

ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE



Over the past several years, the countries located in Southeast Europe have noticed a growing interest among foreigners to exchange the regular vacation spots with small villages that ensure an eco-friendly getaway. This ecotourism niche aims to promote responsible, environmentally-friendly tourism. Travelers want to make an idea regarding how residents live and how they struggle to maintain the area unchanged.

Ecotourism is becoming increasingly popular in the region despite the difficult financial times. Ecotourism has several advantages, one of them being that it supports the development of eco-friendly tourism. Moreover, it also leads to the economic growth of local communities, not just capital cities.

There are numerous ecotourism options in Southeast Europe, due to the fact that many nations promote it: the Greek islands, the small villages in Serbia or the traditional weddings in the Macedonian villages are only three of the many possibilities tourists have in what regards ecotourism. The Kosovo communities of Peja, Prizren or Decan along with the hostels in Moldova which are located on the edge of the Carpathian Mountains, are also very popular nowadays.

For instance, village Vrmdza in Serbia has been renovated with tourism revenue and, as Nebojsa Strahinjac claims: "Last year, people from five European countries visited our village and enjoyed it!". Regarding the economy of Serbia, ecotourism brought no less than 100 million Euros, approximately 16% of the entire tourism revenue.

According to Nebojsa Ciric, the Serbian Economy and Regional Development Minister, Serbia has seen ecotourism as a potential source of revenue that can not only support economic growth, but also increase employment and improve the overall image of the country. In addition, Mr. Ciric also noted that no less than 1,000 households in 70 municipalities are involved in ecotourism, and they basically generate the profit of one thousand small businesses.

With regards to Macedonia, the town of Krusevo is undoubtedly the most important ecotourism site. The town is open yearly between July and August and it hosts historic event re-enactment where both locals and tourists are invited to wear period costumes. As the Krusevo project manager stated, this event managed to bring the entire town back to life. The Krusevo project manager Ranko Petrovic also stated: "Until several years ago, the price for real estate was extremely low. However, thanks to the development that resulted from the project, today the price for real estate is up and currently the property price is approximately ten times higher than before".

Romania is also one of the most beautiful and visited countries in Southeast Europe. It has no less than 3,000 hotels which are members of the Association of Ecologic and Cultural Rural Tourism. The president of the association, Maria Stoian, says that more hotels are joining, regardless of the financial difficulties that most small businesses face. Maria Stoian also added: "There are hurdles all around, just like in any other activity. Bureaucracy, poorly developed infrastructure such as the access roads along with excessive taxes are only several of them".

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