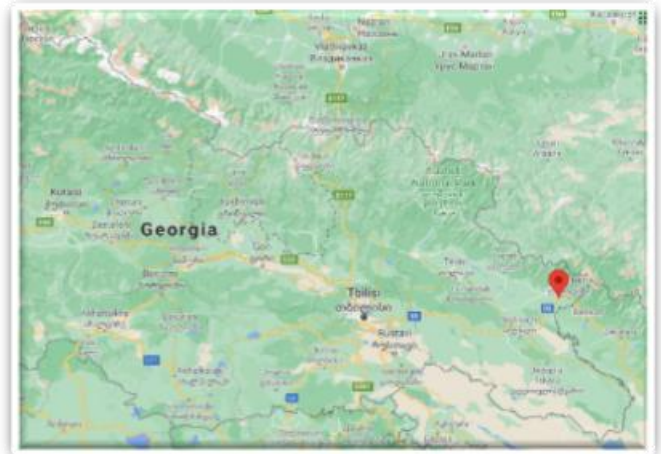




AGRO-TOURISM CENTRE "KORENA"

Location: Georgia/Imereti,
village Gelati

Key words: Culinary offers, gastro tours, folk events, ethno-tours



The hosts of Agrotourism Centre "Korena" started activities by offering food and accommodation services to visitors. The business idea came to mind of the founder of the Centre, Maia Kezevadze during her business visit to Poland where she became familiarized with activities of agrotourism enterprises in Lower Silesia. The family purchased a 170-year old Imeretian House "Oda", found old items and created a space where visitors become acquainted with Imereti culture in a traditional environment.

Currently, there are to family hotels and catering facilities in "Korena". Total area of agrotourism farms is 2500 square meters. The hosts are engaged in agriculture, vineyard practice, grow vegetables, fruits, have cattle (and therefore, their own milk products). They buy other products mainly from neighbours.

The family expanded the hotel offers to receive visitors. The hostess is often invited to share her experience at trainings. The hostess, Mrs. Maia considers that there are many novelties in this sector and it is required to systematically organize courses on gastronomic issues and food delivery to employees. She also developed her own tourist routes - walking and cycling tours to nearby territories.

Additional activities of the family include "Imereti Tour" which mainly cover tours to Zemo Imereti and Racha, as well as Svaneti. According to the family members, visitors particularly like listening to stories about food traditions and masterclasses on these topics.

Mrs. Maia actively cooperates with local residents, including members of the church choir. She established a folkloric ensemble "Trio Okriba" together with them, created masterclasses of the Georgian dances (Rachuli and Acharuli) and songs. The family organizes tours for Polish, Czech and Lithuanian travel companies. Additionally, eco-camps are organized in cooperation with CENN. They provide seasonal agrotourism offers too. 14 persons, mostly socially vulnerable women, are employed at the agrotourism facility. Innovation of the activities is the offers provided with engagement of rural population. They create various items with their own hands and thereafter their hand-made items are sold. Employees of the organization include certified guides, experienced drivers and family cooks.



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Marketing approach

According to the hostess, most of their visitors are sent by their previous visitors. Instagram and Facebook platforms work well, but it is also planned to make a webpage in the nearest future. Another noteworthy segment is tour operators and booking.com.

Financial situation

Customers of the agro-tourism facilities are both foreign and Georgian visitors. As agro-tourism has been developing actively, competition is high, however, all houses have their own niche. This centre has been actively operating on the tourism market since 2008. The founders are oriented at innovation and progress. Folklore and dance masterclasses are held - this service is mainly provided by local population.

Today, "Korena" expands its business with its own income, however, the initial stage began with assistance of international fund projects in 2008. They received small grants that were used for infrastructure projects.

Financial profitability of the business is mainly preconditioned by satisfaction of visitors. The flow of visitors increases on an annual basis. Use of local products in food services also positively influences the factors of confidence and satisfaction.

Success factors and challenges

Mrs. Maia, hostess of "Korena" names labour and positivity as the key to success. Quality of services has been preserved since 2008 and is directed at creating a pleasant, comfortable environment for visitors. According to the family members, seeing successfully examples in Poland and interviewing the hosts were highly important. They clearly saw their own resources and local conditions, realized the threats and risks associated with starting a tourism business. They mentioned that agreement and engagement of family members are highly important. In this family business, the host is the manager, tour operator, chef cook, waiter and

supplier. It is necessary to work in a coordinated manner and distribute the duties, keep a gender balance when making a decision and be oriented at progress. Due to their activities it is important to cooperate with the local community.

Plans for the future development

For better demonstration of attractions and experience gained onsite, the family plans to introduce a full cycle of production onsite. First of all, they are thinking about making a wine-cellar to show the process of wine-making and storage to visitors. From the next year, they plan to produce branded wine and sauce to sell it at the local market. They have purchased wine-making technologies, received construction materials, written a project for purchase of heating system and solar heaters. They are considering to increase the number of hotel rooms in the future.



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