

SPAS – A SOLUTION TO RELAUNCH ROMANIAN TOURISM

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Abstract:

Spa tourism represents that type of tourism, regularly used by a broad range of tourists, motivated by people's wish to maintain or regain health. Romania has a high natural potential for spa treatment of various diseases, given the background of available resources. Romanian subsoil currently contain over a third of the European mineral water resources, and an important number of unique or mineral resources very little spread throughout Europe: mofettes of Oriental Carpathians, sapropelic mud from Salt Lake or Techirghiol. Romania's climate is particularly suitable for therapeutic treatments, including areas with tonic, sedative, marine and saline bio-climate.

Keywords: spa tourism, tourism recovery, tourism competitiveness

JEL Classification: Q20

1. Introduction

Romania was an important tourist destination for zonal market, promoting, especially, coastal tourism products, spas, cultural programs and monasteries in northern Moldavia and Bucovina.

Romanian tourism supply has not changed over time becoming uncompetitive in relation to tourism demand requirements and to similar tourism products on the international market.

Tourist reception structures and especially leisure offer are outdated, uncompetitive, tourism services and programs are achieved in a stereotypical manner and of modest quality and the quality and price ratio is inconclusive. Therefore, in the last 20 years have seen a steady decrease in foreign tourist demand for Romania.

To enter the international tourist competition, we need to modernize, recover and develop Romanian tourism and to create modern tourism products, competitive for the market. It is necessary, therefore, to create new tourism products, resorts, original, attractive and exciting programs that could direct major tourist flows to Romania, through a sustained activity of promotion on the international market. In this respect, it is essential to develop recreational and animation offer, highly attractive, by creating entertainment and theme parks, water parks, offers already present in traditional tourist countries in the world. [1]

Along with modernization and development of a diversified and competitive tourism offer, measures to improve and develop marketing and promotion activities, to integrate in global tourism, to ensure the proper, stable and stimulating, legal and financial, fiscal environment, are necessary.

2. The source of recovery in a competitive market of Romanian tourism.

A special place in modernization and development activities of tourist offer is occupied by health tourism.

Spa tourism is not seasonal or weather related, the product can be sold in 365 days of the year (regardless of weather conditions), can be sold individually, in groups or mass, is settled by public health insurance institutions and it can revitalize the other segments - tourism, culture, sports, leisure etc.

Given these specific features, we can consider it a solution to remove the bankruptcy of dead tourist areas.

The physico-chemical quality and therapeutic value of natural treatment factors are similar and even superior to existing spas acknowledged in the world for all 14 categories of diseases covered by the World Health Organization classification.

Romania's natural resources include:

- thermal mineral waters of international quality;
- therapeutic mud containing organic and mineral substances;
- mofettes - natural emissions of carbon dioxide

- mineralized lakes of different concentrations
- different micro-climates (including those in saline).

In Romania there are 160 resorts and spa towns holding mineral resources treatment factors (which makes Romania one of the richest countries in the world, from this perspective), of which 24 resorts are of national interest, others having less important role in domestic and European tourism market.

They are placed near the main natural areas of Romania, especially the Black Sea and the Carpathian arch, and also in the plains, hills and sub- Carpathian areas. In the Eastern Carpathians it is estimated that there are 1500 mineral springs, whose chemical composition is varied.

But, let's see where the beginning point. Until the World War II the sparkling luxury, balls and casinos rhymed with mineral waters and curative mud. Resorts such as: Herculane, Olănești, Slănic Moldova, Sarata Monteoru or Carmen Sylva (known as Eforie in nowadays) were more appreciated than Baden Baden, Wiesbaden or Karlovy Vary by aristocrats and European medical specialists.

Although a third of Europe's reserves - hot springs, mineral water, mud, salt mines,- are in Romania, we used to have no homologated resort, until recently. All resorts, without exception, were in a pitiable state in terms of infrastructure, medical equipment, qualified personnel. Dubious privatizations, without any strategy, a disastrous management, irrational restitution etc., all have led to the ruin of historic towns, famous since Antiquity for the miraculous properties of their water and mud, such as Herculane or Geoagiu.

Yet, none of them was officially certified as spa resort in Romania or in Europe. The reverse was that no European insurance institution did not reimburse medical services provided in these resorts. Moreover, Romania could not attract one euro from the huge insurance budgets of some countries such as Germany, Netherlands or Scandinavian countries.

Until last summer, no resort in Romania was officially certified, according to representatives of the Ministry of Tourism. Romanian Government approved last year the decision on the status of spa resort for some localities and areas that have natural treatment factors, according to a press release from the Ministry of Health (Felix, Covasna, Sovata, Ocna Sibiu, Olănești, Calimanesti-Căciulata, Herculane, Techirghiol lake, Amara, Govora). One of the advantages of approval is that the resorts could benefit from a government program support. But, above all, that may form an association of health resorts in Romania, with facilities to access EU structural funds. The legal document is intended to supplement existing regulations in healthcare and rehabilitation spa, represented by all medical services provided in spas, climatic and balneo-climatic resorts using natural therapeutic factors and / or physical factors produced artificially, as well as diet, medication, psychotherapy and health education. Proposals and decisions of local councils and papers prepared by the National Institute of Rehabilitation, Physical Medicine and Balneoclimatology from Bucharest, show that conditions for receiving this status for the following cities and areas: Băile Olănești, Covasna, Felix, Sovata Techirghiol, Amara, Băile Herculane, Băile Govora, Călimănești-Căciulata and Ocna Sibiu are provided. These towns and areas are located in areas with appropriate climatic factors to maintaining and improving health conditions and / or work capacity, according to the Ministry of Health.

Regarding criteria used, resorts must meet a set of rules, following the European model, which include age, type of accommodation units and the need an operational spa. These criteria are set at European level. Stations must be at least 100 years old, and there is no problem from this point of view, because we fulfill this requirement with towns like, for example, Geoagiu Băi or Băile Herculane. However, the resorts must include hotels of different category, points of entertainment such as casinos or aqua parks and treatment facilities recognized at European level. It is certain that these criteria could be adapted to the specific state of our country.

The increase of average life expectancy in Europe could be a great growth potential for spa resorts in Romania

Spa tourism could be a viable solution for Romanian tourism recovery, but measures are needed to support and develop this sector.

According to representatives of tourism associations, the spa field could be one of the challenging segments in the future, given that Romania has a third of spa resources in Europe, but this will happen only if facilities and support from state authorities are provided.

Regarding ways to develop health tourism, industry organizations have proposed in a roundtable, an action plan that should be taken into consideration to develop spa and health tourism, among them: the urgent development and promotion health tourism law, and providing tax incentives to investors and travel agencies. Spa tourism could be a viable solution for Romanian tourism recovery, especially on the treatment segment, and less for the spa, because others have spas, too. Focused on the treatment, this strategy will be a very good one, if achieved, because we are better than others on this segment.

Ageing of population, growth potential of spa tourism

A steady increase in average life expectancy in Europe would be a great growth potential for resorts in Romania, since most tourist areas and spa is the persons age two and three.

Aging population in Western Europe is a great growth potential for resorts in Romania. In 2030, people

over 60 will account for less than a quarter of France to 20% today. However, in 2030, people over 60 will represent 37-38% of Germany and 30-31% of the Nordic countries.

Although several years ago to treat Romanians went elsewhere because in our example were not certain operations, now go and interventions with reduced complexity. Reasons for leaving are the insufficient financial support from the state, fluctuating health policies, the excessive media coverage and malpractice cases because healthcare professionals.

Romania has one third of Europe's healing resources. The huge potential just waiting to be tapped. For twenty years, tourism has been much talk and little was done. We swagger with the natural potential of Romania and looked the most authentic country spirit as God-given far more than we take it before - the most available examples are Bulgaria and Hungary - while the entire infrastructure was transformed into ruin. In 2009, the Ministry of Tourism has come up with a new strategy, the health tourism is a priority.

Doctors, as marketing agents

Why don't we promote more? The first step is to convince physicians of the Union, not only on the curative properties of our natural resources. They are the first to recommend certain courses in certain places, they are the first promoters.

But, on the other hand, Romania can not risk to go out in the official campaign resorts in the state is now. Investments in road and tourist infrastructure will be next. If a tourist cannot find what you promised, you lose him forever. Need it and the accommodation, recreation and maintenance are the same. In addition to bathrooms, we need spas, medical services, accommodation, ski, tennis, hiking, restaurants, casinos, road infrastructure.

All this, plus spa resources, must be submitted as a package tourist fairs. Europeans call this tour rework, are active people, even if some of them are retired, do not come to be healed of his coming to spend, to travel, do sports. Go out, visit, buy, spend. Here we have a problem, we can not offer places where you have nothing to do but sit in the tub.

Medical tourism is one which is growing rapidly worldwide, and for this segment to operate in Romania, our country must specialize. The spa is a very attractive niche for foreigners, and in Romania there are many resorts that can be exploited, but must be considered and greater competition in Hungary, this is a conclusion reached by experts in the field yesterday, the International Forum Health, the session dedicated to medical tourism.

Romania should have a single major in which to excel. This happens in other countries where industry is more developed. Approximately 80% of all tourists coming to Romania to treat wine spas, maintenance and aging treatments. In this segment the focus. This sector can bring quick gains. Among the resorts that attract tourists are Felix, Tusnad, Sovata, Techirghiol, Mangalia. There are already foreign tourists. It also made significant investments in Herculane. Example would be Baile Felix, which attracts plenty of tourists, even in Kuwait. In developed countries, medical tourism contributes 4.3 percent to GDP. [2]

We are at the beginning. We hope that medical tourism have even a small contribution to Romanian tourism in general, and in a few years to bring 1-2% of GDP. However, there are major problems, such as language. Documents must be translated in the language of the incoming tourists, coming to be treated in Romania. Each year, in spas go from 600,000 to 700,000 tourists, of which 10.7% are foreign. Fri tourists and Germany, Israel, Belgium, but the resorts most people, 60-80%, wine programs and Pension Houses Health.

Mineral resources are exploited at a rate lower than 1%

Mineral resources are exploited at a rate below 1%, though many reserves. Medical tourism in our country there. But there are certain things you need to put in place for the tourists they return to Romania. If these people are not satisfied, do not come back and make us and negative advertising. Have introduced the concept of "medical tourism all inclusive", ie to provide complex packages, and this niche can jumpstart "your incoming" in Romania. Foreign tourists pay more than 40% for treatment in Romania. [3]

Lower costs in Romania attract foreign tourists. Among reasons why foreigners would come to be treated in our country are much lower costs compared with other developed and shorter waiting lists and that those who practice medical tourism have health insurance and seek lower prices. But one can wonder if these low prices hide some deficiencies. Din hide this reason there are organizations to ensure services such as Medical College or the Ministry of Tourism. Reasons for foreigners coming to Romania are the lower cost, less waiting time, the availability of international travel and the improvement of medical standards. For example, a rhinoplasty operation costs 1,000 euros in Romania, while in Italy reach 4,000 euros.

In India, medical tourism reached 3 billion dollar. To show the importance of medical tourism, we may illustrate the fact that in India the market reaches \$ 2 billion annually, and in Cyprus there are more foreign patients than local people. In Romania, the annual growth rate is 30%, the market reached \$ 250 million and could double by 2014, reaching half a billion tourists, if we keep our costs low.

Entry into force in October 2013, the European Directive on patients' rights in cross-border assistance could make Romania and Romanians lose practice unless developing medical tourism segment. If you do something in this segment, gain and Romanian tourists, who will not go to be treated in other countries, and foreign tourists.

Increasingly fewer tourists will we cross the threshold resort spas in the absence of investment in infrastructure and to provide facilities for investors in this field. Despite autărităților desire, to attract more foreign lands parks and the reality is that the number of Romanians who step into this resort is in a steady decline.

The spas in Romania wine annually between 800,000 and one million people to improve health. Pensionarii added to them and receiving the National House of Pensions tickets treatment. Annually about 250,000 such tickets go to pensioners, but, unfortunately, not all reach the resort.

Only 10% of tourists are foreigners. The future of health tourism is not pink in the absence of sustainable investments done on the future. Industry analysts anticipate a 20% decrease in demand for domestic tourism, seen in the fact decrease packages and spa treatments. However, lack of infrastructure is one of the factors that determine Romanian increasingly consume less domestic destinations.

The tourist seeks both treatment and entertainment.

Spa tourism ranks second in Romania's tourism offer, with approximately 15.4% of the capacity of tourism structures in the country. In Romania, the present there are about 160 state and local resources that have mineral spa spa treatment, of which 15% are of national interest, the rest being of local interest.

A real problem that Romania has to compete with other states in this sector is the lack of international certifications. Along the tourist mentality has changed. No longer considered a patient, but wants to provide opportunity for recovery after the family can come out somewhere to have a certain atmosphere and various services agreement. In addition to spa services we can offer these climatology can offer these to the spa, wellness and anti-aging.

Investors seek an improvement of privatization

Employers offer a number of the facilities of tax that may be granted to investors in this sector to support the tourism, including direct collection by local authorities half the fee they receive at present, the National Agency for Mineral Resources (NAMR), changing tax law so as to provide an allocation of 5% of the counties to tourist resorts, reduced VAT package spa and health, devoting 10% of the CNPAS for treatment and health spa and waiving taxation holiday vouchers [4].

Also, employers in the industry require correction of damaging privatization of health tourism in Herculane, Malnas, Valcele, because these stations revert to the tourist circuit.

Relevant authorities have promised that we will, soon, a law that resorts to be recognized as such, because this time there is a classification of these resorts. [5]

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