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TOURIST POTENTIAL OF SLOVAKIA: REALIZED OPPORTUNITIES, PROSPECTS OF INCREASING THE EFFICIENCY OF USE

The article is devoted to the consideration of the current state of tourism potential in Slovakia and analysis of opportunities to increase its efficiency for the development of the tourist market of the country. Analysis of the tourist potential of Slovakia showed that the industry is rapidly developing due to the presence of unique natural recreational, historical and cultural resources in the country. However, due to insufficiently high level of service, undeveloped tourism infrastructure, the country is not able to realize its potential. In order to achieve higher growth rates in the tourism industry, Slovakia needs to realize a set of long-term and short-term goals, identify key markets, adapt the tourist product to world-class, stabilize the tourism market and get new markets for existing tourist products. In order to reveal the topic, a number of techniques used for geographic and economic sciences are used: methods of analysis, systematic, dialectical, economic-comparative, geographic-economic. The purpose of this work is to explore the tourism potential of Slovakia and to determine the possibilities of increasing its efficiency in building the tourism market of the country. It is shown that individual programs of the tourist market development of the country have been successfully implemented successfully today. Thanks to the public-private partnership, the country has created quite favorable conditions for the development of both organized international and domestic tourism, as well as for independent travel. According to the tourism development rating, Slovakia is an absolute leader on such indicators as the gross domestic product per capita, the share of tourism in GDP, the number of foreign tourist trips, as well as the place in the competitiveness rating of the tourism sector of the country. Based on the research conducted on the effectiveness of the country's tourism potential, a SWOT-analysis of the tourism industry was carried out.

Keywords: tourism potential, Slovakia, natural and recreational resources, public-private partnership, efficiency of the use of potential, international tourism.

Introduction. Despite the unique natural-recreational, historical and cultural resources, Slovakia is seriously lagging behind many of its closest neighbors in the development of tourism. Among the reasons for lagging behind are the unsatisfactory level of public and private marketing strategies, taxation, infrastructure condition, quality of services, etc. At the same time, in recent years Slovakia has made significant achievements in developing competitive types of tourism, attracting investments in the development of tourism infrastructure, and developing tourism. in depressed areas.

Analysis of recent research. Questions of the effectiveness of the use of the tourist potential of Slovakia have repeatedly come to the attention of scientists. Among the many works of Slovak tourism researchers, one can single out articles by Andrei Malakhovsky, Marian Gucik, Matush Marchichi, Peter Kristofori, Diani Kvasnova, Jani Kucherova, Vanda Marakova (2016), Miroslav Medvezhov (2016), Tomas Gaidoshik and others.

Unsolved problems. Today in Slovakia there remain unresolved problems of building effective relations and cooperation between the private and public sector at the local, regional and national level, creating competitive advantages for potential investors in the tourism industry, which generally determines the effectiveness of the use of the country's tourism potential to create a competitive tourism market.

The presentation of the main material. Despite the absence of the sea coast, which, according to international statistics, is the main driving force for tourism and travel, Slovakia has something to offer to foreign guests. The country is famous for its attractive natural wealth, with more than 40% of the territory covered with forests and about 60% of mountainous areas. There are dozens of ski resorts in the country, more than 10 thousand km of cycling trails and 14 thousand km of pedestrian tourist trails. Among the most popular places are 9 national parks and 14 regional landscape parks (which together cover 22% of the country's territory). In addition, there are over 6 thousand caves in the country, of which 18 are open for tourists. Given these factors, we can conclude that Slovakia has a high potential for the development of activities in the field of agro-tourism, winter and summer sports, and the development of tourism in rural areas. The presence of more than 1.2 thousand mineral springs and associated 25 resort towns creates favorable conditions for the further development of health tourism. In addition, there are 7 natural and cultural sites of UNESCO World Heritage Sites and more than 9,000 national cultural monuments in the country (Satelitný účet).

The American news network «CNN» in 2018 named the 11 most interesting places to visit in Slovakia. The list includes ski resorts and the rich historical and cultural heritage of the Slovak cities. The list includes such natural and historical sights as the Low Tatras, the Spissky Castle, the High Tatras, and the city of Levoča,

Bojnice, Kosice, Banská Štiavnica, Trencin, Bardejov, Bratislava and Kežmarok.

Tourism in Slovakia is one of the most promising sectors of the economy. Here in recent years, many new recreation centers have been built, offering their services both in the summer and in the winter season. Tourism revenues in 2017 exceeded 2 billion euros. More than 20 thousand entrepreneurs are employed in the tourist business in Slovakia. In the country, tourists can stay overnight in more than 3,500 hotels and boarding houses.

Slovakia is becoming an increasingly attractive holiday destination for foreign tourists. 2017 was a record number of tourists visiting Slovakia, their number for the first time in the history of the country exceeded 5 million. The positive trend is manifested in both domestic and inbound tourism. Of the total

tourists, the largest share belonged to the Slovaks - 60 percent or almost 3 million guests. If we compare this number with 2016, then we are talking about an almost 15 percent increase. The number of foreigners who visited Slovakia last year for the first time in history surpassed the level of 2 million and in comparison with 2016 increased by 18 percent. Tourists in 2017 also broke the record for the number of nights spent in Slovakia, which exceeded 14 million (Slovenská agentúra).

The largest number of foreign tourists came from the Czech Republic (30.7%), Poland (9.3%), Germany (8.8%), Hungary (4.5%), Austria (4.3%), Great Britain (3, 8%) and Italy (3.2%). The highest growth rates in the number of tourists are observed among visitors from China (+ 81%), Israel (+ 20.6%), Russia (+ 19.8%), the Netherlands (+ 15.3%) and the USA (+ 14.7 %) [eight].

An increasing trend is observed in the case of tourists from Russia (more than 27 thousand) and Ukraine (more than 40 thousand) (Slovenská agentúra). Given the agreement on the liberalization of the visa regime for Ukraine, which was reached on December 8, 2016, it can be assumed that the current trend will increase with time (EU reaches).

It should be noted that domestic tourists spend two times less money abroad than foreign tourists spend in Slovakia, which is explained by the high rates of development of outbound tourism and orientation of the country's tourism industry to tourists from economically developed countries of Europe.

According to the rating of tourism development, Slovakia is the absolute leader in such indicators as gross domestic product per capita, the share of tourism in GDP, the number of foreign tourist trips, as well as a place in the ranking of the competitiveness of the country's tourism sector. The reason for this situation, in our opinion, is the successful geographical position (neighborhood with economically developed countries of Europe), favorable climatic resources, already developed tourist infrastructure, as well as private investment in the tourism industry of the country, and one of the main ones – liberal prices for tourist services. At the same time, public spending in Slovakia on the development of tourism is at the level of \$ 0.04 billion; In general, the tourism sector is developing through private investment (US Department).

In 2016, the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development of Slovakia allocated grants totaling 3.4 million euros for the development of the tourism industry. This money went to the implementation of dozens of new projects, updating and expanding the list of services for tourists. Such state support to entrepreneurs allows them to realize interesting ideas and, ultimately, attract more guests to the country. In total, 32 tourist organizations in Slovakia received donations, foreign ones report. The largest amount (767 thousand euros) went to the High Tatras region. Bratislava and Liptov received a little less, which today are considered very promising in terms of the number of foreign guests (Ministerstvo hospodárstva).

Despite its high potential, Slovakia lags behind its closest neighbors – Austria, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, in many respects tourist market. Among the main reasons for lagging behind are the unsatisfactory level of public and private marketing strategies, taxation, the state of the

infrastructure and quality of services, the ongoing process of building effective relations at the local, regional and national levels including cooperation of the private and public sectors, which, on the other hand, creates competitive advantages for potential investors, among which it is important to specify:

- the number and level of education of the labor force, and its cost;
- the geographical location of Slovakia in the center of Europe and a satisfactory infrastructure connection with neighboring countries;
- national security (from a political and environmental point of view);
- favorable climatic conditions for winter and summer holidays;
- the complexity and uniqueness of the cultural, historical and natural wealth of the country;
- the growing attendance of Slovakia by foreign tourists, creating a demand for quality services within the sector;
- success in overcoming the crisis;
- investment incentives in accordance with EU legislation;

State mechanisms and programs, through which this year provided financial support for projects related to the development of tourism in the amount of 4.2 million euros (Ministerstvo dopravy).

With regard to specific sectors in the framework of tourism that may be attractive to foreign investors, the Agency for Development of Investments and Trade of the Slovak Republic identifies the following:

- recreation complexes;
- ski resorts;
- reconstruction and transformation of cultural and historical sites (for tourist purposes);
- golf courses and sports complexes, campgrounds;
- water parks, water and thermal resorts, indoor and outdoor pools;
- tourist accommodation facilities (hotels, guest houses, motels, etc.), catering facilities;
- theme parks;
- multifunctional objects for the presentation of cultural events, congresses, festivals, folklore, customs and traditions.

In addition, in order to simplify the search for investment opportunities, the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic, in cooperation with the relevant regional authorities, developed a database containing specific investment projects aimed at developing tourism in the country's regions (Slovenská agentúra).

In Slovakia, there are a number of government agencies and agencies offering assistance and support at all stages of planning and implementing investment projects. And, most importantly, there is also a network of professional private companies that specialize in cooperation with foreign investors. One of the most experienced and large is Slovakia Invest, a specialist in doing business and investing in Slovakia, one of the leading players on the Slovak market.

According to the Ministry of Economy of Slovakia, the priorities of the ministry for 2018 will be reforms in the energy sector, changing the philosophy of supporting investments and improving the business environment. In 2018, about a hundred investors are planning to invest in the country's economy, two thirds of them in eastern and central Slovakia. According to the new investment rules aimed at reducing the economic gap between the regions, support for investment projects in the west of Slovakia is possible only if the project includes investments in "very high added value", new developments, or research activities. At the end of 2018, the Ministry also plans to submit an economic policy strategy until 2030, which provides priorities for investment in the tourism industry (Ministerstvo hospodárstva).

Separate programs for the development of the tourism market in the country have already been successfully implemented today. Thanks to the public-private partnership, the country has created quite favorable conditions for the development of both organized international and domestic tourism, and for independent travel.

Slovakia is currently ranked 10th in the global ranking of the strongest passports. Henley & Partners has published a new edition of the Passport Index, which shows how freely citizens of a country can travel the world. The Slovak passport makes it possible to visit 179 countries of the world without a visa, which is 14 countries more than in the previous 2017. The absolute leader is Japan, whose citizens can visit 189 countries without applying for a visa. One visa-free regime less – in Germany and Singapore (Henley & Partners Passport).

Slovakia was the first country in which the international IT company Refundit began testing a mobile application to simplify the refund of value added tax to tourists from non-EU countries. Thanks to the application, tourists to send a request for a VAT refund will be enough to scan a check, passport and boarding pass. Third-country nationals who have made a purchase totaling more than 175 euros (on one check) have the right to receive VAT back. In Slovakia, in 2017, the tourists were returned 2.8 million euros. The Slovak government hopes that the new approach will increase this amount and will contribute to the development of tourism in the country (Finančnej správy).

In 2018, Slovakia launched a number of free mobile applications that could be useful for tourists and travel lovers (Travel in Slovakia).

Slovakia Travel. The new official app called Slovakia Travel will help travelers discover the most interesting places in Slovakia and plan their trip. It contains an overview of the most popular tourist attractions, a number of the best hotels and restaurants, as well as a calendar of events. The application is available for both Android and iOS.

Vypadni.sk. The app is perfect for those who are looking for inspiration and new travel ideas. Here you can find more than 2000 natural, cultural, historical and other sights of Slovakia, see their photos and learn a lot of interesting things. The application is available for Android and iOS.

Bratislava Region. The application combines everything necessary for a visitor to the Bratislava region – the most interesting sights and events, the

best hotels and restaurants (and not only). The application is available for Android and iOS.

Cestovné poriadky CP. Schedule of trains, buses and public transport in one place. It is useful not only for travel, but also for daily life in Slovakia. The application is available for Android and iOS, the Internet version also works well.

Hiking – Turistická mapa SK. Tourist maps that can be downloaded directly to your phone. It's especially useful for all those who like to walk through forests and mountains. The application is available for Android (Travel in Slovakia).

From November 8, 2017, the Dubai Airlines Emirates and Flydubai began operating joint flights from Bratislava to Australia, China and South Korea with a transfer in Dubai. Airlines will continue to be based at Dubai International Airport, synchronizing their systems and operating the hub to ensure convenient travel to Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Bali, Maldives, Seychelles, Mauritius, Philippines, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, China, Australia, India, South Africa, Bahrain, Cuveit, Saudi Arabia, Iran through this largest international airport (Bratislava Airport).

The project "UP! CITY", in which you can rent an electric car, bicycle, or other environmentally friendly vehicles appeared in Bratislava, in 2017. "UP! CITY" is a joint initiative of Volkswagen Slovakia and the public association Aliancia Stará Tržnica, and Bratislava is also one of the partners (Up! City).

In 2014, Slovakia developed a long-term development plan for bicycle infrastructure and cycling tourism. In an effort to follow the example of the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany with their impressive number of cyclists on the streets, a strategy was developed to introduce specific activities that would popularize the bicycle both as a vehicle and as a way of recreation. Mostly cycling develops in the city of Zagora, where a network of cycling routes already existed. But with the support of Phare-Credo resources, 600 km of bike lanes should be built in Záhorie (Ministerstvo dopravy).

On the basis of the conducted research on the effectiveness of using the tourism potential of the country, a SWOT analysis of the Slovak tourist sector has been performed:

Strengths:

- effective pricing policy;
- favorable geographical position;
- unique natural and recreational potential;
- rich historical and cultural heritage;
- unique tourist resources.

Weak sides:

- low investment efficiency in the tourism industry, reducing the efficiency of public spending in the tourism sector;
- inconsistency of the quality of tourist services with international standards;
- insufficient branding of the tourist areas of the country;
- low competitiveness of the tourism infrastructure;
- lack of investment in the tourism infrastructure.

Opportunities:

- encouragement and popularization of domestic tourism;
- development of alternative types of tourism;
- attracting tourists from the neighboring countries;
- holding major events (Olympic games, sports championships, festivals, etc.).

Threats:

- stiff competition from the popular tourist destinations in Western Europe;
- unstable political and economic situation of individual countries - suppliers of tourists (Russia, Ukraine, etc.);
- visa regime of the Schengen zone;
- low investment attractiveness of individual regions.

For stable development of the tourism sector and attracting more foreign tourists, it is necessary to:

- create a loyal visa regime with countries with large tourist flows into the country;
- to invest significant funds in the creation of tourism infrastructure, and not just to maintain it;
- stimulate public-private partnership in all possible ways, which will gradually attract the interested private sector;
- to branch out the tourist infrastructure, increase the tourist attractiveness of the country, increase attention to the country's brand and unique territories, promote the popularization of domestic tourism;
- choose the right niche in the market (alternative types of tourism) and carry out the positioning of the proposed tourism services.

These recommendations, in our opinion, will allow Slovakia to achieve significant success in building a highly efficient tourism market in the near future.

Conclusions. Analysis of the tourist potential of Slovakia showed that the industry is developing rapidly due to the presence in the country of significant balneological and recreational resources. In quantitative terms, outbound tourism in Slovakia is almost 10 times higher than inbound tourism. The effectiveness of tourism potential in the country is lower compared with the neighboring countries of the European Union. In particular, inbound tourism in most EU countries provides significantly more foreign exchange earnings than in Slovakia. The Slovak Republic has unique natural-recreational and cultural-historical resources for the development of tourism and the influx of foreign tourists. However, due to the lower level of service and not sufficiently developed infrastructure, tourism is not able to realize its full potential. In order to achieve higher growth rates in the tourism industry, Slovakia must implement a set of long-term and short-term goals, identify key markets, adapt the tourism product to the world level, stabilize the tourism services market, and get new markets for existing tourism products.

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**ТУРИСТИЧНИЙ ПОТЕНЦІАЛ СЛОВАЧЧИНИ:
РЕАЛІЗОВАНІ МОЖЛИВОСТІ, ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ ПІДВИЩЕННЯ
ЕФЕКТИВНОСТІ ВИКОРИСТАННЯ**

Стаття присвячена розгляду сучасного стану туристичного потенціалу Словаччини та аналізу можливостей підвищення його ефективності для розбудови туристичного ринку країни. Аналіз туристичного потенціалу Словаччини показав, що галузь стрімко розвивається завдяки наявності у країні унікальних природно-рекреаційних та історико-культурних ресурсів. Однак, через недостатньо високий рівень сервісу, нерозвинену туристичну інфраструктуру, країна не у змозі реалізувати свій потенціал. Для того, щоб досягти більш високих темпів зростання туристичної галузі, Словаччина повинна реалізувати комплекс довгострокових і короткострокових цілей, визначити ключові ринки, адаптувати туристичний продукт до світового рівня, стабілізувати ринок туристичних послуг і отримати нові ринки для існуючих туристичних продуктів. З метою розкриття теми застосовується цілий ряд методик, властивих для географічних та економічних наук: методи аналізу, системний, діалектичний, економіко-порівняльний, географо-економічний. Мета цієї роботи: дослідити туристичний потенціал Словаччини та визначити можливості підвищення ефективності його використання для розбудови туристичного ринку країни. Показано, що окремі програми розвитку туристичного ринку країни, вже сьогодні успішно втілені в життя. Завдяки державно-приватного партнерства, в країні створено досить сприятливі умови для розвитку як організованого міжнародного і внутрішнього туризму, так і для самостійних подорожей. Згідно з рейтингом розвитку туризму, Словаччина є абсолютним лідером за такими показниками, як валовий внутрішній продукт на душу населення, частка туризму у ВВП, кількість іноземних туристичних поїздок, а також місце в рейтингу конкурентоспроможності туристичного сектора країни. На підставі проведених досліджень ефективності використання туристичного потенціалу країни виконано SWOT-аналіз туристичної галузі.

Ключові слова: туристичний потенціал, Словаччина, природно-рекреаційні ресурси, державно-приватне партнерство, ефективність використання потенціалу, міжнародний туризм.

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