

ANALYSIS OF TOURISM IN ALBA COUNTY IN 2018

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Abstract

The beauty of an area is revealed by spending time on those lands. By practising various forms of tourism (tourism in mountain resorts, spa resorts, circuit, rural tourism, urban tourism), the traveler can enjoy the wonders of nature (waterfalls, caves, quays, karst springs, etc.) as well as the cultural creations, the traditions and customs of the place it prides itself on. Alba county is endowed with a diversified tourist potential that attracts tourists from all corners of the world in any season, providing accommodation in both urban and rural areas, with an increase in accommodation capacity between 2015 and 2018, which is a gratifying thing.

Key words: Alba, tourist potential, accommodation capacity, tourist reception structures

INTRODUCTION

Every field has a more distant or closer beginning, as in the case of tourism, which, according to some authors, "has begun to exist since the distant days of Herodotus, Pytheas, Hannon, or the time of great geographical discoveries when "Marco Polo, Magellan, and Columbus were tourists" [7] and other authors consider the 19th century to be the beginning of the organized tourist movement when it became a mass phenomenon. Neagu S. speaks of the "tourist explosion" influenced by "demographic explosion, urban explosion, economic growth, special development of ways and means of transport, facilities regarding accommodation, food, rest, recreation, treatment, impetuous growth of the media which has a decisive role in the dissemination of tourism information on a planetary level." [7]

Nowadays, tourism is "a large-scale economic activity and a well-shaped and influential aspect of social life", [9] representing "a permanent and huge migration of people and an infinite number of commercial, technical and intellectual operations" [9].

"The main features of contemporary tourism are:

(i)increasing its mass character by engaging a major share of the population of a country.

Worldwide, it involves hundreds of millions of people;

(ii)increasing the travel rate at continental or intercontinental level (e.g. between Europe and America, Europe and Asia);

(iii)asserting itself by an ever-increasing volume, estimated at the level of tourism consumption, thus becoming, indeed, a basic branch of the economy of many recipient countries;

(iv)diversification of its types in accordance with the offer and especially with the requirements of the demand. The spa-curative, recreational tourism is often followed by cultural or sports tourism, transit tourism is associated with long-stay travel. New forms of tourism are emerging, such as: rural and ecological tourism, hunting tourism (safari);

(v)special mobility due to the improvement and diversification of the ways and means of transport;

(vi)emphasizing the social character by engaging the lower income population in such activities;

(vii)broad affirmation of holiday tourism, promoted especially among youth;

(viii)the naturalization of tourism by increasing the importance of resources belonging to the natural environment"[3].

Tourism has been born thanks to the desire to enrich oneself with new knowledge about

natural and anthropogenic beauties that to some extent influence you. But not every natural or man-made element is a facilitator of tourist attraction. Thus, "the world tourist potential represents the totality of the physical and geographical elements of a territory, which - by virtue of their value - exerts an attraction action on the potential tourists, thus facilitating the tourist exploitation of this space" [5].

The notion of tourist potential is established in the tourist offer and is closely related to the content of tourist services. We cannot talk about tourist potential without referring specifically to tourist services, offered in an increasingly diverse range and at the level of the preferences and exigencies of tourists and potential visitors. "Among the components of the tourist potential we have to mention, first of all, the natural resources (e.g. mountain and landscape beauties, seaside beaches, balneo-climatic resorts, climate, vegetation, fauna, other attractions of scientific interest with unique character). Natural values (the so-called primary offer) form the basis of the potential tourist offer of an area, considered fit to be introduced into tourist circuits. Natural resources (values) are complemented by anthropogenic man-made resources (values) (the so-called secondary tourist offer) designed to improve and facilitate rational valorization of natural tourist potential, providing the premises for transforming this potential offer into an effective tourist offer [6].

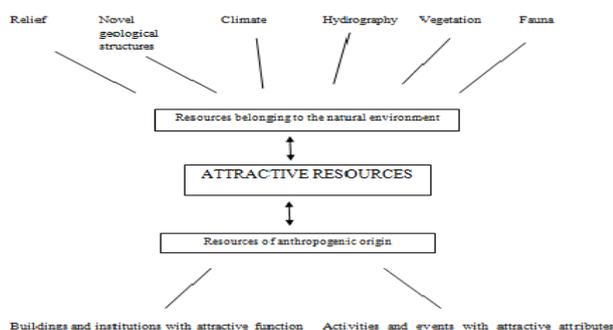


Fig. 1. Attractive resources for tourism
 Source: [3]

Tourist attractiveness resources divided into natural resources and resources of

anthropogenic origin are closely connected and complement each other. (Fig.1).

According to Neacșu *et al* (2006), the tourist potential of a country, area, could be defined as: "The totality of natural values and economic, cultural values that, as a result of human activities, can become landmarks of tourist attraction. It is about those values whose commissioning for tourist purposes requires improvement and fitting-out work, capital investment and a considerable amount of human labor expenditure"[6].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The studied bibliographic sources have been useful to highlight the tourist potential in Alba county, which is meant to attract more and more tourists from one year to another, both in Mioritic regions and from different corners of the world.

The documentation, both bibliographically and on the field, by applying questionnaires on how tourism in Alba county works has revealed the tourist structures of this county which offers the tourist various accommodation units (hotels, motels, tourist villas, tourist cottages, bungalows, tourist guest houses, agrotourist guest houses).

Statistical data of the National Institute of Statistics have been the basis for the research of the dynamics of tourism and agritourism in Alba county in 2018, analyzing the capacity of tourist accommodation existing in the main types of tourist accommodation structures and overnight stays of tourists in the most relevant accommodation units.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

It is said that there are places where you know that you will return sometime, from the moment you see them for the first time, because in our being there is an inexplicable attraction to the beauty created by nature. This is what we can say about the places in Alba county, the heart-shaped county, in the central-western part of our country, with many natural and historical landmarks that greet you all the time and attract you

regardless of the season. Situated in an area with a diverse geographic environment, Alba county can enjoy many forms of tourism, taking into account the main destination, such as: mountain resort tourism, spa tourism, circuit tourism, urban tourism and rural tourism.

From an administrative point of view, Alba county has 11 cities, including 4 municipalities: Alba Iulia - county residence, Aiud, Blaj, Sebeş and 67 communes with 642 villages that have prepared for tourists 5,278 accommodation places in 204 tourist reception units classified in both urban and rural areas.

Analyzing the statistical data from the National Institute of Statistics on the number of tourist reception structures and the reception capacity existing in Alba county in 2018, there is a variety of accommodation possibilities for tourists according to the budget that they can afford to spend for accommodation.

The largest number of accommodation structures is in the rural area, with 119 classified agrotourist guest houses, with an accommodation capacity of 2,157 places.

Tourist guesthouses in a number of 29 units, spread both in urban and rural areas, provide 608 accommodation places for tourists. The hotels, consisting of 19 structures, are located predominantly in the cities of Alba county and have the possibility to accommodate tourists in 1,316 places.

In Alba county 12 tourist villas are classified with an accommodation capacity of 346 places.



Fig. 2. The main tourist reception structures in Alba county in 2018
 Source: [1]

In the mountains there are 6 tourist cottages with 140 places available for hiking and mountain sports enthusiasts, being under the accommodation capacity of 234 places in the 6 motels in Alba county. The bungalows have 3 units with the possibility to offer tourists only 11 accommodation places.

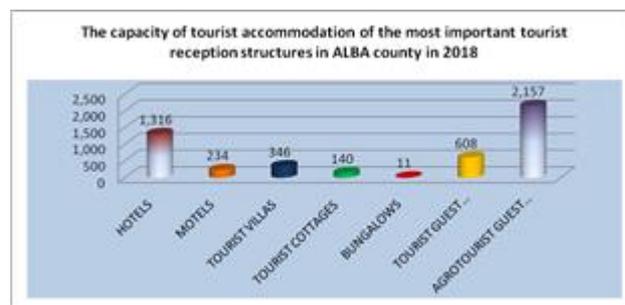


Fig. 3. The tourist reception capacity of the most important tourist accommodation structures in Alba county in 2018
 Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2019 [11]

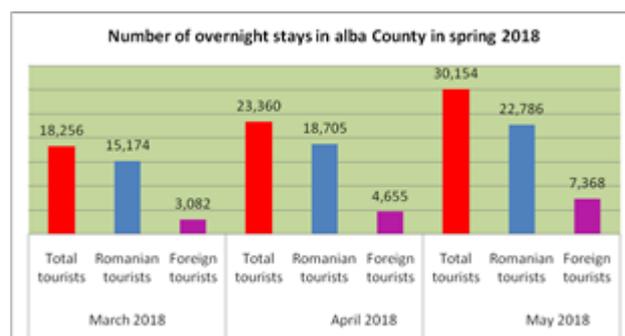


Fig. 4. Situation of overnight stays in Alba county in spring 2018
 Source: National Institute of Statistics [11]

Comparing the data on the number of overnight stays in spring 2018 in Alba county, it is noted that the number of overnight stays in classified accommodation units is increasing in March by 18,256 tourists, in April by 23,360 tourists, and in May their number is 30,154, of whom 22,786 are Romanian tourists and 7,368 are foreign tourists. It is noticed that the number of overnight stays of foreign tourists is increasing, which is a good thing. (Figure 4) The warm season, with many sunny days, determined both Romanian and foreign tourists to spend their holidays in Alba county, so in August the number of their overnight stays reached 56,314, out of whom 48,731 were Romanians and 7,583 were tourists from abroad. Also in June and July

there is an increase in the number of overnight stays in tourist reception structures compared to the previous months of the same year 2018. (Fig. 5).

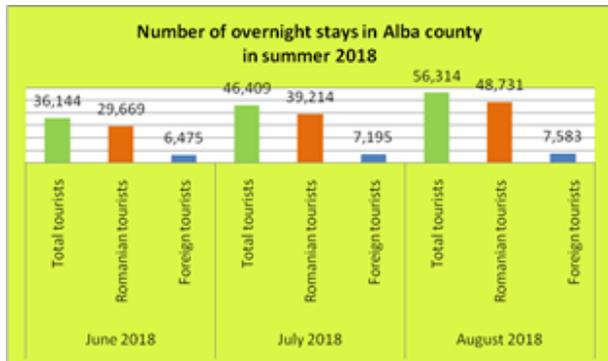


Fig. 5. Situation of overnight stays in Alba county in summer 2018

Source: National Institute of Statistics [11]

Analyzing the autumn season, September is the month when tourists come in larger numbers in accommodation units in Alba county. Thus, the number of overnight stays is decreasing, with 36,404 tourists in September, in October with 7,369 fewer overnight stays of tourists, and in November reaching 25,024, the number of overnight stays of Romanian tourists were 22,516 and of foreign tourists of 2,508. (Fig. 6).

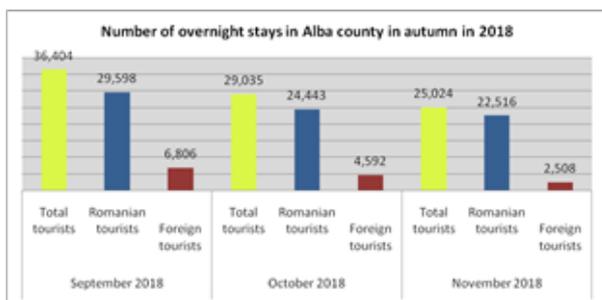


Fig. 6. Situation of overnight stays in Alba county in autumn 2018

Source: National Institute of Statistics [11]

In the winter season 2018, the number of overnight stays of those who have crossed the threshold of tourist accommodation units is influenced by the Christmas and New Year holidays. This is evidenced by comparing the number of overnight stays in December of 22,140 tourists, with the months of the beginning of the year 2018, when the number of overnight stays is 17,186 in January and 17,023 in February respectively. Analyzing

the number of overnight stays of foreign tourists, it was found that in February they were 2,556, compared to 2,363 in the first month of the year or even in the last month, and in December the number of overnight stays of tourists from other countries reached only 2,360 (Fig.7).



Fig. 7. Situation of overnight stays in Alba county in winter 2018

Source: National Institute of Statistics [11]

Comparing the statistical data, Alba county is visited by both Romanian tourists and foreign tourists throughout the year, both during the summer period when the number of overnight stays in classified tourist accommodation structures reached 56,314 in August 2018, out of whom 48,731 were Romanian tourists and 7,583 foreign tourists, and in off-season months such as May 2018, with 30,154 overnight stays, of whom 22,786 were Romanians and 7,368 foreigners, or in the autumn months when in September 2018 there was a total of 36,404 overnight stays of 29,598 Romanian tourists and 6,806 foreign tourists.

It is noted that rural accommodation structures are present in all Alba county, so rural tourism is well represented and requested by tourists regardless of their nationality.

Today, rural tourism is of particular importance. Retirement in an oasis of tranquility in the middle of nature is a haven for tourists wishing to escape from the everyday bustle of crowded cities. The French naturalist Bonnefous believes that: "The mechanized inferno and the monotony of urban life make more and more townspeople want space, freedom of movement, nature. Being a prisoner of the city, man rediscovers

nature to liberate himself." (Edouard Bonnefous, "Man or Nature?", Political Publishing House, Bucharest, 1976, p. 153) [7].

Rural tourism has become a way of life, it is a trend of tourism industry development, being a solution to job creation in rural areas, generating additional income, thus contributing to raising the living standards of the rural population.

A new form of approach to rural tourism is agrotourism, which "comprises two major components: the actual tourist activity, materialized in accommodation, food services, recreation (travel, fishing, equitation), other current services, and on the other hand, the economic activity, mainly agricultural, provided by the owner of the agritourist guest house (farm), materialized in the primary production and processing of agro-food products in the household and their direct selling to tourists" [4].

Agrotourism is a particular form of tourism that aims to combine tourist activity with economic activity in host households. Agrotourism makes the natural and anthropic resources of the area more profitable, contributing to raising the living standards of the rural population. Unlike rural tourism, agrotourism involves: accommodation in the farmhouse, consumption of agricultural products in that household and participation to a greater or lesser extent in specific agricultural activities" [8].

Alba county has many areas where rural tourism and implicitly agrotourism are by far very popular. The Apuseni Mountains area, with the villages of the Aries valley, known as "Țara Moșilor", boasts about "localities attested as tourist resorts of local interest Arieșeni and Albac" [10] and it is considered "the most developed area of Alba county" [2]. The Rimetea microregion, located in the northern part of the county, at the foot of the Trascau Mountains, has as a tourist center the Rimetea commune, which received the Europa Nostra Award in 1999. In the eastern part of the county, towards Sibiu county, there is Călnic village, which is part of the UNESCO World Heritage.

CONCLUSIONS

No matter where you are traveling through Alba county you enjoy special beauties. If you come to Sebeș, it is advisable to discover the first Saxon fortress of Transylvania, then stop at Lančrăm at Lucian Blaga memorial house, where poetry and philosophy are everywhere. The tourist's itinerary can continue to Căpâlna Fortress, a UNESCO heritage monument, since 1999. The "Râpa Roșie" Geological Reservation is a rarity due to red clay "waves" alternating with gray gritstone. Tourists loving adventure and adrenaline can climb these red rocks to go paragliding.

Driving through the winding road of Transalpine and reaching the Sureanu Ski Area, at an altitude of over 2,000 m, you can enjoy during the whole white season 10 slopes arranged at European standards, with a total length of 18 km.

If you choose to wander the Apuseni Mountains you have a lot of options, regardless of the season. Tourists who are fond of the craving for caves have a variety of unusual karstic cavities, both with limestone stalactites and stalagmites, such as "Huda lui Papara" Cave, which is on top of world caves due to the largest colony of bats from Europe, as well as caves with ice formations, such as Scărișoara Cave, or Vârtoș Glacier.

Waterfalls, quays and karst springs have their special beauty that enchants young and old travelers. For example, PISOAIA waterfall in Vidra de Sus, called "Bride's Veil", is a natural gift that charms you both in summer and winter, when water freezes and transforms the waterfall into a nacreous veil. The village of Vidra de Sus is the place where the "King of the Mountains" was born - Avram Iancu, mentioned in the 1848 documents which are exhibited in the memorial house "Avram Iancu".

Pilgrimage through Alba county should include Alba Iulia, a county residence with many landmarks. The best preserved medieval fortress and the largest in Transylvania, Alba Carolina, built in Vauban style, is here. Important moments in our people's history have left their mark in this city. Thus, here

took place the first union of Romanian Countries in 1600, by Mihai Viteazu, being from that time a wooden church. Here, Horea and Cloșca were imprisoned and then pulled on the wheel and even today the Obelisk and the Forks' Hill can be seen. In the Catholic Cathedral is Iancu de Hunedoara's tomb. Also in this city was the Grand Union of 1918 and in 1922 King Ferdinand and Queen Mary were crowned in the Reunification Cathedral as kings of Greater Romania.

The tourist potential of Alba county, which meets the requirements of any tourist, is promoted whenever possible through the participation of tourism operators, tourism service providers, representatives of NARECT Alba (National Association of Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism), the Alba County Council, local councils and city halls at fairs and tourism exhibitions, such as the Romanian Tourism Fair organized in Bucharest and the National Rural Tourism Fair of Albac, which has a long activity, being at its 14th edition in 2018.

From the processed statistical data, it is concluded that Alba county has an accommodation structure that meets the needs of any tourist, whether from the country or from abroad, that it has sufficient accommodation capacity, yet with a perspective of improvement by continuously modernizing existing ones or classifying new tourist accommodation units.

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