

THE RURAL TOURISM POTENTIAL OF VĂLENI VILLAGE, CAHUL DISTRICT

Vladlena CERVONNAIA*, Valentina LUCA

*Hotel services, tourism and leisure, SHTA-231, Faculty of Food Technology,
Technical University of Moldova, Chisinau, Republic of Moldova*

*Corresponding author: Vladlena Cervonnaia, vladlena.cervonnaia@an.utm.md

Liliana PROZOR-BARBALAT, university assistant, TUM

Abstract. *This article explores Văleni Village, how it achieved the title of one of the best rural villages in the world and about the tourist attractions it offers. Văleni village in Moldova has undergone a remarkable transformation into a thriving rural tourism destination, thanks to the EU investments and grants. It showcases picturesque landscapes, including Lake Beleu and the Golden Hills, attracting visitors for agrotourism, ecological tourism, and sustainable tourism experiences. Recognized with the "Best Tourism Villages" award by the UNWTO, Văleni offers diverse activities such as the Eco-Touristic Trail "Petru Rareș Road" and exploration of the Lower Prut Reserve. Guesthouses like EcoVillage Văleni and "La Bunica Clava" provide authentic experiences, blending the traditional Moldovan cuisine and cultural heritage. EcoVillage Văleni offers themed rustic accommodation and a family winery, while "La Bunica Clava" preserves the charm of an old house with a generous garden offering fresh fruits. Both establishments contribute to the village's reputation as a top rural tourist destination, highlighting its rich history, natural beauty, and warm hospitality. The authors state that the village of Văleni has emerged as a prime example of successful rural tourism development, driven by EU investments and local initiatives.*

Keywords: *rural tourism, agrotourism, guesthouses, tourist attractions, rustic accommodation*

Introduction

Following the research, we will talk about the flourishing rural tourism scene in the village of Văleni, which has seen remarkable growth and development in recent years. Situated in Moldova, Văleni boasts outstanding potential for rural tourism, thanks to EU investments and various projects aimed at uncovering its hidden essence. Through an analysis of numerous documents and articles, it has become evident that EU finances and grants have played a pivotal role in revitalizing a multitude of guesthouses and rural houses in Văleni. As a result, the inhabitants of Văleni have been able to breathe new life into old houses, stories, elements, and traditional Moldovan cuisine. Today, these offerings delight all the visitors through the rural tourism experiences, encompassing the agrotourism, ecological tourism, and sustainable tourism practices. Additionally, Văleni benefits from its strategic location, being traversed by two important transportation networks: the terrestrial road Cahul-Giugulești and the railway network Giurgulești-Cahul, both of which contribute to the accessibility and connectivity of the village [1].

Destinations of Văleni

The tourism potential of Văleni village, known for its guesthouses and picturesque landscapes of Lake Beleu, has been recognized with the "Best Tourism Villages" award, 2023 edition, by the General Secretariat of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the most prestigious award globally for rural tourism. Văleni village has started to create tourist trails to develop various types of tourism, which are beginning to take place in the village, where natural resources are exploited and eco-tourism is promoted. One of the most well-known and renowned trails is the Eco-Touristic Trail "Petru Rareș' Road". In the past, the great ruler of Moldova (1527 - 1538 and 1541 - 1546) roamed those places with his hunters for hunting. This trail winds for 9

km through the reeds, rushes, and willows, making access to the opposite bank of the Prut River. Currently, this trail remains as a historically and culturally significant legacy [2].

„The tourist potential of Văleni village is both vast and varied because it possesses both man-made tourist resources that are quite visited and natural tourist resources, such as the Golden Hills or Lake Beleu, where tourists from both within and outside the country gather to explore the old land of Southern Moldova. The Golden Hills are an integral part of the village, representing a Natural Monument protected by the Academy of Sciences under the name "The Outcrop of Văleni". The outcrop near Văleni village is a geological or paleontological natural monument in Cahul district, the Republic of Moldova. It is located 0.5 km south of Văleni village and covers an area of 3 hectares. The outcrop of Văleni consists of several stratigraphic levels of Pliocene and Pleistocene age [3].

Beleu lake is located near the villages of Slobozia Mare and Văleni. It was fundamental in the creation of the "Prutul de Jos" nature reserve, representing a paradise for various species of birds, fish, animals and plants, many of which are included in the Red Book of the Republic of Moldova. Lake Beleu occupies an area of 628 hectares, that is, approximately one third of the entire "Prutul de Jos" reserve. The fauna of the lake is extremely rich, comprising about 198 species of animals and 140 species of birds. Among the rare mammals that can be found here are the otter, wildcat, white-bellied harrier, ermine and European mink. Lake Beleu is, in fact, a small delta of the Danube, characterized by wide waters and rich vegetation, being considered a wetland of international importance. A remarkable phenomenon is the temporary presence of several thousand pelicans, who visit the lake for 2-3 weeks every year. They consume significant amounts of fish from the lake before continuing their journey to the Danube Delta [4].

The Lower Prut Reserve: What it represents, what types of tourism, what it protects. The Lower Prut Reserve is a protected area in the Republic of Moldova, located in the southwest of the country, near the border with Romania. The Lower Prut is a significant wetland area, including marshes, alluvial forests, marshes and bayous, lakes, and rivers. It plays an important role in conserving biodiversity and aquatic ecosystems, as well as in protecting wetlands, which are vital for water filtration, water level regulation, and flood risk reduction. The Lower Prut Reserve offers a variety of unique and interesting tourist experiences, due to its ecological diversity and natural richness. It includes Ecotourism; Birdwatching Tourism; Active, Cultural, Historical, and Relaxation Tourism [5].

Accommodation units with EU aid

The people of Văleni spare no effort to showcase their natural beauty, the natural monuments of unreal beauty, and a history centuries old. They strongly believe in their traditions and ancestral customs, in the smiles of children, and in the tranquility of Lake Beleu, which makes them so famous. Through a well-packed program of traditional customs and ancestral traditions, the people of Văleni offer a wide range of tourist packages. Thus, it has been included in the ranking of the best rural tourist destinations in the world, being the first village in the Republic of Moldova included in this top. Some guesthouses and rural houses in Văleni, that have benefited from financial assistance from EU projects, are EcoVillage Văleni guesthouse and "La Bunica Clava" rural house [6].

Emphasizing ecology and healthy but tasty food, EcoVillage Văleni (founded in 2011) is a local business dedicated to rural, cultural, wine, and ecotourism. The owners initially aimed to create a nationally and internationally attractive point, becoming an example and a driving force for rural development in the region. This guesthouse benefited from a grant under the "EU4Moldova: Key Regions" Program, funded by the European Union and implemented by UNDP and UNICEF, which provided a necessary boost for it. Starting from the concept of a traditional museum, the complex has expanded to include ecological accommodation, a rustic restaurant, and a small family winery - Corbu Wine. Their goal is to offer a variety of tourist packages to welcome both foreign and local tourists. In the guesthouse courtyard are located 4

thematic rustic houses: "The Miller's House", "The Fisher's House", "The Shepherd's House", and "The Blacksmith's House". Each one has 2 rooms with separate entrances, equipped with wooden beds, TV, Wi-Fi, and private bathrooms. The total accommodation capacity of the guesthouse is 24 places. Thanks to the funding of 30,000 euros, the agro-guesthouse territory has been significantly arranged. This funding was directed towards equipping and furnishing eight new rooms in the thematic cottages, installing wooden tubs, and purchasing kitchen equipment. Additionally, the construction of a spa area is currently underway, which will include swimming pools, Jacuzzi, and sauna. These investments have allowed the hiring of three people, and the development of infrastructure has transformed the agro-guesthouse into an attractive tourist destination for visitors from the country and abroad [7].

The rural house "La Bunica Clava" is located in a picturesque location, right at the foot of the Golden Hills in the village of Văleni. It is an old house that has not been left to degrade but has been redesigned to accommodate tourists. The initiative belongs to Nicoleta Ciobanu, who encouraged her mother to apply for grants launched by the GAL Lower Prut, with funding from the European Union. This shelter blends the story of several generations, including that of grandmother Clava, with the desire of the owners to offer tourists an authentic insight into local cultures and traditions. The house has been kept in its original form, built in 1961, allowing each visitor to enjoy a journey back in time when exploring this guesthouse. The house has two rooms, each with three beds, a shared bathroom, a fully equipped kitchen, and an outdoor gazebo, all set in a spacious courtyard. Heating is provided by a central heating system, but for those who wish to experience the authentic rural atmosphere, a fire can be lit in the stove. The generous garden is a true paradise for those seeking the taste of childhood, offering strawberries, cherries, raspberries, grapes, tomatoes, and many other vegetables that can be picked and enjoyed by guests. The owners of the rural house also offer the opportunity to explore the surrounding golden hills, where, with a little of luck, deer can be spotted or the scent of blooming acacias can be savored. And last but not least, the most delicious quince can be tasted here, thus completing the culinary and cultural experience offered by "La Bunica Clava" Rural House [8].

Conclusion

In conclusion, the village of Văleni stands as a shining example of successful rural tourism development, thanks to EU investments and local initiatives that have revitalized the area's natural beauty and cultural heritage. Recognized with the prestigious "Best Tourism Villages" award by the UNWTO, Văleni has become a magnet for travelers seeking the authentic experiences and serene landscapes. From the picturesque Lake Beleu to the geological wonders of the Golden Hills, visitors are treated to a diverse array of natural attractions. Moreover, the dedication of local entrepreneurs, such as EcoVillage Văleni and "La Bunica Clava" rural houses, has transformed traditional homes into welcoming accommodations, offering guests a glimpse into Moldovan rural life. With its commitment to sustainability, preservation of heritage, and warm hospitality, Văleni has rightfully earned its place among the top rural tourist destinations, showcasing the beauty and charm of Southern Moldova to the world.

Bibliography:

- [1] "Introducerea" [Online]. Available: <https://danube-cotravel.com/gastronomie/>
- [2] "EcoVillage Văleni" - [Online]. Available: <https://news.cision.com/chemonicsmoldova/r/valeni-village-in-the-republic-of-moldova-awarded-best-tourism-village-2023-by-the-world-tourism-org,c3857975> ;
- [3] "Lake Beleu" [Online]. Available: <https://visitcahul.md/turism/destinatii-turistice/lacul-beleu> ;
- [4] "The Golden Hills" [Online]. Available: <https://complexvaleni.com/colinele-de-aur/> ;
- [5] "The Lower Prut Reserve" [Online]. Available: <https://prutuldejos.md/despre-noi/> ;

- [6] “Rural houses” [Online]. Available: <https://eu4moldova.eu/ro/beneficiarii-eu4moldova-regiuni-cheie-pensiunea-eco-village-din-valeni-se-extinde/> ;
- [7] “EcoVillage Văleni” - [Online]. Available: <https://visitcahul.md/turism/cazare/eco-village-valeni> ;
- [8] “La Bunica Clava” [Online]. Available: <https://agrobiznes.md/viorica-ciobanu-casa-rurala-la-bunica-clava-am-transformat-casa-construita-in-1961-intr-o-atractie-turistica.html> ;