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## **REGION OF BEROVO AS A TOURIST DESTINATION**

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### **Abstract**

The region of Berovo is known by its rich culture, history and natural beauty, and it is located on the eastern part of North Macedonia. It represents an important tourist destination. In this research paper, the potential of Berovo and its surrounding area as an attractive point for tourists seeking unique and authentic experience, has been examined. The analysis has been focused on the different aspects that contribute to the tourist attraction for the region such as Berovo Lake and Maleshevo Mountains, cultural and historical monuments, as well as traditional manifestations. Moreover, the initiatives for sustainable development that encourage eco-tourism and environmental development has been considered too. The goal of this research is to identify the possibilities for improvement of the tourist offer and promotion of the region of Berovo as a please for unique, cultural and natural identity.

**Key words:** *tourism, gastronomy, promotion*

### **Introduction**

The region of Berovo is known for its wild mountain landscapes and rich history, offering one of the most authentic views of Macedonian cultural heritage and natural beauty. From historic monasteries and old churches to picturesque villages that breathe tranquility and a traditional way of life, the region of Berovo is a real joy for all those looking for a break from everyday city life and opportunities to explore the unexplored. This region is a real place for adventurers and nature lovers, and it is full of unique attractions that make this region special for both tourists and locals. The ravine of Maleshevo, also known as a Berovo's ravine is located in the eastern part of North Macedonia at an altitude of 670 to 1050 meters, stretching along the state border with the Republic of Bulgaria. It is naturally bordered by mountains on all sides, which are rich in forests dominated by oak, fir and beech, and in addition, abundant with pastures, game and lignite. To the east, the ravine of Maleshevo is bordered by Kadriia and Vlaina mountains, to the north by Golak and Bejaz Tepe, to the west by Plackovica and Obozna, and to the south by Ograzhden mountain. The ravine has an average altitude of 900 meters and is among our highest ravines with Mariovo and Prespa, and the rivers Bregalnica and Ratevska Reka flow through it. Two regional highways run through Maleshevia, one connects it to the north with Pijanec and to the south with Strumica ravine, and the other connects it to the west with Kochani ravine and to the east with the ravine of Struma. There are favorable opportunities for the development of tourism in the ravine. In Maleshevia there are 14 villages and two towns, Berovo and Pehchevo. Of the villages, 8 belong to the municipality of Berovo, and 6 to the municipality of Pehchevo. The population is increasing, but stagnating. In 1961, the census population was 20,048 inhabitants, and according to the 2002 census, the total population in the municipalities was 19,458 with 6,141 households and 9,619 apartments. In 2021, according to the census of the population, households and apartments in N. Macedonia, the city of Berovo has a total resident population of 10890 with 4143 households and 8683 apartments, and the city of Pehchevo has a total resident population of 3983, households 1463 and 2903 apartments.

### Tourism potential of Berovo

*Geographical characteristics* - the city of Berovo is located in the eastern part of N. Macedonia in the area of Maleshevia, at 846 meters above sea level. This region is rich in beech, pine and oak forests, so this city got the name "malesh - mountain". The municipal center of Berovo and the village settlements are located on the outskirts of the valley. Near Berovo is the famous artificial Berovo Lake, which, due to its untouched nature and clean air, is a favorable place for the development of tourism, and tourist facilities have been built around the lake. Berovo is a city with a moderate-continental climate, the coldest month is January with an average temperature of - 10°C, and the warmest month is July with an average temperature of + 18°C. The most precipitation occurs in the months of May and June, as well as in November, and the driest are the months of August and September. The relative air humidity decreases from January to August, and then increases from December, and the average air humidity is 76%.

*Historical data* - it is not known exactly when Berovo existed. It was mentioned under that name from the time of the Turkish censuses of 1571. According to them, Berovo was the largest settlement in Maleshevia. However, according to certain research for the Maleshevo region, Berovo began to form as a settlement in the plain where the river Bregalnica emerges from the gorge. This happened at the end of the 17th century when, according to tradition, there were five houses, built of stone and covered with straw. During this period, the Turks moved to Berovo - war veterans, the so-called. Tatars. According to the statistics of Vasil K'nchov in 1900, 2940 inhabitants lived in Berovo, and according to a German map issued in 1941, based on the census of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia from 1931, the city had 3150 Macedonians and 50 other inhabitants. In the first organized census of SFR Yugoslavia in 1948, there were 18,144 inhabitants in the Berovo region, of which 3,619 lived in the town of Berovo, 1,687 in Pehchevo, and 12,838 in the villages of the Maleshevia district.

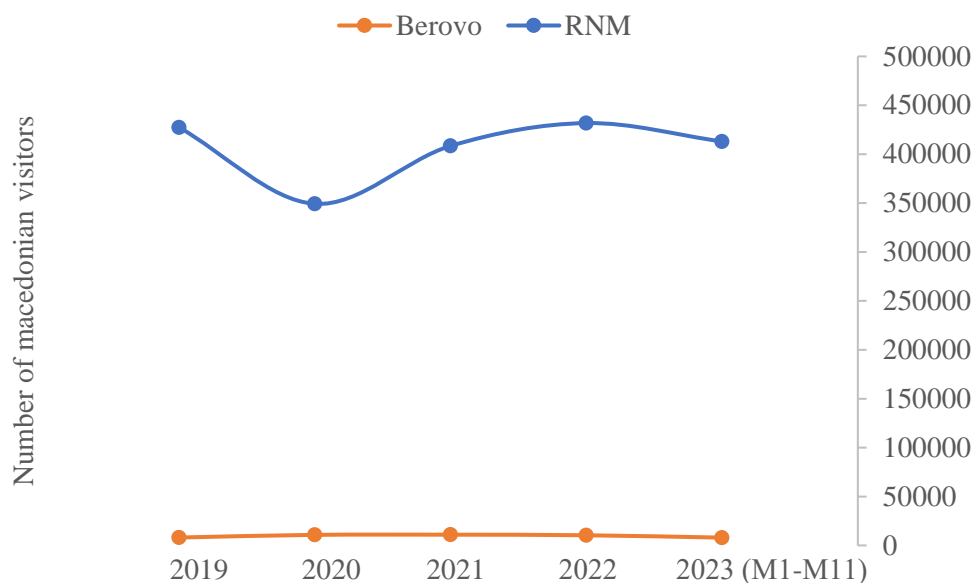
*Tourist attendance of the municipality of Berovo (2019-2023)* - although the city of Berovo is a tourist destination characterized by attractive perspectives and opportunities for the development of several types of tourism in it, it can still be said that its branding on the tourist market is not at a high level . This is indicated by the data on the achieved tourist turnover by number of tourists and overnight stays in relation to the total capacities of the Republic of Macedonia. Table 1 shows the participation of the tourist turnover of the municipality of Berovo in the total tourist turnover of the Republic of Macedonia expressed through the number of visitors.

**Table 1.** Participation of the tourist turnover of the municipality of Berovo in the total tourist turnover of RSM expressed through the number of visitors.

year	Macedonian visitors			Foregin visitors			Total visitorsи		
	N.M.	Berovo	%	N.M.	Berovo	%	R.N.	Berovo	%
2019	427370	8083	2	757593	5442	1	1184963	13525	2
2020	349308	10822	3	118206	755	1	467514	11577	3
2021	408500	10993	3	293963	3470	2	702463	14463	3
2022	431841	10417	3	537436	3088	1	969277	13505	2
2023 (M1-M11)	413036	7976	2	699819	2923	1	1112855	10899	1

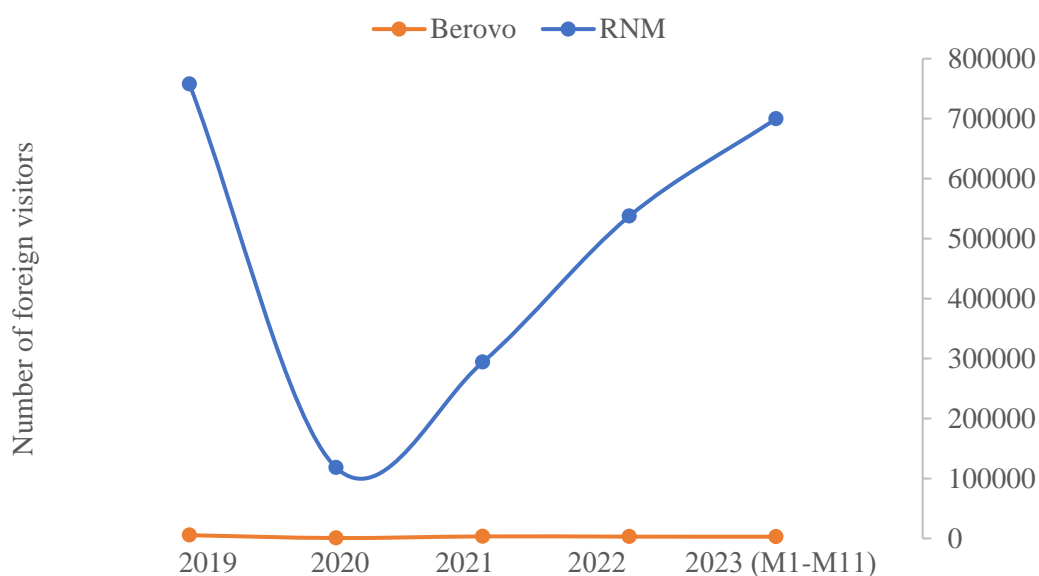
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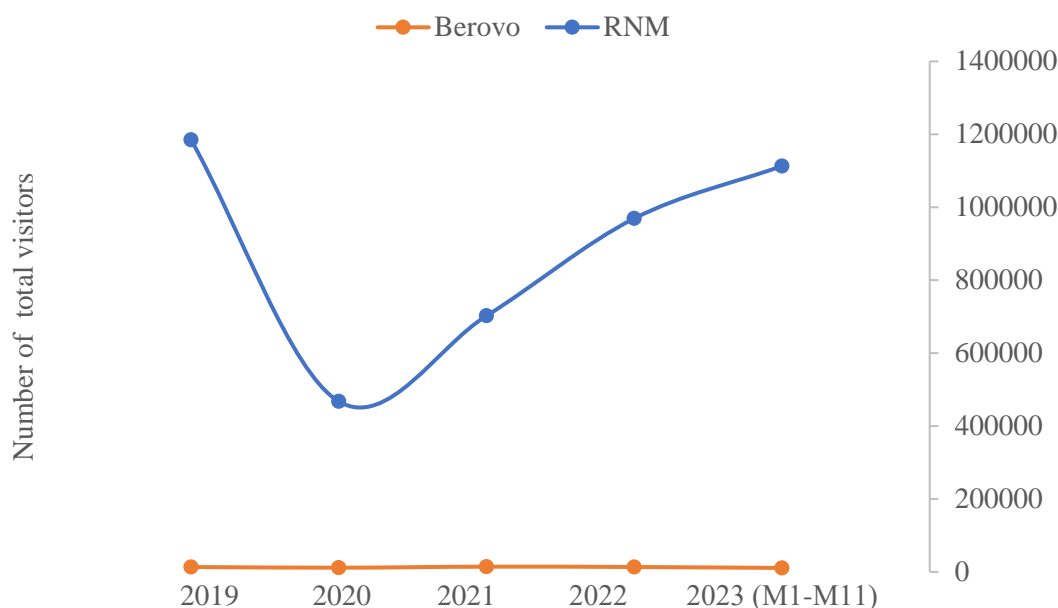


**Picture 1.** Graphic representation of the participation of the tourist turnover of the municipality of Berovo in the total tourist turnover of the RSM expressed through the number of Macedonian visitors.

From the data shown in table 1 and pictures 1, 2 and 3, it can be noted that the number of visitors to the city of Berovo in the analyzed period from 2019 to 2023, including the month of November, moves approximately the same. According to the data, we cannot claim that there is neither an increase in the number of tourists nor a large decrease in both domestic and foreign tourists. It can be stated that the percentage participation of domestic tourists is higher than the participation of foreign tourists, but this percentage is unsatisfactory considering the tourist potential offered by the city of Berovo. If we analyze the data on the number of nights spent by domestic and foreign tourists, as well as their participation in the total nights spent at the level of RS Macedonia, almost no changes can be seen during the analyzed period (Figure 3).



**Figure 2.** Graphic representation of the participation of the tourist turnover of the municipality of Berovo in the total tourist turnover of RSM expressed through the number of foreign visitors.



**Figure 3.** Graphic representation of the participation of the tourist turnover of the municipality of Berovo in the total tourist turnover of the RSM expressed through the number of visitors - total.

Table 2 shows the participation of the tourist turnover of the municipality of Berovo in the total tourist turnover of the Republic of Macedonia shown through the number of overnight stays of the visitors. From the analyzed period from 2019 to 2023, including the month of November, it can be concluded that more domestic tourists stayed in the accommodation facilities. Also, the small number of visitors in the city of Berovo is a result of the pandemic with COVID-19, the closing of the borders in 2020 and 2021 and not the possibility of visiting foreign tourists, but still the overnight stays of domestic and foreign tourists in Berovo are at very low level (Figure 4, 5 and 6).

**Table 2.** Participation of the tourist turnover of the municipality of Berovo in the total tourist turnover of RNM expressed through the number of overnight stays

Year	Macedonian visitors Nights spent			Foreign visitors Nights spent			Total visitors Nights spent		
	N.M.	Berovo	%	N.M.	Berovo	%	N.M.	Berovo	%
2019	1684627	15599	0,9	1577771	9052	0,5	3262398	24651	0,2
2020	1444605	22187	1,5	252930	1214	0,48	1697535	23401	0,07
2021	1643083	20257	1,2	670460	5460	0,8	2313543	25717	0,2
2022	1703841	18260	1	1144763	5347	0,4	2848604	23607	0,18
2023 M1- M11	1681998	14197	0,8	1342111	4818	0,3	3024109	19015	0,15

Source:

[https://makstat.stat.gov.mk/PXWeb/pxweb/mk/MakStat/MakStat\\_\\_TurizamUgostitel\\_\\_Turizam\\_\\_TuristiNokevanja/225\\_Turizam\\_Reg\\_Tu rNokMes\\_ml.px/table/tableViewLayout2/?rxid=46ee0f64-2992-4b45-a2d9-cb4e5f7ec5ef](https://makstat.stat.gov.mk/PXWeb/pxweb/mk/MakStat/MakStat__TurizamUgostitel__Turizam__TuristiNokevanja/225_Turizam_Reg_Tu rNokMes_ml.px/table/tableViewLayout2/?rxid=46ee0f64-2992-4b45-a2d9-cb4e5f7ec5ef) (20.2.2024).

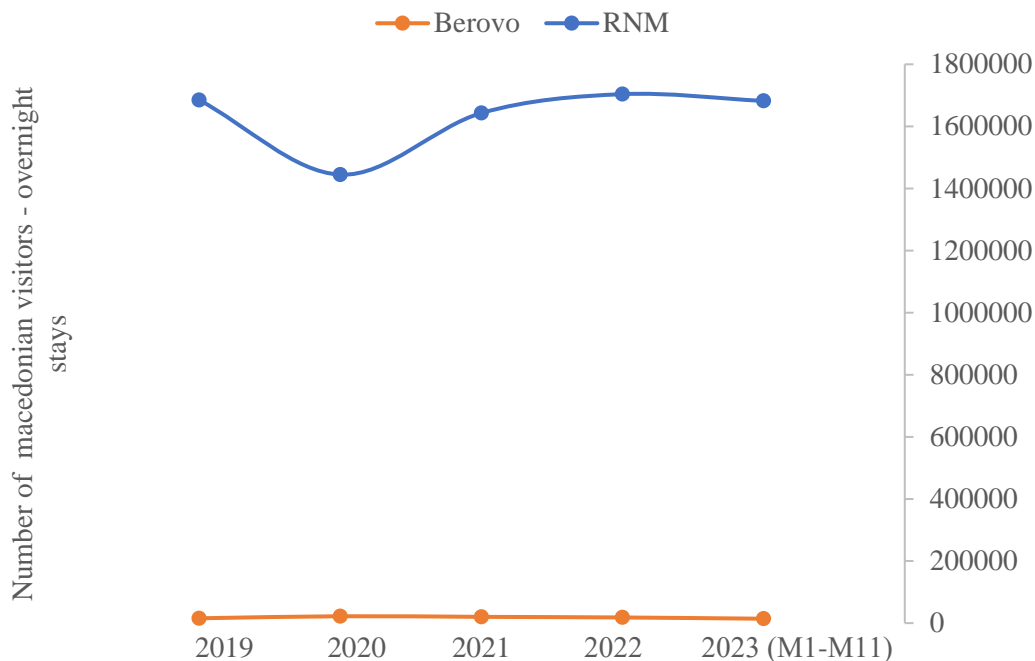


Figure 4. Graphic representation of the participation of the tourist turnover of the municipality of Berovo in the total tourist turnover of the RSM expressed through the number of overnight stays - Macedonian visitors.

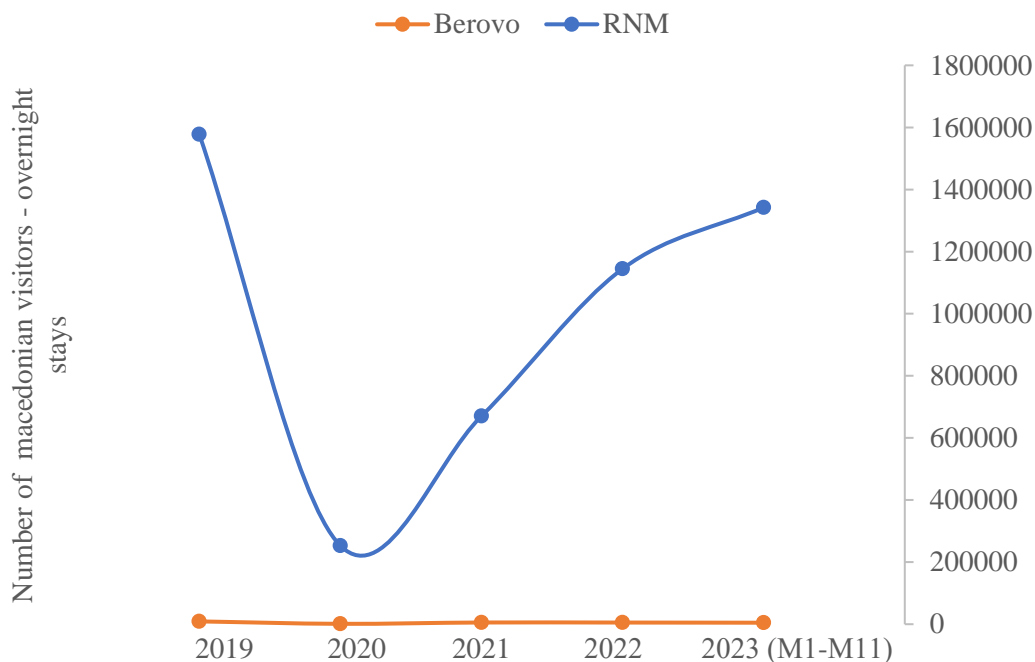


Figure 5. Graphic representation of the participation of the tourist turnover of the municipality of Berovo in the total tourist turnover of RSM expressed through the number of overnight stays - foreign visitors.

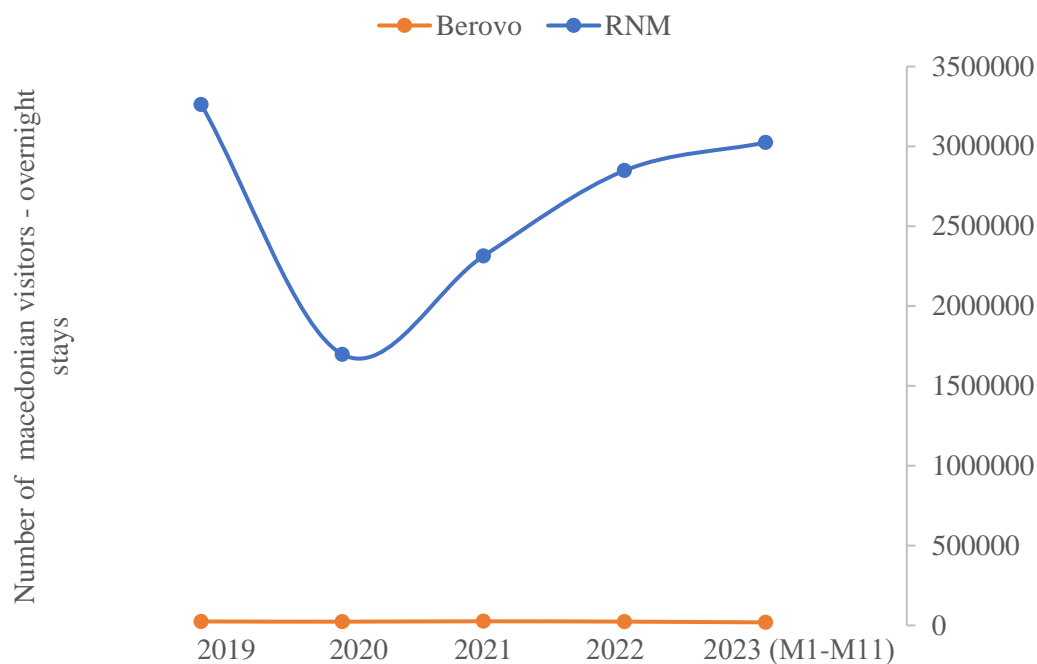


Figure 6. Graphic representation of the participation of the tourist turnover of the municipality of Berovo in the total tourist turnover of RSM expressed through the number of overnight stays - total.

*Analysis of strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities and possible threats (SWOT analysis)* – Berovo has a great potential for tourism offer. This region is ideal for developing several types of tourism, namely: mountain, cycling, health, hunting, gastronomic, religious, fishing, sports, cultural and other types of tourism.

Tourism in the city of Berovo develops every year with the investment and construction of various types of villas, bungalows, as well as catering facilities - restaurants, but the positioning of the Municipality of Berovo on the tourist market is still very weak. This is largely a result of the municipality's lack of financial resources for tourism promotion, as well as the weak promotion of the city of Berovo as a tourist destination.

Maleshevia and the city of Berovo have a large number of churches, monasteries, buildings, monuments, memorial plaques and memorials: monastery church "St. Archangel Michael" (1815/1818), the "Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary" church (1912/922), a memorial bust of Dimitar Pop Gheorgjiev Berovski in front of the monastery in Berovo, a memorial bust of Jane Sandanski at the intersection between Berovo, Pehchevo and Vinica in Smojmirovo, the monument to the 50th Division in the village of Mitrasinci, the memorial to the citizens shot by the Germans at the playground of FC "Malesh" in Berovo, the Monument to Nikola Petrov Rusinski near the Museum of the city of Berovo, the memorial bust of Aco Ruskovski in front of the secondary school in Berovo and many others.

Also, the city of Berovo is known for its activities in the field of culture and the organization of cultural events. Every year in the month of August, the international folklore festival "Milosevski Folklore Meetings" is organized, which is hosted by KUD "Dimitar Berovski" from Berovo, and folklore ensembles from Macedonia, Bulgaria, Serbia and beyond take part. A significant cultural event is also the organization of the Ratevski Bamburci carnival, as well as the "Maleshevia on hand" fair.

The most important and well-known accommodation facilities in Berovo, which make up the majority of the tourist traffic, are the Manastir hotel complex, the Aurora - resort and spa complex and the VIP hotel, and from the restaurants: MRS, Manastir, Loven dom Berovo, Aurora - resort and spa restaurant, Bela Voda and others. Most of the catering facilities in Berovo are dominated by traditional healthy food made according to traditional recipes of grandmothers and great-grandmothers from the Maleševo area, such as the famous Berovo baked potato, Berovo tavche, Berovo sheep's cheese, Berovo pizza, grandmother's cake and other gastronomic Berovo specialties.

Berovo Lake is a very attractive and attractive tourist place in Maleshevia. Berovo Lake is located six kilometers southeast of Berovo. The concrete dam with which the valley of the Ratevska Reka was divided and the lake was created was built in 1971. The dam is 46 m high, with a crest length of 200 m. The lake itself is 2.3 km long and 0.25 km wide. The total length of the coastline around the lake is 8.3 km, and the area is 0.57 km<sup>2</sup>. The greatest depth of Berovo Lake is about 42m and is located 200-300 m from the dam. The Berovo lake is massively visited by organized foreign tourists through projects.

The goal of any SWOT analysis is to identify the key internal and external factors that are important to achieving the goal. The SWOT analysis groups the key information into two main categories, namely: internal factors - the strengths and weaknesses of the city of Berovo and external factors - the opportunities and possible threats to the city of Berovo from the external environment. Table 3 shows a SWOT analysis of tourism in the Municipality of Berovo.

**Table 3.** SWOT Analysis for the development of tourism in the city of Berovo

Strengths	Weaknesses
1. Berovsko Lake 2. Monasteries 3. Churches 4. Monuments, memorial plaques and memorial landmarks 5. Traditional food 6. Healthy food (bio) 7. Cultural manifestations 8. Affordable prices 9. Hospitality of the population 10. Cultivating tradition 11. Cultivation of cultural heritage 12. Recognizable agricultural and livestock products 13. Restaurant facilities 14. Hotel facilities Mountain bike trails	1. Poor visibility of the city of Berovo for neighbors and their tourists 2. Existence of only one border crossing 3. Lack of qualified staff (tourist guides) 4. Small accommodation capacity for larger events 5. Insufficient funds for tourism development 6. Insufficient funds for catering development 7. Lack of a model for monitoring the quality of services 8. Absence of branded protected products 9. Poor visibility of cultural manifestations 10. Lack of gastronomic manifestations 11. Lack of cultural manifestations 12. Insufficient promotion as a tourist attraction 13. Outdated infrastructure 14. Outflow of young personnel 15. Small number of restaurant facilities 16. A small number of directly employed in the tourism and hospitality industry
Opportunities	Threats

1. Development of congress and seminar tourism 2. Existence and use of development funds from the EU 3. Support from local, domestic and foreign donors for the development of tourism 4. Development of local craftsmanship 5. Development of local domestic products 6. Branded products 7. Canoeing development 8. Development of cultural tourism by promoting various cultural manifestations, festivals Gastronomic tourism	1. Increased bills for electricity, water 2. Uncontrolled deforestation 3. Outflow of young personnel 4. Reduction of children born 5. Environmental pollution 6. Reduction of tourists 7. Lack of investment 8. Lack of ideas for tourism development Increased travel costs
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### Conclusion

The city of Berovo and the Berovo region have many opportunities for the development of tourism in the future. Through a SWOT analysis, the weak and strong sides for its advancement, as well as the possibilities for its faster development, but also the possible threats if nothing is taken in the coming years, are noted. Berovo has priceless natural beauty and a rich cultural heritage. The Berovo Lake stands out in particular, with opportunities for tourist promotion and development of numerous sports interesting for visitors, numerous monasteries, churches, monuments and other cultural landmarks for the development of religious, religious and cultural tourism. The presence of accommodation facilities and catering facilities can contribute to the care and hospitality of visitors with their traditional ways of serving and preparing traditional food through the development of gastronomic tourism, which will directly increase the satisfaction of tourists and their loyalty. With rational, timely and immediate investment and promotion of the city of Berovo through the development of various types of tourism and mapping of significant cultural values, this region has the potential to become one of the leading tourist destinations in the country.

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