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THE MAIN ASPECTS OF VIRTUAL TOURISM

Abstract: Tourism development is impossible without the development and implementation of innovations, which are an indispensable condition for achieving economic success. One of the areas is the formation of new types of tourism, in particular virtual tourism. The author characterized its role and value for modern society; proposed the author's definition of virtual tourism and criteria for the classification of virtual tours.

Keywords: tourism, innovations, virtual tourism, marketing, Internet, communications, investments.

In the modern world, tourism is one of the few areas of social and economic activity, the development indicators of which demonstrate almost continuous growth. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the number of border crossings for tourist purposes in 2013 increased by 5% compared to 2012, reaching 1,087 million international arrivals, these growth rates should be maintained according to UNWTO estimates in 2014, and by 2030 the number of tourists crossing the border should reach 1.8 billion people. In general, the tourism market accounts for more than 7% of global investment, about 5% of tax revenues, and about 9% of global GDP is generated by the tourism industry.

The constant growth in the number of consumers of tourism services, meanwhile, does not reduce the relevance of the task of forming an offer of new products, tourists are becoming more demanding, tourism practices are expanding, the desire to receive new sensations and impressions is growing. New types of tourism are emerging, new destinations are appearing, types of communication, transport, service are improving, the consumer of services is becoming more informed, educated and experienced. In changing conditions, tourism companies are increasingly aware of the need to bring new products and services to the market. Innovations in tourism are an indispensable condition for increasing competitiveness, increasing the volume of consumption of tourism services, and achieving economic success.

Innovations in tourism

The issues of developing innovations in tourism, as well as the innovative development of the economy in general, are given considerable attention in the scientific literature. The authors focus on various aspects of innovation. It is indicated that innovation in tourism is the introduction of services to the market that have higher consumer qualities at a certain point in time, while they are aimed at increasing the level of tourist satisfaction and their quality of life. As M.M. Romanova points out, innovation in tourism involves the creation of a new product, which can be either a route or a vacation spot, in addition, they should be based on a number of principles, the use of which leads to positive results. According to A.P. Dud, innovation in tourism is a multifaceted organizational and management innovation, including changes in legal framework, the organization of new types of tourism activities and new tourism products using modern technologies. Thus, in general, when talking about innovation in tourism, first of all, they mean the development and promotion of new tourism products, the introduction of new management and organizational solutions, the application of new principles of service provision using modern information and communication technologies.

All this significantly changes the algorithm of consumer behavior of a tourist, who is increasingly independently forming his own tourism product - determining the route based on the information provided to him by information sites of the destinations he is interested in; booking services of accommodation facilities, carriers, companies providing various related services (ranging from car rental to ordering online for a specific date of dinner in a restaurant, for example, such as the exclusive restaurant "Sublimotion" on the famous Spanish island of Ibiza, where dinner for one person costs about 1,500 euros, and no more than 12 guests are served per evening).

The most common innovations in tourism related to digital technologies were innovations in the field of transport services and accommodation services (electronic booking, electronic tickets, electronic visas). One of the very first innovations is the "electronic ticket" service (or "paperless ticket", which allows you to check in for a flight online), as well as electronic sales in general, which make it possible to receive the necessary information about hotels, cultural institutions, events in the destination and various services accompanying the trip. These types of innovations, their pros and cons have already been discussed in some detail in the literature.

A separate trajectory is made up of innovations by types of tourism, due to the emergence and widespread use of information and telecommunications and Internet technologies. Among the new types of tourism today, virtual tourism stands out. It should be noted that due to the electronic integration of all types of communications, a new symbolic environment is being built, where virtuality becomes reality, and reality becomes virtuality.

Definition of virtual tourism

Today, the topic of virtual tourism is certainly relevant, but has not yet been sufficiently covered in scientific literature. First of all, the very concept of virtual tourism requires clarification, since, despite the fact that this topic is of interest to researchers in various fields of knowledge: philosophers, psychologists, cultural scientists, the boundaries of this concept are very blurred. In this article, we will define virtual tourism and focus on examining its features in comparison with the characteristics of tourism in the traditional sense.

At the moment, there are few articles in scientific literature devoted to the topic of virtual tourism, which is quite natural and is explained by the relative novelty of the phenomenon under consideration. Many definitions are reduced mainly to a description of the technology of virtual travel. Thus, a virtual tour is considered as a way of realistically displaying a three-dimensional multi-element space. In general, we can say that virtual tourism replaces both real travel and real tourism. Such a "tourist trip" is more comfortable and convenient, safe, since it is carried out within the home.

The direct definition of virtual tourism given by I.A. Latypov seems insufficiently capacious to us: "Virtual tourism is a type of activity of individuals and legal entities that organize or conduct virtual tours." Therefore, we consider it important to formulate our own definition of this concept.

Virtual tourism is an individual activity that allows, through the use of modern computer technology and communication networks, to create and receive the most realistic sensory information about the desired destination from among those that actually exist without actually moving to it.

Let us give a few comments on our definition.

First, let us note that when speaking about sensory information, we mean not only visual and auditory perception, because today there are already 4D technologies that simulate sensory sensations, and it is reasonable to assume that in the near future there will be ways to simulate olfactory sensations, and the completeness and realism of virtual space will increase every year.

Secondly, in our opinion, it is fundamentally important in the context of the rapid development of virtual reality to emphasize the fact that by virtual tourism we mean "movement" to an arbitrarily remote, but real place. That is, by virtual tourism we recognize both an online visit to the Louvre and a computer simulation of the landing on the Moon (provided that it is based on documentary material),

but, for example, a trip to the planet Pandora, extremely realistically created by James Cameron in the film "Avatar", we cannot consider virtual tourism.

Thirdly, viewing 3D panoramas, for example, of sports clubs in your city when choosing the right one, we will also call virtual tourism, although a similar offline "raid" can hardly be called a tour in the usual sense, it is rather an excursion or market research. Here it is necessary to note an important difference between virtual tourism and tourism in its classical sense. Going on an offline trip, a tourist sets the purpose of the visit to a country, region, city and much less often - a certain institution. Even if the final destination is still a specific institution: a museum, a world-class restaurant, a hotel (in cases where going beyond its territory is not planned), then on the way to it the traveler involuntarily receives a set of impressions from the features of the region in which he finds himself. In the case of a virtual tour, firstly, the scale of the "visited" object can be significantly smaller (for example, you can only inspect the Kremlin Armory without "entering" Red Square), and secondly, the virtual tourist is relieved of the need to get acquainted with the objects located along the route to the final point.

The value of virtual tourism in a post-industrial society

Virtual tourism is developing rapidly, because it has a number of attractive properties for both the consumer of the service and the producer. Let us note the most significant attractive aspects for the consumer.

1) Minimal expenditure of personal resources: time and money - virtual tours are currently free, they do not require time to "get ready for the trip", in addition, such a trip can be interrupted at any time and then, if desired, continued at a convenient time.

2) The ability to virtually visit regions and objects that are inaccessible in an offline trip. When discussing this point, the most frequently mentioned are the prospects that virtual tourism opens up for people with disabilities. But the list of population groups for whom virtual tourism provides a chance to visit inaccessible territories is much wider. For example, these are unmarried European women who are not allowed to enter a number of Muslim countries; and teenagers who cannot cross the border without their parents; and people burdened with family obligations that do not allow them to move freely around the world: mothers with infants, parents with many children, etc.

3) Safety. Obviously, there are fewer risks when traveling online than when traveling offline. Although, since virtual reality is becoming an increasingly important part of life, you can also encounter "full-fledged" danger in it. For example, if you do not follow the safety rules on the Internet, you can lose money from your bank accounts. However, in any case, a virtual tour does not under any circumstances threaten the life and health of the traveler.

4) A contactless way of getting to know a region is convenient for travelers who do not speak foreign languages, since it does not involve direct verbal communication with the native population and thus allows one to avoid difficulties associated with ignorance of the language and lack of knowledge about the region of stay. For some people, virtual tourism is preparation for a real trip.

Speaking about the attractive aspects for the manufacturer, it should be noted that if we can consider a separate individual (less often – groups of individuals) as a consumer of virtual tourism services, then various economic entities could act as a producer. Most often, this is a business selling services to an individual consumer, and cultural, sports, educational institutions, etc. At the same time, firms directly from the tourism industry should be singled out as a separate group.

Conclusion. Note that in this article we talked about virtual travel in the form in which it currently exists, i.e. about virtual tourism as an auxiliary part of tourist activity, which is used by various economic entities to maintain and develop their main activity. It is reasonable to assume the formation of an industry in the future, in which virtual tours will become the final self-valuable product of consumption, examples of which we already see today. The change in the consumer

behavior model of travel services will only actualize the tasks of innovative development of the travel business and the search for a new offer for an IT-literate user who is able to search on the Internet.

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