

A priori two types of tourism are believed to generate the most profits, namely holiday-making at sea resorts and cultural tourism. All other types of holiday-making altogether, be it medical tourism, eco or exotic tourism, cannot be even compared to the first two either in the number of tourists or in profits. In Belarus, for instance, although the number of foreign visitors in sanatoria, hunting farms and national parks has been growing, the increase is still insignificant. It is not customary to see foreigners walking along the streets of Belarusian towns, and tours along Belarusian scenic routes are booked by Belarusians mostly. But why does such a situation take place? Here are some reasons:

- not all the sights have the infrastructure needed;
- investors are reluctant to invest in the development of this infrastructure, preferring low-cost projects;
- high visa cost for foreign visitors;
- a small number of tourist class hotels (2-3 stars), as well as a higher grade (4-5 stars), slow development of roadside service;
- lack of sufficient information and advertising of Belarus as a country rich in tourism resources.

Summing up, it should be said that further development of the tourist sector should become one of the most important targets in the policy of the Republic of Belarus to make the country famous and recognizable in the world.

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SELF-DRIVE HOLIDAYS IN BELARUS – CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

The basic subject matter of the research paper under consideration is such a phenomenon in tourism industry as self-drive holidays. Self-drive holidays are also known as fly drives, road trip holidays or multi-centre holidays. The aim of this research work is to analyze the present situation in this sphere of tourism in general

and particularly in Belarus and to come up with some recommendations and suggestions on the matter.

A self-drive break gives you the flexibility and freedom to explore the surrounding area at your leisure. It is a perfect option for those who like playing it off the cuff or visit places off the beaten track. In addition, it is a great solution to the problem of accessible tourism development in Belarus since tourists determine every aspect of their travel by themselves.

Every person knows that Belarus is a transit country with a very compact configuration. Indeed, this country stretches for 560 km from north to south and for 650 km from west to east. This fact gives a fruitful ground for creating and developing short-term tourist itineraries. Besides, the latest trends in tourism favour the development in the sphere stated above.

According to the UNWTO forum 2008 and ITB World Travel Trends Report 2011, they are as follows: an increase in short-term travels and dividing holidays into several parts; a growing number of individual tours against the background of decrease in the number of group ones; an increasing specialization among travellers, who will be seeking personalized, unique experiences; tourists' desire to spend less money on their holidays.

As far as self-drive holidays in the world are concerned, it would be right to mention that practically all popular with tourists countries can boast of this kind of tourism. Particularly the author can point out Great Britain, the USA and Australia. However, it would be inappropriate to compare Belarus, a young developing country, with such "giants" as the USA, Great Britain and Australia. That is why the author also analyses situation in Baltic States and Poland.

Unfortunately, Belarus can hardly compete with these countries today although natural and geographical conditions are out of competition. Trying to find out the obstacles which prevent Belarus from being successful in this sphere, the author has conducted an opinion poll, the results of which are as follows:

- nearly 50% of the interviewees have never heard anything about self-drive tourism, and only 10% have heard something about it in Belarus;

- 40% of respondents believe Belarusian roads are of high quality, 25% think they are average, 35% are dissatisfied with the quality of the roads;
- 75% of the interviewed think that roadside service is undeveloped in Belarus, 25% consider it neither bad nor perfect;
- 97% would like to take up a self-drive break but they do not know how to do it.

Having analyzed these data, the author has come to the conclusion that the major challenges are: poor provision with information; lack of providers of self-drive service; insufficiently developed infrastructure, particularly roadside service; lack of attractive for tourists' itineraries.

From this perspective the author can put forward the following recommendations and suggestions:

- to increase advertising and promotion of self-drive tourism by spreading eye-catching ads, creating clubs and forums for self-drive tourists;
- to improve drive route features such as the quality of the roads, available tourist information en route, road signage to attractions and towns, accommodation, visitor information centres, vehicle repair;
- to make up convenient and exciting itineraries.

In addition, the author comes out with a project of the Belarusian self-drive website.

Carrying out this research, the author has come to the conclusion that self-drive holidays are a lucrative niche in the sphere of Belarusian tourism and hospitality and therefore there are a lot of directions to work in.

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