

GASTRONOMIC TOURISM IN THE HERCEG ETHNO VILLAGE IN THE WEST HERZEGOVINA TOURIST-GEOGRAPHIC REGION

Aida Bidžan-Gekić¹

Haris Gekić¹

Emina Ajanović²

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Abstract: The Herceg Ethno Village in the West Herzegovina region is a kind of "living museum" in which the cultural identity of this region is further interpreted through the gastronomic offer. It is necessary to look at this identity through various forms of branding and marketing strategies, which would be used in the promotion of gastro tourism at the Herceg Ethno Village. The authors of this paper want to show that the development of gastro tourism and the development of its brand do not only imply a name or logo, but include numerous elements that shape the experience of visitors/tourists: from the smell and taste of traditional food, the visual identity of the restaurant and the ambience, to the way of presentation and communication with guests. That is why gastro tourism will be observed through its multisensory experiences, which will provide an excellent basis for showing the construction of a strong and authentic tourist brand, in the service of the development and survival of the Herceg Ethno Village.

Keywords: Herceg Ethno Village, gastronomic tourism, branding, marketing, development

¹ Associate Professor, Department of Geography, University of Sarajevo – Faculty of Science, Zmaja od Bosne 33-35, 71000 Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, abidzan@pmf.unsa.ba, hgekcic@pmf.unsa.ba

² Teaching Assistant, Department of Geography, University of Sarajevo – Faculty of Science, Zmaja od Bosne 33-35, 71000 Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Emina.Ajanovic@pmf.unsa.ba

INTRODUCTION

The modern development of tourism, particularly in the context of the growing demand for authentic, experiential, and meaningful forms of travel, has placed gastronomy at the forefront as a powerful element of destination identity and a significant motive for tourist arrivals. In this context, gastro tourism extends far beyond satisfying the basic nutritional needs of visitors; it serves as a medium through which tourists gain a deeper understanding of local culture, traditions, customs, and everyday life.

Culinary practices, traditional recipes, modes of food preparation, and the use of local ingredients reflect the historical, social, and environmental characteristics of a region, thereby transforming gastronomy into a form of cultural expression.

Through such experiences, gastro tourism contributes directly to the development of sustainable and differentiated tourism products by supporting local producers, preserving culinary heritage, encouraging the use of seasonal and locally sourced ingredients, and strengthening the connection between tourism and the local community. At the same time, it enhances the overall tourist experience by creating emotional bonds with the destination, increasing visitor satisfaction, and fostering repeat visitation. As a result, gastronomy increasingly represents not only a complementary tourism activity, but also a strategic resource for destination development and long-term competitiveness in the tourism market.

Gastronomic tourism is frequently understood as a form of travel in which visitors seek to enjoy unique and authentic culinary experiences (UNWTO, 2017). It encompasses a wide range of activities, including tasting local and traditional dishes, visiting farms and food producers, participating in cooking workshops, and attending gastronomic festivals and events that showcase regional specialties. These experiences allow tourists to engage with the culture, history, and traditions of a destination through its food, thereby creating meaningful and memorable connections with the local community.

Gillespie (2000) states that: “The study of gastronomy brings an understanding of the scope of food and beverage production and preparation, as well as how, where, when, and why they are consumed” (Gillespie, 2001). According to Wolf, “Gastronomic tourism is the movement of people traveling in search of enjoyment from prepared food, beverages, and other food-related events” (Wolf, 2006).

Gastronomic tourism is also referred to as “food tourism,” “tasting tourism,” or “culinary tourism.” Culinary tourism is defined as the pursuit of a unique and memorable eating and drinking experience. Gastronomic tourism refers to travel to

destinations where local food and beverages are the primary motivation for visiting (Dávid et al., 2010).

In addition, gastronomic tourism contributes to the promotion and preservation of local culinary heritage, supports small-scale producers, and encourages sustainable practices such as the use of seasonal and locally sourced ingredients. It also plays an important role in differentiating destinations in competitive tourism markets, as food-based experiences are often closely linked to a region's identity and authenticity.

Digital marketing has become an increasingly vital tool for presenting and promoting these experiences. Through high-quality photos, videos, blogs, social media posts, and online reviews, destinations can effectively communicate the sensory and cultural aspects of their gastronomic offerings to a global audience. Such digital content not only raises awareness but also influences travel decisions, shapes visitor expectations, and enhances engagement before, during, and after the travel experience. In this way, gastronomy and digital promotion together form a strategic combination for attracting tourists and strengthening the brand identity of destinations.

Ethno villages in Bosnia and Herzegovina, such as Ethno Village Herceg in the West Herzegovina tourist-geographic region, often provide a rich gastronomic offer rooted in local recipes, traditional methods of food preparation, and the use of locally sourced ingredients. These villages aim to preserve and showcase the culinary heritage of the region, offering visitors an immersive experience that combines taste, culture, and history. Traditional dishes, prepared according to time-honored recipes, and the use of regional products not only enhance the authenticity of the visitor experience but also support local producers and contribute to the socio-economic development of surrounding communities.

Despite the richness of their gastronomic offerings, the digital presence of many ethno villages remains uneven and underdeveloped. While some destinations maintain active social media profiles and online booking options, others lack professional digital marketing strategies, consistent content updates, or high-quality visual materials. This uneven digital visibility limits their ability to reach broader audiences, particularly international tourists, who increasingly rely on online platforms, reviews, and social media content when choosing travel destinations. Strengthening digital communication, including professionally produced photos, videos, blogs, and interactive content, would enable these ethno villages to better showcase their culinary and cultural offerings, attract a larger number of visitors, and establish themselves as competitive, authentic, and sustainable tourism destinations.

Research indicates that tourists increasingly rely on digital sources of information when selecting travel destinations, with social media and websites playing a particularly important role (Mariani et al., 2016). For ethno villages, having a high-quality and regularly updated website—featuring professional photos, menus, interactive maps, and the option for online reservations—can significantly enhance their ability to attract visitors. In addition, user-generated content, such as reviews on TripAdvisor, Instagram posts, and travel vlogs, serves as a highly credible form of promotion that is essentially cost-free for the destination (Fotis et al., 2012).

Moreover, a strong presence on digital platforms such as Google Maps, Booking.com, and Facebook can further increase the visibility and accessibility of ethno villages to a wide audience. These tools not only facilitate trip planning and decision-making but also help establish a destination's online reputation, strengthen its brand, and contribute to competitive positioning within both domestic and international tourism markets.

HERCEG ETHNO VILLAGE IN THE WEST HERZEGOVINA TOURIST-GEOGRAPHIC REGION

According to the collected data, the Ethno Village Herceg (Fig. 1) was founded in 2008, but the process of the construction concept, as well as the idea of creating such a concept, took a very long time, and the construction itself was gradual. Ethno Village Herceg is the kind of village that testifies to the time trapped in the rocky terrain of Herzegovina, embodying the way and culture of life in the rocky area. A village built of stone and made of stone, just a few kilometers from the famous shrine of Medjugorje, at the crossroads of Čitluk, Medjugorje and Ljubuški, can rightly be called the miracle of the Herzegovinian region, and by its geographical position it belongs to the West Herzegovina region. Its tourist-geographical position is very favorable because it is located only 30 km from the Adriatic coast, and it is also located relatively close to the border between our country and the Republic of Croatia, which also increases the importance of its location (Bidžan, 2012).



Fig. 1. Ethno Village Herceg complex in Medjugorje

Source: Official website of the ethno village Herceg (retrieved 25.06.2025.)

Ethno Village Herceg is a hotel and tourist complex that covers an area of 5 hectares, where over 50 stone buildings have been built. The complex has an accommodation capacity of 70 modernly equipped rooms, a restaurant and additional tourist facilities. It is important to mention that the center of the complex is the Herceg restaurant and a hamlet with 10 stone houses with hotel rooms and 3 separate apartment houses (Official website of the Ethno Village Herceg). This area borders a shopping zone with a dozen shops offering handicrafts, souvenirs and traditional products such as homemade honey or freshly ground flour.

The stone houses in this ethno village represent an authentic reconstruction of traditional Herzegovinian stone architecture and the way of life as it was in the past. They have their own symbolism as part of the cultural and historical heritage of this area. Built of stone, a material that dominates the Herzegovinian karst, they depict life in harmony with nature and the modest conditions in which previous generations lived. Also, they are a symbol of an authentic rural ambience, because their interior is equipped with rustic furniture, antique objects and details that faithfully depict the everyday life of old Herzegovinian households. In this way, tourists are given the opportunity to stay in spaces reminiscent of old Herzegovina, which creates a unique experience of combining the past and the comfort of modern accommodation. However, the most important message of these facilities is that they are not only accommodation facilities, but also have educational value because they remind us of the importance of preserving cultural identity through architecture, crafts and everyday customs. Special attention was paid to the preservation of the original appearance (Fig. 2), as well as the beauty of the landscape, and the entire village was built with care and love for nature and the environment. The ultimate goal was to

bring back to the present the Herzegovinian village as it was a hundred or more years ago.



Fig. 2. The beginning of the construction of stone houses in the Ethno Village Herceg
Source: Official website of the ethno village Herceg (25.06.2025.)

Since the demand from modern tourists for additional facilities is increasing, this ethno village also offers: a museum, a chapel, shops, a stable with domestic animals and a bowling alley. Also, a congress hall was built for business purposes, and next to it there is an impressive amphitheater for cultural events. In the second phase, the multifunctional hall Queen Katarina was built, and finally, in 2014, the outdoor pool (Fig. 5), with an area of 1,250 m², was opened. It was built using the latest design technology, with accompanying facilities such as an outdoor bar, outdoor fitness, etc. (Official website of Ethno Village Herceg).

In the center of the village there are a dozen houses that represent the commercial part of this ethno village, where you can find numerous souvenir shops (stone, wood and metal products), art galleries, shops of aromatic herbs, as well as shops of handmade costumes and jewelry. Nearby there is a stone house that is designed as a museum. It houses a setting that represents a way of life as it was lived more than a hundred years ago. This house, as well as the entire village, is a witness to some old times, which need to be shaken out of oblivion. Inside and around the house there are many authentic objects (furniture, dishes, decorations), and tools specific to the Herzegovinian region that were used in the past.

The chapel is located in the center of the village and represents the place from which one moves and to which one returns. The chapel represents a return to the spiritual dimension and the preservation of religious tradition, nurturing culture and the development of literacy. As then, so today, the chapel is the center of life in the area, a

place of socializing around which the locals used to gather to celebrate the successfully completed sowing, harvest or engagement, or they gathered to see off the deceased (Official website of the ethno village Herceg 1).

In addition to the religious building, there are other facilities that are exclusively intended for relaxation or an active vacation in this village. One example is the barn with domestic animals, which is now a great attraction for visitors. Since domestic animals have become a rarity in the Herzegovinian region, the youngest generations today barely know cows, donkeys, sheep and goats. For this reason, in this ethno village they have tried to gather these domestic animals in one place. Among them the most popular are donkeys, and there is also a small horse (pony). For the little ones, it is an irresistible attraction, since they can enjoy touching them and even feeding some of them, of course under the supervision of adults.

When it comes to the gastronomy of this area, the Herceg restaurant plays the biggest role. It is distinguished by six peculiarities that make a unique whole so far unseen in this region. The restaurant has an interesting, authentic interior with a spacious outdoor terrace and is the central gathering place not only for the guests of this tourist complex, but also for those who are attracted here by the rich and autochthonous ethno-gastronomic offer. With a total of three hundred seats inside spread over several floors, as well as an additional three hundred seats on the outdoor terraces, it exudes warmth and a homely atmosphere, and its special charm is given by the stream that gurgles through the entire restaurant. The combination of stone walls decorated with photographs of Herzegovinian motifs and furniture handmade of solid oak, as well as all other details, makes visitors feel comfortable here and come back again and again (Official website of Ethno Village Herceg 2).

The gastronomic offer is quite unusual, because it is a combination of local specialties (Herzegovinian donuts, Herzegovinian prosciutto, Herzegovinian cheeses and cream, Herzegovinian pan, Herzegovinian steak platter, veal peka in Herzegovinian style, honey rosa cake, etc.), which is complemented by modern seafood (fish pâté, octopus salad, pasta with fingerlings, Adriatic squid, various fish, etc.) and international specialties (Greek salad, various risottos, tortellini alla panna, lasagna, pizzas, dessert semifreddo, etc.). In short, there is an offer for every taste, even for the pickiest guests (Official website of Ethno Village Herceg 3). They try to find something for everyone, and this can be reflected in the overall picture of the gastronomic offer, on the one hand positively and, on the other, negatively. The explanation for this is the following: if we adapt too much to the needs of tourists, fulfilling their every wish and thus gaining their trust and enthusiasm, we lose what is traditional and autochthonous.

Therefore, we need to carefully consider all options before making the final offer to tourists, because we still need to keep our traditional gastronomic offer, by which we are unique and by which we need to be recognized in the tourist market. In this restaurant, tourists can enjoy a unique offer of various wines, including the famous autochthonous varieties Blatina and Žilavka.

BRANDING AND MARKETING OF ETHNO VILLAGE HERCEG

Branding of Ethno Village Herceg

"Destination branding is the process of creating a unique identity and perception in the minds of tourists, with the aim of differentiating in a competitive market and building long-term visitor loyalty" (Pike, 2017). In the context of gastro tourism, a brand encompasses far more than a name or logo; it includes all elements that shape the visitor experience—from the aromas and flavors of traditional cuisine, and the visual identity and ambience of dining spaces, to methods of presentation and communication with guests. Through its multisensory nature, gastro tourism provides a strong foundation for building a distinctive and authentic tourism brand.

The taste of dishes, accompanying aromas, styles of serving, local narratives, and customs experienced during meals are deeply embedded in tourists' memories and become an integral part of their overall perception of the destination. When effectively communicated through marketing strategies and coherent brand storytelling, these emotional impressions can play a decisive role in destination choice.

Ethno village branding in Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to rely predominantly on ambience and natural surroundings, while comparatively little attention is given to the development of a recognizable identity that extends beyond the physical space. Ethno Village Herceg has successfully established the image of a high-end ethno complex incorporating elements of traditional Herzegovinian architecture; however, the impression of "museum-like authenticity" often prevails over an authentic representation of everyday rural life.

One of the most critical yet systematically neglected aspects of branding in this context is gastronomy. Rather than serving as a central pillar of identity, traditional Herzegovinian cuisine frequently remains marginalized, replaced by seafood, Italian, or other modern menus that are not characteristic of the region or its rural traditions. Although Ethno Village Herceg makes efforts to present local cuisine, it often adopts a more luxurious culinary approach, thereby distancing itself from the authenticity that should form the core of the ethno concept.

Beyond gastronomic challenges, the destination also faces a gradual erosion of identity authenticity due to modernization and commercialization. As a result, tourism increasingly assumes the form of a staged attraction, leaving diminishing space for genuine cultural exchange between hosts and visitors.

In order to extend the tourist season, the professional management of Ethno Village Herceg should implement the following measures:

- Development of a clear and authentic brand for Ethno Village Herceg, involving the creation of a distinctive identity grounded in gastronomy, cultural heritage, local customs, and unique local narratives, supported by a recognizable “signature” of the destination.
- Investment in digital marketing, which includes the professional production of visual content, active and strategic management of social media platforms, and storytelling focused on traditional recipes, local crafts, and everyday life in the region.
- Introduction of additional digital content formats, such as blogs, YouTube channels, or podcasts, which can further enhance visibility, audience engagement, and long-term interest in the destination.
- Repositioning gastronomy as a strategic tourism product, through the development of a locally recognizable, seasonal, and authentic gastronomic offer. This can be achieved by organizing culinary workshops, food festivals, and promoting local products, thereby directly contributing to the economic sustainability of the destination and the wider rural area.

Marketing of Ethno Village Herceg

Marketing is also one of the segments that have a great impact on the development of gastro tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Tourism marketing is the process of identifying and meeting the needs of tourists through the creation, communication and delivery of value, with the aim of creating a competitive advantage for the destination (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Effective gastro tourism marketing also includes digital promotion channels, especially social networks, specialized tourism platforms, influencers and visitor reviews, which play a significant role in making travel decisions. Modern tourists are increasingly looking for authentic experiences, and it is through clear and attractive marketing communication that ethno villages and traditional catering facilities can convey a unique story about local dishes and customs. In this regard, the importance of storytelling is increasing – telling stories about food, its origin, tradition and the people who prepare it.

When it comes to promoting this ethno village, they use social networks (Facebook and Instagram) the most to advertise and thus attract future tourists. First of all, the visual identity that dominates Instagram and Facebook emphasizes authentic

aesthetics, such as stone houses, massive oak buildings, lush horticulture and biodesign with a swimming pool, etc. Every day, photos or videos are shared on social networks, where there are elements such as a restaurant by the stream or a bocce court, creating the impression of a peaceful oasis that combines tradition and luxury. Also, family-friendly elements are emphasized, such as a barn with domestic animals and sporting events such as the "Explosion of Talents" for children, etc. (See the official website of Brooklyn.)

Following the conducted interviews, data were collected from three distinct groups of tourists: two groups of five international tourists and one group of four domestic tourists. The interview consisted of ten structured questions, to which respondents provided numerical evaluations on a scale from 0 to 5, where 0 indicated the absence of a tourism offering and 5 represented excellence.

The questions addressed various aspects of the ethno village experience, including whether the supporting facilities were consistently designed in an ethno style and whether the respondents considered the quality of services satisfactory in relation to the price paid. Analysis of the responses yielded an average rating of 4.6, indicating a high level of overall satisfaction among visitors. However, respondents also noted that the ethno village should continue efforts to enhance its authenticity, suggesting that further improvements in preserving and presenting traditional elements could strengthen the destination's appeal. It was determined that the respondents became aware of this ethno village through social media. The findings indicate that they learned about the ethno village primarily via social networking platforms, and that well-known influencers and singers who promoted the destination played a significant role in motivating their visits. Also, their attention was attracted by attractive photos and high reviews from guests who stayed here (they saw this information on Booking). That is why it is very important that every ethno village, as well as this one, for marketing campaigns uses professional photographs, carefully selected, which can "communicate" with future potential visitors.

Also, what this ethno village in particular still needs to do is create its own authentic brand, in order to become even more recognizable in the tourist market. Branding in tourism implies the creation of a clear, recognizable and emotionally connected image of a certain tourist destination in the minds of tourists, whether they are current or future. Ethno Village Herceg, located near Medjugorje, which is known as a religious tourist destination, is only trying to build its own brand, which would combine tradition, authenticity, peaceful nature, an oasis and modern comfort.

Ethno Village Herceg was designed, but is also being developed with a clear goal: to become recognizable as a brand of ethno and cultural tourism in Herzegovina and

beyond. The architecture of the village is based on stone, wood and other natural materials that were characteristic of traditional Herzegovinian villages in the West Herzegovina region. Every house, path and detail in the decoration reflects the spirit of the past. This creates a strong visual impression that connects guests to an authentic ambience, without the need for modern effects. What makes Ethno Village Herceg special is the combination of authenticity and luxury: the buildings are built in the antique stone style, and the interior of the accommodation units offers modern comfort, air conditioning, wellness facilities and technical amenities. This combination attracts tourists who want to experience the rural and cultural heritage of an area, but do not want to give up comfort.

Also, we should mention that what the professional staff of Ethno Village Herceg is working on and improving is their e-marketing, and especially e-mail marketing. This form of marketing is one of the oldest, but still extremely effective components of digital marketing. It is about direct communication with the target audience via e-mail with the aim of promoting products and services, strengthening the brand, building relationships with customers or increasing sales. There are three types of e-mail: transactional, relational and promotional (Cave, J., 2016).

Ethno Village Herceg is mostly engaged in transactional e-mail. Transactional e-mail is sent in response to a specific action of the customer; it can be in the form of a reservation confirmation, an invoice if it is an online payment, or a notification of reservation confirmation. This type of e-mail is the most opened by customers and brings in from 2 to 5% of revenue. Of course, using this type of e-mail we can also cause negative consequences; if we perform a minimization of contacts after some negative customer action, we do not need to do this. We do not need to put pressure on customers who want to check out (Cave, J., 2016).

Let's take one example of a transactional e-mail from Ethno Village Herceg:

Subject: Reservation confirmation – Ethno Village Herceg

Thank you for choosing Ethno Village Herceg for your stay! We are pleased to inform you that your reservation has been successfully received and confirmed. Additional information: arrival is possible from 14:00 and check-out is by 11:00. Free parking and Wi-Fi are included in the price, and a map of the village and information materials are available at the reception. We recommend that you do not miss the opportunity to enjoy our traditional gastronomic offer in the Herceg restaurant, as well as a walk through our ethno complex full of authentic architecture and natural beauty. Our team is at your disposal for any other questions – please call us on the phone number

provided or write to our e-mail address. We look forward to your arrival and wish you a pleasant stay!

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ETHNO VILLAGE HERCEG

In the contemporary tourism context, increasing importance is being placed on the development of sustainable tourism infrastructure—specifically infrastructure that does not degrade the local area, natural environment, or social cohesion, but instead contributes to the preservation of natural resources and enhances the quality of life of the local population. Ethno Village Herceg possesses significant potential to become an exemplary model of sustainable development; however, achieving this requires more strategic approaches and long-term planning that extend beyond short-term commercial objectives.

One of the key challenges facing this ethno village is the insufficient development of tourism infrastructure aligned with sustainability principles. Essential infrastructural elements—such as pedestrian and cycling paths, eco-friendly piers, solar-powered public lighting, ecological sanitation facilities, educational points highlighting local flora and fauna, and well-developed transport connections—are either lacking or inadequately developed. In addition to physical infrastructure, the development of institutional infrastructure is equally important. This includes the establishment of local management structures, tourist information offices, trained personnel, and cooperation with local associations, artisans, and producers.

Sustainable tourism also requires the active involvement of the local population in decision-making processes and in the creation of tourism offerings, thereby strengthening the socio-economic stability of the community. In this regard, a suitable development model is the rural tourism cluster, in which Ethno Village Herceg would act as the central development driver, around which local producers of food, handicrafts, and services would be integrated.

Gastronomy plays a significant role in sustainable tourism development. Ethno Village Herceg should aim to base its gastronomic offer on locally produced, organic, and seasonal ingredients, with a transparent system that enables the traceability of product origins. Furthermore, the introduction of slow food concepts—where meals are prepared using traditional methods, without industrial additives—would contribute to the preservation of Herzegovina's intangible cultural heritage.

Digital sustainability also represents an important component of sustainable tourism development. This includes the use of environmentally responsible digital platforms, applications that reduce the need for paper documentation (such as digital guides and

QR-code-based information systems), and online educational content that informs tourists about appropriate behavior, environmental protection, and cultural sensitivity (Ružić et al., 2009).

Ethno Village Herceg should develop an integrated development strategy that connects this area of the West Herzegovina region into a unified community framework, balancing environmental protection with economically sustainable growth and ensuring the active involvement of the local population. In addition, the introduction of environmental standards in construction, the use of natural materials, and the preservation of the surrounding landscape are essential. The development of multifunctional infrastructure that integrates gastronomy, recreation, and cultural heritage should also be encouraged. Digital transformation, along with the establishment of a continuous monitoring and evaluation system for sustainability indicators, will be necessary to maintain a long-term balance between tourism development and environmental conservation.

In contemporary tourism, potential visitors increasingly research destinations through social media, blogs, and online reviews before making travel decisions. Visual representation plays a crucial role in shaping their perceptions and motivating visitation. Promotional photographs that emphasize dense greenery, floral elements, and carefully designed decorative features evoke a sense of natural harmony, order, and aesthetic appeal. When combined with traditional architectural elements—such as stone houses and water features—these visuals effectively highlight the authenticity and cultural character of Ethno Village Herceg. As such, visual content represents a powerful tool within the destination's marketing strategy, contributing significantly to the attraction of potential tourists.

Overall, Ethno Village Herceg is on a promising path toward becoming a recognizable and sustainable tourist destination.

CONCLUSION

Gastro tourism in Ethno Village Herceg represents a significant opportunity for the valorization of rural areas in the West Herzegovina region, primarily through the promotion of cultural and culinary heritage. By integrating authentic Herzegovinian cuisine, preserved natural landscapes, and traditional narratives, Ethno Village Herceg establishes itself not merely as a place of accommodation, but as a destination offering a comprehensive experiential journey. Visitors are provided with opportunities to engage with local customs, taste regional specialties prepared according to traditional methods, and immerse themselves in the intangible cultural heritage of the region.

The future development of this destination will depend on the ability of relevant stakeholders—including local authorities, tourism managers, and community representatives—to identify and adapt to global tourism trends, leverage digital tools effectively, and ensure sustainability through active community involvement. While substantial development opportunities exist, their realization requires a strategic and responsible approach, emphasizing long-term planning over short-term commercial gains. In this regard, the adoption of strategic planning documents is essential to guide sustainable tourism development, coordinate investments, and integrate gastronomy, culture, and environmental preservation into a coherent destination strategy.

In terms of branding, Ethno Village Herceg aims to create an image that blends traditional Herzegovinian elements with a modernized tourism experience. Its marketing activities are primarily focused on digital channels, particularly social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, where visual content highlighting the ambience, culinary offerings, and facilities within the complex is consistently shared. The quality of visual presentation is crucial for attracting younger audiences and international tourists, who often rely on online images and stories to form initial perceptions of a destination.

Moreover, Ethno Village Herceg maintains visibility on online travel platforms such as Booking.com, where it consistently receives high ratings. At the time of writing, the average guest rating is 9.1, with visitors particularly emphasizing the quality of accommodation, cleanliness, friendliness of the staff, and the authentic atmosphere of the village. This demonstrates that the destination successfully meets key expectations regarding service quality and overall visitor satisfaction.

Despite these evident strengths, the analysis reveals several areas for improvement. Notably, there is an absence of a clearly defined branding strategy and a professionalized marketing approach that could strengthen the village's positioning in both domestic and international tourism markets. Enhancing strategic branding would

allow Ethno Village Herceg to differentiate itself from competing destinations, establish a more recognizable identity linked to its gastronomy and cultural heritage, and attract a more diverse and consistent flow of visitors throughout the year. Furthermore, a comprehensive marketing strategy—integrating social media, digital storytelling, influencer collaborations, and targeted online advertising—could significantly increase visibility, reinforce the destination’s image, and contribute to both economic sustainability and long-term tourism development.

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