Technical Brief

Developing Moldova's Tourism Industry

Effectively diversifying local attractions, leveraging social media for promotion, launching successful familiarization tours, expanding export capabilities and demand in the international marketplace, and facilitating public-private dialogue.

Tourism is an emerging sector in Moldova, driven by the need for job creation and the growing tourism market around the world. The number of foreign visitors coming to Moldova is steadily increasing, reaching nearly **2.5 million in 2013**. The sector has more than **440 companies**, but those promoting inbound tourism are limited. Wine, gastronomy, culture, rural, and soft adventure tourism position Moldova with a competitive advantage as an authentic destination in the heart of Europe. The growth of the tourism sector results in an increased demand for important goods and services for Moldova's economy, such as transportation and accommodation. Thus, the growth of the sector means economic growth for Moldova.

Branding Moldova and the Vision

As the economic benefits of a growing tourism sector surfaced, the USAID Competitiveness Enhancement and Enterprise Development II (CEED II) program created a vision focused around supporting the position of Moldova as an in-demand travel destination. A functional approach to promoting Moldova as a tourism destination was created to include upgrading tourism attractions and products, consolidating industry cooperation and public- private dialogue, and creating an enhanced destination image. Each of these components was vital to ensure a comprehensive transformation and re- launch Moldova's tourism sector. Ensuring local buy-in of existing tour operators, associations, and related service providers resulted in tourism strategies, streamlined sector priorities, and a new destination image for Moldova.

Key Indicators

- Among fastest growing industries in the world
- Key driver for socio-economic progress
- 2.5 million foreign visitors in Moldova in 2013
- Moldova declared by Lonely Planet #1 off-the-beaten path travel destination in Europe in 2013

Achieving Impact

With CEED II support, the international perception of Moldova as a tourism destination was raised through a series of strategic actions. The new country image, "Tree of Life", was developed based on a strong public-private dialogue being embraced by the industry and the public. It is now a distinctive brand that positions Moldova as an authentic tourism destination in the heart of Europe. Major initiatives, such as VAT reduction for hotel services, marketing and promotion plan development, and application of statistical methodologies aligned with UNWTO standards, consolidated industry cooperation and enhanced competitiveness in the sector. The Moldova Holiday website - the first and most complex informational platform - was developed and launched in September 2012. Today it is the national tourism website— with more than 1 million page views—that provides valuable information about Moldova's tourism offerings to foreign visitors for targeted markets and Moldovan

citizens. A Moldova Holiday tourism mobile application was developed and launched to feature 50 top tourism destinations. Millions of prospective travelers also learned about Moldova through the first promotional country video broadcast on Euronews. Familiarization tours for travel writers and tour operators from 12 target countries resulted in more than 70 articles being published about Moldovan tourism on specialized websites and magazines worldwide. To help Moldova reposition its offerings, more than 35 new products and itineraries were launched around wine, biking, and hiking. The sustainability of these activities is ensured by collaboration with ANTRIM, the country's first inbound tourism association, created with CEED II support.

SUCCESS STORIES: PROMOTING A TOURISM DESTINATION

Vision for Promotion

Create mediums for tourism in Moldova to be showcased internationally through targeted digital campaigns, familiarization tours, tradeshow and exhibition participation, and innovative product development to create interest.

The most limiting challenge for the growth of the tourism sector is the lack of promotion of Moldova as a destination, a serious constraint on the inbound tourism market. Moldova is a country with a unique profile for tourism, including rich gastronomy and wine traditions, notable cultural history, and an efficient geographical position. It is also one of the least visited countries in Europe. The potential for tourism in Moldova is vast, given the country's ability to offer authentic experiences to visitors. But getting the right information to potential travelers is vital for further sector development.

Supporting Sustainable Advocates

Creating a Common Voice for Inbound Tourism through ANTRIM. After one year of activity, the first Inbound Tourism Association of Moldova (ANTRIM) was created with the support and initiative of CEED II. Today the association is one of the most active and important in the field of NGOs that promotes Moldova as a tourism destination and represents interests of its members in local and international markets. Association membership increased from eight to 14 members after one year. Working together, members contribute to the development of the industry, achievement of common goals, and improvement of the business climate. The spectrum of ANTRIM activities is diverse: from lobbing and advocacy through partnerships with national and international organizations such as the country's National Tourism Agency (NTA), the U.S. Forest Service, and Moldsilva, to international promotion through introduction of innovative cultural events such as "Experience Moldova" (in London, Berlin, Stockholm, and Bucharest for more than 1,000 prospective visitors).

Public-Private Partnerships to Push Industry Priorities. Policy and strategies were developed to support the growing sector, with NTA drafting a Tourism Development Strategy 2020 and improved data gathering systems put in place to more accurately track information in line with EU and World Tourism Organization standards. These activities were undertaken with significant CEED II support through international expertise. In August 2014, CEED II and NTA signed a memorandum of cooperation in which parties committed to join efforts toward development of a new tourism country brand and the elaboration of the marketing and promotion plan to consolidate sector actions. After developing 50- second, 30-second, and 6-minute videos to reach international markets, the NTA aired the first promotional country video on Euronews, which resulted in 25,000 foreign visits to moldovaholiday.travel during one month. A resulting YouTube placement had more than 40,000 views its first week.

"It is important to note that since the launch of the new visual identity, we see a qualitative leap in understanding the market, supply, target consumers and promotion actions are implemented with consistency attract the interest of tourists and experts worldwide"

— Natalia Curnic, USAID CEED II Tourism Industry Manager

Rebranding and Revamping Existing Activities

Crafting an Eye-Catching Logo. In November 2014, CEED II and NTA launched a new visual identity for the country to correspond with tourism offerings. The new country brand program, which includes a series of strategic initiatives for the tourism industry such as a consolidated marketing and promotion platform, a visual identity, and a brand book, and communication strategies, are implemented by NTA. These activities are a result of a successful public-private partnership supported by foreign donors. CEED II continued its rebranding, positioning, marketing, and promotion support to NTA.

Upgrading Resources to Expand Reach on Moldova Holiday. To increase Moldova Holiday's audience, in November- December 2013, "Win a Weekend in Moldova" targeting the UK market was launched. The advertising campaign reached 29,371 people, with social media reaching 123,000 people. As a result, Moldova Holiday gained 869 new Facebook followers, of which 600 were from the UK. With reach into new international markets, the website underwent a series of upgrades including multi-language implementation with two more in French and German in process. With the wide use of the Moldova Holiday platform, it is now Moldova's official tourism website. In April 2015, CEED II launched a new mobile application - a mobile version of Moldova Holiday—to reach the large population of independent travelers.

Promotion, Promotion, Promotion

Reaching Strategic Audiences through Promotional Events. Beginning in 2013, CEED II facilitated attendance at strategic trade shows, exhibitions, and conferences to promote the industry directly to consumers. From Ukraine, Poland, Romania, and Germany to the United Kingdom, Moldovan representatives have traveled to spread the word about the unique offerings of Moldova's tourism industry. The first press conference was held at ITB Berlin 2014 by Moldovan companies and drew 30 journalists. As a result, Chateau Vartely, a winery and leisure complex, established good contacts with German, Romanian, Slovak, Polish, and American tour operators. Many people were interested not only in wine tours, but also combined rural, cultural, and wine experiences. While at the exhibition, local company Tatrabis solicited reservations for six groups of tourists: four groups for 2014 and two groups for 2015. Three Live Concerts of Moldovan Ethnic Music in target markets were launched in Germany, Sweden, and the UK due to their interest in travel blending rural, cultural, gastronomic, wine, and soft adventure experiences. Concerts were positioned to promote the tourism sector *and* Moldova's good investment environment, including its B2B and B2C potential. With the concerts, wine tastings were organized to promote the country brand, "Wine of Moldova", and wine tourism. More than 700 people attended the events and participated in the tastings, including potential partners, media outlets, investors, and diplomatic representatives. Three local TV channels made video reports about the shows.

Exhibition Breakdown

- January 13-18, 2015: Vakantieubeurs International Tourism Exhibition in Utrecht, Netherlands. First exhibition featuring the new tourism country brand.
- January 15-18, 2015: Ferrien Messe Exhibition in Vienna, Austria.
- January 22-25, 2015: EMITT Tourism Exhibition in Istanbul, Turkey.
- March 4- 8, 2015: ITB Tourism Trade Show in Berlin, Germany. First international press conference presenting the new country brand "Tree of Life".
- March 12-15, 2015: Participated at TTR Tourism Exhibition in Bucharest, Romania.

Empowering Tourism Service Providers by Strengthening Online Footprints. Supported by CEED II, 24 tourism service providers boosted their online presence through the development and upgrade of their websites. Three training sessions on Internet Marketing Best Practices for marketing managers from local tour operators, wineries, and event management companies drew more than 50 participants. The "Moldova – European Culture and Destiny," website for the Vatra Cultural Center, launched in April 2014, presented the Medieval Festival, which brought in more than 20,000 visitors, and the Ethno-Balcanic Festival, which drew 15, 000 visitors as a result of the revamped website.

Making the Introduction

Launching Familiarization (Fam) Tours to Penetrate New Markets. Starting in May 2013, familiarization tours, a main promotional tool for foreign journalists and tour operators, were introduced. More than 70 articles were published in magazines and online in channels including Eat, Drink, Travel, Lonely Planet, Der Spiegel, Prestigieux Universe, Krasivaia Jizni, Horizont, the BBC, and CNN after the tours. Articles focused on Moldovan gastronomy, wines, and the underground wine cities, which are unique in the world. As a result of Fam participation by foreign tour operators, Tatrabis facilitated two groups of 10 each from France in October and November 2013.

> "It was a very interesting and meaningful trip, as we were able to get a picture of the country ourselves, which is always important to make it sell better as a destination."
>
> *— Mr. Schneider, Product Manager, Ikarus Tours GmbH*

Moving Forward

Moldova has made good progress in supporting the inbound tourism industry. While the new national brand and strategy define a stronger position for Moldova as a tourist destination, a promotion plan must be developed to support coherent, professional implementation of the strategy and safeguard the fragile public-private dialogue between NTA and industry businesses. Steps should be taken to advance tourism attractions and services that correspond to the country's positioning and requirements of key markets.

Key Initiatives

- New tourism products unique to Moldova, as tourism trends toward "experience" during visits.
- Continued government support and openness to new initiatives.
- Fostering strong partnerships among government, private sector, and donor community.

Moldova declared #1 off- the-beaten-path travel destination in Europe (by Lonely Planet, 2013)

Moldova was named as the third best improved destination in 2015 and jumped in 4 years 28 places in international ranking by Adventure Travel Trade Association.

Upgraded tourism attractions & products

Tourism offer was enhanced through new themed itineraries & products: **35** new products & itineraries — Wine, Biking, Hiking

Attractions were diversified by developing festivals and other authentic experiences: **10** events, **42K** visitors

Sustainability of events was achieved through private partners and sponsors: Moldova, IA mania, Green Run, Dulce Floare de Salcâm

Consolidated industry cooperation and public-private dialogue

The **first inbound industry association**– ANTRIM – was setup

Streamlined industry vision, marketing and export strategies were developed through **public-private partnership**

Tourism statistics policy and methodology were **aligned to UNWTO** standards

Promoted Moldova as a tourism destination

Online presence & marketing was strengthened

Launched the first and largest national platform **www.Moldovaholiday.travel** and first mobile application

300K unique visitors **5** languages **1,1M** pages accessed

Helped SMEs boost online presence **24** websites developed/upgraded

Impactful digital campaign introduced, e-marketing & social media

5 Facebook contests **+600K** prospective travelers

Destination image and trade was raised through familiarization tours for media and business

12 markets targeted, e.g. Romania, Poland, UK, France, Germany

30 tour operators **44** journalists **70** publications

Export capability and demand in international marketplace grew

13 major tradeshows

Stronger tradeshow visibility by introducing press events

3 press conferences, attended by **100+** tourism writers

Innovative concept of cultural events was launched

4 events Great Britain, Germany, Sweden & Romania

800+ Prospective visitors: media, opinion formers & business

Enhanced destination image

Moldova's **new image** was created and embraced by industry, government and community

A **cohesive marketing** and promotion program was developed to support the new brand

First country tourism video was developed and broadcasted on Euronews