tourism, for example, in the case of Kalmykia as to the only Buddhist region in Europe.

2. Case study: Tourism development in Republic of Kalmykia

One of the characteristic features of the Kalmyk tourism product is its exotic character associated with unique natural complexes, specific ethnographic and historical-cultural environment of the country. In terms of worsening problems of environmental preservation the development of ecotourism as an environmentally safe form of recreation and travel could be widespread in the Republic of Kalmykia (Arceo Peon 2009, Blanke 2011). In folk traditions of the Kalmyks, the process of recreation is multifaceted and it focuses on the culture of leisure. In folk traditions of the Kalmyks, the process of recreation includes both recreation and rehabilitation of physical and spiritual strength of the person consumed in the course of employment. Kalmyks attached great importance to the leisure activities. In this regard, the process of recreation held a special place in national holidays, sports, games, traditions of hospitality. In their childhood, the Kalmyks became acquainted with the rules, traditions and customs of hospitality. According to the Kalmyk traditions and customs, any stranger in the wagon was considered a guest. A Guest was considered as an important person by any Kalmyk family and the responsibility of the host was not only to entertain and respect, but also to be responsible for his personal property belongings. The nature served

for the Kalmyks as inexhaustible source and guarantor of life. In harmony with nature Kalmyks saw themselves as a part of the world. Folk traditions of the Kalmyks developed people's respectful attitude to the nature and its resources, that helped them to meet their needs, preserve, protect and increase natural resources not only due to their religious and ideological installations, but also due to their life experience and the internal culture of every particular individual.

The most significant natural site in the Republic of Kalmykia is the biosphere reserve "Chernye zemli", located on the territory of the Chernozemelsky, Yashkul'skiy, Yashaltinskiy and Priyutnenskiy districts.

Along with this nature reserve, there are 12 reserves in the Republic of Kalmykia. The largest federal wildlife sanctuaries – Sarpinskiy, Harbinskiy and Mekletinskiy – are mainly focused on the protection of saiga antelopes. On the basis of hunting and fishing sites were organized two state nature reserves in Iki-Burul'skiy area: "Southern" and "Zunda" nature reserves.

Over the last decade many temples and churches were reconstructed in the Republic of Kalmykia. The appearance of the Republic has been greatly improved, especially the capital of the Republic – Elista. New traditional-looking buildings for leisure, trade and public catering have been built. Together with the preservation of traditional images of Buddhist architecture, there is an innovative approach to engineering and construction.

3. Results and discussion

A lot of different places for accommodation have been constructed on the territory of the Republic. In addition, there are entertainment centers and catering facilities. Overall there are identified areas of tourism development: northern, western, central, eastern, southeastern, and the South-West.

Table 1. Characteristics of tourism development areas of the Republic of Kalmykia

| Zone | Districts | Type of tourism | Infrastructure | Prospects |
|--------------|---|---|---|--|
| Northern | Maloderbetovskiy Sarpinskiy, Ketchenerovskiy Oktyabrskiy | Eco-tourism, ethnographic, hunting and fishing | Hotels: "Sadovoe" settlement. "Kek- Bulg", Ergeninskiy settlement | Creating ethnic village museum that will be interesting for tourists who are fond of nomadic cultures |
| Western | Yashaltinskiy Gorodovikovskiy Priyutnenskiy | Sanatorium-resort ethnographic, hunting and fishing | Accommodation: hunting lodges in Yashalta settlement, hotel 'Vesna' in Gorodovikovsk-city | Ecological tours during tulip flowering period on Tulip island |
| Central | Celinyi City of Elista | Archaeological, ecological, hunting tourism | More than 20 hotels in Elista and Troitskoe settlement | Hippotherapy – treatment programs based on horse riding, congress tourism, medical tourism |
| Eastern | Laganskiy Chernozemelskiy | Ethnographic, hunting and fishing | Lagan hotels: "Caspian", "Alyonushka", "Breeze". Komsomolskiy settlement "Gerel", "Lotus" | Ecological and extreme tourism |
| Southeastern | Yustinskiy Yashkul'skiy | Medical-recreational, ecological | Yashkul settlement – Hotel "555" | Hunting |
| Southwestern | Iki-Burul'skiy | Ethno-tourism, medical-recreational, seasonal hunting | Iki-Burul settlement – hotel "Uyut" | Archeological |

As the Table 1 shows, the Northern zone covers Maloderbetovskiy, Sarpinskiy, Ketchenerovskiy and Oktyabrskiy districts. In Maloderbetovskiy district there is the conservation area "Hlebnikovo pole", which is the main museum attraction of the area dedicated to the activities of the Great Russian poet of the Silver age, V. Khlebnikov

– native-born of Maloderbetovskiy district. In Iki-Bohus settlement there is the Museum of Elaeva Owly, a folk musician, who is the most famous national rhapsody player of the Kalmyk heroic epic "Jangar". The district has a number of features allowing the development of fishing and hunting tourism. The obtained results allow us to identify the village of Tsagan-Nur located on the territory of Oktyabrsky district of the Republic of Kalmykia as one of the possible areas for development of a touristic recreational complex. The lake of Tsagan-Nur, with the adjacent territory, is a unique ornithological, botanical and zoological reserve. The territory around the lake is covered with numerous burial mounds: 16 of them are monuments of history and cultural heritage of the Russian Federation. Today the village of Tsagan-Nur is one of the centres of the preservation of folklore and ethnographic traditions of the Kalmyk people. Language environment, the residents' knowledge of national customs and folklore form the basis of the ethnographic village and it could be interesting for tourists keen on nomadic culture of Mongolian-speaking peoples.

The Western area is located on the territory of Yashaltinskiy, Gorodovikovskiy and Priyutnenskiy districts of the Republic. It is a natural recreational area, encompassing many lakes within the structure of lake Manych-Gudilo. Main focus of the area is the health-treatment as this area is rich in the balneological mud. In addition to ethnographic, fishing and hunting tourism, a promising direction for the ecological tours is the Tulip Island, especially during the time of tulip flowering in Kalmykia steppes.

Water objects on the territory of the district are used for public recreation, for example, the Manych-Gudilo Lake is well known as the lake that can cure illnesses. The most important object in these specially protected areas is the biosphere reserve "Chornye zemli".

As a part of the study we carried out the analysis of development of the central zone – "Celinyi district" and the capital of the Republic – Elista. The Central zone is characterized by the presence of curative springs (settlements Har-Buluk, Yalmta, Arnurskiy, Troitskoe) and, which allows to cultivate archaeological, ecological and hunting tourism. Another important strategic pathway of the zone is hippotherapy – therapeutic program based on the horse riding.

In the "Celinyi district" there are many places steeped in legends, reflecting traces of bygone eras, in which historical events are closely intertwined with people's lives. One of them is a historical place where there used to be the Higher Academy of Buddhism Choyr, the development of which was supported by the personal representative of the Dalai Lama XIII in Russia. Currently, this place is the object of worship of Buddhists pilgrims. The healing properties of the water from the source of "Haar-Buluk" in the territory of the district were known to the healers in the 19th century. The chemical and medical characteristics of the water is close to the mineral water "Batalinskaya" known for its safety and benefits for health. And finally, a Buddhist legend has it that in the desert on the territory of this district there was a place where the goddesses White Tara and Green Tara would come down to the Earth. The "Stupa of Enlightenment" was built on this territory.

The architecture and decoration of the capital of the Republic, Elista, has a strong Eastern (Buddhist) flavor. The most significant objects are jurally complex, which includes Europe's largest Buddhist temple "Golden abode of Buddha Shakyamuni" (height 64 m), and the Buddhist monastery, a statue of "Buddha Sakyamuni", the "Altyn Bosh" (Golden gate), the chess camp "City Chess", and a park called "Friendship".

The results of our study showed that there are a sufficient number of factors that positively affect the development of inbound and domestic tourism in the city:

- the interest of the residents of the Russian Federation and foreigners to the history and culture of the Republic. The modern ethno-cultural particularity and importance of the subject is defined by the fact that the Kalmyks are representatives of the Eurasian culture, whose origins go back centuries to the Mongolian history (scientific, informative, educational tourism);
- economic interest of residents of other regions in establishing business contacts (event and business tourism);
- a wide range of monuments, sculptures, architectural ensembles (Arceo Peon 2009).

The analysis of modern state and tendencies of tourism development in the Republic of Kalmykia allows us to point out that congress tourism is one of the most developed systems of international communication, especially in the development of strategies and implementation of international programs. It serves as a significant factor in increasing the number of visits of the representatives of cultural, scientific, economic and public spheres. This leads to an important insight - Elista today is a venue for interregional and international events, the 'chess capital' of Russia.

Elista has a prospect to become the religious center of Europe and Russia. Buddhist structures, visits of prominent religious figures (Geshe Tenley, Ole Nydahl, Robert Thurman), as well as of leaders of the world religions

(his Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Alexy II) make the Elista an attractive place for conducting religious conferences and trainings. The main attraction of the Republic is Russia's and Europe largest Buddhist temple "Golden Abode of Buddha Shakyamuni" (located in Elista), which is annually visited by thousands of tourists from different corners of Russia and abroad.

The Southeastern zone is located in the Lagansky and Chernozemelsky districts of the Republic and it is characterized by a hydrographic network of lakes and surrounding waters of the Caspian Sea. The coast of the territory of Lagansky district, adjacent to the Caspian Sea, is the only area through which the Kalmykia has direct access to neighboring States (Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan). The lake and the adjacent water area of the Caspian Sea are rich in fish; the area is full of scenic landscapes. Around the city there are lakes with the nest sites of migratory birds, including flamingos.

In the course of the study, the ecological and extreme tourism was defined as the most promising for the Republic of Kalmykia. Semi-arid zones, islands isolated from each other along the coastal line, sharply-continental climate allow us to take measures for the species (robustness, routes of survival). Equally important is the proximity to the port of Lagan and the Caspian Sea, which allows us to cultivate develop the cruise routes and the resort tourism sphere. The town Lagan in the Republic of Kalmykia is situated in a unique natural environment. The coast of the Caspian Sea with the coastal reeds of the landscape is an interesting region, with an abundance of water birds and wild animals.

Special tourist routes to the places of growth of Lotus (the Holy flower, symbol of the Republic of Kalmykia) are annually organized in the summer period. There are two equipped beaches in Lagan, which include small water amusement parks and places for the beach volleyball.

Chernozemelsky district is in the South-East of the Republic characterized by specific agro-climatic conditions and land cover. The area is a great place for fishing enthusiasts. On the territory of district there are located fishy 'Solinskie' lakes. For those interested in Mongolian history, there is a possibility to visit the suburgan of Donduk-Dashi Khan, who played a major role in the development of the Kalmyk state.

The eastern zone covers Yustinskiy and Yashkul districts of the Republic and it lies in the area of shoreline of the Volga River in the village of Tsagan-Aman, the hydrographic network of fresh and salt lakes, pockets of deserts and semi-deserts, that help to develop extreme tourism, as well as hunting and fishing. The area has a number of features favorable for development of therapeutic, confessional, environmental and other types of tourism. Much focus is placed on potential tourists who are travelling in transit through the highway Astrakhan – Volgograd, passing through settlement Tsagan-Aman and Astrakhan – Elista, passing through the "Yashkul" settlement.

The south-western zone of tourism development is situated in the Iki-Burul'skiy district of the Republic. It is one of the most promising areas due to the presence of a federal highway "Khabarovsk – Krasnodar – Mineralnye Vody". It is characterized by stable development of ethno-tourism, excursion tourism, children's holidays by the Chograysky reservoir, and seasonal hunting. Archaeological tourism is a promising line of development as well.

The Kalmyk steppe is a benchmark for the study of archaeological cultures of the ancient and medieval civilizations. The most important are the monuments of the Khazar Khanate - one of the early state formations of Eastern Europe, which had a profound influence on the history of Europe and Asia. Kalmykia is a steppe region with a great number of mounds – there are over 200 thousand mounds. Their age is akin to the age of the Egyptian pyramids. Built thousands of years ago, nowadays, according to Russian and foreign archaeologists, these monuments are archaeological 'El Dorado'.

The Table 2 presents a comparative analysis of the tourism product of the region.

Table 2. Comparative analysis of tourist product of the Republic of Kalmykia

| Comparative analysis of tourism product of the Republic of Kalmykia | |
|---|--|
| 1. Natural resources | Ancient burial mounds, therapeutic mud, coast of the Caspian sea, the shoreline of the river Volga |
| 2. Predominate tourist product | One-day trip to Elista |
| 3. Means of accommodation | Collective places of general purpose (not classified) |
| 4. Predominate types of tourism | Excursion |
| 5. Transport accessibility | Low |
| 6. Recognizability | Distinct Buddhist flavor |
| 7. Related infrastructure | Medium |

Thus, the results and discussion of ethno-cultural aspects of tourism development in the Republic of Kalmykia allows adapting the mechanism of management of regional tourism potential to the peculiarities of the

economic structure of the Republic. In addition, it allows us to identify the development strategy of the tourism sector, using the competitive advantages of the region. Also, sufficient evidence to establish its theoretical significance and clearly expressed practical orientation.

Conclusion

Given the nature of the Kalmyk tourism resources and current status of tourist infrastructure, the following types of tourism are of a particular interest for the development of tourism in the Republic of Kalmykia: cultural, religious, ethnographic and specialized tourism (event-based, ecological, hunting and fishing, including the perspective of therapeutic recreation (folk medicine).

Thus, based on the results of the marketing analysis of the tourism development trends in the Republic of Kalmykia, it could be concluded that the rich cultural, historical and natural heritage of the region in combination with unknown the fact that the region is yet barely explored creates a great interest for foreign tourists.

Inbound tourism in Kalmykia is adapted for family, group and individual trips. It is possible to visit all places of interest, Republic districts and the Kalmyk style Chotons, which are presented by a network of relocatable buildings – nomad tents ('kibitka'). This could be tours of including full recreational services (accommodation, meals, transportation, recreation areas, special programs or individual program. The tourism industry is like no other sector of the economy in Kalmykia is focused on the preservation of natural, cultural, historical appearance of cities and favorable ecological situation in the region.

Acknowledgment

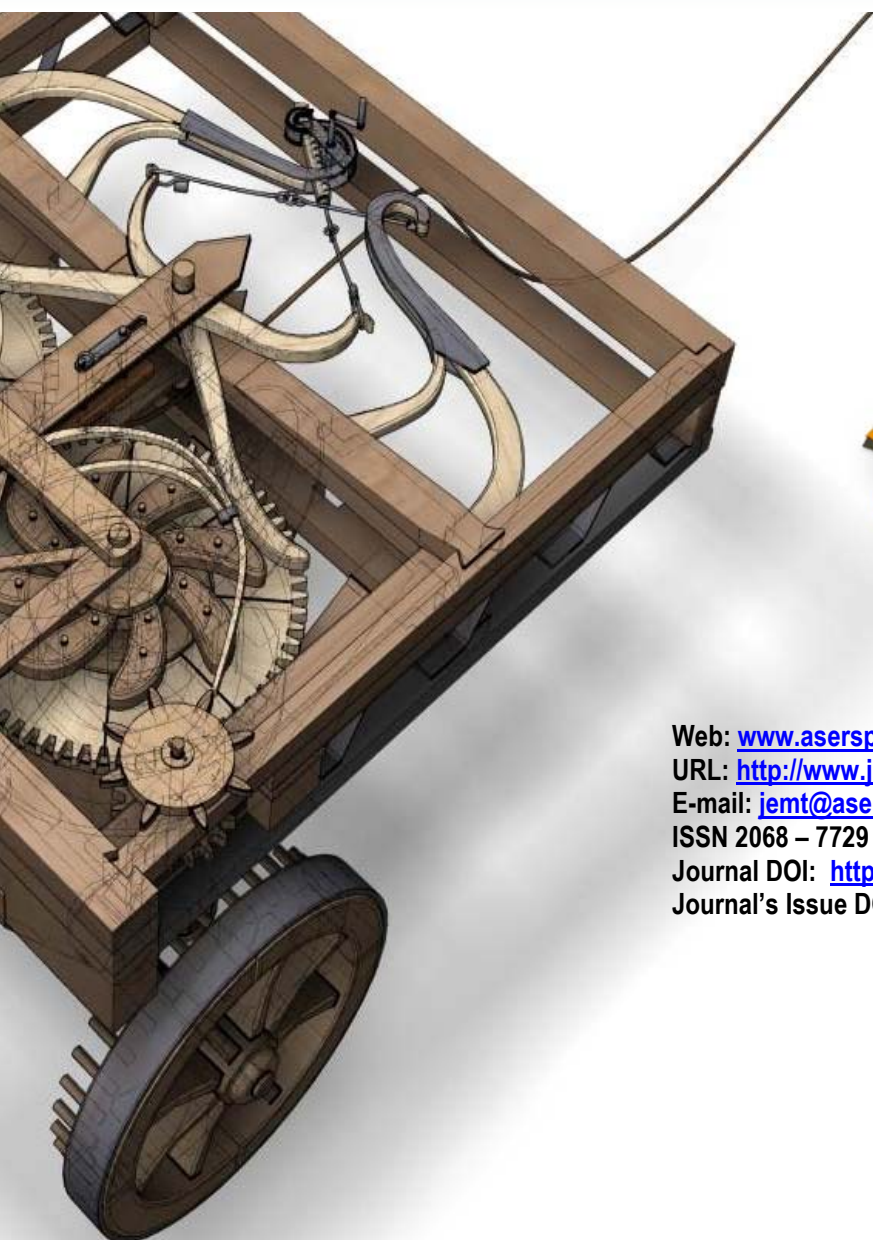
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