

**Vladimir Tourism Team Report**  
**25 August 2004**

**Bruce E. Wicks, Ph.D.**  
**Karen Hasara**  
**Yekaterina Lakshtanova**

For over ten years, the American Home in Vladimir, operated by the firm Serendipity-Russia, has been working to help meet the needs of the community. Based on his observations as an American working in Vladimir and as a tour leader, Dr. Ron Pope, President of Serendipity-Russia, realized that outside assistance with tourism development could be of considerable benefit to both the city and surrounding communities.

In the summer of 2003 an offer was made to Vladimir city officials to try to put together an advisory team. The proposal was accepted with appreciation. This initiative ultimately led to the formation of the group that visited Vladimir in July of 2004—with the help of a \$5,000 Sister Cities International “economic development” grant. That team is pleased to present its project report below.

**INTRODUCTION: Project Assumptions and Goals**

This report represents the first step in the development of a larger comprehensive tourism plan for Vladimir and the surrounding communities with whom it collaborates. Every plan needs goals and operates in a unique environment. The study team has made the assumption that the following views are present in the community and will provide guidance as the project unfolds.

**The stakeholders for tourism development in Vladimir and surrounding areas want:**

- The greatest economic return possible from tourism. Ideally this strategy will maximize money retained locally and foster the growth of new small and home-based businesses
- Quality of life improvements for the residents of Vladimir. The assumption is that the development of tourism in the region should seek a balance between pure economic return and promoting the quality of life and that residents’ opinions should be sought when making tourism development decisions.
- Tourism development activities to follow a sustainable philosophy and the natural, cultural and heritage resources that will make tourism possible to be preserved for future residents and visitors.

**The stakeholders for tourism development in Vladimir and surrounding areas understand the need to:**

- Work together in a collaborative fashion toward a common goal of tourism development.
- Understand the needs and goals of other stakeholders in the tourism system.
- Follow through on commitments made to others.

**OBSERVATIONS: What the Team Concluded**

The basic building blocks for a thriving tourism industry are present in the region. No doubt many other locations would very much like to have such a rich heritage and excellent location.

### **Consider the following assets:**

- Vladimir has already taken action – the tourism planning process has begun, and the city has started investing time and money in tourism development. This is a very positive display of initiative and leadership. Presumably this will provide the momentum to propel tourism development well into the future.
- Many historical resources (that can't be copied) are in the area and represent a critical mass of attractions sufficient to draw travelers from considerable distances.
- Talent and leadership within the tourism industry are present in Vladimir and represent great potential. For example, the success of some local organizations and entrepreneurs in the tourism industry suggests that valuable leadership and expertise exist and these individuals may assume important roles in guiding the future of tourism in the Vladimir region. (But gaps do exist—see below.)
- There is significant potential to expand the attraction base beyond historical, and largely religious architecture. Providing new things for visitors to see and do will help attract the most desirable guests and lead to more lengthy stays. It needs to be understood that the benefits from packaging these assets as one tourism product are very important.
- The name or brand associated with the Golden Ring is known by almost all Russians as well as a growing number of foreigners. The value of this cannot be understated and the need to improve on the image associated with this identity is paramount. Obviously UNESCO recognition is important but many misperceptions about the region exist among potential travelers. For example, Vladimir is apparently seen by many Russians and foreigners living in Russia as not being especially clean and as having a significant crime problem.
- There is a huge market among domestic and international travelers nearby. The Golden Ring's location is ideal. It is far enough from Moscow to have a separate identity, yet close enough to be easily reached by road. The same or greater tourism attractions in far eastern parts of the country will be unable to draw even a small fraction of travelers that now arrive in the Vladimir region.

### **Consider the following *challenges*:**

- The world is your competition. Travelers increasingly have more and more choices about where to spend their time and money, and the many other tourism destinations they may also consider are not resting on past achievements. Instead, competitors are improving their tourism product and becoming increasingly skillful in executing promotional campaigns to attract those tourists. Simply stated, if you are not continuously improving, you will be losing ground to the competition
- Quality counts. Visitors' service quality expectations never decline, they only get more exacting. What may be acceptable service in a restaurant today probably will not be acceptable three to five years from now. This example holds true for all facets of the travel experience from one's ability to search for travel information, to parking, toilet facilities and museum displays, just to highlight a few. The best advice for tourism stakeholders is to put themselves in the traveler's shoes.
- Attracting more tourists may not always be the best strategy. Shear numbers of visitors should not be the measure of success Vladimir uses. Those visitors that spend the most money, have a quality learning experience, respect the local population and impact the natural and cultural resources the least should be the target audience. In fact, "demarketing" or discouraging the "half-day" visitor should be seriously considered.

- Tourists only care about themselves. Tourists are selfish and care little about the efforts made to make their stay more enjoyable. Often they are critical and harsh but industry stakeholders must learn to accept this and make improvements as they can. Tourism development is a never-ending job.

## **NEXT STEPS:**

To achieve the goals noted above, the immediate objective should be to increase visitors' length of stay in Vladimir and other neighboring "Golden Ring" destinations. It is of virtually no benefit for anyone other than the tour company for travelers to arrive by motorcoach, stay three to four hours and then proceed on to another destination or return to Moscow. To increase the length of stay, three things need to be done:

1. Tourism development and visitor services need to be **improved** and need to cater to the needs and wants of more affluent, educated Russian tourists and international travelers.
2. **Marketing and promotion** need to be increased and coordinated so international and solo travelers are aware of and appreciate the area's attractions.
3. New and different **attractions** should be developed to broaden the visitor's experience beyond the historical architecture.

### **1. Tourism Development**

- a. Support collaboration and consider the needs of other spheres. Organize for leadership. To optimize the benefits of tourism all the parts of the system must work collaboratively and stay informed about each others' activities. Currently there is no central contact person or clearinghouse for tourism. No one is in charge, and if one critical part fails everyone loses. **Creating an independent organization in which local industry stakeholders can have trust and where they can work together is the single greatest need and most important recommendation of this report.** Such an organization should be seen as having considerable value because of its broad perspective and its ability to balance competing interests in an equitable fashion. Coordinating the many components of the travel industry and sharing information improves the entire product/experience for the visitor and through efficiencies leads to greater profitability for the industry. There is ample proof that such systems work. Most cities/regions in Europe, North America and elsewhere have formed NGOs to serve this function. In the US they most often are called CVBs (Convention and Visitor Bureaus) or Tourism Development Offices. Irrespective of the name, the function remains the same – working together for the betterment of the industry. All of the suggestions offered below can and should be facilitated by the NGO we are suggesting. Without it, each activity will likely be less effective, take longer to implement and be more expensive to pursue—if anything is done at all. This task will be complicated due to existing independent efforts being made by various tourism stakeholders. Such overlaps and gaps in authority and action will require genuine collaboration to effectively and efficiently manage. An example is the proposed Information Center. The city and a local business are apparently primarily responsible for its development. We believe that the new organization we are proposing should ultimately oversee information collection and dissemination in the Oblast.

- b. Learn more about tourism, and educate community leaders and residents. Modern tourism is a new phenomenon for Vladimir, and the community-at-large cannot be expected to fully understand it. Moreover, experience tells us that people tend to reject what they do not understand. Successful collaboration among tourism stakeholders depends on mutual understanding and trust. Each partner needs to know what the other does and does not do, and why they operate the way they do.
- c. Begin to bring the “tourism team” together. Organize open monthly tourism meetings where ideas and concerns are shared. This should include regional representatives such as from the Oblast Administration and representatives from Suzdal, Murom and other communities. Successfully conducting these meetings will require a talented chairperson and the ability to follow through on commitments. Significant consideration should be given as to who the chairperson will be and how these meetings will be conducted. At a minimum each invitee should be apprised of the purpose of the meetings and what their role will be. It may also be advantageous to travel to other destinations and visit with tourism leaders there to learn from them. For example, the Nizhniy-Novogorod Partner program might be worth examining first-hand. Ultimately collecting information from other communities will also fall under the responsibility of the proposed tourism NGO.
- d. Assign a person to stay abreast of tourism developments at the Federal and international levels and report regularly to regional tourism stakeholders. Not having up-to-date information regarding such developments and possible grants or other support mechanisms could prove very costly in the long term. This collection of information should begin immediately and the city needs to play a lead role until the NGO is created at which time this responsibility should be transferred to it

## **2. Promotion / Marketing**

- a. Agree on your brand/identity and have everything you do support it (mission statement, logo, slogan, publications, website, etc.). For example, the slogan, “Vladimir: Hub of the Golden Ring” might be used to help communicate that travelers should plan to stay overnight in Vladimir and then make trips to surrounding locations. Unfortunately not every stakeholder is likely to agree on this as their immediate needs/interests might not perfectly match, but as tourism grows everyone benefits and new markets can be targeted. However, it is also important to recognize the different travel markets and the large proportion of international visitors in the summer months might be quite different from the largely domestic market during the remainder of the year.
- b. Initiate a marketing/promotional campaign. A number of goals in this report address portions of that objective but a larger strategy is needed. If potential visitors do not know about the resources or attractions available to them it is unlikely they will visit.
- c. Recognize that more research will be needed. Quality data will help stakeholders make more informed decisions and provide credible support for grant requests. The positive impacts of tourism are often hidden among larger economic trends. Whereas it is relatively easy to discover the economic

contribution of an individual factory, the contributions tourism incrementally makes to retail trade, transportation, city tax revenues, and the diverse hospitality industry are difficult to measure and document. Significantly, Ms. Melnikova and Mr. Sharov both identified comprehensive data collection as a priority for tourism development.

- d. Develop more English language materials for tourists. If the international market is important, and we believe it is, this is a must. Although the data is somewhat inconsistent, the proportion of visitors that are considered independent travelers (not with a tour group) is significant and it is important to note that most of them are believed to know English. It is also very likely that this group will continue to grow in the future so the city and region will no longer be able to depend on the tour operators to disseminate travel information. The development of English language materials can begin on a small scale. The new “Minor Golden Ring: Guide and Handbook” is an excellent start. Any travel information that is produced should also be saved in a digital format and included on the webpage noted below. Providing more information in English is related to the need to provide more interpretative or educational information for the traveler. Although guides may be trained to answer most questions, savvy travelers often desire to study the place they are visiting beforehand and also want to have materials to bring home.
- e. Make a firm commitment to support the maintenance of the English language website. English is the universal language of travel and the Internet has revolutionized travel information search behavior worldwide. This tool should be supported and maintained on a consistent basis. Website operation depends on two very different tasks. The first is design and programming and the second, collecting and updating the information presented. A well designed site that is attractive and easy to navigate but which has outdated information is not going to attract travelers nor is a site that has good information but does not make a good first impression and is not easy to use. Whoever is ultimately responsible for this important promotional device must be prepared to support and manage both of these tasks.
- f. Examine opportunities to collaborate with the Tourism Academy in conducting quality research. Information about visitor’s expenditures (economic impacts) and impressions/satisfaction (service quality) is critically needed. Reliable data will provide very powerful justification for future investments in tourism and will make a very important contribution to successful grant applications. And it will, of course, help to identify areas where more work is needed, for example, in order to improve visitor satisfaction. Such information will also help document change and monitor the industry. Perhaps the Tourism Academy can also organize class projects, internships and/or faculty involvement. The Vladimir-area tourism industry is very fortunate to have this resource available—but to date has not taken full advantage of it.

### **3. Attraction Development**

- a. The city should keep up the good work with beautification and infrastructure improvements and continue to serve as an important, but not dominant, player in tourism development. Because of its region-wide mandate and its

“independent status,” the NGO we are proposing needs to play the dominant role in developing tourism.

- b. If this has not already been done, create a comprehensive plan for the Information Center and share it with stakeholders. As the proportion of independent travelers grows, so will the importance of the center. This facility should serve the region’s travel information needs thus encouraging visitors to travel more widely in the area. A well-devised plan is critical as the proposed center will be the “face” of Vladimir and the region that travelers see and thus it must be operated in a professional manner. The plan should include a clear mission statement, governance and staffing guidelines, a realistic budget and financial plan, and a strategy for addressing the legal concerns of creating this new organization. Additionally, specific policies should be drafted that address important issues such as: ideal location, theme, hours of operation, training needs, required language skills, building operation and maintenance procedures, building size and design concepts, type of displays, motorcoach and auto parking, and restrooms. Ideally this center will be housed in a refurbished historic structure that is adjacent to existing attractions and has ample parking for motorcoaches and personal vehicles.
- c. Identify and attract suppliers of authentic quality souvenirs and educate travelers about them. The more local businesses/craft persons involved the better. We have known for a long time, in fact, for many hundreds of years that travelers wish to bring home mementos of their experiences. Research indicates that increasingly tourists are seeking authentic high-quality souvenirs that are unique to the area visited. Hand-crafted items are particularly sought after. Vladimir could benefit economically from an increase in sales of souvenirs while at the same time improving the tourists’ experience by offering a wider range of possible products to purchase. If feasible, a craft center should be opened near the most frequented sites that has for sale items such as needlepoint, woodcarving, quilts, plus newly designed “Vladimir” souvenirs, in addition to traditional offerings. This center could also have space where craft persons demonstrate how their wares are made. Such exhibitions raise the interest and awareness of travelers, promote sales and serve as an attraction in themselves. At a minimum, a listing and a map should be produced showing the location of existing vendors/stores. (People cannot buy souvenirs if they can’t find where they are sold!)
- d. Explore ways to provide travelers more cultural experiences such as, but not limited to: dance, theatre, singing groups, and musical performances. Many such talented people already reside in Vladimir. In addition to providing more attractions for visitors and residents alike, tourists are accustomed to paying for such experiences and that added revenue should be a boost for the performers. The drama theater next to the golden gates presently sits unused during the summer travel season and is ideally located to attract and accommodate travelers.
- e. Develop “nature tours.” An attractive feature of the Vladimir region is its natural resources. The area has two rivers, a forest, pleasant landscapes and abundant open space. Not everyone in Moscow, and certainly not persons from other European cities, has a dacha where they can enjoy the countryside.

There is a large and growing market of families seeking a quite outdoor experience away from the city. There is considerable potential to build on this asset.

- f. Start planning for a new special event to be conducted in the shoulder (off-peak) season. Special events are gaining in recognition as tourism destinations throughout the world and the local success of the Cucumber Festival supports that observation. There are likely to be many good ideas for new events in Vladimir and the region but care should be taken in creating such events to ensure that the theme is appropriate, a viable market exists and visitors have a quality experience. If feasible, such events should be encouraged at times when the tourist season is slow and there is excess capacity in hotels and restaurants. Simply displacing existing visitors with event participants is not an economically sound strategy.
- g. Begin city-wide discussions about other potential tourism developments. It is important to keep in mind that travelers very frequently express a desire to see how other people live, work and play. That is especially important for international travelers who may have seen Moscow or St. Petersburg but not other parts of this vast and diverse country. Efforts should be made to promote relevant interaction between travelers and residents. For example, this could occur by expanding restaurant menus to include more local cuisine, making a banya experience available or providing more opportunities for home stays. For Russian travelers, agritourism and sport tourism come to mind as potential new attractions. While touring Suzdal there appeared to be as much visitor interest in the Monastery garden as there was in the nearby church buildings. Many Russians are avid gardeners and may be attracted to demonstration gardens/farms that might be developed locally. It also came to our attention that there is a wheelchair factory in the city. Wheelchair sports are growing rapidly around the world and perhaps Vladimir could be a center for such training and competition in Russia. Irrespective of the long-term viability of these ideas for developing new attractions, what is most important is that local leaders learn to think like tourism developers and capitalize on the resources already in their community. Experience has demonstrated that we often are aware of such assets but don't understand their tourism potential.

#### **American Home Tourism Team, Action Steps:**

**PLEASE NOTE: The following are dependent upon available time and funding.**

##### **Long-term assistance (one to three years):**

- To the extent feasible provide ongoing support to the tourism development initiative. Team members will continue to be involved on an “as available” basis to support this initiative. Should additional resources be forthcoming (see point 2 below) greater levels of direct assistance can and will be provided.
- Prepare grant proposals to support future tourism development. Obviously, much more can be done if we can get one or more significant grants.
- Support improvements, updates and revisions of the English language webpage (dependent on grant funding).

##### **Short-term assistance (next 6 to 9 months):**

- American Home Tourism Team will complete initial version of the English language tourism information website for the City of Vladimir and provide suggestions for the Oblast English language web site. The abovementioned website will be published on the world-wide web, using a server located in the United States for the best accessibility for foreign travelers. Available funds will be allocated to maintain the site (host) and provide web-support for the period of one year.

**University of Illinois, Office of Recreation and Tourism Development:**

- Develop a class project for a Senior level Tourism Development course. Proposed project title is: “Direct marketing of crafts and souvenirs to Vladimir visitors” Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism, College of Applied Life Studies. Fall 2004 under direction of Dr. Bruce Wicks.
- Graduate student project for Fall 2004 semester under direction of Dr. Bruce Wicks. This can involve collecting information on existing tourism development programs, especially in Europe. (Dr. Wicks will have a grad student who is fluent in English, German, and Polish, and who reads Russian.) Collaboration with the Tourism Academy on research projects and student activities. For example, we can assist them with preparing and analyzing a survey of local guides. What do they see as the most important problems; what do they suggest can be done? Also, Dr. Wicks’ students might be able to work with Academy students and faculty on a project to expand the kinds of souvenirs that are available to tourists.
- Assist with the search for possible educational training and internships for selected individuals from Vladimir and, possibly, other communities in the region.

The American Home will continue to provide communication and coordinating services.

**TOURISM DEVELOPMENT FOR VLADIMIR AND SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES**

**Year Two Report: 2005**

**2 August**

**Bruce E. Wicks, PhD**

**University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, USA**

**Summary Comments**

Important progress has been made in Vladimir in 2004/2005 that will help promote a viable tourism industry for the city. For example the attractiveness of the city center continues to improve as buildings are renovated, old macadam sidewalks are replaced with concrete paving stones and bricks, flowers are planted and litter is promptly removed. Such activities should be commended and certainly continued. More important, however, is the recognition that tourism needs to be managed at both the city and Oblast levels, and that now is the time for the authorities to act. The emergence of interest in creating a new Tourism Development Center (TDC) and a concurrent proposal to construct and staff a Tourism Information Center (TIC) is evidence of such a desire. These actions clearly demonstrate that city officials and leaders are more widely recognizing the benefits of tourism development and that they are beginning to respond affirmatively by building positive momentum toward constructive projects. The Oblast

administration has also shown an increased recognition of the economic and social value of the tourism industry, and they are making a commitment of support. In addition, a growing awareness of tourism's benefits in cities like Morum and other communities in the Golden Ring area can only serve to improve the region's overall attractiveness as a tourism destination.

The increased awareness of tourism's potential for the city and region is a required first step toward successful and sustainable tourism development. However, the development prospects for the city and region are now at a critical juncture. Major players or stakeholders such as the city and Oblast administrations **must** begin a dialogue to discuss the assumption of responsibility for tourism development activities particularly as it pertains to a TIC and TDC and the many smaller supporting projects that have been suggested. Simply stated: Who is going to do what? It should be noted that the report produced last year recommended that a TDC be created that was independent of any specific administration or business. Such reasoning centers on the concept that for a TDC to reach its potential it will need to earn the respect and trust of many different individuals and organizations. This advice was not taken and the comments and recommendations presented in this report will accept that reality, although our earlier recommendation still stands.

Based upon personal interviews we conducted it appears that at this time the combined city-sponsored TDC and TIC will have considerable difficulty achieving its goals as currently envisioned. The charter for this new entity suggests that it aims to be a regional tourism support organization as well as serving city interests. To do this will require significant voluntary contributions of time, information and resources by other administrations and organizations at the same time as the Oblast, with more wide-reaching authority, seeks to provide a similar service. With the many projects and programs that could be developed in and for Vladimir, it's apparent the city's TDC should adopt a more local focus and provide support for regional and national tourism efforts that will also benefit the city—rather than trying to duplicate the Oblast's efforts..

The TIC concept for the city stands on even less stable ground as it will require considerable financing for construction/renovation, staffing and operation. Of even greater concern is the Oblast's plans to seek Federal funding for a series of Golden Ring information centers. Not only have they already selected an ideal location for one in Vladimir next to the Golden Gates, but they are the logical level of government to support tourism information and development at the regional level. Like the city leaders, the Oblast is proposing an expanded commitment to tourism at this time and it has an important regional niche to fill. It would truly be a shame if the city and Oblast's new-found energy in support of tourism was squandered through a duplication of effort or wasteful in-fighting. An additional serious problem with the city TIC will be the proposal to include a new travel agency and retail store to help support it. Not only should government avoid competing with the private sector, but in this instance such a business is very likely to engender resentment within the tourism sector exactly when trust and collaboration are most needed. Although we are well aware of the financial constraints facing the city administration, we have serious concerns that this endeavor is unlikely to be successful either in the short or long term.

The Golden Ring region has great brand recognition or identity but is undervalued by visitors because its attractions have not been thoroughly developed or properly promoted. **For Vladimir the overarching immediate concern for all tourism development stakeholders and activities should be to focus on how to keep tourists in the city longer.** More lengthily visits (greater than 3 or 4 hours) will translate into increased overnight stays, additional meals purchased,

added admission fees and more shopping expenditures. If scarce resources are going to be committed to tourism development there should be a demonstrable return on that investment.

The following report is divided into three sections. The first is labeled Process Tasks for the city and Oblast. The second section includes specific recommendations for both administrations and the third section outlines what the American Home tourism project team is prepared, in principal and assuming adequate funding, to assist with during the following year.

### **Process Tasks: Vladimir Tourism Development Center: City and Oblast Administrations**

Much needs to be done to coordinate tourism development interests in Vladimir and other Golden Ring cities. Particularly at the beginning of a new tourism development initiative, many activities must be undertaken to build trust and consensus among tourism stakeholders in order to facilitate working together toward a common goal. These activities are best described as “process tasks” as they help build capacity for tourism development by employing the collective strengths in the community (synergy). Either in parallel or following these actions more specific or tangible products need to be developed.

*Please note: The items in the following bulleted lists are NOT in priority order.*

#### **In order to promote mutually beneficial cooperative efforts, the following need to be done:**

- Regularly hold meetings of tourism leaders and other interested individuals and organization representatives. Because of the diversity within the tourism industry, and the need for cooperation between the sectors or spheres, research has demonstrated the overwhelming importance of shared communication to promote tourism success. Our observations indicate that this is not now occurring—even though this critically important step will not require any out-of-pocket expenses.
- Develop tourism networks regionally and nationally. The Federal government has expressly identified increased travel and tourism as an economic development goal for the country and specifically the Golden Ring region. Without an active and visible presence where and when tourism related resource allocation decisions are made at the Federal level, Vladimir and the other Golden Ring cities will miss valuable opportunities. In addition, regional leaders will need to lobby for changes in existing laws and regulations that will facilitate tourism development. For example, in addition to lobbying for a simplified international visa application process it would greatly help if local cities could receive tax revenues from businesses operating on their territory but with their legal headquarters in another city, usually Moscow. The current tax law that has a hotel located in Suzdal that is owned by a firm in Moscow pay taxes in Moscow clearly needs to be changed. A bloc of tourism destinations, businesses and governments can have more of an impact when speaking with one focused and collective voice. This effort should generate additional results if it is vigorously coordinated by the Oblast administration for the entire region. Finally, the travel market from Moscow is so large that Vladimir needs to develop close relations with tour operators there.
- Begin a bottom-up tourism development process in Vladimir. This includes actively bringing community leaders from all sectors together to collectively prioritize tourism development goals. Now that the TDC concept has been formally recognized this task should be a high level first priority. Consensus building activities should be employed to

help promote better understanding of divergent views, minimize possible conflicts and prioritize tourism development goals.

- Identify training needs for tourism leaders and the hospitality sector. This should be followed by the development of curriculum objectives and a search for appropriate instructors. Where funds are available, new tourism development staff should join professional associations and attend conferences. For example, the carnival committee director might benefit greatly from joining the International Festivals and Events Association: Europe ([www.ifea.com](http://www.ifea.com)) and learning from European event professionals.
- With regard to developing the Golden Ring brand, it will be very important to create and produce additional educational material about the historical and cultural attractions in Vladimir and the other Oblast tourist destinations. In this connection, the Museum Reserve appears to do a very good job of providing visitors with Russian-language interpretation of their displays, but for international visitors not knowing Russian, educational materials are sorely lacking. It must be kept in mind that tourists at historical and cultural attractions are there primarily to learn. Obviously, an accurate and informative message translated into popular languages will be very helpful.
- The city and Oblast need to designate staff to work in support of the TIC and other promotional or developmental efforts. To the extent feasible, these staff and community leaders should visit other cities (domestic and foreign) to learn how they are developing their travel industries and then share that knowledge locally.
- Cultural events such as art exhibits and various performances are natural and complimentary additions to the historic architectural and religious attractions. Where appropriate the Oblast and city should actively make these local resources available to tourists. Among other things, this will require preparing and keeping up-to-date a calendar of events—and making sure it is made available to tour operators and individual visitors.

**Acton Steps: City.** To promote the City of Vladimir and encourage longer stays by visitors, the following recommendations should be considered:

- It is very important for Vladimir to develop and encourage new activities like special events that communicate a coherent theme or brand message to visitors. Obviously this should revolve around the abundant historical and cultural assets the city and region are now known for. To that end, the city should make a concerted effort to develop and implement special events that follow the historical theme and compliment existing attractions and tourist expectations. This may mean devising new partnerships with other organizations and allocating resources for these activities. New events that are unrelated to a theme may be nice to have but do not contribute to enlarging the destination's attractiveness to traditional tourists and tour operators. This is particularly important when trying to attract visitors during the shoulder and off seasons. For example, festivals and celebrations during the Christmas season could be a large tourist draw as might large secular performances of church music. It may also be helpful to interpret the history of the city in fun and exciting ways such as presenting fun facts or personalities that engage locals and tourists alike.
- Define the City administration's role in tourism development. City leaders should examine closely the mission of the International Relations and Tourism Department with

the goal of maximizing economic return to the city. It appears likely that greater emphasis should be placed on supporting efforts of the new Tourism Development Center (TDC) concept with dedicated Department support staff. This should include revised job descriptions and a review of compensation and training needs. The TDC should remain as autonomous as possible and city staff should contribute to projects that support the larger effort. As noted above, the Oblast, city and other parties need to prioritize tasks and decide who will commit to performing those tasks. This might include assigning someone specific responsibility for keeping track of all city-related special events, and then making sure that these events are adequately advertised locally and beyond. *When no one has clear responsibility for specific tasks, nothing tends to get done.*

- The Vladimir administration should include a line item in its budget for tourism promotion that will be used to produce materials for travelers. Even if very small to start, such an action confirms a commitment and underlines the continued need for such expenditures.
- To the extent feasible, facilitate the construction of new “European quality” lodging facilities that are in close proximity to the city’s historic attractions.
- Provide—or arrange for the provision by one or more private firms—clean public restrooms. Morum has just completed such a project and it might be used as a model for Vladimir.
- The Golden Ring communities need to take maximum advantage of the World Heritage status that has been awarded by the UN to a number of architectural monuments in the region. Currently that valuable recognition is rarely noted. They should start by mentioning this important designation frequently on all promotional materials and by using whatever logo or trade mark that comes with it. Some World Heritage sites even fly the UN flag. It may also be helpful for the city and Oblast to lobby to get the official name changed. It is currently “White Stone Monuments of Vladimir and Suzdal.” The term “monuments” is very confusing both in English and in Russian. A far better term might be “architecture” or even “churches.” This provides a more accurate description. (In English the phrase “Stone Monuments” might mean “tombstones” to some—which is hardly a positive invitation to tourists!) An additional reason for changing the name is that the term “Stone Monuments” may relate to the architectural significance of the sites, but it does nothing to suggest or support their cultural importance that many travelers and pilgrims are seeking.
- A draft tourism site plan for “Old Vladimir” should be produced as a working document. The physical location of proposed developments needs to be constantly reviewed and shared with all concerned. Many notable suggestions have been made with regard to such developments and each will have an impact on the others. Examples include, but are not limited to: a new shopping mall, tour bus parking, a pedestrian street, visitor centers, craft/souvenir display area, public lavatories and auto parking lots. Where are the optimum places for such facilities and how will they interact with each other? Has there been planning for future growth? If planning is not done now, there is a very high probability that major mistakes will be made. Different departments in the city administration (for example: Tourism, Facilities and Construction, History and Roads) must work together on this. For example, in the near future a growing number of independent travelers, both domestic and international, are likely to arrive by personal

auto and will not stay or have a positive experience if they are unable to park their vehicle with reasonable convenience.

- The city has been successful in creating new and distinct organizations in the past that have brought like-minded people together. They should do so again by helping to organize: 1) a Cultural Arts Council to help provide authentic cultural experiences for tourists and 2) an Arts and Crafts Guild to promote the local production and sale of gifts/souvenirs that are uniquely Russian and ideally clearly tied to Vladimir and the Golden Ring.
- The Vladimir-Russia.net English-language tourism web site should receive additional and continued attention as it is of excellent quality and the city should not duplicate efforts in creating another layer of tourism sites on the Internet. This valuable tourism information asset should be translated into other languages, including Russian, to serve the rapidly growing use of the Internet as a travel planning tool. Cooperation between the American Home and local administrations concerning the collection and maintenance of traveler information will be needed to keep this resource current and helpful for potential visitors. The city's webpage should provide a general welcome and information but more specifically it should target the traditional economic development (business investment) audience. One webpage can't adequately communicate to all audiences.
- Develop accountability measures and collect data that will demonstrate the success of initiatives undertaken. Such measures might include but not be limited to: economic impact (i.e., the approximate amount of money tourism brings to the community), hotel occupancy rates, number of international visitors, website "hits," and Tourism Information Center visits. Clearly the Tourism Academy and/or the State University should be well positioned to assist with these activities as student projects and, if possible, externally funded research.

### **Action Steps: Oblast**

- To facilitate collaboration and communication among Golden Ring tourism stakeholders an ideal project for the Oblast would be to periodically produce and distribute a free industry newsletter about tourism developments. A newsletter is desirable as many stakeholders may not be able or willing to attend meetings yet have a serious need to keep informed. Widely distributed, such communications serve to inform and generate support for tourism among the larger community and its leaders.
- Maintain Oblast-wide databases of lodging facilities, restaurants, destinations and other points of interest, shopping establishments and special events. Such data will be needed to help provide prospective and on-site tourists with current, accurate and inclusive travel information (maps, brochures, web sites, etc.).
- At the highest level possible, the Oblast leadership should meet with their counterpart in the city administration and come to a consensus on how to move tourism development forward in an effective and efficient way. Such decisions can then be communicated through the respective support staff of each administration and meaningful actions taken.

Ultimately the goal is to get leaders thinking like tourism development specialists. This means understanding the need to collaborate and viewing the travel experience through the tourists' eyes. Although great strides are being made, much needs to be done to close the gap between

old Soviet era tourism services and the needs of modern sophisticated domestic and international travelers.

### **Proposed Demonstration Tasks (Products) by The American Home and the Tourism Development Team**

- Assist in the development and testing of an English language tourist map that includes an array of relevant information for visitors.
- Translate the new English language web site into Russian and possibly Mandarin Chinese and German for the growing international markets.
- Encourage and facilitate the preparation of English language interpretative material for museums, in addition to producing English language promotional materials and translations of restaurant menus. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century English is the language of tourism, and most Europeans (and many others) with available resources and an interest in traveling to the Golden Ring are fluent in English.
- Develop and design a standard system of signage that will direct travelers, particularly international visitors, to key attractions, the proposed information center, souvenir shops, restaurants, parking and public lavatories. To the extent feasible, recognized international signage should be used.
- Create data collection templates for: restaurants, destinations (museums, etc.), shops, clubs and cafes, cultural performances, outdoor recreation, lodging, special events, and crafts/souvenirs. Such templates will serve as the structure of an extensive database for tourism assets in Vladimir Oblast and possibly beyond.
- Help organize and provide a part of the funding for a trip to the Polish cities of Gdansk, Gdynia and Sopot for local tourism supporters. Such an educational tour will provide an opportunity to learn how this region has managed to organize a successful tourism development effort while transitioning to a free market economy.
- Conduct research and produce a report summarizing the employment of archeological sites as tourist destinations—to help with the development of the Sungir site.
- Prepare a Business Plan for an Oblast souvenir shop.
- Continue to explore sources of funds to support this valuable tourism development initiative.

### **Concluding Personal Admonition—Bruce Wicks**

Tourism for the Golden Ring and Vladimir can develop rapidly with great local cooperation and considerable new revenues or it can move ahead slowly, one step at a time. Either approach is acceptable if trust and collaboration exist among the members of the diverse tourism community, and if there is an unwavering shared commitment to developing QUALITY experiences for tourists.

Please remember, what is good for Vladimir is good for Suzdal and the Oblast and all the Golden Ring. Conversely, the same is true with respect to what is good for Suzdal and the other

communities. I know you understand this, so now make it happen, and remember the most important thing, working together and sharing, costs next to nothing. We are here to help facilitate that process as much as possible, so please don't hesitate to ask ([bew@uiuc.edu](mailto:bew@uiuc.edu)). I look forward to visiting Vladimir and the region again in 2006 to see what great progress has been made and to produce report number 3!

Lastly, let me share a few personal experiences. Many of my colleagues at the university, as well as acquaintances and friends, have asked me many questions about my trips to Russia – they are really interested. I honestly believe they are especially curious in part because they know so little about your large, rich and diverse nation. Hopefully they also realize that the impressions they may have are based on limited, outdated or false information. Regrettably most Americans know only what the media provides, as I expect is the case in Russia too, but the really important issues are not Putin/Bush, Iraq/Chechnya, etc. but the personal connections made between “real people” through travel and tourism. Without exception, my response to such questions has been very positive and particularly complimentary of the friendly people and the beauty of your country. My reaction to these exchanges is that Americans appear greatly relieved that Russians are really not much different from us with regard to concerns about their families, their jobs, the environment, etc. Which brings me to a final point about tourism, the importance of citizen diplomacy, or the genuine interactions between persons of different nations and cultures that promote better understanding and better political relations. These exchanges have immense value and the potential the Golden Ring provides for a positive welcome to the rest of the world is significant—and very important to the global image of Russia. For Vladimir and the Oblast that is an awesome responsibility to try to fulfill.