

ASPECTS CONCERNING THE TOURISM AND AGRO TOURISM POTENTIAL IN VÂRTOPI – ARIEȘENI AREA FROM APUSENI MOUNTAINS

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ABSTRACT - Aspects concerning the tourism and agro tourism potential in Vârtope – Arieșeni area from Apuseni Mountains

The Apuseni Mountains represent one of the most attractive tourist destination in Romania. The studied area comprises the territory of Arieșeni commune, which is placed in the northern part of Alba county and the holiday village named Vârtope, close to the border of Bihor county. The location represents a circle placed at equal distances from several big towns, such as: Cluj-Napoca, Oradea, Arad, Deva and Alba Iulia, therefore it represents an attraction for the tourists belonging to these areas. The population of Arieșeni commune counts 1810 inhabitants. It is distributed in 18 villages, whereby the most important villages are Casa de Piatră, Vârtope, Galbena and Bubești. The main elements of tourism attraction are:

- the ski slope from Vârtope;
- the climatic potential, which is favourable to hiking, climbing, mountaineering, winter sports, repose, relaxation etc., during both seasons: the summer and the winter. The statistics point out that the yearly average duration of the snow cover lasts 150 days, ensuring a schi season of 5 months each year;
- Gârđișoara Gorges; Vârciorog Waterfall; Glacier Cave Vârtope; Crow Castle in Padis Plateau; Gura Apei Cave; Huda Orbului Cave; Hodobana Cave; Aven Cave with two entrances; Izbutul Tauzului Cave etc.

There are also anthropic touristic resources represented by museums, wooden churches, ethnographic and folklore festivals. The tourism of repose and relaxation is practiced most during the summer time, being favoured by a very pleasant natural environment, the water and air purity, the altitude of over 800 m that ensures pleasant temperatures. The vegetation has a vertical distribution and contains deciduous forests, beech forests, mixed forests and valley subalpine meadows with a great variety of floristic composition. In Vârtope-Arieșeni area, there is evidence of 88 guesthouses, having a tourist accommodation capacity of 1190 beds in 2008.

Keyword : tourism, agro tourism, mountains

INTRODUCTION

The Apuseni Mountains represent one of the most attractive tourist destination in Romania.

It was declared nature reserve, due to its karst relief (with about 400 caves), its specific flora and fauna. There is no other place in Romania with such a concentration of natural monuments reported to unit area, which are framed into a beautiful landscape.

The centre of Apuseni Mountains is occupied by Bihor Mountains, out of which other mountains start radially and get as far as the west Plain, through the hollows: Zarand, Beiuș, Borod, which are well populated and have villages perched until the altitude of 1600 m.

Gorges, slopes, caves, avens, springs with intermittent flow, waterfalls, ravines and other elements less important such as lapiazes and dolines, contribute to the beauty of these mountains (ANGHEL ET AL., 1982; COCEAN, 2000).

The altitudes do not get over 2000 m, having the following peaks: Cucurbata Mare (1849 m), Vlădeasa (1836 m) and Muntele Mare (1826 m). The average altitude is around 1000 meters (PETREA RODICA, 2004).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The studied area comprises the territory of Arieșeni commune, which is placed in the northern part of Alba county and the holiday village named Vârtoș, close to the border of Bihor county.

Arieșeni commune comprises the localities: Arieșeni – commune centre, Avrămești, Bubești, Casa de Piatră, Cobleș, Dealu Bajului, Fața Cristeșei, Fața Lăpușului, Galbena, Hodobana, Islaz, Păntești, Pătrăhăitești, Ravicești, Sturu, Ștei-Arieșeni, Vânucești (figure 1).



Figure 1 - Administrative-territorial repartition of the zone Vârtoș-Arieșeni with all its localities

The location represents a circle placed at distances almost equal from several big towns, such as: Cluj-Napoca (141 km), Oradea (130 km), Arad (182 km), Deva (133 km) and Alba Iulia (120 km), therefore it represents an attraction for the tourists belonging to these areas.

Arieșeni commune has a surface of 3322 ha and a population of 1810 inhabitants, with a current average population density of 467.6 inhabitants per km², decreasing as compared to the population census (1921 inhabitants) made in 2002.

The population is distributed in 18 villages, whereby the nearest villages from the commune centre are Ștei-Arieșeni, Păntești and Avrămești and the farthestmost is Casa de Piatră village.

Arieșeni commune has big perspectives in tourism development, due to its location in the Apuseni Mountains, having a high tourist potential.

The rich tourist resources have a high value in the studied area and confer it a high tourist interest both in summer and in winter season, when the snow coverage persists 4 - 5 months per year on the northern slopes and has an average thickness of 60-70 cm.

RESULTS

The main localities and tourist points in Arieșeni commune, which have tourist functions are as follows:

- *Casa de Piatră Village*, located in Gârda Seacă Valley, at an altitude of 1000 m, with a beautiful natural landscape and points of tourist interest, such as: Glacier Cave Vârtoș, successive sources abstraction of the Gârda Seacă valley in Coiba Mare Cave, Coiba Mică Cave, Huda Orbului Cave, Gura Apei Cave (nature reserve) and Sura Popii Cave (figure 2).

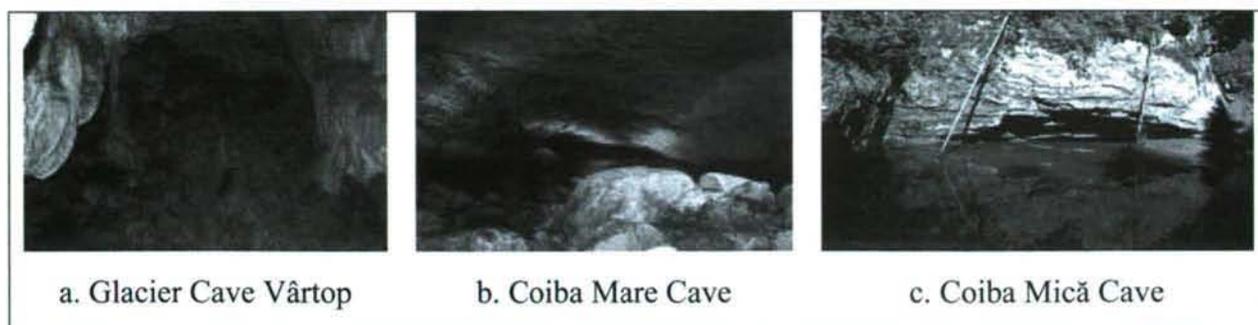


Figure 2 –Tourist attractions in the vicinity of the village named Casa de Piatră

Due to its beautiful natural landscape, this village is ideal for rural tourism. Despite this aspect, this village doesn't belong to the tourist circuit because of the long distance from the Arieșeni commune centre and the difficult access by car, which is possible only through Gârda de Sus (12 - 13 km).

- **Vârtop**, located on the national road DN 75, on the upper side of Arieș river. It has a high tourist potential, which is favourable for tourist activities during the whole year. The main attraction elements of Vârtop village are the following: climbing, mountaineering, repose, relaxation, visiting tourist attractions such as Padiș Karst etc. in the summer (Dudaș Anca-Iulia, Moșoiu Alina, 2009) (figure 3).



Moreover, there is a ski slope at Vârtop, having a level difference of 200 m and a length of 720 m, served by a lift with a capacity of 680 persons per hour. In the winter, the ski slope is mainly used by tourists from Alba, Bihor, Cluj and Hunedoara counties and by foreign tourists, especially from Hungary (figure 4).

- **Galbena village**, located on the national road DN 75, on the right side of Arieș valley, close to Arieșeni commune centre.

Figure 3. – Padiș Karst



Figure 4 – The ski slope from Vârtop

- **Bubești**, located on both sides of Arieș valley, at about 1,5 km downstream Vârtop village, on the national road DN 75. The village offers tourist accommodation places, which are registered in the tourist circuit.

The climate in Arieșeni commune is typically mountain. It is humid and cold on the high points and has a gradual alternation towards the lower regions. There are three levels, depending on the peculiarity of the climate potential reported to the altitude and exposure, such as:

- Climate of peak and plateau higher than 1500 m. The climate conditions are favourable for tourism during the whole year, with differentiations depending on physical abilities and age;

- Climate of mountain, with altitudes between 600-1500 m. This climate has a character of relaxation, very favourable for hiking, winter sports, repose etc. all year round;
- Climate of lowland and large valley corridors, with a moderate temperature and humidity, a big number of bright days and calm atmosphere, less snow, favourable to tourist activities.

Touristic and agrotouristic potential

Arieșeni commune has a high touristic and agrotouristic potential. The most significant touristic resources are the following:

- natural touristic resources, which comprises the mountain vegetation, with species of scientific interest, the fauna, with species of cynegetic interest, the fish and the nature reserve of great importance. We mention in the Arieșeni commune: Gârđișoara Gorges, Vârciorog Waterfall, Glacier from Vârtop, Gura Apei Cave, Huda Orbului Cave, Hodobana Cave, Aven with two entrances, spring with intermittent flow from Tauz.

There are also other nature reserves in the neighbour communes, such as:

- Glacier from Scârđișoara, Poarta lui Ionele, Ordâncușa Gorges from Gârda commune, in Alba County;
- Groapa Ruginoasă from Băița commune, in Bihor county.

- anthropic touristic resources – are represented by museums, wooden churches, ethnographic and folklore festivals.

The most important anthropic resources in the Arieșeni zone are the following:

- Ethnographic Museum in Lupșa locality; Ethnographic Museum in Pătrăhăitești locality;
- Museum of Gold Mining History in Roșia Montană locality;
- Memorial Museum and History and Ethnography Exposition in Avram Iancu locality;
- Wooden Church „Ascension”, having a special room for keeping the wooden plate for being sounded to church and being painted in 1829 by the painter Mihai de la Abrud from Arieșeni;
- Wooden church „Birth of Saint John the Baptist” founded in 1792, painted in 1804, located in Gârda de Sus village;
- Water mills from Cobleș village (Arieșeni commune);
- Wooden houses in Pântești village (Arieșeni commune);
- the air feast „Maidens Fair” on Găina Mountain, which takes place every year in Avram Iancu commune, in July. It is an air feast, hosting the inhabitants from Apuseni Mountains and nearer towns (figure 5).

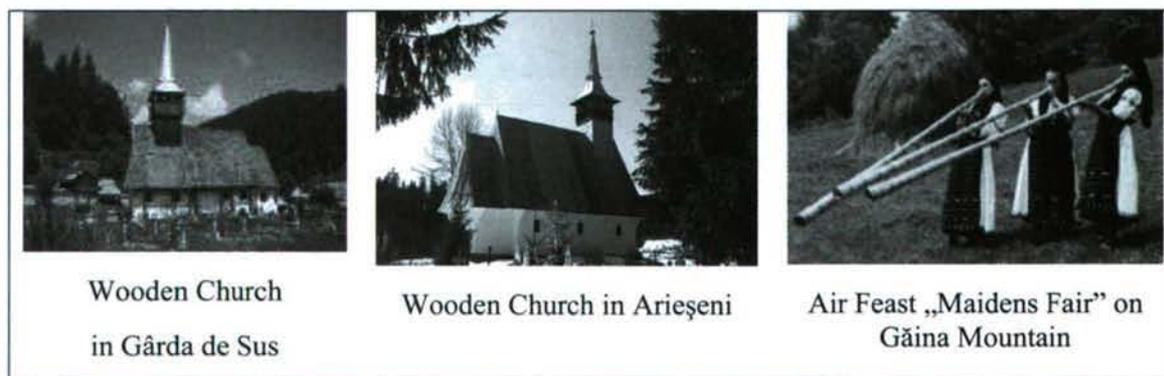


Figure 5 –Anthropic touristic resources

The main tourist points in Arieșeni commune, which have different tourist functions are as follows:

- **Casa de Piatră village** - The tourist functions are the repose and relaxation, due to existing guesthouses and the rural tourism favoured by the spectacular natural landscape;
- **Vârtop** - The main touristic attraction elements are: good conditions for hiking in the sunny summer days and winter sports during the winter season, when the ski slope of Vârtop represents main tourism form.
- **Galbena** - The tourist activities are realised in two seasons: during the summer and the winter time. The tourism of repose and relaxation is practiced here most during the summer time, being favoured by a very pleasant natural environment, the water and air purity, the altitude of over 800 m that ensures pleasant temperatures.
- **Bubești** - This village represents a stop point for tourists visiting the region, relaxing or reposing who are in transit on the national road DN 75. The village has guesthouses units and touristic objectives to be visited.
- **vegetation**, which represents one of the elements that reflect the relief altitudinal differentiation. The mountain vegetation from the studied area has a vertical distribution and contains *deciduous forests, beech forests, mixed forests and valley subalpine meadows* with a great variety of floristic composition.

In Arieșeni commune, there is evidence of 736 residences in 2008, out of which 4 were state property and 732 residences on private property (table 1).

Table 1: Structure of property in the commune Arieșeni, Alba County

Territory, residences	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2009/ 2005- %
Total surface - ha	3322	3322	3322	3322	3322	100,0
Total number of existing residences, out of which:	729	727	731	736	739	101,4
- residences on state property	4	4	4	4	4	100,0
- residences on private property	725	723	727	732	735	101,4
Total habitable surface – m ²	26798	26356	26906	27312	27423	102,3
- habitable surface on state property – m ²	134	134	134	134	134	100,0
- habitable surface on private property – m ²	26664	26222	26772	27178	27289	102,3

Source: Data processed according to the statistical evidence of the mayor's office of Arieșeni commune

Table 2 - Number of guesthouses and the tourist accommodation capacity in Alba County during the 2006 – 2008 period

Year	2006		2007		2008		%/ 2006
	Nr. guest-houses	Nr. of beds - 2006	Nr. guest-houses	Nr. of beds - 2007	Nr. guest-houses	Nr. of beds - 2008	
Albac	30	200	31	344	31	396	198,0
Arieșeni	30	222	30	414	33	623	280,6
Vârtop	19	196	21	380	25	567	289,3
Rimetea	32	320	34	356	38	400	125,0
Gârda de Sus	15	101	15	116	15	137	135,6
Scărișoara	2	8	3	24	5	64	800,0
Lupșa	1	10	1	20	1	35	350,0
Total	110	861	135	1654	148	2222	258,1

Source: Data processed according to the statistical evidence of the Direction of Statistics of Alba County

The total habitable surface was of 26798 m² in 2005 and of 27312 m² in 2008.

The evolution of the number and capacity of the guesthouses in the 2006-2008 period, in Alba County (*including the studied area*), is presented in the *table 2*.

There was evidence of 110 guesthouses registered in 2006. The evolution was positive, the number of guesthouses increasing at 135 in 2007 and 148 at the end of 2008.

The increase of the number of guesthouses and the modernisation of the existing guesthouses led to the increase of the total tourist accommodation capacity, from 861 beds in 2006, to 1654 beds in 2007 and 2222 beds at the end of 2008.

CONCLUSIONS

The rich tourist resources have a high value in the studied area, due to their variety and complexity and confer it a high tourist interest, both in summer and in winter season, when the snow coverage persists 4-5 months per year on the northern slopes and has an average thickness of 60-70 cm.

Arieșeni commune has a high touristic and agrotouristic potential. The most significant touristic resources are the following: **the natural touristic resources**, which comprises the mountain vegetation, with species of scientific interest, the fauna, with species of cynegetic interest, the fish and the nature reserve of great importance, **the anthropic touristic resources** and **the vegetation**. The spectacular natural landscape recommends Casa de Piatră village for rural tourism. Despite this aspect, this village is less visited by tourists, because of the long distance from the Arieșeni commune centre and the difficult access by car, which is possible only through Gârda de Sus village (12 - 13 km). There was evidence of 110 guesthouses registered in the studied area, in 2006. The evolution was positive, the number of guesthouses increasing at 135 in 2007 and 148 at the end of 2008. The accommodation capacity noticed the same trend, as follows: from 861 beds in 2006, to 1654 beds in 2007 and 2222 beds at the end of 2008.

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