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THE FOUNDER OF "BAREV ARMENIA" TRAVEL AGENCY ON TOURISM INDUSTRY



Arthur Lumen Georgian



Pan Photo

< Northern Avenue hosts tourism expo

Inbound tourism market of independent Armenia has experienced significant changes during the recent 25 years. Initially, during the first decade of independence tourism was out of question, as the war and the economic collapse following the breakup of the Soviet Union were risks which could not be combined with such an entertaining and leisure activities as tourism. So tourism began to develop in the early 2000's, when there was a more or less stable economic situation in Armenia. The first tourists which our agency hosted were our compatriots from the Diaspora. The fall of the iron curtain encouraged them to reconsider their concept of Armenia

as homeland and to start visiting here together with their families, or in groups composed of certain community or organization members. A large flow from the Diaspora shaped Armenian tourism with its advantages and disadvantages. For an Armenian by origin, who has never been in his homeland, visiting Armenia becomes an exciting mix of tourism, pilgrimage and repatriation, and it is not quite hard to satisfy such a person, as everything becomes so interesting and emotional for him. Places strongly associating with the propaganda of the Armenian identity, especially churches, landscapes of Ararat, Tsitsernakaberd (The Armenian Genocide

memorial complex) are of great interest among such tourists, as well as stories about being the first nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion and being the first in many spheres, being a most ancient nation are ideas, pleasing the Armenian Diaspora and multiplying their excitement. The advantage of this is the fact that without possessing a travel and tourism industry Armenia managed to generate a huge demand in the market. Probably no one has ever spoken about the main disadvantage of the sphere, as the idea can be labeled as a "treason against the nation". So the idea is that the touristic product that was so pleasant for the Armenian Diaspora became



Opening of TaTever
ropeway, 2010



Armenia

the stereotype of the Armenian tourism for over 10 years. There was nothing else but to show Garni and Geghard, Ejmiadzin and Zvartnots, and dozens of other churches to the tourist, as well as to make khorovats (barbeque) for them, to see them off and to watch him leaving happy and excited.

This completely non-competitive market also had a negative effect of blocking the development of touristic infrastructure, as we felt no internal responsibility to build more comfortable and luxury hotels with high level of service, or acquire better cars, to repair the roads leading to sightseeing places etc. The reason for this was that we were trying to show a miserable image of our homeland, which was in need of aid from the Diaspora. This was the very beginning, and actually it was not bad for the start, as it spontaneously gave birth to a pool of professionals and an infrastructure. Thanks to the first namely non-Armenian foreign tourists we began to acknowledge that it was not very entertaining to show them dozens of churches within a week. The well-established tourism clichés still survive now and even the fact, that we understand that standard tourist routes need reconsideration and replenishment, can change nothing. In terms of developing infrastructure there is very little progress on the part of private investors and state agencies. The classic example is TaTever ropeway, a single successful project that encouraged the development of whole region. Firstly, thanks to this ropeway the southern touristic route became

essential major one, and secondly, a number of hotels, guest houses and restaurants were built in that region.

INTERNATIONALLY ACKNOWLEDGED BRAND?

Currently we have developed a number of historical sightseeing and touristic routes. Experienced professionals work with us, we offer luxury hotels, high quality vehicles, restaurants with appetizing menus. All these components make us competitive in the field. By the way, outbound tourism is one of the rarest highly competitive fields in Armenia and it brings about reasonable pricing and a growth of the volume of their services and their quality. In addition to historical tours we offer a number of modern touristic activities for people with more specific interests, such as winter sports, medical treatment, culinary, winemaking, archeology, observation of rural areas, extreme tourism, bird watching etc. At this stage of the development we face institutional and macroeconomic serious issues. The most essential issue is the lack of government's support for the development of the field to promote Armenia as a touristic destination in the international market. We are not competitive abroad and it becomes obvious at different foreign exhibitions, where we can watch huge thematic pavilions of our neighbors which are designed with the support of public funds next to unattractive and small tables, representing Armenian tourism. Actually there is no progress in the development of different infrastructures either: roads, public toilets, information centers, training of professionals,

establishment of service standards, legislative and tax reforms – all these infrastructures need development.

HOW TO ATTRACT YOUNG TOURISTS?

Seaside and coastal holidays are of top demand in general, but we cannot offer this kind of tourism. If you have an apricot garden it is useless to make huge efforts and plant avocado instead of increasing apricot yield. Increasing of yield would be that Yerevan finally met international standards, offering a number of leisure and entertainment attractions for tourists. Just a simple example: there are a few pools in hotels. It is impossible to keep tourists interested in Yerevan for more than two days. And it is a very serious issue. On the other hand there is no need to underestimate our tourism, which actually possesses its unique huge market. However, there are some issues concerning the development of historical and outdoor tourism. Our product needs additional reconsideration. For instance, if a small outdoor tour is added to the traditional route to Garni and Geghard, along with a refreshment in a rural home, a workshop, an animation, or with a concert of a spiritual and folk choir, or play of duduk, that would be a more expensive, but more interesting and a diverse tour. Even during a standard group tour in European cities tourists do not get so much new knowledge and experience emotions, as during this kind of tours. And these are observations of tourists hosted by our agency. If we add the hospitality, traditional, caring attitude, the delight of a tourist is guaranteed. ♦