

TOURISM DYNAMICS IN BRAȘOV COUNTY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC (2020-2023)

Mădălina Roxana ILIE, Georgiana Armenița ARGHIROIU, Silviu BECIU

University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest, 59 Marasti Boulevard, District 1, 11464, Bucharest, Romania, Email: ilie.madalina22@stud.managusamv.ro, arghiroiu.armenita@managusamv.ro, beciu.silviu@managusamv.ro

Corresponding author: arghiroiu.armenita@managusamv.ro

Abstract

This study aims to analyse the evolution of tourism in Brașov County during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically, the 2020-2023 timeframe. The methods used were qualitative and quantitative. The primary data used were obtained from the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) while the qualitative method included a review of relevant literature and analysis of official documents. The purpose was to see if Brasov County tourism sector was heavily affected by Covid-19 pandemic considering the restrictions and blockages that the industry had to face in that period. The study revealed the fact that Brasov County was very resilient and despite the pandemic which affected tourism businesses, increases were registered in accommodations and tourism arrivals. Important growth was observed in hotels, with occupancy rates increasing from 21.63% in 2020 to 37.41% in 2023, agritourism, 14.63% in 2020 to 19.72% in 2023. The domestic tourists played a significant role, dominating the number of overnights spend, respectively, 1.37 million in 2020 to 2.61 million in 2023 while foreign tourists' overnights reached, from 65,122 to 316,772, representing 386% growth. Nature-based and rural tourism is a key attraction with domestic overnights spent in rural related accommodations reaching 553,466 in 2020 to 842,063 in 2023, both domestic and foreign tourists. Regarding the country's foreign tourists came, Germany led the way, 13,220, followed by Israel, 14,095 and Republic of Moldova with 7,268, in 2022. Brasov's ongoing efforts to improve its tourism infrastructure and expand its offerings are essential for sustaining this growth and strengthening its position as a leading destination for cultural and nature-based tourism in the region.

Key words: rural tourism, Brașov County, Covid-19, tourists, Romania

INTRODUCTION

In January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the COVID-19 outbreak as a global public health emergency. By March 2020, the situation was considered a global pandemic. This lasted until May 5, 2023. This was when WHO announced that COVID-19 no longer met the criteria for a global emergency, though the pandemic itself was not officially declared over [1, 20]. In 2020, worldwide tourism experienced a harsh 72% decline, resulting in 1.1 billion less international tourists, bringing the industry back to levels last seen 30 years ago. Governments implemented various strategies to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector, beginning with widespread border closures and lockdowns to limit virus transmission. As recovery efforts began, policies focused on facilitating safe

travel through initiatives like the European Union's Digital COVID Certificate, which standardized health protocols across member states. Countries such as Greece adopted risk-based border management, using targeted testing rather than blanket quarantines. Financial measures, including subsidies, tax relief and liquidity support, were crucial in sustaining tourism businesses. Additionally, governments promoted domestic tourism to compensate for reduced international travel, and introduced worker protection schemes to preserve employment within the sector [21]. By 2022, the industry showed signs of recovery, with 900 million tourists traveling internationally-double the number from 2021-reaching 63% of pre-pandemic levels, whereas Europe and the Middle East led the way with nearly 80% and 83% recovery rates [18]. In Romania, prior to Covid-19, 2019 marked a peak for tourism industry; 13.37

million tourist arrivals and more than 30.08 million overnight stays were recorded [13]. However, by 2020, the pandemic led to a dramatic 53% decline in tourist arrivals, a 51.65% reduction in overnight stays and a significant drop in international tourist flows by 83.2%, forcing the industry to quickly pivot and focus on domestic tourism to mitigate the impacts [12].

In the following years, 2021-2024, Romanian tourism learned to adapt and registered increases in tourism sector. Tourist arrivals, both domestic and international, in Romania showed an optimistic recovery from the impact of COVID-19, increasing from 9.28 million in 2021 to 13.65 million in 2023, with the trend continuing into 2024 as 2.47 million arrivals were recorded in the first quarter alone [16].

In 2020, the same year WHO declared Covid-19 as global pandemic, Romanian tourists rediscovered the beauty of nature and landscapes by spending their leisure escapades at the mountains, in cultural places, rural areas or seaside [12]. In times of crises, nature offers diverse possibilities, providing both material and non-material benefits that enhance endurance and well-being [3].

In this regard, Braşov County, located in the heart of the Carpathian Mountains, has an array of natural attractions. This includes forests, mountains, valleys and other landscapes that represents nature's beauties. Braşov County has 5,363 km² [5] and a population of 641,194 inhabitants as per January, 2024 [9]. It is a county that owns 66 protected areas; two national parks, Piatra Craiului and Bucegi, representing 57% of the county's area [5]. Braşov is a well-known tourist destination in Romania and offers a wide range of touristic activities. For example, Poiana Braşov is the most visited ski resort in the country having a length of 25 km [5].

In 2023, Braşov County ranked third place in Romania, attracting 1.51 million visitors, following Bucharest with 1.8 million and Constanţa with 1.57 million visitors [15]. Braşov has also been recognized as a top global tourist destination for 2024 by the British travel platform Tripadvisor. It had wide media exposure, including BBC, as

consequence, Braşov had drawn attention from international travellers. It is ranked 21st on Tripadvisor's list and sits near cities like: Tokyo, Nairobi, Casablanca. This position is based on around 1 billion reviews from global travellers. The Tripadvisor award called 'Best of the Best' happens annually [14].

Brasov County offers a large range of accommodation units for tourists: hotels, motels, inns, tourist and agro-tourist guesthouses, apartments, chalets etc [8].

In this context, this study aims to explore the dynamics of tourism in Braşov County during COVID-19 pandemic, precisely on the years 2020-2023 in order to see if the county was affected in terms of accommodations and tourist arrivals. 2020 was the worst year for international tourism with many businesses closing, reducing operations, cutting staff and suffering significant revenue losses [13] while the year 2023 marked the end of Covid-19 as global emergency [20].

The paper seeks to identify key trends and patterns that emerged in response to the challenges posed by the pandemic, based on data related with accommodation facilities, capacity and tourist arrivals within the county. The goal is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the tourism sector in Braşov evolved during this critical period.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study utilized a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore the dynamics of tourism in Braşov County throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on the years 2020 to 2023. The primary data utilized in this analysis were obtained from the National Institute of Statistics (NIS).

A time-series analysis was employed to track and compare key indicators, such as the number of tourist accommodations, changes in lodging capacity and shifts in tourist preferences, between the pre-pandemic period (2020) and the post-pandemic recovery phase (2023). In addition to quantitative analysis, qualitative methods included a review of relevant literature, data collection from accessible studies and analysis of official

documents. The data were processed into tables and graphs, which were then interpreted to identify significant trends and patterns that emerged in response to the challenges posed by the pandemic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The varieties of tourism experiences available to visitors in Braşov County:

Mountain tourism. Mountain tourism involves travel and recreational activities within specific geographic areas like hills or mountains, characterized by unique landscapes, topography, climate and biodiversity, as well as distinct local communities. It includes a variety of outdoor leisure and sports pursuits [19].

Braşov County, with its extensive mountainous terrain, is a premier destination for mountain tourism in Romania, offering pristine natural environments and rich biodiversity. The region's major massifs-Piatra Mare, Bucegi and Piatra Craiului-provide diverse outdoor activities such as hiking, skiing and paragliding, complemented by accommodations ranging from rustic cabins to modern guesthouses [7].



Photo 1. Piatra Craiului Region

Source: Butler (2020),
[https://www.argophilia.com/news/piatra-craiului/293/\[6\]](https://www.argophilia.com/news/piatra-craiului/293/[6]).

Protected areas like Piatra Craiului and Bucegi represents a high factor for sustainable ecotourism and adventure tourism [4].

Cultural tourism. Cultural tourism implies heritage, representing the physical landmarks as well as the cultural traditions of a society [11]. Cultural tourism has gained a lot of attention in the last years. In Romania, Braşov emerged as a prominent destination because

of its historic sites, such as: the Black Church, The Council House, medieval fortifications, the Museum of the First Romanian School or St. Nicholas Church. Nearby towns, such as: Făgăraş, with its medieval fortress and Bran, famous for its castle, together with Râşnov, Rupea and Feldioara, known for their peasant fortresses, also draw many visitors. The villages, such as: Viscri, Prejmer, Hărman, added to the region's appeal, especially with Viscri and Prejmer recognized as UNESCO World Heritage sites, along with Sâmbăta de Sus, home to an Orthodox Monastery. Beyond these cultural attractions, there are other cultural sites throughout the county that are to be incorporated into tourist itineraries [2].

As far as ecotourism, this type of tourism puts a focus on responsible exploration of natural areas implying also aspects, such as: protecting the environment, improving the well-being of local communities and providing educational opportunities for both tourists and residents [17]. Braşov County is well-suited for ecotourism because of the diversity of nature landscapes and numerous protected areas. An example is Piatra Craiului National Park, known for rocky formations, karst landscapes and rare species such as the Piatra Craiului carnation and the chamois. Beyond these attractions, Braşov offers a variety of tourism experiences.

Rural tourism. Rural tourism has seen significant growth, particularly in Viscri, a village within the Buneşti commune. Over the past decade, Viscri has gained recognition for its rural tourism, largely due to the promotion by HRH Prince Charles and its feature in the documentary "Wild Carpathia," as well as initiatives by the Mihai Eminescu Trust. Today, the fortified church in Viscri draws over 15,000 visitors each year, serving as a gateway to the area's stunning landscapes and rich cultural, historical, and traditional heritage. Visitors are warmly received, offered comfortable accommodations, and treated to genuine hospitality by their hosts [2].

Additionally, Braşov is one of the few regions in Romania where culinary tourism is thriving, particularly through truffle hunting

with dogs, an activity practiced in areas such as Viscri-Bunești and Plaiu Fcii near Râșnov. In Viscri, this activity is often paired with gourmet cooking classes.

Table 1. Distribution and evolution of tourist accommodation structures by type in Brașov County, 2020-2023 (No. units)

Type	2020	2021	2022	2023
Hotels	118	121	120	121
(%)	13.1	10.0	9.8	9.7
Hostels	25	25	23	19
(%)	2.8	2.1	1.9	1.5
Apartments and rooms for rent	:	306	350	398
(%)	0.0	25.4	28.5	31.8
Apartment hotels	3	3	3	2
(%)	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2
Motels	9	9	9	9
(%)	1.0	0.7	0.7	0.7
Tourist villas	77	69	64	57
(%)	8.5	5.7	5.2	4.5
Tourist cabins	36	33	34	34
(%)	4.0	2.7	2.8	2.7
Bungalows	5	6	6	11
(%)	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.9
Vacation villages	2	1	1	2
(%)	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2
Campsites	2	2	6	6
(%)	0.2	0.2	0.5	0.5
Tourist cottages	3	4	2	4
(%)	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.3
Student and preschool camps	1	1	1	1
(%)	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Tourist inns	242	240	230	217
(%)	26.8	19.9	18.7	17.3
Agritourism guesthouses	379	387	380	372
(%)	42.0	32.1	30.9	29.7
Total units	902	1,207	1,229	1,253

Source: National Institute of Statistics (NIS), 2020-2023 [10].

Despite its rich culinary heritage, including unique dishes like pumpkin seed soup and soups soured with cabbage juice, these traditions are largely known only to the elderly; *authentic experience tourism* - includes thematic tours, stays at accommodations where guests can participate in preparing traditional dishes and visits to workshops where tourists can interact directly with artisans, such as the blacksmith shop and brickworks in Viscri or the Museum of Textiles and Stories in the village of Mandra and *business tourism* - MICE tourism (meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions) has expanded in mountain resorts

like Poiana Brașov and Predeal, which offer large hotels and event spaces ideal for conferences and teambuilding. The Bran-Moieciu-Fundata area is also suitable for such events, with new large accommodations [2]. These diverse options highlight the county's rich natural landscapes, cultural heritage and commitment to sustainable travel.

However, the success and expansion of tourism in Brașov are highly dependent on the infrastructure available, including transportation networks, accommodation options, tourism service quality and hospitality, hygiene and diversity in terms of tourist experiences. The region's ability to support various forms of tourism is closely tied to these factors, which play a crucial role in attracting and accommodating travellers.

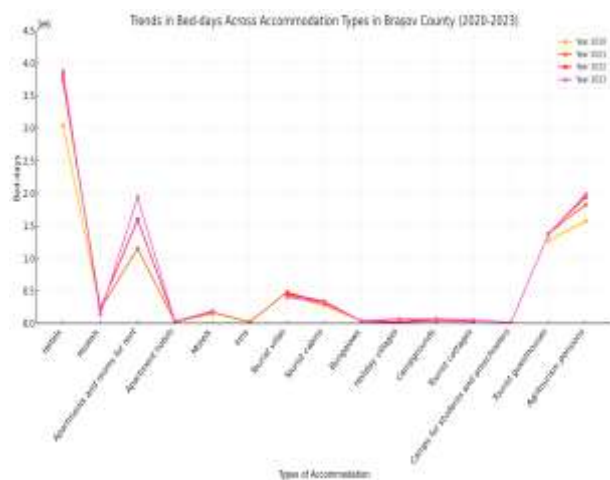


Fig.1. Dynamics of operational tourist lodging capacity by different types of accommodation structures, Brașov County, 2020-2023

Source: Own determination.

Between 2020 and 2023, Agritourism Guesthouses consistently led the accommodation market in Brașov County, although their share decreased from 379 units (42.0%) in 2020 to 372 units (29.7%) in 2023.

Tourist Inns followed, with a decline from 242 units (26.8%) in 2020 to 217 units (17.3%) in 2023.

Conversely, Apartments and Rooms for Rent saw significant growth, rising from 306 units (25.4%) in 2021 to 398 units (31.8%) in 2023.

Hotels remained stable around 120 units, though their share dropped from 13.1% in 2020 to 9.7% in 2023.

Traditional accommodations like Tourist Villas and Hostels declined in both absolute numbers and percentage share over the period.

Table 2. Operational tourist lodging capacity by types of accommodation structure, Braşov County, 2020-2023 (Places days)

Types of tourist reception structures	Period			
	2020	2021	2022	2023
Hotels	3,046,850	3,726,801	3,806,680	3,869,619
Hostels	212,413	220,563	221,594	140,151
Apartments and rooms for rent	:	1,146,972	1,594,852	1,936,822
Apartment hotels	13,862	28,748	31,012	24,168
Motels	152,039	170,228	178,031	188,170
Inns	:	1,770	:	:
Tourist villas	432,856	477,950	449,243	404,022
Tourist cabins	273,407	310,961	335,054	315,977
Bungalows	33,842	34,190	32,090	36,370
Holiday villages	20,304	16,752	17,520	64,172
Campgrounds	69,344	42,944	64,296	62,667
Tourist cottages	23,540	31,404	33,084	49,110
Camps for students and preschoolers	:	:	:	11,174
Tourist guesthouses	1,267,921	1,375,239	1,376,365	1,368,533
Agntourism pensions	1,574,004	1,825,076	1,945,629	1,980,865

Source: National Institute of Statistics (NIS), 2020-2023 [10].

Between 2020 and 2023, Braşov County's tourism sector exhibited strong growth, particularly in the hotel industry, where bed-days increased by 26.9%, from approximately 3.05 million to nearly 3.87 million (Table 2). This growth highlights the centrality of hotels in the region's accommodation landscape, likely driven by a rebound in travel post-COVID-19.

Hostels and tourist villas showed more volatile trends. Hostel bed-days peaked at

221,594 in 2022, dropped to 140,151 in 2023, reflecting potential shifts in travellers' preferences towards more private or alternative accommodations.

Similarly, tourist villas experienced a decline from 449,243 bed-days in 2022 to 404,022 in 2023. Agritourism pensions, on the other hand, saw a significant rise of 26.11%, growing from 1.57 million bed-days in 2020 to 1.98 million in 2023. This increase suggests a growing interest in rural and experiential tourism, thus aligning with sustainability and local experiences.

Table 3. Arrivals in different accommodation structures in Braşov County, 2020-2023

Types of tourist reception structures	Types of tourists	Periods			
		2020	2021	2022	2023
		No. of people	No. of people	No. of people	No. of people
Hotels	Romanian	378,173	550,370	662,311	676,920
	Foreign	20,492	38,384	78,074	115,532
Hostels	Romanian	11,452	12,501	12,817	13,171
	Foreign	815	961	1,015	1,553
Apartments and rooms for rent	Romanian	:	117,937	193,695	227,564
	Foreign	:	4,760	9,049	20,940
Apartment hotels	Romanian	1,584	3,355	3,283	2,899
	Foreign	6	28	117	36
Motels	Romanian	17,531	11,313	12,549	18,840
	Foreign	312	154	199	694
Inns	Romanian	:	407	:	:
	Foreign	:	:	:	:
Touristic villas	Romanian	41,756	56,517	54,568	50,202
	Foreign	594	916	1,990	3,680
Tourist cabins	Romanian	21,190	25,925	27,589	35,266
	Foreign	110	423	746	1,612
Bungalows	Romanian	1,804	2,498	2,404	2,848
	Foreign	280	427	505	620
Holiday Villages	Romanian	757	1,145	1,555	15,907
	Foreign	:	:	:	454
Campgrounds	Romanian	638	501	1,436	1,976
	Foreign	:	:	401	309
Tourist cottages	Romanian	182	442	682	2,963
	Foreign	:	46	:	300
Tourist guesthouses	Romanian	104,859	137,422	143,977	156,001
	Foreign	3,255	6,115	11,145	14,741
Agritourism pensions	Romanian	118,860	176,481	180,543	185,495
	Foreign	821	2,185	4,354	6,156

Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2020-2023 [10].

Despite Covid-19 travel restrictions, in the time frame of 2020 and 2023, in Braşov County tourists' arrivals almost doubled, from 725,471 in 2020 to 1,556,679 in 2023, showing 114,57% growth.

This growth was consistent in hotel accommodations, 378,173 in 2020 to 676,920 in 2023 but also in rural related

accommodations such as agritourism pensions, where arrivals were 118,860 in 2020 and went up to 185,495 in 2023 (Table 3). International tourism showed growing by 524.42% (Table 4) where hotel arrivals was 20,492 in 2020 and reached 115,532 in 2023. Tourist villas, 42,350 in 2020 to 53,882 in 2023, domestic and international arrivals along with tourist cabins and even bungalows saw growth thus reflecting the interest of tourists in this type of accommodations. For tourist arrivals percentage, 2020 versus 2023, it was taken 2020 as the year Covid-19 was declared global pandemic and 2023 as the year Covid-19 no longer qualified as a global emergency.

Table 4. Arrivals in Brasov County in 2020 and 2023

Category	2020	2023	2020 versus 2023 (%)
Romanian tourist arrivals	698,786	1,390,052	98.92%
Foreign tourist arrivals	26,685	166,627	524.42%
Total tourists' arrivals	725,471	1,556,679	114.57%

Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2020 and 2023 [10].

Per all, this trend suggests a growing interest among tourists in rural and experiential travel, likely driven by a desire for more authentic and nature-oriented experiences.

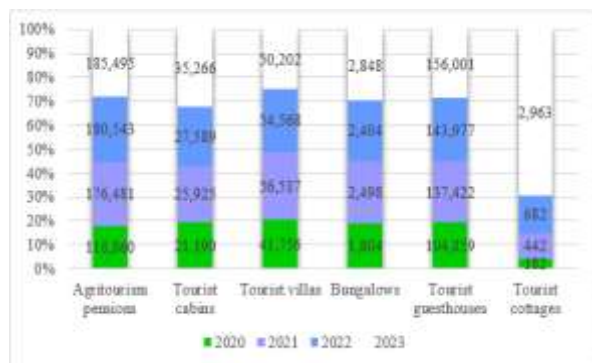


Fig. 2. Romanian tourist arrivals in rural accommodations, Braşov County, 2020-2023
 Source: Own determination.

Figure 2 shows a steady increase in Romanian tourist arrivals across various rural accommodations in Braşov County from

2020 to 2023, with agritourism pensions leading at 185,495 arrivals in 2023.

Notably, tourist guesthouses also saw significant growth, reaching 156,001 arrivals by 2023, while smaller categories like cottages, though less popular, demonstrated consistent growth.

Figure 3 shows significant growth in foreign tourist arrivals in Braşov County's rural related accommodations. Tourist guesthouses and agritourism pensions leading the way.

Tourist guesthouses registered 3,255 foreign arrivals in 2020 but in 2023, the numbers went up to 14,741.

Agritourism pensions also experienced notable growth, with arrivals rising from 821 in 2020 to 6,156 in 2023.

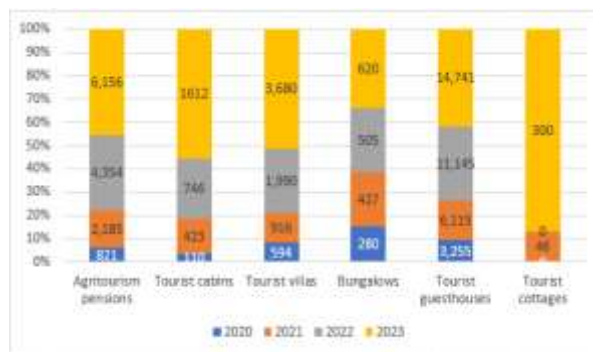


Fig. 3. Foreign tourist arrivals in rural accommodations, Braşov County, 2020-2023
 Source: Own determination.

Table 5. Overnights spent in Braşov County, in the timeframe 2020-2023

Year	Romanian	Foreign	Total
2020	1,370,142	65,122	1,435,264
2021	2,111,056	118,279	2,229,335
2022	2,407,697	209,175	2,616,872
2023	2,615,651	316,772	2,932,423

Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2020-2023 [10].

Table 6. Overnights spent in Braşov County in 2020 and 2023

Category	2020	2023	2020 versus 2023 (%)
Romanian overnights	1,370,142	2,615,651	91
Foreign overnights	65,122	316,772	386
Tourists' overnights (total)	1,435,264	2,932,423	104

Source: Own determination.

Though 2020 was a year severely affected by the global travel restrictions, tourist overnights showed resilience, with 1,370,142 in domestic overnights and 65,122 in foreign overnights spent in Braşov County (Table 5). Although foreign tourists made a smaller portion of visitors, their overnight stays represented a 386% growth in 2020 versus 2023 calculation (Table 6). The overall number of overnight stays doubled, rising from 1,435,264 in 2020 to 2,932,423 in 2023, an increase of 104%. These figures demonstrate the robustness of Braşov's tourism sector and its capacity to attract an increasing number of both Romanian and foreign visitors, even in challenging times.

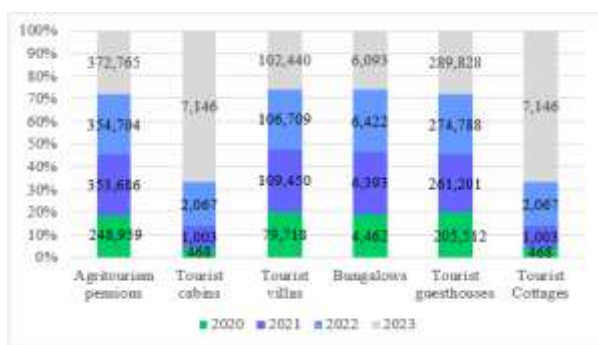


Fig. 4. Overnights in rural accommodations (Romanian tourists), Braşov County, 2020-2023
 Source: Own analysis.

Romanian and foreign tourist overnights in rural tourism related accommodations within Braşov County between 2020 and 2023 reveals the dynamics of rural tourism related accommodations in the period 2020-2023, showing a steady increase in overnight stays among Romanian tourists across all types of rural accommodations and a markedly different pattern compared to Romanian tourists.

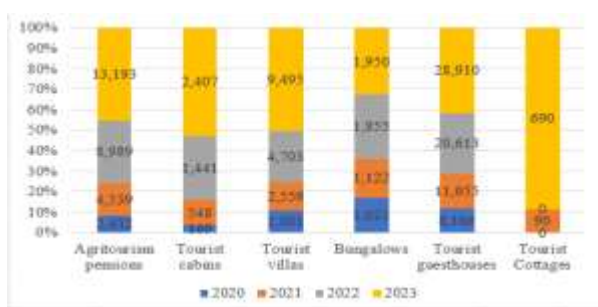


Fig. 5. Overnights in rural accommodations (foreign tourists), Braşov County, 2020-2023
 Source: Own analysis.

Agritourism and tourist guesthouses led the way also in the number of overnights stays for both Romanian and foreign tourists. For both types of tourists, tourist guesthouses registered 213,678 overnights in 2020 and 318,738 in 2023 while agritourism pensions registered 251,391 overnights in 2020 and 385,958 in 2023 (Figure 4 and Figure 5).

Table 7. Utilization net index of accommodation capacity in Braşov County, 2020-2023

Structure type	2020	2021	2022	2023
Hotels	21.63	30.27	35.36	37.41
Hostels	9.45	12.03	13.04	21.8
Hotel apartments	23.35	23.62	23.55	29.04
Motels	21.5	12.11	13.68	19.45
Touristic villas	16.99	23.38	25.01	28.09
Tourist cabins	12.76	13.85	13.87	20.06
Bungalows	16.19	21.69	25.93	22.78
Holiday villages	6.72	13.83	17.76	42.1
Campgrounds	2.18	2.18	9.58	7.85
Tourist cottages	2	3.01	5.53	15.53
Tourist guesthouses	15.8	19.83	21.58	23.29
Agritourism pensions	14.63	19.75	18.82	19.72

Source: Own determination.

Accommodation use in Braşov County also grew. Hotel occupancy had an increased from 21.63% in 2020 to 37.41%, in 2023. Other structure types saw important growth, tourist cottages, from 2% in 2020 to 15.53% in 2023, holiday villages, from 6.72% in 2020 to 42.1% in 2023 while tourist guesthouses and agritourism pensions remain at relatively normal values, between around 14% in 2020 to 20% in 2023.

Table 8. Main countries of tourists' origin visiting Braşov County, 2020-2022

Country	2020	2021	2022
Germany	3,745	7,563	13,220
Israel	1,993	4,499	14,095
Moldova	2,396	2,774	7,268
Italy	1,431	3,287	5,258
Ukraine	923	1,799	5,450
France	1,753	3,704	5,168
Poland	1,193	4,378	5,116
Switzerland	203	624	974
Turkey	383	639	1,342
Austria	384	890	1,628

Source: National Institute of Statistics (NIS), Braşov [9].

From 2020 to 2022, thousands of foreign tourists entered and visited Braşov County, Germany led the way with 3,745 in 2020 and grew up to 13,220 in 2023. Israel and Moldova also recorded notable growth, reaching 14,095 and 7,268 visitors respectively, by 2022.

Table 9. National Ranking of Brasov County in the timeframe 2020-2022

Description	2020	2021	2022
Units existing accommodations	1	1	2
Capacity existing accommodations	2	2	2
Capacity accommodations in function	2	2	2
Accommodated tourists	2	2	3
Accommodated Romanian tourists	2	2	2
Overnights stays in accommodations with touristic reception	2	2	3

Source: National Institute of Statistics, Braşov County [10].

Braşov County maintained a strong national ranking in tourism from 2020 to 2022. It consistently held the 2nd position in available and operating lodging capacity, indicating robust infrastructure. While it was the leader in the number of tourist accommodations in 2020 and 2021, it dropped to 2nd place in 2022. The county also saw a decline in overall and domestic visitor rankings in 2022, moving from 2nd to 3rd place, suggesting increasing competition or shifting tourist preferences within Romania. These shifts highlight the need for strategic adjustments to maintain competitiveness.

CONCLUSIONS

The tourism sector in Braşov County demonstrated significant resilience and adaptability during the COVID-19 pandemic, showing strong recovery and growth from 2020 to 2023. The increase in both domestic

and international tourist arrivals, along with the notable growth in accommodation capacity utilization, particularly in hotels, holiday villages, reflects a robust resurgence in tourism activity.

Nature-based, cultural and rural tourism continue to be pivotal in attracting visitors, with Braşov's unique cultural, historical and natural assets drawing significant attention from both national and international tourists. If we refer only to agritourism pensions, domestic tourist arrivals reached 185,495 and foreign tourist arrivals reached 6,156 in 2023. Though the number of foreign tourists seems low compared with Romanian tourists, it grew from year to year in the period 2020-2023. During the challenging times of COVID-19, domestic tourists made a highly significant contribution to the tourism sector in Braşov County. In 2020, tourists' overnights reached 1,370,142 and continually grew in the following years, 2021 – 2,111,056, 2022 – 2,407,697 and 2023 – 2,615,651.

The county's ability to sustain high levels of tourism, despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, underscores its importance as a leading tourist destination in Romania.

Braşov's ongoing efforts to enhance its tourism infrastructure and diversify its offerings are crucial for maintaining this growth and further solidifying its status as a premier destination for both cultural and nature-based tourism in the region.

REFERENCES

- [1]Abbas, J., Mubeen, R., Iorember, P.T., Raza, S., Mamirkulova, G., 2021, Exploring the impact of COVID-19 on tourism: transformational potential and implications for a sustainable recovery of the travel and leisure industry, *Current Research in Behavioral Sciences*, 2: 100033. Accessed on August 24, 2024.
- [2]Association for the Promotion and Development of Tourism in Braşov County (APDT), 2020, *Turism și Dezvoltare Durabilă (Tourism and Sustainable Development)*, <https://www.brasovtourism.eu/>, Accessed August 27, 2024. Accessed on August 24, 2024
- [3]Benessaiah, K., Chan, K., 2023, Why reconnect to nature in times of crisis? Ecosystem contributions to the resilience and well-being of people going back to the land in Greece. *People and Nature*, 5(2):89-102.

- <https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10546>. Accessed on August 26, 2024
- [4]Braşov County Council, 2021, Sustainable Development Strategy of Braşov County 2021-2023, https://cjbrasov.ro/ova_doc/strategia-de-dezvoltare-a-judetului-brasov/, Accessed on August 27, 2024.
- [5]Braşov County Council, 2024, Presentation of the Braşov County - General Presentation, <https://cjbrasov.ro/judetul-brasov/prezentarea-judetului/>, Accessed on August 26, 2024.
- [6]Butler, M.L., 2010, Romanian National Park Piatra Craiului-A journey, Argophilia.com, 2024, <https://www.argophilia.com/news/piatra-craiului/293>, Accessed August 28, 2024.
- [7]Centered Regional Development Agency, 2024, Profile of Braşov County, https://www.regiocentru.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Profil-judetul-Brasov_2024.pdf, Accessed August 27, 2024.
- [8]Grigoras, M.A., Popescu, A., Grigoras, B.A., 2018, The importance of the guesthouses in the tourism of the Braşov County, Romania, Scientific Papers Series Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture and Rural Development, Vol.18(2), 201-212.
- [9]National Institute of Statistics, Braşov County Directorate of Statistics, 2017-2022, <https://brasov.insse.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/CAPITOLUL-15-Turism.pdf>, Accessed 28 August, 2024.
- [10]National Institute of Statistics, NIS, www.insse.ro, Accessed on August 23, 2024.
- [11]Pleşoianu, D.M., Sandu, C., Popescu, A., 2017, Aspects of Cultural Tourism in Braşov County with a Special Look at the Period 2015-2016. Scientific Papers Series Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture and Rural Development, 17(3):287-293. Accessed on August 23, 2024.
- [12]Popescu, A., 2021, The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Romania's Tourist Flows in The Year 2020, Scientific Papers Series Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture and Rural Development, 21 (1): 655-666, Accessed on August 23, 2024.
- [13]Popescu, A., Pleşoianu, D.M., 2023, Tourist arrivals and overnight stays in Romania by tourist destination in the years 2020 and 2021 of Covid-19 pandemic compared to 2019, Scientific Papers Series Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture and Rural Development, 23 (1): 639-648, Accessed on August 24, 2024
- [14]Romanian Hospitality Newsletter, 2024, Braşov is the only European destination in the Best of the Best 2024 list, <https://rhn.ro/en/Braşov-is-the-only-European-destination-in-the-best-of-the-best-2024-list/>, Accessed on August 28, 2024.
- [15]Statista, 2024, Most visited counties in Romania by number of tourists in 2023 (in 1,000s), <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1202780/romania-most-visited-counties/>, Accessed on August 24, 2024.
- [16]Statista, 2024, Number of arrivals in tourist accommodations in Romania from 2006 to 1st quarter of 2024 (in millions), <https://www.statista.com/statistics/413253/number-of-arrivals-spent-in-short-stay-accommodation-in-romania/>, Accessed on August 24, 2024.
- [17]The International Ecotourism Society Organization, 2015, What is Ecotourism, <https://ecotourism.org/what-is-ecotourism/#>, Accessed on August 27, 2024.
- [18]United Nations Tourism, 2024, Impact assessment of the COVID-19 outbreak on international tourism, <https://www.unwto.org/impact-assessment-of-the-covid-19-outbreak-on-international-tourism>, Accessed on August 24, 2024.
- [19]United Nations Tourism, 2024, Mountain Tourism, <https://www.unwto.org/mountain-tourism>, Accessed on August 27, 2024.
- [20]World Health Organization (WHO, 2024), Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic – Overview, <https://www.who.int/europe/emergencies/situations/covid-19>, Accessed on August 24, 2024.
- [21]World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), 2021, Government policies enabling travel & tourism recovery during Covid-19, <https://wttc.org/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/2021/Government-Travel-Policies-COVID-19.pdf>, Accessed August 28, 2024.

