

THE THEMATIC TOURIST PACKAGE IN OCTOBER WE PICK MUSHROOMS AT THE MAMINA GUESTHOUSE, BRAȘOV COUNTY - A SOLUTION TO INCREASE THE OCCUPANCY RATE OF THE GUESTHOUSE

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Abstract

The locality of Peștera in Brasov County is a mountain village that is part of Moeciu commune, a commune where the scourge of rural tourism has emerged. The most developed pole of rural tourism in Romania for years in a row, tourists staying here on their walks have also discovered this village. Situated at an altitude between 900 and 1100m, the locality is endowed with a marvelous natural setting which, together with the man-made environment, traditions and customs specific to the area, gives this area a tourist potential.

The 10-kilometer distance and the different technical and material base sift the types of tourists who come here. Once there, most of them want to come back. During the summer season in July-August and December, the occupancy rate of pensions and agro-pensions in the area is between 90-95 percent, but during the rest of the summer season, due to the underdeveloped tourist infrastructure, the number of tourists is still quite low.

In this paper we have done some research in the form of a survey to track the opinions and types of tourists who come here.

In the conclusion of the paper we also offered a solution to increase the number of tourists in October.

Keywords: agriturism, development, landscape, mushroom picking.

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INTRODUCTION

The village of Peștera is located in the heart of Romania and is part of the natural reserve of the Craiului Stone. It is bordered on one side by the Piatra Craiului massif and on the other side by the Bucegi massif.

The locality of Peștera, by its geographical particularities, constitutes a well individualized territorial unit. [8]The happy combination of the components of the geographic environment results in a high habitat potential, valorized through an ancient folk tradition. What gives the area its special charm, however, is the harmoniously designed landscape, where the gentle, varied relief is shaped as if to human scale, although it borrows from the monumentality and grandeur of the neighboring mountains.

Peștera could become one of the most representative tourist villages in Romania due to the fact that it has a well laid out natural and anthropic environment. Regarding the technical and material base and tourism, in the locality we have 28 accommodation units representative of rural tourism and agro-tourism. In these units the occupancy rate is increasing due to the fact that during the high season, when Moeciu is already full, tourists come to climb the 10 km distance to stay here. The main tourists are from the municipality of Brasov and Bucharest eager for fresh air, peace and quiet and hiking [3].

Accommodation owners can contribute to the growth of tourism in mountain areas by offering quality

accommodation facilities and services. Attracting more tourists can generate additional income for the local community and support the development of other related economic sectors such as gastronomy, handicrafts or leisure activities, which is why an agritourism package should include not only accommodation and meals but also agreement activities[6].

Mamina Guesthouse is located in a picturesque mountain area, at the foot of the Piatra Craiului Mountains, near the village of Păltiniș, a quiet and ideal place for hiking, relaxation and exploring the area. The area is known for its unique landscapes, dense forests and diverse fauna. Due to its position, the guesthouse is a perfect starting point for various mountain tourism activities, but also for visits to nearby localities.

Facilities and services:

Mamina Guesthouse offers spacious and comfortable rooms, decorated in a traditional style, which reflect the specifics of the area. They are equipped with modern facilities, to ensure guests a pleasant and relaxing stay.

The guesthouse can also organize various activities and events for tourists, such as:

Guided hikes: The guesthouse can organize guided excursions to explore the beauty of the Piatra Craiului Mountains or other nearby mountain areas.

Mushroom picking: During October, the area is an ideal place for mushroom picking, and the guesthouse can provide guidance and support for guests interested in this activity. This type of activity is an excellent opportunity to encourage ecological and sustainable tourism.

Culinary tours: Guests can experience traditional dishes from

Bucovina and Transylvania, cooked with local ingredients, including mushrooms or other products obtained from the forests in the area.

Nearby tourist attractions:

There are various important tourist attractions near the guesthouse, which can attract visitors all year round, including:

Piatra Craiului National Park: A top destination for hiking, climbing and wildlife lovers. Mamina Guesthouse is located close to the entrance to the park, offering tourists a perfect starting point for exploring it.[7]

Bran Castle: Located approximately 30 kilometers from the guesthouse, Bran Castle is one of the most famous tourist attractions in Romania, associated with the legend of Dracula.

Prejmer Fortified Church: A nearby UNESCO site, known for its impressive medieval structure.

Traditional villages in Brașov County: The guesthouse offers tourists the opportunity to visit and explore the traditions and customs of the area, through guided tours or volunteer activities.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

I assume the use of a questionnaire as the main data collection instrument. This questionnaire was administered to a sample of 123 persons selected among tourists staying in the guesthouses in the area analyzed. The methodological characteristics include the type of research, which is quantitative based on the analysis of the answers given by the participants. The size of the sample taken as a basis for the analysis is 123 questionnaires administered among tourists in the locality of Peștera. The sample responds both in terms of size and representativeness. The research instrument included both closed and

open-ended questions designed to collect information about the behavior, preferences and satisfaction of tourists. The application procedure, was both physical and digital depending on respondents' preferences and accessibility. The application period is September 2024. This methodology provides a solid basis for interpreting the data and drawing relevant conclusions about the experiences and perceptions of tourists in relation to the hostels in the area.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The majority of respondents, a proportion of 75%, are women, from which we can see that we have slightly more interest to communicate and analyze.

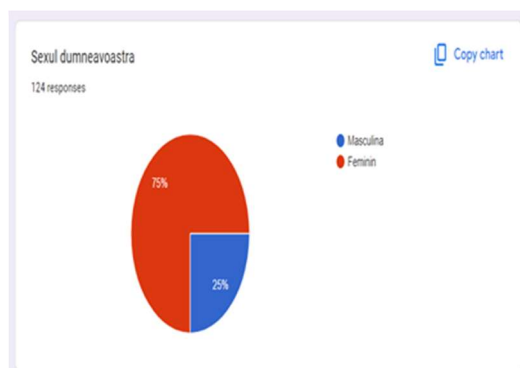


Fig.1

Taking into account the age criterion, 55 of the respondents are between 1-30 years old, 46 between 30 and 50 years old and the rest more than 50 years old.

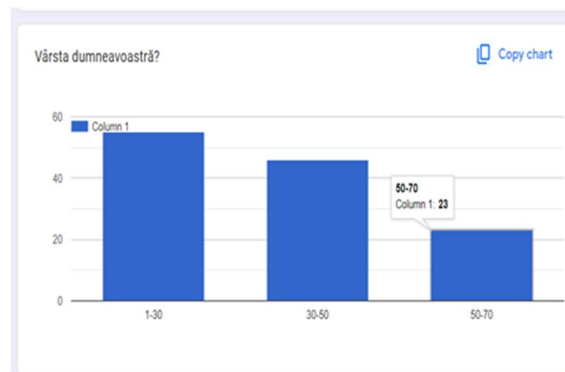


Fig.2

When asked if they know the types of edible mushrooms, the majority of 57.8% said yes. That is why we made an analysis of the types of edible mushrooms that can be found in Romania. Here are some types of edible mushrooms:

Button Mushroom (Agaricus bisporus): Commonly found in grocery stores, these mushrooms have a mild flavor and are available in white, brown, and portobello varieties.

Shiitake (Lentinula edodes): Known for their rich, umami flavor, shiitakes are popular in Asian cuisine and can be found fresh or dried.

Oyster Mushroom (Pleurotus ostreatus): These mushrooms have a delicate texture and mild flavor. They are often used in stir-fries, soups, and sauces[12].

Porcini (Boletus edulis): Highly valued for their nutty flavor, porcini mushrooms are often used in Italian cooking, particularly in risottos and pasta dishes.

Chanterelle (Cantharellus cibarius): These mushrooms are known for their distinctive trumpet shape and fruity aroma, often used in gourmet dishes.

Morel (Morchella spp.): These mushrooms have a honeycomb-like

appearance and are highly prized for their deep, earthy flavor.

Enoki (*Flammulina velutipes*): With their long, thin stems and small caps, enoki mushrooms are commonly used in soups, salads, and stir-fries.

Maitake (*Grifola frondosa*): Known as "hen of the woods," maitakes have a unique texture and are prized for their ability to enhance flavors in a variety of dishes.

Lion's Mane (*Hericium erinaceus*): These white, spiky mushrooms have a seafood-like flavor and are often used in vegetarian dishes as a meat substitute.

King Trumpet (*Pleurotus eryngii*): These mushrooms have thick, meaty stems and a mild, savory flavor, making them popular for grilling or sautéing. These mushrooms are widely used in various cuisines, offering diverse textures and flavors to enhance culinary experiences.

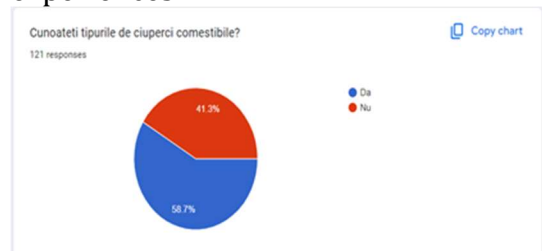


Fig.3

For mushroom consumption, we have 37% of the respondents who consume mushrooms quite often and monthly and 19.4 do not consume mushrooms at all. Given that only 37% of the respondents consume mushrooms monthly, this percentage suggests that mushrooms are generally not a frequently consumed food for the majority of the surveyed population and this may indicate a lower preference or lack of familiarity with mushrooms as a culinary ingredient in the respondents' daily routine. This statistic may signal an opportunity to

educate and promote mushroom consumption, especially in the context of healthy eating. Mushrooms are an excellent source of protein, fiber and essential nutrients, and information campaigns could encourage their more frequent use in the daily diet.

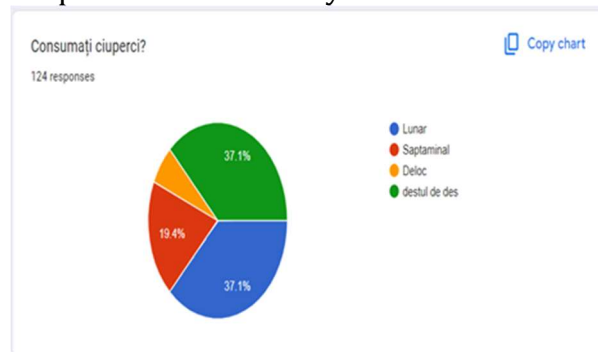


Fig.4

When asked about the way they consume mushrooms, 78.5 % consume them fresh. Both fresh and jarred mushrooms have their advantages and disadvantages, and the choice between the two depends on personal preferences and needs at the time:

- Fresh mushrooms are more nutritious and have a better taste and texture, but they are more perishable and expensive.
- Canned mushrooms are more convenient, easier to store and use, but may have a slightly lower nutritional value and a softer texture.

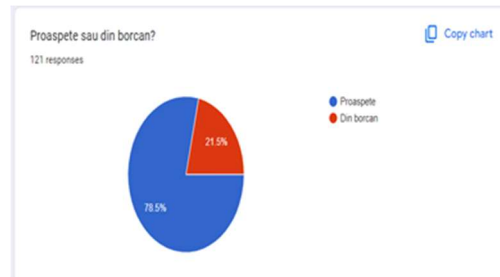


Fig 5

A relatively large number of 30.6% have never been mushroom picking. These statistics suggest that there is low interest among the population in mushroom-

picking activities, which may be attributable to a number of factors, including lack of knowledge, limited accessibility or safety fears. This may represent an opportunity to promote education and eco-tourism to encourage people to participate in mushroom picking and to appreciate the hobby more.

When asked how they rate the role of fungi in the ecosystem, up to 13.8% said it was very important and up to 13.8% said it was not important.

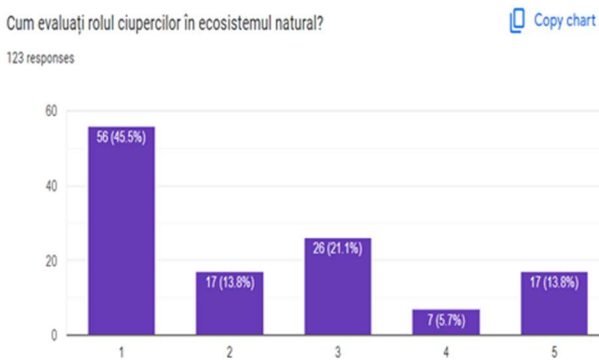


Fig 6

We can confirm Fungi play a crucial role in natural ecosystems, acting as essential components for the functioning and balance of ecosystems. Their roles can be broadly categorized into the following:

For Decomposers (Saprotrophs), Fungi are the primary decomposers in ecosystems, breaking down dead organic material such as fallen leaves, trees, animal carcasses, and plant matter. This decomposition process is vital for nutrient recycling in ecosystems.

By breaking down complex organic compounds, fungi release essential nutrients (such as nitrogen, phosphorus, and carbon) back into the soil, making them available for plants and other organisms. Without fungi, organic matter would accumulate, and nutrient cycles would be disrupted.

Regarding Symbiotic Relationships, Mycorrhizal Fungi: Many fungi form mutualistic relationships with plants through mycorrhizae. The fungus attaches to plant roots, providing them with nutrients (like phosphorus) from the soil in exchange for sugars produced by the plant through photosynthesis. This relationship improves plant growth, enhances drought resistance, and helps plants access nutrients that would otherwise be difficult to obtain.

Lichens: Fungi also form symbiotic relationships with algae or cyanobacteria to create lichens. In this partnership, the fungus provides a protective environment for the algae or bacteria, while the algae or bacteria produce food through photosynthesis. Lichens are important pioneers in ecosystems, capable of colonizing harsh environments like rocks or tree trunks.

For Food Web Dynamics, Fungi are an important part of the food web. Many animals, including insects, small mammals, and birds, depend on fungi as a food source. For example, certain species of squirrels, deer, and wild boar actively forage for mushrooms. Fungi serve as a key food resource for herbivores and are thus integral in the transfer of energy between primary producers (plants) and higher trophic levels (consumers).

Analyzing Soil Formation and Health, Fungi are essential for soil formation and the maintenance of soil health. By breaking down organic matter, fungi help in the creation of humus, which is a vital component of healthy, fertile soil. Mycorrhizal fungi also improve soil structure by promoting aggregation, which enhances water retention, aeration, and root growth, benefiting plant communities.

Disease Regulation, Some fungi play a role in controlling plant and animal populations by acting as natural pathogens. These fungi help regulate the populations of plants, insects, and other organisms, maintaining ecological balance. For instance, certain fungi infect and regulate insect populations, such as the entomopathogenic fungi that attack and kill harmful pests like termites or aphids.

In Carbon Cycle, Fungi are key players in the global carbon cycle. As decomposers, they break down organic material and release carbon back into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide (CO₂), which is then reabsorbed by plants during photosynthesis. This process contributes to the regulation of atmospheric CO₂ levels, thus influencing climate patterns.

Biodiversity Maintenance, By occupying a variety of ecological niches (e.g., as decomposers, symbionts, or pathogens), fungi contribute to biodiversity and ecosystem stability. The variety of fungal species, each adapted to specific environmental conditions or food sources, ensures that ecosystems remain resilient and can adapt to changing conditions.

Fungi are indispensable in maintaining the structure and functioning of ecosystems. Through their roles as decomposers, symbionts, food sources, and regulators of biodiversity, fungi contribute to nutrient cycling, soil health, and ecosystem resilience. Their activities not only help sustain life forms in the natural world but also play a significant role in global processes like the carbon cycle. Without fungi, ecosystems would struggle to function, and life on Earth would face significant challenges.

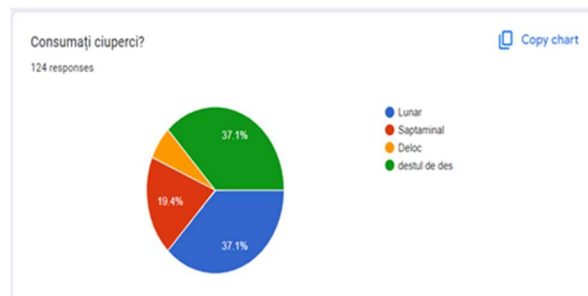


Fig.6

When asked whether eating mushrooms can have a positive impact on your health, 45.2 considered it to have a significant impact, down to 8.9 who considered it unimportant.

We are Mushrooms are nutrient-dense foods that contain a variety of beneficial compounds. Here's a breakdown of the main components found in edible mushrooms[4]:

Water: Mushrooms have a high water content, typically around 80-90%, which makes them low in calories and contributes to hydration.

Proteins: Mushrooms provide a moderate amount of plant-based protein, making them a valuable addition to vegetarian and vegan diets.

Vitamins:

Vitamin D: Some mushrooms, especially those exposed to sunlight or UV light, are rich in vitamin D, which is important for bone health and immune function.

B Vitamins: Mushrooms are an excellent source of B vitamins, such as B2 (riboflavin), B3 (niacin), B5 (pantothenic acid), B7 (biotin), B9 (folate), and B12 (in some varieties), which play key roles in energy metabolism and maintaining the nervous system.

Vitamin C: Although not as high as other fruits or vegetables, mushrooms contain small amounts of vitamin C, which supports immune health and skin integrity.

Minerals:

Potassium: Mushrooms are a good source of potassium, which is important for heart health, muscle function, and fluid balance.
Selenium: Mushrooms, especially varieties like shiitake and maitake, are rich in selenium, an antioxidant mineral that supports immune function and thyroid health.

Iron: They contain non-heme iron, important for oxygen transport and energy production.

Copper: Mushrooms provide copper, which aids in red blood cell formation and supports metabolic processes.

Dietary Fiber: Mushrooms are a good source of fiber, particularly in the form of beta-glucans, which are linked to immune system support and may help regulate blood sugar levels.

Antioxidants: Mushrooms contain various antioxidants, including ergothioneine and glutathione, which protect cells from oxidative stress and may have anti-aging and anti-inflammatory effects.

Low Fat and Calories: Mushrooms are low in fat and calories, making them a healthy addition to any diet.

Polysaccharides (e.g., Beta-glucans): These compounds have been studied for their potential immune-boosting properties and their ability to support heart health by lowering cholesterol levels.

Overall, mushrooms are a highly nutritious food that provides a wide range of vitamins, minerals, and other bioactive compounds beneficial for overall health.



Fig 7

75,8 % of the respondents would opt for a walk in the mountain area with a guide to introduce them to the types of edible mushrooms. This response denotes that most of the respondents would opt for a guided walk in the mountain area, this suggests a significant interest in educational activities in nature. Many people are interested to learn more about the local flora, including mushrooms, and to participate in activities that enrich their knowledge of the environment. Large number of positive responses suggests that there is an opportunity to develop ecotourism or agritourism in mountain areas with environmental education activities. Organizing guided mushroom-picking tours, accompanied by information on the types of edible and dangerous mushrooms, could attract many visitors, including those interested in ecotourism or outdoor activities.

Utilizing input from hostel owners, who are key stakeholders in the local tourism industry, we identified issues and development priorities that had not been systematically explored before. This practical and community-driven approach allowed us to uncover pressing issues in Cave Village that may have been overlooked in larger studies, such as the marginal importance of policy and regulatory compliance in shaping tourism development. Thus, the lack of comparable studies underscores the novelty of our findings and the importance of exploring sustainability from a multi-criteria perspective in this context.

It represents a creative and engaging way to increase the occupancy rate of the guesthouse by promoting a unique, seasonal experience. This concept taps into the growing interest in rural tourism, nature-based activities, and culinary tourism. Here's how this package

could increase the guesthouse's occupancy rate:

1. Attracting Nature and Adventure Enthusiasts

Seasonal Experience: Autumn is the prime season for mushroom picking in Romania, especially in regions like Brasov County, which is rich in forests and biodiversity. The mushroom picking experience offers guests a unique opportunity to connect with nature, explore the forests, and engage in a popular local activity.

Outdoor Activities: Besides mushroom picking, guests can enjoy other outdoor activities such as hiking, nature walks, and wildlife watching, making the experience more diverse and appealing to adventure tourists.

2. Targeting Niche Markets

Culinary Tourism: Romania has a rich culinary tradition, and many tourists are interested in learning about local cuisine. The mushrooms picked during the experience can be used in cooking workshops where guests learn to prepare traditional dishes, adding value to their stay.

Eco-Tourism & Sustainability: Offering a mushroom-picking experience promotes sustainability and ecotourism, which are increasingly popular among tourists. Guests interested in environmental conservation and sustainable travel would be attracted to this type of package.

3. Enhancing Local Culture and Traditions

Cultural Immersion: The guesthouse can offer traditional Romanian meals featuring mushrooms as a key ingredient, highlighting regional recipes and the local culture. Guests can experience Romanian hospitality and traditions firsthand, increasing their satisfaction and likelihood of returning[17].

Workshops and Storytelling: The guesthouse can organize workshops

where locals share the history of mushroom picking, folklore, and the importance of mushrooms in Romanian culture, deepening the cultural experience for tourists.

4. Family-Friendly and Group Activities

Family Appeal: Mushroom picking is an activity suitable for all ages, making it an attractive option for families. The guesthouse can offer packages that include family-friendly accommodation and activities, ensuring a welcoming environment for parents and children.

Group Packages: The guesthouse could offer special deals for groups, such as friends or corporate teams, encouraging longer stays and group bookings. Mushroom picking is a fun and engaging activity for groups, which can then enjoy the fruits of their labor together through shared meals.

5. Effective Marketing Strategies

Seasonal Promotion: Promoting the package through local and national tourism platforms, as well as on social media, can create buzz around the unique experience. Highlighting the beauty of Brasov County in autumn, with its vibrant foliage and serene atmosphere, can attract tourists looking for a tranquil getaway.

Collaborations and Partnerships: The guesthouse can collaborate with local tour operators, mushroom specialists, and chefs to enhance the appeal of the package. Such partnerships can provide additional marketing support and increase visibility[16].

Influencers and Bloggers: The guesthouse can invite travel bloggers or influencers who specialize in nature-based tourism or culinary experiences to experience and share the mushroom picking package, generating online buzz and attracting a wider audience.

6. Customized Packages and Added Value

Personalized Packages: The guesthouse could offer different tiers of packages, ranging from simple stays with the mushroom picking activity to more luxurious offerings that include private cooking lessons, spa treatments, and wine pairing with the meals.

Weekend Getaways and Promotions: The package could be promoted as an ideal weekend escape, allowing guests to disconnect from city life and enjoy the peace of the countryside. Special offers or early-bird discounts can encourage bookings and boost occupancy rates.

7. Seasonal Events and Festivals

Mushroom Festival: The guesthouse could organize a local mushroom festival or a small event dedicated to mushroom picking, where tourists can interact with experts, participate in cooking contests, and enjoy mushroom-based dishes. This would bring added attention to the guesthouse and make it a unique destination in the region.

The thematic tourist package "In October, We Pick Mushrooms at the Mamina Guesthouse, Braşov County" could significantly increase the guesthouse's occupancy rate by offering an authentic, seasonal experience that attracts nature lovers, culinary tourists, families, and eco-conscious travelers. Through strategic marketing, cultural immersion, and partnerships, the guesthouse can enhance its appeal and boost bookings during the autumn season.

Mamina Guesthouse in Peştera, Brasov County, offers an authentic mountain tourism experience, surrounded by nature and Transylvanian traditions. With activities that include hiking, mushroom picking and culinary tours, the guesthouse can become a special destination for nature and tradition lovers. Set in a special area, the guesthouse can offer guests not only relaxation, but also an opportunity to discover the beauty of the region and the local culture.

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