

# Road Transport in Tourism: Development Prospects and Trends in Russia

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**Abstract:** Road transport plays an important role in tourism, despite the decline in the total number of tourists being transported. The development of drive tourism is characterized by contradictory processes, heterogeneity in the structure of organized tourist products, the presence of several problems, and constraints both in Russia and worldwide. The present article is aimed at comprehending the role and place of road transport in tourism in the scientific and expert communities, as well as studying the main issues considered in scientific publications, and discussed by experts. The article attempts to assess the perception of individual tourist products by tourists as consumers, to consider factors influencing the formation of positive tourist impression from auto tourism. Based on the analysis of a broad informational background, it is revealed that road transport is not only a way to transfer tourists, but also the basis for a variety of innovative products, while individual transport facilities and highways become part of the historical and cultural base and a key attraction in the region. At that, bus transport and bus tours still play a key role in the structure of road transport. The article examines the specifics of their organization, considers tourists' feedback and expert opinions which serve the basis to characterize main trends and problems in the industry development. The article identifies the main problems and trends in drive tourism in general, as well as in certain sectors of road transportation in the Russian tourism sector. Drive tourism, despite its demand and popularity, is perceived differently by representatives of the tourism industry in Russia and is considered more often as self-dependent travel. At that, interest in this type of travel is growing. Some companies emerge that offer new unusual automobile tours, car quests, car rallies, etc. in Russia and abroad. Mobility, the ability to choose places to visit, the presence of a large number of applications, audio guides, travel guides, etc. determines the popularity of drive tourism in Russia and abroad.

**Keywords:** road transportation in tourism, bus tours, automobile tourist product.

## INTRODUCTION

Transport plays an important role in tourism, ensuring the performance of the entire tourist system of both individual territories and the country in general. The transport complex makes it possible to deliver tourists to their destination, becomes the basis of special tourist products, such as cruises and bus tours. Individual transport infrastructure objects act as independent attractions that generate tourist interest. Thus, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of the transport component in tourism. At

that, the development of certain types of transport in tourism is currently uneven, while the proportion of road transport in tourist transportations is decreasing.

At the same time, the interest in drive tourism is increasing significantly that is based usually on a trip by private or rented car. This type of tourism requires the creation of a special road tourist infrastructure, superstructure, as well as the development of special tourist products for independent and organized motorists, such as convenient tourist maps and navigators, available online and offline services, audio guides, etc. That is, on the one hand, the importance of road transport in mass tourist transportations is steadily decreasing, while on the other hand, its value for individual travelers is increasing, and contributing to a wide range of different unusual and innovative tourist products being created based on individual tourist road transportations.

This duality necessitates a theoretical comprehension of the place of road transport in tourism, its opportunities, and difficulties when developing popular tourist products. The relevance of this issue is confirmed by the attention paid to it in scientific circles. A search query for scientific publications using drive tourism as a keyword resulted in 22,924 links to various publications. The articles consider statistical indicators of drive tourism (Shteyngolts, Nazarkina, 2015), issues of drive tourism development in Russia (Aksenov, Monastyrenko, 2012; Glotova, Kireeva, 2019; Romanova, 2013; Tsvetkov, 2015), as well as service issues for motorists. Special attention is paid to the design and operation of automobile clusters (Gladskaya, 2014; Ulyanchenko, 2011), the geographical spread of such trips, and the creation of proper special infrastructure (Sakharchuk, Ermakov, Korneev, 2014; Fedulin, Kopylov, Afanasiev, 2015), innovations in the transport services management (Afanasyeva, 2018; Borodovich, Lovygina, 2019) as well as safety issues of tourist services (Murtazina, 2014).

Using the keyword of *Bus tourism*, 4,472 links to publications were found in the Russian Science Citation Index (RSCI), however, not in all of these works bus tourism was the main element of the subject-object field. In many respects, this type of tourism is indicated in the keywords as a component of a regional or national tourist product or a strategic direction of tourism development, and the country's economy in general. The analysis of publications dealing with bus tourism allowed highlighting issues that the authors focused on most frequently, namely, territorial and regional aspects of bus tourism development in Russia, bus tourism safety issues, features of bus tour and sightseeing organization, issues of inclusive bus tourism, and the creation of an accessible environment.

Narrowing the search to individual components of road tourism, including searches by the keywords of the *jeep tour*, *drive tourism*, and *self-drive sports tourism* has shown a significant decrease in publications (the numbers of articles were 108, 4, and 1, respectively). At that, only two of the four sources found through the query by keyword of drive tourism were scientific publications. Among articles found, 37 scientific publications indexed in the RSCI, were dealing with bus tours. In English-language sources, there are several widespread terms related to drive tourism, namely *bus tours*, *self-drive tourism*, and *autotourism*. The latter term is typical of publications translated from Russian and is quite uncommon in English-language literature.

In foreign publications, special attention is paid to the issues of motorists service and maintenance, in particular, the creation of an orientation system (Zakiah, Rosmanira, Norfaieqah, 2013) the analysis of tourist routes and destinations (Hsin-Yu, 2006; Prideaux, 2019), regional aspects (Yu, Wang, Scott, 2015), issues of environmental friendliness and safety in drive tourism (Fyall, Templeton, Sonmez, 2016). In several

publications, the car is considered as an object of tourist interest, the museum exhibit, rather than a means of transportation (Cudny, 2018). However, despite the abundance of scientific publications on the issues of road transport in tourism, several issues remain uncovered.

## METHODS

To identify the problems and trends of a concept of drive tourism which is quite heterogeneous in terms of its internal structure, as well as to analyze trends in the creation of drive tourism products, it is necessary to consider the place of road transport in tourism, as well as to classify the types of car and bus transportations in tourism. Scientific publications of various types (articles, presentations, theses, and monographs), expert opinions, as well as automotive products discussed in professional communities (interviews, articles about tourist products, and exhibitor booths of online exhibitions) were used as information sources for the present research. It should be noted that the final consumers of a tourist product are tourists. Their satisfaction and the positive impressions are the main goal of any organizer of tourist trips. Therefore, an important task of the present research is to study the tourists' feedbacks posted on various information platforms, as well as work with them, identifying the main causes of displeasure and dissatisfaction, and vice versa – identifying factors that caused satisfaction of tourists with rendered services.

To do this, a search was performed using the following keywords: "*bus tours + tourist feedbacks*", "*bus tour + feedbacks*", "*is it worth going to a bus tour*", "*bus tours to + Europe/ Russia + feedbacks*". Destinations were chosen based on the Russian-speaking tourist segment and the fact that Russian tourists mostly went on bus tours in Europe, Russia, or within their home region. Feedbacks about bus tours were not taken into account. Also, feedbacks of Russian-speaking Ukrainian and Belarusian tourists were not taken into account, since these countries were not included in the research territory. Analysis of the information base and feedbacks of tourists allowed assessing the place of road transportation (including bus trips) in tourism, classifying drive tourism, studying the problems in this area, and the main trends in the industry, as well as the reasons that affected the degree of tourists' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the services provided within the framework of bus tourism products.

## RESULTS

Based on the study of the accumulated information, it can be concluded that road transport in tourism serves as:

- a way to deliver tourists to their destination and transfer;
- an excursion transport;
- a basis of bus tours;
- a basis for drive tourism (including caravanning, adventure tours, etc.);
- historical and cultural resources (road transport museums, legendary automobile depots, and vehicle manufacturing, etc.);
- an infrastructure that ensures a tourist destination operation.

Also, the study of the research information base allowed classifying drive tourism based on the characteristics of vehicles and travel goals.

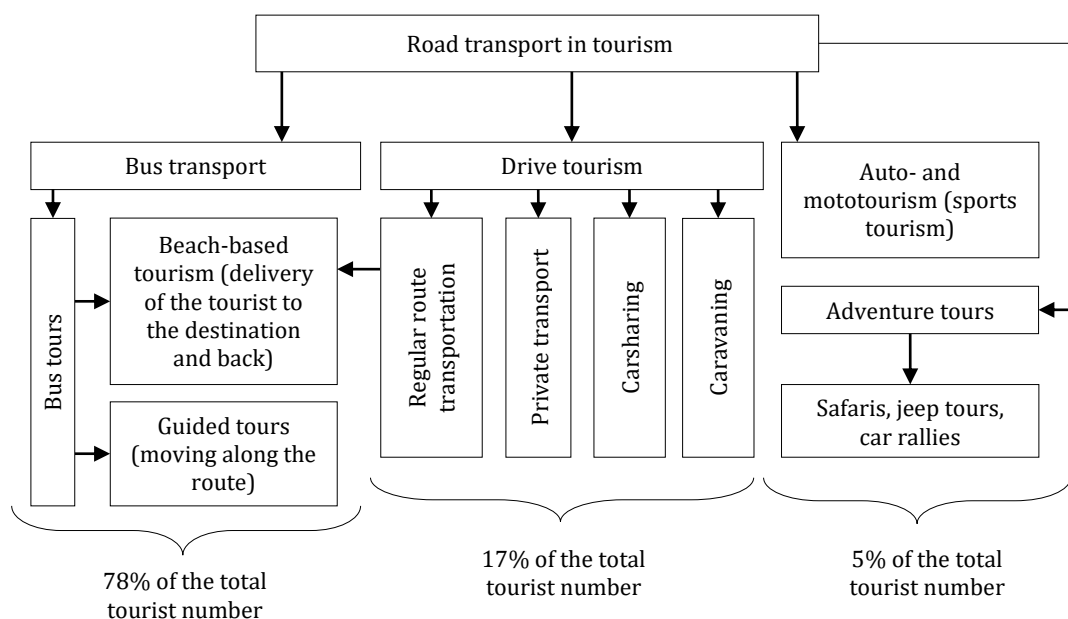


Figure 1. Types of road trips

It should be noted that there is some confusion in the understanding of road transport in tourism. In particular, some authors do not include bus tours and transportation of tourists by bus to the destination in the concept of automobile trips. There are definitions in which drive tourism is understood as travel of tourists to countries or localities other than the place of their permanent residence, in which the main means of transportation is a private or rented car. Following this definition, bus tours should be considered as a particular specially organized complex tourist product, which is based on a bus ride, and whose program, in addition to transportation, includes support on the route, accommodation in hotels (or staying overnight in the bus in case of overnight transfers), and excursion services.

Drive tourism also includes sports and adventure trips, which may be organized or self-dependent, and also pursue scientific goals (for example, expeditions to develop a route or explore a territory, carried out on a jeep or off-the-road vehicle, are most often referred to as adventure trips). However, control over their conduct and the safety of tourists are within the scope of responsibility of the Federation of Sports Tourism, the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Russian Federation, or other authorities. Drive tourism products can also be classified solely by the purpose of travel (educational, beach-based, religious, business, extreme, educational, etc.), by age, social status and mobility of participants (children's, trips for the elderly, for schoolchildren, intensive tours, tours for people with disabilities, etc.), by the geographical location of trips and coverage of the territory, by types of vehicles, by the degree of innovation (for example, traditional, sightseeing bus tours, innovative car quests, theatrical and thematic bus tours), etc.

The analysis of scientific publications, as well as expert opinions published on the pages of international organizations and various professional communities (for example, the Association of International Road Carriers, special issues and publications of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the International Road Transport Union (IRU), the Russian Union of Travel Industry (conclusions and recommendations of the transport commission), the ProfiTravel portal, etc.) allowed identifying and

formulating the main problems and trends in drive tourism in today's Russia. Among the main problems in this field, the following should be noted:

- lack of in-house fleet of comfortable buses of the proper level, as well as enterprises to manufacture tourist class buses (coaches) and carry out their maintenance;
- the lack or low level of tourist infrastructure, its regional disparities in accommodation and quality; in particular, the main roadside accommodation and food facilities are located at an acceptable distance from each other only in Moscow and St. Petersburg, as well as in the Moscow and Leningrad regions, while in the rest of the country they are, if any, designed only for long-distance truckers, and have quite a low level of service and accommodation quality;
- difficulties with parking and traffic problems for both cars and buses in tourist centers of different levels; for example, in Moscow, leaving a car in the parking lot can be quite expensive, while in the downtown of Nizhny Novgorod, it is very inconvenient; in some tourist centers there are neither parking lots for buses, nor the possibility to stop on the street to hop on/off tourists;
- regulatory problems of various levels (for example, difficulties in organizing trips for children's groups, complications in developing certain areas, for example, in China, where there is no mass inbound drive tourism due to the specifics of the legislation and the nonrecognition of international driving licenses);
- lack of a unified concept for promoting regional and national tourist products, disproportions in the distribution of tourist flows along popular routes (for example, along the Golden Ring), their seasonal congestion, and lack of programs for new destinations.

At the same time, it is also possible to identify the most pronounced development trends in the drive tourism both worldwide and in Russia being described below. Interest in auto travel increases and tourists choose vehicles (private or rented) as the main means of transportation both to the destination and within it. This is facilitated by the mobility of this type of transport, the breadth of choice of places for recreation and various programs, the ability to combine the auto trip with different means of transport, etc. The geographic spread of auto travel is extended while preserving sustainable growth in traditional destinations, particularly in Europe and America, which still attracts both domestic and international auto tourists. In these regions, motorists use rented transport (except for caravaners). Drive tourism remains a domestic tourism destination, because most motorists travel for short and medium distances, while tourists traveling by car in Europe, combine different modes of transport in their trip. At that, in Russia, drive tourism occupies about 1% of the tourism market, however, the interest in caravanning increases. The development of this tourism sector in the country is hindered by the lack of domestic production of camper vans, the high cost of their import and customs clearance, the lack of enterprises that provide services and maintenance, the lack of tourist infrastructure for caravanning, etc.

New tourist products are being developed that are focused on meeting the demands of motorists. These are car quests, thematic trips, and runs, ecological car tours, etc. Special attention is paid to sports and adventure drive tourism, the geography of such trips is constantly expanding laying new routes to remote regions. The number of travel companies grow that contributes to providing services in the organization and implementation of automobile trips from route planning and assistance in renting a car to visa support and insurance. Also, it is necessary to note an important trend of the contemporary society manifested in the informatization and using smartphones, which



in turn causes an increase in the number of mobile applications that allow planning a trip, as well as navigation systems, easy-to-use interactive maps that show attractions, accommodation facilities, and their level, catering facilities, etc. Besides, there are special services for motorists. All these make drive tourism accessible and convenient for motorists of different levels and contribute to the growth in the number of road trips.

Another special trend in the development of international drive tourism is the adjustment of certain roads and highways for tourism, providing them with viewing decks and parking lots, the promotion of individual roads as tourist destinations (e.g., Great Kiwi Road in New Zealand), forming or involving existing national and international tourist routes into drive tourism (e.g., a scenic road in California called 17-Mile Drive, the Castle Road in Germany, etc.). However, noted trends and challenges do not reflect the specificity of bus tours, which currently remain the most mass in the number of tourists transported. Consider the conditions for the successful organization of bus tours (Table 1). In addition to the main trends indicated in the general characteristics of drive tourism, the following trends and features are typical of bus tourism. Travel industry representatives working in this area note certain stability, lower probability of risks in comparison with air transport, the presence of regular customers, and the possibility of expanding travel programs.

At that, there are already established organizations in the drive tourism market with streamlined connections and operating experience in the market for more than 15-20 years. The main form of their operation is the rental of buses, including rent in the host countries. Focus areas include international trips (up to 90% of bus tours lasting more than four days are foreign trips), domestic tours (including inbound), and mixed bus tours. The increasing requirements of tourists, in particular, for comfort, availability of spare time during the tour, the choice of programs, and their quality lead to an increase in the comfort of vehicles, decommissioning outdated models. For example, now in Russia, businesses are abandoning double-decker buses, which are less comfortable for tourists, do not provide quick access to household compartments, create additional difficulties and demand a longer time when getting off the bus and boarding.

Table 1. Conditions for the successful organization of bus tours

Condition	Description
The short duration of the trip, provision of the possibility to rest	The further is the destination, the more preference is given to air transport
	Tours with a long vacation by the sea are in special demand, for example, tours in Croatia or Italy provide seven days out of 14 by the sea.
The minimum number (or absence) of overnight bus transfers	Overnight bus transfers reduce the cost of the tour, as well as the comfort of the trip
Convenient combination with other modes of transport	Most often, bus tours involve moving by rail to the starting point of the trip (for example, Brest), or by air (for example, to Berlin)
Low price compared to other modes of transport	Guided bus tours come out at a cost cheaper for tourists due to the level of

	hotels, length of stay, mass hotel occupancy for a single tour, etc.
Tours must be focused on a certain category of tourists	The main audience is curious, not comfort- demanding, hardy tourists, for example, schoolchildren traveling during the holidays. Many tourists are returning, having tried out one tourist program, they are ready to take another bus tour.
Ability to combine individual route sections, services, and program parts	Many tour operators create their programs so that tourists can join the group at almost any point on the route. For example, one can fly by plane to Prague and join the program there.

A tourist is the end-consumer of a bus tour. At that, the tourist impression is the main result gained in the course of tourist service. It is the tourist's favorable impression that indicates a well-organized tour. This is why the feedback from the consumer shows the level and strength of the tourist experience received during the tour, and therefore allows assessing the main mistakes and problems in both the implementation of a particular tour and the performance of the entire tourism sector in general. Note that tourists can be unpretentious as well as, to the contrary, with inflated requirements. The impression received during the tour is influenced by a variety of factors, both objective and subjective. Sometimes tourists' feedbacks aim at promoting or discrediting a particular company. Therefore, this method of studying the problems of a particular tourist destination is not without drawbacks; however, it allows assessing the general trends and system errors that are characteristic of the industry in general. To identify the most typical problems in bus tourism in Russia, the authors analyzed the opinions and feedbacks of Russian tourists for 2017-2019, posted on tour operators' popular resources and sites. As a result, all negative feedbacks can be generalized in several groups, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Analysis of negative feedbacks of Russian tourists concerning bus tours

Source of claims	The group of tourists' claims	The essence of claims, the most frequently described in feedbacks
Mistakes of the tour organizer	Complaints about driving techniques, road selection, and route logistics	The bus was traveling on national roads (not on highways), because of this, time was lost in traffic jams, and the program was not completed. The route was not thought out (stops were more/less often than once every three hours, there was no infrastructure on the road, a journey was too long, due to unexpected difficulties time was lost when crossing the border).

Mistakes of the tour organizer	Complaints about the program (the program is too busy, lack of spare time) and its implementation	The route and order of excursions were changed, tourists didn't have time for some sightseeing, did not visit some tourist sites (the program was not completed), the program was too dense, there was no free time
Mistakes of a specific employee	Complaints about the qualification of the attendant guide, driver, sales manager, etc.	The guide did not explain what to do in case if the tourists got lost; the guide was rude, did not take part in resolving arising conflicts, and didn't solve issues. The tourist was not admitted to cross the border due to certain circumstances (because the manager didn't explain the rules of crossing the border, while the guide did not assist in resolving the arising problem, etc.)
Mistakes of the transport company or tour organizer	Complaints about the comfort of the bus	The bus was almost "dead" (dirty, small distance between the seats, broken seats, no air conditioning, etc.)
Circumstances arising through no fault of the tour organizer	Claims for arising circumstances	Road accidents, delays when crossing the border through no fault of the organizer, thefts, lateness of tourists, etc.

As is obvious, the main complaints of tourists relate to the level of preparedness of the personnel involved in the development (product design mistakes) and implementation of the tour. It should be noted also that the number of negative feedbacks is gradually decreasing, while positive feedbacks starting prevail, in which tourists make emphasis on certain positive points, such as the price, saturation of the trip with impressions, friendly atmosphere, and high qualification of the personnel involved in the implementation of the tour.

However, the specifics of the bus tour significantly complicate the task of any tour operator to satisfy tourists and to form the final positive tourist impression. This is also evidenced by the feedbacks of tourists, which most frequently were formulated as: "I rested so well that was very tired". It should also be noted that the opportunity to enjoy the country from the bus window is a myth since most routes run on expressways bypassing historical sites and major cities. Stay of tourists in a group within a closed space during the bus tour leads to the formation of social roles in the group, a high probability of conflicts, the emergence of dissatisfied tourist groups, etc. Among other problems, one may note certain health problems due to long sitting, problems associated with the short sanitary stops, lack of time for full-fledged sightseeing, lack of spare time for personal needs, additional costs for meals (due to the lack of lunches and dinners, and a time to choose a suitable cafe or restaurant), as well as additional costs for excursions, often not included in the tour price.



Thus, the bus tour is a specific tourism direction, whose successful implementation is based on working with the tourists' audience and feedback, clear planning of the route, program, and logistics of the tour, as well as on impressions of tourists.

## RESULTS

Analysis of the information base and expert opinions has shown that road transport is an important component of the tourist product since it is directly or indirectly involved in its implementation ensuring along with other modes of transport the functioning of the tourist destination. On the one hand, the importance of bus tours in mass tourism is steadily decreasing, and the number of tourists transported is reducing. Consequently, the number of tourist feedbacks concerning bus tours is declining. As a result, the number of tourist enterprises that organize bus tours is also decreasing. According to UNWTO statistics, the number of road transportations has dropped in recent years and now accounts for just 37% of the total traffic volume in tourism. Current situation encourages tour operators to look for new destinations for bus tours, develop new formats including thematic and theatrical tours, improve the comfort of bus travel to generate positive emotions in tourists, and thus return the attractiveness of bus tours, first of all, in terms of getting emotional experiences rather than in terms of price.

On the other hand, drive tourism based on a rented or personal car gradually becomes a growing segment that has long gone beyond self-determined tours. There are a growing number of organizations involved in the development and implementation of drive tourism products that help tourists to plan their trip, rent a car, solve legal and visa issues. The subject and geographical coverage of drive tourism are expanding through emerging innovative tourist products. The drive tourism infrastructure is gradually improving. Programs are being implemented for the formation and functioning of drive tourism clusters in Russia. All this suggests that drive tourism today attracts the attention of both the authorities and the tourist market entities.

## CONCLUSION

Issues of automobile and bus tourism are actively raised in the scientific and expert communities attracting the attention of the authorities and being implemented in programs and strategies for tourism development both in Russia and abroad. Today, the road transport segment in tourism is characterized by heterogeneity and multidirectional nature of occurring processes, the presence of problems and constraints, on the one hand, and trends and development directions – on the other hand.

The development of drive tourism in Russia will expand the geographical coverage of tours around the country, smooth out regional disparities in the distribution of tourist flows, and combine a variety of tourist offers (health, event, gastronomic, etc.) in the regions of the country into car-themed routes. The Great Kiwi Road trip in New Zealand can be cited as an example of such a combination of various resources within a car route, which makes it possible for tourists to visit key attractions of the country by car and get acquainted with tourist resources. This route is both a national tourist product and a means of promoting the country on the international tourist market.

To develop drive tourism in Russia, it is necessary to consider the existing problems in this sector, which are reflected in expert discussions and feedback from tourists. Overcoming these problems and carrying out an integrated approach to the

development of brand tourist road routes, providing them with infrastructure, auxiliary products, such as guidebooks, audio guides, navigation systems, and user interactive and accessible offline maps will significantly contribute to solving existing problems in the drive tourism sector. A comprehensive approach requires also addressing the issues of training specialists involved in the organization of drive tourism of different levels. All this creates a certain field for further research and discussions.

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