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## FORMATION OF THE HOSPITALITY ENVIRONMENT ON THE HOTEL SERVICES REGIONAL MARKET CONSIDERING ETHNOCULTURAL NEEDS OF INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

**Abstract.** *Efficient international and intercultural communication to a great extent relies on the ability to welcome representatives of one nation on the territory of another nation with due kindness and respect to their culture which can be simply described as hospitality. Ethnocultural needs are directly linked to the visitors' expectations and make a tremendous impact on the impression they have from the service as well as on molding an image of the visited country or a specific tourist destination. For instance, developing a special hospitality product corresponding to the ethnocultural needs of the visitors from Japan may help increase the tourist flow from this country and raise it to the level of tourist flows from China and Korea. The article focuses on the study of international visitors' ethnocultural needs in the hospitality industry and sets the following objectives: studying the ethnocultural needs of the Japanese while analyzing their traditions and communicative behavior; studying and analyzing the basic notions of hospitality; defining the impact factors of ethnocultural peculiarities on the perception of hospitality; developing offers on the improvement of the hospitality product for foreigners; elaborating recommendations on communicative behavior when providing service for international tourists in the hospitality industry.*

**Keywords:** *hospitality industry, tourist destination, tourist, special hospitality product*

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## **ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ ГОСТЕПРИИМНОЙ СРЕДЫ НА РЕГИОНАЛЬНОМ РЫНКЕ ГОСТИНИЧНЫХ УСЛУГ С УЧЕТОМ ЭТНОКУЛЬТУРНЫХ ПОТРЕБНОСТЕЙ ИНОСТРАННЫХ ТУРИСТОВ**

*Залогом успешной межнациональной и межкультурной коммуникации является способность представителей одной нации принять представителей другой нации на территории своей страны с радушием и уважением к их культуре, которая выражается в гостеприимстве. Этнокультурные потребности являются фактором, который напрямую связан с ожиданиями туристов и оказывает наибольшее влияние как на их восприятие обслуживания, так и на процесс формирования в сознании гостей имиджа посещаемой страны и, в частности, туристской дестинации. Создание специального гостиничного продукта, отвечающего этнокультурным потребностям гостей из Японии способно увеличить турпоток, сравнив его с турпотоками из Китая и Кореи. Цель статьи – исследование этнокультурных потребностей иностранных туристов в процессе обслуживания на предприятиях гостеприимства. Для достижения цели поставлены и решены следующие задачи: изучение этнокультурных потребностей японцев, анализ их традиций и особенностей общения; рассмотрение и анализ основных понятий гостеприимства; выявление факторов влияния этнокультурных особенностей на восприятие гостеприимства; разработка предложений по совершенствованию гостиничного продукта для иностранцев; разработка особенностей коммуникации с иностранными туристами на предприятиях гостеприимства.*

**Ключевые слова:** *индустрия гостеприимства, туристическое направление, турист, специальный продукт гостеприимства*

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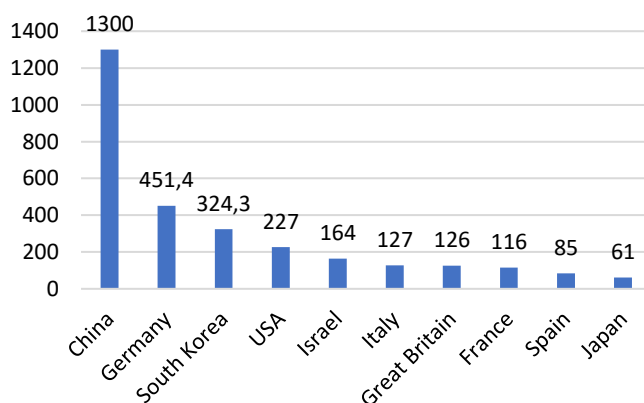
### Introduction

Vigorous development of international tourism has been challenging hospitality enterprises to improve the quality of the service provided to international visitors, which would also allow for greater profits and improved competitiveness. Certificate programs in tourism and hospitality have become one of the ways to meet the needs of the visitors pertaining to different cultures, religions and perspectives on life to the fullest extent. Such international programs are gaining more and more popularity in the global hospitality industry whereas domestic hospitality enterprises have failed to catch up with the global trends. Hence, the tendencies in the inbound tourism development require better quality of service for international visitors and active participation of hospitality enterprises all over Russia and in its multicultural regions with high potential for tourism development in the specialized certificate programs, which is expected to contribute to the sustainable economic development of the national economy and create the image of Russia as an attractive international tourist destination.

Ethnocultural needs directly influence visitors' expectations and perception of service as well as mold the image of a tourist destination. The hospitality environment of a tourist destination is, primarily, defined by warm and amiable disposition towards people with different ethnic backgrounds, which plays a pivotal role in the rapidly changing global community. In many aspects, the image of a tourist destination relies on means of accommodation as providing lodging service is largely understood as hosting/welcoming visitors. Thus, the hospitality business focuses on developing a hospitality product taking into account the ethnocultural needs of the visitors. A friendly welcoming atmosphere creates environment for revisitation of a tourist destination, which allows solving many economic problems at the regional level [5, 6].

According to the statistical profile, inbound tourist flow has been growing in Russia recently. In 2018, Russia was visited by 4.2 million international travellers, which by 400.000 exceeded the rate of 2017. Figure 1 shows the graph of the inbound tourist flow distribution and reflects the number of international visitors per country that travelled to Russia in 2018<sup>1</sup>. The biggest surplus was observed in the tourist flow from South Korea (+45% to the 2017 rate), China (+14.5%) and Germany (+10.5%).

As reported by OneTwoTrip, an online travel agency, the most popular destinations among the international visitors are Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Novosibirsk, Sochi, Krasnodar, Yekaterinburg, Kazan and Vladivostok<sup>2</sup>. Primorsky Krai (Vladivostok) has recently been setting records in inbound tourist flow as it amounted to 780.000 international visitors in 2018 and to 947.000 (+21%)<sup>3</sup> in 2019, which affirms the growing interest in the destination and expanding share of the international tourists in the segment.



*Fig. 1 – Graph of the inbound tourist flow to Russia in 2018, in thousands*

As of today, the largest share of the inbound tourist flow is still from the People's Republic of China followed by the Republic of Korea and Japan. It is worthwhile mentioning that though over the last 2–3 years there have been observed growth patterns in the inbound tourist flow from

<sup>1</sup> The Federal State Statistic. Available at: [gks.ru](http://gks.ru)

<sup>2</sup> Travel & Tourist market Statistics 2019. Available at: [mitt.ru/Stati/statistika2019](http://mitt.ru/Stati/statistika2019) (Accessed on February 9, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Yu. Smityuk In 2019 Primorye was visited by almost one million international tourists. Available at: [tass.ru/obschestvo/7541951](http://tass.ru/obschestvo/7541951). (Accessed on February 6, 2020).

the Republic of Korea, starting 2019 the tourist flow from Japan has been showing good dynamics (+185%)<sup>4</sup> as well. Accordingly, the changing market prompts the hotel business to provide service taking into account the ethnic peculiarities of the visitors and their needs with the purpose of creating hospitality environment. A perfect illustration can be Primorsky Krai known among the international visitors as 'a slice of Europe in Asia'. Besides, Primorsky Krai has a long a history of ethnic cooperation with Asian countries. Historically, Vladivostok's social community integrated representatives of different Asian ethnicities, which was also reflected in the Russian hospitality industry (before the 1917 revolution, most of the hotel staff was comprised of Chinese, Koreans and Japanese [3, p. 72]) characterized by tolerance towards the ethnicities living in Primorye.

#### Theoretical background of the research

The current condition of the hospitality industry predetermines the dominance of the traditional hospitality principles whereas the hospitality services are ranged and the needs of the customers are to be met with respective flexibility and adaptability. At the same time the ethnocultural interaction serves one of the key mechanisms that help communicate the ethnocultural needs of the international visitors to the businesses engaged in the hospitality industry.

In her research, E.V. Aigina focuses on the national and religious peculiarities of tourists and their role in tourism management. The scope of her work includes requirements of Muslim tourists travelling on Halal tourism programs, requirements for Halal catering, rules to be observed in order to meet the needs for prayer as well as rules of behavior and nutrition during Ramadan, gender behavior (e.g. separation of men from women) and activities prohibited in Islam [1, p. 140].

E.V. Aigina and Yu. D. Yudochkina also study peculiarities of tourism management targeting

tourists from China, specifically – Changsha, a kind of tourism focused on historical sites connected with the revolutionary past [9].

There is evidence that being away from home people enter a zone of discomfort due to lack of familiar environment conventional for their nutrition, relaxation and sleeping habits. Thus, the task of the hospitality industry is to minimize the negative impact as the term 'hospitality' denotes the art of welcoming visitors by creating environment that would make them feel at home. Out of many definitions of the term 'hospitality', the key ones are introduced in Table 1 [2].

*Table 1 – Key definitions of the term 'hospitality'*

No	Content
1	Hospitality is a social term that refers to a particular cordiality and geniality shown by hosts when receiving visitors <sup>5</sup>
2	Hospitality is a social institution in traditional communities that obliges the hosts to welcome outsiders with due ceremonies and ensure their safety <sup>6</sup>
3	Hospitality is the focus of the study that can be viewed in three different aspects: first – as an attitude to visitors (customers), ability to predict their needs and mood; second – as production and exchange of services providing for the physical and psychological comfort of a person; third – as a separate category comprised of all the interrelated industries specializing in customer service through such enterprises as hotels, restaurants, clubs, customer service providers, etc.

The abovementioned definitions prove the complex nature of the notion of hospitality that can be described as a system of the following categories:

- a visitor and his needs;
- services and their production;
- service market and exchange mechanism;
- quality of the service;
- enterprises in the hospitality industry.

<sup>4</sup> Primorsky Krai Travel & Tourism Agency. Available at: [primorsky.ru/authorities/executive-agencies/departments/tourism-pk/plany-i-otchety-departamenta.php](http://primorsky.ru/authorities/executive-agencies/departments/tourism-pk/plany-i-otchety-departamenta.php) (Accessed on April 4, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Brokgauz, F. A., & Efron, I. A. (1907). Entsiklopedicheskij

slovar' [Encyclopedic dictionary]. URL: [vehi.net/brokgauz](http://vehi.net/brokgauz) (Accessed on April 4, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Bolshaya russijskaja entsiklopedija [Big Russian Encyclopedia]. URL: [bigenc.ru](http://bigenc.ru) (Accessed on April 4, 2020).

As the hospitality industry developed, the notion of hospitality acquired more and more elements, which resulted from the historical changes and progress, although even in ancient times hospitality included a few aspects of cross-cultural and interhuman interaction. The forms of hospitality that present the greatest interest for the study are such that provided shelter and protection for travelers and outsiders in the areas with rudimentary cultural development and, thus, had a major cultural impact due to establishing and maintaining international communication at the early stages of cultural development. If the Russian word 'gost' (guest) was originally used to refer to a merchant, the French 'l'hospitalité' stood for the practice of welcoming pilgrims and refugees. In this case a guest, or a visitor, might be a sick person in need of help and shelter whereas its Russian counterpart denotes a well-off, of equal wealth or even richer trader.

The extension of the semantic field of the word 'guest', or 'visitor', had both social and religious roots. From the point of view of a traveler, 'being a guest' was a guarantee of safety when travelling; from the point of view of the receiving party, a guest was a sacred being, a symbol of fortune. These two different interpretations became the source of various hospitality rites that regulated the behavior of the guest and of the hosts. For instance, the guest was obliged to say good words about the hosts and accept food and drinks with gratitude and reverence. On the other hand, a guest would often help with household chores, such as cooking, or entertain the hosts by telling stories about his travels, which was a way to show gratitude and return their hospitality. Respectively, the hosts' responsibility was to receive a guest with honor, provide him and his horse with food and shelter and at times even present him with anything he took a liking to. Many peoples believed a guest to be a sacred figure and, thus, a host had to treat the life of a stranger with no less consideration than his own. Gaius Julius Caesar wrote, "The Germanic people consider insulting a guest to be a sin, and no matter who pays them a visit, they protect him from trouble, proclaim him

untouchable, the doors of all houses are open for him and everyone shares his food with him" [8]. Thus, even those ancient rites reflected the features of hospitality still universally recognized by human beings, i.e. cordiality, respect and tolerance.

The development of civilization shaped the social institution of hospitality and defined its transformation into the hospitality industry based on commercialization. This form of hospitality might have lost its initial characteristics, but molded into a goal-oriented and complex phenomenon grounded in the motivation to attract visitors and meet their needs, which consequently had a positive influence on the development of the industry. Efficient visitor management requires creating the most comfortable conditions for their stay, which, therefore, has a positive effect on the development of the material culture: accommodation and road construction, interior and ambience improvement, greater safety and utility of space and better quality of the service, in general. The customs of hospitality have a great incentive in terms of the development of the material culture [14, p.39].

Apart from the material comfort, a visitor should also be provided with spiritual comfort. Though, the most universal features of hospitality are believed to be cordiality and generosity of the hosts, its fundamental principle remains humanism (humanitarianism) as all the peoples have certain rites for welcoming visitors. The modern world being polycentric, representatives of various countries travel many kilometers away from their places of residence. Some of them adapt easily, others can feel discomfort when it comes to their basic needs in food, sleep, hygiene and safety that have to conform to their ethnocultural traditions, religious views, social norms and professional requirements. The discomfort that can be caused by the change of the environment may often become an insurmountable obstacle to travelling. Some religions, for instance, Islam or Judaism, strictly regulate the daily routine of their followers. Many cultures have specific requirements for nutrition. Accordingly, the enterprises



working in the service industry, e.g. hotels, may offer their international customers of different cultures and religions specific kinds of service in order to extend their target audience.

### Results of the research

In Russia there has been observed positive dynamics in the development of programs focusing on meeting the ethnocultural needs of tourists. The main idea behind such programs is to create comfortable environment during the international visitors' stay in Russia, specifically for tourists who that feel discomfort leaving their country due to the centuries old traditions and cultural patterns engrained in their daily lives. Such programs include *China Friendly*, *India Friendly*, *Japan Friendly* and *Halal Friendly*. Unlike *China Friendly* and *India Friendly* that have long proved to be efficient, *Halal Friendly* and *Japan Friendly* have been recently introduced on the territory of Russia. Despite their rapid development, these programs target a limited number of countries whose residents travel to Russia and have been adopted by a small number of enterprises [13, p. 50].

In 2014, the World Without Boundaries Tourism Association (Rus.: «Mir Bez Granits») initiated their project *China Friendly* that has been developing ever since<sup>7</sup>. *China Friendly* is a large-scale project involving enterprises providing hospitality services, such as hotels, restaurants, museums, malls as well as companies providing tourism and excursion services. In 2015, the program was registered with Rospotrebnadzor (Federal Service for Surveillance on Consumer Rights Protection and Human Wellbeing). In 2016, *China Friendly* program manager A. Sibirkina received The Russian Federation Government Award.

The goal of the project is to increase the tourist flow from China to Russia through developing service and its quality. The major requirements for *China Friendly* participants are as follows:

- acceptance of UnionPay cards (UnionPay is China National Payments Systems);

- a reliable Internet provider and free fast Wi-Fi;
- available hot tap water;
- available electrical adapters suitable for China plugs;
- available traditional Chinese dishes on the breakfast menu and available chopsticks;
- all the information available in the Chinese language and/or personnel trained to speak Chinese.

Additionally, hotels may offer Chinese press and customary Chinese hygiene accessories and tools. In Russia the participants of *China Friendly* are: Metropol Hotel 5\*, Crowne Plaza Moscow World Trade Centre 5\*, National Hotel 5\*, Sky-Point Hotel Sheremetyevo, AZIMUT Hotel, Azimut Moscow Olympic Hotel in Moscow and others. The program participant in Vladivostok is AZIMUT Hotel Vladivostok.

The development and startup of *Halal Friendly* program was due to the great potential of the inbound tourism from Muslim counties as one fourth of the world population are Muslims. The experts estimate that in 2020 the market of halal tourism will involve 150 mln people with the expected growth of up to 200 mln tourists within the next 5 years [4]. In order to become a certified participant of the program, a hotel needs to meet a few conditions, i.e. alcohol drinks cannot be sold on the territory of the hotel; halal food should be included into the menu of its restaurants and cafes and a halal food shop should be near its premises (within 500 meters). Should a hotel complex have a swimming pool, there shall be different time allocated for male and female visitors. Unlike the classical system of assigning stars, in the halal system they assign moons (the maximum of five). The "one moon" status can be acquired on the condition that there are no images of people or animals on the premises, there is a list of prayer times available for the guests and information on the halal food and drink venues located nearby. In order to be certified as a five moon hotel, the service shall be focused on halal

<sup>7</sup> China Friendly Program. URL: chinafriendly.ru (Accessed on April 2, 2020).

exclusively and conform to the norms of Islam culture. If issued, this certificate expires in a year. Among the active participants of the program in Russia are Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Kazan and Sochi. According to the data collected by the International Center for Halal Standardization and Certification, the indisputable leader on the market of halal hospitality service is Kazan. Currently, in Kazan there are 8 hotels certified as "halal friendly". These hotels are of different star categories ranging from unpretentious hostels such as ZamZam Hostel or Eurasia Hostel to three and four star hotels (Nogai Hotel 3\*, Relita Kazan Hotel 4\*, Korston Club Hotel 4\* and others). As of 2016, in Moscow three hotels were certified as "halal friendly" and received a certain number of 'moons'. AZIMUT Moscow Olympic Hotel 4\* and Aerostar Hotel were awarded a two moon category and Dedeman Park Izmailovo Moscow was awarded a four moon category.

*India Friendly* was officially set up in Russia in 2016 as a cooperation agreement was signed by the Russian Information Center (Mumbai, India), the North-Western Division Office of the Russian Union of Travel Industry, the National Marketing Center for Tourism (*Visit Russia*), the Union of National and International Tourism Information Organizations (*SONATO*) and the faculty of tourism and hospitality of Saint Petersburg State University of Economics<sup>8</sup>. Currently *India Friendly* in Russia is promoted by the Russian & Indian Information Center in Saint Petersburg and the Russian Information Center in Mumbai while receiving support from the abovementioned organizations [15]. India friendly restaurants and hotels have the following recommendations to follow:

- the personnel should be instructed on acceptable/advisable body language;
- English-speaking personnel has to be hired and the menu and other information materials must be available in English;
- electric kettles, tea, coffee, sugar, cream and sometimes cookies must available in the

rooms;

- free drinking water must be available;
- the representative dishes of the Indian cuisine must be available on the menu or catering from Indian restaurants shall be provided;
- vegetarian dishes must be available on the breakfast menu with a special marking on the menu (as rule, a green dot symbol);
- a welcome drink must be served when the guests check in.

The India friendly hotels in Russia are Kosmos Hotel in Moscow, Stantsia (a hotel chain) in Saint Petersburg, Azimut Hotel chain and others [7].

In the hotel industry there has recently been a slight, but stable growth in the number of hotels for orthodox Jews. The list of needs a Jewish visitor may have is rather peculiar and, first of all, concerns nutrition. A Jew cannot skip a meal as the time before it is reserved for praying. According to the Jewish traditions, a hotel room shall be quiet; the interior shall be in soft tones. On Sabbath, i.e. on Saturdays, a number of strict prohibitions shall be observed, for instance, keycards cannot be used for opening and closing the doors, regular keys are used instead; electric devices cannot be used and must be unplugged, automatic lighting is used and special Sabbath lifts start running, stopping on each floor. The personnel shall also follow certain standards in their wear. It is desirable that all the personnel or at least the hotel manager should be Jews<sup>9</sup>.

To become a participant of *Japan Friendly* a hotel must also comply with a number of simple but necessary requirements. Most importantly, the hotel must accept JCB payments as this payment system is currently among the most popular ones in Japan. The breakfast menu must include dishes of traditional Japanese cuisine. Another vital conditional, which probably concerns all the hotels working with international visitors, is the English-speaking personnel. The navigation system, all the information materials for the visitors

<sup>8</sup> India Friendly Program. URL: india-friendly.ru (Accessed on April 2, 2020).

<sup>9</sup> Halal Friendly Program. URL: halalcenter.ru (Accessed on April 2, 2020).

and announcements must be available in English. A lot of attention is also paid to the ability to understand the psychology of visitors from Japan, their traditions and mentality as all these aspects help considerably improve interaction with the guests. An extra requirement for five star hotels is available Japanese press <sup>10</sup>.

### Conclusion

When studying the national peculiarities of international visitors, first of all, it is advisable to take into consideration the social aspects of serving a certain category of customers that are largely connected with the problem of cross-cultural communication.

"Cross-cultural communication is a kind of information exchange carried out by the representatives of different cultures; thereby, the fact that the communicants are the bearers of different cultures greatly affects their communication and, to a certain extent, defines it" [10, p.8].

In the process of cross-cultural communication, the participants of hotel service may face various barriers hindering successful service delivery, which may consequently damage the reputation of the hotel [12].

The language barrier is one of the most widespread barriers. It signals that hotel enterprises should be more selective when hiring personnel and show preference for those who speak the language of the target customer group. Additionally, the language barrier can be overcome by means of verbal and nonverbal etiquette; however, the national peculiarities of the visitors have to be taken into account.

The next common barrier hindering successful hospitality service delivery is the sociocultural barrier. It results from the political, social and religious differences and lies in the wrong understanding of the communicated message. A solution to this problem may be additional training of personnel in the field of sociocultural communication and more detailed studying of the target consumer group on the example of a certain

hospitality enterprise.

Another barrier is the psychological one that can be manifested through different types:

- 1) barriers in building relationships;
- 2) barrier of negative emotions:
  - a) barrier of suffering;
  - b) barrier of wrath;
  - c) barrier of aversion and abomination;
  - d) barrier of defiance;
  - e) barrier of fear;
  - f) barrier of shame and guilt;
  - g) barrier of bad mood.

Any of these psychological barriers may cause deviations and mistakes in service delivery for domestic as well as international travelers, which, therefore, has a negative impact on the image of a hospitality enterprise. Such situations should be prevented by means of establishing healthy working environment for the personnel and stimulating their motivation for productive work.

Another term that cannot be overlooked in the framework of cross-cultural communication is cross-cultural competence which emerges as the evidence of the efficient cooperation between the representatives of different nationalities. "Cross-cultural competence is a system of competences that an individual successfully masters and can practice with the purpose to achieve mutual understanding in the process of cross-cultural communication" [11, p. 308].

The analysis of the cross-cultural competence in the world and in Russia demonstrates its overall poor development due to the lack of professional training as well as prevalence of different phobias and intolerance.

In general, customer-oriented technologies allow to improve competitiveness and increase incomes of a hotel while minimizing the risks. An important element of such technologies is the knowledge of ethnocultural needs of the visitors and ability to meet them. Efficiency of the above-mentioned programs is indisputable as it was their implementation that contributed to the

<sup>10</sup> Japan Friendly Program. URL: [japan-friendly.ru](http://japan-friendly.ru) (Accessed on April 2, 2020).



growth of the tourist flow by 1.5 – 2 times in comparison to the prior rates, as well as to the stable inbound tourist flow from Asian countries, visitors being by and large satisfied with the service, and Russia building the reputation of a country providing quality service for international visitors.

National and religious peculiarities of tourists should be taken into account when managing nostalgia tourism and tourism for diaspora representatives.

The above kinds of activities targeting Muslim or Chinese tourists do not imply any

restrictions for visitors from other countries. They favor certain categories of tourists, but are not meant to isolate them from others. To build a successful tourism industry it is important to understand and predict the needs, beliefs and preferences of different customers; such foresight can guarantee the best service and satisfaction of all or most of their needs. Mutual interest and respect of national peculiarities and traditions contributes to the growth of the tourist flow as well as mutual trust and cooperation between different countries.

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