

Ecotourism in Protected Areas of Armenia

ARMENIAN ADVENTURE TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

AUA Ecotourism Conference

Yerevan, April 2017

Vladimir Grigoryan

Strategic Vision of Ecotourism Marketing



- Assessment of existing marketing gaps
 - Presence of online sources about PAs
 - Availability of PA oriented tour product
 - Identifying target markets
- Development of competitive tour products
 - Ecotourism and adventure activities in PAs
 - Transboundary tour packages, spanning NPs of Armenia and Georgia
- Improvement of marketing and visibility of PAs in Armenia to domestic and international markets
 - Encourage local tourism industry to actively involve and promote visits to PA
 - Achieve more coverage of PAs in digital and traditional media
 - Increase the level of visits to PAs from identified market segments

1. Market and Product Assessment

- Poor visibility or absence of PAs on Internet
- **On internet there are no any visible well-written single or multiday tours/itineraries offering visits to PAs**
- Incomplete information within the few existing web-sites
- Local TOs are not widely involved in promotion of PAs
- Identifying the priority target audience, separately for domestic and international market

1.1 Virtual analysis of the current situation

- Based on WTO 2016 report, 72% of Germans travel at least once a year
- Aug 2016 film “Conscious Caucasus – Europe’s Last Wilderness” made by WWF about wildlife/tourism and PAs in Armenia
- Anyone who has seen this film may consider Armenia as a possible travel destination for 2017
- What would they do first in order to find available offers, prices and other details?

Google!

1.1 Virtual analysis of the current situation

- Assessment, based on Google search results of first 5 pages (March 2017)
- Searched keyword(s) for specific tour product in NPs:

biking tour in national parks of Armenia

1.1 Virtual analysis of the current situation

Displayed Web-Sites	Disadvantages from Tourist's and/or TO's point of view
http://www.tufenkianheritage.com/en/accommodation/old-dilijan-complex/activities/	Nicely designed site, offering bike rent, but no further info and/or trail description.
http://dilijanpark.am/en/trips.htm	Tour itinerary shows durations, but info is incomplete and visually unattractive, no photos and/or maps, etc.
http://www.besttravel.am/en/mountain-biking-in-armenia/	Visually attractive page, but contains no description at all...
http://www.gardmantour.com/articles/extreme-vacations-ideas.html	Although, google shows that they go to Dilijan NP, but based on description they don't...
http://www.navasardtours.com/հեծանվային-տուրեր	No content at all at this page...
https://araratour.com/national-parks-of-armenia/	Attractive design with general info of NPs only...
Biking Armenia (google drive)	Shows only the drawing of itinerary on the map of Armenia, without any further information...
https://www.tripadvisor.com.sg/Attractions-g293931-Activities-c57-Armenia.html	A lot of unclassified information, no details.
http://world4you.travel/info/armenia/category/64/tour/256	Offers biking, but no PAs.
http://tjs-caucasus.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Armenia-EN-03-2015-WEB.pdf	Perhaps, the most informative PDF source, contains interesting information on English, nice photos and example of regional tour; but as a tour product it is incomplete. Also, most of the web-sites, stated as local (implementing?) contacts, do not exist...
http://eaptc.eu/en/awarded-grant-projects-am-ge/view-biking-and-rural-combined-cross-border-tourism-as-innovative-approach-for-promoting-cross-border-co.html	Offeres cross-border tourism between Armenia and Georgia, again, no any details.
http://www.yukontravel.net/gadventures/22571/best-of-georgia-and-armenia	USA? based agency, offering Georgia-Armenia tour. However, it doesn't go to PAs.

1.1 Virtual analysis of the current situation

Search Results:

- 12 relevant links out of 50; among them:
 - 0 in first 10
 - 2 results from local PAs/NGO/MoNP. However, none of them are complete as tour product.
 - 0 offer from any local Tour Operator
 - No presence of Pas, incomplete information and/or no links to booking

- Next searched keywords for specific tour product in NPs:

hiking tour in national parks of Armenia

1.1 Virtual analysis of the current situation

Displayed Web-Sites	Disadvantages from Tourist's and/or TO's point of view
http://ecotour.am/tours/hiking-in-dilijan-national-park/	Informative site. Offers hikes to Shikahogh, Dilijan and Gnishik. Has description, duration, photos, season, prices. No level of difficulty, no maps (GPS tracks in case of TOs are not necessary for public access?).
https://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g1160895-d7927718-r292397277-Dilijan_National_Park-Dilijan_Tavush_Province.html	Has very good reviews – 16 out of 22 rated as excellent. But! A couple from UK complains that «there is poor information on the internet» and gives recommendations how to get there... Citation: <i>“They call it the 'Switzerland of Armenia' and whilst there are some nice views there is trash everywhere. The town center is ugly, tourist information is impossible to find if you don't speak Armenian or Russian and I don't think we would recommend it to others. Good Luck and Enjoy. Visited March 2016»</i>
http://www.dilijanpark.am/trips.html	Contains 11 links of routes, but ALL are empty. Has a scan of brochure with bike routes, on Armenian only...
https://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2015/02/3-great-hikes-in-armenia.html	Very limited information, more like an introduction.
http://www.armane.am/tours-to-armenia-ecological-tours	Offers tour to Dilijan and Khosrov. Trail info has - Length of the trail, walking time, altitudes. No level of difficulty, maps, photos.
http://tjs-caucasus.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Armenia-EN-03-2015-WEB.pdf	Same as in biking.
http://www.tourradar.com/d/armenia	Attractive design, general info only.
http://www.tufenkianheritage.com/en/accommodation/old-dilijan-complex/activities/	Same as in biking.
http://transcaucasiantrail.org/en/	Citation from the site: <i>«Working with local partners, we are currently scouting possible routes through this region. The route will likely pass through Lake Arpi National Park and Dilijan National Park.»</i>

1.1 Virtual analysis of the current situation

https://www.lostwithpurpose.com/hiking-in-dilijan-lost-once-again/	Citation from site - <i>...but we certainly were lost hiking in Dilijan</i> <i>Only expert hikers need apply.</i> <i>Note that there is even a map (... sort of), but still we managed to get lost.</i>
http://www.navasardtours.com	No content at all.
http://mynatour.org/destination/sevan-national-park-%E2%80%93-armenia	Just a short introduction of Sevan.
https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction_Review-g1160895-d7927718-Reviews-Dilijan_National_Park-Dilijan_Tavush_Province.html	One of the reviews says: «There is no entrance fee for Dilijan National Park» ... Visited April 2015
http://www.gardmantour.com/tours/trekking-tours-in-armenia/trekking-tour-in-armenia.html	Offers 8 days trekking tour, which goes into NPs only in two small sections – Havuts Tar and Parz Lake-Gosh. Description has photos, altitude, price only...
https://www.toursbylocals.com/HikingArmenia	Alghought, there is positive feedback of the local guide, but the description itself is very incomplete.
http://findarmenia.com/5-days-hiking/	Has very nice photos, but provided information is very limited.
http://www.exoticarmeniatours.com/hikingtoursinarmenia.php	In general, this site has a big variety of tours, including regional. Again, very limited offers to visit NPs.
http://www.aryans-tours.com/walking-tour-armenia-10-days/overview	First time we see Lake Apri being mentioned as destination. Overall, a lot of specific information is missing.
https://en.wikivoyage.org/wiki/Dilijan	General information only, no details.
http://www.armeniatour.com/package/trekking-program/	Well written description of tour, which first time in all above mentioned sites, mentions elevation change. However, no photos or maps.

1.1 Virtual analysis of the current situation

- **Search Results:**

- 21 relevant links out of 50; among them:

- 7 in first 10
 - 2 results from local NPs/PAs/any NGO/MoNP. However, none of them are complete as tour product
 - 8 offers from local Tour Operators; only 3 have description, but none of them are complete as tour product

Summary of virtual analysis

- Variations of keywords for Google search may change, but current situation is that as ecotourism destinations PAs of Armenia are not visible
- For example, there is www.khosrov.am which has some relevant information, but it didn't show up
- No consistency of information

1.1 Virtual analysis of the current situation

- Online visibility of NPs in neighboring countries of South Caucasus

Azerbaijan:

- most likely, access to many of the sites at the request from Armenia based ISP is simply blocked.
- among those, that are open, the next page is the most relevant. It has an online ticket sale system to all 8 NPs, offering different price category for locals, foreigners and students.

1.1 Virtual analysis of the current situation



HOME | AZE | ENG

Electronic Services department of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Azerbaijan Republic



Personal Cabinet

PIN :

Password :

Enter

Register

Forgot the password



Users (839)



Number of Appeals



Online tax payment

Online ticket sale

Dear user! Fill the following information form in order to get ticket to National Parks via E-services of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Please be attentive! (*) - important fields)

Type of ticket: *

Local

Local

Foreign

Student

of the last 8 of ID card code):

Name :

Surname: *

Father's name: *

Name of the park : *

* Doldurulması vacibdir

01

01

2016

Number of tickets *

1

1.1 Virtual analysis of the current situation

Georgia:

- Rather confusing information is related to the fact that the online requests about Georgia (country), often display the State of Georgia (USA)
- Nevertheless, there are many available online sources about NPs and PAs in Georgia from Governmental sites and especially local Tour Operators
- Among those, worth mentioning the next page, which in addition to main information about ecotourism and guides, displays photos, hypsometric maps, GPX Tracks

PROTECTED AREAS

ECOTOURISM

MEDIA

PUBLIC INFO

COOPERATION

CONTACT

LINKS

AGENCY

BIODIVERSITY

REPORTS

LEGISLATION

VACANCIES

TENDERS

FINANCES

STATISTICS

FAQS

Map of Protected Areas

Home > Ecotourism > Ecotourism Trails and Guides > Borjomi-Kharagauli Tourist Trails
> 3. Panorama trail

3. Panorama trail

f Like 7

f Share



1.1 Virtual analysis of the current situation



Armenia:

The screenshot displays the official website of the Ministry of Nature Protection of the Republic of Armenia. The header includes the national coat of arms, the ministry's name in large green letters, and flags of Armenia, Russia, and Georgia. Below the header are four landscape photographs. A navigation bar contains links to Home, About us, Nature protection (which is highlighted), Procurement, e.management, Links, and Photogallery. The main content area is divided into three columns. The left column lists links to the RA President, RA Government, and RA National Assembly, followed by a list of ministries. The middle column features a dropdown menu for 'Nature protection' with sub-links for Legislation, Environment, International partnership, Cooperation with NGOs, Inspectorial activity, Expertise, and Hunting areas. The right column displays a 'News' section with three entries, each showing a timestamp and a headline.

MINISTRY OF NATURE PROTECTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

Home About us **Nature protection** Procurement e.management Links Photogallery

RA President
www.president.am

RA Government
<http://www.gov.am/am/>

RA National Assembly
www.parliament.am

Ministries

Ministry of International Economic Integration and Reforms

Legislation

Environment

International partnership

Cooperation with NGOs

Inspectorial activity

Expertise

Hunting areas

Atmosphere

Water

Soil

Wastes

Bioresources protection and sustainable utilization

Forms of statistical, quarter reports and istructions to fill out

News

02:03:17
When trees do not die standing up

02:03:17
The Call of Lake Sevan, Part II

02:03:17
Pivotal enviornmental issues were considered during the non formal meeting

1.2 Assessment of marketing stakeholders



- As for today the biggest promoters of tourism toward Armenia are the local Tour Operators.
- An “average” tour company participates in 3 international tourism/trade fares annually. For example, there were 14 TOs, representing Armenia in one of the biggest of its kind – ITB Berlin, on March 08-12, 2017.
- Participation fee for EACH of them is 1.6 million AMD. They ALL are participating their own promotional materials...

2. Development of Tour Products in PAs



- development of eco-tourism (including in PAs) as a national tourism product is one of the strategic aims
- significant potential for the development of eco-tourism (demand for ecotourism and nature-based holidays is drastically increasing)
- a number of tour-operators providing ecotourism services is increasing
- a number of initiatives towards the development of agro-tourism, ethnic-tourism, cultural-tourism etc. has been developed

Main Constraints for Ecotourism in PAs



- **Management of tourism resource**

lack of human and technical resources of PAs for insuring regulated tourism; insufficient experience to develop and promote tourism products

- **Infrastructure**

poor roads and public transport, limited communications, limited rest stops, tourism routes, sign, etc.

- **Accommodation**

Insufficient number of proper guesthouses, B&Bs and other lodging facilities

- **Quality of service**

Lack of foreign language skills and customer care skills

2.1 Implementation plan for creation and development of the specific tour product for PAs



Hiring 3 teams (2 persons in each) of local experts and/or volunteers and rangers of those areas for the spring-autumn season of 2017, in order to:

1. Collecting all available information about projects, **which had been done before.** (including, but not limited, WWF, TJS, CNF, REC Caucasus, EDMC, etc..)
2. Scouting within all protected areas, for all available types of tour product, such as hiking, mount biking, horse riding, birdwatching, wildlife observation, etc. in order to make detailed descriptions for such activities.
 - 2.1 it is important that those descriptions are independently tested by other teams, in order to provide accurate information.
3. Creation of photo gallery, and/or use existing.
4. Creation of detailed low scale maps and GPS tracks.
 - After creation of such tour product in Armenia, on the level of South Caucasus National Associations, related to eco/adventure tourism, and Tourism Officials, discussions must take place in order to find the best way of marketing the idea of transboundary/regional tour packages.

3. Improvement of Marketing and Visibility



- Assessment of existing marketing and products.
- Creating a 5 year Marketing strategy of Ecotourism Development in PAs of Armenia.
- Based on Stakeholders opinion and recommendations, such marketing strategy will have to realistically identify and prioritise the market segments that offer the greatest potential for further Ecotourism development in PAs of Armenia.
- The aim is to highlight PA's competitive strengths and weaknesses in relation to these market segments and in light of current travel trends on international market.

3.1 Concept of marketing of PAs on international market



- Branding of PAs
- Improving of web-presence and visibility of PAs.
- Linking it to booking and travel companies.
- Social and traditional media to raise interest.

Recommendation:

- taking into consideration that except cases with narrow professional interest, no significant number of tourists will visit a country for touring within Protected Area(s) only.
- it would be more appropriate to create conditions and provide specific information to local TOs, in order them to include visits to PAs into tour packages, promoting Armenia.

3.2. Tour Operators as promoters of PAs

- Some of the reasons why currently TOs are not actively promoting tourism to PAs, are reflected in the **TJS III, International Expert – First Mission Report, Nov 2016.**
 - Those are mainly related to PAs management, pricing policy and operational issues...
 - Absence of specific information, including about PAs infrastructure development, which took place in last 2-3 years.
-
- Local TOs are the ones with already existing knowledge of international travel trends, experience and resources. The local TOs are the **most promising and cost-effective source for promotion tourism to PAs of Armenia.**

3.3 Development of informative web-site about the Protected Areas of Armenia.



- Nicely designed and is on 4 languages (Armenian, English, Russian, German).
- Gives basic information about flora and fauna.
- Most importantly, in order to attract individual traveler and backpackers, it must have professionally designed descriptions of hiking trail, with internationally accepted standards descriptions, such as – level of difficulty, elevation change, length, maps, GPS tracks, etc. Such descriptions, but in a bit different way, should be provided to local TOs.
- Has information about local service providers.
- Gives attractive, well-written information about historical and natural sites, located within Protected Areas.
- Key-point: **risk management and safety issues.** Information about hazards must be accurate, but not exaggerated.
- **Search Engine Optimization is a must!**

Creation of 5-year action plan:



- The action plan should outline a range of cost-effective online marketing activities.
- Pilot Marketing Plan for selected PA.
- The action plan is slightly front-end weighted in favour of the first year, in which the marketing infrastructure (particularly research and a digital/online marketing framework) in Protected Areas will need to be developed.
- Once a marketing strategy is in place, marketing activities can be up-weighted or scaled down according to budget availability in subsequent years (e.g. Research is required to understand the profile and motivation of visitors, in order to enable effective targeting of the PAs of Armenia best prospects and development of the most compelling marketing messages).
- Once the marketing tools are in place and duly improved, the sustainable and long-term funds will be rewired to keep them up-dated and relevant to realities in the future operational phase.



Thank you!

armenia@armadventure.org
www.armadventure.org