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JOINT TOURISM OFFERS
for
the North-East Planning Region
and the Municipalities of
Kyustendil and Nevestino

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INTRODUCTION

The development of integrated joint tourism offers forms part of the project 'Cross-Border Attractiveness – Smart Tourism in the Kyustendil – Kriva Palanka – Nevestino Region' (Reference No BG MK0200028), implemented through a joint initiative between Bulgaria and North Macedonia. The project aims to transform these municipalities into a sustainable year-round tourism destination through a combination of physical infrastructure and digital innovation.

The activity "Creation of Integrated Joint Tourism Offers" resulted in an integrated portfolio of cultural and adventure/mountain tourism programmes and a complementary cycling product. The completed document brings together the region's resources, target markets and seasonal experiences in a common cross-border tourism offer.

The document presents the completed tourism offers and the tourist profiles used in their development. The offers link the resources and experiences of the North-East Planning Region with those of Kyustendil and Nevestino.

The offers were designed with due consideration for resources, services, market segments, seasonality, accessibility and the opportunities to combine both sides in joint tourism products. Particular attention was paid to the balanced representation of locations and activities, the duration of the programmes and the economic benefits for both sides.

The document analyses the existing tourism resources and offers on both sides of the border and develops two joint thematic routes: culture and adventure/mountain tourism. Each route is presented as a three-day and a five-day programme, in accordance with Annex A7.

The joint offers draw on the resources and project activities of the North-East Planning Region, Kyustendil and Nevestino. The all-season integrated offer comprises cultural, adventure/mountain and cycling products. Local food, rural experiences and relaxation complement the principal themes.

The offer was developed around the cultural, adventure and cycling potential of the participating municipalities, with local communities and tourism service providers integrated into the product structure.

I. ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE REGION

1. Scope and approach to the analysis

The analysis covered the North-East Planning Region in North Macedonia and the municipalities of Kyustendil and Nevestino in Bulgaria as a functional cross-border tourism destination. On the Macedonian side, the territorial scope included Kumanovo, Kriva Palanka, Kratovo, Rankovce, Staro Nagorichane and Lipkovo. These municipalities were examined in relation to their tourism resources, visitor markets, accommodation and hospitality services, transport connections and contribution to the joint tourism offers.

The analysis established the foundation for the development of two integrated thematic offers: cultural tourism and adventure/mountain tourism, each presented in three-day and five-day formats. Cycling was examined as a complementary component of the all-season integrated offer. Local gastronomy, rural experiences, spiritual heritage and relaxation were considered in terms of their contribution to the principal themes and the overall visitor experience.

The geographical approach extended beyond the administrative boundaries of individual municipalities. The region was examined through the relationships between attractions, service centres, mountain areas, rural settlements and cross-border connections. This approach identified how individual locations contributed to a coherent journey and how the resources of the two countries complemented one another within a single programme.

Kumanovo, Kratovo and Kriva Palanka were considered as centres connecting cultural attractions, hospitality services and surrounding natural areas. Staro Nagorichane, Rankovce and Lipkovo contributed archaeological, religious, rural and landscape resources to the wider regional context. On the Bulgarian side, Kyustendil combined urban heritage, mineral-water traditions and access to the Osogovo Mountains, while Nevestino contributed the heritage of Kadin Bridge, the Struma landscape, St Anna and the surrounding rural environment.

For this document, the available secondary data from the “Analysis of Potential Market Segments in Tourism for the Third North-East Planning Region” and “Tourism Market — Kyustendil–Nevestino Region” (2026) were systematised. The Macedonian analysis included tourism time series for 2019–2025 and accommodation data for 2024. The Bulgarian analysis contained municipal indicators for 2022–2025, an assessment of tourism resources and a segmentation of visitor markets. Together, these materials provided the statistical and qualitative basis for the joint analysis.

The review distinguished between national, regional and municipal information. National indicators were used to establish the broader tourism context, while regional and municipal data informed the interpretation of demand, accommodation capacity and the geographical distribution of services. Differences in reference periods and territorial coverage were retained in the presentation of the findings, so that indicators remained connected to the areas and years they described.

Tourism demand was examined through recorded arrivals and overnight stays, the relationship between domestic and foreign visitors, length of stay and the characteristics of the identified market segments. Recorded accommodation statistics were considered separately from potential demand associated with day visits, weekend travel and excursions. This distinction provided a clearer understanding of both the existing overnight market and the wider audience addressed by the integrated offers.

The resource analysis considered the relationship between the attractiveness of a site and its contribution to the visitor programme. Cultural and historical locations were examined in terms of their thematic connections, interpretation and relationship with nearby attractions. Mountain

and nature resources were considered through the experiences they supported, including walking, outdoor recreation, landscape interpretation and cycling. Gastronomic and rural resources were assessed as complementary experiences connecting visitors with local communities and services.

The service analysis examined accommodation, catering, guiding, transport and digital interpretation as components of the tourism product. Particular attention was given to the concentration of services in the main urban centres and their relationship with attractions in smaller settlements and rural areas. The resulting programme structure connected these service centres with surrounding sites through daily itineraries, local meals and overnight stays.

Seasonality formed a separate dimension of the analysis. Cultural visits, museums, spiritual heritage and urban experiences provided content for different periods of the year. Mountain, cycling and other outdoor activities introduced seasonal variation related to altitude, weather and terrain. These differences informed the development of the all-season offer and the inclusion of lower-intensity and indoor activities within the thematic programmes.

The analysis also incorporated the relationship between the tourism offers and the project's infrastructure locations. Kokino, Kalin Kamen, Hisarlaka and St Anna were considered within the thematic and geographical organisation of the routes. Their inclusion connected the development of the tourism products with the locations addressed by the project and gave them a defined role in the daily programmes.

The desk review brought together the available statistical evidence, resource descriptions and market profiles within a common analytical framework. Its findings informed the selection of the two principal themes, the distribution of activities across the border, the duration of the programmes and their seasonal content. The completed analysis therefore provided a direct link between the regional tourism context and the structure of the integrated offers.

2. Definition of the required data and systematisation of available data

The data framework was organised around the main elements of the completed tourism offers: target groups, thematic content, geographical coverage, seasonality, programme duration, overnight locations, service composition and market positioning. Each category of information was connected to a specific aspect of product development, enabling the analysis to move from a description of regional resources to the preparation of integrated itineraries.

Quantitative information established the context of tourism activity and accommodation capacity. It included recorded tourists and overnight stays, the domestic and foreign visitor structure, changes over time and the available room and bed capacity. These indicators supported the assessment of the existing tourism base and the relationship between short visits and longer stays.

Qualitative information explained the characteristics of the destination and the motivations of its visitors. It included descriptions of cultural and natural attractions, visitor interests, travel behaviour, hospitality services, guiding, transport connections and digital interpretation. This information supported the selection of experiences and their arrangement within the cultural and adventure/mountain programmes.

The information was systematised into the following groups:

Data group	Available evidence in the analyses	Application in the completed offers
Tourism demand and length of stay	Tourist arrivals, overnight stays, domestic and foreign visitors, changes over time and differences between territories.	Established the demand context for the three-day and five-day formats and informed the relationship between programme days, overnight stays and cross-border travel.
Visitor markets and motivation	Geographical, demographic, psychographic and behavioural segmentation, including cultural interests, outdoor recreation, family travel and short-break motivations.	Informed the tourist profiles, the pace of the programmes, the combination of experiences and the positioning of each thematic offer.
Tourism resources and attractions	Cultural, archaeological, religious, natural, mountain, spa, rural and gastronomic resources.	Supported the selection and grouping of attractions into coherent cultural and adventure/mountain routes, with cycling and local experiences as complementary components.
Accommodation and catering	Accommodation capacity, the distribution of hospitality services and the characteristics of the local food offer.	Informed the selection of overnight locations and the inclusion of meals, tastings and hospitality experiences in the daily programmes.
Routes, accessibility and transport	Existing itineraries, road connections, the geographical relationship between attractions and the cross-border travel context.	Informed the sequence of visits, the use of service centres, inter-site transfers and the organisation of the border-crossing day.
Guiding and local tourism services	Information on guides, intermediaries, tourism organisations and the range of local experiences.	Supported the integration of guided visits, heritage interpretation and locally provided experiences into the programme structure.
Seasonality and activity intensity	Seasonal characteristics of cultural visits, mountain recreation, cycling and other outdoor activities.	Informed seasonal variations, the balance between indoor and outdoor content and the distinction between gentle recreation and more demanding activities.
Digital information and interpretation	Information on digital maps, QR codes, virtual content and the role of digital promotion in presenting the destination.	Established digital interpretation as a complementary element connecting attractions, thematic stories and visitor information.
Market positioning and local economic contribution	Qualitative visitor profiles, indicative spending habits and opportunities associated with hospitality, guiding and local products.	Informed the positioning of the offers and the inclusion of experiences that connect visitor expenditure with local businesses and communities.
Project infrastructure locations	Information on Kokino, Kalin Kamen, Hisarlaka and St Anna within the project context.	Connected the project locations with specific itinerary days and with the cultural and adventure/mountain themes.

The available information was organised by territory, indicator, reference period and source. This structure preserved the distinction between data relating to the North-East Planning Region as a whole and information describing individual Bulgarian municipalities. Regional totals, municipal indicators and qualitative descriptions were interpreted at their respective geographical levels.

The treatment of time periods followed the same approach. Tourism series and accommodation figures were presented with their reference years, while qualitative market information was used to explain visitor characteristics and destination potential. This avoided treating information from different periods as if it represented a single uniform statistical observation.

The systematisation also distinguished between tourism resources, visitor experiences and supporting services. A cultural monument or natural site represented a resource; a guided visit, interpretive walk or outdoor activity represented the associated experience; and accommodation, meals and transport formed the supporting service structure. Linking these three levels enabled the completed offers to present connected journeys rather than separate lists of attractions.

Visitor profiles provided the connection between the evidence base and programme design. Cultural and spiritual interests informed the selection of archaeological sites, churches, monasteries, museums and historic urban areas. Outdoor motivations informed the inclusion of Osogovo, Kalin Kamen, river landscapes and recreational walking. Family, gastronomic and relaxation interests influenced the pace and complementary content of the programmes.

The geographical organisation of the data supported the distribution of activities and overnight stays across the border. The three-day programmes incorporated one overnight stay in each country, while the five-day programmes incorporated two on each side. Attractions and local experiences were arranged around these overnight locations, with the border transfer integrated into the daily sequence.

Seasonal information was applied across both duration variants. The cultural offer combined open-air heritage with museum and indoor interpretation, while the adventure/mountain offer incorporated activities of different intensity and seasonal character. Cycling was organised as a complementary product connecting selected local landscapes and experiences within the wider destination.

The completed framework brought together demand, resources, services and visitor motivations in a consistent structure. It provided the analytical basis for selecting the two thematic routes and developing their daily programmes. The resulting offers integrate accommodation, local food, guiding, cultural interpretation and outdoor experiences into three-day and five-day cross-border journeys.

3. Tourism demand and capacity

The analysis of tourism demand established the scale and structure of recorded tourism activity in the North-East Planning Region and the municipalities of Kyustendil and Nevestino. Tourist arrivals, overnight stays, visitor origin and accommodation capacity were examined alongside the qualitative market profiles. Together, these indicators provided the context for developing programmes that connect existing visitor flows with a wider range of experiences across the border.

The North-East Planning Region combines diverse tourism resources with a comparatively small volume of recorded overnight stays. The Macedonian analysis reported 22,177 overnight stays in 2025, comprising 18,013 by foreign visitors and 4,164 by domestic visitors. Foreign visitors therefore accounted for approximately 81.2% of recorded overnight stays,

while domestic visitors accounted for approximately 18.8%. These proportions describe the use of registered accommodation and do not represent the full structure of visitors to attractions, rural areas or recreational sites.

Compared with the 14,214 overnight stays recorded in 2019, the 2025 figure represents an increase of approximately 56%. This indicates growth between the two reference years, although the overall volume remained modest. The comparison established a positive change in recorded overnight activity without implying that growth was continuous throughout the intervening period.

The accommodation figures reported for 2024 comprised 397 rooms and 847 beds. These figures provided a reference for the scale of the region's accommodation base and its role in supporting multi-day tourism. Their use in the analysis remained distinct from the 2025 demand figures, as the two sets of indicators refer to different years. The capacity data informed the consideration of overnight locations and the organisation of the programmes around established service centres.

Domestic weekend visitors, particularly those travelling from Skopje, were identified as an important potential market. Their significance extends beyond overnight accommodation because short excursions and recreational visits do not necessarily generate a registered overnight stay. Cultural sites, monasteries, natural landmarks and local food experiences therefore address a wider audience than the accommodation statistics alone indicate.

This distinction between recorded demand and potential visitor markets influenced the structure of the completed offers. The three-day programmes connect short-break interests with two overnight stays and a cross-border experience. The five-day programmes provide a more extensive combination of cultural or adventure activities, allowing visitors to spend additional time in the destination and use services in several locations.

For the Municipality of Kyustendil, the Bulgarian analysis reported 46,687 overnight tourists and 97,483 overnight stays in 2025. The relationship between these indicators corresponds to an average stay of approximately 2.09 nights. This pattern provided a relevant reference for the shorter programme format, while also indicating the value of connecting Kyustendil with additional experiences in Nevestino and the North-East Planning Region.

Domestic tourism predominated in Kyustendil's recorded overnight stays. Bulgarian visitors accounted for 85,158 overnight stays, or approximately 87.4% of the municipal total, while foreign visitors accounted for 12,325, or approximately 12.6%. This differed from the structure recorded in the North-East Planning Region, where foreign overnight stays predominated. The contrast informed the consideration of distinct visitor markets within the common cross-border destination.

Nevestino recorded 1,702 overnight stays in 2025. Together, Kyustendil and Nevestino accounted for 99,185 overnight stays. The distribution demonstrates the concentration of recorded accommodation activity in Kyustendil. Nevestino's contribution to the joint offer was also considered through its attractions, rural landscape and role within daily itineraries, rather than solely through its overnight volume.

The available information on Nevestino was less detailed than that for Kyustendil. Consequently, Kyustendil's domestic and foreign visitor proportions were not applied to Nevestino. The analysis retained the distinction between the two municipalities while examining how their different tourism functions complemented one another.

Indicator	Territory and period	Value
Recorded overnight stays	North-East Planning Region, 2019	14,214
Recorded overnight stays	North-East Planning Region, 2025	22,177
Change in recorded overnight stays	North-East Planning Region, 2019–2025	Approximately +56%
Domestic overnight stays	North-East Planning Region, 2025	4,164
Foreign overnight stays	North-East Planning Region, 2025	18,013
Domestic / foreign share of overnight stays	North-East Planning Region, 2025	Approximately 18.8% / 81.2%
Rooms / beds	North-East Planning Region, 2024	397 / 847
Overnight tourists	Municipality of Kyustendil, 2025	46,687
Recorded overnight stays	Municipality of Kyustendil, 2025	97,483
Average stay	Municipality of Kyustendil, 2025	Approximately 2.09 nights
Domestic overnight stays	Municipality of Kyustendil, 2025	85,158
Foreign overnight stays	Municipality of Kyustendil, 2025	12,325
Recorded overnight stays	Municipality of Nevestino, 2025	1,702
Combined overnight stays	Kyustendil and Nevestino, 2025	99,185

The indicators describe territories of different geographical scope and tourism structure. They were used to identify the characteristics of each part of the destination rather than to establish a direct ranking of performance. The analysis connected these differences with the complementary roles of accommodation centres, cultural attractions, mountain areas and rural locations.

The completed programmes respond to this demand context through clearly defined durations, overnight arrangements and thematic content. They connect the established accommodation role of Kyustendil with the cultural and natural resources of Nevestino and the North-East Planning Region. In doing so, the offers create a product structure through which individual visits form part of a longer cross-border journey.

4. Resources, organisation of the offer and limitations

The analysis identified a varied resource base supporting cultural, spiritual, mountain, adventure and cycling tourism. Its principal strength lies in the combination of different experiences within a relatively connected cross-border area. Historic towns, archaeological

sites, monasteries, geological landmarks, mountain landscapes and rural environments provide distinct content for the two thematic offers.

On the Macedonian side, Kumanovo, Kratovo and Kriva Palanka function as the principal centres connecting attractions with hospitality and other visitor services. Their roles within the programmes differ according to location and thematic content. Kumanovo provides an urban and service context for visits to surrounding cultural and natural sites. Kratovo contributes a distinctive historic townscape, while Kriva Palanka connects spiritual heritage with the Osogovo mountain area and the onward journey towards Bulgaria.

The cultural resource base includes Kokino, the Church of St George in Staro Nagorichane, Kratovo's bridges and towers and the Monastery of St Joachim of Osogovo. These locations support different dimensions of interpretation, including archaeology, architecture, religious heritage and local history. Their combination gives the cultural programmes a broader narrative than a sequence of unrelated sightseeing stops.

Kokino contributes the archaeological landscape and its interpretation, while Staro Nagorichane introduces religious art and spiritual heritage. Kratovo's historic urban environment provides opportunities to connect built heritage with local stories and food. The Osogovo Monastery forms a link between the cultural identity of Kriva Palanka and its surrounding mountain landscape.

The natural and adventure resource base includes Osogovo, Kalin Kamen, Bislim Gorge and Kuklica. These locations contribute mountain recreation, walking, geological interpretation and outdoor experiences of different intensity. Their inclusion in the programmes distinguishes gentle nature exploration from optional specialist activities, while maintaining a common adventure/mountain theme.

Local food and rural experiences add a social and economic dimension to both offers. Meals, tastings and encounters with local hosts connect the interpretation of places with everyday traditions. Within the completed programme structure, these experiences complement the principal attractions and distribute tourism-related spending beyond accommodation and transport.

Kyustendil contributes a combination of urban heritage, mineral-water traditions and access to mountain landscapes. The Roman Thermae, Hisarlaka, museums and galleries support the cultural programme, while Osogovo and the park environment contribute to the adventure offer. The municipality's accommodation and hospitality role also provides a base for visits to nearby locations.

Nevestino contributes Kadin Bridge, the landscapes along the Struma, St Anna, village churches and rural settings. These resources introduce a different pace and scale of experience, particularly suited to cultural interpretation, gentle walking and small-group travel. Within the joint programmes, Nevestino connects heritage and landscape with local meals and rural experiences.

The project infrastructure locations were integrated according to their thematic role. Kokino forms part of the cultural itineraries; Kalin Kamen contributes to the adventure/mountain programmes; Hisarlaka connects cultural interpretation with outdoor recreation; and St Anna combines cultural, spiritual and natural content. This relationship gives the project locations a defined place within the overall offer.

The analysis also identified an uneven distribution of tourism services. On the Macedonian side, the main limitations concerned accommodation capacity, access to more remote sites, signage, multilingual information and physical accessibility. On the Bulgarian side, accommodation and other services were concentrated in Kyustendil, while Nevestino and rural areas had a more limited service base. The Bulgarian analysis also identified a limited number of registered guides.

These findings informed the organisation of the completed itineraries. Overnight stays were concentrated in the principal service centres, while daily visits connected these centres with surrounding attractions and smaller settlements. The programmes incorporated transfers, meals and rest periods as part of the visitor experience, linking dispersed resources within a defined daily sequence.

The analysis distinguished between activity intensity and physical accessibility. A short or low-intensity walk does not necessarily provide the same access conditions as an urban museum visit or a vehicle-based excursion. The programmes therefore describe different forms of participation and distinguish gentle cultural and nature experiences from more demanding outdoor activities.

Seasonality was considered across the resource base. Cultural visits, museums, galleries and spiritual heritage provide content throughout much of the year. Mountain, cycling and adventure activities introduce greater dependence on weather, altitude and terrain. The integrated offer reflects these differences through seasonal combinations of outdoor experiences, indoor interpretation and lower-intensity activities.

Digital interpretation was included as a complementary layer connecting attractions and thematic stories. Its role within the product structure supports the presentation of cultural and natural resources alongside guiding and conventional visitor information. It contributes to a common destination narrative without replacing the physical experience of places and local services.

The completed organisation of the offer brings together the strengths of each territory while reflecting their different service capacities and visitor environments. The result is a connected portfolio in which towns, rural areas and project locations contribute to distinct cultural and adventure/mountain journeys.

5. Conclusions for the creation of joint offers

The analysis established that the cross-border area possesses a complementary combination of cultural heritage, mountain landscapes, rural experiences and tourism services. Its strongest product-development opportunity was identified in connecting these resources through shared themes and coordinated itineraries. The completed offers translate this combination into two principal tourism products: culture and adventure/mountain tourism, each presented in three-day and five-day formats.

Selection of the two principal themes

Culture and adventure/mountain tourism were selected because they connect resources on both sides of the border and provide a clear basis for differentiated visitor experiences. The cultural offer brings together archaeological sites, historic towns, religious heritage, museums and local traditions. The adventure/mountain offer combines Osogovo, geological landscapes, recreational walking and other outdoor experiences.

The two themes provide distinct reasons to visit the destination while sharing accommodation centres, transport connections and complementary services. This creates a coherent portfolio with sufficient variety for different visitor interests. Cycling forms the third component of the integrated offer, while gastronomy, rural encounters and relaxation enrich the principal programmes.

Completion of the three-day and five-day formats

Each thematic offer was developed in two duration variants. The three-day programmes provide a compact cross-border experience with two overnight stays, one in each country. Their structure connects a limited sequence of major experiences with a combined transfer day, creating a clearly defined short-break product.

The five-day programmes extend the thematic journey through additional sites, more time for interpretation and a broader combination of local experiences. They include four overnight stays, with two on each side of the border. The additional duration allows a more gradual progression between locations and a wider geographical distribution of visits.

The two formats remain connected versions of the same thematic products. Their shared identity supports a consistent destination narrative, while their different durations address visitors with different time availability and travel preferences. The programme structure clearly distinguishes travel days from overnight stays.

Integration of the cross-border experience

The cross-border dimension was incorporated into the content and sequence of the programmes. Each offer connects attractions through a common theme, with experiences and services on both sides. The border transfer forms part of the journey between related destinations rather than a separate administrative element in the itinerary.

Territorial balance was expressed through overnight stays, visits, local meals and thematic contributions. The programmes recognise the different roles of each territory while giving both sides a substantive place in the visitor experience. Cultural and natural attractions are therefore connected with the services and local settings that give them context.

This approach established a shared tourism product that extends beyond the separate offers of individual municipalities. The value of the joint offer lies in the combination of places and experiences that visitors encounter during the complete journey.

Application of the demand and capacity findings

The demand analysis informed the duration, positioning and organisation of the offers. The importance of short-break interests and Kyustendil's recorded average stay provided context for the three-day format. The five-day variants created a longer product structure connecting several destinations and extending the range of experiences within one trip.

Differences in the composition of recorded overnight stays were reflected in the consideration of visitor markets. Domestic and regional travellers, cultural visitors, outdoor enthusiasts and international visitors already travelling in the wider area were connected with relevant programme content.

Accommodation capacity and the distribution of services informed the use of the principal centres as overnight bases. Smaller settlements and rural locations were integrated through visits, meals and thematic experiences. This structure connects the practical role of service centres with the wider geographical range of attractions.

Connection with project infrastructure

Kokino, Kalin Kamen, Hisarlaka and St Anna were incorporated into specific itinerary days and thematic experiences. Their inclusion establishes a direct relationship between the tourism products and the project's infrastructure locations.

The role of each location was defined by the visitor experience it contributes. Kokino provides archaeological interpretation; Kalin Kamen introduces mountain and adventure content; Hisarlaka connects heritage with park-based recreation; and St Anna brings together spiritual, cultural and natural elements. These locations function as parts of complete programmes rather than isolated project outputs.

Seasonal organisation of the integrated offer

The completed portfolio contains seasonal variations within a common thematic structure. Cultural programmes combine outdoor heritage with museums and indoor interpretation. Adventure/mountain programmes include activities of different intensity, with lower-altitude and gentler experiences complementing mountain content.

Cycling contributes an additional way of experiencing the landscape and connecting local destinations. Its seasonal role is integrated with the broader cultural and adventure content, maintaining the identity of the three-product offer.

The all-season character of the portfolio is therefore expressed through varied experiences across the year. The themes remain consistent while the balance of activities reflects the seasonal characteristics of the destination.

Inclusion of local services and communities

The completed programmes incorporate local food, guiding, interpretation and rural encounters alongside the principal attractions. These elements connect the visitor experience with the people and services of the destination.

Local meals and tastings provide a place for regional food traditions within the programmes. Guiding and interpretation connect sites with local knowledge and stories. Rural experiences extend the itinerary beyond the main urban centres and add content associated with smaller settlements.

The resulting product structure creates opportunities for tourism expenditure across several types of local services. These opportunities are embedded in the daily programmes through the combination of accommodation, meals, visits and experiences.

Clear organisation of the visitor experience

Each itinerary sets out a sequence of visits, transfers, meals and overnight stays. The programmes distinguish the main thematic content from optional activities and identify differences in pace and intensity.

The cultural offer provides time for interpretation, guided visits and local experiences. The adventure/mountain offer combines physical activity with rest, transfers and lower-intensity alternatives. This organisation gives each product a clear character and allows the visitor to understand the nature of the journey.

The programme descriptions also establish the relationship between individual attractions and the complete experience. Each day contributes to the shared theme, while the progression between days connects the different parts of the cross-border destination.

Final structure of the joint offer

The completed portfolio consists of two principal thematic offers, each with a three-day and a five-day programme, supported by an integrated cycling component. Cultural interpretation,

adventure and mountain experiences form the core, while local food, rural life and relaxation provide complementary content.

The analysis, tourist profiles, selection criteria and itinerary design form a connected sequence within the document. The regional evidence informed the choice of themes; the visitor profiles informed the experiences and pace; and the criteria informed the organisation and selection of the products.

The resulting joint offer provides a defined tourism product structure for the North-East Planning Region, Kyustendil and Nevestino. It connects their individual resources within a common destination identity and presents completed cross-border journeys with clear durations, thematic content, overnight arrangements and seasonal variations.

II. CREATION OF TOURIST PROFILES

1. Methodology and common framework

The tourist profiles were developed by combining the geographical, demographic, psychographic and behavioural characteristics identified in the analyses for the North-East Planning Region and the municipalities of Kyustendil and Nevestino. The purpose of this process was to connect the characteristics of potential visitors with the content, duration and organisation of the completed joint tourism offers.

The Macedonian analysis identified cultural, religious, active, geological and scientific, rural and gastronomic, and weekend tourism segments. The Bulgarian analysis grouped visitors into six principal segments: weekend spa, culture and nature visitors; active and cycling visitors; family educational explorers; cultural and historical visitors; visitors seeking relaxation and low-intensity experiences; and international visitors on combined short stays.

These classifications were brought together within a common framework reflecting the cross-border destination. Similar motivations were grouped, while differences affecting programme design were retained. Cultural and spiritual interests were examined within a shared profile because of their connections with heritage interpretation and religious sites. Cycling was treated separately from hiking and general outdoor recreation because it involves distinct equipment, route and transport arrangements.

Eight profiles were developed for the joint offers. They describe the principal visitor interests addressed by the cultural and adventure/mountain programmes and by the complementary cycling, gastronomic and relaxation experiences. The profiles function as product-development categories rather than mutually exclusive groups. A visitor interested primarily in culture may also value local food, gentle walking or mineral-water relaxation.

Each profile was organised around a common set of characteristics:

Profile dimension	Content examined	Application in the joint offers
Geographical origin	Domestic, neighbouring and wider international markets; proximity to the destination; relationship with existing travel routes.	Informed the positioning of short breaks, cross-border journeys and programmes forming part of longer regional trips.
Demographic and group characteristics	Indicative age, household composition, couples, families, friends, clubs and organised groups.	Informed programme pace, group experience and the balance between guided activities and free time.
Main motivations	Culture, spirituality, nature, physical activity, learning, local food, relaxation and discovery.	Connected each profile with the principal themes and complementary experiences.
Travel and booking behaviour	Planning horizon, use of intermediaries, information preferences and comparison of programmes.	Informed the presentation of the offers and the identification of communication channels.
Service expectations	Accommodation, meals, guiding, interpretation, transport and specialist support.	Informed the composition of the programme and its supporting services.

Activity intensity and access	Physical effort, terrain, rest, walking conditions and different participation needs.	Informed the distinction between cultural visits, gentle recreation and more demanding activities.
Duration and seasonality	Available travel time, three-day and five-day formats, and seasonal interests.	Informed the duration variants and the seasonal combination of experiences.

The profiles were analytical syntheses of the available materials. Indicative ages were used to describe broad market characteristics, while motivation, physical ability and travel preferences provided the more direct connection with programme content. Age was therefore not treated as a fixed condition for participation.

The analysis also distinguished between market orientation and measured demand. The marketing focus percentages in the Bulgarian analysis were not interpreted as actual visitor shares and were not applied to the whole cross-border destination. Similarly, qualitative descriptions of weekend and excursion markets were considered separately from recorded overnight statistics.

The completed framework connected each profile with relevant locations, experiences and communication channels. It provided a consistent basis for the selection of themes, the organisation of daily itineraries and the presentation of the joint offers.

2. Profile 1 — Weekend visitors from nearby urban markets

Origin and composition

This profile covers visitors from Skopje and other Macedonian urban centres, Sofia and Western Bulgaria, and nearby border areas. It includes couples, groups of friends and smaller family groups seeking a short break within a manageable travel distance. The indicative age range of 25–55 describes a broad audience whose travel decisions are influenced by work schedules, available leisure time and ease of access.

Proximity is a defining characteristic of this segment. Visitors are familiar with the wider region but may have limited knowledge of the combination of experiences available across the border. The integrated offer connects individual places into a more substantial short-break experience.

Motivations and preferred experiences

The main motivation is a temporary change from everyday routines through a combination of culture, local food, nature and relaxation. This profile values variety within a compact itinerary: a heritage visit, a town walk, a local meal and time in a natural setting can contribute to the same trip.

The attraction of the cross-border programme lies in the opportunity to experience two neighbouring countries within one journey. Differences in local stories, food and settings provide variety, while geographical proximity makes the destination relevant to a short-break market.

Travel behaviour and service expectations

Short planning horizons, price comparisons and convenient access characterise this profile. Visitors assess the overall value of the trip through the combination of accommodation,

experiences, travel time and ease of organisation. Clear programme descriptions help them understand how much is included and how the journey fits their available time.

A balanced pace is important. The visitor experience combines structured activities with meals, breaks and some personal time. The completed programmes reflect this through defined daily sequences and overnight locations rather than a large number of disconnected visits.

Application in the joint offers

The three-day cultural programme provides the strongest link with this profile. It combines heritage, local food and a cross-border journey within two overnight stays. The five-day version addresses visitors with additional leave or a longer holiday period and extends the same thematic experience.

Relaxation and gentle nature activities complement the cultural content. The programmes connect the interests of nearby urban visitors with Kokino, Kratovo, Kriva Palanka, Kyustendil and Nevestino through a varied but coherent journey.

Communication and market positioning

The identified channels include social media, local travel agencies and accommodation partners. The market positioning centres on an accessible regional escape combining culture, flavours and landscapes. The principal value is the complete short-break experience rather than any single attraction.

3. Profile 2 — Families and educational visitors

Origin and composition

This profile includes domestic and regional families travelling with children and, as a distinct subgroup, organised school and educational groups. The Macedonian analysis describes parents mainly within the indicative 30–50 age range. Children's ages, group composition and the purpose of the visit influence the organisation of the experience more directly than the age of the accompanying adults.

Family travel combines the preferences of different household members. Educational groups have a more structured purpose, with greater emphasis on learning outcomes, group movement and shared activities. The profile retains these differences while recognising their common interest in accessible, engaging interpretation.

Motivations and preferred experiences

Families are motivated by time together, discovery and activities that combine enjoyment with learning. Educational visitors are particularly interested in places where history, nature and local culture can be explained through direct observation.

Kokino, Kuklica, museums, Hisarlaka and Kadin Bridge provide different forms of educational content. Archaeological landscapes introduce questions about the past; geological sites support discussion of natural processes; and historic structures connect architecture with local stories. These experiences allow cultural and natural themes to be presented within the same journey.

Travel behaviour and service expectations

Predictable schedules, manageable transfers, meals and regular breaks are central to this profile. Families assess value through the quality of the shared experience and the suitability of activities for children. Educational groups place additional emphasis on organised movement and clear interpretation.

The programmes address these characteristics through age-appropriate activities, a combination of indoor and outdoor experiences and a distinction between gentle recreation and more demanding activity. Time for rest forms part of the programme structure.

Application in the joint offers

The cultural programmes provide the main framework for family and educational participation. Selected nature experiences within the adventure/mountain offer broaden the range of content for groups interested in outdoor learning.

The three-day format provides a compact sequence of discoveries, while the five-day format allows more time for interpretation and varied experiences. Family and educational content is integrated into the principal themes rather than presented as an additional standalone offer.

Communication and market positioning

Relevant channels include schools, educational institutions, family communities and travel agencies. The positioning emphasises learning through travel and the shared discovery of history and nature. Clear descriptions of the experience, daily pace and activity intensity support the profile's connection with the offers.

4. Profile 3 — Cultural, spiritual and thematic explorers

Origin and composition

This profile includes visitors from North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Serbia and wider European markets. It covers couples, independent travellers, cultural associations, religious groups and organised tours. The Macedonian analysis identifies an indicative age range of 35–70 for cultural visitors and 40+ for the religious segment.

The profile includes different levels of prior knowledge. Some visitors seek a general introduction to the region, while others travel with a specific interest in archaeology, religious art, historic architecture or local traditions. These interests are connected by a preference for meaningful interpretation and a coherent thematic journey.

Motivations and preferred experiences

The principal motivations are heritage, history, spirituality and an authentic understanding of place. Visitors value the relationship between a site and its wider historical, social or religious context.

The cultural offer connects Kokino, Staro Nagorichane, Kratovo, the Osogovo Monastery, Kyustendil and Nevestino. These locations provide complementary narratives: archaeological landscapes, religious art, historic urban environments, spiritual heritage and local traditions.

Spiritual visitors place particular value on the atmosphere and significance of religious locations. Cultural visitors may approach the same sites through architecture, art or history. The programme accommodates both perspectives within a shared route.

Travel behaviour and service expectations

This profile values knowledgeable guiding, understandable interpretation and sufficient time at important sites. The quality of explanation often contributes as much to the visitor experience as the number of locations included.

Multilingual interpretation is relevant to international groups, while religious and specialist visitors have more focused expectations concerning the subject matter. The programmes connect major visits with local meals, town walks and periods of rest, creating a continuous experience.

Application in the joint offers

Both the three-day and five-day cultural programmes directly address this profile. The shorter version presents the main cross-border heritage connections, while the longer version provides greater depth and a broader range of visits.

Geotourists and scientifically interested visitors form a related specialist subgroup. Kokino, Kuklica and the Kratovo landscapes connect archaeological, geological and landscape interpretation. These interests also overlap with the nature-based offer.

Communication and market positioning

The identified channels include cultural and religious associations, specialist agencies, museums and educational networks. The positioning emphasises connected stories across the border and the combination of well-defined themes with local experiences.

5. Profile 4 — Hikers and nature lovers

Origin and composition

This profile covers domestic and regional visitors, hiking clubs, groups of friends and European travellers interested in nature. The Macedonian analysis identifies an indicative age range of 20–55, although physical ability, experience and preferred intensity are more relevant to activity selection than age alone.

The profile distinguishes recreational participants from visitors accustomed to more demanding outdoor activity. Both groups share an interest in landscapes and time outside urban environments, but differ in their expectations concerning effort, distance and technical challenge.

Motivations and preferred experiences

The main motivations include physical activity, mountain scenery, nature photography and exploration of less familiar landscapes. For recreational visitors, enjoyment often centres on a manageable walk and time in an attractive setting. More experienced participants place greater emphasis on sustained activity and the character of the terrain.

Osogovo, Kalin Kamen, Bislim Gorge and the landscapes around Nevestino provide the main connections with this profile. Geological interpretation at Kuklica adds variety to the

adventure/mountain theme and connects outdoor recreation with an understanding of the landscape.

Travel behaviour and service expectations

Activity intensity, season and terrain are central to travel decisions. Visitors compare programmes according to the nature of the experience, the balance between active time and transfers, and the availability of appropriate support.

The completed programmes distinguish guided recreational walking from optional specialist activities. Rest, meals and overnight stays are integrated into the daily sequence, giving the journey a structure beyond the individual outdoor session.

Application in the joint offers

The three-day adventure/mountain programme provides a compact combination of Kalin Kamen, Hisarlaka and Nevestino. The five-day version extends the experience through additional landscapes and a broader progression across the destination.

Seasonal alternatives preserve the nature-based identity of the offer while allowing different levels of activity. Gentler park and landscape experiences complement the mountain content and provide a distinct form of participation within the same thematic product.

Communication and market positioning

Relevant channels include hiking clubs, active-tourism agencies, specialist digital platforms and recommendations within outdoor communities. The positioning centres on the diversity of landscapes and the experience of a mountain and nature journey across the border.

6. Profile 5 — Recreational cyclists and cycling clubs

Origin and composition

This profile includes cycling clubs, groups of friends and individual active tourists from nearby and selected international markets. It was developed from the active-tourism segments identified in both analyses.

Cycling ability, preferred terrain and bicycle type are the main differentiating characteristics. Recreational riders, mountain-bike users and club participants may share an interest in the destination while requiring different stage characteristics and levels of support.

Motivations and preferred experiences

Cyclists are motivated by active exploration, landscape variety and the opportunity to connect places through movement. The cycling experience includes the route itself as well as stops, local food and contact with the destination.

The regional context combines urban edges, rural settings, mountain areas and riverside landscapes. This variety provides the basis for a cycling component that complements the cultural and adventure/mountain products.

Travel behaviour and service expectations

Route characteristics and practical arrangements play a major role in the assessment of a cycling trip. The profile framework therefore includes technical difficulty, equipment, bicycle transport, storage, servicing and luggage arrangements.

The cross-border journey was structured around local cycling stages and vehicle transfers between destinations. This separates the experience of riding selected routes from the practical movement of participants and bicycles across the wider area.

Application in the joint offers

Cycling forms a complementary component of the year-round integrated offer. Its connection with culture is expressed through visits and interpretation along the journey, while its connection with adventure/mountain tourism lies in physical activity and landscape exploration.

Stages of different intensity provide a framework for different rider preferences. Local meals, rest stops and cultural visits add variety to the cycling experience without changing its active character.

Communication and market positioning

The identified channels include cycling clubs, active-holiday organisers and specialist communities. The positioning highlights cross-border exploration through selected local stages, supported by the wider range of cultural and natural experiences in the destination.

7. Profile 6 — Rural and gastronomic explorers

Origin and composition

This profile includes couples and small groups from North Macedonia, Bulgaria and Serbia, together with international visitors interested in local experiences. The Macedonian analysis identifies an indicative age range of 30–65.

The profile is defined primarily by interest in food, traditions and interaction with hosts. Visitors may approach these experiences as the main motivation for a trip or as an important complement to cultural and nature-based travel.

Motivations and preferred experiences

The main motivations include local cuisine, seasonal products, crafts and an understanding of everyday life. Food is valued in relation to its setting, preparation and connection with local traditions.

Rural encounters add a personal dimension to the destination. A meal, tasting or conversation with a host connects the visitor with the social context of the places included in the programme. These experiences also provide a change of pace between heritage visits or outdoor activities.

Travel behaviour and service expectations

This profile values authenticity, quality and clear information about the experience. Smaller-group settings support interaction and allow greater attention to local stories and food traditions.

Dietary preferences and the seasonal character of products form part of the profile's service context. The programme structure connects gastronomic experiences with the route and the day's other activities, giving them a defined role rather than treating meals only as practical breaks.

Application in the joint offers

Meals, tastings and rural encounters were incorporated into the three-day and five-day cultural and adventure/mountain programmes. They connect the main themes with the local economy and broaden the range of experiences in smaller settlements.

Within the cultural offer, food and rural traditions complement the interpretation of heritage. Within the adventure/mountain offer, local meals and host encounters provide a social component alongside landscape and physical activity.

Communication and market positioning

Relevant channels include local producers, culinary communities, travel agencies and accommodation partners. The positioning centres on discovering the destination through its food, hosts and traditions, as part of a complete cross-border journey.

8. Profile 7 — Visitors seeking relaxation and low-intensity activities

Origin and composition

This profile includes couples, older visitors and people who prefer a slower pace, mainly from domestic and nearby cross-border markets. It is not defined exclusively by age. Physical ability, the need for rest, preferred activity intensity and access conditions have a more direct influence on the visitor experience.

Some visitors within this profile seek a quiet cultural break, while others place greater emphasis on mineral-water relaxation and gentle nature experiences. Their shared preference is for a programme with manageable movement and sufficient time at each location.

Motivations and preferred experiences

The main motivations are rest, comfort and enjoyment of attractive surroundings without sustained physical effort. Short cultural visits, gentle town walks, local food and relaxation provide the principal content.

Kyustendil's mineral-water and relaxation identity is particularly relevant to this profile. It complements the heritage and nature experiences available elsewhere in the destination and adds a different rhythm to the cross-border journey.

Travel behaviour and service expectations

Comfortable accommodation, manageable transfers and regular breaks are central expectations. Visitors place value on clear descriptions of walking conditions and the amount of movement involved in the programme.

Low-intensity activity and physical accessibility were treated as related but distinct considerations. A gentle itinerary does not by itself describe the accessibility of every entrance, path or vehicle. The profile framework retains this distinction when describing participation needs.

The tourism offer also remains distinct from medical treatment and rehabilitation. Relaxation is presented as part of the visitor experience rather than as a therapeutic outcome.

Application in the joint offers

The cultural programmes provide the principal connection with this profile. Their heritage content, local meals and optional relaxation experiences support a slower form of travel.

The three-day format offers a compact cultural break, while the five-day format provides more time for varied experiences within the destination. Gentler nature and park activities complement the cultural content.

Communication and market positioning

Relevant channels include accommodation and relaxation partners, travel agencies and visitor associations. The positioning emphasises cultural discovery at a comfortable pace, supported by local hospitality and opportunities for rest.

9. Profile 8 — International visitors on a combined short trip

Origin and composition

This profile includes foreign visitors already travelling through Bulgaria, North Macedonia or the wider Balkans. It covers independent travellers, couples and small organised groups combining several destinations within one trip.

Skopje and Sofia provide relevant geographical reference points for entry, departure or connection with a broader journey. The cross-border offer gives this profile a defined regional experience between larger destinations.

Motivations and preferred experiences

The main motivation is to discover less familiar places through a combination of heritage, landscapes and local encounters. Visitors are attracted by experiences that add depth and variety to a wider Balkan itinerary.

The joint offer connects two countries through a shared programme while retaining the distinct character of each territory. Local stories, historic places, mountain settings and food experiences provide the content through which that difference is expressed.

Travel behaviour and service expectations

International visitors compare programme descriptions, reviews, travel connections and booking terms. Clear information is particularly important when the destination is less familiar and the journey includes a border crossing.

English or another agreed language forms part of the communication context. Transfers, overnight locations, included experiences and the relationship with onward travel are central elements in the assessment of the offer.

A coordinated programme reduces the number of separate arrangements involved in visiting several municipalities. The completed itinerary structure therefore provides particular value for visitors fitting the destination into a longer trip.

Application in the joint offers

Both cultural and adventure/mountain programmes address this profile. The three-day format provides a compact regional component, while the five-day format supports a more extensive cross-border experience.

The cultural offer introduces the region through archaeology, historic towns and spiritual heritage. The adventure/mountain offer provides a landscape-based alternative for visitors whose wider journey includes active experiences.

Communication and market positioning

The identified channels include inbound tour operators, hotels, thematic travel platforms and agency partnerships. The positioning centres on a clearly organised journey through two neighbouring countries, combining local experiences with a coherent route and defined duration.

10. Application and validation of the profiles

Application to the completed tourism products

The eight profiles were applied to the selection of themes, programme duration, pace and seasonal content. Their role was to connect the regional resource base with the experiences valued by different visitors.

Nearby urban markets, families and cultural explorers informed the cultural programmes. Hikers and nature lovers informed the adventure/mountain programmes. Cycling interests were addressed through the complementary cycling product, while gastronomic and relaxation interests enriched the principal itineraries.

International visitors were considered across both themes because their distinguishing characteristic is the relationship between the cross-border offer and a wider journey. Their profile influenced the presentation of programme duration, transfers and the overall sequence of the trip.

Tourist profile	Main connection with the offer	Programme features reflecting the profile
Weekend visitors from nearby urban markets	Primarily the three-day cultural programme.	Compact duration, varied experiences, local food and a defined cross-border sequence.
Families and educational visitors	Cultural programmes and selected nature activities.	Educational interpretation, manageable pace, breaks and varied indoor and outdoor content.
Cultural, spiritual and thematic explorers	Three-day and five-day cultural programmes.	Connected heritage narratives, guiding and time for interpretation.
Hikers and nature lovers	Three-day and five-day adventure/mountain programmes.	Landscape variety, differentiated activity intensity and seasonal content.
Recreational cyclists and cycling clubs	Complementary cycling product.	Local stages, equipment and support context, and transfers between destinations.
Rural and gastronomic explorers	Complementary experiences within both principal offers.	Local meals, tastings, rural encounters and connections with hosts.
Visitors seeking relaxation and low-intensity activities	Gentler cultural and nature experiences.	Comfortable pacing, rest periods and optional relaxation.
International visitors on a combined short trip	Both principal thematic offers.	Defined duration, coordinated transfers and a clear connection with wider regional travel.

Relationship between profiles and programme duration

The three-day programmes address visitors seeking a compact experience with two overnight stays. They provide a focused introduction to the selected theme and include activities on both sides of the border.

The five-day programmes offer a broader sequence of experiences with four overnight stays. They provide additional time for cultural interpretation, landscape exploration and local encounters. Duration was therefore connected with the depth and range of the experience rather than treated simply as an increase in the number of visits.

Programme pace and participation

The profiles informed the balance between guided visits, active experiences, transfers, meals and rest. Cultural and relaxation interests were connected with gentler forms of participation, while the adventure profile introduced a more active rhythm.

Family composition, physical ability and specialist interests were considered as distinct influences on the experience. The completed framework avoids treating all members of a broad age group or market segment as having identical preferences.

Optional activities provide variation within the principal themes. This allows different interests to be represented without creating additional standalone programmes outside the defined portfolio.

Seasonal application

Seasonal content was connected with visitor motivation and activity type. Cultural visitors were linked with outdoor heritage and indoor interpretation, while active visitors were connected with the seasonal characteristics of mountain and landscape experiences.

Gastronomic interests added seasonal variety through local products and food traditions. Relaxation and gentler activities complemented the portfolio during periods when more demanding outdoor content played a smaller role.

The profile framework therefore supported the all-season character of the integrated offer while preserving the distinction between cultural, adventure/mountain and cycling experiences.

Analytical validation and consistency

Validation within this document consisted of checking the coherence of the profiles against the available market analyses and the content of the completed programmes. The review examined whether each profile had a clear motivation, an identifiable connection with the destination and a corresponding place within the offer.

The process also checked the relationship between profile characteristics and programme design. Activity intensity, duration, thematic content and service expectations were considered together, ensuring that the profile descriptions and the itineraries followed the same logic.

The profiles remain qualitative market interpretations rather than measured visitor shares. Their validation concerns their analytical consistency and application to the completed product structure; it does not represent a statistical measurement of homogeneous customer groups.

Contribution to the joint destination offer

The completed profile framework provides a common understanding of the audiences addressed by the cross-border portfolio. It connects visitor motivations with the resources of the North-East Planning Region, Kyustendil and Nevestino and explains how those motivations shaped the programmes.

The framework also connects product content with communication channels. Cultural associations, outdoor clubs, family communities, local agencies and international intermediaries correspond to different interests within the same destination portfolio.

The resulting approach gives the joint offers a clear visitor orientation. The cultural and adventure/mountain programmes retain their defined themes and duration variants, while complementary experiences broaden their relevance to different groups. Each profile has an identifiable place within the completed offer and contributes to a consistent presentation of the cross-border destination.

III. DEVELOPMENT OF CRITERIA FOR CREATING A TOURISM OFFER

1. Purpose and application of the criteria

The criteria established a common framework for translating the situation analysis and tourist profiles into integrated tourism products. They connected the characteristics of the destination with the interests of visitors and the organisation of the daily programmes. Their application gave the cultural and adventure/mountain offers a consistent basis for thematic selection, geographical coverage, service composition and seasonal variation.

The framework addressed the North-East Planning Region and the municipalities of Kyustendil and Nevestino as a connected tourism destination. It considered the contribution of individual locations to the complete visitor experience, including the relationships between attractions, accommodation centres, local services and cross-border transfers. This approach placed the emphasis on the quality and coherence of the journey as a whole.

The criteria served three related purposes. First, they established the dimensions used to compare the thematic options. Second, they informed the development of the selected cultural and adventure/mountain programmes. Third, they provided a common reference for checking consistency between the tourist profiles, the programme descriptions and the structure of the integrated offer.

Market relevance and operational feasibility received the greatest weight because they connect visitor interest with the practical organisation of a tourism product. Cross-border added value formed the next major dimension, reflecting the purpose of the joint destination approach. Authenticity, economic sustainability and seasonal flexibility addressed the character and continuity of the offer, while accessibility, local benefit, resource protection and presentation completed the framework.

The assessment considered both the individual programme and its place within the wider portfolio. The three-day and five-day versions were examined as related forms of the same thematic offer. Their shared identity was expressed through the main visitor motivations and regional resources, while differences in duration were reflected in the depth of interpretation, number of experiences and distribution of overnight stays.

The framework also distinguished between principal themes and complementary content. Culture and adventure/mountain tourism provided the organising themes for the two route families. Cycling formed a separate component within the integrated offer, while local food, rural encounters, family learning and relaxation contributed to the visitor experience within the principal programmes.

1.1. Connection with the situation analysis

The situation analysis provided the regional context against which the criteria were applied. Tourism demand, accommodation capacity, the distribution of services and the characteristics of the resource base informed the assessment of each thematic option.

The concentration of accommodation and hospitality services in the main centres influenced the organisation of overnight stays. The distribution of cultural and natural attractions informed the daily sequence of visits. Differences between urban, mountain and rural environments were reflected in the treatment of travel time, activity intensity and supporting services.

The analysis also identified complementary strengths across the border. Archaeological and spiritual heritage, historic urban settings, Osogovo's landscapes and the resources of Nevestino created connections that extended beyond individual municipalities. The criteria translated these relationships into a common product structure.

1.2. Connection with the tourist profiles

The tourist profiles established the visitor perspective within the assessment. Each thematic option was considered in relation to the motivations, preferred experiences, available travel time and service expectations of its principal audiences.

Cultural and spiritual visitors were connected with interpretation, guiding and sufficient time at heritage locations. Families were connected with understandable content, varied experiences and manageable pacing. Hikers and nature lovers were connected with landscapes, activity intensity and the balance between physical effort and rest.

The assessment also considered overlapping interests. Local food, gentle walking and relaxation broadened the appeal of the cultural programmes, while geological interpretation and rural encounters added variety to the adventure/mountain offer. These connections gave the products a clear thematic identity without reducing the visitor experience to a single activity.

1.3. Connection with the daily programmes

The criteria were applied to the sequence and composition of the itineraries. Visits, transfers, meals, activities and overnight stays were considered as parts of a continuous experience.

The three-day programmes were structured around a compact cross-border journey with two overnight stays. The five-day versions provided a broader geographical and thematic experience with four overnight stays. In both cases, the criteria connected programme duration with the amount and intensity of content.

This application established a direct relationship between the analytical chapters and the completed offers. The themes selected through the assessment were expressed in specific locations, experiences and daily arrangements in Chapter IV.

2. Criteria for comparison and prioritisation

The assessment framework comprised nine criteria with a total weighting of 100%. The weights expressed the relative importance of each dimension within the development of the joint offers. They provided a consistent reference for comparison across the cultural, adventure/mountain and complementary product components.

Criterion	Weight	Assessment dimension
Alignment with the target profile	20%	Relationship between visitor motivation, programme content, pace, duration and expected value.
Operational feasibility	20%	Organisation of routes, transfers, accommodation, guiding, activity requirements, service capacity and alternative programme content.
Cross-border added value	15%	Shared thematic content, meaningful experiences and local services on both sides of the border.
Authenticity and quality	10%	Distinctive local character, interpretation, host interaction and coherence of the visitor experience.

Economic sustainability	10%	Relationship between the service package, cost structure, programme duration, group characteristics and market positioning.
Seasonal flexibility	10%	Seasonal content, continuity of the principal theme and alternatives reflecting weather, altitude and terrain.
Accessibility and inclusion	5%	Clarity of participation requirements, activity intensity, access characteristics and different visitor needs.
Local benefit and resource protection	5%	Inclusion of local services, geographical distribution of experiences and responsible use of cultural and natural resources.
Marketing and digital readiness	5%	Clarity of the product description, audience, duration, itinerary, language and complementary digital interpretation.
Total	100%	Maximum weighted score within the framework: 100 points.

The weighting gave priority to the relationship between visitor demand and programme organisation. Together, alignment with the target profile and operational feasibility accounted for 40% of the framework. Cross-border added value accounted for a further 15%, reflecting the central role of integration between the participating territories.

The remaining criteria addressed the quality, sustainability and presentation of the product. Their lower individual weights did not make them optional. Each contributed a distinct perspective to the overall assessment and to the structure of the completed programmes.

The findings below are presented as a qualitative assessment of the product choices and their application. The weights express comparative importance; no numerical performance scores are attributed to the selected offers.

2.1. Alignment with the target profile — 20%

This criterion examined the relationship between the content of an offer and the motivations of its principal visitors. It considered whether the programme had an identifiable audience and whether its experiences, duration and pace corresponded to that audience.

The cultural offer was assessed against the interests of cultural, spiritual, family and international visitors. Heritage interpretation, historic settings and local stories provided the main connection with these profiles. Meals, gentle walks and relaxation contributed complementary value without changing the cultural identity of the programme.

The adventure/mountain offer was assessed primarily against the interests of hikers and nature lovers. Its relevance was expressed through the variety of landscapes, opportunities for physical activity and the distinction between recreational and specialist experiences.

Programme duration formed part of this criterion. The three-day versions provided a focused experience for visitors with limited time, while the five-day versions offered greater depth and variety. The longer format extended the thematic journey through additional experiences rather than simply increasing the number of stops.

The assessment also examined the consistency of the programme with the expectations described in the profiles. Cultural interpretation, manageable transfers, rest periods and

activity intensity were connected with the audiences they served. This established a clear relationship between the visitor framework and the completed itineraries.

2.2. Operational feasibility — 20%

Operational feasibility addressed the way in which the programme components fitted together. The criterion examined the relationship between the route, geographical distances, transfers, site visits, meals, activities and overnight locations.

The location of service centres was a central consideration. Kumanovo, Kriva Palanka and Kyustendil provided the principal overnight structure, while visits connected these centres with surrounding attractions. This organisation linked the wider geographical resource base with the accommodation and hospitality functions of the main centres.

The border transfer was examined as part of the daily programme. It was integrated into the sequence between experiences in North Macedonia and Bulgaria, with the combined travel day serving a defined role in each duration variant.

For the cultural offer, the operational structure connected heritage visits with guiding, interpretation and sufficient time at the main locations. The daily sequence combined major attractions with meals, local experiences and periods of rest.

For the adventure/mountain offer, the assessment additionally considered physical effort, equipment context and the distinction between ordinary recreational participation and optional specialist activities. The relationship between walking, transfers and overnight stays was particularly important to the overall pace.

Alternative programme content formed part of the operational structure. Indoor cultural experiences, gentler walks and park-based activities provided different forms of participation within the same theme. Their inclusion maintained the identity of the offer while recognising the different characteristics of the locations and activities.

2.3. Cross-border added value — 15%

Cross-border added value examined what the combined journey offered beyond the separate experiences available in each territory. The criterion focused on thematic connections, complementary resources and the meaningful participation of both sides in the visitor programme.

In the cultural offer, archaeological landscapes, religious heritage, historic towns and local traditions were connected across the border. The experience developed through different places and interpretations while retaining a common cultural narrative.

In the adventure/mountain offer, Osogovo and the associated geological and river landscapes provided the main geographical connection. The programme combined different outdoor settings within a shared nature-based journey.

Territorial balance was considered through the overall distribution of visits, services and overnight stays. The three-day programmes included one overnight stay in each country, while the five-day programmes included two on each side. This provided a clear accommodation balance within both formats.

The assessment also considered the role of smaller locations. Nevestino and rural settings contributed distinct experiences even where overnight accommodation was concentrated in a larger centre. Their value was expressed through visits, interpretation, meals and landscape experiences.

The criterion therefore addressed the substance of the joint offer. Both territories contributed to the theme, the visitor experience and the service structure of the completed programmes.

2.4. Authenticity and quality — 10%

Authenticity concerned the relationship between the visitor experience and the particular character of the destination. The criterion examined local history, traditions, landscapes, food and interaction with hosts as elements distinguishing the offer from a generic multi-day tour.

The cultural programmes drew their character from the combination of Kokino, Kratovo, the Osogovo Monastery, Kyustendil and Nevestino. These places contributed different forms of heritage within a connected regional experience.

The adventure/mountain programmes drew their character from Osogovo, Kalin Kamen, Bislim Gorge, Kuklica and the landscapes of Nevestino. Their significance lay in the specific settings and experiences of the region rather than in physical activity alone.

Quality was considered across the complete journey. It included the coherence of the theme, the relationship between visits, the role of interpretation and the balance between activity and rest. A programme with a clear sequence and understandable narrative provided a stronger experience than a collection of attractions without a connecting purpose.

Local meals, tastings and rural encounters contributed to both authenticity and quality. They connected the main attractions with the social setting of the destination and introduced experiences associated with local knowledge and traditions.

Digital interpretation was treated as a supporting element. Its value lay in helping visitors understand the places included in the programme and in complementing guiding and other forms of interpretation.

2.5. Economic sustainability — 10%

Economic sustainability examined the relationship between the content of the offer, its service structure and its market positioning. The assessment considered how programme duration, accommodation, meals, guiding, transport and optional activities contributed to the overall product.

The three-day and five-day formats created two different levels of engagement with the destination. The shorter format provided a compact service package, while the longer version included additional overnight stays and a wider range of local experiences. Their economic structure was therefore connected with the duration and depth of the journey.

The geographical sequence was also relevant. Connecting attractions around overnight centres gave the programme a clear service structure and related transport to the daily experience. Meals and local visits were incorporated into that sequence rather than treated as disconnected additions.

The criterion considered the role of different visitor groups. Cultural associations, families, small organised groups and outdoor clubs have different expectations concerning programme content and support. The profile framework provided the context for examining these differences.

Local economic participation formed an important part of the assessment. Accommodation, guiding, meals, tastings and other experiences created several points at which visitors interacted with services in the destination. The completed programme structure distributes these opportunities across both countries.

The economic assessment in this chapter concerns the organisation and positioning of the tourism products. It does not assign an unsupported sales price, revenue forecast or profitability figure to the offers.

2.6. Seasonal flexibility — 10%

Seasonal flexibility examined the capacity of each theme to retain a coherent visitor experience at different times of the year. The assessment considered the relationship between outdoor attractions, indoor content, altitude, weather and activity intensity.

The cultural offer contained a relatively broad combination of seasonal experiences. Open-air heritage, historic town walks and landscape interpretation were complemented by museums, galleries and other indoor cultural content. The theme remained consistent while the balance between activities varied.

The adventure/mountain offer had a stronger relationship with weather and terrain. Its seasonal structure therefore included different forms of outdoor participation, ranging from mountain experiences to gentler park and landscape activities.

The cycling component introduced a further seasonal dimension. The character of the stage, terrain and level of physical effort informed its place within the integrated offer. Cycling remained connected with the broader destination experience through local stops, food and cultural content.

The assessment treated the all-season offer as a portfolio of seasonally relevant experiences. It did not assume that every activity had the same role throughout the year. The completed structure maintained the principal themes while incorporating variations in the way visitors experienced them.

2.7. Accessibility and inclusion — 5%

Accessibility and inclusion examined how the offer described participation and addressed different visitor characteristics. The criterion considered physical effort, walking conditions, transfers, rest and the clarity of information about activities.

The tourist profiles demonstrated that age alone did not determine participation. Families, older visitors, experienced hikers and people preferring a slower pace had different expectations, but these differences also existed within each group.

The assessment distinguished low-intensity activity from physical accessibility. A gentle walk may still involve uneven ground or steps, while a cultural visit may involve different access characteristics. The programme descriptions therefore treated activity intensity and access as separate dimensions.

The distinction between principal and optional activities supported different forms of participation. Cultural visits, park walks and relaxation experiences provided gentler content, while specialist activities remained identifiable within the adventure framework.

Interpretation also formed part of inclusion. Clear descriptions and understandable thematic content connected visitors with different levels of prior knowledge to the same destination. The profile framework linked this dimension with family learning, international travel and specialist cultural interests.

2.8. Local benefit and resource protection — 5%

This criterion examined how the tourism offer connected visitors with local services and how cultural and natural resources were represented within the programmes.

Local benefit was considered through the inclusion of accommodation, meals, guiding, tastings and rural encounters. These elements provided a broader connection with the destination than attraction visits alone.

The geographical distribution of experiences was also relevant. The programmes connected the principal centres with smaller settlements and rural locations, giving different parts of the destination a defined role in the visitor journey.

Resource protection was considered in relation to the nature of each experience. Cultural interpretation recognised the significance of archaeological and religious locations, while outdoor programmes distinguished recreational activities from more demanding specialist participation.

The daily structure distributed the experience across several locations and combined visits with transfers, rest and interpretation. This approach reflected the different character of cultural sites, urban areas, mountain settings and rural environments.

The criterion linked the appeal of the destination with the resources and communities that give it value. Local participation and the continued significance of cultural and natural places were treated as part of product quality.

2.9. Marketing and digital readiness — 5%

Marketing and digital readiness concerned the clarity with which the tourism product was presented. The assessment examined whether the offer had a recognisable theme, a defined audience and an understandable programme.

The completed offers identify their duration, overnight structure, principal locations and main experiences. These elements give visitors and intermediaries a consistent basis for understanding the differences between the cultural and adventure/mountain products.

The three-day and five-day versions use a common thematic structure. This supports comparison between duration variants while maintaining the identity of each route family.

The criterion also connected the offers with the communication channels identified in the tourist profiles. Cultural associations, travel agencies, family communities, hiking clubs and international intermediaries correspond to different interests within the same portfolio.

Digital interpretation was included as a complementary element connecting places and stories. The assessment addressed its role in presenting and explaining the visitor experience rather than treating digital content as a substitute for the tourism product itself.

Within this document, readiness in presentation is expressed through the completed product descriptions and their consistent structure. It is distinct from the operation of a live booking system or the results of a promotional campaign.

3. Assessment and selection of the two thematic products

The comparison of the thematic options brought together the findings of the situation analysis, the tourist profiles and the nine assessment criteria. The final selection retained culture and adventure/mountain tourism as the two principal route families identified in Annex A7.

The selection established the organising themes for the completed programmes. It also defined the role of complementary interests, including cycling, local food, rural experiences, family learning and relaxation.

Offer	Primary profiles	Elements incorporated in the offer	Role within the portfolio
Culture — three-day and five-day programmes	Cultural and spiritual visitors, families, nearby urban markets and international travellers.	Archaeological and historic sites, spiritual heritage, guiding, interpretation, local meals, accommodation and complementary digital content.	Principal heritage-based cross-border route family.
Adventure/mountain — three-day and five-day programmes	Hikers, nature lovers, active groups and visitors interested in landscapes.	Mountain and nature experiences, geological interpretation, differentiated activity intensity, rest, transfers and seasonal alternatives.	Principal active and landscape-based cross-border route family.
Cycling component	Recreational cyclists, cycling clubs and active visitors.	Local cycling stages, landscape exploration, support-service context and connections with cultural and rural experiences.	Third component of the integrated offer, complementing the two principal route families.

3.1. Assessment of the cultural product

The cultural product demonstrated a clear relationship between the region's resource base and several of the identified visitor profiles. Archaeological sites, religious heritage, historic towns and museums provided a connected set of experiences for cultural and spiritual visitors. The same resources also supported family learning and introductory experiences for international travellers.

Its cross-border value was expressed through the combination of distinct locations within a common heritage journey. The programme connected sites in the North-East Planning Region with Kyustendil and Nevestino, giving both territories a defined interpretive role.

The three-day programme provided a focused sequence of major experiences, while the five-day version extended the depth and geographical range of the cultural journey. The two formats retained the same thematic identity.

The cultural product also offered a varied seasonal structure. Indoor interpretation complemented open-air heritage, while local food and gentler experiences broadened the programme without changing its principal theme.

Its final structure reflected the relationship between attractions and services. Overnight stays, meals and transfers formed part of the cultural journey, connecting the interpretation of places with the experience of the destination.

3.2. Assessment of the adventure/mountain product

The adventure/mountain product demonstrated a strong relationship with the landscapes of the cross-border area. Osogovo, Kalin Kamen, geological sites and river environments provided a coherent foundation for nature-based experiences.

The product directly addressed hikers and nature lovers while retaining different levels of participation. Recreational walking, landscape interpretation and optional specialist activities were distinguished within the programme.

Its cross-border value arose from the connected geographical setting and the variety of outdoor environments represented on both sides. The journey combined mountain, park, geological and riverside content within a common theme.

The three-day version provided a compact active experience, while the five-day version introduced a broader sequence of landscapes and local encounters. Transfers, meals and rest supported the progression between activities.

Seasonality was a more prominent factor than in the cultural product. The completed structure reflected this through different levels of intensity and seasonal content, maintaining the adventure/mountain identity across the portfolio.

3.3. Position of cycling within the integrated offer

Cycling was retained as the third component of the all-season integrated offer because it connected regional landscapes with an identifiable visitor profile. Its distinct equipment and transport characteristics justified separate treatment within the product framework.

At the same time, cycling remained closely related to the principal themes. Cultural stops and local food connected it with heritage-based travel, while physical activity and landscape exploration connected it with the adventure/mountain offer.

Its inclusion completed the three-product structure described in the activity framework without creating additional principal route families beyond the cultural and adventure/mountain programmes.

3.4. Role of complementary experiences

Family learning, gastronomy, rural encounters and relaxation were incorporated as complementary experiences. Their role was to enrich the principal offers and connect them with overlapping visitor interests.

Local meals and tastings added social and cultural content. Educational interpretation broadened the relevance of heritage and nature visits. Relaxation and gentler activities contributed variety and a different pace.

These elements were positioned within the daily programmes according to their relationship with the main theme. Their inclusion increased the range of experiences while preserving a clear identity for each product.

3.5. Consistency between the duration variants

The three-day and five-day versions were developed as related programmes within each route family. Their differences concern the depth, range and pace of the experience rather than a change in the principal theme.

The shorter versions include two overnight stays, with one on each side of the border. The longer versions include four overnight stays, with two on each side. This provides a consistent territorial structure across the portfolio.

The five-day programmes add time for interpretation, further locations and a wider range of local experiences. The three-day programmes retain a focused introduction to the same cultural or adventure/mountain identity.

4. Rationale for the final thematic choice

The final thematic choice reflects the relationship between the region's resources, the identified visitor profiles and the purpose of the cross-border activity. Culture and adventure/mountain tourism provide two distinct but complementary reasons to visit the destination. Each theme is supported by resources on both sides of the border and by a clear programme structure.

4.1. A clear relationship with the regional resource base

The cultural offer connects archaeological, urban and spiritual heritage. Its content is grounded in locations with different but related interpretive roles, including Kokino, Kratovo, the Osogovo Monastery, Kyustendil and Nevestino.

The adventure/mountain offer connects Osogovo with geological and river landscapes. It presents the destination through physical activity, nature interpretation and outdoor experiences.

The selected themes therefore reflect identifiable regional strengths. They organise the resource base into visitor journeys with a clear purpose and progression.

4.2. Complementary visitor appeal

The two themes address different primary motivations while allowing overlap in complementary interests. Cultural visitors are connected with heritage and interpretation, while hikers and nature lovers are connected with landscapes and activity.

Families, nearby urban visitors and international travellers engage with the portfolio through the experiences most relevant to their interests. Local food, rural encounters and relaxation provide additional connections across the profiles.

This combination gives the portfolio a broad visitor orientation while retaining a clear distinction between the principal products.

4.3. Meaningful integration of both territories

Both thematic offers contain substantive experiences in North Macedonia and Bulgaria. Their structure connects attractions with meals, interpretation, services and overnight stays on both sides.

The cross-border element contributes to the content of the journey. Visitors encounter different settings and local experiences within a shared theme, giving the complete programme a value that extends beyond its individual stops.

The balanced overnight structure reinforces this integration. The daily itineraries also give smaller locations a defined role through visits and local experiences.

4.4. Connection with the project infrastructure locations

The final products incorporate Kokino, Kalin Kamen, Hisarlaka and St Anna according to their thematic contributions. Kokino supports archaeological interpretation; Kalin Kamen contributes to mountain and adventure content; Hisarlaka connects heritage with outdoor recreation; and St Anna combines cultural, spiritual and natural elements.

This arrangement connects the tourism products with the project's geographical focus. Each location forms part of a complete daily programme and contributes to the wider route.

The connection is expressed through the visitor experience rather than through a separate list of project sites.

4.5. A coherent all-season structure

The combination of culture, adventure/mountain tourism and cycling provides varied seasonal content. Cultural interpretation offers continuity across the year, while outdoor experiences reflect the changing character of landscapes and activities.

The portfolio retains its thematic identity while allowing different balances of indoor, outdoor, active and gentler experiences. This is the basis of its all-season structure.

Seasonal flexibility is therefore embedded in the composition of the offer rather than expressed as an assumption that all activities operate in the same way throughout the year.

4.6. A defined relationship between attractions and services

The final programmes connect visits with accommodation, meals, guiding and transfers. This relationship transforms the resource base into a structured tourism experience.

The use of principal centres for overnight stays links the practical organisation of the journey with attractions in surrounding areas. Smaller settlements contribute through cultural, natural and local experiences.

The service structure also creates several forms of participation for local businesses and hosts. Their role is integrated into the journey through the daily programme.

4.7. A consistent and understandable product portfolio

The final portfolio has a clear structure: two principal thematic route families, each in three-day and five-day versions, complemented by a cycling component.

This structure allows the visitor to distinguish between themes and durations without navigating numerous unrelated offers. It also connects the product descriptions with the tourist profiles and the communication channels identified in the analysis.

The completed programmes specify their main experiences, geographical sequence and overnight arrangements. Their presentation follows the same logic across the portfolio, making the relationship between the individual offers clear.

4.8. Final outcome of the criteria-based development process

The criteria connected the regional analysis with the selection and development of the tourism products. Market relevance informed the relationship with the visitor profiles; operational structure informed the daily itineraries; and cross-border added value informed the participation of both territories.

Authenticity, economic sustainability and seasonal flexibility shaped the character and composition of the offers. Accessibility, local benefit, resource protection and presentation added further dimensions to the completed product framework.

The resulting cultural and adventure/mountain programmes were completed in three-day and five-day versions and are presented in Chapter IV. Together with the cycling component, they form a coherent integrated offer for the North-East Planning Region, Kyustendil and Nevestino.

The final selection expresses the complementary strengths of the destination through defined visitor journeys. It connects heritage, landscapes and local services within a shared cross-border structure while preserving the distinct character of each thematic product.

JOINT TOURISM OFFER

IV. JOINT TOURISM OFFER

The joint tourism offer brings together the resources of the North-East Planning Region in North Macedonia and the municipalities of Kyustendil and Nevestino in Bulgaria within a common cross-border destination portfolio. It translates the situation analysis, tourist profiles and product-development criteria into defined multi-day programmes connecting attractions, local experiences and tourism services on both sides of the border.

The completed portfolio comprises two principal thematic offers: cultural tourism and adventure/mountain tourism. Each was developed in a three-day and a five-day version, in accordance with the scope established in Annex A7. The two duration variants provide different levels of engagement with the same thematic experience. The three-day programmes present a compact cross-border journey, while the five-day programmes provide greater depth, a wider range of visits and additional time within the destination.

The all-season integrated offer connects three product components: culture, adventure/mountain tourism and cycling. Culture and adventure/mountain tourism provide the organising themes of the principal itineraries. Cycling contributes a complementary active experience, while local food, rural encounters, family learning and relaxation enrich the content of the programmes.

The cultural offer connects archaeological landscapes, historic towns, religious heritage, museums and local traditions. Its identity is expressed through the relationship between places and their stories, supported by interpretation and local experiences. The adventure/mountain offer presents the destination through Osogovo, geological landscapes, river environments and outdoor recreation. It combines physical activity with opportunities to understand the natural character of the cross-border area.

Both offers are structured as complete journeys. Their content includes the sequence of visits, transfers, meals, activities and overnight stays, giving each day a defined role within the overall programme. The transition between locations contributes to a continuous thematic experience rather than a collection of separate excursions.

Principle of territorial balance

Territorial balance forms a central element of the joint offer. Both countries are represented through attractions, local experiences, hospitality services and overnight stays. Their contributions reflect the different characteristics of the participating territories while maintaining a substantive role for each side within the complete journey.

The three-day programmes include two overnight stays, with one in North Macedonia and one in Bulgaria. The five-day programmes include four overnight stays, with two on each side. This arrangement provides a clear accommodation balance and connects the duration of the programme with the visitor's presence in both countries.

Balance also extends to the content of the daily itineraries. Cultural visits, nature experiences, local meals and interpretation are distributed across the border. The transfer day includes a transition between related experiences, connecting the two territories within the same thematic narrative.

The North-East Planning Region contributes archaeological, spiritual, urban and natural resources, supported by the service functions of its principal centres. Kyustendil contributes historic urban content, mineral-water traditions, accommodation and access to mountain and park environments. Nevestino adds cultural landmarks, river landscapes, spiritual sites and rural experiences. These different roles create complementarity within the joint offer.

The programme structure also gives smaller settlements and locations a defined place in the visitor experience. Their contribution is expressed through visits, local food, interpretation and landscape encounters, even where overnight accommodation is located in a larger centre. Territorial participation is therefore reflected in the complete service and experience structure, as well as in the distribution of nights.

The cross-border character of the offer emerges from these connections. Each territory contributes content that strengthens the journey as a whole, while the combination provides a broader experience than the individual municipal offers.

Service package

The service package is organised around the main components of a multi-day tourism experience: accommodation, local meals or tastings, guiding, cultural and natural interpretation, and transfers between locations and across the border. These components are integrated into the daily programmes and connected with the principal theme of each offer.

Accommodation provides the overnight framework for the journey. The selected overnight locations connect the daily sequence with the service centres used by the programme. Their position within the itinerary supports the progression between the North-East Planning Region, Kyustendil and Nevestino.

Meals and tastings serve both a practical and an experiential purpose. They provide breaks within the daily schedule while introducing local food and hospitality. Their inclusion connects the main attractions with the social and cultural setting of the destination.

Guiding and interpretation give meaning to the places included in the programmes. Within the cultural offer, they connect archaeological sites, religious locations and historic urban environments through understandable narratives. Within the adventure/mountain offer, they connect outdoor activity with the interpretation of landscapes, geological features and local surroundings.

Transfers form part of the programme structure. They connect dispersed attractions with overnight centres and organise the transition between the two countries. The cross-border transfer is presented within the daily itinerary, making its relationship with visits and accommodation clear.

Outdoor content is described according to its character and intensity. Recreational walking, landscape interpretation and park-based experiences are distinguished from optional specialist activities. This distinction gives the visitor a clearer understanding of the physical nature of the programme and the different forms of participation it contains.

Lower-intensity experiences complement the active content. Gentle walks, cultural visits and periods of rest provide variation within the adventure/mountain journey. In the cultural programmes, local food and relaxation contribute a similar balance between structured visits and less intensive experiences.

Digital interpretation forms a complementary layer within the service concept. It supports the presentation of places and stories alongside guiding and conventional information. Its role is connected with the visitor's understanding of the destination and the continuity of the thematic experience.

Joint market positioning

The offers were structured as a single cross-border destination portfolio with two clearly defined thematic choices and two duration variants for each theme. This common structure connects the sites, people and experiences of the North-East Planning Region, Kyustendil and Nevestino while preserving the distinct character of each territory.

The cultural product is positioned around the discovery of connected heritage across the border. It addresses visitors interested in archaeology, historic towns, spiritual places and local stories. Family learning, food and gentler experiences broaden its relevance to nearby urban markets and international travellers.

The adventure/mountain product is positioned around landscape exploration and active participation. It addresses hikers, nature lovers and groups seeking an outdoor journey through different environments. Its content combines mountain, geological, park and riverside experiences within a coherent programme.

The three-day format addresses visitors seeking a compact break or a short component within a longer regional trip. Its value lies in the concentration of a clear theme within a defined period. The five-day format provides a more extensive destination experience, with additional visits, overnight stays and time for local encounters.

Cycling strengthens the active identity of the integrated offer and connects it with a distinct visitor profile. Local food, rural experiences and relaxation provide additional points of interest across the portfolio. These elements enrich the main products without obscuring their thematic identity.

The common presentation gives each programme a recognisable structure. Duration, overnight stays, geographical sequence and principal experiences are described consistently. This makes the relationship between the cultural and adventure/mountain products, and between their shorter and longer versions, easy to understand.

The destination's market identity is built around the combination of two neighbouring countries within one connected journey. Visitors encounter different local settings and traditions through a shared programme, gaining an experience that extends beyond a single town or attraction.

Organisation of the offer

Each programme sets out its daily route, main experiences, overnight locations and cross-border transfer. The itineraries follow a defined sequence in which activities, meals, travel and rest contribute to the overall rhythm of the journey.

The three-day programmes provide a focused progression from the North-East Planning Region to Kyustendil and Nevestino. Their two-night structure establishes a compact cross-border experience while retaining substantive content on both sides.

The five-day programmes extend this progression through additional locations and greater thematic depth. The first part of the journey explores the North-East Planning Region, the combined transfer day connects the two countries, and the final part develops the Bulgarian component. The four overnight stays support this wider distribution of experiences.

The cultural itineraries are organised around interpretation and the relationship between heritage locations. Major visits are combined with local meals, urban walks and time to experience the surrounding setting. The adventure/mountain itineraries are organised around activity intensity, landscape variety and the balance between physical effort, transfers and rest.

The project infrastructure locations are integrated into this organisation. Kokino contributes to the cultural programmes through archaeological interpretation. Kalin Kamen provides mountain and adventure content. Hisarlaka connects cultural heritage with park-based recreation, while St Anna combines spiritual, cultural and natural experiences. Each location has a defined role within the itinerary rather than appearing as a separate project reference.

Seasonal variations are incorporated within the same programme framework. Cultural content combines open-air heritage with indoor interpretation. Adventure and cycling content reflects the different roles of mountain, lower-altitude and gentler activities across the year. The all-

season character of the offer is expressed through these variations in experience while the principal themes remain consistent.

The organisation also reflects the range of tourist profiles addressed by the portfolio. Clear distinctions between active and gentle experiences, principal and optional activities, and shorter and longer formats connect the completed programmes with different visitor interests.

The resulting structure brings attractions and services together in a coherent cross-border journey. The following sections present the three-day and five-day cultural and adventure/mountain programmes, their daily content, the seasonal product components and their connection with the project infrastructure.

1. THREE-DAY CROSS-BORDER OFFERS

The following two compact programmes directly fulfil the three-day requirement for the cultural and adventure/mountain themes. Each connects the North-East Region with Kyustendil and Nevestino and includes two overnight stays. The transfer day contains activities on both sides; programme hours and local spending, rather than identical calendar-day allocations, are used to assess territorial balance.

1.1. Culture and Spirituality across the Border – Three-Day Programme

Concept and character of the offer

The three-day programme connects the archaeological, urban and spiritual heritage of the North-East Planning Region with the cultural landscapes of Kyustendil and Nevestino. It presents a continuous journey from Kokino and Kratovo to the Monastery of St Joachim of Osogovo, followed by Kyustendil's historic centre and Hisarlaka, and concluding with Kadin Bridge and St Anna near Smolichano.

The programme combines guided interpretation, walking through historic settings, local food and time for individual discovery. Each day develops a different aspect of the cultural theme: archaeological landscapes and historic towns on the first day; spiritual heritage and urban history on the second; and the relationship between local traditions, religious places and natural surroundings on the third.

The offer includes three programme days and two overnight stays: one in the Kriva Palanka area and one in Kyustendil. Travel between the main locations is organised by vehicle, while individual visits include walking sections. The overall category is easy to moderate, with uneven terrain at Kokino and walking on slopes or steps at some locations.

DAY 1 — Kokino, Kratovo and Kriva Palanka

Daily theme: Archaeological landscapes, historic townscapes and local traditions

The first day introduces the cultural diversity of the North-East Planning Region. The route connects the open archaeological landscape of Kokino with Kratovo's historic urban environment and concludes in Kriva Palanka, the overnight base for the spiritual component of the following morning.

Morning — Arrival and interpretation at Kokino

The programme begins with a meeting at the agreed arrival point and a vehicle transfer to Kokino. An introductory briefing presents the three-day route, its cross-border character and the main themes connecting the locations.

The visit to Kokino focuses on the relationship between the archaeological site and its surrounding landscape. Interpretation introduces the significance of the place, its rock formations and the ways in which the site has been studied and understood. Time is included for observation, photography and discussion, allowing visitors to experience the setting alongside the guided explanation.

The walking section follows the character of the terrain, with a measured pace and pauses at suitable points. This part of the programme provides the most pronounced uneven-ground experience of the first day. It is followed by a rest break before the onward journey.

Late morning and lunchtime — Transfer to Kratovo and local lunch

The journey continues by vehicle to Kratovo. The transfer connects the archaeological theme of the morning with the town's built heritage and local traditions.

Lunch forms part of the cultural experience. The meal centres on regional food and provides an introduction to the relationship between hospitality, everyday life and the identity of the town. The lunch break also separates the outdoor visit at Kokino from the afternoon walking programme.

Afternoon — Guided discovery of Kratovo

The afternoon is devoted to Kratovo's bridges, towers and historic streets. The guided walk connects individual structures with the wider townscape, explaining how the settlement's physical setting and historical development shaped its appearance.

The visit combines architectural observation with local stories. Bridges and towers provide the main points of interpretation, while streets, public spaces and views of the surrounding landscape establish the context between the principal stops.

The programme allows time for photography and a short independent break. This gives visitors an opportunity to experience the atmosphere of the town beyond the guided narrative, including a café stop or browsing local products.

The cultural emphasis remains on a coherent introduction to Kratovo. The afternoon combines several related experiences without turning the town visit into a rapid sequence of disconnected stops.

Late afternoon — Arrival in Kriva Palanka

The route continues to Kriva Palanka for accommodation and rest. The overnight location connects the first day's regional exploration with the visit to the Monastery of St Joachim of Osogovo on the following morning.

For visitors accommodated in town, the evening includes an opportunity for a short central walk before dinner. For those staying at the monastery hotel, the surrounding setting provides a quieter conclusion to the day.

Evening — Dinner and overnight stay

Dinner combines local hospitality with a brief introduction to the spiritual and cultural themes of the next day. The evening remains less intensive than the daytime programme, providing time to rest after the visits and transfers.

Overnight location: Kriva Palanka town or the nearby monastery complex.

DAY 2 — Osogovo Monastery, Kyustendil and Hisarlaka

Daily theme: Spiritual heritage and the cultural continuity of the cross-border region

The second day connects the spiritual setting of the Monastery of St Joachim of Osogovo with the historic urban landscape of Kyustendil. The border transfer forms the transition between the two parts of the destination, while the cultural theme remains continuous.

Morning — Breakfast and visit to the Monastery of St Joachim of Osogovo

Following breakfast, the programme begins with the monastery visit. Visitors staying in the town arrive by vehicle, while those accommodated at the monastery hotel begin the day within the same setting.

The visit focuses on the monastery's spiritual significance, architecture and visual character. Guided interpretation connects the religious buildings with the wider cultural identity of the Kriva Palanka area. The experience includes time to observe the surroundings and appreciate the relationship between the complex and its mountain setting.

The programme combines interpretation with a quieter period for individual reflection. This gives the visit a different rhythm from the historic town walk of the previous afternoon and reinforces the spiritual dimension of the offer.

Late morning — Cross-border transfer to Bulgaria

The journey continues towards Kyustendil through the Deve Bair–Gyueshevo border crossing. The transfer forms part of the programme, with time allocated for border formalities and a rest break.

During the journey, the thematic introduction shifts towards Kyustendil's urban heritage and mineral-water identity. The programme does not depend on a fixed border-processing time; the order of the afternoon visits accommodates the actual arrival.

Lunchtime — Arrival and introduction to Kyustendil

Arrival in Kyustendil is followed by lunch and an initial orientation in the town. The meal provides a transition from travel to the afternoon cultural programme.

The introduction presents the relationship between the town's historic layers, public spaces and mineral-water traditions. These themes connect the Roman Thermae, the central walking route and the later visit to Hisarlaka.

Afternoon — Roman Thermae and historic centre

The cultural walk begins with the Roman Thermae and continues through the central area. Interpretation focuses on the place of the archaeological remains within the contemporary town and the continuity of its identity as a destination associated with mineral waters.

The walking programme combines principal heritage stops with streets, public spaces and time to observe everyday urban life. A refreshment break provides a pause between the town-centre visit and the landscape setting of Hisarlaka.

Later afternoon — Hisarlaka heritage and park landscape

The programme continues to Hisarlaka, combining a vehicle transfer with a walking visit. The experience focuses on the relationship between the historic remains, the park and views over Kyustendil.

Hisarlaka introduces a landscape dimension to the day's cultural narrative. The visit complements the urban programme by placing the town within its wider geographical setting. Walking and interpretation are interspersed with pauses for observation and photography.

Evening — Accommodation, dinner and free time

The day concludes with hotel accommodation and dinner in Kyustendil. Free time follows the structured programme.

A spa-oriented hotel provides an optional relaxation component, while an urban hotel keeps the overnight experience focused on the town. Spa treatments and other supplementary services are separate from the cultural visits.

Overnight location: Kyustendil.

DAY 3 — Nevestino, Kadin Bridge and St Anna

Daily theme: Local stories, spiritual places and the cultural landscape

The final day moves from Kyustendil's urban setting to the quieter cultural and natural environments of Nevestino Municipality. Kadin Bridge and St Anna provide the principal experiences, connecting built heritage, local traditions and landscape.

Morning — Breakfast, check-out and transfer to Nevestino

After breakfast and check-out, the programme continues by vehicle to Nevestino. Luggage remains with the transfer vehicle during the visits, allowing the day to conclude with onward departure.

The introduction to the day focuses on the role of smaller settlements and rural landscapes within the cross-border destination. This provides a different perspective from the historic towns and principal service centres visited on the first two days.

Morning visit — Kadin Bridge and the Struma setting

The visit to Kadin Bridge combines interpretation of the structure with the stories associated with the place. The guide distinguishes the historical account from local legend, allowing visitors to appreciate both as different aspects of cultural interpretation.

Time is included for photography and a short walk around the bridge and nearby public areas. The relationship between the bridge, the settlement and the river forms the main focus of the visit.

A refreshment break follows before the transfer towards Smolichano. This maintains a relaxed rhythm and separates the two principal experiences of the day.

Late morning and early afternoon — St Anna near Smolichano

The route continues to the St Anna locality near Smolichano. The church is dedicated to Saints Joachim and Anna and is locally known as St Anna or St Yana. The setting includes a religious site associated with a spring and waterfall.

The programme combines cultural and spiritual interpretation with a short landscape experience. The visit explores the relationship between the religious place, local traditions and its natural surroundings.

The walking component is centred on the main visitor area, with the extent of the nature walk reflecting the terrain and conditions. The experience is presented as a gentle cultural-nature visit rather than a mountain excursion. Time for quiet observation and photography complements the guided introduction.

This visit completes the spiritual thread introduced at the Osogovo Monastery. The connection lies in the experience of religious places within their local landscapes, while each location retains its own identity and setting.

Lunch — Local food and shared experience

Lunch is included in the Nevestino part of the programme, connecting the principal visits with local hospitality. The meal provides time to reflect on the different places encountered during the three-day journey.

Local dishes or a tasting element give the final day a social dimension. Food is presented within the context of the destination and complements the cultural and spiritual theme.

Afternoon — Programme conclusion and departure

The closing interpretation brings together the main experiences: Kokino's archaeological landscape, Kratovo's urban heritage, the Osogovo Monastery, Kyustendil and Hisarlaka, and the cultural-natural settings of Nevestino.

The conclusion highlights the continuity of the journey across the border and the different contributions of the participating territories. It provides a clear ending to the thematic programme before departure.

The cultural itinerary concludes in Nevestino Municipality. The onward transfer follows the selected travel arrangement, whether towards Kyustendil and Sofia or back towards North Macedonia. Its duration is additional to the final site visit and meal.

Programme summary

Element	Description
Programme title	Culture and Spirituality across the Border – Three-Day Programme
Main route	Kokino – Kratovo – Kriva Palanka – Monastery of St Joachim of Osogovo – Kyustendil – Hisarlaka – Nevestino – St Anna near Smolichano
Starting point	Agreed arrival point and transfer to Kokino; the principal cultural itinerary begins at Kokino
End point	Nevestino Municipality, followed by the selected onward or return transfer
Duration	3 programme days / 2 overnight stays
Geographical balance	One overnight stay in North Macedonia and one in Bulgaria; the second day connects both countries
Night 1	Kriva Palanka town or the monastery complex
Night 2	Kyustendil
Type of offer	Cultural, spiritual and heritage-based cross-border journey
Target groups	Cultural and spiritual visitors, small organised groups, couples, international travellers and families with older children
Transport	Vehicle transfers between destinations and across the border, combined with walking visits
Main experiences	Archaeological interpretation, historic town walks, religious heritage, local food, park landscapes and cultural-nature visits
Service structure	Two overnight stays, meals within the programme, guiding, interpretation and organised transfers;
Seasonal character	Year-round cultural theme, with the extent of outdoor visits adjusted to daylight, weather and terrain
Difficulty	Easy to moderate overall; uneven ground at Kokino and slopes or steps at selected locations
Accommodation basis	There are alternative accommodation options; availability, room allocation and package terms are date-specific

1.2. Osogovo and River Landscapes – Three-Day Adventure Programme

Concept and character of the offer

The three-day adventure programme connects the mountain setting of Kalin Kamen with the park landscapes of Hisarlaka and the natural environments of Nevestino Municipality. It presents a cross-border journey through different outdoor settings, combining guided walking, landscape interpretation and optional adventure activities.

The programme develops progressively across three days. The first day introduces the Osogovo mountain environment through Kalin Kamen. The second connects a shorter morning nature experience with the cross-border transfer and the outdoor content of Hisarlaka. The final day moves towards the quieter landscapes around St Anna, Kadin Bridge and the Struma River.

Two overnight stays support the journey: one in the Kriva Palanka area and one in Kyustendil. Vehicle transfers connect the principal locations, while walking forms the core of the visitor experience at each destination. This structure combines active participation with time for meals, rest and recovery.

The main programme is designed for hikers, outdoor clubs and active small groups seeking a varied recreational journey. Its overall category is moderate. Optional adrenaline-park and rope-course activities form separate elements within the programme and operate under the relevant provider's participation rules, equipment requirements and weather conditions.

The principal seasonal format runs from spring to autumn. The lower-intensity winter version retains the nature-based theme through shorter walks, park experiences and a reduced emphasis on specialist outdoor activities.

The accommodation establishments listed below provide concrete alternatives for the overnight locations. Their inclusion identifies possible accommodation arrangements rather than confirmed reservations or contracted suppliers.

DAY 1 — Kriva Palanka and Kalin Kamen

Daily theme: Introduction to Osogovo through mountain walking and outdoor experiences

The first day establishes the active character of the programme. Kriva Palanka provides the arrival and service base, while Kalin Kamen introduces visitors to the mountain landscape through guided walking, observation and an optional adventure-park experience.

Morning — Arrival in Kriva Palanka and programme introduction

The programme begins with a meeting in Kriva Palanka. The introductory session presents the three-day route, the sequence of activities and the relationship between the mountain, park and river landscapes included in the journey.

The activity briefing covers the walking format, expected terrain, equipment and the distinction between the principal recreational programme and optional specialist activities. Participants receive an overview of the day's progression, including transfers, walking sections, meals and rest periods.

The group then continues by vehicle to Kalin Kamen. The ascent introduces the transition from the town environment to the Osogovo mountain setting and forms the geographical opening of the adventure itinerary.

Late morning — Guided walking in the Kalin Kamen area

The principal morning activity is a guided recreational walk in the Kalin Kamen area. The experience focuses on the mountain setting, woodland surroundings, landscape views and opportunities for nature observation.

The walk follows a selected local route rather than a summit ascent. Its purpose is to introduce the landscape through active participation at a moderate pace. Stops for interpretation, photography and rest divide the walking experience into manageable sections.

The guide connects the immediate surroundings with the broader Osogovo landscape. Interpretation focuses on the character of the terrain and the relationship between the mountain environment and recreation, without turning the walk into a technical or endurance activity.

A shorter walking variant remains within the same area and retains the main landscape experience. This provides a lower-intensity form of participation while keeping the group within the same daily programme.

Lunchtime — Meal and rest

Lunch provides a clear break between the morning walk and the afternoon activities. The programme accommodates a meal at a catering establishment included in the travel arrangement or a prepared outdoor lunch at a designated stopping place.

The break includes time for rest and hydration. It also provides an opportunity to review the afternoon options and distinguish the adventure activity from the recreational walking alternative.

Afternoon — Optional adrenaline-park activity and nature experience

The afternoon introduces the Kalin Kamen adventure-park component as an optional specialist activity. Participation includes the operator's briefing and use of the equipment associated with the selected activity.

Visitors following the recreational alternative continue with a guided nature walk, landscape observation and photography. This option maintains the active character of the day while avoiding the technical demands of the specialist activity.

The two forms of participation are connected by a shared meeting point and a common conclusion to the afternoon. The programme therefore provides different experiences within the same location without creating separate itineraries.

A final rest period precedes the return transfer to the overnight accommodation.

Late afternoon and evening — Return, dinner and accommodation

The group returns to the Kriva Palanka area for check-in and recovery time. The evening programme is deliberately lighter than the daytime activities.

Dinner provides a local hospitality experience and a social conclusion to the first day. It is followed by free time and an introduction to the shorter morning activity and cross-border journey scheduled for Day 2.

Overnight location: Kriva Palanka town or the nearby monastery area.

DAY 2 — Kalin Kamen, Cross-Border Transfer and Hisarlaka

Daily theme: From the Osogovo mountain environment to the park landscapes of Kyustendil

The second day combines a shorter morning outdoor experience with the transfer to Bulgaria and an afternoon programme at Hisarlaka. Its intensity is lower than a full mountain day, allowing the journey and border crossing to form part of a balanced schedule.

Morning — Breakfast, check-out and a short nature activity

Following breakfast and check-out, the programme includes a short guided activity in the Kalin Kamen area. Luggage travels with the transfer vehicle, allowing the group to continue towards the border after the morning visit.

The activity provides a final experience of the mountain setting without repeating the longer walking programme of Day 1. It centres on a short landscape walk, observation and photography, followed by a rest before departure.

Where the programme uses a town-based overnight arrangement, the lower-intensity variant places this morning activity closer to the accommodation or along the onward route. This reduces repeated mountain-road travel while retaining the nature-based opening to the day.

The morning component remains compact, preserving sufficient time for the cross-border journey and Hisarlaka.

Late morning — Transfer to Kyustendil

The route continues through the Deve Bair–Gyueshevo border crossing towards Kyustendil. Time is allocated to border formalities and the transition between the two parts of the destination.

During the journey, the guide introduces the afternoon's change of setting: from the mountain environment around Kalin Kamen to the park landscape above Kyustendil. The common theme remains outdoor recreation, expressed through a different environment and level of intensity.

The order and length of the afternoon activities accommodate the actual arrival time rather than relying on a fixed duration for border processing.

Lunchtime — Arrival and rest in Kyustendil

Lunch in Kyustendil provides a break after the journey. It separates the transfer from the active afternoon and introduces the local hospitality component of the Bulgarian part of the offer.

The programme includes time to rest before continuing to Hisarlaka. Accommodation check-in is placed within the day according to the selected hotel arrangement and arrival time.

Afternoon — Hisarlaka eco-trail and park walking

The principal afternoon experience is guided walking in the Hisarlaka park environment. The route combines the eco-trail component with landscape observation, viewpoints and pauses for interpretation.

The emphasis remains on nature recreation and the relationship between the park and the surrounding town landscape. Heritage features provide context along the walk without changing the adventure programme into a separate cultural tour.

The walking pace allows recovery after the morning activity and transfer. Shorter sections and additional pauses provide the lower-intensity version of the same experience.

Optional rope-park session

The optional rope-park component adds a specialist activity to the afternoon. It is presented separately from the standard walking experience and follows the operator's supervision, equipment and participation arrangements.

Participants selecting the walking alternative continue with a guided park route and additional time at viewpoints or rest areas. Both options conclude within the same afternoon programme.

The full walking experience remains the core of the Hisarlaka visit when the specialist activity is not operating.

Evening — Dinner and overnight stay in Kyustendil

The day concludes with dinner and accommodation in Kyustendil. The evening provides time for rest after two days of outdoor activity.

A spa-oriented accommodation option adds the possibility of relaxation, while an urban family hotel provides a simpler town-based stay. Supplementary hotel services remain dependent on the selected accommodation package.

Overnight location: Kyustendil.

DAY 3 — St Anna, Nevestino and the Struma Landscape

Daily theme: Gentle nature exploration and a riverside conclusion to the journey

The final day moves from the mountain and park environments towards the rural and river landscapes of Nevestino Municipality. Its pace is gentler, combining short walks, landscape interpretation, local food and the conclusion of the cross-border experience.

Morning — Breakfast, check-out and departure

Following breakfast and check-out, the group departs by vehicle towards Nevestino Municipality. Luggage remains with the transfer vehicle during the day's visits.

The introduction presents the change in landscape and the relationship between the final day and the preceding mountain experiences. The focus shifts from sustained activity towards observation, shorter walking sections and the interaction between natural settings and local places.

Morning visit — St Anna near Smolichano

The first principal experience is the St Anna locality near Smolichano. The church, dedicated to Saints Joachim and Anna and commonly known locally as St Anna, is associated with a spring and waterfall setting.

The adventure programme approaches the locality primarily as a cultural-natural landscape. A guided walk introduces the immediate surroundings, with pauses for photography, observation and a brief account of the place's local significance.

The standard visit centres on the main visitor area. Any extension towards closer waterfall viewpoints remains dependent on the condition of the path and available access. The programme does not rely on a steep or exposed descent to complete the experience.

The lower-intensity variant retains the main setting and interpretation with a shorter walking section. This preserves the content of the visit while reducing physical effort.

Late morning — Transfer through the rural landscape

The journey continues towards Nevestino. The vehicle transfer provides a rest between the walking components and connects the rural setting around Smolichano with the Struma landscape.

The guide draws attention to the changes in the surrounding environment and the relationship between settlements, roads and the natural setting. This interpretation links the individual stops into a continuous landscape journey.

Lunchtime — Local meal and recovery break

Lunch forms part of the Nevestino programme and provides the main rest period of the final day. Local food complements the outdoor experience and creates a connection with the destination's hospitality services.

The meal also gives the group time to reflect on the different environments encountered during the trip: the Kalin Kamen mountain setting, Hisarlaka's park landscape and the quieter rural surroundings of Nevestino Municipality.

Afternoon — Kadin Bridge and a short Struma-side walk

The final outdoor component combines Kadin Bridge with a short walk in nearby accessible public areas along the Struma setting. The bridge provides a recognisable focal point, while the wider experience centres on river views, landscape observation and gentle movement.

A brief cultural introduction explains the significance of the location and complements the nature-based programme. The main emphasis remains on the landscape rather than an extended historical visit.

This section is a land-based recreational experience. Swimming, rafting and kayaking are not included in the standard programme.

The walk concludes with a shared rest point and a final opportunity for photography before departure.

Programme conclusion and onward travel

The closing session connects the three principal environments of the journey: mountain, park and river landscape. It highlights the variety of outdoor experiences available within a compact cross-border route.

The standard programme ends in Nevestino Municipality. The onward or return transfer follows the selected travel arrangement, either towards Kyustendil and Sofia or back towards North Macedonia.

Seasonal versions and activity intensity

The spring-to-autumn version places the greatest emphasis on guided outdoor walking and the optional adventure-park activities. The daily sequence combines active sections with transfers, meals and rest.

The lower-intensity winter version retains the nature theme through shorter walks in suitable conditions and a greater emphasis on lower-altitude or park-based experiences. It does not include a winter summit ascent or assume the operation of adrenaline and rope-park facilities.

The overall moderate classification relates to the walking programme. Specialist activities have their own participation conditions and are not covered by the general walking category. Exact walking distances and elevation profiles depend on the local route selected for each activity.

Programme summary

Element	Description
Programme title	Osogovo and River Landscapes – Three-Day Adventure Programme
Main route	Kriva Palanka – Kalin Kamen – Kyustendil – Hisarlaka – St Anna near Smolichano – Nevestino – Struma riverside
Starting point	Kriva Palanka, with vehicle transfer to Kalin Kamen
End point	Nevestino Municipality, followed by the selected onward or return transfer
Duration	3 programme days / 2 overnight stays

Geographical balance	One overnight stay in North Macedonia and one in Bulgaria; Day 2 connects both countries
Night 1	Kriva Palanka area: Hotel Manastir Sv. Joakim Osogovski or Noble House
Night 2	Kyustendil: Strimon Garden Medical SPA Hotel or Family Hotel Ramira
Type of offer	Adventure, mountain and nature recreation
Target groups	Hikers, outdoor clubs, active small groups and recreational nature visitors
Core activities	Guided mountain and park walking, landscape interpretation, nature observation, photography and a short riverside walk
Optional specialist activities	Kalin Kamen adrenaline-park activity and Hisarlaka rope-park session, according to operator availability and participation conditions
Lower-intensity alternatives	Shorter nature walks, park routes, additional rest and cultural-natural interpretation
Transport	Vehicle transfers between locations and across the border; walking within the activity areas
Service structure	Two overnight stays, meals within the programme, guiding and organised transfers; specialist activities and supplementary hotel services depend on the selected package
Main season	Spring to autumn
Winter format	Shorter, lower-intensity outdoor experiences adapted to weather and terrain
Difficulty	Moderate recreational programme, with optional specialist activities assessed separately
Accommodation basis	There are alternative options; availability, room allocation and package terms are date-specific

2. FIVE-DAY CROSS-BORDER OFFERS

The five-day cross-border offers provide an extended experience of the North-East Planning Region in North Macedonia and the municipalities of Kyustendil and Nevestino in Bulgaria. They develop the two principal themes—culture and adventure/mountain tourism—through programmes that allow greater depth of interpretation, a wider geographical range and more time for local experiences.

Each programme includes five days and four overnight stays. Two nights are allocated to the North-East Planning Region and two to Kyustendil. Days 1 and 2 explore the Macedonian part of the destination, Day 3 combines activities on both sides with the border transfer, and Days 4 and 5 develop the Bulgarian component.

The longer format gives each part of the journey a distinct role. The opening days introduce the regional context and principal attractions. The third day connects the two countries through a shared theme. The final days deepen the experience in Kyustendil and Nevestino and bring the journey to a coherent conclusion.

The five-day programmes retain the identity of their corresponding three-day offers while extending the experience. Additional time is used for interpretation, local meals, visits and personal discovery. The programme therefore develops through a sequence of connected experiences rather than through an increased number of brief stops.

Territorial organisation and overnight structure

The overnight arrangement provides a balanced presence on both sides of the border. Within the cultural programme, the first night is in the Kumanovo area, the second in Kriva Palanka, and the third and fourth in Kyustendil.

This structure follows the geographical progression of the route. Kumanovo provides the base for the opening urban and religious heritage visits. Kriva Palanka connects the exploration of Kokino and Kratovo with the Osogovo Monastery and the onward journey to Bulgaria. Two consecutive nights in Kyustendil provide a stable base for the town, Hisarlaka and the final excursion to Nevestino.

The two-night stay in Kyustendil also reduces repeated packing and hotel changes during the Bulgarian part of the programme. Nevestino contributes a full concluding day of visits and local experiences, while accommodation remains concentrated in the principal service centre.

Service package and visitor experience

The package structure comprises accommodation, meals or tastings, guiding, interpretation, admissions associated with the selected visits, and organised transfers between locations and across the border.

Local meals form part of the destination experience. They connect the main attractions with hospitality and regional food traditions, while providing regular breaks within the daily schedule. Guiding gives continuity to the journey by linking individual locations with the principal cultural or adventure theme.

The programmes distinguish core experiences from optional services. Specialist sporting sessions belong to the adventure offer where included in the selected arrangement. Mineral relaxation and supplementary hotel services complement the cultural programme without replacing its heritage content.

Each itinerary identifies the overnight location, principal experiences and transition to the following day. This provides a clear structure for the complete journey and an understandable relationship between travel, visits, meals and free time.

Seasonal character

The cultural programme retains a year-round identity through its combination of historic townscapes, religious heritage, museums and landscape interpretation. Outdoor visits play a

larger role in favourable conditions, while indoor cultural content has greater emphasis during colder or wetter periods.

The adventure/mountain programme has a stronger relationship with terrain, altitude and weather. Its seasonal variants preserve the nature-based theme through different activity intensities and combinations of mountain, park and lower-altitude experiences.

The duration of five days remains consistent, while the balance of activities reflects the season and the character of the selected programme.

Accommodation options

The establishments identified within the itineraries provide concrete alternatives for the overnight locations. They represent possible accommodation arrangements within the completed offer. Room availability, group allocation, meal plans and supplementary services remain specific to the selected travel dates and package.

2.1. Five Days of Culture, Spirituality and Digital Stories

Concept and character of the offer

This programme presents an extended cultural journey through the North-East Planning Region, Kyustendil and Nevestino. It connects museums, archaeological landscapes, religious heritage, historic towns and local traditions within a five-day route.

The experience develops through successive themes. Kumanovo and Staro Nagoričane introduce the regional and spiritual context. Kokino and Kratovo connect archaeological landscapes with historic urban life. The Osogovo Monastery provides the principal spiritual experience before the border crossing. Kyustendil develops the themes of ancient history, art and mineral-water identity, while Nevestino concludes the journey through the relationship between heritage, local stories and natural surroundings.

The programme includes four overnight stays: one in the Kumanovo area, one in Kriva Palanka and two in Kyustendil. Transfers between destinations are organised by vehicle, with walking visits at the principal locations.

“Digital Stories” describes the complementary use of available digital interpretation alongside the physical experience of places. Where operational digital content is available, it supports orientation and storytelling. Guiding and printed information provide continuity throughout the programme, so the experience does not depend on a particular application or digital installation.

The overall category is easy to moderate. Most activities are cultural visits and town or park walks, with uneven terrain at Kokino and slopes or steps at selected locations.

DAY 1 — Kumanovo and Staro Nagoričane

Daily theme: Introducing the region through urban history, museum interpretation and spiritual heritage

The first day establishes the context for the wider journey. Kumanovo introduces the region through museum interpretation and the town environment, while the Church of St George in Staro Nagoričane develops the spiritual and artistic theme.

Morning — Arrival and programme introduction

The programme begins at the agreed meeting point in Kumanovo. The introductory session presents the five-day route, the distribution of overnight stays and the principal connections between the Macedonian and Bulgarian parts of the destination.

The opening explanation places the individual visits within a shared narrative. Archaeology, urban history, religious heritage and local life are introduced as connected dimensions of the journey.

Morning visit — Kumanovo Museum

The museum visit provides an interpretive starting point. It introduces visitors to the regional context through the exhibition content included in the visit and establishes themes that reappear at the archaeological, urban and religious locations later in the programme.

The guided presentation allows time for observation and questions. Rather than presenting the museum as a separate stop, the interpretation connects its content with the places encountered during the following days.

Late morning — Guided town walk

The programme continues with a walk through central Kumanovo. The experience connects the museum introduction with the town's streets, public spaces and everyday atmosphere.

The walk combines interpretation with opportunities to observe local life. A refreshment stop provides a pause before lunch and the afternoon excursion.

Lunch — Local hospitality

Lunch introduces regional food within the context of the journey. The meal provides a social setting in which visitors become familiar with the group and the destination.

Local dishes are presented as part of the cultural experience, connecting the town visit with the traditions and hospitality of the wider region.

Afternoon — Church of St George in Staro Nagoričane

A vehicle transfer connects Kumanovo with Staro Nagoričane. The principal afternoon visit focuses on the Church of St George, its frescoes and spiritual significance.

Interpretation connects religious art with the architectural setting and the experience of visiting a living place of worship. The programme allows time for attentive observation rather than a rapid passage through the site.

The visit introduces the spiritual thread that continues at the Osogovo Monastery and St Anna later in the journey. Each location retains its distinct identity while contributing to the wider theme.

Late afternoon and evening — Return, dinner and accommodation

The group returns to the Kumanovo area for check-in and rest. Dinner concludes the structured programme, followed by free time.

The evening provides a quieter transition to the following day, which combines the outdoor archaeological landscape of Kokino with Kratovo's historic townscape.

Overnight location: Kumanovo or its surrounding accommodation area.

DAY 2 — Kokino, Kratovo and Kriva Palanka

Daily theme: Archaeological landscapes, historic architecture and local stories

The second day connects an open-air archaeological experience with the interpretation of a historic town. The route progresses from Kumanovo towards Kriva Palanka, combining visits and transfers within a coordinated daily sequence.

Morning — Breakfast, check-out and transfer to Kokino

Following breakfast and check-out, the group travels to Kokino. Luggage remains with the transfer vehicle during the day's visits.

The journey introduces the change from the urban setting of the first day to the more exposed archaeological landscape. The guide presents the main focus of the visit and the walking character of the site.

Morning visit — Kokino

The visit explores the relationship between the archaeological site, its rock formations and the surrounding landscape. Interpretation introduces the significance of Kokino and the different ways in which the place has been studied and understood.

Walking is organised at a measured pace, with pauses for explanation, photography and observation. The terrain provides a more physically demanding experience than the town walks, while the interpretive focus remains cultural and archaeological.

The visit includes time to appreciate the wider setting. This gives the site a place within the landscape narrative of the journey rather than treating it only as an isolated monument.

Lunchtime — Transfer to Kratovo and local meal

The programme continues by vehicle to Kratovo. Lunch provides a rest after the outdoor visit and introduces the town through its hospitality and food traditions.

The meal forms a transition between the archaeological theme of the morning and the architectural and urban content of the afternoon.

Afternoon — Kratovo's bridges, towers and historic streets

The guided walk connects the principal bridges and towers with the town's wider physical setting. Interpretation explains how the built environment, local history and topography contribute to Kratovo's distinctive character.

The programme combines major stops with walking through the historic streets. Views, smaller details and local stories give continuity between the principal structures.

Time is included for a café stop, photography and individual exploration within the central area. The afternoon therefore balances guided interpretation with a more personal experience of the town.

Late afternoon — Transfer to Kriva Palanka

The journey continues to Kriva Palanka for the second overnight stay. This location connects the day's visits with the Osogovo Monastery on the following morning and the onward route to Bulgaria.

Evening — Dinner and local atmosphere

After check-in, the programme includes dinner and time to rest. Visitors staying in town have the opportunity for a short central walk, while those staying at the monastery hotel experience a quieter setting.

The evening introduces the spiritual theme of Day 3 without duplicating the monastery visit itself.

Overnight location: Kriva Palanka town or the nearby monastery complex.

DAY 3 — Osogovo Monastery and the Journey to Kyustendil

Daily theme: Spiritual heritage and the transition between the two countries

The third day connects the spiritual setting of the Osogovo Monastery with an introductory experience of Kyustendil. Its structure gives sufficient emphasis to the morning visit while retaining a lighter programme after the border transfer.

Morning — Breakfast, check-out and monastery visit

Following breakfast, the programme begins with the Monastery of St Joachim of Osogovo. Visitors accommodated in town arrive by vehicle, while those staying at the monastery hotel begin within the same setting.

The guided visit focuses on the spiritual significance of the monastery, its architecture and its relationship with the surrounding mountain landscape. Interpretation links the religious buildings with the cultural identity of the Kriva Palanka area.

The experience includes a quieter period for individual observation and reflection. This distinguishes the monastery visit from the more active sequence of archaeological and urban exploration on the previous day.

Late morning — Departure and border transfer

The journey continues towards Bulgaria through the Deve Bair–Gyueshevo border crossing. The programme includes the transfer and border formalities as part of the day's organisation.

The narrative shifts towards Kyustendil and the Bulgarian part of the destination. The shared cultural theme provides continuity between the two countries, while the afternoon introduces a different urban setting.

The order of lunch, check-in and the introductory walk reflects the actual arrival time.

Lunchtime and early afternoon — Arrival in Kyustendil

Lunch and hotel check-in provide a break after the journey. The two-night stay begins here, allowing the following day to focus on visits without another accommodation change.

Time for rest precedes the town introduction.

Afternoon — Introductory walk through central Kyustendil

The walk presents the town's main cultural themes and provides orientation for the more detailed programme on Day 4.

The experience introduces historic layers, public spaces and the town's association with mineral waters. Major locations are placed within the urban context, while extended visits to the Roman Thermae, a museum or gallery and Hisarlaka are reserved for the following day.

This lighter afternoon balances the spiritual visit and transfer of the morning. It gives visitors an initial understanding of Kyustendil without repeating the full programme of Day 4.

Evening — Dinner and first overnight stay in Kyustendil

Dinner introduces the local hospitality component of the Bulgarian part of the offer. Free time follows, with optional hotel relaxation according to the selected package.

Overnight location: Kyustendil.

DAY 4 — Kyustendil's Heritage, Art and Hisarlaka

Daily theme: A deeper encounter with urban history and cultural landscapes

The fourth day is devoted to Kyustendil. The absence of a long inter-city transfer allows more time for interpretation, an indoor cultural visit and the park landscape of Hisarlaka.

Morning — Roman Thermae and the historic urban setting

Following breakfast, the programme begins with the Roman Thermae. Interpretation connects the archaeological remains with the town's historic development and mineral-water identity.

The experience develops the themes introduced during the previous afternoon's orientation. Visitors have more time to examine the site and understand its place within the surrounding town.

The walk continues through nearby central areas, connecting the principal visit with the contemporary urban setting.

Late morning — Museum or gallery visit

An indoor cultural visit adds a different form of interpretation. The programme includes a museum exhibition or gallery presentation according to the selected cultural arrangement.

The visit provides time for closer attention to objects, images or artworks and complements the open-air heritage experience. It also introduces a change of pace between the morning urban walk and the afternoon park visit.

The guide connects the exhibition content with the broader themes of the journey, including regional identity, local stories and the representation of place.

Lunch — Local meal and rest

Lunch provides a substantial break within the day. The meal is followed by free time for a short independent walk, a café visit or rest before departure for Hisarlaka.

This interval allows visitors to experience Kyustendil at their own pace within the otherwise guided programme.

Afternoon — Hisarlaka heritage landscape

The programme continues to Hisarlaka by vehicle, followed by a walking visit. The principal emphasis is the relationship between the historic remains, the park environment and views over Kyustendil.

Interpretation places the town within its wider landscape. The visit combines cultural explanation with time for photography, observation and rest.

The walking section maintains an easy-to-moderate pace. The cultural programme focuses on heritage and landscape rather than the specialist adventure activities associated with the wider park setting.

Late afternoon — Free time and optional relaxation

The return to the hotel is followed by free time. Visitors choosing a relaxation component use the facilities or services included in their selected accommodation arrangement.

This period complements the cultural programme and provides a less structured conclusion to the day. It remains optional, preserving the distinction between the core heritage visits and supplementary hotel services.

Evening — Dinner and second overnight stay

Dinner concludes the full day in Kyustendil. The group remains in the same accommodation, with departure and check-out scheduled for the following morning.

Overnight location: Kyustendil

DAY 5 — Nevestino, Kadin Bridge and St Anna

Daily theme: Heritage, local stories and spiritual places within the rural landscape

The final day moves from Kyustendil's urban setting to Nevestino Municipality. The programme combines Kadin Bridge, St Anna near Smolichano and local food before concluding the cross-border journey.

Morning — Breakfast, check-out and departure

After breakfast and check-out, the group travels to Nevestino. Luggage remains with the transfer vehicle during the visits, allowing departure after the programme concludes.

The introduction explains the role of Nevestino within the joint destination: a combination of heritage landmarks, spiritual places and rural and river landscapes.

Morning visit — Kadin Bridge

The visit to Kadin Bridge combines interpretation of the structure with the stories associated with the place. Historical explanation and local legend are presented as distinct but related dimensions of its cultural meaning.

The programme includes time for photography and a short walk through nearby public areas. The bridge's relationship with the river and settlement gives the visit a wider context.

A refreshment break separates this experience from the onward journey towards Smolichano.

Late morning and early afternoon — St Anna near Smolichano

The visit to St Anna combines spiritual interpretation with the experience of its natural surroundings. The church is dedicated to Saints Joachim and Anna and is locally known as St Anna or St Yana; the setting is associated with a spring and waterfall.

The programme focuses on the main visitor area and a short landscape walk. Interpretation connects the religious place with local traditions and the surrounding environment.

The visit completes the spiritual thread introduced at Staro Nagoričane and developed at the Osogovo Monastery. The connection is thematic, while the different settings give each experience its own character.

The walking element remains secondary to the cultural visit. Closer waterfall viewpoints are not essential to completing the programme, and the extent of walking reflects the terrain and conditions.

Lunch — Local food and rural context

A local meal or tasting concludes the main sequence of visits. It connects the heritage programme with hospitality and provides time to reflect on the journey.

Food contributes to the interpretation of the destination through its local setting and social experience. The meal also creates a relaxed transition between the final visit and departure.

Afternoon — Shared-heritage conclusion

The concluding session brings together the principal themes of the five days: regional history, archaeological landscapes, historic townscapes, spiritual places and local traditions.

The discussion connects the experiences across the border and identifies the different contribution of each location. It gives the programme a clear thematic conclusion rather than ending immediately after the last site visit.

The itinerary finishes in Nevestino Municipality. The onward or return transfer follows the selected arrangement towards Kyustendil and Sofia or back towards North Macedonia.

Programme summary

Element	Description
Programme title	Five Days of Culture, Spirituality and Digital Stories
Main route	Kumanovo – Staro Nagoričane – Kokino – Kratovo – Kriva Palanka – Osogovo Monastery – Kyustendil – Hisarlaka – Nevestino – St Anna near Smolichano
Starting point	Kumanovo / North-East Planning Region

End point	Nevestino Municipality, followed by the selected onward or return transfer
Duration	5 programme days / 4 overnight stays
Geographical balance	Two overnight stays in North Macedonia and two in Bulgaria
Daily distribution	Days 1–2 in North Macedonia; Day 3 combines both countries and the border transfer; Days 4–5 in Bulgaria
Type of offer	Cultural, spiritual and heritage-based travel with complementary digital interpretation
Target groups	Cultural and spiritual visitors, heritage enthusiasts, small organised groups, couples and international travellers
Main experiences	Museum interpretation, historic town walks, archaeological landscapes, religious heritage, local food and cultural-nature visits
Transport	Organised vehicle transfers between locations and across the border, combined with walking visits
Service structure	Accommodation, meals or tastings, guiding, programme admissions and transfers, according to the selected package
Optional content	Mineral relaxation and supplementary hotel services
Digital component	Available digital interpretation supported by guiding and printed information
Seasonal character	Year-round cultural programme, with greater emphasis on indoor interpretation during cold or wet periods
Difficulty	Easy to moderate; uneven terrain at Kokino and slopes or steps at selected locations
Accommodation basis	There are several options; reservations, room allocation and services are date-specific

2.2. Osogovo and Struma – Five-Day Nature and Adventure Programme

Concept and character of the offer

The five-day programme connects the gorge landscapes around Kumanovo, the geological setting of Kuklica, the Osogovo Mountains and the river environments of Nevestino Municipality. It presents an extended cross-border journey combining guided walking, landscape interpretation, local food and optional specialist adventure activities.

The itinerary develops through a sequence of contrasting environments. Bislim Gorge introduces the journey through walking and observation of the gorge landscape. Kuklica and Kratovo connect geological interpretation with a recreational day of exploration. Kalin Kamen provides the principal mountain experience on the Macedonian side, followed by the border transfer. The Bulgarian part combines Osogovo and Hisarlaka before concluding around St Anna and the Struma landscape.

The programme incorporates the project locations of Kalin Kamen, Hisarlaka and St Anna within the daily route. Each contributes a different experience: mountain recreation, park-based activity and gentle cultural-nature exploration.

Four overnight stays support the journey: one in the Kumanovo area, one in Kriva Palanka and two in Kyustendil. The two consecutive nights in Kyustendil provide a stable base for the Bulgarian activities and reduce accommodation changes during the final part of the programme.

Vehicle transfers connect the principal destinations, while walking forms the core activity at each location. The programme is classified as moderate recreational travel. Kayaking, climbing, adrenaline-park activities and rope-course sessions are optional specialist components, separate from the standard walking itinerary.

The main seasonal format runs from spring to autumn. Adapted winter modules retain the nature-based identity through shorter walks and lower-intensity experiences appropriate to the conditions.

The accommodation establishments identified below are concrete alternatives for the overnight locations. Their inclusion does not represent confirmed reservations or contracted services.

DAY 1 — Kumanovo and Bislim Gorge

Daily theme: Introduction to the destination through gorge landscapes and guided outdoor exploration

The first day introduces the active character of the programme through Bislim Gorge. Kumanovo provides the arrival and overnight base, while the outdoor visit establishes the programme's balance between physical activity, interpretation and rest.

Morning — Arrival in Kumanovo and introductory briefing

The group meets at the agreed arrival point in Kumanovo. The introduction presents the five-day route, the sequence of overnight stays and the progression from gorge and geological landscapes to mountain and riverside environments.

An activity briefing explains the walking format, the distinction between recreational and specialist activities, and the organisation of transfers, meals and rest periods. Participants are introduced to the day's terrain and the selected walking section.

The programme then continues by vehicle towards Bislim Gorge. The transfer connects the town-based service setting with the natural environment that forms the principal experience of the day.

Late morning — Guided walking in Bislim Gorge

The core activity is a guided walk along a selected section of the gorge area. The experience focuses on landscape observation, the relationship between the river and surrounding relief, and the character of the natural setting.

The walk is organised as a recreational visit rather than a complete traverse of the gorge. Interpretation and photography stops divide the activity into manageable sections and provide time to appreciate the surroundings.

The guide connects the visible landscape with the broader nature-based theme of the journey. The visit establishes an approach that continues throughout the programme: active participation combined with an understanding of place.

A shorter walking alternative retains the principal landscape experience with less physical effort. The standard programme does not depend on entering caves, negotiating exposed climbing sections or undertaking water-based activities.

Lunch — Outdoor break or local meal

Lunch provides a substantial break after the morning activity. The arrangement consists of a prepared outdoor meal at a suitable stopping place or a meal at a catering establishment connected with the route.

The break includes time for rest before the afternoon programme. It also provides an opportunity to distinguish the optional specialist activity from the continuing recreational experience.

Afternoon — Recreational exploration or optional specialist activity

The standard afternoon continues with a shorter guided walk, photography and landscape observation. This gives participants additional time in the gorge environment without repeating the full morning activity.

Kayaking or climbing is presented as an optional addition where an appropriately equipped operator provides the activity and conditions permit. It is not assumed to be a permanently available service at the site.

Participants following the walking programme remain within a separate recreational activity sequence. The alternatives reconnect before the return transfer, preserving a common conclusion to the day.

Late afternoon — Return to the Kumanovo area

The group returns to the accommodation for check-in and rest. The return transfer marks the end of the structured outdoor programme.

Evening — Dinner and overnight stay

Dinner provides the first local hospitality experience of the journey. The evening remains relatively quiet, allowing recovery after arrival and the gorge visit.

A short introduction to the following day connects the gorge landscape with the geological interpretation of Kuklica.

Overnight location: Kumanovo or its surrounding accommodation area.

DAY 2 — Kuklica, Kratovo and Kriva Palanka

Daily theme: Geological landscapes, recreational walking and local experiences

The second day introduces the Stone Dolls landscape at Kuklica and the distinctive setting of Kratovo. Its pace is less demanding than the mountain component that follows, combining outdoor observation with a short town visit and a local meal.

Morning — Breakfast, check-out and departure

Following breakfast and check-out, the group departs towards Kuklica. Luggage travels with the transfer vehicle throughout the day.

The introductory interpretation connects the previous day's gorge setting with a different type of landscape experience. Attention shifts towards landforms, geological processes and the ways in which natural features become associated with local stories.

Morning visit — Kuklica and the Stone Dolls landscape

The principal visit focuses on the Stone Dolls formations and their surrounding setting. The guided walk combines observation of the landforms with an explanation of the landscape and the local narratives associated with it.

Scientific interpretation and folklore are presented as different ways of understanding the place. This gives the experience both an educational and a local cultural dimension while retaining the programme's nature-based focus.

The walking section includes pauses for photography and observation. The visit remains within the established visitor area, with the formations experienced from the walking route rather than through climbing or direct contact.

Late morning — Transfer to Kratovo

The route continues to Kratovo. The transfer provides a short rest and introduces the relationship between the town and its surrounding landscape.

Lunch — Local food and rest

Lunch forms part of the Kratovo visit. The meal introduces local hospitality and provides a break between the open-air geological experience and the afternoon walking programme.

The setting gives visitors time to experience the town at a slower pace before continuing the journey.

Afternoon — Recreational walk through Kratovo

The short guided walk combines the town's bridges, towers and streets with observation of its physical setting. The interpretation connects the built environment with the wider landscape.

This visit complements the outdoor theme rather than functioning as a full cultural itinerary. Its emphasis is on variety: a change from natural formations to a townscape shaped by its surroundings.

Time for refreshments and photography is included before departure.

Late afternoon — Transfer to Kriva Palanka

The group continues by vehicle to Kriva Palanka for the second overnight stay. Arrival is followed by check-in and rest.

The evening introduction presents the following day's Kalin Kamen activity and the cross-border transfer. This prepares participants for a day combining mountain recreation with onward travel.

Evening — Dinner and overnight stay

Dinner concludes the day. Free time follows, allowing recovery before the mountain component.

Overnight location: Kriva Palanka town or the nearby monastery area.

DAY 3 — Kalin Kamen and the Cross-Border Journey to Kyustendil

Daily theme: Mountain recreation and the transition to the Bulgarian part of the destination

The third day combines the principal Macedonian mountain experience with the transfer to Kyustendil. The outdoor component is concentrated in the morning, preserving time for lunch, travel and rest.

Morning — Breakfast, check-out and transfer to Kalin Kamen

After breakfast and check-out, the group travels to Kalin Kamen. Luggage remains with the vehicle for the onward journey.

The activity briefing introduces the selected walking section and the optional adventure-park component. The morning is organised as a contained mountain visit rather than a full-day trek or summit ascent.

Morning activity — Guided mountain walking

The principal activity is a guided recreational walk in the Kalin Kamen area. The experience combines woodland and mountain surroundings, landscape views and interpretation of the local environment.

The route includes pauses for observation, photography and rest. Its intensity is balanced with the afternoon transfer, maintaining a moderate recreational format.

A shorter walking variant provides a lower-intensity experience within the same area. Both variants retain the mountain character of the day.

Optional adrenaline-park component

The adventure-park activity is an optional component within the morning programme. Where included, it replaces part of the walking allocation rather than extending the day into a second full activity programme.

Participation follows the operator's arrangements, supervision and equipment requirements. The guided walking experience remains the complete core programme when the specialist activity is not operating or is not selected.

Lunch — Meal and transition to travel

Lunch concludes the mountain component. It provides time to rest before the journey to Bulgaria.

The programme then shifts from outdoor activity to the cross-border transfer.

Afternoon — Border crossing and arrival in Kyustendil

The route continues through the Deve Bair–Gyueshevo border crossing towards Kyustendil. Border formalities and a rest opportunity form part of the travel sequence.

The introduction to the Bulgarian part of the programme explains the following day's combination of Osogovo and Hisarlaka. No additional demanding activity is scheduled after arrival.

Evening — Check-in, dinner and recovery

Arrival is followed by hotel check-in and dinner. The evening is reserved for rest, with optional relaxation according to the selected accommodation package.

The two-night stay in Kyustendil begins here. Keeping the same accommodation for both nights gives the next day a more settled structure.

Overnight location: Kyustendil.

DAY 4 — Osogovo and Hisarlaka

Daily theme: Mountain landscapes, park walking and optional adventure activity

The fourth day provides the main outdoor experience on the Bulgarian side. A shorter mountain component is combined with the Hisarlaka park programme, creating variety without treating both locations as separate full-day excursions.

Morning — Breakfast and departure towards Osogovo

Following breakfast, the group travels towards the selected Osogovo walking area. The introduction connects the Bulgarian mountain setting with the previous day's experience at Kalin Kamen.

The programme focuses on recreational exploration rather than a high-mountain summit objective. This preserves time and energy for the afternoon visit to Hisarlaka.

Morning activity — Guided recreational walk

The walk introduces the mountain landscape through observation, interpretation and moderate physical activity. Pauses for photography and rest form part of the route.

The experience provides a comparison between the two sides of the wider mountain destination while allowing each location to retain its own character.

The lower-intensity version uses a shorter walking section. Where mountain conditions are unsuitable, the day's outdoor content is concentrated in lower-altitude and park settings rather than maintaining the mountain visit at all costs.

Lunch — Local meal and recovery break

Lunch separates the morning activity from the afternoon programme. The break includes time for rest before continuing to Hisarlaka.

This interval maintains the day's balance between physical activity and recovery.

Afternoon — Hisarlaka eco-trail and landscape experience

The Hisarlaka visit combines the eco-trail component with guided park walking and landscape observation. The route includes pauses at suitable viewpoints and rest areas.

Heritage features provide context along the walk, while the main emphasis remains on the outdoor environment and recreational experience. This distinguishes the visit from the more detailed heritage interpretation included in the cultural offer.

The afternoon pace is gentler than the morning's mountain activity. It allows participants to experience the park without turning the day into a continuous endurance programme.

Optional rope-park activity

The rope-park session provides a specialist alternative within the afternoon allocation. It operates under the provider's supervision and participation arrangements.

Visitors following the standard programme continue with a guided park walk and additional time for photography or rest. The alternatives reconnect before departure for the hotel.

The park-walking component remains the core experience regardless of the availability of the specialist activity.

Late afternoon — Return to the hotel

The group returns to the accommodation for free time. Optional hotel relaxation complements the day but remains separate from the outdoor programme.

Evening — Dinner and second overnight stay

Dinner concludes the day. The evening provides recovery time before the gentler final programme in Nevestino Municipality.

Overnight location: Kyustendil.

DAY 5 — St Anna, Nevestino and the Struma Landscape

Daily theme: Gentle nature exploration and a riverside conclusion

The final day introduces a quieter form of outdoor experience. Short walks, rural scenery and river views bring the active journey to a gradual conclusion.

Morning — Breakfast, check-out and departure

After breakfast and check-out, the group departs towards Nevestino Municipality. Luggage remains with the vehicle throughout the visits.

The introduction presents the change from mountain and park environments to the rural and river landscapes of the final day.

Morning visit — St Anna near Smolichano

The St Anna locality combines a religious setting with natural surroundings. The church, dedicated to Saints Joachim and Anna and locally known as St Anna, is associated with a spring and waterfall.

Within the adventure programme, the visit focuses on the experience of the landscape and the relationship between the place and its local setting. A brief cultural introduction complements the nature-based content.

The guided walk centres on the main visitor area, with time for observation, photography and rest. Any extension towards closer waterfall viewpoints depends on the path conditions and access. The standard experience does not require a steep or exposed descent.

The shorter version retains the setting and interpretation with less walking.

Late morning — Transfer through the rural landscape

The route continues towards Nevestino. The vehicle transfer provides a rest between the walking components and connects the Smolichano surroundings with the Struma setting.

Interpretation draws attention to the contrast between the environments experienced during the five days. The journey itself becomes part of the landscape narrative.

Lunch — Local food and hospitality

Lunch provides the main break of the final day. The meal connects the outdoor experience with local hospitality and gives participants time to reflect on the journey.

A tasting element can form part of the selected meal arrangement, adding local character without introducing a separate activity programme.

Afternoon — Kadin Bridge and a gentle riverside walk

Kadin Bridge provides the focal point for the final visit. A brief introduction explains its local significance before a short walk in nearby accessible public areas.

The principal experience is land-based: river views, landscape observation, photography and gentle movement. Water sports are not included in this part of the standard programme.

The walking section concludes at a shared rest point. Its moderate length and relaxed pace provide an appropriate ending after the more active preceding days.

Programme conclusion and departure

The closing session brings together the environments encountered during the journey: Bislim Gorge, Kuklica's geological landscape, Osogovo, Hisarlaka and the Struma setting.

The conclusion emphasises the variety of nature-based experiences connected within the cross-border route. Each day contributes a different landscape and level of activity while remaining part of the same adventure theme.

The programme ends in Nevestino Municipality. The onward or return transfer follows the selected arrangement towards Kyustendil and Sofia or back towards North Macedonia.

Accommodation on Day 5

No additional overnight stay is included in the standard offer. An extension in Kyustendil remains separate from the four-night programme.

Seasonal organisation and participation

The spring-to-autumn format combines guided outdoor walking with optional specialist activities. Walking, interpretation, meals and transfers form the core experience, while the specialist components add variety where included.

The adapted winter format places greater emphasis on shorter routes, lower-altitude environments and park-based experiences. It does not include a winter summit ascent or assume the operation of kayaking, climbing, adrenaline-park or rope-course sessions.

The overall moderate category describes the recreational walking programme. Specialist activities have separate participation conditions and are not covered by the general difficulty classification.

Exact walking distances, elevation differences and activity durations depend on the local route used for each stage. The programme establishes the daily structure without presenting unverified trail measurements.

Programme summary

Element	Description
Programme title	Osogovo and Struma – Five-Day Nature and Adventure Programme
Main route	Kumanovo – Bislim Gorge – Kuklica – Kratovo – Kriva Palanka – Kalin Kamen – Kyustendil – Osogovo – Hisarlaka – St Anna – Nevestino – Struma riverside
Starting point	Kumanovo / North-East Planning Region
End point	Nevestino Municipality, followed by the selected onward or return transfer
Duration	5 programme days / 4 overnight stays
Geographical balance	Two overnight stays in North Macedonia and two in Bulgaria
Daily distribution	Days 1–2 in North Macedonia; Day 3 combines Kalin Kamen and the border transfer; Days 4–5 in Bulgaria
Type of offer	Mountain, adventure, nature and recreational travel

Target groups	Hikers, outdoor clubs, active small groups and visitors comfortable with moderate recreational walking
Core experiences	Gorge walking, geological interpretation, mountain recreation, park walking, landscape photography and gentle riverside exploration
Optional specialist activities	Kayaking or climbing at Bislim; Kalin Kamen adrenaline-park activity; Hisarlaka rope-park session, where provided under suitable operating conditions
Project locations included	Kalin Kamen, Hisarlaka and St Anna
Transport	Organised vehicle transfers between locations and across the border, combined with local walking activities
Service structure	Four overnight stays, meals within the programme, guiding and transfers; specialist activities and supplementary hotel services depend on the selected package
Main season	Spring to autumn
Winter format	Shorter and lower-intensity nature experiences, with a greater emphasis on lower-altitude and park settings
Difficulty	Moderate recreational programme; specialist activities assessed separately
Lower-intensity alternatives	Shorter walks, additional rest, landscape interpretation and park-based experiences
Accommodation basis	There are alternative options; availability, room allocation and package terms are date-specific

3. YEAR-ROUND INTEGRATED SEASONAL PRODUCTS

The integrated tourism offer brings together three complementary products: culture, adventure/mountain tourism and cycling. These products connect the resources of the North-East Planning Region with those of Kyustendil and Nevestino through a common cross-border destination framework.

The cultural and adventure/mountain products are presented through completed three-day and five-day programmes. Cycling forms a complementary product component, linking active travel with landscape exploration, local services and selected cultural experiences. Local food, rural encounters, family learning and relaxation enrich the three products without creating additional standalone route families.

The year-round character of the offer is expressed through seasonal variations in content, activity intensity and the balance between indoor and outdoor experiences. The principal themes remain consistent, while the way visitors experience them changes across the year. Cultural interpretation provides continuity, mountain and nature activities introduce seasonal variety, and cycling contributes an additional form of active exploration during suitable conditions.

The integrated structure connects the different products through shared service centres, accommodation locations, transfers and local experiences. Kumanovo, Kriva Palanka and Kyustendil provide the principal overnight framework, while surrounding towns, villages and natural sites contribute visits and activities. Nevestino adds a distinctive combination of heritage, rural settings and river landscapes to both principal thematic offers.

Seasonal adaptation was incorporated into the product design rather than treated as a separate set of tours. The three-day programmes retain two overnight stays and the five-day programmes retain four. Changes concern the content and intensity of individual experiences, preserving the geographical balance and thematic identity of each journey.

3.1. Common structure of the seasonal products

Each product combines three connected elements: a principal theme, a set of regional experiences and a supporting service structure. The theme gives the programme its identity, the experiences provide its content, and accommodation, meals, guiding and transfers connect the individual locations into a complete journey.

The seasonal framework also distinguishes core content from optional activities. Heritage interpretation, guided walking and local meals form part of the principal experience. Specialist adventure sessions, selected cycling stages and relaxation services provide additional content within the relevant programme arrangement.

This distinction maintains a coherent offer even when a particular outdoor activity has a limited operating season. The programme retains its purpose through alternative experiences within the same thematic and geographical setting.

Integrated product	Programme structure	Principal experience	Seasonal adaptation
Culture	Three-day and five-day programmes.	Archaeological landscapes, historic towns, religious heritage, museums, local stories and complementary digital interpretation.	Greater emphasis on outdoor heritage and town walks in suitable weather; a stronger indoor cultural component during cold or wet periods.
Adventure/mountain tourism	Three-day and five-day programmes.	Guided walking, mountain and geological landscapes, park experiences, nature observation and optional specialist activities.	Mountain and longer outdoor experiences in suitable conditions; shorter, lower-altitude and park-based activities during colder or less favourable periods.
Cycling	A complementary seasonal component within the integrated offer.	Active landscape exploration through local cycling stages, supported by transfers and local services.	Stages matched to terrain and conditions; non-cycling experiences retain the wider destination programme when riding is unsuitable.

3.2. Product A — Cross-Border Smart Cultural Product

Concept and thematic identity

The Cross-Border Smart Cultural Product connects the archaeological, urban and spiritual heritage of the two territories through interpretation and local experiences. Its central theme is the discovery of places through their history, physical setting and relationship with the people of the region.

The product combines major heritage locations with museums, town walks, food experiences and time for individual observation. Its “smart” dimension concerns the complementary use of available digital information and interpretation alongside guiding and printed material. The cultural experience remains centred on the actual places and their stories.

The three-day version provides a compact introduction to the shared destination. The five-day version adds a broader regional context, further visits and more time for interpretation. Both formats retain the same cultural and spiritual identity.

Macedonian resource base

The Macedonian component connects Kokino, Kumanovo Museum, the Church of St George in Staro Nagoričane, Kratovo’s bridges and towers, and the Monastery of St Joachim of Osogovo.

These locations contribute different forms of cultural experience. Museum interpretation introduces the regional context; Kokino connects archaeology with landscape; Staro Nagoričane and the Osogovo Monastery develop the spiritual theme; and Kratovo presents heritage within a historic urban environment.

Their arrangement within the programmes creates a progression between different settings. Visitors move from exhibitions and town streets to open archaeological landscapes and religious places, experiencing culture through several forms of interpretation.

Bulgarian resource base

The Bulgarian component connects the Roman Thermae, the historic centre of Kyustendil, museums or galleries, Hisarlaka and Kadin Bridge. St Anna near Smolichano extends the spiritual theme into a cultural-natural setting.

The wider resource framework also includes village churches and rural heritage, including the church heritage of Pastuh. These resources enrich the destination context without adding compulsory stops to the four principal itineraries.

Kyustendil provides the main urban and accommodation base, while Nevestino contributes a different scale and pace of experience. This combination connects established cultural attractions with quieter rural and landscape settings.

Spring format

The spring format combines outdoor heritage visits with museum interpretation and local meals. Town walks and archaeological landscapes take a prominent role, while indoor visits provide variety within the daily sequence.

The programme uses the contrast between emerging seasonal landscapes and the built heritage of towns and religious sites. Photography, observation and guided interpretation are balanced with meals and rest periods.

Local seasonal food adds another dimension to the experience. It connects the cultural route with hospitality and the changing character of the destination.

Summer format

The summer format gives greater space to open-air heritage, town walks and evening experiences. Outdoor visits are balanced with indoor interpretation and breaks, maintaining a manageable daily pace.

Local events and festivals provide complementary content when their actual dates coincide with the journey. They enrich the programme through food, performance or community traditions without becoming a condition for delivering the main cultural itinerary.

The summer product retains its identity through the established heritage route. Event participation is an additional experience rather than the basis of the offer.

Autumn format

The autumn format combines heritage interpretation with local food and the changing appearance of the landscape. Historic town walks, spiritual visits and archaeological interpretation remain central to the programme.

Meals and tastings provide a stronger seasonal connection through the products and traditions represented in the selected hospitality arrangements. The pace allows time for observation and photography, particularly where the cultural visit also includes a landscape setting.

Museums and galleries complement the outdoor programme and maintain variety during periods of changeable weather.

Winter format

The winter format places greater emphasis on museum exhibitions, galleries, indoor interpretation and shorter urban visits. Religious heritage and local food remain important components, while the extent of outdoor walking reflects daylight and conditions.

Exposed or uneven-ground visits have a reduced role when conditions limit access. The programme maintains its cultural identity through the combination of indoor content, spiritual heritage and local experiences.

Optional mineral relaxation in Kyustendil complements the winter cultural stay. It remains a supplementary hospitality experience rather than replacing the principal heritage theme.

Digital interpretation and local participation

Available digital content supports orientation, visual explanation and individual exploration. Where operational QR, audio, virtual or other interpretive material exists, it adds a further layer to the visit.

The programme does not assume that every museum or site has an operational AR or VR installation. Guiding and printed information provide continuity across all locations.

Local participation is expressed through guiding, hospitality, meals and encounters with the people associated with the destination. These experiences connect heritage interpretation with contemporary local life.

3.3. Product B — Cross-Border Mountain and Adventure Product

Concept and thematic identity

The Cross-Border Mountain and Adventure Product presents the destination through physical activity, landscape variety and nature interpretation. It connects gorge, geological, mountain, park and river environments within the three-day and five-day programmes.

The core experience is guided recreational walking. Optional specialist activities add a different level of participation where included, while lower-intensity alternatives retain the nature-based character of the programme.

The product's environmental dimension is expressed through observation, interpretation and the way the landscape is experienced. Natural features are treated as places to understand and appreciate, alongside their role as settings for recreation.

Macedonian resource base

The principal Macedonian locations are Bislim Gorge, Kuklica, Kalin Kamen and the wider Osogovo setting. Together, they provide contrasting experiences: gorge walking, geological interpretation, mountain recreation and landscape observation.

The wider resource framework includes the geological landscapes around Gorno Kratovo and Stanečki Waterfall. These provide additional thematic depth to the destination without being mandatory additions to every daily programme.

Kratovo contributes a recreational town walk and a service stop within the longer adventure itinerary. Its role is to complement the nature-based experience through its physical setting, local food and a change of pace.

Bulgarian resource base

The Bulgarian component connects Osogovo, Hisarlaka, the Struma landscape and St Anna near Smolichano. These locations provide mountain walking, park-based recreation and gentler cultural-natural experiences.

The wider thematic resource base includes Provirkata and surrounding rural landscapes. These contribute to the regional identity of the product while the principal itineraries remain focused on the locations specified in the daily programmes.

Kyustendil provides the overnight and hospitality base. Nevestino introduces a quieter concluding environment through short walks, river views and local experiences.

Spring format

The spring format emphasises recreational walking, nature observation and geological interpretation. Lower-altitude locations and park environments provide an important part of the experience, while mountain sections reflect the actual condition of the terrain.

The programme combines active periods with interpretation and rest. Landscape photography and observation contribute to the experience without requiring sustained physical effort throughout the day.

The core structure remains guided walking and local experiences. Specialist activities are separate components within the selected arrangement.

Summer format

The summer format gives greater emphasis to mountain recreation and longer outdoor experiences. The daily sequence balances walking with meals, transfers and recovery periods.

Kalin Kamen and the Bulgarian Osogovo component provide the principal mountain settings, while Hisarlaka introduces a park-based experience. Optional adventure activities add variety where the relevant facilities and operators are available.

The programme retains a moderate recreational character. A summer format does not automatically convert the itinerary into a summit expedition, technical climbing programme or continuous endurance activity.

Autumn format

The autumn format combines walking with landscape observation and photography. Mountain, geological and rural settings provide contrasting environments within the same journey.

The daily pace reflects shorter daylight and changing weather. Local meals and town or park experiences create breaks between the principal outdoor sections.

The nature theme remains central, with greater flexibility in the length and intensity of individual walking components.

Winter format

The winter format uses shorter, lower-intensity experiences and a greater emphasis on lower-altitude or park settings. It preserves the relationship with nature without presenting high-mountain activity as a standard winter component.

Cultural-natural interpretation and local hospitality provide additional content during periods when outdoor time is reduced. Optional relaxation in Kyustendil complements the overnight stay.

The winter version does not assume the operation of rope parks, adrenaline facilities or water-based activities. These remain separate from the core seasonal experience.

Activity intensity and environmental interpretation

The product distinguishes between recreational walking and specialist activities such as climbing, kayaking or rope-course participation. The moderate category describes the walking programme; optional activities have their own requirements.

Lower-intensity alternatives retain the principal landscape experience through shorter routes, additional rest and greater emphasis on observation. This gives different visitors a way to engage with the same destination theme.

Interpretation connects the visible surroundings with the character of the landscape. Geological formations, river settings and mountain environments are presented as part of the destination's identity rather than solely as backdrops for activity.

3.4. Product C — Cross-Border Cycling Product

Concept and thematic identity

The Cross-Border Cycling Product connects active travel with the landscapes and local experiences of the two territories. It addresses recreational cyclists, clubs and visitors interested in exploring places through a combination of riding, stops and organised transfers.

Cycling forms the third component of the integrated offer. It complements the cultural and adventure/mountain products without creating additional fixed-duration route families beyond the three-day and five-day programmes already developed.

The product is organised around local stages rather than uninterrupted riding along the full cross-border road corridor. Corridor VIII provides the wider geographical connection, while the cycling experience centres on individual local areas and the relationship between activity and destination discovery.

Macedonian cycling areas

The Macedonian component draws on the cycling areas identified around Biljanovce Forest Park, Kalin Kamen and the wider Osogovo landscape. Rural settings around Rankovce and Kratovo contribute additional thematic connections with local life and landscape exploration.

These areas offer different experiences within the product framework. Mountain settings relate to active visitors seeking greater physical involvement, while shorter local stages support recreational participation.

The established Kalin Kamen cycling context contributes to the product's active identity. The offer does not assume that a sporting-event course is equally suitable for every visitor or bicycle type.

Bulgarian cycling areas

The Bulgarian component draws on the Osogovo mountain setting and selected rural or riverside areas around Nevestino. Kyustendil provides the main accommodation and service base.

The combination connects mountain landscapes with lower-altitude experiences and local stops. Cultural interpretation, food and rest points add variety to the active journey.

The Struma landscape contributes to the product's setting, without implying the existence of a continuous dedicated cycleway along the river.

Spring format

The spring cycling component emphasises shorter local stages and landscape exploration in suitable conditions. Lower-altitude routes provide an important part of the format, while mountain participation reflects terrain and seasonal conditions.

Stops for local food, photography and interpretation connect cycling with the wider destination experience. The journey is therefore presented as active tourism rather than only a sporting exercise.

Summer format

The summer format includes a stronger mountain component for appropriately experienced participants. Recreational visitors remain connected with shorter or less demanding stages.

The programme combines riding with rest, local meals and transfers. This structure gives the active experience a defined place within the broader journey.

Cycling clubs and organised sporting events represent a related market context. Participation in a competition is not assumed to be part of the standard tourism offer.

Autumn format

The autumn format places emphasis on rural landscapes, local food and a slower form of active exploration. Shorter daylight and changing conditions influence the balance between riding and other experiences.

Cultural stops and local encounters complement the cycling stages. This gives the product a broader appeal to visitors interested in both physical activity and the character of the destination.

Winter format

Winter cycling is not presented as a guaranteed component of the offer. Lower altitude alone does not establish suitable riding conditions.

Where conditions support a limited cycling experience, it remains a defined local activity. Otherwise, walking, cultural interpretation and local hospitality retain the cross-border journey while the cycling component is omitted.

This approach preserves the integrity of the tourism programme without implying that riding is available in every season or on every route.

Service structure and visitor experience

The cycling product includes the organisational context of bicycle transport, luggage movement, storage and support services. These elements distinguish it from the general walking programmes.

Vehicle transfers connect the local stages and provide the cross-border movement of participants and bicycles within the product structure. The offer therefore does not require cyclists to use the main inter-city or border roads as riding stages.

The completed concept connects activity with destination discovery. Local food, heritage and landscape interpretation form part of the cycling experience rather than appearing as unrelated additions.

3.5. Seasonal integration across the three products

The three products share a common geographical and service framework while offering different ways to experience the destination. Their seasonal relationship gives the portfolio continuity across the year.

Culture provides a relatively broad foundation through museums, religious heritage, townscapes and interpretation. Adventure/mountain tourism contributes greater outdoor variety during suitable periods. Cycling adds another form of active participation without becoming a condition for delivering the principal programmes.

Seasonal integration does not require every visitor to participate in all three products. It provides a coherent portfolio from which the cultural or adventure programme retains its principal identity and incorporates relevant complementary experiences.

Season	Cultural emphasis	Adventure/mountain emphasis	Cycling emphasis	Shared complementary experiences
Spring	Heritage walks, archaeological landscapes and indoor interpretation.	Recreational walking, geological sites and lower-altitude nature experiences.	Shorter local stages in suitable conditions.	Local meals, photography and guided interpretation.
Summer	Open-air heritage, historic townscapes and date-specific local events.	Mountain recreation, park experiences and optional specialist activities.	A wider range of local stages, including mountain content for suitable participants.	Rest periods, local hospitality and evening free time.
Autumn	Heritage interpretation, spiritual visits and seasonal food experiences.	Landscape walking, photography and flexible activity lengths.	Rural and recreational stages combined with local stops.	Tastings, town visits and slower-paced discovery.
Winter	Museums, galleries, spiritual heritage and shorter urban visits.	Shorter, lower-intensity and park-based experiences where conditions permit.	Limited conditional activity; non-cycling content maintains the journey when riding is unsuitable.	Indoor interpretation, local meals and optional relaxation.

3.6. Local services and community participation

Local services connect the seasonal products with the economic and social life of the destination. Accommodation, meals, guiding and local experiences give the itineraries a practical structure and a direct relationship with the places visited.

The principal centres provide overnight accommodation and a concentration of hospitality services. Smaller settlements contribute through visits, meals, cultural-natural interpretation and rural experiences. This creates several forms of participation across the two territories.

Local food provides a recurring connection between the products. Within the cultural offer, it complements heritage and traditions. Within the adventure and cycling components, it provides both recovery and a social experience after activity.

Guiding connects the programme with local knowledge. It gives continuity between locations and supports different visitor interests, from introductory cultural discovery to more focused landscape interpretation.

The seasonal framework incorporates these services within the daily journeys. It does not treat community participation as a separate activity outside the visitor programme.

3.7. Relationship with the principal three-day and five-day offers

The seasonal products provide the thematic framework for the four completed cross-border programmes. They explain how the offers retain their identity while the balance of experiences changes across the year.

The two cultural programmes share a common heritage narrative and differ in duration and depth. The two adventure/mountain programmes share a nature-based identity and differ in geographical range and the number of experiences.

The three-day programmes provide a compact journey with two overnight stays. The five-day programmes provide a broader sequence with four overnight stays. Both formats maintain accommodation on each side of the border.

Cycling remains a complementary component within the integrated destination framework. It broadens the active character of the portfolio without adding one-day, two-day or four-day standalone offers.

Summary table of three-day and five-day cross-border offers

No.	Name of joint tour	Predominant experience	Main geographical sequence	Duration and overnight balance	Seasonal format
1	Culture and Spirituality across the Border – Three-Day Programme	Cultural, spiritual and heritage interpretation.	Kokino – Kratovo – Kriva Palanka – Osogovo Monastery – Kyustendil – Hisarlaka – Nevestino and St Anna.	3 days / 2 overnight stays: one in the Kriva Palanka area and one in Kyustendil.	Year-round cultural identity, with a stronger indoor component and shorter outdoor visits during cold or wet periods.
2	Osogovo and River Landscapes – Three-Day Adventure Programme	Mountain and park walking, nature observation and optional specialist activities.	Kriva Palanka – Kalin Kamen – Kyustendil – Hisarlaka – St Anna – Nevestino and the Struma setting.	3 days / 2 overnight stays: one in the Kriva Palanka area and one in Kyustendil.	Main outdoor format from spring to autumn; a lower-intensity winter version centred on suitable shorter walks and park experiences.
3	Five Days of Culture, Spirituality and Digital Stories	Cultural and spiritual discovery, local experiences and complementary digital interpretation.	Kumanovo – Staro Nagoričane – Kokino – Kratovo – Kriva Palanka – Osogovo Monastery – Kyustendil – Hisarlaka –	5 days / 4 overnight stays: one in the Kumanovo area, one in Kriva Palanka and two in Kyustendil.	Year-round programme, with greater museum and indoor interpretation emphasis in winter.

			Nevestino and St Anna.		
4	Osogovo and Struma – Five-Day Nature and Adventure Programme	Gorge, geological, mountain, park and riverside experiences.	Kumanovo – Bislim Gorge – Kuklica – Kratovo – Kriva Palanka – Kalin Kamen – Kyustendil – Osogovo – Hisarlaka – St Anna and Nevestino.	5 days / 4 overnight stays: one in the Kumanovo area, one in Kriva Palanka and two in Kyustendil.	Main format from spring to autumn, with adapted winter modules and a clear separation between recreational and specialist activities.

3.8. Overall contribution of the integrated seasonal products

The integrated seasonal structure connects the four programmes within a common destination identity. Culture, adventure/mountain tourism and cycling provide complementary ways to experience the North-East Planning Region, Kyustendil and Nevestino.

The cultural product establishes continuity through heritage and interpretation. The adventure/mountain product develops the landscape dimension through active participation. Cycling adds a distinct form of movement and exploration within the wider portfolio.

Local services, food and encounters connect all three products with the destination's communities. Seasonal variations give the programmes different expressions across the year while preserving their themes, duration and cross-border structure.

The resulting offer presents a coherent portfolio of completed tourism programmes rather than a collection of unrelated seasonal activities. Each programme has a defined visitor experience, while the integrated framework explains how that experience relates to the wider destination and its changing seasonal character.

4. CONNECTION BETWEEN THE OFFERS AND PROJECT INFRASTRUCTURE

The four project infrastructure locations—Hisarlaka, Kalin Kamen, St Anna near Smolichano and Kokino—were integrated into the completed itineraries. The matrix identifies their place in the three-day and five-day programmes.

Project infrastructure location	Offer / day	Experience integrated in the programme
Kokino, Staro Nagoričane – visitor-site infrastructure improvements	Culture 3-day: D1; culture 5-day: D2	Heritage interpretation and a visit to the archaeological landscape within both cultural programmes.
Kalin Kamen, Kriva Palanka – adrenaline park and associated visitor facilities	Adventure 3-day: D1–D2; adventure 5-day: D3	Guided nature experiences and an optional adrenaline activity within both adventure programmes.
Hisarlaka, Kyustendil – adventure rope park and eco-trail	Culture 3-day: D2; culture 5-day: D4; adventure 3-day: D2; adventure 5-day: D4	Park heritage and interpretation in the cultural programmes; eco-trail and optional rope course in the adventure programmes.
St Anna, near Smolichano, Nevestino – tourist infrastructure improvements	Culture 3-day: D3; adventure 3-day: D3; culture/adventure 5-day: D5	Cultural and nature interpretation, the chapel and landscape walks within the three-day and five-day offers.

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