

Ecotourism: Important Segment of the Romanian Tourism

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Abstract

The application of current principles of sustainable tourism development in natural areas has led to the emergence of ecotourism as a distinct form of tourism, designed to respect the integrity of natural landscapes, ecological biodiversity, in accordance with the requirements of certain segments of tourists, who want to spend their holidays in nature.

This study aims to present the current situation of protected natural areas and stage of development of ecotourism activities within and around them and come up with a set of strategic proposals to guide recovery efforts for these destinations through ecotourism, in accordance with the requirements of national legislation and international conventions to which Romania is a party.

Keywords: ecotourism, ecotourist, ecotourism resources, protected areas, ecotourism programs.

J.E.L. Classification: O13, Q26

1. Introduction

Ecotourism is a form of alternative tourism and must include the following elements: the product is based on nature and its elements, environmental management in the service of a minimal impact, contribution to conservation contribution to the welfare of local communities, environmental education.

A definition of law in Romania officially taken over is that: ecotourism is a form of tourism is the primary objective observation and awareness of the nature and value of local traditions and which must meet the following conditions:

- a) contribute to the conservation and protection of nature;*
- b) use of local human resources,*
- c) have an educational, respect for nature - awareness of tourists and local communities,*
- d) have insignificant negative impact.*

Recovery of the natural environment is one of the key requirements of ecotourism. From this perspective ecotourism interfere with other forms of travel based on nature. Thus, ecotourism activities may include:

- ✓ types of adventure activities (example: rafting, canoeing, equestrian tourism predetermined routes, ski touring, bike tours arranged routes, etc.);
- ✓ tours / trips organized guided tours;
- ✓ observation of nature (flora, fauna);
- ✓ experimental trips to the conservation of nature, local communities;
- ✓ trip (visiting cultural sites, visiting traditional farms, watching traditional cultural events, consumption of products.

In the category of **ecotourist** can enter a person when staying in an ecotourism resort buys a one-day program in a nearby national park, even if their activities in nature is only a small part of his stay. The following figure presents the ecotourism in the tourism market, it appeared that a below market tourism in natural areas, while having strong links with cultural and rural tourism.

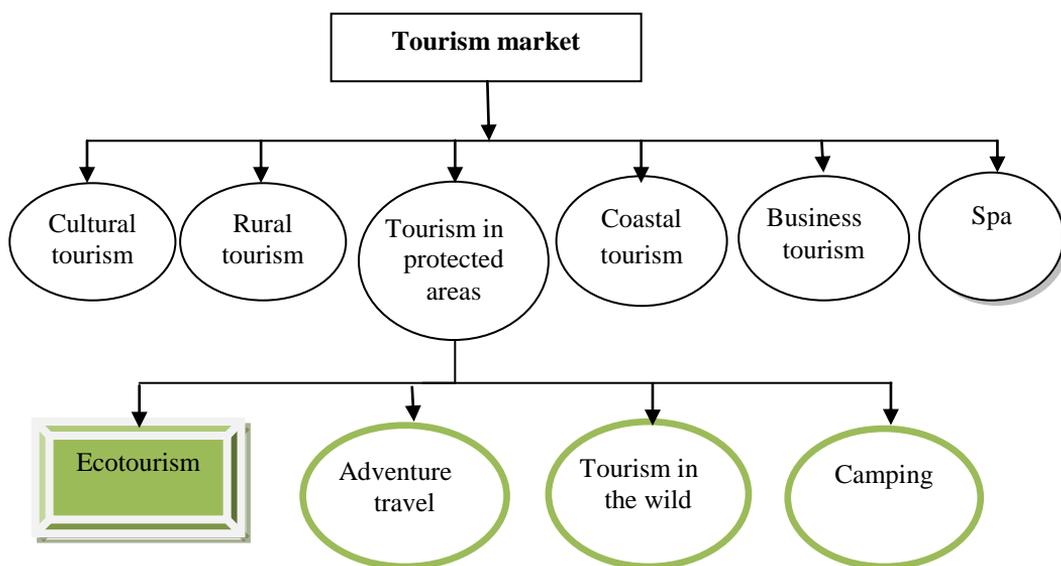


Figure 1: Ecotourism as a market segment

Source: Megan (2002), Eagles (1997)

The ecotourism is trying to minimize negative effects on the local environment and natural and human population. Areas of concern are considered practical, enabling the imposition of special hardship, with beneficial effects on traditional lifestyles of local people. This type of tourism can promote interaction between local people and tourists, and a real interest in protecting natural areas, not only in receiving areas, but also in emitting countries.

Natural areas have important advantages for the development of recreational activities, activities that can bring significant income, so those who manage them and

local communities. Although it is quite difficult to measure, and the results are often quite difficult to see in the short term, tourism is one of the few economic sectors that can realize sustainable development of these areas, and ecotourism is the most accepted sustainable tourism for any country and region of the world.

Developing ecotourism activities in local communities and within protected areas involves a series of *socio-economic benefits*, namely:

- triggering *jobs locally* (directly in tourism or related sectors);
- stimulate the local economy through *infrastructure development* and *tourism services* (accommodation, food, transport, recreational facilities, products and services to handle craft, souvenirs);
- *stimulate the rural economy* by creating or increasing demand for agricultural products necessary for the tourist services;
- boost *infrastructure development*, which equally benefits the local population,
- stimulates the *development of peripheral regions* by insertions of capital;
- *promote the improvement of intercultural relations* in a region. Tourists often seek to know the specific customs and traditions of ethnographic regions, and the host community is encouraged to revive such folk traditions;
- in conditions of normal development, *tourism development can lead to self-financing mechanisms* that can benefit managers of *protected areas as a tool for conservation*;
- *support conservation activities*, by persuading governments and the public on the importance of natural areas.

By broadening the spectrum ecotourism can provide traditional economic activities, without marginalizing them or substitute for the local economy and not be subject to external influences and internal changes. Tourist activities carried out under the banner of ecotourism opportunities specific local population and tourist industry are forced to use natural resources in a sustainable manner and to assess the valuable natural and cultural objectives.

According to the Association of Ecotourism in Romania, the economic damage caused by ecotourism programs run by tour operators in the country EAR value our members is increasing obvious to 0.95 million in 2004 to about 1.6 million in 2008. But what is remarkable is that the local impact of tourism is much more than traditional media. If 80-90% AER members of the expenditure of tourists remain in the deployment of the tour, predominantly rural area.

Given that ecotourism is a niche form of tourism, but still very dynamic, taking into account the environmental regulations adopted in our country, the economic, social and cultural tourism can bring to local communities, but also negative effects that a chaotic development, uncontrolled tourism can generate, replace increasingly common issue of achieving ecotourism development strategy, a strategy that should be tightly correlated with the strategy of tourism development at national level (National Tourism Development Master Plan), development strategies of local tourism (tourism development strategies in protected areas) and the National Strategy for Sustainable Development.

2. Ecotourism resources in Romania

Romania has a highly varied natural capital. It is the only country on the continent that are present within 5 of the 11 European biogeographical regions (Alpine, Continental, Pannonian, and Pontic steppe).

Semi-natural ecosystems and about 47% of the country. Have been identified and 783 types of habitat (coastal habitats 13, 143 specific wetland habitats, grassland and grassland habitats specific 196, 206 forest habitats, 90 specific dune habitat and rocky areas and farmland habitats 135) analyzed in 261 areas across the country.

The conservation of biological diversity, in Romania there were numerous *protected natural areas* (more than 7% of the country or around 18% if taken into account and Natura 2000) and in future it is envisaged enlargement of the network.

According to GEO, 57/2007, protected area is defined as; “*the area of land, water and/or groundwater that there are species of wild plants and animals, biogeographic elements and formations, landscape, geological, paleontological, and other caving, environmental value, scientific or cultural importance, which has a special protection and conservation as prescribed in the law*”.

In Romania there are 28 major protected areas of national interest, namely the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, 13 national parks and 14 natural parks (Fig. 2):

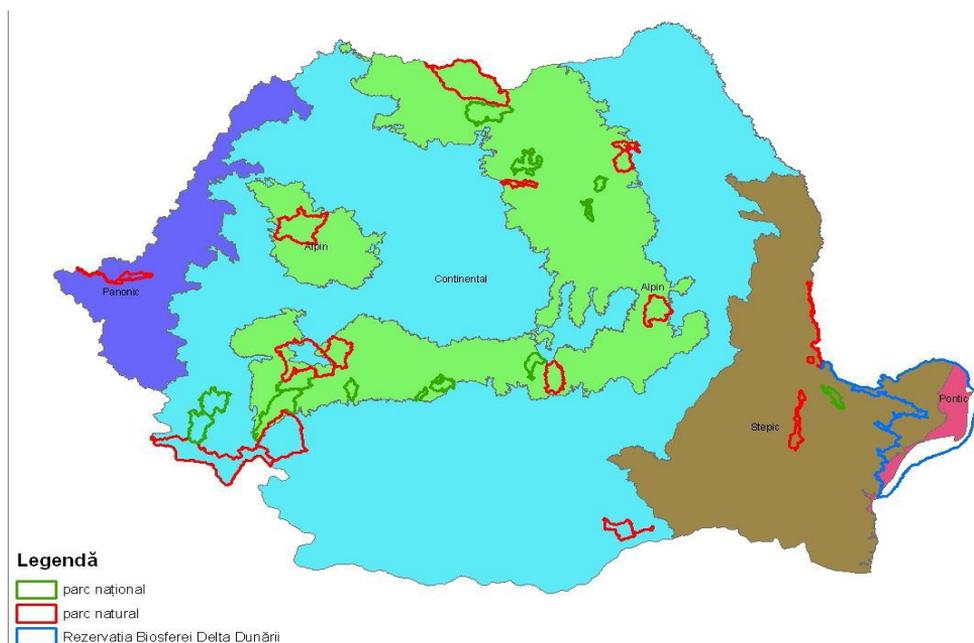


Figure 2: National parks, biosphere reserves in natural and bioregions

In addition to these major protected areas at national level there are 941 scientific reserves, natural monuments and nature reserves whose total area is approximately 316,012.6 hectares. Given the fact that many of these protected

areas are included in the large protected areas (national parks, nature parks and biosphere reserves) the total area of protected areas in Romania (except for Natura 2000) covering 1,702,112 ha, which represents over 7% of the land area country. A good part of the national territory is covered by the Community network of protected areas Natura 2000:

- 108 sites SPA (Special Protected Bird Areas), representing approximately 11.89% of Romanian territory - established by Government Decision no. 1284/2007;
- SCI 273 sites (Sites of Community Importance), representing approximately 13.21% of Romanian territory - established by Order no. 1964/2007 of the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development.

Cumulative, sites included in the Natura 2000 European network covers approximately 17.84% of the country (part of SCI and SPA are overlap).

The value of tourism resources in each territorial administrative units located within or close to the 28 major protected areas can be depicted on the basis of the documentation what was the basis of *Law no. GEO No. 190/2009 for approval. 142/2008 concerning the approval of the National Landscaping Section VIII - areas with tourist resources.*

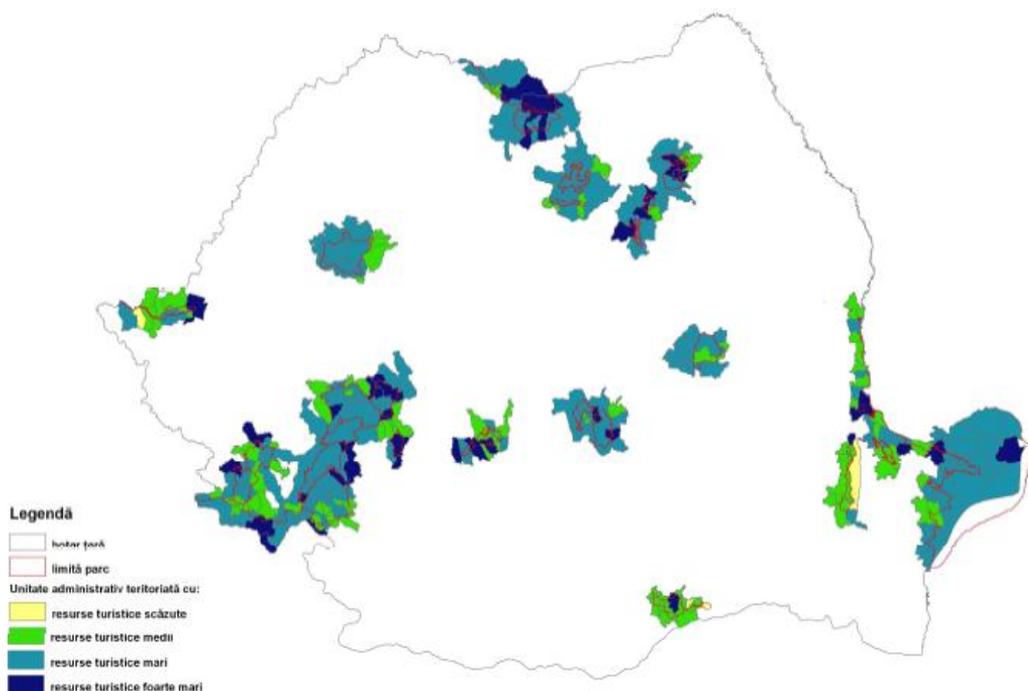


Figure 3: Territorial administrative units within and nearby the major protected areas in Romania

Of the 276 municipalities located within or near major protected areas in Romania, it is estimated that 35 towns have a high value tourism resources, tourism resources have 148 places a high value, 89 settlements have valuable tourist resource average and only four settlements have a low value of tourist resources.

2. Ecotourism programs

Ecotourism programs in Romania are offered for sale through local tour operators, who typically works with tour operators abroad. Among them are five notes and tour operators selling ecotourism programs certified by the Association of Ecotourism in Romania (DiscoverRomania, Carpathian Tours InterPares, Tioc Nature & Study Travel, Equus Sylvania). Among the major travel agencies in Romania, which have developed in recent years, nature tourism programs is remarkable parallels 45 J'Info Tours, Perfect Tour, Transylvania tour, etc.

The main focus areas for ecotourism programs in Romania are:

- ✗ Dobrogea and Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (bird watching, boating);
- ✗ National Park and its surroundings (in particular programs based on observation of large carnivores (wolf, bear, lynx), but also of specific plant species, equestrian tourism, cycling, hiking, etc.);
- ✗ Apuseni Mountains Natural Park (speotourism, themed trips, cultural programs, ski touring, tourism, equestrian, cycling etc.).
- ✗ other protected natural areas, some national park or natural status: Yosemite National Park - Country Dinosaurs Geopark Hațegului, Macin Mountains National Park, Rodnei Mountains National Park, National Park Calimani Mures Floodplain Natural Park, Hunters Neamț Natural Park, with programs focused on: Travel equestrian, cycling, hiking theme, ski touring, observing flora and fauna, cultural programs, canoe expeditions etc.
- ✗ Transylvania - Târnava the Great (Saxon culture discovery and Székely, horseback riding, hiking, theme, etc.);
- ✗ Maramures (discovery of nature programs, horseback riding, cycling, discovering occupations and traditional architecture, etc.);
- ✗ Bucovina (Observation programs or thematic nature hike combined with cultural tourism and tourism-monastic).

A series of fleet administration for the serious efforts of developing and selling tour packages. In this regard, some examples are: *National Park Administration* has compiled a series Călimani ecotourism programs 1, 2, 3, 4 or 6 days:

- Riding through the mountains to the 12 Apostles,
- Riding to the Read Roks,
- Ridind the crest of the volcanic Călimani,

- Haihua, riding through Călimani,
- Riding on roads Maria Teresa.

These five programs are oriented with an attendant on horseback visiting the numerous natural Calimani. Accommodation is in tents.

- Junior Ranger (green camp aimed at children between 10-18 years).

Gorge National Park Administration, Hășmaș ecotourism programs offer a series of 1 and 2 days:

- Walking in the land Ghilcos – “Killer Mountain”;
- Walking in the land "Mills Devil";
- Walking in the land of "Garden Fairies";
- Walk through the "Gorges Gorges - the Land of Hell"

Programs are oriented excursions accompanied by tour guide, presenting Red Lake surroundings, flora and fauna, geomorphology, local legends, shooting and shooting ability of wild animals and their habitats.

Comana Natural Park Administration has developed an ecotourism program for 2 days: "Week-end reserve the thorn."

Under this program includes visiting the thorn Reserve, boating on the Pond Comana, birds-watching, visiting the monastery Comana.

National Park Administration has conducted several programs ecotourism tails of four days:

- "Journeys Cozia legends";
- "Hiking in the realm of Dacian treasures";
- "Hiking the wooded paths of the Narățului”.

These are programs with accompanying guide, aimed at knowing the natural and cultural beauty of the park and its immediate vicinity (Lotrișorului waterfall, Lotrișorului keys, unique forest vegetation associations, places of sightseeing, hinge teeth, tusks of Damascus, tails Monastery, Monastery Turnu Călimăneștiului Ostrovul Hermitage, Roman Camp Arutela etc.). Accommodation is in tourist guesthouses in the neighborhood.

Administration Domogled-Cerna Valley National Park promotes ecotourism program for three days: "Tradition and spectacular nature"; Under this program you can admire the natural beauty of the resort area Herculane are visiting isolated communities in the area, offering the opportunity to interact with them.

Mureș Floodplain Natural Park Administration is promoting a series of eight programs of ecotourism, with times of 1 or 3 days:

- "Ecotur Mureș Floodplain Natural Park and Nature Reserve Runcu thick";
- "Canoe trip and back on the bike in Mures Floodplain Natural Park";
- "Watching the landscape of meadows and islands of the canoe or kayak Mureș";
- "Watching the birds of the observer Bezdin";

- Large mammals in the wild pursuit of observer";
- "Watching the forest, meadow and visiting archaeological items and/or religious bicycle";
- "Watching the forest, meadow and visiting points of archaeological and natural wonders on foot";
- "Visiting the area Prundul Mare Nature Reserve - marsh ecosystems, aquatic, forest, water lily Pond".

Programs include cycling, canoeing, bird and mammal tracking of observatories, visiting cultural sites (archaeological points, monasteries), admiring the riverside forest, visiting a shelter. Accommodation is in the center of Enterprise Ceala.

National Park Administration Semenic - Caras Gorge ecotourism offers four programs of 2 days with the following themes:

- History and tradition Semenic,
- Silvotourism in Semenic,
- Karst,
- man-made lakes.

The programs focus on visiting the representative of the park. Overall the accommodation is in chalets / forest cantons.

- Troops-Neamt Natural Park Administration offers a series of tourist programs focused on the natural and cultural sites on the range of the park, lasting 1 or 4 days;
- "Tour of radius monasteries Neamt Natural Park Hunters" (track only car);
- "Nature and the Sacred " (combined road pedestrian and auto).

Rodnei Mountains National Park Administration held a series of ecotourism programs (horseback or hiking with a guide), with durations of 1, 2, 3 or 5 days:

- Riding on the Mountain Glade daffodil Saca (1 or 3 days);
- rode Rodna (5 days),
- Hiking in Lake Ineu and Lala (one day),
- Hiking in Ineu (one day),
- Hiking the Horse Falls - Lake Stiol (one day),
- Hiking the Horse Falls - Lake Stiol - Prislop (one day),
- Hiking on the trail Borsa Pietroasă - Lake Iezer - Pietrosu Peak - Main Ridge - Borsa Complex (2 days),
- Hiking on the trail Moses - Iza Spring - Old Saddle - Tarnița the Cross - Pietrosu Peak - Lake Iezer - Borsa (2 days),
- Hiking on the trail Black Spring (Monastery) - Spring-tip Iza Pietrosu - Bor (3 days),
- Borsa - Peak-Peak Pietrosu Ineu - Round Step (3 days).

Partnerships with niche tour operators would contribute greatly to the success of these thematic programs.

3. Tourist Movement

Protected areas in Romania was a major incentive travel for many residents and foreign tourists, mainly from Central European countries. Currently, as long as there is no system of charges for tourists at the entrance to the park, there is a record number of visitors, it can only be estimated.

According to estimations, these areas currently attract around 2.3 million visitors. Among these notes Bucegi Natural Parks (about 1 million visitors), Hunter Neamt (400,000), Apuseni (300,000), the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (100,000 tourists stay), the Iron Gates (60,000), Putna-Vrancea (40,000) National Parks and National Park (80,000), Semenic - Caras Gorge (60,000), tails (50,000) Ceahlău (33.000).

Although the estimated number of visitors in the natural and national parks is quite high, however, bear in mind that only a small fraction of them were motivated by the practice of ecotourism. In the National Tourism Development Master Plan 2007-2026 is estimated that the total volume of foreign ecotourism is somewhere between 10,000 and 25,000. Mostly this is due to the existence of a limited number of eco-tourism programs in a small number of parks, the poor transport infrastructure (visitor centers, information, educational trails, observing animals, etc..) and a promotion inadequate. Other categories of tourists visiting national parks / natural in Romania are: tourists on the weekends (in most parks, but especially those located near major cities), tourists who practice religious tourism (Hunter Neamt, tails, Buila Vanturarita Meadow Mureș Ceahlău Comana), tourists who practice sport fishing (Danube Delta, Iron Gates, Meadow Mures, Braila Low Moor, Lower Prut Floodplain, Comana) mountain tourism (hiking, mountain climbing, climbing, sports Winter - national parks and mountain areas), adventure travelers, researchers, students (Scientific tourism), etc. cyclotourists.

Conclusions

Ecotourism programs in Romania have a relatively recent history. Such packages first appeared around 2000, when a series of national and natural parks have begun to undertake projects that were a component of ecotourism (Retezat National Park, Hunter Neamt, Apuseni).

Our country has a high biological diversity, expressed both in terms of ecosystems and species level. In addition, lack of mechanization in the forestry

sector and weak economic growth have led a more limited resources than in most other parts of Europe.

It is important to note that using an appropriate infrastructure management, protected areas (with some exceptions - for example Bucegi Natural Park) could receive more visitors without impacting the environment. That would allow it to generate more revenue from tourism and to improve the current poor financing of protected areas.

In 2008, approximately 85% of financial funds available to the park came from state sources (Alan Kerslake, Mehedinti Neamt County Councils, University of Bucharest), not from the state budget, 12% of the various projects and only 3% own income (from access charges, sponsorships, guided tours, accommodation etc.).

Romania is perceived internationally as a country unexplored and unknown, this could be the basis of future promotional campaigns. We have made great strides in the ease with which you can open a business in our country. According to a study by the World Bank, Romania ranks 47 out of a total of 181 countries analyzed.

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