



# Engaging Local Communities in Promoting Ecotourism in Protected Areas



# Conserving Natural and Cultural Heritage in Protected Areas

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By virtue of its one-thousand-year history and vast territory, Russia possesses enormous natural wealth along with numerous historical and cultural monuments, many of which are closely linked to the natural environment.

This unique combination of resources has not been sufficiently used to develop tourism within Russia and from abroad. Visitors have the opportunity to learn about cultural features and the natural environment in 50 national parks and 103 zapovedniks (traditional strict nature reserves), as well as in 140 open-air museums.

Historical and cultural monuments abound in Russian national parks. Additionally, numerous cultural assets have been preserved in zapovedniks, founded to conserve pristine wilderness areas. According to research carried out by the Zapovedniks Centre in 1998 and 2014, hundreds of age-old chapels, abandoned mills, ancient settlement sites, and other places are situated in zapovedniks and national parks. The number of visitors to these areas is very low, though their attractiveness for tourism is undoubtedly great. The general public knows little about the significance of most of these sites, and the territories themselves do not have sufficient infrastructure to receive large numbers of visitors.

At the same time, there are numerous nearly abandoned villages situated around these sites, which are potentially attractive to visitors. Their residents have not been able to adapt to modern reality and hence often join the ranks of poachers, who damage natural and cultural properties, destroy themselves with alcohol, or move away. Local people need to be engaged in preserving cultural and natural heritage through organizing partnerships between protected areas and local communities, in turn giving these a chance to combat poverty and actively help protect cultural sites in their natural environment.



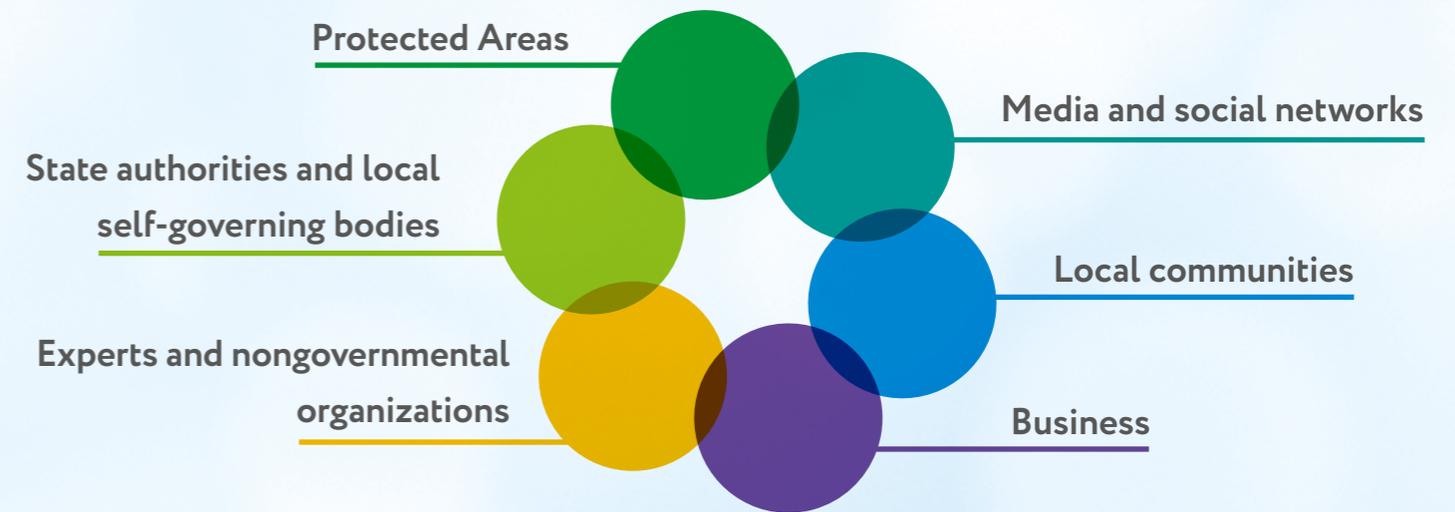
# Local Communities, Protected Areas, and NGOs. Sharing the Benefits

In today's Russia, the countryside is in the midst of a serious crisis. Unemployment, poor roads, schools and hospitals that are being shut down, and degradation of traditional culture force people to leave rural areas. Rural youth leave their native villages. Suburban subdivisions often replace traditionally vivid rural landscapes. Natural products become rare, and the artifacts of daily life of our grandparents can be seen only in museums. At the same time, there is a new trend of downshifting, when city-dwellers who are tired of urban life are beginning to move to remote villages.

Historically, it was the villages that created and preserved Russia's unique identity and traditional cultural values. People on this Earth are responsible for safeguarding our planet's resources. That is why it is necessary to once again start to appreciate and respect rural culture and local people. Development of sustainable rural tourism is an effective way to support this effort.

Experience has shown that projects aimed at developing rural tourism locally are capable of creating "growth points" in the countryside, uniting interested people from different walks of life, organizing cooperation between government and local communities, and promoting sustainable income growth and improvement of the social and economic situation at the local level. Such projects require relatively little investment, while the costs reap large rewards. With each ruble invested in support of local associations that develop rural tourism, the local community benefits tenfold. In places where ecotourism is being developed, rural people can obtain a stable source of income and gain control of their lives and their future. The youth can remain in the villages. Locals engaged in hosting visitors become interested in preserving valuable natural and cultural sites.

Conservation of natural and cultural heritage is built on principles of interaction among all stakeholders.



The Concept for Developing the Federal Protected Areas System to 2020 approved by Russian Government in December 2011 stipulates engagement of protected areas in development of ecotourism.

Among the tasks the Concept aims to resolve, the following are of special importance:

- Broadening cooperation of zapovedniks and national parks with non-governmental organizations
- Striving for formation of local support groups for each protected area, facilitating the groups' practical activities in every possible way
- Facilitating development of small and medium business to accommodate tourism (a network of boutique hotels, guest houses, and farmstays; traditional goods and handicrafts, local organic produce, souvenirs, etc.)

# Zapovedniks Environmental Education Centre

The Zapovedniks Centre has been working since 1996 to build public support for Russia's protected areas.

The mission of Zapovedniks Centre is to increase the effectiveness of Russia's protected areas and build public awareness of the unique value of protected areas for the country's present and future.

The Centre's programs include:

- Protected areas staff training centre (conducting trainings, seminars, apprenticeships in Russia and abroad for staff of PAs, environmental NGOs, and business)
- Environmental awareness in PAs. Coordination of the "Friends of Protected Areas" Russian children's and young people's movement
- Social projects and development of civil initiatives to support PAs. Rural tourism
- "Chipmunk" International Volunteer Centre: volunteer projects to support PAs. Corporate volunteering
- Designing nature trails and visitor centres from conception to details
- Publishing the Protected Islands bulletin

[www.wildnet.ru](http://www.wildnet.ru), [www.greenclick.ru](http://www.greenclick.ru)

Various projects have been implemented since 2006 to conserve cultural landscapes and other cultural heritage sites closely connected with the natural environment and to develop rural settlements near PAs.

Projects implemented during this period are aimed at building partnerships between local communities and PAs, developing rural civil society, and supporting nature-friendly business, mainly through developing rural tourism, cottage industries, and traditional forms of nature management, which in turn help develop local civil society for the benefit of conserving natural and cultural heritage. Public bodies of self-government, municipalities, NGOs, and local community initiative groups, along with PAs interested in cooperation with locals to preserve natural and cultural heritage, are the main partners in this field.



**Sparks of Hope for Russian Villages.  
Implemented by Zapovedniks Centre  
EU-supported**

Overall objective: To promote inclusive and empowered civil society in the Russian countryside by supporting rural development groups' efforts to promote green economy and sustainable livelihoods in local communities.

**WANAPE: Water, Nature, and People in  
a Vanishing Landscape.  
Implemented by the Zapovedniks Centre  
EU-supported**

Overall objective: To catalyze inclusive and sustainable development of Polesk (Russia) and Lepel (Belarus) municipalities through integration of sustainable rural tourism.

**Strengthening the Network of Training  
Centres for Protected Area Management  
through Demonstration of a  
Tested Approach.  
Implemented by Zapovedniks Centre  
Funded by UNEP**

The aim of the project is to enhance biodiversity and rural livelihoods through better management of protected areas in Northern Eurasia.

**Non-Timber Forest Products as an  
Alternative Source of Income for  
Rural Communities.  
Implemented by Kenozersky National  
Park. Funded by USAID, Sustainable  
Development Foundation**

Training and practical support to 50 local people in the development of environmentally-oriented business embracing production of a wide range of NTFP-based eco-products, help identifying market opportunities for local eco-products (certification of 15 products, development of packaging design and purchase of necessary equipment), and promoting and facilitating direct sale of products made by local people in the national park's visitor centre and at fairs.

**Cultural Landscapes: Traditions  
for Development. Implemented  
by the Zapovedniks Centre  
EU-supported**

Overall objective: to contribute to the creation of enabling an environment (institutional, economic, and regulatory) conducive to better governance of cultural landscapes as vectors for sustainable socio-economic development within national parks and open-air museums of Russia and Belarus.

**Development of Local Socio-Economic  
Initiatives Using the Potential of Protected  
Areas and Environmental NGOs.  
Implemented by Zapovedniks Centre  
Funded by TACIS/IBPP**

The project served as a catalyst for environmental-friendly business activities of local people. Training for trainers from PAs and local authorities, who then instructed local people on conservation plans, local sustainable development, and promoting tourism.

The second significant result of this project was development and implementation of sustainable livelihood programs. Two micro-credit funds were established to support local pro-biodiversity initiatives for two model protected areas (Bolshaya Kokshaga and Baikalsky zapovedniks in Russia.

**Ecotourism Development Program in  
Snow Leopard Habitats.  
Implemented by WWF.  
Funded by Citi Foundation**

Overall objective: Improving local living conditions and income through biodiversity conservation. Developing local initiatives in Altai and Tyva republics.

**Cultural Landscapes as Vectors for Local Sustainable Development.  
Supported by Satoyama Initiative; in partnership with Kenozersky National Park  
and Shulgan-Tash Zapovednik Implemented by the Zapovedniks Centre**

Results: Improved capacity of protected area managers and local communities to manage socio-ecological landscapes; best practices experience of Kenozersky National Park published and disseminated.



# Why Rural Tourism?

Rural tourism is one of the most effective activities run by local people and contributing to development of villages. The surge in rural tourism around the world is no coincidence. Examples in Poland, Slovakia, and Belarus, the latter being close to Russia, are especially successful. By organizing guesthouses, local villagers create places to stay: hosts introduce visitors to everyday rural life, traditional agriculture, folklore, and organize excursions to notable sites. These activities encourage local residents to conserve historical, cultural, and natural sites, returning them the role of active custodians of their heritage. Successful experiences in rural tourism development have been accumulated in the Altai, Karelia, Arkhangelsk, Kaliningrad, and other regions. National parks, open-air museums, and zapovedniks that cooperate with rural initiative groups and other non-governmental local associations often become central attractions for tourism development.



# Why Do Local Government Bodies Need Rural Tourism?

Rural tourism:

- Provides an effective mechanism for local development
- Supports small business in the countryside
- Combats poverty
- Increases local activism
- Solves the problem of villages dying out
- Creates new jobs
- Attracts youth to the countryside
- Raises the quality of life in the countryside

Polesky District of Kaliningrad Region demonstrates a successful example.

Thanks to efforts aimed at developing rural tourism, the once bleak district is being gradually converted into an attractive place for recreation. Kaliningrad residents explore rural homesteads and waterways. The district's image, including in the press, has improved considerably. Now Kaliningrad tourist agencies include routes to Polesk in their proposals.

# Why Should NGOs Develop Rural Tourism?

- By helping develop rural tourism, a path is created for successful integration of a PA into the district/region's social and economic development
- Combining PA proposals in the ecotourism sphere with rural tourism services on adjacent lands is a foundation for creating a unique tourist product
- Economic motivation of local people is the best means against fires, conflicts, and poaching
- Creation of a platform for specialists to communicate, an informal expert network that allows people to share successfully experiences

# Why do Locals Need Rural Tourism?

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Rural tourism:

- Provides additional income in the countryside and opportunities for the whole family to benefit
- Creates an outlet for farm produce, as well as traditional goods and handicrafts
- Allows locals to actively participate in village life and development
- Provides way to meet interesting people
- Gives people a reason to talk about their homeland and family histories
- Cultivates new knowledge and skills

Project leader **Ivan Cherloyakov** opened a workshop to produce wax figures in Tondoshka village (Altai Republic). After organizing the processing of wax, a by-product of local apiaries, Ivan acquired special equipment with funds provided under a mini-grant from the project **“Sparks of Hope for Russian Villages.”** The first batch

of products surpassed all expectations: the forms and textures of the wax figures were fine and expressive. A wide circle of partners have been involved in implementing the project: from beekeepers, who supplied the raw material, to the local Orthodox community.

Ivan plans to organize production of souvenirs from local wax. The project is implemented with participation and support of **Altaiisky Biosphere Zapovednik**.



# Why Do Protected Areas Need Rural Tourism?

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Rural tourism:

- Creates an effective mechanism for preserving natural and cultural heritage by treating locals as partners
- Provides an ideal instrument for interaction between PAs and local people and for consolidating public support of PAs
- Sets up an effective means of interaction among local and regional authorities and tourist businesses
- Creates an environmentally- and socially-responsible alternative to building their own hotel complexes
- Provides an opportunity to preserve rural and traditional way of life as a part of cultural heritage and PAs unique tourist products

On December 10, 2015, the **“Protected Village” website run by the regional initiative group** in Yaylyu village of Turochaksky District in Altai Republic began to work in test mode. Thanks to joint efforts by **Altaiisky Biosphere Zapovednik** and “Protected Village,” tourist infrastructure and entrepreneurship has been under development in recent years. Local people are actively involved in excursions and providing visitor services. The Yaylyu Regional website is oriented toward people visiting this unique settlement on the shore of Teletskoye Lake. The interactive panel allows guests to choose areas of interest directly and receive information about them. The website contains interesting selections of photographs from different years of the settlement’s history, as well as rules for visitation, since the village is situated in the protected area and requires that visitors follow certain regulations.

[www.zapovedselo.ru](http://www.zapovedselo.ru)

# What are the Target Groups for Rural Tourism Development Training Programs?

## Local People

They often lack the knowledge, skills, experience, and even resolution to start a new and unusual business.

The locals people:

- Folklore and creative teams
- Chiefs of territorial public self-government
- Craftsman masters, souvenir product manufacturers
- Guides
- Founders of rural museums and expositions
- Holders of nutrition outlets
- Owners of rural homesteads
- Representatives of rural initiative groups

## What Should be Taught?

- Fundamentals of business planning and financial management
- Creating a competitive tourist product
- Fundamentals of marketing and advertising
- Diversification of rural homestead tourist products
- Legal and financial aspect of the activities
- Foreign languages
- Psychological approaches for working with clients
- A cluster approach

## “The Waldwinkel German School” Private Museum

Inessa Natalich started out by buying her home in 1991, which once housed a German primary school, established in 1890. After the war, it became a Russian school. When sifting through the school ruins, she found pieces for **the museum**. She communicated with locals and former inhabitants of Eastern Prussia to find out more about the school’s history. After familiarizing herself with the history of Waldwinkel and the school itself, Inessa Natalich decided to open a museum in 2011, supported by the project **“WANAPE: Water, Nature, and People in a Vanishing Landscape. Development of Sustainable Tourism in Russia and the Republic of Belarus”** (co-financed by the EU). The museum was opened on the ground floor of the building.

The museum is a replicate of the interior of the prewar school classroom. Information stands provide detailed information about the educational system of Eastern Prussia (in Labiau District, now Polessk), memories and photographs of former pupils, stories about the settlement’s past and the harsh daily life of the first Soviet settlers. Unique authentic articles from German and Soviet history can also be viewed in the museum.

Today Inessa Natalich teaches five different lessons and organizes **Prussian traditional holidays**. Local meetings, educational seminars, and master classes for children take place in her hospitable museum. She can now present interesting films and photographs with commentary to visitors during the excursions – digital photo frames hang on the walls, and a screen and a projector were acquired.



## Heads and specialists of regional and local governments

Development of rural initiatives and rural tourism at a site is impossible without support of the local authorities. It is much easier for them to provide support if they understand the real needs of the sector.

### What Should be Taught?

- Rural tourism as an instrument for local development
- Successful experience in Russia and other countries
- Financial, informational, consultative, legislative, and legal support for rural tourism
- Strategic planning and marketing tourism products. The tourist cluster concept

Recommendations elaborated by the Russian Civic Chamber to regional governments stated:

Opportunities for dedicated support of rural tourism development within their jurisdiction shall be considered.

Opportunities for devising and implementing regional strategies and special-purpose programs for development of rural and ecological tourism shall be considered.

**Shulgan-Tash Reserve** was created to conserve forests inhabited by the rare Burzyan wild honeybee. The custodians of the forests, the Bashkirs, were traditionally engaged in wild honey collection in natural tree hives. Thanks to the zapovednik, wild honey apiculture, which disappeared from adjacent lands a quarter of a century ago, has received new growth opportunities, and the **Burzyan wild honey bee**, which is critically endangered, has higher chances of being preserved.

Wild honey is an exclusive product. At present, wild honey apiculture remains only **in Shulgan-Tash Zapovednik and Bashkiria National Park** in Burzyansky District of Bashkiria. Inhabitants of neighboring villages are authentic wild honey gatherers, who transfer their knowledge and skills related to this unique activity from generation to generation.

**Honey tours** are organized for visitors jointly with the protected areas. There is a great demand for excursions to the wild hives during the honey harvest, when visitors can take part in gathering the honey. Thus, the PAs help the wild honey gatherers to sell the honey, and the visitors can satisfy their curiosity and make sure they receive a **genuine product**.

Seminar-training for multisectoral group involved in protecting cultural landscapes (protected area managers, local communities, local authorities) was held at Shulgan-Tash Zapovednik under support of Satoyama Initiative.



## Staff of protected areas

PA specialists are often catalysts for developing rural tourism on protected and adjacent lands. However, they sometimes lack practical skills of working with local people. This theme is crucial for biosphere reserves.

### What Should be Taught?

- Successful experience of Russian and foreign PAs
- Rural tourism as a form of working with local communities around PAs and integration of PAs into the region's social and economic development
- Strategic planning: from idea to action planning
- Forming and promoting comprehensive tourist products of PAs with involvement of local communities. The tourist cluster concept

### How to Train People?

Forms of training used in the rural tourism sphere:

- Short-term and interactive training seminars and master-classes (1–5 days)
- Educational exchanges in successful countries and regions
- Individual consultations over the course of project implementation
- Long-distance learning
- Webinars

### Elena Kalitina, a potter in Vershinino village, Arkhangelsk Region.

This summer in Vershinino village a pottery studio opened its doors to residents and guests of the Kenozero Region. The studio was created by Elena Kalitina, one of the winners of the mini-grant contest “**Sparks of Hope for Russian Villages.**”



In her studio, Elena Kalitina, a potter who has been cooperating with Kenozersky National Park for several years, will make souvenirs and clay pots, as well as provide information, conduct master classes, and put items on display for visitors to see.

In order to set up the pottery studio, a kiln and a clay mixer, as well as other supplies were purchased. The potter now has the material, an electric potter's wheel, and tools for the work. Elena has already fired several items in the new furnace and has put the finished products in **Kenozersky National Park's** souvenir shop for sale. According to Elena, the kiln is easy-to-handle and very economical.



## Tourist business specialists

Managers of tourist agencies often underestimate recreational capabilities of rural areas. Training of these specialists will help forge new partnerships and attract more visitors.

### What Should be Taught?

- Trial visits in order to introduce them to local tourist products



Map author: Ekaterina Rudykh

### “Pocha Village Guesthouse,” Pocha, Arkhangelsk Region

Pocha is the only inhabited settlement within **Kenozersky National Park** founded as a logging settlement in the middle of the 20th century. Unlike other villages of Kenozero Region, which enjoy huge popularity among park visitors, Pocha is off main visitor routes. The village is located in a very picturesque area, situated on both banks of the Pocha River amidst the forest. But until the summer of 2015, park guests could not stay there, as no accommodations were available.

Nadezhda Baeva, who worked at Voloshevskaya High School but is now a pensioner, decided to make her parents’ old rustic home into a comfortable place to host guests. She heard about the mini-grant contest **“Sparks of Hope for Russian Villages,”** and though she hesitated for some time, she decided to submit a proposal.

Now the house has had a face-lift thanks to the grant (wallpaper was hung, the country stove was repaired, the floors were painted, etc.), patchwork quilts and curtains were sewn, floor coverings were woven, and a refrigerator, electrical kettle, and electrical cooker, as well as bed sheets were purchased. The village residents found antiques in their houses and brought them to Nadezhda to decorate the interior.



# Opportunities for Cooperation

We would be glad to cooperate with you when devising and implementing similar projects in Russia.

## Our team can assist with the following services:

- Conducting educational seminars and training exchanges on various aspects of development of rural initiatives and rural tourism for representatives of governmental agencies, business, NGOs, and local communities
- Devising concepts, strategies, and target programs to promote and support rural tourism, including mechanisms for financial support of local initiatives. When drafting documents, participation by local people and all stakeholders is critical
- Comprehensive work with stakeholders at the district and regional level for creating local rural tourism clusters, engaging the local community, enhancing interaction between the cluster and government authorities
- Preparing proposals for seeking funds for similar programs and projects from foundations, grant-making organizations, and from Russia's regional and federal budgets
- Devising and implementing turnkey programs for obtaining small grants and micro-credit for locals aimed at the village/district/region's social and economic development
- Devising, designing, and creating turnkey rural tourist infrastructure sites: ecological and historical trails, bicycle routes, museums, visitor centres, information stands and signs, etc.
- Devising and assisting in implementation of comprehensive programs for promoting rural tourism services

**Would you like to carry out a similar project in your area?**

**Let's work together to make your project a success!**

Moscow, Russia, Zapovedniks Centre, NGO

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“Interactive methods, tuition for each participant, and a project-oriented approach to trainings underlie all of the Centre’s educational programs. Participants devise their own practical projects based on the results of each seminar or educational tour. After the seminar, with methodological support from experienced counselors, these projects are put into practice, and successful experiences are shared throughout the PA network.

Teaching is not an end in itself, but a means of achieving practical goals.”

- From the description of the Zapovedniks Centre educational program



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