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The effect of packages on wellness tourism in Eastern Hungary, North Great Plain Region and Romania's Bihor Region

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Abstract: Hungary and Romania have both abundant sources of mineral and medicinal water. Primary wellness tourism is traditionally based on thermal spas, but other recreational and gastrocultural opportunities are necessary to attract further visitors. The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the availability of complex (fitness-wellness) packages in wellness hotels at Hajdú-Bihar county, North Great Plain Region, Hungary and in some extent Bihor county, Romania. The secondary aim was to examine the possible effect of these packages on local tourism. Twenty-two hotels responded positively to our survey, which represents a reasonably good, over 50 % return rate majority of them above 90 % offer some kind of wellness options (spa, cosmetical, medical or alternative therapies). Very few hotels had some kind of fitness facility. Among medical or other alternative therapies acupuncture, Bach therapy, Kneipp therapy, chiropractic options are the most popular. Recreational or outdoor activities are very few among the hotels participating in our survey. We may conclude that one prospective way to boost touristic revenues related to health and wellness is to introduce or further develop packages. Combining fitness-wellness, recreational, therapeutic, cultural and gastronomic options or services may be the key to attract further visitors to our region.

Keywords: Wellness tourism, Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion, packages

Introduction

The health and wellness tourism area are an ever-growing industry in Hungary, in Romania and across the world. Today people are actively travelling to destinations where thermal bath, fitness and other therapeutically facilities are abundant. There is a huge competition among destinations in our region and in all over Europe too (Árpási, 2014). Hungary and Romania both respected for its rich mineral and medicinal water sources. In Hungary alone, 1372 thermal water source, 51 certified medical spas may be found Rátz & Michalkó (2010), Romania possesses 30 percent of all thermal waters found in Europe. Hajdú-Bihar and neighboring Bihor county (Romania) share a lot in common, as in 2002 the Bihor-Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion was settled (Badulescu et al., 2014). Famous thermal bath facilities, and destinations Hajdúszoboszló, Debrecen, Oradea (Nagyvárad), Baile Felix (Félicsfürdő) available in this historically joint area ^{1, 2, 3}. According to available recent statistical data on regional allocation and share of different kinds of spas in Hungary, the North Great Plain Region have one of the highest number of facilities (Fig. 1) of its kind (Csapó & Marton, 2017).

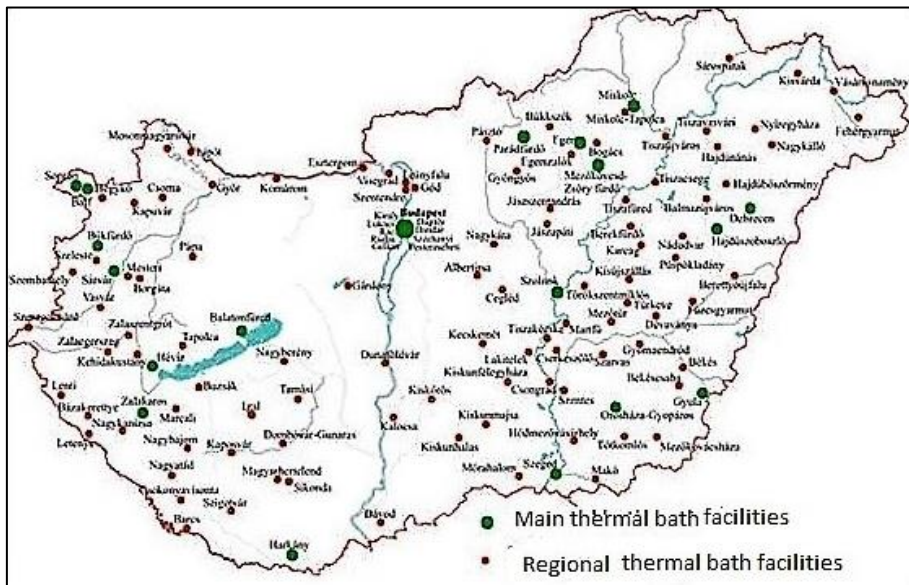


Figure 1. The distribution thermal bath facilities in Hungary (VITUKI)

Most of the people visiting this place are seeking remedies, or medical treatment, younger generations are interested in recreational-fitness programs to. According to Ruszinkó (2006) wellness tourism has great potential for growth. People participating in health and wellness tourism are tend to spend an average 30-35 % more on their trip compared to „ordinary” travelers. According to Global Wellness Institute wellness traveler’s spending are even 61% more than the average

¹ <http://romaniatourism.com/spa-romania-baile-felix.html>

² <http://romaniatourism.com/oradea>

³ <http://tourofbihor.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Discover-Bihor-County.pdf>

holiday-seekers⁴. This spending's may be as high as 1300-1600 Euro per trip⁵ European travelers are actively integrating health and wellness elements into their trips. They tend to choose hotels that offer wide range of health-oriented, recreational, gastronomic activities. This is called „secondary wellness tourism”, this sector between 2013 and 2015, demonstrated a sharp increase (20%) in the number of trips and further (16%) growth in the amount of expenditures. Although traditional, primary wellness tourism, also increased but in a much slower rate, by 2% and 5% respectively.

The advantages of wellness tourism

One of the biggest advantage of wellness tourism that it is not seasonal. These tourists may visit destinations any time of the year, regardless of the season. Not only summer but autumn, and winter may also be popular time of a trip. Travelers usually take a week off for sightseeing or having fun in the beachside. A complete health-wellness therapy may take weeks, this is why the spending of these visitors may be significantly higher compared with other tourists. Beside using therapeutic facilities, these types of visitors will likely to use beauty services (cosmetics, facial therapy etc.) and fitness facilities too. They will also generate income for local restaurants, and shops. This way, shop and restaurant-owners will benefit from health tourism. The motivation for travel may be for therapeutic, medical wellness purposes for wellness in general or using a spa facility. Majority of tourists primarily visiting our region are coming from Western European countries such as Germany and Austria, former Eastern Bloc (Ukraine and Russia, Slovakia, Romania) residents are also traditionally attracted to our region. Although domestic tourism has grown significantly in recent years (Central Institute of Statistics, 2013-2017).

The purpose of this study

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the availability of complex (fitness-wellness) packages in wellness hotels at Hajdú-Bihar county, North Great Plain Region, Hungary and in some extent Bihor county, Romania. The secondary aim was to examine the possible effect of these packages on local tourism.

Material and methods

We thoroughly examined available statistical data (from year 2013 to 2017) on the number of nights spend in a hotel by either domestic or foreign travelers. derived from KSH years (Central Institute of Statistics, 2013-2017) databases. We were specifically focusing on Hajdú-Bihar county, for this reason we created our own questionnaire, we send the survey electronically to a defined list of hotels offering therapeutically and/or wellness services. After several additional notices an phone calls twenty-two of the hotels responded to our survey.

Three to five stars „wellness hotels” with wellness and wider range of wellness offers and other small-scale hotels with only a few options were included.

⁴ <https://www.globalwellnessinstitute.org>

⁵ <https://www.cbi.eu/market-information/tourism/physical-wellness-tourism/europe/>

These hotels are precisely defined by the Hungarian law. According to statute 54/2003. (VIII.29.) these hotels must have qualified personnel responsible for managing and running wellness and recreational services. Must offer services related to the area of health promotion including gastronomy, recreation, and wellness, and further provide some kind of social programme for visitors (Csizmadia, 1996; Gyórfy, 2004). These facilities often feature so-called package services comprising sporting, beauty/medical, nutrition/diet, relaxation/meditation and mental activity/education offers and activities (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). We found it difficult to draw any conclusions about Bihar County's degree of wellness tourism, because the number of English language resources are quite scarce. Researchers such as Borma (2015), Badulescu et al., (2014) and in some extent Soare & Zugravu (2013) investigated this topic.

Results

Twenty-two hotels responded positively to our survey, which represents a reasonably good, over 50 % return rate. Majority of them above 90 % offer some kind of wellness options (spa, cosmetically, medical or alternative therapies). However, the available options reflected only a limited number of offers like spa (bathing, sauna) facilities, beauty (cosmetics, facial and body massage, hair-dresser, manicure etc.) services. Very few hotels had some kind of fitness facility (a room or a smaller scale fitness center). Among medical or other alternative therapies acupuncture, Bach therapy, Knapp therapy, chiropractic options are the most popular. Recreational or outdoor activities are very few among the hotels participating in our survey.

Conclusions

One prospective way to boost touristic revenues related to health and wellness is to introduce or further develop packages. Combining fitness-wellness, recreational, therapeutic, cultural and gastronomic options or services may be the key to attract further visitors to our region. Discounts may be obtained for travelers who visit a spa facility, later go out for a lunch, on the next day visit a fitness facility or a gym for having a good workout (Pucsok, unpub. res. 2010). A similar discount card system has been introduced in the city of Debrecen, which enables cardholders to use a wide variety of services (museums, restaurants, shops, fitness centers, spa facilities) in discounted price. Variety of packages may increase the number of tourists visiting hotels with wellness facilities, although it is difficult to prove statistical relationship between them. The lack of recreational outdoor (Nordic walking, trekking, mountain biking, yoga, etc.) options - at least in the examined region, may distract younger, middle-aged visitors. Adventure is becoming an increasingly important aspect of wellness tourism. Especially younger wellness tourists are attracted to outdoor adventures, which may be primary elements of their holiday. Nowadays, visitors are likely to add adventurous activities to their traditional wellness packages, which includes massage, meditation and hot spring bathing experiences ⁶.

⁶ <https://www.cbi.eu/market-information/tourism/physical-wellness-tourism/europe/>

In the future it would be beneficial to discover the area of wellness tourism, not only locally but include other regions too. Common background and capabilities require joint actions to attract more tourists and to boost revenue in this area. It would be interesting to discover any different or similar trends, tendencies in these regions, in order to further develop facilities, and infrastructure of the hotels.

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