



### **Who are we and why the Agrotourism Unions and SEAGE were created**

We are owners of Rural Tourism and Agrotourism small scale Enterprises in Greece, members of the Greek Federation of Agrotourism Unions. We try to develop infrastructure, work with gentle interventions in the environment and offer the following services: hospitality, catering, sight-seeing, touring, revival of the traditional way of life, acquaintance with traditional crafts, local gastronomy, methods of agricultural production and cultivation as well as traditional crafts that have vanished. We focus on the selling of mainly local agricultural products and artifacts, enabling the visitor to learn about the countryside, the rural area, agricultural pursuits, the cultural life, history, the authentic characteristics of the region, the local products, the traditional cuisine, and the everyday way of life of the rural people.

Our motivation was not to summarize our sizes. Our motivation was to unite our business value (which is very large, since all enterprises are highly successful and acclaimed, and several of them have received excellent international reviews and awards) and to create another model of tourism. Our experience and our perspective in tourism, rang the alarm of ecological destruction and cultural leveling, caused by **mass tourism**. We are convinced that this model of tourism is neither development nor sustainable. Squandering the environment, it has an expiration date for the traveler, since once is enough. The traveler has no reason to repeat it, since "canned" services do not offer new experiences, knowledge, stimulation, human contact with other peoples. He can find the same "can" anywhere without difference.

So we were united in order to create a timeless tourism model based on the only timeless value of people: **CULTURE**.

We believe that if we prescribe a tourist product that respects the values that govern our culture, as :

A. **Respect for human-traveler** and his individuality,

B. **Respect for the environment**, history and culture

D. **Filoxenia** Hospitality" is the official translation of filoxenia, but it doesn't adequately describe it. Filoxenia literally means "love of strangers," is a generosity of spirit, a joyful kind of the-best-of-what's-mine-is-yours attitude in which Greeks take great pride as a defining attribute. Filoxenia means that you will never leave a Greek home without feeling that you had the place of honor while you were there. The best the family has to offer is the rule

C. Maintaining **social cohesion**, through solidarity and synergy, then and only then tourism will really force for development in our country.

But by "development" we don't just mean economic development or growth in an endless way. This kind of development leads us to a dead end. Nature puts the limits otherwise it takes a revenge for (climate change) We must put limits to development. We seek for social and cultural development also, with the concept of self-improvement and spiritual development, which also can occur through human relationship between us and visitors, and through the exchange of achievements of different cultures.

True prosperity is resulting from the combination of both forms of development. This is the value of tourism for us.

### **How does it ensure that tourism services supplied through an agrotourism enterprise, serve those values?**

For this purpose we work at two levels. At a high level and for the last 10 months, we work on finalizing and lawmaking the formal framework for rural tourism in Greece, which needs a lot of study and internal consultation among Union members. In the current political climate, we are optimistic that we are very close to completion and the current Greek government strongly encourages this model of tourism development.

At a lower level and from the start of the Union's creation we configure the criteria that a company should satisfy in order to be evaluated as an agrotourism or rural tourism member and these criteria are inextricably connected with the cultural values that we want to support. This work has been the basis for finalizing the institutional framework mentioned. Though it constitutes a transitional phase, it is very important because it triggers our businesses, it encourages new ones to follow this model and certainly strengthens our network. This phase is framed by assessment and valuation procedures, signing acceptance conditions agreement, even expelling procedures if necessary and ensures the reliability and professionalism of the process.

### **What are the evaluation criteria for Rural Tourism-Agrotourism and why you have chosen them?**

The criteria have been selected adopted, as I said before, in order to ensure compliance with the ethics in tourism and the morality imposed by the culture and history of Greece. Each criterion hides behind one or more ethical culture values:

1. it should be a small sized enterprise, because only through a small sized one the traveler can receive respect of his uniqueness and diversity of, and feel true hospitality
2. The owner or members of his family should work in business in order to have personal contact with visitors.
3. The business facilities should be architecturally harmonized with traditional architecture and this combined with their small size, ensures that it will coexist with the natural environment and will not intrude violently into it. Also any alternative tourism activities should highlight and protect the natural beauty of our land and not to alter it.
4. The enterprise should apply energy-saving standards and environmental protection, serving the value of ecological awareness and consciousness that natural resources belong to future generations.
5. Must be family businesses and cooperates as network members (accommodation catering, production of traditional products, implementation of cultural events, etc.), and this strengthens the synergy, social cohesion, teamwork, solidarity and reinforces the social web.
6. Should promote through their services the local diet, tradition and folklore and so interact and support the agriculture sector (also very important for the development of our country), but still offer the traveler high level of quality and knowledge, respecting the traveller's need to live his holidays as a personal life experience.

### **What is the type of traveler you refer and how to reach him?**

First I need to emphasize that our attitude does not see our visitors only as clients and ourselves as entrepreneurs who use any means as a tool for economic benefits. Instead of that we see them as **guests**, and our aim is that our relationship will be designed in the name of humanity and will highlights its best option: culture. By highlighting and promotion of best features and achievements of our and their tradition, we finally become better people.

According to the approaching and attraction of the traveler, we place great emphasis on outward-looking of the Union. We are members of Eurogites, we are present with any way on the web, we often organize nationwide conferences and we participate in international tourism fairs. We try to promote the model of Rural Agro-Tourism of Greece, in the best possible way. The best promotion is made by the travelers themselves who have lived an agrotourism experience and have every reason to advertise it by returning to their country.

We do not believe that there is a target group for us. This model of tourism is addressed to all countries of origin, all ages, and a large range of financial flexibility. As I said before it respects diversity, so there is a proposal for the one who appreciates gastronomy, the one who loves sports and activities in natural surroundings, the one who needs to improve his health through proper nutrition, relaxation and wellness, those who are interested history, for the photographer, the artist, the child, the scientist.... I cannot think of any case that cannot be satisfied.

The important thing is (compared again with the model of mass tourism) that services are based on authenticity. We are talking about real Cretan diet and not it's imitation, about wellness in a natural environment and not its simulation (SPA), about real contact with the local Greek culture and tradition and not fake touristic folklore happenings, about true human contact with host and not with an

impersonal reception assistant. We are talking about real entertainment and not the pretended amateur's laughing.

So if I have to define a target group I just say: **all people who seek authenticity in their lives**. But even for those that don't seek authenticity maybe we should show it to them. Our philosophy is that we address the **traveller** and not the tourist, or better said **we aim to transform the tourist to a traveller**.

We've learned that tourism is meant to provide good services for people in order to enjoy their staying to a place. We've learned that tourism involves sightseeing, attractions, monuments, a relaxed atmosphere and smiling people. These are all great and the people deal with tourism should be aware for all these.

But for us tourism is also many other things..is a chance to build a bridge between two countries, an opportunity to initiate the foreigner to the unknown and the hidden magic that exists in the daily rituals of each culture, is to provide the chance to live an experience that will form their perspective about the place they are visiting, it is the possibility to share stories, to articulate together the locals and the foreigners a common narrative and in that way reinforce the collective identity.