

Tourism Potential of National Parks: Opportunities for Promotion Through Photo Tourism

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Abstract: The purpose of the present research is to identify the potential and develop proposals for the popularization of photo tourism in Russian national parks. The relevance of the research topic is explained by the fact that the flow of tourists who want to get familiar with various attractions and discover new horizons is growing from year to year. For photo tourism, the main objects of interest for taking a picture are natural, historical, cultural, and socio-economic tourist and recreational resources. Therefore, places with high concentration of such objects and especially areas where they are collocated together, are of particular importance. Specially protected natural areas are one of these types of places. The contemporary consumer of a tourist product becomes more aware of aesthetic and cognitive needs, demands new nonstandard offers from the tourism industry, and seeks new impressions. And everyone, who has visited such places, wants to share this experience with others. Based on this emerging need, tourism has developed a direction such as photo tourism which is a combination of two scopes of activity, namely, tourism and photography that opens up huge opportunities for amateur travelers. The present research is aimed at ordering data on the study of photo tourism in the Russian Federation and making proposals for the development of tourist products. National parks were chosen as the object of the photo tour organization due to special characteristics (the integrity of recreational resources, uniqueness of resources, availability of infrastructure, and high aesthetic component). Creating a photo tour, as well as any other tour, undergoes certain stages. However, when developing a photo tour, in addition to standard indicators, such as the age of consumers, the purpose of travel, and others, it is also necessary to take into account the level of training of participants, their goals, subject matters, technical component, etc. Currently, photo tourism is developing rapidly, offering consumers many different options for photo tours. However, in Russia, photo tourism is still not represented enough and mainly developing as a kind of amateur tourism. In this regard, a problem arises to study photo tourism and to identify its evolution factors.

Keywords: photo tourism, tourist product, national parks, the contemporary consumer.

1. INTRODUCTION

For Russian regions, the development of photo tourism can become one of the mechanisms to promote an active lifestyle and develop regional tourism. Due to specificity, photo tourism has a wide audience, and thus an unlimited development

potential. However, Russia has rich and diverse resources for developing photo tourism. Combining these two features guarantees to give a positive effect, namely, the growth of demand for domestic tourism in Russia and the revenues of additional funds to local budgets. The present research is based on the works of authors such as M.V. Birzhakov, A.B. Kosolapov, I.Yu. Kushnareva, Filippovsky, etc., as well as foreign contributors: M. Robinson, D. Picart, D. Rickard and Linfeng Lu. At the same time, many issues of photo tourism development in Russia have not yet been sufficiently investigated and require regular monitoring to identify problems and prospects for further development (Kupriyanova et al., 2020; Zavalko et al., 2020). Photo tourism is a new, recent direction of tourist activity that emerged as a streamlined process in the 1990s (Romanovich et al., 2019).

According to researchers, the main prerequisites for the rapid development of photo tourism are, first of all, the advances in digital technologies, availability of cheaper and more accessible technical equipment for photography, and second, the popularization of photography in society (Golub, 2012). In recent years, the active development of digital technologies has contributed to the emergence of a huge number of photographic techniques on the market at affordable prices. This allows more and more people to master photographic art, which means that there are quite many people, who want to improve their skills and add high-quality photos to their portfolio. These people are especially interested in visiting photo tours (Vorobyeva, Korotkova, 2016).

By now, there is no generally accepted definition of this type of tourism in official international and Russian documents. Therefore, it makes sense to consider some of the existing approaches (Umarov et al., 2020; Burkaltseva et al., 2020; Savtsova et al., 2019). So, the basis of the studied type of tourism is photography during the trip. Foreign researchers have traditionally pointed to the close relationship between photography and tourism (Fennel, Eagles, 1990; Linfeng, 2010). There is an internal link between photography and tourism. According to M. Robinson and D. Rickard, photo tourism, i.e. photography and tourism, "is the synergy of two passions that merging create a unique symbiosis of travel photography; this is a passion that leads us to the most distant corners of the earth in search of unique frames despite the snow and rain, as heroes of a famous song" (Robinson, Picart, 2009, 5).

There is an internal link between photography and tourism. Scientist J. Kaunoppart presents the concept of photo tourism called the *interrelation of representations* showing that there is a connection between photos of tourist destinations and the success of a tourist product. Photos contribute to good memories of tourist trips and recall personal experiences acquired during the tour (Fennel, Eagles, 1990, 9). According to T.V. Varentsova, photo tourists can be attracted by atypical natural phenomena (polar lights, and meteor rain), areas with untouched nature (equatorial evergreen rain forests, and picturesque rural landscapes), atypical architectural monuments (the Eiffel Tower, and the pyramids of Giza), as well as society and social processes (people's lives, their soul that sometimes is not visible for people, but attractive for the photographer) (Varentsova, 2013).

American researchers have identified the cities of the world which are most attractive to traveling photographers. According to recent research, these cities include New York, London, San Francisco, Chicago, Paris, Los Angeles, Washington, Seattle, Rome, and Amsterdam. The most popular attractions among tourists-photographers are the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, Trafalgar Square, the Tate Gallery, Big Ben and the huge London Eye panoramic wheel in London, as well as the Empire

State Building in New York (Umarov et al., 2020). According to researchers of ecotourism, the essence of photo tourism is to organize tours for both professional and amateur photographers. Such tours require creating conditions that allow making high-quality photography, observe natural and anthropogenic phenomena that inspire the creation of photo masterworks (Zaporozhan, Desyatnichenko, Khodachek, 2017).

According to the reference materials, a photo tour is a highly specialized trip designed for a group of people who are fond of photography (photographers), focused primarily on creating favorable conditions for carrying out the photographic shooting of tourism objects that form the basis of the tour itinerary (Romanovich et al., 2019). Thus, a photo tour in its contemporary view is nothing more than a photographic journey that is specially designed. According to specialists (Plokhikh, Sakypbek, Aktymbayeva, 2015), the main characteristic feature of photo tourism is that it gives the opportunity not only to discover new destinations and visit monuments of natural, historical, and cultural heritage but also to increase the professional photographic level and add new photos to albums. Another feature of photo tours is that they are usually more organized by photo clubs, professional photographers, or schools of photographers. Travel companies also organize photo tours, however, in this case, there is a need for the additional search for the necessary landscapes to ensure the educational component of the photo tour.

Photo tours are developed by many Russian tour operators specializing in ecotourism. However, the organization of photo tours is not their main activity and is an additional service. A set of research methods was used to characterize photo tours as well as to review specialized tour operators staking out in Russian photo tourism market: analysis of statistics on photo tours as of November 2019 based on the Federal Agency for Tourism, and travel agency named Center for Environmental Tours; the general scientific method of comparison used to study the topic in more detail based on proposals of photo tours from Russian creative associations and photo schools.

RESULTS

Photo tourism emerged in the global market more than 30 years ago. In Russia, people started talking about it since the 2000s, but one can note the Soviet photo tourism when a group of activists was traveling to get unique photos. The history of Soviet photo tourism began with the appearance of the Soviet Photo magazine which was founded by Mikhail Koltsov in 1926. The magazine represented a collection of photo works by Soviet and foreign photographers, as well as articles on the theory, practice, and history of photography. In the 1980s, the publication of the magazine had reached a circulation of 245,000 copies. There were photo clubs all over the country (about 450) which dealt not only with theoretical issues but also organized special trips to nature for taking pictures (Enciklopediya dlya vsekh putesthestvennikov «Akademik», n.d., 11).

The rapid development of photo tourism in Russia has begun since the 2010s but these services market is still being formed. Programs conducted by the PHOTO TOUR project team since 2009 have played a certain role in popularizing today's photo tourism in Russia. The project brought together well-known photographers, whose photos had been published in the world magazines National Geographic and National Geographic Traveler. In the years that followed, the number of photo tourism market players has significantly increased at the expense of joined tour operators. Travel companies began to attract professional photographers to the tours, who trained photo tourists during the

trip. In addition to travel companies, photo schools have also joined the promotion of photo tourism.

The following factors contribute to photo tourism market development. First, experienced photographers, who already had acquired some experience in traveling to certain regions and countries, have joined these trips sharing this experience on a commercial basis to those who wish. For example, the Fotoputeshestvie company (Photo Tour) (Pogrebova, 2015) brings together experienced photographers who organize tours to unique areas of Russia. Secondly, the economic situation has changed, and such trips have become more accessible financially to a significant group of people. While being previously elite, photo tourism became available to citizens with average incomes. Third, increased competition in the Russian tourist market initiated a need to develop new types of tourism and tourism programs. Many companies have invested in this area and occupied a certain market niche.

As a result, the most enterprising part of tour operators realized that photo tours could be successfully sold and bring a good profit. Currently, photo tourism is simultaneously contributed by two main sources: the first one is tour operators, while the second one is professional photographers or individual specialist photographers. There are very few specialized tour operators involved in photo tourism on the Russian market. One of them is the Time of Discovery travel agency which is a Russian tour operator that offers in-house tours, photo tours, and unusual trips both in Russia and abroad. The company offers about 30 photo tours. The main regions of photo tourism are Altai, Kola Peninsula, Caucasus, Baikal, and the European North. The average cost of photo tours is about 50-60 thousand rubles per person. Another company with similar services named Fototravel offers more than 20 photo tours, both for groups and individuals (Romanovich et al., 2019).

A more common practice for the Russian market is to offer photo tours by tour operators along with other types of tours. For example, Table 1 shows the characteristics of some of the photo tours proposed in Russia.

Table 1. Russian tour operators that regularly offer photo tours in Russian regions

| Tour operator | The RF entity | Geographical spread | Number of offers |
|-------------------|-------------------|--|------------------|
| Baikalika | Irkutsk Region | Irkutsk Region | 2 |
| Ukok Tour | Moscow | Altai Territory | 1 |
| Ektie Tour | Moscow | Kamchatka Territory | 2 |
| Eco travel Center | Moscow | Altai Territory, Irkutsk Region, Kostroma Region | 3 |
| Altai Tour | Republic of Altai | Republic of Altai, Irkutsk Region | 2 |

Analysis of the ActiveHike photo tour aggregator, which collects tours of all travel companies on the territory of Russia, has shown that more than 200 photo tours a year are offered in 18 regions of the country. At that, 38 photo guides are involved in providing such services (Zorina, Maslennikova, Gazilov, 2014). Table 2 examines the components of some current photo tours as of November 2019.

Table 2. Characteristics of photo tours as of November 2019 (according to data (Zorina, Maslennikova, Gazilov, 2014))

| Name | Duration, days | Price, rubles | Seasonality | Tour category |
|--|----------------|---------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Amazing Stavropol Region | 2-5 | 15,000 | Year-round | Amateurs |
| Kuril Islands. From North to South | 15 | 40,000 | August-September | Professionals only |
| Golden autumn of Altai | 10 | 60,800 | Year-round | Professionals and amateurs |
| Secrets of Khaga-Yaman | 8 | 50,000 | Fall | Professionals and amateurs |
| Legends of autumn in Crimea | 8 | 37,000 | Fall | Professionals and amateurs |
| To the ends of the earth beyond the polar lights | 7 | 33,000 | Fall, Winter | Professionals and amateurs |
| Photo tour to Altai Swan Lake | 5 | 50,000 | Summer, Fall | Professionals and amateurs |
| Kaluga forest reserves | 2 | 14,000 | Year-round | Amateurs |
| The peach blossom of the Crimea | 8 | 37,000 | April | Professionals and amateurs |
| White nights on the Solovetsky Islands | 6 | 35,500 | June | Professionals and amateurs |
| Planet of Kolyma-Yakutia | 16 | 95,000 | August, September | Professionals only |
| Charming Ladoga | 5 | 40,000 | May-November | Amateurs |
| South Ural: Zyuratkul and Karabash | 3 | 5,500 | Year-round | Professionals and amateurs |

Photo tours are designed for both professional photographers and amateur tourists. Most of the tours are suitable for all categories of amateur photographers. Tours are offered in various regions of the country, including very remote ones (Kuril Islands, Kamchatka, Primorsky Territory, Yakutia, Magadan Region, etc.). It is worth paying attention to the broad variety of landscapes that is the distinctive feature of photo tours in Russia. In Russia, one can take a picture of everything and everywhere. Photo tours cover areas from the Kaluga Region to the Far East.

Moreover, the objects for photo tourism are not only natural but also cultural and historical attractions. For example, there are photo tours to Arkhangelskoye, Ostafyevo, Shakhmatovo, Marfino, Zvenigorod, Peterhof, Borodino, Vyborg, Kronstadt, and other well-known places. The average duration of the photo tour is 5-6 days. Besides, there are two-day tours and those lasting two weeks or more. The cost of photo tours varies greatly from 400 thousand to 5,500 thousand rubles. For photo tourism, there is no problem of seasonality since tours are available in all seasons round the year.

The next group of photo tour offers is represented by photo schools and individual photographers. According to the survey results, 72% of photographers and amateurs in the field of photography do not know about the existence of photo tours (Opredelenie portreta rossijskogo ekoturista po rezul'tatam oprosa "Ekologicheskij turizm", n.d.). Table 3 shows the characteristics of photo tours offered by professional photographers.

Table 3. Offers of photo tours from creative associations and photo schools in Russia

| Tour operator | The RF Entity | Geographical spread | Number of offers |
|--------------------------------|----------------|---|------------------|
| Photo travelers club Frame Way | Moscow | Yaroslavl Region Ryazan Region Kaluga Region Tula region | 8 |
| Baikal Academy of Photography | Irkutsk Region | Republic of Buryatia Irkutsk region | 6 |
| Ruslan Orlov Photo School | Moscow | Moscow Region | 3 |
| Photo trip | Moscow | all over Russia | About 30 |

Table 3 shows examples of photo tours offered by photo schools and individual photographers. There are many more such offers however they are not widespread (2-5 tours per year) with the number of participants in groups not exceeding 4-5 people. The duration of such tours is 5-13 days. The association of photographers called Fotoputeshestvie offers about 30 tours to different regions of the country, such as follows (Platonova et al., n.d.):

- The Pechora. Flowering tundra and migratory birds.
- The Arctic. The first snow on Rybachy.
- Planet of Baikal. In the realm of ice and light.
- Spring in Kyrgyzstan. Country of the Heavenly Mountains.
- Kolyma-Yakutia. North Road.
- Storm Lake Baikal.
- Chukotka: Tundra, Eskimos, and whales.
- Photo tour to Yamal. Musk-oxen and deer. The Nenets people and reindeer herders.
- The Caucasus. Karachay-Cherkessia.

According to travel agencies, the tourist demand for photo tourism in most far-flung wild corners of Russia is growing as intensively as the demand for technological tourism, where travelers are attracted by noisy megacities. Experts of UI-Russia also note that photo tourism is gaining popularity, and there is a growing demand for routes to unique natural places of Russia.

ANEX Tour review also proves an increase in demand for photo tours: "Destinations, such as Baikal and Altai are gaining impetus; they have already reached a new peak of popularity, especially in the last couple of years. This is evidenced by the publications of invited bloggers, reviews, and photo reports of tourists on travel sites, as well as a large number of blogs on popular channels" (Opredelenie portreta rossijskogo ekoturista po rezul'tatam oprosa "Ekologicheskij turizm", n.d.).

Despite the overall growth in demand for photo tours, the number of tourists in this tourism segment cannot be significant, since the average group composition is only 5-6 people. Based on the analysis of completed photo tours placed on aggregators such as ActiveHike or PhotoViators, the total number of photo tourists just for these offers can be estimated at 3-4 thousand people.

In other words, this is a narrow competitive niche with specific conditions. For example, according to surveys, most tourists prefer comfortable conditions during a

photo tour. In particular, hotels are the most popular means of accommodation, with 53% of respondents choosing them, while about a third of respondents choose to stay at tourist hostels. A relatively new type of accommodation in Russia is guest houses, which are chosen by 22% of tourists. Among other options, most popular are tent camps or camping sites (4%) (Fig. 1). A small percentage of respondents also stay with friends or relatives.

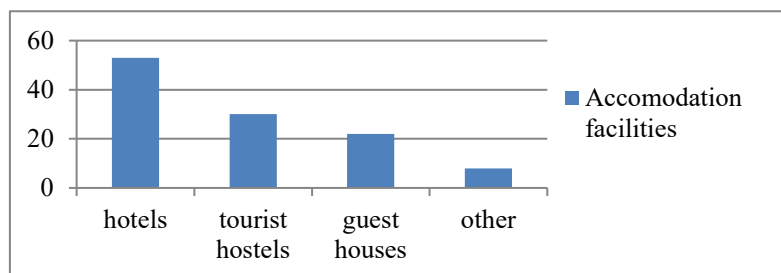


Figure 1. Accommodation options used by tourists when traveling (Zorina, Maslennikova, Gazilov, 2014).

Usually, guest houses, mini-hotels, and tourist hostels are offered as accommodation facilities during photo tours. During many tours that take place in remote and wild places, tourists are accommodated in tents. When choosing the destination of the next trip, respondents most often turn to the Internet (49% of respondents) and consult with friends (36%). Besides, they are guided by their previous experience, and often choose from places which they have already visited before (24%), as well as study articles in specialized travel magazines. Sometimes future travelers independently choose the region or territory they would like to visit and ask to organize a trip there. This is how new routes for environmental travel appear.

The average image of a photo tourist in Russia (his socio-demographic and psycho-behavioral characterization) is given below: age: from 30 to 40 years; gender: men predominate, the proportion of women is lower; profession: mainly managers, administrative employees, creative professionals, small business owners, and mid-level officials; the scale of the locality where the tourist permanently resides: large and largest cities (Moscow, St. Petersburg, Nizhny Novgorod, Chelyabinsk, Yekaterinburg); family income: average and above average; seasonality: people prefer to travel mainly in the summer, while up to 25% of tourists purchase photo tours in other seasons; used accommodation facilities: recreation centers, tourist hostels, tent camps, and hotels.

In terms of offers, photo tours in Russia are characterized by the following features: no more than 20 regions that are the most popular in tourism are used to design tours; the average tour duration is 5-6 days; most of the tourist groups are small (5-7 people); there is no seasonality in photo tourism (tours for all seasons are offered); prices for photo tours are quite high (on average higher than for other types of tourism). Even though the demand for photo tourism is still being formed, it is steadily growing. The contradiction in demand is related to the fact that tourists are interested in unique and therefore remote areas of the country while preferring comfort and convenience when traveling.

The rating of nature biosphere reserves in Russia, popular with tourists, include Stolby (Pillars in the Krasnoyarsk Region) which were visited by 328 thousand tourists, Teberda Nature Reserve (Karachay-Cherkessia) visited by 300 thousand people, Caucasus Nature Reserve (Adygea, Karachay-Cherkessia, and Krasnodar Region), Altai Nature Reserve (Altai), Ilmen Nature Reserve (Chelyabinsk Region), Prioksko-Terrasny Nature Biosphere Reserve (Moscow Region), Zhiguli Nature Reserve (Samara Region), Kivach (Karelia), Shulgan-Tash (Bashkiria), and Oka Nature Reserve (Ryazan Region).

Below is a list of 10 the most popular national nature parks in Russia (according to TurStat) (Platonova et al., n.d.):

1. Elk Island National Park (Moscow and Moscow Region);
2. Sochi National Park (Sochi, Krasnodar Region);
3. Pribaikalsky National Park (Irkutsk Region);
4. Curonian Spit (Kaliningrad Region);
5. The Elbrus region (Kabardino-Balkaria);
6. Shushensky Bor National Park (Krasnoyarsk Territory);
7. Kandry-Kul Lake (Bashkiria);
8. Russian North (Vologda Region);
9. Khvalynsky National Park (Saratov Region);
10. Lower Kama (Tatarstan).

Visiting most of the national parks is fee-paying, however, the admission fee is not high – from 30 to 100 rubles per person per day. Ecotourism includes a broad variety of routes, including archaeological, botanical, ethnographic, adventure, weekend trips, and tours for fans of extreme recreation.

Currently, the territories of twenty national parks of Russia host 36 museums; 92 information centers for visitors operate in 32 national parks; in total, national parks of Russia offer tourists 433 ecological paths and tourist routes with a total length of more than 18 thousand kilometers. Also, more than a thousand tourist service facilities operate in the territories of 38 national parks, including 255 hotels and boarding houses, 492 tourist hostels and campsites, 164 stopping points, and 124 summer camps (Romanovich et al., 2019). The total area of the above-mentioned Special Protected Natural Areas is 136.6 mln hectares (7.5836 % of the country's territory).

Table 4. Comparison of resources for tourism development in Sebezhsy and Kenozersky national parks (Zorina, Maslennikova, Gazilov, 2014)

| Resources | Sebezhsy National Park | Kenozersky National Park |
|---|---|--|
| Landscapes | Variety of landscapes: forests, reservoirs, swamps, meadows, populated localities, and agricultural land. | Most of the land is occupied by lakes, rivers, swamps, and the forest (30%). |
| Flora and fauna | Variety of animal species (291): fish (32), amphibians (9), reptiles (6), birds (202), and mammals (48). | About 300 species, including 220 birds and 50 mammals. Large predators (wolf, bear, lynx) and ungulates (roe deer, wild boar, elk) are still common. |
| Number of paths and routes for tourists | 16 | 25 |
| Availability of tourist attractions | In Sebezhsy tourists can visit the fortress, churches, and the Sebezhsy | Many tourist attractions are available: The complex of the Pochozersky churchyard, |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| | Museum of local lore | Tarasovskaya Borovina, and others; ancient cities of Kargopol (3 km) and Pudozh (5 km) |
| Accommodation and meals | Guesthouses: Center for environmental education and tourism | Guesthouses (eight units), excursion center, eco-education center, etc. |
| Availability of skilled staff | Skilled staff is available. The shortage is only in the experienced guides and museum interpreters | The Department of tourism development and the Department of historical and cultural heritage studies are operating, as well as Department on environmental education |
| Recreation opportunities | Six route options (walking along the ecological path or through the park, as well as car, bus, and water trips on the route) | Three routes are available: walking routes, Northern Equator landscape theater, Potomochka ecoclass, and Northern Silk Museum |

Ecological routes and tourist paths are created in 76 nature reserves of Russia (79%). Their average length amounts to 57 km per nature reserve. Besides, 22 nature reserves (24%) have already established or developing ecological routes in their territory. The key nature-made objects that are visited during sightseeing and tours in national parks include individual components of nature, as well as typical and unique natural landscapes. Often, they serve as the symbols of a particular protected area, which attracts the initial interest of tourists. For example, the Valley of Geysers in the Kronotsky Nature Reserve, granite-syenitic remains of the Stolby (Pillars) Nature Reserve, and Kapova Cave in the Shulgan-Tash reserve. However, flora and fauna are often used as tourist attractions, including those for photo tours, which allow for typical tourist activities such as watching and photographing birds (Vodlozersky National Park, Astrakhan Nature Reserve), animals (Prioksko-Terrasny Nature Biosphere Reserve, Kaluzhsky Zaseki Nature Reserve, and Zaybaybalsky National Park), or studying vegetation (Baikal Nature Reserve and Lazovsky Nature Reserve).

Thus, resources for organizing photo tours based on national parks can include not only individual components of the landscape and natural phenomena, but also specific natural objects, and even elements of flora and fauna. For example, European bison is the main object of the photo tour in the Kaluzhsky Zaseki Nature Reserve. National parks in Crimea offer photo tours during the flowering of poppies and peaches. A large number of photo tours are organized for taking pictures of the Northern lights in the North of Russia. Each national park is distinguished by a variety of resources suitable for tourism that should be taken into account when arranging photo tours. Below, as an example, Kenozersky National Park is considered in comparison with the nearby Sebezhsy National Park.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the national parks of Russia are convenient objects for organizing tourist routes, including photo tours. This is due to the diversity of national parks, their location in different parts of the country, and the interest of the park administration in the development of tourism. The resources of national parks favor the development of various types of tourism, including photo tourism. The following resources can contribute to the development of photo tourism: unique nature-made objects; natural landscapes; natural phenomena and processes; the flora and fauna;

historical and cultural objects, ethnographic programs, etc. Thus, currently, the photo tourism market in Russia is at the nascent stage, and this direction is relatively new. The rapid growth of photo tour offers has begun in the 2010s. There are three groups of tourism service producers on the Russian photo tour market: tour operators (most of them use photo tourism as an addition to the main types of tourism), photo schools and associations of photographers, and individual professional photographers. To date, hundreds of photo tours with different characteristics are designed in different regions of the country.

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