Studienkreis
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Delight over »TO DO Awards« in Sweden and Uzbekistan

»Nutti Sámi Siida« and »Nuratau Community Based Tourism Project« receive TO DO Awards 2023 | Socio-economic independence strengthens local village communities | Safeguarding cultural identity as a key concern in both projects

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Seefeld, 08/02/2023 – This year's internationally renowned TO DO Award Socially Responsible Tourism goes to the Swedish project »Nutti Sámi Siida« and to the »Nuratau Community Based Tourism Project« in Uzbekistan. Since 1995, the Institute for Tourism and Development (Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung) has been honouring initiatives that enable local people to participate and have a say in tourism projects and products.

»Nutti Sámi Siida« – Making a virtue of necessity

For thousands of years, the indigenous Sámi have lived with their reindeer in harmony with nature in a geographical area which they call Sápmi. The land of Sápmi covers northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia.

In the late 1990s, the Sámi experienced several harsh winters in a row that were difficult for reindeer husbandry. The animals could not find enough food in nature and needed additional feeding. Two local Sámi went in search of possibilities to keep up reindeer husbandry in the face of climate change. In cooperation with the manager of a local ice hotel they came up with the idea of taking hotel guests to see their reindeer and of telling them about Sámi culture. The project »Nutti Sámi Siida« was launched.

Tourist demand for its offers increased. From its third year of operation, »Nutti Sámi Siida« was able to offer more jobs for young people. The project employed young Sámi from the locality as well as from bigger cities in the region. Today, »Nutti Sámi Siida« is understood as a place of learning and experimentation for young Sámi. Through an exchange with

tourists the young Sámi get to reflect on themselves, on their culture and their traditional ways of living, thus keeping their traditional lifestyles alive. At the same time, they acquire new skills – from handicrafts to traditional cuisine. Meanwhile, some of the former staff of »Nutti Sámi Siida« have started their own businesses. In this way, the project helps young Sámi to find new ways of sustaining their traditional livelihoods in harmony with the modern world.

The tourism products offered include day trips, the open-air museum Márkanbáiki with a café attached to it, a shop selling Sámi handicrafts and local products, guided reindeer tours, home stays, and finally the so-called Reindeer Lodge as an accommodation facility owned by the project. All tasks are carried out jointly and the benefits, too, are enjoyed by the entire community.

»Nuratau Community Based Tourism Project« as a door opener to Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan is the only Central Asian post-soviet country which during Soviet times already had tourism worth mentioning: Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara were accessible even for travellers from Western Europe or overseas.

Furthermore, with the Nuratau mountains the country boasts of an attractive region which the state only took note of rather late. The Nuratau mountains extend over 170 kilometres in the eastern part of central Uzbekistan, protecting the oases of Bukhara and Samarkand against cold winds from the Kazakh steppe. The few villages that still exist in this area are mainly inhabited by ethnic Tajiks.

The possibilities to develop tourism are manifold – but had not been taken forward for a long time. In the early 2000s, Henry Mix, a film maker from Germany specialised in wildlife documentaries, came up with the idea to develop sustainable tourism in the remote villages of the Nuratau mountains. His objective was to create alternative sources of income for the villagers who were living on subsistence farming. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and its state-run economic

structures, most of the local people had lost their jobs.

The idea was discussed with the village elders and was then slowly but steadily implemented. Since 2008, the region has been experiencing tremendous growth, with travellers from all parts of the world being interested in visiting. In 2008, the first six guesthouses were opened, initially in three villages. The first tours were offered and, with the support of the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), the German Development Service (DED) and the German Embassy, conditions were created to develop tourism structures.

From then onwards, the high growth rates in tourist arrivals ensured an income for local residents. They reinvested in the modernisation of houses, in the education of children, and in social projects like water supply and school refurbishment. Meanwhile, the success of the project has also convinced the government: A vocational training school was opened which also offers training in tourism.

The concept has three objectives: socio-economic empowerment of the local population, development of tourism with an ecological orientation, and sharing local culture with the guests – so that the people may continue to lead self-determined lives. Currently, there are 14 family-run guesthouses with about 200 bedsteads. Up to 40 percent of the population from the participating villages are involved in the project and directly benefit from it.

Claudia Mitteneder, Executive Director of the Institute for Tourism and Development: ”We are particularly pleased that this year we are able to once again honour a European project which stands for a successful symbiosis, maintaining cultural identity, promoting the participation of local people, and ensuring economic success at the same time. Our second award winner offers us a glimpse of a country that many people may know, but which also has tourist attractions off the beaten tracks that have so far remained undiscovered. The projects prove that socially responsible tourism is feasible and can be successful anywhere and under very different circumstances. Congratulations to Sweden and Uzbekistan”!

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Both winners fulfil the main criterion of the TO DO Award in a convincing manner: the participation of local residents in the planning and implementation of tourism projects. In this way, the projects create alternative sources of income and strengthen the self-confidence of local people. A ten-member jury first nominated the projects for the TO DO Award 2023. Then the Institute for Tourism and Development sent experts to check the projects on location. Their assessments turned out entirely positive. The TO DO Award comes with prize money of 5,000 Swiss Francs each, sponsored by the Swiss Foundation for Solidarity in Tourism (SST).

The award ceremony will take place on 7th March 2023 at 2:00 pm on the Congress stage in Hall 3.1 of ITB Berlin.

The information booth of Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung at ITB 2023 will be located in hall 4.1b, stand 201.

Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung (Institute for Tourism and Development) focuses on development related information and education in tourism. In this context it brings out publications, organises international contests, offers training and seminars for people employed in the tourism sector, carries out tourism research and consultancy, and is involved in dialogue on issues related to tourism development.

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