

Analysis of the Current State of Ecotourism in Murmansk Region

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ABSTRACT

The origins of ecological tourism in Russia date back to the end of the 19th century, when amateur nature tours began to be organized. Small groups of tourists organized amateur tours. The development of ecotourism was greatly influenced by the appearance of national parks in Russia in the second half of the 20th century. Since 1995, ecological tourism has already begun to be developed at the state level. At the first stages of its development, the demand for eco-tours among the citizens of the country was small. The relevance of the research topic is related to the need of development of ecological tourism in Russia. The Murmansk region acts as a study area, as one of the most promising Russian regions for the development of ecotourism. Competent planning and design of this type of tourism will help preserve the natural, historical and cultural heritage of the country's regions, create a positive image of Russian regions as favourable for domestic and external tourism, popularize domestic tourism among Russians, and create a comfortable tourist environment on the territory of the Russian Federation. The article presents the characteristics of specially protected natural areas (SPNA) of the Murmansk region, the analysis of ecotours with a visit of these objects. The authors paid special attention to the problems that hinder the development of ecological tourism in the region. Conclusions have been formulated based on the analysis.

Keywords: *tourism, internal tourism, ecotourism, specially protected natural areas, Russian regions, Murmansk region.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, ecological tourism is one of the most actively developing areas in the tourist market. As a separate type of tourism, ecological tourism began to form in the early 80s of the XX century and subsequently took one of the leading positions. This is due to the fact that ecotourism contributes not only to the preservation of natural and recreational resources, but also teaches a careful attitude towards nature. Therefore, one of the main tasks of this type of tourism is to teach people to love and treat nature with special respect, to accept it as it is, not to violate its integrity and original appearance.

The Murmansk region with its rich and unique natural base is one of the most promising areas for the

development of ecological tourism not only in our country, but also in the world. The Murmansk region is interesting in its natural diversity, and therefore it is important not only to use these resources for the development of the region, but also to try to maintain them in the state in which they are now. This is facilitated by ecological tourism. In this regard, there is a need to study the current state of ecological tourism in the Murmansk region, as well as its further development.

There is a large number of works in the field of organization and development of ecological tourism and the use of natural and recreational resources (scientific and applied works of Russian and foreign researchers): M.B. Birzhakov, A.V. Drozdov, A.B.

Kosolapova, T.K. Sergeeva, A.V. Tarasenko, G. Ceballos-Lascurain, K. Miller, K. Lindberg, et. al. [1-10].

In addition to abovementioned works the followings have been used during preparation of this article:

- materials and recommendations of scientific research and scientific and practical conferences dedicated to the development of tourism in the Murmansk region, containing the characteristics of ecotourism objects located on the territory of the considered region;
- normative and legal documents that regulate ecological tourism;
- electronic resources on ecological tourism and official sites, which provide information about the Murmansk region, objects of ecological tourism.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

During preparation of this article, the following research methods have been used:

- analysis of literature on the development of ecological tourism in the world and in Russia;
- generalization of information about ecotourism objects in the Murmansk region;
- studying the possibilities of SPNAs for organizing ecotourism;
- method of SWOT analysis used in order to identify the main advantages of the Murmansk region for the development of ecotourism, as well as to analyse threats from the external environment;
- comparison of the tourist offer within the framework of ecological tourism from the leading tour operators of the Murmansk region.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Murmansk region is unique in its geographic characteristics. The Arctic Ocean meets the Atlantic Ocean here. The administrative centre is the city of Murmansk, which is the largest city in the world, located beyond the Arctic Circle. The Murmansk region is washed by the Barents and White Seas, occupies three peninsulas - Kola, Rybachy and Sredny. It also includes the Ainovsky, Sem, Velikiy and Kildin islands. Most of the region lies beyond the Arctic Circle and borders Karelia in the south and Norway and Finland in the west. Through the White Sea, the Murmansk region borders on the Arkhangelsk region. The population of the Murmansk region is 741.405 people according to data obtained in 2020.

At the end of 2015-2016, the area of specially protected natural areas was 1581.1 thousand hectares, and in 2017 it was 1876.2; at the end of 2018 it was 1884.5; at the end of 2019 it was 1969.3 thousand

hectares, which is more than 12% of the total area of the entire region (see table 1).

Table 1. The number of SPNAs in the Murmansk region (2015-2019) [11]

Types of SPNA	Year, area (thousand hectares)				
	2015 (1581.1)	2016 (1581.1)	2017 (1876.2)	2018 (1884.5)	2019 (1969.3)
SPNA of Federal importance					
State natural reservations	3	3	3	3	3
State nature sanctuaries	2	2	3	3	3
Dendrological parks and botanic gardens	2	2	2	2	2
Natural monuments	-	-	4	4	4
National parks	-	-	-	-	1
SPNA of regional importance					
Natural parks	1	1	1	2	2
State nature sanctuaries	9	9	9	9	9
Natural monuments	50	50	50	50	50
SPNA of local importance					
Special protected natural areas	2	2	2	1	1

Currently, tourism is recognized as a priority type of socio-economic development of the Murmansk region. The goals and priorities of the regional tourism policy are enshrined in the Law of the Murmansk region No. 1674-01-ZMO dated 07.11.2013 (amendment No.2304-01-ZMO dated 06.11.2018).

In the field of ecological tourism, the following regulatory documents are in force:

1. Law of the Murmansk region "On specially protected natural areas in the Murmansk region" dated 10.07.2007 (amendment dated 08.07.2019);
2. State program of the Murmansk region "Environmental protection and reproduction of natural resources" (approved by the decree of the government of the Murmansk region No. 570-PP dated 30.09.2013 on approval, amendment dated 24.12.2020);
3. Provisions on the State Inspection for the Protection, Control and Regulation of the Use of Fauna Objects and Their Habitats in the Murmansk Region (approved by the Decree of the Government of the Murmansk Region No. 74-PP dated 18.02.2009, amendment dated 31.10.2011).

Table 2. SPNAs of Murmansk region [12]

Item No.	Level of SPNA	Type of SPNA	Components of SPNA
1	SPNA of Federal importance	State natural reservations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State natural reservation "Pasvik" (total area 16640 thousand hectares) • Lapland State Natural Biosphere Reserve (area - 278435 thousand hectares) • Kandalaksha State Natural Reserve (area - 70530 thousand hectares.)
		State nature sanctuaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Murmansk tundra sanctuary (295 thousand hectares) • Kanozersky nature sanctuary (656.5 thousand hectares) • Tulomsky nature sanctuary (33700 thousand hectares)
		Natural monuments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Astrophyllites from Eveslogchorr Mountain (Khibini) • Yubileynaya deposit (Karnasurt mountain of the Lovozero mountain range) • Epidosites of Verkhniy Navolok cape (White Sea) • Mogilnoe (Kildin island, Barents Sea)
2	SPNA of regional importance	State nature sanctuaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varzugskiy sanctuary (45093.0 thousand hectares) • Kolvitskiy sanctuary (14.260 thousand hectares) • Ponoiskiyy zoological sanctuary (98.600 thousand hectares) • Ponoiskiyy fishery sanctuary (398.490 thousand hectares) • Kutsa sanctuary (48.640 thousand hectares) • Simbozerskiy sanctuary (39.568 thousand hectares) • Laplanskiy forest natural complex (92.900 thousand hectares) • "Seydyavr" Natural complex sanctuary (17972 thousand hectares) • "Kaita" sanctuary (144381.25 hectares)
		Natural parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Rybachy and Sredny peninsula" • "Korablekk" park
		Natural monuments	50 pieces
3	SPNA of local importance	Natural parks	Severomorsk country park
4	Polar-Alpine Botanical Garden-Institute of the Karelian Scientific Centre of Russian Academy of Sciences of federal significance (Kirovsk)		
5	Khibiny national park (84.804 ha)		

Within the framework of the state program of the Murmansk region "Environmental protection and reproduction of natural resources", events aimed at the development and improvement of protected areas of regional significance are organized. Thus, in 2018, based on an assessment of the current state of the "Seydyavr" and "Kait" nature reserves and their general functioning for the development of nature-oriented tourism, two target programs have been developed.

There are 72 SPNAs in the Murmansk region [12]. SPNAs of the Murmansk region are presented in Table 2.

In 2019, the same assessment of the current state of protected areas has been carried out in the territories of the Pechenga and Kandalaksha districts. As a result, a target program has been adopted to improve the existing SPNAs and create new natural areas: the Korablekk natural park (Pechenga district) and the Voronya Guba SPNA of regional importance (Kandalaksha district). The following main tasks have been highlighted for creation of new natural areas: preservation of

biological diversity and the development of ecological tourism, taking into account all the features of natural diversity associated with their vulnerability to anthropogenic loads.

Ecotourism is actively developing in the SPNAs of the Murmansk region. Thus, natural museums have been opened, information visit centres have been created and ecological routes for tourists have been laid in 3 state natural reserves: Laplandsky, Kandalaksha and Pasvik. In 2017, an ecological educational route with a length of 5 km has been opened not far from Semenovskoye Lake located in Murmansk. A feature of this route is the following: tourists can visit 3 natural zones of the Kola Peninsula (tundra, forest-tundra and taiga) at the same time. Special information stands about natural and landscape attractions of the Murmansk region are installed along the entire route [13,14].

At the end of 2019, the design work for the opening of the new Tersky Bereg national park has been completed. The main goal of creation of the park is to preserve the Varzuga River and the surrounding areas,

since a large number of wild salmon live in the waters of this river. Poaching and uncontrolled flows of tourists who came to the Varzuga River for rafting and fishing led to the fact that the number of fish was greatly reduced, and the nearest territories, including the river bank, were heavily polluted by tourists. Therefore, it was decided to create a natural park, where fishing will be officially allowed, and the flow of tourists will be controlled by the administration. According to the plan for the creation of the park, its territory will be divided into several zones, in one of which, the reserved entrance for tourists will be prohibited. In the remaining territories, it is planned to develop ecological tourism. Ecological routes and paths will be laid, infrastructure will be created, fishing and river rafting will be allowed.

The growing popularity of nature-oriented tourism among travellers contributed to the fact that many tour operators in the Murmansk region began to specialize in the development of ecological tours.

This area is a good platform for the development of ecotourism. Most of them offer hiking with backpacks and spending night in tents. They are popular among tourists with good physical fitness and those tourists who love a "wild" vacation with rather extreme conditions.

Murmania, Flight Group and Russian Lapland tour operators offer ethnographic and ecological tours that include accommodation with indigenous families of the Kola Peninsula. The tour program may include: reindeer or dog sledding, fishing (salmon, brown trout, ide, char, flounder) and cooking it right on the shore of the White Sea. Tour operators mainly develop eco-tours to places that are already popular among tourists, include in their programs the most famous and popular tourist objects [15]. On the Internet, active tours to the Sredny and Rybachy peninsulas, nature-oriented tours in the territories of the Kandalaksha and Pechenga regions, winter tours to the Khibiny and Teriberka are offered to the tourists. Many places where there are natural and cultural-historical monuments such as Lovozersky, Tersky districts and cities of regional significance (Olenegorsk and Apatity) are not used by tour operators for organizing tours.

To promote ecological tourism and preserve the environment in general, tour operators such as "Murmania" and "Kharlovka Company" annually hold campaigns aimed at attraction of tourists to the problems of environmental pollution (since the Murmansk region is an industrial region) and the preservation of animals and plants. "Kharlovka company" tour operator is engaged in the research project "House for Salmon", the main goal of which is to preserve the livestock of Atlantic elk and brown trout in natural conditions. Tourists can also take part in this project.

Despite the diversity of the natural potential in the Murmansk region, the region is faced with a number of problems that prevent the full development of ecotourism in this area in full scope:

1. poorly developed infrastructure or its complete absence. On the territory of natural parks and reserves, not only natural objects, a variety of flora and fauna are important, but also the availability of conditions for study, observation and environmental education. Most of the protected areas, which are popular among tourists, have poorly developed transport links and road networks, poorly equipped eco-trails and tourist routes;

2. lack of qualified personnel. Employees who are involved in serving tourists on the territory of the protected areas have a lack of experience and knowledge (excluding those employees who conduct research work). Tourists are provided with a limited range of services, the quality of which is poor;

3. despite the large number of natural parks and reserves on the territory of the Murmansk region, tourist and excursion activities are mainly carried out on the territory of three large nature reserves: "Pasvik", Kandalaksha and Lapland nature reserves;

4. there is no control over the increasing flow of independent tourists, as a result of which the anthropogenic load on the protected areas threatens their condition. Natural and cultural-historical complexes that cannot withstand such an influx of tourists are under threat;

5. environmental education for a narrow circle of tourists. Environmental education centres (visit centres) have been opened in many SPNAs. Presentations, exhibitions, seminars and lectures are held in these centres. But the problem is that the information that is provided in the centres is aimed mainly at tourists who are engaged in scientific environmental activities, including the collection of scientific information about SPNAs (expeditions of scientists, summer field practices of students, etc.). They make up an insignificant number in the total flow of tourists. This affects the receipt of income from tourist and excursion activities;

6. promotion of an ecological product to the market. Poorly developed marketing activities of SPNAs do not allow to promote an eco-product to the market (not only Russian, but also international). Many SPNAs have no information sites in the Internet and have no advertisements, which would attract not only Russian, but also foreign tourists. Ecological tours are promoted mainly by tour operators.

In order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the Murmansk region, as well as to identify threats and opportunities for the development of ecological tourism, the SWOT analysis method has been used.

Based on the SWOT analysis, the following conclusions have been formulated:

1. favourable geographical, economic and transport position of the Murmansk region is an

advantageous side of the region, as it can contribute to the development and strengthening of international cooperation in the field of tourism and ecotourism, including with such countries as Norway and Finland;

2. the presence of a rich natural-recreational and cultural-historical potential is a good opportunity for the development of ecological tourism, creation of job places and, as a result, improvement of the economic component of the region;

3. It is possible to use rich cultural and historical heritage of the region, natural potential, availability of infrastructure for the development of ecological tourism, which will create a competitive tourist product that will attract Russian and foreign tourists;

4. a great advantage of the region is that the leadership of the Murmansk region is pursuing an active policy for the development of SPNAs, and this can contribute to the regulation of a large flow of tourists as well as to their education;

5. the formation of regional tourist and recreational clusters using the natural and cultural potential of the region is a way to use these territories as a good foundation, to increase the demand as ecological tourism among Russian and foreign tourists in the region.

4. CONCLUSION

Thus, according to the results of the study, the following conclusions can be made:

1. the main resource of ecological tourism are unique natural sites, SPNAs including national parks, reserves, wildlife sanctuaries;

2. the development of ecological tourism in Russia is regulated at the state level. New laws and legal acts that contribute to the preservation of natural and recreational facilities while their using for organizing ecotourism are adopted;

3. The Murmansk region is a region with a huge tourism potential, in particular for the development of ecological tourism not only for domestic tourists, but also for tourists from all over the world;

4. ecological tourism in the Murmansk region is developing rapidly. This is facilitated by the adopted state laws and acts in the field of nature-oriented tourism, as well as the awareness of people that natural objects are vulnerable and need special care and protection;

5. every year, the number of tourists who want to visit the Murmansk region with its unique and inimitable nature is increasing. Over the past few years, the number of tourists visiting the region has almost tripled;

6. the infrastructure in the region develops every year, but due to climatic features, its improvement and development requires large financial costs. However, most of the territories of the Murmansk region, which have the potential necessary for organizing ecological tourism, are not used.

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