

THE NEED FOR PASSING FROM BALNEARY TOURISM TO SPA TOURISM IN MOUNTAINOUS BANAT

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents the results of the study on new trends in health tourism, from traditional balneary tourism to modern SPA tourism (health by water). The SWOT analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats was carried out on the status of Baile Herculane spa resort in Caraș-Severin county. The new forms of SPA tourism constitute "niche tourism" addressed to relatively small groups of tourists, but very "demanding" and therefore a new approach to the tourist offer is needed to surprise the visitors. Tourists will come "for the sake of experience" and, after the experience is lived, they leave as friends of these places and people. If the tourists leave as friends of these lands, the hosts will be grateful. If they come back accompanied by other friends or acquaintances, then this shall be an accomplishment for all!

KEYWORDS: *balneary tourism, SPA tourism, tourist, visitor, touristic marketing, online marketing*

1. PREMISES

*It is not that we could not see the solution,
The trouble is we cannot see the problem.*
[P.G.]

Tourism for health is no longer a privilege for rich people and today it has become one of the most sought-after forms of tourism in the European Union and in the world. The first forms of utilisation of the natural factors therapeutic properties go far back in time and are related to bathing in thermal waters. Practical experience has taught man that certain pains or illnesses can be treated or alleviated with the help of certain hot or cold mineral waters, certain plants, or in places characterised by a special climate.

People in modern society, subjected to a rhythm of life more alert than the previous generations, are strained in increasingly complex activities as they pass to the information society. It is well-known that both in the world and in our country there is an increase in life expectancy, which also implies an increasing stress on the organism, especially in the urban environment.

In contemporary society, modern man has reduced his physical effort in both work and travel, using more and more modern means of transportation, which leads to a sedentary life. All these aspects are in the attention of contemporary medicine, which struggles to find remedies for preventing and combating the consequences of modern living on human health. Under such conditions, health holidays and balneoclimatic curative treatment become an integral part of the health care system

An appeal to this effect is given by the preoccupations of the W.H.O. (World Health Organization) in recent years about the use and valorisation of natural therapeutic factors.

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2. THE ISSUES FORWARDED

One of the important aspects of balneary tourism is given by the fact that at present there is no unitary vision among specialists on the concept of balneary tourism, medical healing and wellness.

Health is defined by WHO (World Health Organization) as being "the physical, mental and social well-being, and more than just the presence of the disease."

Health tourism includes several activities that involve health either indirectly (sun and fun!) or directly through medical treatment, sauna and massage. All these activities have "inflection points" towards other forms of tourism such as recreational, adventure, sports, medical, wellness tourism etc. On the level of collective perception, health tourism is understood under two main aspects, medical and curative, and means "physical, medical healing by therapeutic waters and spa's" (Figure 1)

	HEALTH TOURISM				
MEDICAL TOURISM (therapeutic, dentistry etc.)			WELLNESS TOURISM (rest, relaxation, recreation etc)		
Secondary prophylactic cures	BALNEARY TOURISM				Primary prophylactic cures
Medical recovery cures	Treatment and hiking	Balneo-climatic cures	Sport and fitness		Beauty cures

Figure no 1. Health tourism

From the health tourism matrix we can see that it involves medical recovery cures, as well as balneo-climactic cures and prophylactic cures, as well as balneary treatments, beauty treatments, sports and tourism.

Balneary tourism is seen and understood as a specific form of leisure tourism, which, "along with the diseases caused by the stress of modern life, has exhibited a significant development." (Stăncioiu, 2013, p.127). This perception is also due to the fact that tourists come to balneary-climactic resorts as *patients* who want to heal or alleviate certain conditions that can be treated with spa resorts procedures in the resort. If in the past the touristic product of a balneary resort included treatment cures in the presence of a physician, today the product offered is completed by beauty and maintenance treatments and procedures. Health and recreation are equally sought.

3. THE CORE OF THE PROBLEM

The main reason for the existence of balneary tourism in Mountainous Banat is a real one, given by the quality of mineral and thermal waters. It is necessary, however, to reposition the balneary tourism from tourism for the masses, for the elderly and the "trade unionists", to niche tourism that involves balneo-climactic therapeutic cures, as well as medical recovery cures, as well as beauty treatments, sports, fitness, hiking and meditation. For each of these possible balneary tourism products one can detect the right form of niche tourism, with all basic services (transport, accommodation, meal, treatment and leisure), complementary services and additional services.

Nowadays, **tourism** is exhibiting a broad development under the "umbrella" of the concept of *tourism for health* through the three niche forms: *balneary-medical-wellness (SPA)*. Internationally, spa resort standards are continually improving, with full package tours of health care services. In Europe there are several famous countries for spa tourism such as: Switzerland, Austria, Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland Hungary and Romania.

Over a third of Europe's mineral waters are found in Romania. Some of them are plain waters, others are hot waters, many are radioactive waters. Besides, grace to Baile Herculane resort (1855 years since the first attestation on a votive plaque of the baths - 153 AD), Romania can be considered, rightly, a founding country of spa tourism. Moreover, in the 1970s and '80s of the twentieth century, Romania won the fame of country of "youth without old age", grace to the therapy with the medical products designed by the scientist Ana Aslan form the Gerovital range. In Romania, by Government Decision no. 852/2008 one approved the norms and criteria for the attestation of touristic resorts and these are classified into:

1. *Balneo-climacteric resorts;*
2. *Climacteric resorts,*

and by Government Decision no. 1016/2011 one granted the status of spa resort or balneoclimatic resort to the main touristic resorts in the country.

Wellness tourism is defined as being "*all journeys taken in order to maintain well-being and good health.*" (Popovici, 2017). It can be described in one word: revival! Today, wellness tourism is the most promising form of niche tourism in Romania. The concept of wellness has a prophylactic value rather than a curative value and aims to prevent and not cure or recover from illness, as is the case in medical tourism.

Wellness tourists are looking for "youth without old age" through beauty treatments and a healthy lifestyle, unlike the tourists who aim to take a cure for a disease.

While medical tourism and wellness tourism are always discussed and offered together, they are distinguished by consumption. If medical tourism is sought after by those who want to pursue a cure for healing a disease, as a "reaction" to the emergence of a disease, health-promoting tourism is sought after by those who want to "prevent" the disease and eventually change the unhealthy lifestyle.

According to specialised studies (Hall, M.), depending to the nature of the motivations, there are three types of wellness tourists:

- *tourists looking for beauty treatments;*
- *tourists looking for a healthy lifestyle in close connection with their health;*
- *tourists seeking peace through spiritual retreat.*

Beauty treatments aim at body care by massage, sauna, jacuzzi relaxation, pampering through baths and wrappings. Sports and fitness activities encourage the importance of personalised diet and nutrition through programs designed to help giving up some harmful habits and lifestyle, such as smoking. Vacations for relieving stress and finding the desired tranquillity have the central activity of meditation through exercises combined with games.

Balneary resorts are important touristic destinations, especially for those who are looking for health treatment cures and rejuvenation and beauty services. And modern spa tourism is developing more and more through the concept of SPA - health by water!

The term SPA comes from Latin by the term "sanitas per aquam" which means health by water. Spa tourism through SPA centres includes revitalizing services at high standards, with a wide range of procedures and treatments, organised and coordinated according to the principles of preventive and curative medicine. That's why this modern form of spa tourism is also called tourism for health, revitalisation and relaxation. Balneary resorts with SPA centres are usually located in a place that offers natural beauty and man-made things meant help the tourist disconnect from everyday stress and offer a complete program of water therapy, nutrition based on healthy principles, beauty and relaxation treatments and the practice of sports for both recovery and maintenance of a desired physical state.

It is increasingly obvious that balneary tourism is making a strong comeback by its niche form, SPA tourism. It is increasingly sought because of the ideal combination of travel and the benefits it offers both physically and mentally. At the same time balneary tourism through SPA centres is constantly developing because of daily stress, tourists attempt to relax with various treatments offered by the SPAs around the world. As touristic locations, today's SPA centres have their origins in the Roman period, such as:

- *BadenBaden in Germany, known under the name of Aquae-Aureliae;*
- *Aix-les-Bains in France, called in the past Aquae-Allobrogum;*
- *Bath in England, or Aquae Sulis in the Roman age;*
- *Băile Herculane of Romania, or Ad Aqua Herculi Sacras, in the period of Roman ruling on Dacia.*

Besides cures and treatments with thermal waters, nutrition, relaxation and beauty are concepts that are becoming more and more important for tourists during their holidays.

One of the objectives of revitalizing the spa tourism is that of the international market awareness that Romania is a prestigious balneo-tourism destination in Europe.

Through the richness and variety of the spa resources, as presented in the Master Plan for the Development of National Tourism 2007-2026, Romania has the following arguments in spa tourism:

1. *A third of the natural mineral springs in Europe are in Romania;*
2. *There are over 200 places that have natural cure factors that can treat over 15 types of diseases;*
3. *Natural resources are valued by the existence of more than 100 spa resorts, of which 29 are designated balneary resorts of national importance and 32 are resorts of local importance;*
4. *These resorts are true "oasis of health" that extend from the Black Sea coast to the Carpathian Mountains.*

On the basis of the classification criteria for the balneary resorts, there are three quality classes of these resorts, plus the fourth class for the local touristic resorts.

The classification criteria and the classification scores are shown in the table 1.

The minimum score in the table is mandatory for each of the eight criteria and may not be offset.

For the 4 core services one evaluates:

1. *Accommodation: type of unit, number of rooms, number of places, comfort category, physical and moral wear and tear, number and personnel structure, qualification level;*

2. Meals: types of units, table seats, comfort category, degree of physical and moral wear, number and personal structure, qualification;

3. Treatment: type of unit, capacity, number of basic procedures, number of adjuvant procedures, types of equipment, degree of physical and moral wear and tear, number and personal structure;

4. Recreation: types of equipment, capacities, degree of physical and moral wear, personal number and structure, period of use.

In Caraș-Severin County the first priority is the restoration of Baile Herculane resort.

Table 1.
Criteria for classification of balneary touristic resorts

No.	Criterion	Minimum score			
		I	II	III	IV Local level balneary localities
1.	Quality and quantity of natural factors	20	18	15	10
2.	The comfort and functionality of the material endowment	20	15	10	2
3.	Organisation and provision of healthcare	20	15	10	3
4.	Quality of urban utilities and endowment arrangements	20	10	5	2
5.	Organisation and materialisation of environmental and specific protection	20	17	15	7
6.	Organisation and endowment of balneary parks and entertainment areas	15	10	5	2
7.	Cultural, commercial and administrative organisation and endowment	20	15	5	2
8.	Accessibility, means of transportation	15	10	5	2
TO TAL	Minimum mandatory score for classification	150	110	70	30

SWOT analysis of Băile Herculane resort as a balneary touristic destination

For a good perspective of the balneary tourism in Baile Herculane, a SWOT analysis was carried out starting from the realities of the spa resorts and highlighting the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the near future.

Strengths:

1. existence of natural mineral springs that can be used for the treatment of some diseases, but also for wellness tourism;
2. possibility of therapeutic and prophylactic cures under the guidance of well-trained Romanian physicians;

3. wide range of cure procedures in each balneary resort;
4. relatively low prices for services in two-star accommodation facilities such as most of the traditional hotels;
5. possibility of combining balneary tourism with several forms of tourism, such as: mountain and hiking tourism, cultural tourism etc.

Weaknesses:

1. state of advanced degradation of the touristic infrastructure of accommodation, meal-serving facilities, treatment and recreation;
2. unsuccessful privatisations that led to low quality tourism management generating degradation of touristic infrastructure in the resort and even closure of some hotel units;
3. poor development of the modern SPA and wellness component of balneary tourism and prophylactic treatments;
4. lack of clear and relevant information on the indicators of the existing thermal waters and the recommended cures thereof;
5. very poor development of the leisure component in most balneary resorts.

Opportunities:

1. change of attitude and mentality of the potential tourists from Romania and from all over the world about health tourism;
2. possibility of accessing European funds for investments in the resort;
3. successful partnerships with tourism operators who have international experience on tourism in general and modern health balneary tourism, in particular.

Threats:

1. tendency of an increasing number of physicians to go practice their profession abroad;
2. less and less involvement of the national and local community in the development of balneary resorts;
3. development of modern spa tourism in several countries near Romania (Bulgaria, Hungary, Serbia) with SPA and wellness centres offering better services at the same prices as in Romania or even at lower prices.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Several useful and relevant conclusions have been drawn from the study related to the arguments in favour of Baile Herculane resort passing from balneary tourism to SPA tourism:

A first conclusion is that Băile Herculane can become an attractive resort if the 8 basic requirements are fulfilled, presented in table 1;

The second conclusion relates to the results of the SWOT analysis, which, by comparison, are highlighted in the strengths and weaknesses of the resort, as well as the opportunities for future development;

Another conclusion is the need for disseminating and promoting the new image of Băile Herculane by: slogan, visual symbol and events included in an annual calendar which, later on, can be integrated into the European cultural project: "Timișoara - European Cultural Capital in the year 2021".

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