

HOW DOES THE MAP OF CULTURAL TOURISM CHANGE IN BULGARIA?

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Bulgaria is among the countries which more and more foreign tourists are regarding as a destination for cultural tourism. In recent years, this has been particularly relevant for tourists from the EU Member States who appreciate the change in our vision, mainly associated with mass tourism. More people from the European Union are planning to visit Bulgaria for cultural tourism. More than 55 percent of cultural tourism fans have already visited the country, according to data provided from the Tourism Administration. They choose an 'adventure' holiday and are attracted mainly by the cultural and historical sights, moderate prices and preserved scenery. About 73 percent of the tourists, who have come as cultural tourism practitioners, visit two or more places in Bulgaria during their stay.

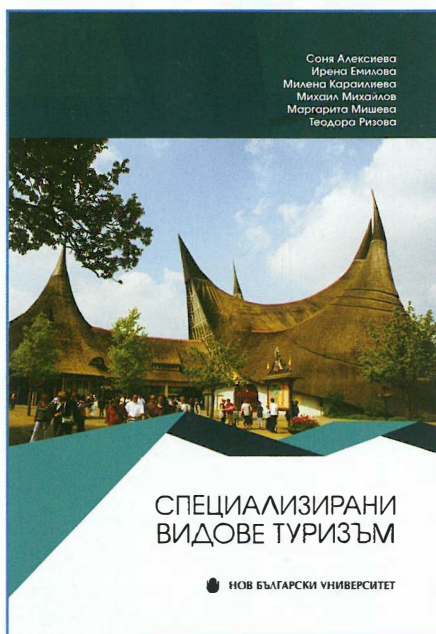
As far as the image of Bulgaria goes, cultural tourism is the most powerful promotion in affirming the country as an attractive tourist destination. Cultural tourism is characterized by several important features: quality of the tourist product; higher price of the offered services; specific user profile; upgrading of specialized interests; uniqueness of experience; opportunity for year-round trips that do not limit the visits and acquaintances with the cultural heritage in particular seasons.

An example of this is the development of Northern

Bulgaria where some of the most attractive cultural destinations in the country map are located. It is enough to point out the cities of Varna, Ruse and Veliko Tarnovo where thousands of Bulgarian and foreign tourists visit the festivals, shows, feasts, museums and contemporary cultural events - a 'trademark' of these cities. It is enough to point out one of the oldest European festivals, Varna Summer Music Festival, which has started since the

first Varna music celebration was held in the summer of 1926. It is enough to mention one of the outstanding European festivals that have been taking place for more than half a century in Ruse, Music Days of March. It is enough to visit the metropolis of Tarnovo, an architectural and cultural treasury, where history and the national events are a symbol of the Bulgarian spirit.

It is the specific motives of the people who choose cultural tourism that are united by the inspiration to travel to unique sites of cultural and historical heritage, to study the past, to get to know world history and culture, to attend festivals, celebrations and thematic events, to take part in educational or creative courses, upgrade their hobby interests, etc. The diversity of religious, educational, festival, folklore, and cultural heritage development are at the heart of Bulgaria's changed vision as a destination attracting with new tourist products.



*The latest book *Specialized Tourism Types* (November, 2017) of the New Bulgarian University team of authors presents practices, development and tendencies in the cultural, wine, urban, ethno, pilgrimage, SPA and wellness, health and cruise tourism, to both students and practitioners.*

The annual cultural calendar of Varna, Ruse and Veliko Tarnovo complements in a natural way the contemporary education of the children and the university education of students because the museums and the reconstructions present the history, culture and traditions of these cities. Among them is the most visited Bulgarian museum, Tsarevets, the International Folklore Festival, the Sound and Light audio and visual spectacle, and the Night of the Samovodska charshia in Veliko Tarnovo. The rich museums and dozens of traditional cultural events in Varna are complemented by the opportunity for tourists to see the items of Varna Chalcolithic necropolis, the oldest golden treasure in the world dating back to six thousand years ago; the Roman Baths, the largest Roman baths on the Balkan Peninsula; the Legends of Aladzha Monastery audiovisual performance...

Investments in tourist attractions, the development of museums and galleries, the promotion of new cultural routes, the creation of unique special events complement the economic, cultural and so-

cial benefits of cultural tourism. An example of this in Ruse is the Festival of Tourist Attractions within the Weekend Tourism fair; Enyovden's [Enyo's day] famous carnival, following the long tradition of entertainment in the square and urban emotions; restoration of the Roman market and the cooking premises of the Sexaginta Prista fortress, where there are attractive demonstrations presenting authentic fighting techniques, everyday practices and games of Roman time.

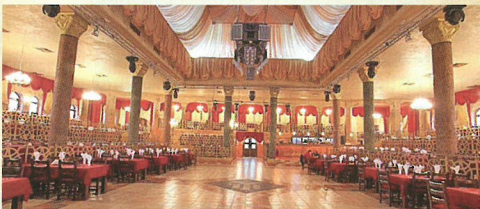
The attractiveness of Varna, Ruse and Veliko Tarnovo destinations proves how cultural tourism, as part of the specialized types of tourism, enriches the famous routes in other historical and Revival Period towns from the last 50 years - Plovdiv, Pleven, Stara Zagora, Gabrovo, Tryavna, Koprivhtitsa, Smolyan, Kotel, Asenovgrad, Kyustendil, Zlatograd, to mention but a few, complemented by dozens of new attractions, sites and regional events that have changed the map of Bulgarian cultural tourism. ■



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