

DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL TOURISM IN VELIKO TARNOVO ON THE EXEMPLE OF THE TOURISM EXHIBITION „CULTURAL TOURISM”

Abstract: Among the modern types of tourism, the development of cultural tourism is becoming more and more important. Bulgaria and Veliko Tarnovo in particular offer great opportunities for its development. The rich cultural and historical heritage of the town of Veliko Tarnovo turns the city into one of the most popular tourist destination in Bulgaria. Thus, the annual Cultural Tourism event held in Veliko Tarnovo can become an important stimulus for the development of international cooperation in the field of culture, education, economy and tourism.

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1. Introduction

Among the modern (specialized) tourism types, the development of cultural tourism is becoming increasingly important. It is no coincidence that 2018 is declared European Year of Cultural Heritage. Bulgaria and Veliko Tarnovo in particular offer great opportunities for its development. The object of the study is the development of the cultural tourism in Veliko Tarnovo and the new opportunities offered by the international exhibition „Cultural Tourism”.

2. Definition of cultural tourism

According to the tourism industry's vocabulary, cultural tourism is „a journey to experience the art or the history of a destination or a journey to communicate with the language, the lifestyle or the culture in an area” [5].

In the Cultural Tourism Charter of the International Council for Cultural Monuments and the Famous Places ICOMOS, cultural tourism is defined as „a form of tourism whose main purpose is the rediscovery of monuments and sites. It exerts an extremely positive influence on them insofar as, in order to achieve its objectives, it contributes to their maintenance and preservation” [3].

According to the Irish Tourism Board (ITB): „Cultural tourism is a journey undertaken with the intention of enriching someone's notion of European cultural values” [4].

According to S. Mileva, „cultural tourism is another type of specialty tourism, whose popularity continues to grow. Cultural tourism is considered to be any form of tourism in which the participation in cultural, educational or cultural heritage activities is the leading factor in the undertaking of the tourist trip” [6].

For E. Kostov the cultural tourism is: „Specialized tourist trip, motivated by satisfaction of socio-cultural needs through consumption of cultural values” [4].

On the basis of the definitions presented, we can conclude that the term „cultural tourism” refers to all trips for the purpose of visiting cultural and historical sites and gaining knowledge of the cultural heritage of a destination, such as heritage covering architecture, stage and visual arts, literature, festivals, the way of life of the local population, local traditions and beliefs [5].

3. Veliko Tarnovo as a tourist destination

In the district of Veliko Tarnovo is one of the largest concentration places of cultural and historical monuments in the country. There are about 140 cultural monuments of national significance on its territory (almost 15% of all the monuments in the country), which are situated mainly in the municipalities of Veliko Tarnovo, Svishtov and Elena [1].

The rich cultural and historical heritage of the town of Veliko Tarnovo turns the city into one of the most popular tourist destination in Bulgaria. Every year more than 400 000 tourists visit the Medieval Bulgarian capital, with the tendencies for increasing the number of tourists considering the diversification of tourist attractions as well as improving the quality of the hotel services.

The old capital city is part of the cultural and historical destinations of the Ministry of Tourism: „Old Towns of Kings and Patriarchs in Bulgaria” and „Architecture and Crafts”. Veliko Tarnovo has recently been part of a new culinary tourism route and from the „New destinations” platform for business and tourism with the initiative „Creativity is the Road” [8].

Veliko Tarnovo is a starting point for the Roman Nicopolis ad Istrum, the ancient ceramic centers near Pavlikeni, Butovo, Hotnica, Emen canyon called Negovanka, Kilifarevo, Kapinovski, Preobrazhenski Monastery, etc. to Arbanasi, Elena, Dryanovo, Tryavna, Plachkovtsi, Bozhentsi [2].

In 2017 a total of 440 679 tourists visited Veliko Tarnovo, of which Bulgarians were 260,575. Visitors from abroad grew by 26% compared to 2016 and reached 180 107. They visit the museums in Veliko Turnovo and the neighboring village of Arbanassi and the cultural and historical landmarks, managed by the Regional Museum of History [9].

The largest number is the number of Europeans - 124 842, but the highest number of guests are from the United States - 27 339 arriving in Bulgaria on Danube Cruises, followed by Romania (26 872), Great Britain (14 839), Spain (13 700), France (13 623), Germany (9 927) and Austria (7 605). Interest has increased in museums and tourists from other continents. In 2017, 19 818 Asians were in the old capital, of which 8,250 Chinese and 2 170 Japanese, and Australians 3 122.

Among the most visited sites in Veliko Tarnovo are the Tsarevets fortress (Fig.1); Museum of Wax Figures, medieval churches-museums „St 40 Martyrs”, „St. Dimitar”, „St. George and Sts. Peter and Paul” in Asenov district; Museum „Revival and Constituent Assembly”; the Prison Museum, the Trapezitsa Fortress [11].



Fig. 1
The Medieval fortress of „Tsarevets”

Among the most visited museum objects in the village of Arbanassi are the unique church „Nativity of Christ”, Konstanzaliev's house, the church „St. Archangels Gabriel and Michael” (Fig. 2).

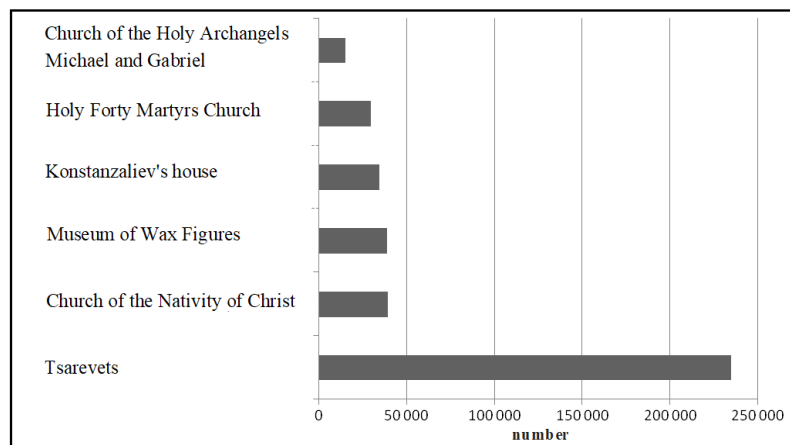


Fig. 2
Most visited tourist sites in Veliko Turnovo and Arbanassi

4. International Tourism Fair „Cultural Tourism”

The economic development of the city is directly dependent on the cultural-historical activities that attract a large number of visitors. The idea of organizing an international forum in Veliko Tarnovo for the purpose of holding the „Cultural Tourism Exchange” is from 2003.

It was then that the first cultural tourism exchange in Bulgaria took place, involving five municipalities and twenty artisan craftsmen. The exhibition has become a national forum and has become a specialized „international event”. The participants in the forum aim to promote their cultural-historical traditions, landmarks and local cultural events to stimulate local tourism and the economic development of the regions and the country. Gradually the traditional exhibition became a symbol of good practice of national significance. During the forum, one of the participants said: „Cultural tourism is the only way for nations to get to know their customs, customs and culture to get closer despite the artificial and impossible boundaries that are being created”.

The realization of the International Tourism Fair „Cultural Tourism” started as a joint project of the Municipality of Veliko Tarnovo, the Municipal Tourism Agency „Tsarevgrad Turnov”, the Bulgarian Hotel and Restaurant Association (BHRA) and the Association of Bulgarian Tour Operators and Travel Agencies (ABTTA). It is carried out with the support of the Ministry of Tourism.

The Fourteenth International Exhibition „Cultural Tourism 2017” was held in Veliko Tarnovo from 6 to 8 April 2017. The number of participants was over 70 Bulgarian and foreign exhibitors. In the days of the exchange, municipalities from the whole country, the embassies of Azerbaijan, Brazil, Vietnam, Palestine, South Africa, the partner cities of Veliko Tarnovo, Braga (Portugal), Bursa (Turkey), Ohrid (Macedonia), Sérres (Greece), Jaén (Spain), museums, non-governmental organizations, tour operators and touring companies presented attractive offers for new and popular destinations for cultural tourism [7].

Foreign guests presented themselves with their traditional food and beverages, which were offered on the stands accompanied by tastings and promotional materials for their attractive tourist destinations. The greatest interest was the presentation of the Portuguese city of Braga and the Spanish city of Jaén.

Braga is one of the oldest cities in Portugal and is an international partner of Veliko Turnovo since 2016. Gastronomy and wine tourism are the directions through which Braga is promoted as a tourist destination of the exhibition (Fig. 3). During the cultural exhibition, opportunities for partnership in the sphere of education, economy and other sectors were also discussed. „We have historical artefacts and beautiful buildings left behind, as Veliko Tarnovo has in abundance”, commented Antonio Barossa, secretary of the mayor of Braga.



Fig. 3
Advertising stand on city Braga

During the forum, project proposals were negotiated, including the opportunities that Veliko Tarnovo offers for joint activities in different fields such as art, culture, science, education and last but not least importance and business. Partnership perspectives were also discussed between universities and the academic communities of both cities.

For the first time, the Spanish city of Jaén, also known for the largest olive oil olive grove in the world, was presented at a tourism fair in Bulgaria. This is the most prosperous city in Andalusia. The Spanish city examines the successful model of Veliko Tarnovo for the development of cultural tourism and is a future city - partner of the old capital, the organizers pointed out (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4
Advertising stand on city Jaén

More than 50 Bulgarian and foreign exhibitors presented at the fifteenth edition of the International Tourism Fair „Cultural Tourism” from 19 to 21 April in Veliko Tarnovo. The exhibition is organized in a new format and in a new place in the Palace of Culture and Sports „Vasil Levski” where 35 municipalities from Bulgaria, the embassies of South Africa, Brazil, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Macedonia (Fig. 5), Azerbaijan, Palestine, The Chinese Cultural Center, tour operators and tour guides presented on stand stands new products, attractions and destinations for cultural tourism [10].



Fig. 5
Advertising stand on city Ohrid

An international round table was held on the theme of the "European Cultural Destinations Map", which was attended by lecturers from the Department of Tourism at the „St. st. Cyril and St. Methodius” University.

The sixth edition of the National Student Competition for the best development of tourist themes at the XVth International Exhibition „Cultural Tourism 2018” - Veliko Tarnovo took place. The competition is announced each year at the only specialized forum for cultural tourism.

This year, 20 students from five universities took part in the competition: VTU „St. St. Cyril and St. Methodius”, Dimitar A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski”, SWU „Neofit Rilski” and New Bulgarian University.

The jury with Prof. Maria Vojenska (Chairperson), Prof. Ivan Markov and Assoc. Prof. Sonia Alexieva (members), announced three winners and the first prize won Angella Stoyanova from VTU „St. St. Cyril and Methodius” (Bachelor's degree course „Tourism”, Faculty of Economics, Department of Tourism) on the theme: „Nudism - a way of life or a means of expression”.

A number of other events were also held:

- IV Scientific Conference „Cultural and Historical Heritage: Preservation, Presentation, Digitization” organized by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences;
- „Book Lounge”;
- Presentation of the only film festival in Bulgaria with tourist themes – „On the East Coast of Europe”.

5. Conclusion

Thus, the annual Cultural Tourism event held in Veliko Tarnovo can become an important stimulus for the development of international cooperation in the field of culture, education, economy and tourism.

There are also opportunities for development of cultural tourism, both in Veliko Tarnovo and in its surroundings, which is also contributed by its unique cultural and historical heritage. By applying the model of diversification of tourism Veliko Tarnovo can develop cultural, ecological, religious and historical tourism.

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