

Research Article

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Towards Green Travel: Application of Principles of Ecological Tourism in the Russian Glamping Market

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Abstract: The article investigates the extent and peculiarities of the application of the principles of ecological tourism in the Russian glamping market. The main research question is whether Russian glamping can be considered a type of ecological tourism. The current state of the Russian glamping market is described, and the basic principles of ecological tourism are identified by the author. Ten Russian glamping sites were selected at random for analysis, and structured face-to-face and telephone interviews with managers of Russian glamping sites and glamping tourists were used as the primary data collection method. The author concludes that the principles of ecological tourism are widely used in Russian glamping sites, and that Russian glamping can, with some caveats, be considered a type of ecological tourism. As the main peculiarity of the application of the principles of ecological tourism in the Russian glamping market, significant lack of both an educational component and cultural benefits to the local area and population has been identified. Nevertheless, the Russian glamping market is moving towards ecological compatibility and green travel. It is suggested that the further development of glamping can contribute to the development of ecological tourism in Russia and, consequently, to the sustainable development of tourist destinations.

Keywords: glamping; ecological tourism; Russian tourism market; ecological compatibility

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1 Introduction

In recent years, the Russian tourism industry has adopted a course towards environmental friendliness. According to the order of the Government of the Russian Federation of September 20, 2019, № 2129 'Strategy for the development of tourism industry in the Russian Federation for the period up to 2035' (2019), the development of ecological tourism is a priority. With this in mind, a clear understanding of what types of tourism are environmentally friendly and an ability to identify the main distinguishing features of ecological tourism are necessary.

In general, the tourism industry is characterized by instability and the constant emergence of new trends. With the constant change in people's idea of travel, there is a demand for innovative types of accommodation with a focus on green and health concepts (Milohnić & Cvelić Bonifačić, 2014, p. 388). One of the relatively new trends in the world tourism industry is glamping, a tourist experience designed to meet the needs of modern society. The world glamping market is growing quickly, by more than 20% per year (Menshikov et al., 2020). Currently, the greatest interest in this type of tourism is shown in the United States, Southern Europe, Great Britain and Australia. There are more than 1 million glamping facilities around the world. In Russia, glamping is just starting down its path to popularity (Glamping.rf, 2020).

When it comes to the distinctive features of glamping, its ecological compatibility is often mentioned (Rucivero, 2012; Groe, 2018; Petruša & Vlahov, 2019; Menshikov et al., 2020). In most cases, this means using green construction methods to use natural resources wisely and minimize harmful environmental impact. Sometimes glamping is referred to as the epitome of sustainable tourism development (Groe, 2018).

This study considers the extent and peculiarities of the application of the principles of ecological tourism in the Russian glamping market. We will be guided by the

following research question: Can Russian glamping be considered a type of ecological tourism?

The objectives of the paper are as follows:

- to characterize glamping as a new trend in the sphere of tourism and describe the current state of the Russian glamping market;
- to analyse relevant scientific literature in order to identify key features and principles of ecological tourism;
- to assess the extent to which the principles of ecological tourism are implemented in Russian glamping sites.

Our interest in glamping is driven by the fact that the Russian glamping market is in its initial stages. Therefore, the key features and peculiarities of this type of accommodation in our country have not yet been fully analysed. Moreover, it is obvious that despite the commonalities, any type of tourism is transformed to some extent when it appears on a new market.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Glamping as a New Trend in the Russian Tourism Market

The term ‘glamping’ has been widely used in the global travel industry since 2005. Some researchers (Cvelić-Bonifačić et al., 2017; Dedok, 2018; Milohnić et al, 2019) agree that the concept of this type of accommodation was already used in the Middle Ages in the construction of luxurious tents for royal persons. Then the concept transformed into camping — a fairly cheap type of accommodation, which rapidly gained popularity among teenagers and young people in the twentieth century. In the new millennium, glamping has returned to its ‘posh’ roots.

According to the *Cambridge Dictionary* (2020), the word *glamping* is a mixture of ‘glamorous’ and ‘camping’. It is more comfortable and luxurious than traditional camping. Glamping is a new trend in outdoor tourism which combines modern luxury and pristine nature. It gives the tourist an opportunity to spend time in nature without sacrificing convenience. Glamping facilities are equipped with everything necessary for a comfortable holiday. Glamping offers various leisure activities: trekking, fishing, paragliding, horseback riding, indoor activities (board games, reading) (Dorofeeva, 2020, pp. 3-4). Slogans such as ‘Where nature meets luxury’ (Kate, 2011)

and ‘Nature on a silver plate’ (Leci Sakačova, 2013) are the briefest encapsulations of glamping.

The decisive arguments for tourists who choose glamping are the possibility of direct contact with nature, glamour, comfort and privacy (Filipe et al., 2018). These tourists are driven by the desire to stay in contact with local traditions, taste local food and practise sports. They hate mass tourism and search for opportunities to spend peaceful days discovering nature (Groe, 2018).

The main advantage of glamping as a business project is that it is possible to start with two or three objects. Thus, the initial stage does not require huge investment. Moreover, since glamping is classified as a tourist activity, it is quite easy to coordinate (Glamping.rf, 2020).

Dedok (2018) distinguishes traditional glamping accommodation facilities (villas, cottages with the implementation of conventional architectural solutions) and specific glamping accommodation facilities. Specific ones are subdivided into four types:

1. accommodation facilities with transparent walls, ceiling (capsule rooms);
2. accommodation facilities typical for different nationalities (yurts, tipi, igloo);
3. accommodation facilities located directly in the natural environment (tree houses);
4. accommodation facilities isolated from other travellers (lighthouses, separate islands).

At the moment, according to an estimate by the travel company Russia Discovery, there are about 50 glamping sites in Russia (Russiatourism.ru, 2020). They are located in the Moscow region (Forest and Sea), Leningrad region (Hills & Huts, Hygge Camp), Karelia (Soul Camp, Camp Rock), Altai (Cheposh Park), Krasnodar region (Skala, Eco Village Sochi), Kamchatka (GlampStory) and Kabardino-Balkaria (LeapRus), as well as in other regions. Also, following the example of European countries, projects for the construction of glamping facilities in the Arctic zone are currently being developed (Vorotnikov & Hasanova, 2019).

According to our observations, traditional glamping accommodation facilities prevail in Russia. However, original architectural solutions have also started to be implemented. For instance, Boho Camp (Leningrad region) offers accommodation in Native American-inspired tipis.

It has been established (Dorofeeva, 2020) that the potential for the development of glamping in Russia is extremely promising because this type of accommodation is able to satisfy the needs of Russian people in the sphere

of tourism. Moreover, Russia has a vast territory, with abundant natural resources and sites of natural beauty. According to estimates by Russia Discovery (Russiatourism.ru, 2020), in five to six years there will be at least 500 glamping sites in Russia.

However, the glamping movement in Russia is quite chaotic, for several reasons, including the lack of strong and diverse traditions of active tourism (Menshikov et al., 2020, p. 41). Another significant obstacle to the development of glamping in Russia is the low level of awareness among some categories of the local population of this type of tourism (Dorofeeva, 2020).

2.2 The Concept and Principles of Ecological Tourism

The term ecological tourism (or ecotourism) was introduced into academia in the late 1980s and instantly became a popular research subject (Weaver & Lawton, 2007; Hunt et al., 2015; Wondirad, 2019). Among the prerequisites for the development of ecotourism, Hawkins and Khan (1998) single out the need for sustainable tourism development, a growing demand for nature-based experiences and the world's focus on the sustainable use of natural resources.

It should be noted that there is no single and commonly accepted definition of the term *ecological tourism* (Wilson et al., 2014; Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2014; Strobl et al., 2015; Djuraeva et al., 2016; Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2018; Wondirad, 2019). Due to the abundance of different interpretations of this concept, it may be rather difficult to identify the distinctive features of ecological tourism. According to Postica & Cardoso (2014, p. 83), this uncertainty allows businesses to use the term *ecotourism* as a marketing tool to gain an edge in today's highly competitive environment. Therefore, we need to identify the principles of ecotourism.

One of the first interpretations of ecotourism was proposed by Ceballos-Lascurain (1987). He defined ecotourism as travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the purpose of exploring, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas. Despite criticism of this definition for missing the economic and conservation foundations of ecotourism, it became the basis for further studies of this phenomenon (Wondirad, 2019).

Twentieth-century research into ecotourism, its definitions, key features and principles was summarised and analysed by Fennell (2001). He examined 85 definitions of ecotourism and conducted a comparative analysis.

As a result, 20 variables characterising ecotourism were revealed. The five most common ones were then selected from among them:

1. reference to 'where ecotourism occurs': parks/protected areas, natural areas/nature, undeveloped areas, rural areas;
2. 'conservation': conservation, preservation, protection, improve/maintain;
3. 'culture': lifestyles/customs, indigenous, archaeology;
4. 'benefits to locals': community development, well-being/welfare, local control, revenue/economy;
5. 'education': learning, education, study, interpretation, discovery/understanding.

The variable 'benefits to locals' became the most controversial, as it was featured in only half of the analysed definitions. However, according to Siswanto & Moeljadi (2015), ecotourism may have significant benefits for the local population. The ecotourism industry generates considerable income for local business owners and economic benefits for the local community. Moreover, the development of ecological tourism can increase the local population's awareness of the need to protect the environment.

Five years later, Fennell's findings were confirmed by Donohoe & Needham's research (2006). Four variables (a reference to 'where ecotourism occurs', 'conservation', 'benefits to locals' and 'education') remained unchanged. However, the variable 'culture' was replaced with 'ethics/responsibility and sustainability' in this study. This discrepancy is explained by the breadth of the analysed definitions and their maturity.

The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as: 'responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education' (TIES, 2015). This interpretation contains all the variables highlighted by Fennell and Donohoe & Needham, except for the divergent variable 'culture' ('ethics/responsibility and sustainability').

A similar approach was proposed by Cobbinah (2015), who identified the following principles of ecotourism: environmental conservation and education, cultural preservation, experience and economic benefits.

Weaver and Lawton (2007) reduce the number of common concepts found in various descriptions of ecotourism to three. The first deals with the types of attractions, which are mostly natural. The second concept

relates to the responsible behaviour of tourists in their interactions with communities and the natural environment. The third emphasises the development of ecotourism in accordance with environmental, sociocultural and economic sustainability.

Chandel & Mishra (2016) summarised the previous 25 years of experience in ecotourism research and identified the following main components of ecotourism:

1. Nature-oriented travel: tourism taking place at nature-based destinations (forests, wetlands, beaches, natural caves, deserts, mountains, etc.);
2. Support of conservation: protection of animals, plants and natural areas from damaging effects of human activity;
3. Learning and appreciation: learning about nature, wildlife and raising environmental awareness of how we can contribute to maintaining natural areas;
4. Socio-economic development of local area: monetary benefits through transactions, employment opportunities and social benefits such as health and hygiene, political empowerment of local people;
5. Support and respect for local culture: a) supporting traditional practices such as dancing and artwork so that they do not disappear. b) The local culture must not be influenced or undermined by tourists so that it does not lose its originality;
6. Local area (people) participation: active participation of the host community or local population in economic, social and political activities.

By and large, these components are identical to variables proposed by Fennel and Donohoe & Needham.

A fairly simple, but at the same time quite complete explanation of ecotourism is given in the *Cambridge Dictionary* (2020). It is defined as the business of organising holidays to ‘places of natural beauty’ in a way that ‘helps local people’ and ‘does not damage the environment’. This description undoubtedly overlaps with all the definitions discussed earlier.

Having examined several studies on ecotourism and various interpretations of this concept, we can highlight the following principles of ecotourism (Table 1):

The next step of our study will be to assess the extent to which these principles are implemented in the Russian glamping market. It should be clarified that the principle ‘(2) Conservation and protection’ will be considered on condition that serious measures such as using eco-constructions, sustainable management of natural resources and taking care of the surrounding area are taken. Principle ‘(3) Benefits to local area and population’ will be considered only if both aspects (socioeconomic and cultural) are observed.

3 Methodology

The research was conducted in three stages. During the first stage, we identified the aim and objectives of the article and determined appropriate research methods; the main research question was also formulated. Moreover, we analysed relevant scientific literature on the development of glamping in the Russian and world tourism markets as

Table 1. Principles of ecological tourism

Principle	Content
(1) Location in the natural environment	Ecological tourism takes place at nature-based destinations such as national parks, forests, mountains, deserts, protected, undeveloped and rural areas.
(2) Conservation and protection	Ecological tourism should help to protect natural areas from the negative impact of human activities. This can include sustainable management of natural resources, eco-design, measures to protect local flora and fauna, etc.
(3) Benefits to local area and population	a) Socioeconomic aspect: employment opportunities, community development and the participation of the local population in economic, social and political activities b) Cultural aspect: support and respect for local culture, including lifestyles, customs and traditional practices, so that it does not disappear and lose its originality.
(4) The presence of an educational component	Ecological tourism should help to raise the level of ecological awareness of tourists and give them the opportunity to learn more about nature, wildlife and local culture.

Source: own processing

well as the phenomenon of ecotourism in order to identify and assess their major features.

In the second stage, our main goal was to determine the extent of the application of the established ecotourism principles in the Russian glamping market. Firstly, we have compiled a list of glamping sites located in Russia in accordance with the web-site *Glamping.rf* (2020). Subsequently, ten glamping sites for analysis were selected by random sampling.

Structured face-to-face and telephone interviews with managers and employees of selected glamping sites and glamping tourists were preferred as data collection tools. For each of the 10 glamping sites, at least 2 managers, 2 employees and 5 tourists were interviewed. Visiting these particular glamping sites within the last two months was a prerequisite for tourists. The total number of respondents was 126 people (20 managers, 34 employees and 62 tourists). Data collection took place from June to August 2020.

The sample list of interview questions included the following:

- Where is the glamping site located? What can you say about the natural environment around it?
- Do glamping activities contribute to the conservation and protection of the local environment and the development of ecotourism in the region?
- What are the socioeconomic and cultural benefits of glamping activities to the local area and population? (In case of difficulty in answering, the following options were proposed: employment opportunities, community development, support of local producers, organisation of excursions to local attractions, introduction of tourists to local customs and handicrafts).
- Does the glamping site implement any educational activities? Does it help to raise the ecological awareness of tourists?

The third stage involved systematisation and analysis of the results received. To quantify the compliance of activities of each of the considered glamping sites with the principles of ecotourism, a methodology based on the percentage ratio was developed. A detailed description of the calculation method is presented in the Results and Discussion section, below. The peculiarities of the implementation of the principles of ecological tourism in the Russian glamping market were also determined. Finally, we have offered concluding remarks.

4 Results and Discussion

Table 2 shows a summary and analysis of the interview results. If the principle is fully applied, it will be marked with a +, otherwise with a -. In case of partial application, the +/- sign will be used. The + sign will be interpreted as 100%, - as 0% and + / - as 50%. As a result, the extent of application of each of the four principles in percentage terms in all glamping sites will be determined. The arithmetic mean of these figures will be considered as the extent of application of the principles of ecological tourism in the Russian glamping sites.

Thus, the overall degree of use of the principles of ecological tourism in Russian glamping sites is 80%, which is a fairly high indicator.

However, the extent of the application of different principles varies from a minimum of 50% to a maximum of 100%. So, the principle '(1) Location in the natural environment' is applied in all cases considered. All selected glamping sites are located in nature-based destinations. This principle of ecotourism is most obvious in the case of glamping, the main essence of which is the direct contact of the tourist with pristine nature.

The principle '(2) Conservation and protection' is fully applied in eight out of the ten glamping sites reviewed. In one case, the application is partial. The most common measures to protect and preserve the environment are the use of eco-construction, the desire to integrate glamping into the environment as organically as possible and taking care of the surrounding area. Moreover, in some cases, innovative and extremely effective measures to reduce the harm caused to the environment by tourism have been identified. Among them are the use of solar, wind and water energy, use of only organic and reusable materials.

The principle '(3) Benefits to local area and population' is the most controversial because it consists of two aspects: socioeconomic and cultural. It is also fully applied in eight out of the ten glamping sites and partially applied in one. Among the socioeconomic benefits to local area and population, the most common ones among the glamping sites considered are employment opportunities for the local population, cooperation with local producers (farmers, beekeepers) and use of local organic products. Moreover, the managers of one of the sites (Yasno Pole) developed a special programme called 'Agritourism as a driver of rural development'. This is how glamping is becoming a driver for the development of ecological and agritourism throughout the region. An illustrative example is the glamping site Green Trail, which purchases products made by people with disabilities who are being treated in a rehabilitation centre and thereby

Table 2. Implementation of principles of ecological tourism in Russian glamping sites

	Natural environment	Conservation and protection	Benefits to local area and population	Educational component
1. Walk-City (Tula region)	+ On the Oka river, in a wooded area.	+/- Taking care of the surrounding area; garbage collection.	+ a) Employment opportunities for the local population; support of local producers (e.g., purchasing of farm products). b) Organisation of excursions to local attractions; introduction of tourists to local customs and handicrafts.	+/- Workshops in painting and local handicrafts.
2. SFERA (Yaroslavl region)	+ In the Pleshchevo Lake National Park .	+ One of the key goals of the glamping site is the development of ecotourism in Yaroslavl region, protection and preservation of the environment, popularisation of the rational use of natural resources through the use of solar, wind and water energy, ecotechnology and reusable materials. In line with that, eco-houses that harmoniously fit into the surrounding nature are used.	+ a) Employment opportunities for the local population; cooperation with local producers. b) Organisation of excursions to local attractions; introduction of tourists to local customs, lifestyles and handicrafts; providing an opportunity to participate in mushroom gathering and berry picking.	+ Lectures and workshops in environmental protection and the preservation of rare flora and fauna.
3. Forest and Sea (Moscow region)	+ On the Volga river, in a wooded area.	+ Interiors made of natural materials; tents neatly fit into the natural surroundings; taking care of the surrounding area.	+/- a) Employment opportunities for the local population; cooperation with local farmers; use of local products.	+/- An example of minimalistic consumption and ecological compatibility.
4. Yasno Pole (Tula region)	+ On the territory of an eco-park, in the countryside.	+ Use of ecostructures (e. g., eco-houses with low energy consumption); sustainable management of natural resources; taking care of the surrounding area.	+ a) Implementation of the program 'Agritourism as a driver of rural development' with the aim of the comprehensive development of the Tula region and increasing its attractiveness for tourists; employment opportunities for the local population; cooperation with local farmers and beekeepers. b) Introduction of tourists to local customs, lifestyles and handicrafts; organisation of excursions to local attractions.	+ Functioning of the Environmental Educational Centre; folk theatre; organic farming courses; workshops in local handicrafts, horseback riding, beekeeping, etc.
5. Scala Glamping Kabardinka (Krasnodar region)	+ On the Black Sea coast; in the countryside.	-	-	-

Table 2 continued. Implementation of principles of ecological tourism in Russian glamping sites

	Natural environment	Conservation and protection	Benefits to local area and population	Educational component
6. Green Trail (Tula region)	+ In a pine forest, on a stream bank	+ Tents made of environmentally friendly materials neatly fit into the natural surroundings; use of eco-friendly principles and ethics not only at the construction stage but also when organising leisure activities for tourists (silent mode, activities that do not harm the environment).	+ a) Cooperation with local farmers; employment opportunities for the local population. Some of the products (cheese, butter) are produced by people with disabilities who are being treated at a local rehabilitation centre. b) Organisation of excursions to local attractions; introducing tourists to local customs, lifestyles and handicrafts.	+ Organisation of excursions to the forest accompanied by a biologist to get acquainted with the local flora and fauna. In general, there is a desire to raise the level of tourists' environmental awareness, to demonstrate an example of minimalist consumption and ecological compatibility.
7. Dobroe (Krasnodar region)	+ On the Black Sea coast, in the Utrish National Park	+ Tents made of environmentally friendly materials neatly fit the natural surroundings; taking care of the surrounding area. Since site is located in the National Park, the principles of environmental conservation are widely applied.	+ a) Cooperation with local producers; using of local organic products. b) Organisation of excursions to local attractions with the possibility of tasting local products and wines; introducing tourists to local customs and lifestyles.	+ Organisation of excursion routes aimed at acquaintance with the local flora and fauna and the formation of a deep understanding of the laws of nature.
8. Hills& Hunts (Leningrad region)	+ On the Karelian Isthmus, on the shores of Lake Vuoksa	+ Organic and nature-friendly architecture: use of natural materials, tents neatly fit the natural surroundings; care taken of the surrounding area.	+ a) Employment opportunities for the local population; cooperation with local producers; use of local products. b) Organisation of boat and walking tours to local attractions; introduction of tourists to local customs and lifestyles.	-
9. Eco Village Sochi (Krasnodar region)	+ In the montane forest.	+ Eco-houses are made entirely of local wood species and neatly fit into the surrounding nature; taking care of the surrounding area.	+ a) Use of local organic products; cooperation with local farmers; employment opportunities for the local population. b) Introduction of tourists to local cooking recipes.	-

Table 2 continued. Implementation of principles of ecological tourism in Russian glamping sites

	Natural environment	Conservation and protection	Benefits to local area and population	Educational component
10. Polyana Glamping (Kaliningrad region)	+	+	+	-
	In the forests of the Curonian Spit, on the territory of the National Park.	Tents neatly fit into the surrounding nature; taking care of the surrounding area. Since glamping is located in the National Park, the principles of environmental conservation are widely applied.	a) Employment opportunities for the local population; cooperation with local producers. b) Organisation of excursions to local attractions.	
The extent of application of the principle in all glamping sites considered.	100%	85%	85%	50%
The arithmetic mean (the extent of application of the principles of ecotourism in the Russian glamping sites)			80%	

Source: own processing

helps the centre to receive additional funds. In terms of cultural benefits to local area and population, the most frequently encountered are an organisation of excursions to local attractions and the introduction of tourists to local customs, lifestyles and handicrafts.

The principle '(4) The presence of an educational component' is fully applied in only four out of the ten glamping sites and partially applied in two. From this, we can draw a conclusion about the lack of an educational component in the Russian glamping market. In this case, it is not enough to conduct master classes in local arts and handicrafts. Educational activities carried out in glamping sites should also be aimed at raising the ecological awareness of tourists and giving them the opportunity to learn more about nature. For instance, excursion routes can be organised with the aim of acquainting participants with the local flora and fauna (Dobroe) or educating participants with lectures or master classes (SFERA) in the field of environmental protection and preservation of specially protected nature areas, rare kinds of animals and plants. Yasno Pole even boasts an Environmental Educational Centre with the aim of environmental education of tourists.

Having analysed to what extent the principles of ecotourism are applied in Russian glamping sites, we can

give a positive answer to the research question — Russian glamping can indeed be considered a type of ecological tourism. However, some peculiarities and caveats should be noted. Firstly, as has been emphasised, a significant lack of the educational component was identified. Secondly, a lack of cultural benefits to the local area and population was revealed. Thirdly, in one of the ten glamping sites examined, only one of the four principles is applied, which is undoubtedly unsatisfactory.

Nevertheless, the Russian glamping market is moving towards ecological compatibility and green travel. It can serve as an example of the successful application of the principles of ecological tourism. Therefore, in our opinion, the further development of glamping can contribute to the development of ecological tourism in Russia and, consequently, to the sustainable development of tourist destinations.

5 Conclusion

The study described the current state of the Russian glamping market. It is at the initial stage of its development, but following the example of other countries, it is rapidly gaining popularity. Glamping is considered a

promising direction for the development of the Russian tourism industry.

Moreover, having reviewed some studies on ecological tourism, we have identified its four main principles: (1) Location in the natural environment, (2) Conservation and protection, (3) Benefits to local area and population and (4) The presence of an educational component.

The findings revealed that the principles of ecological tourism are widely implemented in Russian glamping sites. In general, Russian glamping can be considered a type of ecological tourism with some caveats. As the main peculiarity of the application of the principles of ecological tourism in Russian glamping market, the significant lack of the educational component and cultural benefits to local area and population was identified. Nevertheless, we concluded that it is the development of glamping that may become the impetus for the further development of ecotourism in Russia.

The main limitation of this study is that we reviewed and analysed only ten out of approximately fifty Russian glamping sites. That is why our research into this area is still on-going: the accuracy of the findings will be enhanced by an increase in the sample size. In addition, for a more accurate assessment of the extent of application of the principles of ecotourism in Russian glamping sites, a comparative analysis of the Russian and foreign glamping markets can be carried out.

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Bionote

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