

INCF's team hosted a Study tour to the Bulgarian national parks for tourist service providers, local authorities and community representatives from the Kure Mountains NP region and experts from the Turkish Ministry of Environment and Forestry. The Turkish specialists spend only five days in Bulgaria, but were able to see a lot and learn about the country's ecotourism development achievements. The program covered customer care issues with a focus on the religious, cultural and personal characteristics of Muslim and Christian tourists which is the main theme of the Project.

The group met the two directors of Central Balkan National Park and Strandja Nature Park and some of their staff, tour operators, NGO representatives and local ecotourism entrepreneurs. They visited and learned about some of the best examples of local communities making a living alongside the parks in harmony with the principles of nature conservation.

They visited the tourist information center, managed by a local association and studied the successful family business of Tzutsova Guesthouse in the town of Kalofer. The group had a chance to view the infrastructure in the region, and was amazed by the attractive presentation of information about the plants and animals in the park and the diverse activities for children, that it provides. The specialized eco-trail and the camping site Byala Reka (White River), given out under concession to a local entrepreneur, were studied as valuable examples, which could be realized in the region of the Turkish Kure Mountains National Park.

The Turkish group took a walk in the wilderness of Strandja. All of the visitors were impressed by the tourist information center „Meeting in the Woods“ in Gramatikovo village and the many

different experiences offered to the tourists. They gained new knowledge from the entrepreneurs of the “Veleka Tour 2009” company that offers boat Trips on the River Veleka.

Other highlights during the trip around Strandja Nature Park included the traditional folklore and local delicacies enjoyed at Brodilovo village, a lunch at Kovach, a traditional dairy for the processing of buffalo milk. In addition, there was a stop at the the architectural reserve Brashlyan village, a visit to St. Dimitar church and the ethnographic museum and a colorful folklore singing and game playing session, alongside the lively babi (grannies) in Brashlyan village.







