

THE ROLE OF MUSEUMS OF BURYATIA IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL TOURISM

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Abstract. This paper presents experience and assesses a potential of participation of state museums of the Republic of Buryatia in the development and implementation of transboundary and local tour itineraries.

Key words: museums, cultural tourism, cultural heritage, tour itinerary

Modern tourism is considered a sophisticated inter-sectoral complex highly significant for social and economic development of Russia. Not only does tourism industry stimulate the development of over fifty related branches of economy, but also it contributes to an increase in employment and self-employment of the population, development of small and medium-sized enterprises, and improvement of living standards and social well-being of people. That said the unique natural-recreational and cultural-educational resources form the main constituents of the domestic tourist product.

It is the uniqueness of the geographical position and specific features of the historical and cultural development of Russia and her regions that determine the mainstream directions of tourist activity. In this sense, the Republic of Buryatia is no exception. According to the “Expert RA” rating agency, in 2016 Buryatia occupied the 16th place out of 84 in terms of development of tourism. In 2017 the Republic of Buryatia received The National Geographic Award in the Best Ethnic Recreation category.

Tourist attractiveness of Buryatia is composed of not only Lake Baikal, the UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site, but also of the uniqueness of cultural environment of the region based on its multiethnic character and religious plurality. With a long history of interaction with transboundary territories and Asian states, Buryatia accumulated the experience of preserving unique traditional cultures of the peoples, as well as studying and translating the diversity and multiple aspects of the neighboring cultures. This specificity is reflected in the shaping of a network of tour and excursion itineraries in the republic, which includes over 130 routes that allow visiting over 850 objects of historical and cultural heritage.

Museums, museum-like institutions and cultural heritage objects preserved by them occupy the key place among the objects of tourist interest. They can be regarded an independent aim or the main goal of a tour. Or they may be included into a tourist route as one of the sites. They can also be catalyst to the development and implementation of a tourist product. Nowadays, the museum network of the Republic of Buryatia is represented by three state museums (National Museum of the Republic of Buryatia, Ethnographic Museum of Peoples of Transbaikalia, Kyakhta Regional History Museum named after academician V.A. Obruchev), twelve municipal, over ten institutional and over a hundred school and public museums.

Implementation of both transboundary tourist itineraries, such as “The Great Silk Road”, “The Great Tea Road”, “Russia’s Eastern Ring”, etc., and domestic excursion itineraries, including the “Legends of Buryatia”, provides for the use of the museum potential of the republic.

Revival of “The Great Tea Road” as a tourist project is related to the late twentieth century. It is aimed not only at the use of its rich natural, historical and cultural heritage, but also the promotion of partnership programs based on common economic interests and implemented under one brand name, as well as expansion of tourist exchanges between Russia’s, Mongolia’s and China’s regions. The territory of Buryatia plays an important role in the geography of the Tea Road. It still retains many cultural heritage objects from the tea trade period (eighteenth-nineteenth centuries). It allowed the tea trade history experts to publish a special catalogue entitled “The ‘Tea Road’ in the Collections of Museums in Buryatia” (2011). This publication features a broad range of exhibits from the funds of the Kyakhta Regional History Museum named after academician V.A. Obruchev and National Museum of the Republic of Buryatia. The uniqueness of collections lies in a combination of different types of museum sources: from material objects to works of art. A large collection of tea, tea equipage, items from merchant everyday life, Oriental decorative items and art objects, written sources,



photographic documents, works of Russian and foreign politicians, economists and historians all contribute to the restoration of an objective and real picture of the Russo-Chinese trade. Of special interest to foreign tourists is a rich collection of Oriental decorations and art objects, including ivories, cloisonné enamel, lacquer, porcelain and so on [4].

The permanent exhibition “Kyakhta of the Merchants” is exhibited in the Kyakhta Local History Museum. There one can see seals of the Kyakhta customs office, special tea packages called “*tsybiks*”, exquisitely beautiful lamps, tea-sets, vases, furniture, jewel-boxes, hand fans, and photos of Kyakhta merchants, millionaires and philanthropists. It is also possible to get a glimpse of the Tea Road history in the Museum of History of the City of Ulan-Ude, in the regional history museum of Kabansk where a large collection of samovars and other nineteenth century tea party items are exhibited [3].

In order to attract visitors the museums offer various animation programs. For instance, in the Kyakhta Regional History Museum it is possible to take part in a real tea ceremony tasting tea brewed according to the old merchant traditions. Another offer is participation in a merchant high society evening. One of the promising projects in the Ethnographic Museum of Peoples of Transbaikalia is the cultural and educational project “Verkhneudinsk on the Tea Road” recreating the Verkhneudinsk trade fair with traditional merchants’ rows and the theatrical performance “The Show Booth of the Fair.” Also the project features an interactive platform arranged as a freight yard in the middle of accepting a tea shipment from China.

All this allows us to say that by this moment the museums of Buryatia accumulated some experience of participation in the implementation of “The Great Tea Road” tourist itinerary. The museums display a no less impressive potential on “The Great Silk Road.” According to experts, “the use of the most valuable cultural heritage objects – the archaeological heritage of the Xiongnu period, Buddhist religious items, ethnographic collections, and decorative and applied art of Buryatia has become one of strategic concepts for the worthy representation of East Siberia in the Russian project “The Great Silk Road” [2]. Implementation of this itinerary will turn into a long-term direction in the joint activity of museums and tourist organizations.

The Ethnographic Museum of Peoples of Transbaikalia, located in a popular urban recreational zone “Verkhnyaya Berezovka,” plays the key role in the development of cultural and educational tourism. The recreational zone, convenient infrastructure (footpaths, lighting, and a parking lot) and a popular café at a location nearby position the museum as one of the attractive sites for tourists. Since 2007 in the frameworks of the development of cultural-educational and event tourism Buryatia has been successfully implementing the “Fairytale Sagaalga” project. In 2014 the project won the award of the Russian government in the field of tourism and, according to the rating of the “Tour-Stat” analytical agency, entered the Top Ten popular winter festivals in Russia in 2017-2018. Essentially, the event is a so-called “Father Frost Summit” at which Sagaan Ubegen (the White Elder), a New Year character of the Mongolian peoples, annually meets with his colleagues from other countries and regions. Since 2013 Sagaan Ubegen established residence in the Ethnographic Museum where the meetings of Father Frosts with children are traditionally held. At present the museum develops projects of creating a combined zoo and arboretum park and a center of trade shops.

The specific museum activity aimed at production and sale of tourist products, including the organization of external tour itineraries, is among the highly demanded and promising trends. For instance, the National Museum of the Republic of Buryatia launched four tour itineraries: “The Treasures of Buddhist Teaching”, “The Golden Pages of the History of Buryatia”, “The Strolls through Verkhneudinsk” and “The Mysteries of the Selenginsky Stockade” [1]. A number of tour itineraries introducing the cultures of the peoples of Buryatia and sites of Ulan-Ude, such as “On a Visit to a Buryat Ulus,” “The Cossack Party” and “On a Visit to the Old Believers” have been developed by the Ethnographic Museum of Peoples of Transbaikalia. The Kyakhta Regional History Museum offers such tour itineraries as “The Orthodox Kyakhta”, “On a Visit to the Sacred Places of Southern Buryatia,” and “The Strolls through Old Kyakhta.”

The diverse museum activity to promote tourism is increasingly recognized by the public. An innovative approach to the organization of mass events in the Ethnographic Museum, beautification and creation of comfort for visitors have enabled the Museum to become the best museum of 2016 according to the “Recreation in Russia” magazine. The National Museum won the Thirteenth Exhibition Fair of the Republic of Buryatia “Tourism and Recreation in Buryatia – 2017” in the “Historical Itineraries” section.

Thus, the modern context requires a systemic and comprehensive approach of regional authorities, museums and tour operators aimed at the development of a mutually beneficial partnership and multisided cooperation of all stakeholders for the development of tourist attractiveness of Buryatia. It is the combination of rich historical, cultural and natural heritage that forms a considerable conversion potential into various tourist products and availability of resources for the development of cultural and educational tourism in the region. In

the face of these challenges a winner will be that museum, which develops additional functions, offering its visitor diverse and highly competitive services.

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