

## *Coordinates of the Spa Tourism in Romania*

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**Abstract:** *The seaside resorts, whether they are small or large, have the same objective - the profitability and the same obligation - to provide its clients with quality at all levels. The bidders must take into account the expectations of the customer in order to be able to better conceive the different components of the product, respecting the quality / price ratio.*

**Keywords:** *spa tourism, domestic tourist demand offer of climatic spa services, tourist circulation*

### **Introduction**

Due to the character of mass tourism that was printed to the spa tourism until the '90s, the investments were oriented towards the development and diversification of the means of accommodation offered to Romanian and foreign citizens in order to satisfy the demand, both from the point of view of the structure - hotels of different categories, villas, guest houses, cottages and campsites, as well as in terms of the number of places offered.

In the spa resorts, at the beginning, simple accommodation and feeding units were built so that later they could reach large complexes, which allowed the spa treatment to be carried out regardless of the season.

Our country has a rich and varied background of natural therapeutic factors: mineral water, water and sludge of some lakes, gas emissions, etc., generously spread over almost the entire surface of the country in different climatic zones. The great variety of these factors is due to the geographical location and complex geological structure of the crust of our country. Their presence allowed them to be used for treatment from the time of the Dacians and the Romans, as well as further, developing the spa resorts.

### **1. Highlights of the Concept of Spa Tourism in Romania**

Organization World of Tourism has proposed classifying different types of trips, on account of this criterion, in six groups:

- 1) while freely rest, holiday;
- 2) visiting relatives and friends;
- 3) business and professional reasons;
- 4) medical treatment, including those that benefit of hydrotherapy and spa therapy;
- 5) pilgrimages / religious motives;
- 6) other causes.

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The spa resorts are special functional categories within the urban and rural organization in Romania. In our country there are 160 spa resorts and localities that have mineral resources of cleanliness, of

which 24 are considered of national importance with recognition at European level. The 24 stations of national importance were ranked on the basis of the classification system in Romania according to their degree of endowment. The spa resorts are located in the main natural areas of the Romanian territory: the Subcarpathian Arch and the Black Sea coast. The main resorts that currently have modern accommodation, dining and treatment conditions are:

- In the Northern area of the Eastern Carpathians: Vatra Dornei, Sângeorz-Băi, Borsa, Durău;
- In the area of the Bilbor-Ciuc Pass: Borsec, Băile Tuşnad, Covasna, Lacul Rosu;
- On the Trotus Valley: Slănic Moldova, Târgu Ocna;
- At the foot of the Ciucaş mountains: Cheia, Slănic Prahova, Sovata (Brasov depression).
- Olt Valley: Călimăneşti-Căciulata, Olăneşti, Băile Govora, Voineasa;
- Mehedinti Mountains: Băile Herculane;
- Western Carpathians: Geoagiu-Băi, Moneasa, Stâna de Vale;
- Sub-Carpathian and Plains area: Băile Felix and Băile 1 Mai, Amara (Slobozia), Sărat Lake (Brăila).

Until the 1990s the offer from the Romanian spa tourism had an extensive development, which started from the idea of providing as many places as possible, at affordable prices. In this way, the conditions of the practice of mass tourism were realized internally. In the resorts included in the international circuit, investments were made to increase the quality of the tourist product - spa treatment offered to foreign tourists. The result of the programs of development of the spa tourism until 1989 was materialized in the realization of a modern technical-material base for that period, but that unfortunately remained at the level of that period in many places.

Due to the character of mass tourism that was printed to the spa tourism until the 90s, the investments were oriented towards the development and diversification of the means of accommodation offered to Romanian and foreign citizens in order to satisfy the demand, both from the point of view of the structure - hotels of different categories, villas, guest houses, cottages and campsites, as well as in terms of the number of places offered.

In the spa resorts, at the beginning, simple accommodation and food units were built so that later they could reach large complexes, which allowed the spa treatment to be carried out regardless of the season.

In the past there was an upward trend in the tourist circulation started since 1970, both for tourism in general and for spa tourism, in particular, which has registered a special growth. It was a reflection of the increased interest in tourism and the restoration of work capacity, health. In the years 1988-1989, about half of the population of the country spent a stay in a tourist resort, a situation comparable to that of many developed European countries.

Since 1990 there have been major changes in the society, which have led to a contradictory, sinuous evolution of the economy and implicitly of the tourism in Romania. The decrease in economic performance, recorded after 1989 in the vast majority of the sectors of the national economy, had a direct connection with the decreasing evolution of the components of the spa tourism offer.

The demand of the spa tourism has decreased and implicitly the degree of occupancy of the structures of reception, food and treatment. The incomes obtained from spa tourism, were increasingly lower in relation to the expenses, limiting the possibility of self-financing of the activity.

**Table no. 1**  
**The evolution of the tourist accommodation units existing in the period 2008-2018**  
**in the seaside resorts of Romania**

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Number of units</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| 2008        | 489                    | 91,4              |
| 2009        | 487                    | 91,0              |
| 2010        | 435                    | 81,3              |
| 2011        | 400                    | 74,8              |

| Year | Number of units | Percentage |
|------|-----------------|------------|
| 2012 | 367             | 68,6       |
| 2013 | 347             | 65,0       |
| 2014 | 356             | 66,5       |
| 2015 | 360             | 67,3       |
| 2016 | 369             | 68,8       |
| 2017 | 371             | 69,3       |
| 2018 | 381             | 71,21%     |

Source: Statistical Yearbooks of Romania 2008-2018 [11]

The decision to make investments for the development of the spa offer has registered an upward trend only in the last years, either with private financial sources or with those obtained through national or European funds. The latter were needed to modernize and stop the degradation of existing structures.

**Table no. 2**  
**Tourist reception structures with tourist accommodation functions in the country**

| Number of units      | Years |      |      |      |      |      |      |           |
|----------------------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-----------|
|                      | 2012  | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2018/2012 |
| <b>TOTAL ROMANIA</b> | 3213  | 3338 | 3569 | 3900 | 4226 | 4694 | 4710 | 146,09%   |
| <b>SPA</b>           | 535   | 347  | 356  | 360  | 369  | 371  | 381  | 71,21%    |

Source: Statistical Yearbooks of Romania 2012-2018 [11]

The number of tourist accommodation structures in Romania increased from 3,213 units in 1992 to 4,710 units in 2018 (an increase of 1.46 times).

In 2018, the number of accommodation units in the spa-climatic resorts represented only 71.21% of the number of accommodation structures existing in 2008. If, at the country level, the accommodation units increased, at the level of the spa-climatic resorts they registered a gradual decrease until 2014 when a slight revival of this tourism sector begins.

The average annual rate of decrease in the number of accommodation places in the spa tourism was 1%. The decrease is due on the one hand to the closure of small, old, outdated units and the lack of private initiative in the creation of new units in spa tourism, and on the other hand to maintain the hotels, spas and treatment bases that hold the vast majority in operation. of the number of accommodation places and who could provide the services specific to this form of tourism.

As a result, the large reception structures, the spa complexes, which also had the basic treatment and brought in revenues throughout the year, were kept, and those of reduced capacities, which were removed from the circuit and were degraded in the absence investment or privatization actions. However, the free initiative has begun to emerge and contribute with investments in the technology needed to exploit the resources of the spa tourism. [3, 27]

In the case of the spa resorts, the largest share is the tourist villas, which hold over 38.6% of the total tourist accommodation units. On the next position are the hotels that own 31.1% of the accommodation units. On a good position there are still 9.7% urban tourist pensions. The high percentage of the tourist villas in the spa area can be explained by the fact that the investments and expenses related to this type of accommodation units are smaller, keeping them in operation and even privatization is easier to do.

In the long term, the domestic tourism demand of the spa resorts will increase. They will have lower levels compared to those predicted for external demand as a result of the increase in the number of citizens who will call for trips outside the country for spending holidays. The tendency of the Romanian tourists is towards the tourist destinations outside the country.

## **2. Spa Tourism, an Important Factor in the Development of Tourism in Romania**

Spa tourism is the only form of tourism in our country that is based on a permanent potential, of great complexity, practically inexhaustible. Romania ranks among the European countries with a remarkable spa fund. Practically 1/3 of the thermal and mineral waters of the continent are found in our country. This value is accentuated by the complexity of the natural factors, respectively the finding in the same resort of the main environmental factors, together with a wide range of mineral cleansing substances, with beneficial multifactorial effects and by the existence in Romania of all types of mineral mineral substances that can be used in the whole range of spa treatment profiles.

Hydrogeological research has shown that the basement of Romania contains a variety of spa resources located within or on the surface of the Earth's crust. These resources are represented primarily by the therapeutic mineral substances, which by physico-chemical properties respond to the prophylactic and medical needs of maintaining, consolidating, restoring the state of health, working capacity and individual physical and mental comfort. Secondly, the climatic factors existing in Romania, due to their geographical position (solar radiation, atmospheric circulation, temperature, humidity, aeroionization, saline microclimate) make climate therapy an efficient means, which contributes in any spa resort to completing the treatment offer.

Therapeutic mineral substances are found in both mineral and thermal mineral waters and in the water of therapeutic mud and peat lakes.

Mineral waters are spread over more than 20% of the surface of the country at different depths, having a wide range of physico-chemical and therapeutic properties depending on their genesis.

The presence of geothermal and thermo-mineral waters on the Romanian territory is related to tectonics, hydrogeothermal anomalies, thermal conductivity. They are not pure, but they represent different mineral concentrations of soluble salts, thus having thermal bicarbonate, sulfur, chlorinated, chlorinated-sulfurous thermal waters, with multiple uses in external care.

Romania has a total of 3500 permanent lakes of which 63% have natural origin and 27% are anthropogenic. Due to the pharmacological and pharmacodynamic qualities of their waters, most of the lakes are of particular therapeutic interest.

The development of the spa resorts appeared in the conditions of the increasing demands of treatment with natural therapeutic factors and of the enrichment and renewal of the content of the modern spa medicine. In the modern treatment bases established in resorts, optimal conditions of complex use of natural healing factors have been created. The complex treatment bases include compartments of kinetherapy, hydrotherapy, electrotherapy, mechanotherapy, pneumotherapy and others, equipped with modern equipment and installations.

The variety of mineral waters existing in the country and their qualities, make this natural resource a valuable and important tourist offer of Romania. It is estimated that there are 1,500 mineral springs in the country's spa resorts.

The spa-climatic resorts can be addressed to an exclusively tourist client. It represents on average 70% of the global flow, but can reach up to 90% of the total attendance, according to the reputation of the resort.

The spa-climatic resorts are generally addressed to all age groups, but especially to a public who is aware of the importance of treatments using natural factors. Appeared on the tourism market due, on the one hand due to the evolution of tourists' motivations, and on the other hand, from the desire of the tourism service providers to offer special natural treatments, the spa-climatic resorts have benefited from a stable and secure, constantly growing clientele. This is also due to the tourist motivation, which directs the clientele to this kind of resorts.

At the same time as practicing simple pleasures (watching a match, a race, a movie, etc.), we are witnessing the growth of a number of demands related to social progress : the desire to take care of health, to attend clean places, which It gives you confidence, to replace the days of intense fun with long and sometimes monotonous holidays. The spa resorts have arrived in time to respond to this demand and the clientele is ready to pay. [4, 76]

The attendance of a spa-climatic resort knows different levels of development:

- strong growth of the flow during the start-up and launch of natural treatments;
- slight progress in the maturity phase;
- sharpened resumption in case of reinvestment.

The tourist demand expresses a circle of needs of a higher order, which makes it extremely elastic compared to the influence factors.

Among the decisive factors that can influence and motivate consumers to turn their attention to spending time at a spa resort, we can list [9, 268]:

#### 1. The influence of quality

The spa resorts, whether they are small or large, have the same objective - the profitability and the same obligation - to provide its clients with quality at all levels. The bidders must take into account the expectations of the client in order to be able to better conceive the different components of the product, respecting the quality / price ratio.

Within the quality policy, only the largest spa resorts have developed formalized devices and have resorted to specialized consultancy, but it is advisable to include this policy in the management strategy of each tourism service provider in a spa resort. The success of the experience that the client experiences, goes through the quality of the equipment, the food, but also his relationship with the staff. The hotels in the spa-climatic resorts have a less seasonal operation than other mountain or seaside resorts. In order to ensure a permanent clientele, the suppliers of tourist products from the spa-climatic resorts must employ qualified personnel, able to offer visitors a quality reception. Contacting the customer directly, the hotel staff is the bearer of his image.

#### 2. The influence of the tariff

Price is approached as a formative element of image and quality and also as an attribute in attitude formation. Value perception is the basis of specific pricing strategies. Even if the working time decreases and therefore the leisure time increases, spending the free time in a spa resort is an important investment. From this point of view the hotel management from the spa-climatic resort must adopt a strategy that aims to determine an average price and to balance the quality / price ratio. A complementary strategy is the acceptance for the first two, three seasons of a sub-tariff so that the hotel can ensure a revision rate and can develop a basic clientele.

#### 3. Influence of utilities / equipment

Any hotel, big or small, will only be able to develop its customers thanks to its innovation and originality, compared to the other hotels and it will only increase the number of visitors by creating new attractions and proposing original products. Hotels must face increasingly direct or indirect competition, invest and renew their attractions to maintain or increase the number of customers. Generally, the hotel registers a volume of attendance proportional to the investments. The investments of modernization and restoration, the creation of new attractions are necessary on the one hand to adapt to the evolution of demand and on the other hand, to counteract the boring effect, which is observed especially in passive attractions (rides, handling etc.). Reinvestments are at least 10% of turnover and must be accompanied by an active promotion policy.

#### 4. Influence of infrastructure

The service and quality of road and highway infrastructures represents a moderating or accelerating coefficient that is significant compared to the percentage of use of these three areas.

The offer for spa tourism in Romania will be revitalized by [6, 123]:

- arranging at the European tourist standards of the spa-climatic resorts;
- refurbishing the treatment bases, modernizing and raising the comfort level of the reception structures, modulation and diversification of the leisure, extending the treatment procedures based on natural native treatment factors.
- creating parks ;
- completing and modernizing the tourist infrastructure on the main transit lanes to the spa resorts and the tourist objectives in their area;
- extension of the offer for business tourism and congresses in the spa-climatic resorts. Creation of conditions for the development of special forms of tourism: hunting, fishing, scientific, adventure, etc.
- diversification of the tourist offer by promoting more intense cultural tourism in the areas of the spa resorts.

### Conclusions

Regardless of the tourism potential of the spa-climatic resorts, a factor with a decisive influence on the accessibility in the tourist area remains the infrastructure. Therefore, it is essential to carry out investment projects, public or in public-private partnership, which will ensure easy accessibility in the spa-climatic tourist areas. The balneoclimatic tourism and the spa medicine are acquiring new valences every day, in parallel with the socio-economic development of our country and with the increase and modernization of the reception structures for accommodation, public food, treatment and leisure in the resorts.

Simultaneously with the practice of simple pleasures (watching a match, a race, a movie, etc.), we are witnessing the growth of a certain number of demands related to social progress: the desire to take care of health, to attend clean places, which It gives you the confidence to replace the days of intense fun with long and sometimes monotonous holidays. The spa resorts have arrived in time to respond to this demand and the clientele is ready to pay.

The attendance of a spa-climatic resort knows different levels of development:

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