**The role of tourism marketing in economic development of the Republic of Karelia**

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*Abstract*. The subject of this study is “Russki Sever” tourist company, which is registered in the Republic of Karelia, a region with more than 200 tourist sites. The total income from inbound tourism in the Republic exceeds 2 billion rubles per year. Karelia is visited by more than 1.3 million Russian and foreign tourists a year. It is assumed that the tourism sector can make a significant contribution to the disclosure of the economic potential of the Republic of Karelia, and this, in turn, will lead to an improvement in the quality of life of citizens of the region.

Key words: the Republic of Karelia, tourism, tourism marketing

Marketing is necessary for the enterprises of the tourist sphere, as their activity in the conditions of the market and competition is always connected with bigger or smaller financial risk which degree especially increases in foreign economic activity [1, 7]. Tourism in its main characteristics does not have any fundamental differences from other forms of economic activity. Therefore, all the essential provisions of modern marketing can be applied in tourism [3, 70].

As part of this study, the company "Russki Sever" was chosen for the analysis of marketing activities.

The company was founded in 2009 in the city of Petrozavodsk and initially carried out activities as a travel Agency for the implementation of permits abroad, and as a tour operator in the Republic of Karelia. In 2012, the company changed the direction of its activities; it was decided to focus exclusively on domestic tourism in the Republic of Karelia as a tour operator, that is, to become the organizer of their own excursions and tours. The company purchased ships for the carriage of passengers on routes "Belomorsk – Solovetsky isl.”, "Petrozavodsk – Kizhi isl.". The company also organizes services for cruise ship tourists arriving mainly from St. Petersburg and Moscow.

Since 2010, the company annually serves from 17 to 21.5 thousand tourists.

The company is one of the largest in Petrozavodsk, evidenced by a large client flow, a large volume of regular customers, its own fleet, a large staff.

The main consumer contingent of the company – tourists aged 40 to 65 years. Most often they purchase family tours for 2-4 persons. Travel motivation: rest, cultural enrichment, treatment in sanatoriums.

It should be noted that marketing strategies should be aimed at winning the consumer location not only of tourists of the specified age and the formation of strong preferences, both real and potential customers, but also to attract new customers, both from tourists and travel agencies. The expansion of the consumer category requires the development of a new tourism product and advertising strategies.

In the course of research in 2016-2018, a detailed analysis of the marketing activities of the tourist company was carried out.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of advertising activities in the company is carried out by interviewing customers and employees, as well as through monitoring the statistics of visits to websites related to the company (visit, click on links). When a potential buyer comes to the office, he is asked about the sources from which he learned about the company.

According to the results of surveys of the summer season 2016, it was revealed that most customers pay attention to advertising in Internet resources and radio.

“Russki Sever” mainly uses 3 pricing strategies: maximizes current profits, holds positions in the market and gains leadership in terms of product quality.

The strategy of maximizing current profits is characterized as the supply of unique or low-frequency services at affordable prices, when the demand for certain types of tourist services significantly exceeds the supply.

The strategy of gaining leadership in terms of product quality requires that the company's product is the highest quality of all offered on the market [2, 106].

Retention of high positions in the market of tourist services is achieved through the analysis of prices and offers of other travel agencies. In the case of the company under consideration is observed in the field of water transport.

During the research work on the basis of the travel agency, three marketing projects were implemented. The first project was the proposal "Postcard from Karelia". In preparation for the summer season in the printing house were ordered postcards with photos of tourist sites of Karelia, as well as with animals that are associated with customers with the North-West of Russia. On the reverse side of the card there are fields for self-filling, as well as information about the company. The turnover of the card is designed in red and white colors, which are the corporate colors of the organization. During the season, each client who visited the offices of the travel company, had the opportunity to take any postcard for free or by filling it out, free of charge to send anywhere in the world. The offices were equipped with a special mailbox to ensure that tourists were able to lower them the filled cards. Office managers at the end of the day sent postcards to post offices at the expense of the company.

Advantages of the action " Postcard from Karelia»:

1. The card is at the same time an advertising brochure of the company - managed to cope with the problem of disposal of potential customers of advertising flyers. Receiving feedback about positive emotions from their loved ones, they became interested in this tourist destination, as well as the activities of the company.

2. The cost of postcards and stamps is fully compensated by the cost of any tour offered by the travel agency. The cost of the order of the cards in the printing companies does not exceed the cost of the flyers.

The second project was the action "Offer your price". Tourists had the opportunity to choose the price of the excursion to the island of Solovki within the established limits, where the minimum value was the actual price of the excursion with a 20% discount. The higher the price offered by the client, the greater the possibility of choosing the date. If a tourist was willing to pay a minimum price, he proposed those dates in which the load was minimal, with an aim to its increase. As shown by further analysis, this offer was in great demand than just the announcement of discounts on excursions on a certain date. Tourists were attracted by the opportunity to manage their own funds within one tour.

The third project was a system of food labels. On one side of the label was printed the inscription "Gift from Karelia" with combinations: "to my mom", "to my dad", "to my brother", "to my sister", "to my friend", "to my colleague" and others. On the other side was information about the website of a travel company. Labels were attached in stores (by agreement) to certain products made exclusively in Karelia, which were purchased as a gift to loved ones.

In 2016, the first two projects were successful. It is evidenced by the increased interest of tourists according to their reviews, the increase in applications and bookings of excursions for the next season, positive feedback from tour guides and employees of the company.

In the summer season of 2017, existing projects were supported, with the exception of product labels, as they were not effective. Based on the survey conducted during the 2017 season, aimed at tourists who purchase tours directly in the sales offices of Petrozavodsk, it was found that the most effective types of advertising were radio advertising, as well as the distribution of booklets.

To identify the role of tourism marketing in the economy of Karelia, the data of the Information tourist center of the Republic of Karelia were analyzed: characteristics of the incoming flow; calculation of direct income from inbound tourism in the Republic of Karelia; calculation of additional personal expenses of organized tourists (stationary accommodation, tourists from cruise ships).

In the course of the analysis of the obtained data and the conducted research, it was concluded that the tourism industry is an extremely important segment of the economy of the Republic of Karelia, is 8% of the gross regional product, of which about 3% is provided by tourist enterprises.

In modern conditions, tourist companies and travel agencies of the Republic of Karelia need to pursue an active marketing policy, improve marketing services, expand and stimulate their activities, as this directly affects the development of the region's economy.

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