

SWOT analysis of tourism and agro tourism offer in "Vârtop-Arieșeni" area - Apuseni Mountains

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Abstract

Vârtop-Arieșeni area is located in western Romania, at an altitude ranging between 850m and 1200m at the verge of Bihor and Alba counties. It is a mountainous area with many karst regions which raises the value of this land and it gives a great tourism potential.

Therefore, we consider important to elaborate a paper work that highlights the strong points and chinks of tourism and agro tourism offer of this area, and existing opportunities and threats. Given these issues, we used a SWOT analysis as research method, with the hope that the application of its results will raise the value of tourist offer in this area and tourist services in general.

Key words: opportunities, threats, tourist service.

INTRODUCTION

Geographical Vârtop-Arieșeni area is in Bihor Mountains – Vlădeasa, the mountains which constitute the unit with the highest altitudes in the Apuseni Mountains (Vârful Curcubăta Mare 1849 m), then Arieșul Mare River separate the two mountainous units.

Along Arieșul Mare river wriggles the national road (DN 75), that enters in the commune from Bihor by way of 29.3 km, it goes through it on distance of about 14.2 kilometers, then passes out the commune at 43 km, and heads for Gârda de Sus. This road links Tara Moșilor of Tara Crisurilor, crossing over Bihor Mountains by Vârtop Pass, of Clujului region via Garda de Sus - Scărișoara - Vadul Moșilor - Campeni - Turda - Cluj, of Alba via Campeni - Abrud - Zlatna - Alba and Tara Zarandului via Abrud - Brad.

The area of Arieșeni commune is 6310 hectares, and if we exclude the forests remains an area of 3322 hectares, representing 0.53% of the county.

The commune population totalize currently a number of 1840 people, with an average density of 55.39 inhabitants per km².

Arieșeni territory, mountain par excellence, is occupied by 18 villages scattered over a wide area from Curcubăta on the crest of Bihor up to Bătrâna in Padiș:

Arieșeni – commune's centre, Avrămești, Bubești, Casa de Piatră, Cobleș, Dealu Bajului, Fața Cristesei, Fața Lăpușului, Galbena, Hodobana, Islaz, Păntești, Pătrăhăitești, Poienița, Răvicești, Șturu, Ștei-Arieșeni, Vânucești.

Towards other more important centers, Arieșeni locality, is at distances of: 141 km of Cluj Napoca city; 123 km of Turda city; 39 km of Cămpeni city; 51 km of Abrud city; 120 km of Alba Iulia city – county

borough; 40 km of Ștei city 90 km of Brad city; 130 km of Oradea city; 182 km of Arad city; 133 km of Deva city.



MATERIAL AND METHOD

SWOT comes from the initials of the English words Strengths (strengths), weaknesses (weaknesses) Opportunities (opportunities) and Threats (threats).

SWOT analysis is in fact a technique through which can be identified the strengths and weaknesses and examined the opportunities and threats of a project, of an action or individual.

In case of a project, SWOT analysis can be used to measure its effectiveness.

In our case, with this analysis, we will identify the strengths and weaknesses of the tourist offer in the area studied, as well as opportunities and threats that exist here.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following the analysis made we reached the following results:

Strengths: *existence of tourism strategy, favorable winter sports area, the existence of a slope, mountainous area with attractive landscapes, with routes and interesting tourist attractions (some unique in the country), transnational tradition and history, access road DN 75, available and cheap labor, the existence of educational and health institutions, low delinquency, qualified labor in industry, generators of new jobs and additional sources of income directly contributing to increased quality of life, conditions conducive to engaging in agro-tourism.*

Vulnerabilities (weak): *agricultural and tourism potential is not properly improved, reduced labor employment available due to the low number of industrial units in the zone, abusive and irrational exploitation of forests, inadequate promotion of local agro-tourist potential, low development of fixed network, mobile, mail, cable, no banking system, poor professional training of personnel providing services in agro-tourist pension; the existence of uranium exploitation and radioactive waste nearby, the quality of sanitary services, negative demographic rise, limited financial resources and information, the absent of transport by rail.*

Opportunities: *the elaboration of projects to obtain structural funds from EU for development of different sectors of activity, promoting the area image and the possibilities for attracting aboriginals and foreign investors, organizing training courses, retraining specialization both of staff engaged directly in services and agro tourist pensions managers for training specialized management; the purity and archaic of rural community, fructification of cultural exchange to understand better customer's expectations, valorization of the tourist area (Vârtop Holiday Village in foto), the possibility of acquisition and processing plants and berries, the existence of some sources of governmental and county financing.*



Foto1: Pîrtia Vârtop Arieșeni

Risks (fear, threat): *the reticence of the rural population (aging) at new, low-budget of rural Romanian families, degradation of communication lines and lack of modernization, relatively low quality of offered services, the inadequate report quality - price, accurate misunderstanding of tourists expectations, especially foreign ones, the continuous deterioration of the environment and the existing deficiency in restoring ecological balance, inconsistent policy on tourism and rural tourism at central level, sterile storage, deforestation, not planting, migrating young people.*

CONCLUSIONS

Vârtop-Arieșeni area have a high tourism potential, but modestly exploited.

Relief attractions are beneficial completed by other attractions of natural order: climate favorable for winter sports (the large amount of snow, long time), streams, springs, lakes and numerous waterfalls, forests with animals of important cynegetics, unpolluted rivers, with rich fisheries fund in species etc.

Intense humanization explains the richness of resources of anthropogenic nature.

Anthropic objectives are many and various: castles, wooden churches, monasteries, museums, historical monuments. Țara Moșilor is famous for "wood civilization"(foto 2).



Foto 2: Biserica din lemn Arieșeni

It also notes that ethnographic areas meet in this space mountain, each with its particular folklore, traditions and customs.

The study area lends especially to recreational tourism (mountain hiking, winter sports, speotourism, hunting, fishing, etc.), curative and cultural.

Living tradition, originality, power and wealth of forms specific of peasant lifestyle, simplicity and depth philosophy of life, naturalness and warmth of mind of residents, a remarkable degree of conservation of most components, since the habitat and to the cultural and spiritual, extreme diversity of forms of cohabitation between man and nature are strong arguments, favorable to develop and promote tourism and rural tourism in the area Vârtop - Arieșeni.

Tourism and agrotourism in the area studied have some shortcomings that may constitute obstacles to positive development of the sector, such as:

- *insufficient promotion of the objectives;*
- *inappropriate report quality – price*
- *poor transport routes (rail nonexistent)*
- *low quality hotel services*
- *lack of some specialized guide in the mountain area*
- *low quality of tourist services due to total misunderstanding of client demands and expectations*
- *environmental degradation*
- *inappropriate forest clearing*
- *limited possibility of using modern means of payment: credit cards, traveler's checks*
- *radioactive pollution due to the existence of uranium exploitations nearby.*

Stimulation of tourists to return to the area is conditioned by infrastructure development, implementing the latest technology to improve communication channels, planning of slope and diversification of entertainment methods. There must be identified ways to promote the area to be exploited at the outside the potential of agro-tourist.

Of note is the fact that rail is non-existent in the area, which limits the possibilities of those who do not have cars, to get here.

Knowing at a medium level a widely spoken languages (English preferred), and promoting the offer on the Internet and other media sources would determine greater number of foreign tourists to spend their free time in the Vârtop-Arieşeni area.

Developing the area through tourism and rural tourism is directly proportional to the recorded revenues by locals and accommodation owners. Also socio-economic status is improved by increasing the offer of jobs reducing unemployment.

Local's dissatisfaction is related to the attitude of many tourists who pollute (through negligence and indifference) the area.

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