



Product development guidelines and criteria

SENIOR TOURISM – RURAL TOURISM LOW-SEASON PRODUCT



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Contents

Contents.....	2
Introduction	3
Product criteria and explanation	4
Silver Suitcase logo and card.....	8
Annex 1. Legal framework: Agreement on distribution of the senior card “Silver Suitcase”	13
Annex 2. Legal framework: Agreement on provision of senior friendly rural tourism off-season product.....	15

Project Partners:



**Latvian Country
Tourism Association
"Lauku ceļotājs"**
www.countryholidays.lv



**Norwegian Rural
tourism and local
food "HANEN"**
www.hanen.no/



**Toerisme Vlaams-
Brabant (BE)**
www.toerismevlaamsbrabant.be



**European Federation
of Rural Tourism –
EuroGites**
www.eurogites.org



**Lithuanian Countryside
Tourism Association
of Lithuania**
www.atostogoskaime.lt



**NFE – Nationaal
Ouderenfonds (NL)**
www.ouderenfonds.nl/

Introduction

This guideline has been developed under the project *SenGor – Seniors go Rural*¹, with the objective of creating a tourism product for individual senior off-season travel to rural micro- and SME businesses. The present guidelines are based upon the rural tourism product criteria that were found by the project team through a feasibility study, with special attention to low-season requirements.

The product is aimed at active seniors of age 55+. They are characterised as recognising their age, but willing and able to enjoy their life to the maximum. They spend money on nice things that are relevant for people of their age, but without feeling labelled as “old”. Their motto is ‘you only live once’ and they want to keep active and enjoy themselves. They are not adverse to using aides for older people (hearing aids, glasses, walking aids, etc.) if that helps them to stay active. The criteria are described and explained further in the guidelines to help rural tourism accommodation service providers to prepare for this target audience.

To promote and sell the product, the “Silver Suitcase” member card has been developed. This system is based upon agreements between rural tourism service providers and a rural tourism marketing organisation, where Senior Tourism Organisations can distribute the cards to their individual seniors. The operative model of the card is specially designed to motivate and support senior low-season travel, and is described in a separate chapter of the guidelines.

At the end of the document, we present some examples of rural tourism low-season products for seniors. The examples are selected from Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Belgium. Additionally, two templates for a legal framework agreement between rural tourism marketing organisation and senior organisations, and with individual tourism service providers, can be found in the annexes.

¹ Project: *Seniors Go Rural (75/G/ENT/CIP/13/B/N03S01) (2014 - 2015)*

Facilitating transnational low season tourism exchanges in Europe encouraging Senior Citizens to travel

Project duration: 01.09.2014 - 29.02.2016.

Project information: http://www.celotajs.lv/cont/proj/proj/SenGoR/Sengor_eng_active.html

Product criteria and explanation

Object	Criteria	Guideline
1. Information and bookings		
	Precise description of the accommodation and services (accessibility, etc.)	<p>Description should precisely characterise the conditions in the accommodation from the point of view of accessibility and convenience, e.g., if the guest rooms are on the ground or upper floors, if there are stairs or other facilities to enter the building and rooms (e.g., a lift, a ramp, etc.).</p> <p>Precise information should be provided about all services that are available with their prices and conditions.</p> <p>Information should be provided in the languages in which hosts can communicate with guests.</p> <p>Available services, and eventual restrictions during low season to all the following points, must be clearly defined and explained</p>
	Accessibility information marked with special pictograms	<p>The pictograms reflect the convenience for different levels of mobility. They are also useful to get an idea about other guests that may be staying to avoid mismatch of needs and interests.</p> <div data-bbox="906 1104 1273 1182" style="text-align: center;"> </div> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wheelchair accessible (services that are fully accessible - no ledges or barriers, wheelchair toilets available, etc.). 2. Walking aid accessible (services that are accessible with walking aids - no barriers, lifts instead of stairs, no wheelchair toilets but handgrips). 3. Walking stick accessible (services with some barriers but no long stairs, toilets with handgrips). 4. No special accessibility (stairs, no special toilets, no handgrips). 5. Very fit (accommodation and activities for fit people with sports, cycling or walking).
	Description of local activities and services available low-season.	The description should be provided in the language of you main customers. It should contain clear information about availability and accessibility in the low-season, including booking information.

Object	Criteria	Guideline
	Contact information for the destination and local contacts for assistance and medical aid.	Information on how to reach hosts in case of necessary assistance, and how to reach medical and other services in urgency. Local medical staff frequently cannot communicate in foreign languages. Therefore the local contact information should be provided ensuring that the answering person is able to communicate with the guests and organise the necessary assistance.
	Print and online materials	Clear letters in medium to large size (minimum 12 pts). Colour of texts with high contrast to background. Easy and short sentences. Avoid using slang or local terminology in language.
2. Price		
	Low-season special conditions for seniors	Discounts, free, or complementary added-value services for low seasons senior visitors must be highlighted and clearly presented (off-season, senior club or any other).
3. Assistance		
	Assistance with luggage handling	Seniors would expect assistance with luggage handling as part of service. It has to be provided that the luggage is carried for them, e.g. from the car/bus to the room, etc.
	Luggage transfer (if necessary)	Safe luggage transfer can be offered as extra service or as part of service, if necessary (e.g. if seniors travel by bicycle from one accommodation to the next, etc.).
	Assistance to overcome language barrier	There has to be a language support available to solve unexpected situations and to handle everyday service. For easier communication, it is possible to use mobile translation applications, vocabularies, etc.
	First aid available	First aid box at the facility, and emergency telephone numbers exposed in a visible place. If the accommodation is in a remote rural area, it might be useful to get in contact with the nearest medical station and provide GPS coordinates of the facility so that in case of emergency the brigade can find the place easily and quickly.
4. Location, rooms, surroundings		
	Easy to get to	It is important that the place is easily accessible – with good road, clear signposts, and GPS coordinates.
	Safe destination	The destination should be safe, with friendly a local community, no heavy traffic, etc.
	Pleasant, beautiful, well maintained surroundings	Attention should be give to the surroundings – the yard, the garden, etc. Everything should be well kept, aesthetic and in good technical condition to prevent accidents.
	Accessibility in bad weather conditions	Weather conditions in low season can make access and use of installations more difficult. Special attention needs to be given to avoid related problems.

<i>Object</i>	<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Guideline</i>
	No construction barriers	No construction barriers, either indoors or outdoors, like difficult steps, slippery trails, height thresholds, long distances between parking and buildings, complicated locks at the gates, etc.. Very small level differences (e.g. at doors) can pass unnoticed and create a high risk that people may stumble over them.
5. Equipment		
	Shallow stairs and rooms no higher than one floor to climb	The stairs should meet the building regulations. The steps should not be too high or too narrow. The steps should not be slippery or with worn or rounded edges.
	Banisters	Banisters should be conveniently placed, in full length of the stairs to give the necessary support.
	Toilet and bathroom equipment and installations suitable for elderly people (handrails by the bath tub, WC seat, etc.)	Handrails should be installed in suitable places to ensure convenient and safe use of bathroom facilities. Slippery surfaces may represent danger, therefore attention should be given to bath mats and anti-slip materials in the bath tub and on the floor. In some cases, instruction pictograms might be useful showing how to adjust water temperature or switch between shower and tap.
	Bed mattress is appropriate height for sitting.	The sitting should be neither too high, nor too low for sitting. Seniors would not enjoy using low beds, as it might be difficult to rise up. Attention should be paid to the quality of mattress.
6. Staff and management		
	Personal, friendly attitude.	Personal attention is of extremely high importance. They expect friendly communication and understanding of their special needs and wishes. The staff should be skilled / experienced in interpersonal communication and solving conflicts. The staff should have the necessary patience to explain things clearly, make sure that the client has understood everything right, to cater for and anticipate a variety of small enquiries and requests. Adequate specific training shall be provided or available to assure these needs.
	English knowledge and ability to communicate with people speaking foreign languages.	English language would be a minimum of the required foreign language skills. The staff should be able to communicate in the native languages of the main customer groups of the establishment. Communication in client's language adds to the feeling of comfort and safety, and can be a motivating factor in choosing the holiday site.
	Local knowledge	Seniors, more than other groups, are interested in the culture, history and traditions of the places they visit. When communicating with guests, local knowledge and good presentation skills are important for the staff.
	Contingency provision	Provision should be taken for contingencies: alarms

<i>Object</i>	<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Guideline</i>
		(sound and light), special attention to older guests, clear signposting where needed. Ask for dietary and special healthcare needs on booking or arrival.
7. Services and experiences (meals, activities, animation)		
	Good quality, freshly made food and local produce.	Apart from being fresh and good quality, the food has to be well presented and served. Local foods have to be explained. If unknown or strange, they may be served in small portions for tasting. It is important to inform guests about the origins of the food, e.g., if the food is biologically or otherwise certified, grown/produced on site or in neighboring farms, etc.
	Preparation of food	Attention should be given to texture of food, e.g., it should not be too hard to chew; fish should be prepared so that fish-bones are removed. Quality is more important than quantity.
	Dietary needs	Dietary needs of guests should be carefully considered. Indicate special menus if available, vegetarian vegan, allergens indicated according to EU regulation. Attention to cultural or religious specificities and sensibilities.
	Leisure services	Senior travelers like to socialize, so shared communicative areas where they can sit together informally are recommended. Availability of tables games, reading / library, etc. Possibly activities in the evenings.
	Activities	Provide information about what to do and see regarding insights into local culture, way of living, events, monuments, etc. Easy physical activities (walking, yoga, gym,...)or learning experiences (cooking, music, crafts, agriculture, ...).
	Sustainability and CSR	Organize services in such a way that the local community is integrated and benefits: local providers, staff, stimulate meetings and interaction with the local population

Silver Suitcase logo and card

To make the senior friendly low-season products available for the market, a special Senior Card under the label “Silver Suitcase” has been created. This card is part of a Europe-wide system under standard rules.

Before a card is issued, a formal agreement (Legal framework Annex 1) shall be established between an organisation representing senior clients

(usually, a regional or national seniors association) who distribute the card, and a national or regional rural tourism / marketing organisation representing the service providers who will accept this card. This agreement includes rules about distribution and control of the “Silver Suitcase” card, its individual design elements as in the case of the “Seniors Go Rural” initiative, and others. In some countries, the card may also be available directly from the rural tourism organisation.



All such agreements are registered with the European rural tourism organisation EUROGITES that run the web site <http://sengor.eurogites.org> specifically promoting the senior friendly low-season rural tourism products available in its member countries that operate under the “Silver Suitcase” system.

Card distributors (Senior associations) promote the specialised rural tourism low-season product to their target audience and distribute the cards to individual seniors. Each card has a registration number, and the holder’s name and surname on it. The card holders are registered, this information is available to both parts for control purposes.

The “Silver Suitcase” card is valid in those rural tourism establishments that have signed an agreement (Legal framework Annex 2) with a rural tourism marketing organisation that in turn, has also signed a formal agreement with an organisation representing seniors. The senior friendly establishments are recognised by the “Silver Suitcase” sticker on site or its logo in promotion and marketing.

How does it work for rural tourism providers?

1. The rural tourism/marketing organisation **signs a contract** with a rural tourism service owner willing to offer a rural tourism product under special conditions for seniors that hold the card. This contract includes all the relevant conditions and the operational procedures and defines:
 - The low-season period when the product and its conditions can be used by card holders. Some highly motivated establishments may also offer these conditions to seniors during main tourism season. In either case the periods of validity are clearly stated.
 - The discount or special arrangement that a cardholder is entitled to receive.
 - These special conditions are valid for the card holder and one accompanying person.
 - The rural tourism service owner registers the “Silver Suitcase” customers for statistical purposes and reports upon request to the organisation that distributed the card.
 - The accommodation owner guarantees good quality and professional service according to the Product Criteria set up above in <1>.
 - Contingency procedures in case of conflicts.

2. The card is valid both for advance bookings and for on-site bookings. Bookings can only be rejected due to no availability.
3. The card holder makes bookings directly with the rural tourism services. He must indicate at the moment of booking that the Silver Suitcase card will be used and provide the card registration number.
4. Validity of the card and legitimate ownership must be checked upon arrival of the client. Cards must bear the name of the cardholder and his signature; otherwise they can be rejected.
5. If in spite of compliance with <3> a valid cardholder does not receive the “Silver Suitcase” special conditions, the rural tourism service owner is liable to reimburse the excess charge at a later stage or provide other adequate compensation.
6. Establishments offering the Silver Suitcase products expose stickers at the entrance, in the accommodation premises or other, as appropriate.
7. The card distributor is responsible to explain all conditions and terms of use to the card holder. General rules that apply across Europe and in each specific country for all cardholders are available at <http://sengor.eurogites.org> The national / regional rural tourism / marketing organisation undertakes to involve in disputes that might arise between card holders and service providers during their stay.

Product examples

The following examples characterise the rural tourism product that is of interest to senior audience and suitable to their needs and interests. The examples show the description and services.

1. The Diklu Manor, Latvia

The neo-baroc manor was built in 1896 and renovated in 2003. It is a place to slow down and rest, where one can discover history, a calm rural pace of life and welcoming staff. The Four Star accommodation is equipped with 19-20th century furniture, 20 elegant fireplaces and heating stoves. The Manor's restaurant acknowledged by gourmets. Eco Spa, where one can smell aroma of plants from surrounding meadows and forests. Cultural events take place at the Manor every month.



Accessibilty: There is a lift. Reception staff will assist with luggage.

Silver Suitcase Conditions: Off season (01.10.-30.04.) discount of 20% applies to accommodation. Extras: burning fireplace and blankets in one of the manor halls, collection of books. The „Silver Suitcase” card grants a 10% discount also in high season (01.05. – 30.09.) on accommodation, bicycles for guests use free of charge, boating in the manor pond.

- Booking with member card number on: www.diklupils.lv , pils@diklupils.lv
- Map: <http://www.celotajs.lv/lv/e/map/diklupils>
- Address: Dikļi, Dikļu pagasts, Kocēnu novads, Latvija

2. Store Ringheim, Norway

Welcome to Store Ringheim! The farm has been in the Ringheim family since 1778. Today's hotel/guesthouse is placed in *Gamlahuset* ("the old house"), which is carefully restored. It contains six rooms with a total of 14 beds, all with private bathrooms with walk in showers. All of the rooms have views over different parts of the landscape and distant mountains. The restaurant area used to be the sheep fold at the farm, and today it serves traditional food, all made from local produce.



This farm hotel is placed in Voss, about 1h 30m drive from Bergen.



Accessibility: Access ramp at entry. Stairs with handrails. The staff may assist you with the luggage.

Silver Suitcase Conditions: Off-season offers: 30 % discount in the period of 20.09.-30.11/05.01.-31.03.

- Booking with member card number on: Email: post@storingheim.no
- Contact: Svein Ringheim Ph: +47 954 06 135
- Address: Molstervegen 44, 5705 Voss
- Website: www.storingheim.no

3. Nemunas tour Guest house, Lithuania

Cozy holiday homestead Kliukai situated a little bit out of beaten track but in a very lovely setting, with a private pond and surrounded by open nature. It offers accommodation in a wooden two bedroom cottages, with a terrace and a cozy living room equipped with a bathroom with shower. Each cottage has been developed by the owners with a passion for hospitality and has its own charm. The hosts Vytis and Sandra will be your private ambassadors of their country during your stay.



Each cottage has as its own kitchen with a stove fridge and a microwave if you prefer to cook yourself. But also host will be more than happy to serve you breakfast or dinner if you book it in advance.

The house is located in a quiet area, 40 min drive from Vilnius old town far away from city noises – with wide open sky full of stars at the night time.



Accessibility: Homestead Kliukai is situated in small Kliukai village 40 min drive from Vilnius old town. There are 4 individual cottages with 2 – 3 bedrooms in each. Some cottages are one level with bedrooms and living room situated on the ground floor. Some have the bedrooms on the first floor with wide staircase leading up. Bathroom facilities are next to each bedroom. Luggage assistance is available all the time. Private transfers and guided tours can be booked individually.

Silver Suitcase Conditions: Regular price – 75 Eur per cottage for two persons per night without breakfast. Minimum length of stay – 2 nights; Member card discount – 50% on accommodation. Breakfast 10 Euro per person per 2 night stay

- Booking : Mr. Vytis Stelbys Address: Kliukų village., Dubingių sen., Moletų region Lithuania.
- Phone: +370 68240139
- E-mail: sodyba.kliukai@gmail.com
- Website: www.atostogoskaime.lt/kliukai

4. B&B Luttelkolen, Belgium

Looking for a lovely place to stay? Lieve & Luc welcome guests to their restored farmhouse in the heart of Hageland, a stunning region between Leuven, Diest, Tienen and Aarschot. The rural surroundings around Horst castle, just a stone's throw from the B&B, give plenty of choice for a gentle stroll or energetic bike ride. As an experienced regional guide Lieve is well placed to give you some tips.



The communal area is used as a breakfast room and sitting room. It's a lovely cosy room with a wood-burning stove.

Box spring beds, which can be split into two if required, and dark curtains ensure that guests have a wonderful night's sleep. The modern bathrooms are complete with washbasin, WC, walk-in shower and ecological bath products. Selected linen is bio and fair-trade. Rooms are a pleasant place to relax thanks to a comfortable sofa, Wi-Fi, internet, TV, books and games. Coffee and tea are available in the rooms. Those wanting more independence can book the 'Horstkamer' with a small but well-equipped kitchen available. This studio is a home from home.



Accessibility: all rooms on the ground floor, are comfortably equipped with all mod cons and have direct access to the beautiful south-facing terrace. The largest room is accessible by wheelchair and has a walk-in/roll-in shower, raised toilet, lowered basin and unhindered access to the room from the car park.

Silver Suitcase Conditions: Off-season promotion 2+1 night free (33% discount between 1.12. – 31.03.):

- 3 nights bed & breakfast
 - based on a double room
 - valid when you stay a minimum of 3 nights
- Off-season price: € 180 for 3 nights for 2 people

- Booking with member card number on: www.luttelkolen.be
- E-mail: luttelkolen@telenet.be
- Address: Luttelkolen 9, Holsbeek, Belgium

Annex 1. Legal framework: Agreement on distribution of the senior card “Silver Suitcase”

Place: _____

Date: _____

The present agreement is made between _____ as an organisation representing seniors, in person of _____ (name, position), hereinafter referred to as **Distributor** and _____ as an organisation representing rural tourism service providers, in person of _____ (name, position), hereinafter referred to as **Partner**, collectively referred to as **the Parties**.

1. Purpose of the Agreement.

The given agreement is made on purpose to provide for distribution of the senior card „Silver Suitcase” promoting off-season bookings of senior friendly rural tourism products and services at special rates or conditions.

2. Obligations of the parties.

The distributor is obliged to:

- a) distribute the card to individuals willing to use the privileges granted by the „Silver Suitcase” card, namely, discounts or free added-value services on specified rural tourism products and services that are granted off-season;
- b) instruct its individual members/card holders on terms of use of the „Silver Suitcase” card;
- c) inform its members about current senior friendly tourism products and services accepting the „Silver Suitcase” card;
- d) register the issued cards by their numbers and provide the registration list to the Partner;
- e) promote and advertise the „Silver Suitcase” card and the respective senior friendly products and services according to Distributor’s best capacities and possibilities;
- f) encourage and collect card holders’ feedback on experiences with the „Silver Suitcase” card and products.

The Partner is obliged to:

- a) gather and verify information on the senior friendly services that adhere to the system;
- b) regularly update information on the offer of senior friendly rural tourism off-season products and services in the marketing channels and means used for product promotion;
- c) keep the Distributor updated on changes and news of the senior friendly rural tourism off-season products and services;
- d) to deliver „Silver Suitcase” cards to the Distributor for further distribution to individual seniors and keep the register of the delivered cards;
- e) promote and advertise the „Silver Suitcase” card and the respective senior friendly products and services according to Partner’s best capacities and possibilities;
- f) summarise and review customer feedback regarding the product quality and availability.

3. Terms and Termination

- a) This Agreement shall be effective on the date hereof and shall continue, unless terminated by both parties;
- b) Either Party may terminate this Agreement upon notice in writing in case the other party fails to fulfill its obligations under this agreement.

SIGNATURES

DISTRIBUTOR:

PARTNER:

Annex 2. Legal framework: Agreement on provision of senior friendly rural tourism off-season product

This agreement is made on (DATE, PLACE), between
(service provider's name), legal representative (name, surname), further in the text called “**Provider**”
and
(organisation’s name), legal representative (name, surname), further in the text called “**Partner**”
collectively called “ **the Parties**”.

1. Purpose and Terms:

a) The Parties have entered into this agreement for the purpose of providing the senior friendly rural tourism off-season product to customers and making it available under special terms for the Senior card “Silver Suitcase” holders. The special terms are granted to the card holder and 1 accompanying person.

b) The Provider agrees to provide his services in the terms set out in this agreement, exclusively during the period from.....to.....

2. Services and Delivery

The Provider shall provide the following services:

- a) expose the sticker “Silver Suitcase” in a visible place.
- b1) provide a special discount of% off its regular price for the accommodation to every holder of the “Silver Suitcase” card and 1 accompanying person.
- b2) provide special free added-value services as follows:
- c) reimburse the costs or provide equivalent compensation if, by any reason, a customer has not received the special conditions defined in b1 and b2.
- d) carry out the counting and registration of the customers with “Silver Suitcase” cards and send the results to the Partner upon request.
- d) guarantee the service provision with professionalism, reasonable care and skill.

The Partner shall:

- a) promote the senior friendly rural tourism off-season products,
- b) assist to resolve disagreements if such might occur between the Provider and the “Silver Suitcase” card holder in an agreeable and friendly manner.

3. Terms and Termination

- a) This Agreement shall be effective on the date hereof and shall continue, unless terminated sooner.
- b) Either Party may terminate this Agreement upon notice in writing in case the other party fails to fulfill its obligations under this agreement.

SIGNATURES

PROVIDER:

PARTNER: