

## THE EVOLUTION OF TOURISM IN ALBA COUNTY IN THE PERIOD 2015-2018

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### Abstract

The present work includes some aspects related to the evolution of tourism in Alba County in the period 2015-2018. In order to underline as good as possible a number of aspects specific to tourism in this county, several indicators were analyzed, such as: structures of tourist reception with functions of tourist accommodation; the capacity of a tourist accommodation according to types of tourist reception structures; tourist arrivals in tourist reception structures; overnight stays in tourist reception structures; the net use index of accommodation places. In the future, if investments are made, on the one hand in the infrastructure, and on the other hand in the modernization of accommodation capacities, Alba County can become a pole with a high degree of tourist attractiveness for both Romanian and foreign citizens. The statistical data used in the paper were taken from the National Institute of Statistics and were interpreted, thus highlighting the true state of tourism in Alba County.

**Key words:** Alba County, accommodation capacity, tourist arrivals, overnight stays

### INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times, since antiquity, people have traveled, closer or farther from where they lived, in an organized or less organized form. Later, as society developed, the simple journey turned into a tourist activity. Thus, the nineteenth century is considered the period when the phenomenon of mass tourism appears, when "tourism has become a large economic activity and a well-defined and influential aspect of social life" [10].

Currently, "tourism is an important activity for any country which could generate a competitive advantage by valorizing its natural and anthropic resources in proper landmarks and products" [13].

„Romanian`s tourism is continuously developing year by year as the country attracts more and more visitors” [12].

Due to “an extremely generous natural potential and a valuable cultural heritage, the Transylvania region” [11] is seen as a magnet that attracts not only Romanian tourists but also foreigners from European countries and from other continents too.

One of the well-known Transylvanian counties in terms of the hospitality industry and which has a lot to provide from this point of view is Alba County.

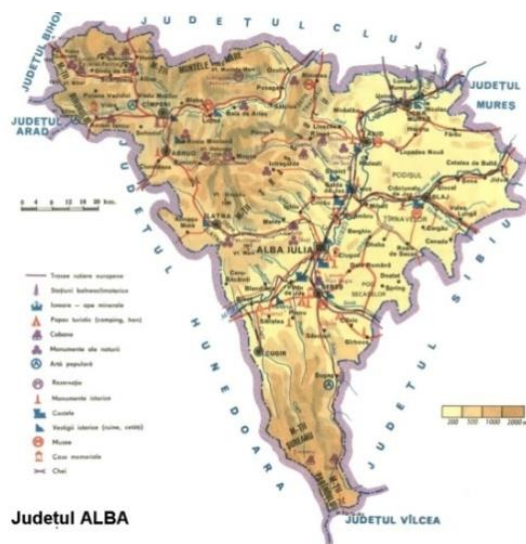


Fig. 1. Map of Alba County  
Source:<https://pe-harta.ro/judete/Alba.jpg> [8].

Located in the central-eastern part of the country, Alba County has an area of 6,242 km<sup>2</sup>, representing 2.6% of the territory of the country and "is neighboring with Cluj County

to the north, Bihor and Arad Counties to the west, Hunedoara County to the south-west, with Vâlcea County to the south and Sibiu and Mureş Counties to the east" [7], (Fig. 1).



Fig. 2. Alba County of Romania's map  
Source: <https://ro.wikipedia.org> [1]

Considering the archaeological discoveries, it is estimated that the settlements in Alba County date back from the Neolithic period. During the Daco-Roman period, settlements like Apulum (Alba Iulia), Ampelum (Zlatna) and colonies like Alburnus Maior (Roşia Montană) and Brucla (Aiud) were established. After the Romans' withdrawal, "the area was marked by an intense population, as certified by the important archaeological evidence specific to the 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries" [6].

Alba County (Fig. 2) is located in the "historical region of Transylvania, with its residence in the municipality of Alba Iulia. It is part of the Centru development region and consists of 4 municipalities (Alba Iulia, Aiud, Blaj, Sebeş), 7 cities (Abrud, Baia de Arieş, Câmpeni, Cugir, Ocna Mureş, Teiuş, Zlatna), 67 municipalities and 656 villages" [5].

From the point of view of the ethno-folkloric areas, in Alba County there are four major regions: the Moţi Land, the Mocani Land, the Székely Land and the Transylvanian Saxons Land, each of them having a particular specificity of the popular clothes and customs. Alba County is dominated by mountain regions that occupy about 52% of the surface, hills and plateaus represent 26%, and the plain area and the river meadows total only 22%.

Alba County enjoys the possibility of carrying out several forms of tourism, being endowed with potential for natural and anthropic tourism that is in great demand.

"The natural environment plays a dual role at the same time, namely that of material support of all activities in the tourism field, as well as that of their essential motivation when its beauty determines the establishment of tourist flows" [4].

The Apuseni Mountains are an important area of tourist attraction that includes a significant area of the Apuseni Natural Park and is characterized by the existence of keys, gorges, karst springs, (eg. Tăuz karst spring), avenas, caves, (eg. Scărişoara), waterfalls (ex. Pişoiaia), the lonely rocks that give a note of dynamism and beauty combined with the mountain fauna and flora.

In the Trascău Mountains there is the Piatra Secuiului "paradise for climbers and paragliders" [16] and Ighiel tarn, the largest karst tarn in Romania, formed "by accumulating water in a perfect limestone channel, created by slope collapse" [16].

Deep in the Metaliferi Mountains there are gold ores that have been exploited since Roman times in Roşia Montană, at present being considered "the largest gold deposit in Europe." [16] Here is the Mining Museum, where tourists, without having special equipment, descend 157 steps in Roman galleries, 1.80 m high and 1 m wide, "being the only ones in the world that can be visited in situ (ie in their natural environment)", [16] because 150 m are arranged for tourists.

The tourist trip through Alba County should also include the municipality of Alba Iulia, county residence, where there is "the best preserved and largest medieval fortress in Transylvania, Alba Carolina, built in Vauban style. Here took place the first unification of the Romanian Countries in 1600, by Mihai Viteazu and the Great Union in 1918. In the Catholic Cathedral there is Iancu de Hunedoara's tomb, and in the Reintegration Cathedral, in 1922, King Ferdinand and Queen Mary were crowned king and queen of Greater Romania" [14].

Mountain tourism, cultural tourism, leisure tourism, rural tourism and agrotourism, urban tourism, business tourism, youth tourism, event tourism, rail tourism are the forms of tourism encountered in Alba County.

Considering the SWOT analysis of Alba County, we can highlight the strengths of this area as well as the opportunities that would add value to the county and lead to the development of different forms of tourism.

Among the strengths which Alba County is proud of we mention: the existence of various natural resources spread throughout the territory of Alba County; anthropic tourist landmarks, of local and national interest, existing both in cities and in villages; high ethnographic and cultural potential; tourist reception units with classified accommodation functions, in number of 204, with an increasing accommodation capacity, reaching 5,278 places in 2018; the possibility of practising several forms of tourism throughout the year; increasing tourist flow.

Economic valorization of the natural and anthropic potential of Alba County; the conclusion of new partnerships with localities in the EU area; accessing European programs that lead to the development of tourism and implicitly of the local community, Alba County; rehabilitation of tourist resorts and villages with tourist potential; organizing as many cultural, artistic events as possible, to bring to light the ancient traditions and customs and to publicize them nationally and internationally, are just a few of the opportunities that would be well taken into account and that could give new value to the county and secondary would lead to the development of the hospitality industry and of many other things.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this research, a series of indicators were analyzed to better reflect the evolution of the tourism sector in the economy of Alba County. The indicators that were subjected to analysis in this research are the following: the main structures of reception with accommodation functions; capacity of

operating tourist accommodation, taking into account the most important types of tourist reception structures; tourist arrivals in tourist reception units with accommodation functions; the number of overnight stays in the tourist reception structures and the net use index of the operating tourist accommodation capacity.

The average and the annual growth rate were used as statistical indicators.

The average achieved for the analyzed period:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum(x)}{n}$$

where:

$x$  is the analyzed technical, economic or social phenomenon and  $n$  the number of years.

Annual growth rate ( $r\%$ ) calculated with the formula:

$$(r\%) = ((\sqrt[n]{\prod p/p_0}) - 1) * 100$$

where:

$\prod p/p_0$  = chained growth indicators; the number of years of the period [2].

In this study, the analysis was focused on the period 2015-2018.

In order to carry out a research that reflects in a realistic way the situation of tourism in Alba County, a series of specialized material was consulted on the one hand, and on the other hand the statistical data related to this county that have been provided by the National Institute of Statistics.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The National Institute of Statistics defines the structure of tourist reception with tourist accommodation functions as "any construction or place arranged or elaborated according to the design and execution, for the accommodation of tourists."

Alba County offers tourists various accommodation structures, both hotels, motels, guesthouses, as well as tourist villas, campsites, hostels, tourist cottages, located in urban or rural areas. The total number of these accommodation spaces has increased in the

last four years, by 28%, from 159 accommodation units in 2015 and 2016, to 191 in 2017, reaching 204 in 2018. The evolution of the main tourist reception structures with accommodation functions from Alba County in the period 2015-2018 is presented in Table 1 where you can see the

average number of accommodation units, as well as the annual growth rate. The highest growth rate is found in the case of tourist stops with more than 44%, followed by tourist villas with 26% and agrotourism pensions with a growth rate of 13.7%.

Table 1. Tourist reception structures from Alba County in the period 2015-2018

Types of tourist reception structures	2015	2016	2017	2018	Average	2018 vs 2015		Growth rate
	No	no	no	no	no	no	%	%
<b>Total</b>	<i>159</i>	<i>159</i>	<i>191</i>	<i>204</i>	<i>178.3</i>	<i>45</i>	128.3	8.7
Hotels	19	19	19	19	<i>19.0</i>	<i>0</i>	100.0	0.0
Hostels	3	3	4	3	<i>3.3</i>	<i>0</i>	100.0	0.0
Motels	7	6	5	6	<i>6.0</i>	<i>-1</i>	85.7	-5.0
Tourist villas	6	5	10	12	<i>8.3</i>	<i>6</i>	200.0	26.0
Tourist cottages	8	9	11	6	<i>8.5</i>	<i>-2</i>	75.0	-9.1
Campsites	1	1	1	1	<i>1.0</i>	<i>0</i>	100.0	0.0
Tourist stops	1	1	2	3	<i>1.8</i>	<i>2</i>	300.0	44.2
Students and preschoolers camps	3	3	3	3	<i>3.0</i>	<i>0</i>	100.0	0.0
Tourist guesthouses	30	28	28	29	<i>28.8</i>	<i>-1</i>	96.7	-1.1
Agrotourist guesthouses	81	84	108	119	<i>98.0</i>	<i>38</i>	146.9	13.7

Source: INSSE, [15] accessed on 16.05.2019 and processed data.

As we can see by analyzing Table 1, the dynamics of the tourist reception structures in Alba County is different, increasing in terms of agrotourist guesthouses, by 47% in 2018 compared to 2015, of tourist villas, where there is a doubling of the number of units, from 6 to 12 villas in 2018 and tourist stops where there are 3 structures in 2018 compared to 1 classified unit in 2015 and 2016.

The decrease in the number of tourist accommodation units is observed with respect to motels by 15% in 2018 compared to 2015, in the case of tourist cottages by 25%, as well as the number of tourist guesthouses by 4% in 2018 compared to the reference year 2015.

Regarding the accommodation structures hotels, hostels, campsites, students and preschoolers camps, there is a stagnation of the number of classified units in the reference period 2015 - 2018.

Another indicator that has been analyzed regarding the tourism in Alba County is the existing tourist accommodation capacity which "represents the number of places of

tourist accommodation registered in the last act of reception, approval, classification of the tourist reception structure with tourist accommodation functions, exclusive of the extra beds that can be installed in case of necessity. The number of places is determined for the tourist reception structures with tourist accommodation functions existing on December 31 and in working condition" [9].

Table 2 presents both the number of places existing in the most important tourist reception structures in Alba County, as well as the dynamics of the accommodation capacity existing between 2018 and the reference year 2015.

It is found that taking into account the total number of tourist reception structures, the number of existing places is increasing, by 15% in 2018 compared to 2015. Significant increases in the existing accommodation capacity are registered in the case of tourist stops by 188%, of tourist villas by 90 %, hostels by 47% and agrotourist guesthouses by 32%. Decreases in the number of places in

tourist structures with reception functions are observed in the case of tourist cottages by 33%, due to the decrease of the number of such units from 8 cottages in 2015 to 6 classified structures in 2018, as well as in the case of students and preschoolers camps with a decrease of 20%, although the number of reception units remains the same over the 4 years, 2015-2018.

Also table no. 2 presents the average of the existing tourist accommodation capacity in the analyzed period, 2015-2018, for each type of tourist reception structure. Thus, it can be seen that on average there are a total number of 4,946.8 accommodation places in Alba County, with a growth rate of 4.8%. Most accommodation places are registered in the case of hotels, on average being 1,280 places, but with a growth rate of only 2%.

A significant growth rate of accommodation is found in the case of tourist stops, of 42.2%, this fact being observed taking into account that in 2015-2016 there were 16 units of this kind, and in 2018, 46 tourist stops were classified in Alba County. A significant growth rate is also registered in the case of tourist villas, of 23.9%, on average being 256.8 accommodation places.

A negative result in terms of growth rate is identified in the case of tourist cottages, the number of accommodation being in a downward trend, from 218 places in 2017 to 140 places in 2018. A downward trend of the growth rate is also registered in the case of student and preschool camps and tourist pensions.

Table 2. Tourist accommodation capacity existing in the period 2015-2018- Number of places (beds)

Types of tourist reception structures	2015	2016	2017	2018	Average	2018 vs 2015		Growth rate
	places	places	places	places	places	places	%	%
TOTAL	4,585	4,748	5,176	5,278	4,946.8	693	115.1	4.8
Hotels	1,240	1,283	1,281	1,316	1,280.0	76	106.1	2.0
Hostels	100	98	158	147	125.8	47	147.0	13.7
Motels	220	193	195	234	210.5	14	106.4	2.1
Tourist villas	182	172	327	346	256.8	164	190.1	23.9
Tourist cottages	209	215	218	140	195.5	-69	67.0	-12.5
Campsites	53	53	53	53	53.0	0	100.0	0.0
Tourist stops	16	16	26	46	26.0	30	287.5	42.2
Students camps	274	274	219	220	246.8	-54	80.3	-7.1
Tourist guesthouses	657	625	664	608	638.5	-49	92.5	-2.6
Agrotourist guesthouses	1,634	1,819	2,035	2,157	1,911.3	523	132.0	9.7

Source: INSSE, [15] accessed on 16.05.2019 and processed data.

The tourist reception units in Alba County were searched by tourists who called for accommodation services, this being observed from the increase in the number of arrivals in some of these units, between 2015-2018.

"The arrival of a tourist in the structure of tourist reception with accommodation functions occurs when a person enters the register of the tourist accommodation structure to be hosted one or more uninterrupted nights. In each accommodation structure there is only one arrival per tourist,

regardless of the number of nights resulting from his uninterrupted stay. Tourists who have been in structure since the month before the reported one are not included in the number of arrivals. For families housed in the tourist accommodation structure, the number of arrivals includes each member of the family for whom at least one place has been paid" [9]. Analyzing the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, it is found that in 2015 there were 154,210 tourists registered as arriving in accommodation units in Alba

County, in 2016 their number increased to 167,970 people, in 2017 the number increased by 4,370, and in 2018 the number of tourists registered as arriving in the accommodation units reaches over 194,800 (Table 3). This fact is encouraging, increasing by 26 percent the number of tourists arriving in the

accommodation units in Alba County in 2018 compared to 2015. In the analyzed period 2015-2018, there is a growth rate of 8.1% of people arriving in all accommodation units in Alba County, on average being over 172,300 people.

Table 3. Tourists' arrivals in tourist reception structures in Alba County during 2015-2018

Types of tourist reception structures	2015	2016	2017	2018	Average	2018 vs 2015		Growth rate
	No. of people	No. of people	No. of people	No. of people	No. of people	No. of people	%	%
Total	154,210	167,970	172,340	194,818	172,334.5	40,608	126.3	8.1
Hotels	73,920	81,126	74,473	84,602	78,530.3	10,682	114.5	4.6
Hostels	2,569	3,734	4,787	2,909	3,499.8	340	113.2	4.2
Motels	8,523	6,118	4,601	5,355	6,149.3	-3,168	62.8	-14.4
Tourist villas	4,624	3,841	7,662	11,638	6,941.3	7,014	251.7	36.0
Tourist cottages	2,710	2,622	2,245	1,997	2,393.5	-713	73.7	-9.7
Campsites	483	643	441	558	531.3	75	115.5	4.9
Tourist stops	9	1,082	986	643	680.0	634	7,144.4	314.9
Students camps	1,337	1,888	1,404	2,266	1,723.8	929	169.5	19.2
Tourist guesthouses	28,392	30,714	32,391	33,486	3,124.8	5,094	117.9	5.7
Agrotourist guesthouses	31,643	36,202	43,350	50,901	40,524.0	19,258	160.9	17.2

Source: INSSE, [15] accessed on 16.05.2019 and processed data.

Analysing the data in Table 3 it is concluded that most of the tourist reception structures in Alba County are in great demand, especially in the case of tourist stops and tourist villas, which registers a growth rate of 314%, taking into account the fact that in 2015 only 9 tourists arrived and their number increased in 2016 to 1,082 and in 2017 being 986 tourists, with an average of 680 tourists in the 4 years analyzed.

The tourist villas were also sought by tourists in 2015-2018, registering an increasing trend of the growth rate by 36%, from 3,841 tourists in 2016 reaching 11,638 tourists in 2018, so an average of 6,941.3 tourists in the 4 years analyzed.

The school camps in Alba County have hosted more and more students and preschoolers, with a 69% increase in 2018 compared to 2015, with a growth rate of 19.2%. The agrotouristic guesthouses have also been preferred by tourists from Alba County, taking into account the annually increasing trend, from 31,643 people registered in 2015

to 50,901 people in 2018, 61% up in 2018 compared to 2015, the growth rate being over 17 percent, and the average in the period 2015-2018 being 40,524 people who stayed in this accommodation structure.

In the case of motels and tourist cottages there is a downward trend in the number of arrivals, this fact can be due to the decrease of the number of accommodation units of this type in 2018 compared to the reference year 2015.

It is noted that in 2015 over 2,700 people were registered in the 8 cottages in Alba County, the following year their number decreases by 88 people, despite the fact that 9 cottages in the county are classified and opened to the tourist circuit. In 2017, the number of tourists decreases by 377, although 11 cottages are classified, reaching in 2018 only 1,997 tourists registered in the 6 existing cottages, a decrease of 26% in 2018 compared to 2015, the average number of arriving tourists was 2,393.5 people. In Alba County, overnight stays in all types of reception structures in the period 2015-2018 are in an

upward trend, totaling 312,762 overnight stays in 2015 and reaching 364,474 overnight stays in 2018, the average being 335,245 overnight stays.

The National Institute of Statistics defines the notion of tourist accommodation as "the 24-hour interval, starting with the hotel hour, for which a person is registered in the tourist accommodation unit and benefits from accommodation, paying the fee for the occupied space, even if the duration of effective stay is less than the mentioned period. The overnight stays related to the extra installed beds (paid by the customers) are also taken into consideration" [9].

Most overnight stays took place in hotels in Alba County, reaching a total of 143,482 in 2015, and in 2018, 154,427 overnight stays, with an average of 150,265.5 overnight stays, followed by overnight stays in agrotourist

guesthouses, 76,117 in 2015 and reaching 109,678 in 2018, the average being 90,564.8 and with a growth rate of 12.9% . Analysing the data in Table 4 regarding the number of overnight stays in the reception structures in Alba County, in the period 2015-2018, we can notice that, overall, the number of overnight stays increased, the increase being by maximum 17 % in 2018 compared to 2015.

Considering the dynamics of the number of overnight stays in 2018 compared to 2015, we can see that most overnight stays are registered in the case of tourist stops, followed at a great distance by tourist villas and students and preschoolers camps.

A decrease in the number of overnight stays is reported in 2018 compared to 2015 in the case of motels by 58%, tourist cottages by 38% and tourist guesthouses by 9%.

Table 4. Overnight stays in tourist reception structures in Alba County during 2015-2018

Types of tourist reception structures	2015	2016	2017	2018	Average	2018 vs 2015		Growth rate
	no	no	no	no	no	no	%	%
Total	312,762	313,415	350,329	364,474	335,245.0	51,712	116.5	5.2
Hotels	143,482	145,078	158,075	154,427	150,265.5	10,945	107.6	2.5
Hostels	3,816	6,191	7,526	5,142	5,668.8	1,326	134.7	10.5
Motels	12,375	8,027	9,020	7,657	9,269.8	-4,718	61.9	-14.8
Tourist villas	9,960	8,511	18,547	24,502	15,380.0	14,542	246.0	35.0
Tourist cottages	10,380	6,338	4,747	4,311	6,444.0	-6,069	41.5	-25.4
Campsites	818	1,340	1,019	894	1,017.8	76	109.3	3.0
Tourist stops	33	1,993	1,977	1,375	1,344.5	1,342	4166.7	246.7
Students camps	3,738	3,817	5,038	8,153	5,186.5	4,415	218.1	29.7
Tourist guesthouses	52,043	52,124	47,912	47,421	49,875.0	-4,622	91.1	-3.1
Agrotourist guesthouses	76,117	79,996	96,468	109,678	90,564.8	33,561	144.1	12.9

Source: INSSSE, [15] accessed on 16.05.2019 and processed data.

"The net use index of the operating tourist accommodation capacity expresses the relation between the operating capacity of accommodation and its effective use by tourists, in a given period. It results from calculation by dividing the total number of overnights spent at the operating tourist accommodation capacity, from that period" [9].

Table 5 presents the averages of the net use index of accommodation places for each year from 2015-2018. We can notice that in 2015 and 2018 accommodation places were occupied by an average of 24%, with lower values of 22.2% in 2016 and of 23.3% in 2017.

Table 5. Average of the net use index of accommodation places in the period 2015-2018 (%)

Years	2015	2016	2017	2018
Indicator				
Average of the net use index of accommodation places	24	22.2	23.3	24

Source: Data processed from www.ccir.ro, [3] accessed on 23.05.2019

Analysing this index of the net use of accommodation in Alba County, between 2015-2018, it is found that on average the accommodation places were used in proportion of 23.4%. Considering the diversity of the existing accommodation

structures at the level of Alba county, it can be said that tourists have the possibility to choose the accommodation unit that meets expectations and meets their needs in all seasons and in all tourist areas of the county.

## CONCLUSIONS

The tourism phenomenon in Alba County is in a continuous dynamic, which results from the analysis of the statistical database from 2015-2018.

Following the research of tourism in Alba County, the following were observed:

- the existence in 2018 of a number of 204 tourist reception units with accommodation functions, a value that is in an upward trend;
- the tourist accommodation capacity has an increase of 15% in 2018 compared to the reference year 2015;
- the number of tourists arriving in the reception structures exceeded in 2018 the value of 194,000, representing an increase of 26% compared to 2015;
- the number of tourists who have stayed in all the tourist accommodation units is increasing continuously from year to year;
- the accommodation places were used on an average of 23.3% in the period 2015-2018.

From the present analysis of tourism in Alba County it can be seen that on the one hand there is an increasing tourist flow, and on the other hand the physical degradation of the tangible heritage is observed due to the lack of investments in this region. However, there is an increase in the number of tourists staying in the tourist units in the county.

Taking into consideration the direct observation in the field, through the visits made to the tourist accommodation structures in Alba County, it is noticed that the decrease of the number of qualified young population who could work in the tourism industry, which is a painful thing. That is why local authorities, especially in rural areas, should take measures to help young people stay home, stay in the country and get involved in the hospitality industry, even by encouraging them to access reimbursed funds for opening and managing an agrotourist guesthouse,

which would lead to the development of the area and to the increase of the citizens' welfare.

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