Ecotourism in Romania: from branding to destination management

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www.asociatia-aer.ro
www.eco-romania.ro
About AER

Established in 2003, AER has achieved a partnership for nature conservation and tourism among private sector businesses (tour-operatours, guesthouses) and organisations acting in nature conservation (NGOs, protected areas, consulting companies, individuals).
80 members:

- 50% privat sector (e.g. tur-operators, guesthouses, guides) & 50% entities and individuals interested in nature conservation and ecotourism development (e.g. NGOs like WWF Romania, CAPDD Bihor, Mioritics Association, ADEPT Foundation, etc.)

Marketing - International Travel Shows, Magazine...

1. Photo-Adventure Viena
2. Destinations London
3. Fair for Special Journey Amsterdam
4. CMT Stuttgard
5. ITB Berlin
Eco-Romania certification system;
Ecotourism destinations network development.

...beyond a green image
Eco-Romania certification system

- Established in 2007;
- Based on Swedish and Australian models;
- Third party certification system;
- For accommodation facilities and tours;
- More than 100 certificates awarded;
- 1.5 or 3 years validity;
Discover Eco-Romania Zenith Map Collection

- Part of a larger concept for ecotourism destinations;
- They integrate the eco-certified services;
- The aim is to open the rural areas around the mountains for tourism and to bring benefits for the local communities.
Ecotourism destination

= The protected area and the (surrounding) local communities that adopted a responsible and integrated local policy based on ecotourism
**Brasov Declaration, the 2nd European Ecotourism Conference 2013**

Ecotourism destinations in Europe should have:

- A **protected area** associated with the destination;
- A critical mass of **local ecotourism businesses**;
- A **sustainability plan** under implementation, in developing ecotourism;
- **Nature and local culture** as the main ingredients in product development and marketing;
- **Active participation** of local communities, empowered through education and awareness raising, based on shared values.
Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)

European EcoTourism Labeling Standard (EETLS)

Ecotourism Destination Criteria Romania

National Tourism Authority Initiative
Ecotourism destinations network

- Eco Maramureș
- Tara Dornei
- Băile Tușnad and Surroundings
- Transylvanian Highlands
- Mărginimea Sibiului
- Pădurea Craiului
- Tara Hategului - Retezat
- Zârnești – Piatra Craiului
- Delta Dunării
- Delta Dunării
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National context

➢ National ecotourism strategy developed by National Research and Development Institute for Tourism defines the needs for **ecotourism destinations in 2009**;

➢ In 2011, the **Inter-Ministry Working Group** for ecotourism development is officially formed under coordination of National Tourism Authority. AER is member of it;

➢ In 2011 – 2013, National Tourism Authority coordinates the process of developing the criteria and procedure for ecotourism destination awards;

➢ **European Ecotourism Conference** (Poiana Brașov/Romania, 2013) agreement on European ecotourism destination concept;

➢ In 2014, the first **two micro-regions are recognized** as ecotourism destinations by the National Tourism Authority in partners.

➢ In 2016, 2018/2019 **national ecotourism** strategy is updated.

➢ In 2016, **two more ecotourism destination** are evaluated and officially awarded.
The network of the seven-ecotourism destination coordinated by AER
General overview of the seven destinations
(evolution of the main tourism related indicators)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NETWORK</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No of guesthouses</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>191</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of beds</td>
<td>1412</td>
<td>1.801</td>
<td>2.357</td>
<td>2.745</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of tourists</td>
<td>74.106</td>
<td>79.495</td>
<td>104.379</td>
<td>113.277</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overnights</td>
<td>127.859</td>
<td>158.292</td>
<td>249.115</td>
<td>265.312</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average stay</td>
<td>2,44</td>
<td>2,33</td>
<td>2,47</td>
<td>2,34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupancy rate</td>
<td>20,02</td>
<td>21,24</td>
<td>27,96</td>
<td>26,48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NAT. STATISTICS</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average stay</td>
<td>2,04</td>
<td>1,99</td>
<td>1,98</td>
<td>2,02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupancy rate</td>
<td>19,6</td>
<td>20,08</td>
<td>21,6</td>
<td>23,3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2018 data: Tara Dornelor Ecotourism Association & AER

Ecotourism network: 22 guesthouse (386 beds);
Overnights: 30500
Average stay: 3.43
Occupation rate: 21.62
Tara Dornelor

Average stay: 3,43
Occupation rate: 21,62

Length of stay

- Without spending the night: 5%
- 1-2 nights: 33%
- 3-4 nights: 27%
- 5 nights or more: 35%
Tara Hategului - Retezat

The main purpose of the visit

- Other
- Secondary home
- Visit the friends or relatives
- Activ holiday beside hiking in Retezat
- Pilgrimage to Prislop
- Relaxing and leisure activities near...
- Visit to the historical sites
- Visitor centeres of the Geopark
- Hiking in Retezat
Eco-Maramures

Citizenship
- Romana
- Foreigners

Resident
- Abroad
- Romania

Information channel
- Site Internet, blog: 36%
- From friends: 11%
- I knew the destination: 30%
- Tourism agency: 6%
- Printed materials (guide book, magazines etc.): 3%
- Other: 0%
- Facebook: 5%
Transylvanian Highlands

Income of tourists

- Above 5000 RON / 1077 EUR
- Between 3001 and 5000 RON / 646 sandi 1077 EUR
- Between 2001 and 3000 RON / 431 and 645 EUR
- Between 1001 and 2000 RON / 215 and 430 EUR
- Under 1000 RON / 215 EUR

Citizenship

- Romanians
- Foreigners
Padurea Craiului

Group structure:
- With friends: 23%
- Couples without children: 28%
- Families with children: 35%
- Individuals: 7%
- Seniors with grandchildren: 2%
- Alta: 5%

Main purpose of the visit:
- Other active holiday: 20
- Team building:
- Other active holiday: 20
- Tourism cave: 60
- Speotourism:
- Secondary house:
- Visiting friends:
Objectives for 2023

- To increase the number of enrolled producers and service providing members with 50% at the level of the network (7 destinations)
- To increase the total number of nights spent by tourists with at least 32% for the whole network,
- To increase the average length of stay at least up to 2,75 days for each destination,
- To increase the occupancy rate of the lodgings units to at least 32% for each destination,
- To improve the ecotourism offer in the 7 destinations
- To strengthen the ecotourism network that includes the 7 destinations
- To strengthen Romania’s image as an ecotourism destination
DMO development

- Tourism monitoring system for real data;
- Resource optimization;
- Sustainable development: lower seasonality, higher occupancy rate and longer length of staying.
2 large tourism destinations: Sibiu and Oradea;
Identification of certification systems for hotels and destinations on sustainable tourism at European level;
Performing the self-check for 10 hotels and 2 destinations.
Funders
Thank you for your attention!

Andrei Blumer
President
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