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NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE NATURE PARK "SHUMENSKO PLATO"

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Key words:
nature park
ecotourism
sustainable tourism
segmentation of tourist services

Abstract

The Nature Park Shumen Plateau is a protected area with the highest degree of genuineness and uniqueness. Typical for the region is the successful ecotourism development, which favors the local traditions and customs and follows the principles of sustainable development by facilitating the preservation of natural and cultural resources, biological and landscape diversity. The article examines the new opportunities for ecotourism by providing services that meet the modern needs of the tourists in an environmentally friendly way, support the community progress and shape the specialization of the regional tourist product by 2020. Furthermore, the article presents the trends and changes in the specialized types of ecotourism in relation to the landscape theory of geoecological protection, sustainable tourism and regional development.

INTRODUCTION

Bulgarian nature is unique - one of the best preserved in Europe. The abundance and diversity of the natural and cultural heritage of the country is an excellent foundation for the development of tourism in its sustainable forms. Much of this diversity is concentrated in protected areas in Bulgaria – Nature Parks, natural and managed reserves, protected areas and natural landmarks[1] which are the basis of ecotourism, with exceptionally pure environment, unpolluted air, water and soil.

In recent decades the interest in ecotourism is growing as a result of the combination of search for authentic travel experiences and increased interest in pure nature. Ecotourism involves travel forms that are compatible with the natural, cultural and social values, and cultural and environmental interactions in an authentic environment. "Green Apple" of tourism – the ecotourism, is at the forefront of the movement for pure nature[2]. It combines tourism and conservation and thus provides a powerful economic incentive to protect the environment. The key challenge today is how to turn ecotourism in economically viable, environmentally sustainable and culturally responsible business. Sustainable tourism development meets current needs without preventing future generations to meet their own needs[3]. It is environmentally friendly, economically viable and socially equitable for the local community[4].

Ecotourism requires joint action and participation of institutions and effective coordination mechanisms at all levels (local, regional, national, etc.). Specialized forms of ecotourism do not replace mass tourism and add value to the tourism product – they enrich it. They are influenced by state policies, new trends in demand and lead to new consumer standards[5]. Protected areas and tourism should be included in the evaluation of environmental protection level concerning sustainability aspects in regional

[1] Protected Areas Act of the Republic of Bulgaria.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] Ecotourism in Bulgaria: Analysis, opportunities and good practices, 2011: http://www.chambersz.org/ecrein/doc/6_Doklad_ecoturism.pdf.
[4] Strategy for Sustainable Development of Tourism in Bulgaria 2014-2030
[5] Grigorova, Z. 2013. Savremenni etatistki politiki za razvitie na ekoturizma v Smolyanska oblast, p. 198.

management and development[6]. Environmental protection level assessments are important for sustainable rural development in Bulgaria - preparation and implementation of strategies and policies in particular[7].

Ecotourism is sustainable tourism that favors nature, local traditions and customs. It follows the principles of sustainable development by supporting conservation of natural resources, biological and landscape diversity, promotes regional development, geological and ecological protection. Ecotourism preserves the identity of local communities and enhances their social status. Directly or indirectly, the success of tourism in the territories under protection depends on a number of heterogeneous activities and practices[8]. Tourism in Protected Areas must be sustainable and this requires balance between the fundamental elements - economy, society, culture, sport and environment - without privileging any of them. Distinctive elements of the relationships between them are:

- Defining the parameters of the carrying capacity of the environment within which human activity should follow;
- Awareness of the interdependence between the economy, regional development and the environment;
- Conducting long-term global strategies and policies at the local level; [9]
- Optimal, but sparing utilization of tourism resources in line with market requirements and consumer expectations;
- Increased capacity;
- Establishing and maintaining the necessary general and specialized infrastructure;
- Improving the quality of services and diversification of the tourism product;
- Stimulating regional development, reducing regional disparities and creating strong regional brands;
- Creating a single tourist information system for electronic reporting in real time including the movement of tourists and overnight stays; [10]

Nature Park "Shumensko plato" is located in the Eastern part of the Danube lowland. The park is connected to Shumen region, located in the central part of Northeastern Bulgaria, bordering districts of Varna, Bourgas, Sliven, Targovishte, Razgrad, Silistra, Dobrich. According to the natural geographical location and new tourism regionalization of Bulgaria, it falls into the Danube tourist region. The area of the park is, in accordance with Order № RD - 563 of 08.05.2003 of the Minister of Environment and Water, prom. State newspaper № 60 of 04.07.2003, is 3929.9 hecs. – figure 1.

The area of the park has landscape features typical of Northeastern Bulgaria residual plateaus. It is inhabited and used by prehistoric times until today. The aim of this study is to explore the opportunities for differentiation of ecotourism in the Nature Park which are not in contradiction to the nature conservation and standardization at national and regional level.

RESEARCH METHODS

A combined methodology is used in the study including collection, processing and analysis of information on the development of ecotourism in the Nature Park "Shumensko plato" (“Shumen plateau”). Specific methods include:

- research, collection and systematization of literature and Internet sources
- planning documents of the Ministry of environment and water
- information from local authorities and NGOs
- fieldwork on landscape and resource base
- study questionnaire, recorded using the "face to face" interviews with local community leaders
- SWOT analysis
- scientific analysis and synthesis

They were examined parameters of the resource base, ecotourism product differentiation, supply and demand. The study was conducted during the period 2013 – 2014 and covers the tourist area of the park.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

"Shumen Plateau" was announced Nature Park in order to preserve the valuable plant and animal communities and the great variety and beauty of places suitable for recreation and tourism. The specific features of karst topography are presented by surface forms (whirlpools, hollows, karst valleys) and underground forms - caves. There are about 34 caves, among them water cave "Zandana" with length of the galleries around 3000 meters and "Secret hole" - the deepest in Northeastern Bulgaria (101 meters long and 1716 meters galleries). On the territory of the plateau there are 9 protected, 1 endangered and 8 rare species of plants included in the "Red Book of Bulgaria".

The geographical coordinates of the endpoints of the Nature Park "Shumen Plateau" are presented in Table 1.

[6] Arabska, E. 2012. Evaluation of environmental protection level concerning sustainability aspects in regional management and development, 2nd International scientific conference CCEDEP Climate Change, Economic Development, Environment and People Conference, Prešov, Slovak Republic, 88-96.

[7] Shopova, I., Arabska, E. 2013. Sustainable tourism development in rural areas, 4th International Conference of Economic Sciences; Quality of Life, Sustainability and Locality; 9-10 May 2013 – Kaposvár University - Kaposvár – Hungary, 535-546.

[8] http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegistreWeb

[9] Sustainable tourism: http://education.rec.org/bg/tourism/sustainable_tourism/index.shtml

[10] *Ibid.*

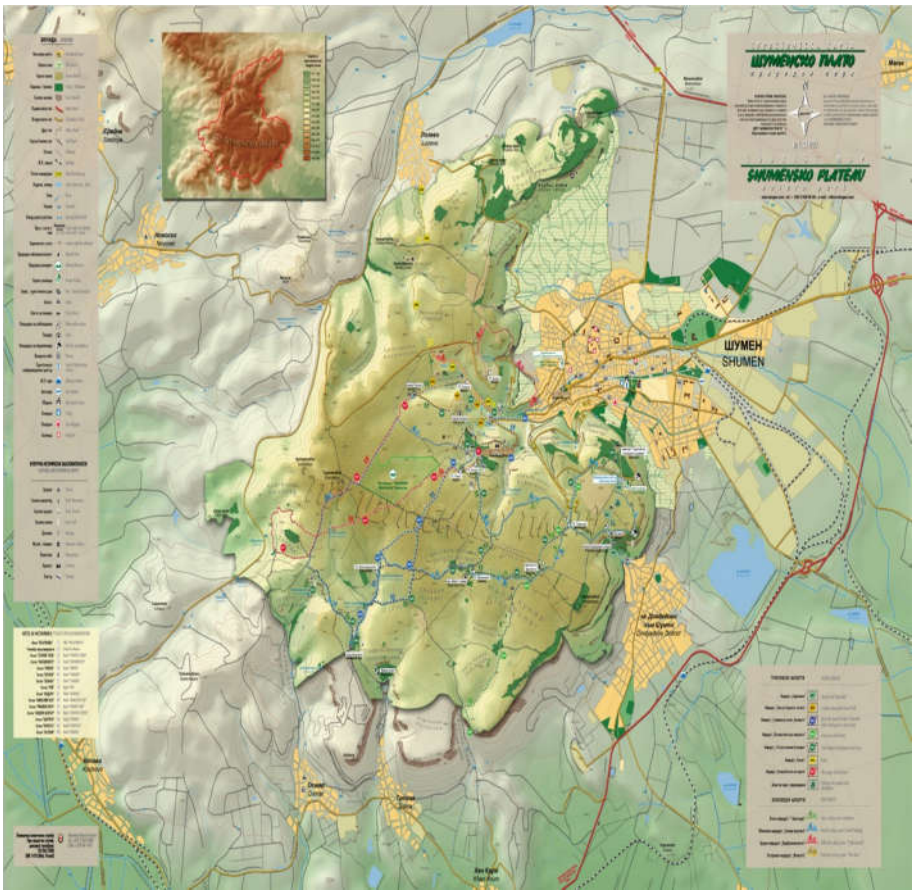

Fig. 1. Schematic map of Nature Park "Shumensko plato"

Fig. 2. Borders of Nature Park "Shumensko plato"

Table 1. The geographical coordinates of the Nature Park "Shumen Plateau"

	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
East	26^0 55' 57''	north slope of the hill Ilchov - over the vineyards
West	26^0 49' 43''	northwest of Kazaltepe – 269,3 m
North	43^0 18' 25''	north slope of Cherkeztabiya - 376,8 m
South	43^0 40' 38''	the foot of the rock next to the Rock Monastery

Table 2. Distribution of the area per municipalities and territories

MUNICIPALITY	FOREST FUND (HAS)	AGRICULTURE FUND (HAS)	DISTRIBUTED AREA RATIO IN %
SHUMEN			
Shumen	1934,7	6,7	50,2
District Divdyadovo	796,8	10,0	20,5
Village of Lozevo	328,5	0,4	8,6
PRESLAV			
Village of Kochovo	162,6		4,2
Village of Osmar	337,2		8,6
Village of Troitsa	312,8		8,0
TOTAL	3872,4	17,1	100.0
%	98,5	0,4	

Source: Natural Park “Shumen plateau” Management Plan.

Table 3. Types of Property in the Nature Park "Shumen plateau"

TYPES OF PROPERTY	AREA IN HAS	RATIO IN %
State public	3653,5	92,93
Municipal Public	260,2	6,63
Private	15,7	0,4
Co-ownership	1,3	0,04
Total	3930,7	100,0

Main base for the park is the town of Shumen, from which the access is via 4 main "entrance doors", the most used are the municipal park "Kyoshkovete" and the driveway or the road to the monument "Founders of the Bulgarian state."

The boundaries are determined by Order №79 / 05.02.1980 declaring the Nature Park status. Adjacent areas are areas that have economic, cultural and environmental impact on the park. Places in the

municipalities of Shumen and Preslav has a direct and indirect impact on the Nature Park - Table 2.

Considering the requirements of the Law on Protected Areas and Regulations for its application*, each state and municipal property in the park should be considered public. In "Shumen plateau" there are the following types of property shown in Table 3:

Natural areas with protection regime for historical and archaeological monuments are 0.2% of the territory of the park. These include historical and archaeological reserve "Shumen Fortress" and the monument "Founders of the Bulgarian state." They do not allow construction except to exhibiting and visiting the sites.

Territories of sustainable management for recreational and tourism functions are 87.9%. These include sites with traditional tourist routes and places for recreation. They allow afforestation with natural indigenous species and building according to established projects of the Ministry of environment and water only for the purposes of:

• scientific research
• tourism
• administration of the park

Shumen and the region has a great potential and many unexploited resources for ecotourism. Anthropogenic resources are extremely rich and recognized high cultural and historical value. They prevail in the development of walking tours in the park. Almost all objects presented as "heritage" could evolve into tourist offering. Numerous objects of cultural heritage in the municipality and the region are present since long time in tour programs and individual routes. In addition to Thracian, Roman, Byzantine and Bulgarian culture, many events in the rich cultural calendar of Shumen also may be treated as a tourist resource to be included in the animation of tourist products.

Natural resources are undervalued, though the exceptional landshtaft of the plateau can ensure successful development in the future. "Shumen Plateau" is the highest and most typical among the rest remaining plateaus in Northeastern Bulgaria. In the western part of the park is located the highest peak - "Tarnov Tabia '- 501.9 m, and the average altitude is 427 meters. The landscape is typically plateaus with extensive slightly hilly ridge level which occupies 60.0% of the area of the park. Of particular interest for segmentated ecotourism product are the steep, in places with exceptionally beautiful rocky crests, slopes of the plateau. Another valuable resource are regional karst geosystems consisting of attractive surface and underground karst (cave).

Surface karst formations - caverns, whirlpools, uval, picturesque valley incisions resembling small canyons and inaccessible rock wreaths are part of the unique natural resources in the park. The caves are more than 30. Some of them have been studied and researched. Caves "Pearl" and "Secret hole" are among the 25 largest caves in the country. Here the plateau lacks surface water. Prevailing groundwater give rise to many karst springs in the foot.

On the territory of "Shumen plateau" there is a clearly defined area "Tourism" with good facilities. On its territory there are touristic routes and recreational areas including:

• accommodation;
• holiday homes;
• dining venues;
• shelters;
• gazebos;
• places with park furniture for short rest - benches, tables, fireplaces;
• attractive monuments;
• religious cult objects;

The most popular tourist sites are:

• "Kyoshkovete";
• Monument "Founders of the Bulgarian State";
• Historical and archaeological preserve "Shumen Fortress";
• Hunting and shooting lodge Diana;
• Hut "Bukakatsite";

In this area are carried out various tourist and recreational activities based on the existing tourism infrastructure and natural resources of the protected area. At present, the Directorate of the Nature Park has no method to monitor visitor flow in the park and in the places for accommodation. Studies show that the stay in the places for accommodation is mostly short, in rare cases with the aim of recreation. More intense as a place to stay for a few days students use "School in the Nature", managed by the Municipal Children Complex - Shumen. In 2005 there were registered 1426 nights, and in 2006 - 1132 nights. Preference for accommodation are: hotels, departmental operating chalets. Visitor flow increases during events and festivals in the park - historical re-enactments, festivals, sports competitions.

Characteristics of categorized accommodation, shelter, food and entertainment

Although the transport infrastructure in the municipality is relatively well developed, the state of tourism infrastructure is unsatisfactory. The system of visual information (directional and informational signs) is underdeveloped and most often presented only in Bulgarian. Conditions for visiting tourists to many natural and cultural sites are of low standard. Missing or insufficient are arranged parking, bathrooms, and in some places even electricity and water.

In the study area work 269 dining and entertainment sites presented by type and in Table 4:

* Rules on terms and conditions for management entrusting maintenance and restoration, the award of tourist activities, security and control in forests, land and water areas in the protected territories - exclusive state property. Ministry of Environment and Water Prom. SG. no. 49 of June 14, 2005.

Table 4. Restaurants and entertainment sites

TYPE	NUMBER	TYPE	NUMBER
Cafe	49	Bars	6
Pizzeria	2	Restaurants	2
Bar and Dinner	76	Coffee shop	11
Beer house	26	Tavern	3
Coffee club	25	Pastry shop	5
Bistro	38	Snack bar	5
Coffee bar	2	Fast Food	1

Source: Direction of the Natural Park Data for 2013.

Table 5. Accommodation within the Nature Park “Shumen plateau”

CATEGORY	TYPE	NUMBER	ACCOMMODATION
*	Hotels and Guest Houses	5	92
**	Hotels	7	269
***	Hotels	9	558

Source: Direction of the Natural Park Data for 2013.

Fig. 3. Touristic routes in Nature Park “Shumen plateau”

Fig. 5. Plan Route "Dendrology Path"

Fig. 6. Plan Route "Karst under protection – a gift for future generations"

Fig. 7. Plan Route "Floral trail"

In the municipality of Shumen there are 17 registered sites / one, two and three-star / - as shelter and 4 sites as shelter and accommodation / two and three-star / - categorization, which are distributed as follows:

The total of beds per person is 919. The largest hotels are:

- complex "Shumen" (3 stars, 400 beds, 2 restaurants, a pub, 2 cafes, night bar, 2 conference rooms, a recreation center with swimming pool);
- Hotel "Madara" (3 stars, 200 beds, restaurant, tavern, 2 cafes);
- numerous family hotels - "Solo", "Contessa," "The Castle", "Central", "Rimini", "Paradise" and others;

Total nights spent in the categorized accommodation in Shumen region (According to the data of the Direction of the Natural Park for 2013) marked an increase in 2014 with 83,193 units, in 2015 up to 90,710 compared to 2008 with 53,601. No noticeable increase in the number of foreign visitors (12,636 in 2008; 15,539 in 2014; 10,902 in 2015). Despite the relatively good specialized tourist infrastructure, usage of bed-capacity is too low (19%), indicating a lack of marketable products, poor advertising.

Specific feature in the distribution of nights spent is their uniformity in all seasons. This is especially beneficial fact, soothing largely sustainable tourism. Weakness "seasonality" typical of the Black Sea destination here is overcome by "seasonal independence" in the prevailing current and potential tourism offering and predominant in the municipality business tourism.

THEMATIC ROUTES:

- ***"Rock Monasteries"***

Marking - green
Length of the route - 18,800 meters
Starts at the Information Centre of the park "Shumen Plateau" - shelter "Violet" – area "Tomb of students" – area "Chengel puddle" - "Han Krumski rock monastery" - rock phenomenon "Maiden Rock" – “Rock Church “- hut "Bukatsite" - "Kostadinov monastery" – area "Tarnov Tabia '- reserve "Bukaka"- shelter "Aleko" - "Shumen Fortress" - area "Han Krumovi gates" - cave "Mermaid" - complex "Orbita".

- ***"Dendrology Path"***

Marking - purple
Duration - 2:00
Starts at "Kyoshkovete" - shelter "Frees" - bridge - rock phenomenon "Opera" - "Devil prohodche" - cave "Mermaid" - forest road in the southeast along an asphalt road - area "Han Krumovi gates" - Figure 5

- ***"Karst under protection – a gift for future generations"***

Marking - yellow
Duration - 2 hours and 30 minutes
Starts at Fountain "Borovetz" - along the natural entrance of the cave "Pearls" - an asphalt road - beech forest - the Northern boundary of the reserve "Bukaka" - tourist shelter "Luck" - parking complex "Shumen Plateau"

- ***"Floral trail"***

Marking - pink
Duration - 2 hours and 30 minutes
Starts at the Information Centre Monument "Founders in the Bulgarian State" (helipad) - along the Southern paragliders landing - asphalt road - "Chengel Tabia”- "Garvanitsa"

WALKING ROUTES

- ***Route "Adrenaline"***

Marking - mignonette
Duration - 2:00 hours
Complex "La Boheme" - Divdyadovski rock wreaths - rock form "Snail" - look palce - information center "Shumen Plateau".

- ***Route "Lesson on the Forest Trail"***

Marking - mignonette
Duration - 1 hour
"Kioshkove" - tourist shelter "Bigora" - cave "Mermaid" - cave “Pearls" - fountain "Borovets".

- ***Route "With backpack to the hut" Bukatsite"***

Markings - blue
Duration - 3 hours
"Kioshkove" - "Shumen Fortress" - tourist shelter "Aleko" - tourist shelter "Avtostroitel" (or "Alvadzhi") - fountain "Great halvadzhiya" - hut "Bukatsite"

- ***Route "Journey to the Past"***

Marking - light green
Duration - 2:00 hours
Information Centre of the park "Shumen Plateau" - tourist shelter "Violet" - Monument of students - "Chengel puddle" - rock monastery over the village of Han Krum

- ***Route "From Here Bulgaria begins "***

Marking - green
Duration - 4:00 hours
"Kioshkove" - tourist shelter "Bigora" - cave "Mermaid" - "Shumen Fortress" - tourist shelter "Clover" - Monument of students - tourist shelter "Violet" - Monument "Founders of the Bulgarian state"

- ***Route "Relax"***

Marking - yellow
Duration - 2:00 hours
"Kioshkove" - "Kokiliev time" - "High Meadow" - camp "Ivanski" – the village of Lozevo

- ***Route "Magic forest"***

Marking - red
Duration - 4:00 hours
Tourist shelter "Aleko" - tourist shelter "Luck" - the eastern boundary of the reserve "Bukaka" - Dry well - Kochovski bunker - catchment in "Tarnov Tabia”- the Western border of the reserve "Bukaka "- cave "Mermaid"

These walking tours cover a significant portion of the park and the main attractions in it (natural and historical). They offer recreation and educational tourism.

In 2004 – 2005 were built the Children's Complex "Sun", the environmental educational trail for children - "Forest maze" near the monument, was renovated playground in the area. "Hut" and built new in tourist shelter "Shumen Fortress" that are suitable for children of small age groups. Use bases "Ekovakantsiya", "green schools", "Speleouchilishta."

Hese walking tours offered by GMP cover a significant portion of the park and the main attractions in it (natural and historical). They offer recreation and educational tourism.

In 2004 - 2005, were built the Children's Complex "Sun" environmental educational trail for children "Forest maze" and a renovated playground in the area, that are suitable for children of small age groups.

For the period 2008 - 2015 the priorities for the development of tourism in the Regional Development Strategy of Shumen District and Municipal Development Plan of the municipality of Shumen and Preslav municipality include:

- Improving planning and organizational basis for tourism development, creating a system, sparing use of natural resources;
- Improving the technical, informational and social infrastructure of tourism;
- Creating tourism products and events that meet the needs of the market;
- Partnership and coordination between the private tourism sector, industry organizations and public bodies;

Special areas for short rest and picnic

To the numerous visitors of the park "Shumen Plateau" the Park Directorate offers special places for short rest or picnic, including shelters, benches, tables, fireplaces, gazebos, fountains. For their location one can orient through directional signs.

- Tourist shelter "Violet". It can be reached on foot or by car. Located in the south of the monument "Founders of the Bulgarian state." In the woods around the shelter there are benches, tables, fireplaces and a fountain. Meadows around are suitable for sports games.
- Tourist shelter "Clover". Located near Monument of students. It is reached by a forest road on foot or by car after detour from the scenic asphalt road. In the refuge and around it there are benches, tables and fireplaces. There is a fountain. In "Long Meadow" near the shelter "Clover" there is a gazebo and nooks with benches, tables and fireplaces.
- Tourist shelter "Diana". Located west of the town of Shumen near asphalt road Shumen – the village of Novosel. The wide open spaces around it offer opportunities for practicing different sports.
- Tourist lodges "Avtostroitel". Located in the area "Osmar colonies" to fountains "Small and large halvadzhiya."
- Tourist lodges "Shumen Fortress" and "Aleko". Located in the area "Hut" near Shumen Fortress. They have playgrounds.
- Tourist shelter "Bigora". Located in the area "Kioshkove" along the theme route "Dendrology path."
- Recreation area in the cave "Mermaid" ("Sulumara"). Located at the entrance of the cave, there is a fountain.
- Recreation area on the South of the Monument "Founders of the Bulgarian State". There are gazebo, fireplaces, benches and tables and playground for children.
- "Han Krumovi gates". Located west of the historical-archaeological preserve "Shumen Fortress". Around it there is tourism infrastructure for short-term recreation, benches, tables, fireplaces. Open spaces suitable for sport.
- "Divdyadovski rock wreaths". Located on the Eastern slopes of the plateau. It provides an opportunity for familiarization with rock formations and rock monasteries. There can be reached on foot in extreme route running from the complex "La Boheme" in the quarter of Divdyadovo or a forest road near the information center of the monument "Founders of the Bulgarian State".

BIKE ROUTES

- ***"Amateurs"***

Level of difficulty - low
Length - 5 km
Terrain - forest road
Displacement - 100 m
Information Centre of "Shumen Plateau" - Divdyadovski rocks - tourist shelter "Violet" - tourist shelter "Shumen Fortress" - historical and archaeological preserve "Shumen Fortress"

- ***"A great rotation"***

Level of difficulty - medium
Length - 16 km
Terrain - forest road
Displacement - about 500 meters
Information Centre of "Shumen Fortress" - tourist shelter "Violet" - "Monument of students" - tourist shelter "Clover" - hut "Bukatsite" - "Tarnov Tabia" – reserve "Bukaka"-"Shumen Fortress" - tourist shelter "Violet" - Information Centre of the park

- ***"Professionals"***

Level of difficulty - high
Length - 6 km
Terrain - forest paths, dirt road, asphalt
Displacement - about 600 meters
"Kyoshkovete" - Climate School - TV tower - path through a pine forest - a path to square "B. Balgaranov" - large S-shaped bend in the asphalt road - starting point of the route.

CLIMBING ROUTES

On the territory of "Shumen plateau" there are two separate climbing places to practice rock climbing: in "Dyavolskoto prohodche" and the rock crown over district "Divdyadovo".

Climbing in "Divdyadovo"

It is located near Shumen district "Divdyadovo." It represents separated from the main plateau rock. Its height reaches 30-35 m. In the middle of a height of about 25 meters passes a small and dangerous path, especially when rocks are wet. The exhibition is south and protected from the wind, making the site a favorite place for climbing in autumn, winter and sunny spring days. The rocks are not loose and falling stones are not common. Currently there are 24 established climbing routes of varying difficulty. Climbing site "Divdyadovo 'can be reached by two roads.

One starts from the town of Shumen, climbing the plateau and passes by the monument "Founders of the Bulgarian state."

The other way to get there is from "Divdyadovo" district, around the hotel "La Boheme", following not very steep path through the forest, marked in green. The time you need to walk is 10 minutes.

The climbing site was developed during the 1988-1989 by alpine club "Madara Horseman" in the town of Shumen. There are 10 tourist routes. In September 2004 Shumen and Varna climbers with the support of the Directorate of the park made new routes and renovated some old ones. The site becomes a great place for all beginners and advanced climbers, offering a variety of climbing surfaces: smooth slabs, ceilings, overhangs, angles, etc.

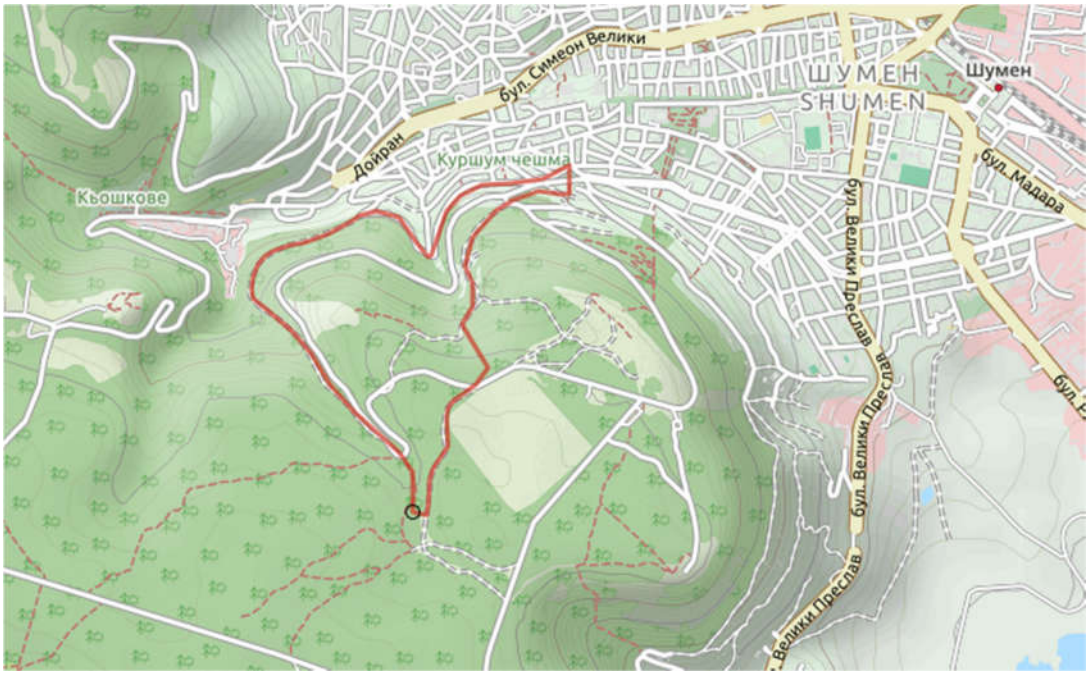

Fig. 8. Bike routes in “Shumen plateau”

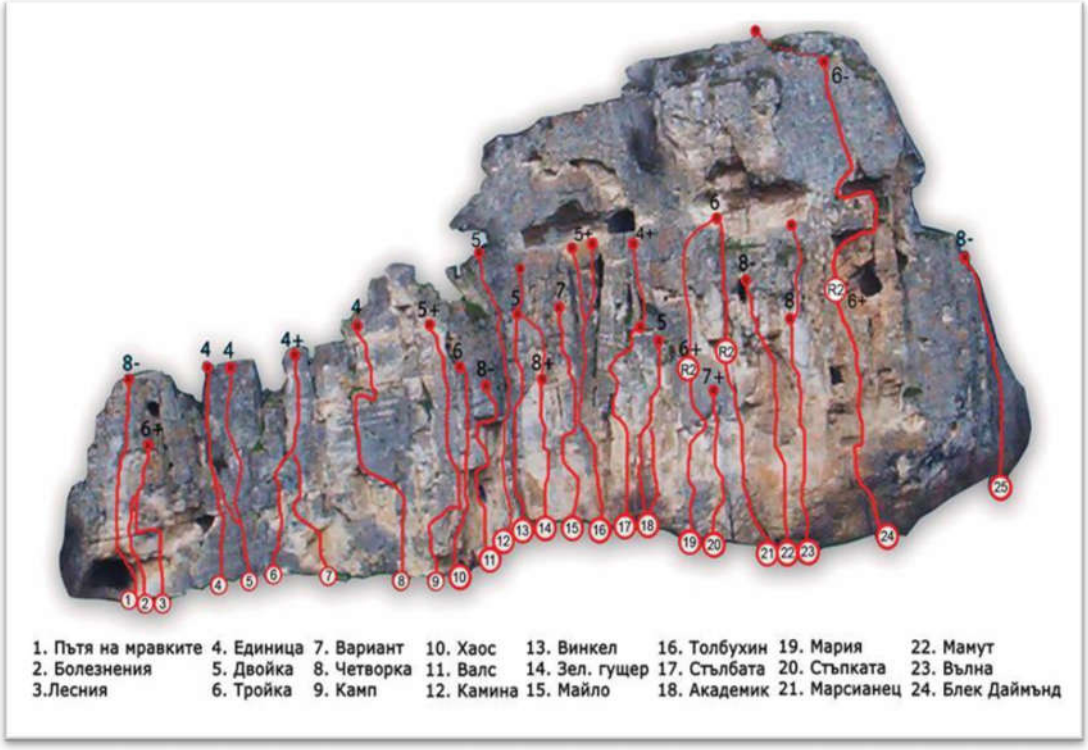

Fig. 9. Rock climbing routes in “Shumen plateau”

In 2012, the Directorate of Nature Park "Shumen Plateau" decided to renovate the existing routes for rock climbing. Some routes were changed; thus measures are taken to protect the chasmophytic vegetation along the limestone rock slopes. The repair of the existing 24 climbing routes included replacement of wedges and other specialized items. Enclosed are 2 pieces of information boards and 24 direction signs - Fig. 9.

Opportunities for new specialized types of ecotourism

"Shumen Plateau" can successfully develop these types of tourism:

- hiking;
- cycling;
- ornithological tourism;
- archeological and historical;
- botanical;
- speleo tourism;

Ecotourism here very successfully combines historical tourism / rock monasteries, old capitals occult seats / rural tourism, mass tourism and others. The park offers opportunities for short-term recreation in the well-developed tourist infrastructure.

EDUCATIONAL TOURISM

"Shumen plateau" has the opportunity to specialize in educational and cognitive tourism. "Shumen Plateau" offers opportunities for conservation and educational initiatives in the reception center of the park and the "forest school". Environmental projects implemented by schools and teachers are one of the most important means of perception and the objectives of the protected area. So by children, information is transmitted in families, clubs and more. Teachers from the region appreciate the nature conservation initiatives. They are one of the most important partners and distributors of ideas for nature conservation. The development of educational tourism contributes to:

• Helping local people and park visitors in exploring interesting habitats and species in the park;

• Increased awareness and knowledge of visitors about the value of the park as a natural complex of landscapes and ecosystems;

• Presentation of the natural and cultural heritage and the need for its preservation;

• Promotion of local tourism products and services, achieving greater demand and opening new market opportunities;

• Providing information about the region, designed for tourists;

• Build public support for the park, including among politicians and decision-makers at regional and national level.

RURAL TOURISM

The region offers opportunities for its development. In the package services of local tour operators are included authentic farmhouses, kept the spirit of the traditional Bulgarian way of life. In the comfort of the rural surroundings tourists enjoy the hospitality of the hosts which offer cold brandy, vegetable salad and manuscript prepared local specialties.

The visitors can follow the technological process of the famous winemaking to the bottling and aging, combined with tasting of different varieties.

"Sveshtarova house" in the village of Osmar welcomes guests with bread, honey and wrist geranium for every tourist. Breakfast is served with homemade pie, a glass of local wine and fruit. Tourists can explore the cooperage with over 70 years of history, implementation of female and male manual labor in the countryside and to learn about the family farm - yard with animals and garden. Anyone may self-pick fruit in season. In addition, the tourists can go on a panoramic tour of the village with donkey carts. Tourists can visit the village church "Sv. Konstantin and Elena", which deserves attention with 150-year history and ancient healing icons.

"Yordanovata house" in the village of Marash welcomes guests all year to taste food prepared by original Bulgarian recipes - 3 types of white wine, 3 types of red wines, 3 kinds of spirits, beer Shumen and yellow lemonade. Capacity is 10-16 people and the biggest attraction is the folk music - bagpipes, flute and mandolin.

“Christina aunt's house” in the village of Madara provides an opportunity for visitors to immerse themselves in the atmosphere of a typical rural yard, fruit trees and vineyards, sheep pens and goats.

Guest house "Omaia" is located in a yard of 1400 m2 and consist of a living room, two bedrooms, a bathroom and a covered terrace. Guests are offered parking, satellite TV, DVD, wireless internet, kitchen, mini bar, covered terrace.

SPORTS TOURISM: rock climbing, orienteering, paragliding, horse riding, cycling, mountain biking, mountaineering.

The following specialized sports clubs are present:

• Tourist Association "Madara Horseman" – with a section for rock climbing

• Club for sports orientation

• Paragliding Club "Shumen -HS"

• Alpine Club "Madara Horseman"

• Racecourse

Traditional annual events are: International Day of Challenge; International Day of Sports; International Olympic Day; International Day of the Running - Samsung;

National and international sports competitions:

• International tournament "Paragliding" - from May to July - "Shumen Plateau";

• International Equestrian Sports Tournament – in September-October in "Kabiuk";

• International rally "4x4 Off" – in November - "Shumen Plateau";

• Rally "Old Capitals" – National – in August;

• Memorial Rally "Valeri Velikov" – National – in September;

• International competition Motorcycling "Enduro" – in September, October;

• National Championship in motor gliders and delta gliders;

• Bowl Shumen orientation;

Club "Kabiuk" was created in 1864. Four major breeds of horses are bred here - Arabic, English, East - Bulgarian and ponies. Tourists are offered horse demonstrations and trekking to the herd, riding and more.

SWOT ANALYSIS

SWOT analysis is designed for limited synthesized presentation of a comprehensive picture of the state of tourism in the park; targeting priority areas of development; focus on priority problems to solve.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
• Favorable geographical location; • Rich natural resources and favorable climate; • Beautiful and clean environment; • Rich cultural and historical heritage - unique cultural facts of national importance; • The park falls in the region "Old capitals" - based on the uniqueness integral formation of tourist services and activities for changing the character of tourist arrivals - from excursions (mainly on the Black Sea) to cultural experience; • Recognition of cultural heritage abroad; • Rich Natural Heritage - reserve "Bukaka", protected areas "The Mound, Oaks and Marashka Curia" • Presence of protected areas • natural beauty, attractive • landscapes; • Geographical proximity to major • target markets of famous tourist • products • Developed urban network with a strong community center; better accessibility to the center; • Outstanding variety of • travel resources • No serious landscape obstacles • Good potential for creating products of alternative tourism • based on the Nature Park and protected • places, • proximity to • Black Sea. • Active participation of the private sector in Tourism • Recently built or renovated tourist accommodation. • Cuisine and wine • Highly competitive prices • Warm Bulgarian hospitality • Awareness of renovation needs • At present, the government and local authorities announced the development of tourism as priority • 21. Registration of Trademark "Bulgaria started here"	• There is no overall strategy • The tourist associations have issues in mobilizing local population; • Missing marketing research of Bulgarian and foreign markets; • Conducted in Bulgaria • tourism fairs do not have a clear focus; • Advertising and information campaigns are limited and do not meet the expectations of tourists; • The resources spent on advertising and promotion are insufficient; • Unclear or "insufficient" image of Bulgarian tourism - lack of adequate information • Regional imbalance in tourism infrastructure • Restricted information on the Bulgarian cultural and historical heritage; • Information centers are not • functioning effectively; • No communication between the parties involved in tourism; • Low developed items outside the tourist destinations • Low assessment of the tourist sector • Poor socialization; • Bad management of natural heritage; • Insufficient knowledge of International market demand; • Underdeveloped Information Technology - Internet, information and marketing; • Relatively neglected • internal market; • Depending on Monostructural • marine tourism and international tour operators • Lack of association of tour operators, restaurateurs, hoteliers; • Poor internal infrastructure for tourism development (roads, airports, railway transportation, etc.). • Travel services with quality lower than desired; • Many of resources for alternative tourism remains untapped; • Restricted product diversity, lacking innovative ideas; • There are no incentives for investment in tourism; • The overall infrastructure is in poor • state; • A large number of people employed in tourism with low qualifications and without major knowledge of the industry; • The age structure of the rural population is worsen; • The critically low number of tour professionals working in this field; • Inadequate sanitation in urban and rural areas is a serious obstacle to tourism; • The existence of many "visual pollution" dumps, creating a bad image of the municipality; • Inadequate planning for the • usage of the territory in • tourist regions; • 33. Still in initial stage of development of Public Private Partnerships (PPP)
OPPORTUNITIES	**THREATS**
• Membership in the EU; • Macroeconomic stabilization; • Increased interest of foreign • investors; • Access to European markets;	• Delayed recovery of the economy and Deterioration of economic conditions and foreign investment; • Deterioration of the ratio between working and dependent population; • Lack of funds for maintenance of transport and

• Improved infrastructure; • Strengthening of international relations; • Proximity to river and sea • ports on the Black Sea; • Use of the Structural and Cohesion Fund for Development • Investments in regional and local infrastructure, providing access to European infrastructure networks; • New international trade agreements; • Training and Information in the direction of starting private business; • Established position of a regional leader in health activities • Large tourist potential • Opportunities for diversification of tourist • products. • Ability to advertise as a destination for eco, cultural and historical tourism • Unrealized potentian for domestic tourism • Unused opportunities for neighbour countries tourism • Improving the qualifications and • staff skills in tourism • Focus on recurrent forms of tourism (eg. A second home, spa, skiing, etc.). • • Increased effectiveness of marketing and promotional programs and activities.	communication links; • Ineffective structure and management of companies; • Closure for the companies not complying with EU standards; • Underdeveloped public • private partnerships; • Barriers to the development of local companies due to high taxes; • Loss of markets, leading to the closure of local industries; • Insufficient private sector investment in education and training in the workplace. • Loss of highly qualified • staff • Gradual loss of one of the most • competitive advantage - low prices (or identification with image • "Cheap" destination) • Less government • support for the needs and priorities • tourism development • A complication due to legislative changes after EU accession • Lack of adequate planning and zoning of tourist • regions • Impact of campaigns aimed at mass tourism by rival destinations • Ongoing dependence on • International tour operators • Failure to achieve • thoroughness of promotional activities • due to insufficient funding • Negative impact of problems where Bulgaria can not easily intervene as natural phenomena, diseases and • terrorist attacks. • Security and • border crossing issues.

On the basis of the SWOT analysis on the state of tourism in the Nature Park "Shumen Plateau" the following conclusions can be made:

- "Shumen Plateau" has a special place in the Bulgarian national history and has an extremely rich / unique cultural heritage;
- Located next to major transport highway only an hour from Varna and large complexes in the Black Sea tourist destination;
- In proximity to the unique historical and archaeological complex of Veliki Preslav and Pliska;
- Potential for ecological, spa and rural tourism;

Recommendations:

- Acceleration of socio-economic development;
- Mobilization of all its potential (natural, human and Investment resources);
- Funding opportunities exploration (national and European);
- Integrated approach to development planning.

The main objective for the development of tourism by 2020 is to increase competitiveness and economic performance of the tourism sector through sustainable practicies. It can be achieved by:

- Positioning of the park as a tourist destination in a higher class national and global tourism market;
- Improving the infrastructure of national, regional and municipal level;
- Application of international standards and best European practices and innovation in terms of products, technologies and human factors in the tourism sector;

The implementation of the above strategic goals should be based on a basic principles of sustainable tourism development:

- Economic viability - improve competitiveness;
- Ensuring tourist stakeholders long term prosperity;
- Local prosperity - increase the impact of tourism and its contribution to prosperity of the local community;
- Quality of employment - making incentives for development of human resources at local and regional level, depending on the unique destinations;
- Social equality - distribution of economic and social benefits of tourism among all the host community, including improved opportunities for access to services and increased revenue for the local population;

- Satisfaction of visitors - providing safe and satisfactory experience for visitors;
- Local control - providing an opportunity for local communities to participate in planning and decision-making on the management and future development of tourism in the area;
- Social welfare - improving the quality of life of the local population and access to resources;
- Natural and Cultural heritage - protection, conservation and development of natural and cultural heritage, traditions and peculiarities of the host community;
- Physical integrity - protecting environmental quality;
- Biodiversity - conservation of natural scenery, flora and fauna, by minimizing the harmful effects on them;
- Efficient use of resources: reduce the use of exhaustible natural resources used in the process of development and management of tourism superstructure;
- Preserved nature and a clean environment: reducing urbanization of natural areas, air pollution control, water and soil and waste by tourism enterprises and visitors.

CONCLUSION

The information gathered indicates that the Nature Park "Shumen Plateau" can find its place in the international programs for tourism in Bulgaria.

Natural, cultural, historical and traditional resources of the region cannot turn it into a unique and attractive tourist destination alone. Adequate to modern standards access to the sites together with comfort and quality service in accommodation facilities will make the tourism product offered in the region a popular and competitive in the domestic and international markets.

Diversification of the regional tourism product, increased quality of services and protection of the rights and safety of consumers can be achieved by: conducting an inventory and evaluation of tourism resources, tools and services; research on regional surveys of visitors; promoting the development of natural, cultural and historical attractions; promoting the diversification of tourist products and supporting the development of regional products; developing travel packages. Research and creation of an integrated thematic tourist product "Bulgaria started here – the Old Capitals".

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