

LAUKU CEĻOTĀJS

LCTA “Lauku celotajs” has finished the guidebook “National Parks in Latvia” and on December 8, 2011, are presenting its Latvian and English versions for public discussion in the Ministry of Regional Development and Environment Protection .

With this guidebook we promote national parks as visitor friendly areas changing the so far popular view in Latvia that national parks are sort of closed areas designated with lots of restrictions for visitors as well as for local residents. In the project, we developed a number of touring routes and worked together with the Ķemeri National Park administration to really achieve involvement of the local community in development of tourist services. This experience and approach spreads to other national parks in Latvia – Slītere, Gauja and Rāzna. Nature conservation through positive communication, increased visitor awareness, positive attitude and responsibility should substitute the previous practice of restrictions and penalties.

The guidebook addresses people who like to observe wild nature, learn about local culture and history, or be active tourists who will visit national parks on foot, on a bicycle, by boat or on skis. We have not forgotten about those who want to drive a car, either. The guidebook offers information about the most important environmental, cultural and historical values of Latvia’s four national parks, also listing the most interesting tourist destinations. Maps are included, and GPS co-ordinates are offered for the most attractive objects. Each of the national parks – Slītere, Gauja, Rāzna, Ķemeri - protects different unique nature values and can offer different experiences to visitors.

For public discussion, we have invited administrations of protected areas, municipalities, tourism businesses, active local representatives and others who are interested to discuss the benefits tourism brings to protected areas as well as existing problems (133 participants). The participants were addressed by Jānis Strautnieks, the director general of the Latvian Nature Conservation Agency supervising the protected nature areas in Latvia. Discussion will continue to provoke all stakeholders voice their opinions, pose problems and offer solutions regarding what and how should be done in the national parks to maintain the balance between nature conservation needs, economic activities and visitor interests.



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