

Guide for rural tourism entrepreneurs' sustainable management in the *NATURA 2000* sites

The last two years of economic recession have outlined new trends in the field of Latvian tourism. Although, in general, the number of visitors in the regions of Latvia has significantly decreased, it is assumed that during the coming years it could grow again because in the period of crisis and post-crisis people will increasingly choose travelling in Latvia. It means that the entrepreneurs should be prepared to offer new and attractive products (including the active, nature and culture tourism) that would be available to a sufficiently wide range of visitors. For their part, the administrators and managers of the tourism objects must think about long-term maintenance of the present infrastructure and the future development of new and contemporary one.

Since ~ 12,0 %¹ from the total area of Latvia are covered by *NATURA 2000* sites, it is natural that the activities of most rural tourism entrepreneurs (tourism accommodations, offering of different tourism products, the establishment of new infrastructure or the restoration of the existing one, etc.) take place in the above-mentioned territories. Moreover, there are important **natural resources** in the Specially Protected Natural Areas (SPNA) and *NATURA 2000* sites (one of the aims of the protection of these territories is the guarding and sustainable usage of the above-mentioned resources), which, comparatively often, become or in long-term have already been significant tourist attraction – nature and active tourism objects. Many of *NATURA 2000* sites as territorial units – national parks, country parks, protected scenery areas, natural sites and several restricted nature areas – are known as popular **destinations** for local and foreign tourists.

In the elaboration of SPNA and *NATURA 2000* territorial **conservation plans** and other documentation, related to the given territories, the organizing of tourism activities, frequently as the solely or main **alternative** due to the restricted economic activities, is proposed to the local entrepreneurs by the development engineers and experts. It means that tourism entrepreneurs are given an opportunity to create their tourism product on the basis of the *NATURA 2000* sites and resources, however frequently without receiving an explanation – what exactly is the base of the resources and how it is to be carried out! Thus a rural tourism entrepreneur often becomes a kind of the situation „hostage”. Firstly, - they are „restricted on economic and administrative basis”, secondly, - they receive recommendations to use important nature values in their tourism offer, thirdly, – tourists quite often negatively influence unique natural specimen/species, and fourthly – not always and not in all cases educational and organizing activities in the given field are carried out for the benefit of entrepreneurs and tourists, etc.

In order to attempt diminishing the above-mentioned contradictions and uncertainties, as well as to delineate the examples of sustainable management (in the context of tourism) best practices, the Latvian Country Tourism Association (LLTA) „Countryside Traveller” has elaborated a material – „**Guide for Rural Tourism Entrepreneurs' Sustainable Management in the *NATURA 2000* sites**” (hereinafter – the Guide), whose principal **aim** is to increase rural tourism entrepreneurs' and other interested individuals' awareness of the above-mentioned issues, as well as – to show the opinion and attitude of the entrepreneurs and travellers themselves to the territories with conservation status (see Section 4).

¹ Source: the Ministry of Environment, Department of Nature Protection
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The Guide was **prepared** by LLTA „Countryside Traveller”. The Guide includes also several fragments of the informative – educational materials, previously elaborated by the Association in the fields of rural tourism and particularly protected nature and *NATURA 2000* sites.

Although the main **target audience** of the Guide is the rural entrepreneurs, it can also be used as help in daily routine by the creators and the executors of the nature protection and tourism policy, the staff of the local authorities, the teaching staff, students, tourists, and other interested individuals, who will find both useful information, references to different supplementary information sources and, possibly, new ideas.

The total **volume** of the Guide is 92 pages, and it includes > 100 illustrative figures and graphs. Section 10 of the Guide indicates informative resources that provide additional information about the given field. The Guide is of advisory character.

In order to facilitate the solution of the problems and situations, described in the Guide, its electronic version has been submitted to the Ministry of Environment, the Department of Nature Protection and the Nature Protection Board, as well as the recommendations by the above-mentioned institutions have been taken into account in the development of the Guide. The author expresses gratitude to **Vija Buša, the head of the Division of Protected Areas of the Ministry of Environment, the Department of Nature Protection**, and to Inga Belasova, the expert of the same division, for the advice and comments, provided during the Guide development.

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This project is partly financed by the European Union (ERDF) within the Baltic Sea Region Programme

