

2: Tourist Information Centres (TICs) — When Government Meets Business

Russia and many other countries run networks of Tourist Information Centres. A TIC looks small — usually just a bright desk at a railway station or on a main square — but it does several important jobs at the same time. First, it gives **public service**: free city maps, bus timetables, emergency phone numbers and visa-registration advice. Second, it supports **local business** by selling museum tickets, walking tours and handmade souvenirs. The government subsidises rent and staff training, while the centre earns a commission on each sale.

This **public-private partnership** helps everybody. Travellers get reliable information in several languages, small companies reach new customers, and the city improves its image. Modern TICs also work online: QR codes on street signs open audio guides on a visitor's phone, and chat-bots answer simple questions 24/7. Some regions even use mobile vans to reach remote villages during tourist season.

The biggest challenge is **neutrality**. A TIC must recommend many cafés, not just the one that pays more. Staff therefore follow strict service standards and update information daily. Technology helps, but friendly human contact still matters. A smile and a short greeting in the visitor's own language can make the whole trip start well.

Tourist Information Centres prove that good cooperation between government and business can turn simple desks into engines of local development — without expensive infrastructure.

Vocabulary:

1. **Subsidy** – government financial support / государственная субсидия
2. **Commission** – sales percentage for service / комиссионное вознаграждение
3. **Public-private partnership** – joint project of state and business / государственно-частное партнёрство
4. **Timetable** – schedule of transport / расписание
5. **Emergency** – urgent or dangerous situation / чрезвычайный случай
6. **Souvenir** – small gift from a trip / сувенир
7. **Reliable** – trustworthy, safe / надёжный
8. **Image** – public opinion about a place / имидж
9. **Remote** – far away, hard to reach / удалённый
10. **Neutrality** – not taking sides / нейтральность
11. **Standard** – accepted level of quality / стандарт
12. **Infrastructure** – basic facilities and systems / инфраструктура
13. **Audio guide** – recorded tour commentary / аудиогид
14. **Chat-bot** – automated online helper / чат-бот
15. **Commission** – fixed sales fee / комиссионные

Discussion Questions:

1. Why should governments invest money in Tourist Information Centres?
2. How can a TIC stay neutral while earning commissions?
3. Which digital tools can replace printed maps in the future?
4. How do TICs help small local businesses compete with big chains?
5. Describe a moment when official information saved your trip.



Choose one of the statements below:

1. Government-funded TICs are essential for successful tourism development.
 2. Online resources will soon make physical information centres unnecessary.
 3. Public-private partnerships give tourists better service than state-only centres.
 4. Human contact is more valuable than technology in visitor information services.
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Give a 1.5-minute talk on one of these statements.

You can use the following plan:

- state the problem;
- express your personal opinion and give reasons for it;
- express an opposing opinion and give reasons for it;
- say why you do not agree with the opposing opinion;
- make a conclusion restating your position.