



THE HIGH POINTS OF A LOW SEASON

In December 2009, the USAID Local Investment and National Competitiveness (LINC) project and its Crimean counterparts looked for ways to make the peninsula more attractive to tourists during the off seasons

As an overwhelming majority of people in the former Soviet republics associate Crimea with basking in the sun on its seaside beaches, the problem that looms every summer is how to keep the Crimean tourism sector busy from November to April, when the sun is anything but scorching.

According to experts, rich in history, ethnic legacies, and variety of cultures and religions, Crimea is much more than a mere suntrap, and these opportunities for attraction of tourists can and must be utilized.

Fully supportive of this idea, the USAID LINC project, which selected tourism as one of its priority sectors for assistance in Crimea, actively collaborates with its counterparts toward this end. To identify challenges and spheres in need of intervention, LINC formed a Working Group of leading players on the tourism market in Crimea, including operators, agencies, associations, researchers, and representatives of the Crimean Ministry of Resorts and Tourism. Three events sponsored by LINC in the first half of December aimed at searching new tourist attractions in Crimea and promoting it as a place for cultural, ethno-historical, and other types of tourism.

Koktebel, Dec. 3-4: Learning, Acting, and Shooting



LINC Crimea Field Director Daniel Themen speaks while standing on the just-unveiled 45th parallel stone, which marks an equal distance from the North Pole and the equator

The two-day conference "Crimea: Culture, Learning, and Activity," organized with the Resorts and Tourism Ministry, the Crimean Tourism Development Center, and the *Terra Tavrika* newspaper in Koktebel, a popular Black Sea resort in Eastern Crimea, gathered about 500 participants, representing tour operators, scientific and educational institutions, and NGO's. The first day was dedicated to presentations and discussions, which dealt with a variety of issues and problems, from Crimean history and culture to environmental protection and to guides' qualifications. It was said that many historical attractions in Crimea are left behind popular routes, and there are new opportunities for active tourism, particularly in the Crimean piedmont. According to Oleksandr Yena from the Crimean Postgraduate Institute, "tourists come to Crimea, skip the 60 kilometers-wide zone stretching from the steppe to the sea, and remain unaware of how interesting this place is."

LINC Crimea Field Director Daniel Themen invited tour operators and other members of the tourism cluster to collaboration with LINC. "Your ideas will help us tune up our project to be of maximum use to you," he said.

The second day was spent in the field. The participants went to an ancient Christian monastery in the mountainous area of Kyzyl Tash; unveiled a stone with a tablet marking the 45th parallel on the Orta-Syrt ridge, visited the Koktebel Gliding Center, which is renowned for being associated with aircraft designer Oleh Antonov and spacecraft designer Serhiy Korolyov; and watched a demo target practice at a shooting-range – a show the military said could well become a tourist attraction.



An episode of the demo target practice. The military say the show can attract tourists

Bilohirsk, Dec. 9: Horses, Rabbits, and Goths

The trip to the Bilohirsk Raion, which was organized with the Resorts and Tourism Ministry and attracted 72 tour operators, media people, guides, and other interested persons, focused on opportunities for green tourism.

The group visited an equestrian sports facility, reviewed a green tourism estate and its surroundings, tasted koumiss at a farm, and discussed the area's tourism potential at the Bilohirsk Raion State Administration.



Hopefully, civilized tourists will crowd out the "black archaeologists" digging the Gothic-Alani burial ground

The Burulcha Equestrian Sports Center offers its guests horse-riding routes and trout fishing in the Burulcha River, as well as accommodation in cottages.

The Rosenthal Estate as a farm specializes in rabbit-breeding, and also functions as a mini hotel for tourists. In the vicinity of the estate is a Gothic-Alani burial ground, presently haunted mainly by so-called "black archaeologists."

Millions of tourists drive every year along the Simferopol-Feodosia highway through Bilohirsk to the Black Sea resorts. As one of participants remarked during the discussion, "Lots of money pass by. We need to interest them in stopping here."



Olha Burova, Ministry of Resorts and Tourism of Crimea Tourism Department Deputy Head: "The LINC project collaborates with us in many activities, providing both financial and consulting assistance"

Olha Burova, the ministry's Tourism Department deputy head, said, "The LINC project collaborates with us in many activities, providing both financial and consulting assistance." According to the official, a result of such reconnaissance trips is new tourist destinations in Crimea outside its popular seaside resorts. Iryna Polyanska, director of a Simferopol-based tourist bureau, said, "I intend to develop a whole program. My plans are to go all over the archaeological monuments and by May 1, 2010, have carried out a Bilohirsk excursion. I'll do my best to raise the profile of Bilohirsk Raion."

Sevastopol, Dec. 11-12: Accommodations, Fortifications, and Monastery



Inspecting accommodation facilities of a tourist recreation complex in Sevastopol

LINC organized a two-day study tour for tourism stakeholders and media to explore lodging facilities and visit places of interest that travel agencies and tour operators could offer to their potential clients. On the first day, the participants inspected various accommodation facilities on the outskirts of Sevastopol including a former military compound that had been turned into a sanatorium, and old-style camping sites offering low-budget vacation on the Black Sea for backpackers. The day wrapped up in a meeting to discuss tourism development in and near Sevastopol.

According to participants, for a long time during the Soviet era Sevastopol, as a naval base, was a restricted area closed to visitors. That is why it still lacks decent accommodation infrastructure. On the other hand, besides having military

facilities, Sevastopol is rich in ancient and medieval Greek monuments and religious sites as well as picturesque landscapes.

On the second day, the participants went on a tour of Sevastopol attractions, including the 35th Shore Battery fortifications and Cape Fiolent with its medieval St. George Monastery. At the end of the trip, Crimean Hospitality Association Chairwoman Olena Bazhenova said, "It's great that LINC has brought us all together. It was a good encouragement to do what we've long wanted to do but never managed: meet and discuss common issues. We need to bear in mind that, irrespective of what we are doing, we are all members of the cluster, and should coordinate our efforts for better performance."



Olena Bazhenova, Crimean Hospitality Association Chairwoman: "It's great that LINC has brought us all together"

Says Svitlana Vozna, LINC Tourism Specialist: "The LINC project's main tasks in the tourism sector are to facilitate association of the tourism industry's actors, such as tour operators, travel agencies, guides, hotels, and educational institutions; help them solve problems of the making of a national system for vocational training, retraining, and development of human resources for the tourism and hospitality industries; assist in establishing relations with public authorities; analyze the regional specifics of tourism activities, and learn the best practices from abroad; and consolidate efforts of most experienced market players. All that will contribute to development of an innovative economic model and will have a positive impact on the image of Crimea and the whole country."