



II e-NEWSLETTER. MARCH 2012

Asnāte Ziemele, Latvian Country Tourism Association

PROJECT PROGRESS

1st project meeting



The kick-off meeting took place in Tryavna, Bulgaria in 13/12/11 – 14/12/11. The partners discussed the project objectives, targets, activities, outcomes, indicators and distribution of tasks. Contracts were signed between the promoter and partners. During the first meeting day, the partners also discussed the dissemination, evaluation and quality management plan with respect to project indicators, financial rules, delivery of reports. The second day continued with discussion of practical and technical aspects of the project: project logo, brochure, web site, administrative handbook, future translational meetings, local studies and researches (methods and approaches, design of questionnaires), the Guide and the Training program, piloting. The three reporting periods and details on the first reporting period were clarified.

Tryavna – meeting location

Tryavna is a town in central Bulgaria, situated 307km to the East from Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria. It is located in the north slopes of the Balcan range and has ca 9000 residents. The first documents of its existence date back to the 12th century. The place has been famous as a health resort as it is surrounded by old pine forests and the climate is favourable for healing and prevention of respiratory diseases. Tryavna is a popular tourist destination with its historical centre and the uniqueness of its traditional architecture. The western part of the town is a cultural heritage site. The town is also famous for its tradition in arts and crafts, the many craft shops have become a major tourist attraction. The town square with the illuminated clock tower and the church looks especially attractive when it is dark on the street.

A number of touring routes cross Tryavna. There are route marking signs on the buildings and other landmarks. One of the routes takes visitors to the Bozhentsi (Боженци) village which is ca 5km away (ca 1,5-2 hours of a brisk walk). The route is suitable for fit hikers, in the beginning it follows a winding small road through residential areas, then continues on an open mountain plateau allowing the enjoy the beautiful Balcan landscapes with pastures and The Bozhentsi village is surrounded by forests and mountains. Because of its unique cultural environment it has been designated as part of UNESCO's cultural monuments. Many of the houses have two storeys, the first being used as a cattle-shed and the second being inhabited by the owners. Characteristic features of the Bozhentsi architecture are the verandas and the stone-plate roofs. The village is a popular tourist destination. The place



AcTour: Active Tourism for Sustainable Development

Leonardo da Vinci Transfer of Innovation

Project no: 2011-1-BG1-LEO05-05043

has retained its authenticity, but at the same time, visitors will find nice cafes, souvenir shops, accommodation and tourist information.

Text, photos: Juris Smajinskis

Tryavna



Bozhentsi



Beech forest between Tryavna and Bozhentsi



Balkan landscape early in the morning





AcTour: Active Tourism for Sustainable Development

Leonardo da Vinci Transfer of Innovation

Project no: 2011-1-BG1-LEO05-05043

Provider survey

Local surveys on key competences for management of active tourism have been conducted in Spain, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Latvia. From total number of 107 respondents in 4 project participating countries, most respondents were aged 41-60, representatives of rural tourism accommodation providing guided tours, equipment rental and/or catering services. Below are the main conclusions from the survey.

TOP 5 General skills:

- advertising and marketing;
- communication/ intercultural communication;
- product attractiveness;
- language skills;
- first aid

TOP 5 Specific skills:

- route planning;
- active tourism consumer & special groups of consumers as seniors and disabled people;
- field training for guides;
- tourism product development;
- nature-based tourism and ecotourism

Skills map

The survey results are used in definition of skills map for active tourism. The project partners have agreed on the list of general and specific skills required in development and provision of active tourism services. The skills map will be used for development of further project results.

JOB-RELATED TRAINING MODEL FROM LATVIA

At present in Latvia the following tourism activities are popular, demanded and linked with rural tourism: Cycling, boating, hiking, bird and animal watching, horse riding, water sports, skiing and snowboarding, mushrooming, geocaching, fishing. The target audience of active tourism diversifies. There are customer groups who want to experience activities in “soft” and leisurely way, together with families and young children. Rural tourism providers, traditionally running accommodation facilities (guest houses, B&Bs, holiday cottages) cannot be experts in all these activity areas that require specific skills and knowledge. However, recent tendencies suggest that rural tourism providers need knowledge and short-term, efficient

training in how to provide good quality services, catering for the needs of different activity tourists. Preferably, training is given by professionals in the field, who are able to share practical advice and know-how.

1. The training needs are established and the training is organised in the following process:



Example: outdoor seminar on marking the touring routes

- ✓ Market demand for active tourism products established;
- ✓ Short-term product-specific training programs developed for rural tourism providers to improve or diversify their product with active tourism elements;
- ✓ Practical training provided, focussed on skills development;
- ✓ Follow-up of the training results and further training needs.

2. The training concentrates on practical issues and is based on practical examples:



A cycling route is tested in a group representing all fitness levels

A training seminar discusses topics like 10 basic steps in making an active touring route. The scheme can be used for hiking as well as cycling routes. Seminar participants receive detailed explanations and ask questions to a lecturer who is a practicing route developer and a cycling guide. Other aspects, like technical equipment and infrastructure, required services, safety and security, giving practical advice to tourists are discussed. Seminar programs are rich in practical examples and case studies allowing to

understand the customer needs and prepare for different situations. Whenever possible, testing of a newly developed touring route is offered to interested rural tourism providers



AcTour: Active Tourism for Sustainable Development

Leonardo da Vinci Transfer of Innovation

Project no: 2011-1-BG1-LEO05-05043

under guidance of a professional guide who explains the route development process and answers questions.

3. Marketing and dissemination of active tourism products



Rural tourism providers need practical training not only for development but also for marketing and dissemination of the products. A template of product description is created and instructions given for simple and easy design using open source software. According to rural tourism provider, guest house “Pītagi” in the Slītere National Park, Latvia, the cycling and walking routes have helped to increase the length of visitor stay in 2012 by 81% against 2008.

Instead of „running through” the park, the visitors choose to stay longer and experience what the national park has to offer. The route descriptions are available for free in tourist service businesses in the national park and from a number of web sites.