

Development and marketing of ecotourism in Baikal region

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Abstract. The necessity of development and marketing of ecological tourism in Baikal region is substantiated today by requirements for sustainability of entrenched economic activities in regions of Russia, as well as, by problems of environment preservation. Therefore, the modern ecological tourism concept and its principles suggested for Baikal region are described. The ecological tourism with active involvement of local residents in particular should become an important element for development of the Baikal region, promoting both economic development and preservation of natural and cultural heritage in the region. The work presents the model and approaches to ecological tourism, as well as marketing concept for ecological tourism products and services, the implementation of which is required for sustainable development of the given entrenched kind of activity in Baikal region territory. The issues of marketing planning and marketing strategy in the sphere of ecological tourism are discussed. The importance of nature preservation and of ecological tourism development for Baikal region is presented, as the most prospective and profitable way of tourism and entrenched for local people activity, which will result in new jobs and sustainable incomes to support local nature and communities.

1. Introduction

Today, when Russia undergoes EC and USA sanctions, the support of innovative activities is required in various industries of economy in Baikal region. After a profound study of the foreign and domestic tourism experience [1], we concluded that it is the ecological tourism, which is to be an important component to facilitate economic development of Baikal region and to preserve its natural and cultural values.

Ecological tourism is a relatively new concept in Russia and in Baikal region in particular. The distinguishing feature of ecological tourism is that the common tourism in general implies just travelling a distance from home, while ecological tourism is defined specifically as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people. Other definitions of the ecological tourism presented in modern dictionaries, including American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Collins English Dictionary, Random House Kernerman Webster's College Dictionary, are the following:

- “tourism involving travel to areas of natural or ecological interest, typically under the guidance of a naturalist, for the purpose of observing wildlife and learning about the environment”;



- “tourism that is designed to contribute to the protection of the environment or at least minimize damage to it, often involving travel to areas of natural interest in developing countries or participation in environmental projects”;
- tourism to places having unspoiled natural resources;
- tourism to exotic or threatened ecosystems to observe wildlife or to help preserve nature.

2. Development of Ecological Tourism in Baikal Region

What we know about the Ecological tourism in Baikal region:

- Tourism in Baikal region is on the rise but there is a lack of ecological tours despite the many ecological sights and nature attractions;
- The entire Baikal region is one of the Russia’s biggest regions. About 1.5 million overnight stays per year only, of which over 70% are during the summer season. Less than 10% of the tourists visit the region in the winter. The number of foreign tourists fluctuates from 40 to 50 thousand visitors per year.
- Very few residents of the Baikal region live on tourism. Despite the fact that many local residents are aware of the prospective incomes to be brought by tourists only few are in the tourism industry and even fewer are aware of the ecological tourism potential.
- The local products, including souvenirs, are still of low interest for tourists. Ecological and regional products can be marketed better by ecological tourism.

The understanding of the tourism and of ecological tourism in particular in Baikal region by local residents is usually strongly correlated with backpacking, recreation activities and leisure time. Recreation is considered as a sort of amusement or an activity a person takes part in for pleasure or relaxation rather than as work. Hence local tourist areas are mostly areas for recreational stay, sports, and games, often with children. Considering the climatic conditions of the region, with average annual temperatures below zero degrees Celsius, the outdoor recreation is more closely related to the mass tourism and usually abroad to the ocean. For example, sunbathing, ashore and in-water attractions visited are usually both recreational activities and tourist activities, with no regard to the duration and location of the trip. Whereas, a traveler who is going out or backpacking, for example, to the nearby forests, for a day or for a weekend, or a longer trip, if visiting further destinations, can be considered as a tourist participating in an ecological tour.

Every year ecological tours only to the Lake Baikal itself attract many thousands tourist from Russia and abroad. Lake Baikal is quite interesting for the visitors not only during the summer but during other seasons too. Though, most of the visits are definitely during the summer months. Some like to stay in comfortable cottages and bungalows, others prefer to spent nights in tents or aboard the boats. However, there is still no such a developed ecological tourism infrastructure in Baikal region as we can see in other eco-attractive destinations.

Today we can name at least seven defining points to describe ecotourism in international practice, which are to be adopted and implemented in Russia and in Baikal region in particular too. The profound studies of ecotourism including University programs use this as the following defining points for the working definition [2]:

a. *It assumes travels to sites of real nature:* These places are usually quite remote areas, whether inhabited or uninhabited, and are officially under the environmental protection at the international, national, regional, municipal or private level.

b. *Minimum impact:* Ecological tourism always strives to minimize the adverse anthropological impact, which can be achieved via, for example, well established and organized tours and use of recycled materials or local construction materials for hotels and other buildings required to provide the tourists infrastructure and environmentally and culturally sensitive architectural design, as well as, alternative energy sources, recycling and/or non-harmful disposal of wastes. Minimization of impact also requires that the behavior of tourists and number of visits are regulated to ensure no damage to the local ecosystem.

c. *It educates environmental awareness:* Ecological tourism always means education, for both tourists and residents of the local communities. It is very important to provide travelers with the relevant information about the country, environment and people, as well as about the formal and informal institutions involved well before the departure to a destination. According to Ecotourism Societies guidelines it is required "to learn about the places and peoples visited" and "to minimize their negative impacts while visiting sensitive environments and cultures". Therefore, good eco-touristic programs should be provided by well-trained, multilingual guides with the knowledge of natural and cultural history, environmental interpretation, ethical principles and effective ways of communication. All ecotourism projects are supposed to educate tourists and local community members, including adults and kids in the host country.

d. *It provides direct financial benefits for nature protection and conservation:* Ecotourism not only promotes environmental awareness, but is directed to raise some funds required for the environmental protection, research and education. This can be achieved via a variety of financial mechanisms, including park entrance fees, eco-tour and transportation companies' contributions, special offers in hotels, eco-taxes and voluntary contributions.

e. *It should provide financial benefits and job advantages to local people:* It is a common believe that National Parks and other conservation areas will only survive if there are "happy people" around the area. It is getting obvious that local communities must be involved with and receive income and other tangible benefits related to state of life improvement and local infrastructure as a result of the conservation areas promotion and construction of its tourist facilities. Actually, people from the local communities surrounding an ecotourism attraction should run campsites, lodges, guide services, restaurants and other concessions. Such a partnership is suggested for all sorts of investors planning their activities in parks or other tourist destination. More importantly, since Ecotourism is often viewed as a tool for rural development, it should also allocate most of economic and political control to the local communities. This is the most common mistake of the operators and the foreign partners to neglect the role of the local officials and business people, including those living in villages and nearby settlements.

f. *It respects local culture:* Local culture is another concern of the ecotourism. Ecological tourism is not only "greener" but also less culturally intrusive and exploitative than any other forms of tourism. Ecotourism always strives to be culturally respectful and have a minimal effect on both the natural environment and the human population of a host country. Sometimes it is not that easy, since ecotourism often involves travel to distant and secluded places where small and isolate communities have had little experience interacting with foreign visitors. Sometimes, even ecotourism involves an unequal relationship of the visitors and the hosts and a commoditization of the relationship through exchange of money. Actually, responsible eco-tourists are learning beforehand about the local customs, dress codes and other social norms and do not intrude into the community unless either invited or as part of a well organized tour.

g. *It should support human rights and local democracy:* Traditionally, it is tourism that is loudly hailed as a tool for building international understanding and world peace promotion. However, it is not always the fact or it does not necessarily happen immediately upon a visit. Most often tourism just bolsters the economies of various countries including even those that tend to be or are undemocratic and repressive. While regular tourists pay low attention to the political system of a country they visit, unless a civil unrest breaks out in there and which is harming the tourists too. In fact, rural population living around national parks and close to other ecotourism attractions are in contradictions with the national and regional laws and regulations, and multinational corporations for control of the assets and possible benefits.

3. Marketing in the Sphere of Ecological Tourism

Marketing in the sphere of ecological tourism is the same activity of planning, development, promotion, and selling of touristic products, including goods and services, stimulating their demand and price setting, as for mass tourism. Marketing in ecological tourism also can be defined as a

complex of measures to increase the market share of eco-touristic products and services. Touristic marketing is a system of management and organization of touristic organization for development and provision of new ecological and eco-effective kinds of touristic services and excursions for their further sale to make a better profit resulting from eco-oriented attitude to services and products provided and considering the processes happening in tourism markets. The major task of Ecological tourism marketing is to stimulate eco-oriented demand for recreation activities, to set the prices right, to provide market segmentation and develop a favorable assortment of eco-touristic services and excursions and attractive advertisement.

The specifics of the marketing in the sphere of ecological tourism are that the major product is actually intangible, the source is inseparable from the service offered itself, the great correlation of the service quality with the local culture and level of training for the personnel, and that none of the eco-product can be stored or kept in a storage. The touristic services offered in the ecotourism market are intangible, you cannot taste or try them, really smell or hear before an actual purchase of such a product.

The marketing of any eco-tour should start with marketing analysis of the environment. The overall and detailed perception of the markets and professional feedback is the responsibility of marketing specialists, whose job is not only to stimulate the demand and increase sales but to develop a firm considering employees' potential, financing, management, price formation, customers' feedback. It implies the creation of channels of distributions, marketing programs development and implementation and budgeting.

Marketing is a good tool to stimulate the demand for ecological tourism, the knowledge of which is a responsibility for everyone involved in tourism industry. The major marketing task in ecological tourism is creation of an ecological tour/product/service to motivate and satisfy clients eco-oriented demands. The major task of a professional marketing specialist in the sphere of ecological tourism is to attract and keep aware customers about the advantages of ecological tours and services, to satisfy the existing and create new demand to increase the profitability. Therefore, marketing in the sphere of ecological tourism is to solve such tasks, as, for example, determination and/or formation of needs and demands for ecological services and touristic products in the market, development and offer of high quality products and services at a market price, stimulation of demand and distribution of supply and its availability. Hence, we can name major tasks of the marketing management in the sphere of ecological tourism. These are demand regulation, analysis, planning, ecological tourism products sales and control, and touristic markets monitoring.

The major feature of the concept of ecological tourism marketing is the nature protection compound. Marketing in the sphere of ecological tourism always assumes a high level of responsibility of marketing specialists for the environment and nature. The nature oriented concept of marketing implies environmental friendliness and careful management of nature resources. Touristic companies and ecological tour operators have to consider their potential negative influence on the environment and strive, if not fully eliminate it, than, rather to minimize it via related environmental activities. This is what is called the environmental friendliness. The care for the clients health in places of their stay is the task of managers in eco-oriented touristic companies.

The modern marketing strategy always requires the inclusion of the ecological component. The issue of social responsibility and of ethical behavior are especially important in tourism business today. The social concept of marketing means employees and specialists awareness about the lawful and acceptable business practices and have to know the business dealing principles, which are based on ethics, corporate culture and interests of clients.

The customer oriented approach is the key to success for any touristic company, since, touristic business consists not only in the development of a final touristic product, but, rather, in satisfaction of customers' demands. Herewith, customer demands can be changed and corrected, and specifically due to professional work of marketing specialists. Marketing can manage the demand and promote ecological tourism products at the target markets, can help to evaluate dynamics of sales in every strategic direction and determine prospective incomes. Once the ecological tour aims of a company

and possible financing are determined, the marketing can solve the tasks, which have been set, effectively to maximize the profitability.

Marketing planning in ecological tourism is required to forecast levels of ecological tours sales and incomes. Therefore, current and planned sales and their time are analyzed and related strategies are suggested. First of all, marketing specialists have to consider the existing markets shares and further market penetration with ecological tour products and only than the possibilities of new markets development. The following steps are development of new products for existing markets, and offer of new products in new target markets, i.e. diversification.

Once a marketing strategy is developed, the related programs for its implementation are defined. Therefore, the strategy includes a frame, resources and personnel to achieve the strategy aims. The qualified and professional employees are involved, training and educational programs for the personnel are introduced, products and services quality control and improvement programs are implemented, the services and touristic products are promoted, informing about the positive and innovative features.

It is worth to mention the particular importance of the personnel awareness and involvement in touristic companies into the development and implementation of corporate strategies. The firm employees in touristic business are the most important element of successful product and service. Formation of terms and conditions, which encourage good services for clients, is often called *internal marketing* [3]. Today, the most successful tourism enterprises have to offer in the markets not only ecological tourism products, but to develop corporate ethics and mentality to satisfy the customers' specific ecological demands. The employees of travel agencies should understand prestige value of ecological tours and advantages of their promotion. The key aspect of the successful internal marketing is employees' motivation. Therefore, along with various financial advantages, the positive influence plays credibility and prospects of their workplace. Other reinforcements and motivators are, for example, a flexible work schedule, child and kids care programs, and other non-financial benefits. The internal marketing will help tourist companies attract and keep good employees too.

We can specify at least three major current tasks of ecological tourism marketing in Baikal region: 1) maintaining and developing existing markets of ecological tourism; 2) search and development of new markets (new clients and destinations); 3) reduction of seasonality influence on demand. In order for a touristic company to achieve these tasks there is a need to perform the following at least annually:

- to correct the marketing plan;
- to assign group of professionals to develop a program of the company's specific, collaborative, research, and other related activities to improve the marketing plan and attract more customers;
- to cooperate with other touristic companies to allocate, provide, and serve customers in the market of ecological tourism;
- to test new ecological tourism products and services;
- to develop mutual measures to promote ecological tourism products in the target markets;
- to develop target segments of the market with seasonal character of services;
- to offer ecological tour packages to multiple destinations according to customers preferences and inquiries.

The major task of the marketing of ecological tourism is to understand the specific ecological interest of customers and offer them the best suiting ecological destinations and services. As a matter of fact, the most successful touristic companies offering ecological tourism products and services, first of all, study from the customers and their demands. It is called "getting closer to the customer". Later they have just to monitor their client and their demands to improve their capabilities and services offered.

Hence, the basic functions of ecological tourism marketing suggested for Baikal region should be the following:

- creation of ecological tourism products and services to be offered to clients in Baikal region;

- promotion of the ecological touristic products and services in the market, including advertisement, and consequent sale;
- arrangement of direct and in person sales;
- setting prices and achieving an allowable level of sales and incomes.

In order to comply with international norms and standards, marketing specialist of ecological tours in Baikal region should follow three main tourism marketing functions proposed by International Tourism Organization:

- Customer relations and feedback establishment. The major task is to convince clients that ecological destinations offered fully satisfy their expectations and demands;
- Development, including design of innovations;
- Control, which is analysis of the results of activities to promote ecological tourism services in the market and verification of results real compatibility to existing touristic capabilities.

Therefore, the especial importance in the marketing of ecological tourism agency plays the relations with the customers. The long lasting relations with clients can be more lucrative and cost less than the marketing expenses, incurred to attract the interest of prospective consumers of ecological tourism services.

If the long lasting relations with ecological tourist are established, it provides a synergy effect, expressed even in adherence and devotion of clients to the touristic agency and their reluctance to change the tour company providing ecological products and services when repeating purchases. It is an interesting fact, that the Pareto effect is clearly observed in the sphere of ecological tourism: 20% of consumers make 80% of a company's income.

Tourism and, especially, ecological tourism is totally different from other consumer industries. Hence, we can indicate its specific characters in Baikal region to be considered by marketing specialists:

- While planning ecological touristic activities, the central issue to be considered are the preferences and demands of the final consumers;
- Non-primary essence of ecological tourism services and lack of knowledge about Baikal region. The ecological tourism is not an essential product, though, the importance of the tourism and of ecological tourism, in particular, as the means of recreation and healthy life style, is on the rise;
- Marketing plays a crucial role in ecological tourism industry. Since, there is no a reference samples of touristic tourism products and the ecological tours sellers have to provide the proof and sound arguments in advantage of their products and services. It is possible only with a well planned marketing program that uses tailored for the target markets instruments of advertising and promotion;
- There is a need to constantly monitor the quality of ecological tourism products and services in Baikal region due to their unstable provision and seasonality;
- Ecological tourism services are unique. The repetitions of all its aspects and provisions are very uncommon. The schedules, routes, terms and conditions of services and prices usually always vary.

Therefore, marketing of ecological tourism for a touristic agency operating in Baikal region should become a system of continuous harmonization of services and products provided with services and products demanded, which an ecology oriented company can offer with a profit and more effectively than the competitors in the market. Today, only a firm with creative and ecology oriented marketing concept can succeed in competitive environment, constantly searching new ways to promote their services in changing markets, actively influencing and interacting with the consumers.

4. Ecotourism Model to be implemented in Baikal Region

Since ecological tourism is always described as an industry developed specifically to promote the sustainable use of resources, the question is how this actually can be achieved in Baikal region. What

should be done if the local people often disregard the ecological importance of the flora and fauna in favor of the mass tourists' visits and advantages, who often ignore the harm and damage possible to the environment, which is done to maximize the profits per visit to a site. The ecological approach to the tourism suggested in Baikal region needs to meet a certain set of conditions, and it is required to comply with rules and an overall ecotourism concept. If the conditions and rules of the ecological tourism are followed, then the sustainability of the tourism and use of the resources involved is achieved.

Actually, there are two traditional approaches to ecotourism in developed world. The first view puts a premium on the conservation of local wildlife, culture and other resources and uses ecotourism as a method to achieve that preservation. Another approach centers on eco-efficient tourism, which is based on the use of resources and depends on their continued existence in order to be marketable and therefore seeks ways of preserving the attractive or pristine state of the destination. Therefore, the proper management of ecotourism programs requires a somewhat different framework from the mass tourism. Hence, participation of scientists and practice practitioners, government officials, and local community is always important for ecotourism. So, in our model, there are at least five sectors involved in ecological tourism development in the order of their importance assumed for the Baikal region [4]:

1. *Local citizens*: These are the local people with their everyday use of the natural, cultural and historic resources who should play the crucial role in local ecological tourism development in Baikal region. Since, they do not only monitor the use of these resources, but are also the hosts to visitors.

2. *Scientists*: The scientists' role is to look at the local resources and their evaluation from economic, social, and natural points of view. The importance of the scientists' involvement is their advisory position, based on their thorough scientific, cultural and historical knowledge, and their ability to disseminate the relevant information. They can also work on planning and elaborating of various tour programs with minimum harm to the nature in mind.

3. *Travel industry*: The travel industry should develop products based on the scientists researches and advices. The travel industry helps stimulate local economies through running its businesses, such as, for example, guided tours.

4. *Tourists*: The tourists, thanks to the knowledge imparted to them by local guides, become more informed on the environment and, of course, they bring both direct and indirect profits to the local businesses and community. They are essential in helping local people realize that sustaining and conserving their natural resources is crucial for the stabilization of their economy

5. *Government*: Government bears the responsibility of supporting the establishment of ecotourism: for example, contributing to the drafting of guidelines, providing education for staff, and supporting non-profit organizations.

5. Results and Discussion

Baikal region is the most prospective centre of ecological tourism in Russia. These days we can offer a number of purely ecological tours. The visitors wishing to see the cleanest and most beautiful lake can easily reach it and stay at the modern ecological facilities few days or weeks and enjoy the comfort of local small resorts and campings.

Ecotourism to natural attractions, which is usually accompanied with recreational and educational activities, actually, is a promising means of advancing social, economic, and environmental objectives in Baikal region. It offers Baikal region new opportunities for small-enterprise investment and employment and increases of the national stake in protecting biological resources. However, making ecotourism a positive economic and environmental tool requires policies that foster responsible nature tourism development, broad-based and active local participation in its benefits, and conservation of Baikal region heritage. It also helps educate travelers and locals and make them environmentally responsible; it even supply funds if not for the conservation but for the minimization of the negative anthropogenic influence; and can directly benefit the economic development and social empowerment of local communities; and it also fosters respect for different cultures and for human rights.

6. Conclusion

Wildlife and its habitats in Baikal region are becoming increasingly popular attractions for international tourism. Baikal region can provide many of the richest, in terms of unspoiled nature, places with bio diverse inhabitants conserved [5]. The numbers of eco-tourists to our region are growing, despite the crisis and sanctions. The new wave of nature tourists is expected to bring with them the finances to spend. This money will support the local travel industry, which already exists and will create new jobs and incomes for households and local communities in and around places of attractions, such as lake Baikal and adjoining forests and other protected areas. There is a need to establish ecotourism enterprises, special tour agencies and guide services, lodges and private reserves, as well as, such activities *as arts and crafts industries*, already present in Baikal region. There is also a need to develop transportation and food services at the local levels to improve ecological tourism. Local administrations can use the incomes generated in this way for more efficient operating and protection of natural attractions. There is a need to implement modern effective and efficient ecotourism practices in Baikal region.

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