

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM ON THE ROMANIAN COASTLINE

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Abstract: *The strategy of developing the coastal tourism product is a way forward for companies in this area, especially in view of the significant increase in tourist traffic in the region. In recent years, the travel motivations of tourists visiting the Romanian coast have diversified and their demands regarding the quality and composition of tourist packages have increased. As a result, the offer of tourism operators must be as attractive as possible by exploiting resources that have not been exploited so far. Thus, the historical vestiges of Dobrogea could be exploited by including themed excursions in tourist packages. As night-time leisure, which is accessed by young people, represents an important source of tourism revenue for the area, daytime leisure services should also be diversified so that water sports can also be a motivation for tourists aged between 18 and 35. In terms of summer recreation, the area lacks or has insufficient sports grounds and playgrounds for children. This area is also accessed by families with children and unfortunately, apart from the helimarine, children have no other leisure time solutions. By diversifying tourist products, the Romanian coast can become an attractive destination on both the national and international tourist market.*

Keywords: *strategies, tourism products, coast, development*

JEL classification: *L83, M31*

1. Introduction

The Romanian coast attracts a significant number of tourists every year. The main reasons for traveling are helimarine cure, leisure, water sports, rest and relaxation. As a result, the tourist products marketed in this area should fully satisfy the requirements of the tourist segments.

In 2020, the Covid19 pandemic hit the tourism industry hard, and when travel resumed, many entrepreneurs charged high prices for tourism products and services.

In 2021, some restrictions on travel to foreign destinations led to an increase in domestic tourist traffic on the Romanian coast. The situation changed starting with the 2022 summer season when many domestic tourists preferred foreign destinations and on the Romanian coast the demand was differentiated in the resorts of this area. For example, in Sulina the tourist traffic decreased significantly in the 2024 summer season. The main reasons for this situation were the high rates charged for tourist services and transportation services.

In the northern part of Constanța County, the resort that attracted the most tourists in the 2024 summer season was Mamaia Nord - Năvodari. The upward trend in tourist traffic in the Năvodari area was higher than that recorded at the county level due to the fact that in the 2021 - 2024 period many of the tourists accessing the resort of Mamaia chose to stay in the Năvodari area because the beach benefits from the fine sand enjoyed by those who come for the helimarine cure. In Mamaia resort, the beach has been widened and the sun loungers are covered with a thick layer of shells. This has been a source of dissatisfaction for tourists in recent years.

Tourism entrepreneurs from the south coast have launched attractive tourist packages for families with children as well as for middle-income tourists. Many hoteliers have thus ensured a high occupancy rate of their tourist accommodation facilities.

In order to increase tourist traffic in the future, tourism entrepreneurs on the Romanian coast should adopt strategies to develop the tourism products and services they market. The Romanian coast has valuable tourism potential which is not being fully exploited. Historical relics can be valorized by designing and promoting cultural-historical tourist circuits for both domestic and foreign tourists. The culinary traditions of the minorities living in Dobrogea can be valorized by launching on the market tourist products that valorize gastronomic tourism. Innovative marketing strategies are the ones that can relaunch tourism on the Romanian coast.

2. Tourist traffic in the coastal area from 2015 to 2023

The tourist traffic manifested on the Romanian seaside registered an increase between 2015 and 2019, followed by a significant decrease of 21.53% in 2020. The decrease was generated by the global Covid19 pandemic that affected the hospitality industry.

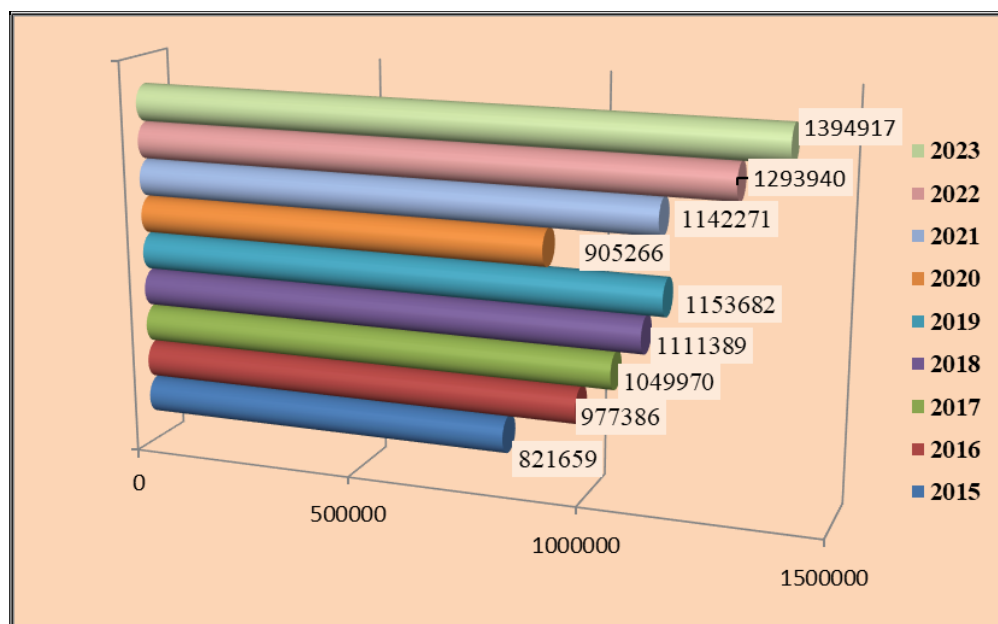


Chart 1 Number of tourist arrivals in the Romanian coastal area (excluding Constanța), between 2015 and 2023

Source: Personal processing based on data retrieved from the website <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>, accessed on 24.03.2025.

In the period 2021 - 2023, the tourist demand on the Romanian coastline has increased year on year. In 2023 the demand increased by 7.8% compared to the previous year. The evolution of the tourist demand is justified by the fact that since the summer season of 2021 tourist trips have been allowed. Very many of the resident tourists who were usually oriented to foreign destinations have chosen to spend their vacation in the 2021 summer season in seaside resorts due to uncertainty about travel conditions abroad. The upward trend in tourist demand has continued in the following years.

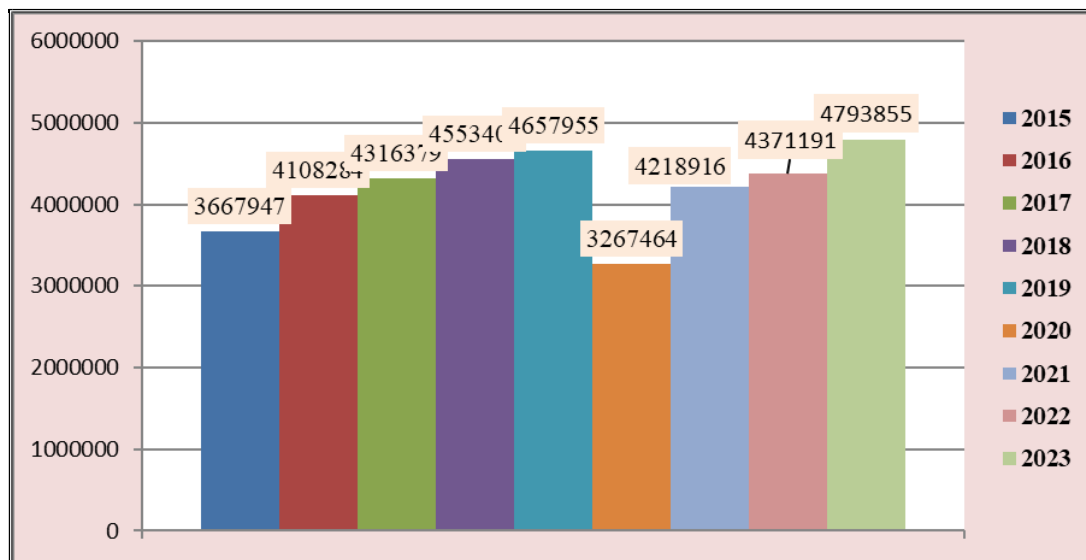


Chart 2. The number of overnight stays made by tourists arriving on the Romanian coast, between 2015 and 2023

Source: Personal processing based on data retrieved from the website <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>, accessed on 24.03.2025.

During the period analyzed, the highest level of the number of overnight stays made by tourists arriving on the Romanian coast was recorded in 2023, when this indicator had a value of 4.793.855. This year, the increase was 9.66% compared to the previous year.

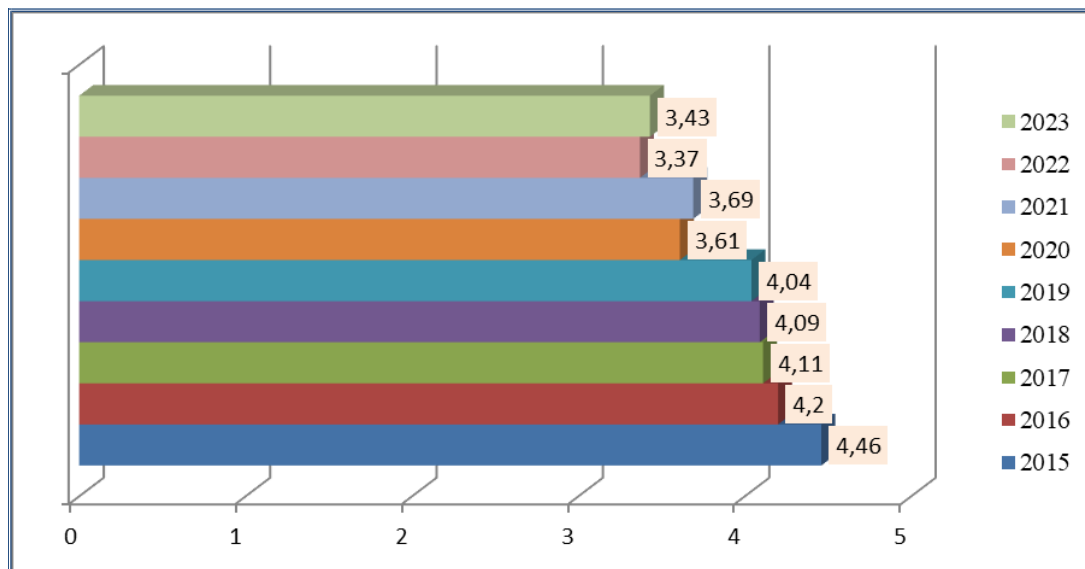


Chart 3. Average length of stay of tourists arriving on the Romanian coast, between 2015 and 2023

Sursa: Personal processing based on data retrieved from the website <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>, accessed on 24.03.2025.

During the analyzed period, the highest level of the average stay realized by tourists arriving on the Romanian coast was recorded in 2015, when this indicator had a value of 4.46 days/tourist. The decrease in the average length of stay is due to the shift in recent years from medium and short-stay tourism to weekend tourism.

3 Strategic directions in the marketing policies adopted by tourism companies on the Romanian coast

The strategy for developing the seaside tourism product is a way forward for companies in this area, bearing in mind that the primary objective is to increase tourist traffic. The historical vestiges of Dobrogea could thus be exploited by including themed excursions in tourist packages. As night-time recreation, accessed by young people, is an important source of tourism revenue in the area, day-time recreational services should also be diversified so that water sports can also be a motivation for the 18-35 age group.

As far as summer recreation is concerned, there are no or insufficient sports fields and playgrounds for children in this area. This area is also accessed by families with children and unfortunately, apart from the heliomarine cure, children have no other leisure options.

The differentiation strategy is another alternative to increase tourist traffic. Differentiation is associated primarily with the rates charged by tourism firms but also with the content of the tourist packages marketed.

Operating on fairly segmented markets (Nenciu, 2009), tourism firms on the Romanian coastline opt mainly for a strategy of adapting the quality of tourism products specific to the coastline in relation to the demands of the various segments of tourists or for a strategy of qualitative differentiation from the offer of competitors in countries offering similar products (Nenciu, 2014). In recent years, some of the four-star hotels in the area are successfully applying these strategies. The tourist services provided in many of the villas and guest houses in Năvodari have improved in terms of quality, but this has led to the use of high price strategies. However, occupancy is high during the summer season. Resorts have also sprung up along the lines of the large resorts in Antalya. The tourist packages marketed by these resorts are complex and all inclusive.

Any tourist trip to a seaside destination induces the tourist's desire to eat different culinary delicacies from those consumed in everyday life. As a result, tourism businesses in the area have diversified their culinary offer to include fish products. The fact that a large number of restaurants specialize in coastal dishes is one of the area's strengths. In recent years, cherhana restaurants and numerous restaurants specializing in fish and seafood have opened in the area.

The strategy of renewal and innovation of the tourist offer is also a solution for the development of tourism on the Romanian coast and for increasing its competitiveness and attractiveness. In this area, innovation is aimed at initiating gastronomic tourism programs related to culinary fish products, real and creative valorization of local cultural potential, traditions of the area, introduction of one-day trips to the Danube Delta in tourist packages.

The role of innovation strategy in tourism has been analyzed in recent years through various studies. Since the mid-twentieth century, several coastal areas in southern Europe started to develop in terms of tourism, attracting significant numbers of tourists and culminating in the emergence of mass tourism. Subsequently, a number of negative effects occurred, leading to a loss of attractiveness and competitiveness vis-à-vis other tourist destinations. Therefore, it is necessary to implement strategies of diversification and

innovation of tourism products in order to economically develop the coastal areas and increase their competitiveness. Recent models of territorial innovation are based on networks, considering that the relationships established between organizations play an important role in the development of new tourism products and services (Brandão et al, 2019).

Tourism on the Romanian coast is currently experiencing a major shortage of qualified staff. Most companies, due to seasonal activity, do not employ qualified staff and do not invest in training. This fact is reflected in the quality of services provided by insufficiently trained staff and very poorly motivated by low salaries (Nenciu, 2014).

It is true that in tourism, the employee's performance is defining because the tourist makes contact with the receptionist as soon as he or she enters the hostel or hotel. If the receptionist is not able to respond to all requests and resolve them then the whole vacation will be affected by this first contact. Ideally, companies should ensure that they have a qualified, responsible workforce that is willing to make a decisive commitment to ensuring the satisfaction of their guests. Unfortunately, there are still managers in the area who do not attach great importance to ensuring a climate of partnership with their employees, and this is reflected in their performance and ultimately in the level of tourist satisfaction.

The selection of staff should be treated seriously, because the fluctuation of workers has negative effects on the overall activity of the tourism company. Ongoing staff training and development should be a priority for Romanian coastal tourism firms. The organization of simple but concrete internal programmes, to be carried out with a well-established periodicity and to include all categories of staff, is a solution in this direction. There are numerous researches (Ubeda-Garcia, 2013; Ul Afaq, 2011) showing the link between employee training and organizational performance. The results obtained from these studies have shown that the participation of employees in tourism establishments in training and refresher courses positively influence organizational performance.

The organization of team-building programs, inside or outside the tourist structure, the attribution of remuneration for the employee's superior performance motivates the employee and motivates him/her to perform in the activity he/she carries out at the level of the tourist structure.

When tourism companies on the Romanian coast will understand that there is a close relationship between the quality of employee performance, the existing facilities and the company's financial results, it will be possible to talk about competitiveness. Evaluating and rewarding performance should be mandatory strategic guidelines for human resources activity in tourism establishments.

At present, coastal tourism employees are paid low wages, have mediocre training, some of them do not know foreign languages and are unable to provide quality services. This is reflected in their attitude towards tourists and their demands.

In conclusion, in the framework of personnel policy it is necessary to adopt strategies to motivate employees and to retain high performers.

Romanian seaside tourism in our country has a significant potential that unfortunately is not being capitalized in a superior way. A good understanding of the real values that characterize the Romanian tourism sector, a correct analysis of travel motivations and the demands of the main segments of tourists, the study of international tourism trends, accompanied by the outlining of marketing strategies tailored to the realities of the area are some of the ways forward for the relaunch of Romanian coastal tourism.

As far as pricing policy is concerned, companies on the seaside should apply fair rates that reflect the true quality of the services provided. Some entrepreneurs in the area apply the all-inclusive system. In the summer season, coastal companies apply high price strategies. This strategy is not reflected in the quality of the services provided, which leads to some dissatisfaction among tourists.

The strategic variants most often used by coastal tourism firms in their distribution activities are represented by the selective distribution adopted by entrepreneurs using a limited number of intermediaries and the intensive strategy used by tourism businesses selling their products and services through a significant number of intermediaries (Nenciu, 2014).

Depending on how the activities are carried out over time (Balaure, Cătoi, Vegheș, 2005), tourism operators in the coastal area adopt the strategy of permanent marketing communication or the strategy of intermittent communication.

At the present time it would be advisable to create a brand of the area to be supported by numerous promotional techniques. It is very true that in recent years, thanks to the events and concerts organized on the area's beaches, the notoriety of the Romanian coast has increased.

4. Conclusions

In order to increase tourist traffic and make the area more attractive to tourists, companies need to adopt marketing strategies aimed at improving the quality of services provided by tourism workers, marketing complex and innovative tourist packages and developing daytime leisure activities. There is also a need for aggressive promotion of this destination on both the internal and external markets through specific promotional techniques and the creation of a representative brand for the area.

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