



**TRANSNATIONAL STRATEGY
FOR SUSTAINABLE TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT OF
THE DANUBE REGION WITH A FOCUS ON TOURISM
DATOURWAY**

TOURISM SURVEY

**COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF THE POTENTIAL FOR DEVELOPMENT OF
DIFFERENT TYPES OF TOURISM**

Bulgaria



Summary

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
GENERAL EVALUATION OF THE TOURISM-RELATED POTENTIAL BY DISTRICTS, MUNICIPALITIES AND TYPES OF TOURISM	5
VIDIN DISTRICT.....	7
Natural geographic and resource potential.....	7
Cultural and historical heritage and potential	9
Evaluation of the material stock and tourism opportunities.....	11
Infrastructure and marketing of tourism	11
Opportunities for tourism	12
Conclusions.....	15
MONTANA DISTRICT	15
Natural-geographic and resource potential.....	15
Cultural and historical heritage and potential	18
Evaluation of the material stock and opportunities for tourism.....	21
Infrastructure and marketing of tourism	22
Opportunities for tourism	22
VRATSA DISTRICT	25
Natural-geographic and resource potential.....	25
Cultural and historical heritage	28
Assessment of the material stock and tourism-related capacity.....	29
Infrastructure and marketing of tourism	30
Opportunities for tourism	31
PLEVEN DISTRICT	33
Natural-geographic and resource potential.....	33
Cultural and historical heritage and potential	35
Assessment of the material stock and tourism-related capacity.....	37
Opportunities for tourism	38
VELIKO TARNOVO DISTRICT	41
Natural-geographic and resource potential.....	41
Cultural and historical heritage and potential	42
Assessment of the material stock and tourism-related procurement.....	44
Infrastructure and marketing of tourism	46
Opportunities for development of tourism.....	47
RUSSE DISTRICT	50
Natural-geographic and resource potential.....	50
Cultural and historical heritage and potential	52
Assessment of the material stock and tourism-related supply	54

Opportunities for tourism	55
RAZGRAD DISTRICT	58
Natural-geographic and resource potential.....	58
Cultural and historical heritage	59
Infrastructure and tourism-related potential.....	60
Assessment of the material stock and tourism-related facilities.....	61
Opportunities for tourism	62
SILISTRA DISTRICT	64
Natural-geographic and resource potential.....	64
Cultural and historical heritage	66
Evaluation of the material stock and tourism-related procurement.....	69
Infrastructure and marketing of tourism	70
Opportunities for tourism	71
EVALUATION AND DIFFERENTIATION/GROUPING OF THE MUNICIPALITIES ON THE BASIS OF THEIR OVERALL POTENTIAL AND DEGREE OF DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM.....	74



INTRODUCTION

The object of evaluation and analysis in this study refers to 79 municipalities, which fall within the scope of 8 administrative districts (NUTS 3 regions) of Bulgarian part of the project region.

The identification of the tourism development potential is performed in consecutive steps of assessment of the tourism-related potential:

1. Level of development of the tourism function. On the basis of statistical data about the state of the material stock and the rate of registered visits to the tourist sites in a given municipality, calculated and compared on the basis of selected quantitative indicators with defined threshold values.
2. Evaluation of the tourism-related resource potential, degree of utilization and possibility for formulation of finished tourist products. It has been calculated through analysis and evaluation of the attractiveness and utilization rate of the different resources and features - *natural and anthropogenic* – as a basis for development of different types of tourism.
3. Evaluation of the infrastructure (accessibility by transport), existing human capacity and marketing of the destinations as factors contributing to attraction of tourist flows.
4. Complex evaluation of the tourism-related potential of the municipalities belonging to the Bulgarian Danube space – through combination of indicators and criteria related to the selected approaches. Ranking and grouping of municipalities by degree of utilization of tourism and potential for development of tourism.

Without prejudice to the importance of the tourism-related material stock, accessibility by transport and human resources, in the process of identification of the indicators and evaluation of the total tourism-related potential higher weight was assigned to the nature-based and cultural potential as a factor for development of the different types of tourism and as a revenue source for local communities. This is, anyway, related to the need of setting in place an A.D.equate accommodation stock and the appropriate infrastructure (including easy access). The influence of these factors has been the reason for the larger number of indicators connected with the nature- and culture-related potential.

Upon review of a large number of possible indicators and in compliance with he formulated objectives and approaches, several indicators and criteria (some of which of a complex nature) have been selected as being A.D.equate to demonstrate and describe the different dimensions of the tourism-related potential of a given municipality.

- Indicators for evaluation of the level of development of the tourist function
- Indicators for evaluation of the tourism-related resource potential, the degree of its utilization and the possibility for formation of finished tourist products
- Indicators for evaluation of the accessibility by transport, the available human capacity and marketing of the destinations as factors for attraction of tourist flows.



GENERAL EVALUATION OF THE TOURISM-RELATED POTENTIAL BY DISTRICTS, MUNICIPALITIES AND TYPES OF TOURISM

Almost all the districts in the area have been evaluated as being territories possessing average favorable conditions for development of tourism as compared to their high potential.

In terms of the **major tourism indicators** the districts falling within the Danube region as a whole demonstrate comparable with or even lower values than any well-developed **tourist municipality** along the Black Sea littoral (Nessebar, Varna, Balchik, Burgas etc.), which by itself is an illustrative fact about the level of development of tourism in them.

Despite the manifested A.D.vance, the two regions account for quite a small share of the accommodation stock and the realized overnight stays. In 2009 the total share of the realized overnight stays was 608,378 and the number of people, who have stayed overnight, was 367,392, which is still quite an unsatisfactory level of utilization of the tourism-related accommodation stock in the area.

As compared to 2008 some reduction has been noted in almost all districts with the exception of Vidin District (under the influence of BelogrA.D.chik). Despite the observed reduction, Veliko Tarnovo District and Russe District retain their leA.D.ing role in the field of tourism in the region under review with respectively 31% and 21% of the overnight stays or more than the half of all overnight stays realized during the year. Ranking the third is Pleven District with 12% of the overnight stays and 13% of the persons, who have stayed overnight.

Silistra District and RazgrA.D. District account for the lowest contribution to the overnight stays in 2009, since despite their significant resources and tourism-related potential they have attracted respectively 5.8% and 4.1% of the persons staying overnight.

Number of accommodation facilities, overnight stays and occupancy rate of the accommodation stock (beds), 2009

District	Accommodation facilities	Beds	Realized overnight stays		Persons staying overnight		Occupancy rate
			Total	District share of the area total (%)	Total	District share of the area total (%)	
Vidin	38	758	48492	9.1%	28967	6.4%	18.2
Montana	26	1355	55243	8.0%	23632	7.9%	11.7
Vratsa	27	1869	54674	9.0%	25745	7.0%	16.0
Pleven	13	1161	73459	12.1%	47684	13.0%	18.1
Veliko Tarnovo	86	4883	189660	31.2%	114124	31.1%	11.4
Russe	50	1903	130607	21.5%	90930	24.8%	19.8
Silistra	22	702	33015	5.4%	21349	5.8%	13.8
RazgrA.D.	20	831	23228	3.8%	14961	4.1%	8.8
Total	282	13462	608378	100.0%	367392	100.0%	

Source: NSI



VIDIN DISTRICT

General description of the resources

Vidin District comprises nature sites featuring broA.D. variety of relief and resource potential. The district **comprises 11 municipalities**: *Vidin, Boynitsa, Bregovo, BelogrA.D.chik, GramA.D.a, Dimovo, Kula, Makresh, Novo Selo, Ruzhintsi and Chuprene.*

The district is traversed by two Trans-European Transport Corridors: No. 4 (Krayova/the Republic of Romania – Vidin – Sofia – Kulata) and No. 7 (Rein-Main-Danube).

The natural northern district border and national frontier – the River Danube – predetermines a multitude of untapped opportunities for socio-economic relations with all the states of the River Danube Basin (including tourism itineraries).

Natural geographic and resource potential

On **the area of the district are situated many protected areas** (including the "Chuprene" biosphere reserve, protected localities – "Vrashka Chuka", "Lipaka" and 12 nature landmarks). These areas represent preserved ecosystems featuring broA.D. variety of flora and fauna species with their habitats. These areas are valuable also by virtue of their characteristic and remarkable landscapes and still-nature sights. Preserved there is rich biological diversity, comprising also rare species, recorded in the UNESCO Red Book. This applies with particular force to the **"Chuprene" Biosphere Reserve**, which has an area of 1439 ha and is included in the UNESCO List. Despite their specific statute and not sufficiently broA.D. popularity, these areas are of interest to many researchers and lovers of nature.

The nature landmarks, which are a potential resource for tourist visits are as follows: "Borov Kamak" on the area of *the village of Borovitsa, BelogrA.D.chik Municipality* (extending over an area of 1.30 ha); "Petkov Tserak" Waterfall on the area of *the village of Boynitsa, Boynitsa Municipality* (20 ha), "Byalata Voda" Waterfall, on the area of *the village of Stakevtzi, BelogrA.D.chik Municipality* (1.00 ha); "Petkov Tserak" Waterfall on the area of *the village of Topolovets, Kula Municipality* (0.20 ha).

Part of the nature potential of the district are the famous BelogrA.D.chik Rocks and the "Magura" and "Venetsa" caves, which rank among the most famous and frequently visited tourist sights not only in the district, but in the entire Northwest Region during the past 2-3 years.

Good potential for short-term tourism offers the "Bozhuritsa" Locality as well. It is situated at some 18 km to the southwest of the city of Vidin. The area is a famous and frequently visited spot, cherished by the local inhabitants as a recreation zone with accommodation facilities.

In the vicinity of the city of BelogrA.D.chik, in Chuprene Municipality, is situated the **"Midgur" hunting-and-game farm**. The farm offers excellent conditions for hunting of

rare animal species, which makes it an attractive destination for tourists from Bulgaria and abroad.

The River Danube offers excellent conditions for development of water-based recreation and sports and cruise tourism. Every year in August the city of Vidin hosts the traditional international regatta TID, which celebrated in 2005 its 50th anniversary and has numerous admirers from many countries.

The River Falkovets offers good conditions for development of extreme sports, such as water slalom, rafting, etc.

The "Rabishko Ezero (Rabishko Lake)" is the biggest Karst lake in this country, extending over an area of 1.5 m². The lake offers perfect conditions for surfing and swimming and has a well-maintained beach strip. A camping site is situated at some 100 m from its southern bank.

The dam in the village of Poletkovtsi is suitable for development of sports angling and hunting and is one of the cleanest dams in the region.

On the area of Vidin District, near the village of Slanotran, have been discovered deposits of highly mineralized thermal waters with high content of iodine, bromine etc. and water temperature of 41°C. The potential of the resources of this mineral water field has not been put to practical use so far.



Cultural and historical heritage and potential

On the area of the district there are a number of sites, which are worth visiting and possess potential for development of cultural and cognitive tourism.

The territory, falling within the scope of the present-day Vidin District, has a rich history. In the course of two millennia the district has been an important military, transport and trade centre. The proof for that are the numerous monuments, architectural fragments, sculptures and works of art (bronze and pottery), evidencing till the present day the upsurge during Roman times of the ancient Ratsiaria (the village of Archar) and Bononia (the city of Vidin). Bononia continues to exist during the Middle Ages under the name Bdin. **In the 13th – 14th century A.D. Bdin is not only a political, but also an important economic centre of the northwestern Bulgarian territories with strongly developed crafts and applied art**, a huge producer of cereals and at the same time a centre of bustling literary activities. The Bdin Fortress was the last one to be conquered by the Ottoman invaders.

In the city of Vidin are situated a number of significant monuments of culture and sights, which are worth visiting. The most attractive among them are as follows:

The "Baba Vida" Castle, which is one of the best preserved **defense facilities in Bulgaria and a monument of culture of national significance**. Its foundations were laid by the end of the 10th century A.D. on top of one of the towers of ancient Bononia. It acquired its known till the present day appearance in the 14th c. A.D., when it served as the domicile of the Vidin ruler King Ivan Sratsimir (1352-1396/97). The castle extends over an area of 9.5 dca including the defense moat.

Worth visiting sights in the city of Vidin are also a number of sites of religious significance, in which the spirit and architecture of the past are incarnated. The "Sveti Dimitar" cathedral church is one of the biggest Orthodox churches in Bulgaria – the second biggest after "Alexander Nevski" in Sofia. The "Sveta Petka" church was built in 1627 on the foundations of an older church and is sunk deep in the earth. Frequently visited are also the "Sveti Panteleymon" and "Sveti Nikolay" churches, as well as the mosque and library of Osman Pazvantoglu and the synagogue.

The list of sights of the cultural and historical heritage comprises also the following:

- **The "Krastatata kazarma (the Cross-shaped Barracks)"**, built in 1801 by Osman Pazvantoglu, an independent Turkish feudal ruler. Presently an ethnographic exhibition is arranged on its premises.
- **The Turkish police office "Koluka" and a Turkish post office**, built during the second half of the 18th century.

Interesting sites to visit are also the remains of a Roman fortress wall and tower in the "Kaleto" neighborhood in the city of Vidin, as well as the numerous **gates** - "Vidbolska", "Enichar", "Florentin", "Telegraph", "Pazar", "Stambol".

Many of the cultural institutions, situated in the city of Vidin, are open for visitors. The most frequently visited ones are: the Theatre – built in 1891, the first ever building in Bulgaria, constructed specifically for the needs of theatrical performances; **the "Nikola Petkov" Art Gallery**, founded in 1963 and possessing a rich stock of artistic works – paintings, graphics, sculpture and applied art.

Sights of the cultural heritage exist in the rest of the municipalities of the district as well. More famous among them are as follows:

- **"Castra Martis". A Roman castle built by the end of the 3rd c. A.D. and the early 4th c. A.D..** It is situated in the centre of **the city of Kula**.
- **"Ratsiaria".** An ancient town on the River Danube banks. It is situated at some 30 km to the east of the city of Vidin. It used to be the main administrative and cultural centre of the region during the period 1st-6th c.A.D..
- **The Belogradchik Fortress.** It was built among hard-of-access rock formations during the times when our territory formed part of the Roman Empire (3rd c.A.D.). It was used also during the Middle Ages and acquired its present appearance in the period 1805-1837. In recent years it is one of the most frequented and attractive sights in the country. It acts as a natural extension of **one of the unique nature phenomena on the area of Belogradchik – the Belogradchik Rocks**. The Belogradchik Rocks is a complex of rock formations, which stretches at 30 km length and 5 km width in the direction from the west to the east. The people's imagination has seen in the rock formations resemblance to humans and animals, so each of the rocks is connected to a specific legend and has its characteristic name.



Vidin Synagogue

Vidin District stands out for its **rich cultural programme**. The district hosts annually exhibitions of paintings, sculpture and wood-carving art, district and international festivals of folk songs and dances, etc.

Evaluation of the material stock and tourism opportunities

Tourism is indicated as a strategic sector by the majority of the municipalities in the district. The existence of sites possessing tourism-related potential is not a sufficient condition for development of tourism and enhancement of the tourist interest in the region at the background of absence of adequate infrastructure. Moreover, the resource for development of tourism industry as an economic sector is inadequate.

The total number of accommodation facilities, number of beds and above all the occupancy rate in the district are quite unsatisfactory.

Number of accommodation facilities, overnight stays and occupancy rate in 2009.

Municipality	Accommodation facilities	Beds	Realized overnight stays		Persons staying overnight		Occupancy rate
			Total	Share of the district total (%)	Total	Share of the district total (%)	
Belogradchik	17	114	3361	6.9%	2773	9.6%	8.2
Vidin	20	634	44946	92.7%	26009	89.8%	20.2
Dimovo	1	10	185	0.4%	185	0.6%	5.1
Vidin District total	38	758	48492	100.0%	28967	100.0%	18.2

Source: NSI

The major portion of the bed stock and the **realized overnight stays are concentrated in Vidin Municipality**, supplemented to an ever growing extent by Belogradchik Municipality (in the period 2008-2010 the Belogradchik Rocks have been visited by more than 500 thousand people). Despite this increase in the number of visitors the number of overnight stays in Belogradchik Municipality has increased by hardly about 50% and in 2009 their number was 3361. This fact shows that despite the improved material stock the majority of the visitors still make a transit passage, doing some visits within a day, or stay overnight somewhere else.

The rest of the municipalities in the district have, despite their interesting and well preserved resources, practically minimum contribution to the development of the sector, at least because of the absence of accommodation facilities and capacity to retain the visitors.

Infrastructure and marketing of tourism

The state-of-repair of the engineering infrastructure and especially of the road network in the district is not particularly good and that creates difficulties as regards the accessibility and undermines the attractiveness of the tourism-related resources, especially those

featuring a more peripheral location, like for instance the municipalities of Chuprene, Makresh, Kula and Boynotsa.

The current economic stagnation, the low level of tourism-related material stock and engineering infrastructure, as well as the peripheral geographic location **are the gravest problems facing the development of tourism in the district.**



Steps undertaken for development of the tourism sector in Vidin District:

- *A Municipal Tourism Council has been set up;*
- *A number of projects in the field of tourism have been worked out;*
- *Contacts have been established with Serbia, Romania, Germany and Italy for partnership under projects in that sector.*

Opportunities for tourism

The nature and cultural sights in the district, supplemented by its rich history, make it an interesting place to visit and an area allowing development of different types of tourism.

Identified as hindrances for the tourism sector in the district appear to be its geographic remoteness, inadequate accessibility by transport and underdeveloped material stock, which impose the prevalence above all of short-term or one-time trips for the purposes of visiting a given site or sight.

Vidin District possesses preconditions and resource for development of the tourism sector. **One of its weaknesses is the impossibility to combine several types of attractions and resources to visit.** *The River Danube and its shoreline in its capacity of a natural resource* offer ample opportunities for water-based, cruise and angling tourism, including **balneological tourism**, however so far there is no comprehensive strategy and infrastructure *in situ*, aimed at and capable of assisting the development of the tourism industry.

The human factor also does not possess sufficient capacity to get adequately involved in this type of economic activity.

The district possesses diverse natural resources, characteristic landmarks and cultural traditions and customs, which might enhance the **development of rural tourism**. Despite these real circumstances rural tourism is quite underdeveloped in the area. *Excellent preconditions for rural tourism exist in a large portion of the settlements in the municipalities of Belogradchik, Chuprene, Bregovo, Dimovo and Ruzhitsi.* Particularly typical for this area are the less known ethnic groups of the Turlaks and Wallachs, who are characterized by a number of specific traits, rich customs and traditions. This resources is not adequately tapped and exhibited either, although it might raise specific interest particularly among foreign tourists.

The municipalities possessing potential for development of tourism in the district are as follows:

- **cultural-and cognitive tourism:** the municipalities of Belogradchik and Vidin and to a lesser extent the municipalities of Dimovo and Kula;
- **ecotourism:** the municipalities of Belogradchik, Chuprene, Bregovo and Boynitsa;
- **rural tourism (+ wine and food tasting):** Makresh, Dimovo, Belogradchik, Chuprene, Novo Selo;
- **water-based tourism:** Bregovo, Vidin, Kula, Novo Selo.

The general evaluation of the tourism potential in the district reveals that it is assessed as average and the level of its tapping is even below the average, while for certain kinds of tourism it is practically zero. **The highest discrepancy between the potential and its tapping in the district is noted in the case of ecotourism and river-cruise tourism.** **The municipalities of Vidin (river cruise tourism) and Belogradchik (ecotourism) possess considerable potential, which to date is practically almost unutilized at all.**

The best resources and development potentials in the district have been noted for the cultural and historical tourism and ecotourism, supplemented to a different extent by the other types of tourism. The current economic stagnation, inadequate level of tourism infrastructure and trained human resources stand out as the gravest barriers to more palpable development of tourism in Vidin District at this stage.

Evaluation of the potential for and degree of development by types of tourism

<i>Type of tourism</i>	<i>Municipality</i>	<i>Scores</i>	
		<i>Potential / capacity From 1 to 4</i>	<i>Degree of development / tapping</i>
General conditions and potential		3	2
<i>River/water tourism</i>	Vidin Novo Selo	4 2	1
<i>Cruise tourism</i>	Vidin	4	1
<i>Ecotourism</i>	Belogradchik Chuprene	4 3	1
<i>Rural tourism</i>	Belogradchik, Makresh, Chuprene, Dimovo	2	1
<i>Cultura and historical tourism</i>	Belogradchik, Vidin Dimovo, Kula	4 2	3
<i>Ornithological tourism</i>	Vidin, Belogradchik, Chuprene	2	1
<i>Spa and wellness tourism</i>	Vidin	2	0
<i>Horse riding tourism</i>	Vidin	1	0
<i>Hunting tourism</i>	Chuprene, Ruzhintsi, Belogradchik	2	1
<i>Cycling tourism</i>	Chuprene	1	0
<i>Mountain tourism</i>	Chuprene, Belogradchik	2	0
<i>Other A.D.ditional forms of alternative tourism (climbing, paragliding, wine-tourism etc.)</i>	Belogradchik, Chuprene, Bregovo, Boynitsa, Novo Selo	3	1

Legend:

4 High-quality resources of the required quality and potential, **tapped** with minor restrictions (of national and international significance).

3 High-quality resources, **not sufficiently tapped**. Improvement in terms of quantity and quality is needed (of regional significance, potential for becoming of national significance).

2 Good-quality resources having potential, **poorly to average tapped**. Considerable investments for improvement of the quality and raising of the potential are needed (of local significance and potential for becoming of regional significance).

1 Low-quality resources. **Practically untapped**, poorly known and exhibited. исококачествени ресурси.

Conclusions

Vidin is among the **districts with modest economic results in the tourism sector but possesses a significant untapped development potential**.

The nature heritage (Magurata Cave, the Belogradchik Rocks, the Chuprene Biosphere Reserve and the Rabisha Lake) and cultural heritage (monuments in the city of Vidin) offer a perfect opportunity for their turning into good-quality tourist products.

A “plus” for the district is the fact that it is an environmentally clean and well-preserved area devoid of big polluters, possessing favorable nature, cultural and anthropogenic resources for tourism.

One of the challenges for tourism in the district is that a large portion of the tourism sites in Vidin District have not been incorporated in the itineraries of the national and international tours, which illustrates the need of marketing and advertising of the nature features and cultural sights in the area. A good example in that sense is the policy of Belogradchik Municipality, which produces ever more visible impact on the development of tourism not only within the municipality, but also districtwide.

Despite a number of unfavorable trends in the development of the sector, the majority of the municipalities in Vidin District possess good conditions and considerable potential for development of tourism, which ensures a serious contribution to the local economy.

MONTANA DISTRICT

Natural-geographic and resource potential

Montana District occupies the central part of Northwest Bulgaria. It has a total area of 3,635 km² or 3.2% of the territory of Republic of Bulgaria. The northern boundary of the district is the River Danube, which is also the state frontier with Romania. To the southwest the district borders with Serbia and to the south it is limited by the northern slopes of the Balkan Mountain Range. Its neighbour districts are Vidin in western direction, Vratsa District in eastern direction and Sofia District in southern direction.

One important advantage of the district, related to its location, is the fact that its area is traversed by two European Transport Corridors of the TINA network: Corridor No. 4 (Route E79) Vidin-Montana-Vratsa-Sofia-Kulata (RP I-1) and Corridor No. 7 (the River Danube). The area of Montana District is traversed also by the shortest route from Vidin to Sofia – the Class Two road II-81 – via the Petrokhan Pass in the Balkan Mountain Range.

The relief of Montana District is very diverse. The northern end of the district is situated in the Danube Plain and in southern direction it gradually changes into mountainous relief, stretching over parts of the Balkan foothills. The southern parts of the district comprise the territory of the most massive part of the Western Balkan Mountain Range the highest peak of which is Kom (2,016 m above sea level).

The main rivers in the district are *Ogosta, Tsibritsa and Lom*. They are characterized by small water volumes and in practice have negligent importance for irrigation. On the area of Montana District are situated the "Ogosta" and "Srechenska Bara" dams and about 50 micro-dams of local significance.

The mineral springs rank among the most valuable nature resources of the district.

Resources of natural significance are the hot mineral springs in Varshets Municipality – in the city of Varshets and the village of Spanchevtsi. They are used for treatment of cardio-vascular diseases, diseases of the central and peripheral nervous system, endocrinologic exchange system, the locomotory system etc. Springs of hot mineral water, which might have economic significance, *have been discovered in the village of Barzia, Berkovitsa Municipality*. Mineral springs exist also in the villages of Borovtsi and Zamphirovo, but they are not utilized and in practice have no application to date.

Generally speaking, Montana District is characterized by the following **natural-geographic conditions and resources, which have potential for development of tourism:**

- *Existence of mineral springs (in the municipalities of Varshets and Berkovitsa);*
- ***A large portion of the southern part of the district is occupied by the Western Balkan Mountain Range*** – well-preserved and diverse natural environment and resources, possessing excellent conditions for mountain, eco-, rural and hunting tourism.
- *The River Danube and its shoreline as a natural resource for water-based, cruise and angling tourism.*
- **Existence of many rivers and water basins** (natural and manmade) and the second biggest dam in the country – **"Ogosta" Dam**.
- There are numerous monuments of the **cultural and historical heritage** in the district
 - *four monasteries of national significance, remains of ancient fortresses, architectural masterpieces, such as the clock-tower in the city of Berkovitsa and the ensemble housing in the city of Lom. Attractive for visiting and possessing high potential are the monasteries – the Klissura Monastery "Sveti Sveti Cyril i Methodii" in Varshets Municipality, the Chiprovski Monastery "Sveti Yoan Rilski", the Lopushanski Monastery "Sveti Yoan Predtechia" in the village of Georgui Damyanovo, the Dobridolski Monastery "Sveta Troytsa" near the village of Dobri Dol, Lom Municipality.*

The natural-geographic conditions and historical heritage of Montana District enable the municipalities on its area to develop different types of specialized tourism (eco-, skiing-, cultural, rural, hunting and angling tourism, spa and balneological cure, etc.).

The mountain-skirts part of the district possesses a number of tourism-related resources of modest utilization, but high potential for development of good-quality and attractive products.

Very suitable conditions for **skiing and mountaineering tourism** exist in Berkovitsa Municipality (skiing complex below the Peak Kom) and in the surrounding area of the city of Berkovitsa (the Ashiklar Locality). The Peak Kom (2,016 m above sea level) is the exit point for many tourism itineraries, including the international pedestrian itinerary E-3 (from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea), paragliding and recreation (2 chalets and one holiday hostel).

Several eco-trails have been set up, which attract lovers of ecotourism and virgin nature beauty. In Georgui Damyanovo Municipality there is an eco-trail *in the area of Kopren Peak and the village of Kopilovtsi*, in Chiprovtsi Municipality – *the Deyanitsa eco-trail*, and in Berkovitsa Municipality an eco-trail *to the village of Barziya and the the 'Khaydushki vodopadi (Khayduk Waterfalls)' Locality*.

Nature parks, protected localities and nature landmarks

The "Vrachanski Balkan" Nature Park extends over the territory of three districts - Montana, Vratsa and Sofia. Its total area in Montana District amounts to 4,097.7 ha and covers the *land area of the villages Gorna Byala Rechka, Dolna Byala Rechka, Dolno Ozirovo and Gorno Ozirovo on the territory of Varshets Municipality*.

Some of the more famous protected localities in the district are as follows:

- **Protected locality "Kopren – Ravno Buche – Deyanitsa – Kalimanitsa"** – total area 536.4 ha forest stock, combining four picturesque localities in the Kopilovski part of the Western Balkan Mountain Range, *Georgui Damyanovo Municipality*. Within the boundaries of the protected locality are situated two of the most beautiful waterfalls in Northwest Bulgaria – *"Durshin" and "Vodniyat Skok", declared nature landmarks*;
- **Protected locality "Usketo"**, 1.9 ha. It is situated in the *Dalgidel part of the Western Balkan Mountain Range, Georgui Damyanovo Municipality*;
- **Protected locality "Uruchnik"** in the Western Balkan Mountain Range, possessing a virgin nature, spreading above 1600 m above sea level (*the village of Barziya, Berkovitsa Municipality*);
- **Protected locality "Shumaka"**, 0.5 ha (*the village of Slivovik, Medkovets Municipality*);
- **Protected locality "Ribarnitsi Orsoya"**, featuring an area of 150.3 ha total forest and land stock (*the village of Orsoya, Lom Municipality*) for the purposes of caring for

and protection of the populations and habitats of protected, rare and endangered flora and fauna species. **It is included in the ornithological wetlands in Bulgaria.**

- **Protected locality “Kaleto”,** 23.6 ha (Berkovitsa). Declared for the purposes of protection of endangered and rare flora species, preservation of the landscape components and provision of opportunities for development of tourism.
- **Protected locality “Kitkata”** (Montana Municipality);
- **Reserves: “Gornata Koriya” and “Ibisha” (incorporated in the list of ornithological wetlands in Bulgaria);**

Declared as nature landmarks in the district are the following:

- **Nature landmark “Mramorna Peshtera (the Marble Cave)”** (Berkovitsa);
- **Nature landmark “Mishin Kamak”,** a cave (the village of Gorna Luka, Chiprovtsi Municipality);
- **Nature landmark “Khaydushki vodopadi (Khayduk waterfalls)”**
- **Nature landmark “Durshin vodopad (Durshin waterfall)” and nature landmark “Vodniya Skok”.** They are situated in the protected locality “Kopren-Ravno Buche-Deyanitsa-Kalimanitsa” in the **Koprilov part of the Western Balkan Mountain Range, Georgui Damyanovo Municipality.**

Declaring of some new territories as protected areas is pending: “Ravnensko Gradishte”, “Chiprovski vodopad (Chiprovtsi Waterfall)” and “Sto Ovtsi (100 sheep)” *in the municipalities of Chiprovtsi and Montana.*

The existence of so many and diverse nature resources is a huge potential for development of specialized forms of eco- and rural tourism with a learning and cognitive objective under stronger control and teaching by specifically trained skilled experts.

Cultural and historical heritage and potential

In the district there are a number of interesting ***monuments of the cultural and historical heritage*** – monasteries, remains of ancient fortresses, architectural masterpieces, museums and ethnographic ensembles and collections.

In the registry of immobile monuments of culture in Montana District are incorporated 282 sites, 29 of which are of national significance. Situated on the area of the district are archeological findings and historical sights, which are proofs of the ancient history of the area. **These monuments are concentrated mainly in the centres of the cities-successors of ancient settlements and cultures.**

The ancient town of Montanezium emerged as a military Roman camp on the remains of an old Thracian fortress during the 1st c. A.D. In the vicinity of the town has been constructed a system of 25 fortresses, which served for guarding the local ore-mining and gold-mining along the upper stretches of the River Ogosta. The foundations of two estates of Roman

summer houses have been discovered near Montana. In the city has been established an outdoor museum collection "Lapidarium" – stone remains of buildings and temples discovered in that area. Marble Roman statues from ancient Montana are exhibited in the National Archeological Museum.



Cup from Jakimovski treasure



*The city of Lom emerges as a Roman *castel* (fortress with armed guards) on the River Danube, which later develops into a human settlement under the name of *Almus*. Evidences of the cultural and historical heritage of the city of Lom are monuments, statues, Roman coins etc. In the city of Lom there are about 50 well-preserved buildings from the beginning of the 20th c. in the Secession style (Russe), which form a characteristic ensemble along the main street of the city of Lom with their remarkable individuality and unique mosaics. The "Uspenie Bogorodichno" church in the city is a monument of culture, as well as the ensemble of buildings in the city centre. In the vicinity of the village of Dobri Dol is situated the "Sveta Troytsa (the Holly Trinity)" monastery.*

The city of Berkovitsa is famous for the "Kaleto" Fortress, which is a symbol of antiquity and the Middle Ages. It is situated at three levels on the "Kaleto" Hill, near the city centre. Monuments of culture of national significance are the churches "Rozhdestvo Bogorodichno" and "Sveti Nikolay Chudotvorets", the clock tower dating from the 18th c., the ethnographic museum and the "Ivan Vazov" house-museum from the beginning of the 19th c. In the city there is an art gallery and a small group of original craftsmen and artisanal masters (potters,

woodcarvers and carpenters), who might upgrade and transfer their skills to the tourists as well. There is an idea to set up a street of the local crafts.

Chiprovtsi Municipality is famous for the "Sveti Ivan Rilski" Chiprovtsi Monastery, whose church is a monument of culture of national significance. The Chiprovtsi area is renown also for the products of the Chiprovtsi carpet-weaving and goldsmith's schools, the Chiprovtsi grammar school since 1624, the high school – Seminarium (built more than three centuries ago), the remains of a Catholic church, the Chiprovtsi pre-Renaissance art and architecture – resources, which are not very well known, but possess huge potential for development of tourism in the event of adequate popularization among society and marketing.

On the territory of Georgui Damyanovo Municipality have been discovered remains from eight Thracian and late-antiquity fortresses, as well as mines in the land of several villages (*Govezhda, Dalgui Del and Diva Slatina*).



Particularly attractive to visit are a number of religious sights – the Klissura Monastery "Sv. Sv. Cyril I Methodii" (Varshets Municipality), the Chiprovtsi Monastery "Sveti Yoan Rilski" (Chiprovtsi Municipality), the Lopushna Monastery "Sveti Yoan Predtecha" (the village of Georgui Damyanovo), the Dobridol Monastery "Sveta Troytsa" (near the village of Dobri Dol, Lom Municipality).

Lopushna Monastery "Sveti Yoan Predtecha"

The existence of these monuments of culture in the district provide and opportunity for development of a product or itinerary of the type "Cultural Park" and incorporation of the cultural-and-historical heritage as an object of culture-oriented tourism, combined with the establishment of different modalities of recreation – "health trails" along the upper stretches of the River Ogosta, sports angling and water sports near the "Ogosta" dam, rural and ecotourism with resort estates (of a type similar to that of the existing holiday-making campus near the city of Montana). Development of such "Cultural parks" is a relatively new trend, which is gaining ground in recent years in the EU Member States, especially in regions, which are faced with economic hardships, and form part of the state policy for building a "culture of recreation".

Annually in the district are conducted a variety of festivals and cultural events, which also attract tourists and are a resource, which needs to be developed further.

National Fests of Brass Bands "Diko Iliev" are conducted in Montana every two years, as well as a number of national and regional festivals.

Two international festivals are conducted in the city of Berkovitsa every year: "Patent Leather Shoes" for children's songs and a *folkloric festival "The Balkan Sings and Dances"*.

Evaluation of the material stock and opportunities for tourism

The material **stock in Montana District is concentrated in three municipalities** - *Berkovitsa, Varshets and Montana*, which is to be assigned to their rich resources, the existing material stock *in situ* and traditions in tourism of these municipalities.

The most frequented municipality in the district in recent years is Varshets Municipality (more than 50% of all visitors). That is partly due to the specific local nature resources (mineral springs), but also to the good marketing, renovated and expanded material stock and enhanced role of balneological cure and spa procedures as a resource and factor contributing to the development of tourism. **The city of Varshets** has emerged around the thermal mineral springs and its history is connected with balneological treatment. The oldest preserved written reference to its existence dates back to the 6th c. A.D. in *Byzantine chronics under the name of "Medeka" (from medicus – curative)*.

The statistical data shows increase in the number of accommodation facilities and number of overnight stays, but reduction of the number of persons, who have stayed overnight and the length of stay. Despite the improved results the share of the district in the tourist flow at the national level remains quite small.

Accommodation facilities, overnight stays and occupancy rate of the tourism-related material stock, 2009

Municipality	Accommodation facilities	Beds	Realized overnight stays		Persons staying overnight		Occupancy rate
			Total	Share of the district total	Total	Share of the district total	
Berkovitsa	9	412	12682	23.0%	8606	36.4%	8.4
Varshets	4	255	28179	51.0%	5431	23.0%	30.3
Georgui Damyanovo	2	50	1297	2.3%	797	3.4%	7.1
Lom	2	165	5196	9.4%	3787	16.0%	8.6
Montana	9	473	7889	14.3%	5011	21.2%	5.2
MONTANA total	26	1355	55243	100.0%	23632	100.0%	11.7

Source: NSI

Despite the economic difficulties, in recent years a certain stirring has been observed in the



sector within the district. New tourist accommodation facilities are being created (although of small capacity) – houses for rural and ecotourism in the mountain municipalities Berkovitsa and Chiprovtsi. Accommodation facilities have been constructed or renovated in some of the human settlements around the mineral springs in Varshets Municipality (the village of Spanchevtsi). This is a very good material stock, which under adequate marketing and better utilization of the rich resources might be considerably expanded and its operation improved.

Infrastructure and marketing of tourism

Montana District has a bordering (with Romania and Serbia) and crossroad transport-and-geographic location – it is traversed by the European Transport Corridors No. 4 (Vidin-Sofia-Kulata) and No. 7 (the River Danube).

The road network is relatively well developed. Its density is 0.29 km/km² at 0.34 km/km² national average. Of great importance for the economic development of the district are the international route E-79 (European corridor No. 4) – road I-1 (Vidin-Montana-Vratsa-Sofia) of the republican road network, which traverses the district and connects Western and Central Europe with Greece. Also very important is the Class II road II-81 (Lom-Montana-Berkovitsa-Sofia) via the Petrokhan Pass, which connects the Port of Lom to the international route E-79. The general state-of-repair of the road network in the district is unsatisfactory and does not meet the modern requirements.

Water transport is represented by the Port of Lom and the local piers. *“Lom Port Complex” SPplc* comprises the ports of Lom and Oryahovo (Vratsa District) and realizes about 40% of the Bulgarian goods turnover along the River Danube. The Port of Lom is an element of the Pan-European Transport Corridor No. 7 (the River Danube) and the second biggest port on the Danube in Bulgaria.

The major factors hampering the development of tourism in the district are the poor access by transport to the tourism locations (*Berkovitsa, Varshets, Chiprovtsi*) via the Petrokhan Pass and the absence of sufficient number of local initiatives and capital for popularization of the available resources and opportunities.

Opportunities for tourism

The natural-geographic conditions and historical heritage of Montana District provide opportunities for development of different types of specialized tourism (eco-, skiing, cultural and rural tourism, hunting and angling, balneological treatment).

The part of the district situated in the mountain skirts contains a number of tourism-related resources, which are currently moderately tapped, but possess high potential for development of good-quality and attractive products, above all in the domain of rural tourism and ecotourism.

A challenge for the local population and authorities is the development of ecotourism, which is viewed as a possibility possessing high economic potential for improvement of the socio-economic situation in the district.

The major resources and potentials are concentrated in the *municipalities of Lom, Montana, Berkovitsa and Varshets*. The municipalities of Georgui Damyanovo and Chiprovtsi possess more limited and less utilized resources.

Localizations with well-manifested resources and prospects for development of tourism:

- **Balneo-tourism:** the municipalities of Varshets (the city of Varshets and the village of Spanchevtsi) and Berkovitsa (a big untapped thermal mineral resource in the city of Berkovitsa and the village of Barziya with declared investor's interest in realization of a project);
- **Eco- and rural tourism:** the municipalities of Berkovitsa (the villages of Chereshovitsa, Barziya and Bistrilitsa), Chiprovtsi, Georgui Damyanovo Municipality with the villages along the course of the River Dalgodelska Ogosta (the villages of Kopilovtsi, Govezhda, Diva Slatina and Melyane);
- **Mountain and ski-tourism:** Berkovitsa (planned construction of a skiing centre with modern facilities);
- **Water and river tourism:** the "Ogosta" Dam (the municipalities of Montana and Berkovitsa), the Danube shoreline of the municipalities of Lom and Valchedram) and the smaller water basins (rivers and dams of local significance) in the district create opportunities for water-based tourism, angling and other types of tourism);

The possibility for these resources to be considered in a **trans-border aspect** is becoming ever more real, especially after the commissioning of Danube Bridge 2 at Vidin and the alleviation of the border-crossing regime with Serbia.

The municipalities of *Montana* (cultural, congress and water tourism), *Berkovitsa* (mountain, eco- and rural tourism) and *Varshets* (spa and eco-tourism) are regarded as municipalities possessing favorable conditions for tourism.

Municipalities with so far untapped potential are Lom (cultural, cruise and water tourism), **Chiprovtsi** (cultural, eco- and rural tourism) and **Georgui Damyanovo** (eco- and rural tourism). In the municipalities of Lom and Valchidram there are insufficiently utilized possibilities for development of cruise, ornithological and water tourism along the River Danube.

The municipalities of Boychinovtsi, Brussartsi, Yakimovo, Medkovets and Valchidram are characterized by limited resources, deficient material stock and human capacity for development of tourism.

<i>Types of tourism</i>	<i>Municipality</i>	<i>Scores</i>	
		<i>Potential / Capacity From 1 to 4</i>	<i>Degree of development / utilization</i>
General conditions and potential		3	2
<i>river/water tourism</i>	Lom Valchedram	3 2	1
<i>cruise tourism</i>	Lom	3	0
<i>eco-tourism</i>	Berkovitsa, Varshets, G. Damyanovo and Chiprovtsi	4 3	1 0
<i>rural tourism</i>	Berkovitsa, Varshets, G. Damyanovo and Chiprovtsi	3 2	1
<i>cultural-and historical tourism</i>	Montana, Berkovitsa, Lom, Chiprovtsi	3 2	1
<i>ornithological tourism</i>	Valchedram, Lom, Berkovitsa, G. Damyanovo, Chiprovtsi	3 2	1
<i>spa and wellness tourism</i>	Varshets Berkovitsa	4 3	3 1
<i>horse-riding tourism</i>	Berkovitsa	2	1
<i>hunting tourism</i>	Berkovitsa, G. Damyanovo, Chiprovtsi	2	1
<i>cycling tourism</i>	Berkovitsa, G. Damyanovo, Chiprovtsi	2	1
<i>mountain tourism</i>	Berkovitsa, Varshets	4	2
Other A.D.ditional forms of alternative tourism (climbing, paragliding, wine tourism etc.)	Montana, Berkovitsa, Varshets,	2	1

Legend:

4 High-quality resources of the required quality and potential, **tapped** with minor restrictions (of national and international significance).

3 High-quality resources, **not sufficiently tapped**. Improvement in terms of quantity and quality is needed (of regional significance, potential for becoming of national significance).

2 Good-quality resources having potential, **poorly to average tapped**. Considerable investments for improvement of the quality and raising of the potential are needed (of local significance and potential for becoming of regional significance).

1 Low-quality resources. **Practically untapped**, poorly known and exhibited (of local significance).

The general evaluation of the tourism-related potential of Montana District shows that it has been evaluated as average and even higher while the level of its utilization is significantly below the average. This is an indication for insufficient highlighting, marketing and socialization of the tourism sites and resources of the district, especially in the small municipalities Chiprovtsi and G. Damyanovo.

The best resources and **development potentials in the district have spa and mountain tourism, supplemented to different degree by the other types of tourism** (mainly eco- and rural tourism). The biggest disbalance between the available potential and its utilization in the district exists for the eco-tourism, spa tourism and the cultural and historical tourism. This applies to the highest extent for the municipalities of *Lom, Montana, Berkovits and Varshets, where the respective resources are concentrated.*

Conclusions:

General conclusions:

- *The geographic location of Montana District from the point of view of tourism may be evaluated as relatively favorable, but insufficiently exploited;*
- *In the district there is potential for development of the mountain, balneological and certain forms of eco-tourism and rural tourism;*
- *The development of tourism may have a positive impact on the revival of the economy in rural areas;*
- *Improvement of the state of the engineering infrastructure and particularly of the road infrastructure is a matter of decisive importance for the development of tourism;*
- *In recent years increase of the accommodation facilities and of the number of persons, who have stayed overnight has been observed, but there is diminishing of the length of stay of the tourists.*

VRATSA DISTRICT

Natural-geographic and resource potential

Vratsa District extends from the River Danube to the north to the Balkan Mountain Range to the south. It has a **diverse relief** – from flat land along the River Danube, undulating with predominant altitude of 150-300 m above sea level in northern direction and mountainous, comprising the Vrachanska Mountains to the south.

Characteristic for the natural environment of Vratsa District besides the rich variety in

terms of relief and landscape is the existence of numerous protected areas: 1 reserve, 1 Nature Park, 13 protected localities and 11 nature landmarks. The rich nature potential and the specific and varying landscape are valuable assets for the development of ecotourism and alternative tourism (paragliding, alpinism etc.)

Particularly valuable nature resource of the district is the **second biggest Nature Park in Bulgaria** – “Vrachanski Balkan”, **which extends on the area of two municipalities from the district – Vratsa and Mezdra**. The total number of caves is above 400. Twelve habitats, covering nearly the half of the area of the Nature Park have been identified and are incorporated in the European legislation for nature protection. In 1999 the Park has been declared a site of international significance for protection of the biological and landscape diversity.

The Directorate of the “Vrachanski Balkan” Nature Park has its strategy for development of alternative tourism and has constructed a number of tourism-related facilities: Vrachanska eco-trail (the village of Zgorigrad), Children’s centre for environmental education in the “Parshevitsa” Locality, “Ledenika” and several visitors’ centres, educational trails, recreation corners, etc. In the Vrachanska Mountains there exist specially set apart zones for recreation and three chalets – “Okolchitsa”, “Parshevitsa” and “Ledenika”.

The Vrachanska eco-trail ranks among the most exiting eco-trails in Bulgaria. It starts from the village of Zgorigrad, situated in the River Leva valley, and leads to the core of the itinerary – the “Borov Kamak” Waterfall. The area looks like a museum in the open, in which are exhibited typical Karst formations – whirlpools, caves, gorges. *A characteristic feature of that itinerary is the exclusive biodiversity, above all the ornithofauna.*

Several non-traditional cognitive itineraries have been designed as well. They differ in terms of both the subject matter and the target visitor groups. Some more interesting among them are as follows:

- *Cognitive itinerary “Karst and biodiversity”;*
- *A forest trail of fairy tales;*
- *“In the world of ecology”;*
- *“The forest – a place to live in and welcome guests”*
- *“Mountaineering for beginners – Ledenika Locality”*

A well known destination for tourists in Vratsa Municipality is the area of the “Vratsata” Pass, where excellent conditions for alpinism exist. **The “Vratsata” Pass is a narrow and rocky gorge**, stretching along the northeastern slopes of the Vrachanska Mountains. *Preserved in the pass are remains of the Mediaeval fortress “Vratitsa” (10th-11th c. A.D.), after which the city has been named.*

With its height of 142 m “Skaklya” ranks among the highest Bulgarian waterfalls. The waterfall is impressive for its greatness and beauty.

The **"Ledenika"** cave is situated in the northwestern part of the Vrachanski Balkan at a distance of some 16 km from the city of Vratsa. The cave is about 300 m long and has 10 halls and one lake.

The "Ponora" water cave is situated near the village of Chiren, at some 30 km from the city of Vratsa. It is one of the biggest water caves in Bulgaria, with bog and vast water galleries, full of secondary cave formations and a deep and long underground lake. All in all "Ponora" is 3 km deep and it represents an exclusive attraction for water-cave explorers.

Above the "Parshevitsa" Chalet, at an altitude of 1484 m above sea level, is situated one of the longest ski-tracks in the country. It is equipped with its own lift, which is a precondition for development of skiing tourism as well.

Another interesting nature sight is "Zhabokrek" – "Bozhiya Most (God's Bridge)". It is situated in the Chiren-Lilyash Karst area to the north of the city of Vratsa. The entrance to that natural arch is 20 m high and 25 m wide. The length of the tunnel along its main axis is 125 m and inside it are situated three small lakes. Near the bridge are situated the **remains of an ancient fortress.**

The cycling itineraries crawl among mountain slopes, meadows, brooks and rocks through the Vrachanski Balkan Mountains. One may travel by bicycle from the city of Vratsa to the "Ledenika" Locality, "Okolchitsa", the "Sedemte Prestola" Monastery and the Klissura Monastery, the beautiful rocks near Lakatnik and the Peak Kom in the Berkovski Balkan Mountains.

The "Botev trail" Memorial Complex is unique in its context and conceptual idea. It is a 120 km long lane from the legendary "Radetski" museum-ship on the Kozloduy bank via the Butansko Inn – Sofronievo – Borovan – Banitsa – Millin Kamak – Rechka to the place of death of Hristo Botev in the "Yolkovitsa" Locality in the Vrachanski Balkan Mountains. Since 1946 on 27 May hundreds of people from all over the country start on a march to pay their tribute to the monuments and memorial plates connected with the passage and battles of Botev and his fellow combatants.

Approximately 5000 ha **of the area of Mezdra Municipality are incorporated in the "Vrachanski Balkan" National Park. This territory is of exclusive importance** for preservation of the rich biological diversity – more than 700 species of higher plants, 90 bird species, more than 500 caves, gorges, rock and cave phenomena.

Nature landmarks having tourism-related potential on the territory of Mezdra Municipality:

- *"Ritlite" – rock formation of an area of 123.3 ha in the land of the village of Lyuti Brod;*
- *"The New Cave" – a 20 m deep hall containing interesting limestone formations;*
- *"Govedarnika" – rocky hill with shallow caves (niches), covering an area of 2.5 ha.*

These landmarks might be incorporated in the tourism itinerary for nature phenomena of this type (for instance for ornithologists and alpinists). Their integration with the resources of Vratsa Municipality would make them even more attractive.

Some of the protected animal species, such as *Sygnus olor*, *Pandion haliaetus*, *Accipiter gentilis*, *Neophron percnopterus* are of interest to amateur-ornithologies and might be used as opportunities for development of certain tourism-related attractions.

In the northern areas along the River Danube course there are conditions for fostering of tourism in a long-term horizon in connection with angling and attractive cruises up and down the river.

Excellent opportunities for development of rural tourism are offered by the nature features and customs of the typical villages in the **Danube-area municipalities** – *Miziya, Kozloduy and Oryahovo* and **some of the mountainous settlements** in the *municipalities of Roman and Mezdra*.

Cultural and historical heritage

During the different historical epochs the city of Vratsa had developed as an important social, economic and cultural centre. The traces of human activity on this area date back to the New Stone Age. The first inhabitants – the Thracian tribe tribally – had developed high material culture, remains of which continue to be excavated even in our time. The unique findings, discovered in the course of archeological diggings at the “Moguilanskata Moguila (Moguian Mound)” **in Vratsa, in the village of Bukyovtsi and the village of Rogozen (Hayredin Municipality) reveal information about a flourishing ancient civilization.** This valuable information has not been adequately studied, which prevents its popularization and use as a resource for attraction of tourists and creation of specialized tourism products.

There are numerous artefacts of the spiritual and material culture as a heritage from the Roman and Slavonic past and the epoch of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, but they are not sufficiently popularized.



Findings in Mogilanska Mound

Valuable exhibits from these epochs, events and personalities are displayed in the rich and attractive exhibitions of the Regional Museum of History. The Museum of History comprises also the Ethnographic-and-Renaissance Complex "Nikola Voyvodov" and the Ethnographic-and-Renaissance Complex "Sofronii Vrachanski". Parts of the museum stock are also the *two Mediaeval towers of the Kurtshpatovs' family* (17th c.) and the Meshchiis' Tower (16th c.).

The "Eski mosque" was built in the early 19th c. It is situated in the oldest neighborhood of the city of Vratsa – "Kamera", in the mountain foothills, which is the starting point of the main tourism itineraries in the direction of the village of Zgorigrad, the "Ledenika" Cave and "Parshevitsa" Locality. "Eski Mosque" has been declared monument of culture in 1953.

In Kozloduy Municipality the museum-ship "Radetski" and the Art Gallery in the city of Kozloduy are a tourism-related resource of particular value and originality.

In Vratsa Municipality are located governmental, municipal, institutional and private cultural institutions: drama theatre, museum of history, art gallery, the Vratsa philharmonic orchestra and puppet theatre, housed in the Palace of Culture in the city of Vratsa. The "Razvitie (Development)" chitalishte (house of culture), the District public library and the "Sv. Sofronii Vrachanski" Ethnographic-and-Renaissance Complex possess their own material stock. In the city of Vratsa there are three private art galleries. *The Museum of History is the only place where the Rogozen Treasure, which has been recovered several years ago, is exhibited to the general public.*

The calendar of cultural events of the city of Vratsa comprises significant national and international forums.

Assessment of the material stock and tourism-related capacity

The major part of the material and accommodation stock of the district is concentrated in the municipalities of Vratsa and Kozloduy – nearly 90% of all the realized overnight stays. This fact may be assigned to the concentration of tourism-related resources and human capacity in Vratsa Municipality and the specific role of the city of Kozloduy as core energy centre of the country.

In 2009 a total of 54,674 overnight stays of a total of 25,745 people have been realized in the district, which makes two overnight stays per person. This is a very insufficient level of occupancy of the material stock despite the slight increase as compared to the preceding year.

Although Vratsa Municipality possesses the most diverse and attractive resources, the largest number of accommodation facilities and beds, it relegates the first place to Kozloduy Municipality and the rate of occupancy of the material stock remains quite low – 13.8%. The municipalities of Mezdra, Byala Slatina and Oryahovo are characterized by relatively small accommodation stock, which is not sufficiently popular and exploited, but possesses a good development potential.

Number of accommodation facilities, overnight stays and occupancy rate of the tourism-related stock during 2009.

Municipalities	Accommodation facilities	Beds	Realized overnight stays		Persons staying overnight		Occupancy rate
			Total	% of the district total	Total	% of the district total	
Borovan	1	5	253	0.5%	210	0.8%	18.5
Byala Slatina	2	35	2874	5.3%	1772	6.9%	22.5
Vratsa	14	1353	22086	40.4%	13256	51.5%	13.8
Kozloduy	5	234	26189	47.9%	9245	35.9%	30.7
Mezdra	2	204	1888	3.5%	519	2.0%	2.7
Oryahovo	2	28	1359	2.5%	718	2.8%	13.3
Roman	1	10	25	0.0%	25	0.1%	1.4
VRATSA total	27	1869	54674	100.0%	25745	100.0%	16.0

Source: NSI

The the several recent years the material stock of tourism has been significantly renovated and improved. Modern and attractive tourism complexes have been constructed in the Vrachanski Balkan. The tourism complexes "Hashove" and "Chayka" in the surrounding area of the city of Vratsa and the "Gorska Feya" Challet in **Roman Municipality** have been rehabilitated.

The state of the established recreation zones in the Vrachanska Mountains has also been improved.

Infrastructure and marketing of tourism

The access to the district is ensured mainly by Road I-1 Vidin-Sofia, which connects it to the national road network of high class ("Hemus" Highway) and provides for access to and from the other regions of the country.

The Class II Road II-15 Vratsa-Oryahovitsa ensures the connection between the inside of the district and the country to the Port of Oryahovo, *where the Oryahovo-Beket ferry is operating*. The intra-regional connections are serviced by the Class III road network, which is not in a very good state-of-repair.

District and municipal groups on tourism have been created in the district. They are responsible for the marketing, participation in exhibitions and publishing of advertising materials.

Information centres for assistance to the visitors and the tourism sector have been established in some of the municipal centres (Vratsa, Oryahovo etc.).

At this stage tourism is not a major sector in the economy of Vratsa District, but there is potential for its gaining in importance. Provided adequate conditions are created for the tourists (rehabilitation of the roads to improve the access to the nature and historical landmarks, repair and upgrading of the materials stock and accommodation facilities) and targeted A.D.vartizing activity is launched, the situation may change radically.

Opportunities for tourism

Vratsa is **one of the districts possessing high-quality but untapped tourism-related resources**. The cultural and historical and nature resources, combined with the local traditions and human potential, are factors which should be fully utilized for development of certain forms of tourism in the municipalities of the district.

The well-protected nature and conserved multiple nature landmarks and protected areas are **prerequisites for development of ecotourism** in a number of human settlements. The most appropriate conditions for that exist in the municipalities, whose territory falls within the boundaries of the "Vrachanski Balkan" Nature Park – *Vratsa and Mezdra*. This is further assisted by the infrastructure *in situ* and the cognitive itineraries, especially in the area of the "Ledenika" Cave.

Good natural resources with underdeveloped potential exist along the Danube shoreline of the municipalities of Kozloduy and Oryahovo.

The numerous caves in the municipalities of Vratsa, Mezdra and Roman and the rock formations (the villages of Lyuti Brod and Zverino, Mezdra Municipality) also act as strong attractions for tourists and constitute a resource for diversification and expansion of the tourism product (including ecotourism and rural tourism).

Excellent conditions for rural tourism exist in the villages of Chelopek and Pavolche (Vratsa Municipality), the village of Lyuti Brod and the village of Zverino (Mezdra Municipality, Zgorigrad). Good conditions are offered also by certain villages *from the municipalities of Byala Slatina, Oryahovo, Mezdra and Roman*, which face a problem with the accessibility by transport and the material stock.

There are excellent conditions for the lovers of **ornithological tourism** in the "Vrachanski Balkan" Nature Park, especially in the area of Mezdra Municipality and the Danube shoreline part of the municipalities of Kozloduy and Oryahovo.

Opportunities for cycling tourism exist along the slopes of the Vrachanska Mountains, supplemented by the existence of a multitude of nature landmarks and eco-trails in the area.

The cultural and historical heritage is concentrated mainly on the territory of the city of Vratsa as an established historical, cultural and administrative centre (monuments, museums, galleries, "Vratsata"). The municipalities of Kozloduy and Oryahovo also have

good cultural potential. The major problem in their case is their peripheral location and remoteness from the main centres of tourism.

Interesting sites to visit are also **the numerous monasteries in the district. Particularly picturesque and attractive among them is the Cherepishki Monastery (Mezdra Municipality)**, situated on the bank of the River Iskar.

Currently the tourism resources and infrastructure are concentrated in the following forms and localizations:

- **ecotourism:** "Vrachanski Balkan" Nature Park, "Ledenika" Cave, Peak "Okolchitsa" (Vratsa Municipality), "Ritlite" – Mezdra;
- **rural tourism:** the villages of Chelopek and Pavolche (Vratsa Municipality), the villages of Lyuti Brod and Zverino (Mezdra Municipality, Zgorigad) and some villages from the municipalities of Byala Slatina, Oryahovo, Mezdra and Roman;
- **cultural tourism:** the cities of Vratsa, Kozloduy, Oryahovo and Mezdra;
- **ornithological:** in the municipalities of Vratsa, Mezdra and Oryahovo;
- **by special interests:** "schools of architecture in the open" – a multitude of sites in Mezdra Municipality; ecoschools – Vratsa Municipality; delta-planerism and alpinism – the municipalities of Vratsa and Mezdra.

Evaluation of the potential and degree of utilization by types of tourism

Types of tourism	Municipalities	Scores	
		Potential / capacity From 1 to 4	Degree of development /utilization
General conditions		3	2
<i>river/water tourism</i>	Kozloduy, Oryahovo	2	1
<i>ecotourism</i>	Vratsa,	4	2
	Mezdra,	3	1
	Roman, Oryahovo	2	1
<i>rural tourism</i>	Vratsa,	4	2
	Mezdra,	3	1
	Roman, Byala Slatina, Oryahovo	2	
<i>cultural-and-historical tourism</i>	Vratsa,	3	2
	Kozloduy, Oryahovo	2	1
<i>ornithological tourism</i>	Oryahovo, Vratsa, Mezdra, Roman	2	1
<i>cruise tourism</i>	Kozloduy, Oryahovo	2	1
<i>horse-riding tourism</i>		-	-

<i>hunting tourism</i>	Kozloduy, Hayredin, Oryahovo, Byala Slatina	2	1
<i>cycling tourism</i>	Kozloduy, Borovan, Vratsa, Roman	2	1
<i>mountaineering tourism</i>	Vratsa	3	2
<i>Other A.D.ditional forms of alternative tourism (alpinism, paragliding etc.)</i>	Vratsa, Mezdra, Kozloduy, Oryahovo		

Legend:

4 High-quality resources of the required quality and potential, **tapped** with minor restrictions (of national and international significance).

3 High-quality resources, **not sufficiently tapped**. Improvement in terms of quantity and quality is needed (of regional significance, potential for becoming of national significance).

2 Good-quality resources having potential, **poorly to average tapped**. Considerable investments for improvement of the quality and raising of the potential are needed (of local significance and potential for becoming of regional significance).

1 Low-quality resources. **Practically untapped**, poorly known and exhibited (of local significance).

The general evaluation of the tourism-related potential in Vratsa District reveals that although it is estimated to be very good its level of utilization to date is even below the average and for some types of tourism is practically zero. The disparity between the available potential and its utilization is the greatest in the case of the ecotourism and rural tourism in the district – *the municipalities of Vratsa, Mezdra, Roman and Oryahovo*.

The cultural and cognitive tourism, ecotourism and rural tourism possess the best resources and development potentials in the district, supplemented to a different extent by the other types of tourism (including different forms of alternative tourism).

PLEVEN DISTRICT

Natural-geographic and resource potential

The natural features of Pleven District as a whole are not unique by themselves, with the exception of those of specific localities.

Protected areas and biodiversity

The total area of the protected areas in Pleven District is 39,982.14 ha or nearly 10% of the territory of the district, which is quite rare phenomenon. Nevertheless, in the district **there are no national parks and declared protected zones.**

The "Persina" Nature Park is one of the youngest parks in the country. It extends on the territory of **three municipalities – Nikopol, Belene and Svishtov**. Within the boundaries of the park are included the **protected localities "Kitka" and Milka**, situated on islands of the same names of the Belene island group. On the Belene island is situated the **"Persinski blata (Persin marshland)" managed reserve**. *Included within the boundaries of the park are also three protected localities and one nature landmark.*

The protected locality "Kaylaka" extends over an area of 1000 ha. Protected localities comprising centuries-old oak forests are **"Bulin Dol", "Dalgata Bara-pametnika", "Gushtera", "Ornitsite" and "Brestnishko Branishte"**.

One of the most frequented nature zones in the district is the "Kaylaka" protected locality in the surrounding area of the city of Pleven. The visits are mainly related to recreation, entertainment and angling. The "Kaylaka" protected locality is a picturesque gorge valley of the Tuchenishka River in the immediate vicinity of the city of Pleven. On that place a Roman road station "Storgoziya" was located with a Roman settlement under the same name, which was later destroyed by the Goths.



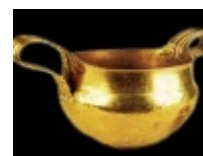
Other zones having recreation potential of predominantly local and regional significance represent two compact areas – one formed on the basis of the Karst valleys of the rivers Tuchenitsa and Chernyalka, to the south of the city of Pleven, and the other in the northwestern periphery of the district, in the area between the village of Baykal and the village of Gigen.

The "Chernelka" Nature Zone is the canyon of the river Chernelka. *It is characterized by an exclusive richness of rock formations, specific ornithofauna and diverse flora, in the composition of which have been identified more than 500 species of higher plants.* On the area of this nature landmark has been set up an eco-trail, which attracts an ever growing number of visitors.

There are significant water resources in the district. In addition to the closeness to the River Danube, its territory is traversed by the rivers Iskar and Vit and on it are situated numerous dams and water basins, predominantly in the municipalities of Dolni Dabnik, Pordim and Levski.

Cultural and historical heritage and potential

Typical for Pleven is an exclusive richness of monuments of culture, which is a prerequisite for protection of the cultural heritage and development of cultural tourism. The effective use and popularization of the entire available cultural resources would contribute to the development of other forms of tourism as well.



Vessels Valchitran treasure

Having the greatest importance for the cultural and historical heritage in the district are a number of sites offering ample proof for the ancient history and culture of the area.

More famous among them are the late antique and early Byzantine basilica "*Strogoziyd*", the ancient Roman town "*Dumuni*" near the city of Belene, the ancient Roman fortress "Lucernaria Bourgon" near the village of Somovit, an ancient Roman settlement "*Utkus*" near the city of Gulyantsi, prehistoric and ancient settlements near the villages of Dabovan and Zagrazhden, the ancient town "*Palacium*" and ancient necropolis near the village of Baykal. The majority of these sites contains a number of unique resources and are **bearers of valuable information**, but are understudied and popularized, especially for the ordinary tourist.

The earliest evidences of human settlement and activity on the territory of Pleven District refer to the end of the New Stone Age. *Artifacts of their material and spiritual culture have been discovered over the entire "Mizia" Province.* During the 1st and 2nd c. A.D. the Romans conquered the territory of the district and gave it the name "Strogoziya". The **civil settlement Ulpia Escus** emerged at the beginning of the 1st c. A.D. during the rule of Emperor Augustus. During the rule of Emperor Trajan, in 106 A.D., it became a town and marked new upsurge during the time of Emperor Konstantin the Great. Ulpia Escus was destroyed at the end of the 6th c. A.D...

After the liberation of Bulgaria, in view of the significance of the battles during the Russian-Turkish War for the liberation of Pleven at the price of enormous sacrifice of human life, **numerous monuments have been built all over the area of the district. The most famous memorial devoted to these events is the unique Panorama "The Pleven Epopee 1877", built as a symbol of the heroism and self-sacrifice. It stands out as one of the symbols of the district, which makes it also one of the most frequented sights.**

The cultural life in the district is concentrated mainly in the administrative centre, the city of Pleven, where the major cultural institutions and visiting sites are located.

In operation of the territory of the district are **13 museums. The most famous among them** are the **Museum of History – a building possessing artistic, architectural and historical value, a monument of culture of national significance**, and a park with exhibition in the open on an area of 37 dca.

The structure of the **Museum of Military History** comprises four museums, two mausoleums, one representative exhibition, the museum-parks, the "Pleven Epopee 1877" Panorama, or a total of 166 immobile monuments in the city of Pleven and the district.

Some of the cultural events conducted in the district are of supra-regional and national significance.

Famous nationwide and abroad are the Pleven-based *"Ivan Radoev" Drama-and-puppet Theatre, a State Philharmonic Orchestra with an opera scene in the open, the Northern Ensemble for Folk Songs and Dances and the "Panayot Pipkov" National Art School.*

The *"Iliya Beshkov" Art Gallery* possesses a rich collection of works – paintings, graphics and sculptures. In 1984 a unique permanent exhibition-donation *"Svetlin Russev"* was inaugurated, representing a rich collection of paintings and sculptures of numerous masters of art from Bulgaria and abroad.

The concentration of cultural and historical monuments in Pleven, Dolna Mitropoliya and Nikopol, nature landmarks in Belene, etc., calls for a differentiated approach to occupy all the possible niches provided by the tourism industry.



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Assessment of the material stock and tourism-related capacity

The contribution of tourism for the local development and economy continues to be quite low. The major visitor flows consist of organized **groups in transit or staying for only a short time, which visit above all the city of Pleven and the museums connected with the Russian-Turkish war**. Foreign tourists account for a very small share. They are representatives of the groups, who visit some specialized sites (for instance the “*Persind*” Nature Park), admirers of the wild nature and the unique findings, which are of no interest to the broad public. On the other hand, however, these tourists have a higher purchasing power and stay for longer periods.

The accommodation stock is concentrated almost entirely in the district centre, the city of Pleven. Some accommodation stock, although limited, exists also on the area of three more municipalities – Belene, Gulyantsi and Cherven Bryag. In the rest of the municipalities there are no officially registered accommodation facilities.

In 2009 a total of slightly more than 73 thousand overnight stays have been registered in the district by 45,690 visitors. The utilization of the accommodation stock (beds) is very low – below 20%. The number of overnight stays demonstrates a drop as compared to 2008 (as a consequence of the economic crisis) in almost all municipalities. Despite the registered drop, however, the concentration of the overnight stays and visitors in the district centre remains quite high – above 95%, which may be explained rather by the minimum contribution of the rest of the municipalities of the district.

Number of accommodation facilities, overnight stays and occupancy rate of the tourism-related material stock in 2009

Municipalities	Accommodation facilities	Beds	Realized overnight stays		Persons staying overnight		Occupancy rate
			Total	% of the district total	Total	% of the district total	
Belene	1	145	1967	2.7%	713	1.5%	4.8
Gulyantsi	1	14	106	0.1%	96	0.2%	2.1
Pleven	10	970	69636	94.8%	45690	95.8%	20.0
Cherven Bryag	1	32	1750	2.4%	1185	2.5%	15.0
PLEVEN total	13	1161	73459		47684	100.0%	18.1

Source: NSI

The share of the registered private guest apartments and houses continues to be low, although they are a major prerequisite for development of alternative tourism and for diversification of the tourism product.

Opportunities for tourism

On the territory of the district there are 11 municipalities – *Pleven, Cherven Bryag, Knezha, Dolni Dabnik, Iskar, Dolna Mitropoliya, Gulyantsi, Nikopol, Belene, Levski and Pordim* – with a total area of 4,653.324 km².

The potential for development of tourism based only on the nature features of the district is not sufficient to help create a finished product and to counteract the competition of the neighbour districts.

The nature features in the district are the most attractive *in the municipalities of Belene, Nikopol, Gulyantsi and Cherven Bryag.*

Unique features for the area are the wetland zones along the River Danube shoreline (including the biggest Bulgarian island in the river – Belene). It appears ever more realistic, however, that a large portion of these resources might be “sacrificed” for the purposes of development of the nuclear energy generation sector in the country.

The River Iskar valley is notable for its very characteristic landscapes, forms and formations (Iskar discharges in the River Danube on the territory of the district), *especially on the area of Cherven Bryag Municipality.*

The cultural and historical heritage is concentrated mainly on the territory of the city of Pleven as an established historical, cultural and administrative centre (monuments, museums, galleries, architecture). The municipalities of Nikopol, Belene and Gulyantsi (Escus) possess quite good potential as well. They are guardians of valuable cultural and

historical heritage, which however is not well popularized and displayed (problems with the ownership rights).

An unsufficiently utilized opportunity for attraction of tourists in the district is the **subsector of congress tourism**. There are realistic prospects for development of business (congress) tourism in the city of Pleven as an established administrative centre not only districtwide, but for the entire North Bulgaria as well, possessing the required material stock, human resources and infrastructure *in situ*.

The best opportunities for development of **rural tourism in the district** exist in the municipalities of *Belene, Cherven Bryag and Pordim*. Opportunities for horse-riding tourism exist in the village of Pobeda.

Evaluation of the potential and the degree of utilization by types of tourism

<i>Types of tourism</i>	<i>Municipality</i>	Scores	
		Potential / capacity From 1 to 4	Degree of development / utilization
General conditions		3	2
<i>river/water tourism</i>	Belene, Nikopol Iskar	3 2	1
<i>cruise tourism</i>	Belene, Nikopol, Gulyantsi	2	-
<i>ecotourism</i>	Belene Cherven Bryag, Gulyantsi	3 2	1
<i>rural tourism</i>	Cherven Bryag, Belene	2	1
<i>cultural-and-historical tourism</i>	Pleven Belene, Gulyantsi, Nikopol	4 3	2 1
<i>ornithological tourism</i>	Belene, Nikopol	3	1
<i>spa and wellness tourism</i>	Pleven	2	-
<i>horse-riding tourism</i>		1	-
<i>hunting tourism</i>	Belene, Nikopol, Pordim	2	1
<i>cycling tourism</i>	Belene, Nikopol, Gulyantsi	2	1
<i>Other additional criteria, situational analysis</i>	Cherven Bryag, Gulyantsi	2	-

Legend:

4 High-quality resources of the required quality and potential, **tapped** with minor restrictions (of national and international significance).

3 High-quality resources, **not sufficiently tapped**. Improvement in terms of quantity and quality is needed (of regional significance, potential for becoming of national significance).

2 Good-quality resources having potential, **poorly to average tapped**. Considerable investments for improvement of the quality and raising of the potential are needed (of local significance and potential for becoming of regional significance).

1 Low-quality resources. **Practically untapped**, poorly known and exhibited (of local significance).

The general evaluation of the tourism-related potential in the district shows that it is evaluated as average, while the level of its utilization is even below the average and for certain types of tourism is in practice zero. **The best resources and development potentials in the district exist in the domain of cultural and historical tourism and ecotourism**, supplemented to a different degree by the other types of tourism.

It will be to the benefit of the development of tourism in Pleven District to apply an integrated regional approach, in the framework of which the individual particularities of the nature and cultural resources would be combined with due account taken of the need of their popularization for the purposes of fostering of the economic development of the district and the region. **The concentration of the cultural and historical and nature sights in several destinations of the municipalities of Belene, Nikopol, Gulyantsi, Pleven and Pordim** provides an opportunity for working out of convenient tourism itineraries. These itineraries might include besides the River Danube also several axes from the inside of the district (for instance visits to museums and sights in Pleven, Cherven Bryag and Pordim), in this way helping to unite the efforts for maximum utilization of the available resource and its popularization and capitalization.

Conclusions:

- The potential for development of natural and cultural tourism in Pleven District is not sufficiently utilized and popularized;
- Underdeveloped tourism-related infrastructure and marketing of the district;
- Underdeveloped rural tourism and ecotourism (absence of accommodation facilities in the villages);
- Popularization of culture and the cultural-and-historical heritage through construction of the necessary infrastructure are those activities, which may make culture part of the tourism product bringing added value for tourism in the district;
- Expansion of the places for accommodation and of the quality of services and their scope is a major precondition for proper supply of tourism services;
- Opportunities for alternative tourism – *wine-tourism, angling, horse-riding*

VELIKO TARNOVO DISTRICT

Natural-geographic and resource potential

Veliko Tarnovo District is situated in the central part of North Bulgaria and extends from the ridge of the Balkan Mountain Range to the south to the River Danube to the north, which is the reason for the rich variety of the landscape and the nature resources of the district.

The district possesses significant **water resources**. The rivers of greater importance traversing the area of the district (excluding the River Danube) are *Yantra, Rossitsa and Dryanovska Reka*. Some of the smaller rivers are *Studena, Eliyska, Lefedga, Stara Reka, Zlatarishka Reka, Vesselina, Bregovitsa and Golyama Reka*.

On the area of the district are constructed the **"Al. Stamboliyski" Dam** (capacity 220 million m³), "Yovkovtsi" Dam (used for water supply) and many other considerably smaller dams for irrigation. In addition to their purely economic functions the dams are also the object of short-term but regular visits by anglers and lovers of nature not only from the district, but from other regions of the country as well. Alone in the area of **Lyaskovets Municipality** there are **15 micro-dams**.

Mineral waters are a significant nature wealth for the district (the village of Ovcha Moguila, Pavlikeni Municipality; the village of Obedinenie, Polski Trambesh Municipality; the village of Voneshta Voda, Veliko Tarnovo Municipality). Unfortunately, the majority of the springs are practically unutilized. In the area of the spring at the village of Voneshta Voda has been constructed a specialized accommodation facility, used for tourism visits connected with longer stay.

The diverse nature resources, the conserved and clean environment, are components, which attract a growing number of tourists and are an important factor for development of ecotourism, rural tourism, hunting and other forms of alternative tourism. These components are typical for almost all the municipalities in the district and that is a precondition for the development of different types of tourism on their area. **One example in that respect is Elena Municipality**, which develops with success ecotourism, rural tourism and attracts lovers of alternative tourism in general.

The total area of the **protected areas** is 38,662 dca.

On the territory of Elena Municipality are situated two reserves.

On the area of Veliko Tarnovo Municipality there are a number of nature landmarks. The most famous among them is the "Savchov Chahir" reserve in the foothills of the Balkan Mountain Range, near "Voneshta Voda". Nature landmarks of high interest for tourists exist also in the area of the village of Balvan, the village of Hotnitsa and the Kapinovski Monastery.

Within the boundaries of Svishtov Municipality falls also part of the "Persina" Nature Park, covering land areas belonging to the city of Svishtov and the village of

Oresh. The area of the park land is 29,241 dca. Subject to protection are specific **wetland areas**, which are a valuable potential for ornithological tourism and ecotourism despite the fact that they are under special regime for visits and exploitation.

In the district there are **15 protected localities and 8 nature landmarks** officially declared. These are rock formations, caves, habitats of rare and protected plant species, waterfalls, and specific landscapes etc., which are of exclusive value for their inherent rarity, representativeness and esthetics.

From the analysis and assessment of the natural-geographic and resource potential of the district **it is possible to make the following summary conclusions:**

- *The natural environment is diverse and well preserved;*
- *The district possesses significant water resources (besides the River Danube) – the River Yantra and numerous dams and water basins complement this wealth;*
- *There are protected area of unique nature features, preserved plant and animal species;*
- *Rich variety of landscape forms and sites (from mountain relief to wetland areas and meanders).*

Cultural and historical heritage and potential

Veliko Tarnovo District is famous for its rich historical past and heritage. This past contributes to form on the area of the municipalities one of the biggest concentrations of cultural and historical monuments in the country. **On its territory have been declared about 140 monuments of culture of national significance (nearly 15% of the national total).** Of these almost 2/3 are situated in Veliko Tarnovo Municipality and the rest is situated in the municipalities of Svishtov and Elena. **Archeological monuments exist in almost all municipalities.** These are prehistoric, ancient and mediaeval settlements, fortresses and mounds.

In Veliko Tarnovo District are situated some of the most frequented cultural and historical sights in Bulgairia – *the symbol of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom Tsarevets, the "Samodivska charshiya", Renaissance Elena, the Roman fortresses Nikopolis as Istrum and Nove, the architectural reserve Arbanassi.* These are all sights which by themselves possess sufficient potential for tourism and if considered as an integrated product of the tourism-related resources in the district turn into a really unique attraction of great cultural-historic and emotional value.

Declared as monuments of culture of national significance are a number of architectural ensembles and single sites possessing architectural value in *the village of Arbanassi, in the cities of Lyaskovets, Svishtov and Elena and other settlements in the district.*

The village of Arbanassi is one of the most picturesque and well-preserved old settlements in the country with monumental and unique 16th-17th c. Renaissance

architecture of the houses and churches. It is situated on a rocky plateau of the same name, only some 4 km to the northeast of Veliko Tarnovo. Next to the settlement are constructed the two still operating monasteries – “Sv. Nikolay” and “Uspenie Bogorodichno”. Preserved till the present day in Arbanassi are 80 houses of unique architecture, 36 of which are national monuments of culture. **The village of Arbanassi has been declared architectura reserve and is incorporated in the UNESCO List of World Heritage.**

Sights of interest in **the city of Svishtov** are a number of architectural ensembles, the “Sv. Troitsa” Church (cathedral), built by Master Kolyo Ficheto and its tower - by Mater Gencho Kanev, the locality with the “Tekirdere” monuments, where in 1877 the Russian liberation army has disembarked. Near Svishtov are situated the remains of the ancient Roman and Early Byzantine fortress Nove.

The architectural and historical monuments of culture in Elena Municipalities are numerous – more than 400, of which 263 in the city of Elena proper.

Among the historical monuments from the antiquity stand out the **Nicopolis ad Istrum fortress, dating back to the 1st c. A.D. It is situated at some 25 km to the north of Veliko Tarnovo.**

The city of Veliko Tarnovo is undoubted pillar of tourism in the district. Heir of the ancient Bulgarian capital, offering a unique combination of anthropogenic and natural resources, the city is famous worldwide, visited by numerous groups of tourists from Bulgaria and abroad. The city is attractive for its unique location among the River Yantra meanders, beautiful nature and preserved architecture. Objects of the greatest interest, however, are the great number of unique cultural and historical monuments – the Tsarevets and Trapezitsa hills, numerous churches and museums.

In the Mediaeval fortress on the **Tsarevets Hill** on an area of 12 ha are excavated, conserved and restored to a different degree fortress walls with towers, public buildings, churches with small monastery complexes and residential buildings. **On the Trapezitsa Hill on an area of 8.5 ha have been excavated the foundations of 17 churches. On the nearby Momina Krepost Hill** of an area of 10.5 ha there are unexcavated as yet resources, but to that end are necessary further archeological studies.

A very characteristic and valuable resource for the district is the biggest concentration of **monasteries in Bulgaria – the “Tirnov Sveta Gora” – a total of 15.** This resource attracts many admirers of the pilgrimage and religious tourism.

The district is characterized by a developed and relatively dispersed **museum network**, comprising 13 museums (*4 in Veliko Tarnovo Municipality, 2 in Gorna Oryahovitsa, 3 in Pavlikeni, 3 in Svishtov and 1 in Elena*). Despite the relatively dispersed museum network the number of visits shows that they are **heavily concentrated in Veliko Tarnovo Municipality** (71% of all the visits and more than 96% of the visitors from abroad).



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Dug into the ground Church St. Nicholas, Elena



Transfiguration Monastery



Kilifarevski Monastery



Patriarchal Monastery of St. Trinity

The district offers considerable attractions for tourists, related to the **folklore, customs and traditional crafts** (for instance the "Samovodska Charshiya", Elena craftsmen etc.) and production activities (for instance vine-growing and wine-production), as well as periodical and random events (fairs, feasts, congress events etc.). A number of international and national festivals are held every year, mainly on the territory of the city of Veliko Tarnovo, thus enriching the calendar of cultural events and attracting new tourists.

Assessment of the material stock and tourism-related procurement

In recent years tourism in the district has undergone serious development, which is illustrated at the best by the increased capacity of the material stock and the number of persons, who have stayed overnight, and the number of visitors in general.

According to data from the official statistics by 2009 Veliko Tarnovo District had a stock of about 4,900 beds in 86 accommodation facilities of different categories, in which nearly 190 thousand overnight stays have been realized. **This fact makes the district the most preferred and visited tourism location in the region.** Nevertheless, the occupancy rate remains unsatisfactory – slightly above 11%, which may be attributed to the great number of newly inaugurated sites and the diminished purchasing power of the population under the circumstances of economic crisis. *Cultura and cognitive tourism and congress tourism* have

a **dominant significance for tourism in the district**. In this way the stay on the territory of the district is predominantly short or connected with the visits of transit groups.

In the currently offered opportunities for visit and recreation predominant role play the tourism hostels, concentrated in the centre cities – **Veliko Tarnovo, Svishtov and Elena**. To date the development of locations for stay outside these centres may be considered rather an exception (accommodation in rural houses in the municipalities of *Elena, Pavlikeni and Lyaskovets*, balneo-tourism in the village of Voneshta Voda)..

Number of accommodation facilities, overnight stays and occupancy rate of the tourism-related stock in 2009

Municipalities	Accommodation facilities	Beds	Realized overnight stays		Persons staying overnight		Occupancy rate
			Total	% of the district total	Total	% of the district total	
Veliko Tarnovo	44	2592	119526	63.0%	80672	70.7%	13.0
Gorna Oryahovitsa	8	263	6474	3.4%	3860	3.4%	7.0
Elena	21	965	18443	9.7%	7101	6.2%	6.7
Zlataritsa	1	12	147	0.1%	113	0.1%	3.4
Lyaskovets	1	60	3955	2.1%	3063	2.7%	18.1
Pavlikeni	3	130	7220	3.8%	1837	1.6%	15.2
Polski Trambesh	1	94	2735	1.4%	2735	2.4%	10.7
Svishtov	7	767	31160	16.4%	14743	12.9%	11.2
VELIKO TARNOVO total	86	4883	189660	100.0%	114124	100.0%	11.4

Source: NSI

The accommodation stock and realized overnight stays are concentrated mainly in Veliko Tarnovo Municipality (63% of the overnight stays and 70% of the persons, who have stayed overnight). In recent years a big **increase in the accommodation stock (beds) has been observed in the municipalities of Elena and Svishtov**, which should be reported as a positive phenomenon for tourism in the district, contributing to diversification of the opportunities and increase of the attractiveness of the sector as a whole. In 2009 in these municipalities were realized respectively 9.7% and 16.4% of the overnight stays in the district. This contributes for deconcentration of the tourist flow, as well as for improvement of the local development in these municipalities.

To date cultural tourism (more exactly cultural and cognitive tourism) and congress tourism play a dominant role in the tourism sector in the district. Under



this type of tourism the stay on the territory of the district is predominantly short and connected with transit passage of tourist groups.

A positive development is the fact that in 2009 in the small municipalities Zlataritsa and Polski Trambesh report the existence of accommodation facilities and realized overnight stays, although a small number, which is a good basis for expansion and further development.

Infrastructure and marketing of tourism

The central location of Veliko Tarnovo District in Northern Bulgaria makes it a crossroad of **transport arteries of the highest rank, conducting the national and international traffic**. The district is traversed by one of the ten Pan-European Transport Corridors PETC No. 9 in along the destination of Class I Road I-5 Russe-Byala-Veliko Tarnovo-Stara Zagora-Kardgali-the Makaza Border-crossing Point.

In east-west direction the district is serviced by the two main road arteries in Northern Bulgaria – the Class I road I-4 (Sofia-Yablanitsa-Sevlievo-Veliko Tarnovo-Targovishte-Shumen-Varna) and the Class I road I-3 (Sofia-Pleven-Byala-Russe), traversing the northern end of the district. This makes the district easily accessible and attractive also for transit tourists travelling to other destinations.

In Gorna Oryahovitsa there is an airport, which although not renovated permits carrying out of domestic and international flights, a fact which is of particular importance for tourism.

The Port of Svishtov is situated on the 554th kilometer from the River Danube estuary and on the 1825th kilometer from the Port of Regensburg. It is **the farthest southern point of the Bulgarian section of the River Danube** and the initial point of the shortest route from the River Danube to the passes across the Balkan Mountain Range and from there to Turkey, Greece and the Middle East.

For several years now a Svishtov-Zimnich ferry is in operation, which might be used as a resource for development of cross-border tourism.

The institutional structure necessary for effective management of tourism in the district is relatively well developed. Local organizations for tourism (associations) are created in Veliko Tarnovo, Elena and Byala Cherkva. The "Tsarevgrad Tarnov" Association is one of the oldest and most active organizations for tourism in the country.

Tourism Information Centres exist in Elena and Veliko Tarnovo.

Despite the numerous websites and huge opportunities provided by the innovative technologies (online registration and enquiries), the presentation of the district in Internet is, with minor exceptions, generally speaking inadequate, especially with respect to the smaller municipalities and tourism centres.

One important **advantage** of the district is the existence of a subject field "Tourism" in the Veliko Tarnovo University (existing under different forms since 1994) and of a Vocational

High School on Tourism in Veliko Tarnovo, which contributes to the high quality of the human resources in the district. In the "D. A. Tsenov" Academy in Svishtov is run a M.Sc. programme "International tourism". Nevertheless, there is no systematized information about the employment in the tourism industry (quantity, qualification, age structure, seasonal occupation).

Opportunities for development of tourism

Veliko Tarnovo District and its municipalities rank among the districts possessing the biggest potential for tourism not only in the region under review but in Northern Bulgaria as a whole. The district is gradually recovering its image of well-established destination for cognitive tourism by enriching its offer by new products.

The natural resources despite their diversity may not, as a whole, be considered to be unique and in terms of their utilization the district faces serious competition by other districts in the region. **This situation calls for** combination of the two main types of resources – natural and anthropogenic – for formation of a comprehensive finished product in order to achieve both **uniqueness and competitiveness**.

Particularly typical and valuable for the district is that it is characterized by one of the biggest concentrations of cultural and historical monuments in the country. **Although the majority of them are situated mainly on the territory of Veliko Tarnovo Municipality**, they attract many tourists. Supplemented by the potential of the rest of the municipalities, this cultural and historical heritage is an excellent precondition for the future of the sector in the district as a whole.

The possibilities and resources for **rural tourism in the district are best developed mainly in the municipalities of Elena and Veliko Tarnovo**, which offer well-preserved nature, unique architecture and attractive accommodation facilities ("Arbanassi" Architectural Reserve). In recent years development of **rural tourism** has been observed, although on a small scale, in the municipalities of Pavlikeni, Lyaskovets, Veliko Tarnovo and Gorna Oryahovitsa.

Specific resources and interesting development opportunities are offered by the so-called "wine-tourism" – in the municipalities of Lyaskovets and Suhindol, which possess the necessary potential and development base *in situ*.

In the district there are many (about 30) **localizations and centres for development of recreation and tourism**. The settlements with well manifested tourism-related functions currently are the already famous tourism centres - Veliko Tarnovo, Arbanassi and Svishtov, Voneshta Voda (balneological tourism) and Elena (mountain tourism).

To date the main centres for development of tourism are as follows:

- **Cultural and cognitive tourism** (Veliko Tarnovo, Arbanassi, Svishtov, Elena);
- **Ecotourism and rural tourism** (Veliko Tarnovo, Elena, Pavlikeni, Lyaskovets);

- **Balneological tourism** (the village of Voneshta Voda, Veliko Tarnovo Municipality);
- **Mountain tourism** (Elena);
- **Wine-tourism** – Lyaskovets (with its museum of vegetable-growing and vine-growing), Suhindol, Karaissen;

The tourism-related potential of the district is evaluated as excellent and its level of utilization is above the average for the Danube region of the country. Capacity for development of tourism exists practically in every municipality of the district, but the high-quality, attractive resource potential is relatively strongly concentrated in two municipalities – *Veliko Tarnovo and Elena and to a certain extent in Svishtov Municipality.*

Evaluation of the potential and the degree of utilization by types of tourism

Types of tourism	Municipality	Scores	
		Potential / capacity From 1 to 4	Degree of development / utilization
General conditions		4	3
<i>river/cruise tourism</i>	Svishtov Veliko Tarnovo	3 2	2
<i>ecotourism</i>	Elena Pavlikeni	3 2	1
<i>rural tourism</i>	Elena, Veliko Tarnovo Lyaskovets, Pavlikeni	4 3	2 1
<i>cultural-historical tourism</i>	Veliko Tarnovo Elena, Svishtov	4 3	3 1
<i>ornithological tourism</i>	Svishtov	2	1
<i>cruise tourism</i>	Svishtov	3	1
<i>spa and wellness tourism</i>	Veliko Tarnovo	3	1
<i>horse-riding tourism</i>	Lyaskovets, Veliko Tarnovo	3	
<i>hunting tourism</i>	Veliko Tarnovo, Elena, Zlataritsa Pavlikeni, Сухиндол	3 2	2 1
<i>cycling tourism</i>	Elena, Veliko Tarnovo, Lyaskovets	2	1
Other A.D.ditional forms of alternative tourism (<i>alpinism, paragliding, wine tourism etc.</i>)	Elena, Lyaskovets, Pavlikeni, Suhindol	3	1

Legend:

4 High-quality resources of the required quality and potential, **tapped** with minor restrictions (of national and international significance).

3 High-quality resources, **not sufficiently tapped**. Improvement in terms of quantity and quality is needed (of regional significance, potential for becoming of national significance).

2 Good-quality resources having potential, **poorly to average tapped**. Considerable investments for improvement of the quality and raising of the potential are needed (of local significance and potential for becoming of regional significance).

1 Low-quality resources. **Practically untapped**, poorly known and exhibited (of local significance).

The best resources and development potentials in the district have the following types of tourism – cultural and cognitive tourism (Veliko Tarnovo, Arbanassi), followed by the ecotourism and rural tourism (Arbanassi, Elena), supplemented to a different degree by the opportunities of the remaining types of tourism (hunting, wine-tasting, spa tourism)..

Conclusions

The municipalities of Veliko Tarnovo District possess exclusively favorable possibilities and potential for development of tourism. These opportunities are determined by the existence and combination of diverse and attractive natural and anthropogenic conditions and resources with great recreation and cognitive potential.

The analysis of the current situation in tourism despite the strong dynamics and the impact of the economic crisis make it possible to formulate the following findings :

- Many of the elements of tourism supply in the district have not been as yet incorporated in integrated products and are not known on the tourism market. This applies above all to the available nature attractions and resources in the municipalities of Veliko Tarnovo, Lyaskovets and Pavlikeni.
- Particularly important for the **development of tourism are the resources and monuments connected with the cultural and historical heritage** (*Tsarevets, monasteries, Nikopolis ad Istrum, Nove*).
- The transport infrastructure in the district presumes easy access and convenient transport services by road, rail, air and water, with a possibility for change from one type of transport to another.
- The existence of an international airport is a great advantage for the district, providing exclusive opportunities for development.

- The district possesses perfect accommodation facilities and despite the low occupancy rate and short duration of the stays it serves as a fundamental resource for future development.

Good indicators about the effectiveness of the tourism industry are the poorly manifested seasonal fluctuations, the diversified and balanced structure of the visitors by nationality at high share of not typical for Bulgaria visitor flows (*from Japan, France, Italy, Spain, the USA*).

The existence of a significant and diverse potential for tourism attractions related to the folklore, customs, traditions and culture in the district contributes for diversification of the supply and increase of the length of stay.

RUSSE DISTRICT

Natural-geographic and resource potential

Russe District has a number of advantages in terms of tourism destination.

One of the advantages of the district is its transport and geographic location.

Besides its being situated on the biggest transport main route in Europe – the River Danube – the district is situated also on the junction of other important transport corridors as well. The Danube Bridge is a large-scale transport communication link by road and rail to neighbouring Romania and Europe. At a distance of only 72 km to the north of Russe is situated the Romanian capital city Bucharest with its 2.5 million inhabitants. In the vicinity of Russe is situated the Shtraklevo Airfield, which although not in operation currently is adapted for regular domestic and international cargo and passenger flights.





Russe District is characterized by exclusively rich biodiversity. **On the territory of the district fall six protected localities, four nature landmarks, one reserve and one Nature Park.**

The "Russenski Lom" Nature Park is situated at some 20 km from the city of Russe and extends over an area of 3,408 ha in the valley of the Russenski Lom River and its tributaries Cherni Lom, Beli Lom and Mali Lom. The rocks in the canyon are covered by about 60 tree and bush species. The rivers are the habitat of 22 fish species, 10 amphibian species and 19 reptile species. **The diversity of bird species is the greatest - 193 nesting species, 127 of which are included in the Red Book of Bulgaria or are declared as endangered on European scale.** These are Ciconia negra, Neophron percnopterus (the farthest north habitat of this species in Europe); among the birds of prey species the most frequently encountered are the Buteo rufinus and peregrine, Aquila chrysaetos, Aquila clanga and Falco cherrug. Out of the 68 mammal species registered in Bulgaria 62 species may be found on the area of the park. *The caves, holes in the rocks and forest sections are inhabited by 26 bat species.*

Part of the **"Beli Lom" Reserve** falls on the area of Russe District. Protected there are typical for the region plant and animal ecosystems.

The wetland zones, which are of high ornithological significance, are situated along the Russenski Lom River valley ("Russenski Lom" Nature Park) and on the area of the nature landmark "Ribarnitsite" near the city of Vratsa. The "Mechka" fish nurseries (at the village of Mechka, Ivanovo Municipality), together with the lakes Srebarna, Durankulak and Skablensko and another four wetland zones serve as refuge for birds classified as endangered species worldwide.

The Danube shoreline on the **territory of Ivanovo Municipality is one of the most attractive sections on the Bulgarian bank of the river.**

Besides being a nature sight, the "Orlova Chuka" cave is an archeological reserve of national significance. In it have been discovered remains of prehistoric people, bears and other animal species.

Russe District as a tourism destination is famous above all by the following nature resources:

- ***The Danube shoreline***, which provides conditions for development of different types of tourism and accompanying services. The Danube shoreline offers excellent conditions for water tourism, ornithological tourism and ecotourism.
- ***The "Russenski Lom" Nature Park.*** The rich biodiversity and landscape, the unique cultural and historical heritage, make the park an attractive centre for development of domestic and international tourism, recreation and development of research and development activities, including environmental education.
- ***"Polomieto"*** (to a large extent overlapping in area with the "Russenski Lom" Nature Park) is rich in cultural and historical monuments of world, national and local significance

– the Ivanovski Skalni Cherkvi (Ivanovski Churches in the Rocks)” Archeological Reserve under the auspices of UNESCO, the “Mediaeval town of Cherven” Archeological Reserve, which have a favorable impact on the development of different types of tourism – cognitive, ecotourism, angling, cycling or horse-riding.

- ***The "Beli Lom" Nature Reserve***, situated along the River Beli Lom valley, to the southeast of the city of Vetovo in the “Golyamata Koriya” locality. Its major function is preservation of the characteristic for the Ludogorie area forest ecosystems with their inherent plant and animal genetic stock and rare species.
- ***Fish nurseries, which are the object of ornithological tourism, as follows:***
 - o ***At the village of Mechka*** – *ornithological wetland, nesting place* water and other birds; it is situated in the “Stalpishte” locality near the village of Mechka on the River Danube banks.
 - o ***At the city of Vetovo*** (nature landmark). They are located along the River Beli Lom valley on the land areas of the city of Vetovo and the city of Tsar Kaloyan and are intended for conservation of the habitats of the Ruddy Shelduck.
- ***The "Orlova Chuka" cave*** (nature landmark). It is situated at 35 km to the south of Russe and at 3 km to the northeast of the village of Pepelina, in the River Cherni Ossam valley. The cave has an area of 80 ha and is the second longest in Bulgaria – more than 12 km together with the galleries. The passable length of the cave is about 1300 m. It is inhabited by 15 species of cave fauna, including 8 bat species.
- ***The "Kalimok-Brashlen" wetland***, protected locality, covering also area from the neighboring Silistra District. Its major function is to preserve characteristic for the Danube marshland ecosystems with their inherent flora and fauna species.
- ***The ecosystem along the River Yantra valley***. Beautiful nature formations, situated on the territory of two municipalities – *Byala and Tsenovo*.

Cultural and historical heritage and potential

The cultural and historical heritage and the architectural heritage are preserved and relatively well studied. The monuments of the cultural and historical heritage as basic tourism resources are concentrated mainly on the territory of the municipalities of Russe and Ivanovo. Some less attractive sights of the cultural and historical heritage are situated in the municipalities of Dve Moguili, Vetovo and Byala.



Exhibits of Borovo Treasury

*Proof for the cultural and historical heritage of the district is provided by the discovered archeological artifacts. From one inscription on stone it is evident that the city of Russe **was founded during the time of Emperor Vespasian (69-79 A.D.)**. Dating back to that period is also the Roman castle "Sexaginta Pristis" – forerunner of the modern city. Part of the mobile monuments of culture is on display in the local museum of history. The repair of the "Pantheon of the heroes of the Bulgarian national revival" has been completed. .*

In the city of Russe are situated some of the most remarkable architectural monuments and ensembles, built at the end of the 19th c. and the early 20th c. A total of 267 buildings have been placed under protection as monuments of culture. These unique buildings are part of peerless cultural and historical heritage. Thanks to the broad spectrum of economic and spiritual contacts with the countries along the River Danube, Russe has developed as a city with specific European appearance and traditions, an integral part of the European space.

In Russe there are multiple **cultural institutions** – *drama theatre, opera-and-symphony society, "State repertoire theatre", regional museum of history, regional public library*. An institution of great significance for building the human resources of culture in Russe is the *"Prof. Vesselin Stoyanov" National Art School*.

Some other characteristic cultural and historical monuments in the municipality are the "Pantheon of the heroes of the Bulgarian revival", the museum-houses "Baba Tonka" and "Zakhari Stoyanov", the Russe Settlement Mound, the Museum of Urban Lifestyle – "The Kaliopa House", Museum of Transport in the city of Russe.

In the city of Russe are organized a number of festivals of international, national and regional significance.

There is a well developed network of museum exhibitions (20) with the Regional Museum of History – Russe. The most outstanding among them are the Museum of Urban Lifestyle – "The Kaliopa House" and the Museum of Transport, which are unique for the country.

Sights, which inspire great interest among the tourists, are the "Ivanovo Churches in the rocks" and the "Medieval town of Cherven".

Archeological remains from that time are displayed in two cultural and historical areas – the *"Ivanovo Churches in the Rocks"* architectural reserve and the *"Medieval town of Cherven"*. The former is included in the UNESCO List of protected world monuments of culture. The *"Ivanovo Churches in the Rocks"* is an important religious centre since the 11th c. There are a number of preserved churches in the rocks, individual cells and unique murals from the end of the 14th c. It is situated at a distance of 4 km from the village of Ivanovo. The access to the site is very good, there is a well marked pedestrian pathway. **The "Medieval town of Cherven" is situated at about 14 km from the "Ivanovo Churches in the rocks".** It is the biggest and best preserved in its authentic state fortress from the epoch of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom.

One may get to the "Big Nisovski Monastery" – "Sv. Konstantin and Elena" (11th c.) – within some 1.5 hour on foot from the village of Nisovo along the River Malki Lom valley. In this area is situated also the "Jewish cave". The village of Nisovo is situated at 35 km to the east of the village of Ivanovo.

The "Monastery in the rocks" at the village of Bassarbovo" is situated at 12 km from Russe on the road towards the village of Ivanovo. It serves as an excellent supplement on the subject of the history of monasteries along the River Russenski Lom valley and is an attraction as the only operating monastery in the rocks in Bulgaria.

Assessment of the material stock and tourism-related supply

The tourism-related infrastructure in the district is relatively well constructed. The city of Russe possesses a very good hotel accommodation stock. Significant **upgrading of the hostelry-related product** has been observed in the recent several years. An important factor for the improvement of the hostelry product is the increased competition and diversification in the sector. This development ranks the district on the second place in the region in terms of realized overnight stays and number of persons, who have stayed overnight with respectively 21% and 24%.

In the period 2003-2004 on the area of the high-value attractions, such as the "Cherven Fortress" and the "Ivanovo churches in the rocks" the access to the tourism sites was improved with funding under the PHARE Programme "Cultural tourism" and construction of tourism-related infrastructure was launched – parking areas, public catering facilities, sanitary facilities, information boards and services, power and water supply, which additionally enhances the attractiveness of the sites.

Number of accommodation facilities, overnight stays and occupancy rate of the tourism-related stock in 2009.

Municipalities	Accommodation facilities	Beds	Realized overnight stays		Persons staying overnight		Occupancy rate
			Total	% from the district total	Total	% from the district total	
Byala	3	65	1896	1.5%	618	0.7%	9.6
Dve Moguili	1	30	677	0.5%	582	0.6%	6.2
Ivanovo	10	81	1543	1.2%	1216	1.3%	5.2
Russe	36	1727	126491	96.8%	88514	97.3%	21.1
RUSSE total	50	1903	130607	100.0%	90930	100.0%	19.8

Source: NSI

In the city of Russe there is a specialized educational establishment for training of personnel in the field of hostelry and tourism – a vocational high school.

In the recent years the ***tourist flow*** shows steady increase, oriented towards Russe Municipality (97% of the overnight stays and number of visitors in the district). This growth corresponds to both the development of the accommodation stock (beds) and the growing interest in the tourist sights. In the structure of the tourist flow realized within the tourism areal of the district domestic tourism prevails (88% of the visitors and 85% of the overnight stays) without significant disparities between the average duration of the stay for Bulgarian and foreign visitors.

The seasonal aspect of tourism in Russe District is poorly manifested. In the case of Bulgarian visitors weaker summer season is observed, typical for urban tourism (predominantly congress tourism). The peak season for foreign tourists is summer – 35% of the overnight stays. The average duration of stay shows no significant fluctuations by quarters.

The main characteristics of the ***structure of tourism activities*** (tour operators, tourist agencies, information facilities) are as follows:

- The structure of the activities in Russe Municipality and more particularly in the city of Russe, where 70% of the companies active in this sector are concentrated, is determinant for the entire Russe District;
- In the rest of the municipalities supplementary tourism activities take place in relationship with those in the cultural and economic centre, the city of Russe;
- The family hostelry (including rural and ecotourism) is underdeveloped as yet both in Russe and in the other municipalities of the district.

Opportunities for tourism

The nature and cultural features of the district, supplemented by its history and location, make the region an interesting place to visit and provide ample opportunities for development of the different types of tourism.

The majority of the municipalities in Russe District have an outlet on the River Danube and at the same time possess also other natural (the basin of the rivers Beli Lom, Cherni Lom, Mali Lom and Russenski Lom) and manmade water reservoirs. This situation preconditions the existence of traditions in angling, fish-nursing, fish food and production of frozen and canned fish products. The exotic of the environment and lifestyle in the *so-called "fishermen's villages"*, combined with the opportunities for development of water sports, constitute a considerable resource for enrichment of the supplied tourism product.

The preserved traditions in the local crafts may be offered as a tourist attraction, especially in the villages of the district – cooperage, wood-working, stone mining and processing using traditional methods, weaving, knitting and embroidery using traditional motifs. The best conditions for rural tourism exist in the municipalities and settlements in the vicinity of other attractions, such as the Ivanovo monasteries, fishermen's villages and water

reservoirs. In Russe District these conditions are most favorable in the municipalities of Ivanovo, Dve Moguili, Vetovo and Byala.

The real estates – sights of the cultural and historical heritage in the district, which have been placed under protective regime vary in terms of type, **degree of popularization** (*display, respectively modern usage and accessibility*) and **visiting rates**.

- ***A specific resource for tourism is the rich and unique for the country architecture of the old Russe from the end of the 19th c. and the early 20th c.*** in Baroque and Secession style, the work of Italian, Austrian, German and Bulgarian architects. *An emblematic building for Russe is the "Dohodno Zdanie" building (presently "Sava Ognyanov" State Theatre).*
- ***The network of museum exhibitions (20) with the Regional Museum of History Russe is well developed.*** Worth noting among them is the Museum of Urban Lifestyle – the "Kaliopa House" and the Museum of Transport, **which are unique for the country**. One should mention here also the **"Sexaginta Prista" exposition in the open** and the "Pantheon of the heroes of the Bulgarian revival".
- From the ***anthropogenic tourism-related resources*** in Northern Bulgaria about 30 sites are situated on the territory of Russe District.



Koprivetski Monastery St. Petka



Ivanovo rock monastery

- ***The "Ivanovo churches in the rocks" are under the auspices of UNESCO.*** They are situated at 21 km to the southwest of Russe, near the village of Ivanovo, at a height of up to 36 m above the water level in the vertical rocky banks of the Russenski Lom River. Created **in the 12th c.** they form a monastery complex of nearly 20 medieval churches, chapels and monk's cells, in which the archeologists have discovered more than 300 premises.

- ***The cultural and historical heritage as a major tourism-related resource is heavily concentrated*** above all on the territory of the municipalities Russe and Ivanovo and to a lesser extent in the municipalities Dve Moguili and Byala.

The district is famous for its rich traditions – local folklore, lifestyle, crafts, rituals, food etc., which are also a valuable resource for tourism.

In the district there are a number of important for the ornithology locations (the fish-nurseries near the villages of Mechka and Vetovo, the canyons of the rivers Cherni, Beli, Mali and Russenski Lom, etc.), which attract the lovers of this type of tourism.

Besides the district centre, the city of Russe, good tourism potential possess also the municipalities of Ivanovo and Byala. The well-established tourism destinations in the district are as follows:

- **Cultural and cognitive tourism:** Russe, Ivanovo, Byala
- **Congress tourism:** Russe
- **Ecotourism and rural tourism:** Ivanovo, Byala
- **Ornithological tourism:** Ivanovo, Byala

Evaluation of the potential and degree of utilization by types of tourism

<i>Types of tourism</i>	<i>Municipality</i>	<i>Scores</i>	
		<i>Potential / capacity From 1 to 4</i>	<i>Degree of development / utilization</i>
<i>Общи условия</i>		<i>4</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>River/water tourism</i>	Russe Ivanovo	4 3	2
<i>Cruise tourism</i>	Russe	4	1
<i>Ecotourism</i>	Ivanovo, Slivo Pole, Vetovo	3	1
<i>Rural tourism</i>	Byala, Ivanovo, Dve Moguili, Vetovo	2	1
<i>Cultural and historical tourism</i>	Russe, Ivanovo Byala	4 2	2
<i>Ornithological tourism</i>	Russe, Slivo Pole, Ivanovo, Vetovo	3 4	2
<i>Spa and wellness tourism</i>	Russe	1	1
<i>Horse-riding tourism</i>			
<i>Hunting tourism</i>	Tsenovo, Vetovo	2	1

<i>Cycling tourism</i>	Russe, Tsenovo	2	1
Other A.D.ditional forms of alternative tourism (<i>alpinism, paragliding, wine-tourism etc.</i>)	Borovo, Russe, Ivanovo	2	0

Legend:

4 High-quality resources of the required quality and potential, **tapped** with minor restrictions (of national and international significance).

3 High-quality resources, **not sufficiently tapped**. Improvement in terms of quantity and quality is needed (of regional significance, potential for becoming of national significance).

2 Good-quality resources having potential, **poorly to average tapped**. Considerable investments for improvement of the quality and raising of the potential are needed (of local significance and potential for becoming of regional significance).

1 Low-quality resources. **Practically untapped**, poorly known and exhibited (of local significance).

Some of the economic activities of the district economy also possess potential for enriching the supplied tourism product with additional attractions and offer of opportunities for recreation.

- *Fush-nurseries and angling* – opportunities for organizing sports angling
- *Vineyard-growing, wine production and fruit-growing* – opportunities for tasting of wines of local make, participation in the vintage and other attractive forms of participation in agricultural activities.

RAZGRAD DISTRICT

Although it has no outlet on the River Danube, the district possesses very rich and interesting natural and anthropogenic resources, which may complement the tourism supply in the region.

Natural-geographic and resource potential

Razgrad District is situated in the easternpart of the Danube Hilly Plain and comprises parts of the Ludogorsko Plateau and the Razgrad and Samuilov Heights, as well as the River Beli Lom valley.

The district suffers from shortage of **water resources** – all the rivers except for the River Beli Lom are temporary. The biggest dam in the district is "Beli Lom" Dam (25.5 million m³). On the territory of Ispcrih Municipality is situated the biggest Karst spring in that part of the



country – the years-long Karst processes have caused the emergence of a unique complex of Karst forms: caves, pot-holes, niches in the rocks, cracks, etc.

Protected areas

According to the requirements for this regime, on the territory of the district despite the rich resources only two categories of protected areas have been identified: protected localities and nature landmarks.

As **protected localities** (a total of 6) have been declared mainly centuries-old forests and troilii fields.

As **nature landmarks** have been declared characteristic formations (a total of 3), situated **mainly in Razgrad Municipality**.

On the territory of Tsar Kaloyan Municipality is situated part of the “Beli Lom” Nature Reserve. In the reserve have been identified 50 build species, among which the rarely seen Neophron percnopterus, Falco, Ciconia ciconia etc. In the reserve there are numerous caves and niches, in some of which have been preserved remains of old Christian monasteries and churches, which are not yet properly studied and displayed.

One very characteristic resource of the district is the “Voden” Game Reserve, which possesses big nature potential and attracts tourists, who are better off in terms of solvency. .

Although there are not many protected areas in the district, the ones that have been declared as such and the unique undulating relief and landscape forms of the Ludogorie area are a good basis for attracting tourists and development of alternative tourism (ecotourism, rural tourism), especially in the smaller settlements.

Cultural and historical heritage

Razgrad District is characterized by extremely rich cultural and historical heritage and numerous monuments of culture, which form the main tourism resource of the district and inspire serious interest in the visitors.

In the district there are about **1200 immobile monuments**, which together with the thousands of objects and artifacts serve as proof for the rich mineral and spiritual culture of the tribes and people, who have lived in the Ludogorie area during the past millennia.

The earlies traces of human presence in the district date back to the early period of the Old Stone Age (500 000 - 200 000 B.C.). In the vicinity of Razgrad was discovered one of the biggest deposits of flint tools in Southeast Europe. From the stone-copper age (5000 – 4000 B.C.) and the bronze age (3000-2000 B.C.) are known more than 100 settlement places, shaped as mounds, whereat the biggest and the highest are situated *in the land areas of the villages of Sveshtari, Malak Porovets and Samuil*.

Nowadays these traces of the ancient past are displayed in architectural and archeological reserves, some of which are known all over the world.

The national historical and archeological reserve “Sboryanovo” with an area of 6470 dca and security zone of 13,304 dca *in Isperih Municipality (between the villages of Malak Porovets and Sveshtari)*. Within its boundaries is situated **one of the nine monuments of culture in Bulgaria, which are under the protection of UNESCO – the Thracian Vault** at the village of Sveshtari, declared for monument of culture of the cultural and historical heritage in 1985.

The historical and archeological reserve “Abritus” in the city of Razgrad with an area of 1000 dca is a *monument of culture of national significance*. It presents the fortification system of the ancient town, which has been studied and partially restored, displayed and accessible for tourists.

The clock tower was constructed in 1764. It is the symbol of the city of Razgrad and is one of the most remarkable and impressive monuments in the district.

The “Ibrahim Pasha” Mosque in Razgrad is a unique monument of the Islamic culture (1614) and is the second biggest in Bulgaria. Besides its role as a religious temple, it has its contribution for the preservation of the cultural, spiritual life and traditions of the Muslims.

The cultural and historical monuments are estimated as ever more important factors for development of tourism. **It is namely the rich cultural heritage that is the main advantage of the sector in Razgrad District.** Its adequate popularization might play a decisive role for turning these monuments into attractive object of tourism and a tool for local development.

The modern appearance of the cultural life is determined above all by the sites and activities developed and operating in the district centre – the city of Razgrad. The “Iliya Petrov” Art Gallery in Razgrad possesses a collection of 2000 paintings, the work of predominantly Bulgarian artists of the early 20th c.

Another famous institution is *the Museum of History in Isperih*, which looks after the unique historical and archeological reserve “Sboryanovo”. Museums of history exist also in the *city of Kubrat and the village of Harsovo, Samuil Municipality*.

Other sites of interest are the *ethnographic museums and complexes in the village of Pobit Kamak*, Razgrad Municipality, and the “*Iliya Yovchev*” *museum-house in the city of Loznitsa* with its exhibits of the lifestyle in the past.

Numerous festivals are conducted mainly in the city of Razgrad.

Infrastructure and tourism-related potential

The state of the road infrastructure and the accessibility to the district by transport are relatively good and is no exception as regards the problems identified for the rest of the districts in the region (depreciated infrastructure).

Razgrad District has the advantage to be services by the **Class I road I-2 *Russe-Razgrad-Shumen*** (European category **E-70**), which forms one of the traditionally established axes in Northeast Bulgaria – the regional transport corridor ***Russe-Varna***.

The Class II road II-49 ***Targovishte-Razgrad-Kubrat-Tutrakan*** is in relatively the best state-of-repair of the entire regional road network in the district.

A characteristic feature of the district is the shortage of roads of a higher class.

In recent years active measures have been undertaken for popularization and marketing of the tourism-related resources of the district.

In Razgrad Municipality there is an operating Centre for Tourist Information. In 2004 a Consultative Board on Tourism was set up in the municipality.

Assessment of the material stock and tourism-related facilities

The accommodation stock in the district is concentrated on the territory of two municipalities – Razgrad and Iserih. At these locations are realized respectively 87% and 13% of the overnight stays. This is attributed to the concentration of resources and human capacity in these municipalities. On the territory of the remaining 5 municipalities there are no officially registered accommodation facilities.

Number of accommodation facilities, overnight stays and occupancy rate of the tourism-related material stock in 2009

Municipality	Accommodation facilities	Beds	Realized overnight stays		Persons staying overnight		Occupancy rate
			Total	% of the district total	Total	% of the district total.	
Iserih	5	150	3079	13.3%	1791	12.0%	6.4
RazgrA.D.	15	681	20149	86.7%	13170	88.0%	9.3
RAZGRAD total	20	831	23228	100.0%	14961	100.0%	8.8

Source: NSI

For the purpose of comprehensive utilization of the existing features for development of tourism activities the municipalities in the district have implemented a number of projects for improving the attractiveness and infrastructure.

A number of activities have been realized for upgrading of the attractiveness, accessibility and the physical environment of the major tourism sights – the “Abritus” Architectural Reserve, the “Sboryanovo” Historical and Architectural Reserve, the “Ibrahim Pasha” Mosque, etc.

Razgrad Municipality gives a good example in this respect. The Municipal Council has approved a development conceptual paper for development of the “Pchelina” locality as a

zone for recreation, sports and tourism. The conditions for recreation and entertainment in the zone have been significantly improved with the help of external funding.

Till now the main portion of the visits to the district are of short duration and comprise mainly visits by groups in transit. The objective is in the future to diversify and popularize the local potential with a view to fostering longer stay of the tourists.

In the tourism-related strategy of the district are formulated two main development directions – to act as a “buffer” of the Black Sea destination and development of an independent regional product together with the adjacent districts Silistra and Targovishte. The attainment of these objectives will contribute also to consolidating the accommodation stock (number of beds) in the district.

Opportunities for tourism

The outstanding particularities of the tourism-related characteristics of the area of the district have been determined by the preserved nature features and the rich cultural and historical heritage, which demonstrate different degrees of utilization and importance for the development of the municipalities in the framework of the district.

On the territory of Razgrad District there are favorable conditions for development of the tourism industry on the basis of the cultural and historical heritage and nature features of the area. The opportunities for that are predetermined by the closeness of the “Sboryanovo” Archeological Reserve and the “Voden” Game Reserve, the remains of the ancient town “Abritus”, the potential of the “Pchelina” locality as a zone for recreation, sports and tourism, as well as the numerous historical, ethnographic, cultural and natural science museums in the municipalities of the district.

In recent years certain development has been noted also with respect to the **rural tourism in the district**, although mainly through purchase of houses and plots in the villages from the *municipalities of Razgrad, Loznitsa and Isperih*. Great potential for development of ecotourism and rural tourism exists in the *municipalities of Tsar Kaloyan and Loznitsa in their capacity of municipalities with rich and well-preserved nature potential and good accessibility by transport*.

Important prerequisites for development of tourism in the district are as follows:

- Geographic closeness to the big resorts on the seaside, to the old capitals and the river Danube;
- Existence of monuments of culture of national and international significance (“Sboryanovo” Architectural Reserve and “Abritus”);
- Network of historical museum sites and ethnographic complexes;
- Renovated campus for sports and short-stay tourism – “Pchelina” near Razgrad;
- Newly constructed and renovated material stock of the accommodation facilities;

- Diversity of traditions and opportunities for alternative activities.

Currently the tourism-related resources and infrastructure in the district are concentrated in the following forms and localizations:

- **Cultural and cognitive tourism:** "Sboryanovo" (Isperih), "Abritus" (Razgrad);
- **Hunting tourism:** "Voden" Reserve (Razgrad), Isperih, Kubrat;
- **Horse-riding tourism:** Razgrad;
- **Rural and ecotourism:** Tsar Kaloyan, Isperih, Kubrat – underdeveloped potential

Evaluation of the potential and degree of utilization by types of tourism

Types of tourism	Municipality	Scores	
		Potential / capacity From 1 to 4	Degree of development / utilization
General conditions		3	2
<i>Ecotourism</i>	Tsar Kaloyan Kubrat	3 2	1
<i>Rural tourism</i>	Kubrat, Loznitsa	2	1
<i>Cultural and historical tourism</i>	Isperih, Razgrad	4	3
<i>Ornithological tourism</i>	Tsar Kaloyan	2	1
<i>Spa and wellness tourism</i>	Razgrad		
<i>Horse-riding tourism</i>	Razgrad	3	1
<i>Hunting tourism</i>	Razgrad, Isperih, Kubrat	3	1
<i>Cycling tourism</i>	Kubrat, Loznitsa, Razgrad	1	0
Other A.D.itional forms of alternative tourism (alpinism, paragliding, wine-tourism etc.)	Kubrat, Loznitsa, Tsar Kaloyan	2	1

Legend:

4 High-quality resources of the required quality and potential, **tapped** with minor restrictions (of national and international significance).

3 High-quality resources, **not sufficiently tapped**. Improvement in terms of quantity and quality is needed (of regional significance, potential for becoming of national significance).

2 Good-quality resources having potential, **poorly to average tapped**. Considerable investments for improvement of the quality and raising of the potential are needed (of local significance and potential for becoming of regional significance).

1 Low-quality resources. **Practically untapped**, poorly known and exhibited (of local significance).

Razgrad Municipality possesses cultural and historical heritage **of world significance, as well as resources for development of elitarian tourism** (horse-riding, hunting). Sufficiently good infrastructure and offer of comprehensive products for formation of specialized itineraries for systematic attraction of tourists are as yet not in place.

The general evaluation of the tourism-related potential in the district shows that its is estimated as average and the level of its utilization is even below the average and for certain types of tourism is practically zero. **The best resources and development potentials for cultural and historical tourism exist in the municipalities of Razgrad and Isperih**, complemented to a different degree by hunting and ecotourism.

SILISTRA DISTRICT

Natural-geographic and resource potential

The territory of Silistra District covers parts of Dobrudga, the Ludogorie area and the eastern part of the Danube Undulating Plain. The predominant surface area below 200 m above sea level is flat, strongly indented by dry valleys, which impart the relief its undulating nature. To the north the plateaus end with steep banks, some 100 m high. Between the shoreline and River Danube nature has formed three famous lowlands along the River Danube – Poberezhie, Popino-Garvanska and *Aydemiska*. *In the southwestern part of latter is situated the "Srebarna" lake-reserve.*

This variety of relief forms and landscapes predetermines the existence of diverse and specific nature resources in the district, which possess big potential for development of tourism activities.

Numerous islands, characterized by their rich flora and unique habitats of bird species exist along the River Danube shoreline in the district.

The fauna in the district is characterized by marked diversity in terms of both mammals and birds. Typical for the area are the steppe animal species (small rodents). Although gravely diminished, populations of bigger mammals are also present and act as a valuable resource for the lovers of hunting tourism.

The River Danube shoreline with its wetland zones and islands is of exclusive importance for a number of *endangered bird species of world significance*¹. These zones have been identified as *important ornithological habitats* and are elements of value of the *European*

¹ *Pelecanus crispus, Phalacrocorah pygmeus, Anser erythropus, Branta ruficollis, Aythya nyroca* *Crex crex*, etc.

ecological network NATURE 2000. The "Srebarna" Lake², the "Kalimok" Marshland and the Pozharevo Island are the district's representatives in the **national system of "Important for ornithology wetlands"**.

The traditionally rich and specific ornithological fauna of the area, in combination with the other natural features, is a resource of high potential for popularization and study of the ecosystems in the district. Typical for the area are ecosystems and landscapes, habitats of rare and endangered flora and fauna species, which are of interest to visit and observe.

There are three categories of protected areas³ falling under the provisions of the *Regime for Protection of the Territory – managed reserves, protected localities and nature landmarks* (a total of 11 protected areas with a total area of 7 392.5 ha).

The "Srebarna" reserve possesses the biggest nature-related and scientific value, as well as potential as a place worth visiting. It is situated on the River Danube bank. It comprises the Devnya Island with an area of 91.6 ha, agricultural land of a total area of 135,0 ha in *the land of the villages of Srebarna and Vetren*, as well as marshland area of 649,8 ha in the land of the village of Srebarna and the River Danube aquifer with an area of 25,7 ha. **In 1977 it was declared biosphere reserve according to the criteria of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.** In 1983 it was incorporated in the list of sights of the world cultural heritage under the auspices of UNESCO.

The "Srebarna" Reserve is one of **the three Bulgarian wetlands of global significance**. In 1989 it was included in the list of important ornithological locations in Europe and **in 1993 – in the list of world and cultural heritage at risk**.

The "Kalimok" fish nurseries belong to the habitats of water birds of international significance. They are of world significance for the *Aythya nyroca*, which builds here its nests, and as a resting place for the *Pelecanus crispus*. The protected locality is included in a project developed by Tutrakan Municipality for popularization and use of the water and eco potentials of the municipality as resources for attraction of tourists and development of tourism.

Other localities and landmarks, which stand out as sights possessing resource for development of tourism in the district, are as follows:

"Garvanski Blata" protected locality, total area 228.5 ha

"Kalimok-Brashlen" protected locality, total area 5 952.3 ha

"Blatoto-the village of Malak Preslavets" protected locality, area 147.3 ha

² The managed reserve "Srebarna" is the sole location in the country where *Pelecanus crispus* build their nests, where one may come across *Pelecanus orocrotalus*, *Phalacrocorax carbo* and *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*, *Egretta alba*, *Ardea purpurea*, *Ardea cinerea*, *Cygnus olor*, *Aythya nyroca*, *Circus aeruginosus*, *Accipiter nisus* and other interesting bird species, a total of about 27 species.

³ Source: National database about the protected areas, Ministry of Environment and Water.

"Ostrov Pozharevo (Pozharevo Island) protected locality, area 71.0 ha. *The Pozharevo Island is an important for ornithology location of world significance as nesting place for the endangered species Phalacrocorah pygmeus.*

From the city of Tutrakan to the village of Pozharevo there is an **existing cycling route**, which continues (although in not a very good state) up to the "**Blatoto**" protected locality in the village of Malak Preslavets.

Other natural resources and sights in the district, which have potential to attract tourists, are the following:

The "Karakuz" hunting reserve in the land area of the city of Alfatar, offers excellent opportunities for the lovers of hunting tourism.

"Nahodishte na bozhur" nature landmark is situated in a state-owned forest stock of an area of 4 ha in the land area of the village of Dobrotitsa, Sitovo Municipality. It is a natural deposit of trollius.

Because of the specifics of the resources (the River Danube and the "Srebarna" reserve, the "Kalimok" and "Pozharevo" protected localities), *these protected areas provide opportunities for development of ecotourism in addition to ornithological tourism.* There are also conditions for development of rural tourism in the municipalities of Silistra (the villages of Srebarna and Vetren), Alfatar, Tutrakan (the villages of Pozharevo and Dunavets).

On the basis of the analysis and evaluation of the natural-geographic and resource potential of the district the following have been identified as valuable assets for development of tourism:

- Well-preserved nature and unique ecosystems and landscapes (wetland zones, islands, dry valleys, rock formations and landscapes);
- Existence of numerous specific representatives of the flora and fauna (plants and birds), subject to the regime of protection of the territory;
- Multiple opportunities for hunting, angling and water attractions.

Cultural and historical heritage

The rich past of the area and the **presence of different cultures** (*Thracian, Roman, Byzantine, Turkish, Bulgarian from the national revival period and Romanian*) have piled layer after layer a variety of cultural and historical landmarks and monuments, which represent a priceless resource for the development of the district as a tourist destination.

Many of these sights are concentrated on the area of the district and administrative centre of the territory, the city of Silistra, which makes it the most famous and attractive destination in the district.

Almost 2/3 of the area of the city of Silistra (1720 dca) has been declared National Architectural and Archeological Reserve "Durostprum-Drustar-Silistra"⁴. The high cultural, historical, cognitive and tourism-related value of the unique monuments and the Roman times and the mediaeval Bulgarian epoch make the reserve a field for studies and a basis for development of numerous tourism products. To mention just a few:

- *The Silistra Tomb-Vault* (the first half of the 4th c. A.D.) – a sight of exclusive artistic and historical value. This is the most famous in Bulgaria and abroad ancient monument of Durostorum, an emblematic work of the late antiquity civilization, having no analogue on the territory of the late Roman Empire. It is mentioned in all serious studies devoted to that epoch.
- *The patriarchal basilica* of Patriarch Damyan (the first patriarchal church in the Bulgarian state, the second biggest in the country).
- *Part of Khan Omurtag's column* (the "glorious house on the Danube", constructed by him, remains undiscovered as yet; the researchers' hypotheses view namely Silistra as the most probable location).
- *The northern fortress wall* of the mediaeval Drustar (restored and displayed in 2000).
- *The mediaeval cathedral Patriarchal and Episcopal church of Drustar-Silistra and the Patriarchal residence from the 10th c.* It is an impressive three-dome basilica at the northern fortress wall of Drustar, reconstructed many times during its existence as a cathedral church.
- *The palace of the Dorostol bishops during the 5th-6th c. A.D. next to the early Christian Episcopal basilica* (in the central part of the city) within a complex of ruins from a Roman villa-urbana (2nd – 3rd c. A.D.).
- *The feretory of the relics of St. Dassi Dorostolski* (the urn-sarcophagus is kept in the city of Ancona, Italy). During his visit to Bulgaria in 2001 Pope Joan Paul II donated to Silistra part of the relics of St. Dassi, laid in a marble feretory (an approximate copy of the urn in Ancona), which is now kept in the "St. Apostles Peter and Pavel" Cathedral Episcopal Church.
- *The Turkish fort "Abdul Medjid"* (Medjidi Tabia). It is situated to the south of the city of Silistra. *This is the best preserved from the total of six points of the fortification system along the northern frontier of the Ottoman Empire.* It was built during the period 1841-1853 by the German military engineer von Moltke.
- *The Kurshumuglou Mosque* - in the centre of the city of Silistra, a monument of culture of local significance.

⁴ Council of Ministers' Decision No. 627/28.12.1971, updated boundaries by virtue of Protocol of the National Institute of Monuments of Culture from 1992.

- *The tomb of the Jewish Rabi Eliesar Papo* (who lived in the beginning of the 20th c. in Silistra; ranking among the 12 most famous Rabi in Israel). The place is honoured as particularly sacred for religious Jews.
- *Armenian Apostolic Church "Surp Astvadzadzin" (Sveta Bogoroditsa), 1620*. This is the oldest Armenian Church in Bulgaria.

Other more notable cultural and historical monuments and places worth visiting in the district outside the city of Silistra are:

- *The Dobrudgan house, the city of Alfatar* – restoration with ethnographic exhibition, opened for visitors in 1984. The house is a major centre of attraction for tourist visits, as well as one of the centers of culture in the municipality. It is also **one of the best known tourist "trademarks" of the district**. It is visited regularly by tourist groups from the Black Sea resorts, but does not form an independent product.
- *The "Sv. Troytsa" Christian church, the city of Alfatar* – a three-dome basilica, built in 1846, with rich decoration of icons and wood-carving, the work of masters from the Tryavna School.
- *The "Ayazmoto" historical location, the village of Ruyno* – a mediaeval Bulgarian fortress from the 9th – 11th c., which used to guard the ancient strategic route between the capital cities Pliska and the Great Preslav and the River Danube. The locality is connected also with the stay of the Moslem saint Demir Baba (the Iron Father) during the middle of the 16th c.
- *The early mediaeval fortress "Kartal Kale" near the village of Ruyno (18th c.)* – situated on a strange and hard of access location in a dry valley on top of the ruins of a small Thracian settlement and a late antique stronghold.
- *The architectural reserve "The fishermen's neighborhood", the city of Tutrakan* – a well-conserved fishermen's settlement, demonstrating the atmosphere and lifestyle of the once main occupation of its population – fishing. The reserve possesses a high authenticity status – 48 of the buildings in it have been declared monuments of culture. This high cultural and touristic value is not, however, adequately displayed. Many of the buildings are in a crucial state-of-repair.
- *The unique ethnographic museum "Fishing and boat-building on the Danube"* – the **only specialized museum on this subject along the entire River Danube shoreline**. On display there are more than 1500 instruments and tools, used by fishermen since ancient times till the second half of the 20th c. – different net- and hook-type devices and instruments, boats, etc.
- *The Tutrakan Museum of History* – keeps valuable exhibits *in the sections Archeology, Bulgarian national revival, New History, Ethnography*. Exhibited are findings from the 5th millennium B.C., Thracian ceramics, artifacts from the times of the ancient fortress "Transmariska", from the times of the First and the Second Bulgarian Kingdoms, the

period of Ottoman rule and the national-liberation struggles, documents and materials from the period after the Liberation 1878-1940. In the Hall of Icons are displayed original icons and books printed using old methods from the second half of the 19th c.

- *Memorial complex "Military cemetery – 1916" – a monument of national significance, situated at some 10 km from the city of Tutrakan*, at the village of Shumentsi, area 3 dca. This is the burial ground of 8000 soldiers – Bulgarians, Romanians, Germans and Turks, who have participated in the battles for the Tutrakan fortress in 1916.
- *The historical fountain near the village of Kaynardga*, connected with the signing of the Kyuchuk-Kaynardgi Peace Treaty in 1774, built in 1892. Its significance is enhanced by its unique size – more than 70-long front. It has been declared monument of culture.

The existence of all these sites corroborates the thesis that the **historical, cognitive and scientific value of the cultural layers in Silistra District is comparable to that of the entire North Bulgaria**. The actions, aimed at study, conservation and exhibition of the majority of the sites, are not adequate as yet to help formulate comprehensive tourist products and attractions, which would contribute for the establishment of the district as a tourist destination.

Evaluation of the material stock and tourism-related procurement

In the recent 4-5 years a certain increase in the accommodation facilities and bed stock in the district has been observed. In 2009 the number of accommodation facilities increased to 22 and the number of beds – to slightly above 700. This is almost two times more as compared to the situation in 2003.

In 2009 the number of overnight stays in the district was 33 thousand, almost 90% of which were recorded on the area of Silistra Municipality. The most frequented among the rest of the municipalities are Tutrakan and Sitovo, but the number of overnight stays and their contribution to tourism and the district economy are insignificant (*below 2 thousand overnight stays*).

Number of accommodation facilities, overnight stays and occupancy rate of the tourism stock in 2009

Municipality	Accommodation facilities	Beds	Realized overnight stays		Persons staying overnight		Occupancy rate
			Total	Share of the district total	Total	Share of the district total	
Kaynardga	1	19	297	0.9%	297	1.4%	8.5
Silistra	15	576	29123	88.2%	18306	85.7%	14.6
Sitovo	1	30	1667	5.0%	1068	5.0%	19.4
Tutrakan	5	77	1928	5.8%	1678	7.9%	6.9
Silistra total	22	702	33015	100.0%	21349	100.0%	13.8

Source: NSI

Despite the increased capacity of the bed stock it remains somewhat modest on a national and even regional scale. The main problem is not the number, but the occupancy rate of the bed stock (13.8%), which is an indicator for not sufficiently attractive products, weak advertising and absence of established tourist “trademark” and well-manifested attractiveness.

The concentration of the bed stock and the number of visits in Silistra Municipalities shows that currently Silistra is the major centre of tourism and main destination for visits in the district.

Recently **an increased interest in development of tourist activities** has been noted **on the part of private entrepreneurs through the construction of accommodation facilities** (*houses for rural tourism, new high-category hotel complex in the city of Silistra*) or through renovation of the existing material stock. Material stock of high quality, excellent engineering and operating characteristics and capacity to offer a variety of additional services is being constructed. Several facilities for accommodation and welcoming of visitors under the rural tourism format have already been set in place in the villages of Srebarna and Vetren.

The tour operators have already worked out a 1-day tourist product, which for the time being ensures the main tourist flow towards the municipality during the summer season through attraction of holiday-makers at the Black Sea resorts.

The major problem for tourism in the district is the state-of-repair of the feeder and main infrastructure to and from the tourist sights. There are no adequately organized conditions for tourist visits to the majority of the natural and cultural sites (*parking lots, sanitary facilities, and at some places even electricity and water supply*).

Infrastructure and marketing of tourism

The outlet of a large number of the municipalities of Silistra District on the River Danube reveals rich and diverse opportunities for utilization of the river as an element for enrichment and upgrading of the tourist product.

In addition to the Danube waterway, the district is traversed also by a transport corridor of Pan-Balkan significance (*Lessovo – Yambol – Shumen – Silistra*), which may also contribute to the development of tourism on the area of the district.

This borderline location of the municipalities in the district offers opportunities for facilitated outlet to tourism markets abroad and combination of the local resources with cross-border ones, above all with those of Romania. Some of the municipalities already have experience in this direction, since they have taken part in a number of projects in support of the development of tourism in the cross-border area. A favorable factor is the fact that Silistra Municipality is part of the “Lower Danube” Euroregion.

Another factor, which has influence on tourism in cross-border aspect, in the facilitated crossing and access to the district after the commissioning of the Silistra-Kalarash ferry line.

The facilitated access and the conversion of the River Danube into an EU internal border is an enormous potential for development of tourism in the district, which currently is manifested mainly in the form of shopping tours for Romanian citizens.

On the other hand, the tourism-related resources of the district (in particular in Silistra Municipality) are situated at a relatively small distance from the Black Sea littoral and near two of the biggest seaside resort estates "Albena" and "Golden Sands", which provides an opportunity for participation in the tourism supply by means of tourist itineraries and tours on different themes (even 1-day ones).

The available **natural and cultural heritage currently is rather a potential than a real tourism-related resource**. This situation calls for incorporation of the resources into attractive and inspiring tourist products. The majority of the resources possessing high tourism-related potential face obstacles of purely infrastructure-related nature (access, specialized services, cleanliness of the environment), as well as hindrances related to the unfinished activities for their display and socialization (restoration, visual information, attractive presentation and marketing). The state of the tourism-related infrastructure in the district is inadequate.

A weak point for the sector is the absence of a unified information system, aimed at presenting the opportunities for tourism in the area both in Bulgaria and abroad. It is only on the territory of Tutrakan Municipality that there is an operating tourist information centre.

Opportunities for tourism

Silistra District and its municipalities rank among the districts possessing the highest potential for tourism not only in the region under review, but also in the entire North Bulgaria (along with Veliko Tarnovo District).

Silistra District possesses high-quality natural and anthropogenic resources. The below listed sights and resources of the district offer an excellent basis for development of different forms of tourism:

- the "SREBARNA" reserve and the "Kalimok-Brashlen" and " " protected localities: tourism for general and specific interests – ornithology, ecotourism, student tours – the municipalities of Silistra and Tutrakan;
- the "Karakuz" and "Voden" game farms: hunting tourism – the municipalities of Dulovo and Alfatar;
- the River Danube and its shoreline in the area of the cities of Tutrakan and Silistra: tourism, sports angling, cruises, tourist infrastructure along the shoreline (possibility for using port facilities);
- the "MALAK KANAGYOL" dry valley: field studies - archeological training (Thracian sanctuary "Badgaliyata") – Alfatar Municipality;;

- conditions for eco and rural tourism: the municipalities of Alfatar, *Kaynardga* and *Tutrakan* (need of improvement of the infrastructure, including access);
- **The rich cultural and historical heritage and attractiveness of the archeological monuments and exhibitions (including museums).** Silistra Municipality possesses the highest potential in this respect. The potential of the municipalities of Tutrakan and Alfatar somewhat more limited.

Opportunities for additional attractions and diversification of the products are offered by the *wine cellar in Kaynardga, the guest houses in the villages of Vetren and Vassil Levski (Silistra Municipality).*

Evaluation of the potential and degree of utilization by types of tourism

Types of tourism	<i>Municipality</i>	Scores	
		Potential / Capacity From 1 to 4	Degree of development / utilization
General conditions		4	2
<i>River/water tourism</i>	Silistra	4	2
	Tutrakan	3	1
<i>Cruise tourism</i>	Silistra	4	1
	Tutrakan	3	0
<i>ecotourism</i>	Silistra, Tutrakan, Glavinitsa	4	2
		3	1
<i>Rural tourism</i>	Silistra	3	1
	Tutrakan, Alfatar, Kaynardga	2	
<i>Cultural and historical tourism</i>	Silistra	4	2
	Tutrakan	3	
<i>Ornithology-oriented tourism</i>	Silistra, Tutrakan Glavinitsa	4	1
		2	
<i>Spa and wellness tourism</i>			
<i>Horse-riding tourism</i>			
<i>Hunting tourism</i>	Dulovo, Alfatar, Glavinitsa	4	2
<i>Cycling tourism</i>	Silistra, Tutrakan Glavinitsa, Sitovo	3	1
		2	
<i>Other</i>	Silistra, Tutrakan, Alfatar, Kaynardga	2	-

Legend:

4 High-quality resources of the required quality and potential, **tapped** with minor restrictions (of national and international significance).

3 High-quality resources, **not sufficiently tapped**. Improvement in terms of quantity and quality is needed (of regional significance, potential for becoming of national significance).

2 Good-quality resources having potential, **poorly to average tapped**. Considerable investments for improvement of the quality and raising of the potential are needed (of local significance and potential for becoming of regional significance).

1 Low-quality resources. **Practically untapped**, poorly known and exhibited.
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The total evaluation of the tourism-related potential of the district reveals that it may be evaluated as very good, predetermined by the availability of high-quality and unique resources. The level of development and utilization, however, is even below the average and for certain types of tourism is in practice zero.

The best resources and development potential have been identified for the cultural and historical tourism (Silistra, Tutrakan and Alfatar) **and the ornithological tourism and ecotourism** (Silistra, Tutrakan). Among the other types of tourism in terms of the level of utilization the hunting tourism (Dulovo, Alfatar, Glavinitsa) and the cruise tourism (Silistra) stand out as possessing the highest potential, although to a different degree.

The analysis and the available data about the development of tourism in the district permit us to make the following conclusions:

- *Existence of a biosphere reserve of international significance and a multitude of protected areas of national significance;*
- *Silistra District occupies a particular place in the Bulgarian national history and possesses rich cultural and historical heritage;*
- *The district is located on the biggest transport main route in Europe, the River Danube, and on the junction of other important transport corridors;*
- *The geographic location assists the development of tourism in a trans-border context. Silistra District is situated on the internal EU border and in the "Buffer" zone of the Black Sea tourist destination;*
- *In the vicinity of Silistra is situated the Lambrinovo Airfield, which although not operating at present is adapted to service domestic and international cargo and passenger flights.*

Weaknesses:

- *Poor state-of-repair and low degree of development of the tourism-related infrastructure;*
- *Absence of comprehensive tourist product;*
- *Inadequate marketing and advertizing of the resources;*
- *Low average length of stay, low revenue, underutilization of the available bed stock;*
- *Underdeveloped technical stock for supply of additional services.*

EVALUATION AND DIFFERENTIATION/GROUPING OF THE MUNICIPALITIES ON THE BASIS OF THEIR OVERALL POTENTIAL AND DEGREE OF DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM

As already noted Bulgaria is a country with diverse resources and possesses considerable potential for tourism. In practice there are favorable conditions for development of all modern types of tourism. To date these rich resources and potentials have not been well displayed and used as components for development of tourism and their conversion into factors for development of the local and regional economy as a whole.

These findings and conclusions apply to a considerable extent also for the territory under review of the Bulgarian Danube space.

In compliance with the selected approach and methodology, described at the beginning of this paper, the municipalities from the Danube Region have been differentiated and assessed using two major criteria:

1. **Evaluation of the resource potential, including also** the level of its utilization;
2. **Evaluation of the modern level of tourism development** (including the utilization rate and availability of material stock) – occupancy rate and number of visitors for the existing material stock.

The obtained summary evaluations concerning the resources and potential of the different types of tourism help us outline the following trends:

- **The number of municipalities evaluated as possessing high-quality but insufficiently tapped resources is the greatest.** This comes again to indicate that improvement of their display and offer in terms of quantity and quality is necessary for their real and effective utilization of these resources. This applies to the highest extent to the municipalities with potential for ecotourism and cultural and cognitive tourism.
- There is a considerable number of municipalities possessing good-quality resources, **which are however underutilized and need considerable investments** for improvement of their quality and potential. This number is the biggest for the municipalities with potential for rural and ornithological tourism.
- The municipalities with high-quality resources are a total of number, whereat some of them belong to that category for more than one type of tourism (*Veliko Tarnovo, Russe, Silistra, Razgrad, Belogradchik*). This illustrates the fact that the high-quality resources (natural and anthropogenic) are concentrated in a limited number of municipalities, which is particularly evident in the case of municipalities with potential for ecotourism and rural tourism. The greatest number of municipalities evaluated as having high development potential is that of the municipalities falling under the category “cultural and cognitive tourism”.
- There is quite a number of municipalities possessing high-quality resources, which are **practically untapped** and are poorly known – (number).

		Potential of the tourism function						
Ranking	Ecotourism	Rural tourism	Cultural and historical heritage	Water/cruise tourism	Ornithological tourism	Spa and wellness	Hunting	Number of municipalities
4 Weight 2	Berkovitsa, Varshets, Vratsa, Belogradchik, Silistra <i>5 municipalities</i>	Vratsa, Elena, Veliko Tarnovo <i>3 municipalities</i>	Belogradchik, Vidin, Pleven, Veliko Tarnovo, Russe, Ivanovo, Silistra, Razgrad, Isperih <i>9 municipalities</i>	Vidin, Russe, Silistra <i>3 municipalities</i>	Ivanovo, Silistra, Tutrakan <i>3 municipalities</i>	Varshets <i>1</i>	Razgrad, Dulovo, Alfatar, Glavinitsa <i>4 municipalities</i>	A total of 28 municipalities Of these in more than one category fall 6-7 municipalities (Belogradchik, Vidin, Veliko Tarnovo, Russe, Silistra, Razgrad, Isperih) Varshets, Vratsa
3 Weight 1,5	Belene, Ivanovo, Mezdra, Veliko Tarnovo Elena, Georgui Damyanovo, Chiprovtsi, Chuprene, Tutrakan, Glavinitsa, Tsar Kaloyan	Berkovitsa, Varshets, Mezdra, Lyaskovets, Pavlikeni, Silistra <i>municipalities</i>	Montana, Vratsa, Belene, Nikopol, Tutrakan, Elena, Svishtov <i>municipalities</i>	Lom, Kozloduy, Svishtov, Oryahovo, Tutrakan <i>municipalities</i>	Belene, Nikopol, Russe, Slivo Pole, Vetovo, Tsar Kaloyan <i>municipalities</i>	Berkovitsa, Veliko Tarnovo <i>2 municipalities</i>	Veliko Tarnovo, Elena, Zlataritsa, Isperih	Total



	municipalities							
2 1,2	Roman, Svishtov, Nikopol, Pavlikeni. Slivo Pole	Georgui Damyanovo, Chiprovtsi, Roman, Byala slatina, Oryahovo,Bel ogrA.D.chik, Ivanovo. Dve Moguili, Tutrakan, Alfatar, Kaynardga, Razgrad Kubrat, Loznitsa	Berkovits, Lom, Kozloduy, Oryahovo, Byala	Novo Selo, Belene, Nikopol	Valchedram, Berkovitsa, Georgui Damyanovo, Chiprovtsi, Chuprene, Glavinitsa, Gulyantsi	Vidin, Silistra, Vratsa, Pleven, Russe	Berkovitsa, Georgui Damyanovo, Chiprovtsi, Ruzhintsi	Total
Number of municipalit ies	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total			

Legend:

4 High-quality resources of the required quality and potential, **tapped** with minor restrictions (of national and international significance).

3 High-quality resources, **not sufficiently tapped**. Improvement in terms of quantity and quality is needed (of regional significance, potential for becoming of national significance).

2 Good-quality resources having potential, **poorly to average tapped**. Considerable investments for improvement of the quality and raising of the potential are needed (of local significance and potential for becoming of regional significance).

1 Low-quality resources. **Practically untapped**, poorly known and exhibited (of local significance).

The following approach has been chosen **for differentiated evaluation of the modern level of the development of tourism** in the municipalities:

- *Group 1: municipalities with **realized overnight stays above 100 thousand** – 25 points*
- *Group 2: municipalities with **realized overnight stays above 50 thousand** – 20 points*
- *Group 3: municipalities with **realized overnight stays above 30 thousand** – 15 points*
- *Group 4: municipalities with **realized overnight stays above 20 thousand** – 10 points*
- *Group 5: municipalities with **realized overnight stays above 10 thousand** – 5 points*
- *Group 6 municipalities with **realized overnight stays below 10 thousand** – 2 points*
Number of accommodation facilities, overnight stays and level of occupancy of the tourism-related material stock in 2009.

MUNICIPALITY	Accommodation facilities	Beds	Realized overnight stays	Number of people staying overnight	Revenue from overnight stays
Russe	36	1727	126491	88514	5577014
Veliko Tarnovo	44	2592	119526	80672	5396414
Pleven	10	970	69636	45690	2739331
Vidin	20	634	44946	26009	1787083
Svishtov	7	767	31160	14743	869459
Silistra	15	576	29123	18306	1442159
Varshets	4	255	28179	5431	606571
Kozloduy	5	234	26189	9245	657886
Vratsa	14	1353	22086	13256	985693
Razgrad	15	681	20149	13170	790641

Elena	21	965	18443	7101	387176
Berkovitsa	9	412	12682	8606	170113
Montana	9	473	7889	5011	362296
Pavlikeni	3	130	7220	1837	144014
Gorna Oryahovitsa	8	263	6474	3860	211539
Lom	2	165	5196	3787	204322
Lyaskovets	1	60	3955	3063	71643
Belogradchik	17	114	3361	2773	74304
Ispirih	5	150	3079	1791	61980
Byala Slatina	2	35	2874	1772	65127
Polski Trambesh	1	94	2735	2735	10532
Belene	1	145	1967	713	155536
Tutrakan	5	77	1928	1678	71027
Byala	3	65	1896	618	22868
Mezdra	2	204	1888	519	33520
Cherven Bryag	1	32	1750	1185	38446

Source: NSI

The thus summarized and analyzed data reveal the following trends:

- In the group of municipalities, which have realized **more than 100 thousand overnight stays** in 2009 fall 2 municipalities – *Russe and Veliko Tarnovo*.
- In 2009 the only municipality, which has realized **more than 50 thousand overnight stays** is *Pleven Municipality*.
- In the group of municipalities, which have realized **more than 50 thousand overnight stays** fall 2 municipalities – *Vidin and Svishtov*. One should add to them two more municipalities with very close indicators – *Silistra and Varshets* (respectively 29 thousand and 28 thousand overnight stays).
- Municipalities, which have realized **more than 20 thousand overnight stays** – in this groups fall 3 municipalities – *Kozloduy, Vratsa and Razgrad*. These three municipalities close the group of 10 municipalities with more than 20 thousand overnight stays in 2009, which may conventionally be **called the Top 10** in terms of realized overnight stays and **earned revenue for their economies**.

- In the group of municipalities, which have realized **more than 10 thousand overnight stays** fall 2 municipalities – *Elena and Berkovitsa*. It is worth noting that the municipality of Elena is closer to the limit of 20 thousand overnight stays.
- The largest number of municipalities falls in the groups of municipalities with **less than 10 thousand overnight stays** – a total of 13 municipalities. **Among the municipalities included in this groups there are some, which have been assessed as possessing high-quality resources, such as Belogradchik, Isperih, Belene, Tutrakan, Montana, Lom etc.** This indicates that the existence of given resources and potentials is not sufficient for the development of the tourism function or at least development in a manner, which may have substantial impact on the local development.

On the basis of the assigned ranking and defined threshold values we obtain the evaluation of the overall potential of the municipalities under review.

Evaluation of the overall tourism-related potential

Municipality	Evaluation of the resource potential	Evaluation of the material stock	Total
Veliko Tarnovo	29.5	25	54.5
Russe	22.9	25	47.9
Silistra	36.5	15	51.5

There appear to be several groups of municipalities with clearly demonstrated tourism function, which have high potential for development of different types of tourism and adequate provision of material stock.

On the basis of summing up of the points obtained for the different indicators (complex evaluation) the municipalities may be grouped in the following manner:

- **More than 45 points: municipalities with high-quality resources**, possessing sites of national and international significance. The number of well-established centres for tourism with serious potential are Veliko Tarnovo, Russe, Silistra, Razgrad
- **35- 45 points: municipalities possessing good-quality by not sufficiently tapped resources** – *sites of national significance. National centres of domestic tourism* – Montana, Vidin, Vratsa, Pleven, Belogradchik, Elena, Berkovits, Varshets, Isperih, Svishtov.
- **25-35 points: municipalities possessing good-quality, but less utilized resources**

- *sites of regional significance. Regional centres for domestic tourism. **This covers the largest number of municipalities possessing tourism-related potential** – Belene, Nikopol, Tutrakan, Mezdra, Lyaskovets, Pavlikeni, Georgui Damyanovo, Chiprovtsi.*
- *Less than 20 points: **municipalities with low-quality resources and low potential** – sites of local significance. Centres mainly in the framework of the municipality (including places for short recreation purposes).*

The presented evaluation scales need certain additional explanations. An often encountered weakness is the overestimation of the cognitive and resource value of the sites (natural and anthropogenic) **resulting from confusing their real importance for the development of tourism on a given territory.** This importance is difficult to measure and is determined on the basis of the influence of many components and criteria, which are provided herewith as an annex, and have been reflected in the complex evaluation.

The selected indicators and the evaluations formulated on their basis do not claim to be exhaustive. They reflect the expert work with a view to the objectives and tasks of this paper. The results from the evaluation in scores may be combined with other methods depending on the formulated objectives.

In many cases to obtain a realistic evaluation means that more detailed work and study of a multi-aspect information (including through field studies) is necessary in order to evaluate the potential of a given site, type of tourism or territory. It is only then that certain amendments of the indicators and incorporation of some new ones, reflecting the specific particularities of the site under review, will be possible and desirable. This applies to the fullest extent, for instance, for the groups of cultural and historical monuments.



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Annex

Criteria for evaluation of the potential for development of tourism of the sites in the Danube Region of Bulgaria

All municipalities have been evaluated using the below described criteria, split by types of tourism, whereat part of the selected criteria are the object of assessment for more than one type of tourism.

Cultural tourism:

- Existence of architectural reserves and sights, ethnographic complexes and combinations – state and importance in a national and regional context;
- Existence of authentic, characteristic local buildings and cultural monuments (*houses, houses of culture/chitalishta, public libraries, etc.*) – extent of socialization and attractiveness;
- Existence of historical and archeological monuments, locations having historical and cultural significance, etc. Status of the sight (*national, regional, local*) and number of visitors.
- Attractiveness and tourism potential of the sights (cultural and historical sights, reserves, museums) to attract tourists and popularize the area;
- Historical and cultural value of the sights (period of construction and degree of study and rate of display);
- Cultural institutions (museums, galleries, opera-houses, theatres, etc.); statute (national, regional, local) and number of visitors;
- Local crafts – uniqueness and demonstrations;
- Renown festivals, cultural events and performances – rank and regularity;
- Local traditional feasts and customs;
- Participation in or possibility for formulation of cultural itineraries, including thematic (*Roman, religious, Renaissance heritage etc.*);
- Visits to sights of the religious tourism (churches, monasteries, mosques, sacred locations);
- Location and physical state of the sight and the adjacent space;
- Accessibility by transport and connection of the sight to other tourist attractions;
- *Other*

Ecotourism

- Existence of protected areas (national and nature parks, protected localities, nature landmarks and etc. of regional and national significance);

- Characteristic for the area and attractive landscapes and formations (caves, wetland zones, dry valleys, etc.);
- Existence of protected animal species and well-preserved nature landmarks (for instance bears, roes, pelicans, lakes, marshlands, etc.);
- Interesting, preserved and outstanding nature and landscape with characteristic sights, such as mountains, lakes, rivers, bays and littorals;
- Existence of eco trails and itineraries;
- Diversity of ecosystems and species;
- Possibility for visit to eco events (festivals and eco initiatives);
- Possibility for cycling and pedestrian passages.

Additional opportunities, such as:

- hang gliding (as paragliding)
- Paragliding
- Rock climbing and alpinism
- Speleology
- Other (*please, specify*).

Rural tourism

- Possibility for observation and involvement of the tourists in specific activities, related to rural lifestyle – agricultural activities, specialized farms, etc.
- Existence of eco trails and characteristic itineraries (places for observation and recreation);
- Introduction to the local lifestyle and traditions;
- Local crafts – uniqueness and demonstrations;
- Introduction to and study of local folklore, existence of displays and collections;
- Local food and typical dishes;
- Cycling passages and itineraries.

Additional opportunities, such as:

- hang gliding (as paragliding)
- Paragliding

- Rock climbing and alpinism
- Speleology
- Other (*please, specify*).

SPA and health tourism

- Existence of mineral springs and facilities *in situ* for SPA procedures;
- Mineral content and importance of the resources, application and degree of utilization;
- Programmes for treatment of different diseases;
- Rehabilitation programmes;
- Beauty programmes;
- "Anti-stress" programmes;
- *Other*

Hunting tourism

- Existence of hunting farms;
- Facilities *in situ* for accommodation and camping;
- Attractive animal species for hunting and collection.

Ornithological tourism

- Existence of unique and attractive bird species;
- Constructed locations for observation and study;
- Existence of a museum or training centre;
- Location and accessibility;
- Additional attractions.

Cruise and water tourism

- Infrastructure provision and state of construction (ports and piers)
- Possibility for incorporation of the human settlements in cruise itineraries
- Organization of attractions and different events (rafting, river-based competitions and events, etc.)

- Additional attractions (places to visit and places for recreation)

Horse-riding tourism

- Existence of horse-riding farms
- Possibilities for passages and training
- Accessibility and physical isolation of the farms

Cycling tourism

- Existence of cycling lanes and itineraries
- Attractive cycling lanes with possibility for integration into cycling itineraries (international, national and regional)
- Possibilities for Additional attraction downward trips (mountbike and cycling competitions)
- Other

Accessibility by transport, human resources capacity and marketing of the destination

- Access and closeness to big cities, airports, other destinations with tourism sights
- Provision of public transport in the framework of the respective destination
- The sight is situated along a route with intensive tourist traffic or in big cities for stationary stay of the tourists (main route/highway or railway transport)
- Possibility for combining two or more transport modalities (water, rail and road)
- General state-of-repair of the infrastructure in the visited areas and sights
- Additional services and conditions (restaurants, shops, entertainment places etc.)
- Popularity and information provision about the visited sights and locations
- Existing channels for information and marketing; participation of the municipality in tourism associations and exhibitions
- Easy recognition and facilitated access to the typical sites and sights (existence of information boards, tourist marking signs)
- Existence of skilled labour force or adequate number of persons having undergone adequate training

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