

ROMANIAN RURAL TOURISM IN GUESTHOUSES - EVOLUTION PERSPECTIVES

Carina Andreia DOBRE, Aurelia Vasilica BALAN, Paula STOICEA,
Adina Magdalena IORGA

University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Bucharest of Bucharest, 59 Marasti Boulevard, District 1, 011464, Bucharest, Romania, E-mails: dobre.carina@managusamv.ro, balanaureliav@yahoo.com, stoicea.paula@managusamv.ro, iorga_adinam@yahoo.com

Corresponding author: iorga_adinam@yahoo.com

Abstract

In Romania, domestic tourism is increasingly incorporating rural tourism. The number of travelers using the specific services provided by agritourism and tourism guesthouses increased during the pandemic. In this context, in this paper it was analyzed the evolution of this categories of guesthouses, at the national level in the period 2018-2023, with the following statistical indicators: tourist destinations, types of tourists, degree of occupancy, accommodation capacity, tourist arrivals, occupancy rate, and number of overnight stays. The study reveals a preference of tourists for guesthouses and the efficient use of natural, cultural and human zonal resources. The creation of tourism products that capitalize on the zonal development potential is one of the options with a great development potential. Tourism and agritourism guesthouses have adapted more easily to the requirements of the health crisis by promoting a personalized tourist offer closer to the needs of tourists. The creation of diversified tourism products that capitalize on the regional specificity is one of the options with a great potential for future development.

Key words: rural tourism, agritourism guesthouses, tourism guesthouses, Romania

INTRODUCTION

Tourism and agritourism pensions (guesthouses) represent an important segment of Romanian tourism that contributes to the development of rural areas and the exploitation of authentic tourism potential of Romania in all its regions [1, 4, 7, 13].

In 2019, the tourist accommodation capacity has the following structure: hotels had the largest share of 58.7% of the total tourist accommodation capacity, then agritourism guesthouses 13.3%, tourism guesthouses 11.6%, tourist villas 4.2%, hostels 3.8%, motels 3.1% and the rest of the types of tourist reception structures with tourist accommodation functions 5.3% [9].

During 2020-2023, Romanian tourism faced the following major challenges:

- During March 2020 and March 2022, the Covid crisis marked the economy and especially tourism due to health restrictions and travel bans [6, 14].

That is why the Government of Romania has adopted measures to support the tourism

sector (for example OG no. 224/30.12.2020) [11].;

- The liberalization of the energy market on January 1st, 2021, which led to the accelerated increase in energy prices;

- The substantial increase of the inflation rate especially in the period 2022-2023 (Table 1) ;

- Increase cost of air and terrestrial transport [2].

Table 1. Evolution of inflation rate during 2018-2023 (%)

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
4.6	3.8	2.6	5.1	13.8	10.4

Source: NIS, Tempo online, Accessed on January 10, 2024 [9].

This study aims to analyze the evolution of Romanian tourism through tourism and agritourism guesthouses, in the period 2018-2023.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We used the data series offered by the National Institute of Statistics Tempo online.

They were analyzed in order to assess the following statistical indicators: number of guesthouses by type, tourist destinations evolution, types of tourists (foreigners and Romanians), tourist arrivals and number of overnight stays, degree of occupancy and accommodation capacity, by type of comfort. The questions we wanted to answer have been:

(a) What was the impact of the Covid crisis on tourist and agritourism guesthouses in Romania?

(b) What is their development potential in the post-Covid period?

The trend analysis and comparison method were the main instruments used to interpret the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The numerical evolution of tourism and agritourism guesthouses, in the period 2018-2023

In 2019, the lowest number of tourism and agritourism guesthouses was recorded, with a number of 1,669 units, respectively 2,800 units.

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 a Global Pandemic, which led to the application of restrictions that affected tourist activity. In 2020, 1,729 tourism guesthouses operated with 60 units, more than in 2019 and 3,022 agritourism guesthouses, with 222 units more than in 2019.

In Romania, in 2021, 1,745 tourism guesthouses operated with 16 units more than in 2020 and 3,460 agritourism guesthouses with 438 units more than in 2020.

Despite the Covid restrictions, the increase in the number of tourism and agritourism guesthouses in 2021 is noticeable. One explanation is the fact that the number of boarding houses that were accredited increased because they could benefit from the vacation vouchers [8].

Also, the guesthouses, due to their small size, were able to manage the restrictions more easily compared to other larger accommodation units [5].

In March 2022, the Covid restrictions were lifted, but the effects of the energy price increase became more acute. All this affected especially tourism guesthouses, their number decreased by 49 units compared to 2021 to 1,696 units, while agritourism guesthouses registered an increase to 3,484 units, 24 more than in 2021.

The evolution of tourist destinations in tourism and agritourism guesthouses, in the period 2018-2023

The evolution of tourist destinations in tourism guesthouses, during 2018-2023

In 2020, Bucharest and the county seat cities, excluding Tulcea, were the preferred destinations of tourism guesthouses with a number of 570 units, followed by other localities and tourist routes with a number of 454 units. The resorts in the mountain area registered with 455 units in 2019.

The trend is of a slight decrease in the period 2022-2023, with the exception of the units in the spa resorts where there is a sharp increase to 240 units.

Table 2. The evolution in tourist destinations of tourism guesthouses, in the period 2018-2023

Tourist destinations/ year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total	1,709	1,669	1,729	1,745	1,696	1,642
SPA resorts	204	202	214	206	205	240
Coastal area resorts, exclusive city of Constanta	10	15	19	22	23	23
Mountain area resorts	471	455	446	435	427	409
Danube Delta area, including the city of Tulcea	26	13	26	63	59	24
Bucharest and the county seat cities, excluding Tulcea	540	534	570	561	507	502
Other localities and tourist routes	458	450	454	458	475	444

Source: NIS, Tempo online, Accessed on January 10, 2024 [9, 10].

The evolution in tourist destinations of agritourism guesthouses, in the period 2018-2023

In the analyzed period the number of agritourism pensions registered a constant increase of 24%. In the year 2023, most agritourism pensions are in other localities and tourist routes with a number of 1,832 units and in resorts in the mountain area with a number of 1,333 units [3].

Table 3. The evolution of agritourism guesthouses in tourist destinations, in the period 2018-2023

Tourist destinations/year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total	2,821	2,800	3,022	3,460	3,484	3,498
SPA resorts	63	64	75	77	94	91
Coastal area resorts, exclusive city of Constanta	6	15	12	11	10	12
Mountain area resorts	1,161	1,134	1,217	1,317	1,334	1,333
Danube Delta area, including the city of Tulcea	123	107	102	301	204	202
Bucharest and the county seat cities, excluding Tulcea	25	30	35	19	21	28
Other localities and tourist routes	1,443	1,450	1,581	1,735	1,821	1,832

Source: NIS, Tempo online, Accessed on January 10, 2024 [9, 10].

Evolution of the number of tourists, by types of tourists (Foreigners/ Romanians), in the period 2018-2022

The evolution of the number of tourists in tourism guesthouses

In 2019, the largest number of tourists stayed in tourism guesthouses with a value of 1,254,476 tourists, of which 120,802 were foreign tourists.

In 2020, the first pandemic year, the decrease was 47% compared to 2019. In the case of foreign tourists the decrease is 85%.

In the following years, there is a slight increase in the number of tourists, but without reaching the values from the period before the pandemic.

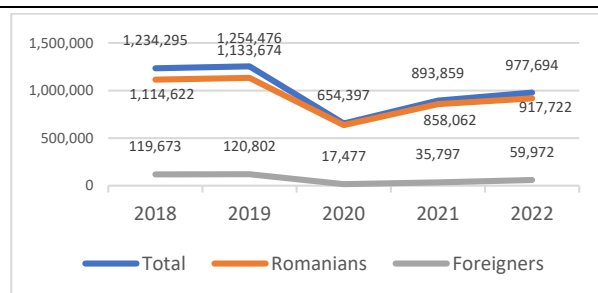


Fig. 1. Evolution of the number of tourists, by types of tourists (Foreigners/ Romanians), during 2018-2022

Source: NIS, Tempo online, Accessed on January 10, 2024 [9, 10].

The evolution of the number of tourists in agritourism guesthouses

In 2019, the largest number of tourists stayed in agritourism guesthouses, namely 1,272,878 tourists, of which 101,088 were foreign tourists. The next year the decrease in the number of tourists is 40% compared to 2019, and that of foreign tourists is 90%. In the following years, in the case of Romanian tourists, the number of stays in agritourism guesthouses increased constantly and reached values close to those before the pandemic. In 2022, the number of foreign tourists' accommodations represents only 58% compared to foreign tourists' accommodations in 2019 [6].

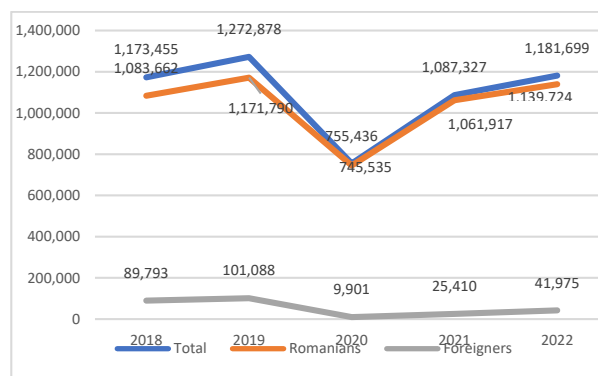


Fig. 2. The evolution of the number of tourists in agritourism guesthouses, in the period 2018-2022

Source: NIS, Tempo online, Accessed on January 10, 2024 [9, 10].

The evolution of the number of tourist arrivals by comfort category and by type of tourist, in the period 2018-2022

The evolution of the number of tourist arrivals by comfort category and by type of tourists in tourism guesthouses

In 2019, the arrivals of foreign tourists in 3-star (56%), 4-star (24.93%) and two-star

(12.54%) tourism guesthouses houses were recorded. In 2022, the preferences have changed in the sense of the decrease to 21.50% of the number of arrivals in 4-star tourism guesthouses and the increase of the number of arrivals in 3-star tourism guesthouses to 59.11%. The total decrease in the number of foreign tourist arrivals was 50%.

In 2019, the arrivals of Romanian tourists were in 3-star (62.76%) and 2-star (17.55%) tourism guesthouses. In 2022 the number of arrivals in 4-star tourism guesthouses increased from 16% in 2019 to 21.6% . While the number of Romanian tourist arrivals at 2 and 3-star ones decreased.

Table 4. Number of tourist arrivals evolution by comfort category and by type of tourists in tourism guesthouses

Comfort category	Type of tourists	Year				
		2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
		No of persons	No of persons	No of persons	No of persons	No of persons
Total	Total	1,234,295	1,254,476	654,397	893,859	977,694
	Romanians	1,114,622	1,133,674	636,920	858,062	917,722
	Foreigners	119,673	120,802	17,477	35,797	59,972
5 flowers	Total	28,793	24,619	12,062	19,442	21,125
	Romanians	21,424	19,012	10,611	16,821	17,745
	Foreigners	7,369	5,607	1,451	2,621	3,380
4 flowers	Total	215,566	216,783	115,542	185,475	211,127
	Romanians	186,257	186,656	112,063	177,802	198,231
	Foreigners	29,309	30,127	3,479	7,673	12,896
3 flowers	Total	751,159	779,768	412,535	542,161	593,594
	Romanians	684,651	711,556	402,120	521,397	558,141
	Foreigners	66,508	68,212	10,415	20,764	35,453
2 flowers	Total	219,321	214,198	101,265	131,652	139,039
	Romanians	204,669	199,043	99,351	127,417	131,763
	Foreigners	14,652	15,155	1,914	4,235	7,276
1 flower	Total	14,967	14,843	9,929	11,303	9,166
	Romanians	14,760	14,645	9,888	11,257	8,946
	Foreigners	207	198	41	46	220
Non classified on flowers ?	Total	4,489	4,265	3,064	3,826	3,643
	Romanians	2,861	2,762	2,887	3,368	2,896
	Foreigners	1,628	1,503	177	458	747

Source: NIS, Tempo online, Accessed on January 10, 2024 [9].

The evolution of the number of tourist arrivals by comfort category and by type of tourists in agritourism guesthouses

In 2019, arrivals of foreign tourists in agritourism guesthouses were recorded as follows: 3 flowers (61.14%), 2 flowers (22.64%) and 4 flowers (13.23%). In 2022, there will be changes in the preferences of foreign tourists in the sense of an increase in the percentage of those who prefer agritourism guesthouses of 4 flowers (18.08%) and decreases in guesthouses of 2 flowers (18.14%) and 3 flowers (59.41%). Compared to 2019, the decrease in the number

of arrivals of foreign tourists in agritourism guesthouses was 60%.

In 2019, the arrivals of Romanian tourists in agritourism guesthouses were in agritourism guesthouses of 3 flowers (62.63%), 4 flowers (18.43%) and 2 flowers (15.48%). In 2022, there were increases in arrivals in agritourism guesthouses of 5 flowers (4.32%) and 4 flowers (19.99%) and slight decreases in those of 3 flowers (61.56%) and 2 flowers (15.48%).

Index of net use of tourist accommodation capacity in tourist and agritourism guesthouses by comfort category

The index of net use of tourist accommodation capacity in tourism guesthouses

In 2022, the highest values of the index of net use of tourist accommodation capacity in tourism guesthouses are recorded in tourism guesthouses not classified by stars with a value of 30.8%.

Then come the 5-star tourism guesthouses (29.8%) and the 4 stars (25.9%).

The evolution of the index indicates a slightly increasing trend (Table 5).

Table 5. The index % of net use of tourist accommodation capacity in tourism guesthouses, by comfort category

Comfort category	Year				
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	Percent %				
Total	20.9	22.2	16.5	18.3	19.9
5 flowers	31.4	32.3	25.1	32.2	29.8
4 flowers	24.1	26.8	19.1	23.6	25.9
3 flowers	21.4	22.7	17.3	18.5	20.4
2 flowers	17.3	17.8	12	13.1	13.5
1 flowers	14.3	15.4	13.8	13.3	12.2
Nonclassified on flowers	34.6	43.9	28.6	30.6	30.8

Source: NIS, Tempo online, Accessed on January 10, 2024 [9].

The index of net use of the tourist accommodation capacity in agritourism guesthouses

Table 6. The index % of net use of the tourist accommodation capacity in agritourism guesthouses, by comfort category

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total	18	20	16.5	17.1	17.1
5 flowers	20.8	24.6	20.2	30	28.9
4 flowers	22.3	25.2	21.3	21.5	21.1
3 flowers	18.6	20.4	16.9	16.8	17
2 flowers	14	15.2	11.7	13	12.8
1 flower	12.7	13.6	11.5	15	12.2

Source: NIS, Tempo online, Accessed on January 10, 2024 [9].

In the year 2022, the highest values of the index of net use of tourist accommodation capacity in agritourism guesthouses are registered in the agritourism guesthouses of 5 flowers (28.9%) and 4 flowers (21.1%).

The evolution of the index indicates a slightly

increasing trend [12] (Table 6).

Evolution of the number of overnight stays, in the period 2018-2022

Evolution of the number of overnight stays in tourism guesthouses, in the period 2018-2022

In 2019 the maximum number of overnight stays in tourism guesthouses was 2,324,217. The number of overnight stays in 2022 was 1,754,388, with a decrease of 24.51% compared to 2019 (Figure 3).

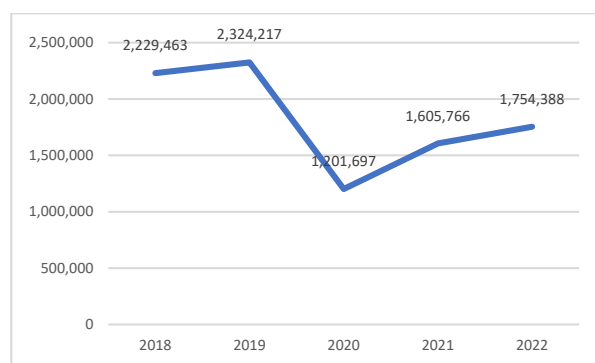


Fig. 3. Evolution of the number of overnight stays in tourism guesthouses, in the period 2018-2022

Source: NIS, Tempo online, Accessed on January 10, 2024 [9].

Evolution of the number of overnight stays in agritourism guesthouses, in the period 2018-2022

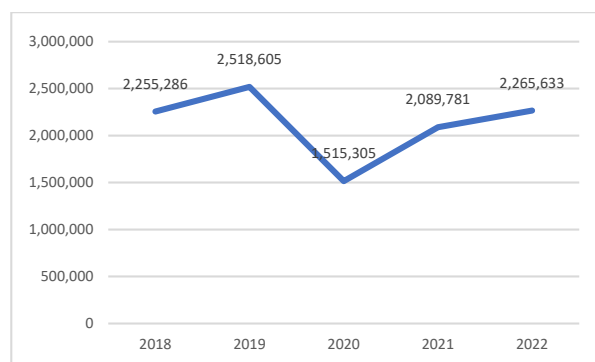


Fig. 4. Evolution of the number of overnight stays in agritourism guesthouses, in the period 2018-2022

Source: NIS, Tempo online, Accessed on January 10, 2024 [9].

In 2019 was recorded the maximum number of overnight stays in agritourism guesthouses with a number of 2,518,605 overnight stays. In 2022 the number of overnight stays was 2,265,633 with a decrease of 10% compared to 2019 (Figure 4).

CONCLUSIONS

Tourist and agritourism guesthouses have adapted more easily to the requirements of the health crisis by promoting a personalized tourist offer closer to the needs of tourists.

The increase in demand for Spa tourism offers a development opportunity for tourist and agritourism guesthouses.

The number of stays in agritourism guesthouses has increased constantly and reached values close to those before the pandemic in the case of Romanian tourists.

A trend of Romanian tourists' preferences is taking shape in the sense of increasing demand for 4-flowers tourism guesthouses and 5 and 4-flowers agritourism guesthouses.

The decrease in the number of foreign tourists staying in tourism and agritourism guesthouses makes it necessary to develop a National Tourism Development Strategy that intensively promotes authentic tourism, based on local natural and cultural resources.

The creation of diversified tourist products that capitalize on the regional specificity is one of the options with a great potential for future development.

REFERENCES

- [1]Cretu, R.C., Stefan, P., Gheorghe, S., Bibicioiu, S., 2015, New challenges for rural tourism. specialization of agritourism guest houses. Scientific Papers. Series "Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture and rural development", Vol. 15(1), 123-126.
- [2]Cretu, R.C., Stefan, P., Alecu, I.I., 2021, Has tourism gone on holiday? Analysis of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on tourism and post-pandemic tourism behavior. Scientific Papers-Series "Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture and rural development", Vol 21(2), 191-198.
- [3]Cretu, R.C., Gurban, G., Alecu, I.I., Stefan, P., 2023, Did the rural mountain tourism in Romania pass the resilience and sustainability test during the Covid-19 pandemic? Scientific Papers-Series "Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture and rural development", Vol. 23 (4), 203-216.
- [4]Dobre, C.A., Zaharia, I., Iorga, A.M., 2023, Authenticity in Romanian rural tourism - defining a concept. Scientific Papers. Series "Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture and rural development", Vol. 23(4), 253-260.
- [5]Dobre, C.A., Stoicea, P., Iorga, A.M., 2023, The pandemic, a chance for an authentic Romanian rural

tourism. Scientific Papers-Series Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture & Rural Development, 23(2).

[6]Grigoras, M.A., Popescu, A., Grigoras, B.A., 2018, The importance of guesthouses in the tourism of the Brasov county Romania, Scientific Papers Series Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture and Rural Development, Vol.18(2), 201-212.

[7]Iorga, A.M., Stoicea, P., 2020, The socio-economic impact of granting holiday vouchers in the Romanian public system. Scientific Papers-Series Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture and Rural Development, 20(2), 261-265.

[8]Linca, A.C., Toma, E., 2021, Study regarding the evolution of mountain tourism and rural mountain tourism in the Romanian Carpathians during covid-19 pandemic. Scientific Papers. Series "Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture and rural development", Vol. 21(2), 357-364.

[9]NIS, Tempo online. <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/>, Accessed on 10.01.2024.

[10]NIS, Tourism Series, 2019, www.insse.ro, Accessed on 27.02.2024.

[11]JOG no. 224, 30-12-2020, <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocument/235872>, Accessed on 20.02.2024.

[12]Popescu, A., 2016, The position of tourist and agrotourist guesthouses in Romania's accommodation structures, Scientific Papers Series Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture and Rural Development, Vol.16(1), 417-424.

[13]Stoian, M., Marcuta, A., Niculae, I., Marcuta, L., 2019, Analysis of agritourism and rural tourism situation in the North East of Romania. Scientific Papers. Series "Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture and rural development", Vol. 19(3), 535-542.

[14]Stoicea, P., Iorga, A.M., Dobre, C.A., 2021, The economic-financial and social effects of the pandemic on tourism. Scientific Papers-Series Management Economic Engineering in Agriculture and Rural Development, Vol. 21 (2) 619-627.