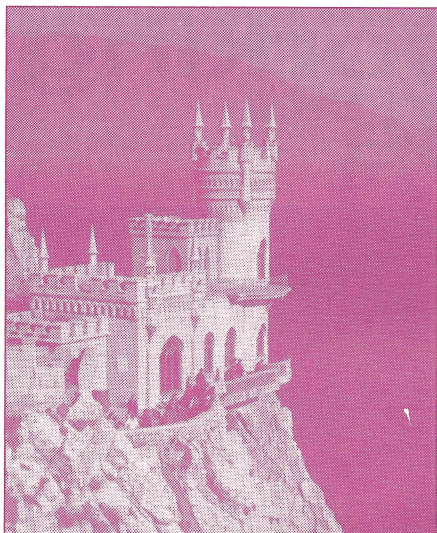




INTERNATIONAL PROJECT TO RENEW BLACK SEA TOURISM

by Ted and Margo Manning



Swallow's Nest, Crimea

The economic transition of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics has created serious problems for the formerly vital tourism industry of the Black Sea coast. Blessed with sandy beaches, warm water, and beautiful scenery the Black sea was the playground of Eastern Europe. But economic collapse, environmental contamination and institutional disruption have left most of the tourism industry in decline. From Yalta to Constanza, from Odesa to Batumi, the tourism industry has suffered from the transition. Empty hotels in Odesa, the suspension of boat travel around the Black Sea and the loss of traditional markets all have undercut this formerly vibrant industry.

In 1995, the Global Environmental Facility began its Black Sea Sustainable Tourism Program, aimed at the resurrection of Black Sea tourism.

The initiative has been designed to rebuild the industry in a way which builds on the environmental and cultural strengths of the region and identifies projects to help in creating a strong regional industry.

The program involves Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine. As specialists in sustainable tourism development with Canada's Centre for a Sustainable Future, the authors have been working with the Black Sea program to provide training and expert advice to the tourism managers of the region on behalf of the World Tourism Organization.

The work in the region has concentrated on identifying the barriers to successful tourism in the region and on

opportunities for environmentally and economically sustainable tourism development in the region. In Ukraine, the project has been working with a committee from several ministries who have jurisdiction over buildings, coastal zone management and environment. As well, there is participation from emerging private tourism operators in Odesa and Yalta who are building a growing tourism industry servicing the needs of visiting passenger ships.

The challenge is to clearly identify the new opportunities and the steps which may help Black Sea countries such as Ukraine respond to the new (generally market driven) opportunities.

This is not an easy challenge. Most of the tourism infrastructure is owned and operated by government ministries. Hotels are still owned by state enterprises and managed by the bureaucracies which ran them over the last decade. While there is interest from Ukrainian entrepreneurs both inside Ukraine and abroad in investment in improved hotel and restaurant facilities, this is not easy. The legislation which would facilitate joint ventures, allow some form of ownership or guaranteed leasehold of tourism properties, or guarantee the right to export reasonable amounts of profits, is not yet in place. Yet former methods of filling the hotels no longer works. When Ukraine became independent, many of the former methods of filling the hotels disappeared. No longer were tourists

from factories in Belarus or Russia assigned to the hotels to fill rooms. Yet managers had neither the training nor the mandate to market their facilities to new potential tourists. With declining revenues, the ability to maintain the properties also declined, rendering them less attractive to potential foreign tourists and operators. In Batumi, Georgia, the decline was disastrous, with most hotels abandoned or used to house refugees. In other nations, such as Ukraine or Romania, the industry remains in better condition, and has potential for renewal given sufficient capital and new management approaches.

In the late summer and fall of 1995, the Mannings worked with tourism officials and planners in the coastal regions of each of the six Black Sea countries. Analyses of the state of tourism and the environment in which it operates are now ready for nearly all of the countries.

At a meeting last November in Sochi, Russia, the multinational team reviewed the reports from each of the countries and began work to prepare specific projects to address some of the key problems. For example, one of the projects presented by the Ukrainian delegation involved the creation of a new ecological village on a lakeside site not far from Odesa, building on the local village culture and designed to attract both Ukrainian visitors and visitors from cruise ships.



Beachfront in Odesa

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