

DEVELOPMENT AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECOTOURISM IN RUSSIA

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Abstract

This paper explores the development and opportunities for ecotourism in Russia. The discussion starts with an overview of concept of sustainable tourism and then moves on to examine more specific opportunities for development of ecotourism. Lack of literature on this discourse of tourism in Russia requires undertaking a conceptual approach towards the research in this paper. Research on principles and practice of relationships between sustainability and tourism is growing with much of this literature until recently having its focus mainly on ecotourism, which is a specific aspect of sustainability. The concept of sustainable tourism has been perceived differently by researchers and a variety of alternatives have been discussed within the literature. Ecotourism explores the impact of tourism on environment and addresses management of natural and sociocultural resources of tourist destinations to ensure their overall wellbeing.

The potential of tourism in Russia has grown drastically for the past decade. This has been triggered mainly by its development and openness of the country towards international tourism. Researchers argue that tourism in Russia needs to be seen as development beyond economy to develop further. The concept of sustainable and ecotourism in the context of Russia has not been explored previously.

The natural environment is an important resource for ecotourism in Russia. Russian Federation poses huge potential for ecotourism, but unfortunately the country is just starting to realize the importance of preserving cultural integrity, essential ecological processes and biological diversity. Russian ecotourism is not just limited to areas of ecological significance, but actively aims to reduce negative impacts in a holistic way. Issues confronted include economic viability, socio-cultural sensitivity, and environmental sustainability at destinations of natural and cultural significance. Efforts to preserve and enhance the natural environment should therefore be a high priority for the industry and for governments. In Russia there are more than dozen areas that are prepared for ecotourism, such as North of European part of Russia, "Greenring", Katun Preserve and many others. The paper provides an overview and analysis of sustainable and ecotourism in Russia at this stage of development, outlines opportunities for its further growth and offers future research directions. Further research is necessary to test the concepts drawn from the paper.

Keywords Sustainability, Tourism development, Russia, Opportunities