

## ASPECTS OF CURRENT AND FUTURE TRENDS IN TOURISM

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*Abstract: Coronavirus crises, those from the energy market and more recently the war on Romania's borders, are major causes of the dynamic changes in Romania tourism, Europe and beyond. The present study refers to some behaviors adopted by tourists, preferences for new tourism products, as well as new shopping habits.*

*Key words: trend, tourism, consumer behavior*

### INTRODUCTION

Although a global post-pandemic economic recovery is expected, this is endangered. If before the appearance of the energy crisis and the war from Ukraine, analysts were optimistic about the global economic future, now the perspectives have worsened.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The paper includes an analysis based on statistical data from various sources regarding current trends regarding Romanian tourism and some new consumer preferences.

### RESEARCH RESULTS

The World Bank has revised down its economic forecasts and anticipates much more modest developments than previous forecasts in all countries of the world.

According to World Bank specialists, they anticipate a global economic growth of only 3.2% compared to 4.1%, the level previously anticipated. Underlying these more pessimistic forecasts sits the impact of the Ukrainian war on the world economy.[15]

At the basis of the decrease of this forecast sits also the increasing costs of food and fuel supported by consumers from developed economies around the world, which are partly the result of Western sanctions on Russian energy, which have led to rising petroleum and gases prices worldwide. Discontinued supply of Ukrainian agricultural exports are also cited as contributing factors to rising prices.

During 2022, international tourism was expected to continue its gradual recovery, after two years affected by the coronavirus pandemic. There are currently a growing number of countries that are releasing travel restrictions related to COVID-19.

Beyond the release of repressed demand, the war from Ukraine poses new challenges and changes from initial forecasts, as the UNWTO points out that, in addition to the impact on the economic environment, it could prevent the recovery of global confidence.

UNWTO warns that if this conflict continues, at least \$ 14 billion (€ 12.7 billion) of global tourism revenue could be lost, as Russia and Ukraine together accounted 3% from global spending in 2020, for international tourism. The importance of both markets is significant for neighboring countries, but also for European sun and beach destinations.[14]

According to the UNWTO, the recent rise in oil prices and rising inflation are leading to higher prices for accommodation and transportation services, adding additional pressure on businesses, consumer purchasing power and savings.

The pandemic has changed consumers' expectations and priorities for the coming years in Romania as well.

According to the study conducted by Travelminit.ro, regarding the opinion of consumers regarding the measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 taken by the accommodation units, it was found that these are an important factor in the booking decision. The pandemic has changed consumer expectations and priorities for the coming years. Thus, in Romania, the share of hotels decreased from 26% in 2019 to 24% in 2020, while the share of non-hotel bookings increased from 20% to 24%. The non-hotel segment includes apartments, villas and summer houses. Although the differences do not seem significant at first sight, the figures show that the number of hotel bookings will stagnate, while the number of bookings for smaller accommodation units will increase sharply.[12]

The US and Asian source markets, which have begun to open up, could be particularly affected when it comes to travel to Europe, as these markets are historically more beware of risks.

The operating interdiction imposed by many European countries on Russian airlines and the closure of airspace affect domestic travel on the European continent, and diversions of long-haul flights between Europe and East Asia lead to longer flights and higher costs, with greater impact on the travel decision.

The focus on the environment and online platforms has also been visible in tourism industry. It has been found that most potential tourists are looking for information about accommodation and travel opportunities on online booking sites.[5]

A special feature of the Central and Eastern European region is the support provided by the state to support domestic tourism, which, especially in the last two years, on the background of the uncertainty of international travel, has enjoyed an exponential growth in Romania. This increase was also stimulated by the option of paying with holiday vouchers, introduced by the Romanian government since 2017. Millions of employees benefited from this financial incentive, which gave them the opportunity to book superior accommodation units, hotels or premium pensions, paying a smaller difference to have access to superior services.[4]

Another trend is present in several countries, not only on the Romanian market, according to which the role of geographical and cultural proximity will increase more and more and will become more and more valuable for tourists. The Central and Eastern European region offers a very varied tourist offer, with its attractive natural and historical objectives, unique in the world.

The trend towards digitalization in the pandemic has also facilitated the digitization of tourism operators, so the main providers of tourism and accommodation services, in particular, have invested in digital platforms, applications and skills, and the trend is upward, which will continue to develop the tourism industry from Romania and to offer more opportunities to tourists.[7,9,10]

Today, no one can deny the convenience of modern tourist booking a trip with the help of an online travel agency, as opposed to booking a tour package through a traditional travel agency.

Among the reasons why tourists choose online travel agencies are the immediate character, the speed and the convenience that offers the possibility to make a reservation anytime and from anywhere. Tourists who care less about the financial side and more about productivity will tend to turn to a travel agent who will take care of everything that means organization.

Another trend in the tourism sector is the orientation of tourism towards the individual. Post-COVID tourism will focus more on the individual than on destinations. It is forecast a growing popularity of health tourism, wellness tourism, spiritual tourism and

possibly religious tourism. Due to the pandemic, tourists will pay more attention than ever to these needs, whether it is health, luxury treatments, pursuing goals to have a physical, intellectual and spiritual well-being after the period of restrictions and lockdowns. It is, in the end, a rediscovery of the self.[1]

Luxury tourism will open up to a new field in which exclusivism and uniqueness will mean what is unexplored, untouched, in which not everyone can reach, far from the masses and with the ability to share unique experiences.

Luxury refers to everything that can be obtained differently, uniquely and exclusively. It does not respond to demand, it does not satisfy the desires of the masses, nor does it seek positioning; it is a product or service offered to everyone, but very few can enjoy it.

Tourists looking for luxury will look for travel and emotional, experimental destinations and, if possible, out of Google search, moving away from what everyone wants and taking advantage of new trends in luxury tourism. Here the luxury tourist reconceptualizes his search and commitment to unique natural destinations, products and services with standards specific to sustainability.[2,6]

The tourist of this era, the millennial, who appreciates the whole experience and for whom technologies are an important part of it, although he wants exclusivity, wants to have fun and communicate with the world. He wants to emphasize the uniqueness of the moment and tell his own story, looking for extraordinary but natural places, which, in turn, are friendly with technology and make his life easier, allowing him to connect all his senses to the experience.

Transmitting the experiences through social networks, these users are the ones who create and consolidate the notoriety of destinations and brands, influencers and bloggers who become the strongest voice from luxury sector.

Among the trends of the luxury tourism industry for the next few years: to follow the speed of these changes, but also to have something differentiated, exclusive and to use technologies to capture the attention of consumers, as well as to integrate numerous channels that allow personalization to the customer.[7]

The behavior of Romanian tourists has changed in recent years, influenced by the pandemic, in the sense of an increased orientation towards domestic tourism. Romanians have begun to plan at least one vacation in the country, discovering wonderful places close to home. There has also been an increase in trust level in travel agencies and their recommendations, and hoteliers can rely on the fact that a recommendation from a travel agent is more direct and profitable than a marketing campaign for attracting tourists. A platform like H2B, which supports the relationship between travel agencies and hoteliers, increases the visibility of hotel offers and brings a threefold benefit: to tourists, hoteliers and agencies.[8]

A new challenge for Romanian tourism is the inclination towards authenticity, close to nature, to simple things, the humanity of interactions being values that are starting to become a priority in more and more places. It is identified a trend towards experience oriented tourism, where the quality of services, food and accommodation go hand in hand with the quality of people and unique interactions. For such experiences, some Romanian and foreign tourists are willing to pay even more than they would pay at a five star hotel in the center of Bucharest.

Instead of opulence and a la carte hotel services, this new type of tourism is looking for something else, even if it is still a luxury one.

For many tourists, a unique experience in nature, a meal like in the past in a peasant's yard or a chat with the owners of a Saxon guest house in Transylvania, for example, can count a lot.[3]

In the case of this tourism type, the value of a location does not necessarily translate into the level of luxury or grandeur of the place, the human component being much more important, and very often, it depends on the owners if a location fails or is successful. It is about a certain traditional authenticity, a local feeling and the warmth of those who take care of the place. For this niche tourism segment, the uniqueness factor is the most important.

Romanians have begun to appreciate the things they have at home - such as this tendency towards nature, the concept of mindfulness, being in nature and enjoying authentic experiences and valuable interactions with other people. This reality balances the pressure put on people by the fast pace in which they live (stress, burnout, overwork) and the need for a calmer lifestyle.

The concept of noble tourism is developing in an extremely dynamic way on the Romanian market. There are many Székely mansions that have been redesigned and reused: they can be visited, are museums or have been renovated, while some have been converted into accommodation or offer other types of services.[4]

Bespoke travel is a dedicated tourism concept that focuses on local and unique experiences, which foreign tourists could not reach otherwise.

Travlocals.com is the only booking platform from Romania designed exclusively for accommodation that goes beyond the classic pattern of hotels and guesthouses. It aims to promote "soulful" hosts and increase tourism to quality local hosts from the country.[13]

Traditional gastronomy can be the asset which, properly integrated into local tourism, attracts both Romanians and foreigners. Taking in consideration the fact that the interest of Romanians is to discover their own country has started to grow recently, tourism businesses are starting to rely more and more on the gastronomic offer. At the same time, traditional recipes, specific to certain regions of the country, have begun to make their way into the menus of restaurants from big cities, both at the request of chefs and at the request of consumers. More and more chefs and owners have chosen this path, preferring to promote the traditional and the local, investing time and important own resources, especially financial, to discover authentic recipes, but also ingredients used in the past, but long forgotten, to bring them up to date. In this sense, gastronomic events will be organized, such as festivals, gastronomic contests, product fairs and conferences, but also courses for entrepreneurs and workers in the field, such as chefs or bartenders. Such events began to take place in Harghita County, 2022 being declared the year of gastronomy for this area, in order to offer visitors arriving in the area a complex perspective on the tastes and aromas specific to the region, a culinary adventure that can be discovered only there. The purpose of this form of tourism is to combat the new trends of fast food and the preservation of the local identity.

Also, as a development opportunity, some of the small entrepreneurs from the region are also interested in setting up local gastronomic points. The Local Gastronomic Points are family-type tourist food outlets, which provide food specific to the geographical area to which they belong.[7]

They can be developed in any rural area of the country, and currently in Romania there are Local Gastronomic Points in several counties such as: Brasov, Covasna, Sibiu, Tulcea, etc. Local Gastro is a national network program that is based exclusively on the establishment of Local Gastronomic Points. It is a way to create a community synergy and a model of rural socialization around the gastronomic act. It has the role to offer visitors the opportunity to serve a meal with traditional Romanian products to local households, in the area where they spend their holidays, in a rustic atmosphere, but in compliance with the hygiene rules imposed by law.

The development of rural mountain areas from Romania based on local-gastro programs will lead both to an increase in the number of products from rural and mountain areas registered as recipes or established products of the regions and the country, and to the expansion of the market and competitiveness of traditional Romanian dishes.

Local Gastro brings a fair and constant income to the locals, adds value to the area and the activity of the households and last but not least, increases the attractiveness and usefulness of rural tourism for Romanian and foreign tourists, whether we are talking about weekend or medium and long term tourism.

Another trend that leads to the development of a niche tourism segment is volunteering in tourism, which means that the tourist can volunteer for a foreign tourist destination where he can do humanitarian work. As there are so many developing countries hit by the pandemic, volunteering will not only is desirable, but even necessary.

In opposition to the war on the borders of our country, we can mention a segment of tourism that arises: tourism for peace or reconciliation, it refers to visiting specific destinations to see, through studies or research, how peace was reached there, to reconcile the community and how this state is appreciated and celebrated. Also under this umbrella, of reconciliation tourism, can be included the proposal that the tourist himself make a contribution to the efforts to make peace in the respective destination, after a conflict. Reconciliation tourism usually involves visiting peace memorials or conflict zones in order to learn from the mistakes of past wars and to help resolve or prevent an existing conflict. Examples of such tourism activities may be educational trips to the Berlin Wall Memorial or the Hiroshima Peace Park, but there may also be workshops and conferences with conflict resolution professionals or guided walks to places in history to conclude peace agreements. Also in this category it also includes visiting art exhibitions with peace themes or participating in festivals and shows.[8]

A special feature of the Central and Eastern European region is the support provided by the state for supporting domestic tourism, which, especially in the last two years, of the background of the uncertainty of international travel, has enjoyed an exponential growth in Romania. This increase was also stimulated by the option of paying with holiday vouchers, introduced by the Romanian government since 2017. Millions of employees benefited from this financial incentive, which gave them the opportunity to book superior accommodation units, hotels or premium pensions, paying a smaller difference to have access to superior services.

A project regarding the de minimis aid scheme published by the Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Tourism, could come in support of tourism operators, because they will be able to receive 40 euros for each foreign tourist who bought and paid, through a tourism organizing agency incoming in Romania, a tourist stay or circuit of at least four nights of accommodation in the country, the state bearing the equivalent of half the cost of the first night of accommodation of a foreign tourist, if he stays in the country for at least 4 nights. Thus, it is desired to stimulate the trade balance in tourism, given the trade deficit of over 20 billion euros in 2021, according to INS.[11]

Also in order to promote and support domestic tourism, the Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Tourism, together with the Alliance for Tourism, is a partner in the second edition of the competition "Destination of 2022", an important action of promoting domestic tourism. Thus, new destinations will be chosen for the categories: City Break and Tourist Localities, which will subsequently benefit from intense national promotion in May-August both on social media and through the Destination of the Year broadcast on Prima TV.

## CONCLUSIONS

The tourism industry has a unique opportunity to reflect on its future. In order to have an impact, it will have to make a priority of offering affordable but at the same time quality experiences that must put the tourist in the center.

Regardless of when travel to the post-pandemic world resumes, the promotion of certain destinations or legendary places has no place. In fact, it may be difficult if there are still restrictions or travel corridors that change their configuration.

The travel industry has no choice but to reshape its holidays to meet the wishes of tourists of all kinds.

Even if Romania still cannot compete with the already established destinations worldwide, because we do not have the necessary infrastructure, we can become relevant in the area of ecotourism or agrotourism, gastronomic tourism and even wine tourism, especially niche tourism, thus entering the countries generating competitive and sustainable tourism.

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