

“When you travel, remember that a foreign country is not designed to make you comfortable. It is designed to make its own people comfortable.”
Clifton Fadiman

Tourism is of growing importance for Georgia’s rural areas as it contributes to alternative income for local communities and supports the conservation of nature and cultural heritage. Rural Tourism businesses are mostly managed by small and micro family enterprises, often on a part time basis. In order to achieve long term business success and economic benefits from tourism, training and education have become very important for these target groups.

The strengths of tourism in Georgia are the geographical diversity of the country, the picturesque environment and culture, cuisine and traditional sense of hospitality. Weaknesses include the lack of adequate infrastructure in many places, the lack of capacity of stakeholders to understand the needs of the tourist. Opportunities include an important untapped potential for tourism development both in cities and rural areas. Threats include the security situation (e.g. the possibility of a long protracted war with Russia).

. The ministry of economics is the line ministry for tourism, and coordinates Government support for the sector within its State Department for Tourism and Resorts.

Rural tourism is a new concept for Georgia with isolated villages taking initiatives to establish guesthouses, and rural tracks, and related services. Support services have included capacity building of local stakeholders, including farmers and youth, networking between villages and outside partners.

International Center for Caucasus Tourism (ICCT) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization, founded in April, 2007 focusing on:

- Collaborative relationships and projects’ joint implementation with like-minded organizations worldwide.
- Popularization of Contemporary Standards of Hospitality among Georgia / South Caucasian population for their further involvement in the tourism industry.
- Poverty elimination through the capacity building of rural population for their further involvement in the tourism industry based upon contemporary methodology and models of country hospitality standards.

Since Aug.2007 ICCT is a member of Rural Tourism International – Training Network (RTI-TN) and is authorized to conduct RT training courses. See www.ruraltourisminternational.org . Since Oct.2007, ICCT is a Partner of Kutaisi- Newport (UK) International Association (KNIA) - See www.knia.ge. The Director of ICCT is also the head of the tourism department of KNIA.

ICCT, with WVI support has also authored and published a manual on "Rural Tourism International Contemporary Standards Establishment in Georgia". Other achievements include the opening of Rural Tourism Resource Centers in resort village Utsera , Upper Racha and Latali, Upper Svaneti. ICCT also authored and published the following: "Tourism and Poverty Alleviation: Recommendations for Action" (2007) and "Poverty Alleviation Through Tourism: A Compilation of Good Practices" (2008)

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Directions of Main activities:

- Running of preliminary talks and meetings with heads of aforesaid instances aimed to familiarize them with Project substance and main points.
- Involvement groups and individuals motivated (on the basis of testing) of tour operators, hotel managers, tourism and culture experts who are eligible to contribute in Black Sea Basin countries capacity building as one of the effective way to raise awareness concerning the best practices and establish stern collaborative relations with like-minded entrepreneurs and farmers in Black Sea Basin. Tourism , in general, and particularly RT are defined to perform human deeds relied upon permanent connection leading to eternal friendship and co-existence for good.
- Provision of intensive preparatory works, including RT trainings and Field Centers opening in all districts of Georgia. In the event of revealed interest ICCT could assist Colleagues in Armenia and Azerbaijan on this account . Local trainers are awarded ICTT certificates as eligible document to coach entrepreneurs and farmers , who express kind will for involving in country hospitality processes.
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