

**LINKING TOURISM AND
CONSERVATION IN THE RUSSIAN
ARCTIC**

**ARKHANGELSK, RUSSIA
NOVEMBER 6-9, 1998**

WORKSHOP SUMMARY

Prepared by
Lee Langstaff, Workshop Facilitator
RESOLVE, Inc.
Washington, DC

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Introduction and Background

The workshop, *Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Russian Arctic* was conducted in Arkhangelsk, Russia November 6-8, 1998 as part of the ongoing effort to develop and implement the WWF project “Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Arctic”. The overall goal of this project is to encourage the development of tourism in the Arctic that protects the environment, educates tourists about the Arctic environment and its inhabitants, respects the rights and cultures of Arctic residents and provides economic benefits to Arctic communities by developing and applying a set of Principles and Codes of Conduct for Arctic Tourism.

This workshop was designed to bring together potential partners in tourism and conservation to explore the unique issues associated with development of tourism linked to conservation in the Russian Arctic specifically, with the objective of identifying potential opportunities for implementation of the project in Russia, and to identify Russian partners for ongoing involvement.

A total of 65 individuals participated in the workshop, representing the fields of tourism and tour operations, science and research, nature conservation, governmental administration, and indigenous communities from Russia, Norway, Iceland, Greenland, Finland, Germany, The Netherlands, the United States and Scotland (a list of participants can be found at Appendix A).

The workshop was hosted by the WWF Arctic Programme (Oslo) and the Ecological Travels Centre (Moscow). Support for the workshop was provided by the joint Russian-Norwegian Cooperation on Biological Diversity which is one of five working groups under the Joint Russian-Norwegian Commission on Environmental Protection.

The workshop included a series of three presentation sessions, each followed by an interactive workshop session. For the workshop sessions, six small groups gathered to discuss specific questions, drawing on the issues and ideas raised in the presentations and on the rich cumulative experience and expertise of participants (see Appendix B for the workshop Agenda). The first session focused on lessons learned from actual experiences with tourism in the Russian Arctic; the second on the unique opportunities represented by protected areas in the Russian Arctic, and the third on identifying specific possibilities for implementing the project in Russia.

Summary of Workshop Discussions

Overall Summary.

It emerged from the workshop that there are a great many potential opportunities for, and there is also great interest in (both within and outside of Russia), developing tourism linked to nature conservation in the Russian Arctic. While nature tourism generally, and Arctic tourism specifically, is not now extensively developed in Russia, many believe that it is poised for rapid growth. This situation represents a real and unique opportunity to integrate conservation goals into arctic tourism development in Russia while it is still in its embryonic stage. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Principles and Codes of Conduct for Arctic Tourism can provide guidance for this development, steering it in a direction that will help to ensure that the inherent potential for environmental degradation from un-managed tourism activities is not realized in the Russian Arctic.

Participants felt it important to note that Arctic tourism anywhere requires special efforts to meet the challenges of accessing and operating in remote and rugged places. They emphasized that these challenges are compounded in Russia, particularly given the current political and economic situation, which increases the already high degree of uncertainty and unpredictability regarding infrastructure and administrative support for these activities. Furthermore, as pressure for fruitful economic development increases, tourism itself may not be viewed as a first priority, and may compete with potentially conflicting interests of industrial development in the Russian Arctic. There are related challenges associated with monitoring and enforcement to ensure compliance with environmentally appropriate rules and regulations.

Having noted and acknowledged these challenges, participants invested their combined experience, expertise, and thoughtful consideration in exploring the potential benefits of, and promising approaches for, developing tourism in the Russian Arctic which supports and enhances the conservation prospects for this special region, consistent with the WWF Principles and Codes of Conduct for Arctic Tourism developed. Some highlights of the potential benefits identified by participants included:

- Linking tourism and scientific research activities to increase understanding that will enhance Arctic environmental and cultural conservation efforts;
- Providing an economic alternative to industrial development in the Arctic – benefiting the environment, tourists and local communities and traditional lifestyles;
- Generating support for the effective oversight of existing protected areas – including appropriate tourism components;
- Promoting the designation of new protected areas in the Russian Arctic regions that successfully combine tourism, education and conservation components;
- Adapting the WWF Principles and Codes of Conduct into rules and regulations for ensuring ecologically and culturally appropriate tourism activities.

It was further pointed out that these and other benefits of linking tourism and conservation successfully can accrue to the wide range of players, including nature itself, tour operators (local or foreign), local communities and economies, science and education, the Russian economy, tourists. Participants acknowledged that this can only be accomplished if the links between

tourism and conservation are integrated successfully throughout the development of tourism in the Russian Arctic.

Finally, participants indicated their support for pursuing tourism development efforts in the context of the “Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Arctic” project, by 1) identifying promising projects to demonstrate and test implementation of the Principles and Codes of Conduct; 2) advocating a leadership and coordination role for the Moscow-based Ecological Tourism Centre (ETC) as the primary Russian liaison to the WWF Arctic Tourism Project, and 3) encouraging further participation by all interested parties – particularly those represented at the workshop.

Following are summaries in greater detail of the results of each of the three workshop sessions.

Session I: Experiences with Ecological Tourism in the Russian Arctic

Following presentations from ten speakers who described a range of specific efforts and experiences with tourism in Arctic Russia, workshop participants broke into six small groups to draw out the lessons that can be learned from these and other efforts and applied to the implementation of the project “Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Arctic”. Discussion questions for this workshop session included:

1. What has worked well - and would support the goals of the “Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Arctic” project - and why ?
2. What have been the greatest challenges – what has not worked so well and why? Are these barriers to the goals of the “Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Arctic” project?
3. What are the potential benefits of pursuing the “Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Arctic” project in Russia, and who benefits? Potential negative effects?

Drawing on their combined experiences, participants noted the following aspects of tourism activities in the Russian Arctic that have been successful:

- Lower costs than in other regions of the Arctic. Compared to other regions of the Arctic, costs in Russia have been favorably low, allowing for relatively affordable tourist opportunities and profitability for tour operators. However, recent experience indicates this may be changing.
- Developing a market by “selling” the uniqueness and intrigue of the Russian Arctic. Tours to the Russian Arctic satisfy the growing hunger for adventure, physical challenge, and travel to remote, rugged ends of the earth.
- Combining tourism with scientific research in a mutually beneficial way. Specific examples of ornithological and palaeontological research efforts benefiting from linked tourism efforts were highlighted. Benefits accrue to tourists interested in participating in real research, additional human resources (in the form of tourists) for accomplishing

research tasks, financial support for the research through fees paid by tourists, and education of tourists which leads to greater awareness of research needs.

- Providing a viable alternative to environmentally less desirable economic development – especially to small local and indigenous communities.
- Increasing awareness and support for the need to protect and care for the Arctic.
- Providing for benefits to local and/or indigenous communities in the Arctic.

Participants illuminated a number of significant challenges they have encountered which, if not addressed, could limit or block attempts to successfully pursue tourism in the Russian Arctic overall, and certainly diminish opportunities to implement the “Linking tourism and Conservation in the Arctic” project in Russia. The following challenges were emphasized:

- Infrastructure to support tourism in the Russian Arctic is limited, and in some cases inadequate. What does exist is increasingly inconsistent and unreliable, both in terms of planning and communication (especially for foreign tour operators), and logistics (transportation and supplies).
- Administrative requirements were described as a moving target, especially with respect to determining what permits or permissions are needed and what they cost, when and from whom they need to be obtained, and procedures for obtaining them. Inconsistent and sometimes contradictory information regarding these and also regarding applicable rules, regulations or restrictions adds to the uncertainty and unpredictability for planners and operators.
- Monitoring and enforcement of administrative requirements is also inconsistent and vulnerable to manipulation. If this continues to be the case, the likelihood of effective implementation of rules and regulations, consistent with the WWF Principles and Codes of Conduct would be seriously undermined.
- In part due to the challenges above, economic benefits are frequently not directed to local or even Russian economies. To the greatest extent possible logistics and supplies are arranged through the most reliable, consistent and predictable entities, and these are often external to the destination of the tourism activity or even to Russia itself.
- There is a shortage of educated, informed and trained individuals with whom to partner or to assist in planning and conducting tour operations in the Russian Arctic. Likewise, there is currently a shortage of trained guides or educators needed to succeed in achieving the educational benefits that could be derived from linking tourism and conservation.

As noted above, if these challenges are not successfully addressed, they will constrain (and already are doing so) development of tourism in the Russian Arctic overall, thereby also diminishing the opportunities for generating the range of benefits possible from linking tourism and conservation goals.

Session II: Opportunities to Link Tourism and Conservation in Protected Areas in the Russian Arctic

This session focused on the unique opportunities offered by, and the issues and challenges associated with, linking tourism and conservation specifically in protected areas. The following questions were provided to guide workshop discussions:

1. What are the potential benefits?
2. What are the potential disadvantages?
3. How can tourism in or around protected areas be structured to maximize benefits and minimize disadvantages?
4. How should tourism in protected areas be pursued in the context of the “Linking Tourism with Conservation in the Arctic” project, and are their specific possibilities that are most promising?

The issue of developing tourism in protected areas in Russia generated a great deal of interest and concern among workshop participants. On the one hand, enthusiastic interest stems from the fact that these often unique, remote and pristine areas are highly desirable destinations and represent a potentially important market for arctic tourism; and on the other hand, there is real concern that development of tourism in these areas represents significant risk of diminishing or even destroying the very characteristics that are the reason for their special protected status. Particular concern was expressed about tourism development associated with the strictly protected and very unique zapovedniks. Conflicts are already evident between scientist researchers and tour operators (and tourists) regarding access and appropriate activities in these reserve areas. There is also concern that, under current political and economic conditions in Russia, the monitoring and enforcement of restrictions that is needed in protected areas may not be reliable.

In considering the potential benefits of developing tourism specifically in protected areas, emphasis was placed on the fact that these areas offer perhaps the greatest opportunity to integrate tourism, education and conservation goals in a relatively controlled environment. Specific benefits discussed by participants included:

- Protected areas represent unique and often rare environments and therefore can provide for unique and highly sought-after tourism experiences. Developing tourism appropriately in these areas could increase awareness and appreciation for these special resources and help to build support, both within Russia and internationally, for their continued protection.
- Benefits could accrue in the form of revenues from tourism that could be used to support the administration and management of protected areas, including the enforcement of

appropriate codes of conduct with their boundaries. Ensuring that protected areas do benefit financially should be one of the goals of developing the types tourism in these areas that are consistent with conservation.

- Tourism in protected areas can provide additional and much-needed resources for scientific research in protected areas. This could take the form of either financial support from tourism revenues, or human resources through research-related tourism where tourists participate in collecting data or other research activities under the supervision of scientist-guides.
- Protected areas also present great opportunities for education at all levels – from young children, to graduate students, to interested tourists. Educational programs already exist in a number of protected areas. Existing programs could be enhanced and expanded, and new programs could be developed through linkages with tourism developments that bring funding and expertise. This education component can also provide additional support to research efforts in these areas, as described above.
- A critical benefit, with respect to achieving and measuring the common goals of tourism and conservation, lies in the fact that the potential for structure, control and monitoring of tourism development and tourist behavior is greater in defined protected areas than it is in non-protected areas.

Finally, several recommendations emerged from this workshop session for how to approach appropriate development of tourism associated with protected areas – approaches that could maximize the likelihood of achieving the benefits, and minimize the potential problems. These include:

- Comprehensive documentation and assessment of existing protected areas. This should include accurate mapping of protected area boundaries and ecological characteristics, and inventories of resources and their conditions within in the protected areas, thereby compiling existing information and identifying information gaps.. In addition to providing a needed public overview of protected areas and their resources, this will provide a baseline against which to measure the effects of tourism-related activities, and the success of efforts to link tourism and conservation in these areas.
- Different types of protected areas should be defined, and the range of activities and restrictions appropriate for each type clearly delineated. There was particular emphasis on distinguishing zapovedniks, which should be at the most restrictive end of the spectrum, from other protected areas, such as zakasniks and increased numbers of National Park types of areas where more tourism activities could appropriately be allowed. Several participants stressed the unique nature of the zapovedniks, emphasizing that tourism activities in these reserves should be considered very carefully in order to minimize violation of their strict protective regime.
- For each protected area, there should be an assessment of tourism/recreational opportunities and capacities, including determination of appropriate types and intensities

of tourism for that area. In particular, tourism activities that support the work or purpose of the reserves should be identified and pursued.

- Zones should be established both within and surrounding protected areas, and appropriate, activities, rules and regulations defined for each zone. In the case of zapovedniks, it was specifically suggested that most tourism activities be limited to the areas adjacent to but outside the boundaries of the reserves, since most of the same or similar resources can be experienced there that are found inside the boundaries.
- The creation of new protected areas in Arctic Russia should be pursued, since such areas exist currently only outside of the Arctic region. These should include new National Parks, and should combine tourism, education and conservation components from the very beginning.

Session III: How to Connect current Activities in Russia to “Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Arctic”

Drawing on the examples, lessons and insights provided by all of the preceding presentations and workshop discussions, participants focused on identifying the most promising possibilities for moving forward with implementation of the “Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Arctic” in Russia. The groups addressed four discussion questions in this session. The combined recommendations developed by the groups in response to each question are summarized below.

1. What are the characteristics of tourism activities that are the most promising possibilities for pursuing the goals of “Linking Tourism and Conservation” in the Russian Arctic?

Groups identified a range of activities that they believe will provide the greatest likelihood of success in pursuing the goals of “Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Arctic” project in Russia. Recommendations included the following:

- Overall, concentrate on getting tourism in Russia more organized, with emphasis on:
 - ~ Focusing on low impact tourism opportunities;
 - ~ Development of professional guides, through education and training and possible certification or other quality control mechanism;
 - ~ Explore possibility of licensing of tour operators (particularly in protected areas) consistent with WWF principles and codes.
 - ~ Decreasing the amount of “wild” (unorganized, unsupervised, unmonitored) tourism in the Russian Arctic.
- Develop a comprehensive information base regarding tourism (particularly ecological tourism) in Russian Arctic. It should identify different types of tourism opportunities and operators and the associated supporting infrastructure and contacts for pursuing them. It should also highlight positive examples of tourism activities that are conducted consistent with the WWF Principles and Codes of Conduct. This resource can be used to inform all interested parties, including tour operators (foreign and Russian); to support marketing

purposes; and to provide a baseline against which to measure the implementation of WWF guidelines.

- Establish connections and communication channels between interested parties – in particular, foreign tourist companies with local organizations who can play a role in assisting with infrastructure, administrative requirements, and operational support for foreign operations.
- Emphasize conservation in protected areas – facilitate the cooperative interaction of managers and administrative authorities of protected areas with tourism experts.

2. *What projects could be carried out during the 1999 Arctic tourist season that would test the application of the Guidelines and Codes of Conduct for Arctic Tourism in Russia?*

Many suggestions for specific promising opportunities were forwarded:

- Franz Josef Land – application of WWF Principles and Codes on ecological trips (Plancius/Ko de Korte).
- Evaluation of Murmansk Marine Biological Institute (MMBI) project on salmon fishing on the Kola Peninsula to profile in Linking Tourism and Conservation Project (Vladimir Averinsov)
- Promotion of nature reserve in cooperation with local Sami and tourists on the Kola Peninsula (*Konstantin Kushnir*)
- Vorkuta: identify conservation project connected to reindeer herding as an alternative source of livelihood for local people. (*Tatiana Tyupenko*)
- Kolguev and other sites in Pechora region – apply to oil companies operating in the Pechora Sea for funding of a project to improve the living conditions of local Nenets through involvement in ecotourism and reserve management. (*Ludmilla Poroshkina and WWF-Russia Programme Office*)
- Produce a video about Nenets with emphasis on natural and cultural values and protected areas in order to educate tourists. (*Ludmilla Poroshkina*)
- Development of White Sea whale - watching tours – particularly in Solovetsky Islands area - using available and currently idle ships. (*Who?*)
- Restoration of Solovetsky Islands with tourist involvement. (*Who?*)
- Pursue ETC project in developing a large arctic state reserve (ETC)
- Educational tours in Arkhangelsk and Murmansk areas by GEF project.

3. *Who should be involved (play an active role) in order to move forward the development in Russia of “Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Arctic”?*

There was virtually unanimous support for the Ecological Travels Centre (ETC) to play a major leadership role in 1) acting as the chief point of contact for, and coordinating with, the WWF Project on Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Arctic; 2) facilitating communication and coordination among all interested parties in Russia; and 3) providing

information to and assisting foreign tour operators in developing linkages with Russian contacts.

More broadly, participants identified the range of parties who should be involved, or included in the coordination and communication efforts of the ETC and the Linking Tourism and Conservation project overall in order to provide the greatest likelihood for success. These include:

- Additional NGOs (can be leaders and drivers of this process) – Russian or international (including WWF-Russian Programme)
- Local and regional administrative authorities; state and local committees
 - The Committee on Protection of Nature
 - Ministries of Sports and Tourism (federal and regional)
 - Ecological Committee
- Protected area managers and administrators
- Scientific Organizations and researchers
 - specialists in ecology of the high north and arctic
 - paleontologists
 - Zoological Institute of St. Petersburg
- Tour Operators (foreign and Russian)
- Tourism officials and other specialists in tourism business development
- Non-commercial tourist clubs in Russia
- Indigenous communities or representative organizations
- Other Organizations
 - Euro Arctic Barents Council
 - Arctic Council
 - Norwegian-Russian Environment Committee

4. *What are the next steps that need to be taken? Who needs to take them? and When do they need to be taken?*

The following next steps were suggested, but not necessarily agreed to, by the workshop groups, and not necessarily in the order listed:

- Further identify and define pilot projects for 1999 (develop descriptions and proposals to submit to WWF Arctic Tourism Project (Who: project leaders or proposers, with possible coordination assistance from ETC as liaison to WWF).
- Possible follow-up workshop in Russia to further define, prioritize, and coordinate the range of activities to be undertaken (ETC coordinate).
- March 1999 Workshop of WWF “Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Arctic” project (in Husum, Germany) – opportunity to present specific pilot project proposals.
- Identify funding sources for projects. Specific opportunities include:

- ~ Russian-Norwegian Environmental Cooperation on Biological Diversity meets in January to make decisions regarding project funding – applications must be in by January 1st;
 - ~ Barents Council of Environmental Ministers meet in March) (Who: those interested in seeking funding for related projects or activities).
- Establish contact and communication mechanism with all relevant and interested partner organizations (Who: ETC)
 - Collect information regarding existing infrastructure, catalogue of current activities and opportunities – (see protected area suggestions) (ETC coordinate).
 - Establish mechanism for tracking and monitoring activities related to this project (ETC)

Participants did not specifically prioritize or assign responsibility for all activities. However, there was general desire for ETC to play a leadership role in helping to facilitate their implementation, coordinate with WWF Arctic Programme and to encourage and assist various other parties to take on specific tasks.

In closing the workshop, the following near-term follow-up actions were identified:

- 1) ETC will compile proceedings of workshop presentations.
- 2) A summary of the highlights of workshop discussions will be drafted by the facilitator and will be circulated to all participants.
- 3) Planning for the next workshop for the “Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Arctic” Project, to be held in Husum, Germany in early March 1999, is underway. At this workshop the results of pilot projects conducted during the 1998 season will be presented and evaluated. Those interested in conducting pilot projects in the 1999 season are encouraged to submit applications to WWF Arctic Programme for possible presentation at the Husum Workshop.

Conclusion

In conclusion it should be noted that the general tone throughout this workshop was one of collegial and collaborative exploration of a subject of real interest and significance to all participants. Genuine, respectful, and open exchange of a wide range of relevant experience, insight, and knowledge characterized both formal and informal interactions throughout. Participants successfully achieved the workshop objective of bringing together potential partners from the tourism and conservation sectors to assess the unique situation of the Russian Arctic and to identify promising opportunities and strategies to implement the WWF Project “Linking Tourism and Conservation in the Arctic” in Russia. They also indicated their support for continued interaction and involvement in this effort, and indicated their preference and support for an ongoing role by the ETC as primary partner and coordinator in Russia for the WWF Arctic Tourism Project.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: List of Workshop Participants

Appendix B: Workshop Agenda

[Appendix C: Resolution of participants]