

## THE TOURIST DEMAND AND THE TOURISTIC OFFER OF THE ROMANIAN CLIMATIC AND SPA RESORTS

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**Abstract:** *The exceptional balneological and climate potential of our country is proven by the existence of more than 160 localities with natural therapeutic factors (mineral and thermal springs, therapeutic lakes, salines, therapeutic muds, mofettes, the Black Sea water and the seaside bioclimate), but only some of them have been declared tourist resorts, spas or climatic resorts, according to the legislation in effect. Romania has 108 certified tourist resorts, 47 of national interest and 61 of local interest, out of which 59 spa and climatic resorts, 37 climatic resorts and 6 spas (but not all of them are certified as spas or climatic resorts yet). The accommodation units in spa resorts represent 7.3% of the total number of accommodation units in Romania, but their number has increased significantly in the latest three years. Tourists' arrivals in the Romanian spa resorts account for only 6.48% of total tourists' arrivals in Romania, meaning 787,947 tourists (most being Romanian tourists, 94.5%). The balneological tourism has increasingly become an important economic and marketing strategy for hoteliers and tourist destinations to attract tourist visitations.*

**Keywords:** Romania, Tourism, Tourist demand, Touristic offer, Climatic resort, Spa, Balneotherapy.

**JEL Classification Codes:** Z320, Z300, O140.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The exceptional balneological and climate potential of our country is proven by the existence of more than 160 localities with natural therapeutic factors (mineral and thermal springs, therapeutic lakes, salines, therapeutic muds, mofettes, the Black Sea water and the seaside bioclimate), but only some of them have been declared tourist resorts, spas or climatic resorts, according to the legislation in effect (certified tourist resorts of national or local interest by the Government Decisions nos. 1122/2002, 867/2006, 852/2008, 848/2009, 1204/2009, 1205/2009, 511/2010, 1181/2011, 1161/2012, 1072/2013, 58/2017; certified spas according to the Government Decisions nos. 1016/2011, 1072/2013; certified climatic and spa resort, according to the Government Decisions nos. 1016/2011, 1072/2013, 107/2018).

In most cases, although the resort has been in operation for a long time, the necessary documentation for certification has not been prepared and submitted by the local authorities. In other cases, some resorts are certified only as tourist resorts. Of course, there are many resorts with natural therapeutic factors that have modest tourist facilities (many deactivated), so that they do not to meet the terms of certification as tourist resorts - yet the existing tourist facilities and the therapeutic resources are used by the locals.



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The mineral and thermal springs are the main natural therapeutic resources of Romania, both through the volume of reserves and their recognized therapeutic qualities, nationally and internationally (Cândea, Erdeli, Simon & Peptenatu, 2003, p.134). These mineral springs generated one of the oldest forms of tourism (balneological or spa tourism), being used for both internal and external therapy, as well as for bottling (table water). From a quantitative point of view, one third of Europe's mineral water reserves are located in Romania, and from a qualitative point of view, the scientifically proven therapeutic value of Romanian mineral waters is similar or even superior to the springs of the famous resorts Baden-Baden (Germany), Karlovy-Vary (the Czech Republic), Bolzano, Abano Terme (Italy), Amnéville (France), Bad Gastein (Austria).

The Romanian legislation distinguishes between 3 types of tourist resorts, based on the criterion of tourism function - Tourism Law Project 2010-2015 (and other prior regulations, such as the Government Decisions nos. 112/2002, 867/2006, and 852/2008): spas, climatic and spa, and climatic resorts. These resorts have mineral resources and benefic climatic factors, proven and traditionally recognized as therapeutically effective, specific facilities for therapy, organized to provide healthcare in adequate conditions, as well as certified accommodation facilities.

Romania has 108 certified tourist resorts, 47 of national interest and 61 of local interest. The most numerous are the mountain resorts (59), followed by hill and plateau resorts (26), seaside resorts (13) and plain resorts (10), out of which 59 spa and climatic resorts, 37 climatic resorts and 6 spas (but not all of them are certified as spas or climatic resorts yet). In addition, these resorts have rest and leisure functions, such as one or more of the following: hiking to admire landscapes or protected areas (including ecotourism), practicing sports (winter sports, water sports, mountaineering, caving, paragliding, etc.), hunting and fishing, visiting anthropic tourist spots (including those related to rural tourism) nearby.

The *mountain resorts* are the most numerous (over 50% of total tourist resorts), due to the great natural potential of the Romanian Carpathians (alpine and mountain landscapes, rivers and lakes, bioclimate, mineral waters, ski areas, karst relief, national and natural parks, Biosphere reserves, fishing and hunting). Depending on the form of tourism practiced, they can be classified in climatic, spa and climatic, and rest and leisure resorts. We mention that all mountain resorts are climatic by definition (the mountain bioclimate favors climatotherapy). 21 of them are spa and climatic resorts, because they developed starting from their mineral and thermal waters, some of them being used since antiquity (Simoni, 2017).

The *hill and plateau resorts* are mostly balneo-climatic, with permanent activity, due to the rich mineral water resources (most of them are salty and sulphurous waters, plus iodate, sulphate, ferugine waters, etc.), sedative bioclimate, and additional therapeutic salines. These resorts have old traditions in balneotherapy, and some of them are world renowned. They developed especially in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and after the Revolution in December 1989, some of them continued to grow, but a few declined due to lack of investors and faulty management (Simoni, 2017).

The *plain resorts* are spas or spa and climatic resorts, linked either to the mineral (carbonated or thermal) waters in the western plains, or to the salty lakes in the southern ones, to which we add Lake Snagov for leisure activities. Most of them (7) are small resorts and the majority are open permanently (Simoni, 2017).

The seaside resorts are, of course, all spa and climatic resorts (based on some valuable therapeutic resources: sea water, seaside bioclimate, and therapeutic mud from the lakes Techirghiol and Mangalia (Simoni, 2017).

## 2. THE TOURISTIC OFFER OF THE ROMANIAN CLIMATIC AND SPA RESORTS

The spatial organization of production within enterprises includes a set of problems that can be systematized on three main areas, namely:

The most recent data (2017) on the accommodation offer, provided by the National Institute of Statistics, shows that the spa resorts (excluding the seaside resorts) account for 7.3% of the total number of accommodation units in Romania, respectively 577 units. The most numerous are (table 1): the tourist boarding houses (200), followed by hotels (132), tourist villas (84), bungalows (57) and agro-tourist boarding houses (35). The number of accommodation units in spas has increased significantly (with 98 units) over the latest three years: from 479 units in 2015, to 486 units in 2016, and 577 units in 2017.

**Table 1. Tourist accommodation units in spas, compared to the national situation, in 2017**

<i>Type of accommodation unit</i>	<i>Total Romania</i>	<i>Spas</i>	<i>Share of total (%)</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,905</b>	<b>577</b>	<b>7.30</b>
Tourist boarding houses	1,666	200	12.00
Hotels	1,597	132	8.27
Bungalows	659	84	12.75
Tourist villas	434	57	13.13
Agro-tourist boarding houses	2,556	45	1.76
Motels	222	15	6.76
Hostels	300	10	3.33
Tourist chalets	225	8	3.56
Camping sites	57	8	14.04
School and pre-school camps	57	7	12.28
Houselet-type units	70	6	8.57
Tourist halting places	40	5	12.50
Tourist inns	3	0	0.00
Holiday villages	9	0	0.00
Ship accommodation places	10	0	0.00

*Source: processed data from Romanian Tourism. Statistical Abstract, National Institute of Statistics, 2018*

The accommodation capacity of spas represents 10.66% of total accommodation capacity of Romania, respectively 36,631 beds. The most numerous are in hotels (25,982 beds), followed by tourist boarding houses (4,063 beds), tourist villas, agro-tourist boarding houses and school

and pre-school camps (table 2). The accommodation capacity of spas has increased by 1,289 beds during the latest three years (2015-2017).

**Table 2. The accommodation capacity (number of beds) of spas, compared to the national situation, in 2017**

<i>Type of accommodation unit</i>	<i>Total Romania</i>	<i>Spas</i>	<i>Share of total (%)</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>343,720</b>	<b>36,631</b>	<b>10.66</b>
Hotels	194,884	25,982	13.33
Tourist boarding houses	34,816	4,063	11.67
Tourist villas	15,255	1,773	11.62
Agro-tourist boarding houses	44,499	946	2.13
Camping sites	8,784	760	8.65
School and pre-school camps	6,436	751	11.67
Motels	8,902	541	6.08
Hostels	14,211	513	3.61
Houselet-type units	2,848	448	15.73
Tourist halting places	1,919	378	19.70
Bungalows	3,554	271	7.63
Tourist chalets	6,503	205	3.15
Tourist inns	63	0	0.00
Holiday villages	539	0	0.00
Ship accommodation places	507	0	0.00

*Source: processed data from Romanian Tourism. Statistical Abstract, National Institute of Statistics, 2018*

### 3. THE TOURIST DEMAND OF THE ROMANIAN CLIMATIC AND SPA RESORTS

Tourists' arrivals in the Romanian spas (excluding the seaside resorts) represent only 6.48% (787,947 tourists) of the total tourists' arrivals in Romania, in 2017 (according to the latest data provided by the National Institute of Statistics). Due to a modest and undiversified offer, as well as a poor promotion of the Romanian balneological tourism, only 5.5% of these tourists are foreigners, and most tourists are Romanians (94.5%) - table 3.

**Table 3. The evolution of tourists' arrivals in the Romanian spas, over the last 3 years**

<i>Year</i>	<i>2015</i>	<i>2016</i>	<i>2017</i>
<b>Total tourists</b>	<b>787,947</b>	<b>851,040</b>	<b>945,257</b>
Romanian tourists	744,491	804,955	896,515
Foreign tourists	43,456	46,085	48,742

Source: processed data from Romanian Tourism. Statistical Abstract, National Institute of Statistics, 2016, 2017, 2018

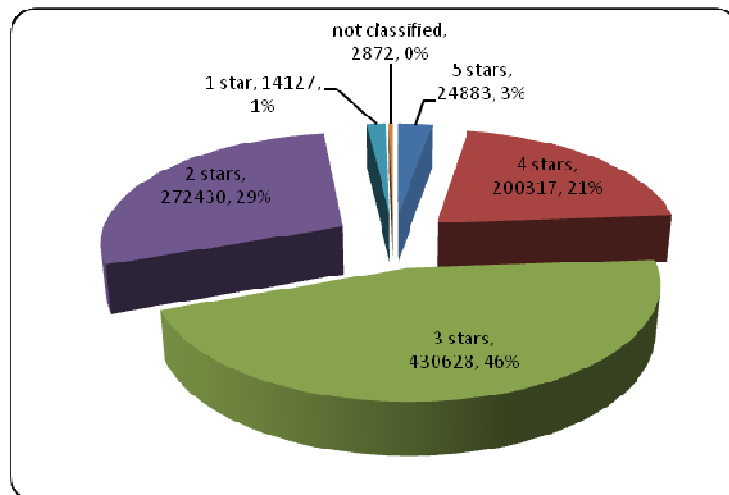
The structure of the tourists' arrivals in the Romanian spas by category of comfort shows a correlation of supply with demand: almost half of tourists preferred 3 star (46%), then 2 star (39%) and 4 star accommodation units (21%), and low shares for 5 star (3%), 1 star (1%) or unclassified accommodation units (table 4, figure 1).

**Table 4. The structure of tourists' arrivals in the Romanian spas, by accommodation unit and category of comfort, in 2017**

	<i>Total</i>	<i>5 stars</i>	<i>4 stars</i>	<i>3 stars</i>	<i>2 stars</i>	<i>1 star</i>	<i>Not classified</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>945,257</b>	<b>24,883</b>	<b>200,317</b>	<b>430,628</b>	<b>272,430</b>	<b>14,127</b>	<b>2,872</b>
<i>Romanians</i>	896,515	24,191	180,943	413,354	261,733	13,422	-
<i>Foreigners</i>	48,742	692	19,374	17,274	10,697	705	-
Hotels	721,652	22,742	183,911	300,398	213,863	738	-
<i>Romanians</i>	689,931	22,090	165,571	292,692	208,840	738	-
<i>Foreigners</i>	31,721	652	18,340	7,706	5,023	-	-
Motels	14,508	-	-	8,360	6,148	-	-
<i>Romanians</i>	13,882	-	-	7,734	6,148	-	-
<i>Foreigners</i>	626	-	-	626	-	-	-
Hostels	12,556	-	-	4,206	8,350	-	-
<i>Romanians</i>	9,924	-	-	4,128	5,796	-	-
<i>Foreigners</i>	2,632	-	-	78	2,554	-	-
Tourist villas	46,023	250	1,415	29,983	14,136	239	-
<i>Romanians</i>	44,848	234	1,353	29,230	13,859	172	-

<i>Foreigners</i>	1,175	16	62	753	277	67	-
Bungalows	2,006	-	-	470	62	1,474	-
<i>Romanians</i>	1,824	-	-	383	62	1,397	-
<i>Foreigners</i>	164	-	-	87	-	77	-
Tourist chalets	1,843	-	-	862	63	918	-
<i>Romanians</i>	1,789	-	-	839	32	918	-
<i>Foreigners</i>	54	-	-	23	31	-	-
Camping sites	3,824	-	-	-	2,703	1,121	-
<i>Romanians</i>	3,143	-	-	-	2,104	1,039	-
<i>Foreigners</i>	681	-	-	-	599	82	-
School and pre-school camps	5,076	-	-	-	-	2,551	2,525
<i>Romanians</i>	5,076	-	-	-	-	2,551	2,525
<i>Foreigners</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tourist halting places	7,988	-	-	-	2,544	5,444	-
<i>Romanians</i>	7,779	-	-	-	2,493	5,286	-
<i>Foreigners</i>	209	-	-	-	51	158	-
Tourist boarding houses	88,894	1,891	13,353	50,621	22,507	522	-
<i>Romanians</i>	82,744	1,867	12,484	47,519	20,382	495	-
<i>Foreigners</i>	6,150	24	869	3,105	2,125	27	-
Agro-tourist boarding houses	39,037	-	1,638	35,488	1,911	-	-
<i>Romanians</i>	34,013	-	1,535	30,592	1,886	-	-
<i>Foreigners</i>	5,024	-	103	4,896	25	-	-
Houselet-type units	1,850	-	-	240	143	1,120	347
<i>Romanians</i>	1,544	-	-	240	131	826	347
<i>Foreigners</i>	306	-	-	-	12	294	-

Source: processed data from Romanian Tourism. Statistical Abstract, National Institute of Statistics, 2018



**Figure 1. The structure of tourists' arrivals in the Romanian spas, by category of comfort, in 2017**

*Source: processed data from Romanian Tourism. Statistical Abstract, National Institute of Statistics, 2018*

First there are considered the tendencies of demand on international markets, in balneal tourism and on potential markets, defined by certain characteristics as number of potentials tourists. Health tourism is a recreational, therapeutic system (Mezei, 2011).

However, in Romania one can refer more to a latent demand, and, in addition, consumers do not know or are not interested in the product, due to the lack of attitude towards the need for treatment, with no health preservation perspective (Stăncioiu, Băltescu, Botoș, Pârgaru, 2013). Health and spa tourism has increasingly become an important economic and marketing strategy for hoteliers, resorts and tourist destinations to attract tourist visitations.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

At present, Romania has a significant number of 108 certified tourist resorts, out of which 47 of national interest and 61 of local interest, but not all of them are certified as spas or climatic resorts, according to the legislation in effect. Romania has a high climatic and balneological potential, proven by the existence of 59 spa and climatic resorts, 37 climatic resorts and 6 spas. In addition, these resorts have rest and leisure functions, offering the possibility of practicing various forms of tourism.

The touristic offer of the Romanian climatic and spa resorts represents 7.3% of the total number of accommodation units in Romania, respectively 577 units, and this number has increased significantly in the latest three years. The accommodation capacity of spas represents 10.66% of total accommodation capacity of Romania, respectively 36,631 beds. The most numerous are in hotels, boarding houses, tourist villas, agro-tourist boarding houses and school and pre-school camps

Tourists' arrivals in the Romanian spa resorts account for only 6.48% of total tourists' arrivals in Romania, meaning 787,947 tourists (most being Romanian tourists, 94.5%), due to a modest and undiversified offer and a poor promotion of the Romanian balneological tourism.

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