

THE IMPACT OF THE TOURISM BEHAVIOR ON THE OFFER OF TOURISM AGENCIES IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

In spite of the existing natural and anthropic riches, the Romanians have lately preferred to spend their holidays in foreign countries, despite the rather timid efforts of the state to promote domestic tourism.

The foreign holiday destinations are among the top of the Romanians' preferences, especially due to the quality / price ratio, but also to the quality offered by hoteliers as well as to the numerous tourist attractions.

We can also say that Romanians have become more demanding in choosing tourist packages and that they prefer to invest in their comfort by allocating more and more money for holidays, especially for those abroad.

Below, shall be presented the results of a research carried out on the occasion of the Tourism Fair in Romania, November 2015, February and November 2016 editions, whose main purpose was to study the trends in Romania's tourism offer.

Keywords

Tourist offer, holiday destinations, tourist preferences, tourist market

JEL Classification

L80, L83, D20, M19

Introduction

Tourism can be defined as a set of activities through which people spend their free time traveling to certain destinations outside their residence and the workplace.

Nedelea (2015) points out that tourism, although considered to be one of the most profitable industries, being a dynamic economic sector, has an oscillating evolution.

Tourism occupies about 40% of the activities carried out by individuals in their spare time, being the main activity of people on holidays or vacations, because this is of particular importance, especially as the main reason for travel is physical and psychic health of tourists (Banu, 2015).

Receiving tourist countries aim to provide the most attractive offers that will make the tourist flow as high as possible.

The growing competition between products and tourist destinations, as well as the increasingly complex requirements of all categories of tourists, lead tourist destinations to be strategically managed brands (Popescu, 2012).

Rotariu (2008) defines the branding of a tourist destination as the totality of the perceptions, thoughts and feelings that a client has regarding one place.

As far as tourist motivation is concerned, it is often personal and subjective as it is determined by psychological and exogenous impulses that can be positive and which are manifested by an attraction towards a certain destination or tourist objective, or negative and are manifested by reservation towards certain forms of tourism (Teodorescu, 2009).

According to the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism, in Romania the project for the definition and implementation of the national tourism brand started in 2007, and since 2010, Romania has begun to promote itself as a tourist destination under the motto "Explore the Carpathian Garden". The main purpose of the campaigns was to develop a favorable image of the country as a tourist destination, both domestically and abroad (Ministry of Regional Development, Public Administration and European Funds, 2012).

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1 Literature review

The tourist offer can be defined as the set of attractions that can motivate tourists to visit them, without limiting to the elements of the natural and anthropic potential, being necessary to add the means of production, namely the labor force and the material base (Minciu, 2004).

An important factor in the evolution of the tourist offer is the technical progress in the field of transport means and tourism infrastructure, which has consequences on the degree of mobility of the population, but also on phenomena such as the performance of hotel facilities, the quality of services rendered, urbanization, industrialization (Turcu and Weisz, 2008).

Companies working in the tourism industry must, therefore, adapt to environmental changes to meet the pressure of competitors, and innovation plays a particularly important role in this respect (Batura, 2014).

The current economic context requires an increase in tourism companies to find new ways of maintaining, or even increasing, the degree of economic efficiency.

The maturing of the market has led to the emergence of mutations in the structure of demand, and tourists have begun to demand more sophisticated products, becoming implicitly more demanding in terms of the quality of services providers are offering (Meneses, 2011).

According IRES (2014), it seems that Romanians are becoming more attentive to their own comfort when they choose an offer, preferring more and more hotels with 3 or 4 stars.

Therefore, the priority of economic agents working in the tourism industry is to ensure the quality of services in order to attract tourists, the main directions of action being represented by: diversification, renewal, innovation, customer orientation (Cristea, 2009).

Romania's tourism potential is distinguished by two components: the natural component, represented by the relief landscape, the favorable weather conditions, the beauty of landscapes, the abundance of cleaning factors, etc. and the anthropic one, represented by ethnography and folklore elements, museums, vestiges, etc.

The tourist offer in Romania encompasses a multitude of forms of tourism that can be practiced: vacation, itinerant, professional, sports, hunting, fishing (INS, 2016).

Despite these issues, Romanians increasingly prefer to go on holiday outside Romania. The motivations that make them choose a particular holiday destination are numerous and include both subjective and objective elements such as: visiting some new places, qualitative services, advantageous prices, proximity to the city of residence, etc.

The Romanian tourist offer was developed especially during the 1970s and implied an active promotion of seaside tourism, spa resorts, cultural circuits and monasteries in Moldova and Bucovina.

Over time, tourism offers have not evolved, becoming uncompetitive on the international market, and tourism's contribution to GDP, is at the moment still modest in spite of the valuable tourist potential (Coroş and Negruşa, 2014).

A tourism market study, developed in 2008 by the Alba County Council, indicates that the even more rigorous segmentation of tourism demand in Romania has led to the emergence of more diversified and more complex tourism products that focus on tourist attractions such as the Danube Delta, Balneo-climatic and mountain resorts.

Thematic circuits were developed, such as cultural tourism circuits, or active tourism (caving, hiking), but tourism products were also created based on new concepts in Romania, such as equine tourism, developed especially in the Transylvanian area.

The North-East Regional Development Agency of Romania points out that spa tourism is also beginning to experience a great development, being associated today with the concept of wellness, which has as its main purpose the prevention, not the cure, and which is in a close connection with changing lifestyle.

Adventure tourism can grow in the coming period, especially due to corporate clients who can perform during team-buildings activities such as diving, rafting, canyoning, ballooning, paragliding. The success of this form of tourism may be due to its playful and exploratory character.

Globally, in recent years, there has been a growing demand from customers to engage in less common forms of tourism such as gloomy tourism, red tourism, suburban tourism, gastronomic, museum, luxury, thanatourism, rural tourism, etc. (Oltean, 2015).

Tourist demand for visiting the countryside also grows regularly for villages with rich heritage and traditions, which leads to the maintenance of local trade and services. That is why village life has to adapt to tourism activities, without a destabilization of local daily life (Bran, 1997).

In Romania, although rural tourism is currently expanding, the accurate assessment of the tourist traffic in this industry is rather difficult (Niță and Niță, 2008).

Rural tourism influences the social, cultural and environmental aspects, with specialists in the field indicating that changes may occur in the locals' value scale, either in the lifestyle or in the community structure (Botezat, 2009).

Gourmet tourism is a tourist experience where food and beverages that reflect local cuisine, culinary culture, or culinary techniques are learned and consumed (Oltean, 2015).

In a phase of strong development, culinary tourism is particularly appreciated in the following tourist destinations: Fez (Morocco), Havana (Cuba), Wellington (New Zealand), Algarve (Portugal), Ljubljana, Slovenia (Food Story Magazine).

The first place was won by Peru in 2015, according to the World Travel Awards.

Luxury tourism includes an extensive market, with a wide range of offers, including the most romantic cities in the world, the most expensive hotels, menus and luxury cruises, representing the top honeymoon destinations.

This paper presents the evolution of the tourist offer in Romania in an attempt to capture the main changes that have taken place in its structure due to the increase of the Romanians' requirements.

The paper aims at contributing to an overview of the current characteristics of Romanian tourism and, more specifically, to the changes that have taken place in the structure of the tourist offer.

The results of this study are indicative and can be used as a support to determine some means of increasing domestic tourism.

2 Research Methodology

In order to carry out this study, a quantitative exploratory research was made in order to obtain opinions of some respondents, meaning, tourism agencies, regarding the evolution of their own offer and tourism behavior.

These were distributed to the representatives of the tourism companies participating in the National Tourism Fair editions in November 2015, February and November 2016.

Data collection was carried out with the help of a group of students from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies.

The number of respondents was different for each edition and a total of 190 valid questionnaires were collected, the results thus having a tentative character. Incomplete, duplicate questionnaires were canceled or the name of the agency was not mentioned.

In order to achieve the objectives pursued in this study, questionnaires were addressed to the following types of tourism companies:

- Tour operator travel agencies;
- Retail tourism agencies;
- Mix Agencies: (European Consumer Center, Romania, 2014).

The research was designed to take into account two directions: one on tourism behavior and one on the characteristics of travel agency offers.

The purpose of the research was to determine the preferences of people using the services of travel agencies and how they influence the work of agencies.

The objectives of the study were:

- Studying the profile of Romanian tourists;
- Studying the evolution of tourism companies' offers;
- Identifying destinations preferred by tourists;
- Finding the motivations that lead tourists to choose a particular holiday destination depending on the purchased tourist packages;

- Evaluation of Romania as a tourist destination.

3 Results and discussions

After analyzing the answers given by respondents, the main characteristics of the collectivity studied were determined:

- 13% of the respondents are retail companies, 69% tour operators and 18% are mixed companies;
- 39% of respondents work in a small agency (1-10 employees), 30% in medium-sized agencies (10-25 employees) and 31% in large-sized agencies (over 35 employees).

According to the Ministry of Tourism, there are currently 2610 accredited travel agencies, and comparing this number with the total number of respondents, 190, we can see that the sample is not representative. In order to be representative, 335 questionnaires would have been required for a 95% confidence level.

Regarding the functions of the respondents, they were heterogeneous, 23% travel agents, 35% management functions, 42% other functions (guide, hostess, receptionist, promoter, economist, etc.).

The localities of these companies also vary, in order, the most frequent being: Bucharest, Braşov, Cluj and Constanţa.

The table below summarizes the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

Table 1. The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Criterion	Percent
Type of Agency	Retail: 13%
	Tour Operators: 69%
	Mix: 18%
Category	Small agency (1-10 employees): 39%
	Medium-sized agency (10-25 employees): 30%
	Large agency (over 25 employees): 31%
Location	Bucharest 70%, Braşov 12%, Cluj, 8%, Other 10%
Function	Manager 35%, Travel Agent 23%, 42% other functions

Source: Author

The tourists' motivations are diverse: while some tourists are looking to relax on vacation, others prefer adventure. Some tourists prefer to discover new places or are interested in cultural events. Also, health recovery is among the most frequently encountered tourist motivations.

According to respondent travel agencies, a large number of tourists who use their services prefer to relax and go to spa treatments (25%) as holidays and holidays. The next places in their preferences is visiting the seaside (21%) and visiting cultural attractions (16%). Only 6% of the respondents stated that during the three editions of the Tourism Fair tourists prefer to go shopping or do sports activities, but visiting the rural areas is the last place in their preferences (2,4%).

There is a variety of accommodation units, from which tourists can choose, respectively: hotel, motel, bed and breakfast, host, cottage, bungalow, etc. Therefore, in order to simplify the analysis of responses, in the questionnaire the variants of response were restricted to six categories, the respondents being able to indicate themselves what other accommodation units they prefer.

Hotels are at the top of preferences (60%), followed by hostels (26%) and motels (4,6%).

As the preferred means of transport on holiday, the plane is the main choice for tourists, with 49% the personal car (25%) and the coach (22%). The ship is the least used means of transport (1,8%).

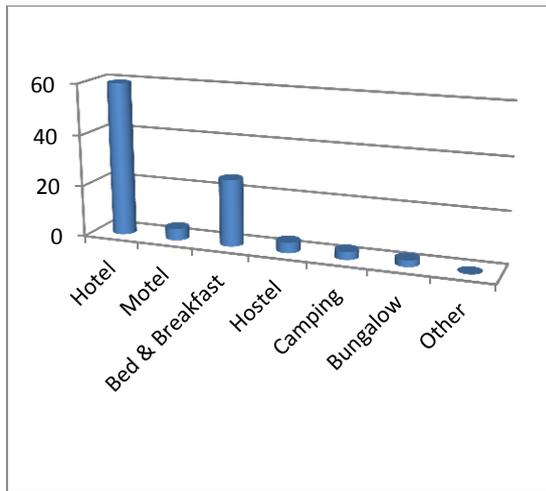


Figure no. 1: Preferred accommodation units for tourists
 Source: Author

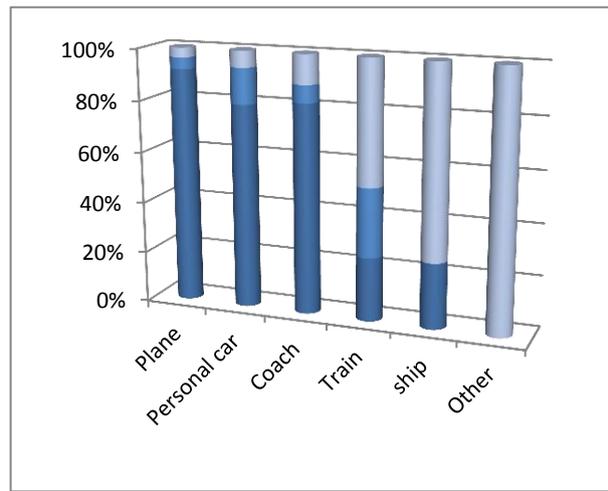


Figure no. 2: Means of transport used by tourists
 Source: Author

Most tourists who use travel agency services travel with their family (46%), while 30% travel together with a group, 17% are couples and only 6.5% are alone.

On average, the budget per person allocated for holiday destinations within the country ranges from 1,000 to 2,000 lei, but it can be noted that at the last edition of the Tourism Fair the respondents' tendency was to indicate a larger budget, over 2,000 Lei. On average, 5% of tourists allocate a budget of up to 500 lei to travels within the country.

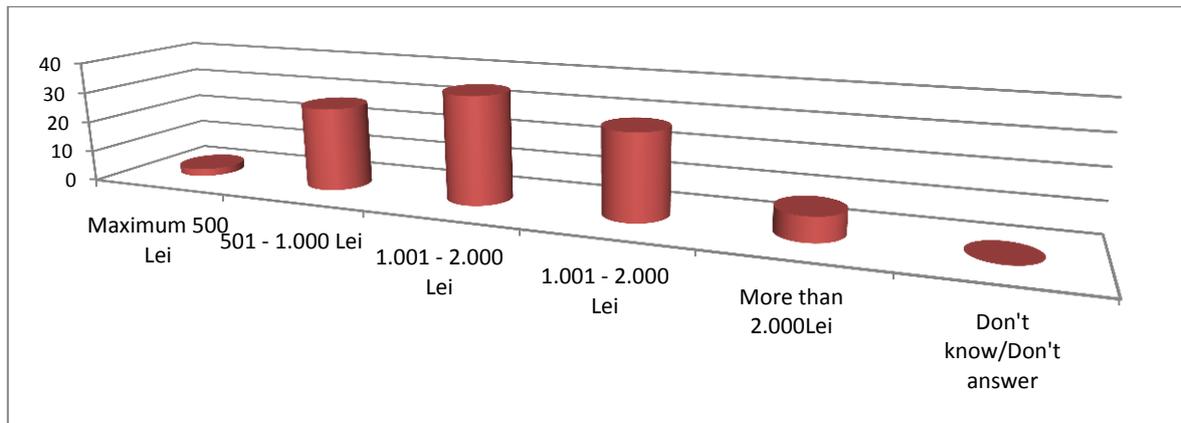


Figure no. 3: The budget per person allocated to travels within the country
 Source: Author

For holidays abroad, tourists allocate a larger budget compared to that allocated to holidays in the country. It is located between 500 and 1,000 euros, 26% of respondents saying they are even willing to allocate over 1,000 euros, only 1,20% of respondents indicating that they allocate less than 500 euros.

According to respondent travel agencies, Romanians increasingly prefer holidays abroad, the main reason being the advantageous prices.

At the moment, most of the promoted stays include both airline tickets and accommodation, and if they are booked in advance, often prices are even lower than in case of a holiday in Romania.

Besides, the price-quality ratio was often mentioned by the respondents, which state that in Romania the conditions in the accommodation units are lower than those from abroad, and yet the prices remain at high levels. In addition, the respondents said that the owners of hotels or hostels abroad are friendlier than those in the country.

Romanian tourists want to visit holiday destinations where they find climatic conditions, fauna and vegetation different from those existing in Romania. Last but not least, Romanians also take into account the recommendations of their friends when they choose where to spend their holidays.

Regarding the evolution of revenues of companies in tourism industry, 26% of respondents stated that they did not change and 21.5% indicated that they increased by between 5% and 10%. 8% indicated that revenues increased by more than 10%.

In the future, 26% of respondents said they appreciated that revenues will not have major changes, and 26% said they expected increases of between 0% and 5%.

Recreational tourism was appreciated in all three editions of the Tourism Fair, as the form of tourism with the most development opportunities, 30% of respondents indicating it. The second place is cultural tourism with 17.3%, rural and adventure tourism by 10%, gloomy tourism being the last one, which illustrates the mixed tourism specificity of our country, having a particular development in the area of spa-seaside tourism, spa and climate tourism and mountain tourism.

Respondents indicated that the most demanded periods during which tourists spend their holidays are 38% in summer and 26% in winter, with autumn being the last in their preferences - 15%.

Among the holiday destinations in the country preferred by tourists are: the seaside, Sighișoara, Brașov, the country of Hațeg, Maramureș, Sibiu, Bucovina and Sovata, Transfăgărășan and the Danube Delta.

In terms of foreign tourist destinations, tourists prefer the main cities in European countries such as: France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Great Britain, Bulgaria and Turkey, as well as exotic countries such as Thailand, Madagascar, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, etc.

For New Year's Eve, travel agencies have prepared offers as varied as possible, based more on exotic destinations such as Cambodia, Indonesia, Mauritius, India, Costa Rica, Thailand, Singapore, but also on destinations in the country: Brașov, Sinaia, Bușteni, being included in packages activities such as: alms of the pig, wine tasting at the Drăgășani wine cellar, karaoke, etc.

Exotic destinations are also at the forefront of travel agency for the summer holidays, islands in Greece being the most promoted by them, Thassos, Lefkada, Crete, Turkey and Malta with all-inclusive packages, but also Croatia, Montenegro, Italy, various cruises, etc.

For the tourist destinations in Romania, travel agencies offer various packages of recreation, rest and spa in various spa resorts, promotional packages for families at the seaside, painting and theater camps for children.

Conclusions

At the moment, the situation of the Romanian tourism industry is different from the international models, the tourist potential being insufficiently capitalized.

The tourist objectives have only individual value, tourist circuits being insufficiently developed and the main form of tourism practiced remains further recreational tourism, the Ministry of Regional Development, Public Administration, 2014. At the same time, tourists still claim the existence of poorly developed general and specific infrastructure

There is a tendency to reposition the domestic tourism in an attempt to capitalize more of the Romanian natural and anthropic potential, while increasing the access to tourist offers and to information points.

Romania is well known for the richness of the natural therapeutically factors, which offer the possibility of practicing a form of tourism loved by Romanians, namely the balneary tourism that starts to see a revival in the context of the promotion of health tourism, investments being made in the modernization and recreation of the infrastructure.

In areas such as Băile Felix, Călimănești-Căciulata, Vatra Dornei, Băile Tușnad, there are numerous forms of recreation, accommodation and treatment spas.

As for the mountain area, we can take a look at the way countries such as Austria, France, Switzerland, Italy are organized, which have invested in networks of specific nutrition units, and which, for the comfort of tourists have built cottages, cafeterias or restaurants right near the ski area, so that tourists no longer have to leave the resort.

To facilitate the practice of winter sports, ski schools for all ages have been set up and rates are differentiated on seasons. Programs full of cultural and sports events are provided (national and European championships for skiing, bobsleighbing or sledding).

In conclusion, the competitiveness of tourism depends not only on attractive landscapes in a country, but on a high standard of services provided, qualified staff and offers with a fair price-quality ratio.

One of the limitations of this research is the fact that respondent travel agencies were distributed in an unbalanced way, more than a third being concentrated in Bucharest, which offers more a local image and not one at national level.

In addition, the number of respondents was limited, the sample not being representative. Therefore, as a future direction, we propose a direct quantitative survey addressed directly to tourists.

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