

# Overview on the Impact of Consumer Behavior Decisions on the Tourism Industry in Romania

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## Abstract

The purpose of the research is to identify the changes that appear from the point of view of consumer behavior in the consumption of tourist services in the post-pandemic period with the analysis carried out on the number of tourist arrivals in Romania, the distribution of the number of tourists on tourist destinations, the capacity of tourist accommodation. and identifying the share of tourism in the Gross Domestic Product of Romania in the period 2008-2020.

According to the research carried out, there is a significant decrease in the tourism industry in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a competitive return in 2021. The impact of the tourism industry on the economic development of Romania was felt at the national level. by decreasing the weight of the gross domestic product. and implicitly of the revenues received from the provision of services.

Consumers notice that they are much more oriented towards digitization in the tourism industry, towards the discovery of new places to visit and with potential involvement in the sustainable development of industries.

The analysis carried out suggests opportunities for investment and development of tourism in less popular areas, which can be discovered and promoted in the context of the new reality in order to increase visibility and explore the potential they hold.

The tourist accommodation capacity is unevenly distributed among the tourist destinations in Romania, with most accommodation places being in seaside resorts, with the exception of Constanta, while the capacity in spa resorts and in the mountain area is lower. Thus, the need to preserve and capitalize on resources from lesser-known areas with potential is identified, in order to develop the necessary infrastructure, to increase accommodation capacities and to attract as many tourists as possible.

**Keywords** tourism, gross domestic product, competitiveness, development, economical growth

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## Introduction

The emancipation of tourism was part of a process of maturity achieved as a major result of economic progress and the increase in the well-being-free time of society. Of course, the process has been facilitated by the development of more efficient transport technologies, by lowering the cost of transport, consequently by the ultimate globalization trends towards a world without borders, along with the emergence and development of digital infrastructure.

As a result, tourism has become one of the fastest growing sectors for the economic field, and many countries and regions consider tourism as a strategic vehicle for achieving prosperity.

The tourism industry is represented by economic activities capable of generating growth and engagement in the EU, while contributing to development and economic and social integration, in particular the countryside, mountainous areas, coastal regions and peripheral regions. There are SMEs that employ around 5.2% of the total workforce (around 9.7 million jobs, with a large proportion of jobs for young people). The European tourism industry generates more than 5% of the EU's GDP, a figure that is constantly growing.

Tourism is therefore the third largest socio-economic activity in the European Union after trade and distribution and construction. Taking into account these 3 sectors, tourism has the largest contribution to GDP and is estimated to generate over 10% of the European Union's GDP and provide about 12% of total jobs (Turcu et al., 2015).

According to the research “The impact of the pandemic on tourism in Romania: a post-pandemic analysis”, the negative effects of the pandemic on the tourism industry were identified, regarding the impact on the revenues of companies in the HoReCa industry, which decreased significantly, the decrease in the number of employees in the industry who have contributed to the increase in the number of unemployed people in Romania, which affects both the companies and the state at the budgetary level through the amounts they have to allocate for the recovery of the sector and for the support of employees (Popescu,2022).

According to the author Ionescu, the change in consumer behavior in terms of preferences in the post-pandemic tourism industry can be observed in the research carried out, regarding the increase in interest shown by them in rural, ecological tourism at the expense of well-known and popular tourist areas in Romania (Ionescu, 2022).

In this work it is aimed at identifying the changes occurred from the point of view of consumer behavior in the consumption of touristic services in the post-pandemic period. In the section on literature, the factors that contributed to the change in consumer behavior will be identified. In the continuation of the specialized literature will be analyzed the information on the number of arrivals of tourists in Romania, the distribution by tourist destinations of the number of tourists, the capacity of tourist accommodation as well as the share of the tourism industry in the Gross Domestic Product of Romania, according to the statistical data provided by the National Institute of Statistics. In the continuation of the specialized literature will be analyzed the information on the number of arrivals of tourists in Romania, the distribution by tourist destinations of the number of tourists, the capacity of tourist accommodation as well as the share of the tourism industry in the gross domestic product of Romania, according to the statistical data provided by the National Institute of Statistics.

## **1. Review of the scientific literature – Changes in the structure of the consumer behavior of tourism products**

The development of information and communication technologies (ICT) and the increase in their use by consumers has brought about a radical change in the relationship between the tourism industry and customers.

Treated as a whole, the third system of services is successful in the market of tourism business providers depending on the extent to which the services will be able to ensure good accommodation relations, in other words, of the environment in which the tourist services are provided.

According to the Treaty of Lisbon, the main objective of European tourism policy is to boost competitiveness. On the other hand, the development of a more active tourism policy could make a significant contribution to relaunching the internal market. (European Commission, 2010, p.10)

The intelligent development of communities, oriented on the qualitative growth of services, minimizing the consumption of resources, economic growth, protecting the environment and promoting ICT solutions, can be supported by PPPs in order to produce effects, for all interesting parts.

In certain projects, individual implementation by public institutions may limit the performance and probability of achieving the projected results (Filipkowska and Wegrzyn, 2019). In addition to this, specific deadlines increase significantly, and the safety of continuing projects decreases significantly, given the change of political or strategic factors. (Dima, 2019)

This way of collaboration between the public and private sectors can help to develop tourism services both at national and European Union level, taking into account also the factors that have a negative impact on the tourism sector.

A series of macroeconomic aspects related to the natural, political and socio-economic environment trigger certain sustainability problems in the tourism sector. These aspects are highlighted by certain shortcomings such as:

- Temporality- natural systems work on periods that are often much larger than those determined by policy cycles, business cycles and planning;
- Spatiality - sustainability and environmental problems tend to be transboundary in nature and for some types of problems on a global scale (climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss);

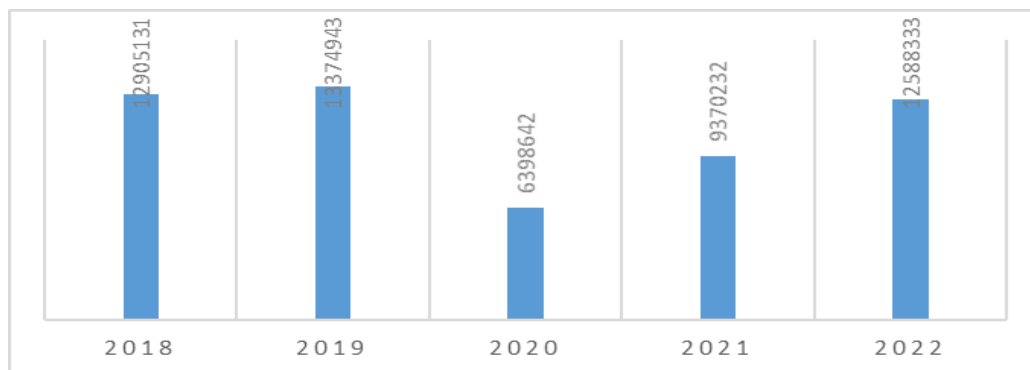
- Limits - the concept of sustainability suggests that there are limits to the exploitation of the natural environment because of its limited capacity for renewal;
- Irreversibility - Some natural capital or environmental assets cannot be renewed or are not easily substituted (soil, groundwater, ozone);
- Uncertainty - some aspects of sustainability are characterized by uncertainty, making it difficult to determine the effectiveness, implications and socio-economic impact of these policy measures. (Gössling et al. 2015).

The tourism industry has begun to develop concepts of sustainable tourism, with the aim of guaranteeing the minimisation of the negative impact of tourism, maximising the positive economic benefits because it represents a unique opportunity to promote the contribution of tourism to the realization of the future that the state wants, and also, in order to determine, the exact role that tourism will have in sustainable development on the agenda, by 2030 to ensure that this is a unique opportunity in achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (Harilal, Tichaawa, & Saarinen, 2019).

## 2. Research methodology

In this section of the paper will be analyzed the data on the impact of the decisions reflected by the consumer behavior on the tourism industry at national level. The analyzed information will be reported to the main tourist destinations in Romania.

In the graphic representation below, the number of arrivals of tourists in Romania in the reference period 2018-2022 will be identified.



**Figure no.1. Number of arrivals of tourists in Romania (U.M.: number of people)**

*Source: authors interpretation based on statistics from National Institute of Statistics*

According to NIS data, in 2018, 12,905,131 tourist arrivals were registered in accommodation units nationwide, and in 2019, their number increased to 13,374,943 people. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of tourists staying decreased significantly in 2020, reaching 6,398,642 people.

In 2021, the number of tourist arrivals increased to 9,370,232, reflecting a significant increase compared to the previous year, still below the level recorded in the pre-pandemic years. A continuous increase can be observed in 2022, when the number of arrivals reached 12,588,333, suggesting a return of the tourism industry to the pre-pandemic level.

An increase in the number of tourists can be interpreted as an increase in tourism activity and tourism revenues, but it can also reflect greater pressure on tourism resources and the environment. Also, the significant decrease in the number of tourist arrivals in 2020 had a significant impact on the tourism industry, generating significant losses for companies in the sector and affecting the economy as a whole.

In general, the analysis of data on tourist arrivals in tourist accommodation establishments is just one of many ways to assess tourism activity and can be complemented by other sources of information, the data can be used to identify trends and patterns in the behavior of tourists, as well as to guide investment decisions and public policies in the field of tourism.

**Table no.1. Distribution by tourist destinations of the number of tourists (number of people)**

Tourist destinations	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Spas	1018721	1133359	601326	924400	1117977
Seaside resorts, The City of Constanta	1111389	1153682	905266	1142271	1293940
Resorts in the mountain area	2217110	2305517	1295105	1866402	2443761
Danube delta area and Tulcea	165431	166411	118325	137182	113105
Bucharest and cities county seat	6178665	6275832	2359090	3660935	5449757
Other localities and tourist routes	2212815	2340139	1119530	1639042	2169793

*Source: authors interpretation based on statistics from National Institute of Statistics*

The presented data provide a complex picture of the evolution of the tourism industry in recent years, they represent the distribution by tourist destinations of the total number of arrivals of tourists in accommodation structures, expressed in the number of people, for the period 2018-2022.

According to these data, in 2018 (the same trend was maintained in 2019), the most popular tourist destinations were Bucharest and the county capital cities, excluding Tulcea, with 6,178,665 tourist arrivals, followed by mountain areas, with 2,217,110 tourist arrivals, and other localities and tourist routes, with 2,213,815 arrivals.

In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of tourist arrivals to most tourist destinations has drastically decreased. The most affected destinations were spa destinations, with only 601,326 arrivals, followed by other localities and tourist routes, with 1,119,530 arrivals, and mountainous areas, with 1,295,105 tourist arrivals.

In 2021, the number of tourist arrivals increased significantly in most tourist destinations. The most popular tourist destinations were Bucharest and the county capital cities, excluding Tulcea, with 3,660,935 tourist arrivals, followed by the mountain areas, with 1,866,402 arrivals, and the resorts in the coastal area, excluding the city of Constanta, with 1,142,271 tourist arrivals. The same upward trend was maintained at the level of 2022.

**Table no.2. Tourist accommodation capacity distributed on tourist destinations**

Tourist destinations	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Spas	36173	35643	36554	36362	36643
Seaside resorts, The City of Constanta	80665	85081	85200	84794	86271
Resorts in the mountain area	65025	64767	63943	66374	66742
Danube delta area and Tulcea	7645	7205	7593	8177	8424
Bucharest and cities county seat	91800	92018	90098	89657	89607
other localities and tourist routes	72527	71848	74731	79143	79699
Total	353835	356562	358119	364507	367386

*Source: authors interpretation based on statistics from National Institute of Statistics*

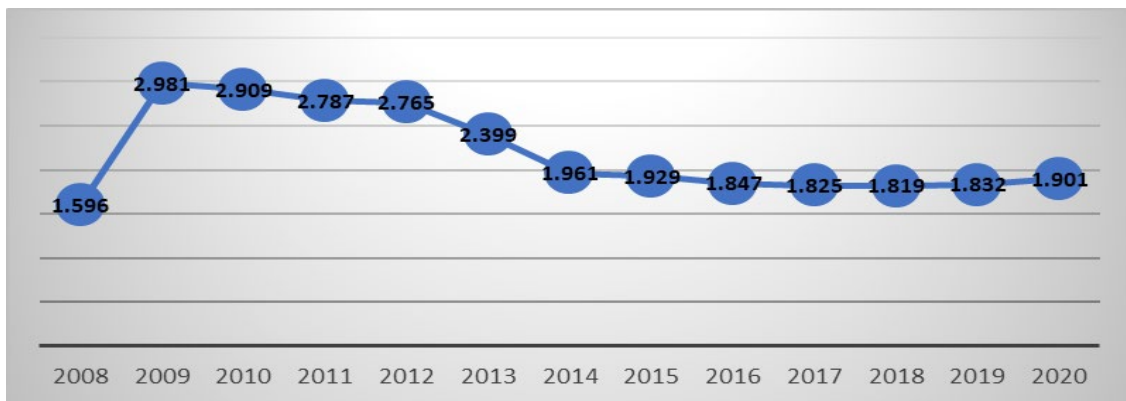
These data reflect the capacity of tourist accommodation by type of accommodation structures in Romania, in the period 2018-2022, distributed by tourist destinations. According to NIS data, in 2018, the accommodation capacity in the spa resorts was 36,173 seats, while in the resorts in the seaside area, with the exception of Constanta, it was 80,665 seats. In the resorts in the mountain area, 65,025 accommodation places were available, while in the Danube Delta area, including Tulcea city, it was only 7,645 places. In Bucharest and in the county capital cities, the tourist accommodation capacity was 91,800 places in 2018, while other localities and tourist routes offered an accommodation capacity of 72,527 places in the same year. The total capacity of tourist accommodation in Romania in 2018 was 353,835 places, it increased

slightly in 2019 and 2020, and in 2021 and 2022 it increased significantly compared to the previous year, reaching 367,386 places in 2022.

The tourist accommodation capacity in the spa resorts and in the resorts in the mountain area is lower than that of the other tourist destinations, but it remains relatively constant from year to year, while in the Danube Delta area, including Tulcea, it is the smallest of all the tourist destinations presented.

The distribution of the tourist accommodation capacity by tourist destinations shows that most accommodation places are found in the resorts in the seaside area, with the exception of Constanta, where the capacity was 85,081 places in 2019 and reached 86,271 places in 2022. The spa resorts have a smaller accommodation capacity, with 35,643 seats in 2019 and 36,643 seats in 2022.

In mountain resorts, the accommodation capacity was 64,767 seats in 2019 and increased to 66,742 seats in 2022. In the Danube Delta area, including Tulcea, the accommodation capacity was only 7,205 seats in 2019 and increased slightly to 8,424 places in 2022. Bucharest and the county capital cities, with the exception of Tulcea, have a tourist accommodation capacity of 92,018 places in 2019 and 89,607 places in 2022. The accommodation capacity in other localities and tourist routes was 71,848 places in 2019 and increased to 79,699 places in 2022.



**Figure no.2. The share of tourism in the Gross Domestic Product of Romania in the period 2008-2020 (%)**

Source: NIS ([https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/field/publicatii/contul\\_satelit\\_de\\_turism\\_2020.pdf](https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/field/publicatii/contul_satelit_de_turism_2020.pdf))

The chart above shows the share of tourism in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Romania in the period 2008-2020. In 2008, tourism contributed 1.596% to Romania's GDP, and in 2009 the share increased significantly to 2.981%. Over the next few years, the share of tourism in GDP fluctuated, but gradually decreased until 2020, when it reached 1.901%. In general, we can see that tourism had an important contribution to Romania's GDP during the analyzed period, but with a slight downward trend in recent years.

These data reflect the fact that tourism has made an important contribution to Romania's GDP in recent years, but fluctuations show that more attention is needed for the sustainable development of the tourism industry. In addition, the increase in the share of tourism in GDP in 2020 could be a sign of economic change and may be a reason for hope for industry in a difficult context generated by the pandemic.

However, it is important to note that the share of tourism in GDP was generally lower than in other European countries, which could reflect an untapped potential for tourism development in Romania. The data also shows a decrease in the contribution of tourism to GDP in recent years, which may indicate a need for investment and tourism development policies.

It is important to take into account that these figures are influenced by several factors, such as investments in infrastructure, tourism promotion, security conditions, political and economic climate, as well as changes in the international tourism market. In this regard, the authorities should take measures to encourage the sustainable development of tourism, in accordance with the principles of environmental and social responsibility, as well as to improve the quality of the tourism services offered.

**Table no. 3. SWOT analysis of the Romanian tourism sector**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Natural potential that supports a wide variety of forms of tourism (cultural, historical, spa, adventure, etc.);</li> <li>- Natural setting with varied landforms that offer landscape diversity (mountains, plateaus, coast, plains, delta);</li> <li>- The wealth of spa resources and natural healing factors, which can be exploited in medical and wellness treatments;</li> <li>- The forest area, the hunting fund and the fishery, which can offer opportunities for hunting, fishing and ecotourism;</li> <li>- Extensive hydrography with a multitude of groundwater, lakes and rivers that can be exploited for water sports and adventure tourism;</li> <li>- Temperate-continental, moderate climate, which can offer opportunities for summer and winter tourism;</li> <li>- The varied anthropic potential made up of archaeological remains and historical monuments over 2000 years old, which can be exploited for cultural and historical tourism;</li> <li>- Developing new tourism products by exploiting unexplored potential, such as mountain tourism, rural tourism or adventure tourism.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tourism infrastructure is underdeveloped, especially in terms of accommodation, restaurants and leisure facilities;</li> <li>- The poor quality of tourist services offered, including the low level of foreign language skills of tourism industry personnel;</li> <li>- Tourist destinations insufficiently promoted internationally, which leads to low visibility and a lack of interest from foreign tourists;</li> <li>- Transport infrastructure is poor, with outdated and underdeveloped roads and railways;</li> <li>- Poor development of water supply, sewage and electricity in certain tourist regions;</li> <li>- The very worn and undeveloped infrastructure in the spa treatment bases, which no longer meet modern standards;</li> <li>- Lack of investment and partnership between the private and government sectors, leading to a stagnation of tourism development in many regions.</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improving the business environment by stimulating investments in tourism and facilitating access to financing for the development of tourism infrastructure and services, including through public-private partnerships;</li> <li>- The increase in the number of tourists from Europe and the world, due to the increasing travel trends and the increased interest in new and authentic destinations, which can be exploited by developing new tourism products and intensively promoting existing destinations;</li> <li>- The strategic geographical position, at the intersection of the main commercial corridors of Europe, offers opportunities for the development of transit tourism, but also for attracting tourists interested in excursions and circuits in the region;</li> <li>- The modernization and promotion of tourist attractions from the cultural-historical heritage, through</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The negative impact of economic crises, as well as unforeseen events such as pandemics, which can affect the tourism industry globally;</li> <li>- Development of alternative or more economically attractive tourist destinations in other countries in the region;</li> <li>- The COVID-19 pandemic and other diseases or epidemics that may affect tourism and international travel in general;</li> <li>- Climate change and extreme weather phenomenon, which can negatively affect certain tourist destinations or lead to the development of environmental problems;</li> <li>- The economic situation influenced by the increase in the price of oil, which can lead to an increase in transport and accommodation costs for tourists;</li> <li>- Delays in completing the modernization of transport infrastructure, such as highways or railways;</li> </ul>

<p>investments in the restoration and enhancement of historical monuments and archaeological sites, can attract a segment of tourists interested in cultural and historical tourism;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- European financial assistance for investment projects can be accessed for the development of tourist infrastructure and other projects that can increase the attractiveness of Romanian destinations;</li> <li>- There are government programs for various economic fields, including tourism development, which can be used to support the tourism industry in Romania;</li> <li>- The development of ecotourism and other related activities can increase tourists' interest in Romanian destinations and contribute to the protection of the natural environment;</li> <li>- The creation of new types of niche tourism can attract specific segments of tourists and increase the diversity of the tourist offer in Romania;</li> <li>- Integrating tourism with other complementary activities, such as rural or wine tourism, can provide opportunities for tourism development in regions where such activities are already present.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The pressure of tourist development on protected areas and cultural and natural heritage, which can lead to their degradation and reduce tourist attraction;</li> <li>- The continuous migration of qualified personnel from tourism to other sectors or more developed countries in the European Union;</li> <li>- Insufficient resources for the modernization and expansion of the tourist infrastructure, especially in the less developed regions.</li> </ul>
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The SWOT analysis of the Romanian tourism sector shows that there is a great natural potential in Romania for different forms of tourism, such as cultural, historical, spa, adventure and ecotourism. Romania has rich resources for hunting, fishing and water sports tourism, and the temperate-continental climate offers opportunities for summer and winter tourism.

In order to develop the Romanian tourism sector, it is necessary for the government and the private sector to collaborate to invest in tourism infrastructure and to improve the quality of tourist services, so that tourists can benefit from a quality experience and more attractive tourist attractions.

In order to reach its maximum development potential, the tourism sector must carefully address its weaknesses and capitalize on the available development opportunities, while focusing on increasing the quality of tourist services offered and promoting Romanian tourist destinations internationally.

### Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant negative impact on Romania's tourism industry in 2020, leading to a steep drop in the number of tourists and a decrease in the industry's contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, in 2021, the tourism industry saw a competitive return, with an increase in the number of tourists and a gradual recovery of the sector. This trend continued into 2022, suggesting a return to pre-pandemic levels.

Data on tourist arrivals at tourist reception structures can provide valuable information about trends and patterns in tourist behavior and can be used to guide investment decisions and public policies in the field of tourism.

The most popular tourist destinations in recent years were Bucharest and the county seat cities, with a significant share in the total number of tourist arrivals. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the tourism industry, with a drastic decrease in the number of arrivals in 2020 in most tourist destinations, especially spa ones. However, in subsequent years, the number of tourist arrivals increased significantly, reflecting a rebound in the tourism industry. This may suggest opportunities for investment and tourism development in less popular areas, which can be discovered and promoted in the context of the new reality.

Tourist accommodation capacity is unevenly distributed among tourist destinations in Romania, with the most accommodation places in the seaside resorts, with the exception of the city of Constanța, while the capacity in the spa resorts and in the mountain area is lower. In recent years, the total tourist accommodation capacity in Romania has increased significantly, reaching 367,386 places in 2022, compared to 353,835 places in 2018.

Most tourist accommodation is available in the seaside resorts, with the exception of Constanța, which suggests that this area is the most popular with tourists. The accommodation capacity in Bucharest and in the county seat cities is also high, which may indicate a significant demand for urban tourism. On the other hand, the accommodation capacity in the spa and mountain areas is lower, but relatively constant over time. The significant increase in accommodation capacity in the last two years may suggest an increase in demand for domestic tourism in Romania.

Although tourism had an important contribution to Romania's GDP in the period 2008-2020, the data show a slight downward trend in recent years and an unexploited potential for the development of tourism at the national level. This highlights the need for sustainable development and strategic planning to ensure the long-term growth and stability of the tourism industry.

The research indicates that the tourism industry in Romania has encountered challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but has shown resilience and potential for recovery in the post period. Adapting to changing consumer behavior, promoting sustainable practices, and investing in infrastructure and marketing efforts are crucial to the future success of the industry.

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