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## POST COVID-19 STRATEGIES TO RELAUNCH THE ROMANIAN TOURISM

**Abstract:** *The Romanian tourism has been crushed by the pandemic crisis, the number of tourists has drastically decreased in 2020 compared to 2019, the new restrictions imposed have limited the type of tourists, so the country has been limited to domestic tourists (96.7% of total arrivals), international tourists having a modest percentage (3.3% of total arrivals). During the whole period of the March 2020 and May 2020 quarantines, national tourism was put on hold, for almost a year it oscillated between opening and closing restaurants, outdoor restaurants and cafes, event halls etc. or operating at 30% capacity.*

**Key words:** Covid-19, strategy, Romanian tourism, tourism destinations, the perception of tourism.

**Language:** English

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### Introduction

#### Literature Review

The first definition of tourism appears in 1876, in the Universal Dictionary of the 19th century, as "a person who travels only for the pleasure of travelling (so that they can say they have travelled)" (Zbigniew Mieczkowski, 1990, quoted by Cosmescu, 1998).

One of the largest intergovernmental international tourism organisations is the **WORLD TOURISM ORGANISATION** (UNWTO), which was established in 1975 (the first General Assembly was held in May 1975 in Madrid).

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), in its recommendations adopted in 1993, states that tourism includes "activities undertaken by persons, during travel and stay, in places outside their usual environment (usual residence), for a consecutive period not exceeding one year (12 months), for leisure (recreation), business or other purposes" (UNWTO, 1993).

Also, from a global perspective, the World Tourism Organisation is the main forum supporting

sustainable and universally accessible tourism development, with a special focus on developing countries.

The non-governmental organisations in which Romania participates through professional associations include: the Universal Federation of Travel Agents Associations (UFTAA), the World Federation of Thermalism and Climatology (FEMTEC), the International Academy of Tourism, the International Bureau of Social Tourism, etc.

The UNWTO experts point out that the travel and tourism industry will rank third in the world businesses after information technology and telecommunications in the 21st century. Some 1.006 billion international tourists and more than 1.055 billion USD in revenue are expected in 2010, and in 2020 the estimated figures are 1.6 billion tourists and 2.000 billion USD in revenue. If we add the domestic tourism (within the borders of the countries), which is constantly increasing, we can estimate the scale of this economic and social phenomenon worldwide, with

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predictable consequences for the environment and human society. (Neacșu et al., 2011).

In our opinion, tourism and environment are considered two notions, different as subsidiary fields, which depend on each other; thus, tourism is recognized as an industry that relies on and depends on natural resources (relief, climate, hydrography, flora, etc.) and cultural resources and local/regional and national heritage.

COVID-19 viral disease caused the 2019 coronavirus pandemic aggravated by a fatal infection (SARS-CoV-2) (Aqeel et al., 2020).

Health experts first identified the virus in Wuhan, China, in late December 2019. WHO declared an outbreak of COVID-19 a public health emergency of international concern in January and a global pandemic in March 2020. As of March 15th 2021, this pandemic has infected more than 119 million people, of which more than 2.66 million people have died from the deadly infectious disease (Lange, 2021).

According to Chang et al. (2020), the future of tourism in the COVID-19 era is uncertain, with pandemics affecting not only people's health, but more so the global economy and the very fabric of society. Thus, there is a critical need for new research aimed at identifying the best solutions to reinvigorate the tourism industry, one of the economic sectors heavily affected by the current health crisis.

The pandemic caused by SARS COV2 - COVID-19 has placed the Romania's hospitality sector under unprecedented pressure. As a result of the travel and health restrictions, the tourism in Romania has gradually ceased its activities in the first half of 2020.

Therefore, we can conclude that the Romanian tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic operates with a complexity of terms that describe the capacity of various territories and areas to attract tourists by exploiting the natural and man-made tourism potential of a city/tourist area, by promoting traditional tourism products, rural areas, crafts, tourism offer, traditions and highlighting the existing tourism potential, each of these notions being defined differently.

From our point of view, tourism is the most complex and heterogeneous activity in the economic sector; the activities embedded in the hotel sector in Romania require a collaboration and balance between several disciplines (from economics, natural sciences, sustainable tourism, informatics, regional tourism,

ecotourism, etc.), focusing on the field of research, to the implementation of effective strategies.

### Data and Methods

The elaboration of this research "POST COVID-19 STRATEGIES TO RELAUNCH THE ROMANIAN TOURISM" involves a complex (quantitative and qualitative) methodology.

Firstly, a cross-sectional research was carried out based on the application of a questionnaire, which aims to know the perceptions that the Romanian tourists had before and after the Covid-19 pandemic, how their choices have changed and what motivation they currently have to travel.

Secondly, in order to refine the results of the questionnaire, a qualitative interpretation of the data obtained was carried out.

Thirdly, a literature search on tourism and the Covid-19 pandemic and statistical documentation from the National Institute of Statistics was carried out. (<http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/>).

The questionnaire is a method, a research and an investigation tool consisting of a set of written questions, and possibly cartographic materials, graphs, videos, logically ordered, through the administration of operators to obtain from the respondents answers as concise and clear as possible that are to be interpreted graphically.

### Introduction

The Romanian hospitality industry was in a period of economic boom when the pandemic hit, a new series of accommodation facilities had been developed and the number of tourists was increasing (Table 1). However, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the sector hard and in 2020, accommodation facilities such as B&Bs, hotels and campsites relied strictly on domestic visitors.

The whole hotel industry is going through the first phase of the crisis triggered by COVID 19, i.e. survival, with all specialised parties of the sector trying to find the best ways to reduce costs either by resorting to solutions offered by the government (unclear) or by negotiating other contract terms with suppliers or employees.

Romania used to be visited by 2.3 million foreign tourists who spent their holidays here or came for business tourism, but in 2020 the situation was totally different as tourists stayed in their own country due to restrictions imposed by each country.

**Table 1. Romania accommodation units before Covid-19 (2018)**

Hotels and motels	22,1% (total)
Agritourism guesthouses	33,4% (total)
Tourist bed and breakfast	20,2% (total)
Tourist villas and bungalows	14,5% (total)
Occupancy rate (average)	32% (total)
Tourism in Romania (GDP)	5% (total)

(source: <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/>)

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Considering the turnover for the first half of 2020 compared to the first half of 2019, the following was found:

- Accommodation structures - reduction of turnover by 36.8%;
- Food facilities - reduction in turnover by 33.5%;
- Travel agents - 60.5% reduction in turnover (<https://www.zf.ro/companii/peste-de-companii-din-turism-afectate-de-criză-covid-19>).

Even before the pandemic, the Romanian tourism industry was one of the most underdeveloped

industries in the European Union, although it has 8,500 accommodation facilities, divided into 12 types.

The crisis generated by COVID-19 has changed the way people travel, the airports being closed and because of the implementation of quarantines for some destinations, tourists choose domestic destinations that are in nature and that offer them health safety, but even if they did not travel abroad, the number of Romanian domestic tourists decreased drastically in 2020 compared to 2019, according to the data provided in (Table 2).

**Table 2. Arrivals of Romanian tourists in tourist accommodation facilities with tourist accommodation functions, by tourist destinations (number of places)**

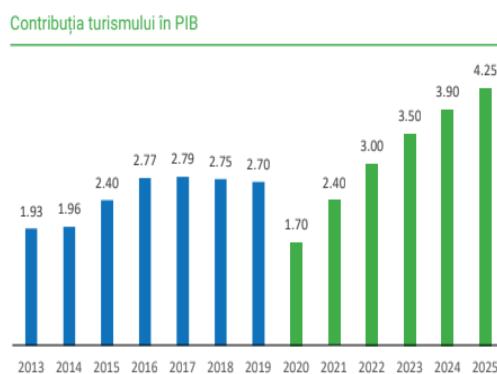
Tourist destinations	2019	2020
Bath resorts	1098706	595762
Coastal resorts, excluding Constanța city	1119401	899104
Resorts in mountain areas	2109378	1269109
Danube Delta area, including the town Tulcea	146006	116797
Bucharest and cities of residence, excluding Tulcea	4209530	1994058
Other localities and tourist routes	2008174	1069945

(source: <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/>)

The revival of the Romanian tourism has been a much-debated topic by people working in this field, as it has been hit hard by the corona-virus crisis, and they have been looking for a return to normality, even if new rules have been implemented to be respected by both people working in tourism and tourists. The Romanian tourism has been on hold for a long period of time, due to restrictions and quarantines that have been implemented on the Romanian territory to stop the pandemic from spreading in the country. In the summer of 2020, quarantine measures began to be relaxed in Europe, as well as in Romania, with the reopening of outdoor restaurants and cafes (until a

certain time of day), restaurants, hospitality industry, etc.

Although the tourism in Romania is not a core branch of the economy because it is not sufficiently promoted and exploited, it accounted for only 2.7% of the country's GDP in 2019, and due to the pandemic, it reached 1.7% in 2020 (Fig. 1). And in order to restore this, people working in this field need to ensure for the tourists travelling here health safety, quality, social distancing, sustainability; and keep their attention towards other types of tourism, which require a smaller number of people, such as: ecotourism, rural tourism, agritourism.



**Fig. 2. Contribution of tourism to GDP**

(source: <https://incomingromania.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Contributia-turismului-in-PIB-ul-Romaniei-1024x607.png>)

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The tourists of 2020 chose family or individual tourism as their first form of tourism and reoriented themselves towards destinations that are not crowded,

for example the Danube Delta (Fig. 3) and tourist areas such as Maramureş (Fig. 4) or Transylvania.



**Fig. 3 The Danube Delta**

(Source: <https://www.unanhaihui.ro/jpg>)



**Fig. 4 Maramureş County**

(Source: <https://cdn.britannica.com/Countryside-Maramures-judet-Romania.jpg>)

As far as accommodation is concerned, in 2020, tourists turned to holiday homes, holiday apartments, B&Bs and smaller hotels.

The Alliance for Tourism (Alianța pentru Turism - APT), which is an organization made up of 18 associations from all representative fields, was founded in order to relaunch the Romanian tourism. Romania reopened its indoor and outdoor restaurants on the 15th of June. Thus, through the initiative „SOS Romanian Tourism”, APT draws attention to the fact that „without a courageous recovery strategy we risk having irrecoverable economic losses at national level” and that „Romania should be part of the first group of countries to reopen tourism”. (<https://www.dw.com/ro/relansarea-turismului-rom%C3%A2nesc-de-la-lockdown>).

### 1.1. Measures to save the Romanian tourism ([www.horeca.ro](http://www.horeca.ro)):

1. Establishing and approving industry medical safety rules by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry

of Economy, Energy and Business Environment that are applicable in tourism industry facilities in order to significantly reduce the risk of infection with COVID-19 virus during holidays/travel in Romania.

2. Supporting the tourism workforce after the end of the state of emergency by extending state-supported technical unemployment also during the state of emergency and also by using the part-time work method. Respectively, for facilities/activities that will not be able to resume work on the 15th of May 2020, maintaining the measure of technical unemployment, as per GEO on the 30th of March 2020, at least for a period of up to 3 months.

3. Partial or full coverage by the State of the additional costs arising from the additional hygiene and sanitary measures to be taken by the accommodation, food, treatment, etc. establishments in order to resume activity (sanitation, additional materials and equipment, etc.).

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4. Temporary modification of the rules for the use of meal vouchers. Use of meal vouchers only in establishments with a restaurant NACE.

5. Financing the activity of Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) through two permanent sources: promotion tax and resort tax

6. Romania's membership in world tourism bodies, to play an active role in these institutions, so as to promote Romania, bring events to the country and make an easy transfer of know-how, e.g., ECTAA, HOTREC, ESPA, ICCA etc.).

7. Update the Tourism Public Investment Master Plan, taking into account global travel industry consumption trends as well as sustainability and climate change adaptation practices.

8. Introducing tourism impact assessment to public investment in other economic sectors (e.g., culture, health, education, infrastructure, agriculture, sports, etc.).

9. Digital platform to promote the Romanian tourism.

10. Increasing the attractiveness of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve.

11. Implementation of a plan of specific measures for sustainable tourism and adaptation to climate change so that sustainable tourism and the network of ecotourism destinations become the basic pillars of the Romanian tourism from 2021 onwards.

12. Start the implementation of the national programme of dedicated cycle routes and Euro routes with dedicated tracks, related infrastructure, IT support and well-defined legislative framework from 2021 onwards.

13. Start the implementation of the national programme for the development and support of the network of mountain huts, refuges and trails in the Carpathians from 2021 onwards.

14. Regulation of tipping (called TIPS) in the hospitality industry.

15. Simplify the activities of tourism transport companies and reduce red tape.

One solution that EU member states have thought of, in order to see under what conditions they will resume tourist activity, has been the creation of so-called travel corridors that offer added safety to tourists, they could be opened from Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Ukraine to Romania, according to APT (<https://www.dw.com/ro/relansarea-turismului-rom%C3%A2nesc-de-la-lockdown-la->).

### 1.2. Tourists' perception before and after COVID-19

In order to analyse the current situation of the Romanian tourism in detail, we have prepared a questionnaire, which aims to find out the perceptions of Romanian tourists before and after the Covid-19 pandemic, how their choices have changed and what motivates them to travel nowadays.

The questionnaire aims to identify the current situation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the Romanian tourism; it was drawn up on a sample of 46 people of different ages (18-59 years), consisting of a series of 58 short questions, belonging to 4 classifications, aiming to obtain:

1. Identifying data: age, education, residence, etc. - 5 questions;
2. Travel patterns before COVID - 19 - 20 questions;
3. Travel patterns after COVID - 19 - 20 questions;
4. Motivation to travel in relation to tourism activity - 13 questions.

80% of the people interviewed come from urban areas, mainly from Craiova, 1 person from Bucharest, and a few other people from rural areas of Gorj, Olt and Mehedinți counties. In terms of level of education, 52.2% are university graduates, 19.6% are high school graduates and 17.4% have masters' degrees and postgraduate studies (Fig. 5).

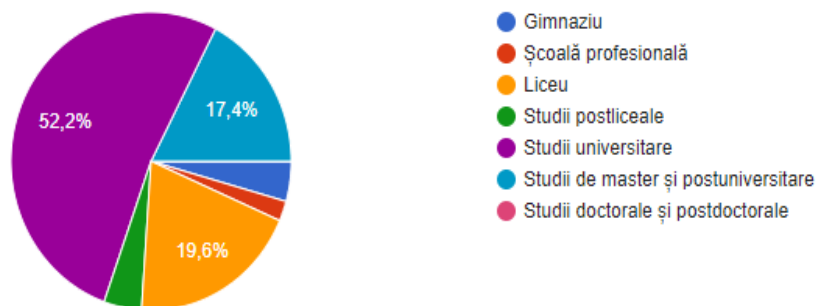


Fig. 5 Education level of respondents

In the following segment I will analyse and compare the results obtained for each question/classification, thus I gave the respondents the opportunity to give scores regarding their participation in tourism activities, ranging from 1

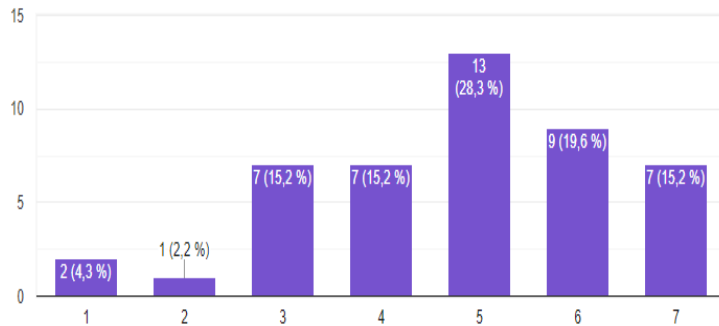
(inactive participation) to 7 (active participation). Before the pandemic, people participated quite often in tourism activities (Fig. 6), as 28.3% of the respondents gave a score of 5; 19.6% gave a score of 6, and the maximum i.e. 7 -15.2%, and the most

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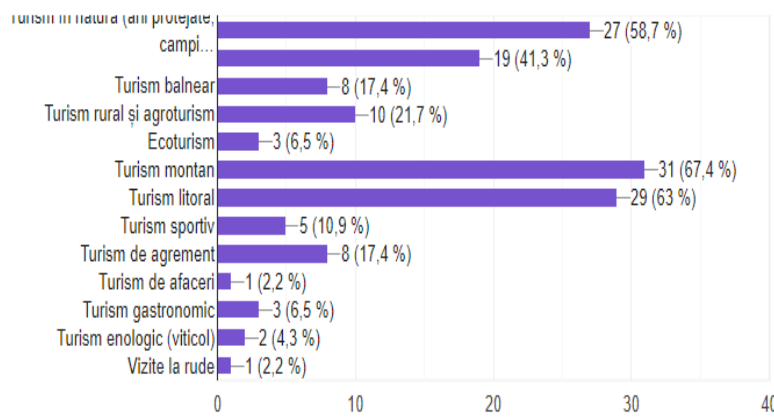
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chosen types of tourism were: tourism in protected areas, mountain tourism and seaside tourism, in the case of this question we let them tick how many types

of tourism they practiced, therefore the graph has high values (Fig. 7).



**Fig. 6 Tourist participation in tourism activities before COVID-19**

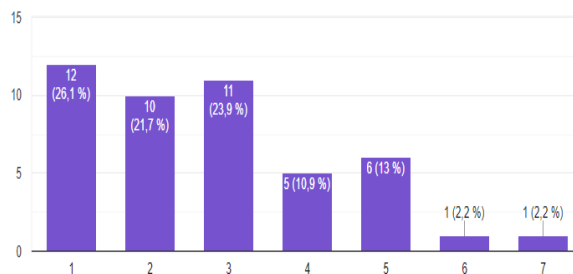


**Fig. 7 Type of tourism preferred by tourists before COVID-19**

(Tourism in protected areas, bath resorts tourism, rural and agriturism, ecoturism, mountain tourism, seaside tourism, sports tourism, leisure tourism, business tourism, gastronomic tourism, wine tourism, visiting relatives)

low, 26, 1% of respondents gave a mark 1 (inactive participation), mark 2 - 21, 7%, and higher mark 7, only 2.2%, and in terms of preferences for a type of tourism practiced, the tastes of Romanian tourists remain the same, although they could change them during this period to avoid overcrowding, for example: to practice rural tourism, ecotourism etc.

Compared to the above, the situation after COVID -19 is totally different (Fig. 8), so the participation of tourists in tourism activities is quite



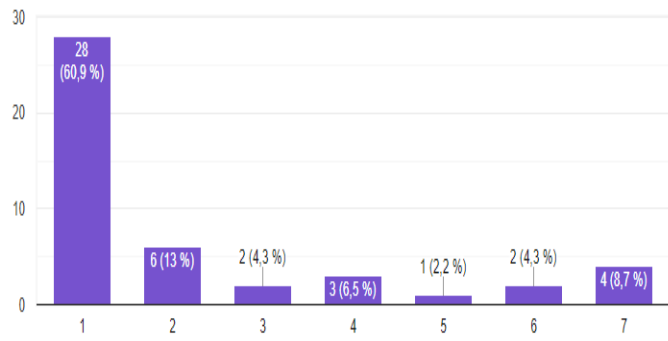
**Fig. 8 Tourist participation in tourism activities after COVID-19**

Out of the total of 46 respondents, 60.9% gave a mark 1 (disagree) and only 8.7% gave a mark 7 regarding the avoidance of eating in public restaurants (Fig. 9) before Covid-19, the situation after Covid-19

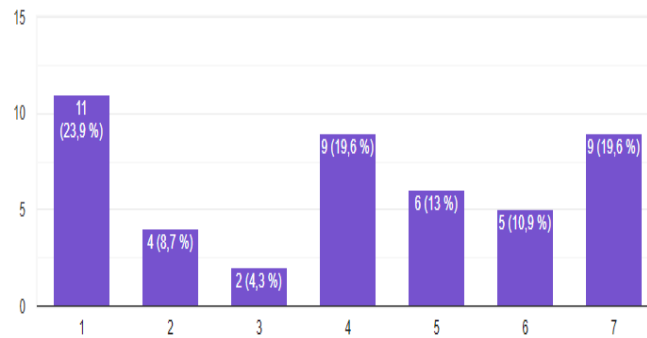
(Fig. 10) is not very drastic, thus 39.1% gave a mark 1 (disagree) and 19.6% gave a mark 7, from which we can conclude that Romanian tourists were willing to frequent restaurants even during the pandemic.

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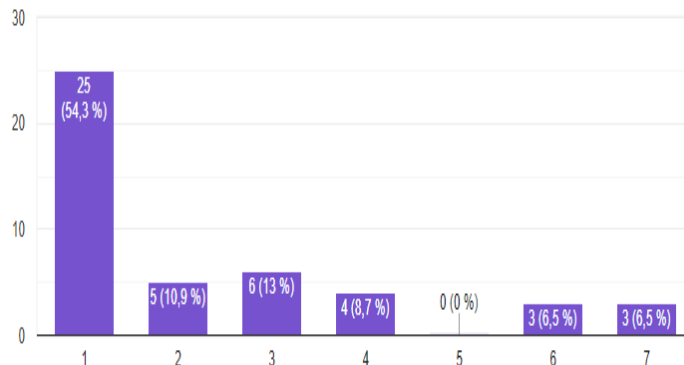
**Fig. 9 Avoiding eating in public places and restaurants before COVID -19**



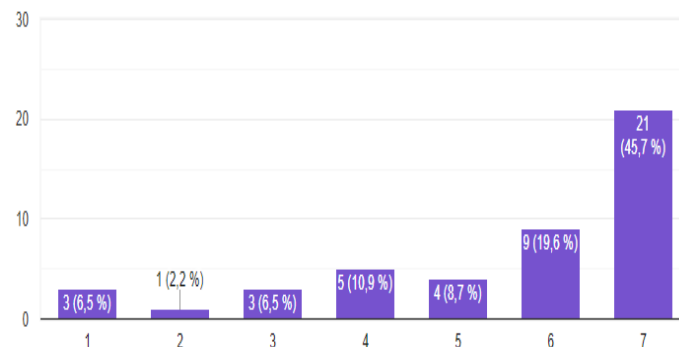
**Fig. 10 Avoiding eating in public places and restaurants after COVID -19**

Depending on the period before and after COVID-19, tourists changed their preferences in terms of choosing a destination, since before the pandemic they opted for crowded destinations (Fig. 11) given the fact that 54.3% chose these destinations, whereas things are completely different after the

COVID-19 pandemic (Fig. 12), people deciding to avoid crowded tourist destinations, thus 45.7% completely agree that is why they also gave the maximum score 7, the main factor that caused this was the fear instilled by the media about the pandemic.



**Fig. 11 Avoiding crowded tourist destinations before COVID-19**



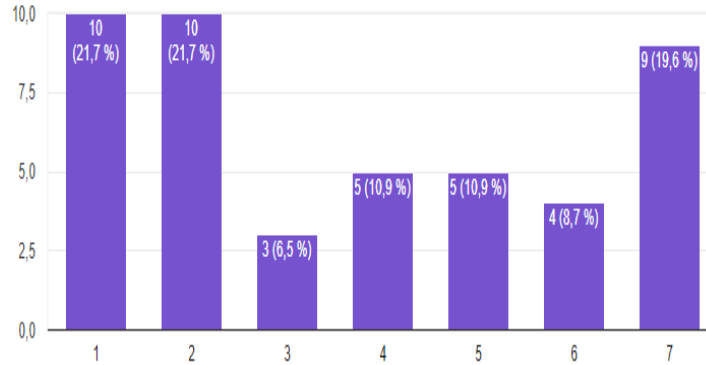
**Fig. 12 Avoiding crowded tourist destinations after COVID -19**

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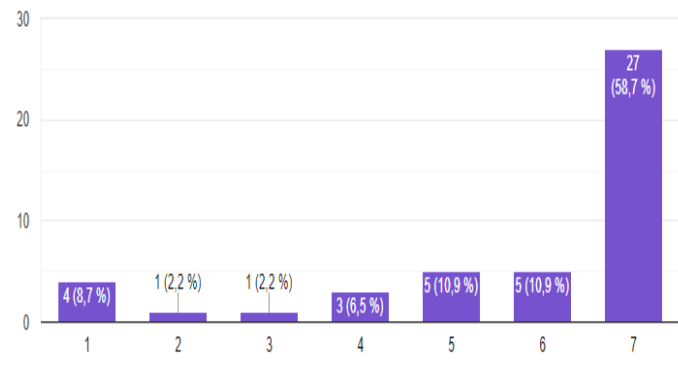
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Before the pandemic, tourists oscillated between seeking information about the chosen tourist destinations, therefore 21.7% gave a score of 1 (completely disagree), but 19.6% gave a maximum score of 7 (completely agree), but after COVID -19,

the situation is completely different, 58.7% of tourists gave a score of 7, completely agreeing with seeking news and good information before choosing a destination (Fig. 13 and Fig. 14).



**Fig. 13 Search for information about a destination related to the risks it offers before COVID -19**



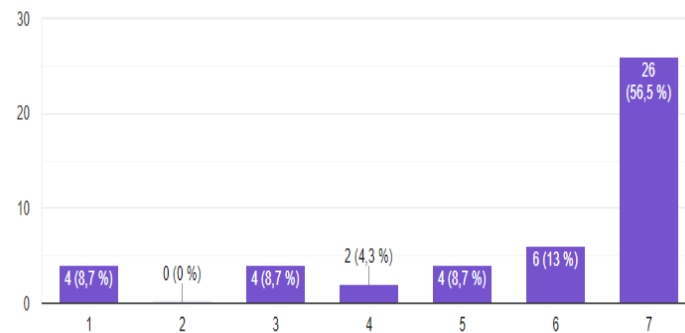
**Fig. 14 Search for information about a destination related to the risks it offers after COVID -19**

The last questions of the questionnaire comprise the fourth classification which aims to find out the motivation to travel that tourists have after and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Tourist motivation is the main factor influencing a tourist to travel, it is based on needs, which have to be satisfied, such as:

- The need for entertainment or leisure;
- The need to get away from the polluted urban environment and escape from everyday life;
- The need to discover 'new' things;
- Health care;
- The need to get to know the traditions, customs, landscapes, etc. of an area;

- The need to escape the stress caused by pandemics.

The first questions of this classification are based on the perception that tourists have about a possible infection with COVID-19, so from the answers we received we concluded that people are afraid of a possible illness caused by this virus, of the 46 people interviewed, 26 gave the highest score, i.e. 7 (completely agree) to the question: "Would the whole family suffer if you were infected with COVID-19?" (Fig. 15).



**Fig. 15 Tourists' perception of COVID-19 infection**

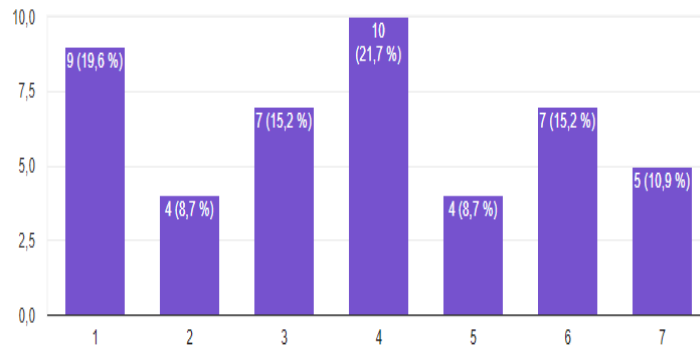


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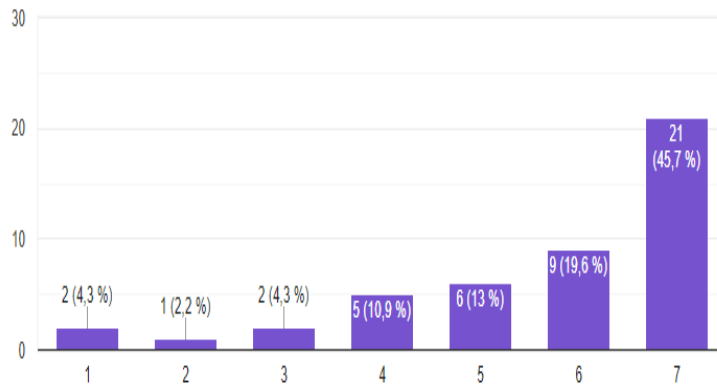
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Regarding the safety that masks, disinfectants, etc. offer them when travelling, tourists are quite oscillating in their answers (Fig. 16), thus I can

conclude that they do not have enough confidence in these means of protection, but they are willing to use them in order to travel (Fig. 17).



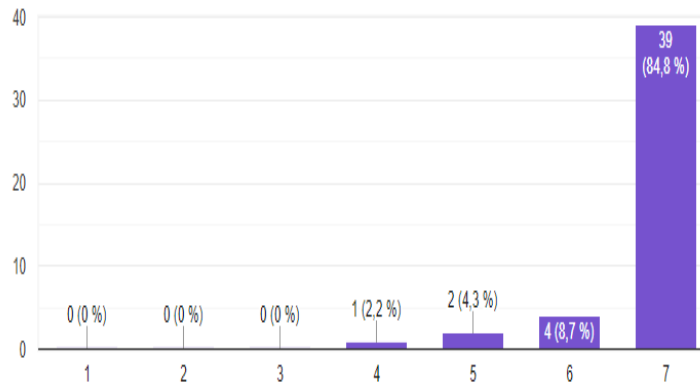
**Fig. 16 Travelling with mask, disinfectant, etc.**



**Fig. 17 Always wearing the mask when travelling**

Even if the COVID-19 pandemic has brought Romanian tourism down, it still offers people a good mood, given the fact that 84.8% gave a maximum

score of 7 (completely agree) to the question "Does tourism offer you a good mood?" (Fig. 18).



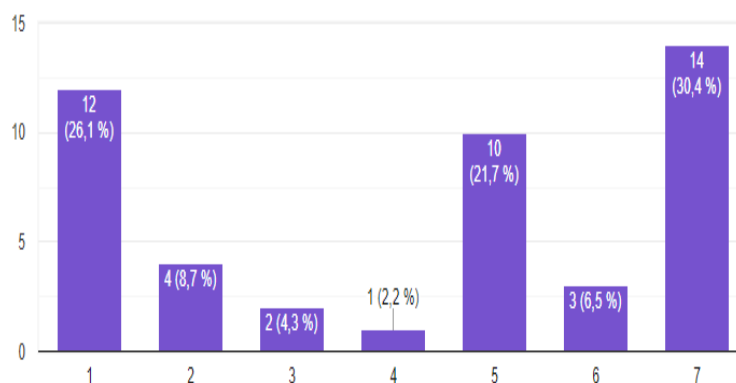
**Fig. 18 The mood that tourism offers**

Respondents are willing to use some health insurance, vaccines, etc. in the pandemic to travel

(Fig. 19), but are willing to change their travel style POST COVID-19.

## Impact Factor:

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ISI (Dubai, UAE) = 1.582	PIHII (Russia) = 3.939	PIF (India) = 1.940
GIF (Australia) = 0.564	ESJI (KZ) = 9.035	IBI (India) = 4.260
JIF = 1.500	SJIF (Morocco) = 7.184	OAJI (USA) = 0.350



**Fig. 19 Ways to facilitate travel during the pandemic**

The last question asked to the sample of 46 people: "Do you have any suggestions or recommendations regarding the pandemic in tourism?", where we received the following answers:

1. "Reducing travel restrictions abroad. Also reducing restrictions at home by opening SPA centres."

2. "Lower prices to persuade as many tourists as possible to resume their tourist activities at the pre-COVID-19 level".

3. "Strict compliance with the imposed rules".

4. "Let people not be deprived of this enjoyment, which is tourism" etc.

### Conclusions

The Romanian tourism economy has been knocked down by the COVID-19 pandemic, and, after the study we conducted, we came to the following conclusions:

- Tourism is an activity that is meant to offer people a good mood.

- Tourism is a system that is influenced by many factors, both positive and negative.

- The Romanian tourism is based on the country's natural potential (Carpathian - Danube - Pontic areas).

- Although the tourism potential is huge, the poor promotion and exploitation of this sector places it at the bottom rank in terms of its contribution to Romania's GDP (5%).

- Romania offers a wide range of types of tourism, from mountain tourism, seaside tourism, rural tourism, etc.

- The global economy has faced various economic crises, and the ones that have affected tourism the most were: the global economic crisis of 2009 and the global pandemic crisis generated by the COVID-19 virus in 2020.

- Following the economic crisis in 2009, the situation of the Romanian tourism was not very tragic, compared to the economic crisis in 2020, which literally brought tourism to its knees.

- In 2020 the number of tourist arrivals in Romania was 6.3 million, down by 52.3% compared to 2019. Almost all tourists visiting the country were Romanians (93%) and very few foreigners (7%).

- The number of overnight stays fell drastically with 14.4 million tourists, down by 51.6% compared to 2019.

- The utilization rate of accommodation places in 2020 was 22.8% on the total number of tourist accommodation facilities, down by 11.3% compared to 2019 (33.9%).

- Most tourist arrivals and overnight stays in tourist accommodation facilities with tourist accommodation functions were in the following counties: Constanța, Brașov, Sibiu, Mureș, Suceava, Vâlcea, Caraș-Severin, Timiș, Prahova, Bucharest municipality and Cluj.

- The revival of the Romanian tourism has been and still is a serious and complex issue debated by people working in this field.

- The central body for the revitalisation of the Romanian tourism is the Alliance for Tourism (APT).

- The way of travelling and the lifestyle of tourists changed radically after the COVID-19 pandemic, they had to adapt to the new style.

- The European Commission has adopted several solutions to facilitate free travel, such as: the Re-open EU platform, contact tracing mobile apps and the latest measure is the green certificate.

- Two types of guides have been launched in Romania: "Restaurant Safety Guide" and "State Aid Guide for the hospitality industry".

As it is outlined in One Planet Vision for a Responsible Tourism Recovery from COVID-19, commitment and planning for a green recovery gives us a unique opportunity to transform the sector in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement. If we can move quickly away from high carbon emission and material consumption visitor experiences, and instead prioritise community and ecosystem wellbeing, then

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tourism can be a leader in the transformation towards a low carbon emissions future.

A just transition to Net Zero before 2050 will only be possible if the tourism recovery accelerates the adoption of sustainable consumption and production and redefines our future success to consider not just economic value, but rather the regeneration of ecosystems, biodiversity and communities.

In order to safely reopen the Romanian tourism, serious investments in this field are needed, as well as a lot of commitment to promote it, through the tourist attractions that the country offers. We must not limit ourselves to seasonal tourism (summer and winter), but we must also publicise other types of tourism that are suitable for the current situation, such as rural and agritourism, ecotourism, etc.

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