

**COMPARATIVE STUDY FOR RURAL TOURISM IN PADUREA CRAIULUI
AREA JUNE-JULY 2019 COMPARED TO THE SAME PERIOD 2020**

GHERGHELEȘ CARMEN GEORGETA*¹, MARELE DANIELA CAMELIA¹

¹*University of Oradea, Romania*

*Corresponding author's e-mail: i_carmen_g@yahoo.com

***Abstract:** This paper aims to briefly discuss the potential of Pădurea Craiului as a destination for rural and gastronomic tourism in June and July 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. In recent decades, rural tourism has grown to become a major economic activity in some rural areas in Romania. Contributing to this growth have been changes in travel consumers in terms of their motivations and how they spend their holidays and vacations. The Padurea Craiului Mountains region is one of the most picturesque in Romania, for the cultural heritage of the unique ethnographic areas very popular in this part of Europe.*

***Key words:** gastronomy, rural tourism, Pădurea Craiului, tourist*

INTRODUCTION

Located on the northwestern border of Romania, Bihor County is endowed with numerous natural and cultural values, concentrated in established tourist areas, attracting tourists from all over the world annually. The variety of tourist attractions and the infrastructure specific to tourism satisfy the most diverse motivations and ensure the possibility of practicing different types of tourism (recreational tourism, curative tourism, adventure tourism, but also cultural tourism, etc.) [11].

Due to the picturesque mountains, fragmented by valleys with sectors of gorges and wild gorges, thermal springs and plains crossed by meandering rivers, Bihor is the perfect tourist destination for an active vacation. The wooden churches, testimonies of the Romanian popular creation, complete together with the public gardens and the heritage buildings from Oradea, the relaxing atmosphere. The places loaded with legends and people's experiences, food, traditions and crafts, offer tourists who travel through Bihor, fairytale experiences.

Hiking enthusiasts can cross the Pădurea Craiului on marked paths that cross places of a special picturesque, such as the Crisului Repede. Those who want to practice activities full of adrenaline (rafting, kayaking, canyoning, zip-lining, via ferrata) can venture with boats on the waters of Crisului can overcome spectacular natural cliffs using climbing techniques or can use the arranged adventure routes [14].

The fascinating underground world can be explored by lovers of caving, Bihor housing the highest density and variety of karst forms and phenomena in Romania, some with the status of national and European superlative (Wind Cave, Unguru Mare, Farcu Cave). For those who want to relax in a healthy environment, accommodation units in rural areas are available. Rural settlements in the mountain or plain area attract visitors through the ancestral atmosphere, the elements of folk architecture and the customs and crafts that give identity to the place: shepherding (villagers at the foot of the mountains), pottery (white pottery by Vadu Crisului by Leheceni), painting icons on glass and wood (Roșia), violin making (violin with trumpet from Lazuri de Roșia) etc. [12].

The hospitality industry is an area in which the rules and the way of carrying out the activity will undoubtedly have to be rethought on a global scale, but it definitely cannot be ignored. Rural tourism during this period was an alternative, most Romanians choosing to spend their holidays in the country [6].

Food is an integral part of any tourist experience and is a substantial and, at the same time, essential component of tourism. Moreover, in symbiosis with cultural tourism,

but not only, gastronomic tourist products develop excellently. Currently, the development of such products is being tried at the level of local destinations [1]. The analysis made regarding the offer of public catering services currently existing at the level of accommodation capacities in Padurea Craiului allows us to characterize it succinctly: about half of the total structures are from the categories of classic restaurant and bar, which are not necessarily associated with a higher level of quality. Given this distribution, it can be shown that the food supply is not sufficiently diversified and does not respond according to tourist demand, in the sense that currently there are not enough restaurants with specific (local, regional, national and international) and specialized restaurants (fishermen , hunting, dietetic and lacto-vegetarian, respectively family or pension type) [7].

One of the most valuable components of rural tourism in the Pădurea Craiului Area is the local cultural offer, because, as shown, rural tourism provides visitors with personalized contact, a sample of physical and human rural environment and allows them to participate in activities , traditions and authentic local life. In Padurea Craiului, rural tourism enjoys excellent development conditions, the following forms having a special potential: agrotourism, weekend rural tourism, rural tourism in secondary residences, cultural rural tourism, rural leisure and recreation tourism, rural tourism curative, religious tourism and sports tourism, adventure and practicing local and/or extreme sports activities. From the perspective of the offer of tourist reception services, it should be noted that in the rural environment the agro-tourist pensions (to a lesser extent) and the rural tourist pensions have developed [14].

Even though we are at the beginning of the third millennium, in an ultra-technological Europe, Romania continues to welcome its guests with its villages where even the landscape, faith and traditions breathe an archaic atmosphere [2].

The gastronomy of Pădurii Craiului has kept simple and very tasty recipes over the years. The culinary products specific to these places bring together Romanian and Hungarian recipes [5]. Traditional pies, goulash, fried or smoked trout, zacusca, homemade jams, compotes and syrups from berries, baked hot pita, cheese, bacon and onions - the "basic" kind in Transylvania, and jam hot peppers, another local specialty, delight visitors' senses, making them want to spend more time in these fairytale places. The chefs compete to make, according to their own recipes, sausages and traditional meat dishes, which complete the joy of discovering the natural beauties of Pădurea Craiului. Of course, all this is required, musai, watered with real brandy, made from healthy fruits, with a lot of patience and with a certain science. Located on the northwestern border of Romania, Bihor County is endowed with many natural and cultural values, concentrated in areas established tourist attractions, annually attracting tourists from all over the world. The variety of tourist attractions and the infrastructure specific to tourism satisfy the most diverse motivations and ensure the possibility of practicing different types of tourism (recreational tourism, curative tourism, adventure tourism, but also cultural tourism, etc.) [12].

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main objective was analyzed the number of tourists arriving in the Rural area of Padurea Craiului Area during June - July 2019 and June - July 2020 respectively in the context of the COVID 2019 Pandemic. The correct study proposes to present the evolution of Romanian and foreign tourists analyzing the results of the period mentioned above. To achieve the purpose of the study, the quantitative analysis of both the number and the percentage of the number of tourists based on data generated by the National Institute of Statistics (INS) was used as a research method. The available data were analyzed in order to present the main findings regarding the evolution of the total number of tourists for the period and the rural region mentioned.

From the perspective of the chosen accommodation units, foreigners prefer: hotels, urban and rural tourist pensions, respectively villas, classified at 3-4 stars / flowers; at the same time, the structures of 2, respectively of 5 stars/flowers are seldom taken into account; a significant percentage of foreign respondents opt for accommodation with relatives and friends. Net preferred by Romanians are rural guesthouses, followed by urban ones, as well as tourist villas and hotels; Regarding the classification level, the same preferences are observed in the case of Romanians as in the case of foreigners. In fact, about half of both categories of respondents opt for structures classified at 3 stars / flowers, which indicates the orientation towards medium budget accommodation units, which ensures a decent degree of comfort and a series of services that tourists need, without being luxurious. It should be noted, however, that Romanians have more modest expectations in terms of services and quality of service in general, as, as noted, they stay mainly in rural guesthouses, while foreigners prefer hotels that offer superior comfort [13]. Foreigners choose to spend longer stays in Padurea Craiului, compared to Romanians; thus, 40% of foreigners declare average lengths of stay of 2-5 nights, while 59% spend 6-10 nights in the destination, given that 48% of Romanians have stays of 2-5 nights and only 10% spend between 6 and over 12 nights in Padurea Craiului, which suggests especially a decrease in interest in the spa offer, but indicates for both foreigners and Romanians a clear preference for cultural tourism (more obvious for foreign tourists and rather under the form of weekend tourism and mini-holidays for Romanians) [4].

The most used means of information for tourist purposes by foreign and Romanian tourists, alike, is the Internet. Specialized TV shows and documentaries enjoy great credibility. At the same time, the relatives and acquaintances of Romanian origin have a hard word to say, respectively the people who have already visited the destination. Most of

the Romanian respondents are willing to get directly involved in the promotion of local destinations [5].

RESEARCH RESULTS

In June 2020, compared to the corresponding month of the previous year, arrivals in tourist reception facilities with accommodation functions decreased by 47.5%, and overnight stays by 46.4%.

Of the total number of arrivals, in June 2020, the arrivals of Romanian tourists in the structures of tourist reception with accommodation functions represented 96.1%, while foreign tourists represented 3.9% [10].

Regarding the arrivals of foreign tourists in the tourist reception structures, the largest share was held by those in Europe (86.2% of total foreign tourists), the vast majority being from countries belonging to the European Union (Hungary, Slovenia, Poland) [8].

Out of the total number of overnight stays, in June 2020, the overnight stays of Romanian tourists in the structures of tourist reception with accommodation functions represented 96.1%, while the overnight stays of foreign tourists represented 3.9%. Regarding the overnight stays of foreign tourists in the tourist reception structures, the largest share was held by those in Europe (83.9% of the total foreign tourists), the vast majority being from countries belonging to the European Union.

The average length of stay in June 2020 was 2.1 days for Romanian tourists and foreign tourists.

The index of net use of accommodation places in June 2020 was of 23.8% on total tourist accommodation structures, decreasing by 18.9 percentage points compared to June 2019.

Higher indices of use of accommodation in June 2020 were registered in bungalows (33.7%), campsites (15.4%), hotels (14.9%), tourist villas (13.7%), tourist cottages (12.5%), agritourism pensions (12.4%), tourist chalets (11.8%) and tourist pensions (11.2%) [9].

In July 2020, compared to the corresponding months of the previous year, arrivals in tourist reception facilities with accommodation functions decreased by 23.4%, and overnight stays by 24.7%.

Of the total number of arrivals, in July 2020, the arrivals of Romanian tourists in the structures of tourist reception with accommodation functions represented 96.7%, while the foreign tourists represented 3.3%.

Of the total number of overnight stays, in July 2020 the overnight stays of Romanian tourists in the structures of tourist reception with accommodation functions represented 97.3%, while the overnight stays of foreign tourists represented 2.7%. Regarding the overnight stays of foreign tourists in the tourist reception structures, the largest share was held by those in Europe (88.1% of total foreign tourists), the vast majority being from countries belonging to the European Union.

The average length of stay in July 2020 was 2.7 days for Romanian tourists and 2.2 days for foreign tourists.

The index of net use of accommodation places in July 2020 was 78.8% on total tourist accommodation structures, decreasing compared to July 2019 [10].

Higher indices of accommodation use in July 2020 were registered in bungalows (35.0%), hotels (32.9%), tourist cottages (30.0%), campsites (27.4%), tourist villas (26.8%), tourist stops (24.6%) and agritourism pensions (22.1%).

It was noted that the demand for dining on the premises of accommodation has increased between June and July 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. This is due to the suspension of the activity of restaurants due to the measures imposed by law.

CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions drawn from the research undertaken on the tourist behavior of foreigners and Romanians who visited the Pădurea Craiului Region in the two periods June - July 2019 and June - July 2020 are summarized below. Thus, for foreigners, Pădurea Craiului is a destination chosen for relaxation, cultural interests and the practice of rural tourism. In the case of Romanians, there is especially tourism practiced for the purpose of visiting relatives and friends; Furthermore, their preferences are: weekend tourism and mini-vacations, respectively longer stays; cultural tourism and mountain tourism (summer hiking and winter sports). Significant percentages of visitors, both foreign and Romanian, intend to return to the destination. In the case of favorite activities, there are again a number of similarities between foreign and Romanian tourists, in the top preferences of both categories being: visiting religious and cultural objectives, discovering the local specifics, eating at restaurants, carrying out various cultural activities recreation, hiking, discovering nature.

Most Romanian tourist trips take place in summer, and by 2020 many will opt to spend their holidays in accommodation units in rural areas.

Foreigners opt for Pădurea Craiului especially in summer, but there are a considerable number of respondents who are not dependent on a certain season.

The main destinations of the chosen area are: rural areas as well as mountain areas; a significant proportion of foreign tourists (almost a third) are oriented towards tourist circuits. The favorite types of tourism of Romanian tourists are: mountain hiking and relaxation tourism, active and adventure tourism and ecotourism. To these are added rural tourism and agrotourism, respectively cultural, spa and circuit tourism. Gastronomic and religious tourism are not of interest to about half of the respondents. For foreigners, the traditional villages, wooden churches and speleological, gastronomic tourism and mountain trails are of interest.

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