

## **MOUNTAIN TOURISM IN THE RUGOVE AREA IN PEJE AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**

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**Abstract:** Mountain tourism is one of the most important formats for sustainability in Kosovo, playing a special role in promoting the country's cultural, economic and economic resources. The Rugova Mountains area, in the municipality of Peja, is among the most important for the purpose of mountain tourism, thanks to its landscapes of this and the great potential for recreational activities such as mountain hiking, mountaineering, rafting, camping and skiing. This type of tourism contributes to the economic community of the local community by creating work technology and promoting traditional products of the country. This includes for occasional visitors and support for the sustainability of the area. However, Rugova Mountains faces significant challenges such as vulnerable infrastructure, lack of professional training and external international promotion. Although it may not have, Rugova Mountains remains a destination with great potential for alternative and ecological tourism. Based on the principles of sustainability and local cooperation, the mountains in Rugova Mountains could serve as a regional development model that contributes to the economic, social and local community well-being.

**Keywords:** Mountain tourism, sustainable tourism, alternative tourism, biodiversity

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Mountain tourism is one of the most sustainable forms of tourism development, combining environmental protection with socio-economic benefits for local communities. Rugova, part of the Peja municipality in Kosovo, is one such destination that deserves the greatest attention from all the potential it represents in the field of mountain tourism development; it is among the most important mountain tourist destinations - mainly because it is endowed with great natural potential and offers rare picturesque landscapes. Rugova represents a unique space for the development of recreational activities, as it has high mountain peaks, deep gorges, clean rivers and mountain lakes. Activities such as hiking, mountaineering, rafting, camping and winter skiing are all within its capacity. The majority of the income generated by mountain tourism in Rugova is related to accommodation, food and tourist guide services provided to the local population. Thus, this contribution is important and significant for the social and economic development of the region. Tourism is a sector that generates diverse employment opportunities, encourages infrastructure development and promotes the consumption of traditional products at the local level, which strengthens the link between cultural heritage and economic development. (Hargrove, C. 2020). Environmental conservation, as well as balancing economic development with environmental protection, is an integral part of mountain tourism in Rugova. Through these principles of sustainable tourism, biodiversity will be preserved and natural resources will be managed in a sustainable manner (Kuqi & Selimaj 2023). Full involvement of the local community in development planning would ensure an authentic experience for visitors, while simultaneously increasing sensitivity to the preservation of natural and cultural heritage (UNWTO 2019). However, the development of mountain tourism in Rugova suffers from several constraints such as poor infrastructure, lack of professional training for tourist guides, and insufficient international promotion. Addressing these challenges requires a strategic approach and cooperation between local institutions, tourism operators, and the local community to achieve sustainable and balanced development (Kuqi 2018). In this regard, the study of mountain tourism in Kosovo, identify current challenges and propose measures to improve the management of tourism resources. Rugova with its rich natural and cultural potential can be an example at the national and regional level for the proper development of sustainable tourism (Kuqi, B., Vishaj, B. 2024).

### **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The methodology of this study on mountain tourism in the Rugova area of Peja is based on a combination of primary and secondary data, collected from local and international scientific and institutional sources. Reports of the MCYS, the Municipality of Peja, and the Kosovo Agency of Statistics were analyzed, as well as documents of organizations such as UNDP, GIZ, and USAID, which address the development of sustainable tourism. Primary data were obtained through field observations and interviews with local stakeholders, while secondary data were obtained from official reports, scientific literature, and institutional websites such as [www.mkrs-ks.org](http://www.mkrs-ks.org) and [71](http://www.peja-</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

rks.com. This approach aims to analyze in an integrated manner the potentials, challenges, and economic and social impact of mountain tourism in Rugova, relying on verifiable evidence and official documents.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of this paper show that mountain tourism in the Rugova area has a significant impact on the development of sustainable tourism in the municipality of Peja. Rugova, with its rare landscapes and unique biodiversity, offers numerous opportunities for the development of recreational and tourism activities (AMMK 2021). Data analysis shows that tourists visit Rugova mainly for hiking, mountaineering, rafting, camping and winter sports, contributing significantly to the economic development of the local community (HKT 2025). The majority of income is generated from accommodation, food and tourist guide services, which create new employment opportunities and encourage local operators to develop professional tourism services. Mountain tourism is closely linked to the promotion of traditional products and local culture, strengthening the link between cultural heritage and economic development. Social benefits are also evident, as residents directly benefit from tourism activities, while their involvement in tourism planning and management increases sensitivity to environmental and cultural heritage conservation (C.L., Lizama, J.T. (2018) : (Lajçi et al.,2021) However, the development of mountain tourism faces significant challenges, including poor infrastructure, lack of professional training for tourist guides, and insufficient international promotion. The seasonality of visits also creates dependence on certain periods and limits the full potential of the area. The community perception analysis shows that residents are aware of the importance of tourism for economic and social development, but require continuous institutional support to improve the quality of services and infrastructure. Rugova has great potential for the development of alternative and ecological tourism, promoting traditional products, local food, and sustainable activities, which help preserve biodiversity and manage natural resources. Improving cooperation between local institutions, tourism operators and the community is needed to create a sustainable development model. Investments in infrastructure, professional training and international promotion will increase the number of visitors and ensure that the economic and social impact is long-term (MIT 2024). Limited financial resources, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of skilled workforce can hinder the success (Michele L. Healy 2019). The results show that Rugova can serve as a model for the development of sustainable tourism at the regional and national levels, integrating best practices and the experiences of the local community

*Photo 1. Hiking in Rugova*



*Photo 2. Traditional wooden guesthouse in Rugove*

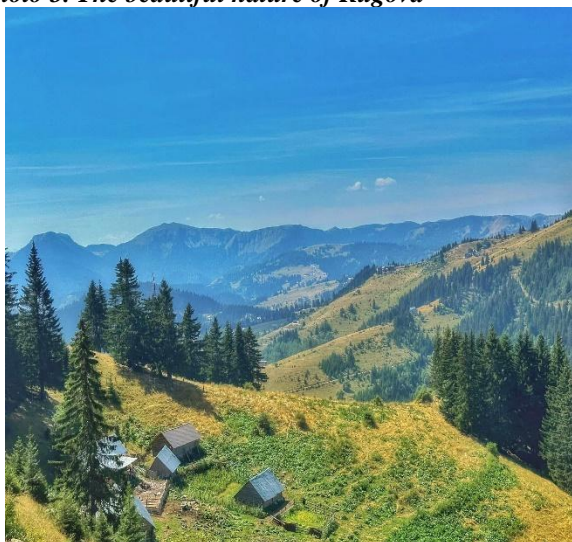


Source: Authors

Hiking in Rugova is one of the most popular activities for visitors seeking outdoor adventures and untouched mountain landscapes. The diverse trails offer varying levels of difficulty, making them suitable for both beginners and more experienced climbers. The green terrain, fresh air and panoramic views make the experience unique and relaxing. This activity also contributes significantly to the tourist development of the area, promoting sustainability and the appreciation of natural resources. In Rugova, hiking is directly transformed into an authentic mountain experience. The traditional wooden guesthouses in Rugova represent the characteristic architecture of the area and the traditional way of mountain construction. They create a warm and welcoming environment, reflecting the culture and lifestyle of the local inhabitants. These structures are built with natural materials, making them sustainable and

harmonized with the surrounding landscape. Visitors experience an authentic rural atmosphere, away from the noise and urban rhythm. Guesthouses serve as a key element in promoting cultural and sustainable tourism in Rugova.

*Photo 3. The beautiful nature of Rugova*



*Photo 4. Views of nature and villas during winter*



Source: Authors

The nature of Rugova is characterized by stunning mountain landscapes, dense greenery and complete harmony between the relief and the tranquility of the environment. It offers a special experience for visitors seeking tranquility and authentic natural beauty. During winter, Rugova transforms into a white landscape with villas surrounded by snow, creating a peaceful and picturesque atmosphere. This period attracts visitors seeking relaxation, winter sports and unique natural views.

*Table 1. Number of visitors and nights of stay by region, September 2024 – September 2025*

	visitor			Night stands		
	September 2024	September 2025	%	September 2024	September 2025	%
			September 2025			September 2025
			September 2024			September 2024
<b>Internal visitors</b>	<b>23 001</b>	<b>25 330</b>	<b>10.1%</b>	<b>71 967</b>	<b>74 116</b>	<b>3.0%</b>
Gjakovë	314	270	-14.0%	376	455	21.2%
Gjilan	4 484	3 829	-14.6%	23 112	23 864	3.3%
Mitrovicë	1 267	1 044	-17.6%	1 696	1 243	-26.7%
Pejë	7 726	8 281	7.2%	28 280	25 048	-11.4%
Prizren	3 066	4 696	53.2%	8 417	8 744	3.9%
Prishtinë	3 550	5 248	47.8%	4 989	9 606	92.6%
Ferizaj	2 595	1 963	-24.4%	5 099	5 156	1.1%

Source: ASK 2025

Regarding foreign visitors, compared to the previous period (September 2024) the number of visitors has remained the same, without change. In total 39,397 foreign visitors, of which the largest number were from: Albania, Germany, Switzerland, Turkey, etc.

*Table 2. Number of foreign visitors and their nights of stay in hotels, by country of origin*

	Visitor			Night stands		
	September 2024	September 2025	%	September 2024	September 2025	%
			September 2025			September 2025
			September 2024			September 2024
<b>External visitors</b>	<b>39 392</b>	<b>39 397</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>77 645</b>	<b>72 482</b>	<b>-6.6%</b>
Shqipëria	7 821	7 884	0.8%	16 240	13 713	-15.6%
Gjermania	3 926	4 103	4.5%	7 464	7 578	1.5%
Zvicra	2 906	3 114	7.1%	4 954	4 971	0.4%
Turqia	3 382	2 967	-12.3%	5 306	4 353	-18.0%

Source: ASK 2025

The data presented in the tables for domestic and foreign visitors show a moderate increase in domestic visitors by 10.1% in September 2025, while overnight stays only show a slight increase of 3.0%. The regions show marked differences, with Pristina (+47.8%) and Prizren (+53.2%) showing the largest increases in visitors, while Mitrovica and Ferizaj show significant decreases. As for foreign visitors, the number remains almost unchanged compared to the previous year, but overnight stays fall by -6.6%, suggesting shorter stays. The countries with the highest number of visitors remain Albania, Germany, Switzerland and Turkey, although some of them, such as Albania and Turkey, show a decrease in overnight stays. These results indicate an increase in tourist mobility, but not necessarily an increase in long-term stays.

This paper highlights that mountain tourism is not only a recreational activity, but an engine of economic and social development that can maintain a balance between economic benefits. Environmental protection is important to tourists (Bacow, J. (2019). Through careful management of natural resources, promotion of ecological activities and active community involvement, Rugova has the opportunity to develop as a sustainable and internationally recognized destination. This rich natural and cultural potential places Rugova in a key position for the development of tourism in Kosovo and creates opportunities for development models that can be applied to other mountain destinations (Vishaj & Kuqi 2025). Finally, Rugova shows that mountain tourism can positively impact economic, social and environmental development, representing a clear example of the integration of sustainability principles into tourism practices.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Mountain tourism in the Rugova area represents an important opportunity for the sustainable economic, social and environmental development of the region. Rugova, with its rich landscapes and unique biodiversity, offers recreational activities that promote alternative and ecological tourism. This sector creates employment opportunities and encourages the development of local services, including accommodation, food and tourist guides. The active involvement of the local community is essential for the preservation of cultural and natural heritage. However, the main challenges remain poor infrastructure, lack of professional training and insufficient international promotion. Addressing these challenges requires cooperation between institutions, operators and the local community. Rugova has the potential to serve as a regional model for sustainable tourism, integrating best practices. Strategic investments in infrastructure and resource management will maximize economic and environmental benefits. Mountain tourism also contributes to environmental education and sensitivity to the environment. In conclusion, Rugova represents a clear example of the integration of economic development with environmental and cultural heritage conservation

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