

ЭКОЛОГИЧЕСКОЕ ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

DOI 10.22363/2313-2310-2021-29-3-266-276
UDC 502.3


Research article / Научная статья

Eco-friendly and agricultural destinations as green tourism trends

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Abstract. In recent years, the environmental pollution and global warming are having a strong impact on the choice of tourists travel methods around the world. The eco-friendly destinations and agricultural tours (food festivals are included in this list) are becoming the contemporary trend that attracts the attention of many people. The surveys with statistics data of different world tour operators prove this trend relevance. The study reflects the current preference of green tourism, the environmental protection tours for tourists, especially for the young people, and this is a trend that countries all over the world are aiming for. Thus, the countries are increasingly aware of the issue of protecting nature, and environment and culture are the basis for sustainable tourism development. Not only the government agencies are interested in creating green tourism destinations but also the tourism businesses are working on different ways to protect the environment. But between the good intentions and their manifestation there is a large gap which is expressed in a serious distortion when the specially protected natural areas having a high recreational potential are utilized for green tourism destinations at the cost of inevitable losses (the samples of this tactics are given on two countries cases).

Keywords: ways to protect the environment, green growth, green tourism, sustainable tourism, eco-friendly destinations, agricultural tours, food festivals

Article history: received 03.12.2020; revised 27.02.2021.


For citation: Talalova LN, Chu Thanh H, Gardiennet A. Eco-friendly and agricultural destinations as green tourism trends. *RUDN Journal of Ecology and Life Safety*. 2021;29(3): 266–276. <http://dx.doi.org/10.22363/2313-2310-2021-29-3-266-276>

Эко- и агротуризм как основные тренды зеленого туризма

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Аннотация. В последние годы проблемы загрязнения экологической среды и глобального потепления детерминировали актуальность поиска новых стратегий в организации туризма во всем мире. Экологический и сельскохозяйственный туризм, или агротуризм, включая гастрономический, стали популярными трендами, а численность сторонников этих видов туризма поступательно растет. Статистические данные исследований ведущих мировых туроператоров подтверждают релевантность тренда. Рассматриваются причины, обуславливающие популярность (особенно среди молодежи) зеленого туризма, и переход всех стран к повестке формирования туристической отрасли в контексте устойчивого развития. Показаны механизмы включения зеленого туризма в структуру такого развития. Отмечена роль не только государственных институтов по встраиванию в новую модель, но и бизнес-структур, которые также становятся важными игроками в реализации своих бизнес-проектов по защите окружающей среды. Вместе с тем актуализируется имеющийся серьезный разрыв (при кажущейся схожести целей) между стратегиями, направленными на сохранение экологического баланса территорий, и стратегиями развития на них экологического туризма, реализация последних неизбежно приводит к потерям. Приведен разбор ряда кейсов на примере конкретных стран.

Ключевые слова: меры по защите окружающей среды, экологичное развитие, зеленый туризм, устойчивое развитие, экологический туризм, сельскохозяйственный туризм, агротуризм, гастрономические фестивали

История статьи: поступила в редакцию 03.12.2020; принята к публикации 27.02.2021.

Для цитирования: Talalova L.N., Chu Thanh H., Gardiennet A. Eco-friendly and agricultural destinations as green tourism trends // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Экология и безопасность жизнедеятельности. 2021. Т. 29. № 3. С. 266–276. <http://dx.doi.org/10.22363/2313-2310-2021-29-3-266-276>

Introduction

In recent years, the environmental pollution and global warming are having a strong impact on the choice of tourists travel methods around the world. In particular, the green tourism is receiving a lot of attention from the young people. Eco-friendly destinations and tours are becoming the trend that attracts the attention of many people. The article first evaluates the current trend of choosing green tourism destinations through statistics (Booking.com, the Travel Horizons, Agritourismitaly, Spaintastic, Agoda.com) and relevant ratings (The Sustainable Top 100 Global Destinations). Besides the cause-and-effect analysis was productive for us too. It helped us to have a glance on the problem of a gap which exists between two sorts of strategies: one of them is oriented to preserve the ecological balance and the other one is oriented on eco-tourism development. At first look

they coincide in their objectives. Or the latter one must be complementary to the former. And it must be evident. In practice they often neither coincide nor complement each other. Vice versa, eco-tourism development often becomes a great challenge to the ecology preserving. Our task is to explore the twilight area.

Results and discussion

Through the review and the analysis of tourist statistics, one can see that green, eco-friendly tourist destinations always make up majority of tourists' choices, especially among the young people. Today's tourists tend to choose tourism that experiences local culture and most of them are willing to pay more for the eco-friendly places. The tourist destinations are becoming more environmentally friendly and with more visitors joining. They've turned into trends which put an emphasis on the local culture prevalence over the mass tourism. The Sustainable Top 100 Global Destination rating (which is very relevant and valid for tour operators) monitors countries with the best places for tourism, and all these places are eco-friendly. The utter task of each country is to obtain a position within this rating as a guarantee of being patronized by world tour operators for enlarging the number of tourists. For local tourist agencies it is a good chance to present its tour product on a worldwide scale. For many developing countries it is often the way to survive.

Green destinations are favored increasingly by tourists. According to a recent study by Booking.com which is one of the leading digital travel platforms in the world almost three-quarters of travellers will offer sustainable travel options to save the planet, and the company has announced its travel start-ups with financial assistance.¹ Green tourism is a type of tourism based on natural resources and indigenous culture with the usage of renewable energy sources and developing green products to protect the environment. In his latest report on the impact of the pandemic the UN Secretary-General A. Guterres marked the importance of transforming the tourism sector in a “climate friendly”² manner. Planetary health and a human life become closely connected. The green tourism trend is supported by young people, and it also spreads actions to protect nature. A Facebook account of Byron Román launched the garbage movement with the hashtag #ChallengeForChange at many tourist sites, and it has become a worldwide trend. Not only the young people but people of all ages start favouring for green tourism, and it receives a widespread attention, especially from those who have a need for experiential tourism and modern travelling with knowledge. Today the 55% of global travellers want to go to the places which have unique cultural values and pristine ecology. The Travel Horizons survey found that 58% of US adults believe it to be good to know about the local culture of the destination they are visiting.

¹ Wilson A. Changing travel: the sustainable startups boosted by awards from Booking.com. *The Guardian*. 21st May 2019. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2019/may/21/sustainable-travel-startups-booking-com-awards-fund-social-enterprise> (accessed: 30.10.2020).

² World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). *UN Secretary-General: “It is imperative that we rebuild the tourism sector in a safe, equitable and climate friendly manner.”* 25th August 2020. Available from: <https://www.unwto.org/news/un-secretary-general-it-is-imperative-that-we-rebuild-the-tourism-sector> (accessed: 09.11.2020).

Agricultural tourism is thriving again. One form of tourism that has recently blossomed around the world is agritourism. Visitors can both visit the place and admire the scenery while participating in some daily agricultural activities of the indigenous people. The agritourism model can bring the great amounts of economic resources for people. A good example of it is Vineyards in the Soave Valley, Italy, traditional vineyards that attract tourists and provide income for more than 3,000 families. No room for ecology preserving problems. Agritourism is extremely popular in Italy, Spain and France. Though the agritourism birthplace since 1952 is France with its farm and rural routes, Italy seems to be the Europe's leader in the agritourism, the country also has a professional Agritourism Italy website that helps visitors to be contacted with farms, and you can even view properties and make reservations online.

There are some illustrations when different food festivals worldwide as the samples of agritourism influence not only the festive sociability but on the regional economics, and the impacts are significant. Among them there are Oktoberfest in Munich (Bavaria, Germany), Limassol Wine Festival (the Lemesos Gardens, Limassol, Cyprus), the Lexington Barbecue Festival (North Carolina, the USA), etc. which evince the preponderance. La Tomatina (Spain) is one of them. The overwhelming majority of them have been a strong primordial (often religious) tradition.

But as to La Tomatina which is also associated with Luis Bertran and the Mare de Deu dels Decemparats (Mother of God the Defenseless) nobody knows the genesis. The versions cover "a local food fight among friends, a juvenile class war, a volley of tomatoes from bystanders at a carnival parade, a practical joke on a bad musician, and the anarchic aftermath of an accidental lorry spillage. One popular theory is that disgruntled townspeople attacked city councilmen with tomatoes during a town celebration."³ By all means, there exists the mature judgment that the origin of La Tomatina food fight festival is surprising because of the tradition genesis: imagine that it started with the political confrontation of young people who used the tomatoes as the only 'weapon' they could find (even if another version that it was a mere quarrel between two friends is also relevant). After tomato-throwing the clash was over. It was proven to be so satisfying that it happened the next year after and after, since the year 1944 (1945) up to nowadays but like a pure fun. On the last Wednesday of August during an hour, from 11 up to 12 am (water cannons are launched to start and to close La Tomatina) thousands of people coming from all over the world make tomato battles on Plaza del Pueblo, just in the center of the town, and La Tomatina turned to be the most popular food festival, Pamplona's Bull Run is the second in the list.⁴

But an hour is for fun and half a day and even more is needed for communal services with their fire trucks to clean up the mess and to wash the streets. Taking place in Buñol, a very small city and municipality in the province Valencia, located approximately 38 km west of Valencia, this annual a week-long festival which brings from 20 to 40 thousand (now the number is restricted to 22 thousand) of tourists and

³ La Tomatina Tours. Available from: <https://www.latomatinatours.com> (accessed: 25.11.2020).

⁴ Dolasia M. Tomatoes take center stage at Spain's La Tomatina Festival. *DOGOnews*. 30th August 2013. Available from: <https://www.dogonews.com/2013/8/30/tomatoes-take-center-stage-at-spains-la-tomatina-festival> (accessed: 24.10.2020).

9 thousand local population all together for the giant tomato fight has become a management brain teaser indeed. The same may be said on the ecological situation in the surroundings. Let us explore this paradox. Surely, at first the festival was mainly local as tomatoes grown in Extremadura in the west of Spain on purpose for the festival, and most part of participants was from Buñol and its rural surroundings. Today, according to the site of La Tomatina Tours, people come to take part in food fight with more than 100 metric tons of over-ripe tomatoes which are everywhere in the streets.⁵ Thus, the number of guests grew several times over the years, and it turned into the first problem in the long run. The further problems are determined by the first one and they concern the small area, the weak infrastructure of the periphery town and its security while being overcrowded. Besides the town's residents are reluctant to participate in the festival because they feel endangered.

The mayor was forced to say that the town has lost the spirit of La Tomatina, and there is a lack of space, it starts to be dangerous. Buñol's annual fiesta exists for almost a century (precisely it is 75 years old, the festival was banned during Franco's regime, i.e. the National Catholicism period, and after his demise in the 1970s it was renewed) but it started attracting audience when the media covered it at a worldwide scale. In pre-Internet period the popularity grew through the 'word of mouth.' "With the Internet there came new modes of communication <...>. This evolution has marked all sectors of industry, including the event sector" [1. P. 9]. As a result, the festival has gained in popularity exponentially and thousands of people want 'to experience' the local festival in a very small city. This striving for experience led to the consequences: reaching its highest peak of 40 thousand participants versus 9 ones of autochthonous population. The city is supposed to hold 10 thousand people roughly but once a year this number multiplies by a maximum of four. We could potentially argue that some sea resort cities have the similar problems especially in summer period. There is a major difference. Coastal cities are built up to welcome people who rent a house for a season. Predominantly agricultural Buñol is somewhat far from the coastal city, there is no viable structure (roads, healthcare, shops and markets, hotels, restaurants and cafes, museums, etc.) to welcome tourists whose number is four times higher than the maximum permissible one.

In those regards the city council made some decisions (limitations) on the festival and ones to come. The first one was the decreases in the number, i.e. only 22 thousand were allowed each year. The second one was the introduction of the payment. The participation isn't free of charge anymore for the foreigners, and the participants pay a fee on 15 euros. The inhabitants are still allowed to participate free of charge. The organizers reserve 5000 free tickets for them. This has at least two great effects, the selling access rights to participants is allowing the stricter control over the amount of people joining the festival, and the collected funds are used to reinforce the security during the festival for better protection of both the guests and the locals. Surveillance and security became the key words which reflected the inventions done by the town officials for making la Tomatina a controlled fest. The next step was the following. The festival was managed by local authorities who caught that the obligations must be compartmentalized.

⁵ La Tomatina Tours. Available from: <https://www.latomatinatours.com> (accessed: 25.11.2020).

Then the festival had been privatized because the town officials sold the rights to the Spanish tour operator located in Valencia. The latter runs the festival nowadays. It is Spaintastic. The changes are interfering with the ways the participants are expecting the festive days to be. The tickets are sold only by tour operator who has better understanding of participants' needs and desires. One of the innovations is the wristbands which became practically obligatory in recent years, and they allow paying for the consumption via the site through the usage of a smart card which is integrated with the smart bracelet. Special trains are laid on, and recently the company started organizing bus transportation from Valencia (15 euro) and Madrid (alternatively, one can rent a car). The tour operator even created a special menu of traditional Spanish cuisine for Buñol restaurants. The most famous food fight festival is now more than ever under the competent surveillance assuring which is an absolute guaranty of a bright and safe future.

Moreover, Spaintastic tries to attract the Spain-devoted tourists by other popular folk festivals, precisely in Valencia. Valencian celebration Las Fallas de València is a good example. This is one more traditional festivity (“Night of Fire”) in commemoration of St. Joseph, and it was added to UNESCO’s intangible cultural heritage of humanity list in 2016. Not only folk festivals but also Valencia itself, in its turn, might be able to lure the tourists. A trip to La Tomatina can provide a good opportunity to explore Spain’s third largest city: “Valencia has all you want”,⁶ San Nicolás frescoes are also known as the Valencian Sistine Chapel, the authentic historical center of València el Barrio del Carmen is, according to the VLC.VALENCIA Official Website, a ‘bohemian’ territory.⁷ Thus, the tourists choose to visit La Tomatina and to look at the sightseeing of Valencia as well. Not vice versa. The food festival has crossed national and cultural boundaries and captured the interest of many countries. Inspired by La Tomatina, Tomato Battles are also held in Sutamarchán (Colombia), San José de Trojas (Costa Rica), Dongguan (China), Quillón (Chile), and multiple cities in the United States including Reno and Copper Mountain, Dallas, and Seattle.

While exporting the festival Spain made the semi-calque of La Tomatina. Instead of tomatoes bunches of grapes are utilized now. Being a partial copy of La Tomatina, this food-throwing festival oriented for youth, nevertheless, has a status of a unique event because the grape fight takes place. Held in a picturesque Binissalem town in the mid-September (the duration is more than half a month) Festa des Vermar (Wine Fair) which celebrated the 55th anniversary is the annual festival after the grape harvest on the island of Mallorca. The fight ceremony copies La Tomatina precisely: ‘Dionysus’ recites a poem and gives his blessing for the great grape battle with the firing of a rocket from the balcony. This small ancient town is famous for its wine from last batch of grapes and the legend says that in Roman times the locals had the similar celebration just for getting rid of spoiled grapes. The differences between festivals are the number of international tourists (approximately 1500 participants instead of thousands in

⁶ Mullins D. La Tomatina. *RTE*. 26th June 2009. Available from: <https://www.rte.ie/lifestyle/travel/2009/0626/141194-latomatina/> (accessed: 20.11.2020).

⁷ Barrio del Carmen: living history. Available from: <https://www.visitvalencia.com/en/what-to-see-valencia/historical-centre/del-carmen-neighborhood> (accessed: 26.11.2020).

Buñol) and the location (not in the center of the town but on the outskirts of it). There is an excuse: Binissalem is practically not a town but a very small village. But there is an advantage: it is a 17-day wine fair as well, and besides of music, activities for children, wine testing sessions, its culmination is the harvest supper Fideus de Vermar, a traditional dish (a type of paella made with short noodles instead of rice, cooked with lamb, tomatoes, sobrassada and the famous Binissalem red wine). The smart management made the festival to be the global one too like La Tomatina.

The same tendencies could be seen in Middle East region, tourism business recognizes the increasing interest to the so-called “Halal tourism” [2], the neologism was first time used in professional literature in 2010 by Battour [3]. As to Asia, in S. Korea for example, the agricultural tours are considered one of the strategies of the agricultural development [4]. But not only the developed Asian countries follow green tourism strategies, many Central Asian countries which have maintained a ‘pastoral realm’ image [5] are oriented to green tourism too. One of the examples is Tajikistan Hisor valley which is famous of its archaeological sources as a territory where the Great Silk Road has taken place [6]. It was the Arachun state (before the Arab invasion), the Shuman state, the part of the Samanid Empire (9–10 c.), the Turk, Mongolian Empires part, the Emirate of Bukhara part (19–20 c.) [7]. The madrassah, the fortress with its arched gate is a museum now. But Hisor is not only the Middle Ages monument, it is the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages period one, it is one of the first early man campsites of the Neanderthal period. Being excavated (1938) by the A.P. Okladnikov and his colleagues’ expedition in the Teshik-Tash Cave in the Bajsuntau mountain range in neighbor Uzbekistan, the Neanderthal skeleton radically changed the prior theory of the Neanderthals’ spreading [8].

Later A.P. Okladnikov within the historical-materialist epistemology of Soviet archaeology described the emotional world of the early man. After the burial study he said (though his interpretation is under debates) that 50.000 years ago the early man started idolizing the Sun and the Sky. Another illustration of an early man emotional sphere reflection is cave painting. Thus, he speaks on the epic hyperbolization, and the samples of this sort of objective reality reflection are the hypertrophied, exaggerated features of the depicted animals. This manner of painting has been pushed to its logical limit to the end of the Upper Paleolithic period. It became stylized, decorative and purely ornamental but in the Paleolithic period it didn’t exist yet. The early man draws expressively what he merely sees. And the great leap in the nature development from the animal to a human being has taken place here in Historical Tajikistan too. Tajikistan being practically an agricultural country has managed to organize an international-oriented eco-tourism market and to form within the eco-tours the well-done infrastructure, the roads are included. Thus, all the ancient monuments and the cave paintings are in a danger now. The specialists say they may be lost completely [9].

Though Hisor is also a Specially Protected Natural Area (PAs), this sort of areas is objects of national heritage. By the decisions of Tajikistan authorities (since 2003), they are fully or partially withdrawn from agricultural use, and have special protection. The Hisor Historical and Cultural Reserve in South Tajikistan

is a PAs, an object of national heritage with its nature areas and as well an object of world significance in scientific, historical, cultural, art and environmental spheres. Thus, in 2009, the program on integration of ecotourism on the slopes of the Hisor Mountains has been launched, and it was done according to the “Biodiversity Hissar (Hisor) Mountains” project initiated by the UN. It involves three PAs: the Tajik National Park, the Shirkent Historical and Natural Park, the Sari Hosor Natural Park. A good sample is Sari Hosor, it is located on one of Tajikistan’s mountainous beauty spots (on the Vakhsh ridge), and it is an illustration of ecotourism project validity. This is a good sample of mature Tajik nature: the area is upstream along the Surkhob River at an altitude of 1,200–1,600 m, it has both low and high mountains, but mostly the mountains are middle-sized, they reach 1,200–1,300 m above the sea level. The borders of the area range in altitude between 1,200–3,500 m. Since 1996 Sari Hosor village and Shokhidon administrative center have been a part of Khatlon region (Baldzhuvan district). The name ‘Sari Hoksor’ has an ancient history and many different meanings. According to locals, it is the village which is located on a hill of white sand (Sari Hoksor).

Sari Hosor has rich recreational resources with unique cultural and historical sites, and they give clear insight into the lifestyle, traditions and crafts of the local people. The terrain is highly complex and varies widely from that one of other regions, being flat, accumulative and one of the ‘middle-mountain’ type. The terrain was formed by porous geological deposits of the Carboniferous Period. This indicates the diversity of the area’s ecological system. Sari Hosor is fed by the Surkhob, Tire, Obi Mazor, Shurobdaryo and Sharsharai Pashti Bog rivers. Sari Hosor nature is unique in its beauty and diversity. Perfect harmony reigns in this absolute paradise with forests of abundant fruit tree forests on both sides of the gorge and thick meadows and stony tracts. In the valley there is a waterfall near the village Mulokoni. The water cascades down from a 50 m rock while splashing into millions of drops which shimmer in the sunlight with all rainbow colors. Being high in the mountains, the water flows down the valley; there are clear springs, shady nut tree groves, perennial plane trees, diverse wildlife, and all this beauty is covered by the azure dome of the cloudless sky. The villages in the valley are of low population. Life in the villages runs according to the ancient traditions from generation to generation. This is how the people have learned to live in harmony and peace with their environment, not fighting against it, but contributing to its transformation, not as masters, but more like ‘children of nature’, it is a pure pastoral life [10. P. 107]. Now a rehabilitation center and other leisure facilities are being constructed in order to develop the area’s ecotourism. The officials comprehend their responsibility before nature, and all the possible (but not necessary) eco-oriented measures are maintained.

Green tourism development must be the key to sustainable development.

In fact, many customers tend to choose eco-friendly facilities and hotels, although the prices may be higher than hotels in the same class. A travel agency survey of Agoda.com found that 58% of hotel guests prefer an eco-friendly hotel. It affirms that green tourism is not a guarantee for sustainable tourism development but soon a solution to increase the number of high-cost tourists and civilized awareness when participating in tourism. Though many countries have already the specific

policies and actions. The best known one is probably Sweden, with its ambitious goal: to eliminate fossil fuels from electricity generation by year 2040 within its borders.

Russia is a large country, sparsely populated, ranked as the 5th in the world, thus, it has a great ecotourism potential. There are all the planet climate zones from arctic to subtropical ones, different and unique landscapes, 11 natural objects are under the UNESCO's patronage, 15 are waiting to become the objects of this very status. The Prime Minister M. Mishustin said that the government views the development of ecotourism as one of the most perspective spheres. Within the National project "Ecology.RF" the ecotourism is one of the major constituents. In Russia there exist 231 Specially Protected Natural Areas (PAs) of the federal level (108 nature reserves, 63 national parks, 60 reserves) with the unique ecosystems and habitats of rare species, and the network of them is expanding. The Caucasus as a sample offered several territories which will be established as national parks or nature reserves: the "Utrish" Nature Reserve, the Sochi National Park, the "Erzi" Reserve in Ingushetia (the Jeyrah-Assin basin), the "Itzari" Nature Park in Dagestan, the biosphere polygon of the Teberda Reserve or the migratory corridor for connection the Teberdinsky area with the Caucasus Nature Reserve, as well as the Natural Complex "Tarki-Tau" in its status of a monument of nature of regional importance.⁸ During the recent years in Russia there appeared 14 PAs, among them there are the State National Natural Parks "Samur" in the South Dagestan, "Zigalga" in the South Urals, the inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list "The Lena Pillars" in the Sakha Republic (the right bank of the middle part of Lena River in Yakutia), "Kyutalyk" in Yakutia, "Koygorodsky" in the Komi region, "Tokinsk-Stanovoy Range" in Amur region, the "Medvezhy Islands" Nature Reserve in the East Siberian Sea (Yakutia), etc. 24 PAs are close to be open. All of them are the objects of national heritage. The most popular routes are Lake Baikal, the Altay region, the Putorana Plateau, 5 national parks of the Far East, the Black Sea region, etc. The eco-friendly and agricultural destinations become more and more popular among the Russian and international guests though the tourist infrastructure of Russian Federation is far from being perfect. The most popular types of green tours in Russia became fishing, kayaking and rafting, hunting, equine tourism, visiting apiaries and eco-farms.

Conclusion

Tourism industry depends largely on natural resources. Thus, it is necessary to protect nature for further sustainable development. Tourism needs efforts to cope with global climate change. Development of the so-called green tourism products will increase competitiveness and attractiveness to the destination. Fast-growing and 'hot' tourism markets often experience bad environmental problems, and then the visitors have a negative impression of the place. At Paola Mar, the Venice city government used pauses which were determined by Covid-19 to bring the locals back to live in the city permanently. Not only the government agencies are inte-

⁸ WWF. *Regions. The Caucasus. Development of system of especially protected natural territories*. Available from: <https://wwf.ru/en/regions/the-caucasus/development-of-system-of-especially-protected-natural-territories/> (accessed: 01.12.2020).

rested in creating green tourism destinations but also the tourism businesses are working on different ways to protect the environment. The Walt Disney Co has announced earlier that all Disney locations worldwide would be non-disposable plastic. The concrete examples are enough to be enumerated.

Summarizing the above-mentioned items, we may emphasize that the countries are increasingly aware of the issue of protecting nature, and environment and culture are the basis for sustainable tourism development. In future, the green tourism destinations will be in further development, and the further generations of tourists will be more responsible. Simultaneously, the analysis shows that though the goals of green tourism, precisely eco-tourism, are formulated by countries and organizations in a tolerant way, they proclaim the sustainable future, nevertheless there is often a real danger for eco-balance because the real actor of goal realization is a human being. The transformation of the territories with a high recreational potential into the attractive green destinations are possible but at great cost, at the cost of inevitable losses. The task is to minimize them.

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