

The effect of interpretation by local guides in burabay aspiring geopark, Kazakhstan

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Burabay National Park was founded in 2000 with the area of 83 511 ha and is located in the north of the country near the capital of Kazakhstan. Over 1 000 000 tourists come to Burabay annually including up to 500 000 in the summer time. The numbers grew significantly from 120 000 people in 2011 and 12 000 people in 2005 respectively. Most tourists are attracted by outdoor recreation activities including hiking, fishing, horse back riding etc. In a recent study, Burabay was named the most popular destination among CIS destinations for tourists from neighboring Russia.

Since 2017 Burabay has received the status of an Aspiring Geopark, and currently, there are ongoing efforts to nominate the territory of the national park and adjacent territories to UNESCO Global Geopark. Unique geological formations such as in-depth magmatic rocks and metamorphic mountain rocks are represented in the territory. There are 14 picturesque lakes in Burabay and uniquely formed rocks that are associated with many legends told by local people. 757 species of plants including 95 rare species, 305 vertebrate species of animals including rare and endangered 200 species of birds are found in the park. All these create vast opportunities for geotourism, ecotourism, different sporting activities, heritage tourism etc.

The study **aims** to look at the effect of interpretation provided by local guides to visitors in Burabay National Park. The guides were selected and trained among representatives of local community within geopark project. The **methods** used included questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The questions asked included not only the ones that can reveal the usefulness of interpretation, but also its effect on satisfaction level and destination loyalty. Can the local guides transmit the love and passion for their land to visitors? How perceptive the tourists are for hearing the legends "first-hand" from locals? Finally, can the management of the park employ the "soft" management approaches by proper selection and training of the guides and appropriate interpretation techniques? These and other questions are answered in this study. The **results** of the study show that interpretation and environmental education can be used as powerful management tool in combination with other tools. The role of museum visitation prior to the actual visits as well as the use of information panels can increase the efficiency of the tool. The study confirms that tour guide interpretation influences tourist satisfaction levels and has a positive effect on destination loyalty.



Borovoye Lake and Zhumbaktas Mountain in Burabay National Park

References

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