THE EQUESTRIAN TOURISM FARM

FERMA DE TURISM ECVESTRU

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Abstract: *The equestrian tourism, widely extended in the West, is a new preoccupation for romanian agrotouristic farms. Many pensions in the rural areas combine agroutouristic activities with the equestrian one. In case of a traditional household, owning equine herds, joining agrotouristic and equestrian activities doesn't require large investments. It is a simple business, available to anyone who dedicates himself and obeys its specific rules. This kind of business combine accommodation and meal services with riding lessons, carriage and horseback rides.*

Key words: *farm, equestrian, horse, agrotourism, equipment*

INTRODUCTION

Equestrian tourism is now the main "knowledge-activity" of recreational equestrian sport. Recreational sports does not imply a sustained activity, but on the contrary, a sporadic activity that allows riders to take delight in riding the trails in the nature when time and financial resource permit this. Equestrian tourism farms offer the opportunity to enjoy horses and proper equipment, offering various recreational activities in the surroundings on horseback.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The authors have used the methods of work: identification and data collection, processing, analysis, observation and interpretation. In this paper we detected what a equestrian farm is, what requires an equestrian agritourism farm and which are the advantages of this activity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Agro business combination with equestrian activity may represent a real advantage for a farm registered in the tourist circuit. This gives tourists a unique experience by making the household herd horses.

In the last few years, the Western men crowded the stud farms and horse-riding schools, filling their little spare time with continuous activity. There was only a step from this point to success for the equestrian tourism.

An equestrian tourism business may seem extremely simple and at hand. It is a simple business, available to anyone who dedicates himself and obeys its specific rules. There are various levels and, in this context, the complexity and the quality of services, as well as the need for endowment (space, horses, equipment, human resources etc.) differs from one extreme to the other.

The best destinations in the world for the fans of this kind of tourism are: Jordan, Marocco, Mongolia, Ireland, France.

In Romania, the equestrian tourism is not as widespread as it is in the West. There are a few stud farms nationwide, where the persons interested can take horse-riding lessons, rent horses for riding or watch equestrian shows.

The equestrian activities have been noticed also by pensions in the rural areas, which improved them or even made them there main object of activity. There are pensions in Calimani Mountains, Piatra Neamt, Alba or other areas of our country, which combine the agrotouristic activity with the equestrian one. Next to accommodation and meal services they offer riding lessons, carriage and horseback rides. For example, the five daisies touristic pension "Casa La Mesteceni" in Rahau, Alba county, under the slogan "Riding-Adventures-Transylvania", offers a long weekend ride (from Thursday to Sunday) to discover the area. The 8-days vacation offered by the pension, called "Transylvania villages", includes five days riding on Rahau-Poiana Sibiului-Sibiel. On village roads and paths, the tourists will make around 100 km enjoying not only the exquisite landscapes and fresh air, but also the traditional cheese and wines, the Ethnographic Museum in Poiana Sibiului, the Gales glass icons Museum, the Calnic Peasant Fortress. As part of the Country Club 'La Mesteceni', the English Riding School offers specialized riding classes.

The school is twinned with the famous Sue Adam's Riding School from Shobdon, Herefordshire, England and benefits of instructors trained at this facility. The philosophy is simple: riding, for those who practise it daily or at least several times a week is more than an agreeable pastime; it helps you remain fit and healthy it is an exercise in educating your patience and regaining your natural rhythm, it can become a way of life.

Table 1.

Prices the English Riding School

1.	Riding Lesson Adult, one-to-one (30 minutes):	50 lei
2.	Riding Lesson Adult, group (60 minutes):	50 lei
3.	Subscription 10 lessons – adults (30 / 60 minutes)	400 lei
4.	Riding Lesson, child, one-to-one (30 minutes)	40 lei
5.	Riding Lesson, child, group (60 minutes)	40 lei
6.	Subscription 10 lessons, child	300 lei
7.	Hacking, one-to-one (60 minutes)	75 lei
8.	Hacking, group min 2 pax (60 minutes)	50 lei
9.	Carriage rides, group (30 minutes)	75 lei
10.	Horses in livery (horse / month)	700 lei
11.	Riding trip (4 hours)	200 lei
12.	Riding trip (one day including lunch/picnic and accommodation)	500 lei

Source: www.riding-adventures-transylvania.com

In case of a traditional household, owning equine herds, joining agrotouristic and equestrian activities doesn't require large investments. The equestrian agrotouristic farm represents the most simple way of offering services to tourists interested in interacting with horses in a most traditional environment. It is, also, the farm which allows all tourists, regardless of personal equipment and riding knowledge, to ride a horse or to take a carriage ride, a sleigh ride or a cart ride on rural routes.

The offer must presents itself as the most simple and traditional way to come forward with boarding and to interact with horses. The farm must

be prepared to offer appropriate conditions, both for beginer riders and advanced ones, both for tourist owning equipment (riding cloths) and for the ones wearing bluejeans.

The best location for an equestrian agrotouristic farm are the villages in picturesque areas, places rather far from national roads, those villages which still keep a traditional life environment, specific for romanian villages.

The space required by an equestrian tourism farm ,with traditional style,doesn't need to be large, but rather well organized, clean and tidy. Thus, at stud farm's level, there will be provided appropriate spaces for sheltering the horses (the stable), storing the fodders (the barn), storing riding equipments and parking the carriages, the sleighs and the rustic carts (the shed), plus a place, in the courtyard, for preparing the riders and the harness for going on the route (an area for harnessing the horses and an area for horses to be tied until the tourists are equiped and distributed). The minimum required space depends on the project's dimensions, but the ideal minimum area should be between 1200 and 1800 m2.

An equestrian farm must also provide places for welcoming the tourists, so that the tourists may perform the equestrian activity as long as possible. Housing and horsemanship services may be offered either by only one farm or by two associated farms, through dividing the activities , as it follows: one farm provides the welcoming of the tourists and the other provides the riding services, as well as the equipments and the required harness.

The barn, on one side, represents the place where the fodders for horses are stored and, on the other side, the place where the horses'bedding is stored. The agrotouristc offer of the farms abroad also includes, during the summer, arranging places to sleep in the hay 'bed'. But, for this, the barn must be clean, there must be no rodents or unpleasant smells to disturb the tourists. Preferable, the place for sleeping will be isolated, in order to avoid the draft.

The paddock for moving may offer an advantage to the equestrian farm, facilitating the interaction between tourists and horses. Inside the paddock, there may be offered short riding lessons and children may feed and admire the horses from nearby.

The most appropriate horse breed for an equestrian agrotourism farm, organized in a traditional household, is the Romanian semi-heavy

weight. The Romanian semi-heavy weight was recently created through complex crosses among mares from Ialomita, Trotters and Lipizzans with Ardennes breed. In a farm with an ample equestrian activity, there may be, also, one or two ponies.

The riding equipment for the rider consists of: horse-riding trousers, horse-riding coats, shirts, blouses and t-shirts, jackets, long socks for horse-riding, lether jampiers, horse-riding boots and topboots, protection helmets, gloves, as well as other products and accessories for horse-riders.

While the rider's equipment allows some adjustments, the horse's equipment is extremely important. This must be chosen depending on the activity. The most recommended horse-riding saddles are the ones made of synthetic material, either english or western model. The synthetic material used nowadays is more lasting than any kind of lether, because it doesn't get musty, it doesn't need greasing, it can be washed with water, it doesn't change its features because of bad weather and it offers tourists more support than the lether does, as lether, at some point, becomes shiny and slippery on the friction area, thus indangering the riders, especially those wearing inappropriate riding cloths.

The image and quality of equestrian agrotouristic farm also depends on the harness it uses. The sladge, the carriage and the cart must be confortable and well-kept. A version seen in rural area and which is suitable for tourist rides is represented by the gig, a light little carriage, with only two wheels, pulled by only one horse, a middle version between a cart and a carriage. An equestrian agrotouristic farm will, preferably, own a cart, a gig and a sladge.

The carts used in equestrian tourism are normal carts used by villagers for dayly activities (transportation, carrying). In order to include them in touristic activities, the owner must paint their ladders (the lateral parts of the cart, made of wood), set back-benches as it follows: one in the front for the person driving the carte and, in cas of need, for one more person (depending on the cart's width), the second in the middle of the cart, and the third bench in the rear edge. On the outer part of the ladders, near each bench there will be set feet suports, to facilitate the climbing.

The persons in charge with the equestrian services offered by the farm need to be members of the family, who know the animals and their behaviour, the neighbourhoods and the adequate routs for horse-back riding travels, the touristic sites in the area to be included in tourists'rides. The

measure of taking care of the stables, the equipments and the animals depends on the staff's abnegation, involvement and aknowledgment of these factors'importance in the quality of the services offered by the farm.

It is said that a good rider can hear his horse when it speaks, a great rider can hear the whisper of the horse but a bad rider can not hear even the the scream of a horse. To win the trust of the horse, the rider must be open minded and start to wonder what is in the horse's mind. A horse should be treated like a horse, it is not human but an animal atrubute an instinctive behavior programmed for thousands of years.

The equestrian activity performed in a traditional household needs to be most simple and accessible to tourists who wish to spend a weekend or a vacation. Thus, riding services and carriage/gig/cart/sledge rides must be organized and charged at a level accessible to all tourist, regardless of age and possibilities. A child who lives in the city and knows a horse's image only from books will enjoy a horse-back riding or a cart ride as much as an old person or a couple of lovers will.

Lack of horse-riding knowledge, inappropriate equipment or fear to control the animal, will make a cart/carriage/gig/sladge ride more suitable, for most tourists. A stud-farm must provide a minimum of equipment, because tourist are, commonly, persons who practice this sport once or twice a year and they are not willing to invest in a horse-riding equipment, which is rather expensive. Saddles, reins, bridels, bit, stirrups, caparisons must be provided by the stud farm; they must be well-kept and safe. A minimum of 2 helmets and 2 protections for the back should also be provided, especially for children.

The equestrian offer combines three elements, thatis: the western riding equipment, which allows the rider to hold on to the saddle fork and wear any outfit he/she wishes; the horses, who needs to be very obedient and to already know the routes; the routes, thought and organized on levels of difficulty and time (persons who are not used to horse-riding will have trouble sitting in the saddle for more than an hour).

The cost of the equestrian services needs to be determined considering that the tourists also spend their money on other services offered by the farm – meal and housing. The equestrian activity needs to come as a completion of these services, as an entertainment and a singularity of the farm. Most owners already have all the elements (horses, stables, equipments, harness) and perform this activity in order to stimulate

housing and meal activities. Investment will only rise to some of the required equipments for this kind of activity (helmet, back-protection). Allthough, for a villager, these elements may seem useless (even for some tourists), there are persons who find them very important and who will only choose this kind of vacation under safe circumstances. In determining the price, the owner of a stud-farm with 8-15 places for housing has to consider the differences between his farm and the equestrian tourism farms which offers conditions, equipments, horses, professional instructors and services based on a large investment.

A price of 25 – 30 ron per hour, even one hour and a half, of riding is acceptable for both sides. The time required for rides depends on the tourists'rhythm, but they need not to be rushed and this must be made clear to them.

Providing equestrian services may also come from the cooperation between the farm and other agrotouristic farms or even horse and harness owners. Starting an agrotouristic business is a new challenge for the owner, so he is not willing to invest in too much equipment until he feels the business' pulse himself. Few agrotouristic farms, organized in a traditional household, will have funds to start with carriages and sladges from the very first day; most of them will choose to make this purchase later, when the income affords this and when they are certain that there is demand for this kind of services.

The price of a sledge ride should by around 20 ron per person for 1,5-2 hours. A sladge may have up to 5-6 places and, in case of a group, the price can be reduced.

The cart can carry 6 to 9 persons, depending on its dimensions and on the number of benches. The price for a cart ride needs to be extremely atractive, in order to stimulate tourists to consider this kind of a ride at least once a day. Analyzing the offer of other farms in the country, we'd say that a suitable price would be 50 ron per hour for 6 persons. At the same time, tourist may be offered one-day trips , with a picnic outside,in nature, being transpotred by cart. The farm also has advantages from cart/gig/sledge rides, thatis small number of horses (2 horses) needed to transport a group of 6 to 9 persons, little and low-cost equipment and low probability of accidents.

Joining agrotouristic activity and the equestrian one may represent a real success and an advantage for the farm in front of its competitors on local market. The excesive mechanization in agriculture increased

horses'role in entertainment. There are only few villagers who work their land using horses anymore, most of them using tractors and special machineries. Using horses in farm's activity may represent a source of extra-income and a way to perpetuate horses'existence in rural area.

CONCLUSSIONS

Joining agrotouristic activity and the equestrian one may represent a real success and an advantage for the farm in front of its competitors on local market. Horses can take tourists through virgin forests, untouched by human progress, through alpine pastures, on the slopes of sunny hills, on the ridge of mountains and through the valleys of the mountain streams. The panorama of open landscapes of extraordinary breadth and north facing valleys that never see the sun, will be as many moments of meditation and remembrance.

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