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PERSPECTIVES OF HEALTH & WELLNESS TOURISM IN SERBIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SOKOBANJA

Summary: Modern tourism industry is more or less represented in almost all areas of society. The tourism industry also affects the socio-economic activities and the quality of environment. The tourism industry is one of the fastest growing in the world.

Health & Wellness tourism has experienced its rapid growth, whereas spas have become recognizable as popular destinations not only for tourists whose primary concern is their healthcare treatment, but also for all other people who want to rest in a natural surrounding or to be entertained. The number of tourists in our spa resorts has grown from year to year, which rate of growth has been conditioned by a number of factors. At an accelerated pace, the number of spas giving health and tourist services has rapidly increased, while the lack of capacity in hotels and other basic facilities has been compensated for accommodation in private households, which soon accounted for 75% of total spa capacity.

Sokobanja is among tourist centers with the longest tradition and one of the most visited places in Serbia. Medicinal waters from mineral springs and fresh mountain air, with lots of ozone, are ideal for treatment and rehabilitation.

The current degree of development of tourist capacities is not sufficient to achieve significant economic effects and generate development. Therefore, in the future, emphasis should be placed on improving accommodation facilities, by construction of new five-star hotel facilities, in order to attract foreign tourists with greater means of payment, and focus on broadening the supply of tourist attractions.

Key words: tourism, spas, Sokobanja

Introduction

The use of hot mineral water springs for therapeutic purposes in Serbia dates back to the Roman period. At that time, facilities were built in the places where the springs were located, and their purpose was to give people opportunity to bathe and rest in them. However, in the seventies of the last century, health resort

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spas, besides their primary medical purpose, started providing tourism services, and that is when the construction of modern spa centers, including new rehabilitation centers, restaurants, hotels and other auxiliary facilities also begins.¹ Since then, Health & Wellness tourism has experienced its rapid growth, whereas spas have become recognizable as popular destinations not only for tourists whose primary concern is their healthcare treatment, but also for all other people who want to rest in a natural surrounding or to be entertained. Most spas are well wooded, have a favorable climate and organize many cultural and entertainment events.

High spa attendance rate is a consequence of numerous thermal mineral springs and their healing qualities. Besides using water from these thermal mineral springs for bathing, swimming or even drinking, applying curative mud, which is also rich in various minerals, on the skin of patients or simply guests of the spa centers has also been practiced. A number of spas situated at a slightly higher altitude, due to favorable air currents, have been declared for airstream spa resorts.

Due to these facts, spa tourism with its spectrum of services can respond to the demands of the most diverse tourists. There are also various sports facilities and terrains in the spa centers, which are suitable for all sports. For these reasons, sports clubs in Serbia often opt for spas when it comes to preparation periods for their competitions, because spas provide them with a natural environment in which sportsmen and sportswomen can be relieved from stress and regenerate their muscles and entire bodies.

Over the last 10 years, a certain amount of financial resources has been allocated to improve the overall supply in the spas of Serbia, but this is still not enough to make them competitive at the international level. One of the novelties in the spas is that a special dietary nutrition was introduced in rehabilitation centers, for users with excessive weight problems.²

Health & Wellness tourism includes spas as places characterized by prominent health and recreational functions, due to the richness of their natural elements - thermal mineral springs, noble gases, peloids, climatic conditions, vegetation.

Tourism as a global phenomenon

Modern tourism industry is more or less represented in almost all areas of society. The tourism industry also affects the socio-economic activities and the quality of environment. The tourism industry is one of the fastest growing in the world, which can be confirmed by the data of relevant international institutions. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)³ the number of global tourists has been constantly growing over the past 60 years. In the early fifties of the twentieth century, a number of people that took part in the tourism movements was

¹ Милојковић М., Развој здравственог и велнесс туризма у Бањама Србије, Мастер рад, Природно-математички факултет, Ниш, 2013; стр. 35

² <http://www.apartmani-srbija.com/istrazi/banje-srbije-zdravstveni-turizam>

³ UNWTO, 2016, p.2

25 millions. In the nineties of the last century, that number grew up to 435 millions, while in the first decade of this century it increased to 674 millions, then to 950 millions at the beginning of this decade, whereas in 2015 that same number reached a figure of 1.186 million tourists. Throughout that entire period, the area of Europe was the main receptive market, with a significant increase in the number of visitors. The role of tourism in the economic sense is quite impressive. During 2015, earnings from tourism increased by 4.4% compared to the previous year, reaching 1.260 billion dollars. According to the data of the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) ⁴ the total contribution of this industry to GDP amounted to 7,170.3 billion dollars in 2015. Also, this industry directly and indirectly employed 284 million workers, while the investments amounted to 774.6 billion dollars.

The participation of the Republic of Serbia in the global tourism market is negligible. Unlike the seventies and eighties when the number of tourists exceeded 4.7 million, and the number of overnights stays was 14 million (in 1986), the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century marked the collapse of the tourism market in the Republic of Serbia. Since 2010, according to the data of Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia ⁵, there has been an evident increase in tourist traffic, so in 2016, there have been 2,753,591 arrivals and 7,533,739 overnight stays recorded, which accounts for half of the record results in 1986.

Tourist arrivals - According to statistical data on tourist traffic in Serbia in 2018, the total number of tourist arrivals amounted to 3,430,522 (an increase of 11.2% compared to the same period of 2017), the number of which the domestic guests made 1,720,008 (increase of 8.3%), ie. they participated with 50.1% in total arrivals. The number of foreign tourist arrivals amounted to 1,710,514 (an increase of 14.2% compared to 2017), which represents a share of 49.9% in total tourist arrivals.

Year	ARRIVALS						PARTICIPATION IN TOTAL ARRIVALS IN SERBIA (in %)	
	Total	Index	Domestic	Index	Foreign	Index	Domestic	Foreign
2012	2.079.643	101,0	1.269.676	97,0	809.967	106,0	61,1	38,9
2013	2.192.435	105,4	1.270.667	100,1	921.768	113,8	58,0	42,0
2014	2.192.268	100,0	1.163.536	91,6	1.028.732	111,6	53,1	46,9
2015	2.437.165	111,2	1.304.944	112,2	1.132.221	110,1	53,5	46,5
2016	2.753.591	113,0	1.472.165	112,8	1.281.426	113,2	53,5	46,5
2017	3.085.866	112,1	1.588.693	107,9	1.497.173	116,8	51,5	48,5
January- December 2018	3.430.522	111,2	1.720.008	108,3	1.710.514	114,2	50,1	49,9

Table 1: *Tourist arrivals 2012 - 2018*⁶

⁴ WTTC, 2016, p.1

⁵ RZS, 2017, pp. 2-3

⁶ Source : Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia

Tourist overnight stays - In the course of 2018, a total number of 9,336,235 overnight stays (an increase of 12.1% compared to 2017) was reached, the number of which domestic tourists made 5,678,235 overnight stays (an increase of 10.3% compared to the same period of 2017), ie they participated with 60.8% in the total number of overnight stays, while foreign tourists made 15.2% more overnight stays (3.657.868) compared to the same period of 2017, i.e. participated with 39.2% in the total number of overnight stays.

Year	OVERNIGHT STAYS						PARTICIPATION IN THE TOTAL NUMBER OF OVERNIGHT STAYS IN SERBIA (in%)	
	Total	Index	Domestic	Index	Foreign	Index	Domestic	Foreign
2012	6.484.702	98,0	4.688.485	94,0	1.796.217	109,0	75,3	24,7
2013	6.567.460	101,3	4.579.067	97,7	1.988.393	110,7	69,7	30,3
2014	6.086.275	92,7	3.925.221	85,7	2.161.054	108,7	64,5	35,5
2015	6.651.852	109,3	4.242.172	108,1	2.409.680	111,5	63,8	36,2
2016	7.533.739	113,3	4.794.741	113,0	2.738.998	113,7	63,6	36,4
2017	8.325.144	110,5	5.150.017	107,4	3.175.127	115,9	61,9	38,1
January-December 2018	9.336.103	112,1	5.678.235	110,3	3.657.868	115,2	60,8	39,2

Table 2: *Overnight stays 2012 - 2018*⁷

According to the data of the World Economic Forum⁸, the Republic of Serbia has a constant deficit in the balance of payments in the field of tourism. Expressed in US dollars, in 2007 the Republic of Serbia collected 531 million, 865.4 million in 2009, 991.7 million in 2011, 1052.9 million in 2013, and 1,048 million in 2015. The National Bank of Serbia (NBS) records show that foreign exchange inflow from tourism increased by 97.4%, with an average annual growth rate of 10.8% in the period from 2007 to 2015. However, in spite of this, the deficit ranged from 107 million dollars in 2012 to 48 million dollars in 2015⁹. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC)¹⁰ the total contribution of tourism to Serbia's GDP amounted to 254.7 billion RSD (6.4%) in 2015. Tourism industry of the Republic of Serbia together with complementary activities has generated 93,500 job openings (5.5%). Investments in tourism were at a very low level and amounted to 29.5 billion RSD (4.1%) of total investments.

Tourism traffic is an important indicator of tourism development. It synthetically shows summarized indicator of the scale, dynamics and structure of tourist movement. It represents a relevant indicator of the existing position in the tourism market, which can be shown by the number of tourists, the total number of

⁷ Source : Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia

⁸ WEF, 2008., p.306;2011. p.328; 2013.p.306;2015., p.292.

⁹ https://www.nbs.rs/platni_bilans

¹⁰ WTTC,2016, p.1

overnight stays and other data. The spa tourism of Serbia as a particularly motivated type of movement has two important characteristics: relatively long stay and seasonality of traffic related to the period when 45% of arrivals and 55% of overnight stays are realized. According to the seasonality of tourist traffic, Sokobanja is in the category of centers where in addition to the summer, the emphasis is also placed on the winter season in which more than 20% of the annual turnover is realized.

Spa tourism in Serbia

According to the number of frequent occurrences of thermo-mineral waters and their diversity, Serbia is in proportion to its total surface area the richest in the Balkans and in Europe, and according to some analyzes, probably in the world. Therefore it is popularly referred to as "the land of spas." Although curative waters can be used in medical and recreational purposes throughout the entire year, in case of spas in our country, the seasonal character of tourism is strongly manifested. Namely, the main season in the spas of Serbia is related to the period from June to September, because during this time interval about 55% of overnight stays and 45% of tourist arrivals are realized. Besides the scarcity of tourist offer, one of the reasons why the tourist turnover in our spas has been strongly associated with the summer season is certainly the fact that the summer period is characterized by the holiday season and the effect of this factor cannot be avoided.

Spa tourism of the Republic of Serbia is characterized by a significant dominance in circulation of domestic guests, while the share of foreign tourists in the overall financial transactions is at a very low level and has a marginal character. Somewhat higher participation rate of foreign guests in spa turnover was recorded in the late 1980s, when tourism of the Republic of Serbia recorded the best tourist results so far.

Although Serbia has a large number of thermal and mineral springs, official statistics records more significant tourist turnover in only about 30 spas, which account for 95% of spa tourism turnover of our country. It should be noted that among these thirty or so spas there are huge differences in the volume of tourist turnover.

The natural properties of thermo-mineral waters and the size of accommodation capacities have not had a decisive influence on the size of the tourist turnover realized by some of the spas in Serbia so far, but the geographical position and distance from the urban settlements as the basic elements of tourist valorization have decisively influenced the size of turnover in the spas of our country.

In Serbia, according to the size of turnover, several groups of spas can be singled out. The first group consists of our most visited spas: Vrnjačka Banja and Sokobanja. Vrnjačka Banja is our most successful spa, which has a share of about 20% of total overnight stays in spas of Serbia which is far ahead of all other spas in Serbia. The best results, Vrnjačka Banja, like other major tourist centers in Serbia,

achieved during the 1980s. Later, the tourist results during the crisis of the 1990s were significantly modest. However, during all that time, there is a present dominance of Vrnjačka Banja in comparison to other spas in the country. It is our best-built spa, with the longest tradition, which lies at the foot of the attractive mountain Goč and has the most even distribution of turnover by months of the year, which indicates a favorable perspective for its future development, which is why it deserves a special place in the development of tourism in Serbia. According to the achieved turnover, right after Vrnjačka Banja, there is Sokobanja, with its solid accommodation base, medical facilities and long tradition. Together with the mountain Ozren, at the foot of which it is situated, Sokobanja represents a unique tourist and functional whole.

The second group includes spas that generate more than 100,000 overnight stays per year - Banja Koviljača and Bukovička Banja - the two spas who are considered to be among our developed of our spas. They are characterized by a relatively developed medical function and a solid material base, and have a favorable position (proximity to communication routes, urban settlements and other motives).

The third group include spas that make over 50.000 overnight stays per year, such as: Gornja Trepča, Sijarinska Banja and Prolom Banja. Among other spas we should single out Vranjska Banja (Vranjska Banja has an excellent position and it is also the most famous hypertherm in our country with a water temperature higher than 90°C), Bogutovačka Banja, Kuršumlijska Banja (near the mountain of Kopaonik), as well as Ribarska Banja, which recorded a significant growth over the past few years, using the convenience of its location as it is situated on the slopes of mountain Jastrebac, near Kruševac, which also developed its medical treatment function and improved its material base. All other spas lag far behind the abovementioned and they cannot be expected to achieve better results in the short and medium term.

The number of tourists in our spa resorts has grown from year to year, which rate of growth has been conditioned by a number of factors. It is evident is that spa tourism revived rapidly after World War II with the support of state social policy, especially since 1960s when spas acquired the status of natural health resorts.¹¹ At an accelerated pace, the number of spas giving health and tourist services has rapidly increased, while the lack of capacity in hotels and other basic facilities has been compensated for accommodation in private households, which soon accounted for 75% of total spa capacity. The diversity of natural and therapeutic resources, their spatial distribution, as well as their connectivity to emitting markets, decisively affected the dominance of domestic turnover in the spas of Serbia, even to this day. In the period from 1990 to 2016, situation became somewhat more complicated taking into account turnover fluctuations in the spa centers. In percentages terms, 2010 was the most successful year since spas participated with 17.2% in arrivals and 34.5% in overnight stays at the level of total arrivals and overnight stays in Serbia.¹²

¹¹ Гавриловић, 2009, стр.4

¹² RZS,2011,p.255

Considered individually, Vrnjačka Banja achieved over 20% of the overall spa overnight stays on the basis of which it is far ahead all other spas. In addition to Vrnjačka Banja, Sokobanja stands out with 18% of the total number of overnight stays, with solid accompanying material base and medical facilities.¹³

Year	Arrivals	%	Overnight stays	%
1955	95.400	9,1	1.008.000	33,8
1965	200.000	7,5	1.925.500	23,6
1975	394.000	9,8	3.472.900	34,8
1985	493.000	10,4	4.154.000	29,9
1995	323.000	13,3	2.399.000	29,5
2005	303.000	15,2	2.012.000	30,9
2015	427.456	17,5	1.854.582	27,9

Table 3. - *Share of spas at the level of total arrivals and overnight stays in Serbia*¹⁴

In the spa resorts in 2018, the total number of overnight stays of tourists amounted to 2,542,391 (growth of 14.1%). Domestic tourists registered 2,226,627 overnight stays (growth of 13.8%), while foreign tourists registered 315.764 overnight stays (growth of 16.4%).

Total number of tourist arrivals in the spas of Serbia in 2018 amounted to 596,884, a growth of 15.0% compared to the same period in 2017.

In the category of spa and climatic resorts, Sokobanja has been in second place for several decades according to the number of tourists and realized overnight stays. On the other hand, the period since 2005 has been characterized by a decrease in Sokobanja's share in total arrivals and overnight stays due to the strengthening of spa centers that have experienced a longer period of stagnation.

Year	Arrivals	%	Overnight stays	%
1955	5.732	6,0	81.219	8,1
1965	19.652	9,8	241.469	12,5
1975	44.831	11,4	528.053	15,2
1985	65.741	13,3	601.272	14,5
1995	40.483	12,5	289.434	12,1
2005	60.541	20,0	371.433	18,5
2015	41.676	9,7	194.894	10,5

Table 4. - *Arrivals and overnights stays in Sokobanja in the category of spa resorts*¹⁵

Sokobanja

Spa tourism in Europe has a very long tradition, but there are differences between the profiles of guests in those countries. In the Czech Republic and

¹³ Јовић, 2008, стр.9

¹⁴ Source : Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia

¹⁵ Source : Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia

Slovakia, most of spa guests are domestic guests, and both of those countries have very well equipped modern medical facilities, which have been in the focus of interest of foreign guests in recent years.

The question that arises is how to promote our spas, as health or tourist centers. Our spas are mainly medical centers. Therefore, perhaps, due to the high quality medical staff in the spas, some of them should be profiled as health centers, and the others, recognised as tourist centers, should be focused on enriching their tourist attractions.

Sokobanja is a spa town and tourist town located at the foot of mountain Ozren in southeastern Serbia, surrounded by four mountains: Rtanj (1560m), Ozren (1117m), Devica and Bukovik. Through Sokobanja flows river Moravica, which springs under the mountain Devica. At the village of Bovan, the river is dammed, forming artificial Bovan lake

According to the latest data, the municipality of Sokobanja has 19,068 inhabitants, which represents 0.24% of the population of Serbia. The gender structure of the population indicates almost equal distribution of sexes - 49.4% of men and 49.6% of women. The average age of the population is 45.3%.

Sokobanja is among tourist centers with the longest tradition and one of the most visited places in Serbia. Medicinal waters from mineral springs and fresh mountain air, with lots of ozone, are ideal for treatment and rehabilitation. For Sokobanju can rightly be said to be the master of spa tourism in Serbia, also called „the Serbian queen of tourism". Sokobanja has been engaged in tourist activities for 180 years, and in the last ten years it has been developing rapidly due to the influx of healthy capital and the construction of aqua park and wellness center, so that, in addition to health tourism, Sokobanja has developed recreational-commercial tourism.

At the recommendation of the European Spas Association, a modality should be found for clearly delineating spa health institutions which could be directed towards strengthening of wellness programs from those spa health institutions that would exclusively remain rehabilitation centers.

In the interval 1955-1970, tourism of Sokobanja had significant fluctuations. Until 1959, the number of guests did not exceed 10,000 and it fully consisted of domestic guests. At the beginning of the sixties, the number of guests increased from 14,009 to 34,146 in 1970. At the beginning of the 1970s, the trend of growth continued, with the number of guests exceeding 30,000 in the period from 1970 to 1973, then 40,000 in the next three years, to finally exceed the number of 50,000 in the period from 1977 to 1980. The most successful was the year of 1979, when Sokobanja achieved a record of 64,834 arrivals. Almost the entire turnover consisted of local guests, whereas the number of foreign tourists was only minor (Denda, 2015, p.183). In the eighties, spa tourism in this area reached the highest level. The increased number of tourist visits was the result of already formed physiognomy of Sokobanja, as well as favorable socio-economic conditions and the rise in the living standard of the population. At that time, the most important accommodation facilities in Sokobanja have been built, which still form the basis of tourist economy.

The best results were achieved in 1987 when 96,771 guests visited the spa, mostly in the period 1955-2016. The first negative tendencies were recorded in the early 1990s that will culminate in 1993, when only 28,837 guests (29.8% less than realized arrivals in 1987) stayed in the spa resort (Denda, 2015, p.183). In the last recorded period 2000-2016, the situation has somewhat changed. After the initial momentum that lasted until 2007, when Sokobanja recorded one of the best results (72,396 arrivals), of which the number of foreign visitors was 1,612, there has been a continuous decline since 2008. During 2010 and 2012, the number of tourists was minimal (around 49,000), with only 772 foreign guests staying in 2012. There can be noticed a continuous decline in the number of domestic visitors, while the number of foreign visitors has only slightly increased (2013 - 1,588, 2014 - 2,756, 2015 - 4,522).

Year	ARRIVALS			OVERNIGHT STAYS		
	Total	Domestic	Foreign	Total	Domestic	Foreign
1960	21.616	21.609	7	386.918	386.860	58
1965	19.652	19.460	192	241.469	241.000	469
1970	34.146	34.000	146	368.000	367.200	800
1975	44.831	44.642	189	528.053	527.116	937
1980	53.125	52.869	256	588.823	587.828	995
1985	65.741	64.848	893	601.272	597.111	4.161
1990	55.299	54.812	487	484.776	482.520	2.256
1995	40.483	40.340	143	289.434	289.016	418
2000	53.176	52.895	281	340.155	339.115	1.040
2005	60.541	59.911	630	371.433	369.581	1.852
2010	48.837	47.572	1.265	295.098	290.575	4.523
2015	41.676	37.154	4.522	194.896	184.022	10.874

Table 5 - Arrivals and overnight stays in Sokobanja in the period 1960-2015¹⁶

In the interval until 1961, the number of overnight stays steadily increased from 81,219 (1955) to 386,918 (1960). In the period 1964-1970, between 200,000 - 300,000 nights were realized. During 1967, the largest number of overnight stays was recorded (1.317), which was only to be exceeded in 1979. At the beginning of the 1970s, an intensive trend of growth in the number of overnight stays continued, ranging around the number of 400,000, whereas in 1975, that number reached 528,000. The fact that at the same time the number of foreign tourist overnight stays decreased and did not exceed 1,000 overnight stays per year was concerning. The

¹⁶ Source : Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia

end of the seventies and the eighties was characterized by an upward trend. Thus, in 1986 there was a record number of overnight stays (818,556). Compared to the previous year, it was an increase of about 220,000 overnights or 36.1% (Denda, 2014, p.69). On the other hand, in 1982, the largest number of foreign overnight stays was recorded (15,327). Since the nineties, the total number of overnight stays has been steadily declining, reaching a minimum of 208,260 (1993). Nevertheless, the number of overnight stays of foreign guests did not decrease at such a pace, it even reached an increase in 1990. On the other hand, the historic minimum was recorded in 1994 (only 145 overnight stays). Since 1995, we could no longer talk about a significant number of overnight stays as we could in the former Yugoslavia. In the period from 2010, the number of overnight stays did not exceed 400,000, except in 2007, when 409,000 overnight stays were realized. From 2010, the total number of overnight stays ranges between 200,000 and 300,000 per year (Denda, 2014, p. 70). A positive indicator is the continuous increase in the number of foreign overnight stays (2010 - 4,523, 2013 - 5,327, 2014 - 10,697, 2015 - 10,874).

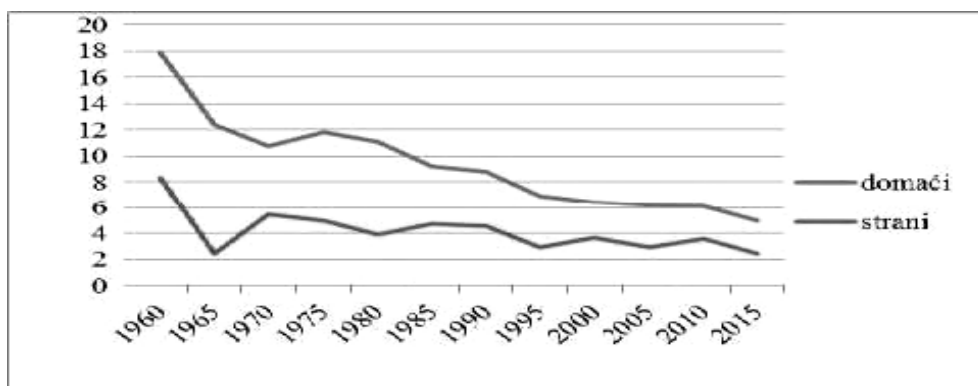


Chart 1.- Average length of tourist stay in 1960-2015¹⁷

In close relation with the above data is the average length of stay of domestic tourists in the spa center. In general, there are four stages of tourist stay that can be distinguished. The first stage from 1955 to 1970 was characterized by a relatively long stay of 11 to 18 days, which could be linked with the rehabilitation program organized by the Health Insurance Fund. The second stage from 1971 to 1991 consists of two phases: the first one encompasses the seventies and the beginning of the eighties when guests stayed 10-12 days in the spa center, and the second one, until the beginning of the nineties, when the stay was reduced to 8-9 days. The third stage from 1992 to 2001 was characterized by further decline when the length of stay was reduced to 6-7 days. In the last stage from 2002 to 2016, guests stayed for 5-6 days. Significant foreign guests staying of 8 days at the beginning of the eighties was reduced to 3 days in the nineties and to four days in 2000s (Denta, 2015, p.184). It is interesting that in 2015 and 2016 foreign guests stayed shorter than 3 days. The average length of stay of domestic tourists is conditioned by visits in order to meet their

¹⁷ Source – Authors

health and curative needs. Unlike them, foreign visitors are participants of congress gatherings, various manifestations and excursions where a significantly smaller number of overnight stays are realized. The average length of stay of tourists in Serbia in 2018 was 2.72 days, with the average length of stay of domestic guests lasting 3.30 days and the average length of stay of foreign guests lasting 2.14 days.

Months	05.	06.	07.	08.	09.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.
I	2,8	4,4	3,7	3,2	3,4	1,6	2,1	2,5	2,7	4,4	4,9
II	4,2	2,2	2,2	2,7	2,9	1,6	1,7	0,2	2,1	2,8	1,7
III	4,6	3,6	5,5	5,7	5,8	2,8	5,7	4,6	4,6	6,3	4,6
IV	9,3	9,1	6,9	10,7	9,9	7,3	9,6	9,7	10,1	8,5	7,9
V	11,8	13,3	9,3	12,1	12,9	13,1	13,2	12,3	12,1	10,6	8,3
VI	12,6	12,9	11,7	13,3	12,8	14,0	11,8	12,0	11,0	11,1	12,0
VII	12,0	13,6	17,1	12,9	13,8	14,6	15,3	16,2	16,1	16,5	15,0
VIII	13,0	14,4	17,3	13,3	18,5	18,3	17,3	18,8	18,4	20,0	23,7
IX	10,0	9,1	10,2	9,8	9,1	10,5	10,0	9,8	10,1	9,8	10,4
X	11,5	8,3	8,1	9,4	7,1	8,9	8,0	8,7	6,5	5,9	6,3
XI	5,2	4,7	5,1	4,5	2,0	4,3	3,1	3,1	3,0	1,7	2,8
XII	2,8	4,3	2,8	2,2	1,6	2,7	2,0	2,0	3,3	2,3	2,2

Table no. 6. - *Structure of annual overnights in Sokobanja 2005-2015*¹⁸

After examining the available data, it is noted that the turnover from tourism in Sokobanja has accentuated seasonal characteristics. This is conditioned by the fact that our spa centers have not yet managed to provide such an offer which would enable year-round, profitable business activities. During the analyzed period (2005-2015), the largest number of overnight stays was realized during August, 17.5%. Then follows July with 14.8% and June with 12.3% of overnight stays. We conclude that during the summer season about 44.7% of the total turnover is realized. On the other hand, the smallest turnover is realized in December, January and February, about 8.0% of total turnover. The best results were achieved in August 2014, 20.0%, and the worst in February 2002, 0.2%. In Sokobanja, the highest increase in the total number of arrivals (87.6%) was registered in 2018, as well as the largest increase in the total number of overnight stays (90.3%).

Conclusion

Spas in the world completely changed their concept of meaning, but also their appearance. Once before the spas were primarily rehabilitation centers and hospitals visited by elderly and sick people, who stayed in them for a longer period of time, while the program contents in the new spa centers focus on people regardless of their age and state of health, because the main emphasis in these new spa centers is on prevention.

¹⁸ Source : Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia

Although Serbia has exceptional natural prerequisites, plans and development strategies are needed in order to transform our spas into health resorts and centers that will attract modern, young and healthy people. The Republic of Serbia with over three hundred mineral springs and thermo-mineral waters is one of the richest areas in Europe.

Thanks to a quality resource base and historical reputation, Sokobanja is a highly ranked destination in Serbia. Since it has a primary basis, a lot of efforts should be invested in improving infrastructure capacities (hotel facilities, road and communal infrastructure, etc.). In further development, more efforts should be made to promote spas in the international market and increase the number of foreign visitors. In order to adapt Sokobanja to the new trends in healthcare and spa tourism, more investments are needed in the construction of modern wellness and spa centers. At the same time, it is necessary to emphasize the complementary types of supply that are in line with the concept of sustainable tourism (eco, rural and sports-recreational tourism). On the other hand, investments in the construction of congress halls are needed to attract rich business clients. These activities will enable extended tourist season and realization of year-round tourist turnover. In this way, the tourist economy and local self-government will allocate the surplus of financial resources in the reconstruction of the existing and the construction of new infrastructure.

The obstacles to the development of tourism, among others, are poor equipment and the current state of cultural institutions, lack of information on cultural and tourist amenities, insufficient financial support, lack of activities in this field, and other problems. Cultural tourism represents a chance for the development of the municipality of Sokobanja. It is necessary to adequately protect, present and promote the existing cultural and historical heritage and to include it in the tourist offer. In addition to cultural tourism, chance for development also have rural tourism, hunting tours, recreational tourism, cultural events and especially transit tourism.

The current degree of development of tourist capacities is not sufficient to achieve significant economic effects and generate development. Therefore, in the future, emphasis should be placed on improving accommodation facilities, by construction of new five-star hotel facilities, in order to attract foreign tourists with greater means of payment, and focus on broadening the supply of tourist attractions. Also, better cooperation with neighboring districts and more developed marketing is needed.

By developing certain forms of tourism (rural, excursion-recreational, transit, etc.) on the basis of comparative advantages and tourist attractiveness, tourism could achieve positive economic effects in the future development, such as reducing population migration and increasing the quality of life of the population.

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ПЕРСПЕКТИВЕ БАЊСКОГ ТУРИЗМА У СРБИЈИ СА ПОСЕБНИМ ОСВРТОМ НА СОКОБАЊУ

Сажетак: Савремена туристичка делатност је у мањој или већој мери заступљена у готово свим областима друштва. Туристичка индустрија утиче и на социоекономске активности и квалитет човекове средине. Туристичка индустрија је једна од најбрже растућих у свету.

Бањски туризам доживљава свој убрзани раст, и бање постају препознатљиве као популарне дестинације не само за туристе чија је примарна сврха лечење, него и за све друге људе који желе да се одморе у природном окружењу али и да се забаве. Број туриста у нашим бањским местима се мењају из године у године што је било условљено бројним факторима. Огромним темпом се повећавао број бања које су пружале и здравствене и туристичке услуге, а недостатак капацитета у хотелима и другим основним објектима надкнађен је смештајем у приватним домаћинствима која су убрзо чинила 75% бањских капацитета.

Сокобања, спада у ред туристичких центара са најдужом традицијом и једно је од најпосећенијих места у Србији. Лековите воде и чист планински ваздух, са пуно озона идеални су за лечење и рехабилитацију.

Тренутни степен развијености туристичких капацитета није довољан да би остварио значајне економске ефекте и генерисао развој. Зато у будућности акценат треба ставити на побољшању смештајних капацитета, изградњом нових објеката високе категорије, како би се привукли страни туристи већих платежних могућности, и обогатила туристичких садржаја.

Кључне речи: туризам, бање, Сокобања

