

# The Institute For Integrated Rural Tourism

Example from a two day workshop in Bologa, Romania conducted in February 2003 by Todd Comen and The Institute For Integrated Rural Tourism

## Introduction to Integrated Rural Tourism and Tourism Product Development

Day 1 The workshop was designed to be both interactive and lecture. The information presented on day one focused on tourism product development. A power point presentation was given to begin the workshop that illustrated integrated rural tourism development in a remote village of Honduras. This example painted a picture of the concept of integrated rural tourism and helped to bring the workshop into context of small scale and low impact tourism in remote and under served areas.

The day was spent in lecture and discussion with information presented and discussed on the following topics:

- Tourism industry lifecycle
- Key elements of the tourism industry
  - Facilities and Services
  - Attractions
  - Information
  - Policy
  - Visitors
  - Transportation
- Integrated rural tourism product development
  - Major components and goals of integrated rural tourism
  - How to differentiate the rural tourism product
  - Telling the unique story of the rural community
  - Building partnerships and associations to enhance the tourist experience
  - Creating a theme based tourism experience
  - The importance of trained guides
  - Creating an itinerary for a one to three day tour



Day one was punctuated with examples from the village of Bologna to illustrate the major points of discussion. The workshop participants were divided into small groups during the second half of the day in order to develop ideas around the unique story of their respective villages. Teams were asked to present their ideas and to develop a draft brochure and itinerary during the evening hours if they had time that could be used to attract visitors to their village.

## Day 2

The second day of the workshop began with a review of the topics and key points of the first day. To illustrate these points small groups of participants presented a brochure and two day tour itinerary depicting the story of their community.

Discussion centered around developing a vision, story, and practical tour for both domestic and international visitors to the region.

In addition, the topic of **guiding** became a point of discussion once again as the importance to meeting

customer requirements for a quality learning experience. Later in the morning the discussion evolved into the topic of marketing the travel product, one of the three main topics for day two of the workshop. The three main topics for the second day all revolved around understanding consumers and engaging the integrated rural tourism customer in a learning experience. The three main topics are briefly described below.



**1) Tools and methods of marketing the travel product.** Discussion centered on the practice of market segmentation. The points were illustrated using the example of the “soft adventure” travel market. It was not surprising that this is one of their main market segments that purchase the rural tourism product now being developed in the Huedin micro-region. Also discussed were low cost methods of marketing and designing the tourism product for both the Romanian market and the International market. Building long-term relationships with individual customers as well as tour operators was discussed extensively.

**2) Understanding customer needs during the four stages of the visitor cycle is critical to delivering quality tour products and services.** The four stages include 1) the pre-arrival stage, 2) the arrival stage, 3) the occupancy stage, and 4) the departure stage. The discussion centered on the needs and wants of the consumer during each one of these stages and how people in the travel business can effectively meet the needs and wants of their visitors during each stage. Topics in this section also included employee training employees and listening to the customer.

3) **Pricing the travel product** was introduced so that participants could understand how a packaged tour can provide financial rewards to a variety of people in the village. The example was once again focused on the village of Bologna to illustrate the pricing method. In the example, a two - day tour was developed that included the following:

- Accommodations for one night
- Main meals for two days
- Visit to the water driven grain mill
- Visit to the 14<sup>th</sup> century fortress
- Visit to the unique black stone church
- Visit to the sheep farmer to sample sheep milk cheese
- Visit to the forest
- Participation in a typical Romanian celebration with music and dance
- Wagon ride around the village
- Trained guide
- Visit to a shop for afternoon coffee and treats
- Visit to a weaver who demonstrates weaving techniques and sells woven goods
- Visit to a stone carver
- Visit to the stone quarry



These activities created a tourism experience around the unique features and individuals of the village of Bologna. The tourist experience centered on the story of stone, from the stone quarry to the stone fortress, to the black stone church and the grain mill where stones grind the grain for both animals and humans, and finally to the stone carver who works to shape the stone from the quarry for human use. The story then weaves village life patterns into the visitor experience including the farmers, weavers, and other cultural traditions. The tour product featured a variety of villagers who would benefit financially from being a part of the unique story of the village.

Once this tourism package was complete, fixed and variables costs were discussed and allocated to each item and finally a price for each component of the tourist experience was determined.

Other important topics of discussion included:

- how to develop a tourist attraction around a farm operation with specific emphasis on fruit production,
- understanding how customers will become more engaged in their learning experience when they are moved from their “comfort zone” into a zone of greater perceived adventure and risk,
- Discussion of competition and the pros and cons of competing based on price or based on a model of differentiation with a menu of options the customer can choose from, and
- how interfacing with students studying at the university in Cluj can become a valuable resource for helping to conduct consumer research and gather information on rural tourism.

From this initial visit to the Transylvania region of Romania, the following next steps were recommended:

1. Encourage the growth of the regional association of tourism providers
2. Build a network of rural tourism associations that can share stories, experiences, clientele, etc.
3. Strive for certification by Pan Parks for one or two protected areas that can attract ecotourists to the region.
4. Encourage a guide training program for the region so that villagers who are competent in 2-3 languages or have an interest in guiding only Romanians can develop guiding skills and the knowledge of ecosystems and cultural heritage in the micro-region.
5. Monitor progress of workshop participants to determine if they were motivated by the ideas and methods presented in the workshop