

# ARCTIC TOURISM IN RUSSIA HAS JUST STARTED



North Pole, Arctic land and the way of life of indigenous people. These are the main themes of arctic tourism attracting a growing number of adventurous souls.

On June 15, the Russian Arctic opened its doors to tourists for the first time this year. The nuclear icebreaker “50 Years of Victory” sailed from Murmansk for 11 days in the Arctic Ocean. **On board, there were 125 tourists from Asia and Europe.**

The arctic tourism in Russia is developing fast. The government is closely monitoring the interest of visitors. “The potential of tourism development in the Arctic is obvious and far from fully realized,” said the head of the Federal Tourism Agency Oleg Safonov.

“By combining the efforts of the Federal Tourism Agency, regional authorities, members of the tourist market, the Russian Arctic can and should be made accessible. It possesses natural and cultural originality that is interesting to many,” Safonov added.

Each country of the “Arctic Five” tries to use the tourism potential of their northern lands. Denmark is the most successful country in this regard, which includes the easily accessible (from transport point of view) Greenland. Norwegian Svalbard is also popular with tourists around the world with comfortable accommodation in the capital of the archipelago Longyearbyen.

The Arctic zone of the Russian Federation offers several options for a vacation. Cruises to the North Pole, journey to the islands and archipelagos of the Northern Sea, as well as familiarity with the Russian Polar region and the way of life of indigenous northern peoples. Despite such a variety, however, Russia cannot boast of good transport connections or comfortable tourist resorts. To occupy a higher a place in the ranking of Arctic tourism countries, Russia should solve several problems. Both investments as well as research are a must.

The biggest dream of an arctic tourist is the North pole. One can get there by air, in a helicopter. Or on an atomic icebreaker - and thus only from Russia, the only country with a nuclear icebreaker fleet.

A cruise to the North Pole takes about 12 days. During the cruise tourists enter bays and archipelagos, enjoy polar barbecues and swim in the Arctic Ocean. The cost of such a journey starts from 24 thousand dollars, according to websites of travel agencies.

Sky-high prices for tours in the Arctic are justified by the high price to pay for transportation of passengers in the Arctic waters. The Federal Tourism Agency considers it necessary to develop a flexible system of tariffs for the construction of the Northern Sea Route and the rates of port charges for passenger ships. This will reduce the total cost of the tours and allow Russian tour operators to compete with foreign companies.

The demand in Russia is low now because of the price and preference to spend a vacation in warmer

temperatures. Arctic tourists arrive mainly from China, Germany, Switzerland and the United States and tours are organized by foreign agencies.

For the transformation of arctic tourism into mass industry it is necessary to improve port infrastructure, adapting it to receive various types of ships. **An important factor is the construction of hotels in the major tourist areas.**

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of Russia have a promising project, which concerns national park "Russian Arctic" - the archipelago of Franz Josef Land and the northern part of Novaya Zemlya archipelago. By 2019, multifunctional complexes should be built at Cape Desire and on the Hayes island. Helipads, hotels for 50 people and much more. According to the head of the Ministry of Natural Resources, 700 million rubles will be allocated from the federal budget for this project.

"This will make the Arctic tourism in Russia more accessible. Of course, it will not be as cheap as a trip to Egypt. The number will probably be no higher than 100,000 tourists. But we could also think of weekend tours," says Alexander Kirilov, head of the "Russian Arctic" National Park.

As the conditions are improved in the Russian market, travel packages will be gradually more affordable.

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