

INTRODUCTION

Astrotourism in Bulgaria has the potential to be developed in the near future but for now it is not very well known and developed. We could say that Astrotourism in Bulgaria is a new and exciting theme.

All activities are concentrated in observatories and planetariums. There is 6 observatories situated in the big cities of Bulgaria. The biggest observatory named NAO Rozhen is situated at Rhodopa mountain. There are also planetariums in some towns. The most well equipped and well known planetarium is located in Smolyan municipality.

Still there are no astrotourism projects which have character of bottom-up initiatives taken in the areas characterized by high quality dark sky.

1- Analysis of the destination and visitor profile

Bulgaria is located in Southeast Europe, in the northeast part of the Balkan Peninsula. It is a European, Balkan, Black Sea and Danube country. The country's biggest advantage is that it is an all-year-round holiday destination, with both beaches and ski resorts.

Bulgaria is a popular tourist destination as a country with thousands of years of history and a cultural heritage and Arrivals of visitors from abroad to Bulgaria are 9 408 821 in total and 5 431 145 from EU countries (official statistic for 2012).

The most popular cities are Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Burgas and sky resorts Bansko, Borovetz and Pamporovo.

Bulgaria has Three national parks, which have been established in the country – Pirin (UNESCO), Rila, Central Balkan, and 11 natural parks – Belasitsa, Balgarka, Vratsa Balkan, Golden Sands, Persina, Rila Monastery, Rusenski Lom, Sinite Kamani, Strandzha and the Shumen Plateau. In order to preserve the biodiversity, 89 reserves have been established (17 were declared biosphere reserves according to the UNESCO program "Human and Biosphere" – Ali Botush, Bayuvi Dupki – Dzindzhiritsa, Bistrishko Branishte, Boatin, Chervenata Stena, Chuprene, Dzhendema, Dupkata, Kamchia, Kupena, Mantaritsa, Marichini Lakes, Uzunbodzhak, Parangalitsa, Srebarna, Steneto, Tsarichina) and 2,234 sites were declared natural landmarks. Two of the natural sites – Natural Park Pirin and Srebarna Reserve – have been included in the UNESCO List of the Global Natural Heritage. Pirin and Srebarna national parks are the most popular among tourists.

Despite the fact that it occupies only 2% of Europe's territory, about 40,000 historical monuments have been registered in Bulgaria (7 of which are included in the UNESCO list of world cultural heritage sites), 36 cultural reserves, 160 monasteries, and roughly 330

museums and galleries. This includes prehistoric finds, Thracian tombs, sites from the Greek Age, Roman fortresses, and historical monuments from the time of the First and the Second Bulgarian Kingdoms, and architectural landmarks from the Age of Revival.

Emblematic for Bulgaria are the monuments included in the UNESCO List: the Kazanlak Tomb (4th – 3rd century BC), the Thracian Tomb by the village of Sveshtari near Razgrad (3rd century BC), the Madara Horseman (8th century), the Boyana Church (10th – 11th century), the Ivanovo Rock Churches near Ruse (10th – 14th century), the Rila Monastery (10th century), the Old Town in Nesebar.

When it comes to the areas that have some kind of astrotourism to offer they are either located in the big cities where planetariums are open or in the mountains where the light pollution is minimal.

Examples:

1. NAO Rozhen- The Rozhen National Astronomical Observatory was officially opened on March 13, 1981, while the regular observations have begun since September 1980. No Rozhen is the biggest astronomical facility on the Balkan Peninsula. There is a visitor center open during the year.

2. Smolyan observatory- On September 6th 1975, the biggest Planetarium with public observatory in Bulgaria opened its doors in the town of Smolyan. Smolyan is a tourist center in the West Rhodopes lying 800 m above sea level, near the famous Bulgarian winter resort of Pamporovo. The Planetarium is the town's most frequently visited place of interest. The planetarium and observatory complex works with no day off.

3. Observatory-Belogradchik- Arrangement in advance is recommended because the visitations are not always possible!

Visiting during daytime: The visitors can see the observatory, the collection of posters of interesting sky objects, the telescopes and the apparatus. A short talk is presented on astronomical observations performed at the observatory. Professional astronomer will answer all your questions about astronomy.

Visiting during evening time: Possibility to observe interesting sky objects through the telescopes of the observatory. This is only possible at nighttime and clear sky

4. Observatory and Planetarium in Stara Zagora

Established in 1961 as one of the first in the country, the Astronomical Observatory offers educational lectures, observation of the sky, introduction to sky maps, and multimedia presentations.

5. Observatory and Planetarium in Dimitrovgrad-The National Astronomical Observatory and Planetarium (NAOP) Giordano Bruno is located in park "Nikola

Vaptsarov" in town of Dimitrovgrad. The site is designed by Arch. Milko Mialonov and was officially opened on 24 May 1962. This is the first planetarium in Bulgaria.

The complex occupies an area of 8000 m² and has three main buildings and two auxiliary halls (total 404 m²).

The Planetarium has a "Star hall" which is 8 meters in diameter and a capacity of 60 persons (45 sitting places). The hall is equipped with projectors and a dome-like screen where starry sky is displayed.

The astronomical observatories are equipped with professional telescopes and other facilities that serve for sky observation. Besides from scientific use they are, either on regular basis or during special events, made available for tourists. In most cases, promotion of activities is made via websites and local media. In some instances, they are also promoted by local tourism boards.

There is no dark sky protected areas in Bulgaria.

Some times in NAO Rozhen there are workshops for stargazing organized for students and children interested in the observation of the sky. Promotion of these activities is focused on the websites of organizations which are in charge of initiatives. There are no stargazing workshops for tourists.

Analysis of the tourist profile

- families with children;
- seniors;
- students, young people.

2. Analysis of the tourism supply

There are no special astrotourism offers in Bulgaria. Stargazing activities are mainly consisting of planetariums and observatories which are located in some cities in the country.

Shortcomings and problems:

- insufficient promotion of the offer;
- information about the offer is hard to find;
- the astrotourism offer is limited to special events;
- lack of advertising and working network;

Astrotourism in Bulgaria is not particularly well developed. It is a niche, in which marketing could be greatly improved on. Promotion actions are rather limited to passing information on current events on websites and social media. Special events as scientific conferences are

promoted more intensely. Unfortunately there are no brochures, videos or other advertising materials for astrotourism in Bulgaria.

Astrotourists in Bulgaria are in general Bulgarian citizens.

Foreigners are a small % of the people, who visit observatories and planetariums.

Both groups are demanding about accommodation, food, services and transport infrastructure.

Young people and students are interested to participate in special events, adventures, night events.

Families with small children prefer more relaxing vacations.

Nowadays astrotourism is a rather unknown term in the Bulgarian tourism industry. We believe that astrotourism offers interesting and exciting activities and has potential to be developed in the near future. To attract people to astrotourism it is necessary to start making efforts to establish a network between business organizations, local authorities, and scientific organizations in order to make all the possibilities visible.

It will be useful to be built a multilingual website dedicated to astrotourism, when events, information videos could be published.

NAO Rozhen

Advantages

- situated in the mountain, great environment for tourism;
- has a well-equipped visitor center;
- extraordinary astronomical equipment
- enthusiastic and professional staff;
- there are a lot of possibilities for outdoor activities in proximity to the observatory;
- has a good infrastructure;

Disadvantages

- insufficient promotion;
- astrotourism offers are still not very well developed;
- information on events and astrotourism offers is hard to find;
- there is no public transport from the nearest town to NAO Rozhen;
- it is not accessible for people with special needs;

Planetarium Smolian

Advantages

- open for tourists at a regular basis;
- good equipment;
- reasonable admission price;
- rich and varied program for all age groups: guided tours on various topics and languages;
- accessible for people with special needs;
- well connected, public transport;

Disadvantages

- old website;
- lack of information;

3.- Analysis of the tourist demand

No exists data available about tourist demand in Bulgaria.