

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON ROMANIA'S TOURIST FLOWS IN THE YEAR 2020

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Abstract

The paper aimed to analyze in what measure the Covid-19 pandemic has influenced tourist flows in Romania's tourism in the year 2020 comparatively with the year 2019 and the 2020 forecast. The main indicators taken into consideration have been tourist arrivals, overnight stays and travels abroad. The data provided by the National Institute of Statistics have been processed using the annual average growth for setting up the 2020 forecast, and the index method allowed to quantify the percentage differences carried out in 2020 versus 2019 and the forecast level. In 2020, in Romania, tourism arrivals declined by 53%, but less compared to Europe 70 % or 74% at the global level. Romanians represents 93% of total arrivals, but their number decreased by 45% compared to 2019. Also, overnight stays declined by 51.65% and the residents' travels abroad by 58.8%. A critical situation was in case of foreign tourists' flow which diminished by 83.2% and the number of overnight stays by 81.1%. The most difficult period for tourism in the year 2020 was March-June, but in July-September, it was noticed a recovery. However, tourism industry was also affected regarding its receipts, turnover, personnel, and tourism units, many of them being closed and a few of them failed due to the imposed restrictions by authorities to diminish the spread of the pandemic. Romanians saved tourism rediscovering the beauty of the natural, cultural and historical treasures of their own country, spending their vacations at the seaside, in the mountains and in the rural areas, and, in general, preferring accommodation in small hotels and tourist and agri-tourist guesthouses. Rural tourism was a niche which offered safer stays, more activities in nature and benefiting of hospitality suitable for families and small groups of friends. Romania's tourism has to be more flexible in the year 2021 and the coming years in adapting the development strategy paying attention to the increased demand for domestic tourism including offers and experiences in open-air, nature-based and slow travel destinations. At international level Romania has to be promoted as a rural destination which is able to offer a high quality hospitality and the beauty of the country.

Key words: tourist flows, Covid-19 pandemic, impact, Romania

INTRODUCTION

Since January 2020 when the World Health Organization mentioned the first time the high risk of the spread of the new SARS-CoV 2 virus from China, the whole world was facing with a huge Covid-19 pandemic which has affected almost all the countries from a health, economic, social and cultural point of view as never before!

On Feb 13, 2021, the WHO statistics showed that, since the beginning of the pandemic, at the global level there were confirmed almost 108 million cases of Covid-19, of which over 2.4 million deaths [48].

The authorities in each country have been obliged to take specific policy measures to protect the health of the population, to reduce

the pressure on the medical system, to diminish the effects of the pandemic. However, the imposed restrictions increased the fear, anxiousness, troubled people behavior and changed the life style, obliging them to stay home, to work from home or to lose their jobs and income.

The economy of all the countries was affected more or less, and depending on the expand of the pandemic, the Governments tried to set up strategies to gradually return to a normal life.

Tourism which has proved to be one of the most dynamic branch of the world economy during the last decades has been deeply affected [8, 9, 10].

Compared to the year 2019, when the international arrivals reached the peak of 1.46 billion tourist arrivals, USD 1,481 billion

tourist receipts, generated USD 1.7 trillion exports from international tourism and had an important contribution of about 10% to the global GDP and of about 320 million jobs, in 2020, due to the pandemic, tourism has deeply declined due to the fear of the people to travel, the imposed movement restrictions, the close of the borders to tourists in many countries [9, 21, 42, 44, 45, 46].

According to UNWTO, in the year 2020, due to the wider spread of the novel corona virus, tourism industry lost approximately 1.1 billion international tourist arrivals, USD 910 to 1.1 trillion receipts and 100-200 million jobs, many of them in small and medium sized enterprises

Also, about USD 1.3 Trillion were lost in export revenues - more than 11 times the loss recorded during the 2009 global economic crisis [40, 42, 43, 44, 45].

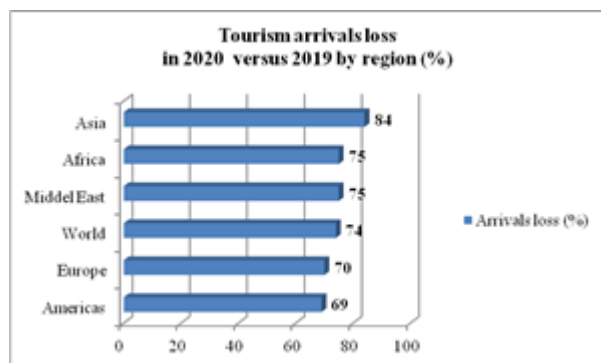


Fig. 1. Decline in tourist arrivals at the global level in 2020 by region (%)

Source: Own design based on the data from UNWTO, 2021 [47, 48].

Because of the decisions taken by Governments to limit the expand of the virus such as: social distancing, self-isolation, travel restrictions (mandatory testing, quarantines, closure of borders etc), movement limitations, lockdown, confinement, closure of hotels, restaurants, bars, clubs, shops, museums, cancellation of cultural and sport events etc and other social and economical reasons, tourist behavior changed during the year 2020 and especially in the period of vacations during Summer and Autumn 2020.

The measure in which tourism was affected in each country depends on the spread of the virus and the dependence of the economic development of the country on tourism

compared to other sectors of the economy [2, 39].

Europe which is the top destination in the world registered the deepest decline in international tourist arrivals of over 500 million in the year 2020, meaning by 70% less than in 2019 [44].

UNWTO (2020) has found that 93% of destinations in Europe have fully closed the border for international tourism. Many of them being in the top visited countries of Europe such as France, Spain, Italy, Germany, United Kingdom, Austria, Portugal, Greece, Netherlands, Belgium, Czech Republic, Poland etc. [8, 24, 28, 30, 31].

Since the end of December 2020, the vaccination campaign which started in many countries has become a hope which could "restore traveller confidence, contribute to the easing travel restrictions and pass to a relatively normalized travel in 2021 and especially in 2022 as it is expected [44].

Romania is a country with a tourism in a continuous development mainly during the last decade, and it is not yet a destination of high attraction for international visitors, but it is a good offer for residents to learn more about their own country and discover its natural, historical, cultural values.

The tourist demand in terms of arrivals and overnight stays raised in close relationship with offer regarding the number of units for tourists accommodation and the number of places [19, 22, 25, 29, 32, 37].

In Romania, tourism has become more and more important sector for creating jobs and providing its contribution to GDP, its turnover accounting for about 5 billion Euro in 2019 and also its efficiency has become more evident [4, 20, 23, 33].

Like in other countries, Romania's tourism has been affected from all the points of view by the covid-19 pandemic in the year 2020.

In this context, the paper aimed to quantify the impact the Covid-19 pandemic on tourist flows in Romania in the year 2020 comparatively with the year 2019 and the 2020 forecast. Tourist demand was appreciated based on the statistical data provided by the National Institute of statistics

and refers to tourist arrivals, overnight stays and travels abroad.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For setting up this study, the main indicators taken into consideration to characterize tourist flows have been the following ones:

- (i) tourist arrivals in the units with function for tourist accommodation (total, Romanians, foreigners);
- (ii) foreign visitors' arrivals at the frontiers of the country;
- (iii) tourist arrivals in the units with function for tourist accommodation in the most attractive destinations in the country;
- (iv) tourist overnight stays in units with function for tourist accommodation (total, Romanians, foreigners);
- (v) Romanian tourists' travels abroad.

The empirical data have been provided by the National Institute of Statistics.

The years of reference taken into consideration were 2010, 2019, and 2020.

From a methodological point of view, in the study have been used:

- The average annual growth in the period 2010-2019, $\bar{\Delta}$ AAG, which was determined using the formula:

$$\bar{\Delta} \text{ AAG} = (\bar{X}_n - \bar{X}_1) / (n - 1)$$

- Forecast for the year 2020, F_{2020} was established based on the formula:

$$F_{2020} = \bar{X}_{2019} + \bar{\Delta} \text{ AAG}$$

- Fixed basis index method, $I_{\text{FB}\%}$, was determined according to the formula:

$$I_{\text{FB}\%} = (X_t / X_0) * 100$$

where: X_t is the level of the indicator X in the year t , in this case in 2020, and X_0 is the level of the same indicator X in the year 2019 and, respectively, the forecast level for the year 2020.

- The structural index (SI%), reflecting the tourist arrivals and tourist overnight stays

structure taking into account their geographical areas of origin.

The graphical representations and the tabled results have been accompanied by the corresponding comments destined to characterize the main trends and identify the aspects related to covid-19 impact on tourism indicators in 2020.

At the end of the study, the main ideas resulting from this research were highlighted and included in the conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Tourist arrivals

The year 2020 was an atypical year for tourism in Romania as in many other countries worldwide. The evolution of the pandemic imposed a large range of restrictions in the period of alert or emergency, and in the period of relaxation, which varied from a month to another.

This determined tourists to change their behaviour with a deep impact on tourism business.

Till May 15, most of the tourists cancelled their reservations for spending their vacations mainly for Easter and 1st May, but starting with May 15 and especially with June 1st, when the restrictions became more relaxed, the Romanians returned to their wish to travel and enjoy their holidays in summer season [1]. This was a chance for tourism industry to recover, mainly in July and August, when the Romanians invaded the sea side, and then the Danube Delta, the mountain areas, rediscovering the beautiful landscapes, fresh air and new attractions in safe places in Romania. Therefore, 2020 was the year of changes and challenges for tourism industry, tourists' preferences and habits.

However, less than 50% of potential tourists have avoided to travel, staying home as they were scared, worried and anxious about their holidays [5].

The rest of tourists choose destinations either close to their home or in isolated places and areas, preferring accommodation in smaller units, hotels or mainly guest-houses, apartments and holiday villas.

The holiday vouchers saved the domestic tourism and tourism agencies offer was diversified with new packages adapted to the imposed measures of hygiene and social distance to assure tourist and personnel protection and diminish the spread of the pandemic.

The statistics showed that in 2020, tourist arrivals accounted for 6.33 million in Romania, being by 52.64% smaller than in 2019 and by 55.35% lower than the expected forecast level for 2020, estimated based on the average annual growth recorded in the last decade 2010-2019.

From total arrivals, Romanian tourists' arrivals accounted for 5.88 million representing 55.51% of their arrivals in 2019 and 52.28% of the 2020 forecast. Therefore, Romanians were the dominant source of tourists with a share of 92.84% in total arrivals.

The year 2020 did not favour incoming tourism, due to the restrictions imposed in various countries related to the pandemic. The number of foreign tourists' arrivals was just 453.1 thousands, representing only 16.88% of the 2019 level and 15.99% of the 2020 forecast (Table 1).

Table 1. Tourist arrivals in the units with function for tourist accommodation, Romania in 2010, 2019 and 2020 (Thousands)

	Arrivals- Total	Romanians' arrivals	Foreigners' arrivals
2010	6,073	4,726	1,346
2019	13,375	10,597.1	2,684
Δ AAG	811.3	652.3	148.6
2020 forecast	14,186.3	11,249.4	2,832.6
2020	6,335.4	5,882.3	453.1
2020/2019%	47.36	55.51	16.88
2020/2020 forecast %	44.65	52.28	15.99

Source: Own calculation based on the data from [12].

The monthly evolution of total tourists' arrivals reflects that the most critical months in Romania's tourism were April, May, and also March and June. After the implementation of the relaxation measures in May and June, tourist arrivals started to grow from July to the end of September.

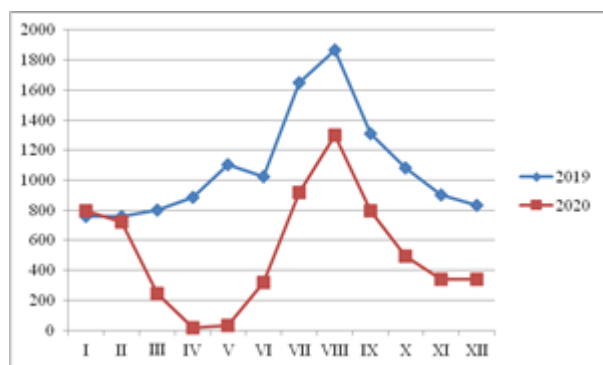


Fig. 2. Total tourist arrivals in Romania in 2020 versus 2019 by month (Thousands)

Source: Own design based on the data from [12].

The peak of arrivals was 1,301.4 thousand registered in August, but representing about 70% of the level in the same month in 2019.

After a decline in October and November, a slight increase was noticed in December on

the occasion of Christmas and New Year's Eve celebration and also for winter vacation which have been the main reasons to encourage the growth of arrivals (Fig.2).

In case of the Romanian tourists' arrivals, the dynamics was almost similar with a deep decline in April and May, also in March and June, and with a peak of 1,269.1 thousand arrivals in August, followed by July and September (Fig. 3).

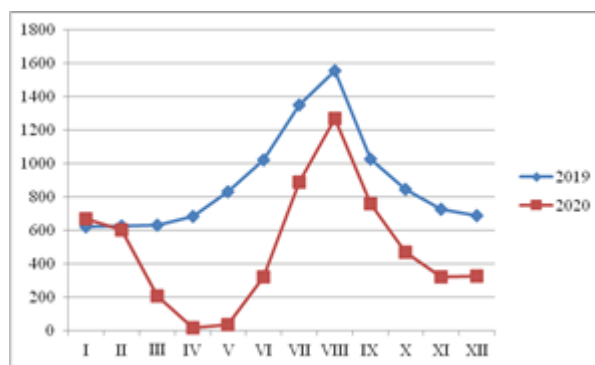


Fig. 3. Romanian tourists' arrivals in Romania in 2020 versus 2019 by month (Thousands)

Source: Own design based on the data from [12].

The arrivals of foreign tourists registered the worst situation due to the fear to travel abroad

and restrictions imposed by their countries regarding covid-testing, quarantine or isolation imposed by the destination country or the country of origin at their return.



Fig. 4. Foreign tourists' arrivals in Romania in 2020 versus 2019 by month (Thousands)

Source: Own design based on the data from [12].

All the months registered a very low number of foreign tourists starting from March and continuing till the end of the year 2020 compared to the figures recorded in 2019 (Fig.4).

This situation is also presented in Table 2, where there are shown the percentage differences in total number of tourist arrivals, for Romanians' arrivals and foreign tourists' arrivals in 2020 compared to the level performed in the year 2019.

Regarding the region of origin, most of the foreigners who visited Romania in the year 2020 came from Europe.

Table 2 . Percentage differences of tourist arrivals in 2020 versus 2019 by month (%)

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
Total arrivals	105	95.5	30.2	1.9	3.1	31.4	55.3	69.6	74.3	45.6	37.5	41
Romanian arrivals	108	96.7	32.9	2.2	4.0	31.3	65.7	81.5	74.3	55.5	44.0	47.4
Foreign arrivals	91.2	89.5	20.2	0/7	0.5	4.5	9.9	10.3	11.4	10.3	10.6	11.0

Source: Own calculations based on the data from [12].

They accounted for 78.38% of the total number of foreigners arrivals. The tourists who came from the EU-27 (United Kingdom excepted) registered 58.15% in total arrivals

of the foreign tourists. A smaller proportion was represented by tourists coming from Asia, 10%, and from North America 5.58% (Table 3).

Table 3. Foreign tourists' arrivals in the units with accommodation function, by geographical area of origin

	2020 (Thousands)	2020/2019%	Structure by origin area, %	
			2019	2020
Total arrivals	453.1	16.8	100.00	100.00
-Europe	355.3	17.9	74.23	78.38
-EU-27 (UK excepted)	263.6	17.2	57.31	58.15
Asia	45.6	12.6	13.50	10.05
North America	25.3	13.5	6.97	5.58
South America	3.2	14.8	0.81	0.70
Africa	4.7	23.5	0.74	1.03
Others	19.0	19.0	3.75	4.26

Source: Own calculations based on the data from [12].

The number of foreign visitors recorded at the frontier points accounted for 5,022.7 thousand in 2020, representing only 39.25% of the 2019 level.

If in the months of April and May, it was registered the lowest number of visitors, the

highest level of about 490-494 thousands was achieved in July and August (Fig. 5).

Like usual, during the Summer season, the most attractive destinations in 2020 for the Romanian tourists were the Black Sea shore resorts and other small localities.

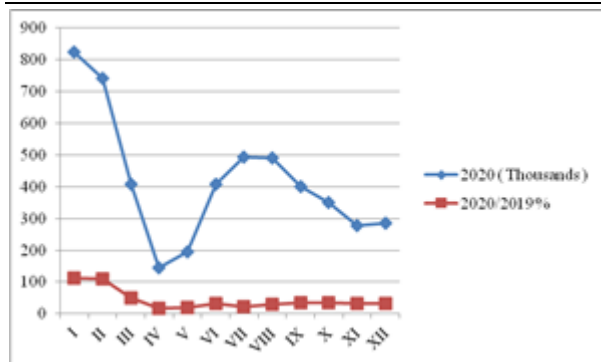


Fig. 5. Foreign visitors' arrivals at the frontier points of Romania in 2020

Source: Own design based on the data from [12].

Starting from June and mainly in July and August, and in a few measure in September, as the month had a wonderful weather and the tariffs were discounted, the seaside was full of tourists [38]. Also, the mountain areas and resorts came on the 2nd position during

summer season, but also at the end of the year.

Bucharest and other important cities have relatively maintained their shares among the preferred destinations, despite that in the summer season, they registered the lowest weights in total arrivals, as the Romanians desired to spend their vacations in safer places, in the middle of nature, in isolated areas where to discover new attractions, like in the mountain and rural areas, applying for accommodation mainly in tourist and agri-tourist guest houses, or wishing to rent a guest house for family or a small group of friends [3, 7, 13, 14, 15, 16].

The worst situation was registered by the balneary resorts in the period of restrictions, but then the situation went well as a part of people needed to recover their health (Table 4).

Table 4. The share of tourist arrivals in accommodation units in the most attractive destinations of Romania in 2020 versus 2019 by month (%)

	Bucharest and other cities		Mountain resorts		Other localities and tourist tours		Balneary resorts		Seaside resorts (Constanta city excepted)	
	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020
I	41.0	41.4	28.1	27.0	19.0	18.3	10.8	11.7	0.8	1.2
II	46.4	44.7	23.7	24.3	18.4	18.5	9.8	11.1	1.2	1.00
III	48.3	49.2	19.2	9.9	20.0	21.5	10.7	9.9	1.3	1.7
IV	46.3	65.7	19.4	2.3	20.8	28.2	10.9	1.9	1.8	1.1
V	45.5	64.4	17.9	10.2	20.4	20.9	11.4	1.2	3.0	2.3
VI	37.0	33.0	16.9	16.9	17.9	17.1	9.8	5.0	16.5	24.2
VII	29.7	22.7	16.7	15.9	16.5	14.8	9.7	9.0	25.5	34.6
VIII	28.5	22.7	17.6	18.8	16.3	15.5	9.3	11.0	26.0	29.1
IX	38.1	31.8	18.6	20.2	18.9	18.5	10.8	11.8	11.4	14.6
X	45.7	40.6	19.8	23.8	20.6	20.6	11.5	11.8	1.3	1.8
XI	47.9	41.9	19.9	24.8	19.6	21.7	10.9	9.6	1.2	1.3
XII	46.9	42.1	24.9	29.9	18.9	19.7	8.8	7.3	1.0	0.5

Source: [12].

Tourist overnight stays

In the year 2020, the number of overnight stays was closely related as usual to the number of arrivals and the length of stay in various accommodation units preferred by tourists.

Compared to 29.87 million overnight stays in 2019, in 2020 it was registered only 14.44 million, representing 48.35% of the previous year and 45.99% of the 2020 forecast, calculated based on the average annual growth in the decade 2010-2019.

The Romanian tourists registered 13.44 million overnight stays, having a share of 93.1% in the total overnight stays.

However, their stays represented about 55% of the 2019 level and 52% of the 2020 forecast.

The worst situation was noticed in case of the overnight stays performed by foreigners, which accounted for 995.8 thousand, representing 18.9% of the figure achieved in 2019 and 17.95% of the 2020 forecast (Table 5).

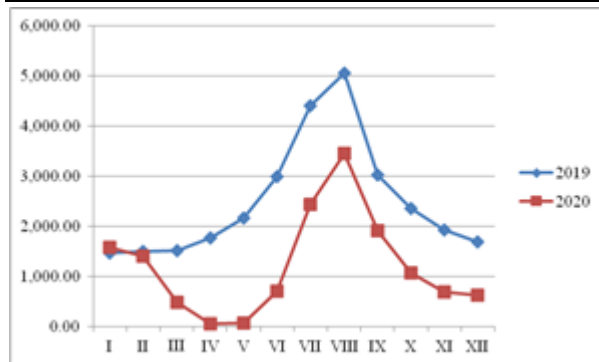


Fig. 6. Total tourists' overnight stays in Romania in 2020 versus 2019 by month (Thousands)

Source: Own design based on the data from [12].

The evolution of total overnight stays by month in the year 2020 reflects that the lowest levels were registered in April, May and also in March and June, and a better situation in the pandemic was carried out in July and August when tourists spent their summer vacation (Fig. 6).

A similar trend was noticed regarding the overnight stays belonging to the Romanian tourist who are the dominant category of visitors. In July, August and September, their stays recorded the highest level in 2020 compared to 2019 level, respectively: 62.2%, 75.8% and 73.8% (Fig. 7).

Table 5. Tourist overnight stays in the units with function for tourist accommodation, Romania in 2010, 2019 and 2020 (Thousands)

	Overnight stays- Total	Romanians' overnight stays	Foreigners' overnight stays
2010	16,051	13,284	2,767
2019	29,870.4	24,603.4	5,267
$\bar{\Delta}$ AAG	1,535.4	1,257.7	277.7
2020 forecast	31,405.8	25,861.1	5,544.7
2020	14,444.7	13,448.9	995.8
2020/2019%	48.35	54.60	18.90
2020/2020 forecast %	45.99	52.00	17.95

Source: Own calculation based on the data from [12].

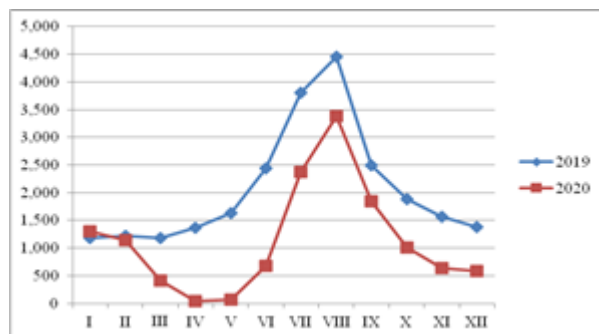


Fig. 7. Romanian tourists' overnight stays in Romania in 2020 versus 2019 by month (Thousands)

Source: Own design based on the data from [12].

The worst situation was carried out in case of foreign tourists whose stays recorded the lowest level in general, and especially in April, May and June, but with a slight recover in July, August, September, October, November and December (Fig. 8).

The synthesis of the increase or decline of overnight stays in 2020 versus 2019 in percentages is presented in Table 6.

Taking into account the region of origin, the overnight stays belonging to foreign visitors accommodated in tourist units reflected that the highest share, 77.2%, belonged to the European tourists and, of course, 56.38% to the EU-27 citizens, followed by Asian tourists with 11.42%, and North Americans with 5.71% (Table 7).



Fig. 8. Foreign tourists' overnight stays in Romania in 2020 versus 2019 by month (Thousands)

Source: Own design based on the data from [12].

Table 6. Percentage differences of tourist overnight stays in 2020 versus 2019 by month (%)

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
Total overnight stays	106.9	93.8	31.8	2.5	3.0	23.5	55.2	68.1	63.1	45.2	35.3	36.9
Romanian overnight stays	109.3	93.2	34.9	2.9	3.7	27.7	62.2	75.8	73.8	53.5	40.4	42.7
Foreign overnight stays	97.0	96.7	20.8	1.3	0.7	4.9	11.1	11.5	13.5	12.2	12.7	12.1

Source: Own calculations based on the data from [12].

Table 7. Foreign tourists' overnight stays in the units with accommodation function, by geographical area of origin

	2020 (Thousands)	2020/2019%	Structure by origin area, %	
			2019	2020
Total overnight stays	995.8	18.9	100.00	100.00
-Europe	768.9	20.26	72.05	77.20
-EU-27 (UK excepted)	561.5	19.29	55.24	56.38
Asia	113.8	14.05	15.37	11.42
North America	56.9	14.68	7.35	5.71
South America	7.5	16.62	0.85	0.75
Africa	11.4	27.87	0.77	1.14
Others	37.3	19.75	3.61	3.78

Source: Own calculations based on the data from [12].

Romanians' travels abroad accounted for 9,510.1 thousands in 2020, representing only 41.2 % of the 2019 level, when it was registered 23 million travels [12].

If in the last years, outgoing tourism exceeded the incoming tourism, in 2020, Romanians rediscovered their beautiful country full of splendours and unforgettable vacations.

However for the Romanians who travelled abroad in 2020, the most desired destinations were Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey in the period when the restrictions have been partially reduced [1].

Then, at the end of the year, due to the critical situation of the pandemic in the European countries and the imposed restrictions, Romanians preferred to spend the New Year's Eve and also the vacations in January 2021 in exotic destinations such as Maldiv Islands and Zanzibar, and even in Dubai and Egypt [1].

In general, the external trips booked in advance for the period of Spring were cancelled or postponed for other periods, and this has affected very much the travel agencies regarding their activity, incomes, staff and salaries.

Rural tourism in the pandemic

The pandemic has changed tourists' behaviour, desires and demand regarding the choice of destinations.

Tourists looked to be more interested to travel and spend week-ends or vacations far away of the crowded cities, in a natural environment, in rural areas, in attractive villages, where landscapes, traditions and rural civilization are well preserved and assure a safe stay.

They preferred to be accommodated in small units, especially in tourist and agro-tourist guesthouses with a small number of rooms, which could assure a safe stay for a family or a small group of friends, to be a pleasant and cleaned accommodation, to assure a large range of activities in fresh air (walking, hiking or cycling on specific routes to discover unknown places, to enjoy new experiences, fishing, bird watching, walking through the forests, learning about the rural life, local gastronomy, tasting wines, visiting memorial houses, old churches, natural monuments, getting knowledge about various occupations of the rural artisans, playing with the animals, riding the horses, participating to hay, fruit or egg harvesting, picking up mushrooms, medicinal plants or forest fruit, buying local

products naturally manufactured based on traditional recipes, learning to cook traditional local dishes, getting more information about folk traditions (songs, dances, suits, weddings etc).

Rural tourism was in 2020 and will continue to be in 2021 an alternative for many Romanians to spend the week-ends and also their vacations for more days than before.

If in the month of Spring 2020, rural tourism was affected very much during the imposed restrictions, and the reservations made in advance for Easter and May 1st were cancelled, the owners of guesthouses could not get any income.

However, in the period of relaxation measures, rural tourism has become the most attractive form of tourism in Romania.

Tourists became more oriented to guesthouses with large gardens, terraces, enough space for staying outdoor, and wonderful surroundings where to benefit of fresh air and feel well in the middle of nature.

Other tourists applied to experience individual tourism with the family in camping, having a camping van, or moving their tent from a place to another in their route hiking or climbing the mountains, or preferring to visit and to be accommodated in monasteries.

During the last decade 2010-2019, the number of tourist guest houses and agro-tourist guesthouse has enormously increased so that it exceeds 5,000 at present [18, 26, 27, 34, 35, 36].

They represent a proud of the small business run in the rural and mountain areas of Romania. They valorise the natural, human, material resources of the country and offer a chance to their guests to learn about hospitality of high quality, and the owners of the guest houses to get incomes and improve their living standard and contribute to the development of the local communities.

The guest houses have been adapted rapidly by their owners to the imposed measures, assuring a permanent disinfected environment, social distance, personnel route, masks, gloves, disinfectants for staff and guests. Also, the owners offered individualized packages and diversified the

activities to better satisfy tourists' requirements.

Among the most attractive destinations where tourist and agri-tourist guesthouses have become well known and the most preferred type of accommodation units are: Bucovina, Maramures, Sibiu surroundings, Rucar Bran-Fundata-Sirnea, the Sub-Carpathian Oltenia, the Danube Delta. Also, the small localities with guest houses situated close to the National Parks like in the Retezat, Ceahlau, and Piatra Craiului Mountains are also of high interest [6, 7, 11, 17, 19, 20, 31, 32, 39, 40, 41].

The beautiful landscapes, the rural houses and guest houses which preserved their specific local architecture and traditions or were modernized, the hospitality of the owners and the delicious traditional meals have made "Magura, Pestera, Cheia, Sohodol, Sirnea, Fundatica, Balvanyos, Berca, Bisoca etc" to be among the most attractive villages [41].

However, in the rural tourism, local authorities and communities have to be much more involved in the sustainable development of all the forms of rural tourism and to promote Romania as a rural country which should face much better to the pandemic [6].

CONCLUSIONS

In Romania, compared to other countries from Europe, tourism has been affected in a smaller proportion in 2020 compared to 2019, the main aspects being:

- the number of arrivals decreased by about 53% instead of 74% at the world level and 70% in Europe;
- the number of Romanian tourists dominated the domestic tourism with a share of 93%; their number was by 45% smaller compared to 2019;
- the number of overnight stays was by 51.65% lower than in 2019;
- the number of the Romanians' travels abroad was diminished by 58.8% compared to 2019;
- the most critical situation was in case of incoming tourism, which brings foreign currency; the number of foreign tourist arrivals declined by 83.2% compared to 2019

and the number of overnight stays was by 81,1% lower;

-the most critical periods for tourism in 2020 were March, April, May and a part of June, but July, August and even September contributed to the recovery of this economic sector.

-the restrictions imposed in the pandemic affected very much hotels and restaurant industry in the months specified above and also in the periods when the restaurants and bars were closed. This led to a loss of personnel, incomes, salaries, a part of the units were closed or failed.

-the most attractive destinations in the pandemic were the sea side, the mountain areas and resorts, rural areas and isolated places;

-the most preferred accommodation units were hotels and tourist and agri-tourist guesthouses;

-rural tourism was the most preferred alternative due to the safe geographical position, beautiful natural sceneries, charming villages, safe offer of accommodation, rural facilities, outdoor activities, hospitality suitable for family and small groups;

-the decline of the classical tourism in the main cities.

As a final conclusion, Romania's tourism has learnt what it was good and bad during the pandemic of the year 2020 and has to be more flexible in the year 2021 and the coming years in adapting the strategy both at the national and local level, having in mind the new trend in customers' demand, to create incentives for potential tourists to travel.

We must be aware that tourism crisis is far from over, as the pandemic will continue in 2021 and in the next years.

Travel risk reduction measures taken step by step, regarding travel testing, tracing, vaccination certificates or passports have to be the result of a coordinated harmonized policy based on international digitalization of the pandemic situation in the destination countries. They are the key for recovering tourist confidence in a safe travel and of tourism industry in the coming years.

At the global level, it is expected to continue the new trends regarding the increasing

demand for more tourism activities and experiences in "open-air, nature-based and slow travel destinations, and especially in the field of domestic tourism".

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