



EASTERN RHODOPES

How tourism can contribute to nature conservation



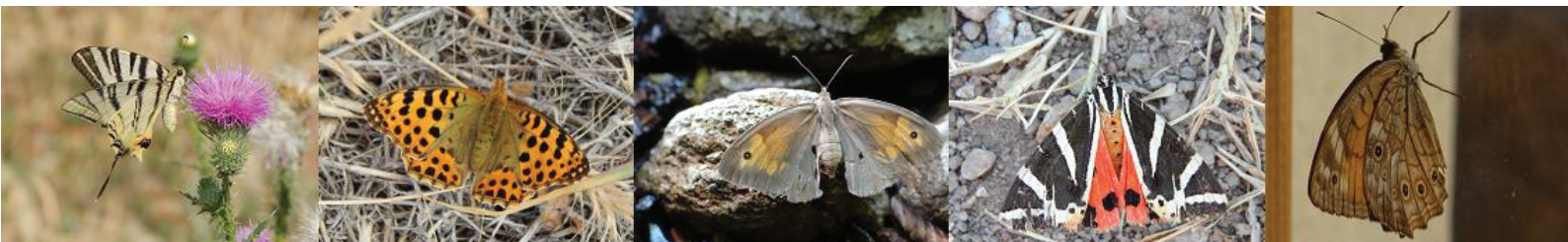
On behalf of:
New Thracian Gold & Ark Nature



Wendy Liefing & Iris de Boer
23 October 2013
Kardzhali, Bulgaria



"An area which deserves a visit"



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On behalf of:
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Kardzhali, Bulgaria



Bachelor internship
Forestry and Nature conservation
Van Hall Larenstein, University of Applied Sciences



"An area which deserves a visit"

Preface

July 26th we gathered on Eindhoven airport, waiting for our adventure to start: an internship in Bulgaria! Now, almost three months later, we can look back on an amazing experience. During our stay in Bulgaria we have met very enthusiastic and inspiring people and we got to experience the real Bulgarian rural life. We learned a lot about the culture here and the big differences with the Netherlands. It was an eye-opener to us that not everything is as easy here as it is in the Netherlands. But at the same time we experienced the richness of this country, especially the richness of the sun; the delicious, good food and the very healthy people. This experience is one that we will remember for the rest of our lives.

It would not have been possible for us to go to Bulgaria without Frank Zanderink. Therefore we would like to thank him for all his help, support and feedback that we have received during the last three months. Another thanks goes to Mihaela Kircheva, for arranging everything for us in Bulgaria. Also her feedback and help was very much appreciated. Special thanks go to all of our hosts; Dimo Karaboyukov, Sevda Ali, Betty Vassilievi, George Sheremetev, David, Todor Mitkov, Nusha Nikolova and Hava Halil, during the last three months. They have provided us with information, gave us the chance to taste the traditional Bulgarian life and helped us a lot. Without them the report which is now in front of you, would not be here.

Iris de Boer and Wendy Liefing
20th of October 2013

Summary

There are two main reasons for the initiative of this report. The first one is land abandonment, youth is moving to the city and leaving a beautiful landscape behind. In history, cattle were keeping the area open for a lot of plant and animal species. At this moment the open area will become forest which results in a decline of biodiversity. The second reason is the economic crisis. Due to the economic crisis governments had to cut their budgets. One sector which was hit very hard because of this was nature conservation. Many organisations got problems with financing their organisation and are now aiming to find their own sustainable resource for financing.

Tourism is seen as an option to solve these problems. Job opportunities can be created and more people will stay in the Eastern Rhodopes. If tourism is coordinated in a certain way, money can be raised for New Thracian Gold. A webpage will be created through which tourists can book activities and accommodations and hereby pay a fee which goes to New Thracian Gold.

The Eastern Rhodopes is an European holiday destination which will mainly attract the 'Soft adventurer' tourist and the big 'E' tourists, explained by Macklay. This kind of eco tourists would like become involved in the local traditions and culture and want to explore nature as much as possible. The Eastern Rhodopes are already a good eco tourism destination, but still some important improvements can be made. An important improvement can be the creating of convenient maps of the area and to place readable information panels near historical relicts. The local people have to be taught how to behave with tourists, for example learning English and become familiar with the desires of (Western) tourists. Eco tourism in the region will bring many positive impacts; local people will become aware of the high value of their culture and nature and will take more care of this. Tourism always brings some negative impacts, which are important to have in mind, then they can be kept low as possible or be prevented.

Tourism is depending a lot on trends. Therefore you can never be sure about the money it will raise and the sustainability can be questioned. For now ecotourism is rising in popularity and the amount of tourists visiting the Eastern Rhodopes is rising as well. Therefore, at this moment it can be seen as a sustainable resource for financing an organisation, but you cannot predict how long this trend will continue.

The goal of the webpage is to raise money through a fee which is applied on activities and accommodations that can be booked on the webpage. But this can be done according to different methods. One is by adding a fixed percentage of five to ten percent to each activity which goes to New Thracian Gold. Another option is to have an initial fee per person per booking. This is a fixed amount of money which has to be paid together with a small fee per activity or accommodation night which is booked by the tourist. The advantage of the initial fee is that a fixed amount of money will be raised per person per booking and with the fixed percentage it depends completely on the amount of activities or accommodation nights that are booked.

To make sure that tourists will find the webpage, it has to be promoted. There are different ways for promoting the webpage. Most of the tourists which can be attracted by the Eastern Rhodopes use social media. It is important to reach the tourists in this way. This can be done by organizing competitions, publishing a beautiful and exciting trailer about the area and visiting the right fairs. The main idea for the webpage is that everything revolves around a map. On this map visitors of the webpage can see where they can find which activity and what accommodation is near to the activity. When visitors 'click' on an activity an information bar will appear with a description and pictures of the activity or accommodation. On the bottom there will be a 'holiday bar', this will function as a schedule for the holiday while using time blocks. Here visitors can fill in what they want to do on which day.

We believe that there is a high potential for the Eastern Rhodopes to become a popular ecotourism destination and that it can support New Thracian Gold in terms of an external resource for finance.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Motivation

The distance between humans and European nature is getting bigger and bigger, however the interest in nature which is far away from our homeland - like the desert in Africa and the tropical forests in Costa Rica - is growing day by day. Nature in our own environment has lost its highly intrinsic value but the value of nature in countries on the other side of the world is growing in the eyes of lots of Western people. Why are people travelling to the South of Africa for an adventurous safari holiday, but never travel to North East Europe to spot brown bears, lynxes and wild horses or to make an exciting survival or bird tour through the mountains and forests? The answer seems to be easy, these destinations are not well known for (Western) people and they do not know that high valued nature experiences can also be achieved in areas which are not on another continent but closer.

The Eastern Rhodopes contain a mountainous area in the South-Eastern part of Bulgaria. An area with Europe's highest biodiversity. An area where the time stood still. An area which deserves attention of adventurous nature tourists.

As many other places in Eastern Europe, the villages in the Eastern Rhodopes are being abandoned. Young people are escaping to cities for work and to develop a sustainable livelihood. The older people stay behind with some free grazing cattle in the grasslands and their vegetable garden near their cosy houses. Unfortunately, their children are not willing to take over their cattle and the nature is developing into a forest due to less grazing. A shame for the high biodiversity that will get lost this way. To predict that the nature in this area is getting monotone and that it will lose the many plant and animal species, we have to come up with a sustainable solution. And that is the main goal of New Thracian Gold; finding ways for a greener future for the Eastern Rhodopes. They focus on three main arrows; tourism, wilderness and agriculture. These three themes are all connected with each other and by developing one of them you directly develop the others. For example; when the nature gets wilder and animals will be introduced, tourists will be attracted for exciting wildlife tours or photography.

At this moment the New Thracian Gold project is almost running for five years and has achieved a lot good things already. Many local people in small villages have started their own enterprises and developed guesthouses and interesting tourism activities. Also a lot of people are willing to take care for the future of the Eastern Rhodopes, there is missing still one component: the tourist! Our task is to think of an interesting way how tourists can be reached in the form of a webpage. We have experienced this area for three months as a tourist vs. student and we are able to write an extended evaluation about tourism in this region. Besides this experience our main goal is to write interesting and enthusiastic promotion texts for each activity offered in this area. These texts will be used on the soon to be created webpage for tourism in the Eastern Rhodopes.

Hopefully the (Western) European tourist will find the Eastern Rhodopes because it is worth a visit!

1.2 Purpose

There are two main reasons for the initiative of this report. One of them is abandonment, which has been explained in the motivation. The other one is the economic crisis. Due to the economic crisis, many governments had to cut their budgets. One sector which was hit very hard because of this was nature conservation. Many nature conservation organisations got problems with financing their organisation. The awareness that you -as organisation- cannot rely just on government funding is rising. Therefore organisations are aiming to find their own sustainable resource for financing, to make sure that they are not depending on others for funding.

Tourism is seen as an option to solve these problems. By having tourists, job opportunities will be created and more people will stay in the Eastern Rhodopes. If tourism is coordinated in a certain way, money can be raised for the New Thracian Gold foundation. This will be done by initiating a webpage, on this webpage tourism activities and accommodations will be promoted. Because the New Thracian Gold foundation is the initiator of this webpage, they can raise money for the foundation through it. This report functions mostly as an advice for New Thracian Gold about how to develop this webpage and promote the activities and accommodations on it.

1.3 Method

The method that has been used for this report can be divided in three fields of activity.

1. Experience
2. Evaluation
3. Outputs

Experience

First we explore the surroundings of the accommodation. This to gain a broad view over the area. Furthermore we will participate in as many tourism activities as possible. While participating we collect information and make pictures which will be used for the webpage.

Evaluation

Often there are opportunities for improvement of the activities. From the perspective of a Western-European tourist we will think about how the accommodations and activities could be improved and if the activities are sustainable.

Output

Finally, we will make descriptions about the activities that can be used for promoting the activities on the webpage. We will connect 'Tags' to activities, for example 'Hiking' or 'Wolf watching'. This will be useful for the visitors of the website to find activities in their field of interest. Practical information will also be provided about for example what the target group is and if food is included. Also we will write an evaluation about the accommodation and activities and give recommendations about how to improve them.

1.4 Structure

In this report you will find a description of the diverse tourism activities, an evaluation for each guesthouse and village we have visited and last but not least a recommendation for the new webpage that is going to be developed. It is our intention to produce practical information that can be used immediately, so not much theoretical information, but our impression of the area and useful descriptions of each activity.

In the second chapter the Eastern Rhodopes will be discussed as a tourism destination. This is a general evaluation about if the Eastern Rhodopes are ready to become a tourism destination.

The third chapter will be about tourism as a sustainable financing resource. Within tourism are a lot of trends and you can never be sure about how many tourists will come to visit the area, therefore the sustainability of it will be discussed.

In the fourth chapter the financing structure will be discussed. This will be an advice about the different possibilities of extracting money for New Thracian Gold through tourism activities.

In chapter five the different ways of promotion will be discussed. Also an advice about the best options to promote the website will be given.

The sixth chapter will contain recommendations about how the website should look and how it should function. An example of the webpage is given.

In the attachments you can find the different tourism activities with descriptions, recommendations and practical information and the evaluations of accommodations. A CD with photos is attached to the report as well. These pictures can be used for the promotion of activities on the webpage. An extended table with practical information of all activities is added, these information is especially useful for promoting them on the webpage.

2. Eastern Rhodopes as tourism destination

A General evaluation

"I want to discover the world, but without a big footprint. I want to learn from other cultures, but without making societies poorer. I want to explore and survive in nature, but without disturbing the ecological environment. I want to make a safari tour, but without making animals out of their comfort. I want to be a tourist, and in the meanwhile contributing to nature conservation." – a Nature tourist

The Eastern Rhodopes are an upcoming tourism destination. On the 30th of September, Ark nature published on her website a news article about the growing of tourism in this region. In the year 2012 there was an amount of 776 nights booked in the Eastern Rhodopes, now, before the end of 2013, this are already more than 1000 nights. For example the Wild Farm; they had 286 nights booked in 2012 and this year they were full booked from April till September. Also Ark nature concluded that more and more tourist are coming from Western Europe this year comparing with 2012 (www.ark.eu 2013).

Because of this data it is clear that the region attracts tourists. But we must not forget that a mission of New Thracian Gold is to work on a greener future of the Eastern Rhodopes. How can we ensure that tourism can grow without a negative impact on the nature and local people? What kind of tourism is needed in this region or what kind of tourists will be attracted to this area. And are the Eastern Rhodopes ready for this kind of tourism?

Addition: This chapter is a general evaluation of the Eastern Rhodopes as a tourism destination. For a more detailed evaluation per region and guesthouse, you can have a look at attachment A: activities and B evaluation accommodations. In those attachments a more extended evaluation and recommendations for each activity and accommodation are given.

2.1 Eco tourist

If we talk about the Eastern Rhodopes being an eco tourism destination. We are talking about a specific type of tourist that is interested in this kind of tourism. Just to make clear on which type of tourist this review is focused. And to describe the tourist that will be attracted by the Eastern Rhodopes, the eco tourist is explained in more detail below.

First an explanation of alternative tourism is given, because alternative tourism is somehow a kind of umbrella of different kinds of tourism which includes eco tourism as well. Brown (1998) defines alternative tourism as follows: *"Activities are likely to be small scale, locally owned with consequentially low impact, leakages and a high proportion of profits retained locally."* Main characteristics of this form of tourism is the minimized of negative environmental and social impacts, the maximized linkages to other sectors of the local economy, localized power sharing and involvement of people in the decision making process. (Holden, 2008)

As said before, eco tourism is one type of alternative tourism which is described by the International Ecotourism society: *"Purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the culture and natural environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem, while producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people."* It can be said that also eco tourism is a complex term which covers many aspects. At first ecotourism should involve education, secondly it has to maintain the quality of the environment, it also should give the tourist an exciting and unique experience and at least it has to be a sustainable form of tourism that contributes to resource conservation and economic development (www.ecotourism.org, 2013)

There is not one 'perfect' eco tourist, but instead we can define eco tourists in three different types. The people that are covered by these types of eco tourist will not all desire to be environmentally educated and will not all have the smallest impact upon the environment as possible.

Mackay (1994) describes the three types of eco tourists as follow: The type of eco tourist with the biggest representation in number of people is the little 'E' tourist (1). This is a tourist who is aware of the impacts of tourism upon the environment. He wants to be

Three types of eco tourists (Mackay, 1994)

- (1) Little 'E' tourist
- (2) Soft adventurer**
- (3) Big 'E' tourist**

sure that the companies he is travelling with, meet the requirements of acceptable environmental standards and that his accommodation has a kind of 'green' or 'eco' label. But that is it. The second type of eco tourist Mackay describes is the 'Soft adventurer' (2), who is a tourist that wishes to make a trip through wilderness areas but rather in comfort and without the feeling that the environment he is visiting is being destroyed by tourism. The last type of eco tourist is the one that is willing to travel into undiscovered areas. He accepts the, sometimes, uncomfortable standards of the services and accommodations offered by local people. This is the big 'E' tourist (3). These are the most adventurous eco tourists with the smallest footprint (Holden, 2008). Three types of eco tourists which I think are not all appropriate for the Eastern Rhodopes. From my point of view this area is perfect for the third one: The big 'E' tourist. There are also possibilities for the second one: the soft adventurer. But the first one, the little 'E', will not be attracted by this area in special.

2.2 Are the Eastern Rhodopes ready for the eco tourist?

To answer the question from above, I first have to give a definition of the certain tourist I will focus on in this review. For the best approach as possible, I use the tourist I am myself; the big 'E' tourist, who likes to explore, be adventurous and not need to much comfort. I was in the Eastern Rhodopes for three months and I think I can say that I am one of the kind of nature tourists, the Eastern Rhodopes is able to attract. I also spoke with other tourists from Western Europe who are oriented on nature and adventurous holidays and I have read the feedback of the Ark employees, who visited the Eastern Rhodopes in spring 2013. I will use their impressions in this review as well. Besides the big 'E' tourist, this area will attract 'soft adventurers' as well. So the tourist for this review will be a mix of them. From my own point of view and with some literature studies, I will try to answer the question: 'Are the Eastern Rhodopes ready for the (Western) nature tourist?' I will do this by focusing on three main pillars, namely: Nature, Local people and facilities.

Nature

Protected sites

Big parts of the Eastern Rhodopes are covered by a Natura 2000 site or protected area. Nevertheless most of these areas are free accessible for people, so for tourism as well. The protected sites host many spectacular plant and wildlife species which will attract the eco tourist. The Eastern Rhodopes cover the highest biodiversity of Europe. An impressive scenery for tourists. Nowadays tourists can enter many protected areas by themselves, but it would be better if this will be more regulated in the future, especially when this area is getting more known by tourists. Good guidance will be needed for this.

Picnic places

In the nature areas several picnic places can be found. Mostly in the neighbourhood of parking places and interesting historical sites. Those picnic places exist of an open wooden building with roof and wooden table. For tourists these are good places for a rest and to escape the burning sun for a moment. An additional value on a new map would be if those picnic places are marked on the map. We found for example one near Kovan Kaya, Gorno Pole and the meanders of Byala reka. Some of these picnic places are not in a good condition anymore. Another suggestion might be to create official fire places where tourists can create their campfire, but this is a bit tricky during the very dry summer season.

Running water

Of high value is the enormous amount of water fountains in the Eastern Rhodopes. I heard from local people that when someone in the family dies, the family builds a fountain at a memorial place. The number of these fountains is high and during most of the hikes in nature, you will pass by at least one fountain. Especially during the hot season this is very pleasant.

Trails

The Trans Rhodope Long Distance Biking Route is a mainly off-road marked trail. The trail is crossing mountains, forests and small villages. The length of this trail is approximately 500 kilometres (newthraciongold.eu, 2013). The trail is interesting for mountain bikers, but for hikers as well. The route can be followed in total, but tourists can also walk or bike parts of it. During the internship we walked different parts of the trail and we were not always as satisfied about it as we hoped to be. Many times the marks were unclear and not well findable. This resulted in walking in the wrong direction or doubting which path to chose. Besides this we saw many marks near asphalt roads, which is especially for hikers

not an interesting place for hiking. A detailed map which shows the trail would be of added value. Anyway the trail is a very good initiative and with some improvements it will be of high value for hikers and bikers to explore the whole Eastern Rhodopes! Besides the Trans Rhodope Long Distance Biking Route, there are not many short trails marked in the area. For tourists it might be interesting to make shorter hikes from around the 5-15 kilometres. It might be an idea to mark those trails from guesthouses or villages where tourists stay. We did some suggestions which can be found in attachment A and B.

Disturbance

To keep the disturbance of tourism on nature and wildlife as low as possible, it is important that trails do not enter very protected places. Even better would be to let tourists enter those protected sites only with guides. Guides know the good spots for tourists and they even can prevent disturbance.

Crossbill guide

In April 2013 a Crossbill guide of the Eastern Rhodopes was published. This is a very useful guidebook about the Eastern Rhodopes in Bulgaria and Greece. The guide covers the wildflowers, birds and all other wildlife which can be found (in some cases if you are very lucky). Routes, information about the good bird-watching spots and observation tips are included as well as interesting information about the landscape and ecology (Hilbers, 2013). This guide is of great value for tourists who visit this region, but I have to add that it is especially of interest for the hardcore green tourist. The book focuses mainly on ecology and is very species-oriented. Besides this the book is especially useful in spring and beginning summer because then most of the species can be seen. Nevertheless the Crossbill guide is a very welcome and good publication about this region.

Hides

For the ultimate nature experience without disturbing the wildlife, several Vulture hides are built in the Eastern Rhodopes, especially around Madzharovo and Studen Kladenets. For tourists and photographers this is a wonderful way to get in touch with the flying doors of the Rhodopes, without disturbing them. During our internship we have seen a lot of those hides and their condition differs from hide to hide. Some of the Vulture feeding places are spoiled with many leftovers and bones of carcasses. Also the condition of the construction of the buildings differs quite much. Perfect are the hides where tourists can overnight, there is a little toilet available and good camera holes are available which is of great value for (professional) photographers.

Facilities

Maps

When you as a tourist enter the Eastern Rhodopes, you probably will visit the tourist information centre of Gabi tour in Kardzhali. Here you can buy the map of the Eastern Rhodopes that was created by New Thracian Gold. A good looking map with nice paintings and good symbols which show you the facilities and sights in the area. Just enough for driving by car. For bikers and hikers this map is not usable. A more detailed map of the area is needed, at least 1:50.000 but 1:25.000 for some regions is better. It might be difficult to create such kind of maps at short notice, but there are a few regions where the process of creating these maps can start first. For example Ivaylovgrad region, Studen Kladenets and Madzharovo region. For a green tourist, who would like to explore the nature, a good map with altitudes and black roads is needed!

Shops / Hospitals / Banks / Restaurants

In the Eastern Rhodopes many families are self sustaining. They probably do not need a big supermarket or a bank. Actually for tourists this is not so convenient. For example Madzharovo region, a place that will be, especially in future, a hotspot for the eco tourists, has no bank. The closest bank can be found in Haskovo, Kardzhali or Ivaylovgrad. In future it might be a good improvement to have a bank in this region as well. Besides this, big supermarkets are rare, fortunately there are sometimes little weekly markets in the villages where vegetables and fruits can be bought. The closest hospitals can be found in Kardzhali and Ivaylovgrad.

Almost every village has one or two little bars where you can eat, do not expect luxurious restaurants, but local traditional dishes while sitting between the local people drinking beer and playing cards. When tourism will develop more in this region, this industry will get a boost and owners of restaurants will provide English menu cards and in the future English speaking staff.

Information (panels and centres)

The Eastern Rhodopes are very rich in historical sites which are related to the Thracian times in this region. Many Thracian tombs, rocks and carved cities are still intact and are worth a visit. Unfortunately the walking trails to these sites are hard to find and not well maintained. It seems that in earlier years people took effort in marking trails to different kind of sites. Also old information panels can be found near historical sites, but most of the time they are collapsed or at least not readable anymore. This is a shame and testified not of care for this places. I also saw different small information buildings (for example near Kromlech) which were in use for a maximum of one year. After this there was not many left. The abandoned information buildings and the poorly maintained information panels do not stimulate tourists to visit the sites and more important, they will not remember those sites as nice and protected places. And that while the historical sites are of really high value.

In Ivaylovgrad is a tourist information centre located, but I was disappointed when entering this. The first three times I was standing for a closed door with nobody in the centre. The fourth time there were people, but they did not speak English. And in my opinion the tourist centre is the place where somebody has to be who speaks English.

In Madzharovo the Vulture centre is located. Here the people are more help full. People speak English and are enthusiastic. The exhibition is a bit old fashioned, but they are working on a new exhibition from which the ideas are promising.

Roads

The roads till the capital city Kardzhali are in good condition, but from there the roads are starting to get bad. Tourists have to be aware of the many potholes in the roads. Carefully driving is important. The improvement of the roads in the area seems to be not of high priority, so it is part of being on holiday in this area.

The roads in villages are mostly even more terrible, but also here the best solution is driving carefully. The place wherefore I do recommend to improve the roads is game reserve Studen Kladenets. To reach the lodges and the campsite you have to drive a very bad road for a few kilometres. At some places this is hardly doable with a normal car and you almost need a 4x4 car. I can imagine that tourists who brought their own car, or rent a car, do not want to drive this road. I would recommend the game reserve to think about a good solution for this part of the road. Maybe with not too much efforts the most bad parts of the roads can be made more car friendly.

Local people

Hospitality

The hospitality of local people in the Eastern Rhodopes is admirable. Especially for Western tourists this will be a pleasant surprise, because we are not used to this kind of hospitality. To give a personal example: I was walking through the village Svirachi, when a farmer with his donkey invited us to come with him to his garden. He showed us the many plants he has, the different grape species and his oven. During this, his wife was preparing a table with many kind of grapes and other fruits. It was unbelievable, so friendly and hospitable. And I know that this is not an exception for this region. Tourist will like this. These are moments you cannot predict, but this short story is the evidence of the hospitality in the region. And this is just one example of hospitality during three months in the Eastern Rhodopes. Actually in this kind of hospitable situations, Western tourists can feel a bit embarrassed. Another example of hospitality is the enormous amount of food which will be presented during dinnertimes. For the hosts it is important to learn that good food for tourists, is not always the same as large amounts of meat.

It can be concluded that the people in this region are naturally hospitable and that is perfect for a tourist destination like this.

Guidance

We found out that local people know a lot about the region. Most of the people I spoke with are still living in the village they were born, or at least close by. They have a lot of knowledge about the history of the area, about the traditions but sometimes also about nature; wildlife, flora and fauna. At this moment a few local people are connected to New Thracian Gold as a 'guide'. But I think it is worth to build up a larger group of people and connect them in this way easily with tourists. Nevertheless good English skills are needed (see part about communication).

Generation:

When travelling through the Eastern Rhodopes, I visited many little villages which were sometimes almost abandoned. Villages where in past (50 to 100 years ago) were living easily a thousand people, now just a few hundred or less inhabitants remained. If the amount of people living in a village is high or low, one

fact is always very visible, the people remained are almost all retired. Young people left the villages to bigger cities. Schools are empty and abandoned, no future for the young generations in such villages. As a tourist you see hard working old women in colourful clothes harvesting their own vegetables. Old shepherds take their sheep and goats into nature every day. Most of the people are self sufficient. For the especially Western tourist it is an attraction to see this. It fits in the desires of an eco tourist, to experience and see the traditional lifestyles. But it is not really sustainable. Because the next generation is gone.

Communicative skills

The local people in the Eastern Rhodopes are enthusiastic and most of the time willing to contribute to the attraction of new tourists to 'their' region. But to help and guide the tourists, good communicative skills are a must. Languages that are spoken in this area are mostly Bulgarian and Turkish. But only young people (who are very rare at most of the places) speak quite good English. The older generations do not have English language skills. It is important to promote the importance of the English language.

Job opportunities

Great in the Eastern Rhodopes is that tourism is a sector from which the incomes flows **not** to foreign countries. Instead of this more tourism results directly in job opportunities and income streams for the local people. Local people start developing tourism activities and they build tourist accommodations. This influence of local people in the tourism industry will also result in a comeback of younger people to the region. Tourism also stimulates the preservation of ancient traditions.

Waste pollution

As a tourist I was shocked by the enormous amounts of waste I saw in nature. Especially in the surroundings of villages and cities many people 'dump' their trash in nature. For nature this is a big problem but for tourists it spoils the scenery as well. I think ever every tourists who visit this area wants to work on a greener future of the Eastern Rhodopes as well. Let's start with a cleaning project. If every tourist can bring a bag of trash home after each hike, we can reach a lot. Not everything of course, because the mentality of local people first has to change.

2.3 The impacts of tourism on the Eastern Rhodopes

Tourism has a big influence on the environment, not only the natural environment but also the economic and social environment, Bull (1991) suggests that: *"Tourism is a human activity which encompasses human behavior, use of resources, and interaction with other people, economies and environments."* In other words we can say that tourists are using the place they are visiting and this results in impacts on, or consequences for the environment. These impacts can either be positive or negative (Holden, 2008).

Positive impacts

It is already clear from the evaluation above that tourism can influence the region in a positive way. Especially for people and nature. Shortly the most important positive impacts of tourism which are related to the Eastern Rhodopes will be explained in this part of the report.

In many regions of Bulgaria it is very common that one or more hunting associations are located in the area. A lot of animals will be shot. In game reserve Studen Kladenets I met a group of hunters who showed me their just shot dead Wolf. I was shocked and I will not be the only tourist who will react like I did. I was especially surprised that the people who are developing tourism in the region, simultaneously scare tourists away. At the moment I saw the dead Wolf, I immediately thought: *'Now is the change of seeing a Wolf a life a bit smaller'*. A tourist wants to have a meeting with a living Wolf, not with a dead one. I understand that it will be a hard task for hunters to change their mind and that they start too see more value of a Wolf a life than a dead one. But when hunters see this value of living Wolves and if they realise they can earn more money with a living Wolf by organising for example Wolf tours with tourists, this will be a really positive impact of tourism on nature!

Another very positive fact of developing tourism in the Eastern Rhodopes is that this developing is initiated by a green minded non-government organisation; New Thracian Gold. One of their main goals is restoration of nature and the developing of organic farming. The tourism that will be developed, would always go hand in hand with these goals. In this way New Thracian Gold acts as a certain monitoring organisation to see if the tourism will not adversely affect nature.

Volunteering can give the small villages a boost of younger people. Farmers or local people who are developing a tourism destination or attraction can function as place where (young) volunteers want to spend their holiday to help out. This will stimulate local young people to stay in the area as well.

Finally it has to be said that the developing of eco tourism will contribute to the preservation of the culture and traditions. Because eco tourists are interested in experiencing the cultural life of the region they visit, the local people will be stimulated to continue with their traditions.

Negative impacts

Tourism can always bring negative impacts as well. The influence of this negative impacts rely on the amount of tourists. With small scale eco tourism, which is perfect for the Eastern Rhodopes, the negative impacts can be kept low easily. Important is to make tourists aware of the aim of restoring nature in this area. Tourist do have to take care over their waste and always leave a place as how it was before entering.

The local people in the Eastern Rhodopes are very authentic and for tourists they can serve as a 'picture object' their holiday photos. Tourists have to be aware that not all the local people appreciate it, when tourists make pictures of them. Especially when the amount of tourists will grow it is important to be careful with taking pictures of local people without asking. The contrast between the livelihood of (Western) people and local people can differs very much. Tourists have to respect the way of living here (Bouwman, 2000).

2.4 Ready? Yes or no

The Eastern Rhodopes have a lot of potential to become an ideal tourism destination for the 'Soft adventurer' and the big 'E' tourist. The natural value is really high and the area is perfect for experiencing the traditional life of people here. Tourist can taste from the culture and nature in the Eastern Rhodopes. It has to be said that there still are aspects which need a boost, especially the facilities for tourism have to be developed more. Important is to start with creating convenient maps of the area which can be used by hikers and mountain bikers. More trails have to be marked and local entrepreneurs and farmers have to be taught how to become a good host for tourists. And of course the hunter associations have to become aware of the fact that a living Wolf is more worth than a dead one!

3. Tourism as sustainable financing resource

Nowadays, more and more foundations and organisations have problems with financing their organisation. Most of them were depending on government subsidies and other funds for financing their organisation. Since the economic crisis of 2010 many governments had to cut their subsidy budgets, one sector which noticed a lot of negative effects because of this was, and still is, nature conservation. For this sector there was a lot of decrease in budgets. Many nature conservation organisations deal with trouble for financing not only their organisation, but most importantly, their activities as well.

The awareness that you –as an organisation or foundation- cannot rely just on government funding is rising. Therefore many organisations and foundations are searching for other, sustainable, sources for financing their organisation. Many of these organisations see tourism as a great external, and sustainable, resource for generating new funding's.

In this chapter the sustainability of tourism will be discussed. Tourism is depending a lot on trends and fashion but is also market-linked, therefore the sustainability of it can be questioned. Trends change throughout the years and market-linked businesses rely on the world- and local economy. Also other factors as nature conservation and development of tourism in the Eastern Rhodopes influence the sustainability of tourism as sustainable financing resource.

3.1 Structure of New Thracian Gold

The situation of New Thracian Gold differs from what is mentioned above, but they are aiming for the same goal: tourism as external resource for financing their organisation. By having an external resource for financing an organisation, this means the activities of the organisation as well. At this moment the project is funded by the Dutch Postcode Lottery, but this funding ends in April 2014. Therefore they have to find new sources for financing their organisation.

At this moment they work with three components which support each other: Wilderness, Tourism and Organic farming. These components are meant to help the Eastern Rhodopes with developing a greener future (newthraciangold.eu, 2013). Now tourism is not only seen as a component to support the development of the Eastern Rhodopes, but to generate finance for New Thracian Gold as well. Hereby they will focus on ecotourism. This is a growing segment in the global tourism industry that is making positive contributions to the environment, social-, cultural- and economic well-being of destinations and local communities all over the world. Because it is market-linked, ecotourism can be seen as a long term solution because it is not relying on government money (www.ecotourism.org, 2013).

Together with local entrepreneurs New Thracian Gold wants to have benefits from ecotourism and continue with developing the region.

3.2 The tourism industry

To tell if tourism can be a sustainable resource for financing, first we have to take a look into the tourism industry. This will be done by explaining the origins of tourism, trends within tourism, growth of the tourism industry and the development of tourism in the Eastern Rhodopes.

Origins of tourism

In this chapter ecotourism will be discussed as a resource for finance, but ecotourism is a trend within tourism. Later on the trends of tourism will be described, but first the origins of tourism will be explained. The origins of tourism explains in the first place why tourism started but also why some trends within tourism occurred.

"Tourism comprises the activities of persons traveling and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited."

– World Tourism Organisation (www.media.unwto.org, 2013)

The origins of modern tourism lay within what is called the 'Grand Tour'. Upper-class European young men, mainly from England, joined this crusade which leads especially to Italy. The custom was especially around 1660 very popular and developed in the 1840's to a standard route. (Roberts, 2001)

Other developments have led to the more familiar forms of tourism. This was mainly the industrial revolution. Due to the industrial revolution employees could be replaced by machines and every factor at work should contribute to efficiency. In the beginning of the industrial revolution it was normal for employees to work the entire day for a low pay in unhealthy conditions. Starting in the 1950's employees started to resist themselves against these working conditions. They had collective demands which included higher pay, shorter working hours and better working conditions. After the middle of the 19th century employers began to adopt 'enlightened' and 'progressive' approaches. Many of them realized that tired workers were neither efficient, nor reliable, and that the loss of working time could be at least partly compensated by an increased productivity and fewer mistakes during the remaining hours of work. This idea became more dominant as the industry became more capital-intensive and mistakes became more expensive and dangerous. Employers began to realize that using leisure to motivate their employees could be more effective than trying to suppress their pastimes. The standard working day was cut back to not more than 10 hours in nearly all industries during the second half of the 19th century. (Roberts, 2001)

This important development was the start and ensured the increase of 'leisure', which later on developed in 'Tourism'.

Because of the unhealthy working conditions in factories, most employees wanted to get out of the unhealthy environment. This was the start of tourism as we know it today. People would go to a place outside their usual environment for not more than one year to relax. (Holden, 2008)

Trends in tourism

The first trend known in tourism is seaside tourism, as mentioned above. This transformed over the years from small trips to the coast to big resorts. Most of these resorts are located in the Mediterranean region of Europe near to the coast. Tourists just come here to relax and enjoy the weather. (Marchman, 2013)

Due to globalisation, which developed together with the industrial revolution, trade all over the world became easier. Therefore travelling all over the world became easier and faster as well. Because of this development more exotic places became very popular as tourism destination. People wanted to explore the world and go to completely different places than they are used to. (Holden, 2008)

A trend which grew out of the global environmental movement in the late '70s is ecotourism. It started with a slow growth and development but in the early '90s ecotourism, along with nature-based, cultural, heritage and adventure tourism, had become one of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry worldwide (www.ecotourism.org, 2013).

Even within ecotourism there have been some developments. When ecotourism started in the '70s, it was only focussing on nature conservation. The goal was to raise money for nature conservation and to raise awareness for the need of nature conservation through tourism (www.wetenschap24.nl, 2013). This was the start of building luxurious lodges which are located mainly in Africa. The target group of these lodges are people with high-end incomes. These holidays are nowadays still very popular (Pedro, 2013).

In the current ecotourism communities are also included in generating benefits from ecotourism. Ecotourism is popular because it is a 'justified' way of going on holiday. Enjoying a holiday while doing good for the environment and local population (www.wetenschap24.org, 2014).

A quite recent development within ecotourism is individual travelling. Especially younger people do not plan their holiday but just go to a destination and arrange everything there themselves. But also for other age groups, the group travels are not that popular anymore. "Nobody wants to be for three weeks in a group of travellers from their own country and a guide from their own country". This quote comes from a newspaper article which was published in August 2013. The conclusion of this article is that tourists want to travel more individually, therefore a lot of holidays are being developed which are still group travels, but with more freedom. Also travelling with an international group has become more popular. This movement shows that people want to travel more individual and experience the local

culture as much as possible, but don't want to arrange everything themselves (besides younger travellers from the age of 18 to around 25) (Dubbelman, 2013).

Growth of the tourism industry

Comparing to other businesses the tourism industry is relatively new, but tourism alone can claim to be the world's biggest industry. This does not mean that tourism itself has the highest amount of people that work in this sector, but a lot of people are indirectly engaged into tourism. For example cleaners of hotels, waitresses and many more (Marchmann, 2013).

It is also important to have in mind that the economy is still in a crisis. But even last year the tourism industry has grown with four percent, which is a new record of growth. Not only the number of holidays increased, but the amount of money that tourists spend on their holiday as well (www.kenniscentrumtourisme.nl, 2013).

In 2004 the World Tourism Industry made a graph in which their expectations about the growth of the tourism industry is visualized. This graph can be seen below.

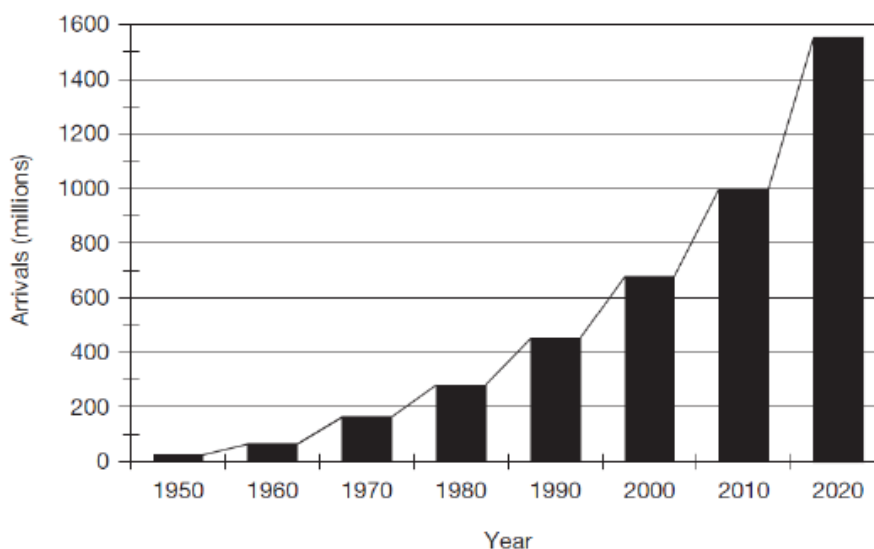


Figure 1.2 Actual and forecast international tourist arrivals from 1950 to 2020 (data source: WTO, 2003b; WTO, 2004a).

(Holden, 2008)

This graph shows a growth of the tourism industry between 2010 and 2020 of 55 percent. This does not mean that ecotourism will grow with 55 percent because this is about the tourism industry. But a growth of ecotourism can be expected, the growth can be equal to the complete industry but also higher because ecotourism is growing within the tourism industry.

Development of tourism in the Eastern Rhodopes

At this moment the number of tourists visiting Eastern Rhodopes is increasing very strong. Since 2009 NTG is working on improving the tourism facilities (travel guides and maps e.g.). In 2012 there already was a growth of tourists but in 2013 was the growth in visitors and staying overnight spectacular. Last year 90% of tourists was from Bulgaria and 10% from Western-Europe, but the number of foreign tourists has increased strongly. Exact numbers of 2013 are not known yet, but the Wild Farm in Gorno Pole had 286 nights in 2012 which has increased to 860 nights for 2013 already. The lodge in Studen Kladenets had zero tourists in 2011, twenty in 2012 and 55 in 2013 already. Also other Bed & Breakfasts and hotels noticed a strong increase in amounts of guests in 2013 (www.ark.eu, 2013).

3.3 Nature Conservation

To attract eco tourists, high quality of nature is essential. Eco tourists are mostly attracted by a high biodiversity in plant and animal species. Unfortunately tourists have – besides positive effects – some negative effects. Two of these effects pose a threat for ecotourism, these are land degradation and pollution. These effects will make the landscape less attractive and therefore pose a threat for future tourists. Nature conservation is therefore very important, because less tourists – as result of less attractive landscape – means less financing for New Thracian Gold. This can be seen as a positive effect because it obligates New Thracian Gold (and local tourism entrepreneurs) to maintain the quality of the landscape. Money raised through tourism will be used for nature conservation and development of the area. In this way ecotourism helps to protect the environment with its biodiversity.



Maintaining the quality of nature makes New Thracian Gold able to ensure that the area stays attractive for ecotourism. Here must be noted that eco tourists mainly want to cause as less impact on the area as possible but some will have impact.

3.4 Other factors that influence tourism

Another important factor for tourism is the political situation in the country of destination. When a country is in the news in a negative way for a long time, this can affect the amount of tourists. This was the case in 2012 for Greece, at that time there were a lot of uncertainties if Greece would stay within the European Union and that year the amount of tourists was very low. Many hotels had just a small number of guests. This shows how much a political situation can affect tourism. It is important for tourists to be in a safe surrounding.

If tourism becomes a big success in the region, also the risk occurs that entrepreneurs who are not bound to the webpage of New Thracian Gold can try to generate profits from it. Then it will be hard or almost impossible to generate money through these tourists for New Thracian Gold. It is important to become the most known tourist website from the area but also to maintain this position. Another importance lays within stimulating local entrepreneurs to engage themselves within the network of New Thracian Gold in a way that they will be placed on the website.

3.5 Is tourism a sustainable resource for financing?

At this moment all trends are positive for tourism in the Eastern Rhodopes. Tourism has always been depending on trends and fashion and the popularity of ecotourism is still increasing. The growth of the tourism industry during an economic crisis is very positive. Also the growth of visitors in the Eastern Rhodopes is a positive development. Therefore tourism can be seen as a sustainable resource for financing. The downside is that it continues to be depending on trends. No one can tell how long the positive trends for ecotourism will last and how far they will develop. But the impressive growth predicted by the tourism industry shows that for the next ten years the tourism industry will continue to grow. Therefore it should not cause any problems for at least ten years.

The best would be to create a network of nature oriented tourists which can sustain itself. New Thracian Gold is not aiming to develop mass-tourism in the Eastern Rhodopes and therefore this would be sufficient. If the network of tourists can sustain itself, it will also sustain the financing for New Thracian Gold.

4. Financing structure

The aim of the website that will be created by New Thracian Gold is to generate financing for their organisation by tourism activities. This money can be generated in different ways, in this chapter five ways of generating money for New Thracian Gold through tourism activities will be given. These five ways are an advice about what possibilities are available and can be used. The money that goes to New Thracian Gold will be referred to in this chapter as 'Conservation fee'.

Fixed percentage on activities

Every activity has an additional percentage of fee which goes to New Thracian Gold, conservation fee. This can be a fixed percentage from around five to ten percentage which applies to everything. It does not matter how many activities or accommodation nights the tourist books. The percentage will be included in the costs of every accommodation night and activity and cannot be separated from it. This way of generating finance is visualized in figure 1: Fixed percentage on activities.

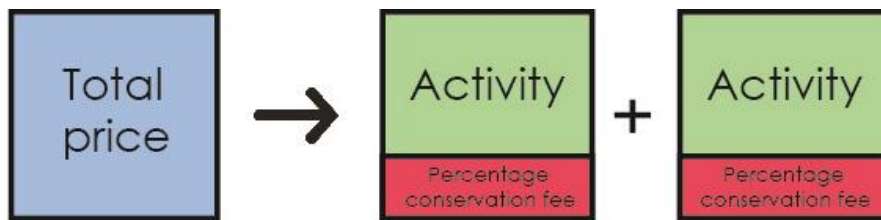


Figure 1: Fixed percentage on activities

Variable percentage based on amount of activities booked

Another option is to lower the percentage when tourists book more activities. For example: ten percentage conservation fee when the tourist books one to three activities or accommodation nights which decreases to nine percentage when the tourist books four to six activities or accommodation nights. This idea is visualized in figure 2: Variable percentage based on amount of activities booked. The idea is that when a tourist books more activities or accommodation nights the conservation fee percentage becomes lower. For example, when a tourist has booked three activities the percentage of conservation fee is ten, but when a tourist would book four activities the conservation fee is nine. This makes it financially more attractive to book an extra activity because the conservation fee decreases in percentage. Even though tourists would spend more money in total, a lot of people like the idea of discount and are tempted by it.

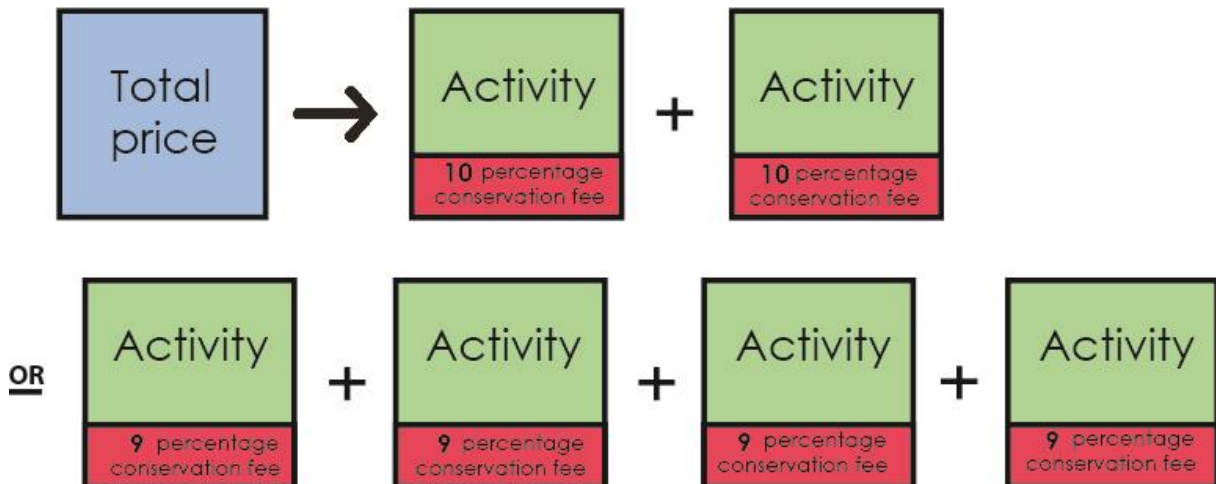


Figure 2: Variable percentage based on amount of activities booked

Daily conservation fee

This option means that every person pays a fee for the amount of days that they are in the area. Many tourist organisations or tour operators that work in Africa use this way of generating money for nature conservation. For each day in the area a fixed amount of money per person is being charged. This does not change due to activities but is depending on how long the tourists are staying in the area. For example, in Kruger National Park in South-Afrika the conservation fee is a bit more than 30 BGN per day for an adult, children till the age of 11 are charged 15 BGN per day (krugerpark.co.za, 2013).

A comparable fee can be applied to the Eastern Rhodopes. Based on the activities and amount of accommodation nights that are booked through New Thracian gold, the amount of days that the tourist is staying can be determined and therefore a conservation fee per day can be charged. The conservation fee is per person, therefore for children there should be a lower fee charged than for adults. This idea is visualized in figure 3: Daily conservation fee.



Figure 3: Daily conservation fee

Initial fee

The idea of the initial fee is that every person pays a fixed amount of money, no matter how long they will stay in the area or how many activities they book. In this way you can make sure that a certain amount of money, the initial fee, is being raised per booking. The idea is visualized in figure 4: Initial fee. The downside of this fee is that there is no difference for people who book one activity or more activities and it does not matter how long the people stay in the area.



Figure 4: Initial fee

For the reason mentioned above, this idea can be expanded with adding a small fee for each activity and/or accommodation tourists book while lowering the initial fee. Then the tourists will pay the initial fee with small fees for the activities they book. This can also be a fixed amount of money which is the same per activity or accommodation night. For a better overview of this idea, it is visualized in figure 5: Initial fee with small fee per activity. Another option is to set different fees for activities, for example an accommodation night has a lower fee than a Wolf tour or the other way around.

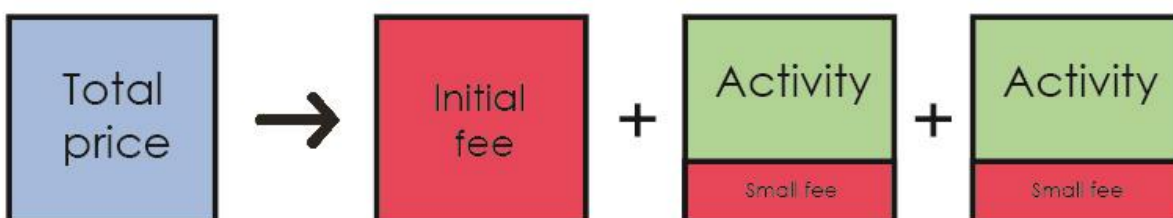


Figure 5: Initial fee with small fee per activity

Donations as addition

If tourist want to pay extra for conservation of the area, they should have the ability to do so. Therefore it would be good to add the possibility for donations. Than tourists can decide themselves if, and how much, they would like to donate. This would be additional to the other fee which is charged for the activities or the stay of tourists in the area.

Advise

Fixed percentage on activities is a way of gaining money for nature conservation which we think is the best option. This option is the most easy one to accomplish and for tourists also the most clear option. Another good option is the initial fee with small fee per activity, which says that every tourist pays one certain amount for nature conservation, unless if you are participating in one or more activities. For each activity the tourist pays an extra fee.

5. Promotion

When the new website will be launched it is really important to attract people. The webpage can be very shiny and professional, but the right tourists have to find it. In this chapter there are some ideas offered how to promote the webpage, but also New Thracian Gold and the Eastern Rhodopes in general. We are not specialists in this field of work, so we just give our ideas we have about promotion and used some examples of methods which are used by other organizations.

Social media

Most of the people in Europe are at least part of one kind of Social media, for example Facebook and Twitter. It is remarkable that the Facebook of New Thracian Gold is in use quite much, but most of the updates are in the Bulgarian language. The first step, which can start from now, is writing these updates in English. When needed a Bulgarian or Dutch translation can be added, but the main communication language has to be in English. Twitter is in use of New Thracian Gold as well. For this media goes the same as for facebook; updates has to be written in English.

It would be great if the amount of followers on Twitter and Facebook will rise up. This can be done by interesting tweets, short movies and updates which are worth to share. This is also a good medium for competitions or trailers about the area. For example New Thracian Gold can have a look on the way how Rewilding Europe is using these social platforms. Showing impressive pictures which makes people enthusiastic and curious for this beautiful area is a good example.

Fairs

The Eastern Rhodopes as a tourist destination fits in many different kinds of tourism:

- Adventure
- Wildlife
- Biodiversity
- Photography
- Traditional
- Historical
- Bird watching

It is good to divide the promotion strategies over those different subjects and visit different kind of fairs.

1. The Dutch fair: 'Fiets en wandelbeurs' is a fair for tourists who are interested in biking and hiking. This fair is in the weekend of the 1st and 2nd of March 2014.
2. The Dutch fair: 'Adventure fair' is a fair for active travellers with subjects as: outdoor activities, cooking workshops, winery tours etc. The fair is especially focused on small scale organisations.
3. The Dutch seminar programme: 'PIXperience' is a seminar about nature photography. Besides interesting lectures there is a nature photography fair which might be interesting for New Thracian Gold to promote the Eastern Rhodopes as a destination for photographers. This fair took place in March 2013, we are not sure whether this fair will take place in 2014 again.

Another option might be promoting the Eastern Rhodopes among people who are working for (large) nature organizations. For example sending flyers to these organizations and asking for a promotion in their newsletter or webpage. Many people working for nature organizations are adventurous and nature oriented during holidays as well. This might be a good target group to focus upon.

Trailer

When searching for 'Eastern Rhodopes' on youtube, many short films can be found about the Wild farm, Vultures and activities in the area. All the movies are nice to see and promoting the area, but the number of views is low. Maybe every week another short trailer/film can be posted on the facebook and twitter page. Besides this it would be nice to produce one trailer for the Eastern Rhodopes in total. A beautiful and professional trailer like the trailer of Rewilding Europe (www.rewildingeurope.com, 2013) and the Dutch movie 'De nieuwe wildernis' would be a good promotion tool for the area. Just a short but powerful trailer which shows impressive shots of the wildlife and orchids and make people really curious to the Eastern Rhodopes. The trailer gives a kind of 'WOW'- impression. This trailer has to become a popular one and must be promoted very well on the webpage, Facebook, Twitter, but also during conferences and fairs. The trailer can directly explain the goals and ideas of New Thracian Gold. Also it might be interesting to include a shot of the traditional way of farming and living here. We were really impressed by the very basic and traditional ways of how people are living in the villages, we did not expect this in advance, because there is not many information about it in brochures or on the

webpage. It can be a good addition, it will attract more tourists who are especially interested in this old and traditional lifestyles.

Competitions

Competitions can be used to promote the Eastern Rhodopes. There are many options for competitions which are listed below:

- *Photo contest*: New Thracian Gold can open a photo contest. Photo contest are very popular and used by many nature organizations and NGO's. It can be a photo contest in general or about a specific subject related to New Thracian Gold and the Eastern Rhodopes.

- *Sharing*: You can create a kind of lottery around a Facebook update from New Thracian Gold. With the message: "Among the people who share this update/item we raffle a Crossbill guide from the Eastern Rhodopes".

- *Competition with a question*: If there is an interesting question, people can take part in a competition and win something.

By organizing competitions and contests a lot of publicity and sharing of the project can be the result. Especially in social media. A prize can be small or bigger. People can for example win a Crossbill guide, but maybe also an overnight in a Vulture hide, a short excursion in Eastern Rhodopes or a discount / voucher for visiting this area.

Newsletter

A newsletter is a perfect way to stay in touch with people who are interested in the Eastern Rhodopes and the New Thracian Gold project. People just have to subscribe with their e-mail address and they will receive monthly or quarterly a newsletter with all new facts and insights. We do not know how often the newsletters of New Thracian Gold are published at this moment. But it is good to have a certain structure in this. The layout of the newsletter needs some more attention maybe. And promoting this newsletter as well. Some messages in the social media like: 'Are you already member of our newsletter?' would attract new readers.

Materials

We now see that many materials of New Thracian Gold have a different lay-out. They all show the logo of New Thracian Gold, but further the lay-out differs. It would be more professional to have one lay-out which is used for all the promotion materials.

Mouth to mouth

For this tourism destination 'mouth to mouth' promotion is probably the best way of promoting this region for holidays. People who have experienced this area are the best promoters and have probably friends, family or relatives which are interested in such kind of destinations as well. A review page on the website would be of great added value. A place where tourists who have visited this area can post their best impressions or reminders!

6. Recommendations webpage

In this chapter we will give recommendations about how the webpage which is going to be developed by New Thracian Gold should look like. We will give recommendations based on other ecotourism webpage's but first we will explain the main idea we have for the webpage.

Main idea

When you enter the webpage you will first enter a page with general information about the Eastern Rhodopes and a lot of beautiful pictures. This will contain promotion about the region and why tourists should visit it. On the top you can find a bar with three options, first is 'Eastern Rhodopes', second 'Practical information' and third is 'Create your journey'.

The second page will be with practical information about how the booking system works and information about the conservation fee.

On the third page you will find the booking page. The main idea of this page is that it completely revolves around a map, for example the one drawn by Jeroen Helmer but then with roads and villages included and no animals because these will be used for the activities. On the side of the map you will find a list with twelve tags that have been used for the different types of activities; Accommodation, Agriculture, Camping, Flora, Food, Hiking, History, Minerals, Outdoor/sport, Traditional, Vulture and bird watching, Wildlife and Wolf watching.

When you select one (or more) of these, all activities with this tag will occur with a symbol (designed in the same style as the map) on the map. All of these symbols will have their own identical (solid) colour, to give an organized overview. When you will 'click' on a tag a short list of all activities will occur underneath the tag. If you 'click' on a specific activity on the map an information bar will occur on the right with the information that we have described about the activity. Also some practical information will be provided here about the duration of the activity for example. Accommodation will be the first tag that has to be chosen before other activities can be booked. When the information about the activity will be shown, also the option 'What can I do here?' will pop up. If a tourist will 'click' on this option, the activities near the accommodation will light up in the map. Important is that the activities and accommodation only occur when they are available. Especially for activities this is important because most of them are not available throughout the year.

Underneath the map you will find the 'Holiday bar' which shows the days of the stay and booked activities on which day. In this holiday bar timeframes are visible, there are three timeframes per day and each activity has his own duration in timeframes.

Steps for tourists to book their holiday

Here we will describe all the steps that tourists have to undertake for booking their holiday.

1. A visitor has to 'click' on the tab: 'Create your journey'. The page with the map will occur on their screen.
2. The visitor fills in the amount of days and date that he or she is willing to stay in the area. also the amount of people who will join will be filled in here.
3. Their personal holiday bar will appear on the bottom of the page. Here the amount of days is being visualized in a table and timeframes are visible.
4. The visitor can orient himself by using the different tags and the map on what he or she wants to do and where to stay.
5. After the visitor has found activities and accommodations he or she can fill in the 'holiday bar' and make a schedule for their holiday.
6. When the visitor is satisfied with his or her holiday bar, this will be sent to New Thracian Gold. Here has to be checked if all accommodations or activities are available and after that there will be send a confirmation to the visitor.

For making this advice we also used three example webpage's to orient us about the possibilities. All these webpage's have positive and negative points. Below you can find the websites that we have used and what we under found as positive and negative.

OutSight Travel, <http://www.outsight.nl/default.aspx>

Positives:

- Short positive introduction text of the area.
- Good explanation about how the webpage works.
- Possible to see information about accommodations before booking.
- Possibility to move accommodation nights and activities in the schedule. Also immediately visible what the duration is of the activity.
- Schedule colors red when the day is full with an activity.
- Easy to make changes in the schedule.
- Travel schedule receives feedback within two days.
- Day and night time block

Negatives:

- None or just one picture added to descriptions of activities.

Cape Town, <http://www.capepointroute.co.za/getaways-hiking.php>

Positives:

- Good distribution in different tabs and many opportunities to find information
- Good looking symbols.
- Clear list of accommodations, activities and others per category.
- Nice addition of the weather forecast.
- Connection to social media on the webpage
- 'We recommend it' list about what to wear, what to bring and others when going to the destination.
- Staff can be contacted by sending a message on the webpage.
- Good looking pictures added to activities.

Negatives:

- The used colours look unprofessional.
- Opens a new tab for final booking.
- Map is good and gives a good overview but more landscape could be included.
- No explanation about how the website works and how you have to book.
- Takes a while before you know how the webpage works.

NRV Holiday, <http://zelfsamenstellen.nrv.nl/>

Positives:

- Starts with a map.
- Immediately clear how it works, the webpage 'leads' you through the process.
- Time of leaving and duration of activity is mentioned.
- Possible to read experiences of tourists who participated in the activity.
- Looks very professional.

Negatives:

- Unclear travel schedule, too much information in the schedule.
- After adding an activity to the schedule, not possible to show the information again.
- Only possible to see the activities after choosing the destination. We think it is better to do it the other way around.
- Not many pictures added to activities.

When the definitive webpage will be created, we recommend to take a look on the webpage's mentioned above. From our point of view the first one: OutSight travel, is definitely the best webpage. We strongly recommend to watch carefully how this webpage is built up.

7. Conclusion

There are two main points of conclusion. The first is an evaluation about the Eastern Rhodopes as a tourism destination. This is mainly based on our experiences during the last three months. The second one is about the sustainability of raising money for New Thracian Gold through tourism. This is mainly based on the current development of tourism and the trends of tourism.

Evaluation

The Eastern Rhodopes have a lot of potential to become an ideal tourism destination for the 'Soft adventurer' and the big 'E' tourist. The natural value is really high and the area is perfect for experiencing the traditional life of people here. Tourists can taste from the culture and nature in the Eastern Rhodopes. It has to be said that there still are aspects which need a boost, especially the facilities for tourism have to be developed more. Important is to start with creating convenient maps of the area which can be used by hikers and mountain bikers. More trails have to be marked and local entrepreneurs and farmers have to be thought how to become a good host for tourists. And of course the hunter associations have to become aware of the fact that a living Wolf is more worth than a dead one!

Sustainability of raising money for New Thracian Gold through tourism

Tourism destinations are depending a lot on trends. Therefore you can never be sure about the amount of visitors and the amount of money it will raise. For now, the popularity of eco tourism is rising. Even though there is an economic crisis the sector of eco tourism is still growing worldwide and the amount of money that tourists spend on their holiday as well. The amount of tourists visiting the Eastern Rhodopes is also rising. These trends are all in favour of using tourism as a finance method. For now it can be seen as a sustainable resource, but you cannot predict how long this trend will continue and for how long it will raise enough money for financing.

We believe that there is a high potential for the Eastern Rhodopes to become a popular holiday destination among eco tourists and that it can support New Thracian Gold in terms of an external resource for finance. It is important to promote the area, for example the creating of a strong trailer for the area and bring this under the attention by social media is recommended. There have been many developments already to make Eastern Rhodopes a good ecotourism destination. Not just because of New Thracian Gold but also by local entrepreneurs who are building guesthouses and starting tourism enterprises. This area really deserves the attention of the adventurous eco tourist.

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Extra:

Evaluation from team Ark Nature, May 2013

Attachments

A Overview activities

Popovets - Trakia house

Popovets is a small village in the middle North of the Eastern Rhodopes. This little village can be described as one that gives you the authentic Bulgarian farmers feeling. The square of Popovets is the centre and this even is the local meeting place. If you as a tourist try to cross this square you will have a significant chance to get invited by the owner of the local pub for a coffee or cola. Dimo and his wife are one of the few Bulgarian inhabitants of this village and run a quite new guesthouse. Let yourself be welcomed by Dimo and Paulina in their lovely paradise in the middle of Popovets. Besides offering accommodation, Dimo and his wife organize activities that are mainly about traditional food and drinks from the region. Dimo has his own vineyard that is developed originally by his grandfather, his father took over the business and now Dimo is the owner of this small wine company. With his vineyard he produces five types of wine: Rosé, Merlot, Kehlibar, Rubin and white wine. His wife Paulina is an amazing cook, every time again she bakes the most tasteful Banitsa's and other typical Bulgarian dishes. The Breakfast is original and surprises you every morning. Lunch and dinner are presented with delicious meals and salads. Pauline is very hospitable and gives you a feeling you appreciate to have when you are on holiday.

1. Tour vineyard, winery and wine tasting

Description

Recently Dimo and his friends build a brand new winery. The grapes that are harvested in October, when they are as sweet as possible, will be turned into five flavourful wines. The way Dimo makes his wine is interesting; instead of using sugar to give the wine a more sweet taste, he uses the sun as sugar. "The sun is the sugar of my grapes," he says. Part of his vineyard is organic, there are no poisons used against unwanted herbs or animals and the wine produced with these grapes is bio-wine. Dimo is very proud of this and he lets you taste the grapes in the field. He explains with passion about the differences in grape varieties. Walk through the long lines with grape plants and feel like a wine farmer. If the time is there, you can even help Dimo with picking grapes (autumn) or browsing the plants (winter). After a visit in the vineyard you walk down the road that leads to Popovets, after a small walk of fifteen minutes you will enter the small farmer-village and the guesthouse plus charming winery of Dimo. He will show you his beautiful hand build winery and demonstrates you the process from grapes in the field to the several bottles of wine. After this explanation the excursion will end with the tasting of the five different wines and local goat cheese.

Tags: **Agriculture** **Traditional Food**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

At this moment this activity is not running yet. The winery of Dimo has recently been finished. It has resulted in a very good and traditional looking place for tasting wine. He uses traditional attributes. Important for the activity is to give the tourists the time for tasting. When we stayed at Dimo's place we sometimes had the impression that he wants to taste you many wines in a very short term. He is really enthusiastic of course. In the vineyard it is important also take the time to show the different grape species and let people walk around. An important improvement that has to be made are his linguistic skills. It would be very useful and interesting if Dimo can explain the process of wine making in English.

2. BBQ with lamb (Cheverme)

Description

The vineyard of Dimo is situated very near to Popovets, the village where the guesthouse is located. After a walk of fifteen minutes you will arrive at the vineyard, by car it takes more or less 5 minutes. Dimo brings you with his "limousine" (an old, small white Suzuki) over the black road to a place besides the vineyard. Here he has build a beautiful and relaxing place for a rest or picnic, including a fresh water fountain, a place for barbecuing and a place where a Bulgarian lamb from a farmer in Popovets can be grilled above the fire (this is called 'cheverme'). With some Rakia, a typical drink that is branded by Dimo himself, the evening will pass by in a cosy and pleasant way.

Tags: Agriculture Traditional Food

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

We haven't participated in this activity in Popovets, so it is difficult to say how this activity actually is organized. The place for the Cheverme located is in a very nice scenery and the facilities like the water fountain and the table are very useful. The only missing thing is a toilet, we do not consider this as a problem, but the activity will take many hours and for some tourists this might be a problem.

3. Dinner, sleeping and breakfast

Description

Take place at a wooden table in a cosy house and surprise yourself with a traditional Bulgarian dish cooked by the hospitable woman of the house. The hosts will make sure that you have a pleasant dinner and they will adapt to your wishes. After this meal with Rakia and homemade wine you can go upstairs and have a good night rest in one of the beautiful rooms with heating in winter and ventilator in summer. Wake up with the sounds of chickens and balking donkeys for the ultimate Bulgarian rural life experience. Enjoy the breakfast with traditional Bulgarian baked dishes. They will make sure you have eaten more than enough.

Tags: Agriculture Accommodation Traditional Food

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

Dimo and his wife offers three two-dorm bedrooms which are all unique and with typical Bulgarian furniture. We have no comments on this accommodation. The only small thing we would like to mention is that the house is very noisy because of the wooden floor. The television downstairs in the living part of Dimo and his wife is always on and makes a lot of noise. This is unpleasant if you want to sleep. It is good if they would take this in mind when watching television in the evening.

Madrets – House Madrets

Madrets is a small village on a steep hill, approximately five kilometres away from the famous historical site Perperikon, which is worth a visit. If you drive over the main road and enter Madrets, the first building your eyes fall on is the restaurant of the family from Sevda and her husband Feti. Together with their daughter and son they will welcome you in their restaurant and lead you the way uphill to their brand new guestrooms in their typical Bulgarian-Turkish villa. If you get lost in this small village the way to the guesthouse is not that difficult at all because the beautiful wooden and white house is the eye catcher of Madrets. Anyway, if you have installed your baggage in one of the modern rooms, the only thing that remains is relaxing. Because Feti and Sevda serve the most delicious dinners at their restaurant, with passion they show you the local farmers for your (first) milking experience and you will be thought how to act as a beekeeper. Sevda and her family take care of you and this will result in a very pleasant stay.

1. Honey harvest

Description

Right next to the house Madrets there are several organic beehives. From this beehives honey is harvested which is used for the meals prepared at house Madrets. For this activity you will dress up as a beekeeper and take out the parts where honey is kept one by one. When this is completed you will go inside the house and prepare the honey to be held out by a machine. During the process they will let you taste the most fresh honey you have ever tasted! After this process is finished the honey will be put into pots. You can buy a jar of honey after this activity.

Tags: **Agriculture**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

This activity is one that still has to be developed. Feti and Sevda are on the good track. The beehives are located in the garden near their guesthouse. They have enough special bee harvest cloths which the tourists can wear and they explain very careful how everything works. When we took part in this activity after harvesting the honey we went in their own house to take the honey out of the honeycombs. This part of the activity was a bit uncomfortable on the floor of their hall between their shoes and jackets. It would be great if they have one room which specially can be used for tourism activities. Such a room maybe can be realized in the new to be build restaurant.

2. Traditional Bulgarian/Turkish cooking workshop

Description

If there is something the family of Sevda and Feti can do, it is cooking. Sevda is very passionate and enthusiastic. She is willing to learn you the tricks of preparing a traditional Bulgarian or Turkish dish. This can be a Banitsa, Sarma's but also for the Turkish Baklava she can teach you how to prepare this yourself. So explore your cooking skills with this workshop and eat the prepared dishes afterwards with a drink. Most dishes are always possible to prepare but in the right season she can also teach you to make chutney or jam with fresh plums and other fruits.

Tags: **Agriculture** **Traditional Food**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

This activity is one that still has to be developed. Sevda is a great cook and can explain quite good the different steps to prepare a dish. At this moment she will give the cooking workshop in their own kitchen, which is full with stuff of their family and not very proper. It would be great, the same goes for the bee harvest workshop, that there is a separated room which can be used especially with tourists. Feti and Sevda have plans to build a new restaurant in front of their house, they can think of a small practice room inside this building for tourism activities.

3. Fishing and lunch with baked trout

Description

Get the ultimate relaxing experience at a privately owned lake with a lovely house in a nature setting. In the morning this place is a good and relaxing spot for fishing with a nice view upon the mountains. With some guidance even the people who have no experience can catch a fish. After the fishing you will move to the restaurant where a specialty of the restaurant. Special baked trout will be prepared with fresh caught trout from the lake and other fresh organic products from their own vegetable garden in the village.

Tags: **Agriculture Food**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

This activity is partly developed already. At this moment tourists can fish near the lake, but it does not include a lunch with baked trout. It would be interesting to combine those two separated activities because this will make both activities more interesting. We do not have any recommendations for this activity, although it would be great if the fish lunch can be organized near the lake as well. At this moment it is only possible to have a lunch with baked trout in their restaurant.

4. Night walk, camping and fishing near lake

Description

Besides owning a restaurant the family of Sevda and Feti owns a lake with a nice lake house. At night a lot of animal sounds of Jackal, different species of birds and sometimes even Wolves can be heard here. The walk will start at the restaurant of the family in Madrets. From here you will walk with guidance of the 'grandfather' of the family. You will arrive safely at the lake house. Here you will spend the night in a caravan or tent and if you are interested another walk is possible. If you wake up in the early morning you might have a chance to see the wildlife drinking at the lake. The morning is also a good time for fishing, a relaxing way to start the day.

Tags: **Accommodation Outdoor/sport Hiking Wildlife**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

At this moment all the components of this activity can be done separately, but they are not into one package. When we stayed one night in the caravan near the lake, the grandfather of the family was able to tell us many things about the wildlife around there. He makes hikes every night and morning and it would be of interest for tourists to join him. The facilities for camping are very basic, actually the only facility is the ground for camping. The toilet is not more than a gap in the ground between the trees. A simple toilet and outside shower would be a nice addition to this place, especially if you want to camp for more than one day. Then the hosts can also ask a higher fee for campers.

5. Hike and guide Perperikon

Description

With just a distance of 5 kilometres away from Madrets lays the historical site of Perperikon, a Thracian rock carved city. After a walk of around two hours through the landscape you will arrive at Perperikon, some people believe that Alexander the great got his vision to conquer the world at this place in the Eastern Rhodopes. This historical site is not like others, you are allowed to walk nearly everywhere and it offers a great view over the region. You also will see many archaeologists working there, because this ancient place is much bigger than now is discovered and shown.

Tags: **Hiking History**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

Perperikon is located very close by to the guesthouse and a hike to this historical site is very interesting for active and nature tourists. At this moment there is no trail marked from Madrets to Perperikon. We walked this trip with Sevda and without her it would have been very difficult to find the right way to the site. We think that would be really interesting to walk this trail with a guide and even have some guidance in Perperikon, but there might be tourists who would like to walk by themselves. For these tourists it would be very useful to follow marks to Perperikon.

Gorno Pole - Wildfarm

Gorno Pole is a very small village located North of the town Madzharovo. This village would not be as well-known as it is now, if the Wild farm of Betty and Nicky was not situated here. With their farm and new but still traditional guesthouse they provide job opportunities for other inhabitants of the village and they are an important hotspot for every tourist visiting Madzharovo region. They take care of an enormous herd of traditional Eastern Rhodopes Short Horn Cattle which roam free in the nature around the farm. The dishes they serve you in mornings and evenings are completely produced with organic meat and vegetables from their gardens. The honey in your mountain tea is produced in their beehives which you can find two kilometres away in the forest. Betty is everywhere in and around the house and garden and to find Nicky you must take a look between the herd!

Additional info: Gorno Pole is a very small village, it has a small supermarket where you can get the most important basic needs like bread, rice and water, but that is it. For a little bigger market you have to drive to Madzharovo, the closest town. Keep in mind that there is no cash machine in the area nearby. The nearest cash machine can be found in Kardzhali and Haskovo (both more than one hour driving).

1. Honey harvesting

Description

After a walk of 2 kilometres through the tough forest a little open field will appear. Around 30 green and yellow coloured beehives, owned by Betty and Nicky, are located at this silent and calm place. The 1st of July is the best moment to harvest this lovely honey produced by the bees. The whole day you will spend in the forest and learn how to take the honey from the hives. The day will expire while tasting as many honey as possible and a little lunch with tomatoes, bread, fruit and water. After this whole day you have become a real beekeeper and you can buy a jar of honey at the Wild farm to remember this experience during your following breakfasts.

Tags: **Agriculture**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

The beehives are located in an open field just outside the forest, a beautiful location. Because the beehives are organic they can only be harvested once a year, therefore this should be promoted more. A great thing about the harvesting is that after harvesting the honey, tourists can buy this honey. Also just harvesting once a year gives a limit to the amount of tourists that can participate in this activity.

2. Folk dance

Betty did not had information about this activity yet. Please contact her for more information. The aim of this activity is to have a dancing instructor coming over to the Wildfarm and teaches the tourists traditional Bulgarian dances.

Tags: **Traditional**

3. Hike Thracian Tombs (long)

Description

With a distance of 10 km from the Wild Farm in Gorno Pole a Thracian Tomb is located. After a nice walk through the landscape while following a marked route you will arrive at a Thracian tomb. This walk contains a smooth climb up a mountain and offers therefore a nice view along the way. The walk is considered as quite tough and is therefore not recommended for children. The walk can be done under guidance of Nicky. First you will drive to a place near the Arda river where you can park the car, from there Nicky will lead you through the exciting nature area and shows the hotspots of nature and wildlife.

Tags: **Outdoor/sport Hiking History Culture and bird watching Flora**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

This is a quite tough walk, therefore this can only be done in spring or autumn. When you prefer to do the walk without guidance of Nicky it is hard to find the tomb. The markings are not that well. It would be better when there are good markings and that tourists are more able to find the tomb by themselves as well. With the guidance of Nicky the walk is less tough and tourists are guaranteed to find the tomb, also more information is provided for tourists.

4. Hike Thracian Tombs (small)

Description

At a small distance from the Wild Farm you can find some Thracian relicts like a Thracian tomb and a Rocky tomb. With the guidance of Betty or her good representative son Mitko, a nice walk through the landscape will lead you to these places. After a visit of these historical places you can continue the road to a beautiful panoramic place where you can see Vulture nests from above! If you are interested after this hike you can come back for a lunch and end the day with a visit to Cromlech, a Thracian relict which you can compare to the English 'Stonehenge'. You can park the car near Cromlech and after a walk of 2 kilometres you will reach it.

Tags: **Outdoor/sport** **Hiking** **History** **Vulture** and **bird watching**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

This hike is just a small hike under the guidance of Betty or Mitko. At this moment Mitko does not speak English. He will learn this in high school and this will be of added value to this activity when Mitko will be the guide. The Thracian tomb is very interesting and some information would make it even more interesting. The tomb has a few very small interesting details. Without any guidance these details are easily being overlooked, which would be a shame.

5. Camping

Description

The Wildfarm is also available for camping. With the enormous grasslands around, you can find a great spot to put your tent. It will be hard to go to bed because the sky is filled with the most stars you have ever seen. After a good night rest you will wake up with the balking donkeys. Leave your tent quickly to see Vultures and other birds flying. For breakfast you can make use of the great cooking of the host Betty.

Tags: **Accommodation** **Camping**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

At this moment there are no facilities available outside of the main building, but we heard from Betty that a toilet is being built. We also suggest to create a small place for showering and washing. A place for campfires would be a great addition as well to complete the camping experience.

6. Horse riding

Description

Experience the area in real Wild Farm style by horse. There are possibilities for beginners and advanced horse riders. Advanced riders can make a day tour through nature and visit some historical places. Halfway the day there will be a picnic to generate some new energy for the rest of the day. For beginners there is the possibility to ride at the Wild Farm where you will be guided by someone walking next to the horse. Both possibilities can be discussed and adapted to your wishes by the hosts.

Tags: **Outdoor/sport**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

For now all horse riding activities are under guidance. Inexperienced horse riders will not come very far away from the farm or even leave the farm. Experienced horse riders can make a guided day tour. This is very nice in combination with a picnic because it is a long tour. But there are no possibilities for

advanced horse riders to make a small individual tour. Therefore it might be interesting to have a marked route in the near surroundings of the Wild Farm which can be done without guidance. With a small individual route, this means one or two hours horse riding.

7. Mineral tour

Description

The Eastern Rhodopes are rich in a lot of different minerals and the garden of the Wildfarm is filled with those beautiful and unique stones from the Madzharovo region. Under guidance of Mitko, son of Betty and Nicky, you will walk through the good mineral places and pick some stones. You will be provided with some explanations about the minerals. If you are interested it is possible to combine this mineral tour with a workshop from Slihavstvo, he knows the best places in the Arda river for finding gold pieces. Betty has more information about Slihavstvo.

Tags: **Hiking Minerals**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

With this activity the son of Betty and Nicky will take the tourists to a place where minerals can be found. For now Mitko does not speak English, he will learn this in high school and this will be of added value to the activity. It is great that this activity can be totally adapted to the wishes of tourists. Mitko is not educated in minerals but knows some things about it. For tourists it might be interesting to have this knowledge transferred to them. It is not known if Silhavstvo speaks English, but if he does not, we recommend to have a translator during this activity.

8. Picnic/lunch

Description

If you go for an adventurous day nothing is more important than a good lunch with a nice view in between. In agreement with Betty you can choose for a long lunch / picnic or a simple lunch package. The simple lunch package exists of two double sandwiches with cheese/meat, tomatoes and cucumber, fruit and water. There is a vegetarian and non-vegetarian version. The other option, picnic, is more extended and will be located at a fire place in the nature. This lunch above the fire includes meat and a dish with potatoes, onion and cheese. Also for this lunch you can choose a vegetarian version.

Tags: **Traditional Food**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

The lunch can be arranged on request, also the content of the lunch can be arranged on request. Therefore this is always adapted to the wishes of the tourist. For us it was not clear whether it was possible to have lunch at the Wild Farm, it is not shown as a possibility on the website. Therefore we doubt if most tourists know. We recommend to place having lunch as a possibility on the website of the Wild Farm.

9. Dinner

Description

For the evening you can take a seat at the Bulgarian table at the Wild farm for a dinner. Betty will prepare delicious meals based on traditional recipes and a lot of kitchen-experiences. Dinner exists of three courses, a typical salad with very fresh tomatoes, a main dish with baby beef or sometimes lam and the dinner will be finished with an always surprising dessert. To make the evening more enjoyable you can choose for a good glass of local produced wine, a fresh beer and of course the brandy Rakia!

Tags: **Traditional Food**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

The host will cook dinner and the guests can take a seat at the table. There is no choice in meals but vegetarian meals are available on request. Drinks are partly served on the table and partly available on

request. When many guests want to join dinner, there are two dinnertimes when the food is served. This is because of the limited amount of chairs and places in the dining room. Then might occur that some people have to rush their dinner to make place in time for the other guests, which might be not very pleasant. Another recommendation we have is about the time being given for each meal. It is very typical for Bulgaria to serve the dishes very fast, also when someone did not have finished the dish before, the new dish will be served. Although it is part of the Bulgarian traditions, it might be better to give tourists more time to finish their meals. This will ensure that they do not feel any hurry and have a more relaxed dinner.

10. Accommodation

Description

The Wild Farm is not looking like what you expect when you hear this term. It is definitely a farm and it is definitely wild but it is also a beautiful and luxurious location to stay for one or more nights as a tourist. The house lays on a beautiful location with view upon a mountain. The decoration of the house is very traditional and sophisticated. Every part of the house is kept nice and clean and the garden is very good-looking with many beautiful chosen flowers and a wide diversity of butterflies. For accommodation you can stay in one of the rooms in the main building, but there are four other accommodation places located in the village of Gorno Pole. For more information about the different possibilities you can ask Betty.

Tags: **Accommodation** **Camping**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

All four accommodation houses are in Gorno Pole. Only in the main house there is no facility to cook for yourself and this is the place where the restaurant is. People who are not accommodated in the main house can come here to have dinner too. The main house is the only house which has an Wi-Fi connection which is quite good, all other houses do not have a Wi-Fi connection. All houses look very nice and are kept clean.

11. Arda beach

Description

If you drive from Gorno Pole in the direction of Madzharovo, once you will drive almost parallel to the Arda-River. This river with its very fluctuating water level can offer you a refreshing dive! There are several sandy and rocky beaches near the Arda river which are nice to explore by yourself. You can join and camp near the river without seeing anybody for a whole day; totally relaxing! But if you want a bit comfort and some facilities like a bar and some background music we recommend you Arda Beach. Arda Beach is a sandy and stony beach near Madzharovo. A good place for a dive and a fresh beer or juice, but also a good place for more adventurous activities. 50 meters away from the Arda Beach you can find the rope garden. Also kayaks can be rent per hour. For more information about the other activities you can visit ardabeach.com.

Tags: **Outdoor/sport** **Camping**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

Arda beach is a place which you can visit to have a swim or relax. A lot of local people also come here and there is a small cafeteria where you can get food and drinks. The music of this cafeteria is quite loud but when you are at the beach this music will not disturb you. When you are sitting near the cafeteria the music is quite loud. You must like this to enjoy sitting here. The facilities of Arda beach needs a boost, especially the toilet is not in a good condition. For camping the facilities are too basic, no possibilities for showering.

12. Rope garden

Description

Have you always wanted to be Tarzan or Jane for a short moment, then you have to try the rope garden. This rope garden is located 50 meters near the Arda Beach and exist of cables, ropes and wood high in the Poplar trees. Take a helmet and safety belt and start the challenge. Climb upwards in the first tree like an athletic monkey and try to find your balance over the cables to the next trees. At the finish of your circuit you can choose for the cable way back down or choose for jumping and hanging between the trees while being lowered by the instructors. And watch out! If you did this once, you will try it more and more! For young children there is a possibility to swing between two trees, an exciting experience.

Tags: **Outdoor/sport**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

The rope garden is now organized by Pesjo, a guy from Gorno Pole, and some of his friends. They arrange the safety belts and lines. One of Pesjo his friends was staying in the same house as we did. The night before we tried the rope garden he was very drunk and the next morning we saw him walking around with beer. When one of us was going to do the rope garden activity he was the one having the safety line. This made us feel very unsafe because we knew how much he was drinking in the last hours and how much he was drinking the night before. It would be a suggestion to not let drink the instructors when they are in the rope garden.

13. Kayaking

Description

When spending a relaxing day at the Arda Beach you will have several chances to become active, besides the Rope garden you can choose for a trip with the kayak. Explore the riverbanks and the nature from the water. See the little fish hiding away from the boat and enjoy the calm water. When the dams were opened recently, the stream is high which makes it even more exciting and adventurous.

Tags: **Outdoor/sport**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

The kayaks are now being rent by Marin from Madzharovo. He arranges that the kayaks are at the right place and that there is someone who can rent them to tourists. These people often do not speak English, but it would be helpful for foreign tourists if they did. It would be great if the people who lease the kayaks can give some suggestions of nice places to kayak to, separated in short and long tours.

14. Bird/Vulture hide

Description

The area around Madzharovo contains a high amount of different bird species. Over 150 different bird species can be found in nature around Madzharovo. Near the Wild Farm in Gorno Pole a special hide is built to watch birds. To prevent misunderstandings, this is not especially for Vultures but for all kind of birds and even foxes and other animals can be seen from here. There is a possibility to sleep in the hide, therefore you are in the morning directly in the right place without disturbing birds. The hide has a place for two person and a toilet is included. A traditional breakfast will be provided in the hide.

Note: This hide is now being built therefore this activity is not ready yet.

Tags: **Wildlife Vulture and bird watching**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

For now the hide is not ready yet, but the location looks very promising. Therefore we believe that this will become a great activity for birdwatchers. What must be taken in mind -to ensure the quality of the hide- are the sleeping places and the comfort of them, the toilet and the privacy of this toilet. Also when the hide will be used for Vultures the distance of the carcass must be right and cleaning of bones

afterwards is important. Before entering the hide a short explanation of how to behave when birds come and how to behave in the hide while waiting is always pleasant for tourists. Another thing which is very important is the possibility to make good photographs. This must be taken in mind while constructing the hide.

15. Chevermé

Description

Chevermé is a traditional Bulgarian barbecue. With this barbecue a lamb or baby cow is above a small fire and you will all sit around the Chevermé and watch the meat become tender. The lamb takes around 3 to 4 hours to become ready and a baby cow around 9 hours. This traditional barbecue is with local meat. Together with some other Bulgarian dishes it will make a completely traditional Bulgarian meal from which the taste will positively surprise you!

Tags: **Agriculture** **Traditional Food**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

We were not able to participate in this activity. If we believe the host, the place where the Chevermé is held is very beautiful. The Chevermé will be served with some salad and other dishes as well. For tourists it gives a great experience if they can all sit around the Chevermé and watch the meat become tender together with some drinks and snacks. Maybe it would be nice if tourists can participate in the process of preparing the Chevermé. Some additional snacks would be good because the meat takes quite some time to become tender.

16. Museum Hristo Borislavtsi

Description

In the small village of Borislavtsi a museum about the history of Bulgaria is located. Here are old farm aides shown, traditional clothes, minerals, former Bulgarian money, relicts from communism and other interesting things. Some of the people who work at the museum can speak English and will provide you with interesting information about the history of the villages in Madzharovo region.

Tags: **History** **Traditional**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

The museum is a private museum that will be a national museum in the near future. It is a small museum with a lot of interesting exhibition pieces. The people who work in the museum know some English but it is not much. It would be better if they know more English and if there would be some descriptions of the exhibition pieces in the museum. Near to the museum is the Tahini factory (from the next description), we knew in advance it was there and because of that we asked about this. But it would be better if they would have some posters, flyers or other kind of information about this because they can escort you to the tahini factory.

17. Tahini factory

Description

After a visit of the museum from Hristo Borislavtsi, it is recommended to combine this with a visit of the small family Tahini factory of Hristo Zafirov. He produces the Tahini in the traditional manner. With passion he will show you his factory and the Sesame plants in the garden. After a very carefully explained tour through his Tahini factory you will taste 4 different Tahini's and a honey. After this you have also the chance to buy a jar.

Tags: **Agriculture** **Traditional**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

The tahini factory is privately owned and you can get a free tour there. This tour is combined with the tasting of tahini which is produced in this factory. Afterwards there is a possibility to buy tahini. One of

the owners of the history museum accompanied us to this factory and could translate some things for us. The owner of the tahini factory does not speak any English but has a lot of enthusiasm. There is not always someone who speaks English at this factory but we do think it would be of added value if there would be someone, or that someone could come there on request. For example that there is a collaboration with the museum and that someone of the museum would be the guide at the tahini factory. The museum owners can also inform their visitors about the tahini factory and when visitors are interested (and do not speak Bulgarian), escort them to the factory.

18. Hike to Madzharovo

Description

Gorno Pole is located on a mountain and that is the first thing you will consider when you walk this hike in the direction of Madzharovo, because of the wonderful panoramic views during this hike. If you stay in front of the Wild farm, with the farm at your back and the road in front of you, turn right in the direction of the central square with church. You have to pass the church and turn right, follow this road and one moment the road is becoming a black road. After all the houses and farms, approximately 10 minutes walking, you see at your right a small teahouse, pass this house and turn left. From here you just have to follow the dirty road downhill. Very fast a great view on the mountains and Madzharovo will appear. Down in Madzharovo you can visit the Vulture centre, go for a dive in the Arda River or do some grocery shopping. The road back is the same, uphill.

Tags: **Hiking**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

From Gorno Pole there is a good possibility to hike to Madzharovo. This is a very beautiful hike with good view over the area. The host can explain the way to Madzharovo very well but still at some points there are uncertainties about what direction to go. Therefore it would be better if the hike can be marked both directions. Then there are no problems anymore with finding the way.

Studen Kladenets game reserve

If you are a real nature lover you must visit Studen Kladenets! With a normal city car this is a hard journey but if you are in the middle of the reserve you can explore by foot, boat, mountain bike or join a ride with one of the hunters in the area by jeep. The biodiversity is impressive and everywhere you see the Fallow Deer hiding in the bushes if you are not quiet enough. In the evening, while you take a seat near the lake and let your intensively worked feet bungling in the water, you can hear the barking Wolves! Early morning and late afternoon are especially in summer, the best moments of the day to explore the area. If you have plans to visit Studen Kladenets for a longer time (2 days or more) and you will be accommodated in one of the lodges or in a tent, it is important to be aware of some facts; The road to the centre of Studen Kladenets game reserve is a bad one, with normal car it is very hard to drive here. Because of that it is not worth to drive this road too often. We suggest you to have in mind that there is no cash machine or normal supermarket in the neighbourhood, therefore be prepared. If you want to experience the area for a long time and you have no Jeep, it is recommended to rent a guide of the game reserve to bring you to impressive places like the Vulture hide.

Activities

1. Kayaking

Description

There is one thing the Damlake Studen Kladenets is perfect for: exploring the nature and water by kayak. The game reserve offers four kayaks for nine persons in total (three two-person kayaks and a three-person kayak). There is no strict route you have to follow, just row in the direction you think is interesting. If you row to the opposite side of the lake you can see the bottom of the lake, but you also can row near the trees and see the Fallow Deer drinking from the lake water. An interesting route is to first cross the lake to the other side and go then to the left while you row near the rocks. If the time is there you can cross the lake again and continue your way into an arm of the lake, here you have chance to see many water birds and maybe the Black stork.

Tags: **Outdoor/sport**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

The kayaks of Studen Kladenets are quite new and in a good condition. They look very comfortable but if you are paddling for more than two hours, the seats are not comfortable enough. Therefore these kayaks are perfect for a short trip, but for a longer or day trip you must have the availability to use better seats in the kayak.

At this moment the kayaks are stored in a barn near the lodge. There is no landing stage and when you want to enter the water or get out of the boat, this is not possible without getting dirty shoes. The lakeshore is dirty with a lot of trash and glass. We recommend firstly to clean the shore. After this it will be of great value to build a simple landing stage. This would be useful for entering the kayaks but for swimming and diving into the water this is of added value as well.

2. Boat trip

Description

Both guesthouses are located near the Damlake Studen Kladenets. A beautiful long stretched lake and when the sky is blue, the lake coloured like this as well. With the fist-mountain on the background the scenery gives a beautiful composition. Even more interesting is to watch the landscape from the water. The camouflaged engine boat of the hunting reserve is not the fastest, but perfect for a silent boat trip near the line between land and water. Watch the White-tailed eagles circling above your head and see how the cormorants fly over the water in massive groups. After a trip of approximately one hour the boatman will head for the shore at a surprising place where a very little church is situated. Take a rest here and if you want a sandwich, this is the right place to have a picnic. Explore the landscape by foot and when the time is there the boat will bring you back home or further to the dam.

Tags: **Outdoor/sport Vulture and bird watching**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

First of all the lake is ultimately perfect for a boat trip. We went from the game reserve to the right and went by boat in the direction of a little church on a hill. We passed by an enormous colony of Great cormorants. We also saw a pair of the Short tailed Eagle flying nearby, wonderful. It is if the guide can show these birds and give information about the birds and the area. It might be an interesting idea to include a picnic in this activity. The location near the church is perfect for this. The engine boat is good for a daytrip. When we participated the boat was not in a good condition. Before we went away with the boat some people had to repair it and when we were almost back at the lodge, the motor quit working. This is of course not very pleasant for tourists. But it is an adventure for sure.

3. Hike through reserve (part of long distance trail)

Description

If you want to get a good impression of the landscape of game reserve Studen Kladenets in one day, this hike is the best way to do so. You will cross many kind of sceneries and the view is awesome. The trip is partly, let's say half of it, marked with the red-white signs of the long distance trail, and partly you have to find the way yourself. You can start this trail at the old and at the new house. This description has been written for the start point near the new (main) house of game reserve Studen Kladenets. If you are standing in front of the house with the door on your backside, you have to take the road to the left. The first mark will be found soon. After more or less two kilometres, you have to turn to the right, uphill. This is also the point where the route starts for the older house. From here you just have to follow the marks. The road is a real dirty road but accessible by cars as well. The first part of the trail is only uphill. At one moment, let's say after 1,5 to 2 hours. There is a splitting point of two dirty-roads. One goes straight ahead, the other one turns to the right. If it is not your plan to walk the long distance trail, but make a circle back to the Reserve, this is the point you have to turn right. From this point you will not find any longer a mark of the long distance trail, just follow the main way for another 2 to 2,5 hours. Because of the wide view after half an hour, you can easily see the finish point: follow your mind!

Additional info: This walking trail will takes approximately 4 hours, but with a picnic, or some breaks included even a bit longer. Bring enough water, especially in summer you will need this; the sun is really warm and not so many shade can be found. No water fountains can be found during the road. The first part of the road you have to hike uphill, this is a tough climb and only doable with good hiking shoes. The second part (after the splitting point), is mostly downhill. The road of this second part is at some places even more difficult because of the rolling stones. Watch your steps carefully.... And don't forget to enjoy the beautiful view!

Tags: **Hiking** **Wildlife** **Vulture and bird watching**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

At this moment only the long distance trail is marked. This part of the trail that crosses the game reserve is marked pretty well, but there was one point where the mark was hard to find (here the main road turns to the left, but the markings go into the forest). It would be good to remark the trail where needed. Another recommendation we would like to give is to mark the hike described above separately from the long distance trail. This hike is a perfect trail of four hours which starts and ends at the lodge. The first part is marked with the signs of the long distance trail, but later on there are no marks anymore. Besides this it is not clear when you have to leave the long distance trail to make your circle back to the lodge. The best way is to use a new colour for marking this whole trail separately. A little, simple map (for example with the altitudes) would be useful as well.

4. Chevermé

Description

Chevermé is a traditional Bulgarian barbecue. With this barbecue a lamb or baby cow is above a small fire and after a few hours this will give very tasty meat. The lamb takes around 3 to 4 hours but a baby cow around 9 hours to get ready. This traditional barbeque is with one of the most traditional kind of meat in Bulgaria. This meat will be served with some other dishes and a salad to make the meal complete. The taste of the meat will definitely surprise you.

Tags: **Agriculture** **Traditional Food**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

What we have heard about the tradition of Chevermé is that all the people are sitting around or near the fire, because it takes a while. One man takes care over the meat, while the rest of the group is joining him. Chevermé would not be only the eating of the meat, but is about the whole process. We were a bit surprised that in this situation in the game reserve it was totally different. Here, Chevermé was only about eating the meat. The meat was being prepared in the backyard and nobody was aware of this. When it was time for dinner, the meat was deserved without seeing anything of the process. It was a very delicious dinner, but for tourists it is more interesting to get involved in the process of the Chevermé. For this the location where the Chevermé was being prepared has to be changed and the people who are preparing the lamb or cow has to give some interesting information about the process. Sell the chevermé as an activity and not only as a dinner, that is our advice.

5. Fish lunch

Description

The lodge of game reserve Studen Kladenets watches out over a beautiful dam lake. In this lake different kind of fish species are living. Near to the lodge is a fish farm where Karp is being produced in the lake. This fish farm is in direct connection with fresh water from the lake and that makes this Karp a local product from the lake. With this local Karp the woman of the house prepares a tasty dish which is well known in this region of Bulgaria.

Tags: Agriculture Traditional Food

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

This is just a nice dish and that is it. Very typical for this region and what it makes interesting is that the fish is very local. Another idea is to let tourist catch their own fish and after the fishing the fish will be prepared by the women of the house.

6. Wildlife watching Zornitsa hide

Description

The Eastern Rhodopes are well known by bird watchers, especially birds of prey and Vultures can be seen often. You just have to walk or drive around a bit near rocky cliffs to see the Griffon Vultures circling above your head. Even more interesting is of course to see them on eye level. This is possible in the Zornitsa hide, located one hour driving from the guesthouse in game reserve Studen Kladenets. You will be driven by a 4x4 car over a heavy black road, a beautiful trip through the wild landscape of Studen Kladenets. With some nice stops to watch the panoramic scenery and see the birds already flying this is a really interesting ride. When you arrive very early in the morning, a cadaver is in front of the hide. Go in the hide, prepare your camera with the good settings and take place on the seat. Wait for the first Griffon Vultures and you can start making the most wonderful pictures of these impressive birds on a very small distance. Some other birds can be seen as well, like the Egyptian Vulture, Black Vulture and Eagles. And maybe if you have your lucky day a Grey Wolf will pass by!

Tags: Wildlife Vulture and bird watching Wolf watching

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

We have visited the Vulture hide and it looks very promising. The Vultures where flying around very nearby and the scenery is beautiful (in our eyes very good for nice pictures). We think it will be good to include the possibility for people to overnight in the lodge. In this way they do not have to drive to the lodge very early in the morning and this might be better for the chance to see wildlife as well. The facilities are ok, there are enough chairs and there is a private toilet (which was not working). Below a short summary of the recommendations that were given by the people from Ark Nature in May 2013.

There is a panoramic view which is great. The holes for watching the wildlife are a bit low, especially for tall people. The feeding place seems to be a bit too far away from the hide and many leftovers of the carcasses are there, better to remove this more frequent. English guide would be useful, more instruction about how to behave during waiting for the Vultures is important (or an English poster which describes this).

7. Wildlife photography

Description

This activity has no specific information yet. See our recommendations below for suggestions.

Tags: [Wildlife](#) [Vulture and bird watching](#) [Wolf watching](#)

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

At this moment the hide in Zornitsa is the best place for photographers to make pictures of the wildlife. The area has many birds and other interesting animals, so it would be of added value when more small photography hides will be placed. Another option to rent photography tents which can be placed by tourists themselves.

8. Wolf tour / hike with guide

Description

Studen Kladenets is a popular living area for Grey Wolves. When the night falls you have chance to hear them barking from the waterside. When you walk around a bit you might see some footprints in the sandy road and if you are lucky some Wolf droppings. These are all interesting signs of the Wolves, but what is more exciting than a face-to-face meeting with this animal from fairytales? The hunters of the area know the good places where you are probably able to spot them, but it is nature so it is all about luck. One hour before sunrise you will be driven by car over the black road, and at one point they will park the car from where you will continue the road on foot through the bushes and where you will see Fallow Deer hiding away. Finally you end up at a small open grassland and the time is left for listening, being quiet and watching carefully in the direction of the valley with binoculars, waiting for the moment of truth.

Except for Wolf tours you can also hire a guide for other trips in the reserve, for example for watching birds and wildlife but also for a hike.

Tags: [Hiking](#) [Wildlife](#) [Vulture and bird watching](#) [Wolf watching](#)

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

At this moment this is not an official activity, which is a shame, because some hunters know the good spots where you have a chance to see Wolves. First we drove with the 4x4 car for 15 minutes and after we went by foot to an open place in the forest, from where we had a good view into the valley and to the other side of the valley. The chance to spot Wolves with your binoculars is there. You will hear them barking for sure. Even footprints can be found easily. That we saw a Wolf very close by was luck. The chance to see a Wolf very close by is rare. Nevertheless this Wolf watching with a hunter can be transformed into an interesting activity for tourists. It is nature and there is a chance to hear no noises of the Wolves or see not any Wolf, but only the experience is worth it. If the guide can speak a bit English he can also give some explanations about the Wolves in the area.

9. Camping

Description

Around the old house of hunting reserve Studen Kladenets you can find two beautiful meadows. A perfect habitat for the grazing Red and Fallow Deer and the Hares jumping through the high grass, but also a perfect area for placing your tent over here for the most wonderful night rest you have ever had! Fall asleep with the barking of Wolves on the background and in the morning, when the sun rises, open your tent and watch the many Deer's around you. The campsite is a very basic one, pure nature. But you can use the facilities of the guesthouse, the bathroom is included, if you want to make use of the kitchen you just have to pay an additional fee.

Tags: [Accommodation](#) [Outdoor/sport Camping](#)

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

The place is ultimately perfect for camping, near the water, a view on the mountains and between the grazing Deer's. You can make use of the facilities of the lodge, but more easy would be a little toilet building near the campsite. An outside shower would be useful as well. Just to make everything a bit

more camp-suitable and to be sure that the toilet is available 24 hours a day. Furthermore we do not have recommendations, it is a basic campsite, but that is what is desired for this place.

10. Accommodation

Description

In a remote place near the dam lake of Studen Kladenets you can find the lodges of the hunting reserve Studen Kladenets. One of them is very traditional, the other more modern and new. Both of them offer the same great environment. In mornings and evenings you can try to spot the drinking Deers near the lake. During the night you can hear Wolves when lucky! The hunting reserve itself looks very beautiful as well and you can make a lot of hikes through the area. When the weather becomes too hot for you, just dive into the lake to cool down. There are lots of possibilities to enjoy this area as much as possible.

Tags: **Accommodation**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

Communication is a big problem at this accommodation. There is nobody available that speaks English, only one person speaks basic German. There was not many effort to communicate with us and it was very difficult to communicate. We strongly recommend to have someone present in the lodge that speaks English.

Another thing we missed in the living room of the new lodge was a bit of 'cosiness' the decoration of the accommodation is almost all white and wood. Usage of some colours would make the vibe a lot better. We did not experience this with the room, which was very good looking. The balconies of the rooms have a nice view over the lake.

Letovnik – Happy Hippy Hostel

1. Horse riding

Note: This activity will be ready in the near future. Please keep in touch with the owners of the hostel about this activity.

Description

Experience the area on the back of one of the most reliable animals of the region. It does not matter if you have horse-riding skills or not, everyone can try. In consultation with the host you can decide to make a small tour with or without guide, long or short tracks, down to the river for a swim or even go camping. Therefore you can make this the ultimate horse-riding experience adapted to your own wishes and you can experience the area and beautiful scenery just like you want to. This activity can be done throughout the year but do take in mind that it would be very cold during winter times.

Tags: **Outdoor/sport**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

This activity is not running yet, because the hostel is not officially opened and the activities still have to be developed. At this moment the owners of the Happy Hippy Hostel have one horse which is ready for horse-riding, but just one horse is too less. They already have contact with somebody in the neighbourhood from which they can 'rent' or 'use' the horses for this activity. First the horses have to be trained. So it will take a while before this activity can start. It is hard to give recommendations already. This activity is guided, especially when tourists have not so many experience with horse riding. When people have a lot of experience they probably can go alone, but than good instructions about the roads are needed.

2. Mountain biking

Description

It goes fast and slow, downhill and uphill, you can see a huge area in a short time and take a break whenever you want. Mountain biking in this part of the Rhodopes will not bore you. The Happy Hippy Hostel is located on a mountain from which you can have a great view into the valley, just cycle 15 minutes uphill to the right. The view is most amazing in the morning when the sun is rising and in evening with the sunset. The first part of the road is quite good, but after those fifteen minutes it is becoming a black road. From here you can also follow the long distance trail marks. Another option is to choose the left way. Feel the wind blowing when you cycle through the lovely landscape in the direction of Gruevo and further. This region has many possibilities for mountain biking and the hills are not too steep, especially for professionals, but it is a challenge for the amateurs. The Happy Hippy Hostel can offer five mountain bikes at this moment, in future maybe more.

Tags: **Outdoor/sport**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

There are five bikes available, but not all bikes are working very well (especially the gears, which are very useful in this area). The area is perfect for mountain biking, not too steep, just perfect. We would like to recommend a better care over the bikes. Besides that it would be interesting to have diverse routes for the mountain bikers. You can just bike around a bit, but a tour that passes some interesting places would be nice. A good map of this region would be of great use as well.

3. Kayaking

Note: This activity is not available because the hostel is not open yet. Please keep in touch with the owners of the hostel about the official opening.

Description

Somewhere near Letovnik is a special place with lovely forest, valleys and hills which is a beautiful secluded spot. This spot is an amazing spot for kayaking, and you will be brought there by a guide. At this place the kayaks will be waiting for you to be used! Explore the area from the water and enjoy the

beautiful scenery. During lunchtime you will enjoy a picnic at this place and afterwards there will be time to kayak some more. And if you want to, you can also swim here. At the end of the day the guide will bring you back to the hostel. This activity can be done from spring until autumn.

Tags: **Outdoor/sport**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

We did not take part in this activity, but we can imagine that this area is a great area for a kayaking trip. The owners of the hostel do not have kayaks themselves, but they can rent them from someone in Kardzhali. The kayak tour will be guided and includes a lunch. It would be nice if tourists can kayak downwards with the river and that a car will pick them up at the end of the day and bring them back to the hostel.

4. Wild fruit and herbs tour

Note: This activity is not available because the hostel is not open yet. Please keep in touch with the owners of the hostel about the official opening.

Description

Learn all about the usefulness of plants in nature. There are more plants than you think! Several plants are suitable for eating and all other kind of purposes. With some guidance you will walk through nature and pick the suitable plants. After the picking you will make portions from the plants which you can use! The availability of this activity depends on the availability of wild fruits and herbs. This activity can be done from May to October and depending on the amount of herbs and fruits this can take half a day to a day. Please consult the hosts of the hostel first about the availability of this activity.

Tags: **Agriculture Hiking History Traditional**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

This activity is not running yet, because the hostel is not officially opened yet and the activities still have to be developed.

This activity is very promising, it is the first one in this area we found that is about the wild fruits and herbs. Interesting about this activity is that every tour is unique. It depends on the season and the weather which fruits and herbs you will find. After the picking of the fruits and herbs, it would be interesting to prepare a nature-medicine, a jar of a delicious meal with the collected products.

5. Rock climbing

Note: This activity is not ready yet. Please keep in touch with the owners of the hostel about the official opening.

Description

Near to Letovnik are the cliffs, where the Monyak fortress is located, which are very appropriate for rock climbing. With some instructions of experienced climbers you are able to make the climb up the mountain! After you have reached the top of the mountain and enjoyed the great view of the Arda river valley you can come down by abseiling. By doing this you will get a big adrenaline kick and afterwards you will feel proud of yourself to have accomplished this.

Tags: **Outdoor/sport**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

This activity is not running yet, because the hostel is not officially opened yet and the activities still have to be developed.

6. Accommodation for workshops like retreats, yoga and art workshops

Note: This activity is not available because the hostel is not open yet. Please keep in touch with the owners of the hostel about the official opening.

Description

The hostel is also available as retreat centre for groups who want to do workshops. For example when you want to organize a yoga trip the hostel is available as a location and the garden can be used for yoga. The place is also interesting for a retreat week or for art and music workshops. If you have an idea for this place or you want to organize a workshop or special week, you can discuss about the possibilities. Many things are possible, a place for creativity and new ideas! For groups the prices will be on request.

Tags: **Accommodation**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

This activity is not running yet, because the hostel is not officially opened yet the activities still have to be developed.

This activity is very open and can be adapted to wishes of visitors. It is very nice that the Happy Hippy hostel offers a place for workshops that can be organized by someone else.

7. Canyon

Description

The host of Letovnik is living there for several years and has found many beautiful places throughout the area. One of these places is a swim canyon. This is an amazing place for swimming on a distance of just 30 minutes by car and another 5 minutes walking away from Letovnik. It is hard to find if you do not know where it is. But the host can give you enough instructions to find it or maybe someone who knows where it is will join you to there. At this place you can jump into the water from a height of 5 meters. For some people this is quite scary but for others this gives a major adrenaline kick. Also without jumping it is possible to swim here. It is a real natural swim and jump paradise!

Tags: **Outdoor/sport**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

This place is a really secret place and only known by local people. If you want to go there you definitely need some guidance. The place is wonderful. We are a bit afraid that in future too many tourists can find this place, we have to be careful with this, because the place is also nice because of the quietness. We would suggest to organize this activity with a guide, in this way you can keep it a kind of 'secret' place and disturbance can be avoided.

8. Accommodation

Note: This activity is not available because the hostel is not open yet. Please keep in touch with the owners of the hostel about the official opening.

Description

The Happy Hippy Hostel can be described best as a happy place. Everyone is free to do whatever they want to do. There is a big garden where you can sit down and relax, a pool will be finished in the near future and there is a place to make fires. Inside the hostel there is beautiful decoration inspired on nature and other creative things which makes it a bit like a museum of art. Taking a shower is having a great experience in a futuristic garden! Because the hostel is on a remote place the hosts prefer everyone to join dinner at the hostel. Which is quite cheap (average 5 BGN per dinner) and very delicious. Breakfast is included with sleeping in the hostel. When you prefer to camp this is also possible, but then breakfast is not included.

Tags: **Accommodation Camping**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

The hostel is located at a lovely place in the small village Letovnik. The view is great and the garden offers very good spots to relax, to play a volleyball game, to pick fruits and vegetables and to learn about the animals. At this moment the hostel is not opened officially but this will be probably in the beginning of 2014.

Pelevun – Todor's house

The village Pelevun is a characteristic one. Everywhere you see donkeys. Local people in colourful clothes are working between the Tobacco and Sesame plants.

Pelevun is a village from where you can see the border with Greece. Small, cosy with a nice square, a beautiful church and little historical museum (ask the local people if you want to visit this). In the village there are two little supermarkets vs. bars, at the same a meeting place for all the 120 people still living in Pelevun. In Pelevun there are two possibilities for accommodation. One is in the house of Todor and his mother, living in a traditional house with local food. The other option is in one of the guesthouses of Miroslav, he is still building but they will be finished fast and it looks promising!

There are many opportunities for hiking and biking in the area (you have to bring your own bike or rent one in Ivaylovgrad). The Rhodope long distance trail passes this village as well and you can bring a visit in Kostilkovo, the nearby located abandoned village where Karakachan horses are grazing.

Todor is a local guy who is learning to speak English and he can be a guide and of great help during your stay here in this lovely village!

1. Byala Reka and picnic – guided tour

Description

Join this activity which brings you to a wonderful natural place, namely the meanders of Byala Reka (literally translated this means 'white river'). From the village of Meden Buk the meanders can be easily reached by yourself. But it is more worth to go with a guide who shows you the most beautiful places near the river. The guide takes you with his 4 x 4 car through a nice landscape to the meanders. There are several points where you can rest and have a picnic. The locals built tables from river stones where you can sit. Hours and hours you can spend with searching for wild flowers and animals like the Spurt-tightened tortoise, the Hermann's tortoise and the Balkan Pond turtle. You can paddle with your feet through the water between the little fish. The guide will bring you with a little walk of half an hour in the direction of two other spots of the meander where you can go for a fresh dive into the water. This area of 5.189 hectares is protected by the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds, therefore always take good care for the nature and keep it clean.

Tags: Outdoor/sport Hiking Wildlife Flora

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

The places described in this activity are at this moment only known by local people from the surrounded villages. This area has a high potential for tourism activities, because of the enormous biodiversity, the quietness and peacefulness value and beautiful scenery. It is important to have in mind while creating an activity for this place, that the amount of tourists will be low. Because this place is one of the favourites by the local people, we also have to respect this. If this place will become a very known tourist place, the peacefulness value will get lost definitely. For this reason we want to recommend this place only as a guided activity and not to stimulate people to go by themselves. In this way there will be a certain control over the place.

2. Visiting the farm and milk products tasting

Description:

On the edge of the small village of Pelevun near to the forest is a sheep farm with around 280 sheep. These sheep are used for milking and making cheese out of this milk. Miroslav is involved with this process from the start on. He milks the sheep and makes the cheese and is very willing to let you enjoy his homemade product as well! After you have seen the farm, you will go to a cosy room and will get the opportunity to taste these products.

Tags: Agriculture Traditional

Recommendation (current and desired situation):

For now it is not possible to do the tasting on large scale. Miroslav does not have a machine to conserve the cheese for eating the entire year. Therefore this activity can only be done on request unless it is between April and August. When he does have a machine to maintain cheese throughout the year, more tourists can come for tasting the cheese.

3. Milking, demonstration, tasting and entertainment

Description:

In the small village of Pelevun you can find a big herd of sheep. These are all sheep of Miroslav and his family. On the edge of the village they have a traditional farm where the sheep stay overnight and during winter. The sheep are used for milking and from this milk Miroslav and his family produce cheese. As tourist you can also take part in this process! You will first get a tour around the farm, then you can milk a sheep with some help and afterwards you can taste the milk and cheese produced in his farm. A traditional Bulgarian rural life experience!

Tags: **Agriculture** **Traditional**

Note: the full attraction is only available on request from March to August and a minimum of 10 participants is required.

Recommendation (current and desired situation):

The place of the activity is very beautiful. Further we cannot make statements about this activity because we haven't experienced it. Useful would be if Miroslav learns some basic English, in this way he can explain also foreign tourists about the process of making cheese.

4. Traditional Bulgarian live folklore music

All over the world people have expressed themselves through music for many years. In Bulgaria's rural areas they do this by folklore music. Miroslav can arrange some live folklore music in the country air! Enjoy this music and let yourself get blown away.

Tags: **Agriculture** **Traditional**

Recommendation (current and desired situation):

The place of the activity is very beautiful. Further we cannot make statements about this activity because we have not experienced it.

5. Chevermé

Description

Near Pelevun, at a secluded spot near a small waterfall, there is a local meeting point. When locals meet at this place they organize a Chevermé. This is a traditional Bulgarian barbecue. With this barbecue a lamb or baby cow is above a small fire and after a few hours this will give very tender meat. The lamb takes around 3 hours but a baby cow around 9 hours. With this traditional barbecue you can all sit by the fire and watch the meat become well-done. And of course enjoy this meat during the dinner.

Tags: **Agriculture** **Traditional** **Food**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

For now the Chevermé 'place' is only used by locals and it is not offered as a tourist activity yet. Because of the beauty and quietness at this place we think it would be a great tourism activity to offer Chevermé here. We recommend to develop this as a tourist activity, in a way that tourist can come to have Chevermé with some salad and drinks.

6. Archeological tour (Dolmens – Lyutista – Gugutka fortress – Dolno Lukovo – picnic)

Description

In the close surroundings of Pelevun many archaeological relicts can be found from different periods of time. With some guidance and transportation by Jeep you will be able to see the archaeological highlights near Pelevun. This will start with two dolmen which were built by Thracian tribes in the close

surroundings of Pelevun. After visiting the dolmens you will continue your journey to an old fortress. Between visiting archaeological relicts there will be a picnic. This will contain bread, sausage, cheese and salad with some drinks. This will help you to renew your energy and enjoy the rest of the day. After lunch you will visit Dolno Lukovo. This is a small village with traditional stone built houses. The guide will lead you to a great viewpoint from where you can see the village from above. Then you will continue to a Roman bridge which is perfectly intact because of the restoration 11 years ago. The last stop will be a visit to Lyutitsa fortress. Because of the strong marble made walls this is one of the best preserved medieval strongholds in the Rhodopes.

Tags: **Hiking History**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

All archaeological relicts are accessible for tourists, some are better indicated than others but tourists are able to visit them all. Not at all relicts information is provided about the relicts and their history. In some tourist guides this happens but not all tourists have these. Also some relicts are difficult to find and people are not able to see many of them on one day. Therefore it would be good to have an archaeological tour with a guide. This way the guide can lead the way to the relicts and provide information about the relicts. Because this would be a day activity, a lunch should be included.

7. Part of long distance trail

Description

One part of the Transrhodope long distance trail goes from Pelevun to Ivaylovgrad. This whole hike has a distance of 15 kilometres and goes through a diversity of different scenery's from the traditional village Pelevun to a forest and agricultural lands. During the hike you will pass the Lyutitsa fortress which is worth a visit! After the Lyutitsa fortress you will cross an area with open meadows where a colony of Sousliks is living. The finish of this hike is in the town Ivaylovgrad, you can stay here for a drink and if wanted you can ask Todor if he will pick you up and bring you back to Pelevun.

Tags: **Hiking History Flora**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

Since a few years this hike is marked with the white-red-white marks. We have walked this path and we have considered that the marks are not always easy to find. At several cross points we were in doubt which path to choose. Some marks are painted on stones near the ground and we only saw them on our way back, it is important to improve this track with new and more visible marks. We also would like to suggest that this part of the long distance trail also can be used for a one day walking trip to Lyutitsa or Ivaylovgrad. Because the way to Ivaylovgrad takes a few hours it would be interesting if there is a possibility that the tourists will be picked up by Todor when they arrived in Ivaylovgrad.

8. Hike Kostilkovo

Description

A really nice and diverse hike starts in the centre of Pelevun. This hike of approximately 13 kilometres is not a really tough one because the altitude is low and the mostly sandy road is pretty good, nevertheless this hike will take half a day because there is so many to see during the way. After leaving Pelevun you will first walk through an agricultural landscape with Tobacco and Sesame in the direction of a little lake. You will continue your road through a pine forest which is a nice change of the scenery. After 1,5 hours you will enter the abandoned village of Kostilkovo, a very interesting village for a photography moment and a rest. In this village there is an availability to tap fresh water at one of the springs. In the surroundings of Kostilkovo you can find several Karakachan horses grazing freely in the nature. After visiting this village you first have to walk back the same way for 2 kilometres and after that continue the sandy black road in the direction of Kostilkovo. An interesting walk able for everybody who is a fanatic hiker during holidays.

Tags: **Hiking History Traditional Wildlife**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

This hike takes approximately 4 hours and has a distance of approximately 13 kilometres (see figure 6). Besides the long distance trail this is a very interesting hike which starts in Pelevun. Todor showed us the

road via Google maps, first his instructions sounded easy, but when walking we found many cross points where we were in doubt which way to choose. At this moment a GPS is needed to find the way easily. But in short notice we really recommend to mark this walk (of course in another colour than the marks of the long distance trail). We had a discussion with Todor about marking this trail because he thinks you can earn money by not marking this trail and take tourists with a car through this landscape. This is a good idea as well, but as far as we think it is a totally different kind of activity and nature tourists would like to discover the area by foot as well. Good marks are essential. Below you can see the route we walked and which is worth marking.



Figure 6: Hike Kostilkovo (13km)

9. Safari Kostilkovo

Description

For a nice and wild impression of the nature in the surroundings of Pelevun you have to join this excursion which is headed by Todor, a guy who is living for all his life in this area. He knows a lot about the history, nature and wildlife of the region. With his 4 x 4 car he will drive you through the landscape to show you the most interesting features of the area. One of the highlights is the visit of Kostilkovo, an abandoned village near the border with Greece. In this village, where are two inhabitants left, Karakachan horses are introduced a few years ago. This Karakachan horse is a local primitive breed, extremely durable and adapted to whole year round ways of living. From strong winters with a lot of snow to the hot summer days in July and August. The horses are relatively small and strong. When Todor parks the car he will show you the horses while walking through the tough nature. Especially in Spring you will also find many Orchids and birds (and even raptors). If interested he will offer a picnic during this safari tour as well.

Tags: **History** **Traditional** **Flora**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

This Safari tour is not developed yet, but we think it will have a high potential. Todor crosses this area everyday with his car and is living for his whole life in Pelevun. He knows the hotspots in the surroundings of Kostilkovo and has a big heart for the Karakachan horses. His car is perfect for a safari tour through the landscape. He has place in his car for four tourists. His English is still very basic, but for Bulgarian tourists he will offer a lot of information. In future when his English is more developed, this tour will be interesting for foreign visitors as well. We recommend to organize this safari tour especially in the early morning or in the late afternoon, because the moment of sun rising and sunset it is beautiful! Three hours of this safari tour would be great and if wished tourists can also offer a picnic with for example salad and home baked dishes. The price of this activity will consist the guidance, fuel for the car and if wanted a picnic.

10. Pelevun as central tourist point

Description

Pelevun is a small, typical Bulgarian village which is located close to Ivaylovgrad. This village has a rich history and is full of traditional built houses. On the main square is a statue which is dedicated to the national hero Petko Voyvoda, who was a leader and freedom fighter who dedicated his life to liberation of Bulgaria. In this small town he has fought an important battle. The village has a small museum in which traditional farm aides, clothes and information about Petko can be found. A small orthodox church is also a major show place. The local inhabitants of this village are very hospitable and have a small meeting place near the main square.

Tags: **Agriculture** **History** **Traditional**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

There is many potential for the museum but for now nobody does something to develop the museum. A lot of materials are shown but most of the information is only in Bulgarian. With some help of volunteers the museum can be further developed and made more attractive for tourists. Having an entrance fee for tourists (of for example 3 BGN) can raise money for maintenance of the museum.

11. Photography hide / Vulture hide

Description

Note: This activity is not ready yet because the hide is not finished yet.

The entire Eastern Rhodopes are very famous for bird watching. Many very impressive species can be seen here, different kind Vultures like Griffon Vulture, Egyptian Vulture and even Black Vulture. Also different kind of Eagles can be spotted here. By making use of a Photography/Vulture hide you can see the birds from a short distance, without them seeing you and you are able to make amazing photographs. This hide has windows on two sides showing different sceneries. There is not only a chance for birds, but also for Jackal and even Wolves!

Tags: **Wildlife** **Vulture and bird watching**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

For now the hide is still under construction, but the place where it is being built is very beautiful and offers a great view. Therefore the hide looks very promising. Hopefully it will be finished in the near future and will be open for tourists quickly.

12. Accommodation Todor

Description

Todor his house lies in a small typical Bulgarian village named Plevun, but when you have arrived there you will only hear Pelevun. He and his mother will give you a warm welcome and make you feel at home. The house is small and cosy with a nice small garden.

Todor his mother is a great cook and cooks in a very traditional way. You will be impressed about the way she prepares food and the taste of it!

Tags: **Accommodation**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

Sometimes communication is a problem here, Todor knows some English but this is limited. His mother only speaks Bulgarian. Todor is trying to learn English and we strongly recommend him to continue this. It is possible to communicate with him, but it would be easier, and better, if he knows some more English. When the weather is warm enough, food will be served outside. When this is not possible, food will be served in the bedroom of Todor and his mother. For some tourists this is quite uncomfortable and we recommend to not serve food in the bedroom. After a week we found out that they have a traditional and beautiful dining room, we do not know why this was not used when we were there. We strongly recommend to use only this room for receiving guests and not the bedroom.

One of the guestrooms gives a feeling like you are having a sleepover in the house of your grandmother and grandfather. This is because there are a lot of personal belongings in the room. It would be better to hide personal belongings from tourists.

Another point is the meals. It is very unclear when the dinner will be served and what it will contain. Sometimes there is no breakfast and the times when lunch and dinner are served depend on when Todor has finished his jobs. This gives a lot of uncertainty for tourists about their food. It would be better to have set times when dinners will be served in consultation with tourists.

13. Accommodation Miroslav

Description

Note: The houses are still under construction. The house for 5 people will probably be finished in two months, the house for 9 people will probably be finished in 5-6 months.

In the small village of Pelevun are two traditional houses made suitable for tourists. One of these houses can accommodate five people and the other nine people. At the house for five people a small shop and restaurant will be included but dinner possibilities will be present in the house for nine people as well. Both houses lie on a beautiful location and from the rooms there is a good view over the village, the agricultural lands around the village and the mountain where the border with Greece is.

Tags: **Accommodation**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

The houses are now still under construction, but based on the already achieved results we think this will become a great place for tourists. The locations and the constructions of the houses look very promising.

Ivaylovgrad – Luxor complex

Ivaylovgrad is one of the bigger towns in the Eastern Rhodopes. Approximately 3500 people are living in this city. Different churches can be visited in Ivaylovgrad and a winery as well. There are many facilities available like a bank, several local markets, a small tourist information centre and a history museum. You can spend some time in this town but also rent a bike in the tourist centre for exploring the surroundings. Villa Armira is a highlight but also many natural places are worth a visit! Mandritsa and Odrintsi are almost abandoned villages that are like an open air museum, it is wonderful to walk through the sandy streets and watch the houses and people in the gardens. On Wednesday morning a market with fresh fruits and vegetables and some other stuff like clothes is located in the centre of Ivaylovgrad. For a nice overview of the city you can walk uphill to Dupkata area, a good place for Orchids.

1. Mountain biking

1.1. Information centre:

Description

In Ivaylovgrad is a small tourism centre. Here you can come for information about the area and suggestions about what places to visit. Also there is the possibility for renting a bike here. In the surroundings of Ivaylovgrad are many possibilities for a nice cycling tour. You can go for an off-road tour to a fortress and monastery. Another option is to cycle just outside Ivaylovgrad and enjoy the landscape. Ivaylovgrad region is known for its wine and therefore high amounts of grapes. In the surroundings of the city many vineyards can be found. Enough possibilities to make a nice tour!

Tags: **Outdoor/sport**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

There are a lot of possibilities for making a great cycling tour through the area. But tourists do not know the way and therefore they can miss great spots. Therefore it would be good if there are some routes of different amounts of kilometres marked. For example a round of 20, 30 and 40 kilometres.

1.2. Luxor complex:

Description

In the near surroundings of Ivaylovgrad many interesting elements can be found. Like a fortress and monastery but also many vineyards. If you're adventurous enough and like to experience the landscape in a different way, going by bicycle might be just the thing for you! The roads are very good for cycling and if you would like to try off-road cycling, there are also many possibilities. The bikes can be found in the hotel, you can just ask one of the employees about the bikes.

Tags: **Outdoor/sport**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

There are a lot of possibilities for making a great cycling tour through the area. But tourists do not know the way and therefore they can miss great spots. Therefore it would be good if there are some rounds of different amounts of kilometres marked. For example a round of 20, 30 and 40 kilometres.

2. Vila Armira

Description

Villa Armira is a luxurious villa-palace built by Romans. The lavish decorations and original marble mosaics are defined as Roman provincial art and architecture. It is the richest private palace of this period ever revealed in Bulgaria, built by a famous Thracian aristocrat. When one of the inhabitants of Villa Armira died their bodies would go to "The great mound". An impressive tumulus, just one kilometre away from Villa Armira. This is not an official site, but if you visit Villa Armira this is worth a visit as well. Villa Armira and "The great mound" are attainable for everyone but have in mind that there is a high possibility of nobody speaking English there. Therefore it is recommended to hire a local guide, please inform about this at the reception of the hotel.

Tags: **History**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

At Villa Armira some posters are in Bulgarian and English, but this amount is very low. For foreign tourists it would be more interesting to have more information provided to them in English. Also the people who work at Villa Armira do not speak English. Therefore international tourists cannot make use of a guide. We recommend to provide more information in English and/or have English speaking guides at the site.

At this moment Villa Armira is under renovation. A lot of construction workers are at the site which makes a lot of noise. Also not the entire villa was accessible. The access possibilities were very limited but we are not sure if this was just due to the renovation or if this is usual.

3. Madrintsa and Dolno Lukovo

Description

At a distance of around 20 kilometres away from Ivaylovgrad you can find two very interesting villages. These are Mandritsa and Dolno Lukovo. They are just seven kilometres apart but completely different. Mandritsa was founded by Albanian people and the houses are built mostly out of clay. While the houses in Dolno Lukovo were built by Bulgarians and are built mostly out of stones. Both villages are almost abandoned but there is more than enough to see. Some people describe these villages as 'outdoor museums' and the villages are definitely worth a visit!

When there is interest for having some guidance you can hire a local guide, please contact the reception of the hotel for this.

Tags: **Agriculture** **History** **Traditional**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

The villages are not meant to be a tourist destination, therefore they do not offer many facilities to tourists. In both villages an information sign can be found at the church, but in Mandritsa this sign is completely faded. Therefore we recommend to renew this sign, but also to place signs at the main square of the village with some information about when the villages were built and how the houses were built.

Interesting information for New Thracian Gold is that currently 8 apartments are being built in Mandritsa, while making use of the traditional clay for construction. These apartments are finished at the end of this year. A hotel is already finished in this village. Maybe this accommodation is interesting to cooperate with for New Thracian Gold.

4. Accommodation Mandritsa

Description

In the small village of Mandritsa all houses look slightly different than in the rest of the region. This is because of the way these houses were built. The village was founded by Albanians which used their traditional way of building houses. Now there is a way for you to experience this authentic kind of houses. A guesthouse in the very centre of this village has recently been built with this authentic way of building, but than in a more modern way. The village is surrounded by nature and is close to the White river. Enough possibilities for a nice walk or swim!

Tags: **Accommodation**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

The house is at this moment not finished, but the picture which shows the eventual design looks very promising. We recommend to continue with this good work but to do keep in mind to make nice decorations and to make sure that the house looks just as beautiful (or more) as on the outside. Also most West-European tourists like to shower without making the entire bathroom wet. Therefore we recommend to make a separated shower (by having a shower curtain or a wall) in the bathroom.

5. Likana Orchid meadows

Description

Likana is a protected site near Ivaylovgrad (just like Dupkata). Due to the geology and the climate the Eastern Rhodopes are determined as an area with one of the richest biodiversity in Europe. Because of the position of the Eastern Rhodopes, species typical of the flora of both Europe, the Mediterranean, and of Caucasus and Anatolia can be found here. Around 13 rare Orchid species can be found here with other endemic, rare or endangered plant and animal species as well. This makes a visit to Likana definitely worthwhile when you are in the Eastern Rhodopes. It is strongly recommended to visit these sites with a local guide because the sites are protected, please contact the reception of the hotel for this.

Tags: **Hiking Flora**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

Because Likana is a protected site, maybe it should be obligatory for this activity to have a guide. This will prevent tourists from picking plants, leaving trash behind and overcrowding the area. It might also be wise to have a maximum of participants for this activity. This to protect the area and keep it excluded.

6. Dupkata Orchid meadows

Description

Dupkata is a protected site just 1,5 kilometre away from Ivaylovgrad (just like Likana). Due to the geology and the climate the Eastern Rhodopes are determined as an area with one of the richest biodiversity in Europe. Because of the position of the Eastern Rhodopes, species typical of the flora of both Europe, the Mediterranean, and of Caucasus and Anatolia can be found here. Around 13 rare orchid species can be found here with other endemic, rare or endangered plant and animal species as well. It is strongly recommended to visit these sites with a local guide because the sites are protected, Please contact the reception of the hotel for this.

Tags: **Hiking Flora**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

Because Dupkata is a protected site, maybe it should be obligatory for this activity to have a guide. This will prevent tourists from picking plants, leaving trash behind and overcrowding the area. It might also be wise to have a maximum of participants for this activity. This to protect the area and keep it excluded.

7. Lyutitsa fortress

Description

In Bulgarian history this fortress is known as the "Marble City". This is exactly why this fortress is still intact. Due to the strong marble walls this fortress is one of the best preserved strongholds in Bulgaria. This makes it very impressive to see. In this fortress some relicts of a church with the graves can be found. Also a well can be seen. From the fortress walls you can enjoy an amazing view over the area. The end of Rhodope mountain is also visible from this point.

Tags: **History**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

At the fortress is one information sign but this offers quite less information. In the history museum of Ivaylovgrad are some very beautiful drawings of how the fortress used to look like. It would definitely be of added value if these were also at the site of Lyutitsa. The amount of information offered at the site itself is very low, while there is quite much information known about Lyutitsa. Therefore we recommend to place more information with some drawings about how the fortress looked like in the past at the place itself.

8. Accommodation Luxor Complex

Description

Luxor Complex is a luxurious hotel in the small city Ivaylovgrad. The hotel is kept very clean and the rooms look nice. Downstairs in the hotel you can find a restaurant and when this restaurant is not open you can find it near the pool outside. This restaurant is open all day, so pool guests can relax with a drink or something to eat. In the city of Ivaylovgrad you can find a small tourist information centre, interesting history museum and every Wednesday a local market where lots of fruits and vegetables produced by local farmers are being sold. These things are definitely worth a visit while being in Ivaylovgrad.

Tags: **Accommodation**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

When we arrived in the hotel there was no one at the reception. We had to ask the woman from the salon to ask someone to come. The only thing we were told was what our room was and that was about it. A bit more hospitality would be very pleasant. Also the bar outside has very loud music which is not considered as pleasant by all guests. We feel like the people who work here would not like to do anything extra than what guests ask them.

9. Accommodation Svirachi

Description

This house is what you can describe as one of the nicest houses in the village. The house has recently been renovated and looks very beautiful. When the weather becomes too hot for you, just cool down in the pool which is in the middle of the big garden. If the weather becomes too cold for you, just sit down in a chair in front of a fire. In the village of Svirachi, where the house is situated, all people are very friendly and will welcome you here. When you do not feel like driving to Bulgaria they offer the possibility for renting a car. They even can come and pick you up at the airport. An English and Bulgarian speaking guide is available on request, he can offer different kind of activities based on what your interests are. While staying in the house you can make use of the kitchen and a wash machine is available for use during a longer stay in the house.

Tags: **Agriculture Accommodation Traditional**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

At this moment 300 euro of deposit is asked for staying in the Fig House. For many people this is a lot of money and we wonder if 300 euro of deposit is not too much asked. The house can only be booked for a minimum of a week, maybe it is interesting to shorten this period. Some tourists do not want to stay a whole week at a certain place.

Madzharovo – Vulture centre BSPB

Madzharovo is no city neither a village, just something in between. Around 500 people are living in Madzharovo but the abandoned shops and the almost empty flats from the socialism period state that this was certainly a city. Madzharovo is a village like other villages in the Eastern Rhodopes. Two small supermarkets and restaurants are available, both have an English menu which is very helpful. Other facilities are not available, so before entering Madzharovo be sure that you have enough cash money. Madzharovo is located in a valley of a beautiful region surrounded by mountains. Vultures are flying over every day and after five minutes walking you are very near the Arda river where you can stay for a fresh dive, a picnic, a kayak tour, watching birds or just for a nice hike! The Vulture centre of BSPB is located in front of the bridge that crosses the Arda river, you can go here for a drink and dinner as well. They also have an interesting exhibition about the Vultures and other birds of prey in the area.

1. Tarpan horses

Description

Near to Madzharovo, in the abandoned village of Sbor, you can find a wild herd of Tarpan horses. They live here together with Wolves and a lot of other different kind of wild animals. They have adapted themselves in a way that they can survive Wolf attacks and maintain their herd. It is a socla herd, which includes an alpha male, alpha female and more. Very interesting to see in a beautiful area. Together with a guide you will go here to spot the herd and recognize the social structure of it. The guide can also provide you with a lot of different kind of information as well. About the wild flowers, Wolves or reptiles for example.

Tags: **Hiking Wildlife Vulture and bird watching**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

It is obligatory with this tour to have a guide to join, but there has to be set a maximum amount of tourists that can join this area each year. In a conversation we had with Desy we heard that the aim is to keep the tourist density of this area as low as possible. Therefore it would be good to have an agreement about this. Another thing is to find proper guides to enter this region. Maybe it would be good to have two people who can come here with a group of tourists and no other people.

2. Mineral tour

Description

The village of Madzharovo has a big mining history and is known for its interesting soil and minerals that are within it. In 1987 the young family of the guides has found their second home in Madzharovo. They both graduated at Sofia University, the man is a geologist and the woman a geomorphologist. Therefore they definitely know what they are talking about. Together they have made a collection of minerals which they found in this region and some are for sale as well. Also there are possibilities to organize an adventure ecological tour in the region of Madzharovo to visit attractive deposits of valuable minerals with a guide-geologist and forest picnic. Also special expeditions for geologists and collectors are possible.

Tags: **Hiking History Traditional Minerals**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

The guides of this activity do not speak any English. Therefore they cannot provide international tourists with information about the area. They can show where the places with minerals are, but not more. Especially with this kind of tours it is useful to have an English speaker because the information is very helpful to understand. With the combination of the personal collection and the walk through the area it is interesting to tell about where they found which mineral and to provide tourists with information about the mineral(s) they have found themselves.

3. Bird watching

Description

The region of Madzharovo in the Eastern Rhodopes is known for the high amount of bird species that can be seen here. One of the ultimate places for birdwatchers with species such as Griffon Vulture, Egyptian Vulture, Imperial Eagle and even the Black Vulture can be spotted here! Together with a well experienced guide who knows very much about birds you can go out in the field and try to spot these birds. This can be during a walk in the morning near to the centre but also on other places for the entire day. In collaboration with the guide it can be adapted to your own wishes.

Tags: **Hiking** **Vulture and bird watching**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

A lot is unclear about this activity, maybe some 'frameworks' can be created by which the activity will be set up. It would also be great if there is an option for hiring binoculars, not every tourists owns one. Maybe another option for bird watching is renting telescopes. A lot of people would enjoy using this for a day or more but cannot afford to buy one themselves.

4. Vulture / Wolf hide Marin

Description

If you have never seen Vultures before and you still have the wish to see them once, you definitely have to go to Madzharovo region. With a certainty of 100% you will see the Griffon Vultures flying, maybe even the Egyptian Vulture and with some luck the Black Vulture. It is great to see them flying high in the sky above you, but even more special is to see them at eye level. This can be arranged by Marin, owner of the tourist company 'Madzharovo nature'. He build a hide high on a mountain with view on a valley and with on the background another mountainous part. He will provide the place in front of the hide with a carcass of a death cow or sheep and the Vultures will find it. As tourist you can stay in the hide from the evening before and have a night in the middle of nature. After a good and silent night you have to wake up before sunrise and just wait very quiet for the first Vultures to arrive. With some good instructions of Marin you will shoot the most beautiful and closest pictures of Vultures and when lucky even Wolves or other mammals.

Tags: **Accommodation** **Wildlife** **Vulture and bird watching** **Wolf watching**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

We are very enthusiastic about this activity. Although we have not seen any Wolves or Vultures from there, the comfort was very good. For such a small hide the facilities are good. A toilet (not private) is available and there are two beds. The isolation of the hide is good (but we do not know how it is in winter). The distance to the feeding place is very good and therefore perfect for pictures. The scenery behind the feeding place is characteristic and nice. There is a panoramic view through glass and there are four holes available for cameras with big lenses, especially big lenses, because for our smaller lenses the holes where to big. Because of the four camera holes, four people can make pictures at the same time! We were in the hide by ourselves, but Marin told us that it is also possible to go in the hide with up to 8 people, because people can change their cameras easily. We do not think it is very pleasant to stay in this hide with a big amount of people, because it is really important to behave quiet. But it is possible.

5. Nature Madzharovo (Природа Маджарово ЕООД) - Marin's tourism activities in surroundings of Madzharovo

Description

Marin is a nature lover with a lot of passion in special for birds. He knows the surroundings of Madzharovo very well and can show you all the secrets of this beautiful part of the Eastern Rhodopes. With his company he can take tourist as individual or as a group into the mountains. He is experienced in many fields of interest. The most important ones are; adventurous sports like kayaking and rafting, bird watching, wildlife photography, Orchids, minerals, chevermé, Vultures and Wolves. With his company he is very flexible. All the activities can be adapted to the wishes of the (group of) tourists. If they want for example a full day activity which consist photography of Orchids and searching for minerals, this can be arranged. The same goes for other activities. The tourist pays one fixed day price for guidance and

in some case an extra fee for materials like for kayaking. Not all the activities can be done during the whole year. For example the Orchid tours are only interesting in May and June, while the photography of Wolves is interesting especially during winter. Kayaking and Rafting are successful when the level of the Arda river is high enough.

All the activities take place in the surroundings of Madzharovo. Marin also can arrange transport, because of his big car which has place for 8 people. There are also other guides who work for this company, they all have their own specialization and Marin knows which guide is perfect for which activity.

Tags: Outdoor/sport Hiking History Traditional Wildlife Vulture and bird watching Wolf watching Flora Food Minerals

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

Marin is very enthusiastic in his job and has a lot of experience with guiding tourists. He knows the surroundings of Madzharovo very well and is a passionate guide about this area. He takes good care over his tourists. Originally he is a nature conservationist and that is the reason why taking care for nature is on the first place for him. When we were driving with his car he even stopped to pick up some trash from nature. With his tourism activities he will ensure the minimum of disturbance and he also will teach his tourists about this fact. On the way he is working in the field we have not so much recommendations. But we do have a recommendation about the communication with his tourists in advance. Marin has a lot of connections with people in the tourism sector, so for groups of tourists, or tourists who book their holiday with help of a tour operator, Marin's company can be found easily. This is different for individual travellers who are not connected to any tour operator. Marin does not have any webpage or information materials, he only uses Facebook by which he promotes his activities. We would recommend to make his company more known for other tourist for example by creating a simple webpage.

6. Vulture centre / accommodation

Description

The accommodation is located above the visitors centre of the Bulgarian Society for Bird Protection. It is just outside of Madzharovo and has a nice surrounding. You can walk out of the accommodation and immediately spot some Vultures! Also a lot of other birds can be found in this region. There is a small restaurant with nice benches and tables outside. Here you can sit outside while having a feeling like you are within a forest and enjoy the calming sound of the river Arda on the background. Because the accommodation is located above the visitors centre of the Bulgarian Society for Bird Protection this place is very popular among birdwatchers and you can see an exhibition here about the birds in the region.

Tags: Accommodation Food

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

The centre is not open all year round, but there do are tourists when the centre is closed. Also there is a lot of uncertainty of the opening hours of the visitors centre and the restaurant. It would be helpful to place signs and/or place on internet when the centre is open or not. Same goes for the restaurant which is in the centre. It is very unpredictable when there is someone there or not.

Potochnitsa

Potochnitsa is a village on the way to Krumovgrad. A village which you must not forget when travelling in Eastern Rhodopes, at least because of the hospitality of the inhabitants. Most of the people living in Potochnitsa have a Turkish background with the associated traditions. All the families can cook very delicious meals. When walking over the mostly sandy and stony streets many people start talking to you, which makes you feel very welcome! In the centre of Potochnitsa, Hava and her husband own a supermarket vs. bar. This is the local hang out of the inhabitants of the village and even of great use for tourists to buy some basic needs. The closest bank can be found in Krumovgrad, the biggest town nearby which is around 20 kilometres driving.

Hava and her family have plans to build a beautiful tourism accommodation right next to the central square of the village. From Potochnitsa you can survive in the lovely surrounded nature with its enormous biodiversity in the nature area Valchi Dol and the many Vultures flying around. And if you want to be the archaeologist for a day you can visit the closely located unexplored fortresses or search for beautiful minerals in the area.

1. Vulture hide

Description

Did you ever see a Vulture from a very short distance? No? Here is your chance! While being in a hide you can see the Vultures, without them seeing you. Therefore you can watch them from a very short distance and are you able to make impressive pictures of these magnificent birds. When you arrive early in the morning, a carcass has been laying here for almost a day. This is to give Vultures time to spot their food which they will consume in the next morning, when you will be in the hide! In consultation with the host, you can have breakfast at the same time as the Vultures, before or afterwards in the hide.

Tags: **Vulture and bird watching**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

The Vulture hide is very old and does not provide any comfort for tourists. A toilet is present in the hide but without any privacy. From the hide there is a view upon a grassland which is filled with many bones. The nests are very close by from the hide but the windows which were watching in the direction of the nests are now closed which is a shame. Furthermore the hide is in a very bad condition. There are no chairs, the windows are holes and makes people visible for Vultures and the toilet does not have a door. It would be good to improve this hide and make it for example available for sleeping there as well. The host does not know how to behave when there are Vultures around. While we were watching a Vulture, she was walking around the entire time, making phone calls and trying to scare away a cow. Maybe it would be useful to provide her with information about how to behave while watching Vultures. Then she can also share this knowledge with the tourists.

A final remark which is very important for this activity is to pay attention to the distance of the carcass from the hide. It must be possible for tourists to make good photographs of the Vultures, therefore it would be a shame if the carcass is too far away from the hide. By cleaning the bones afterwards also the scenery stays beautiful. It is not pleasant to have a lot of bones on a picture while you just want to photograph the Vulture.

2. Mineral tour

Description

The Eastern Rhodopes are very known for the high amounts of minerals that can be found here. Together with a guide who knows the hotspots of the region and a hammer you will be able to find some yourself. Different kind of minerals can be found over different places where the guide can bring you, here you are guaranteed to find minerals. On request you can visit multiple of them or just one and try to find the best mineral to bring home as a souvenir. You will walk around while looking very carefully, the best looking mineral could be just in front of you!

Tags: **Hiking Minerals**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

The guide does not speak any English and neither does the host. Therefore there was no communication possible about what kind of minerals could be found where. For international tourists

this would be of great addition, then they can learn about what they found and might bring home with them. Furthermore because of the communication problem it was difficult for us to understand where we were going. Both places give guarantee for finding minerals but using these resources too much may cause them to run out. Therefore it might be wise to think about letting tourists search themselves and not leading them to the resources. This might make the activity less attractive for tourists, but it would be better for the resource where the minerals come from and more sustainable for this activity as well.

3. Cooking workshop

Description

The woman of the house is a great cook who can prepare a lot of traditional Bulgarian, but even more Turkish dishes. And she is willing to show and teach you the tips and tricks to make these yourself too! She can teach you to make a Banitsa, Sarma's and when you have more time: a Baklava! Pay attention, these dishes are completely homemade. These skills can be very useful to prepare these great dishes yourself at home too. After cooking the dish, you can taste the result yourself while enjoying a drink.

Tags: **Agriculture** **Traditional Food**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

The activity now took place in the house of the parents in law of our host. We assume that this is not the place where the tourists would come for this activity. Because the accommodation for the tourists still has to be built, we recommend to think about having a room in which this activity can take place. It would be great if there is room for a big table where everyone can try their cooking skills at the same time and that the kitchen is big enough to receive tourists there.

4. Hike Valchi Dol

Description

Near to Potochnitsa, you can find the protected area Valchi Dol. This area is protected because of the high amount of endangered and/or rare species in this area. Together with a guide you will visit this area. During a hike in this area, you are -depending on the season- able to spot several Orchids, Vultures, Reptiles and other species. While enjoying the great view you can make a nice walk here. You do not have to worry about bringing enough water, many beautiful water fountains can be found along the way! This will make the walk a lot more comfortable.

Tags: **Outdoor/sport** **Hiking** **Wildlife** **Vulture and bird watching** **Flora**

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

For this hike it would give a lot of added value to have a guide who knows the area very well but also knows a lot about the plant and animal species. Then he or she can explain about the importance of protected areas, how to behave while seeing animals and what kind of species can be found in the area. Another advantage of having an experienced guide who knows the area is that he or she can show you the good places to find wild flowers or reptiles for example.

5. Accommodation

Note: The accommodation still has to be constructed. The building will start in spring 2014.

Description

Potochnitsa is a village with mostly Turkish inhabitants, just like the family of Hava. Together with her husband and son they will receive you with open arms. They are very hospitable and will make sure everything is alright. In the very centre of Potochnitsa you can find the guesthouse, a shop and restaurant are also present in this building. During the day the restaurant and shop function a bit like a local meeting place. This guest house is the good place to relax after a long hike in the adventurous surroundings.

Tags: **Accommodation** Food

Recommendations (current and desired situation)

The construction of the guesthouse will start in spring 2014, but the building drawings look very promising. The location of the house is in the centre of Potochnitsa and a restaurant and shop will be included as well. We recommend to have in mind that everything is suitable for international tourists. For example: to place windows on the spots in a way that there is a nice view or that it is possible to have a shower without making the entire bathroom wet.

B. Overview evaluation

Popovets – Trakia House

Trakia House lies in the very centre of the small village Popovets. It is a mall guesthouse which is properly maintained with a beautiful garden. There are nice places to sit in the garden. The bathroom is in general very clean but on one day we found cigarette ash in the bathroom and this was there for the rest of our stay. Smoking is not for all tourists pleasant inside the house. Especially not in the bathroom or during dinner.

The hosts are very hospitable and friendly and the man of the house knows some basic English. The woman of the house doesn't speak any English. More than basic English is a problem here, the man of the house knows how Google Translate works and tries to understand. It would be more pleasant for tourists to communicate directly though. Also during activities it is hard to ask more detailed questions. The woman of the house is a great cook who could be able to give cooking workshops but for now only for domestic tourists. Therefore we think that English needs a boost here and it will add extra value for foreign tourists.

All the rooms are very good looking and traditionally decorated. In case of staying during winter there is a heater and in case of staying during summer there is a ventilator.

Some other things we under found are that it is hard to find the house if you do not know how it looks like, even though Popovets is a small village. There is no clear sign which can be seen from outside the house. A good mark of the guesthouse when you enter Popovets is recommended!

The man of the house made a lot of pictures of us without asking while we were in the vineyard. Some people can find this unpleasant and consider this as impolite.

During dinner a lot of drinks are served. The man of the house likes his homemade Rakia and wine a lot, which is a positive thing, but he likes to share a bit too much. At one moment we had 5 drinks in front of us. From which three were containing alcohol. Not all tourists will enjoy this.

The man of the house is often dressed in just a swimming pants. We did not consider this as a problem but other tourists might consider this a problem.

The facilities in the house are: a pool, Wi-Fi (not a very good connection though).

Facilities

WI-FI	- yes (weak connection)
Pool	- yes
Garden	- yes
Kitchen	- no
Laundry machine	- yes
Television	- no
Children	- yes
Camping	- no
Restaurant/bar	- yes
Super market	- yes
Cash machine	- no
	closest in Kardzhali (35KM)
Languages:	Bulgarian English (basic)

Madrets – House Madrets

House Madrets stands out from all other houses in Madrets because it is the most beautiful house in the village. From the house there is a nice view upon a mountain and it has a good looking and well maintained big garden. For now the house is still a bit under construction but it looks very promising. When we were at house Madrets there was no running water yet, but according to the hosts this will be arranged in October 2013. The family owns a restaurant at the main road of Madrets but this restaurant will be moved to their house. They also own a lake with a lovely lake house. They catch the fishes which are being served in the restaurant. Near their house a vegetable garden is located from which they use the by themselves harvested vegetables and fruits in the restaurant.

The moving of the restaurant to the house will take some time and constructions but we believe that this will offer something extra to the guests and it will be a good change. But good marking from the main road is recommended, otherwise this restaurant will be more difficult to find than at the place where it is located right now.

The hosts are very hospitable and friendly. They don't speak English but the woman of the house is trying to learn. Further they speak Bulgarian, Turkish and basic German. But we suggest to continue with studying English because this will be very pleasant for people who don't speak any German, Bulgarian or Turkish. At the lake house lives the 'grandfather' of the family. He knows a lot about wild animals that live near and in the lake and how to find them. He only speaks Bulgarian or Turkish but he can show tourists where to find these animals.

The woman of the house is a great cook, she can teach tourists to make their own Banitsa's , Sarma's and even Baklava. One problem is that her English is not good enough, yet, to explain this to foreign tourists.

Another problem we have for seen for future tourists is that it is hard to find the house if you don't know how it looks and how to get there. We recommend to place a sign at the main road that leads people into the village.

The facilities that house Madrets has are Wi-Fi (good connection), a big garden and soon a restaurant near the house which is at the moment still in the village.

Facilities

WI-Fi	- yes
Pool	- no
Garden	- yes
Kitchen	- no
Laundry machine	- no
Television	- yes (in living room)
Children	- yes
Camping	- no
Restaurant/bar	- yes
Super market	- no
Cash machine	- no
	closest in Kardzhali (15KM)

Languages:	Bulgarian
	Turkish
	German (basic)

Gorno Pole - Wildfarm

The Wild Farm has one main house and three other houses where they can provide guests with accommodation. All houses are on beautiful locations in Gorno Pole and lie on a distance of around five minutes walking from the main house. The main house has had a renovation around a year ago and is very good-looking with a nice flowering garden. It also has a great view upon the mountain. For all houses goes that there is proper sanitary which is kept very clean.

All the hosts are very friendly but only the woman of the house speaks English pretty well. She is almost all the time in or around the house. Also she is a great cook who prepares lovely traditional dishes from their own produced organic ingredients.

There are several facilities in the main house but these are not all in the other houses as well. For example Wi-Fi can only be found in the main house, the connection is very good. Also the restaurant is at the main house. People who are staying in other houses than the main house can come there for dinner too. In the main house there is no kitchen for guests but in the other houses guests have a kitchen. Therefore in the main house there is no ability for people to cook for themselves and are almost obligated to eat in the restaurant.

A lot of activities start at the Wild Farm. Some can be executed without guidance but others require a guide. Even activities which can be done without a guide are sometimes hard to execute. For example we were unable to find a Thracian Tomb very near the Wild Farm, even with instructions for the direction. Perhaps a route leading towards this tomb can be marked.

Soon the activity bird watching from the – now to be built – bird hide will start. There are some problems with the construction of this hide but the ideas and the location of this hide are very promising. Another recommendation is the marking of the hike towards Madzharovo, with good instructions the road can be found, but at some moments there are some doubts which way to follow. A marked trail also prevents tourists asking all the time where and how to go.

Facilities

WI-Fi	- yes
Pool	- no
Garden	- yes
Kitchen	- no
Laundry machine	- no
Television	- no
Children	- yes
Camping	- yes
Restaurant/bar	- yes
Super market	- yes
Cash machine	- no
	closest in Kardzhali(60KM)

Languages: Bulgarian
English

Studen Kladenets game reserve

Game Reserve Studen Kladenets has two lodges which are 2,5 km apart from each other. They both lie on a beautiful location with a view on dam lake Studen Kladenets. The 'main' house is a new house which was built one year ago. This is a good looking house with a big (not finished) garden. The 'old' house looks more traditional but can use some renovations. Both houses have proper sanitary and are kept clean very well. The reserve itself is also very beautiful and it is recommendable for tourists to discover it.

The people who work in the reserve are during the day in the 'main' house or with tourists in the reserve. Most of them are dressed in hunting clothes on daily basis. This can scare some eco-tourists / nature lovers. Also the fact that on some occasions hunters can come back from their hunting trip with a dead animal. Some eco-tourists are not keen of hunting and do not like to be asked to see the shot animal. Especially when it is a Wolf which they would rather see alive than dead.

A big problem in Studen Kladenets is communication. Only one person speaks a little German and further people only speak Bulgarian. Communication in English is not possible. We strongly recommend to have someone in the lodge who speaks at least some basic English. Speaking English can offer some extras to activities. Most of the people who work here have a strong connection with nature and know a lot about the reserve. They can transfer this information to Bulgarian speaking tourists but other tourists might be interested in this information as well. English speakers can also prevent misunderstandings. On one day we thought we were going to the Vulture hide but turned out that we were going on a Wolf tour/hike. Not that we did not like to do this but misunderstandings are not always pleasant.

Both houses have the same facilities, which are: a kitchen, Wi-Fi (not very good connection though in both houses) and a big garden. The 'main' house has a sort of restaurant. When you join for dinner the dinner is served at the main house or outside with a view on the lake, this is also possible for people who stay in the 'old' house.

Another problem we dealt with was the road leading towards the reserve. This is a road which is broken on many places. For some cars it is not possible to drive this road and for some drivers it might be too hard to drive this road. And still if it is possible, tourists might not want to ride this road with their own good car. We recommend to improve the road on the most bad places.

There is a very interesting hike that makes a circle though a big part of Studen Kladenets. Part of this route is marked by the long distance trail signs, the other part of this route is not marked. It would be nice if the hike can be marked with a different colour in total. So then it also will be clear for hikers where to split the trip from the long distance trail (after 2 hours, they have to go right to go back to the reserve).

Facilities

Wi-Fi	- yes
Pool	- no
Garden	- yes
Kitchen	- yes
Laundry machine	- yes
Television	- yes
Children	- yes
Camping	- yes
Restaurant/bar	- yes
Super market	- yes
Cash machine	- no
	closest in Momchilgrad (30KM)
Languages:	Bulgarian German (basic)

Letovnik – Happy Hippy hostel

The Happy Hippy Hostel is located in the small village Letovnik, which is hard to find. You will find your way easily to Gruevo, the village before Letovnik, but from there it is a difficult task. Happily all the locals know that Dave (owner and founder of the HH-Hostel) is doing a great job in Letovnik for more than six years, and the locals will show you the way. Signs that mark the road to the hostel specific are not there yet, but we understood from Dave that this still has to be done. The hostel is not opened officially, this will happen in the beginning of 2014, but more than 400 volunteers already visited the hostel. If the signs are there in future, tourist and hitchhikers definitely have to visit this hostel. The Happy Hippy hostel is great and fits perfectly in the ideas of New Thracian Gold. With that reason we were very disappointed to hear that the connections between this hostel and NTG are not that good at this moment. We heard from the owner of the hostel that since they became part of NTG two years ago, nobody of NTG took any effort to visit the hostel, which is a shame. We would recommend NTG to put more energy in a good cooperation with this hostel (but of course we know just one part of the story).

The Happy Hippy Hostel is owned by a perfectly English speaking South African and his British girlfriend. They are young, enthusiastic and have a lot of energy to attract tourists from over the whole world to this idyllic place of the Eastern Rhodopes. They rebuild an abandoned school to a lovely and cosy place. They grow their own vegetables and conserve them. They have many animals and a lot of great plans to develop interesting tourism activities like kayaking, rock climbing, workshops and wild fruit and herbs tours. We think that this hostel can be a perfect example of how these region can be developed in a positive way by tourism. Hopefully the relationship between them and NTG will grow because it is worth!

Facilities

WI-FI	- yes
Pool	- yes (near future)
Garden	- yes
Kitchen	- yes
Laundry machine	- no
Television	- no (in living room)
Children	- yes
Camping	- yes
Restaurant/bar	- yes
Super market	- no
Cash machine	- no
	closest in Momchilgrad (10KM)
Languages:	Bulgarian (basic) English

Pelevun – Todor's house

Pelevun is located close to the bigger city in the area, Ivaylovgrad. Pelevun is a village with around 120 people. It is a cosy village with a clear centre, the square with the statue of the national hero Petko Voivoda. New Thracian Gold already placed a useful information panel in the middle of this village, the highlights of the region are marked on a map. The church is absolutely worth a visit. There is a little history museum in Pelevun as well. This museum is not open normally, we had to ask for it. It is interesting that there is an availability in this village to find out background information about this and other surrounded villages. Especially because of the story of Petko Voivoda. The entrance is free at this moment and the museum can use a boost. There is no money for this, but in combination with summer volunteers there can be done a lot! We would suggest to develop Pelevun as a centre point for tourism in the region. Maybe the museum can function as a kind of information point.

Besides the museum and the church the village offers a goat and sheep farm where nice activities for tourists are being organized. The owner Miroslav, is rebuilding two houses that will become great tourist accommodations and Todor has plans for this as well. The area around the village is interesting. People can visit the horses and the several Thracian relicts.

Another idea is to mark more hike trails in the area with as start point Pelevun. We walked a part of the long distance trail, but many other options are a possible as well.

It is really nice to see that there are living young and enthusiastic people in the village who are willing to turn Pelevun into a tourism destination.

Facilities

WI-FI	- yes
Pool	- no
Garden	- yes
Kitchen	- no
Laundry machine	- yes
Television	- no
Children	- no
Camping	- no
Restaurant/bar	- yes
Super market	- yes
Cash machine	- no
	closest in Ivaylovgrad (20KM)

Languages:	Bulgarian
	English (basic)

Ivaylovgrad – Luxor complex

Luxor complex is a big hotel which is located near the centre of Ivaylovgrad. From the hotel you can reach after a short walk the edge of the city to enjoy the view of the many vineyards.

The hotel has a big pool which can be used during summer period and a bar outside. Dinner is also served here, which is fine during summer season but otherwise a bit cold. The food which is served is very good.

All rooms look very nice and are kept clean. There is proper sanitary which is also kept clean but it is hard while being in the shower to keep the rest of the bathroom dry.

The staff in the hotel could use some improvement, they are not very hospitable and do not make you feel very welcome. Sometimes it feels like they don't really listen to you and will not make an effort for you. Only one guy speaks good English and one girl can speak a little bit English. Further there are no people that speak English in the hotel.

In Ivaylovgrad a small tourism centre is located. The people who work here do not speak any English except for one guy who is not always around. They really want to help and provide information but are not capable of doing this. It would be better if there is always someone around that knows English and English folders of the activities in the area would also be great to have. Furthermore a small history museum can be found in Ivaylovgrad. It is very small but has an interesting exhibition from several periods of time. The people who work here (again) do not speak English. Some of the notes in the exhibition are in English but most of them are only in Bulgarian. It would be very helpful to have someone who speaks English here, or at least have all descriptions in English. Same goes for Villa Armira, here are also some notes in English but most of them in Bulgarian and no English speaking people. It would really be of added value for the exhibitions to have more English notes or English speaking guides.

Facilities

WI-FI	- yes
Pool	- yes
Garden	- no
Kitchen	- no
Laundry machine	- no
Television	- yes
Children	- yes
Camping	- no
Restaurant/bar	- yes
Super market	- yes
Cash machine	- yes

Languages:	Bulgarian English
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Madzharovo – Vulture centre BSPB

Madzharovo is a town, but with its 500 inhabitants left, it is more like a village now. In spring and autumn Madzharovo is a hotspot for birdwatchers and nature lovers. One of the few populations of Griffon Vultures is breeding in this region. If you have never seen Vultures in your life, and you wish to see them, you just have to visit Madzharovo. Guaranteed that you will see them! Before entering Madzharovo you will pass a bridge where behind the Vulture centre of BSPB is located. A centre which focuses on the nature in the region, but mainly on the Vultures and other birds of prey. The Vulture centre includes an exhibition, three guestrooms and a restaurant. The three components will be evaluated below.

Vulture centre exhibition – The exhibition is a good initiative. It is educational and for people who do not know anything about birds it is a welcome introduction in the world of the Vultures. When we visited the exhibition there was a guy who could explain a lot about the different birds. We do have to mention that for people without any knowledge about birds the story was a bit too theoretical / difficult. But maybe this is not always the case. The attributes that are visible in the exhibition are a bit old fashioned. The exhibition is not that modern for current time. We heard that there are plans to invest in this exhibition and that it will be totally different next year. We already saw a new attribute; the rock, which is handmade. It looks beautiful and has a lot of details. But in our eyes it is very fragile and vulnerable, which is a shame. The rock has three little doors which can be opened by visitors, but these 'doors' are very sensitive for breaking. We hope this rock will not be broken on short notice. We also had some questions about the visiting hours of the exhibition. Sometimes it was opened, sometimes it was closed (in September). It was not clear when it was open and when not. We met tourists who would really like to see the exhibition, but then the centre was closed.

Three guestrooms – The guestrooms are located above the exhibition and restaurant. The rooms offer places for in total 9 guests (three beds in each room). The rooms are spacious which is very pleasant. In contradiction to the bathroom which is very small, while showering everything remains wet for hours. The rooms are practical but some cosiness is missing, with a few little adjustments the rooms can be transformed in welcoming guestrooms, for example some colours instead of everything white.

Restaurant – What we said above about the guestrooms goes the same for the restaurant. Some few additions like dimming lights, candles and colours can make the restaurant much more attractive.

Facilities

WI-FI	- yes
Pool	- no
Garden	- no
Kitchen	- no
Laundry machine	- yes
Television	- no
Children	- yes
Camping	- no
Restaurant/bar	- yes
Super market	- yes
Cash machine	- no
	closest in Ivaylovgrad (60KM)

Languages:	Bulgarian
	English (basic)

Potochnitsa

Hava and her husband have great plans to develop a tourism accommodation in Potochnitsa. They showed us the drawings of the to be build guesthouse which is looking very promising and modern. We only have some question marks about the place the guesthouse is going to be build. Namely, this is in the middle of the village, besides the main road, right next to the central square and next to a local pub. We have the idea that this location might be a bit too noisy for tourists who wants to relax a bit. Hopefully a fenced or bounded garden will be created, because then the tourists will have a place to sit with some privacy if this is desired. An advantage of placing the guesthouse near the main road in the centre of the village is that all the tourists who cross the village will see the accommodation. In this way also tourist who did not plan in advance to overnight here, though will stay for accommodation probably.

Hava and her husband only speak Turkish and Bulgarian, which makes communication with foreign tourists very hard. Fortunately Hava is really willing to learn English quite soon, so probably she knows some English when the guesthouse will be finished and the first guests arrive. This will be very useful. Hava and her family are very hospitable and you will feel at home easily. Hava is also really enthusiastic about the area and can perform as a guide sometimes as well.

For tourists there are several interesting places in the surrounding which are worth a visit, activities around those places still have to be developed. A nature area with a lot of potential is Valchi Dol. We made a day tour by foot through this area and it did not bore us! The landscape is very varied and the same goes for the types of walking paths and altitudes. A visit in this nature area can easily take one day, but a shorter trip is possible as well. Good guidance is of great value because local people know the good routes and the nice spots in the area. Because of the tough roads and the altitudes it is important to inform people about the area before they go in.

Another important value of Potochnitsa is the closely located Vulture hide where many vultures can be seen. The area is perfect for finding minerals, again guidance is pleasant. We also want to note a fortress closely located to Potochnitsa, this fortress has not been studied yet, and because of this worth a visit even more for adventurous tourists.

In the nearby located village Studen Kladenets a new guesthouse and restaurant are build; La Place. This guesthouse has two guestrooms at the moment, but this will be expanded in future. The owner of the house speaks fluently Dutch which is useful for Dutch tourists. The host is very enthusiastic about the nature and if wanted he can be a guide through the area. This guesthouse is perfect for a cooperation with New Thracian Gold.

Facilities

WI-FI	- yes
Pool	- no
Garden	- ?
Kitchen	- ?
Laundry machine	- ?
Television	- ?
Children	- ?
Camping	- no
Restaurant/bar	- yes
Super market	- yes
Cash machine	- no
	closest in Krumovgrad (20KM)

Languages: Bulgarian
Turkish

C. Extended table with activities

D. Example webpage

Tags

Accommodation

-  Agriculture
-  Camping
-  Outdoor/sport
-  Hiking
-  History
-  Traditional
-  Wildlife
-  Vulture and bird watching
-  Wolf watching
-  Flora
 - Safari Kostilkovo
 - Hike Valchi Dol
 - Likana
 - Picnic at Byala Reka
-  Food
-  Minerals



Information

Accommodation Wild Farm

The Wild Farm is not looking like what you expect when you hear this term. It is definitely a farm and it is definitely wild but it is also a beautiful and luxurious location to stay for one or more nights as a tourist. The house lays on a beautiful location with view upon a mountain. The decoration of the house is very traditional and sophisticated. Every part of the house is kept nice and clean and the garden is very good-looking with many beautiful chosen flowers and a wide diversity of butterflies. For accommodation you can stay in one of the rooms in the main building, but there are four other accommodation places located in the village of Gorno Pole. For more information about the different possibilities you can ask Betty.

> What can I do here?

Activity	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Morning	Hike Perperikon		Vulture hide		Leave for Sofia
Afternoon				Searching for Minerals	
Evening		Vulture hide			
Accommodation	Madrets	Vulture hide	Gorno Pole	Gorno Pole	

