

TOURIST ARRIVALS AND OVERNIGHT STAYS IN ROMANIA BY TOURIST DESTINATION IN THE YEARS 2020 AND 2021 OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC COMPARED TO 2019

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to analyze the dynamics of tourist flows in terms of tourist arrivals and overnight stays by tourist destination in Romania in the years 2020 and 2021 of the Covid-19 pandemic compared to the year 2019. Graphics and fixed and variable basis and structural indices were used to show the difference of the level of these two indicators and their distribution by each destination. The year 2019 was the best for Romania's tourism when over 13.37 million arrivals and over 30.08 million overnight stays were registered. In 2020, the arrivals were by 52.16% lower than in 2019, and the overnight stays smaller by 48.45%, showing that this year was the worst, as a part of units were closed or worked at a reduced capacity, recording a lower revenue and even failed. Romanians saved tourism, being the dominant category who rediscovered the beauty of their own country both in 2020 and in 2021 when the restrictions were cancelled or limited. In 2021, the number of arrivals accounted for over 9.37 million and the number of overnight stays for over 20.83 million. The hierarchy of the tourist destinations in Romania based on the level of these two indicators is: Bucharest, the capital and the main cities, other localities and tourism itineraries, seaside resorts, mountain resorts, spa resorts and the Danube Delta and Tulcea City. The recovery of was not yet at the level of 2019, despite that in 2021, tourism managers have made special efforts to improve and diversify their offers and better satisfy their guests. This dynamics gives a hope that in coming years tourism will return to the level of 2019 or even to exceed it.

Key words: tourist arrivals overnight stays, dynamics, tourist destination, Covid-19 pandemic, Romania

INTRODUCTION

"The physical space where the tourist spend at least one night" and benefits of different services and attractions" is the definition given to tourism destination by [39, 32].

The destinations for which the tourists leave home and travel could be represented by a country, a region, a city or town etc that they prefer to visit and spend their money assuring a revenue flow from tourism to that destination.

To better satisfy tourists, a tourist destination must be accessible by means of travel services, must offer accommodation and board services, various attractions and high quality services [7].

The loyalty of the tourists for a specific destination depends on the relationship

existing between "the destination image and value and tourist satisfaction degree [4].

The recognition of the position of a country in the world tourism is given by the number of international tourist arrivals and also by the revenue coming from tourism [12, 40].

Romania is a tourist destination grace to its geographical position, mild climate, relief variety in a shape of an amphitheater: mountains, hills, plains, the Black Sea coast for a length of about 245 km with fine sand beaches, warm sea water and the necklace of well known seaside resorts beginning with its pearl Mamaia, the Danube Delta - the paradise of fishes and birds. The sceneries are beautiful, the natural resources are rich and of a large variety, culture, history and gastronomy are mysterious, unique and attractive stimulating curiosity and delighting the eyes of the visitors, improving their

knowledge through an opened door to the people civilization in this part of Europe.

The hospitality and quality of tourism services connected to price and tariffs contribute to visitors' satisfaction and increase their desire to return and recommend Romania as a charming destination.

Taking into account the life cycle of a tourist area, business management has to be permanently kept under control to maintain tourism destinations in the visitors' preferences [1, 34, 38].

Romania has become more and more known for its special attractions like: Transilvanian medieval towns, castles and fortresses, Bran Castle, the Royal Peles Castle in Sinaia, the Prahova Valley, the painted monasteries from the Northern-Eastern part of the country, Sarmisegetusa Regia, Sighisoara - the only medieval inhabited city in Europe, the Danube Delta - the most beautiful natural reservation of this type in Europe, the charming cities like Bucharest, the capital, Brasov, Sibiu, Cluj-Napoca, Timisoara, Transfagarasan and Transalpina roads crossing the Southern Carpathians [3, 12], traditional villages, arts, crafts, local architectural style, traditions and customs, folklore, events and festivals, delicious and tasty food and flavoured wines [33].

Wild Carpathia serials which promote the beauty of Romania by the well known journalist Charlie Ottley and the visits of King Charles III mainly in Transylvania [41] have increased the fame of Romania as a paradise garden where nature is preserved and offer a peaceful and healthy life to its inhabitants.

Tourism is sustained by its human resources working in the field in accommodation, restaurants and catering, transportation, entertainment and management and improving their attitude, behaviour, knowledge and skills to offer best conditions and higher and higher quality services to their visitors, and to ensure a sustainable and profitable business and protect environment [2, 10].

Tourism stakeholders make high efforts to assure the balance between offer and demand, by increasing the number and comfort in the accommodation units and the number of places [15, 16].

Tourism is among the most dynamic branches of the economy contributing to GDP and economic growth [20, 22].

Also, tourism is a field where efficiency could be high, as in the year 2019, when it attained over Lei 5 Billion turnover, even though in the years of the Covid-19 pandemic, 2020 and 2021, it decreased below that level [14].

The Covid-19 pandemic has disturbed the ascending trend of tourism all over the world [5], and in Romania as well, regarding tourist flows [18, 25], tourism seasonality in the seaside and mountain resorts [19], tourism offer and demand [31], and concentration of tourist arrivals in tourist and agro-tourist guesthouses [29], and stimulated agro-tourism [36], and ecotourism [35].

However, the tourist destination image has been the reason why tourists decided to travel during the risky conditions in the Covid-19 pandemic [37].

The main tourist destinations in Romania are classified into balneary resorts, seashore resorts without Constanta City, mountain resorts, Bucharest and other municipalities, the Danube Delta and Tulcea City and other localities and tours [8].

In this context, the purpose of the paper was to comparatively analyze the dynamics of tourist arrivals and overnight stays in Romania by tourist destination in the years: 2019, the top year in Romania's tourism, in the year 2020, the 1st year of the pandemic, which was the worst year which deeply affected this branch of the economy, and 2021, when tourism started its recovery.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is based on the data provided by National Institute of Statistics [8] regarding the number of tourist arrivals and overnight stays both at the country level and also by destination: balneary resorts, seashore resorts without Constanta City, mountain resorts, Bucharest and other municipalities, the Danube Delta and Tulcea City and other localities and tourism itineraries.

The dynamics was represented by graphics to enable the readers to better understand the evolution of the two indicators in three years:

2019, as a reference year when Romania recorded the highest numbers of tourist arrivals and overnight stays, 2020, when tourism was very much affected by the pandemic and the imposed restrictions till June and 2021, when the measures of restrictions were much earlier relaxed starting from the month of March.

In the calculation, the fixed and variable basis index was used to show in what measure the level of each indicator changed from a year to another.

Also, the structural index was used for reflecting the share of tourist arrivals, and, respectively, the weight of overnight stays in their total number by destination.

Suitable comments have accompanied the results and finally, the conclusions

emphasized the main ideas resulting from this research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Tourist arrivals

Tourism arrivals had a large variation from a year to another in the studied short interval and proved how the Covid-19 pandemic decreased the number of arrivals for the peak performance of 13,374,943 carried out in the year 2019, to the low level of 6,398,642 arrivals in 2020, meaning by 52.16% less and then, in 2021, in the 2nd year of the pandemic how tourism has started to recover and tourist arrivals raised to 9,370,232 being by 46.44% higher than in 2020 by 30% lower than in 2019 (Fig. 1).

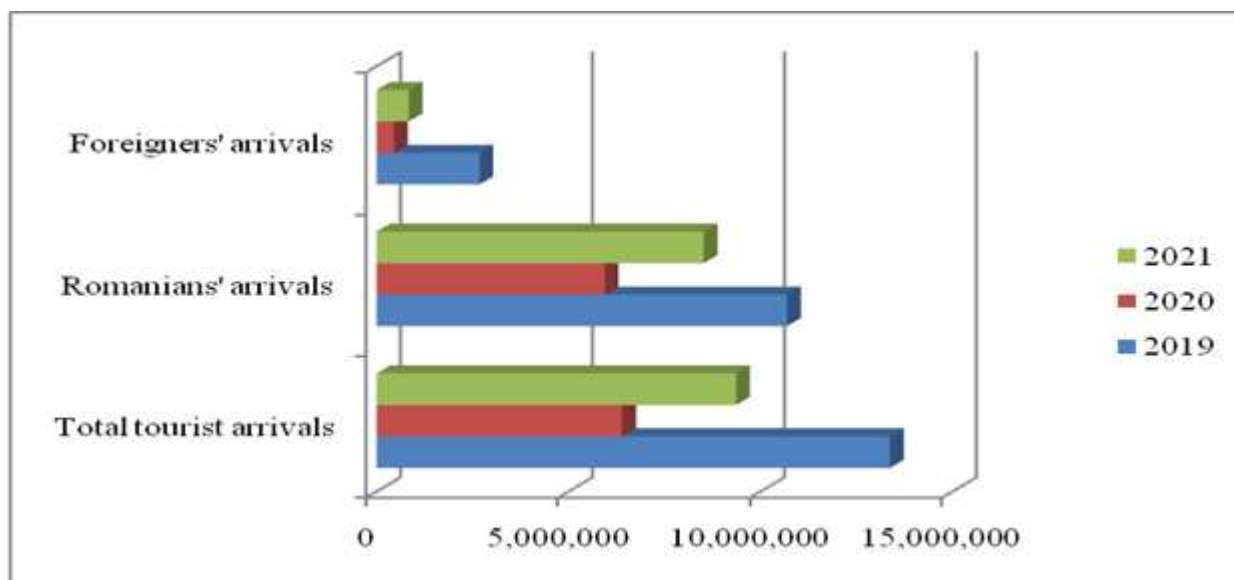


Fig. 1. Dynamics of tourist arrivals in Romania, 2019-2021 (Number)
Source: Own design based on the data from NIS [8].

The share of foreign arrivals in the total number is in general small as Romanians are dominant. However, if in 2019, the arrivals of the foreign visitors reached 20%, in 2019 it declined to 7% and in 2021 it climbed to 9%, but it did not yet achieve the peak from the best year for Romania's tourism. Travels abroad were really a critical aspect in the two years of pandemic due to the different restriction measures imposed by each country

authorities (Fig. 2). The decline in the number of arrivals was determined by the type, duration and severity of the restrictions imposed by authorities to stop the spread of the corona virus, the people's fear to travel and not to get the virus, variation of income per family in relation to job situation (employed, unemployed, hired, home work etc), vacation duration and other conditions).

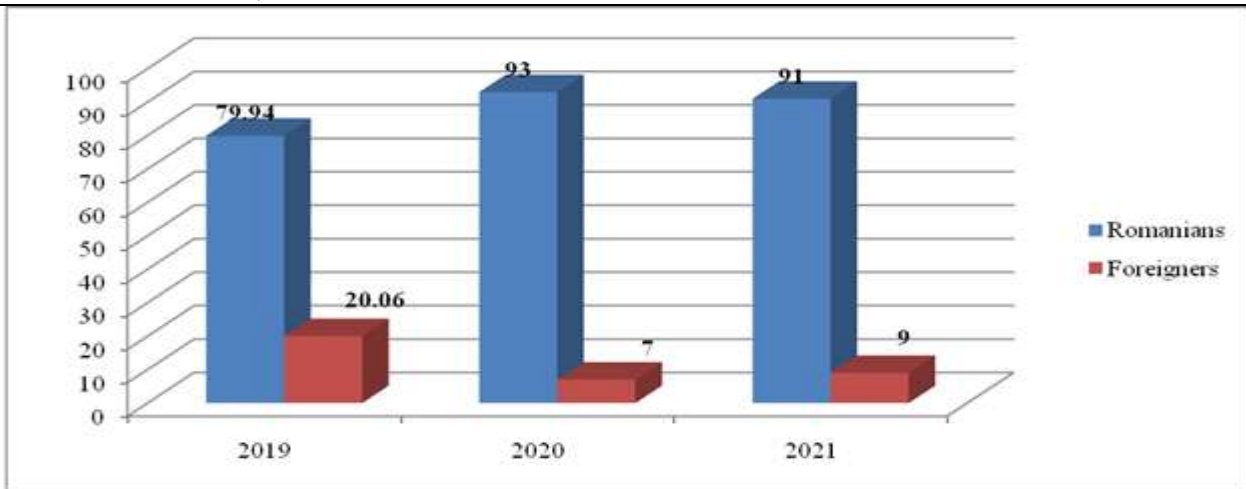


Fig. 2. Share of Romanians and foreigners in total arrivals in Romania, 2019-2021 (%).
 Source: Own calculation and design based on NIS data [8].

Foreigners have many reasons and interests to visit Romania such as: to visit their relatives, to meet their friends, to learn about the capital and other cities, cultural and historical places, gastronomy, for treatment, leisure and entertainment, looking for a job opportunity, to enjoy admiring the beauty of the landscapes, wild life etc.

The main tourist destinations in Romania are classified into: balneary resorts, seashore resorts, mountain resorts, the Danube Delta and Tulcea City, Bucharest and the main cities residence of the counties, and other localities and tourism routes. The dispersion of tourist arrivals by destinations in Romania is presented in Fig. 3.

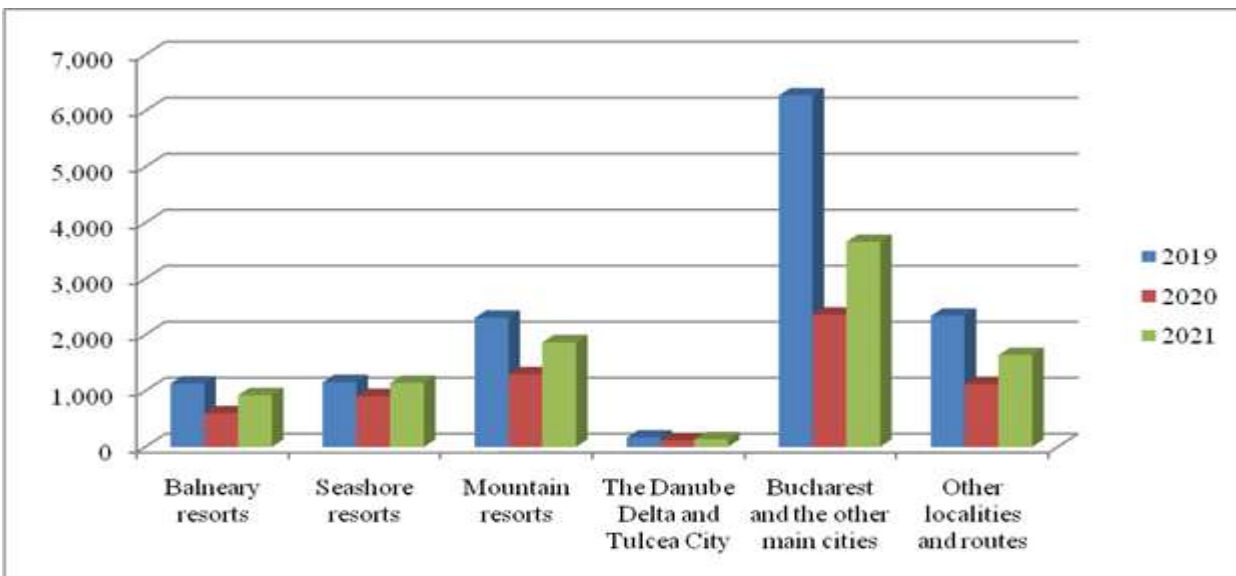


Fig. 3. The number of tourist arrivals by destination in Romania, 2019-2021 (Thousands)
 Source: Own design based on the data from NIS[8].

From Fig. 3, it is easily to notice that the highest number of tourist arrivals in registered in Bucharest, the capital of Romania, and also in other cities like: Cluj-Napoca, Brasov, Sibiu, Timisoara, Iasi. Among these cities, Cluj-Napoca and Sibiu look to be more and more visited especially by foreigners on the occasion of various festivals and events [21].

In 2019, it was the peak of visitors in the cities accounting for 6,276 thousands. In the 1st year of the covid-19 pandemic, this destination remained on the top position with 2,359 thousands visitors, but this number was by 62.42% smaller than in 2019. In 2021, when tourism activity restarted earlier and in relatively normal conditions, the arrivals in Bucharest and other municipalities went up to

3,661 thousands, being by 55.19% higher than in 2020 and by 41.67% lower than in 2019.

The tourists interest to Romania's destinations in their decreasing order established based on the number of arrivals in the following one: Bucharest and the other municipalities, mountain resorts, other localities and tourism itineraries, seashore resorts, balneary resorts and the Danube Delta and Tulcea City.

The mountain resorts come on the 2nd position and are of a high attractiveness along the whole year, but especially in the winter season when the snow layer covers the mountains and offer opportunities for practicing winter sports mainly for ski lovers in the well know resorts like: Poiana Brasov, in Predeal and Sinaia and other localities in the Prahova Valley, Balea Lake, Vidra/Voineasa, Paltinis- Sibiu, Ranca-Gorj, Straja-Hunedoara, Madarasi-Harghita, Olimpica-Borsa etc.

Poiana Brasov is one of the pearls of the mountain resorts of Romania with wonderful ski slopes endowed with modern equipments, like of the other ski resorts, but in addition it is situate at 14 km from the City of Brasov with its well known cultural objectives [9].

More than this, in the Prahova Valley it is also a necklace of well known mountain resorts, Sinaia being the pearl of this valley, being followed by Predeal, Azuga, Busteni [10].

Mountain areas are visited along the year in many seasons, the seasonality reflecting a top of tourists in summer and also in winter season. In this periods of high number of tourists, the accommodation units are full and sometimes it could appear a difference between the need of rooms and beds and the offer [28].

In 2019, the mountain resorts were visited by over 2,305 thousand tourists, but in 2020, the 1st year of the pandemic the arrivals declined to 1,295 thousand, being by 44% smaller than in the previous year. In 2021, a number of over 1,866 thousand arrivals were registered in the mountain resorts.

On the 3rd position come the seashore resorts, which are a real necklace of beautiful resorts like Mamaia, Eforie North and South, Costinesti, Olimp, Venus, Saturn, Mangalia and Vama Veche with fine sand beaches,

warm and pleasant Black Sea water in summer time, elegant hotels and villas, divers restaurants with large range of menus, many of them specialized in fish and sea fruit dishes, and of lot of opportunities for entertainment during late in the night, tariffs being accessible for all the pockets [26].

The seashore resorts came on the 1nd position based on the number of visitors and preserved their position from a year to another. In 2019, over 1,154 thousand tourists spent their vacations on the seashore of Romania, in 2020 their number of a little higher than 905 thousands, meaning by 22% less than in the previous year. But, in 2021, the seashore resorts received 1,142 tourist arrivals, by 26% more than in 2020 and by only 1.1 % less than in 2019. Therefore, we may conclude that 2021 was really a mouth of "fresh air" for the seashore tourism.

However, in summer season, seaside resorts are full of visitors and sometimes it is an unbalance between tourist demand and offer, a few visitors looking for accommodation in private houses [23].

Balneary resorts are very attractive during the year, being suitable in general to elder people who have health problems and needs treatments and various procedures, but also young tourist who are keen to keep their body in good condition. And the spa units make huge efforts to diversify their services and the service quality for satisfying better their clients and increase their income [6].

In the year 2019, over 1,133 thousand tourists benefited of spa services, but in 2020 their number decreased to 601 thousands, meaning by 47% less. In 2021, their number increased reaching 924 thousands, being by 53.7% higher than in 2020 and by 18.5% smaller than in 2018.

However, even in the spa resorts, it is not always a correlation between the demand and offer of accommodation services, and some people apply for private houses and tourist guesthouses instead of staying in hotels [27].

The Danube Delta and Tulcea City are a special attraction mainly for people interested to the Danube Delta natural reservation which is very rich in thousands of birds and fish

species, and also for the people who like fishing and fish meals.

In 2019, about 166 thousand tourists visited the Danube Delta, but in 2020, their number decreased to 118 thousands, being by 29 % lower than in the previous year. In 2021, the Danube Delta and Tulcea were visited by 137

thousand tourists, meaning 16% more than in 2020 and by 18% less than in 2019.

Taking into account the number of foreign tourist arrivals and its dispersion by destination, it was calculated the share of the arrivals of foreign visitors in total arrivals of foreigners and the results are presented in Fig. 4.

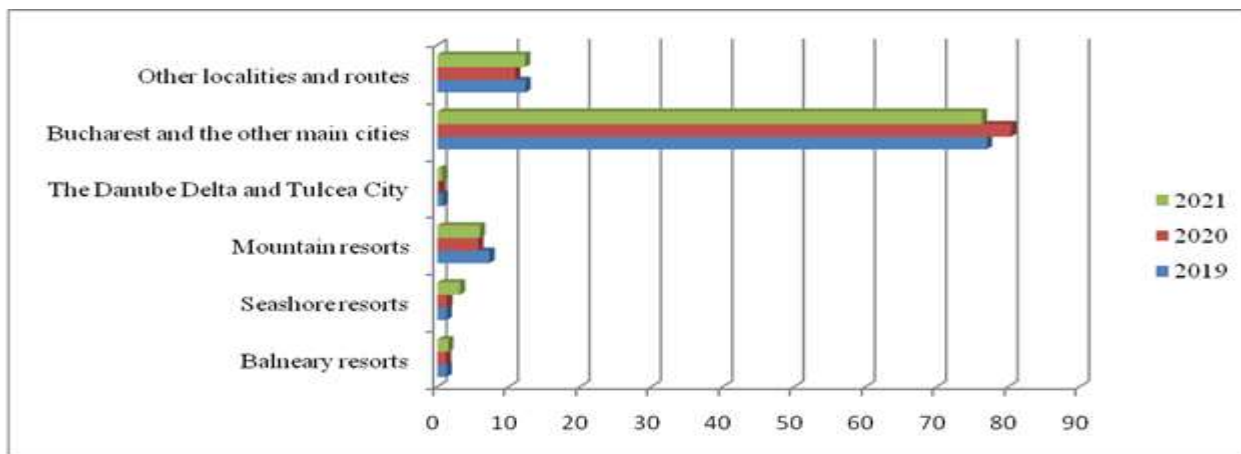


Fig. 4. The share of the arrivals of foreign visitors by destination in total arrivals of foreigners in Romania, 2019-2021 (%)

Source: Own calculation and design based on the data from NIS[8].

The results showed in Fig. 4 inform us that that 76% in 2019, 80.42% in 2020 and 76.31% of the number of tourist visiting Bucharest and the main municipalities were of foreign origin. Foreign visitors accounted in the other destinations for the following shares: 12% in other localities and routes, 5-6% in the mountain resorts, 1-2% in the seashore resorts, and 1.2-1.5% in balneary resorts. In the Danube Delta, in 2019, foreigners represented 0.76% in total number of visitors, but in 2020, it was only 0.33% and in 2021 0.71 % Figure 5 presents the share of foreign

tourist arrivals in total arrivals of tourists by destination (%). From Fig. 5 we may notice that foreigners have an important share in the number of tourists who visit the capital and the main municipalities. Its level was 32.93% in the year 2019, 15.47% in 2020 and then 17.57% in 2021. In other localities and itineraries, foreign tourists represented 14.18% in 2019, by only 4.42% in 2020 and 6.33% in 2021. In the mountain resorts, 8.5% of visitors were foreigners in 2019, then in 2020 their share declined to 2% and in 2021 it was only 2.68%.

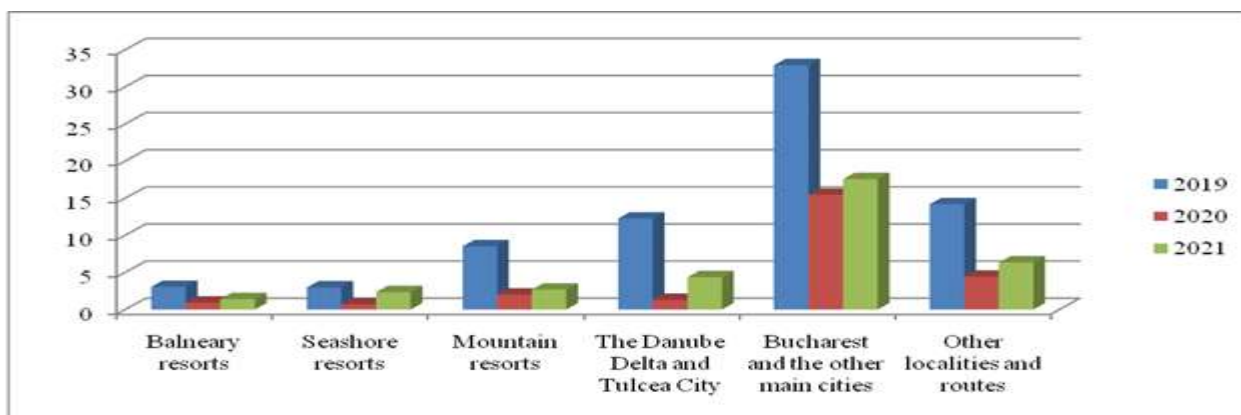


Fig. 5. The share of foreign tourists arrivals in total arrivals of visitors by destination (%)

Source: Own calculation and design based on the data from NIS.

In the seashore resorts, foreigners represented 2.97 % in 2019, 0.68% in 2020 and then 2.33 % in 2021, while in balneary tourism their weight varied between 3% in 2019 and 1.4 % in 2021, but in the 1st year of the pandemic declined to 0.92%.

Tourist overnight stays

In Romania, the number of overnight stays reached the top level in the year 2021, where

they accounted for 30,086,091, but during the year 2020, the 1st year of the pandemic, they decreased by 48.45%, accounting for only 14,579,140. In 2021, the situation started to recover in relation to the increased number of arrivals. In this year, the total number of overnight stays was 20,835,814, by 42.91% higher than in 2020, but still by 30.75% lower than in the year 2019 (Fig. 6).

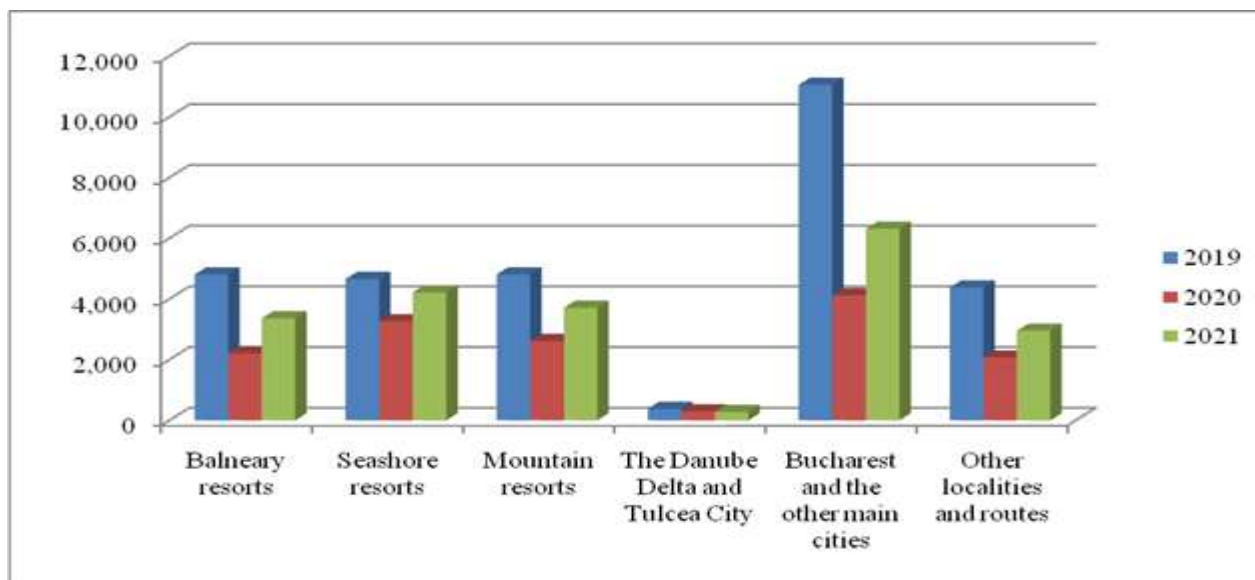


Fig. 6. The number of tourists' overnight stays by destination in Romania, 2019-2021 (Thousands)
 Source: Own design based on the data from NIS [8].

The overnight stays belonging to the Romanians were dominant with a share of 82.41% in 2019, 93.15% in 2020 and 91.20% in 2021. Therefore, they followed the evolution of the number of tourists' arrivals.

The share of Romanians by tourist destination ranged as follows:

-In the year 2019: 63.58% in Bucharest and other municipalities, 86.57% in other localities and tourism itineraries, 87.78% in the Danube Delta and Tulcea, 91.92% in the mountain resorts, 97.35% in the seaside resorts and 97.67% in the balneary resorts.

-In the year 2020, Romanians had the highest share in all the destinations varying from 80.95% in Bucharest and main cities and 99.37% in the seaside resorts, the last destination being the most desired by tourists in the first year of the pandemic when the restrictions were relaxed starting from the month of June.

-In the year, 2021, the weight of the overnight stays in the capital and the main cities

accounted for 77.8%, being smaller than in 2020 by 3.15 percentage points, but by 14.22 higher than in 2019. The highest share of overnight stays accounting for 98.81% was recorded also by the seaside resorts which continue to be on a top position as a summer destination.

Regarding the preference of tourists for accommodation, it was noticed a special attention given to hotels [30] where it was possible to assure a safe stay and also to tourist and agro-tourist guesthouses, as suitable for spending a safe vacation for a family of a group of friends [17, 24].

CONCLUSIONS

The year 2019 was the best for Romania's tourism when the number of tourist arrivals and overnight stays reached the top level in the last decade.

In this year, a peak of over 13.37 million arrivals and over 30.08 million overnight stays in Romania were registered.

The year 2020 was the worst year for Romania's tourism as many units from tourism sector were obliged to close or to work at a reduced capacity, hiring a part of the personnel and registering a low revenue and even failed.

Romanians saved Romanian tourism, being the dominant category who rediscovered the beauty of their own country in the 1st year of the covid-19 pandemic, where the restrictions were cancelled or limited.

In 2020, the number of arrivals was by 52.16% lower than in 2019, and the overnight stays were smaller by 48.45%.

In 2021, it was noticed a recover in tourism due to the relaxed restrictions starting from March compared to June in 2020. The number of arrivals accounted for over 9.37 million and the number of overnight stays for over 20.83 million.

The recovery of was not yet at the level of the year 2019, despite that in 2021, tourism managers had more time to prepare their offers and receive guests and also to people to plan their vacations and excursions in a longer period of the year.

Based on the obtained results for the number of arrivals and overnight stays by tourism destination, the following classification was established: Bucharest, the capital and the main cities, other localities and tourism itineraries, seaside resorts, mountain resorts, spa resorts and the Danube Delta and Tulcea City.

The interest of foreign visitors to discover Romania is increasing due to the intensified promotion on media (internet, youtube, facebook, twitter, instagram, blogs etc), and also grace to its beautiful landscapes, cultural-historical places, large variety of tourism forms (mountain, seashore, spa and medical, cultural, historical, musical, religious, gastronomic, sport, adventure, rural, ecotourism, fishing, wild etc).

Tourism is one of the main reasons why the people leave home and spend vacations to charge their "batteries" by leisure and entertainment, to enrich their knowledge and

cultural horizon, meeting new people and civilizations or enjoying life in its various splendors.

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