

ANALYSIS OF THE POTENTIAL AND TRAFFIC OF HUNEDOARA COUNTY SPA TOURISM, ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT: *In the last ten years, the growth of the spa tourism sector, which includes a wide range of services from medical to wellness & spa tourism, has become very fast in Europe and in Romania as well. This situation is due both to the aging of the populations phenomenon in developed and rich areas and to the increasing incidence of some diseases related to the generalization of urban, sedentary lifestyle. The generosity of the natural spa resources that Romania and Hunedoara county are endowed with, determined that the most resorts can provide therapeutic solutions for a wide range of conditions and this paper aims at highlighting these aspects.*

KEY WORDS: *tourism potential, wellness and SPA tourism, Romania.*

JEL CLASSIFICATIONS: *R0, R1, Z3.*

1. FEATURES OF THE SPA RESORTS FROM HUNEDOARA COUNTY

Currently, in Romania, 52 localities are certified as tourist resorts of national interest and 87 as tourist resorts of local interest. Of these, a number of 29 localities were granted the status of balneary resorts.

In Hunedoara county there are the following resorts: *Vața de Jos* - spa resort with accommodation in 2,3,4 star hotels, with over 20 procedures and treatments, *Geoagiu Băi* (46 km from Deva and 19 km from Orăștie), permanent spa resort at the base of the Metaliferi Mountains, (350 m altitude) recognized for the therapeutic qualities of thermal waters, comforting climate and spa treatments performed in spa polyclinics and *Călan Băi* (thermal resort in ancient Aquae) (Buia & Nimară, 2016)

Geoagiu Băi resort is located in Hunedoara County, belonging to the city of Geoagiu. The distance between the city and the resort is only 6 km. In this area, the

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Figure 1. Location of the spa resorts in Hunedoara county

nearest cities are Orăştie, located 18 km away and Deva, 46 km away. This area is ideal for a stay of a few days, during which tourists can enjoy the benefits of healing spas. Being located at the base of the Metaliferi Mountains, from the Geoagiu Băi resort you can admire picturesque landscapes and the natural surroundings offer a state of relaxation. Access to this location can be done both by road and by rail or by air.

Tourists who travel by car or bus will follow the route Deva-Sebeş-Sibiu, on the European road E68, respectively Simeria - Rapolt - Geoagiu.

The route to Geoagiu Băi is normally weightless. Regarding the railway transport, the passengers can travel to Geoagiu from Orăştie Station, located at 18 km away and then with the buses that run from hour to hour to the resort. Also, the access can be made from Halta Geoagiu to the resort. Those who decide to travel by plane, from the country or from abroad, will have the opportunity to take off from Sibiu Airport which is 90 km away, on Timișoara International Airport which is 200 km away, or on Arad International Airport, located 190 km away. The stay in this location is all the more pleasant as the fauna and flora in this area are rich and extremely varied, and the mountainous area offers the possibility of a stay where walks and hikes can be done on the agenda.

The reason why this resort is visited by tourists is the effect of thermal waters on the body and its diseases. The existing waters here have proven to be extremely beneficial, over time, for the cure of rheumatic diseases of all kinds, diseases of the nervous system, dermatological diseases etc. In addition to the spa treatments and thermal water that can be offered here, the resort can also offer intense relaxation treatments with the help of massage services, packaging and accommodation services in the area. Algototherapy, anti-cellulite belts, weight loss massages, heat-sealing, parafango, parargil wraps, thermoactive chocolate wraps, firmness treatments, relaxation massages, wine therapy, reflexology massage, facial massage and many other procedures can be performed with the help of specialized staff.

Călan Băi resort with the Băile Aquae treatment center is located on the left bank of the Strei river, at an altitude of 230 m above sea level. They are located about 2 km North of the city of Călan, on the road DN 66 (respectively E 79).

The baths were very well known and used by the Romans, hence the Latin name of aquae (Waters), their existence being attested by the inscription *Genio pagi aquaensis*, which is on a stone in the altar of the church of Streisîngeorgiu, as well as the inscriptions with votive character that the healed put in honour of the gods. The inscriptions, placed by the sick or by those who visited the Baths, are addressed to the healing gods Hercules, Aesculapius, Nimphe, Mitras or invoke the house god, such as Silvanus.

The Roman basin can still be seen today, it is dug into the rock, it has a perimeter of about 94 m, a length of 14.2 m, a width of 7.5 m and a depth of 4 m. It (popularly called the spoon) is fed by three springs gushing from the bottom of the basin. The water is drained through a gutter dug in the stone.

This Roman Spring has been cleared and still produces. The water of these springs is maintained at a temperature of 23-24° C. Using the seven springs captured today, a microstation known not only locally has developed in the area.

After the commissioning, in 1980, of the third furnace, then of the agglomerate factory and the coking plant, over the Baths it rained with soot, ash and coal dust. The clogging of the thermal springs in the pools and the intense pollution of the area with soot from the Călan Iron and Steel Works have determined the decline of this resort (Bran, 2001).

In 1995 the activity was resumed by S.C. Metaloterm S.R.L. Călan, opening new perspectives for the resort.

Currently the thermomineral water of the 4371 H well is used in five basins, one of which is covered. The water temperature is between 27 - 29° C. The water removed from the well is thermomineral, bicarbonate, chlorinated, calcium, sodium, magnesium with a reddish yellow color, indicating a significantly higher iron content (in mg % to 1 kg of water: 3HC, 4.5 Cl 7.6 Na + 11.3 Ca ++ 38.1 Mg ++ 0.51Fe ++ 3.5 S).

The therapeutic effects of these hot springs are used in the treatment of degenerative rheumatism, spondylosis, osteoarthritis, polyarthrosis, extraarticular rheumatism (tendinosis, tendomyosis, tendoperiostosis, periartthritis humeroscapularis), inflammatory rheumatic diseases (painful conditions of the joints of the wrists).

Currently the resort has a restaurant with 125 seats, terraces, 14 houses with 2 seats each, playgrounds for children, tennis court, volleyball court, large space for car parking. Around the pools are 20 cabins and showers, outdoor disco.

The area is rich in historical vestiges, from Aquae Baths you can make trips to: Strei Church (5 km), Streisîngeorgiu Church (4 km), Prislop Monastery (20 km), Church and Castle of Sîntămăria Orlea (27 km), Densuş Church (39 km), Corvineşti Castle (16 km), Simeria Dendrological Park (14 km), Slivuş Haţeg Forest Bison Reserve (18 km), Cioclovina Cave (18 km), Red Stone Ruins from the complex of Dacian fortresses (25 km).

Vaţa de Jos commune, located on the road from Brad to Oradea, covers an area of 20,263 hectares, of which 3,570 are agricultural land, its population is about

3,718 inhabitants and consists of 13 settlements, these being the center of the commune and the villages: Vața de Sus, Căzănești, Basarabasa, Prăvăleni, Ciungani, Ociu, Ocișor, Brotuna, Târnavă de Criș, Prihodiște, Tătăraștii de Criș, Vata de Jos and Birtin. Vața de Jos commune is located at the northeastern extremity of Hunedoara county.

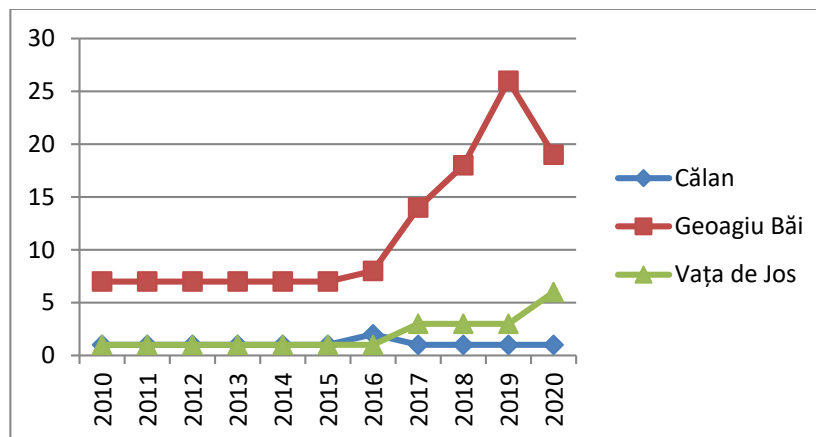
In the north and west the commune borders with Arad county, in the southwest and south it borders with Tomești commune, in the southeast with Vorța commune, and in the east with Baia de Criș commune. The main watercourse that crosses the commune is the Crișul Alb river, into which the Ponor brook (Vața) flows.

The groundwater layer is at a depth of 3-6 m. The thermomineral water deposit has the hydrostructure represented by the melafiric complex, faulted and fissured, through which the juvenile waters circulate upwards. It mineralizes the waters with sulphates, chlorine, magnesium, sodium and bronze. After the mineralization of the radiant waters they become ascending and appear as thermomineral springs. The area affected by the thermal waters is limited, but the possibilities of deposit are great.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE TOURISTIC INFRASTRUCTURE

The existing tourist accommodation capacity represents the number of tourist accommodation places registered in the last act of reception, homologation, classification of the tourist accommodation unit, excluding the extra beds that can be installed in case of need.

The places related to the tourist reception structures with complementary tourist accommodation functions (holiday cottages, camping etc.) to a basic tourist accommodation structure (hotel, motel, campsite etc.) and the use of these places are included in the basic structure.



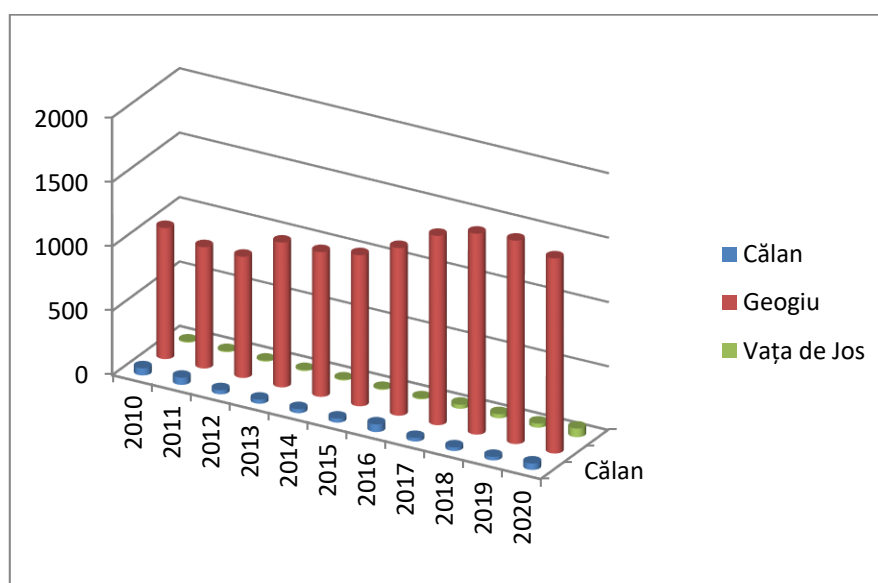
Source: INSSE, 2021

Figure 2. The situation of the tourist reception structures, with tourist accommodation functions

According to the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, in 2020 there were 27 accommodation units, most of which are located in the city of Geoagiu

(19 accommodation units). Also here was made the largest number of investments in terms of accommodation infrastructure.

The tourist accommodation capacity in operation represents the number of accommodation places made available to tourists by the tourist accommodation units, taking into account the number of days the units are open during the considered period. This is expressed in places-days. Places in rooms or temporarily closed units, due to lack of tourists, for repairs or for other reasons are excluded from the analysis.



Source: INSSE, 2021

Figure 3. Existing tourist accommodation capacity, by types of tourist reception structures in Hunedoara county

The tourist accommodation capacity in operation for tourist spa is presented in the following table (observation: nd - no data):

Table 1. Tourist accommodation capacity

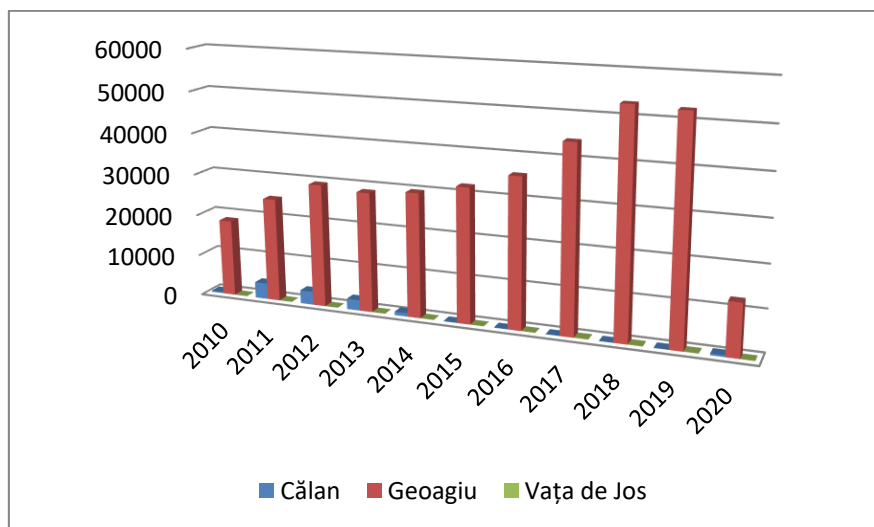
	Year					
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Geoagiu Băi	1177	1307	1475	1566	1586	1522
Călan	32	60	28	28	28	50
Vața de Jos	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd

As we can see in the above table, in 2016 for Călan town, the tourist accommodation capacity was double but it dropped to the next years and for Geoagiu Băi, the tourist accommodation capacity increased each year from 1177 in 2015 to 1522 in 2021 (INSSE, 2021).

3. ANALYSIS OF THE TOURISTIC TRAFFIC

Among the most representative indicators used to characterize the touristic traffic, there is also the indicator number of tourists. It is obtained from the accumulation of information contained in various statistical documents, effectively calculated at the end of the calendar year, but also for shorter periods, depending on the needs of the user. This indicator can be determined by total tourist traffic or by types of actions, tourist areas.

The number of arrivals in the accommodation units for tourist spa are presented in the following figure (figure 4):



Source: INSSE, 2021

Figure 4. The evolution of tourists' number arrived in the three tourist spa resorts, in the 2010-2020 period

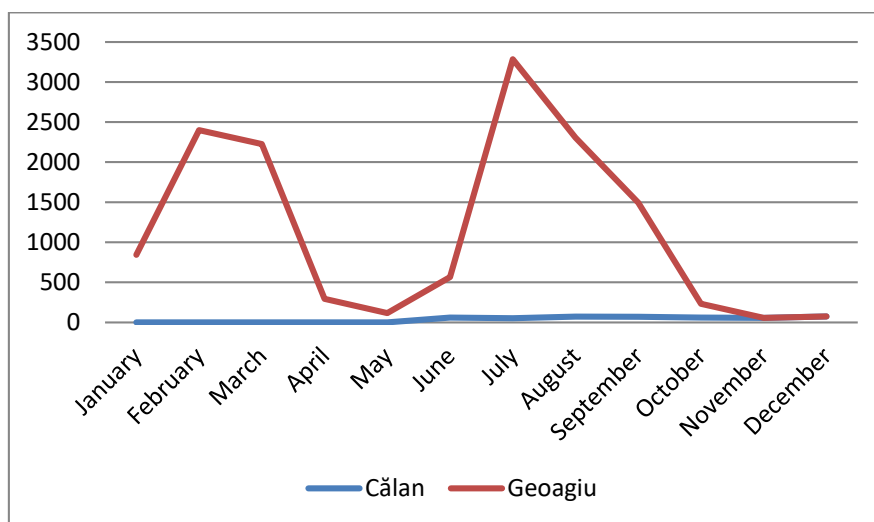
The seasonality from Geoagiu-Băi does not seem to have a clear structure during the analysed period. Geoagiu Băi, like other spas in Romania displays a peak season in summer and a sharp drop in attendance in winter. However, in 2014 the resort managed to have a much more balanced seasonality than many other spas with tradition in Romania, Monday as May, October and November recording attendance figures similar to those of August. The winter months are also recording overnight stays, even if they remain at a low level, a feature that is explained by the maintenance of capacity accommodation open during the winter, a characteristic feature of the resorts where they took place investments in the modernization of accommodation and treatment infrastructure.

The tourist overnight stay represents the interval of 24 hours, starting with the hotel hour, for which a person is registered in the tourist accommodation and benefits from accommodation on account of the tariff related to the occupied space, even if the

actual stay is less than the mentioned interval. Overnight stays for extra beds, paid by customers, are also taken into account.

According to the analysis of the data contained in the attached figure, it can be seen that the highest number of overnight stays in the tourist accommodation structures is registered in two distinct periods of the year, namely (figure 4):

- the period February - March, when the number of overnight stays varies between 2225 and 2399;
- July to August, when the number of overnight stays varies between 2233 and 3231.



Source: INSSE, 2021

Figure 5. Overnight stays in tourist accommodation units

The lowest number of overnight stays recorded in the analysed period was recorded in May and October for all three spa resorts. The average length of stay decreased sharply during the reference period, from 7 nights to below 4.5. This one decrease due to increased attendance and investments in the modernization of accommodation capacities and associated services, indicates an increase in the proportion of tourists who do not come on the basis of the ticket treatment, but access packages of tourist services that may or may not include spa treatment or, more likely, the wellness type. However, the average length of stay is not much longer lower than at the national level in spas.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The differences and regional peculiarities found were largely preserved, the regions of development of Romania presenting a rather disparate image in terms of investments that have been made during the last 10 years (Candea et al., 2003). The analysed resorts are key elements for tourism in the Western Region of Romania due to the quality of the thermal springs, due to their location, historical heritage, the national

custom of going on vacation in resorts and the new international trend of spa and medical tourism.

The tourist frequency of the Geoagiu Băi resort seems to have benefited from the investments that took place. However, although in the first part of the interval were recorded solid increases in both arrivals and overnight stays, in the second part of the interval arrivals stopped from the increase and the overnight stays registered a decrease in 2014. Between 2015-2020 the average annual increase of tourists' arrival was 14.2%.

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