

08.00.00 Economical sciences

08.00.00 Экономические науки

UDC 338

«Sochi Goes International» – Required Actions to be Taken to Facilitate the Stay for International Tourists¹ Eduard Besel² Ivan Cakaric³ Evgeniya V. Vidishcheva

¹ Heilbronn University, Germany
University of Heilbronn, Heilbronn city
Student

E-mail: eduard_besel@gmx.net

² Heilbronn University, Germany
University of Heilbronn, Heilbronn city
Student

E-mail: i.cakaric@t-online.de

³ Sochi State University, Russia
Sovetskaya st. 26a, Sochi 354000
PhD (Economy), associate professor
E-mail: evqenia-vv@mail.ru

ABSTRACT. As host city of many big international sport events, Sochi's publicity is increasing and people from all over the world will discover it as a new travel destination. To guarantee and enlarge the attractiveness and popularity of the city, some essential improvements, which would facilitate the stay for international tourists, are recommended.

Keywords: Improvements; international tourism; sustainability; attractiveness; recommendations.

INTRODUCTION. For many years Sochi has been a popular place for many Russians and people from the countries of former Soviet Union. Even the president of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, has his summer residence in Sochi. But outside Russia, the city is not well-known yet and neither during summer nor winter many international tourists are in the city.

From 2014 this situation will change: As host city of the Winter Olympic and Paralympic games, one of the biggest sport events in the world, it will be focused by many people all over the world. Many of these will hear the city's name for the first time; others will see how the place has changed in a very short period of time. Furthermore the Russian Formula One Grand Prix and several football matches of the FIFA World Cup 2018 will take place in Sochi. All these international events will attract people from many countries. Like in the former host cities of these sport events the international tourism will also increase.

Through all these mentioned big and important events Sochi has the chance to represent itself and especially its diversity to the whole world. It is one of few holiday resorts which can offer so many different possibilities at the same time: in the morning people can do winter sports in the Red Valley and after that go swimming and sunbathing in the Black Sea. Furthermore there is a beautiful and untouched nature which invites to hiking and relaxing. Currently a lot of money is being invested in the city and its surrounding in order to be well prepared for the coming events. Nobody doubts that the world will see fantastic and unforgettable Olympic Games.

Problems regarding transport or information will be solved for example by volunteer programs. The actual problem is that the events are limited in time. After that Sochi and its inhabitants will continue their everyday life and the world will look at the next city. If Sochi wants to become a popular holiday resort in the long run it has to provide all the comfort and information

to all tourists and visitors who come after all these events. Regarding this fact, the city is not ready yet. There are still many obstacles which probably are not planned to be changed. But these can be frustrating and hindering if someone wants to relax, discover the city or just enjoy the free time. It can even happen that some tourists will not come again or recommend Sochi as holiday resort.

This report is going to describe some of these possible obstacles and will present some suggestions for improvement. Most of the facts are based on personal research and experience as foreign visitors of Russia's future sport metropolis.

Transportation

Coming to Sochi the tourists will have to get from one point to another. This can be for example just to get from the hotel to the beach but also to visit places which are further away. All current transport possibilities are not ready and prepared for international tourists [1].

"Marshrutkas", busses and trains

The problem of "Marshrutkas" and busses is that their routes and stations are not well defined and for foreign visitors it is not easy to understand which bus to take to reach their goal. Firstly all routes are written in Cyrillic. For someone who cannot read that, it is not possible to see if it is the right bus or "Marshrutka" they are entering. Secondly there is no possibility to inform oneself which bus number drives which route. At the bus stations there is no plan or map where one can see which route is the right one. There is neither a possibility to know which bus station comes next when being already inside the bus. And very often the English skills of the drivers are limited so that in many situations, asking is not very helpful. All these facts lead to the situation that a visitor just cannot use these transport possibilities and getting from one point to another can be very problematic.

Another problem is the further public transport possibilities at Sochi airport. The timetables for busses are very often useless because the busses do not arrive or they are delayed. The possibility to use the "Aeroexpress train" is also limited because currently, it runs only four times a day from Sochi train station to the airport and back. Either the travellers arrive at the airport hours before their flight or they have to wait for a long time when arriving in Sochi. Both situations are inconvenient.

What to improve:

- At the bus stations should be placed maps where it is visible which route the several bus numbers are driving and where they stop. All information should also be written in English or at least Latin letters so that people without Russian language skills can inform themselves.

- In the busses or "Marshrutkas" should be a possibility where it becomes clear what station comes next. The easiest way is to place a plan of the route somewhere. A further possibility is to install screens which provide the passengers with the needed information.

- On the stations itself it should be written the name both in Cyrillic and Latin letters so that everybody can easily see if he or she has to leave the bus or not.

- As the busses and "Marshrutkas" run frequently in the city centre and because of the traffic, timetables are not that important to be placed. But at the airport it should be ensured that the busses arrive on time and the timetables are always up to date. Otherwise the holidays are stressful and frustrating before they even started.

- The "Aeroexpress" should run more frequently. Actually it should be ensured that it is the most reliable, fastest and comfortable transportation possibility from and to the Airport [2].

Taxis

Besides the public transport, taxis are one of the most important transport possibilities in cities. The individual and quick service is one of the biggest advantages of a taxi. For this service passengers are also willing to pay more than for public transportation. But the pricing should be transparent and the passenger should have the guarantee to trust the driver and that the shortest route is chosen in order to avoid additional costs. In Sochi the taxi system cannot provide this service yet. The prices for a certain route are a matter of trade and it is not defined by the kilometres. Further there are many unofficial taxis which define their prices by their own. A tourist who cannot speak Russian could get into the situation that a drive with a taxi can get too expensive. The risk of fraud is pretty high and tourists can be frustrated especially in a situation if they are dependent on a taxi [3].

What to improve:

- The taxi system and its pricing should be transparent and trusty. That can be reached by installation of taximeters in all taxis. Further all taxis should be official and the controls to avoid the unofficial ones should be higher.

- Especially at the airport there should be information how much a usual ride to a certain, frequently requested place cost, for example the main train station in Sochi, the centre of Adler or the Red Valley.

Orientation and Information

Being in a foreign city it is always difficult to orientate and to find places you want to visit. Before doing holidays usually people inform themselves where to go, what sights to see or about the possibilities of doing excursions on their own. Sochi has many interesting and beautiful places and especially a diversified and unique nature. There are already many small stands which offer excursions to the different places. But the problem is that there is only too little information in other languages than Russian. Furthermore in the city there are no possibilities where tourists receive information when requested. This can be difficult and very problematic especially in case a doctor is needed or any important documents are lost. Additionally there are too little maps in the city centre where foreigners can see where their current position is and where to go to get to a certain place. A further point we noticed is that at Sochi airport many announcements which inform about changes or registration of flights are only in Russian language. For some people all these problems might be just unimportant but for tourists who cannot speak or read Russian or who want holidays without any trouble, these can be crucial regarding their decision to come again to Sochi or not [4].

What to improve:

- All the stands which offer different excursions either to Red Valley, the many parks and resorts or waterfalls should provide information to interested people in different languages. There should also be tour guides who tell the people about Sochi, at least in English but even better if there are possibilities in more languages.

- In the city centre and the different districts of Sochi more touristic information points should be installed. These should offer help and support in different situations. Especially in case that a translator is needed or some administrative work for certain authorities has to be done. These information places can be private companies or governmental institutions. A fee for the service can be taken but it should be adequate: the necessity of help should not be seen as a chance to earn a fortune.

- In all parts of the city there should be placed maps of the city and its districts. It should provide tourists with information about their current position, street names and where the most popular sights are located. Further it is possible to write how to get easily to certain places or which "Marshrutka" or bus route is the most convenient one. Of course all information and names should be both in Russian and at least in English. These maps would be also very helpful for people who plan to do some sightseeing on their own.

- All announcements made at the airport or any train station should be both in Russian and in English. By doing so the possibility that international tourists understand relevant information is given [5].

General difficulties and recommendations

The following points are a summary of situations which already occurred during the stay in Sochi and which were on the one hand frustrating because they took a lot of time and effort to be done but disappointing on the other side because some nice things could not be enjoyed completely.

Stamps and postcards

Many tourists want to share their experience during holidays and send some greetings to friends or family. Usually it is done by writing a postcard which is mostly also the easiest way. But in Sochi and generally in Russia this can be very time-consuming and difficult because stamps are available only in the post offices. Due to the fact that many processes there are very slow and many services are offered there e.g. receiving pensions, paying communal costs etc. the queues are long and it takes a lot of time to get some actually quick things done.

This problem could be easily solved by the possibility that shops which sell postcards would also be allowed to offer stamps. There does not have to be a wide range of stamps or post services. It should only avoid that tourists who want to enjoy their holidays do not have to wait for hours in a post office just to buy a stamp and send a postcard [6].

Restaurants

When visiting many restaurants in Sochi, international tourist will face the problem that they neither can read the menu nor imagine what the dishes are made of. Tasting national dishes, for some tourists it is an experience and important part of their holidays. Therefore it is a pity if they even do not know what they order. Furthermore we noted that very often when going out in a group, ordered dishes are not served at the same time. While one person has already finished its meal the other is still waiting for it. This situation is not very satisfying because it destroys the atmosphere of a comfortable and common dinner.

To avoid these situations, restaurants which are located at places with many tourists could offer menus in different languages. Additionally to the description of the dishes there could be a picture which shows how the meal looks like. A good example of such restaurant is the one at "Rosa Pik ski resort". All offered dishes and drinks are described in different languages and easily to understand by everyone. This action requires only little additional costs but it can raise the guests' satisfaction enormously. Regarding the problem with the serving, the restaurants have to improve the processes in the kitchen so that they can serve everything simultaneously.

Traveller cheques

Travelling in foreign countries brings always the question how much money will be spent, how much to take with oneself and which way is the safest and cheapest way to carry it. Most tourists do not want to carry too much cash with them and prefer either to withdraw money at ATMs or use traveller cheques. Especially the cheques are a very secure way of getting money in a foreign country. They can be changed at many places and in case of loss it is no problem to get new ones because they are insured. But in Sochi it is very difficult to use these cheques. Many banks do not accept these. It is very frustrating to run from one bank to the other, wait in the long queues and only to realize that you cannot get the amount of money you want [6].

Being a city which is visited by many international tourists Sochi and especially its banks should guarantee an acceptance of traveller cheques and the staff should know how to handle these quickly. A tourist who finally found a bank that accepts these cheques will not be satisfied if he or she has to wait more than half an hour until he receives the money.

Events and national holidays

As Sochi is a place where people can actually do holidays during the whole year the chance to be here at a national holiday is high. On these days like for example May 9, events and festivals are organized which could be also very interesting and eventful for tourists. But unfortunately there are no information what kind of events and where they are taking place.

This useful and interesting information could be displayed at the already mentioned tourist information points or just at different, frequently passed places. Doing so people would get to know more about life in Russia and Russian culture which is very diversified and impressive [7].

CONCLUSION

All mentioned facts are actually not difficult to implement but they would have a big effect on Sochi as an international and sustainable holiday resort. Living a longer time in Sochi people get used to all these problems and find the places where they can receive help. Tourists who come only for a short time to visit the city do not have this possibility. Every day they have to struggle with some problems or lack of information they get more frustrated and feel upset. Currently a lot of money is being invested to build hotels, to improve the infrastructure and to prepare the city for the many visitors. In such cases, the responsible authorities do not pay so much attention to situations which could occur in everyday life. But these are the things people most appreciate if they are also well organized. Sochi's authorities should put all effort to highlight its uniqueness and beauty and to guarantee a high comfort to every visitor. The city should open its doors to the whole world and make sure to become a place people want to come back again.

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УДК 338

**«Международный Сочи»
необходимые действия для привлечения международных туристов**

¹ Эдуард Александрович Безель

² Иван Томиславич Чакарнич

³ Евгения Владимировна Видищева

¹ Университет Хайльбронна, Германия
Студент

E-mail: eduard_besel@gmx.net

² Университет Хайльбронна, Германия
Студент

E-mail: i.cakaric@t-online.de

³ Сочинский государственный университет, Россия

354000, г. Сочи, ул. Советская, 26а

Кандидат экономических наук, доцент

E-mail: evgenia-vv@mail.ru

Аннотация. В ближайшем будущем в городе-курорте Сочи состоится много крупных международных спортивных мероприятий. Следовательно мировая известность города повысится и люди со всего мира откроют Сочи для себя, как новое направление для проведения досуга. Но чтобы гарантировать и увеличить привлекательность и популярность города, рекомендуются некоторые существенные улучшения, которые облегчат пребывание в Сочи иностранных туристов.

Ключевые слова: усовершенствование; международный туризм; устойчивое развитие; привлекательность; рекомендации.