

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES OF INCOMING TOURISM IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: Incoming tourism represents the tourism traffic undertaken by non-resident visitors of the country of reference. Therefore, incoming tourism can be considered a form of export and contributes to the trade balance of the country of reference. In the case of Romania, the number of tourists leaving the country for other destinations far exceeds the number of foreigners entering the country. Future developments in this field depend heavily on the ability of the Romanian state administration and private sector to market and promote Romania as a viable and enjoyable tourism destination. The travel packages promoted by several travel agencies that practice incoming tourism in Romania were also examined.

Key words: incoming tourism; tourism export; tourism in Romania; Romanian travel destinations

INTRODUCTION

Incoming (or inbound) tourism represents an important factor towards tourism development, as it signifies and is a direct result of the attractiveness of domestic touristic destinations as viewed by foreign citizens [2].

Moreover, this type of tourism can benefit from modern marketing tools and social media, as information about the natural and cultural heritage shared on those new forms of media were reported to have a positive effect on incoming tourism [3].

Incoming tourism is a component of both internal tourism (together with domestic tourism) and international tourism (together with outbound tourism) [16].

A factor facilitating inbound tourism is the introduction of visa-waiving programs and accession to supranational organisations, as do free trading measures [10,11]. In the case of Romania, such a factor was joining the European Union, which opened up the possibility of further European integration, with future prospects of joining the Eurozone and the Schengen Area [12,13].

Another factor of note is the promotion of tourism attractions in an international context [9]. Romania's brand image projections are based around ecotourism and leverage the natural potential of several destinations. As of the time this article was written, the most well known touristic slogan of Romania is „explore the Carpathian garden!”. This contains a call-to-action applicable to both incoming and local tourists [1].

However, the economic benefits of incoming tourism can be more intense than of the other types of tourism. In the case of domestic tourism, exchanges are made utilising the local currency, while in the case of outgoing tourism, foreign currency tends to leave the country. Incoming tourism becomes in this context a reliable source of foreign currency [6]. Considering this, the development of incoming tourism can be considered a boon to the national economy, generating a significant multiplicative effect, providing job opportunities for the local population while also bringing about cultural exchanges [4,8].

At the same time, overt reliance on inbound tourism can become a problem during periods in which international travel flows are disrupted, as was the case of the coronavirus pandemic [5]. During such periods, domestic travel becomes the primary form in which tourism manifests. Moreover, domestic travel is in itself subject to various restrictions,

ranging from relatively short term ones, as was the case of Romania, to long term and harsher restrictions, which also tended to garner much more criticism in the mass media, as was the case of China and its' Zero Covid Policy [7].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study we examine the panel data detailing the number of foreign tourist arrivals by country of origin over the last ten years. This data was obtained from the Tempo Online platform of the National Institute of Statistics, with further processing done by the authors in order to analyse the differences between years and the sources of inbound tourists.

Secondly, information regarding travel agencies that practice inbound tourism were obtained from their respective websites, which we analysed by viewing the destinations on offer and their features.

RESEARCH RESULTS

In the 2011-2021 period, most of the incoming tourists in Romania arrived via car, followed by tourists that arrived by plane, while the number of tourists arriving by train or by ship is mostly negligible (figure 1 and 2).

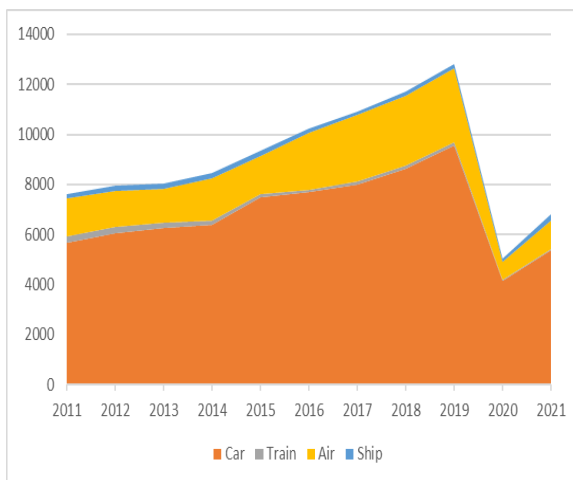


Figure 1. Time series analysis of incoming tourism by mode of transportation (2011-2021)

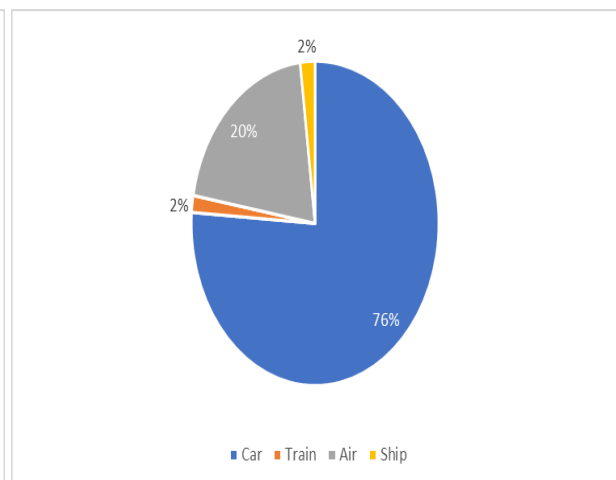


Figure 2. Distribution of total number of incoming tourists by mode of transportation (2011-2021)

The Romanian border crossings can be considered the first elements that incoming tourists come into contact with, as such assuring a smooth and speedy processing of arrivals is of major importance. The border crossings are visualised in figure 3.

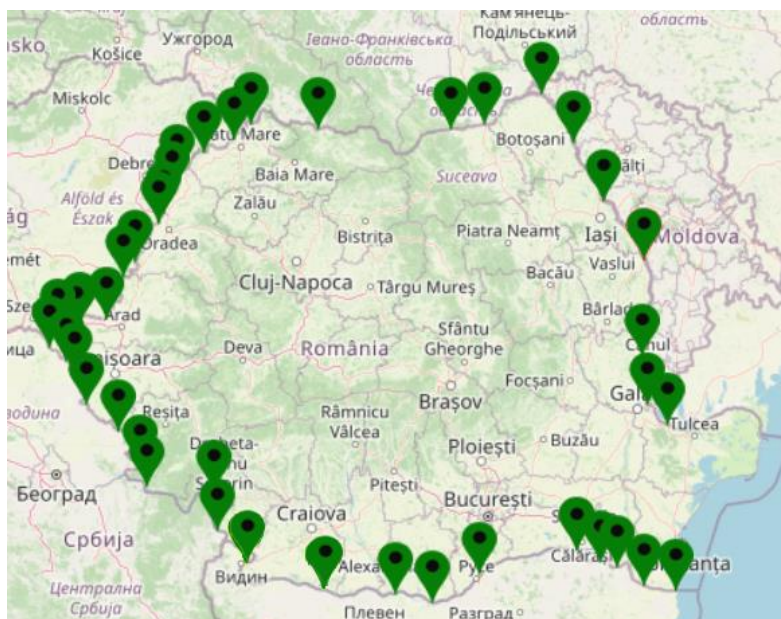


Figure 3. Romanian border crossings

Romanian airports can be considered sources contributing to inbound tourism, as they accounted for 20% of total touristic arrivals of foreign citizens in the last ten years. The airports functioning in Romania can be seen in figure 4.



Figure 4. Romanian airports

The coronavirus pandemic had a significant negative effect on inbound tourism arrivals, practically bringing the country back to levels of foreign tourism not experienced in more than ten years. The drop of reported in 2020 was of more than 60%.

The distribution of touristic arrivals in the last ten years is heavily biased towards countries and regions that are closer geographically to Romania. Over 50% of all touristic arrivals in Romania originated from the European Union. Moldova and Ukraine retain a relatively significant portion of touristic arrivals, with approximately 17% and 11% respectively (table 1, figure 5).

Table 1.

Percentages of overall touristic arrivals by country

Country	% in overall touristic arrivals
European Union	53.05
Moldova	17.25
Ukraine	10.97
Serbia	3.99
Türkiye	3.72
Asia	3.57
Israel	1.84
USA	1.69
Russian Federation	0.97
Belarus	0.76
Canada	0.62
Other European countries	0.50
Africa	0.32
Macedonia	0.29
Australia, Oceania	0.19
South and Central America	0.13
Egipt	0.08
Montenegro	0.03
Unspecified	0.01

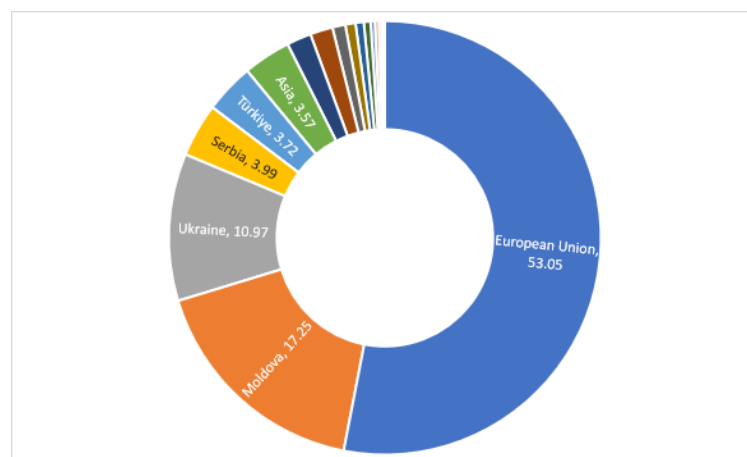


Figure 5. Percentages of overall touristic arrivals by country

The coronavirus pandemic had a significant negative effect on inbound tourism arrivals, practically bringing the country back to levels of foreign tourism not experienced in more than ten years. The drop of reported in 2020 was of more than 60% (figure 6). This sharp decline affected all sources of incoming tourism. 2021 was marked by very small improvements in the situation of inbound tourism compared to the previous year but was still not comparable to any other year. This would suggest that the effects of the pandemic on international travel are still far reaching and can continue to be so in the near future. Considering this development, future prospects and perspectives should be conservative in their evaluation of incoming tourism.

Nevertheless, tourism strategies should continue targetting countries in the European Union as a reliable source of inbound tourists for Romania.

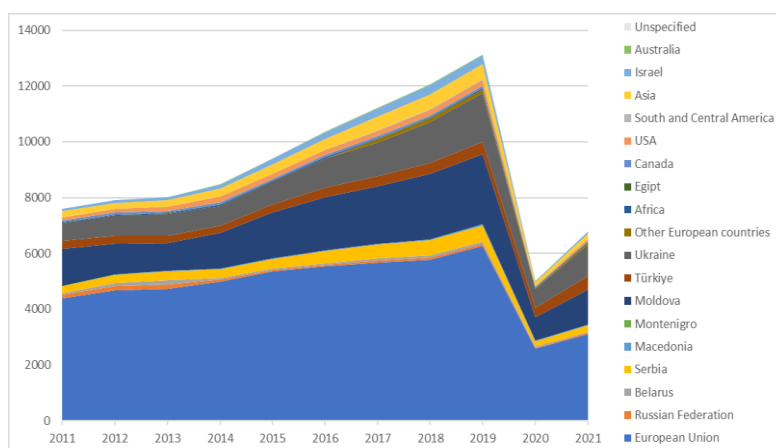


Figure 6. Panel data of inbound tourism in Romania by country (thousands of people)

Travel agencies practicing incoming tourism promote a wide range of destinations and travel packages (table 2). The following travel agencies were studied: Karpaten, Christian Tour, Paralela 45 [14,15]. The main travel package types and destinations were: sea, Danube Delta, mountain areas, spa towns, circuits, rural Maramureș.

Table 2.

Packages offered by travel agencies in Romania

Name	Karpaten	Christian Tour	Paralela 45
Black Sea seaside	✓	✓	✓
Danube Delta	✓	✓	✓
Danube Gorge		✓	
Mountain areas	✓	✓	✓
Spa towns	✓	✓	✓
Transilvania	✓	✓	✓
Moldova	✓		
Urban cities	✓	✓	✓

CONCLUSIONS

Incoming tourism is an important development factor for economies, but it can become vulnerable to external crisis. Romania caters mostly to tourists located in the European Union and other neighboring countries. The vast majority of the foreign tourists arrive in Romania via car, bus and other road vehicles.

Future perspectives in the short term should be focused on regaining the number of tourist arrivals that was lost during the COVID-19 pandemic, the prospect of surpassing previously reported maximums being a goal that is yet to be attained. However, a more accurate picture of the situation of Romanian inbound tourism will be attained once the statistics are updated for the 2022 year, with the possibility to forecast becoming more easily accessible.

Finally, the promotion of tourist destinations by travel agencies that practice incoming tourism can be a positive factor towards attaining the previously stated goal of winning back lost t

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