

## PROSPECTS REGARDING THE DYNAMICS OF THE TOURIST ACTIVITY IN ALBA COUNTY

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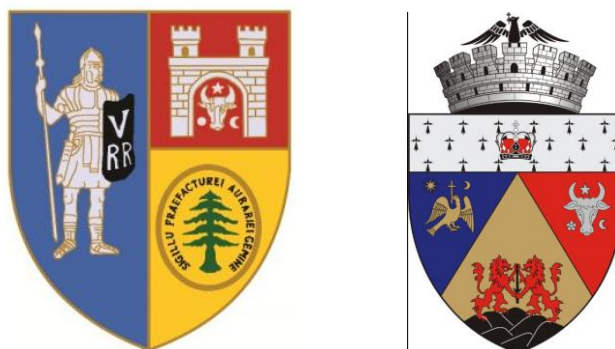
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**Abstract:** *The natural tourist resources of Alba County are remarkable, including areas with picturesque natural landscapes, a suite of nature reserves, some of national and even European importance, natural monuments, rivers and waters, flora, fauna, resources. In the context of the resources at its disposal, the county has a high potential for the development of rural tourism/agrotourism, leisure, oenological and gastronomic, etc. The pandemic has severely affected tourism activity. The accommodation in the area decreased 32% compared to 2019. The pandemic severely affected tourism in the analyzed county. Receiving units have lost a large number of customers in recent months. Arrivals in accommodation facilities with accommodation functions decreased in July 2020 by 30.2% and overnight stays by 31.8% compared to the same month of the previous year. Moreover, between January and July, tourist arrivals decreased by 52.1%, compared to the corresponding period in 2019.*

**Key words:** *arrivals, overnights, tourist dynamics, accommodation capacity*

### INTRODUCTION

The analyzed area is located in the central part of Romania. It borders Cluj County to the north, Bihor County and Arad County to the west, Hunedoara County to the southwest, Vâlcea County to the south, and Sibiu County and Mureș County to the east. The capital of the county, Alba Iulia, is located on the left bank of the Mureș River, at the confluence of the Ampoi and Sebeș rivers [3,4].



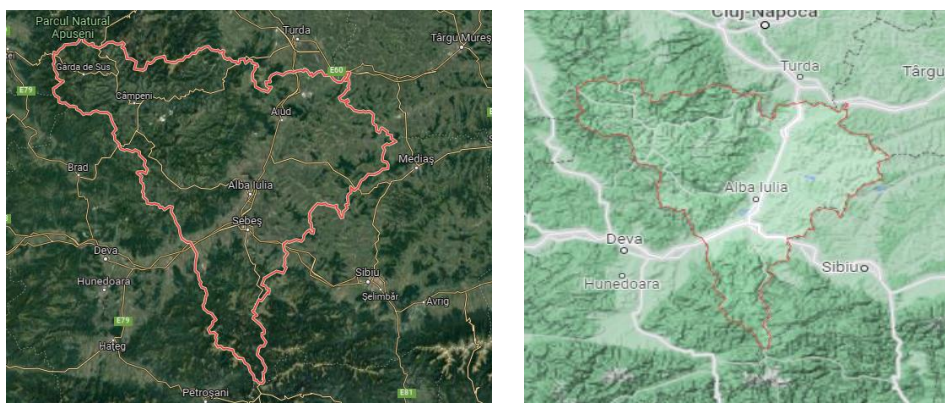
**Figure 1. Emblem of the analyzed area (Alba County, and Alba-Iulia)**

Source: Processing after [https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stema\\_municipiului\\_Alba\\_Iulia](https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stema_municipiului_Alba_Iulia)[18],[19]

Predominant in the studied area is the high regions of plateau, hill, and mountain, in the east with the Metaliferi Mountains, in the south, the Șureanu Mountains, in the northwest the Bihor Mountains, and the Parâng Mountains. The area is covered to the east by the Târnavelor Plateau and the Secașelor Plateau, and to the west by the Apuseni Mountains. The Șureanu Mountains, crossed by the Sebeș Valley, limit the south of the county, as well as a small part of the Cindrel Mountains. The north and northwest are guarded by the Great Mountain and the Bihor Mountains [2,7].

The analyzed area has high potential but there are practically a number of four tourist poles of the county, namely: the northwestern extremity of the county, Rimetea and

its surroundings, Alba Iulia, and the Sebeş - Pianu area. The rest of the areas are characterized by less developed tourist infrastructure compared to the areas mentioned above despite the many tourist attractions [4,6,17].



**Figure 2. The study area (Alba County, satellite view)**

*Source: Processing after <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Alba+County> [16]*

The elements that make up the tourist image of the area can be summarized as follows: wonderful natural landscape and wild, unique attractions, traditions, and ancestral crafts well preserved, intertwining the traditional with the modern, with the new: cultural treasure - ethnographic, archaeological, religious, architectural, etc.[1,4].

Tourism in the area has also developed in rural areas. Pensions have developed in the households of the locals, constituting in many cases a secondary income-generating activity [5,7].

The effects of the pandemic on the area can be seen in the statistics: arrivals registered in the tourist reception structures decreased by 44.4% in July 2020 compared to July 2019. Overnight stays decreased by 44.7%, according to information centralized by the National Institute of Statistics. Also, the number of foreign tourists who visited the area has collapsed [11,14].

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this article, the authors used data collection, centralization, analysis, and finally the interpretation of the data. Due to the current conditions, the displacement is not possible, the data were collected from national statistics, direct contact with state institutions, and various meetings held online [9,10].

## RESEARCH RESULTS

In the first four months of the year, over 30000 tourists were accommodated in the reception units in the analyzed area, registering an increase of 12.2% compared to the same period in 2020 [15].

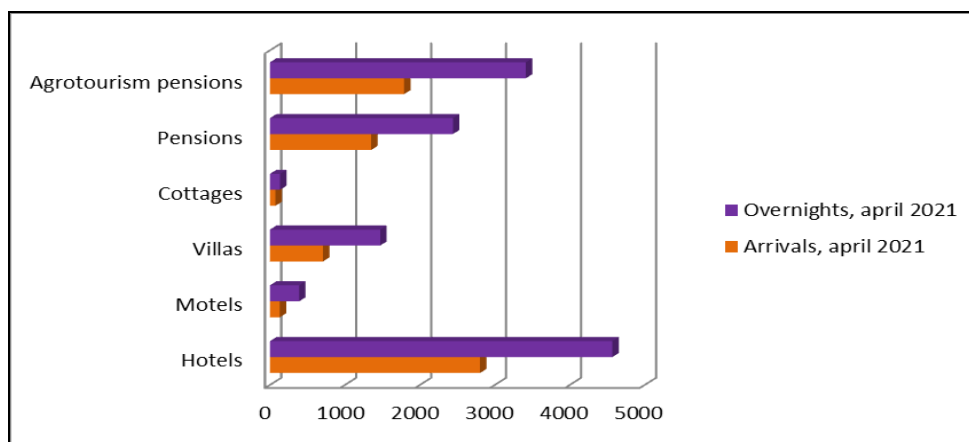
According to the data, in April 2021, compared to the corresponding month of the previous year, the arrivals in the reception structures with accommodation functions registered an increase of 6232 arrivals, and the overnight stays by 12621 [10].

The index of net use of accommodation in the area in April 2021 was 13.1%. [13] In April this year, 6987 tourists were accommodated in the reception units in the studied area, most of them were accommodated in hotels (40.1%), agritourism pensions (25.6%), tourist pensions (19.3%), registering an increase of + 825.4% compared to April 2020 and a decrease of -7.2% compared to the previous month [13,15].

**Table 1.**  
**Number of arrivals and overnight stays by types of reception structures,**  
**April 2021 (people)**

		Hotels	Motels	Villas	Cottages	Pensions	Agrotourism pensions	Total county
<b>Arrivals</b>	April 2021	2804	133	708	75	1351	1789	6987
	The difference compared to April 2020	2775	-21	708	75	1322	1774	6232
<b>Overnights</b>	April 2021	4568	390	1471	136	2442	3416	12621
	The difference compared to April 2020	4115	236	1471	136	2386	3226	10722

Source: National Institute of Statistics [14]



**Figure 3. The situation of arrivals and overnight stays, April 2021**

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro> [14]

The average length of stay in the tourist reception structures with accommodation functions this month was 1.81 days, compared to 2.52 days recorded in April 2020 [15].

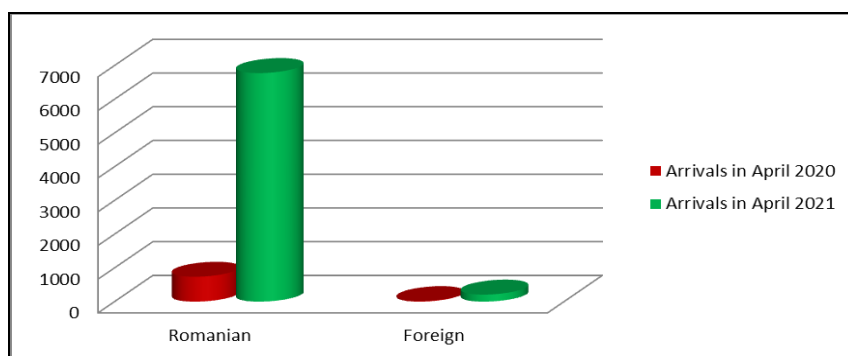
According to the data obtained, between January 1 and April 30, 2021, 30699 tourists were accommodated in the reception units in Alba County, registering an increase of 12.2% compared to the period January 1 - April 30, 2020 [10].

Romanian tourists hold a share of 97.9% of the total number of tourists registered in the county, and foreign tourists represent 2.1% [13].

**Table 2.**  
**Number of arrivals in April 2020 and 2021 (persons, Alba county)**

	Romanian	Foreign	TOTAL
Arrivals in April 2020	739	16	755
Arrivals in April 2021	6778	209	6987

Source : <http://statistici.insse.ro> [14]



**Figure 4. Number of arrivals in April 2020 and 2021 (person, Alba County)**

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro> [14]

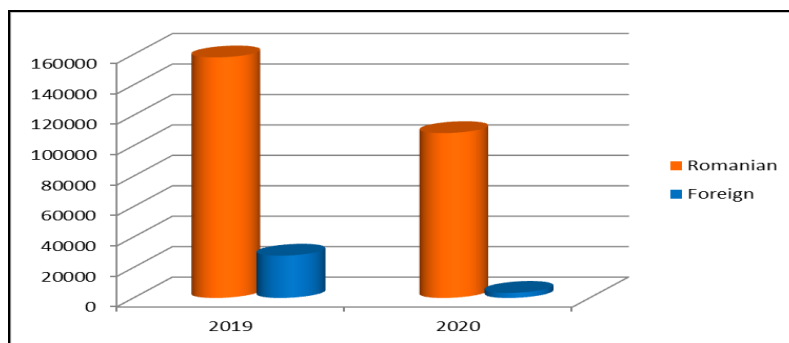
The number of overnight stays of tourists in the tourist reception structures in the county, registered between January and April 2021 was 56,710, more by 21.9% compared to the corresponding period of 2020. The average length of stay in the tourist reception structures with accommodation functions in this period was 1.84 days, compared to 1.85 days in the corresponding period of the previous year [11].

Between January 1 and November 30, 2020, compared to the corresponding period in 2019, tourist arrivals decreased by 39.9%. In November 2020, 4671 tourists were accommodated in the tourist units in the county, most of them were accommodated in agritourism pensions (39.0%), hotels (30.2%), tourist pensions (20.1%), registering a decrease of -62.8% compared to November 2019 and -50.4% compared to the previous month [10,12,15].

The number of overnight stays of tourists in the tourist reception structures in the county registered in November 2020 was 7709, less by -62.1% compared to November 2019 [13].

The average length of stay in the tourist reception structures with accommodation functions this month was 1.65 days, longer than in November 2019 (1.62 days). The index of net use of accommodation places in the county in November 2020 was 10% (compared to 16.8% in November 2019), the country registering an index of 12.8% (compared to 29.6% from November 2019) [15].

The average length of stay in the tourist reception structures with accommodation functions this month was 1.65 days, longer than in November 2019 (1.62 days). The index of net use of accommodation places in the county in November 2020 was 10% (compared to 16.8% in November 2019), the country registering an index of 12.8% (compared to 29.6% from November 2019) [11,14].



**Figure 5. The situation of accommodations in 2019 and 2020 in the analyzed area**

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro> [14]

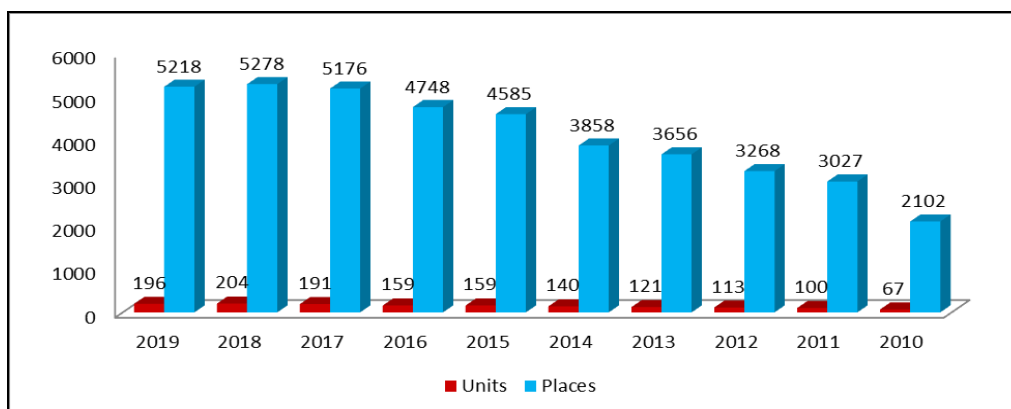
The number of overnight stays of tourists in the tourist reception structures in the county, registered in January-November 2020 was 201991, less by 40.7% compared to the corresponding period in 2019. The average length of stay in the tourist reception structures with functions of accommodation in this period was 1.81 days, compared to 1.83 days in the corresponding period of the previous year [10].

In the first three months of the year, 23712 tourists were accommodated in the studied area, 435 of them foreign citizens. In comparison, in the first quarter of 2020, the year of the pandemic, their number was 24422 (1,657 foreigners). The decrease is 2.9% [12].

Only in March, however, the analyzed records indicate an increase of almost 140% in accommodation in the county. However, among the counties in the Central Region, Alba had the fewest tourists. In March 2021, 7529 tourists were accommodated in the tourist units in the county. Most were accommodated in hotels 45.2%, agritourism pensions 24.9%, tourist pensions 18.2%, registering an increase of + 138.1% compared to March last year and a decrease of -10.8% compared to the previous month [11,13,15].

The number of overnight stays of tourists in the tourist reception structures in the county registered in March this year was 13688, more by + 123.4% compared to March last year and less by -11.2% compared to the previous month. The average length of stay in the tourist reception structures with accommodation functions this month was 1.82 days, compared to 1.94 days registered in March 2020 [14,15].

The index of net use of accommodation places in the county in March was 15.6% (compared to 11.6% in March 2020), the country registering an index of 14.9% (compared to 14.3 % from March 2020) [11].



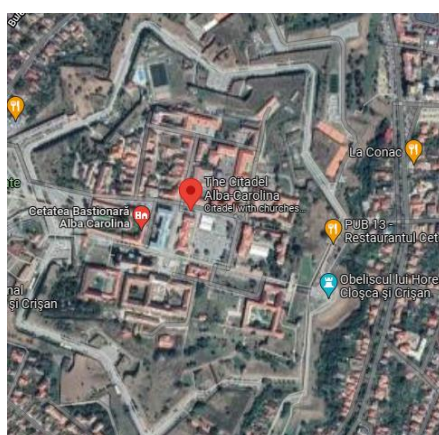
**Figure 6. Number and capacity of accommodation units for tourists in Alba County, in the period 2010-2019**

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro> [14]

Compared to 2010, there were increases in accommodation capacity in most types of structures, except for student camps, where capacity decreased by 60 seats. The largest increases were recorded in the case of agritourism pensions, tourist pensions, and hotels[10].

The public investments made in the area for the development of tourism were numerous, the most important aiming at:

- Rehabilitation and modernization of the network of county roads and local interests;
- Supporting the activity of cultural institutions and the events organized by them;
- Establishment of ADI “Munții Șureanu” in order to develop the tourist infrastructure in the area of Cugir, Sebeș, Pianu, Săliștea, Șugag and Săsciori localities;
- Restoration of Alba Carolina Fortress, and the Dendrological Park;

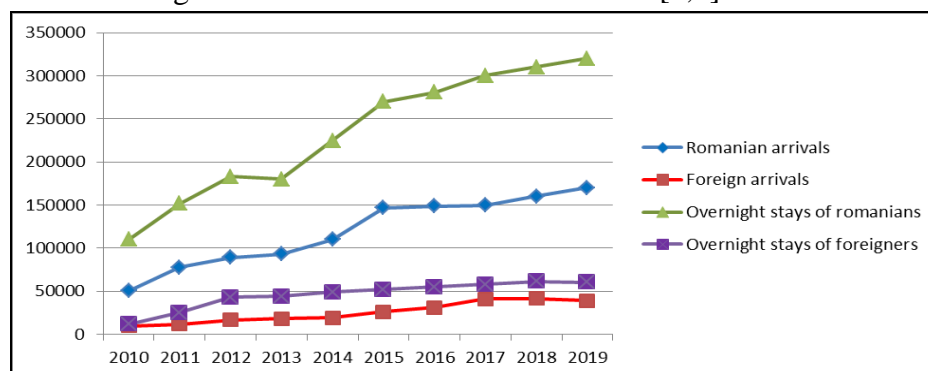


**Figure 6. Alba Carolina Fortress, satellite view**

Source: <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Alba-Carolina> [20]

- Restoration of the Cultural Palace from Blaj;
- Restoration and introduction in the tourist circuit of the Călnic Evangelical Church (UNESCO patrimony objective);
- Development of the ski area in the city of Zlatna;
- Development of the “Ursoaia” tourist area in Horea commune;

According to NIS, in 2019, 201840 tourists were accommodated in Alba County, of which 15% were foreign tourists and 85% were Romanians [5,8].



**Figure 7. Dynamics of the number of tourists arriving in the accommodation unit and of nights spent by them, by types of tourists, in the period 2010-2019**

Source: *Integrated rural development strategy* [10]

Compared to 2010, their number increased more than four times (322%), in the case of foreign tourists the increase was 223%, while the number of Romanian tourists increased by 345%. However, the county registered in 2019 a share of only 6% in the total number of tourists in the Center region (5th / 6th place, surpassing only Covasna County) and a share of foreign tourists 1% lower than the regional average and 5% compared to the national one [10,11,15].

## CONCLUSIONS

Depending on the tangible and intangible valuable heritage, the traditional architecture of the house and the elements of the special natural landscape, the territory of the county consists of a series of areas with important resources of anthropic and natural heritage, whose unique character is an important resource tourism development. The last ten years have seen a significant increase in accommodation capacity and the number of tourists.

The exploitation of tangible and intangible heritage following the capitalization of the natural landscape, is an opportunity for medium and long-term development for Alba County, in its promotion as a tourist destination for several niche markets: cultural tourism, mountain tourism, agrotourism, spa tourism. Highlighting cultural routes, tourist circuits, involves the conservation/rehabilitation of monuments, infrastructure works, development of tourist services, and promotion.

The number of accommodation units for tourists increased almost three times between 2010 and 2019, reaching a cumulative capacity of over 5000 places (8000, according to other sources), which places the county on the penultimate place at a regional level. The accommodation offer is dominated by small agritourism pensions, located especially in the Apuseni area, to which is added a rather small number of hotels, concentrated in the urban environment. They are addressed to all categories of tourists, from one star to five stars/flowers (Alba Iulia, Sebeș, Ighiu, Șugag).

The number of overnight stays of tourists in the tourist reception structures registered in April 2021 was 12621, more by 10722 (+ 564.6%) compared to April 2020 and less by 1067 (-7.8%) compared to the previous month.

According to official data from November 2020, compared to the corresponding month of the previous year, arrivals in tourist reception structures with accommodation functions fell by 62.8%, and overnight stays by 62.1%. The statistics refer only to registered accommodation units.

If we add the unclassified and closed-circuit pensions, we deduce that the situation is much more alarming.

According to data provided by the Regional Directorate of White Statistics, the index of net use of accommodation in the county in November 2020 was 10%. November is the most recent month for which data has been processed.

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