Particularities of Rural Tourism Services in Tarnava Mare Area

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Abstract. This paper presents the main characteristic of the services that offered by the rural tourism guesthouse from Tarnava Mare area. Beside the fact that the particularities regarding the quality and the variety of the services offered by these guesthouses were analyzed, also the perceptions of the tourists regarding the quality of the services the benefit from were analyzed. This research was based on two questionnaires, one for the owners of the guesthouse and other for the tourists.

Keywords: guesthouse, rural tourism services variety

INTRODUCTION

During the last years the rural tourism from Romania developed, the number of guesthouse increase and also the number of tourists that choose this kind of tourism [1, 2]. Previous studies also relived the fact that over 90% of those that are practicing this kind of tourism in Romanian rural area are national tourist [2].

The main well known areas for rural tourism are: Maramures, Lunca Ilevi, Bucovina, Danube Delta, Bran-Rucar, Sibiu Area and Apuseni Mountains. This paper is focused on Tarnava Mare area, where ADEPT Foundation is developing its activity. During the last year the activity of the foundation regarding the tourism activities has been improved, and more and more services are offered to their customers.

If a look is taken to the data offered by The National Institute of Statistics regarding the Romanian tourists during the period 1998 – 2007, it can be observed that the number of those whom chosen to spend their holiday outside Romania is no less than 3.5 higher that those that spent the holiday in their country. Some reasons that could influence this trend can be: the increase of life standards, the ration between the quality and the price of the Romanian tourist services.

Also a SWOT analysis published by Business Monitor International in the Romania Tourism Report Q1 2009, regarding the Romanian tourism services relived the fact that the poor quality of the tourist services offered represents a threat for the Romanian tourism.

The objective of this research was to see which are the main characteristic of the services offered in Tarnava Mare area, and can be done to improve on hand the quality of the services offered, and on the other what can be done to attract more and more tourists to this area, and not only.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the purpose of this paper during the period 10th – 15th of May 2009, seven guesthouses from Tarnava Marea area were visited and a questionnaire was applied to the
owners. Also a questionnaire using the SERVQUAL method and QUALITEST method was applied to the tourists accommodated in these guesthouses. This research was possible with the help of ADEPT Foundation which is running tourism activity in this area.

The questionnaire has eleven questions, also open question and as well multiple choice questions.

Tarnava Mare area of South-Eastern Transylvania is one of the Europe’s most important natural and cultural landscapes, including some of the finest pristine wildflower rich grasslands – the result of centuries of good husbandry by local farming communities, who are still managing the land today in a way that has long protected the countryside and created a unique sense of place.

The churches of Viscri, Saschiz and Biertan are on the UNESCO World Heritage list and are among many that can be visited.

This area is well known because of the 30 churches that exist here, from which 10 are fortified and four are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Beside visiting these sights there are more activities to experience such as: observing the evening procession of cows returning to their owners’ homes for milking, traditional bread making, organic farming training scheme for young people, barrel making, blacksmith, charcoal burning, weaving and embroidery demonstration, visit to the beekeeper, visit to the shepherd, visit the goats and cheese making and sample traditional cakes, jams and pickles [5].

The research was conducted in four of the villages from this area: Saschiz, Crit, Viscri and Biertan. There have been visited: 1 guesthouse from Viscri and Biertan, 3 guesthouses from Viscri and 2 guesthouses from Saschiz.

QUALITEST is a tool for the Quality Performance Evaluation of tourist destination. This tool is based on two questionnaires one designed for the tourists and one for the tourism industry and it was used to evaluate the quality in fifteen rural destinations from all over Europe.

The SERVQUAL method was first developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry in 1985. According to this, perceived service quality can be expressed as follows:

$$\text{Perceived service quality} = \text{perceived service (P) – expected service (E)}$$

It is necessary to be mention that this research is a pilot study in order to improve the future studied that want to be conducted in this area.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Analyzing the collected data it was observed the fact that from 7 of the visited guesthouses 6 of them are classified with 2 or less flowers, from it can be concluded that the services offered by these can be improved. It was also observed the fact that number of places in the majority of cases is over 4, even this only one of the guesthouse can assure bathroom for each room. In one special case, more exactly in Viscri village, the drainage does not exist, and this why the toilet is outside the house. This is one of the unpleasant facts remarked by the tourists.

Regarding the other facilities offered to tourists in forth of the cases these have access to internet, three of them also have a playground for children.

Other services offered to tourists are the possibility of tasting different kind of traditional foods and beverages such as: jam from different kind of fruits, like: blackberry, strawberry, quince tree and so on; goat cheese, sheep cheese, venison, home made drinks from fruits, alcoholic and non-alcoholic.
From the total number of the visited guesthouses two of them have no authorization from a specialized body regarding the tourism activity. In all the cases the guesthouse has no employees and for all them this represents a source of supplementary income. During the last year three of the owners have followed the special courses organized by ADEPT in order to improve their services. Part of these courses was focused on the gastronomy, hygiene and serving of the meals.

Even if they do not have specialized employees, the score registered in the case of the responsiveness and empathy dimensions, from the questionnaire designed for tourists, are positive which shows that fact that the personnel are receptive to the tourists’ problems and needs and they are always willing to help them [3].

Being asked for how long the guesthouse was opened last year, three of the owners declared that the pension was opened the whole year, while the rest declared 6 months, from April to September. In one case the guesthouse was opened from July to December, being the first year of activity.

Being asked which the total number was on nights registered with tourists it was observed that only two of the guesthouses keep their records accurately, and could answer to this question. Form here it can be deducted that most of the guesthouse do not register all the tourists to whom they assured accommodation, during the last year, and part of the income from this activity is not declared, so the owners do not pay any kind of fee to the state for that money. The tariff practiced during the last year by the guesthouse started from 35 lei in the case of two flowers pensions, only for the accommodation, and ended to 85 lei for bed and breakfast. As previous mention the tourists were also asked to fulfil a questionnaire. Being asked how they consider the price of the services from which they have benefit 50% answered that the price paid for the services was high, while only 1 person from 50 answered that is was small.

It was surprising to find out that the average length of stay declared by the owners of the guesthouse was of 2 days, while the average length of stay of the inquired tourists was 3.5 days, from here it can be deducted that the services have been improved compared with the previous year and the tourists are more and more attracted to this area.

From the total number of respondents 40 per cent of them considered the quality of the accommodation used as being poor, while 30 per cent considered it very poor, only 10 per cent of them believed it excellent. Having this information the owners of the guesthouse should improve the facilities of the pension. Regarding the quality of information on things to do in the destination, 40 per cent consider it very good, while 30 per cent consider it excellent. From here it can be concluded that the owners of the guesthouses are well informed about the attractions from the area and in case they may become a guide for the tourists.

The friendliness of the local people was once confirmed 60 per cent of the interviewed considering it excellent while 40 per cent very good. But even this is not enough if the proper service is not delivered to the tourists. Asked about the cleanliness of the local environment 40 per cent of the tourists considered it very good, while 50 per cent poor. For improving all these aspects, efforts should be done by the public authorities in collaboration with the local people, so they could have a more clean area, and take advantages of all the natural and anthropical attractions form this area.

CONCLUSIONS

As it was observed, Tarnava Mare Area has great potential for developing rural tourism services, but still there are a few aspects that should be improved. For instance, the
problem regarding the introduction of a sewer system in Viscri village is one aspect that should be taken into consideration, because no matter the attractive is this area and the fortified church, this is unpleasant issue for the tourists, expressed not only on comfort guarantee, but on hygiene assurance too.

Future study should be conducted to see which the more attractive sights from this area are, and to see what can be done in order to determine the tourists to visit the area. Having all information regarding the best and the worst thing that the tourist have visited, upcoming actions could be taken and improved the quality of the services offered.

It is true that the area is recognized for its archaeological sights and the gastronomy, but even that the proper accommodation facilities should be assured.

REFERENCES

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