

(Translation of article from first and second page of Vecherniy newspaper)

Guides of the Year

Our guide won in international tourism competition: Cholpon Soodaeva as a runner up, and Sergey Gluhoverov as a guide.

The competition was organized by noncommercial organization “Leap Local”. The main task was to find the best possible service around the world to help tourists. To do it as clear as possible the guides did not know about being included in the competition.

Last year in August an international tourism expert Kirsten Koza, who lives in Canada, arrived in Kyrgyzstan on behalf of “Leap Local”. She had a biking tour with Cholpon along the northern shore of Issyk Kul Lake; they were in Naryn, Tash Rabat, Son Kul lake, Chaek and Toktogul. Kirsten Koza had service as a usual traveler. And only before the flight back, Kirsten told us about the competition and her mission. She said that she was inspired by travel in Kyrgyzstan (she has a long experience to compare with, because she had similar tours in 18 countries around the world!) and she added that she was going to include Sergey and Cholpon in the international competition. To be sure about their service the guides were asked to give all contacts and feedback of the previous tourists.

Daniel Keller from Switzerland, one of Sergey’s travellers, said, “My first trips lead to known places along the silk-road and still Sergey makes you feel like an explorer discovering the most secret places.”

Paul Albers, a travel agent from Germany said, “I was impressed by the knowledge about culture and history displayed by Cholpon. She also was a very enthusiastic guide with a very good sense of humor. She already knew the tricks to keep a demanding group interested, even on long driving days. And Sergey had excellent flexibility to fix problems mid-tour and change locations or itinerary to suit needs and situations.

2nd page.

Our country does not have good tourist infrastructure and we do not have many five stars hotels, but we have a lot of untouched places that are so far from the civilization. Wild nature, customs and traditions attract tourists. All these things our guides must point out – says Sergey Gluhoverov. Several years ago we had a married couple from England. Guides asked them which place in the world they liked most of all. The travelers said about a small European town. The reason was a particular service in the hotel. In the morning a local guide asked them if they need anything in the morning. The answer was: “Two coffee with sugar and newspaper “Times”. In few years they came back to the same hotel and in the morning all these things again were on the table. So much time has passed but the owners of the hotel kept all information about wishes of their clients. We decide to take it into consideration and to make all travelers in Kyrgyzstan feel particular and unique Kyrgyz service. For several years we have been collecting articles about history, geography, archeology, traditions and then opened guide courses. Cholpon is one of the first our students.

Every group in the airport is met with hot national bread boorsoks and home made jam. In every hotel room is already a special card with greetings and panorama view of Kyrgyzstan. Before driving to mountain regions we present them wool talismans and local handicraft masters make slippers with the names of tourists. We do not let people be bored – we ask them Kyrgyz riddles, tell them nomadic anecdotes. On the farewell dinner we present men national white hats and present women wool handbags. We take photos and then in the airport give them a disk with the best photos of their tour. Also before they arrive in Kyrgyzstan we send them a special document about particularities of the country. In feedback tourists write: “We could not expect such service”.

Each guide has there secrets to entertain a traveler. For example I sing about national hero “Manas” and move as a real Kyrgyz artist. Another guide makes special music with a help of national instrument “chopochor” to collect his tourists on the bazaar.

The guides on www.leaplocal.org were judged by an international panel of responsible tourism experts including; Richard Hammond - National Geographic, Rough Guide, Geographical (Royal); Vicky Baker - Guardian, Time Out, Sunday Times; Brad Hafford Ph.D. - University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology; Peter Moore - popular Australian author of eight travel books. Guides around the whole world participated in the competition. Among the best guides beside Kyrgyzstan were guides from Peru, USA and Canada, and the runners up again from Peru, Germany and Ecuador.