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## Ecological tourism in protected natural areas of the Russian Arctic: prospects and challenges



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**Abstract.** The article focuses on the problems and prospects of the ecological tourism in the natural protected areas (NPA) in

the Russian Arctic. It is proposed to create a unified terminological basis for the concept of “ecotourism”. We analyzed the systemic problems that hinder the development of ecotourism in the NPA of the Arctic region. The article shows arising recreational conflicts, caused by environmental and traditional land use issues and the existence of NPA in the Arctic. We also discuss promising aspects of the ecological tourism, preservation of the heritage of indigenous peoples of the North and opportunities for involving local people in economic activities and environmental education.

**Keywords:** *Ecotourism, protected territories, the Arctic, recreational capacity, recreational, environmental, traditional land use, natural and cultural heritage, geographical factors*

According to the experts of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), share of ecotourism in the structure of the global tourist market is about 10-15%. It is one of the most perspective types of tourism. The Russian Federation has considerable potential for the development of ecotourism, but now it accounts for no more than 1% of the tourist market<sup>1</sup>. The foundation of the ecotourism in Russia is a developed network of specially protected natural territories (SPNT).

<sup>1</sup> Strategiya razvitiya turizma v Rossijskoj Federacii na period do 2020 goda. Utverzhdena rasporyazheniem Pra-vitelstva RF ot 31 maya 2014 g. №941-r. URL: [http://www.russiatourism.ru/data/File\\_news\\_file/2014//data/File/news\\_file/2014/Стратегия развития туризма в РФ на период до 20120 года Распоряжение Правительства РФ от 21.05.2014 № 941-p.pdf](http://www.russiatourism.ru/data/File_news_file/2014//data/File/news_file/2014/Стратегия развития туризма в РФ на период до 20120 года Распоряжение Правительства РФ от 21.05.2014 № 941-p.pdf) (Accessed: 18 March 2016)

Federal law identifies six categories of SPNT; three of them (nature conservation zones, national parks and natural parks) play the greatest role in the ecotourism planning and its activities.

### ***System problems of the ecological tourism development***

However, the development of tourism in protected areas in our country is linked to a number of difficulties, including the spatial differentiation. This allows us to formulate some *system problems of ecotourism development*:

- ✚ The ambiguity interpretation of the concept “ecological tourism” and its different understanding.
- ✚ Lack of preparation and, as a consequence, the uselessness of tourists resources.
- ✚ The inevitable conflicts between the recreation, environmental and traditional environmental management.
- ✚ Undeveloped infrastructure.
- ✚ Unpreparedness and lack of interest for ecotourism at the SPNTs’ administration.
- ✚ The lack of the recreational capacity estimates of the SPNTs’ territories and waters.

Currently there is no single definition of “ecological tourism”, and all existing ones repeat or complement each other, corresponding with the common principles, which can equally serve the purposes of ecotourism. According to these principles, ecotourism should be based on the natural resources and contribute to environmental education, conservation of local social and cultural environment, ensure economic benefits and sustainable development of the areas [1].

Classical, environmental interpretation of ecotourism is relatively undisturbed natural systems or individual components [2]. The objects of ecotourism are the concrete ways of interaction between a man and the environment and ways to minimize the negative effects of this interaction.

In accordance with specific objectives discussed above, ecological tourism has its specific being a type of recreation. In the opinion of A.V. Drozdov, the first function of ecotourism is providing physical rehabilitation due to the stay in environmentally friendly areas, greener services and inclusion in the rest of the diverse and balanced forms of activity. The author considers emotional recuperation and “getting rid of the stress of the city” as equally important. In addition, ecotourism advocates and enriches people with important scientific and ecological knowledge, including environmental safety. Last (but not least meaningful) function is formation of tolerant attitude towards other cultures and ethnicities, their way of life and traditions, adapted to the life within the nature [1].

E.Y. Kolbovski [2] considers ecotourism as a complex concept that includes three parts. Each part implies blocks of certain actions and settings: 1) cognitive (emotions, information, impressions); 2) athletic (physical effort); 3) consumer (food, leisure, entertainment).

So, we are focusing on the two most common definitions of ecological tourism. *The First one* was formulated in 1983 by Mexican ecologist and economist Hector Ceballos Lascurain. He understood ecotourism as a “travel in relatively undisturbed or pure plots of wildlife with the specific objectives of the study, as well as admiration and the pleasure of admiring the landscapes and their inhabitants, all manifestations of culture found in the area”. *The second* definition was given by the The Ecotourism Society: “ecotourism is a responsible travel to natural areas that promotes conservation and improves the well-being of local people” [3].

### ***Types and stages of the ecotourism development***

Ecotourism and its structure are not homogeneous. Various gradations and classification of eco-tourism and tours exist. The diversity of the ecotourism types could be divided into 2 major classes: 1) ecotourism within the boundaries of protected areas and ecosystems (classical type of environmental tourism); 2) ecotourism outside the bounds of especially protected natural territories and waters, mostly on the territory of the rural landscape.

V.V. Khrabovchenko identifies the following types of ecotourism: a scientific natural history tours; adventure tours; travel in natural reserves and SPNTs [4]. However, it is hard to distinguish the classification criterion (scientific and natural history tours — on the criterion of “purpose”; adventure tours — “purpose” and “method of organization”; travel in the natural reserves or the SPNTs is defined by the “object of visiting”). The use of classifications often causes difficulty. More accessible for use is the classification by A.V. Drozdov, who offered generalized hierarchical classification (table 1). Ecotourism there is a type of nature-oriented tourism.

*Table 1*

*Classification of tours (Drozdov, 2005)*

Level	Categories
Type	Nature-oriented
Classes	1. Eco-tours in the wild, in the borders of SPNA 2. Eco-tours outside the boundaries of protected areas on the territory of the cultural landscape
Types	1. On the main objective 2. On principal object
Forms	1. Age of participants 2. As their health 3. Largest groups

Types are defined by the aim and object of the tour [5]. *The “aim” criterion defines* the following types of tours: 1) observation and study of “wild” or “cultivated” nature with the environmental training; 2) relaxation in natural surroundings with emotional and aesthetic purposes; 3) medical treatment by natural factors; 4) tours with sport and adventure objectives. *The “object” criterion largely defines the content of the tour and partly shapes its organization:* 5) botanical, zoological, geological tours, etc.; 6) ecological and ethnographic or archaeological, ecological tours; 7) agricultural tours; 8) speleological, water and mountain tours.

In addition, ecological tours can be classified by many other features. For example, by the way of movement, composition of participants, duration, relative to the boundaries of the country of residence and so on. A very important classification sign of tours is the age and health of the participants, as well as the size of the groups.

Interestingly, the classification of tourism and ecotourism in English-speaking countries differs significantly. For example, the classification of tours (Lindberg K, 1993) depending on their purpose and nature of the activity: 1) “highly specialized”: for scientists or members of the specialized tours (ecologic-educational and scientific - ornithological, botanical, ethnographic, archaeological, etc.); 2) “interest tours”: tourists who deliberately come to protected areas to get knowledge of local nature and culture; 3) “main stream tours”: tourists whose primary purpose is simply to get an “unusual journey”; 4) “random”: tourists who visit natural reserves as a part of a broader tour [3].

Despite the relatively wide range of criteria for the classification of ecotourism, it is important to note that the main arena of development of ecological tourism is SPNTs of different types and grades [6]. According to the Russian Federal Law “On specially protected natural territories” (1995), SPNTs are “land, water and air space above them, the natural complexes and objects, which are of special environmental, scientific, cultural, recreational, aesthetic and recreational value, protected by decisions of public authorities from economic use, and enjoy a special mode of security”<sup>2</sup>. Analyzing the work of specialists in the field of ecological tourism, Khrabovchenko V.V., Kolbovsky E.Y., Drozdov A.V., Chihzova V.P. Stepanicky V.B., etc., it may be noted that every authors in one way or another allocates a cognitive component of ecological tourism, its orientation on cognition of nature and emphasizes the importance of this element.

The term “ecotourism” in Soviet sources appeared in the mid-1980s. Bureau of international youth tourism (BIYT) “Sputnik” developed “Ecotour on the Krugobaikalskaya railway”, “Goloustnoj River Valley Ecotour” and some others. This is how the ecotourism was introduced in

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<sup>2</sup> Federalnyj zakon RF «Ob osobo ohranyaemyh prirodnyh territoriyah» / Prinyat Gosudarstvennoj Dumoj 15 fevralya 1995 g. Redakciya ot 25 iyunya 2012 g.

our country. It was represented by the routes used for recreational purposes with a minimal impact on surrounding environment and when the visitors could be acquainted with natural-ecological problems of Lake Baikal. The concept of “ecotourism” was perceived more as a moral category, rather than economic [7].

The next step in the development of ecological tourism in our country is the introduction of such categories as “National Park”. The first National Park in the USSR was created in Estonia in 1971 (“Lahemaa”). By the year 1983, the territory of the USSR republics had eight national parks. The first national parks of Russia — “Sochinsky” (Krasnodar territory) and “Losiniy Ostrov” (Moscow). They were created in 1983. The other national parks of Russia were organized in 1990s. In 1995, Russian Federal Law on “especially protected nature territories” was approved by the Parliament. The law defined the function of protected areas, including the priority development of some kinds of tourism for different types of protected areas.

Today, Russia has a number of reputable organizations whose main activity is connected with the promotion of ecotourism in the country. Among the most significant are the following. *Ecological and educational center “Reserves”* was created for the project “Public support for protected areas and environmental education” carried out by the the World Wildlife Fund in 1996<sup>3</sup>. The centre acts as an independently public organization. Part of its staff is occupied with educational work and edition of popular science and information products to attract people and increase the interest of the population to SPNTs of Russia, which contributes to the development of ecotourism in protected areas.

A non-governmental foundation for the development of ecotourism “*Dersu Uzala*”<sup>4</sup> was established by the US Agency for international development (USAID) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). It is one of the first organizations whose activity is the ecological tourism only, its planning and development in the regions of Russia. The foundation also organizes training for professionals and employees of the SPNTs and tourist companies engaged in information services about the activities of Russian SPNTs.

In 1998, the Moscow State University supported the establishment of the “*Centre of environmental travel*” involved in the development of scientific and educational and ecological tourism in Russian reserves and national parks. In 2001, “Dersu Uzala” initiated the establishment of the *Association of Ecotourism*. Its primary mission is “promotion of international principles of sustainable and ecological tourism in Russia; the development of ecological tourism in the Russian pro-

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<sup>3</sup> World Wildlife Fund. URL: <http://worldwildlife.org/> (Accessed: 18 March 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Fond razvitiya ekoturizma “DERSU UZALA”. URL: <http://www.ecotours.ru/ru/> (Accessed: 18 March 2016).

tected natural areas; work on projects for the preservation of the cultural and natural heritage of the country”<sup>5</sup>. The Association is working to create an information space in Russia in order to promote the world practice of ecological tourism.

However, despite the positive historical development trends and according to some experts, now ecotourism in our country is slowly developing. Weak legal protection is reflected in the territorial claims for tourist and recreational areas, reducing the potential for accommodation and ecotourism. Russia has a need for planning recreational and ecotourism attractive territories [8].

Unlike the reserves where tourism and its development could be carried out by a special order of the federal body of executive power, national parks provide functional zoning of the territory. Among the six possible tourist zones of the national parks, only one is fully reserved and any economic activity is prohibited there. Specially protected areas are open for excursions and tourism. The same applies to the objects of cultural heritage. The main distinguishing feature of the national park is the presence of recreational zone with sport facilities, tourist industry, museums and information centres. However, when it comes to organizing recreational activities on the territory of NP, such activity is possible only under a special protection regime.

*Natural Parks* (NPs) are one of the main goals of its activities. Recreation and tourism in the NPs mean “environmental recreational institutions under the responsibility of the responsible bodies of the Russian Federation; their territories include natural complexes and objects of significant environmental and aesthetic value that are possible to be used for environmental, educational and recreational purposes”. NPs are increasingly focused on the development of mass tourism.

Thus, we see that the main SPNT (under the current law), which may exercise activities, ecotourism is nature conservation zones, national and natural parks. While in the reserves, because of their exceptional conservation status, there are only strictly regulated and maximally sparing form visits.

At the same time, national and natural parks serve the main arena for the development of ecological tourism in our country. Significant recreational potential of the SPNTs can and should be a significant factor in the development of recreational areas and ecological tourism of our country.

The main part of the SPNTs (50-100%) is the land suitable for ecological tourism or land with the objects of cultural heritage. The other part of territory (agricultural, fishery, settlements) is not in use for tourism. The area around the SPNTs there is a zone where all economic activity should be done after approval of the state authorities. Usually some territories of the national parks have other owners and users. The proportion of such lands is extremely high (75% — in the

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<sup>5</sup> Associaciya ekologicheskogo turizma. URL: <http://www.ecotourism-russia.ru/> (Accessed: 18 March 2016).

Park "Ozero Plesheyevo", 58% — "Orlovskoye Polesie", 54% — "Meshcherskiy" and "Russskiy Sever", 48% — "Samarskaya Luka", 41% — "Sebezhsy") [9].

It should be noted that Russia has a long tradition of development of tourisms close to ecological tourism in its modern sense.

### *The specificity of the ecological tourism in the Arctic*

In terms of the Arctic tourism development, it is necessary to assess the specificity of the ecological tourism in the region, which includes:

- a. extreme climatic conditions (seasonality of a tourist product);
- b. low accessibility and the high cost of tours;
- c. poor quality of information service on ecotourism in the Arctic;
- d. visa for foreign tourists;
- e. lack of guaranteed tourist demand, as a result, low interest of travel agents;
- f. high vulnerability of the Arctic ecosystems.

Successful development of ecological tourism means that the territory should have natural potential, favourable socio-economic conditions and a very good transport accessibility. It should also be provided with the necessary infrastructure, which, *firstly*, will create opportunities to host visitors, and *secondly*, will assist their safety prevent the destruction of natural landscapes. It is necessary to ensure maximum safety of protected natural complexes, including: proper organization of the territory; presence of specially equipped environmental trails and routes; equipment for the environmental trails and routes; information; a set of special rules and restrictions for visitors and permanent monitoring and tracking of the visited territory<sup>6</sup>.

Another important factor in the development of ecotourism in the Arctic is the promotion of ecotourism products. At the federal level the following parameters are approved to access the quality of informational support: organization of educational activities in protected areas; the number of environmental trails and other tourist offers; detailed descriptions of the trails and routes; the presence and number of visit centers and museums; the presence of virtual tours and video materials; foreign language information and web pages. A comprehensive analysis allows to decide the SPNT in the following way (Fig. 1 and 2).

The history of the development of tourist activity in the Russian Arctic comprises three main phases, characterized by the political and socio-economic development of the country. Every stage of development has a certain set of periods caused by lifting and attenuation of tourist activity.

<sup>6</sup> Концепции развития системы особо охраняемых природных территорий федерального значения на период до 2020 года / Утверждена Постановлением Правительства РФ 22.12.2011.



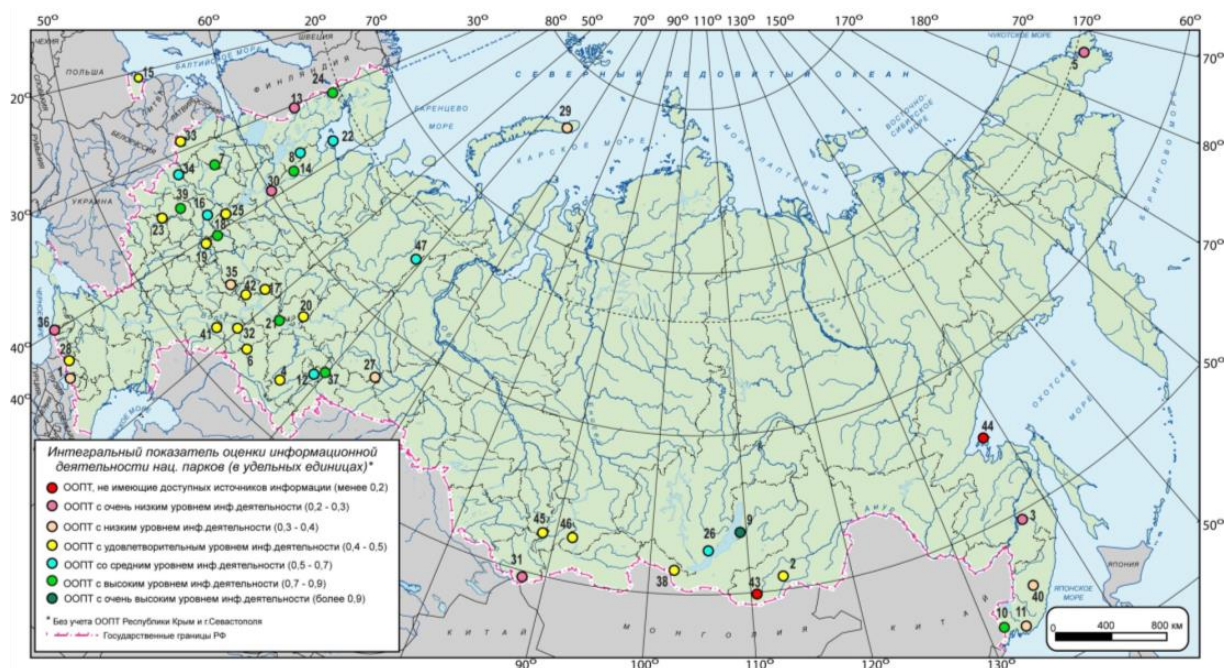


Figure 1. NP information services



Figure 2. Nature reserves information services

**National parks (Figure 1):**

1. Alaniya. 2. Alhanaj. 3. Anyujskij. 4. Bashkiriya. 5. Beringiya. 6. Buzulukskij bor. 7. Valdaiskij. 8. Vodlozerskij. 9. Zabajkalskij. 10. Zemlya Leoparda. 11. Zov tigra. 12. Zyuratkul. 13. Kalevalskij. 14. Kenozerskij. 15. Kurshskaya kosa. 16. Losinyj ostrov. 17. Marij Chodra. 18. Meshhera. 19. Meshherskij. 20. Nechkinskij. 21. Nizhnyaya Kama. 22. Onezhskoe Pomore. 23. Orlovskoe Polese. 24. Paanayarvi. 25. Pleshhevo ozero. 26. Pribajkalskij. 27. Pripyshminskie bory. 28. Prielbruse. 29. Russkaya Arktika. 30. Russkij Sever. 31. Sajlyugemskij. 32. Samarskaya Luka. 33. Sebezhsckij. 34. Smolenskoe Poozere. 35. Smolnyj. 36. Sochinskij. 37. Taganaj. 38. Tunkinskij. 39. Ugra. 40. Udegejskaya legenda. 41. Hvalynskij. 42. Chavash Varmane. 43. Chikoj. 44. Shantarskie ostrova. 45. Shorskij. 46. Shushenskij bor. 47. Yugyd va.

**Nature reserves (fig. 2):**

1. Azas. 2. Altajskij. 3. Astrahanskij. 4. Bajkalo-Lenskij. 5. Bajkalskij. 6. Barguzinskij. 7. Basegi. 8. Bastak. 9. Bashkirkij. 10. Belogore. 11. Bogdinsko-Baskunchakskij. 12. Bolonskij. 13. Bolshaya Kokshaga. 14. Bolshehehirciskij. 15. Bolshoj Arkticheskij. 16. Botchinskij. 17. Bryanskij les. 18. Bureinskij. 19. Verxne-Tazovskij. 20. Visimskij. 21. Vitimskij. 22. Visherskij. 23. Volzhsko-Kamskij. 24. Voronezhskij. 25. Voroninskij. 26. Galichya gora. 27. Gydanskij. 28. Dagestanskij. 29. Dalnevostochnyj. 30. Darvinskij. 31. Dauriskij. 32. Denezhkin kamen. 33. Dzherginskij. 34. Dzhugdzhurskij. 35. Zhigulevskij. 36. Zejskij. 37. Ilmenskij. 38. Kabardino-Balkarskij. 39. Kavkazskij. 40. Kaluzhskie zaseki. 41. Kandalakshskij. 42. Katunskij. 43. Kedrovaya Pad. 44. Kerzhenskij. 45. Kivach.



46. Kologrivskij les. 47. Komandorskij. 48. Komsomolskij. 49. Koryakskij. 50. Kostomukshskij. 51. Kronockij. 52. Kuzneckij Alatau. 53. Kurilskij. 54. Lazovskij. 55. Laplandskij. 56. Magadanskij. 57. Malaya Sosva. 58. Mordovskij. 59. Neneckij. 60. Nizhne-Svirskij. 61. Norskij. 62. Nurgush. 63. Okskij. 64. Olekminskij. 65. Orenburgskij. 66. Ostrov Vrangelya. 67. Pasvik. 68. Pechoro-Ilychskij. 69. Pinezhskij. 70. Polistovskij. 71. Poronajskij. 72. Privolzhskaya lesostep. 73. Prioksko-Terrasnyj. 74. Prisurskij. 75. Putoranskij. 76. Rdejskij. 77. Rostovskij. 78. Sayano-Shushenskij. 79. Severo-Osetinskij. 80. Sihote-Alinskij. 81. Soxondinskij. 82. Stolby. 83. Tajmyrskij. 84. Teberdinskij. 85. Tigirekskij. 86. Tungusksij. 87. Ubsunurskaya Kotlovina. 88. Ussurijskij. 89. Ust-Lenskij. 90. Utrish. 91. Hakasskij. 92. Hankajskij. 93. Hinganskij. 94. Hoperskij. 95. Centralno-Lesnoj. 96. Centralno-Chernozemnyj. 97. Centralnosibirskij. 98. Chernye zemli. 99. Shajtan-Tau. 100. Shulgan-Tash. 101. Erzi. 102. Yuganskij. 103. Yuzhno-Uralskij.

The first phase (end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century — 1917) was associated with increasing interest of the Russian intelligentsia to the North of Russia, as well as with the development of river and sea passenger transport. Before the First World War, in 1914 the interest for travel goes down.

The second phase is the Soviet (1918—1991). It is associated with the change of government in the country and consists of three periods: the first period (1918—1930) is characterised by weak interest in tourism and travel due to the focus on reconstruction and development of the national economy. The pre-war period 1931—1941 is characterized by the establishment of the first tourist station on the Kola Peninsula in the first State organization focal point for tourist-excursion traffic. Interest for tourism grew up after the WWII and recovery of the state economy.

The third phase of Post-soviet (1992 — now) consists of two periods: 1992—2000 and 2001 — the present time. The first period of post-Soviet phase: the polar tourism was associated with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the destruction of a single all-Union tourist-excursion system. The modern period is characterized by the increasing interest in natural cognitive tourism in the Arctic, including ecotourism, by both Russians and foreign tourists.

### Conclusion

In the Russian Arctic development strategy untill 2020, it is noted that “in order to strengthen good governance and socio-economic development in the AZRF it is necessary to provide: Arctic tourism development and expansion of environmentally friendly tourism activity in the Arctic; improvement of legislation to ensure tourism; its financial support and public-private partnerships and the Arctic tourism promotion at the national and international markets”<sup>7</sup>. The Arctic tourism development strategically and practically becomes an important element of socio-economic development of the Russian North.

The subjects of the Russian Federation, located above the Arctic Circle are invited called “Rossiiskoe Zapolyare” (“Russian Polar area”). This area of the Russian Arctic has extreme natural conditions, unique landscapes, vast uninhabited spaces, which imposes its own limitations to the

<sup>7</sup> О Стратегии развития Арктической зоны Российской Федерации и обеспечения национальной безопасности на период до 2020 года. URL: <http://government.ru/info/18360/> (Accessed: 18 March 2016).

organization of tourism and recreation. The Arctic has a variety of tourist and recreation resources, suitable for different types of tourism, including the journeys far from civilization.

Tourism and recreation in the Russian Arctic regions can help the employment and small business. The development of ecotourism contributes to the preservation of cultural and natural heritage, as well as increase the attention to indigenous cultures.

Authorities and polar management entities realize the potential, social and economic benefits from tourism. They develop and approve the strategy for socio-economic development of the regions, regional tourism development programmes and define tourism the priority of economic development. Tourism should be developed at the local level, in municipalities (or at district level). This approach is due to the current organizational structure of the territories, regions and the corresponding allocation of financial flows within the boundaries of the administrative division of the country, including those aimed at the development of tourism. It is clear that ecotourism is the most effective in those regions and municipalities where the tourist and recreationa potential is the highest.

The competitive advantages of development of ecological tourism in the Arctic region:

1. A large number of SPNR of different categories.
2. Large protected areas enable to “reserve” a part for infrastructure.
3. Diversity of natural conditions to use and to create a range of ecological products.
4. The Arctic tourism — the priority of the current world tourism.
5. The ability to preserve the heritage of the indigenous peoples of the North.
6. Involvement of the local population in economic activity.
7. Additional income for budgets.

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