

Most beautiful rural tourism farmsteads in Lithuania



EUROPOS ŽEMĖS ŪKIO FONDAS KAIMO PLĖTRAI:
EUROPA INVESTUOJA Į KAIMO VIETOVES



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The publication presents rural tourism farmsteads in Aukštaitija, Dzūkija, Suvalkija and Žemaitija and their owners, who successfully used the Rural Development Programme for Lithuania 2007–2013 (RDP) measures and prior to 2007 received the support under the Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (SAPARD) and Lithuanian 2004–2006 Single Programming Document (SPD) programmes. An exhaustive description is given of the diversity of rural tourism services, traditional agricultural activities, which are interlinked with the services for tourists: fresh products, grown on the farm are supplied to holidaymakers. Attention is also focused on the provided recreational services: water sports, horseback-riding, and elements of traditional agriculture.

Photos by Jurgita Briedienė, Nijolė Petrošiūtė, Violeta Seredžiuvienė, Česlovas Skaržinskas and owners of rural tourism farmsteads are used in the publication.

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Lithuanian rural tourism fascinates guests by its authenticity

Mantas ČESONIS

Klaus Ehrlich, General Secretary of the European Federation of Farm and Village Tourism, who visited Lithuania quite recently, spoke about perfect opportunities existing for rural tourism in Lithuania. Visitors from the West and East find in Lithuania authenticity, something they have already lost. Lithuania can boast of extant old villages, farmsteads, and very hospitable and sincere people. According to 2007–2013 Lithuanian Rural Development Programme measure “Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities”, special attention is devoted to improving the quality of rural tourism services, enhancing their diversification, and implementing innovations in rural tourism business. We talk about rural tourism with Linas ŽABALIŪNAS, President of the Lithuanian Rural Tourism Association.

“What are tendencies of rural tourism development in Lithuania?”

“We may judge about them by watching the countries with more extensive experience. For instance, two–three years ago in France, where rural tourism is the old tradition, it started changing in the core. A certain breakthrough occurred. Due to the specificity of rural tourism activities when clients communicate face-to-face with farmstead hosts, come to them for holiday-making, the service was started to be referred to as a “personal communication” accommodation service”.

“Are we coming back to something that has once been rejected? It seems as if we do not need to come back as we have not lost such communication skills”.

“Yes. Nowadays, such communication in the still more alienated world is highly appreciated, and this is a very important trait of Lithuanian rural tourism”.

“Thus, rural tourism is not just a stay overnight in the picturesque scenery”?

“People involved in rural tourism in Lithuania understand that rural tourism is not the ordinary accommodation business. It requires much more. The visitor may be offered not only a stay for a night but also the activity programme. Guests may see or even feel something new, never experienced before. Such holidaymaker sees how the host lives, his everyday life, and may experience all that himself as if he is a member of the family. For example, he eats not only organic or healthier products but also has an opportunity to see the whole process, how those products find their way to the table, i.e. how grain



Linas Žabaliūnas: “Rural tourism farmsteads of each region in Lithuania have something to display: different traditions, ethnographic items, and architecture”.

is grown on this farm or neighbouring farms, how cows are milked, and how dishes are prepared. The choice is big, indeed. Some may take delight in quietness, admire the mist rising above the lake in the early morning, listen to bird songs and do nothing else. Others may spend their time more actively: exercising, going to baths, and testing the effect of herbs on their health”.

“Do rural tourism farmsteads take advantage of the specific features just of Aukštaitija, Žemaitija, Dzūkija, and Suvalkija”?

“Each region actually has something to show. Namely, different traditions, ethnography elements, and architecture. Rural tourism in Aukštaitija is developed most extensively, but not only lakes attract the people. For instance, guests in the homestead of Birutė Šeškauskienė are acquainted with ceramics.

Žemaitija attracts with its National Park and memorable seaside specificity. E.g., at the farmstead of Virgis and Gitana Leliūgos “Under the Oaks” near Plateliai the culinary heritage is popularized – holidaymakers produce natural leaven and bake bread. In 2011, G. Leliūgienė under the RDP measure “Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities” received the maximum EU and national budget support of 690,560 Lit. Dzūkija employs successfully its woods and buckwheat growing traditions. The latter opportunity, for instance, is used with success in the farmsteads of Laima Mačionienė and Lina Černiauskiene in Marcinkonys. Holidaymakers watch or participate in buckwheat harvesting, running the buckwheat through a mill and, finally, making a buckwheat cake Dzūkija-style. Each region has its own specific features, whilst comparison or rivalry is impossible in this field”.

“In 2011, during the award of rural tourism farmsteads, unusual nominations attracted attention, for example, “Farmstead of Healthiness”.

“This nomination is not accidental. We selected a priority to develop harmonious and sustainable tourism. We would like the activity not to be a one-day event; it should be undertaken with responsibility, sustaining the nature and environment, and the tourist product not harming the nature. It is greatly valued in the West”.

Zofija Tikuišienė’s farmstead “The Estate of Storks” in the Klaipėda district was recognized as “Farmstead of Healthiness”. This woman grows herbs and uses them in health strengthening procedures. After spending a week in the farmstead, holidaymakers receive a whole

complex of services – from teas to educational sessions. Vidas Silvestravičius’ farmstead titled “The Hunters’ Capital” is of interest as well. It specializes in the field of hunting and presents various forms of hunting. Holidaymakers may shoot bows and arbalests. They target flying plates, not beasts or birds, and therefore this shooting is recognized as nature protecting. As a matter of fact, V. Silvestravičius (Kėdainiai District) twice received the EU and national budget support under the RDP measure “Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities”. In 2010, 38,836 Lit, and in 2011, 149,481 Lit.

Roma and Eimantas Zalensai farmstead in Kaunas district is magnificent. In 2009, the Zalensai received the maximum support amounting to 690,560 Lit from the EU and national budget under the activity area “Encouragement of Rural Tourism, Including the Development of Crafts in Rural Tourism Farmsteads” of the measure “Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities”. The Zalensai used those funds for arranging a cognitive trail and a craft yard.

“Has rural tourism come out of the economic crisis”?

“In the past years, we feel the economic recovery. In 2011, the incoming tourism accounted for 8 per cent (a year ago only 5 per cent). The rural tourism sector officially went up by 11 per cent last year. However, meanwhile, the rural tourism services are used mostly by the local population (90 per cent). This ratio is also characteristic of many EU countries. Certainly, with the exception of such countries, like Austria, where even 60 per cent of holidaymakers in rural tourism farmsteads are international.”

“Visitors from what countries are most numerous”?

“Neighbouring countries are dominant: Poland, Latvia, Russia, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland, few tourists from Great Britain and some other countries. Last year Russians were more active than Germans, who most often preferred the seacoast. It is interesting to note that Russians for a long time did not appreciate our proposals to use Lithuanian rural tourism services. Now the situation has changed in the essence. Finland, where rural tourism is very popular, helped us in this respect. Russians got to learn about rural tourism pleasures first of all in that country. Thus, now they start discovering rural tourism in Lithuania as well. Nature in Lithuania is similar, the conditions here are even more favourable, and prices are lower. In addition, in Lithuania they can communicate in Russian, it is easily accessible, and nostalgia here is still alive”.



In 2011, as compared to 2010, the number of holidaymakers in Lithuanian rural tourism farmsteads increased by 11.1 per cent.

In 2011, the number of holidaymakers was higher

According to the data of the Lithuanian Department of Statistics, in 2011, the number of visitors in rural tourism farmsteads was 252,800, including 20,600, or 8 per cent, from overseas. Holidaymakers were most numerous in Vilnius (62,300, or 20.1 per cent), Kaunas (44,100, or 18.4 per cent) and Alytus (40,800, or 16.6 per cent) counties.

In 2011, as compared to 2010, the number of holidaymakers in rural tourism farmsteads was by 11.1 per cent higher. 92 per cent of all holidaymakers were Lithuanian residents. Foreigners mostly came from Poland, Russia, Germany, and Latvia. The average stay at a rural tourism farmstead in 2011 was 1.79 nights (in 2010, 1.67). The average price per night at a rural tourism farmstead in the counties fluctuated from 31 to 48 Lit. The resident of Lithuania paid for a night at a rural tourism farmstead, on the average, 36 Lit, and a foreigner paid 53 Lit. The holidaymakers were most numerous only on weekends. Most popular months for holidaymaking in rural tourism farmsteads were July and August.

In 2011, the holidaymakers stayed in 615 rural tourism farmsteads.

In 2011, accommodation services were provided in 615 rural tourism farmsteads, this being by 4.2 per cent, or 25 farmsteads, more than in 2010. The number of accommodation places increased by 7.3 per cent – to 13,300. The majority of rural tourism farmsteads are located in Trakai, Zarasai, Lazdijai, Utena, Ignalina, and Molėtai regional municipalities. Accommodation services in Trakai and Zarasai regional municipalities were provided by 42 rural tourism farmsteads in each, in Lazdijai and Utena – 41 in each, Ignalina – 39, Molėtai – 38, Plungė – 33, Varėna – 31, Klaipėda regional municipality 28 farmsteads. Farmsteads, sited near the lakes, were most favoured by holidaymakers.

Table 1. Number of holidaymakers and nights in rural tourism farmsteads by counties

Counties	Number of holidaymakers, thous.		Number of nights, thous.		Compared to the previous year, increase, decrease (-), %		Average number of nights per holidaymaker	
	2010	2011	2010	2011	Number of holidaymakers	Number of nights	2010	2011
Total	227.5	252.8	379.8	453.4	11.1	19.5	1.67	1.79
Alytus	37.8	40.8	58.5	62.0	8.1	6.1	1.55	1.52
Kaunas	41.8	44.1	70.3	73.8	5.5	4.9	1.68	1.67
Klaipėda	15.4	17.1	23.4	31.6	11.3	35.1	1.52	1.85
Marijampolė	11.1	8.8	17.7	19.1	-20.2	8.3	1.59	2.16
Panevėžys	12.3	12.4	23.0	24.5	1.4	6.6	1.87	1.97
Šiauliai	5.7	8.2	8.5	12.8	44.1	51.0	1.49	1.56
Tauragė	4.3	4.3	12.4	12.5	1.1	1.0	2.90	2.90
Telšiai	15.0	15.0	21.4	21.1	0.5	0.4	1.40	1.40
Utena	38.6	39.6	71.4	85.1	2.8	19.4	1.85	2.15
Vilnius	45.7	62.3	73.3	110.8	36.3	51.1	1.61	1.78

Note. In some columns, due to the approximation, the sum of columns may not coincide with the data "total".

Table 2. Number of rural tourism farmsteads and accommodation places by counties

Counties	Number of rural tourism farmsteads		Number of rooms		Number of places	
	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011
Total	590	615	3878	4231	12421	13332
Alytus	95	94	593	591	2010	2018
Kaunas	65	70	549	587	1871	1943
Klaipėda	37	46	279	310	874	973
Marijampolė	20	22	128	139	570	613
Panevėžys	22	23	194	208	618	630
Šiauliai	13	16	126	132	381	425
Tauragė	19	17	151	132	332	306
Telšiai	41	41	302	312	878	885
Utena	193	184	901	866	2835	2688
Vilnius	85	102	655	954	2052	2851

Implementation of the measure "Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities" under the Rural Development Programme for Lithuania 2007–2013.

The following areas of activities are supported by the measure "Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities" under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) for Lithuania 2007–2013: "Encouragement of Rural Tourism, Including the Development of Crafts in Rural Tourism Farmsteads", "Establishment and Development of Rural Tourist Campsites (Except for Forest Areas)". In total, in 2007–2013, 1,614,304,66 Litas was allocated for this RDP measure, 2,899,925,6 was paid out until the end 2011.

After starting the implementation of the Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (SAPARD) and Lithuanian 2004–2006 Single Programming Document (SPD) programmes, the popularity of that measure increased greatly among the applicants. In view of this, special attention under the measure "Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities" of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) for Lithuania 2007–2013 was devoted to the quality improvement of rural tourism services, increasing their diversity, as well as for the implementation of innovations in rural tourism business. Seeking to increase the diversity of rural tourism services, it is encouraged to link the

traditional agricultural activities with services for tourists, for example, to supply fresh products, grown on the farm, to holidaymakers, to provide recreational services (water sports, horse-riding, an introductory course to traditional agriculture, etc.). Thus, rural inhabitants may be certain of creating long-term jobs and receiving complementary income. Taking into account the increased popularity of rural recreation and seeking for the diversity of rural recreational services, support is also granted to the establishment of short stay campsites and/or overnight accommodation places or rural camping sites, except for forest areas, since they are supported under the RDP measure "Non-profit Investments in Forests." Aiming that the RDP measure "Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities" would contribute to cherishing cultural heritage, it is encouraged to follow Lithuanian traditions when creating a new rural tourism farmstead. Support under this programme is provided to natural persons, i.e. farmers or rural inhabitants.

The Lithuanian recreational potential in the development of rural tourism is extremely diverse – it consists of forests (32 per cent of the country's territory), a dense network of internal waters (2,850 lakes and 758 rivers), cultural heritage objects and traditional crafts, the location of which distinguishes the priority territorial rural tourism development regions – lakes and forests of East Aukštaitija, forests, rivers and lakes of Dzūkija, highlands in Žemaitija, and the Seacoast Region.



Why here is not like in Switzerland?

Kirkšnovė is a nook in the gardens of paradise

Milda MEDŽIOKALNYTĖ

In the Raseiniai district, in-between Ariogala and Betygala, where the Kirkšnovė River, boasting of impressive banks, inflows into the Dubysa, which is highly praised by poets, a nook as in the real paradise is sited. It is difficult to describe it in speech or writing. Only after staying here a little longer, one can understand what miracles our people may create with the help of the EU structural funds.

First of all, the SAPARD support.

Romanas Aniulis, the Kirkšnovė farmstead owner, said openly that he had days when he wanted to give up everything, when he asked himself what for he needed all those things, if he had a good job and wages in Kaišiadorys? Even when asked himself what he would do with his restituted paternal land, because of which he had to spend his childhood in the Igarka tundra? His inner contradictions became more intense as in the centre of his land the once beautiful ameliorators' villa was sited: with splendid ponds and cascades, with a huge main building (their native house was demolished after their deportation to Siberia). The building began to

collapse and decay together with the fall of the Soviet regime. The more so that tipsy former functionaries during their orgies burnt down the former bathhouse. R. Aniulis, probably, would doubt, some time longer, if he did not hear by chance that one of those functionaries had already prepared the designs for reconstruction of those buildings. And then a "Siberian" began to seethe with anger – "you would no longer be the masters of my land. And if you need those buildings and everything else, take them, but go out of my land".

R. Aniulis is open about numerous collisions he has to face until the hunters' entertainment place became his property. A most upsetting thing was when the acquired holiday resort had to be put to order. And money, very big money,

was needed. However, probably, not in vain people say – put your effort and God will help you. “My! SAPARD support has come. I signed an agreement with the National Paying Agency at the Ministry of Agriculture for a project “Investments in Tourism Services of R. Aniulis Farmstead” under the SAPARD measure “Development of Economic Activities and Promotion of Alternative Income”, sector “Rural Tourism and Recreation Services.” During this project, 57,230 Litas “came” to R. Aniulis farmstead.

R. Aniulis used that money for acquisition of the most necessary household appliances for his rural tourism farmstead: a frozen food storage cabinet, freezers, a fryer, a meat-chopper, a cutter, an air exhaust hood, a washing-machine, a dishwasher, an electric range, microwave ovens, etc. He also bought the inventory for recreation and services: bicycles, for land and water, tents, boats and canoes, tables for billiards and table tennis, training equipment. Some money was still left for furniture: beds, tables and small tables, coatracks, outside furniture, etc.

After the NPA assessed applications, filed for the fourth priority measure under the 2004–2006 Single Programming Document, related to idea originality, activity of applicants, seeking for support in several trends, accurate completion and submission of documents, the real objective and result achieved, it awarded R. Aniulis for successful investment in the rural tourism farmstead.

Serving people and decorating the landscape.

“Soon, when money started lacking again, the 2007–2013 Lithuanian Rural Development Programme measure “Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities” came forth. Here



Birutė and Romanas Aniuliai, the owners of “Kirkšnovė”.

special attention had to be focused on our heritage and Lithuanian traditions. I prepared a technical project for reconstruction of the building in Darbutai village, Betygala seniūnija (eldership). The value of the project exceeded 120,000 Litas. After implementing the project I resolved a guest accommodation problem, since before we had no opportunity to provide overnight accommodation for bigger groups of people.” R. Aniulis tells that a house which was reconstructed from the EU and national budget funds previously was on the verge of decay and stood like a ghost with nailed-up windows. Now it serves the people, longing for rural relaxation, and decorates the countryside.

R. Aniulis draws attention to a newly asphalted road and block-laid parking sites: “Those small roads, left from the Soviet times, were awful. The asphalt covering was completely cracked, and the road was bumpy. Therefore, I applied for help once again. According to the RDP measure “Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities” I prepared a project “Reconstruction of the Access Road to the “Kirkšnovė” Rural Tourism Farmstead and Installation of the Car Parking Site.” I received the support of 123,581 Litas, and from the last year our guests enjoy a new road and a splendid parking site. The issue of access and parking being settled, the quality of the service provided improved considerably”.

The rewarding time for taking honey out of beehive has come...

Birutė Aniulienė, with a 35-year pedagogical work record, speaks openly of this period as being not that easy for rural tourism. Completely empty days happen, even



Sap trickling down ...



The main building of the farmstead is high on the slope.

though “Kirkšnovė” welcomes all, be they revellers, wedding guests, and holidaymakers searching seclusion in the nature. Here all conditions exist for organizing business meetings, conferences, and seminars. And this is available the whole year round. Guests may go fishing, boating, canoeing, water-cycling, climb hilly trails, fly with a rope like Tarzans over the “precipice”, pass by a “monkey-bridge” connecting two slopes, and balloon. The outdoor swimming-pool and bathhouse with natural outdoor cascades are available. After heating in the bathhouse, you may go and jump under the falling water stream of the pool. You can go skiing in winter and enjoy other winter entertainments. One can play billiards, table-tennis, and shoot a bow. Residential apartments with showers and other amenities are nicely arranged. In the farmstead, tree sap is available for guests all the year round. Each spring about half a ton of sap is being prepared. For it to keep longer, it is pasteurized and stored in containers. If one chooses for his relaxation the period of honey harvesting from a beehive, he, together with the hosts, may participate in this process. All conditions are offered for tent hikers.

The Aniuliai say no business can exist without “ups-and-downs”. On the other hand, there is no way for retreat, since this is the Romanas’ native land; here there are their roots and their home.



A hut of the newlyweds.



One of the numerous wells in the farmstead.



The rural tourism farmstead of Raimonda and Gediminas Meidai in the Molėtai district.

A firebird was attracted in the Labanoras forest

Vidas VENSLAVIŠKIS

Raimonda and Gediminas Meidai for setting up a four-stork category rural tourism farmstead "Stirnelės viensėdis" (Roe-deer Steading) in Molėtai district, Mindūnai eldership invested more than 0.5 million Litas. In 2005, they used the activity area "Encouragement of Rural Tourism and Crafts" of the Rural Development and Fisheries Priority measure "Promoting the Adaptation and Development of Rural Areas" of the Single Programming Document (SPD) for Lithuania 2004-2006 and received the support of 260,000 Litas.

The family from Molėtai was one of the first in the country that used the support from the European Union (EU) and national budget in the field of rural tourism and created an oasis of relaxation and tranquility in the magnificent nook of lakeland.

The vision proved itself.

A historical farmstead, encompassed by the Labanoras forest, and the Stirnelė River flowing nearby, is well known to water tourists. It welcomes visitors, longing for peace in the nature, at any season. Such a vision of rural tourism of the Meidai family, implemented in 2006, fully served the purpose.

At present the farmstead "Roe-deer Steading" is annually visited by over 500 people. At their service, three log cabins and a separate house with the banqueting

hall and a bathhouse. It is hardly possible to imagine more convenient place for mushrooming, berry-picking, fishing or hunting. Here a popular route for canoeing and boating is running. Cycling and hiking, visiting lakelets at a radius of 4 km, is a pleasant pastime.

The beauty of the nature, tranquility, convenience and exclusive privacy within the territory of 10 ha, bordering Stirniai Lake, fascinate not only Lithuanians. Visitors from Moscow, St. Petersburg and other cities found their way to this place as well.

The founders of “Roe-deer Steading” are convinced they could have failed to catch the firebird if not their decision in 2005 to use the activity area “Encouragement of Rural Tourism and Crafts” of the Rural Development and Fisheries priority measure “Promoting the Adaptation and Development of Rural Areas”.

“With very favourable circumstances formed, we acquired a land plot. A niche for rural tourism in Lithuania was free. The EU and national budget support was available. We did not have big money for investments, and the bank should not have borrowed us half a million. Therefore, we seem to be the first who filed an application without a second thought,” tell the Meidai.

In the former estate land.

This family from Molėtai acquired a land plot for its own money already in 2002. The steading once belonged to the well-known Čiulai estate, which now has decayed. Part of its lands later sited the Lithuanian Army volunteers. The romantic name “Roe-deer Steading” originated from the surviving archival documents.

The extant foundations of the historical buildings gave the right to the Meidai to create a rural tourism farmstead in the Labanoras Regional Park, though it had to comply with the peculiarities of the landscape under preservation. Four new houses where 30 people can stay at a time were built following the ancient rural traditions, using the rubblework logs, beams, boards, etc. Here the kitchenettes, showers and other amenities were installed.



Raimonda and Gediminas Meidai and their son Rokas take pleasure in selecting rural life and running successful rural tourism business.

The EU and national budget funds were used for acquisition of furniture and tourism inventory. The major part of investments was allocated to the installation of communications: the artesian well was bored, the water supply was laid out, and wastewater treatment facility was built. Electricity was distributed via underground cables. The liquefied gas reservoirs were installed, and its stock is sufficient for heating of buildings.

“Such network of the underground communications ensures the operation of the farmstead throughout the year. Therefore, our family business derives permanent income, and we can devote all attention to the improvement of the quality of services. We could create the competitive farmstead for peaceful relaxation only with the availability of the EU and national budget support, which compensated half of the investments,” notices G. Meidus.

For holidaymakers – organic products.

They worked very hard, and income now is sufficient for successful repayment of the loan and more than that. In the farmstead, the hosts’ house, which arose at some distance from the guests’ zone, is nearing completion. The Meidai family has a son, and this is one of the reasons they are happy of selecting the rural life.

“We come to Vilnius several times a week, thus we do not feel being very far away from the city. However, after returning to our farmstead, we always take delight in tranquillity and clean air. Here we are growing vegetables, have a garden, keep domestic and wild birds. We can also offer organic products for farmstead guests,” says joyfully R. Meiduvienė.



Beauty of the nature, comfort and exclusive privacy fascinate the visitors to “Roe-deer Steading” farmstead.



Father and son cannot embrace a hundred-year old oak with their hands without the help of all family members.

The family dream is becoming a reality

Violeta SEREDŽIUVIENĖ

“While living in town I had never lifted my eyes to the sky, as first of all I had to look just forward and under my feet. Now in the evenings in my farmstead I lift my head and look up at the sky, and in the mornings I can wade in dew. This is unrepeatable... Our whole family is eager to settle as soon as possible in this magnificent nook of nature, in the rural farmstead among the woods and in the vicinity of century-old Lithuanian oaks,” tells Arvydas Laurinaitis, the master of the future rural tourism farmstead “Laurynė” in Jančiai (Šakiai district). The rural tourism farmstead vision is evidently becoming a reality.

A decision was taken to undertake an EU-supported project.

According to 2007–2013 Lithuanian Rural Development Programme (RDP) measure “Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities”, the farmer Arvydas Laurinaitis implements the project “Establishment of the Farmer’s Farmstead for Provision of a Rural Tourism Service”. The total project value is 1,275,000 Lit.

65 per cent of the project expenditure is financed from the EU and national budget funds. “I am very happy being able to implement my plans with the support granted. Without it, the dreams of our family would have failed to come true. No doubt, we had to take a loan from the bank, since the project funds would come back only after the performance of works fore-



A. Laurinaitis bought an old farmstead with the dilapidated farm building in 2010. He built a new house on its former site.

seen in the project,” tells the farmstead master A. Laurinaitis.

Reconstruction of the farmstead was started in 2010 after the approval of the investment project. With the coming of the spring of 2012, the work in the farmstead is in full swing. Reconstruction of the farm building by adapting it to the rural tourism needs is close to completion. The main internal and external building operations have already been performed: the building is insulated, the roof covered, the sewage system and heating installed, electric wiring laid out. In the short-term plans, easier and more pleasant worries and works are awaiting: internal and external finishing of the building. A. Laurinaitis plans to finish all the works under the project approximately after one month and to submit all necessary reports to the National Paying Agency under the Ministry of Agriculture, involved in the project administration. Construction works are under the supervision of the farmstead owner Arvydas and Povilas, his son and main assistant. Ilona, the farmstead owner's wife, having an economic education, also helps him with advice. The elder son Ramūnas, living in Kaunas with his family, is always happy to lend a hand to his father. The youngest future master of “Laurynė” is their four-year old grandson Lukas. “Since we, the Laurinaičiai, are even four serious men in our family, the name, given to the farmstead, also sounds similarly – “Laurynė”. Thus, the former real urbanites, Arvydas and Ilona Laurinaičiai, who lived for more than a decade in Kaunas, now would become the rural inhabitants, farmers, and the owners of their own land and farmstead, taking delight in the tranquility of the surrounding nature.

Long-term experience gained will be useful.

Asked how the idea was born to start such not easy rural tourism business, A. Laurinaitis recognized that his thirty-year long many-sided professional experience and desire to implement the accumulated ideas stimulated him to take that step. “Even though I am a mechanical engineer by education, I worked in the field of catering and services for a long time, headed quite a big network of restaurants, organized various entertainment and leisure pursuit projects. After leaving that job, I wanted to self-realize and to apply the accumulated knowledge. Moreover, our family always felt attraction to the nature, tourism, and Lithuanian countryside. I see a lot of opportunities in the rural tourism activities not only by providing qualitative rural recreation services, but

also by implementing various tourism and educational programmes,” A. Laurinaitis shared his future plans. The farmstead owner plans to install the production premises for food preparation. Farmstead visitors will be offered dishes of traditional Lithuanian cuisine. In the main hall of 200 sq m for 100 people, not only parties, but also conferences and other events are intended to be organized. It is planned to make use of the advantageous historical and cultural heritage of the Zanavikija region, boasting of the famed Lithuanian writers, poets and politicians of the past ages. “The façade of the building would be some sort of allusion to the ancient Lithuanian estate, therefore a park, rosaries, and a bit further a stage would be arranged in the main farmstead territory. The stage will be used for folklore festivals, concerts, and rave-ups. The pond will be cleaned and made deeper. I expect assistance from my old friends, professional performers, with whom more than once I organized various cultural events. I have been a dancer of the Lithuanian folk dance group for 36 years; therefore, Lithuanian folk art traditions are close to my heart. Also, I am a follower of healthy lifestyle and in my young days in winter I used to bathe in the ice-hole. Now I also do my best to follow the principles of healthy life; therefore, farmstead visitors will be offered healthy leisure pursuits,” Arvydas told about his future plans. The farmstead guests will be offered to cycle through the picturesque Lekėčiai environs and pine-scented paths, to walk the Nordic style. As the farmstead owner notices, the walking Nordic style is not that simple, here special knowledge is needed how to walk and breathe correctly. The professional instructor will help one to learn to do this. Bathhouse services will be also provided. A tub with water is installed. “We will arrange the real Lithuanian bathhouse, following all the recommendations of the specialists from the Bath Academy. The bath stove will be special: water will be thrown onto the stones from inside, not outside, therefore, steam will be different,” said Mr. Arvydas.

Waiting for the feast after works are finished...

The farmstead owner Mr. Arvydas is completing the implementation of the project for establishment of a rural tourism farmstead and reconstruction of the former farm building, supported from the EU and national budget funds. Some other works are waiting in the farmstead, covering the area of over one hectare: farmstead environment and planting works, and later advertising, cultural educational projects are foreseen. Many original ideas and plans are in the head of the “Laurynė” owner.



“Bukonys” rural tourism farmstead.

Life is going round in winter and summer

Violeta SEREDŽIUVIENĖ

“Real farmstead, belonging to true-born Suduvians, in real Sūduva! Here at any season one can relax in an interesting and romantic way, celebrate a wedding or other personal festivities. All creativity, material, intellectual and physical forces are invested in the farmstead to make guests feel elated and relaxed, savour the pleasures of country life and explore,” these words are inserted in the colourful Internet page about the rural tourism farmstead “Bukonys” (Marijampolė municipality). Actually, one of the first rural tourism farmsteads in Suvalkija, it can offer at present wide range and good quality services all the year round.

Zenonas Naumavičius from Marijampolė in 2011 implemented the project “Adaptation of the Farmstead for Provision of Quality and Diverse Rural Tourism Services in Marijampolė Municipality”, prepared under the simplified implementation rules according to 2007–2013 Lithuanian Rural Development Programme (RDP) measure “Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities.” The project with the total value of 161,394 Litās has been successfully completed. Necessary inventory and building materials were acquired, all planned construction and reconstruction works performed. Ser-

vices, still more qualitative and of broader range, are provided in the farmstead.

Beginning – a desire to be closer to the nature.

“Bukonys” rural tourism farmstead is the first official farmstead of this kind in Marijampolė municipality. It started operating from 2008 in Bukonys village. The farmstead territory covers almost 8 ha. Here two ponds, covering the area of 17 and 35 ares, where fish is raised, are stretching. The hub of the farmstead is a red-brick dwelling house, a resting-house with a bath-

house, summerhouses, outhouses, spaces for sports, recreation and campsites. The farmstead is set up in an extremely convenient place, some 2 km away from the highway Marijampolė–Prienai–Vilnius, 8 km away from Marijampolė. The Amalva Botanical-Zoological Reserve, located nearby, includes Žuvintas Biosphere Reserve. Several kilometers away Varnupiai mound is sited.

The farmstead in Bukonys village was established in 1936 by a big land-owner who possessed the farm of about 200 ha. In the Soviet period, the farmstead owner was deported to Siberia. During the war, the farmstead housed a school, and later the collective farm office. Cherishing and restoring of the abandoned old homestead has been started from 2005, when it was bought by the Naumavičiai family. The farmstead owner is Zenonas Naumavičius, a true-born Suduvian, with the considerable experience in the field of business and construction. He likes mixing with people, therefore, he has never regretted and does not regret of having started rural tourism business.

“We wanted to be closer to the nature. At first a bathhouse was built. A lot of friends, relatives and acquaintances used to come. Everybody liked to relax in the nature. Unfortunately, after one of the noisy parties the bathhouse was burnt down. It had to be restored anew. The farmstead began to be expanded and adapted for rest and tourism. Thus, rooms for staying overnight, a banqueting hall, and a kitchen were arranged,” remembers the farmstead owner. Žydrūnas, his son and the

main helper, notices that the most difficult thing in creating the farmstead was to guess the needs of the clients and to plan the farmstead infrastructure so that a territory of 8 ha would house the ponds, children’s playgrounds, parking sites, paths and other objects of attraction. Everything should be matched and fitted into the splendid landscape. “Some more ideas, however, have not been implemented. We are delighted that the project, implemented with the European Union and nation budget support, made it possible to improve the level of services and expand their range. We do our best to make something new, interesting and attractive for holidaymakers in the farmstead,” told Žydrūnas Naumavičius.

From the medieval bows to bathhouse services.

Summer is the most popular season in the farmstead, even though guests are welcome all the year round. Annually, about 1000 people, on the average, visit the farmstead. For clients, we offer bathhouse services, a tub, night accommodation, banqueting and conference halls, and children’s playgrounds. Fishing and water cycling on the pond are available. The farmstead owners are ready to organize any other possible entertainments to the wishes of their guests. Traditionally, live music festivals “Songs by the Bonfire” are organized. “Bukonys” is the most well-known and most frequented rural tourism farmstead in Marijampolė municipality, which was estimated at a 3-4 stork level. “The vision of owners is a cosy, functional, interesting and well-arranged rural tourism



The archery range for shooting bows, reminding weapons used by medieval archers, is arranged.



Everybody likes relaxing in the nature.



Zenonas Naumavičius' vision is a cosy, functional, interesting and well-appointed rural tourism farmstead, constantly changing, propagating active and healthy pastime the whole year round.

farmstead, constantly changing, propagating the active and healthy relaxation through all the seasons. Here not only accommodation but also catering services are provided. Various cultural and other events are organized in

the farmstead. Holidaymakers come here to gain physical and spiritual strength, many foreigners put up here," relates Žydrūnas Naumavičius.

Holidaymakers especially fall for the baths pleasures, as after bath you can jump directly to the pond and in winter to the ice-hole. Bath is heated with firewood and is equipped following all the requirements, with regulated ventilation. For tub lovers, bathing in a tub with hot water is offered. For guests, night accommodation in cosy rooms, each bearing special name "Rye", "Grass", "Sun", "Milk", "Clouds" and "Dew" is offered. The farmstead may accommodate up to 30 persons, and the banqueting hall may seat around 60 guests. The hall is snug, functional, with good acoustics, out of it you can go directly to a spacious terrace at the pond.

The archery range for shooting bows, reminding weapons used by medieval archers, is installed in the farmstead. On the loan or in the shade of trees in the farmstead, a tent, camper or car may be parked comfortably. A huge bonfire place is arranged nearby and a festive fire may be made for cooking fish-soup or grilling savoury ribs. The hosts from Suvalkija, being prudent, tidy and hospitable, warn everybody: "You don't need to bring firewood, but it is necessary to be in high spirits and to have good friends!"



Live music festivals "Songs by the bonfire" are traditionally held in the farmstead.



At present, the Sabaliauskas couple spends almost all their time in the farmstead and seldom recalls a road to the capital – too much work, time and heart is put in creating a new home.

Hundred-year-old linden trees lead to success

Vidas VENSLAVIŠKIS

Attraction of the visitors to the representative rural tourism farmstead “Among the Linden Trees” in Anykščiai district was strengthened by a picturesque pond, looking like a small lake. It was built from the European Union (EU) and national budget support funds. Lina and Rimantas Sabaliauskai for their 4-stork category rural tourism farmstead in Anykščiai district, Debeikiai eldership, used successfully the measure “Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities” under 2007–2013 Lithuanian Rural Development Programme (RDP) (simplified procedure). In 2010, the support over 100,000 Litas was devoted to the pond digging and land plot management project.

Benefit of support.

In Ragaišiai village, surrounded by forests and enwrapped in tranquility, a spacious rural tourism farmstead of the Sabaliauskai family is located. Here one can be treated to delicious meals and enjoy the heat of baths or tub. The guests are offered to play on the playgrounds, to contemplate in the library, to cycle in the fabulous Anykščiai land territories, to canoe in the picturesque Šventoji river and the impetuous Jara river.

The farmstead, consisting of two buildings, can accommodate comfortably 33–35 visitors in 9 rooms at a

time. Gates are open for tourists with tents and campers. Each year, about 500 people visit this place.

The huge territory, covering 13 ha, possesses a number of recreation zones. The most important focus, however, is the pond, stretching in the half-hectare area. Its nurtured banks and an islet are decorated with wooden sculptures. This project gave the opportunity for the Sabaliauskai to make sure of the benefit of the RDP measure “Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities”.

“We are located hardly 700 metres away from the confluence of the two rivers, but people like to relax at the

water reservoir. Therefore, the pond, for arrangement of which we received the European Union and national support, imparted more attractiveness and increased the flow of visitors considerably," rejoice the Sabaliauskai.

The value of the pond digging and land plot management project exceeds over 216,000 Litas. 65 per cent of the project sum was compensated to the farmstead owners from the EU and national budget funds. After building the pond, the farmstead landscape became still more scenic. Here one can also swim, and in winter go skating. The amateurs of fishing have a chance to angle and boast of catching tench, perch or pike.

The second application was filed.

In the mid of 2011, the Sabaliauskai, inspired by successful experience, submitted the second application for the measure "Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities" under 2007–2013 Lithuanian Rural Development Programme (RDP) (simplified procedure). The support of almost 150,000 Litas was requested for the project "Rural Tourism Development in the Farmstead." Those funds should cover more than half of the price for construction of a new house, with 4 rooms and a bathhouse, built on the bank of the pond. The support funds should be also allocated for installing the fence on the outskirts of forest for fallow-deers and moufflons.

"Until then we looked at any support very skeptically and with distrust, since we lived exclusively from our own earned money. We thought that borrowed money may be just the burden and dependence. Today, we are

happy that RDP measure gave the opportunity to expand and to use our own funds more effectively," states L. Sabaliauskienė.

The farmstead among the linden trees.

When the spouses in 2001 acquired the farmstead by chance, they did not think about rural tourism business. The technical specialists from Vilnius just wanted to put to order the old farmstead for spending summers.

"Here there was such a mess; everything was so untended and overgrown with brushwood that it seemed hopeless to create something beautiful. Optimism and willingness to settle, however, took the upper hand. This place fascinated. Old trees around, and the forest almost growing in the yard. Edible boletus mushrooms grow just 80 metres away the house. Around – the magnificent surroundings of the landscape reserve, places of known historic events. As people say, here is a good aura", R. Sabaliauskas remembers the beginning of setting up.

As a matter of fact, for restoration of the farmstead, a lot of funds were required. The settlers started thinking about tourism business. In 2003, they flung gates open for their guests.

"The farmstead needed to be given a name. On a nice morning we went to the yard, looked at the blue sky, then we saw the verdurous hundred-year old linden trees. And decided – here the farmstead "Among the Linden Trees" will be set up. The more so that we brought up two daughters as young linden trees. Is it a coincidence or a fate?" smile the farmstead owners.



Glimpses of relaxation



Third place was awarded to the farmstead of Lina and Rimantas Sabaliauskai in the competition "The Most Successful Tourism Project 2011", which was organized by the State Tourism Department.



The professional shooting-range, installed with the use of the RDP measure “Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities”.

The hunter's dream was given the firm support

Vidas VENSLAVIŠKIS

Support to Vidas Silvestravičius, the owner of the 4-stoke category farmstead “Capital of Hunters, in Kėdainiai district, Josvainiai eldership, granted under the measure “Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities” of 2007–2013 Lithuanian Rural Development Programme (RDP) (simplified procedure), helped to ensure the competitive advantage.

The owner of the farmstead “Capital of Hunters”, established in the centre of Lithuania, even during the hard times managed to target a dead shot. With the use of the European Union and national budget support, he created one of the most attractive entertaining shooting ranges. In 2010, the support of 40,000 Litass was allocated for partial renewal of the auxiliary building and improvement of the environment, and in 2011, support of almost 150,000 Litass for encouragement of farmstead activities.

Exclusive supply of entertainments.

In the Šušvė reserve of unforgettable beauty, in Kunionys, the rural tourism farmstead “Capital of Hunters”, established in 2006, earned recognition of visitors within the short period. Quality recreation, catering and night accommodation services, the environment,

imbued with romance, annually attract about 5000 guests.

The convenient geographical position also contributed that this place became favourite with the representatives of state institutions and serious companies for organization of conferences. However, one of the most important reasons for attraction to the farmstead was the exclusive supply of entertainments.

The founder of the farmstead and devoted hunter V. Silvestravičius offered perfect conditions for guests to try out marksmanship by hitting targets with guns, bows, and arbalests. Most venturesome experience is targeting flying saucers.

Modernized farmstead.

“The rural tourism farmstead succeeds in maintaining itself, if in addition to the night accommodation and

catering it may offer lots of interesting entertainments. This was also proved by the fact that during financial crisis I decided to modernize the farmstead. Only quite big investments could bring efficient benefit, therefore, I decided to use the RDP measure “Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities,” says V. Silvestravičius.

The first support under this measure of simplified procedure in 2010 compensated part of expenses, intended for improvement of working conditions and enhancement of the farmstead attraction. Some 180,000 Litas was spent for installing a modern unit for client registration, auxiliary premises and environment improvement.

In 2011, V. Silvestravičius applied again for support of the project with the value of 300,000 Litas. Half of the investments were compensated under the RDP measure “Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities”.

“Firstly, support made it possible to build the professional entertainment shooting-range, popular with numerous hunters and shooting sport enthusiasts. Here 10 apparatus for releasing flying targets are arranged, competitions by Lithuanian Hunt Shooting Federation are organized, contests for winning a Hunters’ Capital Cup, being organized for five years, have become traditional,” says V. Silvestravičius with delight.

Moreover, the EU and national budget support funds are invested in the maintenance of the farmstead. Water treatment equipment was renovated. The automatic watering systems reduced expenses for maintenance of the lawn covering 60 ares. A modern lighting



The farmstead founder V. Silvestravičius, the devoted hunter and enthusiast of sport shooting.

system also helps save. Before investments, lighting of the farmstead required 50 kWh of electricity per night, and now even 100 times less.

“All these projects increased considerably the farmstead competitiveness and helped to keep up the flow of visitors. We could work profitably without increasing the cost of services. The EU and national budget support gave the firm start to my dream – to set up the first entertainment shooting park in the rural tourism farmstead in Lithuania,” asserts the farmstead owner.

A record was achieved.

V. Silvestravičius started rural tourism business all of a sudden. When studying at the then Kaunas Forestry College, he bought at an auction a cheap parcel of land with the abandoned construction site of the collective farm. He then hoped that with his wife Jovita he would set up their home here in the future.

However, when for more than ten years ago the buildings were erected, the family understood that it would be quite complicated to bring three children from here to school. They started thinking that in the centre of Lithuania a rural tourism farmstead, the place for gathering of families and hunters, may be born.

“Capital of Hunters” very soon justified its eloquent name. In almost a year and a half after the housewarming party, a Lithuanian record was achieved here: the festivity in the 4 ha farmstead territory gathered 2,500 participants, including 650 hunters.



The hall of “Capital of Hunters” may seat 80 participants of the feast.



Farmstead "Pearl of Dzūkija".

The pearl of Dzūkija near the Nemunas

Jurgita BRIEDIENĖ

Some search for pearls in China, others in Philippines, whereas the most beautiful Lithuanian pearl (from Dzūkija) you will find in Dubaklonis village, near Merkinė, Varėna district. Birutė Stepankevičienė from Garliava, the owner of rural tourism farmstead "Pearl of Dzūkija", discovered this magnificent kingdom of nature 9 years ago.

According to Birutė, "I came, I saw and I understood that I would not go anywhere from here." Without a second thought, a woman paid a deposit and acquired the then neglected homestead, covering 11 ha. At first she thought this place would be intended only for family rest and pastime. Later, after seeing how friends and acquaintances rushed into her farmstead, the enthusiastic owner of the farmstead in 2010 decided to apply for support under the measure "Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities" of 2007–2013 Lithuanian Rural Development Programme (RDP).

She couldn't do without support.

B. Stepankevičienė applied to the National Paying Agency (NPA). The project "Birutė Stepankevičienė's

Rural Tourism Farmstead" was prepared and implemented in several stages. The total value of the project was 364,604 Litas. The project was implemented in 2010–2011. According to Birutė, "those funds were a substantial support in building and installing the recreational complex and especially money-consuming sewage treatment equipment." After implementing the support, the farmstead roads were paved, solar collectors, modern tennis courts, an outside swimming-pool, a spacious and big kitchen with all necessary equipment built, and a tractor, needed by the farmstead, was acquired. "I would not be able to create all that just with my own money," says Birutė. She took a bank loan for the development of her rural tourism farmstead. Her son also helps her. "I would be lost in those my hectares without him," Birutė is joking.



Birutė Stepankevičienė feels happy at her choice of rural tourism business.

The second project was also a success.

At the beginning of 2012, the farmstead owner decided to take the forest by “attack”. Birutė filed an application to the NPA and in 2011 prepared a project “Management and Adaptation for Recreation of Birutė Stepankevičienė’s Forest Plot at Dubaklonis Village” for the support under the measure “Non-profit Investments in Forests” of 2007–2013 Lithuanian Rural Development Programme.” The support of 188,496 Litass was granted to Birutė under this measure. Out of these funds, the farmstead owner plans to build four outdoor arbours, playgrounds, health trails (some 1.7 km), an observation deck for admiring magnificent views, and a car parking site. The future plans include the blueberry plantation. When Birutė speaks about it,



Paths were paved from the EU and national budget support.

her eyes start shining. “It will be over there, near the water reservoir,” she shows. “Not only a blueberry lawn but also an orchard will be sited here. Saplings have already been bought. I am waiting for the proper planting time.” One more dream of this great enthusiast is wind turbines. “They will be here by all means, but some time later,” tries to persuade Birutė. “Firstly, we shall implement the existing project, and then take further steps”.

Holidaymakers are in plenty.

According to Birutė, “the farmstead is in sleep in winter, it awakens together with the nature”. The boom of the guests starts from May and continues until late autumn. The farmstead at that time is flooded by lots of holidaymakers. Wedding parties are organized. In summer, over 850 holidaymakers visit the rural tourism farmstead. Tennis, handball, and karate summer camps are very popular. The best evaluation, according to Birutė, is that “many visitors not only come back, but also bring their friends, and this is the best advertisement. In the farmstead, up to 50 guests may live at a time, and in this case I have to let out my house as well”. This woman, delicate to look, who call herself a tradeswoman, radiates extraordinary kindness and light from her heart. She is good at everything: cooking, reciting and felting.

A pony, a flock of curly sheep and hens inhabit the farmstead to the delight of guests. “I would like my guests to use organic and healthy food,” says Birutė. “We organize parties at the outdoor swimming-pool, with all lamps and candles lit, so that it gladdens my heart as well. I arranged a solarium in the bathhouse for our dear ladies and young girls”.



Summer is the most attractive pastime in the farmstead.



Close to the Bieliniai family rural tourism farmstead is Nava Lake.

The exploited natural resources in Aukštadvaris

Jurgita BRIEDIENĖ

A four-stork rural tourism farmstead of Viktorija and Antanas Bieliniai cannot be accessed otherwise than through the churchyard of Transfiguration of Christ Church in Aukštadvaris. It is hardly imaginable that rural tourism business can be developed in the very heart of the settlement, but after seeing views which open from Viktorija and Antanas Bieliniai residential house you feel like in the paradise...

Stretching Nava Lake fascinates with tranquility, and log cabins on a slope look like illuminated homes of angels. The European Union (EU) and national budget support, received under the Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (SAPARD), Lithuanian 2004–2006 Single Programming Document (SPD) and 2007–2013 Lithuanian Rural Development Programme measures, helped the Bielinis family to create a cosy tourism oasis in Aukštadvaris.

Inspiration came from unexpected guests.

What was the beginning of business, started by the rural tourism farmstead owners in Aukštadvaris? As it turned out, it was not that simple, but rather stone-paved. Everything started some 15 years ago, in 1997, when one evening the family from Caucasus travelling in Lithuania knocked at the door of Viktorija and Antanas farmstead. They asked for one thing only: to let them spend at least several days here, as, according to them, they could not find the more beautiful farmstead like that and more comely views in the whole vicinity. The hosts were embarrassed. They had not much to offer, but could not

deny them help. They swung open doors of their home, enwrapped guests with warmth and hospitality, and accommodated them in their daughters' rooms. The guests left a month later... Antanas says that already then a thought flashed his mind to do something with that beauty, the more so that guests so complemented them and inspired. After the Rural Tourism Development programme was approved, the idea for the development of tourism services strengthened still more. Representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania and Lithuanian Farmers' Union visited their farmstead and encouraged to use the available natural resources. Thus the ice has moved. According to Viktorija, "we always lived with a thought that we wanted to share and communicate with others, to radiate warmth and not to be alone at an old age".

SAPARD money were the first.

The Bieliniai started from selling out machinery, implements and the property, so that they could start building first houses. Viktorija began attending a course for organization of rural tourism and learnt how to make a



Viktorija and Antanas Bieliniai set up a cosy rural tourism farmstead for holidaymakers in Aukštadvaris.

business plan. In 2002, they filed an application to the National Paying Agency (NPA) under the Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development. Their application was registered under No.1. Antanas Bielinis used SAPARD support for the development of rural tourism business – in Aukštadvaris Regional Park near Nava Lake equipped a cosy guest home, a banqueting and conference hall, acquired recreation and sport inventory. The owners of the farmstead received 52,000 Litas according to the prepared project. “That money at that time did not seem to be serious, but we managed with it”, smiles fastidious Viktorija. Certainly, this was not enough, we needed to expand. After having equipped a banqueting hall, the farmstead owners felt shortage of the space for bedrooms... So the diligent Bieliniai became involved in rural tourism business. As holidaymakers began to increase in number, the spouses started creating plans for business expansion and improvement – to accommodate guests under the same roof with the hosts was inconvenient. In their farmstead, the Bieliniai had outhouses, which were reconstructed according to the project financed from the SAPARD support funds. The enterprising entrepreneurs instead of the garage and the barn equipped a hall for guests and rest-rooms and built one more small cabin.

They did not stop halfway.

Business went well, but the farmstead became crowded again and bedrooms for holidaymakers were lacking. New buildings for accommodation of more guests had to be built. The Bieliniai did not have enough money for the farmstead development. Therefore the farmstead owner decided to seek for the EU and national budget support. In 2005, the Bieliniai developed independently a project according to the activity area “Encouragement of Rural Tourism and Crafts” under the Rural Develop-

ment and Fisheries priority measure “Promoting the Adaptation and Development of Rural Areas” of the Single Programming Document (SPD) for Lithuania 2004–2006. The support was allocated on February 3, 2006; the project was implemented in 2007. The owners received the support of over 143,000 Litas under this project. The Bieliniai, using those funds, built and equipped one more residential house for accommodation of 12–17 guests, the farm building with two bedrooms (up to 8 people), expanded the banqueting hall (up to 15 people).

The Bieliniai developed their rural tourism business further on. In 2009, they again applied to the NPA. This time according to the measure “Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities” of 2007–2013 Lithuanian Rural Development Programme. And received over 115,000 Litas in 2009 under the project “Development of Rural Tourism and Recreation Services”. With this money, a big banqueting hall, the kitchen and auxiliary premises were reconstructed. Two sewage treatment systems were installed, paths were paved, modern kitchen facilities purchased, and a woodshed built.

Holidaymakers are not lacking.

Today six log houses with all amenities are intended for relaxation of guests in the Bieliniai rural tourism farmstead. They are equipped with kitchenettes and fireplaces. A log steam bathhouse is built at the lake, and one can jump to the water at once. The farmstead has two banqueting halls: with 40 and 18 places. Both halls are equipped with kitchens. The environment is well-appointed: an asphalt-covered car parking site, cosy outside arbours with fireplaces. The farmstead also sites children’s playgrounds, swing, and sand boxes. For active sports lovers: basketball, volley-ball grounds, bikes, canoes, boats, and water bikes. In winter one may enjoy sledging and skiing.

The visits to the farmstead are evidently witnessed by figures, submitted by the Lithuanian Department of Statistics: in 2011, the farmstead hosted 2,700 Lithuanians and 200 guests from overseas. “So much work that you should move rapidly around”, says the industrious farmstead owner and proficient financial expert Viktorija. Viktorija graduated from the Agricultural Academy where she acquired the speciality of an economist organizer. Aukštadvaris is Viktorija’s homeland. The master of the farmstead is Antanas of venerable age from Ignalina. He is on a par with his wife. Antanas is a qualified agronomist, during his professional career he took top-ranking positions (worked as a chairman, director of Aukštadvaris State Farm). They are together for 48 years.



Holidaymakers are captivated by an ancient ethnographic homestead from the late 19th century, with a large forecourt and a garden.

Suduvian's farmstead is part of ethnographic Lithuania

Violeta SEREDŽIUVIENĖ

In Šakiai district, Sudargas eldership, Pervazninkai village, rural tourism in "Suduvian's Farmstead" has been developed for a decade. It is owned by Vydas and Aurelija Rutkai. This is an ancient ethnographic homestead from the late 19th century, with a large forecourt and a garden. It sites the authentic barn with ancient outhouses, a bathhouse, and a pond.

Nearby the farmstead, a wood and the Nemunas bend are sited. A bit further, the mounds of Sudargas. Each nook of the farmstead reminds the times of our forefathers, their ancient traditions and language. The support under the measure "Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities" of 2007–2013 Lithuanian Rural Development Programme (RDP) helps the Rutkai develop successfully rural tourism business.

EU project funds are invested in historical heritage.

"With tourist flows increasing, we understood that quality of services to visitors should be improved, bedrooms equipped, old buildings repaired, a barn and a cattle-shed roofed anew. As we lacked funds for doing this, we decided to apply for the European Union and national budget support. Thanks God, there is an opportunity to use such support; otherwise, we would not be able to implement our plans. It is good that the support funds are invested into the future, historical and cultural heritage. We have done a lot of works under the project, but quite a few are still ahead", spoke openly the farmstead owner Aurelija. The farmstead owners participate in the 2007–2013 Lithuanian Rural

Development Programme and in 2012 are implementing the project "Development of the Rural Tourism Farmstead "Suduvian's Farmstead" under the measure "Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities." The total value of the project is 960,000 Litas, including the EU and national budget support funds of about 469,000 Litas. Implementing the project, the roofs of the barn and the farm building were replaced, interior works are going on. After the barn reconstruction, a spacious banqueting hall on the ground floor will seat 80 guests; bedrooms on the first floor will lodge 50 visitors. Heating and water supply systems, water treatment facilities are foreseen. Not only all household amenities but also a kitchen for preparing food will be built. Modern amenities shall be installed in a way that farmstead authenticity will be preserved. Each nook in the farmstead will remind ancient times when it was the ancestral place of residence. It will be a perfect venue for traditional family holidays, weddings, or jubilees. All ancient traditions will be followed. "Suduvian's Farmstead" represents Lithuania and its historical heritage in its own way; therefore, we must do our best that visitors, especially foreigners, would see at least a small part of ancient authentic Lithuania and feel the spirit of

industrious and inventive rural people,” said the farmstead owner Aurelija Rutkienė.

Exclusive aura of the farmstead fascinated.

The family bought the old farmstead fifteen years ago. The real Suduvian forester Vydas was enchanted by the farmstead authenticity and aura. This farmstead was founded in Pervazninkai village already in 1890. Its last masters were Juozas and Marija Petkevičiai. After the death of the lonely old man the Rutkai bought the abandoned farmstead quite cheaply. “We fancied this farmstead at once, though we understood it would require much of our work, funds and heart. The roofs of the buildings were leaky, walls were ramshackle, and the surroundings untended. Since then we have never thought of any holidays, we spent all our time toiling in the farmstead”, remembers the farmstead owner Aurelija Rutkienė. “Once a young couple happened to come to the farmstead and said they wanted to celebrate their wedding here. For them it was of no importance that the farmstead had no water supply and other amenities. They were simply enchanted by the natural landscape and the ancient spirit of the farmstead. And thus people wishing to stay here, to celebrate family festivities and gatherings of several generations came more and more often. I realized that all people would be afforded an opportunity to marvel at this unique farmstead. I also realized that all efforts should be put to preserve the 19th century farmstead authenticity. “Therefore, collecting of new ethnographic exhibits, ancient farm and household utensils, pieces of furniture was started. A lot of authentic exhibits were given as presents from acquaintances, friends and relatives. The farmstead has become still cosier, richer and with more ethnographic elements with each year.



According to Aurelija Rutkienė, holidaymakers come to their farmstead from various cities of Lithuania and overseas.

Young people are interested in their ancestors' style of life.

Aurelija Rutkienė, involved in rural tourism for already ten years, said that holidaymakers from different towns of Lithuania and overseas come to their family farmstead. From 2003, A. Rutkienė is a member of the Lithuanian Rural Tourism Association (LRTA). In “Suduvian’s Farmstead”, holidaymakers get knowledge of Suduvian ethnoculture history, which is presented interestingly by the farmstead hostess Aurelija Rutkienė, a specialist in the Lithuanian language and literature, who worked as a teacher for 25 years. Excursions from Lithuanian schools are also frequent. The hostess remembered how several years ago she received a call from S. Nėris Gymnasium of Vilnius for an excursion. A double-decker, full of schoolchildren, their parents and teachers, drove inside the farmstead. The Vilnius excursionists were fascinated by the farmstead authenticity, abundance of exhibits and cosy atmosphere.

The regional events of ethnoculture are also organized in the farmstead. Contests were held to judge about the nicest and widest swath but also the ability to properly whet a scythe.

“Quite recently, I saw a grandma with a granddaughter passing by. The girl said she wanted very much to visit the ancient farmstead. There is something here that attracts children. We, Lithuanians, still want to live in ancient houses”, A. Rutkienė felt delighted. For young people coming to the farmstead it is an exotic experience to sit on starlight nights at a cracking bonfire, to look at the stars and sleep in the tents set up on the lawn. In the authentic ancient barns, once used for farm-men and farm-girls, in the two-ended “stuba” (heated room), the hosts may accommodate overnight 10–15 guests. Until recently the farmstead lodged guests only in summer.



Schoolchildren are sincerely interested in the style of life and traditions of their grandfathers and forefathers.



The farmstead owner Gediminas with his plane takes holidaymakers for a flight.

In Rėžaliai - five seasons

Nijolė PETROŠIŪTĖ

In the rural tourism farmstead "Fifth Season" in Rėžaliai village, Tytuvėnai eldership, Kelmė district you will really experience five seasons. It is said four seasons are everywhere else, whereas in Rėžaliai they are five. Don't believe? Stay for a while and make sure.

Making a stop for a while in the farmstead, you will see a fabulous view through the windows, and a spectacular panorama of Padubysis, not overshadowed by houses or trees, will open before you. You can also marvel at the view from the roof of the main building, which like of other cabins, is grass covered Norwegian style. The magical aura, however, you will feel only after staying a bit longer.

If you climb the hill, on a slope of which the homestead is set up, you will find yourself at a height of 30 metres. This stunning height, probably, predetermined the establishment of the rural tourism farmstead "Fifth season" instead of shrubbery after the European Union (EU) and national budget funds were received.

The farmstead instead of shrubbery.

When Gediminas Bagdonavičius from Kaunas was offered to buy a land plot of 21 ha in Rėžaliai, he not at once made up his mind to do this as he did not know what was to be done with that jungle. And he did not see any benefit from the arable land, as it was sand drifted by the wind. However, after taking a flight with his plane above those areas, he understood that a better place could not be found for a rural tourism farmstead: far away from urban noise and outsiders' eyes. Just like in the kingdom of God.

The farmstead owner also says that if not the EU and national budget support, granted in 2005 under the activity area "Encouragement of Rural Tourism and Crafts" of the



Gediminas Bagdonavičius is breeding Scottish highlanders.

Rural Development and Fisheries priority measure “Promoting the Adaptation and Development of Rural Areas” of the Single Programming Document (SPD) for Lithuania 2004–2006, everything, probably, would end with a perspective from a bird’s eye view. “To start from scratch it would be too difficult, even impossible, when even an electric line was laid only on the other side of the Dubysa. Therefore, not wasting my time I prepared a project “The Rural Tourism Farmstead of Gediminas Bagdonavičius” with the total value of almost 3 million Litass (with VAT). The supported part of the project is 1.2 million Litass”.

Gediminas tells that while implementing the project “The Rural Tourism Farmstead of Gediminas Bagdonavičius” he first of all laid electric cables, and this made it possible to start construction works. A water well was bored in the farmstead. Infrastructure was put to order, bathhouses and houses were built. “Some money was even left for furniture. After such support you may further run your business ...”

It is possible to take a flight with a plane.

Today a recreation complex “Fifth Season” consists of the main house and three separate cabins adapted for family relaxation. The main house sites the conference hall and banqueting hall with all necessary facilities. It houses five rooms adapted for relaxation with mini-kitchenettes, and each room has its own amenities, a separate terrace with outside furniture. The same is also available in three smaller cabins. The homestead is designed so that its guests would have much more privacy. At the guests’ service, baths, a jacousi, a tub, and billiards table. Amateurs of active sports, depending on the season, may go canoeing, boating, cycling, skiing or sledging from the Dubysa slope, and skating. Gediminas says that soon the farmstead will

have a horse-dragged cart. “This is all included in the total price. It is unacceptable for me that a guest should extra pay for each service, be it canoeing or cycling. A guest, after stepping over the threshold of our farmstead, should forget all concerns, calculations and prices for this or that. He may just relax and admire everything, created by God. Therefore, I contributed to this with the European Union and national budget support”.

Gediminas tells that guests are treated to breakfasts and suppers, this being quite a rare occasion with rural tourism farmsteads. Catering is also included in the same price”.

The exclusive feature of the rural farmstead “Fifth Season” is the possibility to fly on a plane. Gediminas Bagdonavičius is a professional pilot, flying on his plane from Kaunas Darius and Girėnas Airport to his farmstead in Rėžaliai and taking his guests for a flight. “It is faster and cheaper by plane. It takes for me half an hour to fly from Kaunas to the farmstead, and I use only 8 l of A98 petrol. Only the plane and its maintenance are costly. Each of us, however, has some hobby. My hobby is to fly. Also to travel”.

He gained experience abroad.

Gediminas Bagdonavičius says frankly that prior to opening his own rural tourism farmstead he used as a guest to stay at some local and foreign rural tourism farmsteads and to learn how to avoid lapses. “If we compare our rural tourism farmsteads with those abroad, especially in Poland or further to the south, our level of services is high, indeed. I had a chance to be in such farmsteads where only a folding bed was available, and there were no towels”.

Gediminas says that only those who search for innovations will survive. Thus, already in 2012 the Scottish highlanders appeared on his farmstead pastures. So far, they, unusually shaggy and with menacing horns, are just attraction to the farmstead guests, but in the future it is expected to get organic meat from that herd.

Taking a view to the future, in 2010, Gediminas under the 2007–2013 Lithuanian Rural Development Programme measure “First Afforestation of Agricultural Land” planted more than 7 ha of his lands with oak-trees. At first he offered that land to farmers for free. He said: work and use. But... no one was willing. Now an oak-wood would be in this area. Gediminas recognizes that he as a young farmer had some more opportunities to use the EU and national budget support, but he was not in due time in one case, and missed a chance in another case. “Nothing of note, you should not wish to get all money, some other you need to earn himself. I have already received quite a lot”.



Panorama of rural tourism homestead estate "Radailių dvaras".

In the Radailiai estate, on the bank of the pond

Nijolė PETROŠIŪTĖ

The owner of the rural tourism homestead "Radailiai Estate" (Klaipėda district) Vita Aušrienė feels happy after she left Klaipėda, her childhood city, for the countryside, its greenery, fresh air and bird songs. No, she does not say all things in her life were going swimmingly. She passed through different stages. "Just like at the sea: the ebb and flow", said the maiden from the seacoast.

Being a true-born Samogitian, she also knows a somewhat rude proverb: where is no bad smell, there is no good smell. This also had happened with their business. She experienced a lot of not very pleasant things, until her rural tourism business gained momentum and became flourishing. Maybe, she had just the same dream from her childhood – to have her own business of services. To launch this business she was encouraged by the support of 655,000 Litas, granted on 18 July 2006 under the activity area "Encouragement of Rural Tourism and Crafts" of the Rural Development and Fisheries priority measure "Promoting the Adaptation and Development of Rural Areas" of the Single Programming Document (SPD) for Lithuania 2004–2006.

Big investments were needed.

Vita tells that her brother and she as real children from the seacoast started their independent business from

fish: they acquired a parcel abounding in haddock and opened here a fish smokehouse. The smoked fish was sold in the market. After some time business began to decay: competition increased, fish prices went up, buyers' money ran down, whereas the EU requirements for food companies increased, and to comply with them big investments were needed.

However, if we take a look from the present-day perspective, even most unsuccessful business days could be called the beginning of business. During free hours they started cleaning the surroundings and detected the beauties of the nature hidden beneath the shrubs, hardly passable by man. "After cleaning and put to order everything, we were amazed to see how beautiful the place was. And then the idea dawned on us that this place would be good for setting up a rural tourism farmstead and a complex of baths. A childhood dream as if emerged again to have a restaurant on the sea-



In the reconstructed building.

coast". Vita smiles: they could not build a restaurant on the real seacoast, but nobody hindered them to dig a pond and name it the Radailiai Sea.

One more detail, for a childhood dream to come true, very big investments were needed. Therefore, the activity area "Encouragement of Rural Tourism and Crafts" of the Rural Development and Fisheries priority measure "Promoting the Adaptation and Development of Rural Areas" of the Single Programming Document (SPD) for Lithuania 2004–2006 was met joyfully.

V. Aušrienė, after she prepared the project "Reconstruction of the Fish Processing Shop, Adapting It to the Rural Tourism Building", was granted the support of 655,000 Litas (1.3 million of expenses was recognized as eligible for financing). Vita says that they just used the framework from the old building, and all other remaining parts were built anew and in a modern style. With the implementation of that project, the number of guests increased and the quality of the provided services went up to another level.

Holidaymakers become more numerous.

According to Vita, however, the supply of their services could not satisfy the still increasing demand. "The constantly growing number of guests forced to search opportunities for accepting their bigger flows. Thus, in 2011, we prepared another project under the measure "Encouragement of Rural Tourism Activities" of 2007–2013 Lithuanian Rural Development Programme. This time our project was named "A Rural Tourism Building", and its total value amounted to 1,110,000 Litas. This project has not been signed by the National Paying Agency so far, but if everything goes on successfully

we could equip another six apartments, six double and four bedrooms".

V. Aušrienė says that all conditions are created on the bank of the pond, called the sea by the guests, for each to feel a real master. A lot of diverse services are offered here. Nature, no doubt, is the highest value. A complex of baths leaves memorable impressions. It is built ingeniously, using rough terrain, which is quite a rare occurrence at the seacoast. The complex of baths, of unique architecture and built of old German bricks, is located not only on the bank of the pond, but is also somewhat burrowed in the earth. The complex has two completely separate steam baths, the pre-bath halls of which sometimes... may be connected into one. Here is also the pond terrace where you may flop down into the tub.

Nothing is better after bath than to plunge into the pond, with the rivulet flowing through it and an island in the middle...

A two-storied restaurant on the pond, i.e. on the Radailiai seacoast, is for a pleasant pastime. More active sport lovers may be offered basketball, volley-ball, and football grounds, venturesome paintball; children have a game room and playgrounds, outside harbours, etc.

No problems related to the project were faced.

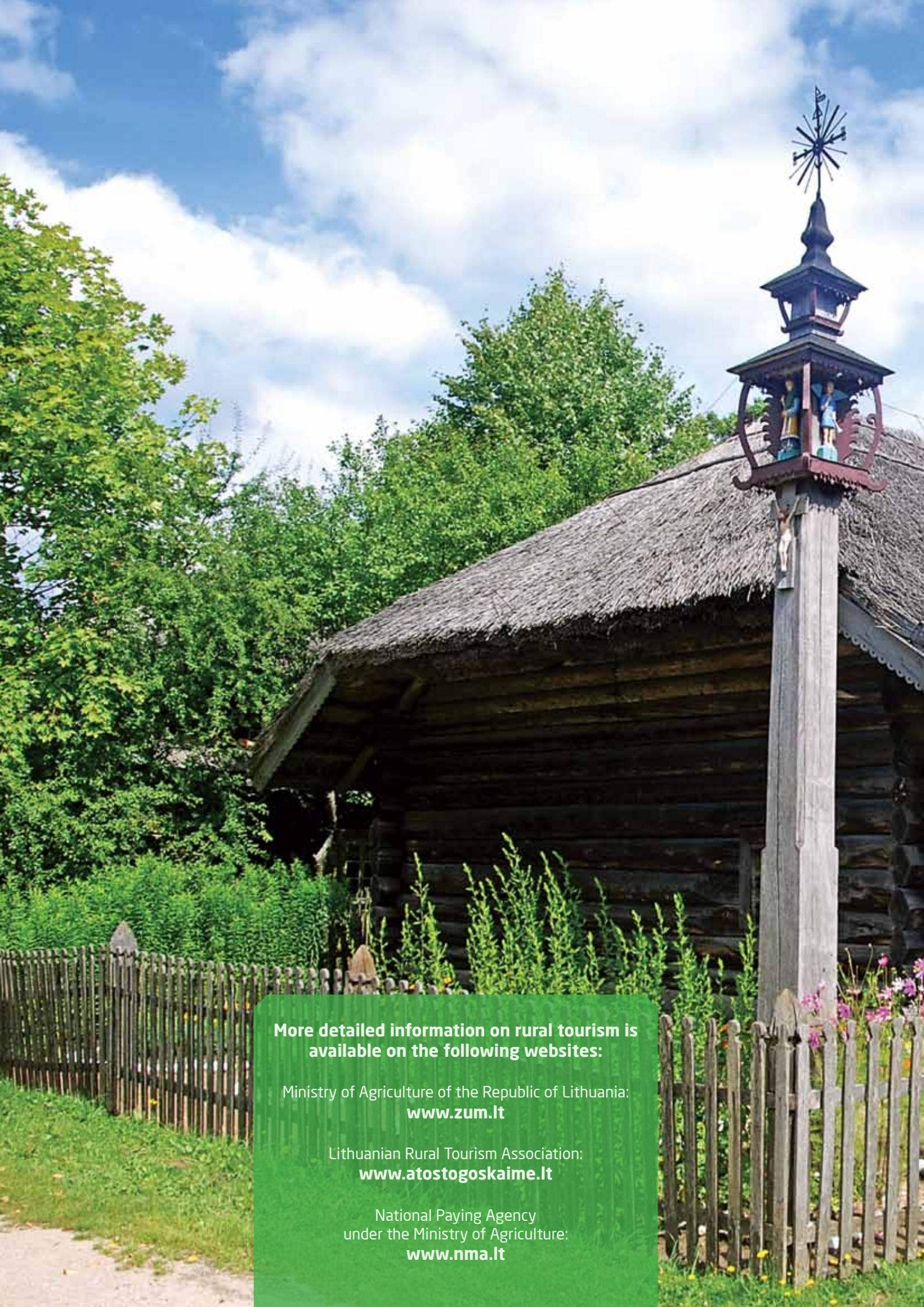
V. Aušrienė does not like to complain about worries which she, as a delicate woman, has to stand. It is said that in Radailiai only guests may feel like lords, whereas hosts must be swift-handed and do everything to please them. Is it always a success? "It depends. Some people come with the negative prepossession. For such people nothing and never will be good. But, luckily, they are not very numerous. There are also such people who even grumble against the support. V. Aušrienė says about the support: "I appreciate the European Union and national budgetary support very positively. Any support is very good; one should thank for it and... be able to use it". V. Aušrienė is delighted she did not have any problems as regard the project: requirements were very strict, but fair. They did not contain anything you could not fulfil.

Sorry, we did not tell you where the Radailiai estate is located. Just seven kilometers away from Klaipėda... You may also ask why the estate, as the rural tourism homestead was set up in the brushwood? At the beginning of the 20th century, at this place the estate with 247 ha of land and the well-known milk farm was located. Thus, according to V. Aušrienė, they did not have to invent a bicycle, it was just enough to remember the history of the locality.



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More detailed information on rural tourism is available on the following websites:

Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania:
www.zum.lt

Lithuanian Rural Tourism Association:
www.atostogoskaime.lt

National Paying Agency
under the Ministry of Agriculture:
www.nma.lt