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Rural Green Tourism in Odesa Region

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Abstract: The intensification of social life significantly increases the burden not only on working individuals but also on all residents, especially in medium and large cities. The dynamic and stressful pace of life, along with urban environmental pollution, leads to various physical and psychological health issues. People need to periodically change their environment in order to maintain essential levels of well-being. Rural green tourism can offer this necessary relief. Rural green tourism involves a return to the roots of the nation, to the natural environment and cultural heritage that shaped its identity. However, its main characteristic is active participation in agricultural activities - crop farming, animal husbandry, vegetable gardening, beekeeping, collecting herbs and mushrooms, flower growing, and more. Rural vacations are also closely linked with tasting local cuisine, which is based exclusively on natural ingredients. Traditionally, three main types of rural green tourism are distinguished: agritourism, recreational (or rural) tourism, and ecotourism.

Keywords: Rural green tourism, Odesa region, local resources, ecotourism, recreational (or rural) tourism.

1. Introduction

The administrative-territorial reform, decentralization of power, the COVID-19 pandemic, the intensified phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war, and the transformation of Ukrainian Bessarabia into one of the country's key centers for

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export-import operations have posed new challenges for local territorial communities. In the post-war recovery period, communities that are institutionally prepared to compete for resources will have the advantage.

The formation of new, stable transport and logistics chains between the Ukrainian Black Sea region and Southern and Central Europe indicates that, along with cargo, a large number of people will also move along this route. It is essential to create conditions that allow them to gain meaningful impressions before reaching the war-affected regions. One effective tool for this could be the development of tourism and recreational industries, for which Odesa Oblast has ample resources.

Therefore, it is particularly relevant to assess the current state of the most attractive resources across various categories.

2. Summary of the Main Material

The regions of Ukraine are quite unevenly endowed with natural resources. In particular, Odesa region is relatively poor in mineral resources. However, the region as a whole – and especially its southwestern part –stands out for its recreational potential, which includes a favorable climate, the sea, therapeutic muds, mineral springs, and brine from estuaries and the sea.

It also possesses rich biological resources from the sea, estuaries, and major rivers, as well as highly valuable biosphere resources represented by unique and distinctive natural complexes (such as wetlands, spits, and barrier beaches), ecosystems, and biocenoses.

The specific geographical position and considerable north-south extent of Odesa Oblast – which result in a diverse range of natural landscapes, a multi-ethnic population, developed agricultural production, and other socio-geographic factors – create unique prerequisites for the development of rural green tourism.

The climate is moderately continental, characterized by hot, dry summers and mild, snowless, and unstable winters. The frost-free period lasts 180–210 days. The active vegetation period (with average daily temperatures above +10°C) spans 180–190 days.

Average January temperatures range from -1.0°C in the southeast to -3.0°C in the northwest, while average July temperatures range from 22.8°C to 20.5°C,

respectively. Absolute maximum temperatures can exceed +40°C, and minimums can drop below -30°C (Odesa region, 2003).

The region's climate is arid, with an annual precipitation of 360–450 mm.

By key performance indicators of sanatorium and health resort facilities, Odesa Oblast ranks second among the regions of Ukraine, following the temporarily annexed Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Its share in the total number of such facilities is 14.1%, while it accounts for 8.9% of the total number of people treated.

In terms of the number of children's health and recreational institutions operating in the summer, Odesa Oblast ranks first in the country: in 2018, there were 1,073 such institutions, which accounted for 6.2% of the national total. However, in terms of the number of available places, it ranks fifth—12.8 thousand places, or 6.5% of the national figure (Todorov, 2015).

By the number of hotels and other temporary accommodation facilities, Odesa Oblast ranks only seventh among Ukrainian regions, with 80 establishments representing 4.8% of the total in the country.

The region has a rather complex history. The possibility of safely crossing the Danube River attracted numerous peoples to the interfluves area as they migrated from the East to Central and Southern Europe – and sometimes in the opposite direction. This territory is rich in outstanding historical monuments.

Undoubtedly, the most famous is the ancient Greek city of Tyras, founded in the 6th century BCE. Its remains are included in the list of prominent archaeological monuments of Ukraine. However, few people know that in the middle of the second millennium, the city of Likostomon played a significant role in the life of the Northern Black Sea region and a large part of Eastern Europe. It was located on one of the islands of the Danube Delta near present-day Kiliia (its exact coordinates remain unknown). Its position in a hard-to-access location – safe from regular invasions by various powers and situated on the border between the Muslim and Christian worlds of that time – stimulated the city's development as a major trading hub. In fact, it represents the most successful historical example of utilizing the region's transit potential.

During the period when the region was part of the Roman Empire, a massive earthwork fortification – Trajan's Wall – was constructed. Its remnants stretch from Stari Troyany (Lake Chitai) to the village of Suvorove (Lake Katlabuh) and to the

village of Tabaky. Between the 14th and 18th centuries, giant fortresses such as Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyi, Izmail, and Kiliia were built.

The leaders in rural green tourism development are the suburban areas of the city of Odesa ("Greater Odesa") and rural settlements located near unique recreational sites. Attention should especially be given to settlements in close proximity to the town of Vylkove, which hosts one of Ukraine's main ecological tourism centers: the Danube Biosphere Reserve. In the northern districts of the region, however, tourism is significantly less developed, despite the forest-steppe zone – which covers a large portion of that territory – offering a competitive advantage compared to other parts of Odesa Oblast.

The further development of rural green tourism is closely linked to solving the following issues. On one hand, it is necessary to intensify tourism in regions where it has already begun, and on the other – to develop it in new locations. Traditionally, the first group includes the village of Novosilske in Reni Raion, the town of Vylkove, and neighboring settlements (Desantne, Prymorske, Lisky).

The delta and the Danube floodplains are recognized as an important natural region within the Pan-European ecological network, established by the European Union in 1995 (in Seville, Spain). In Ukraine's National Ecological Network program for 2000–2015 (approved by law in 2000), the Danube floodplains were declared one of the country's main "biospheric windows." The Lower Danube and its floodplains serve as key components in international programs for the ecological protection of the Black Sea and integrated management of its coastal areas (Maslyak, 2008).

The Ukrainian Danubian region stands out not only for scientific and practical significance, but also for its uniquely rich natural resource potential. The region possesses enormous water resources – Danube River, Danubian lakes, and groundwater – unique for a steppe zone. Fertile soils combined with a warm climate contribute to a strong agro-production potential. Its main natural wealth lies in its biosphere resources, represented by the unique natural complexes, ecosystems, and biocenoses of the Danube delta and the Danubian lakes.

Therefore, the region has extremely high biospheric and recreational potential, which is currently being significantly underutilized. The Danube Biosphere Reserve receives about 4–6 thousand "green" tourists per year. The dominant flow consists of unorganized tourists, especially fishermen and hunters. The most promising directions for tourism in the region include: (1) ecological tourism in the Danube Biosphere Reserve and other protected areas; (2) hunting tourism; (3) fishing and

water-sports tourism; and (4) ethnographic and historical-cultural tourism. In other words, the status of the Danube Biosphere Reserve should fully correspond with the spirit and letter of the Seville Strategy for Biosphere Reserves (1995) and the Johannesburg Declaration. All this attests to the unique prerequisites for the development of rural green tourism in Odesa Oblast.

It should be noted that, despite many unique resources, the region currently has very few specialized programs for serving rural green tourism. However, clear trends toward an integrated approach to organizing ethnographic and rural green tourism are emerging. This approach is undoubtedly promising, as it reflects modern tourism-business trends – simultaneous stays in two or more landscape environments. Moreover, the compaction of rural settlements into contiguous clusters makes such combined tourism possible in rural areas.

In recent years, rural tourism has developed in several sub-regions of the oblast – formerly Kiliya, Izmail, Tatarbunary, Bolhrad, Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyi, Biliaivka, and Tarutyne Raions. Visitors are offered stays at rural homesteads, introductions to local lifestyles, traditions, customs, tastings of national dishes, and simply spending time in nature.

Let's consider the most popular rural green tourism sites:

- "Bessarabian Courtyard" homestead in Stara Nekrasivka (Izmail Raion)**:** a modern guesthouse in a folk style where visitors can purchase local handicrafts made of hemp, cotton, and silk. It offers six double rooms with all amenities—hot water, bathroom, TV, large double beds, and natural interior finishes – accompanied by traditional Bessarabian cuisine featuring Moldovan mamaliga, Bulgarian kurban, Lipovan fish soup with sturgeon, and many other unique dishes.

- "Danube" recreation base**:** an eco-friendly entertainment complex situated on the scenic bank of the Kyslytsia arm of the Danube, 7 km from Izmail. The design of this leisure area combines family-picnic relaxation with guided tours along the Kiliia arm of the Danube.

- "At Malanka's" homestead in Tatarbunary: the owner and her family have collected unique household items, farm tools, embroidery, and weaving typical of the region. Guests are served Ukrainian dishes and homemade wine from an old cellar. Fascinating legends and a folklore program complete the visitor experience.

- "Bilocha Guest House" in Shershintsi (Kodyma Raion)**:** This area, located at the border between Podillya and the Prydnistrovia region, captivates guests with its

natural surroundings. A minimum stay of three days is recommended to experience making traditional Podilian dishes, baking bread and pastries, learning folk crafts, and gaining weaving techniques.

Recent developments also include rural tourism in Mykolaivka and Petrivka villages. In Mykolaivka, tourists can visit an exhibition of embroidered icons and participate in a pottery master class. The "Kyiva Skarbnytsia" folk craft center in Petrivka offers visitors the opportunity to make traditional motanka dolls, bake with special dough, and take part in weaving, spinning, Ukrainian egg painting, or wood decoration workshops.

A special place in the region's recreational complex is held by Nova Frumushyka (Veselodolynska rural council, Tarutyne Raion). Built six years ago on the site of a former military training ground, the village successfully combines rural green tourism and ethnic tourism. It features cottages meeting modern European standards, a picturesque lake, wildlife enclosures, and adrenaline-filled excursions into untouched steppe, ravines, and gorges in an off-road vehicle. There is also a national cuisine restaurant on site.

Nova Frumushyka functions almost as an open-air museum. Eight houses represent the lifestyles and traditions of the region's different ethnic and social groups. Along a rose avenue, visitors find a Moldovan homestead, followed by German, Ukrainian, Russian, Bulgarian, Gagauz, and Jewish houses. Of special note is a mid-20th-century collective-farming worker's home as a period monument. All houses are built from natural traditional materials and furnished with antique domestic items and agricultural tools. The interiors contain rare objects – traditional carpets, hand- and loom-woven floors. The interiors are entirely authentic, assembled from local villagers. Additionally, each house is equipped, through separate doors, with modern bathrooms, hot water, and a Jacuzzi – offering tourists an exotic experience with full amenities.

The project also envisions the development of local crafts. Bessarabian folk crafts are traditionally widespread – from embroidery and ceramics to wrought iron and wooden household items. A folk craft shop on-site allows tourists to purchase items branded with the village logo. The complex also features a national cuisine restaurant ("Korchma"), a mini-zoo, and a Bessarabian ethnographic museum.

However, this recreational facility has a significant drawback: directly across a ravine lies the world's third-largest fine-wool sheep breeding complex (over 8,000

head). With operations of this scale, odor pollution is practically unavoidable, which is likely to affect the appeal of the settlement.

Rural tourism has the potential to relieve the overcrowding of coastal areas in the oblast during summer. Tourism facilities in villages can partially reduce this load – by hosting festivals, village celebrations, church holidays, national holidays; providing additional employment and self-employment for rural residents; attracting investment in rural areas; reviving folk crafts; and organizing event-based activities (wine festivals, cheese festivals, and more).

3. Conclusions

Rural green tourism is a type of economic activity that can become a key driver for effective tourism development in Odesa Oblast. This is supported by the abundance of natural and cultural resources, the relatively simple entry into this sector, the region's favorable geographic location, and the availability of qualified personnel for its development. Rural green tourism should be integrated into the Strategy and Programs for the socio-economic and cultural development of territorial communities.

The spatial organization of rural green tourism in Odesa Oblast should be oriented around the Odesa–Reni corridor and the coastal areas along the Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyi–Serhiivka–Tatarbunary road. However, for effective implementation, it is necessary to establish a tourist information center based on a new model – a multifunctional space where local craft products can be marketed and sold.

If not for the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing war, such a facility would likely have already been constructed near the village of Sarata with funding from the State Regional Development Fund of Ukraine.

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