

Quality System GOOD HOST

The quality system has been created within the cooperation project of Estonian Rural Tourism Organization and Dedoplistskaro Tourism Development Association in 2023. The cooperation project was funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia.



What is quality?

Quality is an interesting term and there are many definitions. They all say that it is always perceivable and mostly measurable, it focuses on the visitors and their expectations, needs and wishes.

The quality of the service is the difference between the visitor's expectations and their experience. The smaller the expectation is, the bigger is the perceived quality. Good quality ensures high customer satisfaction which means more visitors to the enterprise and bigger income. Successful enterprises know their visitors, ask for and listen to their feedback and use the results to improve the enterprise and design the services.

Visitors are different: some only like resting in the city, because the city is comfortable. Some only like resting in the countryside, because it is cozy. Some like to use services in the city as well as in the countryside.

Regardless of where the visitor is, either in the city or in the countryside, or what they do, they **expect** a pleasant experience, **wish** to enjoy something special and expect that their unspoken **needs** are also fulfilled!

- If the visitor's **needs, wishes and expectations are fulfilled**, they will be satisfied.
- If the visitor is **satisfied**, they have been granted a service of sufficient quality.
- If the visitor is **amazed**, they have been granted a service of excellent quality

When talking about the quality of the service, three important components are often meant: **technical quality**, which creates the framework for enjoying the experience (for example the cleanliness of the rooms, good condition of appliances), **functional quality** – how the quality of the service reaches the visitor (for example the behavior of employees, courtesy, hospitality, the appearance of personnel) – and **reputation**. Reputation is the sum of technical and functional quality with addition of tradition, public relations, advertising, pricing and other aspects (for example the reviews of other visitors, the overall image of the enterprise etc.).

Quality system GOOD HOST addresses all three components and creates a good premise for the enterprise to develop services which offer high customer satisfaction.

How to ensure quality?

Quality or customer satisfaction can be ensured by managing the enterprise and offering of services – managing quality – constantly, thoughtfully and with a focus on the visitor. It is a journey of improving the enterprise constantly and stopping means going back. The journey begins with assessing the enterprise's current situation and setting clear goals, determining the target group or expected visitors and creating an action plan.

The well-known Deming cycle summarizes the actions of a successful entrepreneur clearly: plan, do, check and act. And repeat. It means that the entrepreneur thinks, plans and then takes action. Then they check how it went, ask the client for their impressions and assessments (satisfaction) and make new plans according to the results.

For tourism entrepreneurs it is especially important to ensure the quality of the service – the visitor comes with an open mind to get a good experience and perceives quality at every moment during the whole service.

How to amaze the guest?

Answer: Find the right guest and try to surprise them! The entrepreneur can best fulfill the guest's wishes and plan surprises if they have walked through the visitor's journey in their enterprise in the visitor's shoes.

How to find and invite the right tourist?

Answer: Manage realistic expectations by giving correct and sufficient information about the enterprise's services.

How to surprise?

Answer: Offer more than promised in the advertisement. Offer an experience that represents Your enterprise – what the guest is actually interested in and what they expect!

The quality system Good Host was created so that the Georgian tourism enterprises would have the best chance to offer a competitive service with good quality.



Quality System GOOD HOST

The purpose of the quality system GOOD HOST is to raise the reputation of the services of agrotourism and rural tourism, to support the development of tourism enterprises and to positively highlight the emphasizing of heritage culture and local specifics in tourism enterprises.

Uniform quality system definitely means more safety and a greater quality guarantee for the guest as well as the host. The guest knows what to expect and the system helps the host to improve the quality of the enterprise and its services as well as its competitiveness so that it would be based on the wishes and needs of the guest.

Principles of the quality system:

- The entrepreneur applying for the quality label Good Host guarantees that their enterprise is in accordance with the legislation and the corresponding requirements stemming from the legislation are met in the enterprise.
- When creating the quality system, Georgian local tourism experts with the experts from the Estonian Rural Tourism Organization analyzed and took the quality systems valid in Estonia as a basis – the purpose was to keep the system simple, up to date and better responding to the expectations of the guests.
- The criteria of the quality system are in accordance with the legislation of Georgia.
- The quality assessors only look at those rooms, outside areas and services that are fully available for the visitor (plans, projects, drafts, incomplete objects etc. are not taken into account).
- In issuing the quality label, the biggest concern has been the matters that are important to the visitor.
- Rural tourism enterprises are very different and the purpose is not to measure all of them in the same way, but to acknowledge and support originality, rusticity and the cooperation of enterprises. Therefore to get the label, 70% of the mandatory quality requirements and 30% of the recommended quality requirements must be fulfilled.

The relative importance of measurable physical criteria is marginal in the system and the importance of the criteria stemming from the expectations of (foreign) visitors is the priority.

The quality system leaves more space for individuality. The special features of the tourist enterprise are taken into account – location, environment, target group etc. In attributing the quality label GOOD HOST, attention is paid to the surrounding environment, existence of information materials, spaciousness and decor of the rooms, availability of additional options, sanitary rooms, service readiness, highlighting the heritage culture and local specific characteristics, using the local cooperation networks etc.

To stand out in the tourism field, it is highly recommended to use and emphasize local cultural heritage as much as possible – in accommodation as well as in serving food.

It is also important to implement the principles regarding quality management in the enterprise and to have such support documents (for example a development plan, in a bigger enterprise an employee training plan, analysis of the visitor's route, visitor's feedback system, relevance of the home page etc.)

The quality system is meant for professional entrepreneurs who are registered and follow the local laws.

It is definitely important that in every enterprise there is a manager or a person responsible for services who is related to the enterprise on a daily basis (is in charge on site). They are the person who contacts the owner themselves to solve things, not guides the visitor to do so.

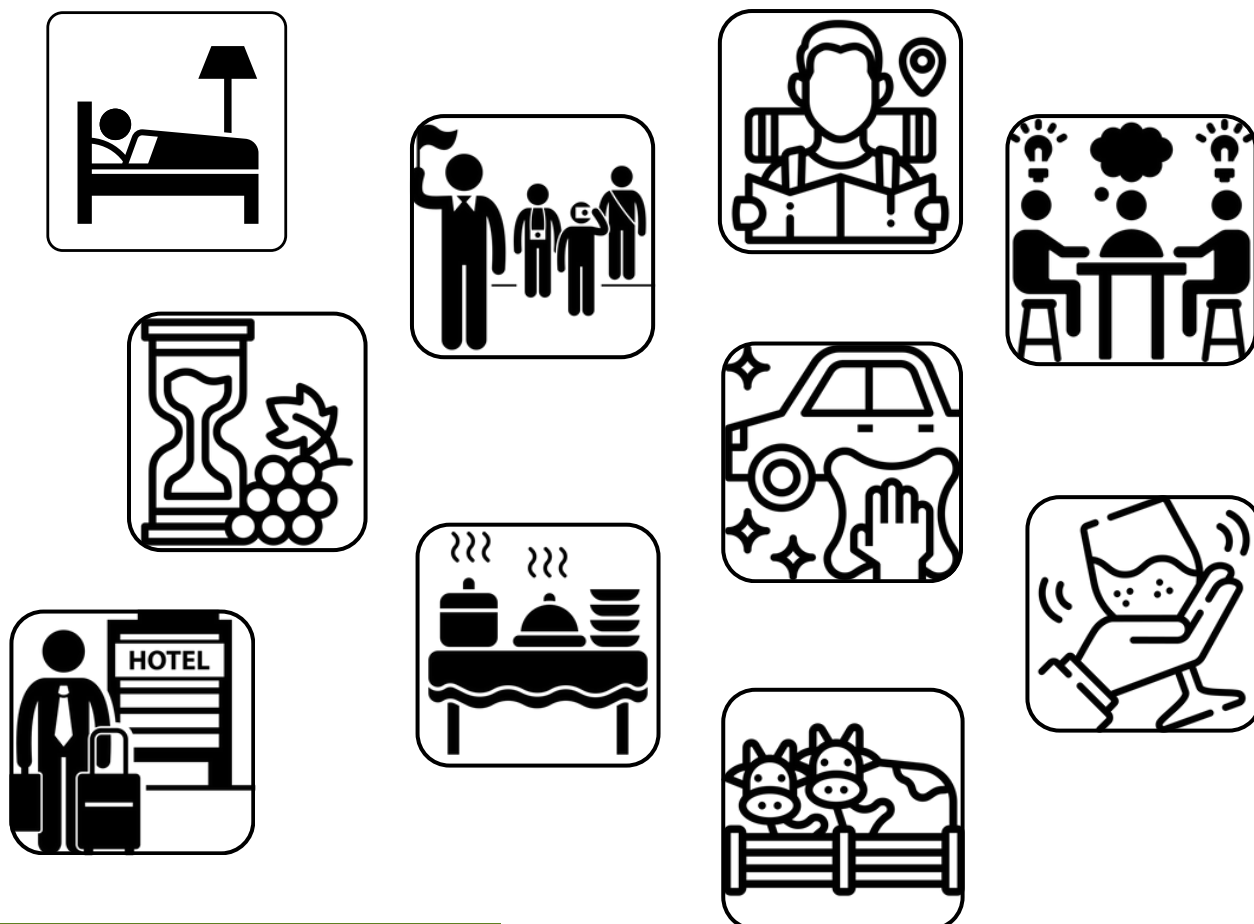


Photo: In 2023 the first quality assessors of the Dedoplistkaro region have received certificates.

The criteria of the quality system Good Host are created for 11 different types of tourism enterprises and the basis of this classification is the main activity of the enterprise.

1. Accommodation enterprise
2. Accommodation enterprise who also serves food
3. Agrotourism enterprise (animal husbandry or crop production farm, wine farm etc.)
4. Agrotourism enterprise who also serves food
5. Catering enterprise (restaurant, café etc.)
6. Catering enterprise who organizes workshops and degustations
7. Enterprise offering a cultural heritage service (handicraft, souvenirs, organizing events, organizing workshops etc.)
8. Enterprise offering a nature tourism and recreation service
9. Gear rental enterprise
10. Guide service provider
11. Enterprise offering transport service

NB! An enterprise can also apply for the label in several different categories.



EVALUATING THE ENTERPRISES

First the entrepreneur reads the quality criteria and assesses themselves – they mark, which requirements are met and which are not. It is important for the submission of the application for the quality label that in the entrepreneur's own assessment they have met at least 70% of the mandatory and 30% of the recommended requirements.

When the required percentage is fulfilled, the entrepreneur can submit an application for the GOOD HOST label in the same place.

If the required percentage is not fulfilled (either because of the mandatory or recommended requirements), the entrepreneur can submit an application to Dedoplistskaro Tourism Development Association for consultation.



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After the entrepreneur's application has come in, a trained quality assessor visits the enterprise. They check the compliance with the criteria, converse with the entrepreneur, advise them and guide them to take the next steps if necessary.

When visiting the enterprise, the assessor takes pictures of criteria-related positive details and details in need of improvement to support their opinions.

Checking the compliance with the quality criteria is based on the same table that the entrepreneur filled out during the self-assessment.

When the evaluation in the enterprise's category has been completed, the assessor writes a summary and presents their proposal to the commission whether to grant or not to grant the label to the enterprise.

If according to the assessor the entrepreneur has not met the necessary amount of the mandatory and recommended requirements, an action plan is compiled with the assessor to make improvements and a deadline to fulfill them is set. After that a re-evaluation is carried out.

ABOUT THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE QUALITY SYSTEM “Good Host”

The enterprises are evaluated for the quality system as a whole and the requirements are divided in two parts:

1) General requirements

- Information and marketing (PR)
- Territory, surrounding environment, parking options
- The quality of the services

2) Requirements stemming from the corresponding type of the tourism enterprise (for example: requirements for accommodation, catering service of a catering enterprise, degustation of products, workshops, nature tourism service, guide service, transport service etc.)

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

Under the general requirements, attention is first paid to the fact whether the enterprise is registered and follows the local laws.

It is definitely important that in every enterprise there is a manager or a person responsible for services who is in charge on site on a daily basis and who contacts the owner themselves to solve problems, not guides the visitor to do so.

The enterprise’s links to cultural heritage are also important. To stand out in the tourism field, it is highly recommended to use and emphasize local cultural heritage as much as possible – in accommodation as well as in serving food.



Photo: Personality, differentiation, use of local cultural heritage play an important role. On the left is picture of the Niko Pirotsman State Museum in the Dedoplistskaro area and on the right is Nurka Farm in Estonia.

Information and marketing (PR)

Requirements focus on the enterprise's information's availability on the internet, giving the visitors information and shaping expectations.

It means that the enterprise's information has to be available on the internet and visible in as many marketing and information channels as possible – especially in the more popular ones like Google Maps for example. It is reasonable to create a Google Business Profile for the enterprise and keep it up to date, which creates the first impression to the visitor – GBP is especially important if the target group is foreign visitors.

The enterprise also has to be visible in social media or at least on tourism portals (local, regional, national portal).

It is recommended that the enterprise has a webpage, where it can introduce their services and contacts more comprehensively in different languages. If the enterprise is aimed to foreign visitors, the information on the webpage has to be available in at least one foreign language. Neither of these actions need big expenses, just contributing time.

It is important to emphasize that the enterprise has to regularly check and update their information on those channels. For example: if the information about the prices or contacts is wrong, then the visitor will be disappointed.

Note:

If the visitor gets an answer to their question after 3 days, they usually have found a new place by that time and the entrepreneur loses a potential visitor.

Note:

An FB account, where the last post is from half a year ago, is not very trustworthy. If the entrepreneur feels they do not have enough time to update their social media accounts, it is better not to have them.

Inquiries have to be answered quickly. It is commonly presumed that the entrepreneur answers within 24 hours.

It is recommended that the enterprise has a photobank they can use and update for marketing.

Payment options (cash or card) have to be brought out in the enterprise's information channels so that the visitor can take them into consideration.

Is cooperative marketing useful? Definitely, because it increases visibility and trust, especially with foreign visitors. The keyword here is cross-marketing.

Territory, surrounding environment, parking options

Meeting the requirements gives the opportunity to create a pleasant, safe and well designed environment for providing a service for the visitor that meets their expectations.

It is recommended for the entrepreneur to walk through the enterprise's territory and rooms from time to time (in the beginning of or during the season) and see that only the things that are necessary for tending to the customers are visible and the personal things of the hosts are not left in the cupboards. There should not be things in the visitor's zone that are not meant for tending to them. Personal things should be kept in separate rooms that are not accessible to the visitors.



Note:

One possibility is to offer family and/or friends test visits. It means that they come and spend 24 hours with You and later give You feedback about what they liked and what disturbed them. It often happens that the entrepreneur does not notice small mistakes in their everyday environment.

The enterprise has to think through their accessibility. The visitor has to have a chance to come even if they do not have their own transport. If public transportation does not reach You, then it is practical to provide transport service from point A to point B for an extra fee. This already increases the visitor's satisfaction.

It is important to install signs marking the parking area. If the visitor already sees the enterprise's name and/or logo from far away, they know that they have reached the right place – definitely think about that as an entrepreneur.

For European and North American visitors cleanliness is an elementary requirement. The visitor expects that the territory and the rooms are clean. It is important to install trash cans (in the rooms as well as the outside area). There can be no concessions in cleanliness – there can be no signs of the last visitors and it has to be visible that the rooms are recently cleaned (especially the sanitary rooms).



Note:

Take enough time to clean between the visitors, because lack of time as an excuse is no argument for the next visitor!

Because of the warm climate it is practical to create possibilities to spend time in fresh air – terraces, outside areas, gardens, balconies etc. It is important that the recreation area also has elementary furniture in good shape so that visitors can also sit in the shadows.

Foreign visitors usually appreciate when local design elements are used in the decor and environmentally friendly materials are used inside and outside the house. It offers a better experience.

It is important that the furniture the visitors can use is clean and intact. It has to be regularly (during cleaning, for example) checked that the furniture is functioning and all utensils meant for the visitors are working (including the TV, the TV remote, water kettle etc.).

If it is known that the water supply is problematic from time to time, then there should be alternative solutions (canisters, water bottles etc.) and it is important that the visitors are notified about it. The visitors cannot be left without drinking and/or washing water. In case of power outages, the entrepreneur should have alternative solutions – generator, candles etc. The visitor cannot be left in the dark and they have to be informed of the possible alternatives.

Although nowadays almost every tourist has their own phone, there should be a phone on site that the visitor can use in case of emergencies (for example a landline) or they should be able to use the host's phone for an extra fee, if needed.

Where it is technically possible, there should be Wi-Fi installed. In that case the Wi-Fi passwords have to be in a visible place.

Why is it good to have a logo for the enterprise? Logo provides free marketing and expresses Your enterprise's identity. If You have a logo, it should be visible to the visitors. If the enterprise is part of a network, then it is also important to present the network's logo or certificate.

It is also nice to have uniform clothing for the employees (T-shirt, apron etc.) and it is even better if it shows the enterprise's identity.

The quality of the service

Requirements focus on creating the best visiting experience for the visitor and communicating with the visitor and they are based on the thought out visitor's route.

It is important that the enterprise has thought out and formulated the principles of hospitality for themselves.

Hospitality shows the attitude towards the visitor, respect and friendliness. Hospitality helps to ensure the satisfaction, well-being and memorable experience of the visitor. Hospitality is what gives the visitor motivation to come again and creates the emotion to recommend the service to their friends and acquaintances.

Hospitality also means appreciating yourself (for example I will set the table for myself also, keep my house and its surroundings clean even if there are no visitors coming...).

Hospitality does not mean that the guest should feel at home! When being away from home, they want a chance to experience something new and different, they want to be free of everyday routine and duties. Therefore when designing the hospitality, it has to be well thought out, how to make the guest not feel at home, but to feel comfortable, safe and special.

It should be understood that the (potential) visitor feels the hospitality (or the lack of it) in everything and at every step that is related to the place – in publications, emails, phone communication, on the way, arriving there, during the stay, walking in the city, visiting a shop, meeting people in the street, leaving and even after that.



Note:

Think about yourself, whether You are hospitable by nature or if You are only hospitable in Your actions because certain rules command it?



The way the tending personnel look is crucial. The employee has to differ from the visitor so that the visitor knows who to turn to. Employees who are in contact with making and serving food should wear an apron – it is necessary for correct appearances as well as hygiene.

Note:

The visitors usually take many pictures and later show them to their friends and acquaintances and share on social media. If the enterprise's owner's or the tending personnel's clothing differs from the visitors' on the pictures is an added bonus and important for marketing.



Photo: The company's employees are easily recognizable in a group photo with guests. Photo taken at Nino Meris Wine Cellar.

It is important to design the provided tourism service. For that it is recommended from time to time for the owner of the enterprise as well as for the employees to take part in some relevant training, because the sector is evolving and trends change and it is always good to hear about different experiences.

Note:

When choosing the training(s), we recommend thinking about which training you need as the owner of the enterprise or for your employees to be competitive, sustainable and able to reach your goals.

It is important to inform the visitors if they can drink the tap water and if they cannot, they have to be provided with bottled water.

In conclusion it is important to check in the service providing chain that everything in the enterprise is being done as sustainably as possible and that environmentally friendly products are being used. That way the same values are being promoted to the visitors.

REQUIREMENTS STEMMING FROM THE CORRESPONDING TYPE OF THE TOURISM ENTERPRISE

If the enterprise serves **food**, it is important that the produce is as local as possible and the recipes are based on the local traditions as much as possible.

It shows respect towards the visitor if...

- the food is served beautifully and the used textiles are clean;
- the hosts are dressed appropriately;
- the rooms used for providing the service are clean and recommendably easy to access (especially for visitors with special needs).

If You expect foreign visitors in Your enterprise, it is important that the menu is also available in the corresponding language (for example English and/or Russian). It is recommended to also think about visitors with special needs (food intolerance) and children (for example smaller portions) and offer food meant for them in the menu.

The visitors will definitely appreciate a chance to buy small food souvenirs to go.

A good story gives good food the final touch. The visitors always wait with great interest for the introduction of the food and encouraging instructions, how to eat it according to traditions.

Note:

Dietary preferences are also very different among people who do not have allergies or medical contraindications to different products, the number of people with special diets is much bigger than expected and the trend is increasing. Be ready to offer and customize a menu for special requests: lactose and gluten intolerance, vegetarian food, raw food, different allergies etc. In particular, be flexible to make changes in the fixed menu (replacing the produce: for example instead of potatoes more raw salad, replacing meat with vegetarian food, leaving out produce containing milk etc).

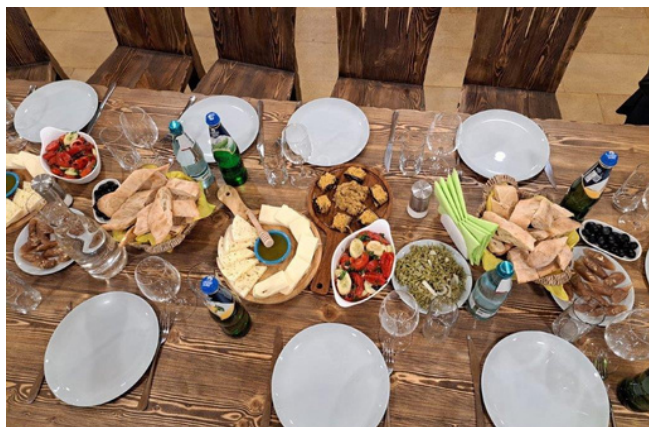


Photo: Diversity, tasteful table setting are important keywords in the food offering. Photos are taken at Nasrashvili Family Winery and at Nino Meris Wine Cellar.

It is important for an **accommodation enterprise** to provide the visitor with attentive and professional personnel. If You expect foreign visitors, the host has to speak at least one foreign language (the language depends on the target group).

For the visitor to feel comfortable, the rooms need to be clean, as spacious as possible and have enough furniture. A chance to wash themselves and use the toilet (as well as primary hygiene products like soap and toilet paper) have to be provided.

As bonus services You can offer breakfast, sports gear, board games and other possibilities to spend free time. Enterprises meant for families can also have activities for children or a small play corner.

It is most important for **nature tourism service providers** to offer a service that is distinctive and interesting for the guest, but at the same time as sustainable as possible.

To ensure safety, in nature tourism the size of active vacation groups is small, 10–15 people per instructor / tour guide, and it is recommended to use non-motorized transport when providing the service (excluding transport to the site). It is important that the enterprise has conducted a risk analysis of the service and figured out optimal solutions for possible risk situations.

While staying in nature, the group has to be able to communicate with each other.

When making a campfire, local regulations have to be followed. It is important that the employees are trained and know how to react in case of an emergency.

When serving food, the focus should be on local products that are introduced also in foreign languages (if needed) and served according to hygiene regulations. If possible, disposable dishes should be avoided.

Note:

Experiences that have a small ecological footprint are the ones that do not affect the environment or local biological diversity and protect habitats, decrease pollution and practice sustainable waste and water management.



Photo: Think carefully in advance about the organization of meals during activities in the nature - the key word is green thinking. In the photo, the guide training lunch break in the Vashlovani National Park.

When providing a **cultural heritage service** (handicraft workshops, making souvenirs etc.), it is central to focus on the local cultural heritage. The guest has a chance to make something with their own hands, while the connections of the product or service to local history and traditions are being introduced to them.

When selling souvenirs, it is important to think about the design of the packaging. In addition to the visual, it is important to add the producer's information to the package which can help the guest to share their impressions with their friends and acquaintances and look for additional information on the internet.



Photo: Engage the visitor, surprise her/him with some exciting activities.
Photos are taken at Nino Meris Wine Cellar.

Agrotourism services are based on local traditions and rural lifestyle. The purpose is to offer the visitor genuine rural life experiences (including degustating the food produced on site). It is important that the hosts can tell guests stories about the area and introduce their farm and its services. If possible, the visitors are included in the practical activities. If food or degustation is offered, the emphasis has to be on the farm's products or more widely on local products. The rooms and the inventory needed for the service have to be clean.

For a **guide service provider** it is important that their guide is an excellent communicator, a good time manager and has good group leading skills. They have to have wide knowledge of the area's history and culture and good map-reading and orientation skills. It is a bonus if the guide can tell good stories.

When meeting a group, the guide has to be well prepared – they have to know the group's needs, composition, transport needs and other organizational matters.

The guide service provider has to have conducted a risk analysis of their service and thought out an action plan that helps them to manage also in unexpected circumstances (for example bad weather, unexpected accident, visitor health issues etc.).

If possible, the guide includes local service providers and local people to offer the visitors as authentic and exciting an experience as possible.



Photo: A knowledgeable guide is essential for hikers and nature lovers.
On the photo, nature enthusiasts with a guide in the Vashlovani National Park.

When providing a **transportation service** it is important that it is done with a clean vehicle that is in good technical condition. The driver's license has to be valid and the driving has to be as safe as possible. It is important that the driver knows the local road network and local road conditions. When providing the service to foreign visitors, the ability to speak at least one foreign language (according to the target group) on a basic level is required.

If the driver is providing the service to another tourism enterprise, he has previously gathered enough information about the needs of the passengers (including the amount of luggage), route, timetable and other organizational matters.

An enterprise **renting out gear for free time activities** has to have worked out clear and unambiguous manuals for the gear that are available for the visitors. The gear has to be clean, in good shape and assembled according to the requirements.

IN CONCLUSION

The purpose of the handbook is not to discuss in depth all the criteria points of the quality system GOOD HOST, but to bring out the most important observations and situations where misunderstandings are more common.

Many of the criteria may seem elementary at first, but can be left without attention in a quick pace of life.

At the same time, quality is of utmost importance in every stage of providing a tourism product, because it has a big impact on the visitor's experience and their next choices. Indicators of quality are focusing on people, physical and virtual accessibility, different quality labels that tourism enterprises can apply for and many other aspects. We definitely recommend asking for feedback from Your visitors. Often people do not voluntarily come to talk about shortcomings, but this information is priceless and can be used to improve Your services. Keep in touch with Your visitors and let them know about Your improvements, events, and future plans – this can also bring the visitor back to Your enterprise.

Therefore we advise the entrepreneur to read the criteria of the quality system Good Host, assess themselves on the corresponding platform and if necessary, consult and ask for advice.

It is not possible to update everything at once. Every development or improvement takes time, but by doing it step-by-step You always reach Your goal!



Photo: Important and forward-looking things happen in cooperation!

Photo from the closing event (September 2023) of the two-year cooperation project, where, among other things, the first GOOD HOST labels were handed out.

Cooperation partners:

Estonian Rural Tourism Organisation



Dedoplistskaro Tourism Association



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Thanks to all!