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What are the trends in the country tourism of Latvia 2011-2012?

The year 2011 can be seen as successful overall. At the end of last year "Lauku ceļotājs" surveyed country tourism entrepreneurs, asking them to evaluate the successes and trends. The results are summarised here:

http://www.celotajs.lv/cont/prof/news/2011.11.15/A.Damberga_Gada_aptauja.pdf.

Overall the year 2011 has not been uniform for the owners of country tourism. In several establishments the number of the customers has increased considerably – even by 30-40%, whilst in others a decline of the same amount can be observed. Many connect their successes or failures with the economic situation in the country, but the majority acknowledge that intensive and contemporary marketing for a quality offer helps to attract the customers even in the conditions of crisis. A reason for the increase that has also been mentioned is the fact that people are starting to dare to spend money again. For the year 2011, overall, the prices for the services of country tourism stayed at the level of the previous year. Also in the year 2012 a rise of the prices hasn't been observed.

The most in demand country tourism services. Still on average around 80% of holidaymakers in all the establishments are from Latvia, in second place, depending on the location of the establishment and its specialisation - Lithuania, Germany, Russia, Estonia or Sweden. Still a significant circle of customers are Latvians who work abroad and companies that organise events in country guest houses. There is a stable increase in the amount of visitors to the show- establishments which offer to see, taste and buy *countryside goodies*. The same trend is also confirmed by the surveyed Information Centres.

The most demanded services in the accommodations are sauna (countryside sauna, black sauna, sauna with a pool), sauna-men's services, weddings and other celebrations, boats, fishing, SPA, massages, nature tourism, cycling, excursions in the surroundings. In Tourism Information Centres routes of active nature tourism are in demand.

The members of the Association "Lauku ceļotājs". Over the year 2011 and at the beginning of the 2012 the Association has been joined by 28 new members: accommodations, Tourism Information Centres, relaxation complex, castles, pubs, deer and wild sow garden. We congratulate the new members and will tell more about them in the e-newspapers of the Association <http://www.celotajs.lv/news/topic/view/e-avize>, which can be read by all, who are interested in the current events of country tourism from both viewpoints – the traveller's as well as the entrepreneurs, in the homepage of the Association (the next newspaper will be issued in the middle of April). In total there are 291 active members in the Association.

The newest guides and maps. This year we have concluded several big and successful projects dedicated to nature tourism and the preservation of military heritage – we have created a good, professional offer to travellers as well as a plentiful range of maps, guides, route descriptions and other materials, which can be seen in e-version here: http://www.celotajs.lv/cont/cntr/publications_lv.html. News: The Guide of Baltic National Parks, where information is summarised about the tourism possibilities in the 14 National Parks of the Baltic states, the Guide of Latvian National Parks and the Guide of the Baltic Sea Coast (in English, German, Russian languages). The travellers can still have access electronically as well as in a printed version to the Botanical guide, the Map of Military Heritage and our other publications.

New – Latvian values offered by country tourism. We begin the year 2012 with a new initiative – introducing the national culture heritage in the offer of country tourism. It means tasty Latvian

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dishes, as well as traditional, houses characterising the styles of regions and interiors of building, as well as celebrations of festivities. In order to avoid kitsch and pseudo nationalism, to respect authentic values, the house owners will receive help from the people who are knowledgeable in Latvian culture heritage – practitioners, who will participate in the collaboration with INTERREG IV A programme within the frames of project „Culture heritage” <http://www.kultura.celotajs.lv>, which we are carrying out together with Estonian Country Tourism Association and Estonian Agricultural and Trade Chamber.

News in the project:

- As a result of a competition 15 country tourism establishments in Latvia have been chosen and 15 establishments in Estonia, the owners of which will receive individual consultations by specialists to improve their offer until, in their own chosen areas – the architecture of buildings and the landscape, interior of the premises, Latvian food, organising of events and traditional festivities the end of the year 2013, when the project will be concluded. The winners of the competition – the establishments involved in the program – can be seen in the homepage of the project. All these establishments will become demonstration places where also other country tourism entrepreneurs who wish to create a similar offer will have an opportunity to meet with the owners, see the accomplished and learn.
- On April the 17th and 23rd two seminars will take place "Latvian and contemporary design of tourism services". The aim of these seminars – to give an insight in creating tourism services with Latvian identity, communication and marketing. We will have discussions on how easy or difficult it is to show the Latvian identity to tourists, and how to „dress” it in a service. What can we do in order for our tourism to be recognisable as Latvian tourism? The service providers will share their practical experience, their organisers and the ones who enjoy the end-product. Seminars will continue in the autumn, after the active tourism season.
- On the 5th of June within the frames of the project it is planned to organise a mass media trip to introduce the media representatives with the Latvian culture heritage in Vidzeme through objects, trades and people who will tell and show how to link the traditional and contemporary values in country tourism.
- Within the frames of the project „Lauku ceļotājs” will also renew its own country tourism quality system. In collaboration with country tourism organisations from European countries, the common aim is to achieve a joint and recognisable quality of country tourism offer in the Baltic states as well as in Europe. The quality system is one of the means to do that.
- Within the frames of the project a special sign for cultural heritage will also be created, which according to defined criterions we will grant not only to the accommodations, but also to other country enterprises – the carriers of the Latvian identity.

For more information on the events of country tourism, please see the news on offer already in April in our e-newspaper and www.prof.celotajs.lv.

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