TOURISM CAPACITY IN IALOMITA COUNTY, ROMANIA IN THE PERIOD 2008-2020 - WHAT ABOUT ITS FUTURE?

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Abstract

Capitalizing on the tourist potential of a region together with the presence of roads and means of transport to areas with potential generates numerous tourist flows that will contribute to the tourist development of that geographical part of the country. The tourist technical-material base adapted to the needs and standards of tourists will contribute to a high number of overnight stays in the tourist region. The data processed in the work come from National Institute of Statistics-NIS. The qualitative aspects in this research were studied based on current scientific literature, official documents and observation method, and the quantitative research was carried out using statistical analysis of the processed data, graphic and cartographic method, the method of observation and interpretation. The results were presented in tables, graphs and then interpreted and examined. Data used in this study are part of the textbook on the desk. Tourist reception structures are the most important part of the technicalmaterial base of tourism. The tourist accommodation units include public utility spaces classified and arranged in such a way as to allow the accommodation of tourists and the provision of specific services according to the location. Despite that the most numerous accommodation units are represented by hotels, their number declined from 2,100 in 2008 to 1,526 in 2020 (-17.4%). The number of overnight stays is also high in hotels, but they also decreased from 52,481 in 2008 to 22,368 in 2020 meaning by - 67.4% less. A number of 304,068 tourists visited Ialomita county in 2008 and 73,697 in 2020, which reveals 24.2% because the county is visited especially for spa treatment in Amara Resort. The more active involvement of the authorities and the population for competitive activities and the increased degree of responsibility for everyone will generate a sustainable development of the region.

Key words: tourists, tourist flow, tourist capacity, tourism, profit

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the most dynamic branch of the economy of any country with tourist resources and brings an important contribution to GDP [19, 22].

Between demand in terms of tourist arrivals and overnight stays and the number of accommodation units and number of places (beds) it is a strong correlation destined to assure the balance in tourism market [17, 20]. "Within the technical-material basis of tourism, accommodation facilities, public food, entertainment, by their number and structure, reflect, to a greater extent, the degree of touristic equipment and development in its ensemble and levels" [3]. The need to maintain health has contributed to

the development of spa tourism in Romania

which has a lot of natural resources in this respect and many balneary resorts within Amara, in Ialomita County, occupies an important place for treatments based on mud and not only [6, 25].

Among the categories of accommodation units, hotels come on the top position having a higher capacity and comfort, closely related to tariffs for their services and facilities [26].

Also, other types of accommodation units like hostels, motels and agri-tourist guesthouses have become more attractive.

For the safety of tourists and their stay, especially during the Covid 19 pandemic, agro-tourist guesthouses were preferred by tourists [23, 24].

In Ialomita county, there is an important number of guest houses, the majority of them two pearls pensions and hotels.

However, none of the existing pensions use the local specification (architecture, interior design, traditional food).

Their degree of opposition is compared to the area's potential, demonstrating that the tourist traffic in the region is quite low, or that the tourists rarely stay during the nights in local accommodation units, preferring other accommodation.

The restaurants are few in number, they do not use the local specificity in the menus or in the interior and exterior decoration [1].

However this situation could be considered an exception, as in many regions of Romania tourism offer has started to modernize and develop to better satisfy visitors' desires of accommodation, facilities an entertainment [10].

There are well known regions [12, 13, 18] and counties 11, 16, 21] where tourism is flourishing benefiting of more visitors, overnights stays and income [Tourism agencies play an important role in promoting the tourist offers [14, 15].

The objectives of the current study are to analyze the accommodation capacity of the region, the number of accommodation units, the number of overnight stays and the net capacity rate in Ialomita County.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For a more concrete documentation, we analyzed and interpreted tourism data from Ialomita in the period 2008-2020 [30]. The statistical data provided by NIS regarding the tourist infrastructure were also utilized.

For the qualitative research, there were applied the following methods: documentation based on the consultation of current literature that could be accessed and official documents, and observation method.

The quantitative research used the following research methods: analysis method and data processing, graphic and cartographic method, the method of observation and interpretation.

The data were processed and converted into tables, graphs and then interpreted and analyzed. Data used in this study are part of the textbook on the desk.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Number of places in accommodation units and their structure by unit category in Ialomita tourism

Tourist reception structures are the most important part of the technical-material base of tourism.

The tourist accommodation units include public utility spaces classified and arranged in such a way as to allow the accommodation of tourists and the provision of specific services according to the location.

The accommodation facilities include all the facilities and services for overnight stays for tourists, such as: hotels, motels, inns, inns, villas, bungalows, cottages, campgrounds, youth camps, sanatoriums, etc., with permanent or seasonal occupancy [4].

The number of places existing in housing units in Ialomita county was 2,473 in 2020, approximately 0.69% of the total number of places housing units in Romania.

The number of places in housing units registered a fluctuating trend, thus, from 2,528 units in 2008, 2,807 in 2010, to 2,473 in 2020 (-55 places versus 2008) (Table 1).

The most numerous places are in hotels, with a share of 83.06% in 2008, but with 61.7% in 2020.

On the 2nd position are campgrounds preferred by tourists with lower incomes and especially for one night. The share of their places increased from 1.34% in 2008 to 13.82% in 2020.

On the 3rd place are the motels, whose

percentage increased from 4.58% in 2008 to 8.16% in 2020. In general, they are

frequented by people who stay for one night and are in transit.

Tourist cottages are ranked the 4th, with a share of the number of places of 4.15% in 2008 and a slight growth to 4.24% in 2020.

Tourist villas are ranked the 5th with a lower share ranging between 1.02 % in 2008 to 2.91% in 2020, but being preferred mainly by families desiring to spend a few nights in a comfortable place.

Table 1. Existing tourist accommodation capacity by type of tourist accommodation facilities in Ialomița County (number of places)

No. places in	2008	2009	2010	2018	2019	2020	2020/
accom. units							2008%
Total	2,528	2,612	2,807	2,469	2,477	2,473	97.82
Hotels	2,100	2,156	2,193	1,522	1,530	1,526	72.66
Hostels	15	15	15	69	69	69	460.00
Motels	116	120	145	202	202	202	174.13
Tourist Villas	26	26	50	72	72	72	276.92
Tourist small Cottages			18	14	14	14	-
Campgrounds	34	44	44	342	342	342	1,005.88
Tourist larger cottages	105	105	105	105	105	105	100.00
Student and preschool camps	120	120	122	90	90	90	75.00
Tourist guesthouses				27	27	27	-
Agrotourism guesthouses	12	26	26	26	26	26	216.66
Share of hotels in total units (%)	83.06	82.54	78.12	61.64	61.76	61.70	-
Share of campgrounds (%)	1.34	1.68	1.57	13.85	13.80	13.82	-
Share of motels (%)	4.58	4.59	5.16	8.18	8.15	8.16	-
Share of tourist cottages (%)	4.15	4.01	3.74	4.25	4.23	4.24	-
Share of tourist villas (%)	1.02	0.99	1.78	2.91	2.90	2.91	-

Source: Own calculation based on NIS data [10].

The accommodation capacity recorded fluctuations.

In Ialomita county, the accommodation capacity decreased from 2,473 places in 2020 compared to 2,528 places in 2008, while in Romania, between 2008-2020, the accommodation capacity had an upward trend. Thus, the share regarding the tourist capacity experienced a decrease. Thus, compared to Romania, in Ialomita county, it declined from 0.85% in 2008 to 0.69% in 2020.

This situation could be explain by the fact that in the year 2020 it has emerged the Covid-19 pandemic which paralyzed many fields of activities among which tourism was the most affected.

People has to respect the measures imposed by authorities, and the period of relaxation started in June when most of the tourists had to take last minute decisions where to spend their vacation.

Many tourism units with role in tourist accommodation were closed in the first part of the year and the personnel had to look for jobs in other fields than tourism.

Tourist accommodation capacity in operation in Ialomita county in terms of the number of places-days

The number of days in tourist accommodation units in Ialomița county decreased by 42.33% during the analyzed period, 2008-2020. Thus, from 596,683 days in 2008, they recorded a decrease to 345,307 days in 2020 (- 42.13%).

In the same interval, 2008-2020, at the national level, the number of places-days increased by 8.19% from 59,187,968 places-days in 2008 to 64,040,595 places-days in 2020 (Table 2).

Number	2008	2009	2010	2018	2019	2020	2020/
of places-							2008%
days							
Romania	59,187,968	51,104,435	63,808,286	89,075,891	88,789,656	64,040,595	108.19
Ialomita	596,683	577,621	573,151	511,156	506,494	345,307	57.87
county							
Share of	1.01	0.95	0.90	0.57	0.57	0.54	-
Ialomita							
county in							
Romania's							
places-							
days (%)							

Source: Own calculations based on NIS data [10].

Number of dining units

Along with the dining units, an important part in the structure of the technical-material base is held by the food units, designed to ensure both dining and entertainment facilities.

The food facilities offered by tourism represent the entire food and catering system for serving tourists meals for the duration of their temporary stay at tourist destinations. The same is true of the facilities offered by the food establishments, other than those intended for tourist food: breweries, taverns, daytime and night-time bars, chefs, pastry chefs [5].

The most famous restaurants are: Sohodol, Semluna, M Somimas, lexi Star, Brancusi, Laguna Albastra, La Scala.

In Ialomița county, the food network has approximately 23,000 places to eat, the structure of the units varying from casual or special restaurants, to brasseries, bars, buffets, cafeterias.

Regarding the level of comfort, most of the losses at the table are taken in the units of the first and second categories (about 87% of the total).

It results in an average of 2.5 places per table for one place.

Leisure units

Leisure represents a basic component of the tourist product, although it is designed to ensure the active rest of the tourists, contributing greatly to a new health of life.

In the county of Ialomița, leisure takes various forms such as: parties, dance halls, billiard tables, but their number is quite small.

The only leisure complex is located on the territory of the city of Amara, in the immediate vicinity of the lake with the same

name, at a distance of only 7 km from the Municipality of Slobozia.

The favorable climate contributes to relaxation together with the steppe vegetation and landscaped parks.

Treatment units

The treatment centers are located in Amara Resort. They offer a large range of treatments various for diseases like: articular polyarthrosis; degenerative rheumatism; peripheral rheumatism: neurological disorders; gynecological disorders; posttrauma syndrome; recovery after operations on joints, muscles, bones; dermatological disorders; endocrine disorders; occupational diseases.

The main natural healing agent is the Amara lake. The total degree of mineralization of Amara Lake is 9.88g/l, with a high content of sulfate, sodium chloride and magnesium.

The silt of the lake is sapropelis, which contains 40% organic substances and 41% mineral substances.

Among the main facilities available at the resort, there are: baths and wraps with salt mud, mud poultices, internal salt of mineral water, hydrotherapy, electrotherapy, air therapy.

Analysis of tourist traffic

For a better understanding of the tourist phenomenon in Ialomița county, the internal tourist circulation is being studied.

The arrivals of tourists (established tourists), the number of overnight stays, the average length of stay, the tourist density and the coefficient of use of accommodation capacities are the main indicators according to which we analyze the tourist flow [7].

Tourist arrivals

The structural changes of the main indicators, the number of tourists staying and overnight stays generate fluctuations in tourist traffic in Ialomita county. Tourist traffic in Ialomița county is reduced, given the socio-economic conditions unfavorable to mass tourism, as well as the technical condition and the low level of comfort [30]. This is also due to the constant reduction, from year to year, of the number of tourists arriving in accommodation

units [8]. Other reasons that could have caused this reduction in the number of arrivals are: the quality of the services offered to tourists, the tourist potential of the county, the rates charged in these accommodation units, tourist offices, etc. [28].

From Table 3, one can very well observe the evolution of the number of tourists arriving in the tourist reception facilities.

Table 3. Tourist arrivals in tourist reception structures with tourist accommodation function by unit category and type of tourists in Ialomita County, 2008-2020

Type of	Type of	2008	2009	2010	2018	2019	2020	2020/ 2008%
accom. unit	tourist	50 401	12.020	26,400	40.154	10.567	22.269	
TOTAL	Total	52,481	42,839	36,480	42,154	43,567	22,368	42.62
	Romanians	48,177	39,776	34,417	39,101	40,387	21,785	45.21
	Foreigners	4,304	3,036	2,063	3,053	3,180	583	13.54
Hotels	Total	43,009	38,382	30,732	30,865	32,242	15,572	36.02
	Romanians	38,863	35,514	28,895	28,334	29,567	15,027	38.66
	Foreigners	4,146	2,868	1,837	2,531	2675	545	13.14
Hostels	Total	548	171	69	3,200	4,263	2,283	416.60
	Romanians	546	169	66	2,981	4,049	2,263	414.46
	Foreigners	2	2	3	219	214	20	1,000.0
Motels	Total	4,008	2,906	3,871	6,354	5,184	3,690	92.06
	Romanians	3,860	2,782	3,713	6,062	4,912	3,674	95.18
	Foreigners	148	124	158	292	272	16	10.81
Tourist villas	Total	3,480	189	554	756	932	789	22.67
	Romanians	3,480	128	508	751	917	787	31.73
	Foreigners	<i>.</i>	61	46	5	15	2	-
Tourist cottages	Total			22	28	27		-
0	Romanians			17	23	27		-
	Foreigners			5	5			-
Campgrounds	Total	180	183	265	-	-	-	-
	Romanians	180	183	265				-
Camps for students and preschoolers	Total	894	470	735	587	499		-
	Foreigners	894	470	735	587	499		-
Agritourism guts houses	Total	362	538	232	205	20	34	9.39
	Romanians	354	530	218	205	20	34	9.60
	Foreigners	8	8	14				-

Source: Own calculations based on NIS data [10].

In the year 2020, most of the tourists, more exactly 74%, preferred to stay in hotels, then in motels 11.89%, in hostels 9.78%, at a very long distance there are villas 2.13% and camps for students and preschoolers 1.14%. All the other accommodation types have less visitors. In 2020, the highest share is represented by Romanians, 92.7% of the total tourist arrivals in tourist reception structures.

However, even in this case, their number in 2020 decreased by 54.38% compared to their number in the year 2008.

The highest decline of Romania tourists was noticed in hotels (-61.34%), tourist villas 60.27%. But in hostels, the number of domestic tourists increased more than 4 times. This is a reflection of the lack of attention paid by managers of tourist units to modernize

accommodation conditions and facilities, including leisure alternatives. Also, the lack of correlation between the tariffs per night and services quality is also a cause which explains the reduction in the tourist' number in Ialomita county. The reduction in tourist flow generates a very low coefficient of capacity utilization in Ialomita county. This is a result of an irresponsible survey, not adapted to the new market trends, or of the almost permanent changes involved in the organization of resorts or commercial tourism companies in the Ialomita county [29].

Number of overnight stays in the existing facilities

Table 4. Overnight stays in tourist accommodation facilities by types of facilities, types of tourists in Ialomița County, 2008-2020

Type of accom. unit	Type of tourist	2008	2009	2010	2018	2019	2020	2020/ 2008%
TOTAL	Total	304,068	273,843	199,574	170,308	184,076	73,697	24.23
IUIAL	Romanians	296,193	266,588	199,574	164,913	177,911	72,195	24.23
	Foreigners	7,875	7,255	3,974	5,395	6,165	1,502	19.07
Hotels	Total	233,552	259,456	183,858	151,739	163,086	62,062	26.57
1101015	Romanians	225,960	252,632	180,245	147,066	158,577	60,667	26.84
	Foreigners	7,592	6,824	3,613	4,673	4,509	1,395	18.37
Hostels	Total	2,122	485	357	4,939	7,747	4,418	208.19
11050015	Romanians	2,122	482	296	4,612	7,260	4,337	204.57
	Foreigners	2	3	61	327	487	81	4,050.0
Motels	Total	5,635	6,009	7,141	8,013	8,616	6,394	113.46
	Romanians	5,378	5,742	6,967	7,634	7,479	6,370	118.44
	Foreigners	257	267	174	379	1,137	24	9.33
Tourist villas	Total	56,956	336	659	1,463	1,642	789	1.38
	Romanians	56,956	275	613	1,458	1,616	787	1.38
	Foreigners	:	61	46	5	26	2	-
Tourist cottages	Total	:	:	37	48	46	•	-
	Romanians	:	:	21	38	46	:	-
	Foreigners	:	:	16	10	:	:	-
Campgrounds	Total	2,340	2,580	3,325	:	:	:	-
	Romanians	2,340	2,580	3,325	:	:	:	-
Camps for students and preschoolers	Total	2,764	3,960	3,774	3,522	2,370	:	-
	Romanians	2,764	3,960	3,774	3,522	2,370	:	-
Agritourism guts houses	Total	699	1,017	423	392	20	34	4.86
	Romanians	675	917	359	392	20	34	5.03
	Foreigners	24	100	64	:	:	:	-

Source: Own calculations based on NIS data [10].

Approximately 90% of the number of tourists from Ialomita county stay in hotels, followed by motels, student hostels and campsites, as shown in Table 4.

The number of overnight stays by tourists in hotels also decreased significantly from 304,068 overnight stays in 2008 to 73,697 overnight stays in 2020 (-75.77%).

In 2020 versus 2008, the results from Table 5 show that the highest declined was recorded in hotels (-73.43%), in agri-tourism guest-houses (-95.14%) and tourist villas (-98.62%).

Motels are an exception, where the number of overnight stays increased by 13.46%, but also hostels, where they increased by 108.19%, due to practical the low prices.

In 2020, the number of overnight stays in Ialomita county accounted for 73,697 compared to 304,068 in the year 2008, meaning a reduction of 58.12%. As a result, the share of the number of overnight stays in Ialomita country in the total overnight stays in Romania declined from 1.46% in 2008 to 0.5% in 2020.

The degree of use of the tourist resource This indicator is expressed in percentages and used in the evaluation of the degree of exploitation of tourist capacities.

The calculation formula is as follows:

GUGT = number of nights/number of accommodation places x number of working days x 100 [9].

The results presented in Table 5 reflects a low capacity of using the available resources in the tourism of Ialomita county, as in the period 2008-2020, the number of overnight stays declined by -75.77% and the number of places by -2.18%. In consequence, the degree of use of the tourist resources decreased from 32.96% in 2008 to 8.16% in 2020.

Table 5. The degree of utilization of the tourist resource in Ialomita County

	2008	2009	2010	2018	2019	2020	2020/ 2008 %
Overnight stays	304,068	273,843	199,574	170,308	184,076	73,697	24.23
Number of places	2,528	2,612	2,807	2,469	2,477	2,473	97.82
Degree of use (%)	32.95	28.72	19.48	18.90	20.36	8.16	-

Source: Own calculations based on NIS data [10].

The net capacity rate of utilization

The index of tourist net capacity rate of utilization has varied in Ialomita county from a month to another sometimes being higher than the national average, other times being smaller in the year 2020 as shown in Fig. 1. In Ialomita county, the index of net capacity rate in the tourism is higher than the average index in Romania's tourism in January, February, March, April and June, but in the summer months it is below. However, in the month of August, it recorded a peak value, as at the national level, August being the month when most of people is in summer holidays.



Fig. 1. The dynamics of the index of net capacity rate in the tourism of Ialomita County compared to the average rate in Romania in the year 2020

Source: Own design based on the data from National Institute of Statistics.

In September, October and December, in Ialomita tourism the net capacity rate is below the national index, but in November is higher. Therefore, this could be explained by the key attraction which is in Ialomita county, the Amara spa resort, where many people go for getting a corresponding treatment for various diseases. In the first months of the year and in November, the main category of tourists in Amara resort are the pensioners.

This confirms again that tourism resources are not enough valorised in this county and for this reason the tourist flow and number of

overnight stays are not satisfactory in comparison with the accommodation capacity. If we compare with other counties of where the local authorities and business people are very much involved in the development of the localities and the region by means of tourism, we cannot be satisfied about how tourist resources are valorised in Ialomita county.

CONCLUSIONS

Ialomița County, thanks to its natural elements, offers elements of beauty and novelty, the hunting and fishing area of the Ialomița and Danube rivers, historical and cultural values, creates the proper framework for the development of tourism.

The most important tourist destination of Ialomița County are Băile Amara, located 7 km from Slobozia and 126 km from Busurești, famous for its sapropelis mud and medicinal mineral water, which are popular in the countryside.

The county is visited especially for spa treatment in Amara Resort and not for other tourist objectives.

Therefore, Ialomita County has numerous tourist resources, but they must be kept alive and not excessively exploited in order to preserve them.

The most numerous accommodation units are represented by hotels, and the number of overnight stays is also high in hotels.

However, hostels and motels look to be the most attractive unit of accommodation and Romanians are the main visitors, even though their number has substantially declined in the analyzed period.

However, tourist flow declined in this county of Romania due to a weak management of tourist resources and low service quality connected to tariffs.

A higher involvement of the local authorities and new opportunities for business could be encouraged as Ialomita country to have a flourishing competitive tourism.

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Scientific Papers Series Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture and Rural Development Vol. 23, Issue 1, 2023

PRINT ISSN 2284-7995, E-ISSN 2285-3952

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