

# SUCCESS STORY

## CULTURAL FESTIVALS ATTRACT TOURISTS TO RURAL AREAS

**Festivals act as a magnet for domestic and international visitors, showcasing rural regions and cultural traditions and boosting local hospitality and craft businesses.**

*The small Moldovan village of Holercani, situated an hour from the capital on the banks of the Nistru river, does not normally see a large number of tourists. But for the past six years, it has been home to the IA MANIA festival, welcoming record numbers of visitors each June – reaching 10,000 in 2017 and 2018.*



Photo credit: Maxim Ciomas  
Photo caption: Nata Albot, organizer of the IA MANIA Festival, giving an interview for the national tv station MI

Tourism represents less than 1% of Moldova's GDP, but it is a vital engine of economic growth, providing jobs and alternatives to migration in rural areas. Festivals concentrate local food, music, artisans and producers in one place for a limited period of time, creating a strong enough attraction to draw domestic tourists out of urban areas, and providing clear dates for international tourists to plan their trips around.

### **Festival that celebrates traditions hits record of visitors**

IA MANIA is a unique festival celebrating the traditional Romanian embroidered blouse, or 'ia'. The blouse has reached global popularity in recent years following appropriation by international fashion designers from Yves St Laurent to Jean Paul Gaultier. Nata Albot, a former journalist and opinion leader, came up with the idea for a festival in 2013 following international efforts to remind fashion consumers of the blouse's folk origins.

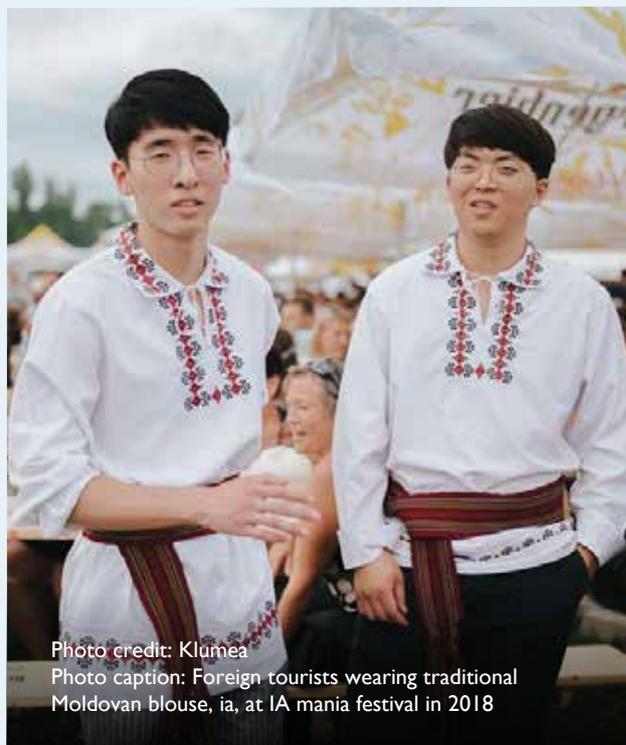


Photo credit: Klumea  
Photo caption: Foreign tourists wearing traditional Moldovan blouse, ia, at IA mania festival in 2018

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*“As a result of the international campaign “La blouse romaine” which aimed to transform the traditional Romanian blouse into a country brand, we thought of bringing the idea to Moldova and turning it into a festival where artisans ... could meet to celebrate authentic traditions”.*

**Nata Albot,**  
la Mania organizer

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The 2018 edition of the festival capitalized on the rapidly growing segment of ‘soft adventure’ tourism, providing the 10,000 visitors to Holercani with opportunities to taste local dishes, join in with dance performances, buy products from local artisans, and immerse themselves in the culture of the la.

IA Mania Festival is part of the Tree of Life agenda - a centralized calendar of cultural events, developed by MCP in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, the National Office of Vine and Wine, and the inbound tourism association ANTRIM. In 2018, MCP doubled the number of featured cultural events to 28, including 17 outside the capital Chisinau.

The 2018 Tree of Life calendar is promoted locally through the Tourist Information Center, the moldova.travel website and Moldovan press, and internationally through social media channels, Moldovan tour-operators, international exhibitions, press-trips etc., allowing visitors to plan ahead, and orient their trips around different festivals showcasing Moldovan wine, traditions, customs and important tourist attractions.

### **From least visited destinations to top recommended by international publications**

MCP is funded by USAID and Sweden and invests in the development of Moldova’s tourism industry. Complex MCP interventions focus on increasing the number of visitors to sites outside the capital, to act as an engine of economic growth and job creation. As a result of MCP activity, Moldova is now placed as one of Europe’s ‘top-10 must-visit destinations’ in global publications such as Trip.com and Lonely Planet, only four years after being declared Europe’s ‘least visited destination’. The number of foreign visitors is also beginning to increase, with 17 percent average growth during 2016-2017, reaching up to 3.2 million visitors and 121,000 tourists.



Photo credit: Klumea  
Photo caption: Crowd of visitors at the 2018 edition of la Mania