

PROVADIA: NEW HORIZONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVE TOURISM

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Abstract

Provadia is a city with a rich historical heritage. It is located in Northeastern Bulgaria, about 50 km from the seaside capital of Bulgaria - Varna. Its favorable geographical location, natural features and cultural and historical landmarks provide opportunities for the development of various types of tourism. In the context of the contemporary challenges facing the tourism sector, the city has the potential to establish itself as an attractive destination for cultural, balneological, ecotourism and alternative forms of tourism activity. The key factors for the development of tourism in Provadia, the potential challenges and the prospects for sustainable management of tourism resources are examined. The purpose of this article is to present and promote the opportunities for tourism, attract visitors in order to seek opportunities for the use and development of the tourism resources of the city of Provadia. This article aims to analyze the opportunities for tourism development in Provadia, identify key challenges, and propose strategies for increasing the attractiveness of the city as a tourist destination.

Keywords – *Provadia, tourist resources, ecotourism, balneo and SPA tourism, sustainable development*

Provadia is located in the eastern part of Bulgaria, about 50 km west of Varna. The city is located in the valley of the Provadiyska River and is surrounded by rocky massifs that create unique natural forms. The relief in the area is flat and hilly-plateau-like, mineral springs gush from the bowels of the earth, and 5 km southeast of the city is the Mirovsko salt deposit. This relief appearance contributes to the development of ecotourism, hiking and adventure tourism. One of the most remarkable natural phenomena is the Provadiysko plateau, which offers panoramic views and nature routes. In addition, there are numerous caves in the region, some of which are the subject of archaeological research. According to GRAO data, as of 2023, the population of the city at the current address is 12,196 people, and at a permanent address 14,560 people. Provadia has a variety of tourist resources, some of them are used as such, and others are not [1].

The Provadia Plateau is also known as "Surta" from the Turkish word surt - elevation, hill. The favorable natural resources have attracted people since ancient times. In addition, the region is an important strategic location, connecting Northeastern Bulgaria and Dobrudzha, the Northwestern and Northern Black Sea coast, along the course of the Luda Kamchia River, through the Aytos Pass, to the south with the Thracian Lowland, Strandzha, the Aegean and Marmara Seas, the Dardanelles and with one of the centers of the world Constantinople. In close proximity to the Western Pontic ancient Greek cities-polises Odessos and Mesembria. During the Roman era, the main city of Lower Moesia - Marcianopolis. Here is the monastery complex near the village of Ravna, and during the Second Bulgarian Kingdom the Provadia fortress "Ovech". From the Neolithic and Eneolithic culture (prehistoric times) there are numerous tomb mounds, fortresses, open settlements, and sanctuaries, a sign of the presence of Thracian tribes. From the Middle Ages, archaeological and etymological traces of our direct predecessors, the Slavs and Proto-Bulgarians, have been preserved - settlements, necropolises, churches, monasteries. A large number of artifacts and evidence of artistic and scientific value have been discovered, which indicate the presence of man since the Stone Age [2, 3, 4].

From the above, it is clear that various tribes and peoples passed through the region, leaving their marks on their way of life and culture, which are now used as tourist resources and to preserve the rich past of the city of Provadia.

Крепост „Овеч“

The ancient and medieval fortress "Ovech" was built on a plateau located east of the city, it is also known as "Kaleto". The highest part of the fortress has an altitude of 166 m above sea level and is called "Citadel". The fortress was used from the middle of the 3rd to the end of the 17th century, with an interruption from the first decades of the 7th to the 10th century. The Byzantines called it "Provat", the Bulgarians - "Ovech", and the Turks - "Tash hissar", which means Stone Fortress. Its unique natural features make it difficult to capture by enemies. The fortress is protected on all sides by rocks with a height of between 11 - 18 m. A narrow rocky isthmus connects "Kaleto" with the neighboring plateau "Tabiite". In the past, they were connected by a wooden bridge. Rulers such as Petar Asen, Kaloyan, Ivaylo, Ivan Alexander, Ivan Shishman, the knights of Amedeo VI of Savoy, the Ottoman invasion, the anti-Ottoman uprising of the early 15th century, the campaign of the Polish-Hungarian king Władysław III Jagiellon. In the 14th century, it was the seat of a metropolitanate. Today, the foundations of three churches, residential buildings located in the northern part of the fortress, three entrances (northern, eastern and western), defensive structures, a well with a depth of 79 m, eleven cisterns, 30 early Christian tombs, streets and others have passed through the Ovech fortress.



Fig. 1 and 2 Wells for water



Fig. 3 Wooden bridge to the Tabiite plateau



fig. 4 Guard post



Fig. 5 Ovech Fortress

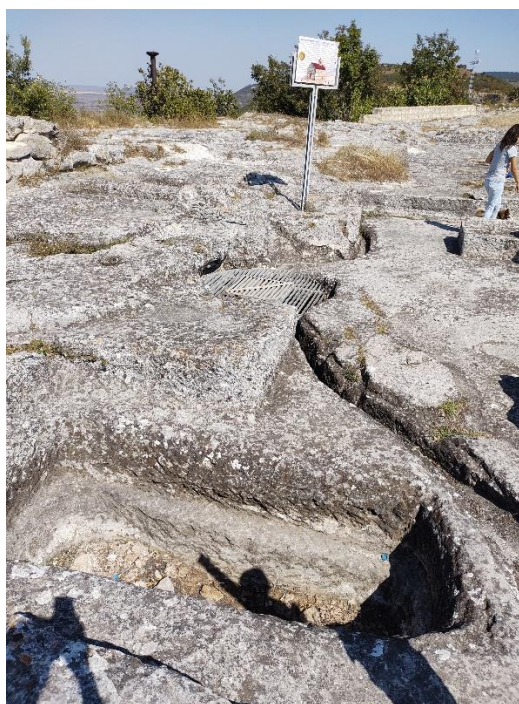


fig. 6 Church

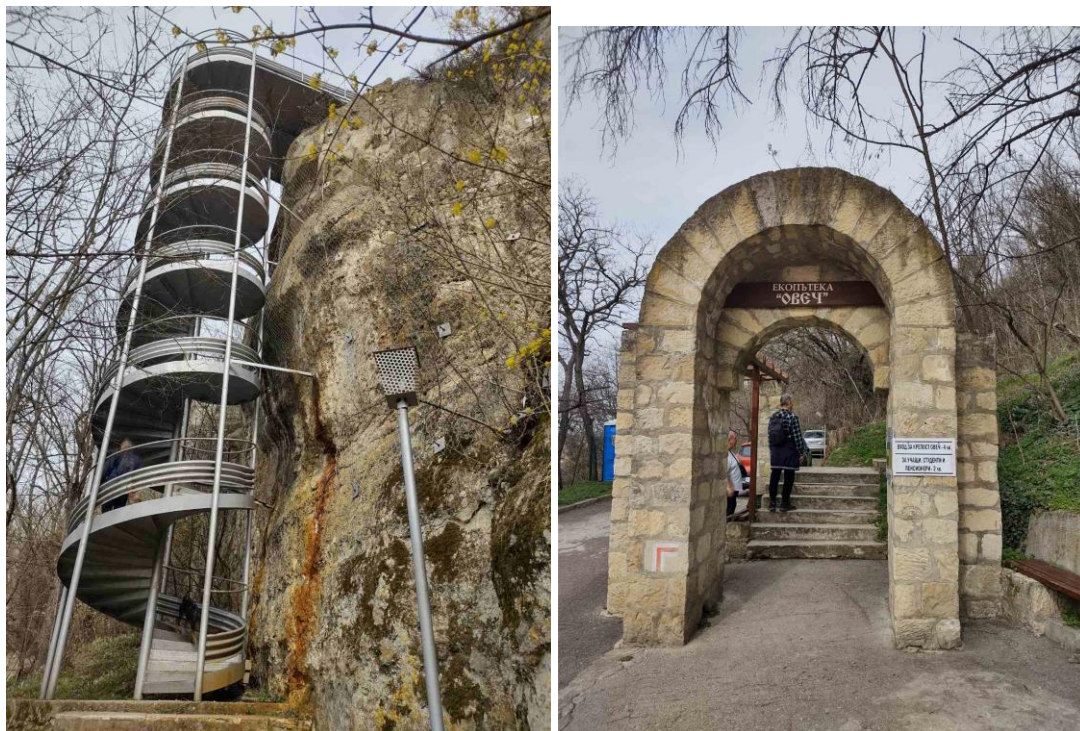


Fig. 7 and 8 Entrances to Ovech Fortress

In 2008, the Ovech Fortress was declared an immovable cultural monument of national importance [5, 6, 7, 8, 9]

The Ovech Fortress offers its visitors a walk through different eras, an impressive view of the city, the canyon of the Provadiyska River and the tranquility of nature. On the way to the fortress and in it there are places for rest, where there are conditions for picnics.

On the Tabiite plateau there is a 23-meter illuminated cross, a symbol of the Christian faith. It is located in the immediate vicinity of the Ovech Fortress and is visible from the entire city during the day and night. The idea behind it is to protect the city and its inhabitants from bad omens and natural disasters.



Fig 9 and 10 Luminous cross - 23 m

In addition to the historical past of the plateau, which provides an opportunity for cultural and educational tourism, here you can observe various forms of relief carved into the rocks, such as: river valley, canyon, karren and natural phenomena such as rockfall slope.



Fig. 11 and 12 Karren

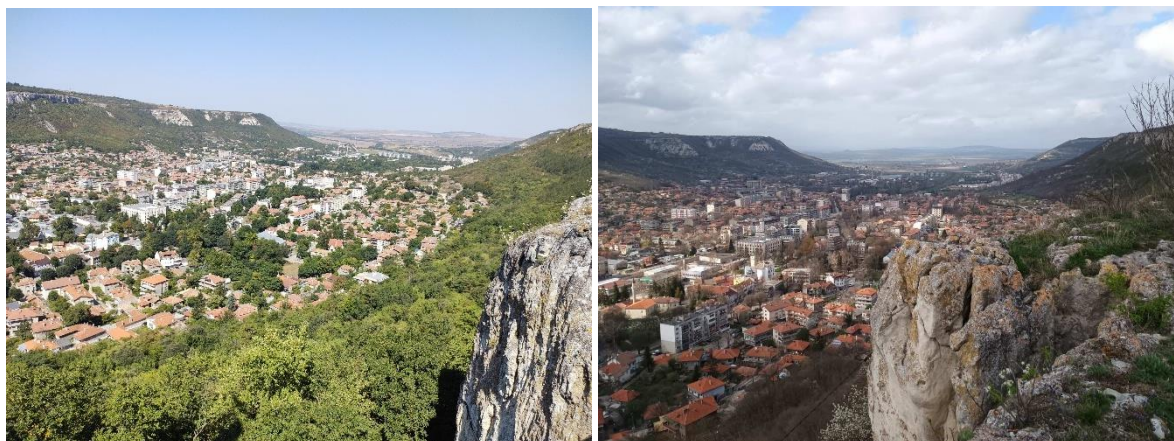


Fig. 13 and 14 River valley and Canyon



Fig. 15 Natural phenomena such as rockfall slope

Rock monastery

The rock monastery is located in the Shashkani area, 300 m above the Sever district of Provadia. There are no scientific publications about it. It is believed to have been created in the 12th–14th centuries. It consists of ten cells, located individually and in groups at a height of about 30 m. The first group is formed by three cells, followed by two independent ones and a second group of five cells. There are no traces of inscriptions or Christian crosses in them. The monastery was difficult to access, now it can be reached by a metal bridge. Tourists and guests of Provadia have the opportunity to take a long walk along an eco-route starting from the Ovech fortress, through the Tabiite plateau to the monastery in the Shashkani area.



Fig. 16 and 17 Bridge to the Rock Monastery



Fig. 18 – 21 Rock Monastery



The remains of the **Prehistoric Complex of Provadia-Solnitsa** represent the oldest salt production site in Europe (5600 – 4350 BC), from which the earliest prehistoric urban settlement on the continent (4700 – 4350 BC) emerged. The complex is located on an area of about 30 hectares. The emergence and development of the site is associated with the largest and only rock salt deposit in the Eastern Balkans – the “Mirovsko salt deposit”, on which the settlement is located. Salt production at the site is based on brine (dense salt water) that flows from this salt deposit. The boiling of brine in ceramic vessels at Provadia-Solnitsa is the earliest example in Europe of the use of this technology in salt production. It has been practiced here for more than a millennium. The heat required for the process is generated in advance in a special installation or, alternatively, is provided directly from an open fire, but in both cases by burning firewood. A change in technology was introduced at the end of the Chalcolithic – then the water from the brine is evaporated in a large “pool” by using heat from solar radiation. The development of the five parts of the complex is presented: the tel with deposits from the Late Neolithic and Chalcolithic, an Early Bronze Age cemetery, a Thracian “royal residence” from the 2nd – 1st centuries BC and a very large mound on the top; a salt-mining center from the Late Neolithic and Chalcolithic together with ritual facilities from that time; a Late Neolithic pit sanctuary and a Middle Chalcolithic cemetery above it; a Late Chalcolithic pit sanctuary; a Late Chalcolithic cemetery [10]. The discovered fortress walls, dwellings, and salt storage vessels prove that this was an important trading center.

The complex is of great interest and attracts numerous tourists, although excavations are still being carried out in it and it is open to visitors only on certain days. In most cases, the complex is open for visits on holidays and additional entertainment is organized for visitors, such as making salt paintings, searching for treasure, boiling salt, etc. After the excavations are completed, it will be able to be fully used as a tourist site.



Fig. 22 and 23 Prehistoric Complex of Provadia-Solnitsa



Fig. 24 Painting with salt



Fig. 25 Search for artifacts

The Provadia Historical Museum was opened in 1959, gradually enriching its exposition. The museum is housed in part of the house of the volunteer Stefan Bogdanov, donated by his heirs. Its halls display exhibits from the city and dozens of settlements of the former Provadia district. The objects date from the end of the Neolithic Age to the mid-20th century. The emphasis is on the finds from the Prehistoric Salt Mining and Urban Center of Provadia-Solnitsata, the Late Antique and Medieval Fortress of Provat-Ovech, the Old Bulgarian Monastery - a literary center from the 9th-11th centuries near the village of Ravna, materials from the Ottoman period, the Bulgarian National Revival, the New and Most Recent history of the city and the region, coins, weapons, photographs [11].



Fig. 26 and 27 Exhibits at the Provadia Historical Museum



Fig. 28 and 29 The Provadia Historical Museum

Svetoslav Obretenov House-Museum

In 1976, the country's first museum of a composer, the Svetoslav Obretenov House Museum, was established in Provadia - exhibited in his native home. Over the years, the museum has been the subject of many visits by tourists, and music lessons have been held for students from the city. After 1998, the museum was transformed into a museum collection and moved to another building. Historical Museum - Provadia is the successor to the Svetoslav Obretenov House Museum and the general historical museum collection. Today, its funds store over 15,000 objects from the past of the Provadia region. The bell with the composer's memorial plaque was moved from the house in which he lived to the courtyard of the Svetoslav Obretenov Children's Music School [11].



Fig. 30 and 31 Svetoslav Obretenov House-Museum

National Competition "Svetoslav Obretenov"

In 1964, a regional competition for graduates of children's musical instrumental schools in Northeastern Bulgaria was organized and held for the first time. Five years later, the competition was transformed into a National Competition for Young Instrumentalists named after the composer "Svetoslav Obretenov". Initially, the competition was held once a year, and since 1970 - every even year. All musical instruments included in the composition of the classical symphony orchestra are represented. In 1984, the National Competition "Svetoslav Obretenov" was accepted into the European Union of Youth National Music Competitions. A characteristic of the National Competition "Svetoslav Obretenov" is that only works by Bulgarian composers are performed at it - published and unpublished. This makes it unique and one of a kind not only in Bulgaria, but also in Europe [12].



Fig. 32 National Competition "Svetoslav Obretenov"

The national competition provides a good opportunity for symphonic music lovers to enjoy it. They can also take a walk in the beautiful nature and visit the tourist sites in the city and its surroundings.

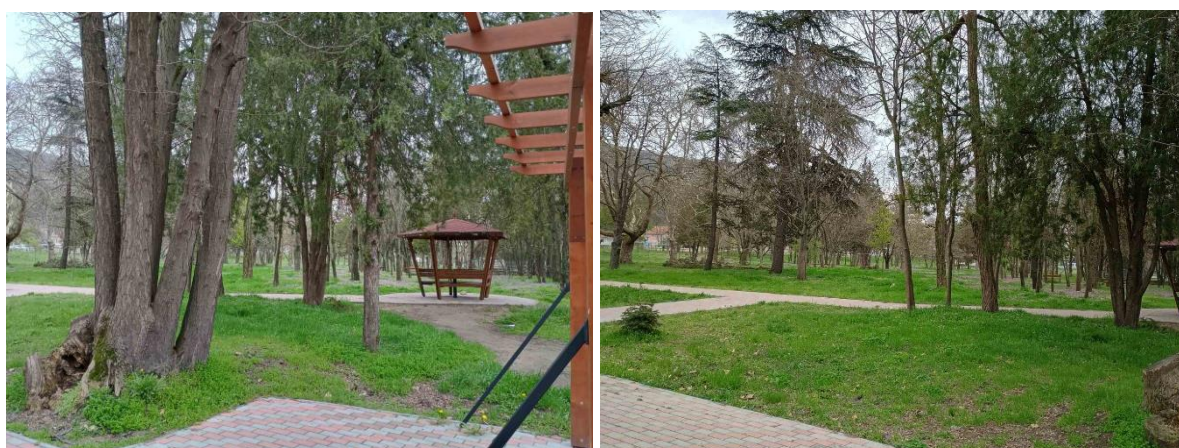
Salt mineral springs

The only deposit of rock salt in Bulgaria is located 5-6 km southeast of the town of Provadia. It was formed in a small isolated basin from the evaporation of sea water during the Late Permian. There are two salt mineral springs near the Provadia River – “Salt Water” (14 C°) at the Mirovo station and “Sernia Izvor” (21 C°) with a total flow rate of 5 l per second. The construction of the mineral baths began in 1923, and over the years it has been expanded and modernized. This marked the beginning of balneotherapy near Provadia, treating inflammation of the peripheral nervous system, diseases of the genitals and musculoskeletal system, liver and biliary diseases, gastritis, colic, etc. Massage rooms, therapeutic exercise, paraffin treatment and physiotherapy were built, and the area around the mineral baths was turned into a park. The Provadia mineral baths are unique in Bulgaria, baths with similar effects can be found in Karlovy Vary – Czech Republic. Baths with salt mineral water can be found in

Russia, Romania, Poland, France, Great Britain, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, USA, Japan, etc. [13]. Due to the economic crisis in Bulgaria, in the late 1990s, balneotherapy in Provadia declined and in 1997 the baths were closed [14].



Fig. 33 – 36 Mineral baths



Currently, the buildings used for physiotherapy, paraffin treatment, accommodation, mineral baths, canteen and boiler room are crumbling. In recent years, improvements have been made to the park, which is actively used by residents for walks and recreation.

Undoubtedly, the mineral springs near Provadia are an invaluable natural resource, which can and should be used again for the development of balneological and wellness tourism in the city. In the context of the global increase in interest in a healthy lifestyle, this sector can contribute significantly to the economic development of the region. In the vicinity of Provadia there are other rock monasteries that are of interest to tourists, and these are: a rock monastery in the Kara Cave area near the village of Manastir and St. George 2 km southeast of the village of Petrov Dol. The two sites were declared cultural monuments of local importance in the State Gazette, issue 16/1968 [15].

The natural features of the area provide conditions for ecotourism, mountain biking and alternative forms of tourism. The rock formations of Provadia are extremely suitable for mountaineering and climbing. In addition, the eco-trails around the city attract nature lovers with rich biodiversity and picturesque views. Among the most popular routes are the Path to Ovech - a historical and natural adventure, the Rock Route to the Rock Monasteries and the Walks along the Provadia River - suitable for bird watching and natural phenomena. The villages around Provadia offer opportunities for rural tourism, combining traditional Bulgarian customs, folklore and crafts. Local culinary traditions include the preparation of homemade dairy products, wines and traditional dishes. Despite the rich potential for the development of various types of tourism, there are also some challenges: Insufficiently developed infrastructure - the lack of modern hotels and tourist complexes limits the attraction of more tourists. Weak advertising and marketing - Provadia is still not well promoted as a tourist destination. Insufficient

investment – attracting private investors and developing sustainable development projects is key to the future development of tourism.

Challenges to the development of tourism in Provadia

Despite the rich tourism potential, the development of tourism in the region is limited by several key challenges:

- Underdeveloped infrastructure – lack of hotels and tourist facilities
- Low level of promotion – limited marketing and advertising of the region
- Lack of sufficient investment – need for public-private partnerships.

Conclusion

Provadia is a city with exceptional tourism potential, combining historical heritage, natural features and opportunities for balneo-, eco- and cultural tourism. Despite the challenges, investments in infrastructure, digital marketing and sustainable tourism practices can establish the city as an attractive destination in Bulgaria and the Balkan region.

In the context of the challenges facing tourism and business logistics in the 21st century, it is necessary to seek innovative strategies for attracting tourists, as well as sustainable solutions for preserving the cultural and natural heritage of Provadia.

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