

TOURISM FARMHOUSES IN SLOVENIA AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECOTOURISM

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Abstract

Ecotourism is often claimed to be the most rapidly expanding sector of the tourism industry, with an annual growth rate of 5% worldwide, representing 6% of the world's gross domestic product. Ecotourism is a part of a much broader tourism product sector, which includes nature, adventure, cultural and perhaps also farm or rural tourism. Ecological food today represents an important element in tourism services, but ecologically produced food plays an especially important part in the rural tourism offer. With its origins in rural hospitality and bed & breakfast establishments, farm tourism now contributes a significant component of income streams for farm landholders in many parts of the world.

There are only 44 ecotourism farmhouses in Slovenia out of 567 farmhouses in Association of Tourist Farms of Slovenia. Considering farmhouse guests' opinions and expectations, the paper aims to suggest the future development guidelines. The paper particularly defines rural tourism and its connection with the ecological agriculture.

In the empirical part of the paper, a survey among the tourism farmhouses guests was conducted. Our intention was to examine the meaning and acceptability of ecologically produced food among the farmhouses guests. In the research part of the paper, we were concerned with discovering the needs, motives and expectations of guests who are visiting tourist farmhouses over Slovenia. Our special interest was focused on the farmhouses' quality of tourism services, the guests' views of that as well as the quality of the food.

Findings of this study show guests' highest satisfaction was with the friendliness and hospitality, peace and quiet, and the appearance and neatness of tourism farmhouses. Furthermore, only 18 percent of them think that the food was ecologically produced. Future research in the context of the presented study may be focused on guests' satisfaction, given the rapid changes of the tourism market conditions. An extended satisfaction survey could give the ability to analyze the guest preferences in comparison with the new trends that influence that particular segment.

Key words: ecotourism, rural tourism, farmhouses in Slovenia, guests satisfaction, farmhouses offerings quality

