

IDENTIFICATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES POSSIBLE TO BE CAPITALISED THROUGH TOURIST ACTIVITIES FROM VARTOP AREA

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Abstract: Vartop area from Arieseni commune is part of Romanian communities with great tourist potential, being able to offer tourists a wide variety of tourist products, the defining emblem being multiple: the quality of the landscape, the warmth of the inhabitants, traditional occupations, customs, gastronomy, natural resources. Added to this is the awareness of the need to diversify local activities, and engaging in tourist activities can represent a solution for a sustainable "re-imagining" rural world, with all that is significant and comes with the possibility of ensuring the plurality of incomes following the exploitation: the reception structure by offering the accommodation space; own or local activities and resources by offering specific products and services.

Key words: tourist resources, tourism, Vartop area, capitalization

INTRODUCTION

For Romania, the structure of tourist heritage highlights, through its complexity, the chance of a safe future development. The inventory of natural objectives placed in service of tourism is and will certainly be involved in defining the basic motivations, in the organization of recreation activities, restoration of health or in the cultural ascent. The multitude and variety of these objectives are, undoubtedly, the guarantee of an upward evolution of tourism. [4]

In recent years, many groups around the world have tried to develop sustainable, successful rural tourism. The key of success was usually a strategic plan including a well-thought philosophy for socio-economic development. [9,11] This concept tries to evaluate the tourism potential of a settlement after taking into account the cultural, ecological and community situation. [1,2] It provides guidance towards a form of rural tourism that can be both commercially viable and environmentally friendly at the same time and here are several examples in this case. [8,14,15] Rural tourism has special qualities: it is not simply tourism in a rural area. The key factors are:

- development according to the landscape and community scale;
- authenticity;
- an additional and sustained role in the economy rather than a dominant role;
- an unmechanized natural environment.

One of the alternatives for sustainable exploitation of the resources of rural natural areas with touristic potential, especially from rural environment is the rural tourism field, which can be considered one of the most complex industries, generating added value by: exploiting the resources of the traditional community, ensuring complementary incomes, creating jobs, raising the level of training and civilization. [7,13]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We chose as the research area, Vartop area, which represents a starting point for climbing and hiking trails in Apuseni Mountains. During winter, these places are full of tourists from the neighboring counties and from all over the country, who come here to practice winter sports, using Vartop Arieseni ski slope, for relaxation and for special landscapes of the Apuseni mountains. The values of this natural area have brought this area

to the attention of the authorities, the whole area is particularly attractive, many interesting objectives await their visitors.

Apuseni Mountains are the ideal destination for those who love snow and winter sports, and Vartop area is among the most sought mountain resorts from the West of the country.

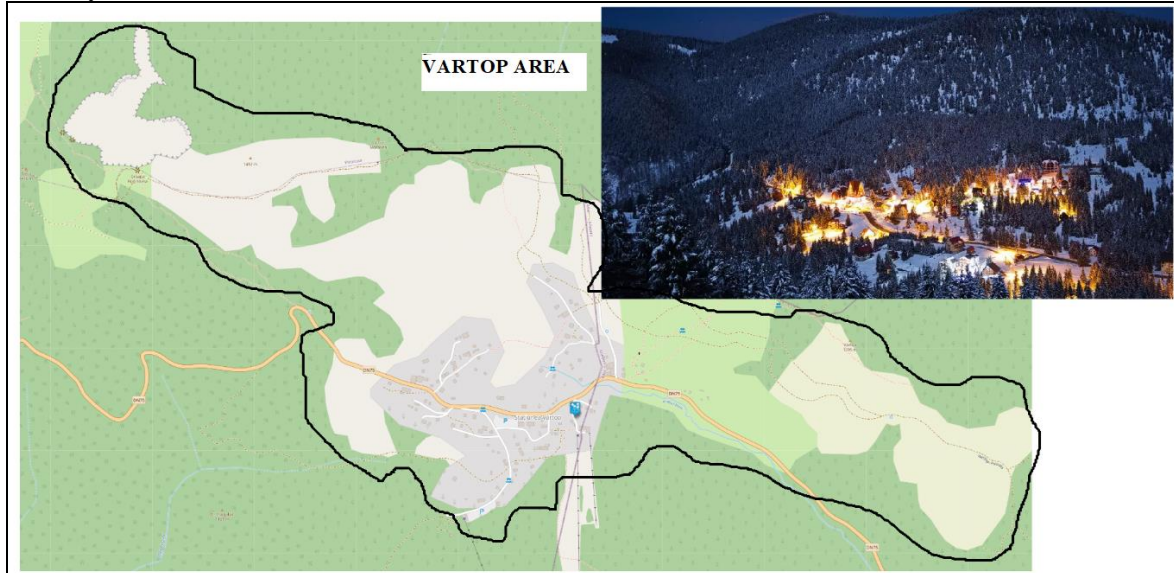


Figure 1. Vartop area - Geographical location and access

Vartop administratively belongs to the town of Nucet, located close to Arieseni commune, one of the top tourist destinations from Apuseni. From the point of view of access, it enjoys a first strong point, namely the fact that it is located on the border of two counties, Bihor and Alba, therefore the area can be reached from several directions, namely from Oradea 116 km, Turda 119 KM, Deva 120 km:

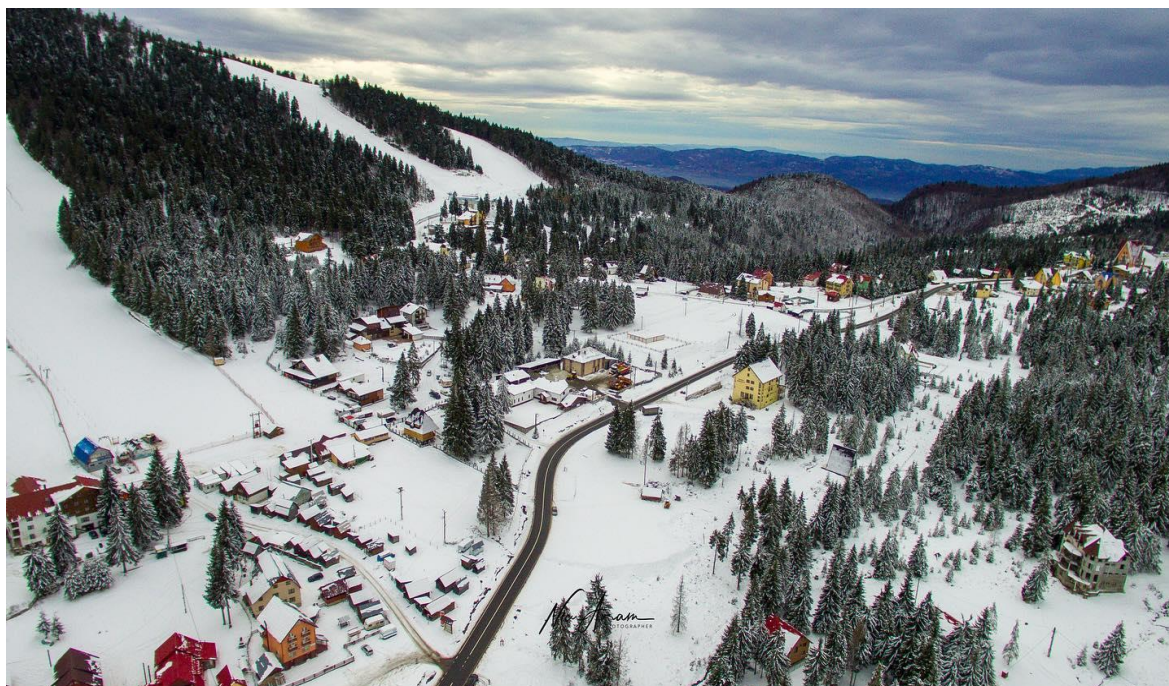
- from Oradea to Beiuș ~ 50 km: Beiuș (E79) > Stei > Lunca (– DN 75) >Campani> Vartop resort;
- from Cluj Napoca, passing through Turda (160 km);
- from Alba Iulia ~ 117 km (DN74) > Abrud (DN75) > Campeni > Arieseni > Vartop Resort.

We have used as research method qualitative study, using different source of information.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Vartop area, or Vartop holiday village, or Vartop Resort, bears the same name, whether we are talking about the part that belongs to Bihor County, or whether we are talking about the part that belongs to Alba County.

The researched area is part of the Apuseni Mountains National Park (including by Law 5/12 April 2000 territories totaling 75,784 square km belonging to Alba, Bihor and Cluj counties) it counts among the protected landscape components and a lot of nature reserves and monuments concentrated in the area Vartop - Arieseni - Garda, complex, landscape, geological, geomorphological, speleological reserves of national importance: Scarisoara Glacier Cave, Vartop Glacier Cave, Gardisoara Gorges, Ordancusa Gorges, Varciorog Waterfall, Coiba Mica Caves, Coiba Mare Caves, etc. (<https://muntii-nostri.ro/ro/povestiri/satul-de-vacanta-vartop-aproape-de-groapa-ruginoasa>)



Vartop area – General and panoramic view

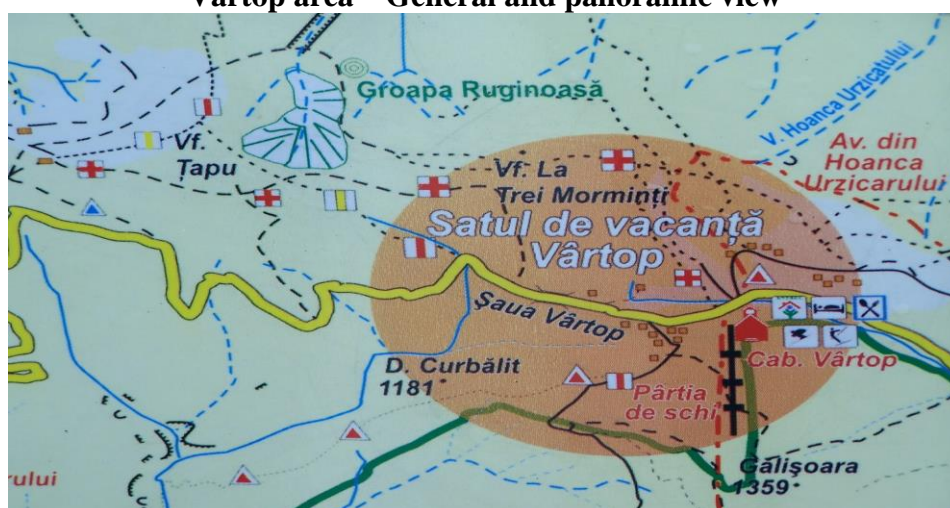


Figure 2. Vartop area - Synthetic presentation of the representative objectives

The area offers the possibility of practicing various winter sports on the Vartop-Arieseni ski area, sleighs drawn by horses, in off-season, adventure and adrenaline through rock climbing, speotourism, cycle tourism or via ferrata (Black Stones). The skiing potential is especially appreciated by tourists from neighboring counties and beyond. Vartop holiday village has three slopes:

- Vartop 1 - 1000 m, with ski lifts, night and snow cannons. The one from Vartop 1 has a length of 1,000 meters, benefiting from nocturnal, snow cannons and with an average difficulty;

- Vartop 2 - 430 m long, with ski lifts and snow guns - for beginners. The one at Vartop 2, also of medium difficulty, measures 430 meters.

- Piatra Graitoare - 1600 m long, with a modern chairlift, 2 slopes for advanced skiers. The slope from Piatra Graitoare measures 1600 meters, with three descent options that will be served by a modern chairlift with 4 seats with a length of 1095 meters and a capacity of 1400 people per hour; the chair lift is detachable - the chairs move at a much

lower speed in the stations to facilitate the tourists getting on the chairs; the speed of the chairlift being 5 meters/second and in stations 0.5 meters per second.

Vartop attracts more and more tourists not only by the presence of the ski slopes, but also by the presence of the sights and tourist routes from the area:

- Red Band: Saua Vartop - Piatra Graitoare Peak - Cucurbata Mare (Bihor Peak)
- Red point: Vartop 1 - Piatra Graitoare slope + BR towards Piatra Gaitoare hill
- Red Band: Saua Vartop - below Vartopu Peak - Poiana La Grajduri (Glavoi)
- Yellow Band Vartop Saddle - Rusty Pit - Grohotilor Hill - Stei town
- Red Cross: Vartop - under La Trei Morminți Peak - Rusty Pit - Black Stones

The link between Vartop towards the upper part of Bubesti village, at the meeting with the atypical red dot marking towards Padis; a link Arieseni – Gaina Mountain; a route Albac - Fața Albacului - Runc hamlet - Valea Ordancusa; a connection Cucurbata Mare Peak - Avram Iancu commune; a route Arieseni commune - Poiana Vadului commune. All this could allow the knowledge of life in the altitude villages and an unpolluted nature.

Apart from the routes to Groapa Ruginoasa, Piatra Graitoare and Bihor Peak, near the Vartop holiday village you can visit a number of other special natural objectives:

- Varciorog waterfall, accessible from Arieseni on the Yellow Dot marking or unmarked from the Piatra Graitoare hill (forbidden in winter)
- Patrahaiești waterfall and ethnographic museum in the village, Red Point marker
- Sighistel Gorges - the cavers' paradise, with over 200 caves and grottoes, on the Red Point route - from Cave of the Bears or Blue Triangle - from Sighistel or from Vartop.

From Vartop, the experienced tourists can go right to Cave of the Bears on a route that visits several geological and scientific reserves of interest: the Rusty Pit, the Guinasu rocks, Micula's Cave etc. - Blue Cross marker.

Extreme sports enthusiasts can try the Pietrele Negre area, with a spectacular via ferrata route, designed by Salvamont Salvaspeo Bihor and inaugurated in 2014. The via ferrata route is of easy to medium difficulty and ends at a viewpoint where the entire route and the beautiful panorama of the Biharia massif can be admired. On the steep Pietrele Negre there is also a route designed for climbing.

Most of the routes starting from the area of the Vartop holiday village or on Biharia summit can also be approached by mountain-bike lovers. In addition, in Vartop there is the Scorbura Motului Adventure Park, with an ice rink, zipline, climbing or archery trails.

In the upstream sector of Sighistel Valley, there is the Sighistel Valley Canyon, more precisely the Cheia Rea sector, which falls to the confluence with Sohodolul Mare, forming in the wet season (floods or when the snow melts) no less than 17 waterfalls, of which the largest is 17 m.

Thus, close to Vartop, we find a genuine trail of waterfalls that puts extreme sports lovers to the test, the Cheia Rea canyon, the perfect place to practice Canyoning - a relatively recent adventure sport that combines a series of techniques such as mountaineering, walking (hiking), abseiling (climbing) and sometimes swimming, all in a canyon.

This kind of adventure in a unique way is also practiced on Valea Seaca, downstream from Groapa Rusinoasă, up to the intersection with Galbena Valley, during periods of precipitation. The water has dug a canyon that is difficult to traverse without canyoning knowledge. Erosion is still working today, increasing the size of the place: 80 years ago, on old maps - the place was marked with a very small ravine.

Therefore, near the Vartop Resort, there are many possibilities for tourism.

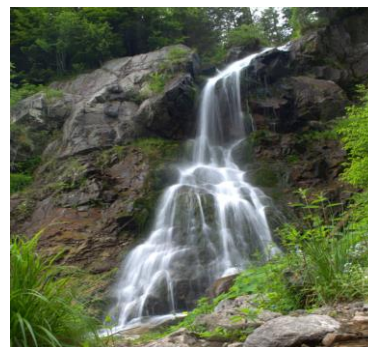
From the category of *natural resources*, the following stand out, either directly in the area or in the surroundings:

Groapa Ruginoasa- "living wound of the Apuseni Mountains". This tourist objective is one of the most famous from Apuseni, due to the fact that it is not difficult to reach at it. From a landscape point of view, Groapa Ruginoasa has a special aspect, which is worth exploring in any season. It is part of the Apuseni Natural Park and represents a huge ravine, with rusty cracks, over 600 m in diameter and 100 m deep. Groapa Ruginoasa is a real "living wound" in the body of the mountain, formed at an altitude of 1400 m, by the extremely active torrential erosion (ravine) of quartzite and red clay deposits. The gigantic "wound" has the surface of 44 football fields and the depth of 100 m. It is one of the most spectacular natural erosion phenomena from Romania.



Groapa Ruginoasa

Varciorog Waterfall. It is a spectacular waterfall over 15 meters high located in a coniferous forest at the foot of Piatra Graitoare Peak. It is found in Arieseni, near Vamvucesti village - 5.5 kilometers from the center of the commune. The waterfall and the buffer area around it constitute a landscape reserve protected by law. The tourist route can also be traveled by carts/sleighs drawn by horses.



Varciorog Waterfall

Piatra Graitoare with an altitude of 1557 meters is located in the southeast of Bihor County, in the southern part of the Vladeasa Mountains. The Piatra Graitoare peak is a witness to the passage of time and implicitly to the erosion that helped shape and raise it above the level of the Carligati platform. It managed to stand out and win the title of Botanical Reserve. It occupies an area of 5 hectares, being established with the aim of protecting and conserving the relict vegetation. Piatra Graitoare peak is part of countless tourist routes that lead to Bihor Peak, being preferred by tourists who choose this area for the wide opening to the Apuseni Mountains and the panorama that manages to steal your words through the grandeur of nature.



Piatra Graitoare



Scarisoara Cave

Located in Garda de Sus in Alba County, Scarisoara Cave is one of the largest Ice Caves in Romania - the second largest glacier in the world. It is not known exactly when it was discovered, but the first time it was mentioned is the year 1863, when the Austrian geographer Adolt Schmididi made the first observations and the first sight of it.

Now, *Scarisoara cave* is declared a natural monument and speleological reserve. Located at an altitude of 1165 m, Scarisoara is the largest ice cave in Romania. Its length is 720 meters, and its depth is 105 meters. Likewise, it is famous due to the fact that it has a 3000-year-old glacier inside, which has a surface of 5500 meters², with the thickness of the ice layer exceeding 37 meters in some places; the thinnest layer is 26 meters. Inside, it is equipped with metal stairs and is lit, and large groups can hire guides. The Great Hall and the Church are the two places of the upper part of the glacier that can be visited. The church, for example, presents numerous ice formations even during the summer. The cave can be visited throughout the year.

The *Vartop Glacier Cave* is known and appears under several names, the Wonderful Cave or the Stone House Glacier. The Vartop Glacier is famous, apart from the limestone jewels, for the presence of traces left in the calcite crust, over 25000 years old. The name of the cave comes from the plateau under which it is located, the Vartop plateau, the vortices being the depressions, sinkholes that form the karst areas. To this hamlet can also be reached by getting off the Padis-Scarisoara tourist route from Poiana Calineasa. Vartop Glacier is located on the western slope of the mountain, towards Garda Seaca Valley, at a level difference of 170 m from the bottom of the valley. The entrance to the cave, at an altitude of approximately 1200m, is closed by a metal gate that protects it from possible barbaric acts. Visiting is allowed only with the guide who lives nearby. It is a fossil cave, with a length of approximately 300m. The first hall, the largest one, is covered with ice. There follows a corridor leading to the "Dom Hall". Also from here, a narrow corridor called "Red Corridor" leaves to the left.

Coiba Mare is a cave located in Alba County, 300 meters from the Casa de Piatra village. The total length of all the galleries exceeds 4 km, and the most interesting part of this cave is the portal whose dimensions are 47 meters high and 74 meters wide. A waterfall about 3m high and two deep lakes, which can only be crossed with the help of a rubber boat, are difficult barriers to cross.



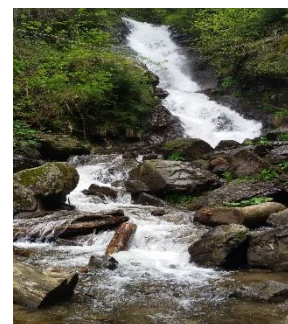
Coiba Mare cave

After 386m, a third lake, this time gushing, appears as an obstacle that makes any means of exploration powerless: on the black mirror of the water, the floods have collected over time countless logs piled up in a chaotic tangle of branches and stumps which neither the boat nor the diver can cope with. It is called the Lake of Death. The water still runs through at least 2.5 km of unknown galleries before it reappears on the surface through Tauz.

Izbucul Tauzului, a monument of nature, is a protected area of national interest that corresponds to IUCN category III, a geological nature reserve, located in the west of Transylvania, on the territory of Alba County. The natural area is located in the Bihor

Mountains, a mountain group of the Apuseni Mountains, belonging to the Western Carpathian chain, in the northwestern extremity of Bihor County, on the administrative territory of Arieseni commune, in the east of Hodobana village.

The Bucinis waterfall - after the name of the river on which it is formed, is located at the foot of the Curcubata Peak, in the Bucinis Valley. The waterfall is an impressive waterfall of 14 meters high, in 2 steps.



Bucinis waterfall

The cave under Zgurasti. The largest and deepest underground lake in our country, with a depth of over 12 meters and over 7,000 cubic meters of water, is located in the Zgurasti cave, a protected natural objective located within Bistra commune. The cave houses numerous rooms, such as the Hall of Collapses, impressive due to the number of rock blocks up to several cubic meters in size, the Dining Hall, the Lake Hall or the Hall of Hope, the floor of which is covered with clay over which stalagmite formations have developed up to 2.5 meters high. Another Hall is that of the Water Lilies, where stalagmites-candles and "water lilies"- formations of calcite single crystals meet. Through the Long Lake Gallery, 75 meters long, you reach the Hall of the Collapsed Temple, where the blocks measuring several cubic meters attest to successive periods of ceiling collapse.

The practice of rural tourism development in Romania has highlighted the fact that due to the lack of a unitary local development strategy that could have been implemented in the general urban planning plan, it has come to be that sites with a touristic function are realized by chance and without substantiated market studies following the principle of creating the objective in order to stimulate interest. This principle determined the appearance of some dysfunctions through the achievement of objectives outside the general tourist framework. This practice endangers a large part of the investments made so far, in the conditions where the development of localities involves the structuring of infrastructure elements in other perimeters. Thus, it can be seen that the investments made are based, for the most part, on projects that remove the constructions from the zonal specificity, especially regarding the exterior, as there is a danger of the appearance of monotony elements. For the most part, the tourist sites, at the present time, are constituted in entities somewhat broken from traditions and traditional occupations, which can only have negative effects both for the present and especially for the future.

Obviously, a possible development proposal [6,12] could include the entire area, namely the creation of a traditional tourist village. [5] This proposal starts from the premise that the area is visited (at a narrower level and more for the natural resources at present) by Romanian but also foreign tourists, so there are the starting bases of a development specific to the tourist activity. Therefore, the design of a tourist village could be the next necessary step in order to support local development and to solve some specific local problems, in this sense the entrepreneurs can associate in order to create a tourist village and create a tourist product that to bear a specific local imprint, thus can be inserted: the existing natural tourist resources; local products regardless of their type; the various tourist attractions that can even be "curiosities" for tourists; the way of life specific to mot; practicing or even reviving traditional crafts; specific architecture, so the area would only benefit.

Directions with a "must have" character to ensure future development: [3,10]
-Improving the ability to lead/coordinate activity at individual and local level
-Improving the ability to create tourism products with a unique character, own "brand" and of the place
-Engaging and incorporating specific local resources into the tourist circuit so that the tourist activity generates a positive "smart" impact.

CONCLUSIONS

There are places where you know you will return someday from the moment you see them for the first time, because there is an inexplicable attraction in our being to the beauty created by nature. One such place is the studied area.

This area has tourist potential, presenting a significant degree of tourist attractiveness, which makes the development of rural tourism opportune. A true mountain paradise, a perfect destination for tourists who want to relax, regardless of the season. Among the tourist attractions are the Rusty Pit, Scarisoara Cave, Coiba Mare Cave, the Cave under Zgurasti.

The peak season is in the cold season, the Vartop slope being one of the points of attraction for winter sports lovers. There are a lot of guesthouses in the area, scattered on the mountain, just like the villages. The main tourist attractions in the area are the many beauties of nature, which seems to have poured here all the wonders that delight the eye. The beautiful landscapes, the caves, the flora, the fauna, the clean and refreshing air of the Apuseni Mountains, the various rock formations not found in other areas, make this part of the country a real treasure that tourists don't know enough about, it seems. Otherwise, it cannot be explained that in the height of summer, you can find hostels everywhere with unoccupied places. Most of the sights are only accessible on foot. However, the mountain trails are not extremely difficult, especially if the weather is nice and you feel like moving.

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