



**STUDY OF THE
CUSTOMER'S NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS IN
RURAL TOURISM - AGROTOURISM
IN REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA**

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1. Abstract

The present study is part of the project “Quality Certification System in Agrotourism - CerTour” and has the objectives to assess the level of the services provided in agrotourism sector, and to develop an understanding of what customers need and expect in their visits to the agrotourism enterprises in Moldova.

The research was conducted during October-November 2013 in four geographic regions of the country. The size of the tourists group interviewed was 41 persons. The basic survey tool used for interviewing the respondents was *questionnaire*. The following data collection methods were used: *personal interviews* and *email and internet surveys*.

According to the study results most of the tourists that visit Moldova according to the study findings are young, between 20 - 40 years old and over 60% are men.

For more than half the respondents, newness of the place and exploring new things was the main causes in choosing this destination. Friends and forums on internet remain the most used sources of information about the destination. *On-line* method of making reservation is not much used but instead more than two thirds of respondents are making their reservations *by their selves*. Also, tourists try to visit as many attractions as possible during their stay. The most popular attractions are *cities, churches and monasteries, winery places of historical significance and sightseeing by car/coach or on foot*. At the same time, the most popular activities that tourists take part during their stay are *short walk/stroll – and guided tours*. It seems that most satisfied tourists were when it comes to the *Cost of travel, Value for money, Friendly and efficient service and Low cost/budget accommodation*. Tourists consider that *hospitality, traditions, food, nature, tranquility and peace* are the strongest sides of Moldova. At the same time, *infrastructure, utilities, information, transport access and hygiene* needs to be improved in our country in order to be more attractive for the foreign tourists. Most of the respondents were very positive when thinking about a trip to this destination again and this is a very good result for agrotourism in Moldova.

2. Introduction

The present study is part of the project “Quality Certification System in Agrotourism - CerTour”, Contact No: DGCTE 31422/16.04.2913 Ref. 2.1.2.75741.253 MIS-ETC 2634; Start Date: 28/5/2013, End Date: 28/5/2015, funded by European Union. The objective of the project is to promote the agrotourism in the partner' regions and to improve the quality of the services provided by introducing a common specific quality standard and a

specification process, the participating partners have to better understand the profile of the agrotourism customer.

In order to achieve the goal of the project a study of the customer's needs and expectations was conducted in October-November 2013.

The objectives of the study were:

- to assess the level of the services provided in agrotourism sector, and;
- to develop an understanding of what customers need and expect in their visits to the agrotourism enterprises in the partners' regions.

3. Methods

The target group is people who live in foreign countries other than Moldova and have spent at least one night in tourist accommodation in Moldova.

The research was conducted during October-November 2013 in four geographic regions of the country, but mainly in central part of Moldova that is corresponding to the region that is concentrated most of the agrotourism sector. The size of the tourists group interviewed was 41 persons.

The basic survey tool used for interviewing the respondents was *questionnaire*. The following data collection methods were used:

- *Personal interviews*
- *Email and internet surveys.*

The questionnaire used for the research consisted of 23 questions and the mean duration of filling a questionnaire was 25-30 minutes.

4. Results

4.1 The home countries of tourists surveyed.

Surveyed tourists were represented by adults who live in other countries than Moldova and who visited Moldova. Tourists residing in 18 countries have responded to the questionnaire.

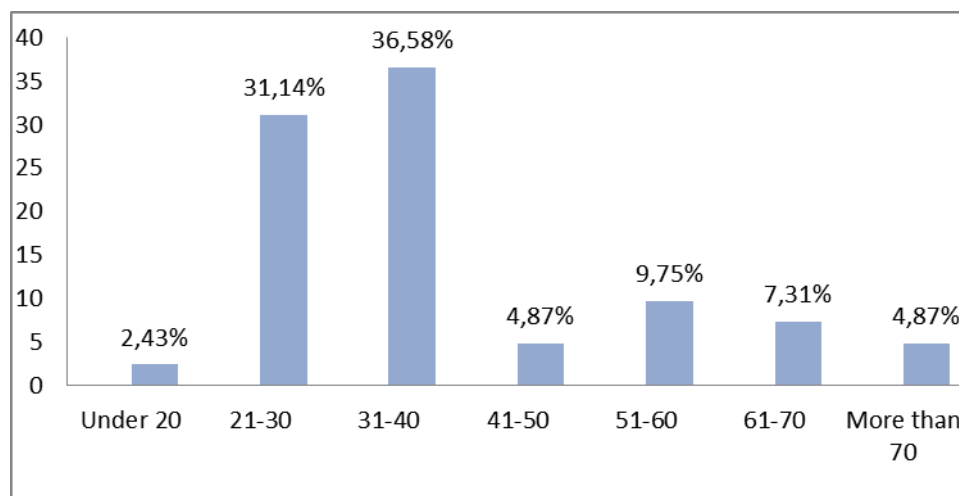
Table1. The home countries of tourists surveyed

Country of origin	Nr. of tourists
Canada	1
Denmark	3
Spain	1
Latvia	1
Belarus	1
Estonia	5
Romania	7
USA	5
Italy	4
Bulgaria	1
Sweden	4
Czech Republic	2
Ukraine	1
Russia	1
Austria	1
Poland	1
Japan	1
France	1

4.2 Distribution of tourists by age, sex and profession.

Tourists surveyed who visited Moldova are **36,58% women** and **63,41% men** and the **average age of tourists is 36,14 years**. The most popular **professions** of the tourists visiting Moldova are the followings: managers, engineers, project consultants, volunteers, doctors (medicine), students, and a very small part answered as unemployed.

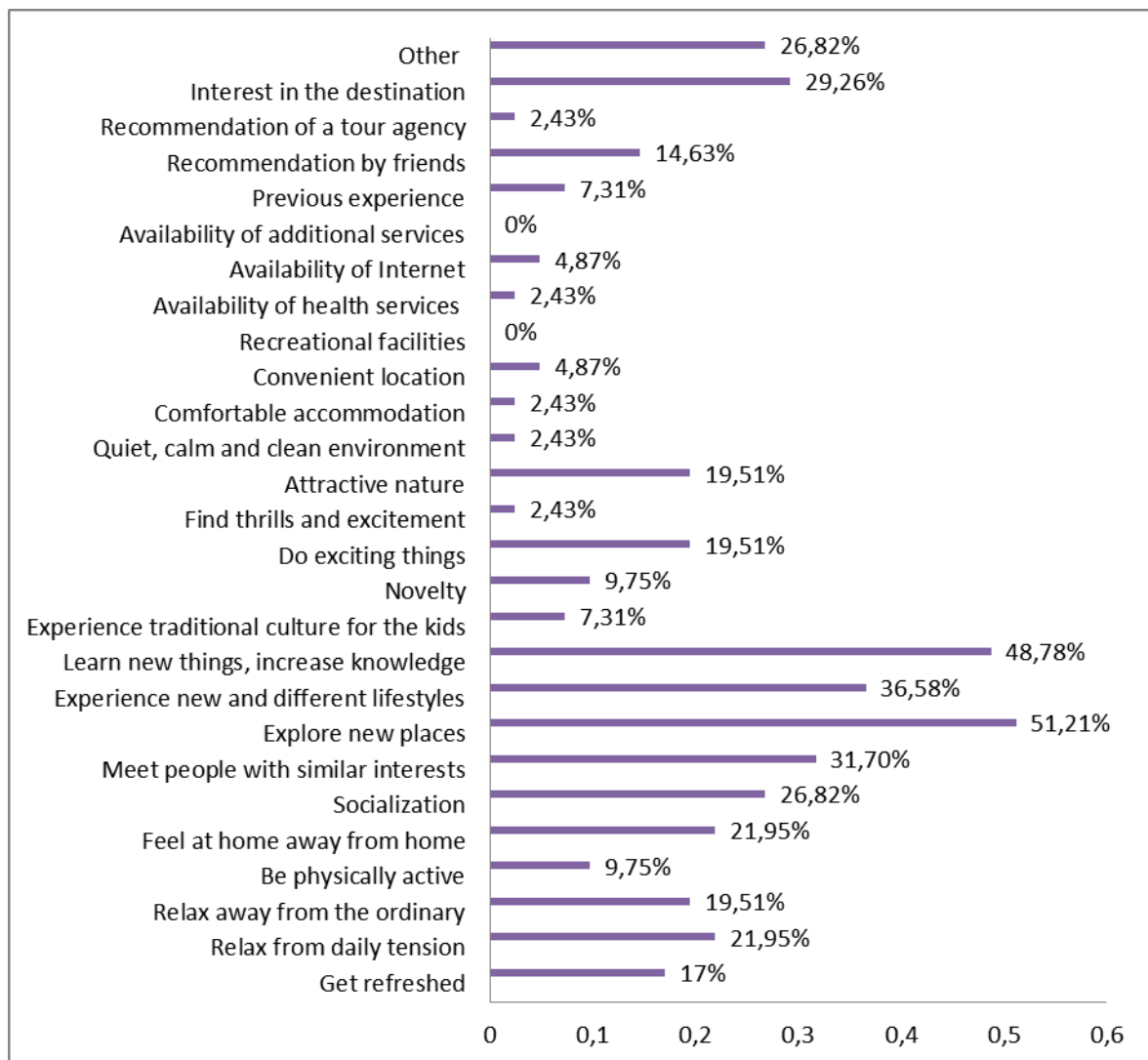
Table 2. Distribution of tourists by age



4.3 Reasons for selecting this destination.

At the question ***What were the reasons for selecting this destination*** most of the respondents gave multiple answers. For more than half of the respondents the reason for selecting this destination was to *explore new places (51,21%)*; for 48,78% of the respondents the main reason for visiting the destination was to *learn new things, increase knowledge*; also many respondents indicated that one of the main reason for visiting this destination is to *experience new and different lifestyles (36,58%)*. Also, among the most popular answers were *interest in destination (29,26%)*, *meet people with similar interests (31,70%)*, *socialization (26,82)*. Big part of the respondents indicated in their answers other reasons for visiting the destination: *business, visit friends or family, work, etc. (26,82%)*. None of interweaved tourists pointed out *availability of additional services and recreational facilities* as reasons for selecting this destination.

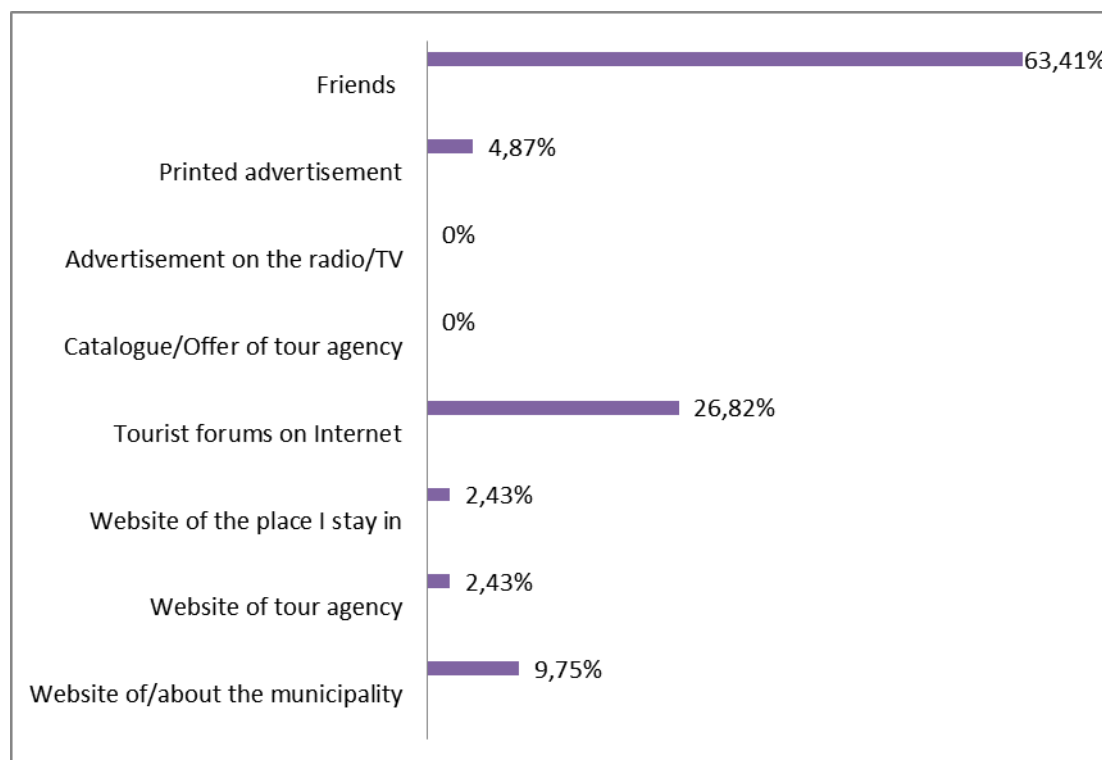
Table 3. Reasons for selecting this destination.



4.4 Sources of information about the destination.

Most of the respondents answered that they **get information about this destination** from their *friends* – 63,41%, also an important source of information for the tourists are *tourist forums on Internet* – 26,82%. None from the respondents pointed out *catalogue/offer of tour agency* or *advertisement on the radio/TV* as their source of information about the destination.

Table 4. Sources of information about the destination



4.5 The method of making reservation.

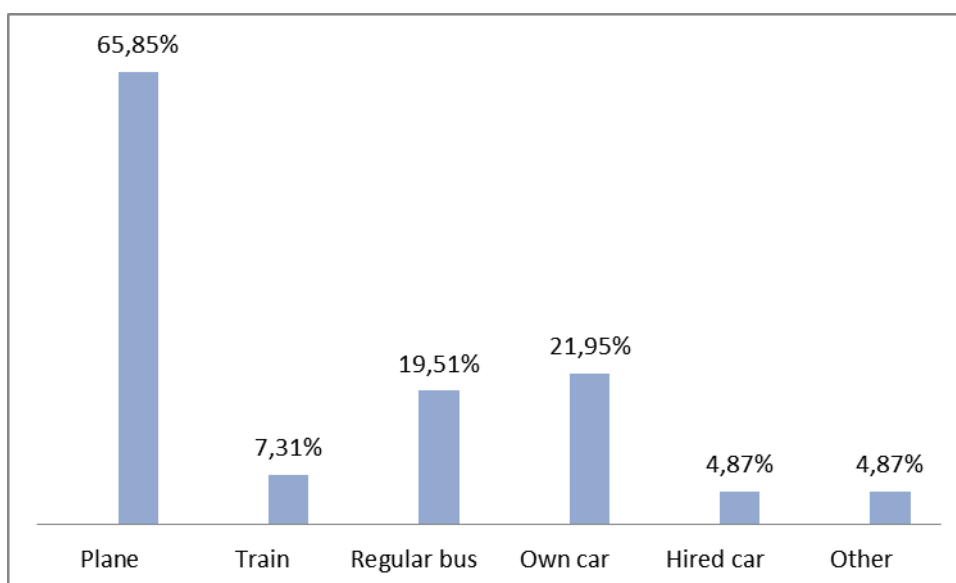
Most of the tourists participating in the study said that they **make their reservation** by their selves - 70.73%. About 19,51% of the interviewed tourists make their reservation via tour agency and only 9,75% of the tourists are making their reservation on-line.

4.6 Form of transport used to reach the destination.

Most of the tourist **reached the destination** using plane – 65,85% and this is due to the fact that for most of the interviewed tourist the word *destination* had the meaning of Moldova as destination and not a particular area or region in the country. Moreover, there are only international flights from and to Moldova; there are no internal regular flights. Almost the same number of the tourist use own car and regular bus to reach the destination, 21,95% and respectively 19,51% of the respondents. About 7,31% used train to reach the selected destination and 4,87% use hired car to travel to the

destination. Also, 4,87% of the tourists indicated other means of transportations – friends/colleagues cars.

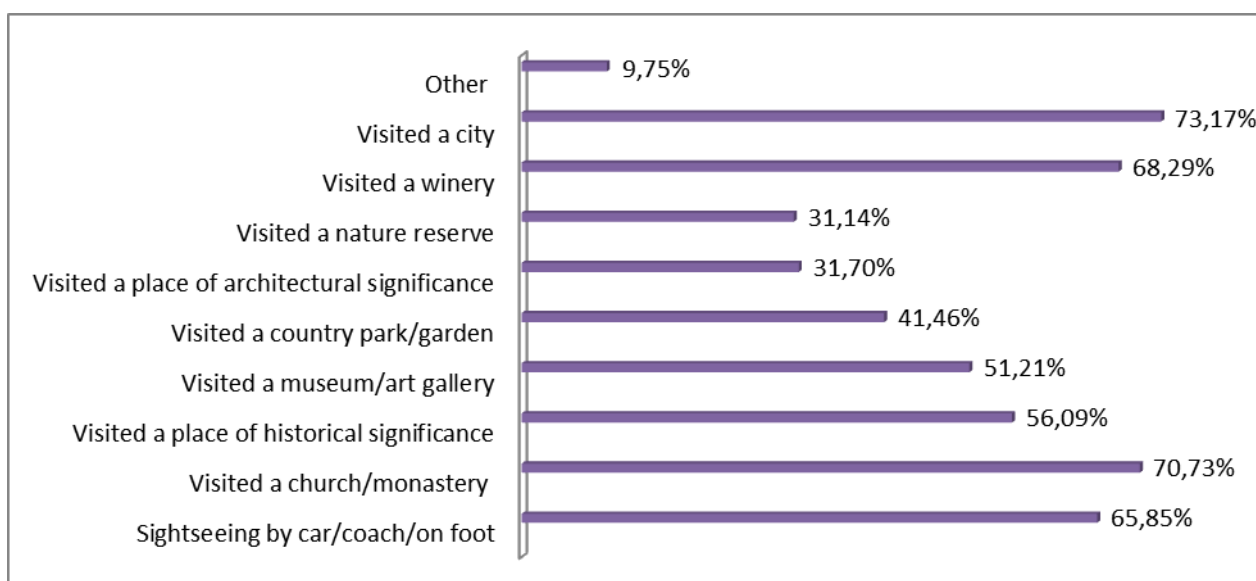
Table 5. Form of transport used to reach the destination.



4.7 Types of attractions visited during the stay of tourists.

At the question *What type of attractions did you visit during your stay* most of the tourists participated in the study gave multiple answers, and usually all the tourists try to visit as many attractions as possible during their stay in Moldova. According to the results, most visited attractions visited are cities – 73,17%, churches and monasteries – 70,73%, winery – 68,29%, places of historical significance - 56,09%, museum and art gallery – 51,21%. Also, very popular attraction for the tourists is sightseeing by car/coach/on foot – 65,85%. Among other attractions pointed out by the tourists are: nightclubs, restaurants, familiar locations and people, etc.

Table 6. Types of attractions visited during the stay of tourists.



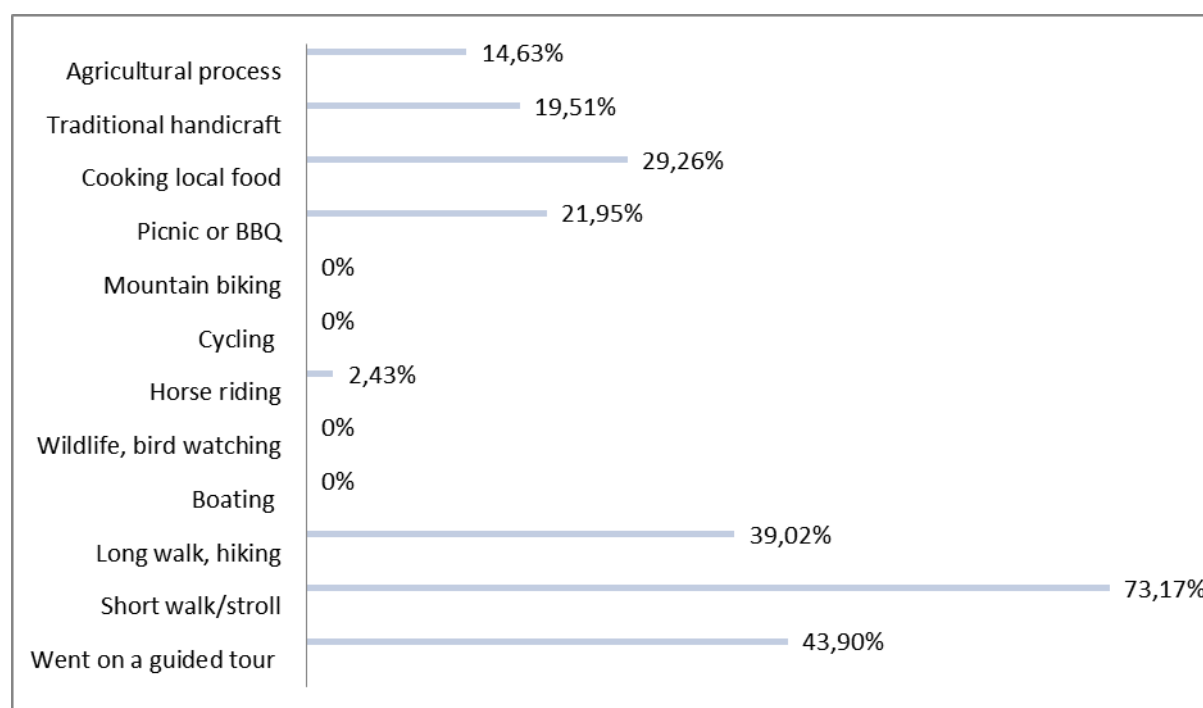
4.8 Suggested attractions that the tourists would like to visit.

From the **suggested attractions that the tourists would like to visit** the most frequent answers were: more monasteries; nature reserves; traditional food places; karaoke clubs; nightlife attractions, Transnistrian region.

4.9 Type of activities tourist take part during their stay.

It seems that from the **activities that tourists take part during their stay**, the most popular is *short walk/stroll* – 73,13%. *Guided tours* are the second most popular activity pointed out by tourists – 43,90%. Also, many tourists are practicing long *walks and hiking* during their stay – 39,02%. Judging from the responses of tourist *cooking local food* is also popular activity, it was pointed out by 29,26%. More than 20% of the tourists take part in *picnics and BBQs* and less about 19,51% are participating in *traditional handcrafting*. Only 14,63% are participating in agricultural process but we suppose that this number is low because of the period that the study was conducted (October-November) and by this period most of the agricultural processes are ended. We also suppose that these results could be different if the study was conducted in a period of the year of agriculture activity. None of the tourists pointed out that they take part in *mountain biking, cycling, boating or wildlife/bird watching*. It seems that these services are less developed and not offered very often to the tourists.

Table 7. Type of activities tourist take part during their stay.



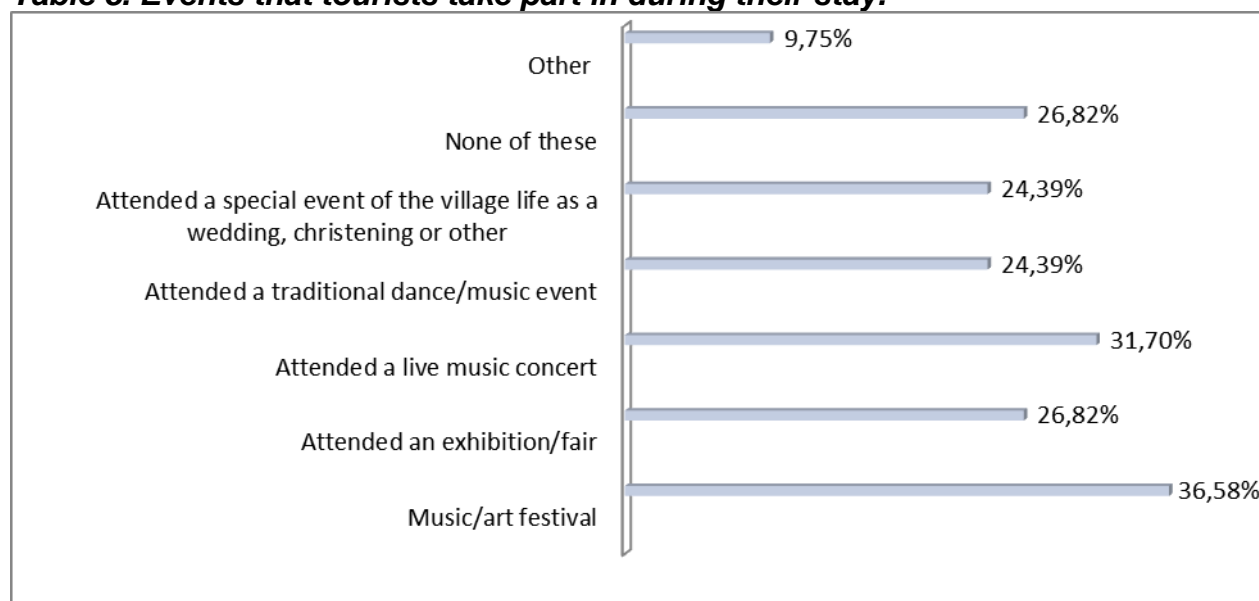
4.10 Suggested types of activities that tourists would like to take part.

The most **suggested types of activities that tourists would like to take part** were the followings: tours on air balloon; visiting more historical sites and nature reserves, motorcycling, canoe, Para-plane, horse riding, cooking local food, agricultural process, cycling, mountain biking.

4.11 Events that tourists take part in during their stay.

From the **events that tourists took part during their stay** in Moldova the most popular are *music/art festival* – 36,58%, *live music concert* – 31,70%, *exhibition/fair* – 26,82%, 24,39% answered that they attended both *traditional dance/music event and special event of a village life as a wedding, etc.* At the same time 26,82% has participated at *none of these events*. 9,75% of tourists participated at other events than those indicated in the questionnaire, among them the most popular are the followings: meeting with (business) partners; festivals and concert, wine festival, fest of the city.

Table 8. Events that tourists take part in during their stay.



4.12 Other type of events that they would have wished to take part in.

More than half of the interviewed tourists could not suggest **other type of events that they would have wished to take part in**. From the suggested type of events the most popular are: movie/film, ethnic festival, traditional art exhibition; attend a special event of a village, attend traditional dance event; music event, etc.

4.13 Level of satisfaction on planning their trip, accommodation and activities offered.

Within the study, tourists were asked to make an assessment of the level of satisfaction on planning their trip, accommodation and activities offered. Tourists were asked to give an appreciation of choosing from six levels of satisfaction:

Very satisfied	6
Satisfied	5
Fairly satisfied	4
Fairly dissatisfied	3
Dissatisfied	2
Very dissatisfied	1

When asking about the level of satisfaction **of the trip planning** the answers were the followings: *Availability of useful information online to help you plan the trip* the average of the assessment was - **4,13**; At the question - *Availability of other useful information off-line to help you plan your trip* the average of the assessment was - **3,72**; At the question - *Availability of convenient transport routes* the average of the assessment was - **4,05**; At the question - *Cost of travel* the average of the assessment was - **5,05**.

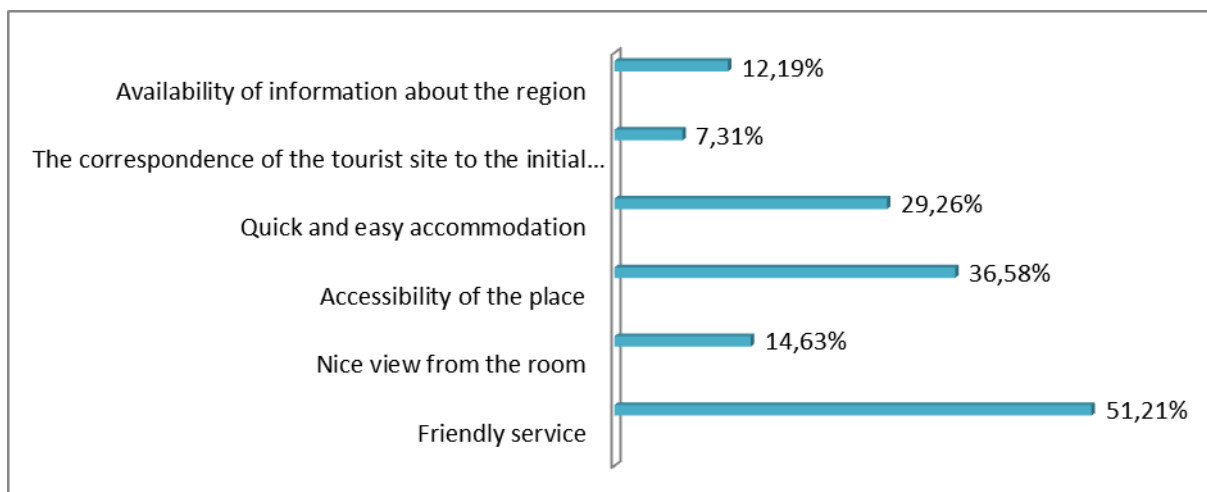
When asking about the level of satisfaction **about the accommodation** the answers were the followings: - *Availability of low cost/budget accommodation* the average of the assessment was - **4,91**; At the question - *Availability of good quality accommodation* the average of the assessment was - **4,52**; At the question - *Value for money* the average of the assessment was - **5,05**; At the question - *Friendly and efficient service* the average of the assessment was - **4,88**.

When asking about the level of satisfaction **of the activities offered** the answers were the followings: - *Availability of information locally about places you can visit during your trip*, the average of the assessment was - **4,08**; At the question - *Enough opportunities to take part in various activities*, the average of the assessment was - **3,85**; At the question - *Enough opportunities to attend local events/festivals*, the average of the assessment was - **4,13**.

4.14 The most important first impression after tourist arrival.

The most **important for the first impression for the tourists at their arrival** according to their answers is *friendly services*. By friendly services were impressed 51,21% of the tourists participating in the study. Also, *accessibility of the place* was one of the most important impression for the tourists – 36,58% of the respondents. For 29,26% of the tourists also the *quick and easy accommodation* was an important first impression after the arrival. Less important first impression was *the nice view from the room* – 14,63%, *availability of information about the region* – 12,19% and the less indicated first impression for the tourist was *the correspondence of the tourist site to the initial description* – 7,31%.

Table 9. The most important first impression after tourist arrival



4.15 Most enjoyable things about the trip.

In order to capture the country's image in the minds of foreign tourists in the questionnaire was introduced with an open response questions that were asked to say **what they have enjoyed the most during their trip**. Key phrases are indicated by tourists are: *food, parks in Chisinau, whole trip experience, monuments, churches, Chisinau city; nature, sightseeing, weather, friendly services, hospitality, process of making food, wine, friendly and warm hosts, friendly people, beautiful country, people and friends, generosity of the people, meeting with locals, countryside and Transnistria, intercultural shock, interest from people to show their culture, visit at the winery; experiencing new environments and culture, colleagues, meeting friends and family, walking around the city, hotel staff, hiking in the country side, picnic with locals, nature, whole trip experience, welcoming and very hospitable people, authenticity of the local life*. Almost 10% of the tourists have mentioned **food** as the most enjoyed during their trip. At the same time almost 20% have mentioned **hospitality** as the main thing that they have enjoyed during their trip. 17% of the tourists have enjoyed the most - **friendly people** that they have meet during their trip in Moldova. Also, among the most enjoyable things were mentioned – **wine, nature and meeting old friends**.

4.16 What was expected to find during the stay in Moldova and was not.

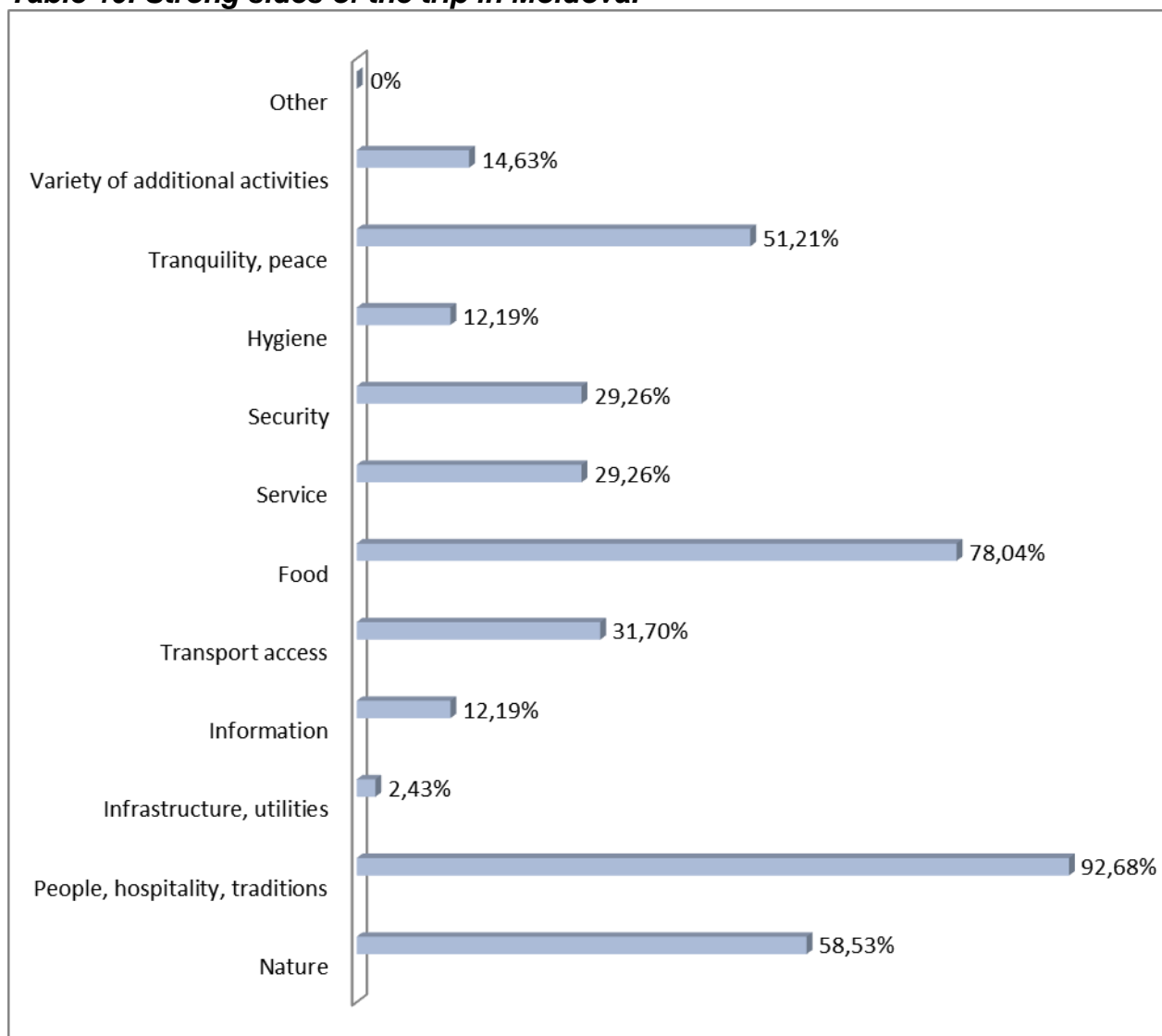
When asked **what you expected to find during your stay in Moldova and you didn't** most of the tourists said that actually they didn't have any expectations before coming to Moldova. Tourists that gave answers to his question said that they expected to find during their stay and they didn't the followings: *lack of services; more European lifestyle; souvenirs; high quality service, better touristic infrastructure; better access to maps,*

information and events list from the country; country non-spoiled of consumerism; poor roads.

4.17 General impressions and observations of the trip in Moldova.

Tourists are given the opportunity to give appreciation on **general impressions and observations of their trip in Moldova**. They could choose from **Strong sides** and **Need for Improvement**. When indicated the strong sides of their visit most of the tourists consider that *People, hospitality, traditions* – 92,68% are the strongest sides of Moldova. 78,04% of the tourists consider that *Food* is the strongest side of tourism in Moldova. Also, more than half of the respondents consider that *Nature* – 58,53% and *Tranquility, peace* – 51,21% are the strongest sides. At the same time, such things like *Hygiene, Information, Infrastructure and utilities* has the lowest points in the table below.

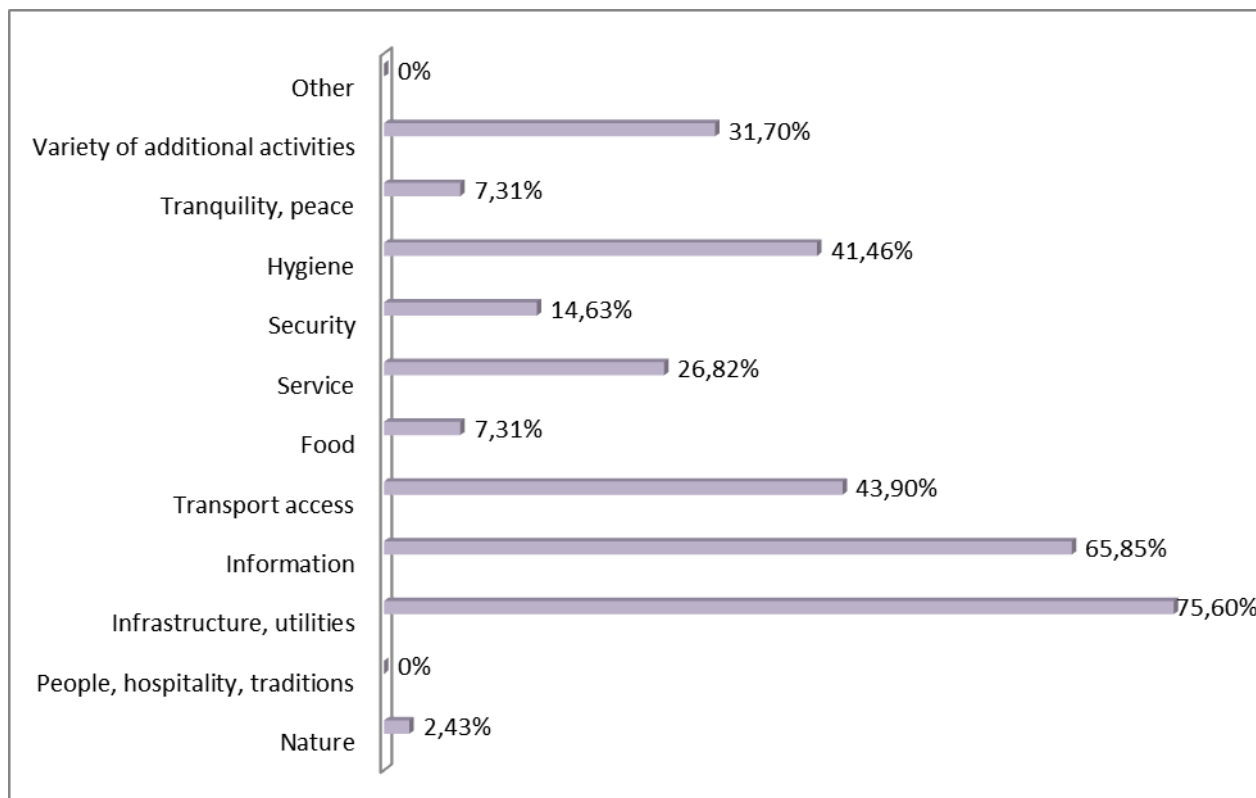
Table 10. Strong sides of the trip in Moldova.



Most of the tourists that have participated in the study consider that *Infrastructure, utilities* has to be improved firstly – 75,60%, also what they consider that has to be

improved is *Information* – 65,85%. According to the survey results also *Transport access* – 43,90% and *Hygiene* – 41,46% needs to be improved. What tourists consider that definitely do not need to be improved is *People, hospitality, traditions* and *nature*. Also very low percentage of the tourists considers that *Tranquility, peace* and *Food* needs to be improved.

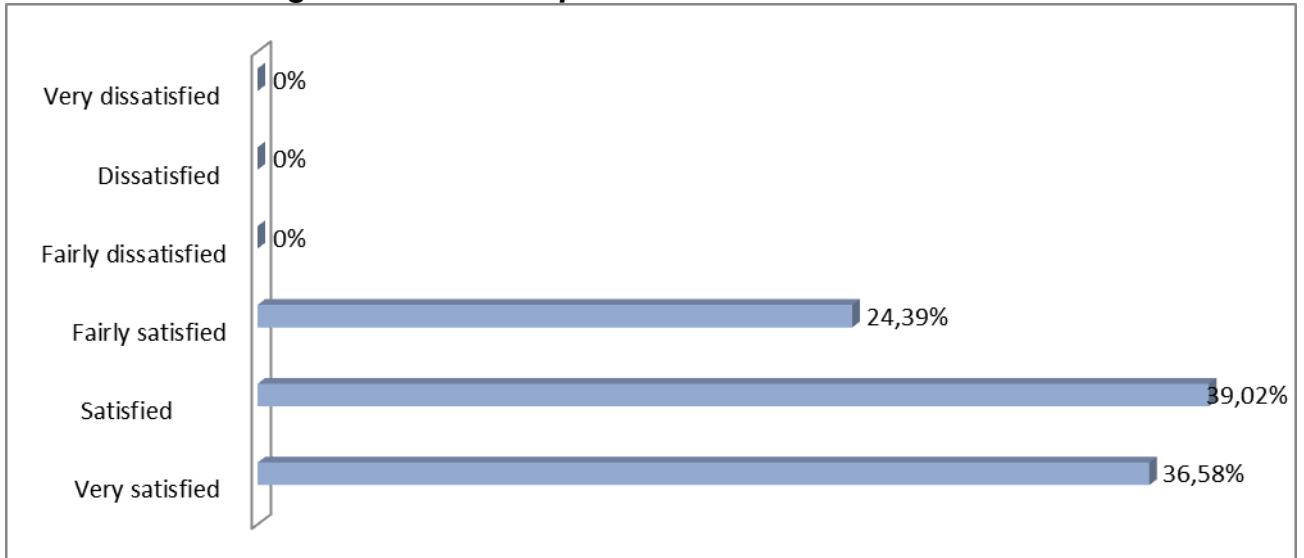
Table 11. Needs improvement when talking about trip in Moldova



4.18 Rating of the overall experience of the destination.

Asked to **rate their overall experience of the destination** most of the tourists have indicated that they were *Satisfied* – 39,09%, also a big part said that they were *Very satisfied* - 36,58%, and *Fairly satisfied* – 24,39%. It should be noted that none of the respondents answered that they were *Fairly dissatisfied*, *Dissatisfied* or *Very dissatisfied*.

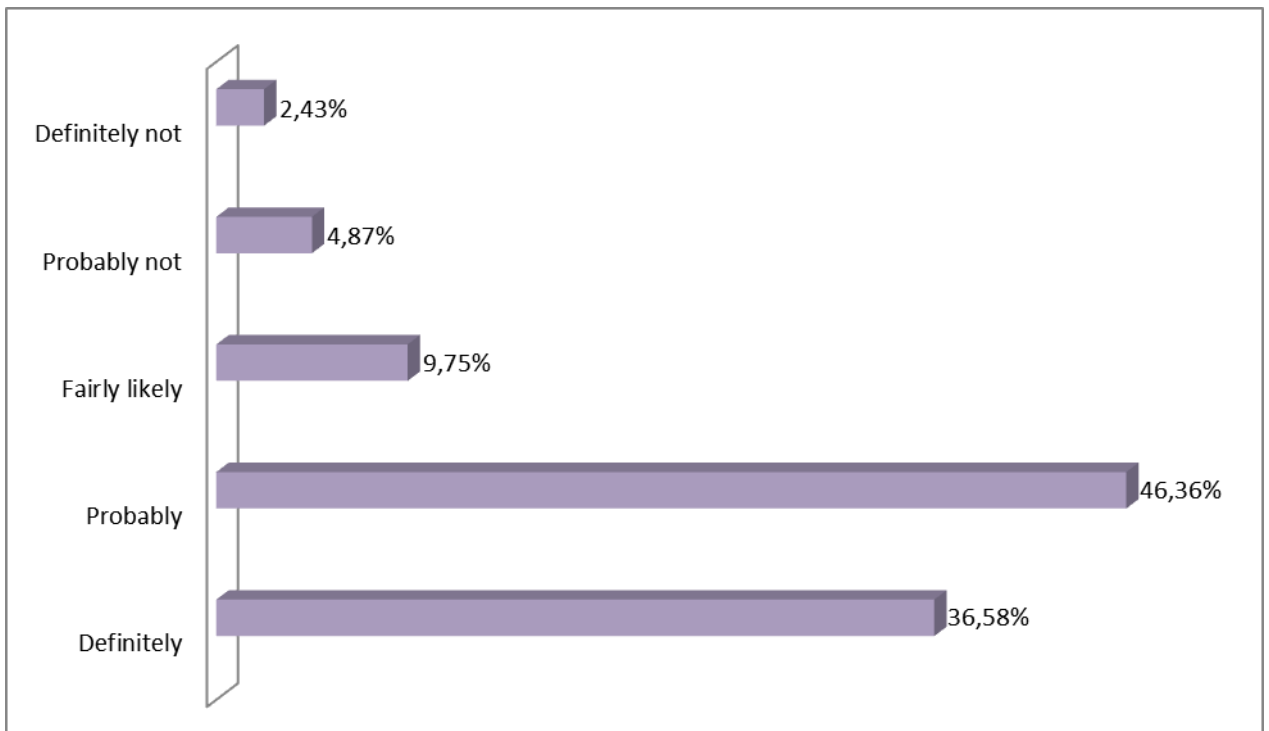
Table 12. The rating of the overall experience of the destination



4.19 Likelihood to return to this destination again.

36.58% of tourists who visited Moldova *definitely* will come back. About 46,36% said that they will *probably* will take a trip to this destination again. Also, 9,75% of the respondents answered that they will fairly likely to take a trip to this destination again. Very few respondents answered that they *probably not* - 4,87% and *definitely not* – 2,43% take a trip to this destination again.

Table 13. Likelihood to return to this destination again



5. Conclusions

Most of the tourists that visit Moldova according to the study findings are young, between 20 - 40 years old and over 60% are men.

For more than half the respondents, newness of the place and exploring new things was the main causes in choosing this destination. None of interweaved tourists pointed out availability of additional services and recreational facilities as reasons for selecting this destination. This can mean that these are not present in Moldovan tourist industry, not known by the tourists or not attractive to the tourists.

Friends and forums on internet remain the most used sources of information about the destination. This can be explained that these sources are most credible. At the same time we suppose that these two are almost the only sources used by the tourists because the rest sources are underdeveloped or inexistent, no respondent pointed out *catalogue/offer of tour agency* or *advertisement on the radio/TV* as their source of information.

On-line method of making reservation is not much used but instead more than two thirds of respondents are making their reservations *by their selves*. Also, less than 20% of the respondents use the services or *tour agencies* for this purpose.

Most of the respondents indicated that they use *plane* to reach the destination and this is because they understood Moldova as a destination, but when it comes to destination within the country, *own car and regular bus* is the most used form of transportation.

Usually tourists try to visit as many attractions as possible during their stay. The most popular attractions are *cities, churches and monasteries, winery places of historical significance and sightseeing by car/coach or on foot*. Also some tourists indicated that they would like to visit also but they didn't: *nature reserves; traditional food places; karaoke clubs; nightlife attractions; Transnistrian region*.

The most popular activities that tourists take part during their stay are *short walk/stroll – and guided tours*. None of the tourists pointed out that they take part in *mountain biking, cycling, boating or wildlife/bird watching*. It seems that these services are less developed and not offered very often to the tourists. At the same time some activities that were not mentioned by the tourists we can find in suggested types of activities. Many tourists suggested that they would love to take part in: *tours on air balloon; visiting more historical sites and nature reserves, motorcycling, canoe, Para-plane, horse riding, cooking local food, agricultural process, cycling, and mountain biking*.

According to the study findings *music/art festival, live music concert and exhibitions/fairs* are the most popular events that tourists took part during their stay. At the same time almost one third of the respondents didn't participate in any of the indicated event. This can be due to the lack of information and touristic guides with this information available. From the suggested type of events that tourists would like to take part, the most popular are: *movie/film, ethnic festival, traditional art exhibition; attend a special event of a village, attend traditional dance event; music event, etc.*

It seems that most satisfied tourists were when it comes to the *Cost of travel, Value for money, Friendly and efficient service and Low cost/budget accommodation*. Less satisfied tourists were when they were asked about *Availability of other useful information off-line to help to plan the trip and Enough opportunities to take part in various activities*.

The most important for the first impression for the tourists at their arrival according to tourists answers is *friendly services and accessibility of the place*. Also, the most enjoyable things for the tourists during their trip were *food, hospitality, friendly people wine, nature and meeting old friends*.

Some tourists expected to find during their stay in Moldova *more European lifestyle; souvenirs; high quality service, better touristic infrastructure; information and events list from the country* but they could not find any. In contrary some tourists expected to find in Moldova *bad roads and lack of services* but for them was a surprise to see that it is not so, and things are better than expected.

Tourists consider that *hospitality, traditions, food, nature, tranquility and peace* are the strongest sides of Moldova. At the same time, *infrastructure, utilities, information, transport access and hygiene* needs to be improved in our country in order to be more attractive for the foreign tourists.

Three-fourths of respondents said they were or *very satisfied* or *satisfied* of the destination. The overall assessment of the experience of the destination is positive, no one from the tourists said that he is not satisfied from the experience.

Less than 8% of the respondents said that *probably they will not* and *definitely they will not* take a trip to this destination again. The rest of the respondents were very positive when thinking about a trip to this destination again and this is a very good result for agrotourism in Moldova.