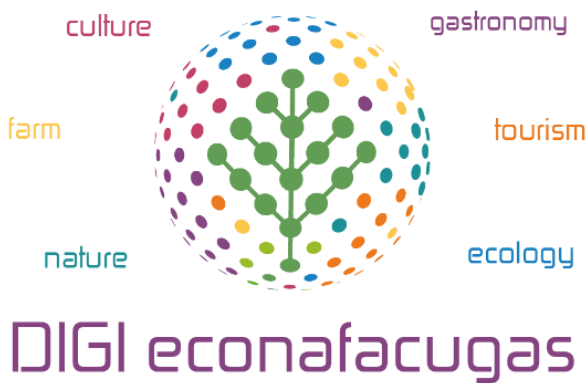


# DIGI-ECONAFACUGAS

Collecting of materials:  
Spain, Slovakia, Austria  
and Romania



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the European Union**

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## Overview about the rural tourism in Spain, Slovakia, Austria and Romania.

Rural tourism is a thriving and diverse sector in Spain, Slovakia, Austria, and Romania, offering unique experiences and attractions in each country.

1. Spain: Spain's rural tourism spans mountainous areas, flatlands near major cities, and boasts a variety of activities, including hiking, mountain biking, and nature tours. Accommodation options range from mountain lodges to eco-friendly hotels, often combined with local gastronomic experiences. Recent developments include enotourism, oleotourism, and original offerings like dancing courses.
2. Slovakia: Slovakia's natural beauty, including picturesque landscapes and mountainous regions like the High Tatras, Low Tatras, and Slovak Paradise, attracts outdoor enthusiasts for activities such as hiking, climbing, and skiing. The country also offers opportunities for cultural immersion in traditional villages and agro-tourism experiences.
3. Austria: Austria's tourism industry is a vital economic driver with a strong connection to other sectors, including agriculture. Rural tourism here combines natural and cultural elements, with a focus on regional cuisine. The country offers a wide range of tourism types, including cultural, wellness, sports, adventure, and gourmet tourism.
4. Romania: Romania's rural tourism sector benefits from a favorable natural environment and a growing interest in preserving traditions. Visitors can engage in a variety of activities, including farm stays, traditional crafts workshops, and cultural immersion in historic villages. Agrotourism is also prominent, allowing tourists to participate in agricultural activities and experience rural life.

All four countries emphasize the importance of preserving their natural and cultural heritage, offering travelers a chance to explore the unique characteristics of their rural areas

## 1. Overview about the rural tourism in Spain:

**What are the local characteristics of rural tourism?** (e.g. mountain areas, flatland, etc. – what activities: Accommodation, meals, guided nature tours, etc.)

Rural tourism in Spain takes place mainly in mountain areas, including low and high mountain areas; next to big cities (Barcelona, Madrid, etc.) there is also rural tourism in flatter areas. Rural accommodation sometimes is in combination with other services (meals, horseback riding, guided tours – nature, walking, biking, etc. – but in most of the cases it is only accommodation in houses. More or less half of the accommodation facilities for rural tourism in are in the autonomous regions of Castilla y León (20,1%), Andalusia (13,8 %) and Catalunya (12,9 %).

Recently, Spain has offers for enotourism (wines), oleotourism (olive oil) and gastronomic tourism in rural areas.

Some of the touristic offers in rural areas are very original, like dancing courses, artisanal workshops, cooking, etc.

It is very common in Spain to do make excursions – also day trips – to the countryside.

40,9% of Spanish population says to have practiced some kind of rural tourism.

Rural tourism in Spain offers a diverse range of local characteristics depending on the region. Here are some common characteristics and activities found in different types of rural areas:

### 1. Mountain Areas:

- Activities: Hiking, mountaineering, rock climbing, mountain biking, skiing, snowboarding.
- Accommodation: Mountain lodges, rural cottages, eco-friendly hotels.
- Meals: Traditional local cuisine, farm-to-table experiences, local gastronomic festivals.
- Guided Nature Tours: Wildlife observation, birdwatching, nature photography, botanical excursions.

### 2. Agricultural Plains:

- Activities: Farm visits, agricultural experiences (harvesting, cheese-making, wine production), horseback riding.
- Accommodation: Farm stays, agritourism establishments, rural bed and breakfasts.
- Meals: Locally sourced farm-to-table meals, wine tastings, cooking classes.
- Guided Nature Tours: Agricultural tours, visits to vineyards, olive groves, and fruit orchards.

### 3. Historical Villages:

- Activities: Cultural and historical tours, visits to monuments and archaeological sites, traditional crafts workshops.
- Accommodation: Historic guesthouses, restored traditional houses, boutique hotels.
- Meals: Local delicacies, traditional recipes, food festivals.
- Guided Nature Tours: Nature walks, visits to natural parks, hiking trails.

### **What is the economic importance of tourism in your country and what proportion of it is rural tourism?**

Due to the data of Exceltour and the Banco de España **tourism made 61% of the economic growth of Spain in 2022. The contribution to the GNP** (gross national product) was 12,2%.

It is calculated that in 2022, 72 million of tourists came to Spain (in 2021- 31 million and 2020 19 million).

Income in 2022: € 69 billion (€ 71 billion in 2019).

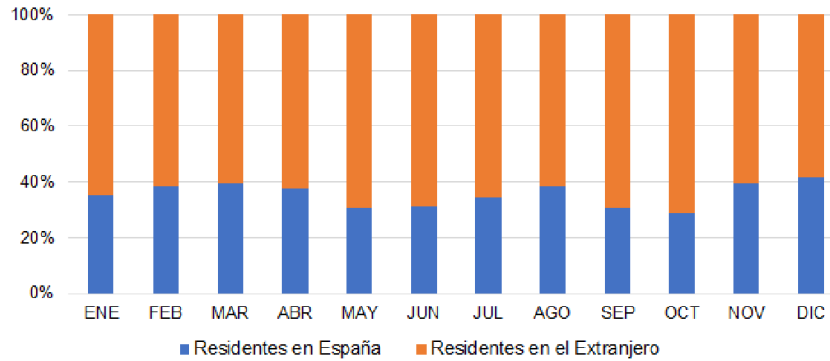
[Translation of the figures in green.]

Incoming international tourists	Variation % 2021	Expenditure of international tourists (Millions €)	Variation % 2021
LLEGADA TURISTAS INTERNACIONALES	VARIACIÓN % 2021	GASTO TURISTAS INTERNACIONALES (MILLONES DE €)	VARIACIÓN % 2021
Andalucía	10.011.512	+135,7	11.981
Illes Balears	13.203.537	+108,8	15.220
Canarias	12.329.171	+134,5	17.425
Cataluña	14.803.187	+155,8	16.461
Comunitat Valenciana	8.606.914	+114,1	10.101
Comunidad de Madrid	6.038.588	+177,4	9.610
Resto de Comunidades	6.568.579	+95,2	6.235
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>71.561.488</b>	<b>+129,5</b>	<b>87.061</b>

Source: Ministerio de Industria, Comercio y Turismo (2023).

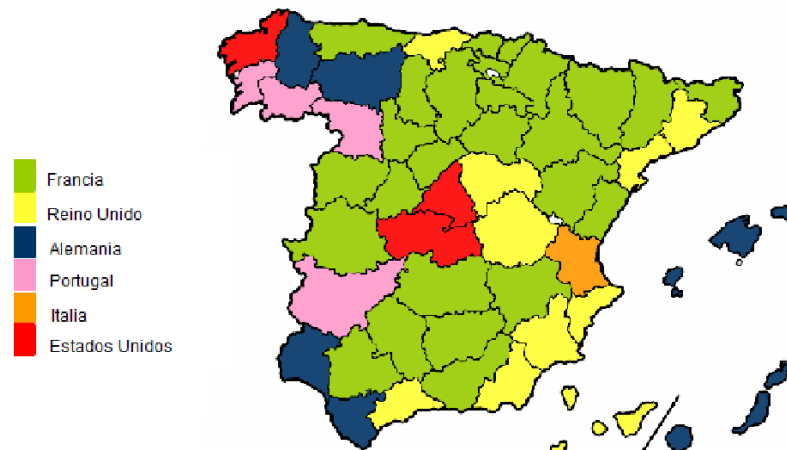
Overnight stays 2019: blue: residents in Spain – orange: residents abroad

**Pernoctaciones hoteleras según residencia del viajero. 2019**



Country of origin of non-residents' overnight stays in 2018

**Principales pernoctaciones hoteleras de no residentes según país de residencia. 2018**



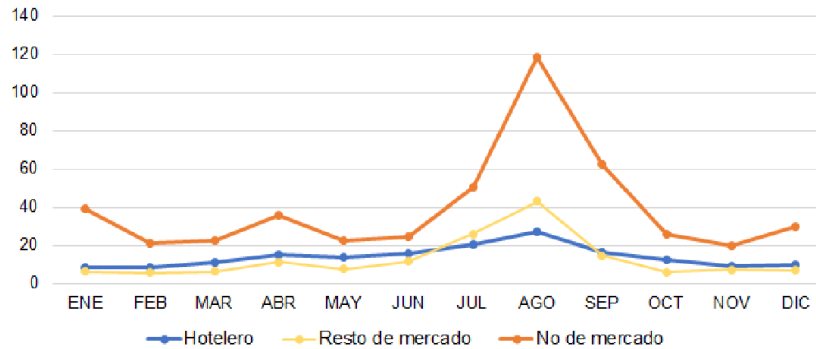
## Overnight stays of residents per type of accommodation 2019 (millions)

Blue: hotel

Yellow: others

Orange: non-market

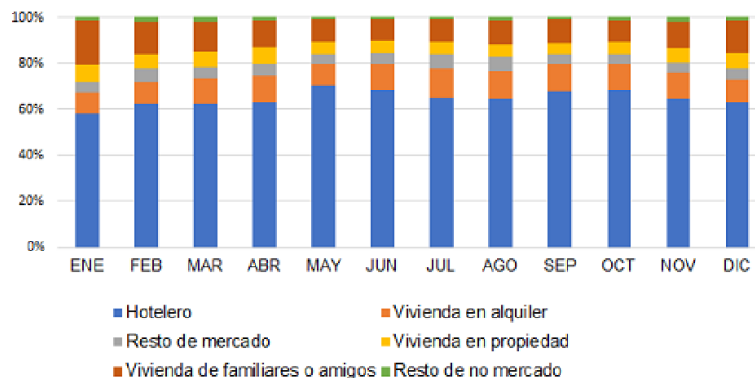
**Pernoctaciones de residentes por tipo de alojamiento. 2019 (millones)**



## Non-resident tourists per accommodation 2019

Blue: hotel; orange: rented apartment; grey: rest of the market; yellow: house ownership; brown: family's and friend's housing; green: other non-market

**Turistas no residentes según alojamiento principal. 2019**

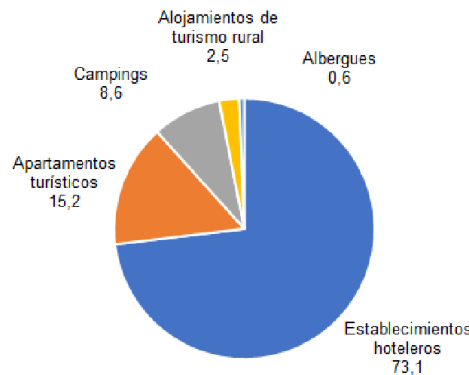




## Overnight stays in touristic accommodation, 2019, (%)

(Clockwise: Apartments, Camping, Rural Tourism, Hostel, Hotels)

**Pernoctaciones en alojamientos turísticos. 2019 (%)**



Source: Boletín informativo Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 04/2020.

Rural tourism grew between 2014 and 2019 up to 4,4 millions of tourists in rural tourism.

### Rural tourism – May 2023

#### Turismo rural - Mayo 2023

	Valor/Value	Variación/Variation
Pernoctaciones Overnight stays	875.834	3,48
Estancia media (número de días) Average stay (days)	2,40	3,84
Grado de ocupación por plaza (porcentaje) Level of occupancy (%)	16,25	-0,10
Precios alojamientos de turismo rural (índice) Prices for accommodation in rural tourism (indicator)	162,49	5,97

- Variación: porcentaje sobre el año anterior/Variation: percentage to previous year

In 2020, 2021, due to COVID, only about 2 millions (1,8 million domestic, 200.000 foreign)

Mainly domestic tourism, but number of foreign tourists in rural tourism is growing.

Profile of tourists: mainly families (close family 37%, extended family 23%, couples 44%)

11.500 rural tourism establishments – Castilla y León: 2.400

In 2021, rural tourism grew 5 points

Average spending € 30/night in 2021 (7% more that before)

According to a report by the Spanish National Institute of Statistics, **rural tourism accounted for around 20% of total overnight stays in 2019** (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2020).

**To what extent is tourism in rural regions linked to agriculture? Which typology of agricultural, livestock and forestry activities, are currently practising nature or rural tourism activities?**

Tourism in rural regions is often closely linked to agriculture, as it provides an opportunity for visitors to experience and engage with the local agricultural practices and rural lifestyle. Rural tourism in Spain frequently incorporates agricultural elements, showcasing the agricultural traditions, products, and practices of the region. Visitors can participate in agricultural activities, such as **farm visits, fruit picking, wine tasting, cheese-making, and olive oil production**. Agricultural landscapes and the presence of working farms contribute to the scenic beauty and authenticity of rural tourism destinations.

Various agricultural, livestock, and forestry activities are practiced in nature or rural tourism activities in Spain. Some examples include:

- **Crop Cultivation**: Visitors may have the opportunity to engage in activities such as fruit picking in orchards (e.g., citrus fruits, apples), harvesting olives or grapes, or **participating in organic farming practices**.

- **Livestock Farming**: Rural tourism activities can involve interactions with livestock, such as **feeding animals, milking cows, or observing traditional animal husbandry practices** (e.g., sheep farming, cattle ranching).
- **Wine and Olive Oil Production**: Rural tourism destinations often offer wine tours, **wine tastings, visits to vineyards**, and educational experiences related to wine production. Olive oil mills and tastings are also popular.
- **Forestry and Woodcraft**: Some rural tourism sites incorporate forestry activities, such as **guided walks** through forests, **mushroom picking**, or workshops on traditional woodcraft techniques.

There is a network for rural tourism ([Home](#) | [RRN \(redruralnacional.es\)](#) offering all kinds of types of accommodation (houses, apartments, hotels, hostels, camping, villas, farm school for children)

The accommodation is often in typical traditional houses (even in abandoned villages).

Agrotourism is mainly focused on small animals (chicken, sheep, goats), horses and donkeys, winery, and horticulture. In rare cases, extensive and transhumant livestock management offers to accompany the wandering herds.

Agrotourism is often combined with artistic routes, cultural routes, gastronomic routes, wine routes, horseback or donkey riding, star watching, massages, SPA, hiking, biking, adventure.

The Spanish climate allows outdoor activities during the whole year.

### **What innovative tourism offers are available in rural regions?**

**Star watching** and **SPA/health care** are the most recent offers in rural tourism. Spaniards are very creative and like to share their activities, like cheese making, etc.

Here are some examples of innovative tourism experiences available in rural areas:

#### **1. Agro-tourism and Farm Stays:**

- Many rural areas offer agro-tourism experiences where visitors can stay on working farms, participate in agricultural activities, and learn about **sustainable farming practices**.
  - Farm stays provide opportunities to engage with rural lifestyles, experience farm-to-table dining, and understand the importance of locally sourced and organic products.
2. **Adventure Tourism:**
- Rural regions often provide adventure tourism activities such as hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, and zip-lining to explore the natural landscapes and mountains.
  - Canyoning, paragliding, and hot air ballooning are some of the thrilling activities offered in rural areas.
3. **Ecotourism and Wildlife Observation:**
- Many rural areas in Spain are home to unique ecosystems and natural reserves, offering ecotourism experiences.
  - Visitors can engage in guided nature walks, birdwatching, wildlife observation, and photography tours to appreciate the rich biodiversity.
4. **Wine and Gastronomy Tourism:**
- Rural regions with vineyards and wineries provide wine tourism experiences, including vineyard tours, wine tastings, and food pairings.
  - Gastronomy tourism allows visitors to explore local culinary traditions, participate in cooking classes, and attend food festivals celebrating regional delicacies.
5. **Cultural Experiences and Heritage Tourism:**
- Rural regions often preserve cultural heritage, traditional crafts, and historical sites. Visitors can engage in cultural experiences such as pottery workshops, traditional music and dance events, and visits to historical monuments and castles.
6. **Wellness and Retreats:**
- Rural areas offer wellness retreats focused on **relaxation, meditation, yoga, and spa treatments** amidst tranquil natural surroundings.
  - **Thermal baths**, natural hot springs, and wellness centers provide opportunities for rejuvenation and well-being.

## 7. **Digital Detox** and Nature Retreats:

- Some rural areas promote digital detox experiences, where visitors can disconnect from technology and immerse themselves in nature.
- Nature retreats offer activities such as forest bathing, stargazing, and outdoor yoga to reconnect with the natural environment.

### **Which economic activities of potential interest for developing rural tourism activities can be announced?**

Accommodation: big variety from rural hotels high standard to camping (houses, apartments, vacation villages, etc.)

Participation in farming activities

Different kinds of sport and adventure activities: hiking, climbing, riding, biking, hang gliding, kite flying, skiing.

Health, wellness and beauty: ayurveda, massage, fasting, SPA

Star watching

Gastronomy: making and tasting wine, olive oil, cheese, marmalades, liquors, traditional sweets, etc.

Alternative and spiritual activities: retreats, meditation courses, Vision Quest

Artisanal and artistic activities: handicraft with stones, wood and cork, painting courses

Specifically, some examples can be provided:

#### **1. Agro-tourism and Local Food Production:**

Region: La Rioja, known for its vineyards and **wine production**, offers wine tourism experiences, including vineyard visits, wine tastings, and wine festivals.

Region: Andalusia, particularly the province of Jaén, is renowned for its **olive oil production**. Visitors can engage in olive oil tours, tastings, and olive harvest experiences.

Region: Ribera del Duero, known for its vineyards and wine production, offers wine tourism experiences, including vineyard tours, wine tastings, and visits to wineries.

Region: Sierra de Gredos, famous for its **cherry orchards**, offers cherry picking experiences and opportunities to learn about cherry cultivation and **local fruit production**.

## 2. Handicrafts and Artisanal Products:

Region: Catalonia, specifically the town of La Bisbal d'Empordà, is famous for its **ceramics and pottery**. Visitors can participate in pottery workshops and purchase locally crafted ceramics.

Region: Castilla y León, particularly the town of Medina del Campo, is known for its **traditional leatherwork**. Visitors can explore leather workshops, learn about the craft, and purchase handmade leather goods.

Region: Salamanca, particularly the town of La Alberca, is known for traditional craftwork, including handwoven textiles, pottery, and woodworking. Visitors can explore artisan workshops and purchase locally crafted products.

Region: Segovia, especially the town of Riaza, is known for its leatherwork. Visitors can visit leather artisans, learn about the craft, and purchase handmade leather goods.

## 3. Nature-Based Activities:

Region: Pyrenees, located in northern Spain, offers opportunities for **hiking, mountain biking, and wildlife observation**. The Pyrenees region is known for its stunning landscapes, including national parks like Ordesa and Monte Perdido.

Region: Canary Islands, particularly the island of Tenerife, offers diverse nature-based activities, including hiking in Teide National Park, exploring volcanic landscapes, and whale watching.

Region: Picos de Europa National Park, spanning across several provinces including León and Palencia, offers opportunities for hiking, mountaineering, and wildlife observation in a stunning mountainous landscape.

## 4. Cultural Heritage and Historical Tourism:

Region: Andalusia, specifically the cities of Granada and Seville, offers rich cultural heritage sites such as the Alhambra, Generalife Gardens, and Alcázar of Seville. These cities attract tourists interested in history, architecture, and Moorish influences.

Region: Extremadura, particularly the towns of Cáceres and Mérida, is known for its well-preserved **Roman ruins**, medieval architecture, and UNESCO World Heritage sites. Visitors can explore historical landmarks, museums, and **Roman theaters**.

#### 5. Adventure and **Sports Tourism**:

Region: Catalonia, specifically the Pyrenees Mountains, offers adventure sports such as rock climbing, canyoning, and white-water rafting. The town of Sort is a popular base for adventure activities.

Region: Canary Islands, particularly the island of Lanzarote, offers opportunities for water sports like surfing, windsurfing, and kiteboarding due to its favorable wind and wave conditions.

Region: Soria, with its diverse natural landscapes, offers adventure activities such as hiking, mountain biking, and rock climbing. The natural park of Laguna Negra and the Natural Park of River Lobos are popular destinations for outdoor enthusiasts.

#### 6. **Wellness and Health Tourism**:

Region: Galicia, known for its **thermal waters**, offers wellness tourism experiences in towns like Ourense and Caldas de Reis. Visitors can enjoy thermal baths, spa treatments, and wellness retreats.

Region: Balearic Islands, particularly the island of Mallorca, offers wellness retreats, yoga centers, and luxury **spa resorts**, providing visitors with relaxation and rejuvenation in a tranquil setting.

#### 7. **Educational and Learning Experiences**:

Region: Basque Country, specifically the town of Getaria, offers educational experiences related to **gastronomy and fishing**. Visitors can learn about traditional fishing techniques, visit fish markets, and participate in cooking classes.

Region: Asturias, known for its natural landscapes and traditional farming practices, offers educational programs and **workshops on sustainable farming, cider production, and cheese-making.**

### **To what extent is rural tourism promoted through public initiatives? How?**

There were many subsidies during the LEADER era for Objective 1 areas mainly for renovation/construction of rural accommodation facilities. But, also, other financial support is given by different public entities especially in areas of depopulation/demographic decrease.

Recently a call for projects for “Tourism with experiences/adventures” was launched by the Ministry in order to incentive new ideas of rural tourism especially involving active, individual, hand-on experiences in rural tourism. But the budget was low and the conditions for the applicants were very specific.

The conditions for applicants are a general problem concerning subsidies or calls for projects in Spain. Often it favors big and/or public entities and makes it very hard or even impossible for SMEs to apply.

Public support for rural tourism is often matched with gender policy, enhancing women’s participation in economic development.

There are some specific examples of public initiatives to promote rural tourism in Spain. Each initiative focuses on different aspects such as infrastructure development, product diversification, sustainability, and heritage preservation:

- “Plan Nacional e Integral de Turismo” (National Integrated Tourism Plan):

This national-level plan, developed by the Spanish government, includes specific strategies and actions to promote rural tourism.

It focuses on improving the quality and competitiveness of rural accommodations, enhancing infrastructure and services in rural areas, and supporting the preservation of natural and cultural heritage.



- "Programa de Desarrollo Rural" (Rural Development Program):

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) provides financial support through the Rural Development Program, which is implemented at the regional level.

These funds are used to support rural tourism projects, such as the renovation of historic buildings for tourist accommodations, the development of nature trails and visitor centers, and the enhancement of local cultural events.

- "Plan Estratégico de Turismo Sostenible de Andalucía" (Strategic Plan for Sustainable Tourism in Andalusia):

The regional government of Andalusia has developed a strategic plan for sustainable tourism that includes specific actions to promote rural tourism.

It focuses on diversifying tourism products and experiences in rural areas, preserving natural and cultural heritage, and improving accessibility and infrastructure.

- "Camino de Arte Rupestre Prehistórico" (Prehistoric Rock Art Paths):

This public initiative, supported by the Ministry of Culture and regional governments, promotes rural tourism through the creation of thematic routes that connect archaeological sites with rock art.

It aims to enhance the visibility and understanding of prehistoric rock art, while also contributing to the economic development of rural areas.

- "Red de Hospederías de Extremadura" (Extremadura Lodging Network):

The regional government of Extremadura has established a network of rural accommodations, known as the Extremadura Lodging Network, to promote rural tourism in the region.

This initiative supports the renovation and management of historic buildings and rural lodgings, providing quality accommodations for visitors and generating economic opportunities for rural communities.

- "Club de Ecoturismo en España" (Ecotourism Club in Spain):

The Ecotourism Club, supported by public entities at various levels, promotes sustainable and nature-based tourism experiences in rural areas.

It provides certification and support to tourism businesses that meet specific criteria related to environmental sustainability, cultural heritage preservation, and community involvement.

### **What are the barriers for rural tourism?**

Irregular occupation.

#### **Increasing prices for electricity.**

There are several barriers and challenges that can hinder the development and growth of rural tourism. These barriers can vary depending on the specific context and region, but some common ones include:

#### **1. Limited Infrastructure and Services:**

In remote rural areas, there may be a lack of proper transportation infrastructure, including roads, public transportation, and connectivity. The availability and quality of accommodations, restaurants, and tourism services in rural regions can be limited, especially in less populated areas.

Little accessibility by public transport.

**Little access to internet** – difficult for online-working.

#### **2. Seasonality and Tourism Demand Fluctuations:**

Rural tourism in Spain often faces seasonality, with peak tourist seasons concentrated in specific periods, such as summer or holidays. Fluctuations in demand can result in challenges for businesses in terms of maintaining consistent revenue and employment throughout the year.

#### **3. Limited Marketing and Promotion:**

Some rural destinations in Spain may have limited marketing and promotional efforts compared to more popular urban or coastal

areas. **Lack of visibility** and targeted marketing campaigns can hinder the awareness and promotion of rural tourism offerings.

#### 4. **Financial Resources** and Investment:

Securing financial resources and investment for rural tourism projects can be challenging, particularly for **small businesses and entrepreneurs in rural areas**. Limited access to funding sources, grants, and loans may hinder infrastructure development, product improvement, and marketing initiatives.

#### 5. **Perception and Stereotypes**:

Rural areas in Spain may face negative perceptions and stereotypes, such as being less developed or lacking modern amenities. Overcoming these perceptions and showcasing the unique cultural, natural, and gastronomic experiences available in rural regions is essential for attracting tourists.

#### 6. **Skill Gaps and Capacity Building**:

Some rural areas may have a **lack of specialized skills and training among local residents** and tourism providers. Enhancing the skills and knowledge of individuals involved in rural tourism, through training programs and capacity-building initiatives, is crucial for offering high-quality experiences.

#### 7. **Environmental and Cultural Sustainability**:

Ensuring the **sustainable management of natural resources, protection of cultural heritage**, and responsible tourism practices is essential for the long-term viability of rural tourism in Spain.

Balancing tourism development with environmental conservation and cultural preservation is a challenge that requires careful planning and management.

#### 8. Regulatory and **Administrative Barriers**:

Complex regulations, **bureaucratic procedures**, and administrative burdens can pose challenges for starting and operating tourism businesses in rural areas.

Simplifying regulatory processes, reducing administrative barriers, and providing support for compliance can facilitate the growth of rural tourism.

## Are there any training needs that are potentially identified as necessary for rural tourism?

There are specific training needs that have been identified as necessary for rural tourism in Spain. These training needs aim to enhance the skills and knowledge of individuals involved in rural tourism, including entrepreneurs, tourism professionals, local communities, and other stakeholders. Some of the identified training needs for rural tourism in Spain include:

- **Language Skills**
- Hospitality and **Service Skills**:

Training programs that focus on customer service, hospitality management, and interpersonal skills are essential for providing quality experiences to rural tourists. These programs can cover topics such as effective communication, guest relations, problem-solving, and cultural sensitivity.

- Sustainable Tourism Practices:

Training on sustainable tourism practices, such as the principles of sustainability, waste management, energy efficiency, biodiversity conservation, and cultural heritage preservation.

- Nature and Cultural Interpretation:

Training programs that enhance the knowledge and interpretation skills of tour guides and local guides. This training may cover topics such as local history, ecology, flora and fauna, cultural traditions, and storytelling techniques.

- Entrepreneurship and Business Management:

Training on entrepreneurship and business management equips rural tourism entrepreneurs with the necessary skills to develop and manage successful tourism businesses. This includes training on business planning, financial management, marketing strategies, digital skills, and the use of technology in tourism operations.

- **Product Development and Diversification:**

Training programs that focus on product development and diversification help rural tourism stakeholders identify and create unique and marketable tourism offerings. This may involve training in identifying target markets, designing thematic routes or experiences, creating tourism packages, and collaborating with local suppliers.

- **Digital Marketing and Online Presence:**

Given the increasing importance of online presence and digital marketing, training on digital skills, social media management, website development, and online booking systems can help rural tourism businesses reach a wider audience.

- **Community Engagement and Collaboration:**

Training programs that promote community engagement, cooperation, and collaboration are vital for fostering a sense of ownership and shared responsibility among local communities. This includes training on community-based tourism, involving local residents in tourism initiatives, and fostering partnerships with local suppliers, artisans, and producers.

## **Characterizations of the profile of rural tourists/nature tourists**

**Please describe the characterization of the profile of nature tourists. At least one experience analyzing the internal and external environment of tourism linked to agricultural, livestock and forestry activities, and to identify barriers to the development of economic activity.**

Profile of tourists: mainly families (close family 37%, extended family 23%, couples 44%)

Interested and eager to learn.

Spain has a long and very extended tradition to visit the countryside and to buy traditional local products in the respective places. Domestic tourism even nearby the place of residence is very frequent in Spain.

## **Example 1: Fundación Monte Mediterráneo**

### **Strengths**

Unique and interesting agro-ecosystem: dehesa.

Big biodiversity with many rare and endangered species (flora and fauna)

Within a Nature Park and Natura 2000

Nature stone houses

Solar energy supply

Four languages spoken.

Broad offer of documentation (library)

WiFi

### **Weaknesses**

High time input and dedication for small groups

Current renting prices do not cover the costs (manpower)

Instability of WiFi, solar supply in remote areas

Conflicting interest between tourists' activities and farm work or hunting activity (e.g.: free ranging livestock and guardian dogs; limited access to certain areas)

### **Opportunities**

Unique place for photographers, biologists

Remote, peaceful place

Well communicated transport wise

Interesting cultural, gastronomic places to visit nearby

Nice climate during the whole year

Growing demand: domestic and international

## Threats

High investments which are amortized only in the (very) long run

High input/investment in marketing and promotion – too expensive

Hard to find the correct target group

## Example 2: El Bierzo, Castilla y León

El Bierzo is a picturesque region located in the province of León, Castilla y León, in northwestern Spain, surrounded by mountains.

## Strengths

- **Natural Beauty:** El Bierzo's stunning landscapes, surrounded by mountains, valleys, and rivers, attract nature lovers and outdoor enthusiasts.
- **Agricultural Heritage:** The region's strong agricultural traditions, including vineyards and local products, contribute to its authentic rural appeal.
- **Gastronomy:** Renowned local dishes like botillo and regional wines, especially the Mencía grape variety, enhance the gastronomic experiences for visitors.
- **Cultural Heritage and Pilgrimage:** El Bierzo's role in the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route adds cultural significance and draws pilgrim tourists.
- **Natural and Cultural Attractions:** The presence of natural parks, historic towns, and monuments offer diverse tourism opportunities.

## Weaknesses

- **Seasonality:** Concentrated tourism during peak periods can lead to fluctuations in demand and challenges in maintaining year-round economic activity.
- **Accessibility:** Limited access to some remote rural areas may hinder the overall tourism experience and visitor mobility.

- **Marketing and Promotion:** The region may face challenges in effectively promoting its rural tourism offerings due to limited marketing resources.
- **Capacity Building:** Ensuring that local residents and tourism operators have the necessary skills to deliver quality experiences is essential for long-term success.

## Opportunities

- **Diversification:** The region can develop new and unique tourism products, such as cultural events, eco-tourism, and adventure activities, to attract different types of tourists.
- **Collaboration:** Establishing partnerships between tourism authorities, businesses, and local communities can enhance marketing efforts and create cohesive tourism experiences.
- **Sustainable Tourism:** Implementing sustainable practices can attract environmentally conscious travelers and preserve the region's natural and cultural assets.

## Threats

- **Competing Destinations:** Competition from other rural tourism destinations may impact El Bierzo's ability to attract visitors.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Insufficient investment in transportation and tourism infrastructure could hinder growth.
- **Over-tourism:** The popularity of pilgrimage tourism can lead to over-crowding and strain on local resources and heritage sites.

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## 2. Overview about the rural tourism in Slovakia:

**What are the local characteristics of rural tourism?** (e.g. mountain areas, flatland, etc. – what activities: Accommodation, meals, guided nature tours, etc.)

Rural tourism in Slovakia offers a diverse range of experiences for visitors seeking a tranquil and authentic getaway. The country's natural beauty, with its picturesque landscapes, mountainous regions, and charming rural communities, provides a perfect backdrop for rural tourism activities. Here is an overview of the local characteristics and activities associated with rural tourism in Slovakia:

1. **Mountain Areas:** Slovakia is known for its stunning mountain ranges, including the High Tatras, Low Tatras, and the Slovak Paradise. These areas attract outdoor enthusiasts and adventure seekers who enjoy activities such as hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, and skiing (during the winter months). The mountainous regions offer breathtaking views, crystal-clear lakes, and opportunities to explore unspoiled nature.
2. **National Parks and Protected Areas:** Slovakia boasts several national parks and protected areas, which are ideal for nature lovers and eco-tourists. The Tatra National Park, Slovak Paradise National Park, and Pieniny National Park are popular destinations, offering a wealth of hiking trails, wildlife observation, and guided nature tours. Visitors can witness unique flora and fauna, explore scenic gorges and waterfalls, and learn about the conservation efforts in place.
3. **Traditional Villages:** Rural tourism in Slovakia often involves staying in traditional villages, where visitors can experience the country's rich cultural heritage. These villages offer accommodations in guesthouses, cottages, or farmsteads, providing an authentic and immersive experience. Guests can enjoy traditional Slovak cuisine, made from locally sourced ingredients, and participate in activities such as folk music and dance performances, traditional crafts workshops, and farm visits.
4. **Agro-tourism:** Slovakia's fertile plains and agricultural areas provide opportunities for agro-tourism activities. Visitors can engage in farm stays, where they can experience the daily life of farmers, participate in agricultural tasks, and learn about traditional farming practices. This includes activities like milking cows,

herding sheep, picking fruits or vegetables, and even cheese or wine making.

5. Cultural Heritage: Rural areas in Slovakia often have a rich cultural heritage, with historic buildings, churches, and castles dotting the landscape. Visitors can explore these architectural gems, learn about the country's history and folklore, and attend local festivals and events that celebrate Slovak traditions.
6. Wellness and Relaxation: Many rural areas in Slovakia offer wellness and relaxation opportunities, with natural thermal spas and wellness centers. Visitors can rejuvenate in hot mineral springs, indulge in spa treatments, and enjoy the peace and tranquility of the surrounding countryside.

In summary, rural tourism in Slovakia encompasses a wide range of activities and experiences. From exploring majestic mountain landscapes and national parks to immersing oneself in traditional villages and engaging in agro-tourism activities, visitors can enjoy a unique blend of nature, culture, and relaxation in Slovakia's rural areas.

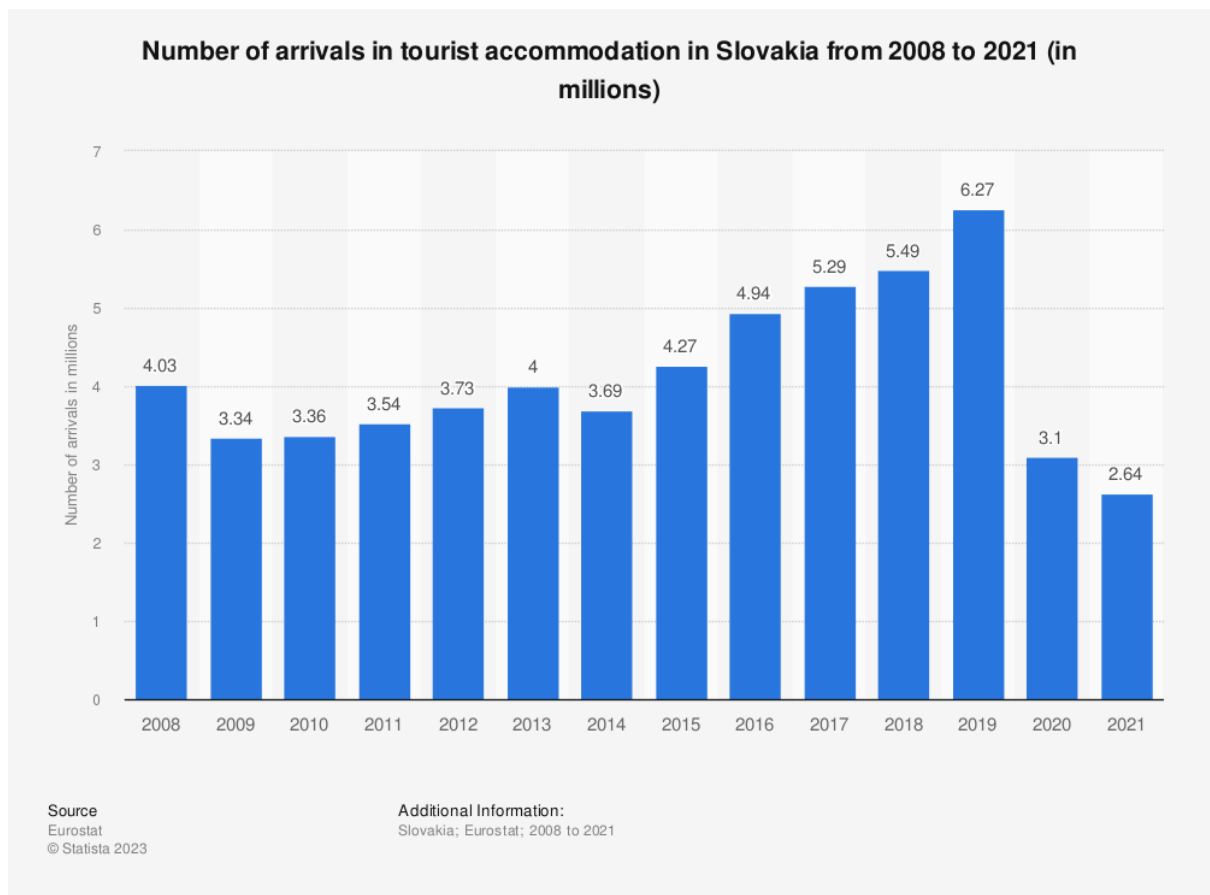
### **What is the economic importance of tourism in your country and what proportion of it is rural tourism?**

Tourism plays a significant role in the economy of Slovakia, and both urban and rural tourism contribute to its overall economic importance. While specific data on the proportion of rural tourism within the overall tourism sector in Slovakia is not readily available, rural tourism has been growing in popularity in recent years. Here are some insights into the economic importance of tourism in Slovakia:

1. Contribution to GDP: Tourism makes a substantial contribution to Slovakia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the direct contribution of tourism to Slovakia's GDP was 3.8% in 2019, with a total contribution (including indirect and induced impacts) of 8.7%. It is important to note that these figures encompass all forms of tourism, including rural tourism.
2. Employment Generation: The tourism industry in Slovakia is a significant source of employment. It provides job opportunities in various sectors, such as accommodation, food and beverage services, transportation, travel agencies, and tourist attractions. The exact proportion of rural tourism employment is not available, but rural areas

often rely on tourism to generate income and create employment opportunities for local communities.

3. Regional Development: Tourism, including rural tourism, contributes to regional development by promoting economic activity in rural areas. It helps diversify local economies, stimulate entrepreneurship, and preserve cultural and natural heritage. Rural tourism encourages investment in infrastructure, accommodations, and services, which benefits not only the tourism sector but also the overall development of rural communities.
4. Sustainable Development: Rural tourism in Slovakia often focuses on sustainability and responsible practices. This form of tourism promotes the preservation of natural resources, supports local communities, and encourages the conservation of cultural heritage. By emphasizing sustainable tourism practices, Slovakia aims to ensure long-term economic benefits while protecting its rural areas and their unique characteristics.



Although specific data on the proportion of rural tourism within the overall tourism sector in Slovakia is not readily available,

the growing interest in rural tourism suggests that it plays a significant role in the country's tourism landscape. The government and local authorities recognize the potential of rural tourism and continue to promote its development, highlighting its economic importance and the benefits it brings to rural communities.

**To what extent is tourism in rural regions linked to agriculture? Which typology of agricultural, livestock and forestry activities, are currently practising nature or rural tourism activities?**

Tourism in rural regions of Slovakia is often closely linked to agriculture, as it provides an opportunity to showcase and promote the agricultural practices, local products, and rural way of life. The interconnection between agriculture and rural tourism varies across different regions and activities. Here are some typologies of agricultural, livestock, and forestry activities that are currently practicing nature or rural tourism activities in Slovakia:

1. Agro-tourism Farms: Many rural areas in Slovakia offer agro-tourism experiences, where visitors can stay on working farms and actively participate in agricultural activities. These farms engage in various agricultural practices such as crop cultivation, fruit and vegetable farming, and viticulture. Visitors can assist with tasks like planting, harvesting, and tending to animals, gaining firsthand knowledge of agricultural processes.
2. Animal Husbandry: Livestock farming is an integral part of rural life in Slovakia, and some farms open their doors to tourists, allowing them to experience animal husbandry activities. Visitors can learn about and participate in activities such as milking cows, feeding animals, herding sheep, and observing traditional livestock management practices.
3. Organic Farming: Slovakia has seen an increase in organic farming practices, driven by consumer demand for healthy and sustainable products. Some organic farms engage in rural tourism, offering visitors the opportunity to learn about organic farming methods, visit organic gardens, and taste organic produce.
4. Beekeeping: Slovakia has a rich beekeeping tradition, and many rural areas are known for their honey production.

Beekeepers often welcome tourists to their apiaries, providing insights into beekeeping practices, honey extraction, and the importance of bees in pollination. Visitors can learn about the role of bees in the ecosystem, taste different varieties of honey, and purchase bee-related products.

5. **Forestry and Woodcraft:** Slovakia is blessed with extensive forested areas, and some rural tourism initiatives focus on promoting sustainable forestry practices. These activities include guided nature walks, forest educational programs, and workshops on woodcraft, showcasing traditional woodworking techniques and the cultural significance of forests.
6. **Culinary Experiences:** Rural tourism in Slovakia often incorporates culinary aspects, highlighting local and traditional dishes. Many rural accommodations and restaurants source ingredients directly from local farmers and promote farm-to-table experiences. Visitors can participate in culinary workshops, learning to prepare traditional Slovak meals using locally sourced ingredients.
7. **Natural Resource Conservation:** Some rural tourism initiatives in Slovakia are closely connected to environmental conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources. These activities may include guided nature tours, birdwatching, wildlife observation, and educational programs on biodiversity and conservation.

It is worth noting that the specific typology of agricultural, livestock, and forestry activities engaged in rural tourism can vary across regions in Slovakia, depending on local resources, traditions, and the preferences of individual farmers and entrepreneurs.

### **What innovative tourism offers are available in rural regions?**

In recent years, rural regions in Slovakia have been embracing innovation to enhance the tourism experience and attract visitors. Here are some innovative tourism offers available in rural regions of Slovakia:

1. **Agri-tourism Experiences:** Rural regions in Slovakia are offering innovative agri-tourism experiences that go beyond traditional farm stays. Visitors can participate in hands-on workshops such as bread-making, cheese-making, and traditional crafts. They can also engage in activities like grape harvesting, winemaking, and distilling traditional

- spirits, allowing them to learn about local traditions and take part in unique experiences.
2. **Adventure Tourism:** Rural areas in Slovakia are tapping into the growing demand for adventure tourism by offering innovative outdoor activities. These include activities such as zip-lining, canopy walks, treetop adventure parks, and off-road vehicle tours. Adventure enthusiasts can explore the natural landscapes, including mountains, forests, and rivers, in thrilling and unconventional ways.
  3. **Ecotourism and Nature Conservation:** Rural regions in Slovakia are promoting ecotourism and nature conservation initiatives to showcase their pristine natural environments. This includes guided nature walks, wildlife watching, birdwatching tours, and educational programs on environmental conservation. Some areas also offer volunteer opportunities for visitors to participate in conservation projects and contribute to the preservation of the local ecosystems.
  4. **Wellness and Retreats:** Rural regions in Slovakia are embracing wellness tourism by offering innovative wellness retreats and spa experiences. Visitors can enjoy yoga retreats, meditation workshops, nature-inspired spa treatments, and wellness activities amidst the peaceful rural landscapes. Some accommodations also provide wellness-focused amenities such as saunas, hot tubs, and wellness centers.
  5. **Cultural Immersion:** Rural areas in Slovakia offer immersive cultural experiences that allow visitors to engage with local traditions and customs. This includes attending traditional folk festivals, participating in music and dance workshops, and exploring rural museums and heritage sites. Visitors can also interact with locals and learn about their way of life through homestays and community-based tourism initiatives.
  6. **Digital Connectivity and Smart Solutions:** To enhance the visitor experience, some rural regions in Slovakia are implementing digital connectivity and smart solutions. This includes providing Wi-Fi access in accommodations and public areas, offering digital guides and interactive maps for exploring the region, and utilizing technology for online booking systems and virtual tours.
  7. **Gastronomic Tourism:** Rural regions in Slovakia are showcasing their unique culinary heritage through gastronomic tourism initiatives. Visitors can enjoy food and wine tours, visit local food producers, participate in



cooking classes to learn traditional recipes, and explore food markets and festivals celebrating local cuisine. Some areas also offer farm-to-table experiences, where visitors can directly taste and purchase local products.



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These are just a few examples of the innovative tourism offers available in rural regions of Slovakia. These initiatives aim to attract a diverse range of visitors and provide them with memorable and unique experiences that showcase the region's natural, cultural, and gastronomic assets.

**Which economic activities of potential interest for developing rural tourism activities can be announced?**

Developing rural tourism in Slovakia can involve various economic activities that can contribute to the growth and sustainability of the sector. Here are some economic activities of potential interest for developing rural tourism in Slovakia:

1. Accommodation and Hospitality: Developing a range of accommodation options suitable for rural tourism, such as guesthouses, bed and breakfasts, farm stays, eco-lodges,

- and boutique hotels. Investing in hospitality infrastructure can attract tourists and provide them with comfortable and authentic experiences.
2. Agri-tourism and Farm Experiences: Encouraging agricultural and farming activities that offer unique and interactive experiences for tourists. This includes agri-tourism activities like fruit picking, wine tasting, cheese-making, bread-making, and organic farming practices. Providing opportunities for tourists to engage in hands-on agricultural tasks and learn about traditional farming practices can enhance their experience.
  3. Local Food and Gastronomy: Developing culinary experiences that highlight local food and gastronomy. This includes promoting farm-to-table practices, establishing local food markets, organizing food festivals, and supporting local producers. Encouraging the use of local ingredients and traditional recipes can create opportunities for rural restaurants, cafes, and food-related businesses.
  4. Handicrafts and Artisanal Products: Supporting and promoting local artisans and craftsmen by showcasing their traditional skills and crafts. This can involve establishing craft workshops, organizing artisan fairs and markets, and providing training and support to local artisans. Artisanal products, such as pottery, woodwork, textiles, and traditional crafts, can be marketed to tourists as unique souvenirs.
  5. Outdoor Activities and Adventure Tourism: Expanding outdoor activity offerings to attract adventure-seeking tourists. This can include developing hiking and cycling trails, adventure parks, rock climbing sites, water sports facilities, and winter sports activities. Providing equipment rental services, guided tours, and adventure packages can further enhance the tourism experience.
  6. Nature Conservation and Eco-tourism: Promoting eco-tourism initiatives that focus on the preservation and sustainable use of natural resources. This can involve organizing guided nature tours, wildlife watching experiences, and educational programs on environmental conservation. Encouraging responsible tourism practices and supporting conservation efforts can contribute to the long-term sustainability of rural tourism.
  7. Wellness and Retreats: Developing wellness and retreat facilities that cater to tourists seeking relaxation and rejuvenation in rural settings. This can include spa resorts, wellness centers, yoga retreats, meditation

centers, and nature-based wellness activities. Creating opportunities for visitors to unwind and reconnect with nature can be a significant draw for rural tourism.

8. Cultural Heritage and Events: Showcasing the rich cultural heritage of rural areas by organizing cultural events, festivals, and exhibitions. This can involve promoting local traditions, folklore, music, and dance performances. Supporting the preservation of historic sites, traditional architecture, and cultural landmarks can enhance the tourism appeal of rural regions.

Investing in these economic activities can help develop rural tourism in Slovakia, diversify the local economy, create employment opportunities, and improve the quality of life for rural communities. Collaboration between the government, local authorities, tourism organizations, and private enterprises is essential to foster the growth of rural tourism and ensure its sustainable development.

### **To what extent is rural tourism promoted through public initiatives? How?**

Rural tourism in Slovakia is promoted through various public initiatives aimed at highlighting the unique features and attractions of rural areas. The government, tourism organizations, and local authorities collaborate to support and develop rural tourism in the country. Here are some ways in which rural tourism is promoted through public initiatives in Slovakia:

1. Marketing Campaigns: Public initiatives promote rural tourism through marketing campaigns that showcase the natural beauty, cultural heritage, and unique experiences available in rural areas. These campaigns often involve online and offline promotional activities, including websites, social media platforms, brochures, and travel guides. They target both domestic and international tourists, raising awareness about rural tourism opportunities in Slovakia.
2. Destination Branding: Public initiatives work on developing and promoting specific rural destinations as attractive tourist destinations. They create destination brands that highlight the distinct characteristics and offerings of rural areas, such as natural landscapes, traditional

- villages, and cultural heritage. This branding helps position rural regions as desirable places to visit, encouraging tourists to explore beyond urban areas.
3. **Tourism Infrastructure Development:** Public initiatives focus on enhancing tourism infrastructure in rural regions. This includes improving road networks, signage, parking facilities, and public amenities to facilitate access and movement within rural areas. Investments are made in the development and maintenance of hiking trails, cycling routes, and other outdoor recreational infrastructure that supports rural tourism activities. Training and
  4. **Capacity Building:** Public initiatives provide training and capacity building programs for local communities, tourism providers, and entrepreneurs in rural areas. These programs aim to enhance the skills and knowledge necessary to deliver quality tourism services and experiences. Training may cover topics such as hospitality, customer service, sustainable tourism practices, and product development.
  5. **Financial Support and Grants:** Public initiatives offer financial support, grants, and incentives to encourage the development of rural tourism. Funding may be provided for infrastructure projects, business startups, product diversification, marketing campaigns, and sustainable tourism initiatives. These financial incentives help attract investment, stimulate entrepreneurship, and drive innovation in the rural tourism sector.
  6. **Collaboration and Networking:** Public initiatives foster collaboration and networking among stakeholders in the rural tourism sector. This includes facilitating partnerships between tourism providers, local communities, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations. Collaborative efforts enable the exchange of knowledge, sharing of best practices, and coordination of initiatives for the sustainable development of rural tourism.
  7. **Policy and Regulation:** Public initiatives involve the development of policies, regulations, and guidelines that support and regulate rural tourism activities. These policies aim to ensure the sustainability, quality, and responsible management of rural tourism, taking into account environmental, cultural, and socio-economic factors.

By implementing these public initiatives, Slovakia promotes rural tourism as a valuable component of its overall tourism strategy. The focus is on leveraging the unique assets of rural

areas, fostering community engagement, and ensuring the long-term sustainability and economic benefits of rural tourism.

### **What are the barriers for rural tourism?**

While rural tourism in Slovakia has great potential, there are several barriers that can hinder its development and growth. These barriers include:

1. **Limited Infrastructure:** Some rural regions in Slovakia may have limited infrastructure, including transportation networks, roads, and public facilities. Insufficient infrastructure can make it challenging for tourists to access and explore rural areas, limiting their overall experience.
2. **Lack of Marketing and Promotion:** Rural areas often face challenges in effectively marketing and promoting their tourism offerings. Limited marketing budgets, lack of awareness, and inadequate promotional activities can make it difficult for rural regions to attract tourists and compete with more established destinations.
3. **Seasonal fluctuations** can be a significant barrier for rural tourism in Slovakia. Many rural areas rely on specific seasonal activities or natural attractions, which can result in a limited tourist flow outside peak seasons. This can lead to economic challenges and difficulties in maintaining tourism-related businesses throughout the year.
4. **Limited Diversification of Activities:** To attract a wider range of tourists, rural regions need to diversify their tourism offerings. This can be a challenge if there is a lack of resources or entrepreneurial mindset among local communities. Limited diversification can lead to a narrow range of activities, which may not appeal to a broader tourist base.
5. **Skill Gaps and Training Needs:** Rural communities and tourism providers may lack the necessary skills and training to deliver high-quality tourism experiences. Training programs and capacity-building initiatives are essential to enhance hospitality, customer service, marketing, and sustainable tourism practices.
6. **Funding and Financial Support:** Access to funding and financial support can be a significant barrier for rural tourism development. Limited access to capital for infrastructure improvements, business start-ups, marketing

campaigns, and product development can hinder the growth of rural tourism initiatives.

7. Limited Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement: Effective collaboration and engagement among stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, tourism organizations, and private enterprises, are crucial for the success of rural tourism. Lack of collaboration and coordination can lead to fragmented efforts and hinder the overall development of rural tourism.
8. Perception and Image: Some rural areas may face challenges in overcoming negative perceptions or stereotypes associated with rural tourism. Misconceptions about limited amenities, lack of modern facilities, or limited entertainment options can discourage potential tourists from considering rural areas as attractive destinations.

Addressing these barriers requires concerted efforts from various stakeholders, including the government, tourism organizations, local communities, and private sector actors. Strategies focusing on infrastructure development, marketing and promotion, capacity building, funding support, diversification of activities, and stakeholder collaboration can help overcome these barriers and unlock the full potential of rural tourism in Slovakia.

**Are there any training needs that are potentially identified as necessary for rural tourism?**

Yes, there are several training needs that are identified as necessary for rural tourism in Slovakia. These training needs aim to enhance the skills and knowledge of various stakeholders involved in rural tourism, including local communities, tourism providers, entrepreneurs, and service providers. Some of the potential training needs for rural tourism in Slovakia include:

1. Hospitality and Customer Service: Training programs focusing on hospitality and customer service are essential to ensure high-quality visitor experiences. This includes topics such as effective communication, cultural sensitivity, guest satisfaction, conflict resolution, and the provision of personalized and memorable service. Sustainable
2. Tourism Practices: Training on sustainable tourism practices is crucial to ensure that rural tourism activities are conducted in an environmentally and socially responsible manner. Topics can include waste management,

- resource conservation, eco-friendly practices, responsible visitor behavior, and the promotion of local culture and heritage.
3. **Entrepreneurship and Business Management:** Training in entrepreneurship and business management can help local communities and tourism providers develop and operate successful rural tourism businesses. This may cover topics such as business planning, financial management, marketing and branding, product development, and effective business operations.
  4. **Marketing and Promotion:** Training in marketing and promotion is necessary to effectively promote rural tourism offerings. Topics can include digital marketing, social media strategies, content creation, branding, market research, and the development of tourism packages and itineraries.
  5. **Tour Guiding and Interpretation:** Training programs for tour guides and interpreters are essential for providing engaging and informative experiences to visitors. This can involve training in storytelling, interpretation techniques, local history and culture, natural and cultural heritage, and guiding best practices.
  6. **Food and Beverage Services:** Training in food and beverage services is important to enhance the culinary experiences offered in rural tourism. This can include topics such as food preparation and presentation, food safety and hygiene, menu development, local gastronomy, and the promotion of local and sustainable food products.
  7. **Language Skills:** Developing language skills among tourism providers, especially in popular foreign languages, can facilitate effective communication with international tourists and enhance their experience. Language training programs can focus on English, German, Russian, or other languages depending on the target market.
  8. **Digital Skills and Technology:** Training in digital skills and technology can help rural tourism stakeholders leverage online platforms, digital marketing tools, reservation systems, and social media to promote their offerings, engage with customers, and improve overall business operations.

Identifying and addressing these training needs can contribute to the professionalization of rural tourism in Slovakia, improve service quality, enhance visitor satisfaction, and support the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of the sector.

Public initiatives, tourism organizations, vocational training institutions, and industry associations can collaborate to design and deliver training programs tailored to the specific needs of rural tourism stakeholders.

## Characterisation of the profile of rural tourists/nature tourists

**Please describe the characterisation of the profile of nature tourists. At least one experience analysing the internal and external environment of tourism linked to agricultural, livestock and forestry activities, and to identify barriers to the development of economic activity.**

The profile of nature tourists in Slovakia can vary, but there are certain characteristics that are commonly associated with this group. Nature tourists are individuals who are attracted to the natural beauty, biodiversity, and outdoor recreational opportunities that rural areas in Slovakia have to offer. Here is a characterization of the profile of nature tourists in Slovakia:

1. **Nature and Outdoor Enthusiasts:** Nature tourists are typically passionate about nature and outdoor activities. They enjoy exploring and experiencing natural landscapes, such as mountains, forests, lakes, and rivers. They engage in activities like hiking, trekking, cycling, birdwatching, wildlife spotting, fishing, and camping.
2. **Interest in Biodiversity and Conservation:** Nature tourists have a keen interest in biodiversity and conservation. They appreciate the unique flora and fauna of the regions they visit and seek opportunities to learn about and observe the natural environment. They may participate in eco-tourism activities and support initiatives focused on nature conservation.
3. **Cultural and Heritage Appreciation:** While nature is a primary draw for these tourists, they also appreciate the cultural and heritage aspects of the destinations they visit. They have an interest in local traditions, rural lifestyles, traditional crafts, and indigenous knowledge related to agriculture, livestock, and forestry.
4. **Seek Authentic Experiences:** Nature tourists value authenticity and seek experiences that allow them to connect with local communities, traditions, and natural



resources. They prefer immersive experiences over mass tourism and enjoy interactions with local residents, learning about traditional agricultural practices, and tasting local cuisine.

5. Environmental Awareness and Responsible Travel: Nature tourists tend to be environmentally conscious and prioritize responsible travel practices. They are mindful of their impact on the environment and seek accommodation, activities, and services that align with sustainable tourism principles. They respect local cultures, minimize waste, and follow Leave No Trace principles.

An example experience analyzing the internal and external environment of tourism linked to agricultural, livestock, and forestry activities in Slovakia:

#### Internal Environment:

- Strengths: Abundance of natural landscapes, diverse flora and fauna, rich cultural heritage, traditional agricultural practices, local expertise in farming and forestry, potential for agri-tourism experiences.
- Weaknesses: Limited infrastructure, lack of diversification in rural tourism offerings, seasonal fluctuations in activities, limited marketing and promotion, skill gaps among local communities and service providers.

#### External Environment:

Opportunities: Growing demand for nature-based tourism experiences, increasing interest in sustainable and authentic travel, potential for collaboration with local farmers and producers, access to EU funding for rural development projects.

Threats: Competition from other destinations, changing weather patterns affecting seasonal activities, environmental degradation, changing consumer preferences and travel trends.

#### Barriers to the development of economic activity:

- Limited financial resources and access to funding for infrastructure development and business start-ups.

- Lack of awareness and marketing efforts to promote rural tourism offerings.
- Seasonality and fluctuations in visitor numbers, leading to economic challenges.
- Skill gaps and the need for training and capacity building among local communities and tourism providers.
- Limited collaboration and networking among stakeholders.

Overcoming these barriers requires addressing infrastructure gaps, enhancing marketing and promotional efforts, providing financial support and training programs, fostering collaboration, and diversifying rural tourism offerings to attract a wider range of tourists.

### 3. Overview about the rural tourism in Austria:

**What are the local characteristics of rural tourism?** (e.g. mountain areas, flatland, etc. – what activities: Accommodation, meals, guided nature tours, etc.)

More than almost any other sector, Austrian tourism plays an important role as a link between economic, natural and cultural dimensions: Not only is the tourism and leisure industry one of the most important economic sectors in the country, but it is also closely interwoven with other sectors and thus an essential driver of regional development. At the same time, tourism is a small-structured interconnected economic system: around 90 percent of the companies in tourism and the leisure industry are SMEs.

Numerous sectors such as trade, transport, construction and last but not least agriculture interact with the tourism industry. Tourism is thus much more than a service sector that focuses solely on the demands of its holiday guests. The industry also makes a valuable contribution to the all-embracing quality of life in Austria. For example, in the form of infrastructure, cultural and leisure activities or better local and long-distance public transport. And last but not least, also in connection with agriculture.

The natural and cultural landscape is not a backdrop, but an important component of the tourist offer. The range of typical regional dishes and culinary traditions based on local agricultural production is increasingly becoming the focus of the tourist offer. Thus, the offers in the field of nature education are also increasing.

While recreational tourism was the most important form of tourism for a long time, today it can be said that a variety of types of tourism are represented in Austria, such as cultural and city tourism, wellness and spa tourism, sports tourism, adventure tourism or gourmet tourism. Whereas tourism is important in winter as well as in summer - also in rural regions

Specifically, it can be divided into the following sectors:

- Summer tourism: mountain sports and seaside tourism
- Winter tourism

- Cultural tourism
- City tourism
- Congress and other business tourism
- Spa and wellness tourism
- Agri-tourism

The starting point for rural tourism in Austria is excellent. Austria has a large number of lakes and mountains. The wine regions are also a popular tourism hotspot.

As can be seen in the figure below, rural tourism in Austria shows a west-east divide. While the mountain regions are almost entirely dominated by tourism, tourism east of Schladming, for example, is lower, with the exception of some thermal spa regions in eastern Styria and the area around Lake Neusiedl, which has seen large increases in overnight stays in recent years.

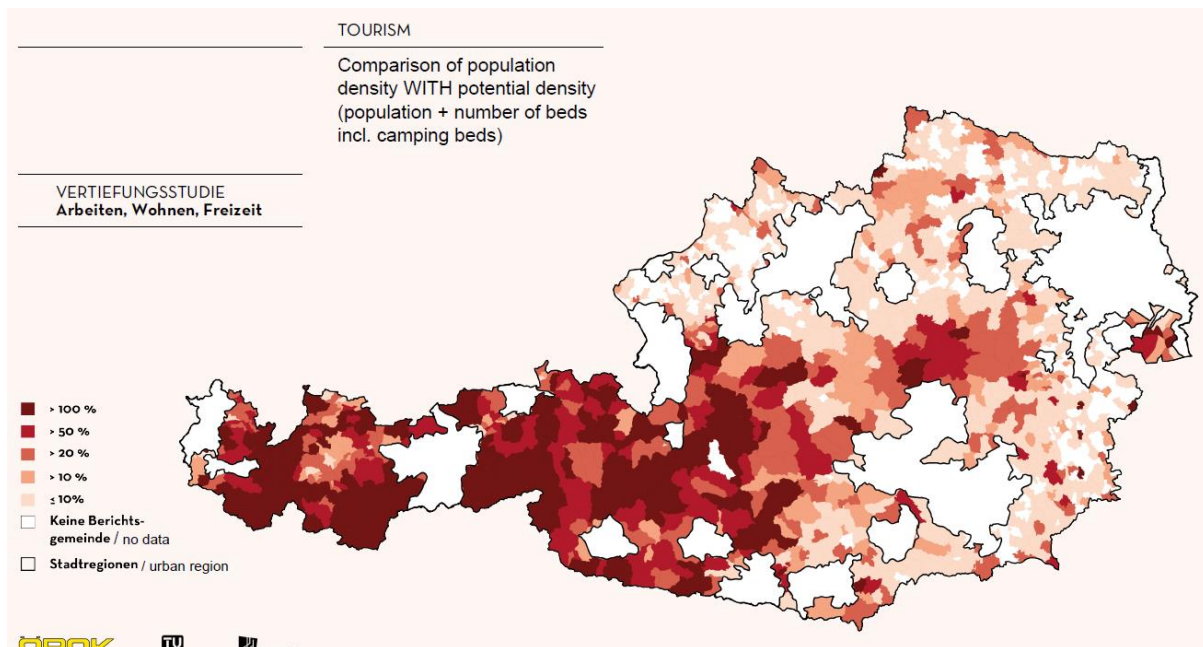


Figure 1: Comparison of population density WITH potential density (population + number of beds)

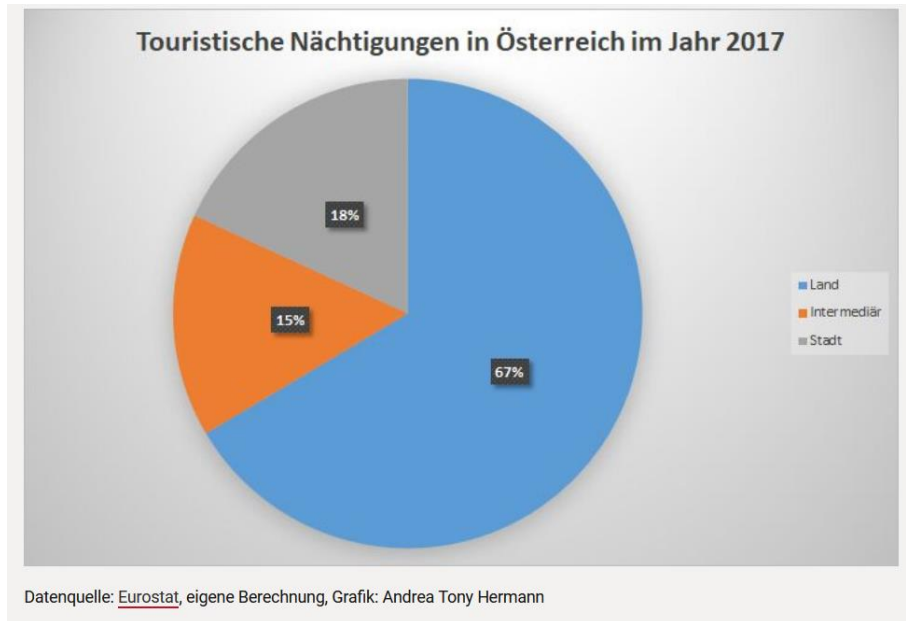
Austria's Alpine regions are a big draw for outdoor enthusiasts and nature lovers. The Austrian Alps offer opportunities for skiing, snowboarding, hiking and mountaineering, while tranquil lakes and picturesque landscapes provide a peaceful backdrop for relaxation and outdoor activities.

### **What is the economic importance of tourism in your country and what proportion of it is rural tourism?**

In Austria, tourism is gaining in importance every year, even though there was of course a slump during the pandemic. Around 300,000 people are employed directly or indirectly (full-time equivalent) in the Austrian tourism industry in over 90,000 businesses. With a GDP share of about 16%, the tourism and leisure industry makes a significant contribution to Austria's economic performance. Especially in alpine regions, Austria is dependent on tourism.

With 80.5 million overnight stays, around 67 percent of tourist overnight stays in Austria took place in rural areas in 2017. Urban areas recorded a significantly lower share of tourist overnight stays in 2017, at around 18 percent (22.0 million tourist overnight stays).

Even fewer tourist overnight stays were made in Austrian small towns and suburbs in 2017, which accounted for a share of approximately 15 percent with 18.6 million tourist overnight stays in the same year.



*Figure 2 Tourist overnight stays in Austria, blue: country, grey: intermediate, orange: city:*

Compared to the EU average, the Austrian value of tourist overnight stays in rural areas is very high. Across the EU, around 38 percent of tourist overnight stays in 2017 were in cities, around 32 percent in small towns and suburbs and only around 30 percent in rural areas.

In the EU country comparison of tourist overnight stays in rural regions, Austria leads the list of EU-28 countries ahead of Greece, Croatia and Denmark. The high share in Austria is due to the Alpine regions (especially Tyrol and Salzburg).

**To what extent is tourism in rural regions linked to agriculture? Which typology of agricultural, livestock and forestry activities, are currently practising nature or rural tourism activities?**

Rural guest accommodation is a relevant element of the Austrian tourism economy; about every 30th tourist overnight stay in Austria takes place on a farm. Every second overnight stay involves a guest from Germany, which means that rural guest accommodation is particularly strongly focused on the German market.

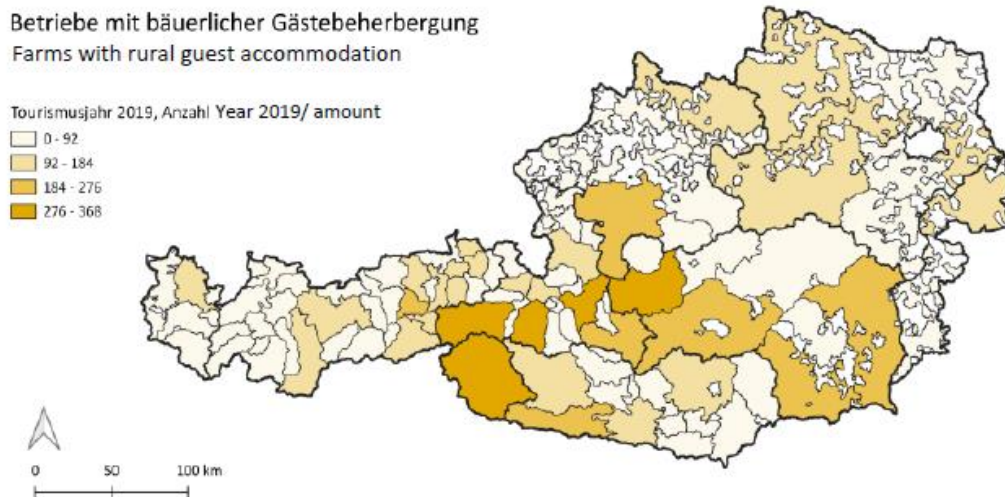


Figure 3 Quelle: Evaluierungsprojekt Cluster Urlaub am Bauernhof

In Österreich sind die touristischen Aktivitäten landwirtschaftlicher Betriebe unter der Bezeichnung Urlaub am Bauernhof (UaB) bekannt. Durch die Gründung des Vereins „Urlaub am Bauernhof“ im Jahr 1991 wurde diese Bezeichnung zu einer qualitätsgeprüften Marke.

The development in the past years has been consistently positive. Furthermore, the situation shows great regional differences. In the period from 2014 to 2019, the number of rural accommodation establishments declined in a large part of the tourism regions, as did the number of related overnight stays. This goes hand in hand with the structural development of agricultural businesses.

Thus, the secondary activity of rural guest accommodation leads to a regular employment of about 4,400 workers and 1,400 irregularly employed workers in UaB enterprises. In other rural accommodation enterprises it leads to a regular employment of about 10,500 workers and 4,200 irregularly employed workers.

The share of women is about 60 %. Due to the additional demand (e.g. in the regional gastronomy or leisure industry) as well as income-induced effects, rural guest accommodation leads to an additional employment of about 3,400 workers away from the farms (regional employment effects). In total, rural guest

accommodation leads to an annual gross value added of about EUR 300 million.

Rural guest accommodation not only contributes to the (at least partial) utilisation of agricultural labour, it also ensures the continued existence of one third of the farms, whereby the importance of secondary tourism activities is particularly pronounced in tourism-intensive regions.

Analyses show that the secondary activity in guest accommodation is of central importance for UaB enterprises. It ensures the survival of one third of the farms - especially in tourism-intensive regions. In addition, it is responsible for more than 40 % of the income of the B&Bs on average. The share of income largely corresponds to the labour input, i.e. the labour productivity in guest accommodation largely corresponds to that of the main activity. For women, the share of work in guest accommodation is above average.

The broad tourism offer of the farms is to be considered essential. This is based on the resources of the farm and increases the attractiveness of the product agrotourism.

Several effects of agrotourism go hand in hand with the main task of accommodating tourists:

- Culture and customs are brought into focus
- The new tasks on the farm contribute to job creation.
- Because of diversification, new products and offers are often developed within the framework of the quality certificate.
- Tourists boost direct sales, as they not only spend the night on the farm, but also consume or buy the farm's own products.
- Positive changes in the daily life of the family members of the farm, as agrotourism contributes to the increase of the social status of the farm family.
- The changes in the economic and social sphere in rural areas lead to an increased appearance of women in agriculture.



## What innovative tourism offers are available in rural regions?

In general, a trend towards "proximity tourism" can be observed in rural tourism. Above all, the focus is shifting to regional food shopping.

Digitalisation has also found its way into tourism. On the one hand, this concerns advertising, but also tourist offers directly in the regions.

**New offer in the mountain areas:** New sports and trends are emerging in some regions. For example, mountain biking downhill is becoming more and more important in some areas of Salzburg. In Saalbach, for example, the largest bike region in Austria has been established. More than 90 km of lines & trails and 9 mountain railways on 7 mountains provide boundless biking experiences. On the one hand, an alternative can be offered in winter when there is a lack of snow, and in summer the establishments are fully booked.

**Farm holidays:** this form of holiday will continue to be pursued and expanded.

**Nature education:** Nature mediators try to work more closely with tourism businesses to present the special features of the regions. In the area of the national parks, national park rangers enable better visitor guidance.

**Regionality:** especially in rural tourism, more and more emphasis is being placed on the special features in the region. Old traditions are reactivated and regional products are used in catering.

**Camping:** During the pandemic, camping in Austria got a boost again. - This also applies to offers directly on farms. There are now several platforms that arrange camping sites on farms. <https://www.schauaufsland.com>, <https://www.urlaubambauernhof.at/de/erlebnisse/camping-hund/camping> On the one hand, this enables farmers to earn a direct income through rentals, and on the other hand, guests usually also buy products from direct marketing.

**Culinary offers:** Some regions focus in particular on regional speciality. Especially worth mentioning here are the wine regions in Austria

**Seasonal cultural events in rural regions:** Many regions offer concerts, operas or caberets during the summer months. This offers artists the opportunity to be active during the summer, as many theatres close during the summer in the cities. There is an additional offer for the REgions. E.g. concerts in quarries, on lake stages, in castles

### **Which economic activities of potential interest for developing rural tourism activities can be announced?**

Rural tourism is already very widespread in Austria. However, an east-west divide is noticeable. Especially popular are regions with specific characteristics. (mountains, lakes). Some regions have special features regarding their agricultural production: e.g. wine regions.

- The following trends will become even more important in the futureTrend towards sustainability
- Focus on regional products
- Development of new offers, also to mitigate the effects of climate change

### **To what extent is rural tourism promoted through public initiatives? How?**

Austrian tourism is very strongly supported by the association Österreich Werbung. Its budget is made up of membership fees from the members of the association, the Republic of Austria, represented by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economics, and the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, as well as contributions from the tourism industry in the context of participation in specific marketing activities. The association's task is to promote Austria as a holiday destination. With its 21 locations, Österreich Werbung is currently working on 27 markets of origin and, in cooperation with AUSSENWIRTSCHAFT AUSTRIA, on a further 8 potential markets.

In the field of agri-tourism, there are special support schemes via the CAP. In the LE 14-20 programme, the strengthening of agricultural enterprises with tourism offers was supported within the framework of various measures. Here, the aim was to

strengthen the diversification of the farms towards tourism services; in addition, cooperation is supported via a special funding line "Cooperation of small economic operators with regard to tourism services" and "Establishment and operation of clusters". The overarching objectives of the measure and the respective project type are to create and secure jobs in rural areas and to make a proactive contribution to the sustainable development of rural areas. Similar approaches are also included in the new funding period.

Currently, the embedding of UaB enterprises in regional networks - apart from the UaB association - in connection with their secondary activities in guest accommodation (e.g. in regional tourism initiatives) is primarily characterised by personal networks and regional specificities; an institutionalised exchange with all regional tourism associations or other initiatives for regional development does not take place.

At regional level, rural regions in particular benefit greatly from Leader projects. In this way, the region can be made more attractive and innovations can be implemented.

### **What are the barriers for rural tourism?**

With regard to barriers, a distinction must be made in Austria between regions that are well developed for tourism (Alpine region and lake regions).

One problem of tourism in rural areas can be seen in the often poor accessibility. Public transport is not developed enough for the specific region and is often inappropriately timed.

The status quo of tourism mobility in rural areas shows that cars, motorbikes and motorhomes/caravans play the primary role, accounting for 83% of the main means of transport for travel between 2011 and 2018. However, it is precisely this individual transport that conflicts with the sustainable development of tourism and the sought-after travel motives such as intact nature and recreation.

The consequences caused by traffic range from noise and pollutant emissions to land consumption and fragmentation to emissions of climate-damaging gases and have a negative impact on people and the environment. Consequently, a shift in tourism mobility in rural areas from individual transport to public

transport is necessary. However, the mobility offers of many rural regions are not or not sufficiently geared to the needs of tourists, which is why holistic concepts consisting of a combination of push and pull factors are needed to enable or accelerate a shift.

An environmentally friendly, holistic and demand-oriented mobility concept that takes into account the needs of tourists can not only reduce environmental and health impacts, but also contribute to the provision of public services and social participation by offering a more comprehensive range of services that could be co-financed by tourism.

In some places, the recreational path network with hiking, cycling, riding and water paths is insufficiently developed. In less touristic regions, the lack of infrastructure in terms of catering establishments such as restaurants or shops can also be a problem.

The intensification of agriculture, especially in favourable areas, can also have a negative effect on the tourism industry. In mountain areas, the abandonment of alpine farming is a problem for tourism, as cultivated cultural landscapes are lost: idyllic alpine pastures with cattle and sheep, meadows become overgrown and forested.

Climate change is also a major challenge for winter tourism. Last year showed that a lack of snow can also occur in supposedly snow-sure regions. Without artificial snow, skiing would be possible in very few regions. In terms of sustainability, however, snow production must be questioned, even if great efforts are made to keep the use of resources as low as possible.

The corona virus has had a negative impact on tourism in recent years.

The shortage of labour is becoming an increasingly urgent problem, especially in tourism - particularly in rural areas. According to the Chamber of Commerce, 30,000 additional people are currently needed. This also applies to the alpine huts needed for soft tourism in summer.

**Are there any training needs that are potentially identified as necessary for rural tourism?**

Tourism is currently characterised by a strong shortage of skilled workers. There are different training paths to become active in tourism. These range from apprenticeships to higher schools.

In the agricultural sector, the Organisation Urlaub am Bauernhof offers various advisory services and training courses.

The Economic Development Institute of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber offers a wide range of further education programmes. These range from gastronomic topics, marketing topics, languages, tourist guide activities to the culture of complaints.

In the field of nature education, there are different providers throughout Austria. The Austrian-wide platform for nature education, which is coordinated by the university college of agrarian and environmental pedagogy, provides an uniform certification and quality management.

## Characterisation of the profile of rural tourists/nature tourists

Please describe the characterisation of the profile of nature tourists. At least one experience analysing the internal and external environment of tourism linked to agricultural, livestock and forestry activities, and to identify barriers to the development of economic activity.

People and their motivations to holiday in rural areas vary.

The following characteristics apply to many:

- **Enjoying nature:** Outdoor activities, biodiversity, cultivated cultural landscape
- **Sports opportunities in rural areas:** Winter sports such as skiing, cross-country skiing etc., cycling, swimming, sailing, surfing, horse riding...
- **Prefer individual tourism:** no mass tourism,
- **Sustainable holiday:** shorter journey
- **High recreational value:** relaxing, calmer environment
- **Culinary quality:** regional Specialities

## Example 1

### **Farm Holiday: Moar zu Lessach hut** <http://www.moar-lessach.at/>

typical agricultural dairy farm in a nature park. The farm is run on a full-time basis, and a hut is also rented out for tourists.

#### **Internal environment:**

Streghts: Varied landscape, nature park, hiking possibilities, not far from the nearest ski area, secluded location/no neighbours, possibility to get to know a farm, traditional but comfortable furnishings in the house "cottage flair", but comfort like dishwasher and sauna, Possibility to get fresh milk in the barn every day, Sale of farm products, WIFI, own garden, promotion via the platform "Holiday on a farm"

Weeknesses: few indoor attractions nearby /rain programme, Arrival by public transport is not possible, resaurants and supermarkets cannot be reached on foot, no childcare facilities, No catering facilities

#### **External Environment:**

Opportunities: Growing demand for nature-based tourism experiences, increasing interest in sustainable and authentic travel, Additional income besides agricultural production

#### Threats:

Very high safety requirements that have to be met on the farm

Difficulties in getting additional staff to clean the hut

#### 4. Overview about the rural tourism in Romania:

**What are the local characteristics of rural tourism?** (e.g. mountain areas, flatland, etc. – what activities: Accommodation, meals, guided nature tours, etc.)

Romania has a favorable natural environment rural tourism purposes, and thus has the opportunity to act in the direction of preparation and promoting rural tourism offers to be aligned to international standards.

Because rural tourism is based on the characteristics of rural space and represent a desideratum of the existing socio-economic interests at the local level, the factors of influence on this type of tourism can be structured and that the bio-psychosocial factors, such as:

- modern Trend underscores the need to lead a healthy life, the concept is one of utmost topicality, rural areas are favorable to carrying out leisure activities, nature walks, cycling, climbing, etc., the countryside is considered the healthiest, tonificând body through clean air, unpolluted, quiet living environment devoid of major stress conditions;

- -It is very beneficial for children. This environment is conducive to health, children, vigoritații through both natural and nutrition through the link designed with nature, with an important role in shaping their formation, personality.

- Charged atmosphere of tranquility and peace, the stress, the rhythm of the city accelerated are the elements that have favored the orientation of tourists towards the place that offers the peace and tranquility much desired.

Any household that wants to enter the agrotourism circuit must first be assessed, and in possession of a certificate of conformity, certificate showing that a plurality of conditions requested.

At the moment, in Romania there are mainly two types of tourist structures of accommodation that are found in rural areas: touristic pensions and agrotouristic:

- touristic pensions – are structures of reception for tourists that offer the hosting and serving of the meal; they can make available between 3 and 20 rooms, operating in the homes of the

owners or in real estate who are independent, who can provide and means of leisure;

- boarding houses agro – tourist structures with the same functions as the guest house, having 3 and 10 of the rooms, in the same housing with the owner which ensures all the raw materials and food from their own resources or local.

The demand for practice rural tourism was increased from year to year as a result of changing conditions of life and mentalities regarding practicing forms of tourism including tourist presence in nature and active participation of the implementation of specific operations.

Romania has a rich natural and cultural potential in rural areas, which is a great advantage for attracting tourists to rural tourism and agro-tourism.

Increasing interest in rural tourism development and agro-tourism in Romania is based on:

- hospitality offered to tourists in rural areas by hosts (mountain areas, protected areas, traditional villages, agro-tourism, cultural heritage, wellness and relaxation)
- preserving traditions, customs and their valorization within the rural areas and agro-tourist boarding houses in Moldova, Apuseni, Bucovina, Maramures, Transylvania, Dobrogea, including the Danube Delta;
- the existence in many rural areas of traditional activities, a low degree of industrialized activities and pollution;
- existence of natural resources unaltered by industrial activity;
- the high quality of the services offered as well as the authentic, natural and traditional products and preparations offered within the agro-tourist boarding houses;
- possibility for tourists to participate in the activities within the household and to get in touch with the style and way of life specific to the Romanian rural areas;



- existence of associations working in the field of rural tourism and agro-tourism, which aim at developing this form of tourism, guaranteeing the quality and authenticity of rural products and services.

### **What is the economic importance of tourism in your country and what proportion of it is rural tourism?**

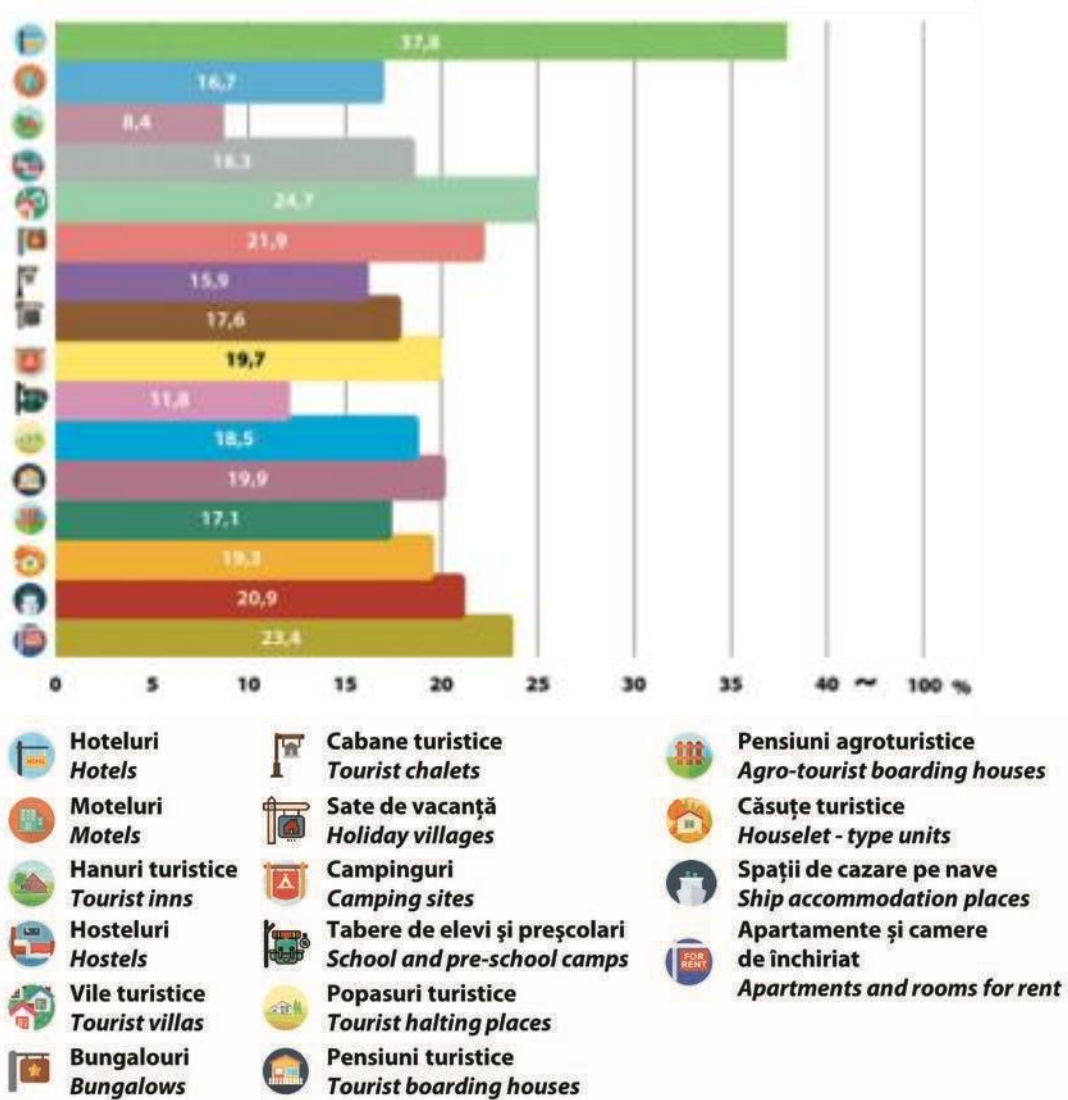
Tourism is an important sector of the economy of Romania. In 2019, tourism directly contributed RON 31.6 billion to Romania's economy, equating to 3.0% of total GDP. The sector directly supported 412 649 jobs, representing 6.3 % of total employment in Romania. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic saw tourism employment fall to 393 427 jobs in 2020, or 6.1% of the workforce.

International arrivals at the border totalled 5.0 million in 2020, a decrease of 61% when compared to 2019. International nights in registered accommodation declined by 81.1% to 1.0 million in 2020. An initial recovery in 2021 saw international nights return to 1.8 million, an increase of 83.7% compared to 2020. However, this remained 65.4% below the 2019 level. Romania's main source markets in 2020 were Germany, Italy, and France based on arrivals in accommodation units.

In 2021, domestic tourism remained a driver of recovery, totalling 19 million nights and 91.2% of total nights in accommodation establishments. After falling 44.4% in 2020, domestic tourists (in all accommodation types) recorded 8.5 million tourists in 2021, 20.2% below pre-pandemic levels.

Rural tourism occupies in 2022 roughly 28% out of the total touristic capacity in Romania.

**Net use indices of the tourist accommodation capacity in use, by type of establishments of tourists' reception with functions of tourists' accommodation, in 2022**



In Romania, the agro-tourism can contribute to sustainable development in rural areas through:

- sustainable use of tourism resources and maintaining the natural, cultural and social diversity of rural areas;
- integration of agro-tourism into national and local development planning and strategy;

- supporting local economies in the social and economic development of the community, but also in protecting nature and cultural values;
- development and promotion of local tourist offer.

After 1990, rural tourism started to develop in Romania. The core was the Moieciu-Bran area, and then the phenomenon spread throughout the country, as tourists began to prefer unpolluted air and tranquility in rural areas instead of hotels (Bran et al, 1997, p.128). Thus, the facilities for the development of rural tourism in the mountain area, the Danube Delta and the Black Sea coast were started.

The Romanian village is an original tourist product that generates tourist flows because it is based on:

- a wide range of natural and cultural resources;
- various tourist facilities and tourist experiences;
- traits of the specificity and uniqueness of our country: people, history, culture, traditions and customs.

The development of private property in Romania has led to an increase in accommodation capacity in agro-tourist boarding houses. Thus, according to the data in table no. 1, there is an increase in the number of accommodation places of the agro-tourist boarding houses from 9405 in 2004 to 30480 in 2014, which represents a growth of 3.4 times. This increase is due to the demand for holidays in rural areas of Romania, especially the demand from foreign tourists.

From 2004 until 2014, the trend of increasing accommodation capacity in agro-tourist boarding houses has been maintained, even during the economic crisis of 2007-2011.

This growth is based on investments made in rural areas in order to start a family business as a source of permanent income generated by rural tourism or as an additional income from agro-tourism.

If we consider the total accommodation capacity, there is only an increase of 12.8% in 2014 compared to 2004, when in the case of accommodation places (number of beds) in agro-tourist boarding houses and rural tourist boarding houses, there was an increase of 224%. This highlights the higher dynamics recorded by the rural tourism segment, including agro-tourism, in Romania.

However, this superior development in the case of rural tourism and agro-tourism does not indicate a mass tourism that contravenes the principles of sustainable tourism. This is evidenced by the data in.

In 2004, the accommodation in rural tourist boarding and agro-tourist boarding houses accounted for only 3.41% of the total existing accommodation capacity in Romania compared to 9.8% in 2014. It should also be noted that in Romania, accommodation is also carried out in the homes of the locals, without this being included officially in the tourist circuit. Therefore, the segment of rural tourism and agro-tourism is higher than that recorded in the statistical data, which means that rural tourism and agro-tourism represent a strong motivation among tourists, especially foreigners.

- Rural tourism and ecotourism are economic activities supported by the European policy for rural development and nature conservation, being considered on the one hand possibilities for diversification of the rural economy, and on the other hand important sources of income for the administrations of protected areas.
- • In the case of Romania, the importance of the resources, although very rich and diversified, for the development of tourism in general and of rural tourism and ecotourism in particular is relatively low, as long as they are not integrated into competitive tourist products, alongside basic tourist services and complementary, adapted to the specifics of resources and individualized by local characteristics
- • The low degree of use of the tourist capacity (below 15%), the short duration of the stay (two days) and the low proportion of foreign tourists are the most important challenges for the development of rural tourism and ecotourism in Romania
- • The general infrastructure and the level of development have an important effect on tourism
- • In the development of ecotourism development strategies, adaptation to local conditions, the implementation of zoning works, ensuring accessibility using low-polluting means of transport, the expansion of research into

ecotourism products or their various components must be taken into account.

- Tourist circulation trends allow the establishment of agro and ecotourism guesthouses either through new constructions or through the transformation of existing ones using the financial resources made available through the National Rural Development Program

**To what extent is tourism in rural regions linked to agriculture? Which typology of agricultural, livestock and forestry activities, are currently practising nature or rural tourism activities?**

**What innovative tourism offers are available in rural regions?**

Romania is one of the most biodiverse countries in Europe. The 27 national and natural parks, the Natura 2000 network and the cultural and historical heritage make this country an ideal ecotourism destination.

Through the Association of Ecotourism

**The network of ecotourism destinations in Romania**

An **ecotourism destination** is a micro-region with remarkable natural and cultural assets, where sustainable tourism can be conducted, offering integrated experiences with minimal environment impact, by aggregating a network of complementary ecotourism service providers under the same common marketing and development strategy.

The areas most suitable for ecotourism are, however, among the least developed in Romania, with low revenues, no economic opportunities and, many times, jeopardized by an "industrial" approach to development: deforestation, mass tourism or other activities that place nature and the unique values of the area at risk.



## To what extent is rural tourism promoted through public initiatives? How?

There are just dispersed small local initiatives done mainly by public authorities that initiate rural tourism promotion. There is no coherent initiatives done at a national scale on rural tourism.

## What are the barriers for rural tourism?

Rural tourism and agro-tourism represent a very important form of tourism for Romania, which contributes to the satisfaction of the tourism motivations specific to this tourist segment and also represents an alternative offered to the local communities to obtain an income.

Therefore, for its development it is necessary to consider:

- general infrastructure that negatively affects this form of tourism;

- inappropriate legislation in the field that does not provide enough facilities to local communities;
- infusion in rural areas of elements specific to urban tourism, which affect the specific characteristics of rural tourism and agro-tourism.
- Reduced mobility – infrastructure, trails, public transport to reach rural areas.
- Low quality of life for the local communities and access to fair payed jobs that lead to the abandonment of rural areas in search of higher salaries in urban areas
- Social infrastructure – there is still no access to quality public services services
- Lack of a coherent national strategy for developing and promoting rural tourism
- Development of the institutional capacity for the absorption of European funds
- Stimulating entrepreneurship for young people from rural areas
- Preservation of rural cultural heritage
- Development of authentic rural tourism products
- Availability of information on rural tourism and ecotourism destinations
- Promotion on the international market

In Romania, rural settlements with a tourist function, namely tourist villages, are not homologated and legalized by legislation, therefore they have not been identified, organized, arranged and promoted. In the rural area only the rural tourist boarding houses is promoted, without mentioning the ethnographic area it belongs to. Therefore, in many rural areas, rural tourist boarding houses were built without respecting local specific architecture and without the use of environmental friendly

building materials. This is very dangerous for rural tourism because it leads to the loss of local identity and the transmission of specific elements of urban settlements.

Consequently, in order to maintain the characteristics specific to the Romanian rural tourism, all measures must be taken to preserve unaltered and to protect the natural and cultural resources specific to rural areas and to establish strategies at central and local level for the promotion of rural tourism and agro-tourism, both internally as well as internationally.

## **SWOT Rural Tourism and ecotourism in Romania**

### **Strengths**

- Tourism representation at the central public authority level
- The national tourism brand almost exclusively promotes tourism products that include services and activities specific to rural tourism and ecotourism, emphasizing wild nature and cultural heritage
- High level of development of tourism associations that ensure the promotion of rural tourism and ecotourism, stimulation of entrepreneurial initiatives
- High-value, diversified and accessible tourist potential (protected areas, forests, cultural landscapes)
- Reduced tourist density in most protected areas and rural areas
- The offer of rural tourism and ecotourism products is in an intense development process that tends to include more and more valuable and unique aspects of rural life, but also of well-preserved nature inside and outside protected areas
- Events organized to keep alive and revive traditions and increase tourist attractiveness



- The administrations of the protected areas have developed ecotourism programs that are available in Călimani, Cheile Bicazului-Hăsmas, Comana, Cozia, Domogled-Valea Cernei, Lunca Muresului, Semenic-Cheile Carasului, Vânători-Neamt, Rodnei Mountains

## Weaknesses

- Very low degree of use of the tourist capacity, this being used in a proportion of only 13%, varying between 10% in the North-East region and 17% in the West region
- Very poor representation of foreign tourists in tourist traffic (8%)
- The average length of stay is very short, with episodic and insignificant overruns, highlighting an acute lack of complementary services intended to motivate the extension of the stay
- Reduced qualification for tourism of entrepreneurs and their family members, with a significant impact on the quality of services
- Disproportionate representation of regions in rural tourism products, with a concentration in Brasov county
- The non-existent or damaged arrangement of the majority of tourist attractions, with the exception of religious objectives
- Numerous accommodation structures intended for rural tourism and ecotourism are new constructions, whose architecture, size, location, interior design, conception is discordant compared to the traditional local context, aiming to capture the tourism-agriculture segment, motivated by romantic notions regarding rurality, the desire of spectacle, disneyification, myths, legends, rural clichés
- In the protected areas, only tourists with medium incomes are attracted, while in developed countries ecotourism is a form of tourism accepted by the segment with high incomes

- Nature-centered tourism products emphasize the adventure and relaxation component, relying on superficiality and less on education, learning, deep and authentic experiences, respectively the key characteristics of ecotourism products
- Weak connections with international networks for the promotion and distribution of rural and ecotourism products

## Opportunities

- The European programs for the promotion of quality and sustainable tourist destinations allow participation in thematic competitions of Romanian rural tourism and ecotourism products
- The emergence of a European tourism policy, which builds competitiveness on the basis of diversification, innovation, professional skills, the extension of the tourist season and the consolidation of the knowledge base.
- Diversification of the rural economy and obtaining income in protected areas have a priority position for tourism in the sphere of solutions, highlighted by the components of specific community policies (rural and environmental development).
- Ecotourism is the form of tourism with the most dynamic evolution, recording annual growth rates of 20%, six times higher than the growth rate of the tourism industry in general.
- The green economy, a strategic vision developed at the UNEP level for the preparation of the Rio+20 high-level conference, which will take place in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, includes investments and the development of ecotourism, emphasizing its role in job creation, community involvement local and poverty reduction.
- In the National Rural Development Program, "Encouraging the diversification of the rural economy and improving the quality of life in rural areas" has an important budget allocation (338.3 million euros) for the creation and diversification of tourist facilities and the development of tourist attractions. The Environmental Sectoral

Operational Program through axis 4 and the Regional Operational Program through axis 5 also provide financial resources for investments in rural tourism and ecotourism.

## Threats

- The negative image formed internationally for Romania.
- The continuation of illegal forest cutting in the context of an ineffective, corrupt and bureaucratic legal regime, which does not sanction either the owners, the exploiters or the intermediaries.
- Weak awareness, even among the rural population, of the heritage values represented by old buildings, furniture, costumes, tools and other elements of the traditional rural dowry.
- The high rate of poverty among the rural population, which encourages on the one hand the undervaluation of some heritage elements, and on the other hand discourages entrepreneurial initiative, especially on the part of young people.
- The initiation and consolidation of small and medium enterprises focused on rural tourism and ecotourism is a difficult process, as is accessing European funds.
- Urbanization of the rural environment, by taking over the facilities for living, but without preserving the traditional elements of the buildings (architecture, wood and stone decorations, furniture, flooring, fireplaces and stoves, etc.).
- The international and national economic and financial crisis, the influence of which is highlighted by the unfavorable evolution of key tourism indicators both at the national and regional level
- • Strong international competition and the weakening of the position of European destinations compared to those in North and South America, especially in the ecotourism component

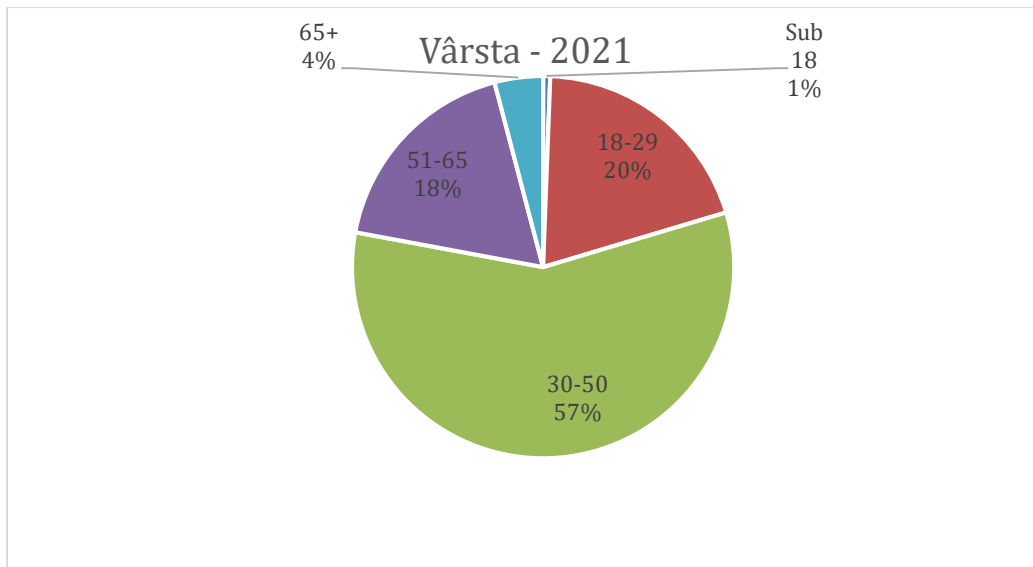
## Are there any training needs that are potentially identified as necessary for rural tourism?

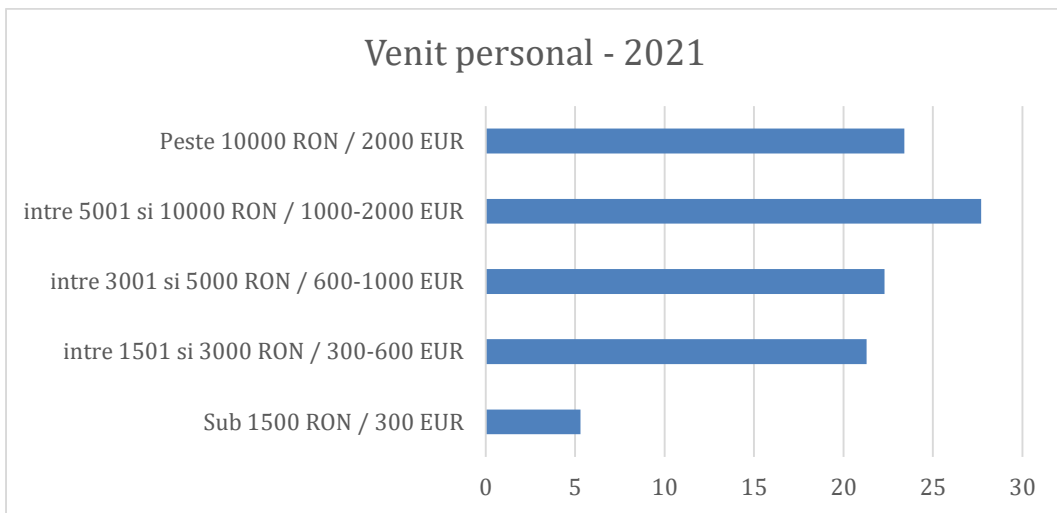
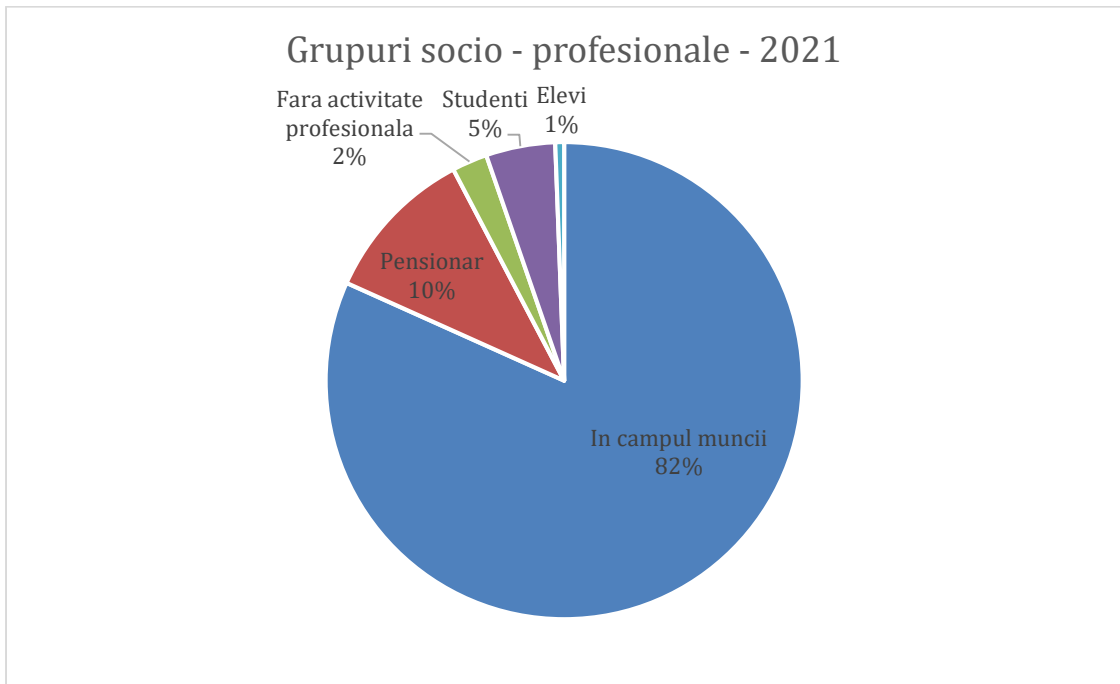
The main training need identified were on the following topics:

- Establishing and maintaining a local gastronomical point
- Business administration
- Marketing and promoting
- Destination manager

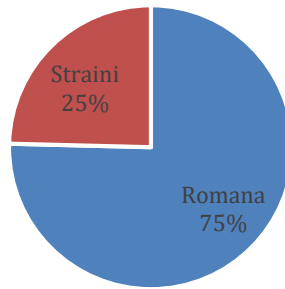
## Characterisation of the profile of rural tourists/nature tourists

Please describe the characterisation of the profile of nature tourists. At least one experience analysing the internal and external environment of tourism linked to agricultural, livestock and forestry activities, and to identify barriers to the development of economic activity.

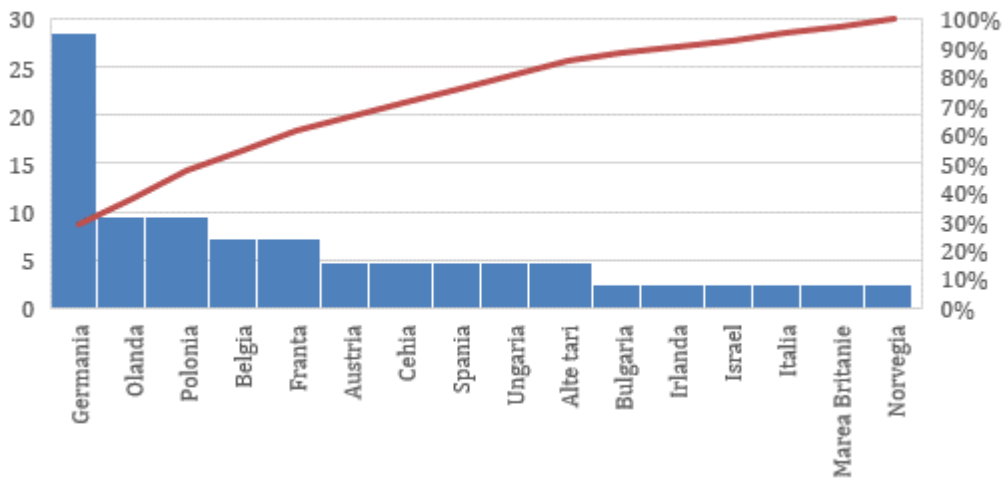


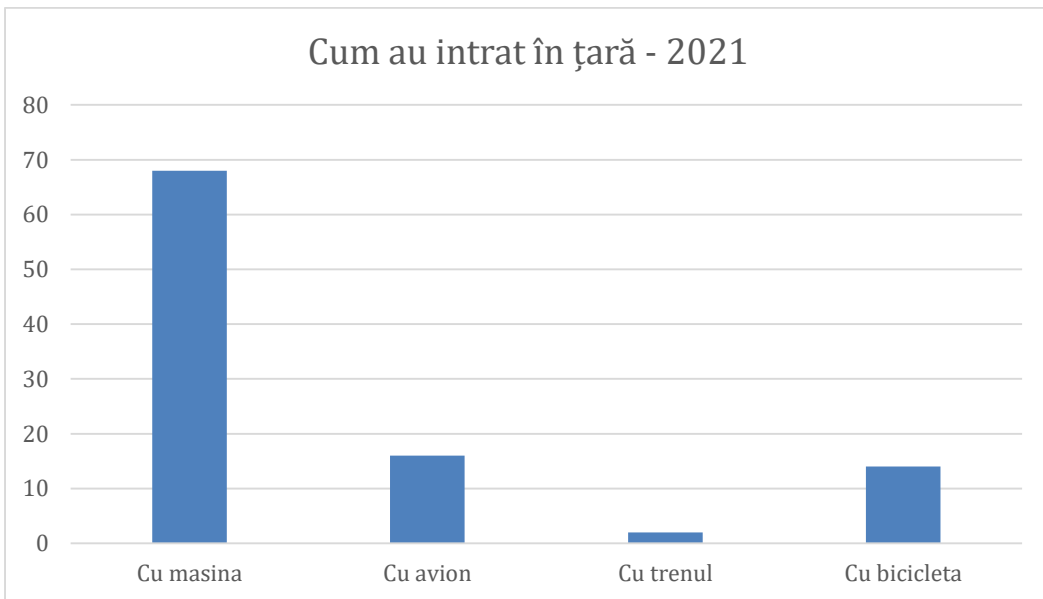
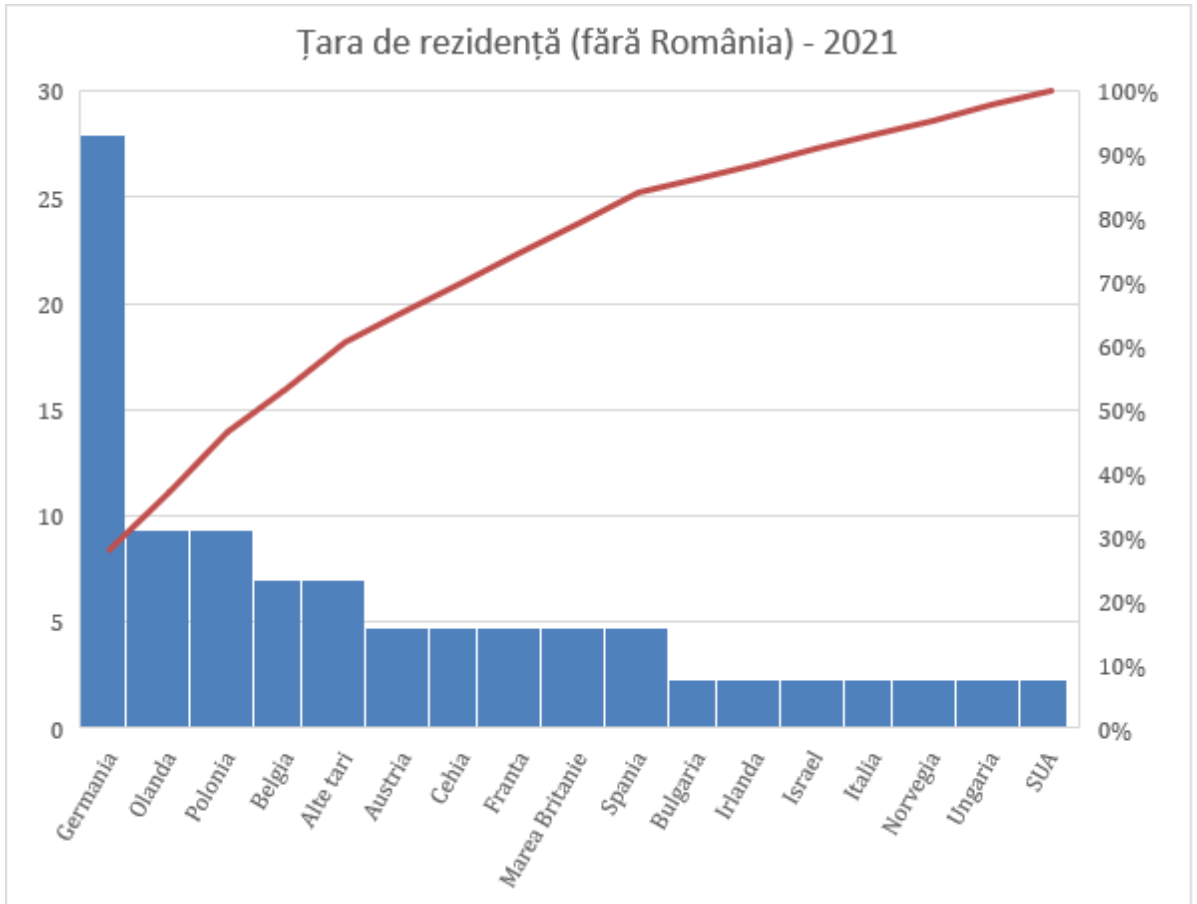


### Cetățenie - 2021

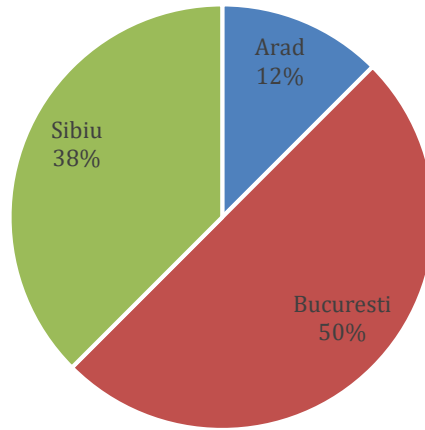


### Țara de proveniență (fără România) - 2021





### Aeroportul unde au aterizat - 2021



### Prima dată în România - 2021

