

AMARA, A SPA WITH AN EXTRAORDINARY NATURAL POTENTIAL

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Abstract

Spa tourism in Romania is a crucial sector of the tourism industry because of its specific features. Economic growth quality of life of modern human being, bring, besides the positive, some negative aspects: stress, power imbalances, negative actions of the environment on the body due to physical and chemical pollution. To mitigate those negative aspects more and more tourists choose spas as a holiday destination. The purpose of the paper was to analyze Amara resort potential for health tourism. Based on a profound documentation and on the collected data on the statistical data provided by National Institute of Statistics, Ialomița National Environmental Protection Agency, the research work was focused to process the data and interpret the results. The main conclusions highlighted the importance of mud, which is the key mean in preventing and treating various diseases. It is successfully used in wraps, baths or massage. Amara spa is one of our country's resorts treating musculoskeletal disorders, gynecological diseases, endocrine disorders, dermatological diseases, hepatobiliary diseases and cures of diuresis. The analysis of the tourists flow over a period of 14 years pointed out that the increased number of tourists is due to the good promotion of the resort and of its high quality services.

Key words: Amara resort, mud, natural resource, recovery, spa

INTRODUCTION

Given its geographic location, Romania has an abundance of natural resources giving the possibility of practicing a wide range of forms of tourism [8].

Spa tourism is one of the forms recently remodeled at European level, because of the concept that "health is a state of well-being".

The content of health tourism involves several stages of indications and forms of treatment which differ in accordance with the proposed purpose: *prevention* dealing with disease prevention and *prophylactic cures* against body degradation by reducing harmful influences (stress, pollution) frequently met in the developed society; therapeutic spa cure and recovery cure are destined to treat the chronically sick persons by including activation exercises, recovery and functions stimulation [10].

In this context, the purpose of the paper was to analyze the role played by Amara spa resort in health tourism of Romania.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To accomplish this work, the statistical data provided by the National Institute of Statistics and Ialomița National Environmental Protection Agency have been processed using the usual modern methods for such a research work. The results were converted into tables, graphs and then interpreted, and finally the main conclusion were drawn.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Amara resort's natural tourism potential.

The natural environment where Amara resort belongs is Bărăganul Însurățeilor with a relief ranging between 25 to 45.5 m. The specific climate is a continental one, characterized by hot summers and cold winters. The amount of precipitation falls in the range 450-500 mm [9].

The main water source is the Amara Lake, falling into the category of lakes with salt water and silt mud. The lake surface has changed over the time from 40 ha in the year 1939 to 168 ha at present.

Among the highlights natural resources of

Amara Lake there are: water chemistry, mud and water mineralization.

Amara Lake water chemistry is the sum of anions and cations dissolved in water and a series of chemicals that are formed directly on the lake, through the decomposition of organic matter and sludge. Amara Lake is a brackish lake type, with low salinity 1-25 g/l [3].

Being fed by rainfalls, the lake has shown an increasing trend in the period 1956-1966. Between 1970-1971 the lake reached depths of 4 m, but to prevent flooding nearby land and buildings it was built a channel for draining excess [1].

This measure has had a negative impact on salinity. Thus, in 1887, Petru Poni calculated for Amara Lake a salt concentration of 89.45 g/l in about 90 years and in 1976 it reached 7.7 g/l, which favored the development of a fauna specific to freshwaters.

The seasonal variations of salt content are related to the amount of rainfalls [3].

Currently, the lake water has a concentration of 31,038.1 mg/kg, predominantly SO₄ anion with 12,846.9 mg/kg, Cl 7,478.7 mg/kg and Na cations with 7,858.2 mg/kg and Mg 1,768 4 mg/kg.

The mud of the Amara Lake, called "black gold", is black (with air becomes gray), greasy, salty and has a very strong smell of hydrogen sulfide. It contains 41% inorganic salt, 39% organic matter and 20% water.

The substances from the lake water have a positive influence in treating various diseases, a reason as the number of tourists coming to treatment to grow.

The water sweetening and fish fauna development have reduced sludge whose thickness increases from the shore to the center by almost a meter (0.03 m to 1.10 m), requiring long periods of formation. The thickness of the sludge is currently 30-60 cm [4].

Analyzing Table 1 and Fig.1. it was noticed a significant decrease across 36 years, starting from 409,000 cubic meters in 1961 to 150,000 cubic meters in 1997.

Table 1. The decrease of the mud reserve in the Amara Lake during 1961-1997

Year	Quantity (mc)
1961	409,000
1974	287,000
1984	217,000
1997	150,000

Source: National Environmental Protection Agency, Ialomița [6].

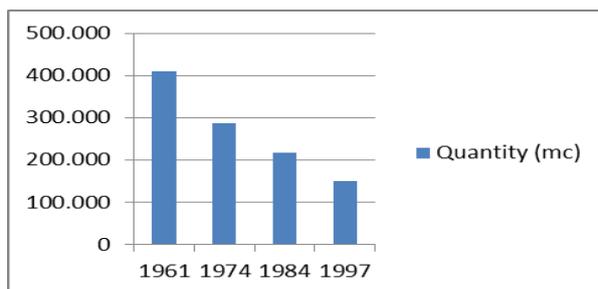


Fig. 1. The decline of sludge reserve in Amara Lake during 1961-1997.

Source: Own design.

The lake is said hydrogeological protection zone for sludge reproduction, but this requires restoring forest belts deforested after 1989 ban in the area of irrigation, wastewater discharges, harvesting aquatic vegetation and the pace of exploitation of sludge on preferential areas. This also required the creation of a natural treatment thereof, for inactivating pathogenic microorganisms and assuring a hygienic sanitary lake.

Amara Lake water mineralization values are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Amara Lake water mineralization values

Year	Determination source	Mineralization g/l
1887	Petru Poni	89,45
1933	P. Petrescu	28,60
1973	V. Bulgăreanu	4,46
1993	National Agency for Environmental Protection Laboratory Ialomița	9,5
2013	National Agency for Environmental Protection Laboratory Ialomița	11,3

Source: National Environmental Protection Agency Ialomița [6].

Looking at Table 2 and Fig. 2 we can say that in 1887 Petru Poni determined the highest values of mineralization, 89.45 g/l, but in

1933 the values accounted for only 28.60 g/l, reflecting a continuous decline. The lowest value was recorded in 1973, accounting for 4.4 g/l.

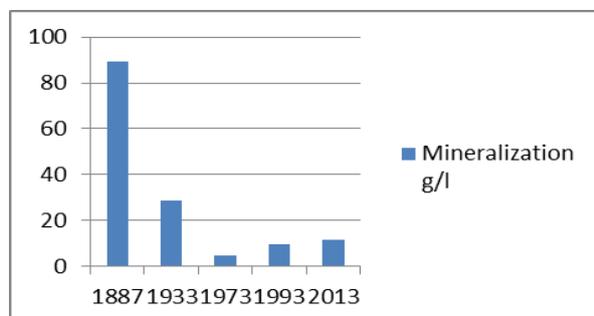


Fig. 2. Changes in Amara lake water mineralization
 Source: Own determination.

These changes in mineralization of the lake water is due to: changes in hydrology, massive deforestation curtain forest on the Southern shore, building area of the resort Amara does not have sewer and water coming from rain and snowmelt drained directly into the lake, operating with outdated equipment producing turbulence in the water, a phenomenon negatively influencing mineralization [5].

Anthropic tourism potential. Treatment base.

By its nature, the Amara resort receives patients with chronic diseases even from infancy. The resort has facilities for anointing with cold mud followed by bathing in the lake, installations of warm baths and mud, physical therapy installations for warm baths in tubs and pools with water from the lake, installations for electrotherapy and hydrotherapy, buveta for internal treatment with mineral water jets, medical gyms, massage rooms, three swimming pools and beaches for sun tanning, one of which with 10,000 seats [6].

Diseases and illnesses treated

The main diseases treated in Amara are musculoskeletal disorders, gynecological, endocrine, dermatological, hepatobiliary diseases, cures for diuresis.

Contraindications

Amara Resort has contraindications for the following diseases: neuroses, active pulmonary tuberculosis, cardiovascular disease, Basedow disease, and asthma [10].

Accommodation

Amara resort has several types of accommodation units such as: hotels (Lebăda, Park, Ialomița), villas (Carmen, Dana, Irina, Livia), and a Camping.

Accommodation at the resort Amara has registered an upward trend especially in the category of hotels (Table 3) [7].

Table 3. Tourist accommodation capacity in the period 2001-2014 in Amara resort

Years	Hotels	Cam ping	Camp	Villas	Small houses	Total
2001	1,665	83	500	188	105	2,541
2002	1,665	83	474	188	105	2,515
2003	1,689	70	337	206	105	2,407
2004	1,763	40	337	214	105	2,459
2005	1,781	36	120	122	105	2,164
2006	1,660	36	120	122	105	2,164
2008	1,785	38	120	26	105	1,949
2009	1,845	34	120	26	105	2,070
2010	1,845	44	120	26	105	2,140
2011	1,839	44	212	26	105	2,232
2012	1,971	342	92	26	105	2,404
2013	1,971	342	90	26	105	2,534
2014	1,894	342	90	26	105	2,534

Source: National Institute of Statistics, Ialomița [7].

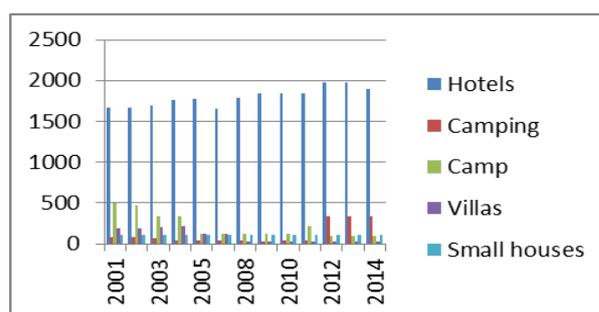


Fig.3.Evolution of tourist accomodation units in Amara resort

Source: Own design.

Looking at Table 3 and Fig. 3, one can see that the number of beds is relatively constant during the period 2001-2014. In 2001 there were 2,541 places, in 2002 they accounted for 2,515, but in 2003 their number declined to 2,407 places. After a period of decrease in 2003, then, the number of places recorded a slight increase in 2004, reaching 2,459 seats. These small fluctuations in the number of beds for tourists were due to the restoration works of the rooms. After the year 2010, the number of seats has continuously raised. The number of tourists in these accommodation units ranged from a year to another, reaching the lowest level in 2010, 15,985 tourists and the highest level, 25,688 tourists in the year 2007. (Table 4).

Table 4. The number of tourists accommodated in Amara resort in the period 2001 - 2014

Years	Hotels	Camping	Camp	Villas	Small houses	Total
2001	15,415	429	1,763	1,037	520	19,164
2002	14,997	120	727	69	30	15,943
2003	19,346	274	1,013	31	60	20,724
2004	19,661	223	845	134	20	20,883
2005	15,818	10	249	189	77	16,344
2006	17,759	40	727	680	10	19,216
2007	24,002	0	906	636	144	25,688
2008	18,208	180	894	3,480	15	22,777
2009	19,535	183	470	34	50	20,272
2010	14,879	265	735	71	35	15,985
2011	18,238	500	418	107	10	19,273
2012	17,335	260	463	547	140	18,745
2013	15,647	130	334	160	100	16,371
2014	16,587	140	480	70	122	17,399

Source: National Institute of Statistics, Ialomița [7].

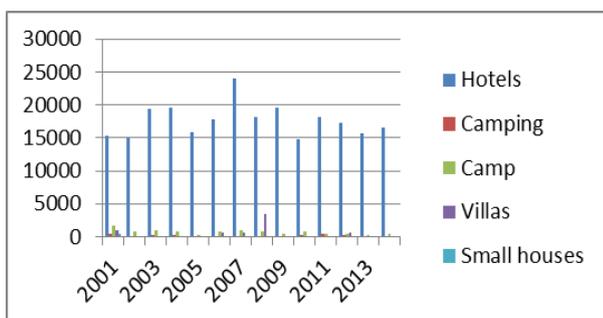


Fig. 4. The number of tourists in the Amara resort during 2001-2014

Source: Own design.

Looking at Fig. 4 and Table 4, one can see that highest number of arrivals was recorded in 2007 (25,688) and the fewest arrivals were registered in 2002 (15,943).

Despite of the fluctuations of the number of tourists arrivals, Amara resort is one of the most visited spas. The increased number of tourists is due to the development of the resort, improved quality of services and their diversity [8].

CONCLUSIONS

Amara resort has a considerable potential for health tourism.

The therapeutic value of water and sludge has been gained from the natural conditions of formation of the environment. The salt water of the lake is a favorable environment for the *Artemia salina* crustacean, whose

decomposition is formed by mud.

Mud is the key of the development of tourism in the resort of Amara, being used in wraps, baths or massage treatment or prevention of disease.

The main diseases treated in Amara are musculoskeletal disorders, gynecological, endocrine, dermatological, hepatobiliary diseases, cures for diuresis.

Spa tourism is addressed to those who want to relax, regain vitality, and to have a good physical, mental and spiritual condition.

The resort has a hospitality network, composed mainly of three hotel complexes, Lebăda, Park, Ialomița, a properly equipped spa with treatment rooms to ensure appropriate services throughout the year.

Analyzing the flow of tourists, studied over a period of 14 years, we can conclude that the resort has a large flow of tourists, thanks to good promotion of the resort, and the quality of services.

There are Romanian and foreign, young or middle-aged tourists who choose Amara resort for treating various diseases. Amara resort is a natural source of health and living that highlights its curative valences which is endowed with.

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