

## **Exhaustive Analysis of the Way in which were Promoted Romanian Spas/Water Thermal Villages at the November 2013 Edition of the Romanian Tourism Fair**

by

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**Abstract.** Romania is one of the countries that, despite its potential, have failed to pass a single spa tourism product, preferring to rely on multiple sides. This paper discusses how the resorts and areas with watering potential in Romania are currently promoting to attract more tourists. In this regard, we undertook research in the November 2013 edition of Romania's Tourism Fair which we address issues such as the number of participations, materials distributed and the funds used to attend. Also in the same event we did an analysis of the materials distributed at fair booths that promoted and entities in the area of health tourism (resorts, hotels) to compare with those offered by Austria, Turkey and Bulgaria. Besides these issues, the paper presents and analysis statistics provided by the National Institute of Statistics, including: the number of tickets allocated to rest and treatment, or the budget for this purpose in 2009-2011.

**Key words:** Climatic resort, Health tourism in Romania, Romanian tourism fair, Tourism marketing, Watering resort

**JEL classification:** L83, M21, M37

### **1 Introduction**

Water use by human society for purposes beyond the vital aspects is known since antiquity. Bathing to cleanse the body or curative was used by all people: Mesopotamians (Grog and Peter, 2008), Chinese (LaMoreauz and Tanner, 2001), Greeks, Romans, Turks, who guessed the curative properties of springs and have operated them in various forms. Although bathing cult lost in Europe over the centuries, after the eighteenth century there is a change, spas gaining an increasing importance (Voinea and Baran, 2008, p 175).

In Romania, there is still evidence of the fact that thermal waters have been used for nearly 2,000 years - Băile Herculane, dating from 153 dc ([http://www.mdrt.ro/userfiles/publicatii\\_gh\\_id\\_statiuni\\_balneare.pdf](http://www.mdrt.ro/userfiles/publicatii_gh_id_statiuni_balneare.pdf)) is the best proof. There are also known benefits of salt water and saline aerosols - knowing locals use these waters for centuries to treat certain diseases without having ever received medical advice (Sandu et al, 2010).

Among the first who made efforts to revive was the country balneologists Carol Davila, "which in the second half of the nineteenth century reformed scientifically Romanian health system,

to distinguish two aspects by defining the use of natural factors: the brimstone period and sludge period [...] the plague during 1828-1830 influenced the knowledge and exploitation of mineral waters" (Miclaus *et al*, 2008, p. 65). The interest in this area began to grow in the twentieth century, when it was set up National Institute of Rehabilitation, Physical Medicine and Balneal Climatology, being at that time the second institute in Europe, after the one in France (Munteanu and Finch, 2011). Also during this period, in 1928 Romania held the fifth edition of the International Congress of Thalassotherapy, an event which gave the country a great visibility at European level in this area (Miclaus et al, 2011).

Currently, in Romania there are "approximately 232 municipalities and 160 spa points and resorts, of which only 24 are of national interest and those included in the international circuit are: Băile Felix, Călimănești-Căciulata, Băile Herculane, Sovata, Slănic Moldova, Băile Olănești, Băile Govora, Vatra Dornei, Covasna, Buziaș. Of these, the one which has the largest capacity is Băile Felix (Nistoreanu, 2005), whose name is believed to come from the fact that those who came here to improve their health always left happy. Its first attestation is in

a document dating from 1405, which shows that the properties of local waters are recognized in Europe (Rosca and Farcas, 2012).

Some of the features Romanian spa tourism has are the strong social footprint and lack of investment in specific infrastructure (Erdeli et al, 2011). Also, in addition, stands the approach taken in the marketing.

Over time, it has undergone several stages in Romania; the central pillar was the Ministry of Tourism, who served several functions: promoter, stimulation, intervention and currently coordinator. "By December 1989 there was an industry, coordinated and funded by the Ministry of Tourism: editing in English, French and German to a monthly magazine: *Travel, Holidays in Romania*", printing flyers into hundreds of thousands of copies, with even a printing company specializing in this type of work, regular attendance at international tourism fairs, inviting many foreign journalists to visit Romania (Nedelea, 2003, p 181).

Romania does not have a comprehensive product to promote in accordance with the requirements of tourists, while countries such as Hungary, Italy, Germany and France have specialized in a particular segment, which makes that part of the request to move to other locations (Stăncioiu et al, 2012).

To promote resorts/spas localities in the country is done using European funds attracted through specific projects: REGIO (<http://www.inforegio.ro>) and funds provided by the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism (<http://www.mdrt.ro>).

## 2 Methodology

The methodology used for the article was to analyze the statistical data from the National Statistics Institute. We wanted to see what is the situation in Romanian's tourism regarding the availability of treatment and rest tickets, budgets and length of stay.

We also undertook a research in the autumn of 2013 (November 14 to 17) at Romania's Tourism Fair which had two objectives: questioning participants representing resorts / towns with potential spa and analysis of materials distributed by them compared with

other three participating countries: Turkey, Austria and Bulgaria.

## 3 Current trend in Romanian SPAs

According to the Romanian Tourist Breviary in 2013, health tourism is the fourth in terms of accommodation capacity in operation before the sea-side zone and after the mountain zone.

Given the fact that the investments were limited in the spa area, what makes the request to be present in this market is the allocation of tickets each year for treatment and rest. This enables business continuity with units that no longer correspond to the current demands of tourists.

The following figure (Fig. No.1) presents the evolution of the allocation of tickets for treatment and rest (thousand units) in 2009-2011.

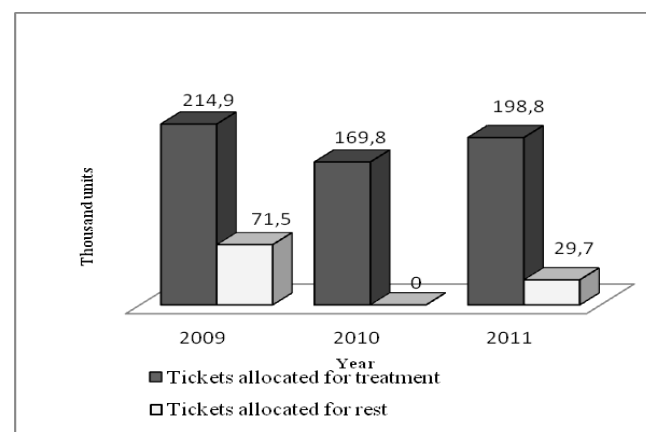


Figure 1. Evolution of treatment tickets in 2009-2011  
Source: Processing by INSSE: Romania in numbers 2013

The number of tickets allocated for leisure is noticeably lower than those allocated for treatment, their level oscillating in both cases: in 2009 reached the highest level for the coming year - in 2010 was not assigned any ticket for rest but in 2011 it increased again.

Assigning a large number of tickets for treatment can be explained by the role of prophylactic procedures they have in the state, which leads to significant long-term savings in the health sector.

Rest and treatment tickets are assigned to persons by the National Retirement Pensions in 2013 are charged at a maximum of 1550 Ron for assigned units framed at 2 stars and 1604

Ron for assigned units framed at 3 stars (<http://www.cnpas.org>).

The existence of treatment facilities and trained medical personnel are other reasons why this sector needs to be exploited.

In addition to the number of tickets allocated the budget for them also varied, its evolution is shown in Fig. No. 2.

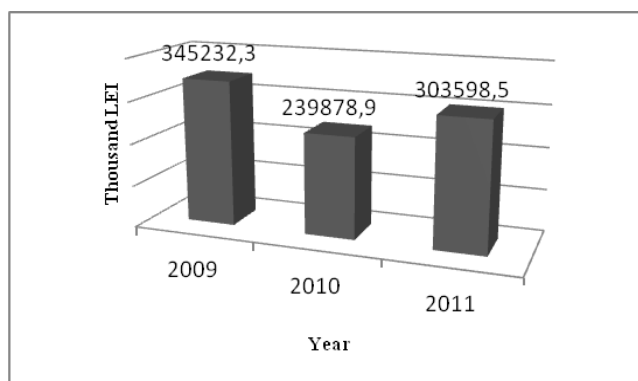


Figure 2. Evolution of the expenditure incurred for treatment and rest in 2009-2011

Source: Processing by INSSE: Romania in numbers 2013

In terms of budget allocated for treatment and rest tickets, 2010 is at the lowest level of the three years analyzed.

The fact that the social aspect is prominent in health tourism in Romania is that the services cannot compete with those from other countries, something that is seen in the share of foreign tourist arrivals in the state, which is only 4%. Appearance of "closed loop" time of some establishments feel safe due to the constant flow of tourists generated by the contracts held with the National House of Pensions and the Ministry of Labor makes modernization, including its behavior to be delayed.

Also, another aspect that made our research study is the number of overnight stays, being known that health tourism is characterized by a longer duration of stay. This is due to medical procedures which are made in the treatment facilities and for an optimum effect and must be repeated over several days.

In 2012, according to Statistical Summary 2013, domestic travel for holidays and business balneal resorts recorded the highest level during the periods 4-7 nights. Figure No. 3 shows the structure of domestic trips by length of stay in resorts.

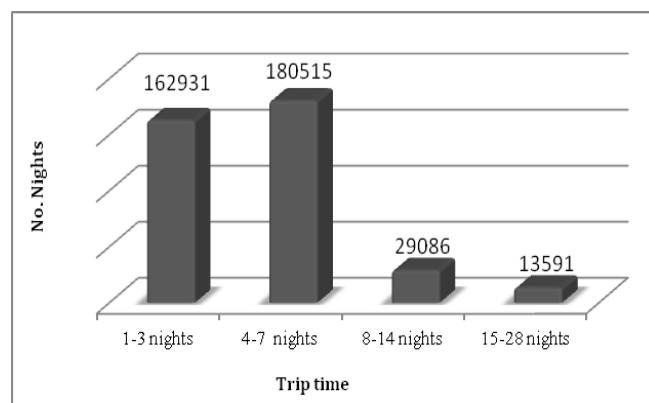


Figure 3. Domestic trips for holidays and business in Romanian resort in 2012

Source: INSSE, Touristic Breviary of Romania 2013

Although the spa package implies a set of specific elements that allow tourists to stay for 10-18 days, the data shows that this sector restricts its duration. Periods of 15 to 28 overnight stays are today the least represented, being surpassed those 4-7 nights and 1-3 nights. Thus, representing about 8% of the overnight stays of two categories that stand out.

One of the reasons for the length of stay is becoming smaller is that hotels which have spas also have available conference rooms and organize business events that are reduced in scope. This makes the data present stay lower. Also today people desire to leave fragments to reach more places in a year with increased mobility that they have today (mobility given by the large number of those who own a car).

#### 4 The presence of Romanian SPAs/water thermal villages at the November 2013 edition of the Tourism Fair

Another issue raised in this article is how the resorts and areas with thermal potential from Romania were presented at the Romanian Tourism Fair held from 14 to 17 November 2013. The research undertaken in this event had two main objectives: the analysis on the stands which promote this type of tourism and analysis of materials that promote spas locations in Romania in comparison with those of Austria, Bulgaria and Turkey presented at the fair.

To achieve the first objective, we undertook a survey based on a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of five mixed questions

with the response time of approximately 2 minutes.

There were targeted 21 SPAs and water thermal villages; representing 85% of the resorts in the area attended the fair.

For the second goal we considered the material available at the stands compared to the stands from countries like: Austria, Turkey, and Bulgaria. In this situation we considered the following attributes of materials: paper quality, picture quality, information provided.

#### 4.1 Results

Regarding **the first objective**, the answers obtained from the questionnaire are presented below.

The first question was: "How many times before did the resort participated at the fair?". Responses were different, four of them were at the first participation and also 4 were those who said they had participated in more than 10 editions. Other responses were: three resorts have answered that they are at the second, third and fifth participation, two units in the fourth and one was at the sixth participation, respectively at the nine participation.

The second question was "What promotional materials are used at the stand?". The answers available were: flyer, brochure, catalog, postcards, calendars, bookmarks, posters, others. The material used most was the booklet - 20 of them offering it to those interested, followed by flyers - 19 and catalogs - 14. There were also specified in the "other" category the following: samples of sludge, folders, logo bags, notebooks, pens, badges, DVD, CD, tourist map, roll -up.

The third question concerned the nature of the funds that have been used to make these materials. The possible answers were: own funds, European funds or both. Of the 21 units surveyed, 11 said they had used their own funds, 5 said that they appealed to European funds and 5 that have used both sources.

The fourth question was "What is the purpose of participation in Romania's Tourism Fair ", with the answers available: increasing awareness, attracting a large number of tourists, others. In this situation multiple responses could be given.

Thus, 20 said they were concerned by the exposure to attract a number of tourists and 11 wanted to increase awareness. In the category "other" main answers were: interaction with other partners in tourism.

The last question was "What did the stand promote?" With three possible answers: the image of the balneal climacteric resort /village, its image + accommodation, its image + spa tourism product. Most have checked the latest version (13), 6 answered the image of the balneal climacteric resort / village and the fewest, 2, image + accommodation.

To achieve **the second objective** - we considered gathering of materials provided at Tourism Fair of Romania and we examined the specified attribute.

For classification, we defined three categories in which to fit the distributed materials: excellent, medium and weak. Attributes that distinguish these categories are: quality of raw material (paper), the quality of images, available information.

Materials offered by Romania stands fall into 3 categories.

The first category, the "excellent " includes materials distributed by representatives of SPAs / water thermal villages from Romania that meet the following attributes : they have a very good image quality, the paper used is of high quality, with many images, color printed, the information was easy to read and understand.

The image used is of high quality - they did not change when they were integrated into the text (modifying its size). Also, the chosen images were representative for locations and units, were made by professionals who also have used professional models (not ordinary people). In this category are mostly catalogs and brochures of hotels and treatment facilities.

The second category, the medium one includes most materials. For it has been used paper which is suitable for color printing color, including images produced. What made the difference compared to the previous category is image quality. These were made using non-professional cameras or people who are not professional photographers. This follows from the frames and angles chosen - often are too

dark, do not inspire a holiday wish of the locations photographed – roads are not referring to the location or the unit shown, the people who appear in the photographs - are ordinary people who do not favor the promotion.

Regarding the information provided, they are too elaborated, describing too in detail the capture sources, the physical and chemical properties of water.

The third category that defines them as weak materials includes those that are printed on normal A4 paper, black and white or color, with images or pictures of very poor quality, with information which are hard to read. This category is underrepresented, comprising mainly New Year Eve offers in some spas.

The other three countries analyzed had fewer materials about health tourism, the least represented being Bulgaria. Materials provided they fall within the category of "excellent" and "medium", the first group having a better quality than those from Romania. Although Romanian catalogs and booklets in this category are of high quality in terms of attributes analyzed, those from abroad are higher. The paper is thicker, both the inside and the one used for the covers, more catalogs being embossed with various details visible from certain angles. The images are made with professional equipment, professional photographers, which are passed through specific editing programs. Also, models were used to represent units of tourists on Spa and Wellness.

Austria had the largest number of different resorts and establishments that promote wellness in the country, some of which were published in several languages: English, German, and Russian. Also their catalogs provide information including charges, which are presented in a very readable manner, one of them being sponsored by BMW.

Bulgaria didn't have a catalog only for spa and wellness tourism. Instead this segment was inserted in presentation of some ski units offer that also offer specific health tourism services. This catalog falling in the category "excellent". Turkey had materials that were classified as "medium" in large part because of the images

used. Regarding the information provided, it was hard to read, the background used was too stylized and some brochures had information only in Turkish.

## 4.2 Advantages and Limitations

The main advantage of this research stems from the fact that data could be collected in a very short time - the first 2 days of Romania's Tourism Fair, November 2013 Edition and all respondents and collected materials could be found in the same location. Another advantage is the moment we chose to distribute the questionnaire - the beginning of the event, when the flow of visitors was reduced, representatives from the stands being so willing to answer questions sought.

The limit of this research is that not all spa resorts present at this event were surveyed.

## 5 Conclusions

The analysis done for this article drawn the following:

- In 2009-2011 the budget for treatment and rest tickets fluctuated, with the result that there is not a predictable trend in the social program.
- The number of treatment tickets surpasses the number of rest tickets; resulting authorities focus more on prevention and treatment.
- The trips of 4-7 nights are the most numerous.
- In terms of promoting SPAs and water thermal villages at the november 2013 Edition of the Romanian Tourism Fair, of the 21 units analyzed, most have turned to own funds for promotion.
- More than half of them were promoted at the stand the image of the resort and a spa tourism product. They offered to those interested advertising materials such as: brochures, flyers, catalogs.
- The quality of the material presented was good, but inferior compared to those from Austria.

The spa tourism in Romania still has a stronger social footprint and this fact has several implications. On the one hand it enables certain categories of people, especially pensioners, to improve their health. This leads to long-term savings from both their and the Ministry of Health. Also, the resorts facilities continue of operating with a high occupancy rate, regardless of weather conditions.

On the other hand, this prevents the improvement of services to attract a higher percentage of foreign tourists. In present, the foreign tourist percentage is only 4%.

So, in conclusion, to participate in future editions of the Romanian Tourism Fair are appropriated to seek to improve the weak areas observed in this study. Thus, it is advisable to work with specialized companies that have experience in printed promotional items.

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