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## **РАЗВИТИЕ НА ТУРИСТИЧЕСКИЯ ПРОДУКТ ЗА РЕГИОНА НА КОРЧА**

### **TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT FOR THE KORÇA REGION**

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**Abstract:** Tourism in Albania is a relatively new phenomenon. During the 50 years of communist rule groups of Western tourists were only allowed to visit Albania after the 1980s. Since the end of the dictatorship, tourism has been progressing, slowly at first but at spectacular rates in recent years.

Albania's vast number of tourism assets offers a range of different experiences to visitors - from 470 km of Mediterranean coast with excellent beaches to mountain areas and lakes as well as a rich and varied cultural heritage and remarkable history. The most visited areas of the country include the capital Tirana, mostly as a gateway to Albania and for business purposes; the coast with the beach resorts at Durres near Tirana and Vlore in the south; the archaeological sites of Butrint and Apollonia; and the historical towns of Berat, the 'town of 1000 windows'; and Gjirokastra, the UNESCO heritage site. The north of the country offers wild mountainous landscapes and excellent eco and adventure tourism opportunities. The Korça Region located in the Southeast of the country is reputed for its culture and history as well as its lakes (Ohrid and Prespa), historic villages and mountains. The region has a range of products based on its history, culture and traditions, its villages and its lakes and mountains.

**Key words:** tourism product; tourism development, Korça region

#### **Introduction**

Tourism in Albania is a relatively new phenomenon. During the 50 years of communist rule groups of Western tourists were only allowed to visit Albania after the 1980s. Since the end of the dictatorship, tourism has been progressing, slowly at first but at spectacular rates in recent years.

Albania's vast number of tourism assets offers a range of different experiences to visitors - from 470 km of Mediterranean coast with excellent beaches to mountain areas and lakes as well as a rich and varied cultural heritage and remarkable history. The most visited areas of the country include the capital Tirana, mostly as a gateway to Albania and for business purposes; the coast with the beach resorts at Durres near Tirana and Vlore in the

south; the archaeological sites of Butrint and Apollonia; and the historical towns of Berat, the 'town of 1000 windows'; and Gjirokastra, the UNESCO heritage site. The north of the country offers wild mountainous landscapes and excellent eco and adventure tourism opportunities. The Korça Region located in the Southeast of the country is reputed for its culture and history as well as its lakes (Ohrid and Prespa), historic villages and mountains. The region has a range of products based on its history, culture and traditions, its villages and its lakes and mountains.

#### **1. Tourism Projects and Initiatives**

The tourism projects and initiatives carried out by the different organizations are described in this section and most

organizations plan to continue supporting the sector in the future.

**SNV:** SNV has been very active in the tourism sector since 2005. The organization has carried out the following projects during this period:

- ✓ Facilitating the budgeting process through participation, prioritizing tourism
- ✓ Assisting the Korça City Municipality to organize events (beer festival, pie festival, end of year fair)
- ✓ Inventory and cataloguing of Korça region monuments and attractions through a participatory process
- ✓ Other activities include creating partnerships and cooperation with different stakeholders or partners.

**GTZ:** GTZ has been involved in the Korça Region tourism sector since 2002 through its economic development and employment promotion programme. Tourism has been one of its priority sectors for intervention. The following activities were carried out over this period:

- ✓ Renovation of guest houses around Prespa Lake.
- ✓ Tourism Strategy for Korça Region, in collaboration with external consultants and the University of Korça.
- ✓ The tourism strategy chapter in the Regional Development Strategy.

GTZ has sponsored a number of training initiatives including: hotel management; improvement of service quality (waiters, chefs, housemaid); trainings for tour guides; English for waiters; family tourism in some villages in Korça's Region.

**USAID:** The tourism sector is a component of USAID's Enterprise Demand and Export Market Services (EDEM) project. Over the years, several initiatives have been launched by USAID in the tourism sector. The main objectives cover two aspects: building the capacity of tour operators in the industry; and improving the image of Albania abroad. In the Korça Region, USAID have been involved in a couple of initiatives: It helped set up a tourism association in Voskopoja; in collaboration with SNV, it organized training of local stakeholders in some villages.

## 2. The Product / Market Fit

The Product / Market Fit is a technique which is used to analyze the products that tourists visiting a destination enjoy. The Korça Marketing and Product Development Strategy Working Group, went through a Product / Market Fit exercise to reflect on the link between markets attracted to the region and products that they consume during their visit. This method provides a simple grading system to assess markets and products at a destination. A matrix is developed listing all the markets visiting the region in columns and the products available in the region in rows. Two points are allocated to products which are of particular interest to a specific market; one point to products which the market is somewhat interested in; and no point if the market has no interest in the product. The scores across the markets for each product are totaled (column on the right of the matrix). This indicates the products that are of most interest to the greater number of markets. The scores for each market are totaled (last row). This indicated the markets that enjoy the greatest number of products in the region.

The results of the approach allow us to make a number of inferences about products and markets in the Korça Region.

### ➤ Products

It is clear that both soft culture (i.e. intangible culture such as arts, crafts, folklore and society) and hard culture (i.e. historical and contemporary monuments) are the greatest pull factors to the Korça's Region. 'Cuisine and Drinks' and 'Music and Events' score the highest amongst the majority of markets closely followed by more tangible culture of "Churches and Museums" and Villages. In fact there is a close link between Villages, "Cuisine and drinks" and "Music and events". History also scores very highly and historical attractions are popular with many of the market segments.

Nature is a strong pull factor to the Korça Region with "Mountains and Lakes" scoring high. However, it is also apparent that currently visitors do not participate in

many activities in nature surroundings such as cycling and horse riding. Hiking is the activity that is enjoyed the most, but that is still fairly limited. The lack of organized activities, information on what is possible to do in the area and the few opportunities to rent equipment and facilities to actively enjoy Korça's natural environment is hindering the development of nature tourism and ecotourism. According to anecdotal evidence from the volunteer Tourist Information Office in Korça, 80% of enquires last year were from visitors wanting to know about cycling possibilities in the area. This would indicate that new products could be developed in the region. It is clear that nature is an important tourism asset for the region but its potential is not being realized.

➤ **Market Segments**

According to the analysis of the Korça Marketing and Product Development Strategy Working Group, independent foreign visitors enjoy most products in the Korça Region. Although this is a broad category, it can be presumed that the independent traveler is under less time pressure than other market segments and will take time to explore the region and participate in as many activities as possible, enjoying all the experiences that are on offer. However, the number of visitors is estimated to be currently fairly small

(although data is not readily available yet) and targeting the marketing effort to this segment is harder than to well defined segments like tour groups which can be reached through tour operators and geographically demarcated segments such as Albanian Americans and Canadians.

*Foreign residents* with Albanian background fall into 3 main categories: Albanian that emigrated in the 1930s and 1940s – a substantial number are located in the US; Albanians that emigrated in the 1990s after the change of regime; and ethnic Albanians from Kosovo and Macedonia. Albanian Americans and Canadians are potentially a strong market segments and, according to the brainstorming, enjoy a variety of products in the Korça Region.

*The domestic market* is strong; particularly the domestic middle aged visitors, the domestic youth and school groups. They enjoy the regions soft culture as well as its nature. The youth and school groups enjoy the opportunities for active tourism such as sports. Tour groups are also a good market to target. The potential of combining tours with neighbouring countries(cross-border products) must be explored so that the Korça region can offer a product that is distinct from those in the other countries and represents the diversity of Albania in the package.

<b>MARKET SEGMENTS</b>	<b>PRODUCTS</b>	Domestic middle age	Domestic families	Domestic Youth	Schools	American Albanians	Albanians: Kos\Mac	Others	Tour group	Independent neigh	Independent others	Business/etc	<b>TOTAL</b>
Villages		2	2	1	2	2	0	2	2	1	2	1	17
Churches/ Museums		2	1.5	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	18.5
History (arch./medieval)		1	1	0	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	15
Mountains/nature		1	1	2	2	2	0	1	1	1	2	1	14
Lakes	/	2	2	2	1	1	0	1	1	2	2	0	14

MARKET SEGMENTS PRODUCTS	Domestic middle age	Domestic families	Domestic Youth	Schools	American Albanians	Albanians: Kos/Mac	Others	Tour group	Independent neigh	Independent others	Business/etc	TOTAL
beaches												
Hiking/walking	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	2	1	8
Cycling	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	3
Horse riding	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Skiing	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	5
Bird watching	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Cuisine/drinks	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	20
Music/events	2	2	2	2	1.5	1	2	2	1	2	2	19.5
Handicrafts	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	13
Communist era	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	2	1	5
Sports	1	0	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	6
Matrimonial	1	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	5
<b>Total</b>	17	12.5	15	16	18.5	6	14	15	16	23	13	

*Independent visitors* from neighbouring countries will include Albanian immigrants returning home to visit friends and relatives, those that have invested in property in Korça but also tourists visiting Albania for a change of scenery and culture (i.e. weekend visit) or for shopping. These are more difficult to market to but products should be made available to them and well publicized so that they are aware of them and can find them easily.

### 3. Product Development Strategy

This chapter presents the methodology used to formulate the marketing and product development strategy for the Korça Region. It starts with a review of the core strategies

that are central to developing a strategic plan.

#### ➤ Core Marketing and Product Development Strategies

As with all strategic processes, developing tourism destination strategy comprises a number of stages:

✓ *Analysis* which involves assessing the products and resources that exist at the destination; the markets that visit the destination; the environment in which tourism at the destination operates; and the destination's competitors. The question which is answer at this stage is: **Where are we now?**

✓ *Strategy Formulation* which involves segmentation, targeting markets and positioning the destination. The question which is answer at this stage is: **Where do we want to go?**

✓ *Formulation of tactics* which involves ensuring that the product is appropriate for the markets targeted, promoted and distributed accordingly through focused marketing channels, and priced within their expectations and possibilities. At this stage the question

which is answered is: **How do we get there?**

✓ *Monitoring:* It is important that plans that are made are carefully followed and monitored to ensure that they are achieving what they were designed to do. Therefore, the impact of the activities prescribed must be checked on a regular basis, and if these are not achieving the desired results, they must be reviewed and reoriented. This answers the question: **Did we or are we getting there?** Therefore the special considerations in the formulation of a marketing strategy for a

destination are the two core strategies of:

✓ Market segmentation and the identification of target markets; and

✓ Destination positioning and branding.

Determining target markets and developing destination products are interrelated tasks because of the relatively static nature of the tourism product at the destination. To attract markets suitable for the mix of products available at the destination, marketing strategy focuses on identifying potential visitors with common characteristics and on developing the appropriate activities and services to satisfy their needs. The second essential task in the strategy is to position the Korça Region as a destination vis-à-vis each target market and to endow it with a strong, easily recognizable and unique identity. Once these aspects have been determined, a number of strategic actions can be programmed to promote the destination and increase the number of tourist arrivals as well as business turnover.

#### ➤ **Methodology to Formulate the Korça Region Marketing and Product Development Strategy**

The methodology adopted to formulate the Korça Region marketing and product development strategy involves a number of steps and stages. Both primary and secondary research was carried out.

✓ All documents concerning tourism development in Albania (i.e. the National Tourism Strategy, the Tourism Law and so

on...) and the initiatives that have been carried out in the Korça Region, in particular the TAP processes conducted by SNV Balkans in collaboration with local stakeholders were reviewed in detail.

✓ Field trips were undertaken around the Korça Region to examine the products and assess their potential. Three brainstorming sessions were held with an especially created working group of Korça Region stakeholders, each on a different theme to elicit their views, to involve them in the formulation process and to agree the best way forward to develop the regions products and target the markets which will bring the greatest positive impact to the region. The strategic process was undertaken in collaboration with the working group and the SNV tourism advisors has involved:

✓ Two techniques to analyze tourism markets and tourism products of the Korça Region: the Product / Market Fit and Value Chain Analysis.

✓ Based on the analyses, three markets to be developed in the short term were selected and the appropriate product improvement, expansion and development identified.

We used hypothesis evaluations in this study, as follow:

❖ To evaluate Hypothesis 1 a – “Nationality of tourists affects the interest to natural and historical heritage of the rural destination”, let us see the cross tabulations between their elements and test Chi-Square. For:  $\chi^2 \text{ llog} = 2.54$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.4 > 0.05$ . Thus, the Hypothesis 1a was not proved. The same conclusion results from the simple linear regression ( $F = 0.009$ ;  $p = 0.92$ ).

❖ Hypothesis 1 b: The higher the interest for the rich nature, the higher the frequency of visits in destination, is :  $\chi^2 \text{ llog} = 12.31$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ,  $\chi^2 \text{ tab} = 15.5$ ,  $F = 4.88$  for  $p < 0.05$ . so,  $\chi^2 \text{ llog} < \chi^2 \text{ tab}$ , Hypothesis 1b was proved.

❖ For the Hypothesis 2- Nationality of tourists affects considerably their expenses in rural destination, the following results were found:  $\chi^2 \text{ llog} = 31.22$ ,  $df = 12$ , for  $p =$

0.002,  $\chi^2$  tab = 21.22, F = 1.5, p = 0.02. So,  $\chi^2$  llog >  $\chi^2$  tab, that is why Hypothesis 2 b was not proved.

❖ Hypothesis 3 -The more satisfied tourists during their vacation, the more recommendations will they give to other people about the destination affecting thus its image, : $\chi^2$  llog = 7.11, df = 6,  $\chi^2$  tab = 12.59, F = 5.105; p = 0.02. So,  $\chi^2$  llog <  $\chi^2$  tab, that is why the Hypothesis 3 was proved.

#### 4. THE OBSTACLES AND CONSTRAINTS

✓ *Transport in the area Markets:* national road under construction from Progradec to Korça City; lack or insufficient signage; rented car only in Tirana; roads in the region need improvement; narrow roads for buses

✓ *Marketing Channels:* marketing only of events (newspapers, posters, local TV); relies on word-of-mouth rather than promotion strategy; only local TV used – not national TV, especially to reach Albanians in Macedonia, Kosovo and Greece, but also in Tirana etc; local characteristics such as clement climate in summer and snow in winter not sufficiently promoted if at all (people just seem to know about it); limited collaterals and often out of date – collaterals usually developed with assistance of NGOs and are 'one time' initiatives; lack of knowledge of marketing at local level; lack of research on market needs Interventions to solve the problems caused by the constraints and obstacles are recommended as shown:

**Areas of potential intervention:**  
**Markets / Marketing Channels:** marketing strategy should focus strongly on domestic tourism, especially Albanians in neighboring countries by promoting events and festivals not only on local TV but also on national TV and in national newspapers; also promote the opportunities to enjoy tourism in the region; seek endorsement of famous personalities originating from Korça; invite journalists and tour operators to see the tourism attractions of the Korça Region (fame trips); market research to uncover

their needs in order to adapt the product in Korça; capacity building in tourism, especially in marketing; attend relevant trade fairs in Albania and in areas with Albanian populations reside to promote the Korça Region; **Transport in the area:** lobby local and central government to improve roads to attractions; review and develop appropriate signage; encourage local business to establish a rented-a-car service in Korça City; develop and distribute a Korça Region map with attractions and tourism services clearly indicated (encourage private sector business).

Based on the analysis of the value chain, it is possible to draw conclusions about the viability of the market or the product.

In conclusion, the domestic market is currently the main market to the region which has the choice of other areas to visit if they are not satisfied with the attractions and services of the area. It is a large market that comes to the Korça Region for day excursion, weekends as well as longer holidays. It can be generally reached through the national media and trade fairs, for specific groups such as schools and trade unions as well as for special interest groups through their associations. This market enjoys many of the region's products, including experiencing nature and events. However, promotion to this market needs to be improved and should be stronger and more sophisticated.

##### **Value Chains focused on Products**

This section focuses on the products that tourists enjoy in the Korça Region.

##### ➤ **Village Tourism**

Villages are an integral component of the Korça Region tourism product and Voskopoja in particular is featured on most tour operator itineraries through the area. Village tourism is already becoming well established and the domestic market in particular is increasingly aware of Korça's villages. The Korça villages provides direct benefit to local communities thus improving standards, quality of life and alleviating poverty as well as enhancing SMEs in the region. The development of tourism in

villages encourages improvement of infrastructure. Interesting villages can be found throughout the state, each with the possibility of offering a different experience to the visitor. However, the Village Tourism product offer needs to be upgraded to fit in with market needs and expectations and to be strongly promoted.

➤ **City or Urban Tourism**

Cities are the arrival points in the region where tourists will start to explore other areas. They represent the region and are the centre within their area where services can be found, used, purchased or booked. They are also where several attractions can be found within a small and well defined area (i.e. museums, theatres, exhibitions etc...). However, cities in the Korça Region must be made 'tourist friendly' and upgraded accordingly; for instance, there is no official tourist information office in any of the cities; there is a lack of signage to attractions and amenities that are important to tourists like museums and restaurants; attractions are often closed, even during publicized opening times; menus are generally only in Albanian; there are few higher category hotels for tourists who require this type of facility and hospitality services are not professional...

➤ **Cultural and Historical Tourism**

The Korça Region is famed for its historical and cultural assets. History and culture are found in cities but also in villages, and tourists travel around the region to experience 3000-year old Illyrian archaeological sites, medieval and Byzantine churches and buildings, Second World War monuments and memorials as well as vestiges from the communist era.

Culture and history are of interest to the general sightseeing tourist market, to the specialist market (domestic and international) and of particular interest of the Diaspora to see where much of Albania's culture and history generated (Albanian language, first school etc...).

The region is rich in traditional culture with each area offering original music and dance. Korça is famous for its 'serenades' which are internationally known. Many of

the towns and villages in the region claim famous poets, writers and painters, some of which are known around the world. The culture of the Korça Region is also enriched by ethnic minorities such as the Macedonian community in the Prespa area which offer tourism alternatives and unique traditions to present to visitors. Organizing historical and cultural assets into tourism products will encourage tourists to stay longer in the area

➤ **Festivals and Events Tourism**

Festivals and events bring visitors, especially domestic tourists, to the region including during the off-season. They increase the income of tourism stakeholders including those that provide services to tourists but are not direct stakeholders such as taxi drivers. They promote the Korça Region as a region of activity, entertainment, fun and dynamism – somewhere there 'is always something going on' – a positive brand image for the region therefore increase visibility of the region in tourist markets. Festivals and events have been very successful for the Korça Region in the last couple of years which is now gaining a reputation in Albania and in the neighboring countries.

➤ **Beach and Lake Tourism**

The Ohrid and Prespa Lakes are outstanding tourism assets with international recognition. They attract the domestic market for day excursions, weekends as well as longer stays during the summer and the international market for relatively short periods of time to see the lakes. However, there is a need to upgrade the product to compete with similar products in Macedonia and Greece and highlight the characteristics that are special about Albania. Environmental clean up is vital to the success of this product.

➤ **Nature Tourism**

The Korça Region has outstanding opportunities for nature tourism. It can attract the general tourists who are interested to see high quality landscapes as well as fauna and flora but also specialist markets such as ecotourists; adventure tourists who want to enjoy activities in

nature such as trekking, climbing and sports; and researchers and scientists.

Specialist markets are easier to target than general tourists as they have their own marketing channels. Nature tourism can involve day excursions but also longer stays in the area. It spreads tourism in the region to other areas apart from the cities, enhancing opportunities for villages to offer new products. It can offer opportunities at different times of the year (i.e. skiing in winter). Currently, there are ongoing initiatives to develop nature tourism and developing a range of products and activities will encourage specialist tour operators to feature the region. However, some of the initiatives that are proposed replicate ventures that have been implemented in other countries and may not be suitable for the region. The implications of launching these initiatives must be carefully assessed. This market is not yet properly developed although it presents undeniable potential. It should be encouraged but will take time to become established.

#### ➤ **Handicrafts and Local Specialties**

Handicrafts and local specialties are important additions to the tourism assets of a destination. They represent the variations in culture and traditions that can be found within the region. The value chain is different to tourism value chains as it concerns the creation, production and distribution of physical goods rather than services. The stages of the value chain involve the sourcing of raw materials; their treatment and processing; their design and production; their distribution; and their marketing and sales.

Linking handicrafts and local specialties with tourism will allow the traditions to live on and develop, and skills can be passed onto the younger generation. The traditions of past generations and the cultural heritage of the society are preserved for future generations. Handmade and cottage industry products tend to be of high quality and cut across other value chains (i.e. agriculture, textile etc...). The sector employs women, creates income through

new businesses and promotes the region nationally, but also if properly marketed internationally.

### **5. General Recommendations for all Value Chains**

It is clear from the value chain analysis that there are areas of general improvement which must be achieved if the Korça Region is to become a major tourism destination in Albania and in Southern Europe. The following section provides essential recommendations to advance the tourism sector in the region.

#### **Positioning and Branding the Korça Region**

The first rule of destination positioning and branding is : ***'it is not what you say it is, it is what they say it is'***. Being the first to claim a unique position in the mind of the consumer is very powerful and provides a great advantage. The second entrant will find it difficult to claim the position even when the attributes are better or stronger. To select the Korça Region's best position, its attributes have to be isolated, the market perception of each attribute assessed and then evaluated against competing destinations. It is therefore important to identify the attributes that characterize the Korça Region to extract the core attribute and the supporting assets. The position is conveyed through the brand. A brand is not a slogan or a logo; these are tools that are employed to communicate the values and identity of the brand or in this case the destination. Branding a destination is transmitting an experience, a feeling; not places to look at or things to do "***Tourists want experiences not places***".

The Korça Region brand needs to reflect the Korça Region's personality and its identity. Brand of Korca is "Alternative Korca" To make sure that tourists enjoy their visits in the rural destination with natural and cultural features that would make them stay longer and spend more money, it is recommendable to:

~ Encourage the local businesses to develop activities like riding and cycling, rent equipments and improving passages

with appropriate signals and compiling tourist guides.

~ Encourage the improvements of hotels, guest houses to comply with tourists' standards (were needed).

~ Encourage the restaurants to offer and promote traditional cooking making use of the regional specifications and distinctions between villages.

~ Encourage owners to train their staffs in tourist services and apply their knowledge.

~ Keep records of their tourist activities not only as business, finding ways to increase the tourists' number.

~ Guest houses should advertise their services so tourists could see what they offer, especially the characteristic cuisine of the area.

All mentioned above will help in increasing the quality of tourist products in rural areas and make these products fit the tourist markets.

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