

THE DYNAMIC OF EUROPEAN AND ROMANIAN ECOTOURISMS – A QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Europe occupies the first position in the field of tourism: the first half of 2011 was much more profitable than the same period of last year. In January-February 2011 268 million international arrivals were registered worldwide, approximately 12 million more than the previous year, when 256 million international arrivals were registered.

Keywords: ecotourism, Internet, Europe, Romania

JEL Classification: L83

1. Introduction

International tourism has a growth of the profit margin despite the challenges of the economic crisis, and ecotourism has registered growth as well in the past few years, of a few percents yearly, Europe being in top, as far as the number of tourists and the turnover in this sector is concerned.

In Romania ecotourism is a new branch of tourism, but there are a lot of areas where it can be practised and a lot of activities that the nature lover can do on holidays.

2. The current situation and the prospects of international tourism in the present economic context

International tourism has witnessed a growth of profit despite the challenges raised by the economic crisis: in spite of the ongoing crisis, the number of international tourist arrivals increased in the first four months of 2011, in comparison with the beginning of the year, by 4.5%. This increase was positive in all regions, according to the studies of UNWTO (the International Tourism Barometer), except for the Middle East. Some sub-regions saw significant growth, expressed in two figures: South America (+17%), South Asia (+14%) and South-East Asia (+10%).

World tourism is continuing to consolidate and grow, in comparison with 2010, irrespective of the impact of recent developments in the Middle East, North Africa,

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as well as the tragic events in Japan, which have temporarily affected the flow of tourists in these areas. In addition, there is the high unemployment rate and austerity. The sum of all these problems leads to some difficulties that these regions are facing, where governmental support is trying to ameliorate economic and social stability. In conclusion, short-term prospects remain favourable.

Europe exceeded expectations (+6%) and presented the greatest growth registered in the first four months of 2011. The results reflect belated recovery on various European markets.

For the rest of the year the prospects are growth with respect to the previous year: in the second interval of 2011 the tourism season begins in some countries and the number of international arrivals raises substantially in comparison with the anterior period. This reflects in the Trust Index calculated by UNWTO, which shows an optimistic forecast.

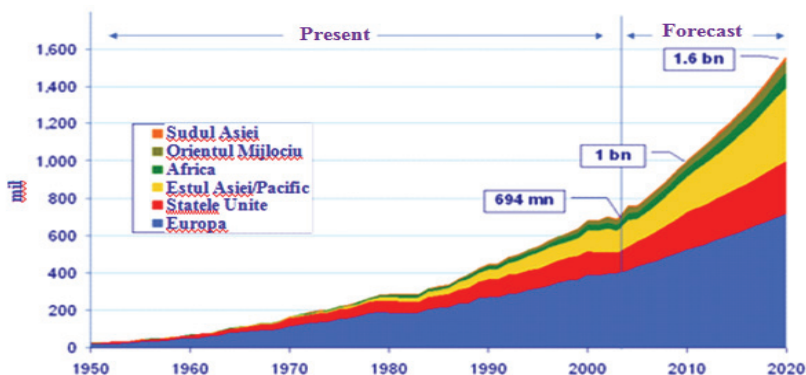
The optimism due to the calculation of the Trust Index is reassuring, especially since we are in the middle of an economic crisis and fiscal instability, both in the United States of America and in Europe.

The World Tourism Organization has developed a long-term outlook, over the first twenty years of the new millennium. The calculation has been made on an interval of twenty-five years, starting with 1995 and ending with 2020, having as basis the year 2010.

The evolution of tourism in the past few years has been fairly uneven, UNWTO (the World Tourism Organization) is nevertheless maintaining its future strategy for the moment. The trend concept for the following years will not suffer any major changes. The data collected throughout the years has shown that occasionally there has been great growth short-term (for instance in 1995, 1996, 2000) and periods with very little growth (for instance 2001-2003) (source: mkt.unwto.org)

For this little growth at the present moment a compensation is expected before long, namely it is predicted to develop into significant growth.

Chart 1: The situation of international tourist arrivals between 1950 and 2020



Sursa: World Tourism Organization (ONWTO)- <http://www.unwto.org/fa>
cts/eng/vision.htm

According to the studies performed by UNWTO, the international arrivals are expected to grow up to 1.6 billion euro by 2020. Out of this, 1.2 billion will be from intra-regional arrivals, whereas the rest of 378 million will come from long travels.

Out of the total number of tourists divided per regions, it is shown that by 2020 Europe (717 million tourists) will be in a top three position, along with East Asia and the Pacific (397 million) and the United States of America (282 million), followed by Africa, the Middle East and South Asia.

East Asia and the Pacific, Asia, the Middle East and Africa will register a growth of over five percents yearly, in comparison with a growth of 4.1% maximum in the other regions. In Europe and the United States of America a growth that exceeds that of 4.1% of the other regions is predicted. It seems that Europe will have the greatest growth.

Table no. 1: The outlook on international arrivals until 2020

	Year 1995	Forecast (million)		Market share (%)		Yearly average, growth rate (%)
		2010	2020	1995	2020	
Global level	565	1006	1561	100	100	4.1
Africa	20	47	77	3.6	5.0	5.5
The United States	110	190	282	19.3	18.1	3.8
East Asia and the Pacific	81	195	397	14.4	25.4	6.5
Europe	336	527	717	59.8	45	3.1
Middle East	14	36	69	2.2	4.4	6.7
South Asia	4	11	19	0.7	1.2	6.2

Source: World Tourism Organization (ONWTO)- <http://www.unwto.org/facts/eng/vision.htm>

From table 1, where the reference year is 1995, a forecast of international arrivals until 2020 is offered; we can notice the evolution of every region in comparison with the reference year.

A parallel was drawn between the arrivals in 1995 and those from 2010, and of 1995 with those from 2020. The results of the forecast are calculated in millions of international arrivals, the results of the market share are expressed in percentages, and the yearly average of the growth rate is also a percentage.

According to table 1, the growth registered in 2010 for all regions was between 0.7% and 59.8% despite the economic crisis that affected almost all the regions; the prognosis for 2020 is extremely optimistic, as there will be growth in comparison with 2010 in all the regions. In the last column of the table we can notice the average

by which the yearly growth rate has increased every year since 1995, and by which it will be increasing until 2020.

The European tourism industry is the most sought-for, as it represents half of the total number of international arrivals, namely the equivalent of all the other sub-regions' together.

Table 2 shows a global detailed description of international arrivals divided into sub-regions, where the yearly situation for every sub-region is presented, in comparison with the previous year as well; the registered quota, YTD (year to date) indicates the situation up until a certain date of the current year, as well as series of monthly or quarterly dates in relation to the same time interval the previous year.

The information has been centralized into three categories: advanced economies, developing economies and regionally. The regional classification has been divided into 15 regions as follows: Europe has been divided into four regions, Asia and the Pacific into four regions, America into four regions, Africa into two regions and the Middle East one region.

3.The online promotion of international ecotourism

As a result of thorough online research, a top of 34 international websites specialized on international ecotourism has been drawn.

For nature lovers and for those who like travelling, ecotourism is the perfect solution to combine two hobbies into one. Through the perspective offered by the 34 websites, those people who are keen on ecotourism can choose the best offers that suit their preferences.

The ecotourism lover may be undecided as to where to go or what budget (s)he has available. Having an extremely wide range of services to choose from, (s)he will become even more confused, after prospecting the market, as the offer is so varied that it is very difficult to pick out only one destination if his/her time is limited.

Blogs are becoming an increasingly popular source for Internet users. Specialized ecotourism blogs are a very efficient informational tool as far as ecotourism is concerned.

Blogs are user-friendly websites where ideas, photographs, video and audio recordings are posted, and a virtual space where one can communicate with the other users that are interested in the same subject.

Ever since the first blogs, the Internet has been remodelled according to these, as they have given the users a voice and the possibility to come in contact with one another. The main attribute of a blog and its motto is "to communicate".

If the client does not wish to visit a particular country and wants to have certain activities (s)he may choose from one of the activities that are specific to ecotourism, such as: an adventure holiday, an archaeological holiday, cycling, ski, snowboarding, backpacking, car tours, castle visitation, horse races, a culinary holiday, a cultural holiday, an educational holiday, holidays that are classified according to age, health and beauty holidays, hiking, balloon rides, ice climbing, kayaking, motorcycle rides, mountain biking, climbing, a multisports holiday, a national park visitation, a

photography tour, a polar expedition, a navigation holiday, a spiritual holiday, a supernatural tour, surfing, camping, volunteering, nature walks, river rafting, wilderness tours, wineculture, yachting.

If we take France as an example, it has as ecotourist destinations the following: Amboise, Loire Valley, the Pyrenees Mountains, Beaune, Burgundy, Cluny, Dijon, Monbazillac, Dordogne, Pomerol, Gironde, Sarlat, Aquitaine, Florac, Languedoc, Languedoc-Roussillon, Midi-Pyrenees, Rocamadour, Lot, Saint-Vino-d'Olt.

An two-week ecotourism holiday in France that includes accommodation, meals and sightseeing or other excursions and environmental protection campaigns costs around 1000-3000 euro per person, a fairly big price.

In the case of Italy, the ecotourism destinations are: Assisi, Umbria, Chianti, Tuscany, Perugia, San Gimignano, Siena, Spoleto, Lake Como, Lombardy, Ossola, Piedmont, Venice.

A two-week holiday costs around 1000-4000 euro per person without extra costs from the client.

In Austria the tourism destinations are: the Danube Valley, Enns, Upper, Krems an der Donau, Lower, Melk, Steyr, Vienna, Wachau, Altaussee, Styria, Hallstatt, Mondsee, Salzkammergut, Salzburg, Steyr.

The price of a one-week ecotourism holiday in Austria varies between 500-1500 euro for one person.

4.The current situation and prospects regarding Romanian ecotourism

Romania has an extremely diversified natural capital. This diversity is in part due to the physical-geographical conditions, including mountains, plains, hills, the Danube Delta, rivers and lakes. The valuable natural capital of Romania consists in 579 protected areas (out of which 13 national parks).

Romania's ecotourism destinations are: Braşov, Transylvania, Bucovina, the Eastern, Middle and Western Carpathians, the Danube Delta, Humorului Monastery and others from Moldavia, Suceava, Maramureş, Sugatag Mine, Poenari Castle, Argeş, Cluj, Sighetu Marmăţiei, Felix Bath, Slănic Prahova, Slănic Moldova, Vidra, Vidraru, the Iron Gates, Sadu River, Sighişoara, Bran, Sărata-Monteoru, Nerei Valley, Sibiu Mine, Călimăneşti, Sovata, etc.

The types of ecotourism activities in Romania are hiking, wilderness trips, horse riding, cycling, aqua activities, winter activities, speleology, photography tours.

As one can see in the enumeration of Romanian ecotourism destinations above, there are a lot of areas where ecotourism is practised, along with other activities that the nature lover can perform during the holidays.

The price for a two-week holiday posted on international websites, blogs and forums is between 1000-2000 euro for one person, and the current offers are very few, which makes Romania a destination that few people choose.

On the other hand, if those who are interested in ecotourism look for offers on the Romanian websites, they will find a much larger array of ecotourism offers (in mountainous areas, hill areas, the Delta, caves, monasteries, the seaside, accumulation

lakes, saline lakes, thermal waters, virgin territories, picturesque landscapes, which are unique in Europe or even in the world) at very small prices in comparison with other European destinations.

The major disadvantage of Romanian ecotourism is the low number of appearances on the international websites, blogs and forums, which would promote Romanian destinations on a much wider scale.

Another disadvantage is the fact that most ecotourism promotion websites are in Romanian, which makes them incomprehensible to a lot of people.

In order to increase the number of tourists we should have a wider range of offers on international websites, but, moreover, the existing ecotourism websites from Romania ought to be translated in more international languages.

One of Romania's major advantages, which is not yet fully exploited, is the low price of excursions in comparison with those of European competition, whose prices are two or three times bigger.

Nowadays, when the economic crisis has affected all peoples, the prices that Romania has for its ecotourism holidays should attract a lot of visitors. A two-week holiday costs no more than 700-1000 euro per person, which is very little if we compare it to the salaries that Europeans earn.

A disadvantage for Romania is the lack of auto infrastructure, which impacts traffic and implicitly represents a significant drawback, favouring the choice of another ecotourism destination. However, with good promotion with very low prices it can still be a destination sought by a lot of Europeans.

Ecotourism programs in Romania are relatively recent. The first such tourism packages appeared around 2000, when some national or natural parks began to develop projects that had an ecotourism component (Retezat, Piatra Craiului, Vânători Neamț, Apusenii).

The ecotourism programs in Romania are sold through local tour operators, which usually collaborate with tour operators from abroad. Among these, there are five prominent tour operators that sell ecotourism programs that are certified by the Romanian Ecotourism Association (DiscoverRomania, Carpathian Tours, InterPares, Tioc Nature & Study Travel, Equus Sylvania). Among the major Romanian tourism agencies that have developed packages in the middle of nature in the past few years we may mention Paralela 45, J'Info Tours, Perfect Tour, Transylvania Tour etc.

5. Conclusions

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Romanian ecotourism has a low number of appearances on the international websites, blogs and forums, which would promote Romanian destinations on a much wider scale. Also, a large number of the promotional websites are in Romanian, and thus a lot of foreign people cannot understand their messages. In order to increase the number of tourists, there has to be a wider variety of offers on international websites, and, moreover, the existing ecotourism websites from Romania must be translated in more international languages.

A major advantage of Romania, which nevertheless remains unexploited fully, is the low price of the packages, two or three times lower than that of the competition, and nowadays, when the economic crisis has affected all the countries, these prices should attract a lot of visitors.

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