

An Analysis of Information Resources: Specialized Services for Japanese Tourists (a case study of Khabarovsk Territory)

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1. Introduction

This article explores the role of information resources in tourism services within cross-border areas. The following case study examines tourism in Khabarovsk Territory by analyzing the impact of consumer preferences of tourists from Japan. This article advances the notion that tourism services are the most effective when they are constructed according to the preferences of foreign consumers.

2. Analysis of inbound tourism in Khabarovsk Territory

Organizations and private companies working in the tourism industry always take into consideration the demands and interests of potential consumers when creating various tourist services. Frequently the most probable consumers of tourism services are those living in neighboring countries. Border areas occupy a special place in the development of international tourism; under favorable conditions, they stimulate the development of tourism in neighboring countries. The tourism industry plays a vital role in the Russian economy, and for Russia to successfully participate in the global market economy it must seek to further develop cross-border cooperation among neighboring countries. This strategy will help Russia more effectively attract foreign tourists resulting in broader development of the tourism industry as a whole.

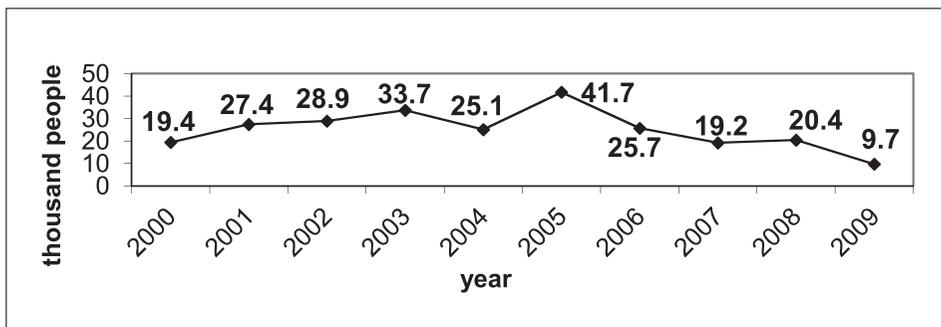
In the tourism lexicon, the term border cooperation is defined as a set of joint administrative, technical, economic and cultural actions aiming at strengthening the development of neighborly cooperation between regions located on either side of a border, as well as the formation of agreements to address future problems that may arise in the tourism sector. Khabarovsk Territory is one of Russia's most promising areas for tourism development. To the

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south, the Territory has an extensive border area creating a number of potential partners for the development of tourist relations. This regional feature has a number of advantages demonstrated by increasing demands for specific tourist services. This increased demand has been indicated by the featured content of various tourism programs. However, despite these advances in industry growth, information resources provided for tourist have remained poorly developed in terms of content and their role in various tourist programs (Mirzekhanova, (2005), pp.55-58) . The purpose of this article is to reveal how information resources argument tourist programs for Japanese consumers, and to demonstrate the importance of these information resources for the successful development of tourism in Khabarovsk Territory.

Khabarovsk Territory is the recognized center of international tourism in the Russian Far East. It has a number of advantages including proximity to Northeast Asia, a lengthy border with China, large transport arteries -the Trans-Siberian and Baikal-Amur trunk-railways, the administrative center of Khabarovsk Far East Federal District, as well as features of historical and natural significance. These features help to create favorable conditions for inbound tourism, specifically from Northeast Asian countries (China, Japan, Republic Korea). They also aid in enabling the flow of tourism passing through Khabarovsk on to Baikal, Kamchatka, Sakhalin, Yakutia and Western Russia (gov.khabkrai.ru/invest2.nsf/pages/TourismRus.htm, 2010). Future development of the tourism industry in Khabarovsk Territory relies heavily on continued increases in inbound tourism. For the last five years, inbound tourists have made up about 20 % of the total number of the visiting tourists. More than 20 companies of in the Territory specialize in receiving foreign visitors with about 80 tourism programs offered.

Figure 1 Dynamics of inbound tourism

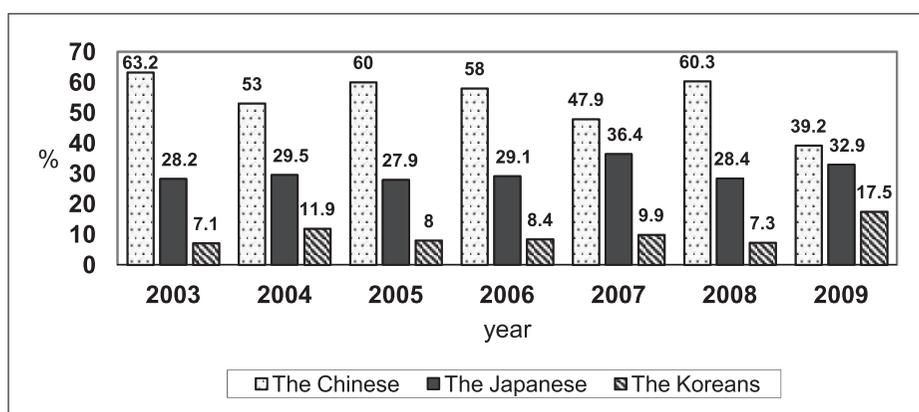


Source: Tourism and recreation in Khabarovsk Territory (2010).
<http://gov.khabkrai.ru/invest2.nsf/pages/TourismRus.htm>

Fig. 1 illustrates that since 2000 the flow of inbound tourism has been erratic. From 2006 to 2009 there was a decrease in number of foreign visitors. In 2009 inbound tourism direction amounted to 9.7 thousand people. On average about 30 thousand foreign tourists visit the Territory per year.

Fig. 2 displays the basic inbound tourism indices for Khabarovsk Territory. The core consumers of tour services in the Territory are tourists from Northeast Asian countries.

Figure 2 Share of tourists from the Northeast Asia in the general tourist flow on inbound tourism



Source: Tourism and recreation in Khabarovsk Territory (2010).
<http://gov.khabkrai.ru/invest2.nsf/pages/TourismRus.htm>

It is clear from the diagram that for several years the majority of tourists in the region were from China. This resulted from a shared border with China and to an Agreement on visa-free group tourism trips. In 2009 the percentage of inbound Chinese citizens was more than 39.2% (3.8 thousand persons). Tourists from Japan – 32.9 % (3.2 thousand people) and the Republic of Korea – 17.5 % (1.7 thousand people) also show a sustained interest in visiting the Territory. (gov.khabkrai.ru/invest2.nsf/pages/TourismRus.htm, 2010).

3. The Japanese tourists and their preferences

In order to stimulate the development of inbound tourism to Khabarovsk Territory it is necessary to analyze the motives of Asian tourists to visit the region. To do so is important to identify and examine the preferences, behavior patterns and spending habits of tourists. These characteristics influence the destination choice of visitors. The goal of this research is to develop a better understanding of the growing Asian tourism market to tourist industry of Khabarovsk Territory, and to develop tourism services based on the national preferences of foreign tourists.

For Northeast Asian tourists, visiting Russia represents interaction with western European culture. Asian delegations have demonstrated a keen interest in the national customs and culture of people living in Khabarovsk Territory. Exploring the local ecology is also popular, especially given the presence of unique natural resources absent from The Land of the Rising Sun, Celestial Empire and The Land of the Morning Calm.

The Japanese market in particular offers potential for further development in tourist communications. Japan and Khabarovsk Krai have been a strategic partners in the tourism industry for several years. This relationship is built upon geographical proximity and both parties' desire to develop more comprehensive international cooperation. Therefore, developing tour services that specifically address the needs and desires of Japanese tourists is one of Khabarovsk Territory's primary goals. This not only benefits the tourism sphere, but also strengthens the broader socio-political and economic partnership between Russia and Japan.

In 2007 Japan passed new legislation to assist in developing the growing tourism industry. This enabled the Government of Japan to devise a five-year plan for tourism development that defined a list of the most promising tourist destination. Russia was included on this list, identifying Moscow, St. Petersburg, Khabarovsk, Vladivostok and Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk as the most attractive regions for tourists. Given the importance of this tourist exchange, and the fact that Japanese visitors are among the most creditworthy tourists in the world, the Government of Khabarovsk Territory is systematically working to further develop bilateral tourism relations with Japan. The Japanese centre in Khabarovsk has worked fastidiously to continue attracting tourists from Japan.

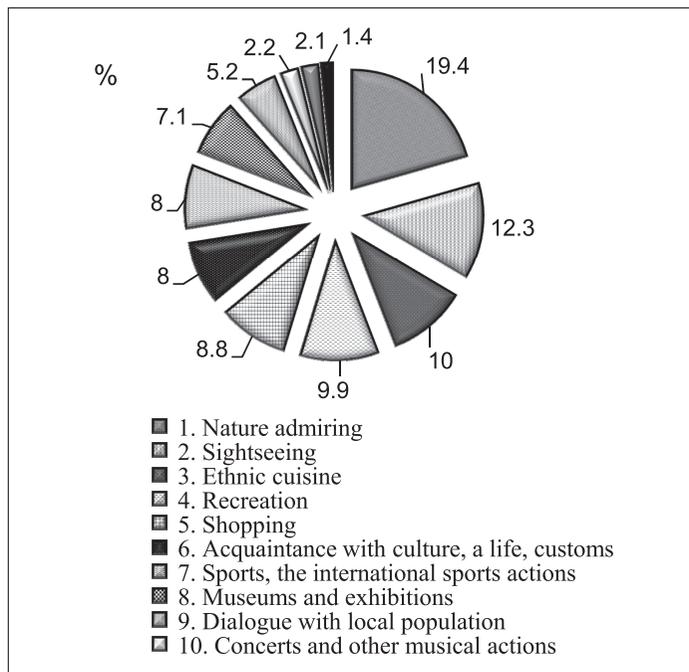
Japanese tourists are partial to affordable, safe and proximate destinations that are easily accessible for short-term trips. Khabarovsk region satisfies these conditions and a represents a promising target for outbound tourism development for Japan. While visiting Khabarovsk Territory, Japanese tourists have shown an interest in the European culture, the traditions of ethnic minorities, the natural environment as well as places connected to Japanese history and culture. These tourists are characterized by a high level of participation in business and active tourism. Furthermore, the majority of international fishing tourism is connected with the Japanese tourists (Sazikin, (2005), pp.188-191).

In general, Japanese tourists are extremely inquisitive and use travel opportunities to further their knowledge of other cultures and places. For example, they enjoy learning first-hand about a host country's indigenous folk art. Thus, to better introduce Japanese people to the history and culture of a host country it is vital to develop information resources about museums and showrooms that might be of interest to visitors. Recent studies have demonstrated that the most active tourists are not elderly people, as previously considered, but young Japanese.

A second reason many Japanese tourists travel abroad is in order to improve their knowledge of foreign cuisine. It is important to recall that the Japanese have distinct culinary habits: dishes should be of a proper size, portions should be small, less oil should be used in the cooking process, and meals should consist primarily of vegetables. It is recommended that guests add salt and pepper their own food based on personal preferences; however, it is expected that soy sauce is present at all meals as is non-aerated mineral water.

Although tourists from Japan travel for a variety of purposes, analyses have revealed that basics preferences remain consistent(Fig. 3). Figure 3 illustrates that the main trip objectives for Japanese tourists are enjoying nature, sightseeing and sampling ethnic cuisine(Morozov,(2000), pp.27-33).

Figure 3 Target preferences of the Japanese tourists

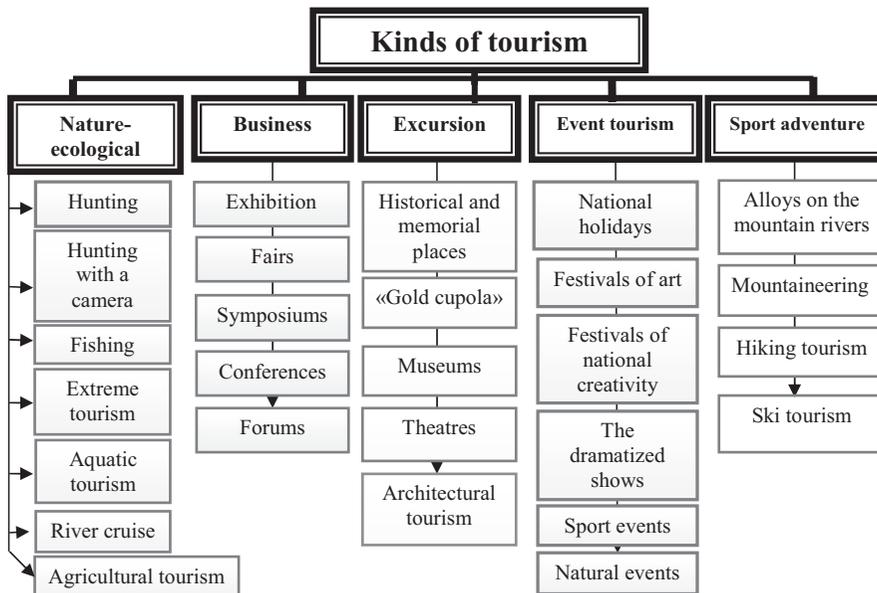


Source: Marketing in Russia and abroad

In 2008 inbound Japanese tourism to Khabarovsk Territory was comprised of business tourism (10 %), individual tours (30 %) and group excursion (60 %). The majority of tourists from Japan stay in the regional centre for two or three days. During their stay, these tourists typically spend time sightseeing, visiting the Museum of Local Lore and taking cruises on the Amur River (summer). Trips to the ancient Nanai village in Sikachi-Aljan and to the Bolshehehtsirsky natural reserve are also popular.

The majority of tourists in Khabarovsk (70 %) seek out local points of interest. According to Japanese experts, 50 % of Japanese tourists visit the region for information gathering purposes, and greater than 10 % of Japanese tourists are interested in adventure tours, including fishing and hunting. About 20 % of Japanese tourists prefer to travel on the Trans-Siberian trunk-railway, through Khabarovsk Territory to Vladivostok, and others, about 10 %, use Khabarovsk as a transit point for the further travel to Kamchatka, Magadan, the Sakhalin areas and Yakutia. According to these statistics it is possible to distinguish the principal kinds of tourism in Khabarovsk Territory, popular among Japanese tourists, which have not yet been fully developed (Fig. 4).

Figure 4 Kinds of tourism in Khabarovsk Territory most preferable by Japanese tourists



Source: Mirzekhanova Z.G., Mirzekhanova D.G., (2011), pp.56-60

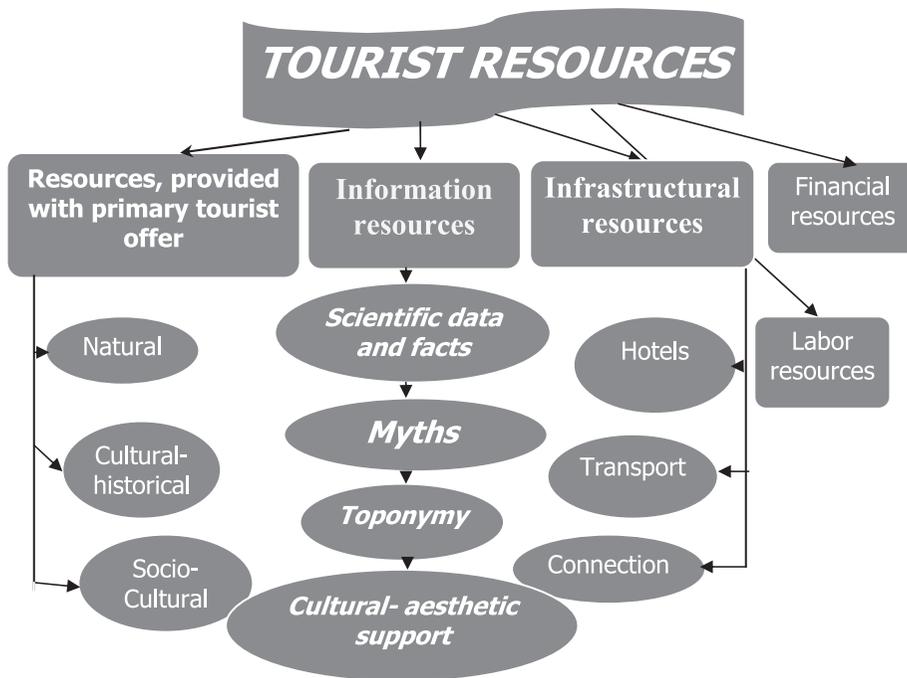
4. Information resources for tourist services within the transboundary territories of Khabarovsk Territory.

4.1 The content of information resources of tourist services.

According to Japanese experts, Japan and Russia have entered a new phase of relations in the tourism industry built upon their preexisting historic and cultural connection. In order to further stimulate international tourism in Khabarovsk Territory, and attract more tourists from Northeast Asia, it is necessary to provide the market with competitive tourism services. This requires the effective use of all available resources in the territory. Undoubtedly, information support must be

one of the primary components of such services. The demand for information resources is indicated by the social, aesthetic and informative needs of tourists, as well as the national characteristics of tourists from neighboring countries. The below scheme illustrates the role of information resources in tourism services (Fig. 5).

Figure 5 Resource support of tour product



Source: Mirzekhanova, (2005) , pp.55-58.

Information resources seek to satisfy the educational and aesthetic needs of tourists. Therefore information resources are comprised not only the information itself, but also the means by which it is delivered to an audience. All information resources can be divided into 4 main groups:

1. *Scientific support*: provides tourists with reliable information regarding objects likely to be encountered during excursions (formal and informal) .
2. *Mythological support*: presents scientific facts in the form of interesting and exciting narratives that are accessible to tourists of different ages and educational levels.
3. *Toponymic support*: explains the meanings of geographical names along typical tourist routes.

4. *Cultural-aesthetic support*: helps to create a vivid image and emotional perception of tourist destinations.

To achieve tourism's main goal, satisfying tourists' informational needs about a given destination, each resource category performs its own function in general system of information support. These information groups should seek include a number of "highlights," which focus tourists' attention on the most eye-grabbing and interesting opportunities. Efforts to promote inbound tourism from Japan should take into account the preferences of Japanese tourists when identifying such highlights.

1. Scientific support.

The role of scientific support in tourism services is to properly explain and characterize scientific processes, phenomena, objects, and facts about the territory. This information should be connected with modern life.

Tourist relations between the Russian Far East and Northeast Asian countries originated from a shared history. In Khabarovsk Territory many historical sites are connected to events reflecting this common historical development. Before traveling, Japanese tourists educate themselves on expected points of interest, thus the resources provided by tourist services should include pertinent scientific information about these known highlights. Furthermore, one of the distinctive features of tourism in Khabarovsk Territory is the opportunity to explore the region's nature and ecology. Visitors from the neighboring countries who are knowledgeable about natural systems are likewise interested in scientific information relating to the region's natural diversity, culture and traditions. Lastly, information about historical events involving famous state representatives is also popular among tourists.

In the Khabarovsk Territory Japanese tourists have an opportunity to visit Park Dynamo, also known as the Park of Peace and Friendship, which serves as a cemetery for Japanese nationals who died after the Second World War in the former USSR. In the park there is also located an arch where the following inscription can be found in Japanese: "It is work of the Japanese who were in Khabarovsk in 1951." The park demonstrates how the Japanese have contributed to modern renovations in Khabarovsk. For example, the Japanese Mitinoku-bank has given considerable support for the reconstruction of one of the ponds adjoining Park Dynamo. City deputies have named the pond in honor of the bank as a symbol of acknowledgement and gratitude to Japanese assistance. Soon after the park's reconstruction one of the alleys also took its name from Mitinoku-bank. On another note, information about historical events or places included in tourist resources should take into account controversial issues such as border conditions and past political shifts. Such selectivity is advised in order to avoid contention.

2. *Mythological support.*

Presenting only scientific information tends to create a one-dimensional and uninteresting image of objects or places. Therefore it is advantageous to combine scientific material with mythology in tourists' information resources (Vedenin, (1998), pp.87-79). Centers of international tourism work to create carefully designed images, which influence patterns of international tourism. Beautiful or charming tales and myths impart a sense of spirituality and poetic nuance to the landscape closely connecting nature to a system of aesthetic values.

Information about myths, legends or objects that relates to Japanese national heritage is of great interest to Japanese tourists. Legends about love, heroes and deities are especially popular in all countries around the world. In order to make excursions more informative and vivid, informational resources should include rich historical material, about ancient national legends, great heroes, deities, cult ceremonies, and objects of honor and worship. For example, the legend of "the three suns" helps improve tourists' perception of the petroglyphs at Sikachi-Alyan, a village located on the right bank of the Amur River. The primary "highlight" of this tourist destination is the mythology. Overall, presenting national myths plays a crucial role in furthering the development a vibrant tourist industry.

3. *Toponymic support.*

Before traveling Japanese tourists review maps, schemes and guide-books of the area they will be visiting. They also read geographical and historical literature, focusing on toponymy. The artistic or historical interpretation of toponyms is also a special informational resource. A curious tourist or excursionist is always interested in the origin of an object's name. Scientific explanation of contemporary names should be given in an accessible manner. The complexity of toponymic informative given depends on the amount of available resources such as scientific articles and dictionaries. Many legends and stories explaining the origins of geographical names also include information concerning the history, customs and traditions of nations. For example, the Amur, one of the largest rivers in the world, located in the Far East, has a deep connection to the history and culture of local indigenous people. According to the languages of various ethnic groups, the names of this river, Damur, Amar, Sakhalyan-Ula, Hara-Muren and Heilundzyan. mean "huge black river."

4. *Cultural-aesthetic support.*

The ways in which people from various cultures express themselves is always a point of interest for visitors. Tourism often serves to help improve ones' cultural awareness. Cultural heritage serves as a source of interesting information for tourists, enabling them to generate a more complete image of an object or place. Such cultural heritage consists not only of art, architecture, music and literature, but also of intangible elements such as folklore, crafts,

festivals, religious rituals, etc. (Kvartalnov, (2000), p.111).

Some tourist sites symbolize multiple elements of a nation's culture. For example, Amur river cruises offer tourists the opportunity to experience the region's nature, history, culture as well as the traditions of indigenous groups living near the riverbanks. The lyrics of the song "Silent Amur," reflect the perception that the Amur is one of world's the greatest rivers. The Amur River is the one of the regional highlights; the majority of natural and cultural-historical tourist sites are located in its valleys. During river excursions Japanese tourists pay close attention to information regarding the area. Travel along the Amur is considered to be an exotic experience for visitors for several reasons. First, it exposes travelers to the culture and traditions of indigenous peoples. Second, the tour is modeled on the concept of "green parking," which offers Japanese tourists spectacular views of the surrounding natural environment.

As demonstrated, the unique culture found in Khabarovsk Territory is one of the strongest incentives for potential tourists to visit the area. Therefore the preservation of cultural heritage is of crucial for sustainable development of the tourism industry. In order to produce quality tourism services all categories of information resources must be applied in a logical and well-balanced manner. This helps to achieve the main goal of tourism – satisfying tourists' needs by providing interesting information about the nature, history and culture of any given destination.

4.2 Requirements to information resources

The quality of tour services provided can only be assessed through practical application. During and after a tour, visitors are not only passive consumers, but also judges of quality. By imparting their experiences and impressions to others interested in traveling to the area, tourists create either a positive or negative image of various tour companies. Thus, pleasing the consumer is very important if a company desires to build a good reputation. Furthermore, the quality of information provided plays a vital role in forming consumer impressions. This can determine the overall success of the company as well as influence patterns of tourism in the region (Mirzekhanova, (2005), pp.55-58).

In order to avoid a negative reputation, the information resources provided by tourist organizations must meet certain standards. These requirements refer to the components and delivery methods of tourist resources. First, the information provided should be reliable, comprehensive, relevant, original, unbiased, and aesthetically pleasing. Second, a tourist's evaluation of services depends heavily the methods of information transfer. Failure to meet the above standards and the use of ineffective information delivery devalues the quality of the resources and decreases the company's competitiveness in the tourist industry.

Methods of information transfer depend on a tour's purpose, the environmental conditions

(the method of information transfer for eco-tours is different from that of tours in metropolitan areas or health tours), and the target audience. It's well known that people of different ages, religious beliefs, ethnic groups, from both urban and rural populations, perceive the same information in different ways. However, in order to have a strong impact, the means of information delivery should strive to forge an emotional connection with the listener. Monotonous narration with no active perception leaves the audience bored.

Use of comic phrases, idiomatic expressions, witty remarks, visual aids (films, records, slides, illustrative material) can make a presentation interesting and memorable.

No matter how important the topic is (in form of excursion, illustrative material – pamphlets, maps, guide-books and other forms), passive perception is always inferior to active forms. Games or role-play are popular means of information delivery. When tourists become active participants during excursions, their experiences from their time abroad are more likely to be retained. This serves to create a long-term positive impact on promoting inbound tourism. Active participation also help to further familiarize tourists with Russian traditions. Popular tours illustrate the various ways of celebrating pagan holidays including New Year, Ivan Kupala, the Bear holiday, Maslenitsa, and the Day of Sun. Entertainment includes national games such as driving Troika, cockfights, gorodki, gorelki, fist-fighting, and visiting a Gipsy camp. Participating tourists also have an opportunity to dress up in traditional Russian costumes. Foreign tourists, especially the Japanese, enthusiastically participate in these games, cultural-entertainment programs, singing contests (they sing well-known songs like “Katusha” and “Moscow nights” with in native and Russian languages), and ceremonial festivities. Tourists from Northeast Asian countries love competitions, team games and relay races.

5. Conclusion

Based on the information presented above the following claims may be inferred:

1. Khabarovsk Territory is able to bridge Asian and European cultures due its the extensive border shared with countries of Northeast Asia. This border undoubtedly promotes the development of inbound tourism, especially from the nearby states.

2. During recent years Japanese tourism has taken one of the lead positions for international patterns of tourism to Khabarovsk Territory. This is due to territorial proximity and the collaborative work of the both countries to develop international tourist communications.

3. Currently, scarce attention is dedicated to information resources provided by tourist services. Information resources serve to satisfy the informative needs of tourists and seek further motivate them to travel around the region.

4. The potential for tourism to the territory is based on its natural beauty and historical and cultural values. Also, the high quality of services promotes the growth of the tourism industry.

5. In the future tourist services should be based on the principle of information standardization and improved methods of information transfer. Special attention should be paid to the needs and wishes of potential consumers; awareness to the national culture of visitors helps create a more comfortable and enjoyable travel experience.

Developing tourism services with information resources focused on the needs and preferences of consumers is the first step to continued successful development of inbound tourism to Khabarovsk Territory.

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