

# PROMOTION OF TOURIST ATTRACTIONS AND IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROMOTIONAL MARKETING MIX APPLIED BY TRAVEL AGENCIES IN THE CENTRE REGION OF ROMANIA

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**Abstract:** *The overall activity of the travel company is inconceivable without proper promotion, through which information about the characteristics of products and services offered are provided to consumers, users and the general public. The promotion of tourism services is aimed at attracting new customers and keeping existing customers. The promotion must be directed at potential tourists and precise targets by engaging forces at different levels: local, regional, national and international.*

**Key words:** *promotion, research, tourism packages*

## 1. Introduction

The promotion in the Centre region is carried out by the economic agents in tourism and by public administration, both at national (through participation at the main tourism fairs in Romania) and international level (e.g. through the presence of the County Council at the Tourism fair in Berlin).

Recently there has been a progress of promotion in tourism of each county in the region at the level of the public administration, which was also appreciated as positive by the majority of interviewed accommodation operators.

At regional level, tourism is one of the main development and investment priorities. Tourism is considered one of the economic areas that can increase the region's competitiveness and develop it economically and socially.

## 2. Promoting Tourism Services in the Centre Region

Marketing research is of major importance because it helps to obtain the information that is necessary for the operation of a marketing system. Due to the research, the marketing specialist identifies the characteristics, threats and opportunities of the markets.

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The tourist activity is a complex and very dynamic phenomenon. Its regular and sustained assessment, as well as the factors that influence it, are needed at the level of any tourist destination to become and remain competitive on the market.

In the current environment characterized by fierce competition, the need for accurate, current and relevant information is essential for tourist destinations that want to remain competitive or for those who want to gain a position on the market.

The role of marketing researchers in tourist destination management is to provide information so that the limited resources of the destination are effectively used to meet the changing needs of visitors. Travel and tourism management organizations, the public and private sectors involved in tourism must be aware of and analyze the changes in the needs of consumers to develop viable strategies and provide products and services that will create extraordinary and memorable experiences for visitors (Youcheng and Pizam, 2011).

Marketing research provides information about attitudes, opinions and behaviors of consumers, as well as about the current state and the evolution of the marketing environment, thus being indispensable in the design and realization of marketing plans and strategies (Lefter, 2004).

The qualitative research focuses on identifying the deep causes of opinions, attitudes, behaviors of the consumers and their subjective characteristics. This is an investigation that allows a profound understanding of the concepts and is aimed at identifying and defining important aspects for a marketing context (Lefter, 2004).

In order to carry out this research chapter were studied national researches and researches referring to the issue of spa tourism ([http://mdrl.ro/\\_documente/tourism/./masterplan\\_tourism\\_balnear.pdf](http://mdrl.ro/_documente/tourism/./masterplan_tourism_balnear.pdf))

### **3. Results and Discussions**

#### **3.1. Opinions and Attitudes of Operators to Identify Methods of Promoting Spa Tourism in the City Centre Region**

Marketing research establishes the information required to investigate aspects of the problem, lays down methods of obtaining information, guides and ensures the data collection process, analyzes and communicates their results and implications.

Identifying a tourist destination with a brand is very important because a brand signifies the promise of a unique, memorable experience and it can differentiate and create an emotional bond between the tourist and the destination (Stăncioiu, et al. 2011).

The qualitative research method is the *structured depth interview*. The structured depth interview is a conversation, a dialogue, a highly structured communication that involves the researcher's formulation of a list of key themes, each theme being detailed in the form of questions to find details about the subject, his beliefs and feelings about everything connected with a certain subject matter in order to discover the basic reasons for his behavior. Therefore, the interview will be used to study the attitude of

tourism agents and their knowledge of the development of spa tourism in the Centre region.

### **3.2. Identifying the Characteristics of Tourism Packages in the Centre Region**

From the analysis of operators' responses, the following conclusions can be drawn, in connection with the identification of the characteristics of the tourism packages for the Centre area.

Regarding the aspect of *standard package or a personalized stay*, six of ten respondents considered standard programs the most suitable for the Centre region but with optional tours included. The other four respondents said that they find more suitable personalized programs because tourists are not appreciated, and the stay can be perfectly adapted to the needs, individual wishes of each tourist.

Regarding the *freedom to travel in a personalized stay*, five out of ten respondents say that the importance of the freedom to travel depends on age: young tourists want to have the freedom to travel as much as possible in a personalized stay, the older tourists intend to travel rarely. Three of the interviewed travel agents consider that tourists consider the freedom of travel at any age in a stay very important because they do not want to be constrained by any prearranged programs, they want to manage their time themselves.

Two of the agents consider that the importance of the freedom to travel depends on the purpose of the stay: for the "leisure" segment, the freedom to travel is very important because tourists enjoy having free time that they manage as they wish; in the case of the freedom of business travel, it is not so important because the purpose of the stay is primarily professional.

The existing *facilities* in the Centre region in spa tourism have great chances to develop in the years to come due to its strengths: natural factors of cleanliness, natural and anthropic potential, lack of seasonality and last but not least, the medical services offered to tourists. The access to information should be improved by developing and distributing several promotional materials and implementing subsidy tourist programs.

*The most popular tourist destinations in the Centre region:* Covasna, the city of the 1000 springs (from January 31, 2018 Covasna received a new brand: the town of mofettas and of the 1000 mineral springs), Lake Sfântu Ana, Tinovul Mohoş, Bálványos, Tuşnad, Hasznan Pal National Museum and watermill from Cernat, mineral water treatment centers: Belin, Malnaş, Mărtunuş, Hătuica.

Regarding the *main features of the tourists who opt for the Centre region*, seven of the ten interviewees consider that most of the tourists visiting the Centre region are of Romanian origin, both men and women, aged 25-65, with average earnings and at least average studies. Three of the subjects are of the opinion that foreign tourists who visit the Centre region are 40 years old, have medium or large incomes, have higher education, have visited most of the countries in Europe, and are interested in discovering new destinations.

Five of the ten interviewed agents consider that both foreign and Romanian tourists spend an average of 2-3 nights in the Centre region, and foreign tourists arrive to visit this area in each season.

Most of the respondents (8 of 10) consider that a tourism package including the basic accommodation, dining services and a visiting the environment of the Centre region and the surrounding area (Covasna, Vale of the Fairies in Covasna, Gheliţa – Saint Emeric Church, Count Mikes Estate from Zăbala, Mestecănişul de la Reci and many craftsmanship presentations in Sfântu Gheorghe and in nearby villages. Lake Sfântu Ana, Tinovul Mohoş, Peştera Puturoasă (Stinking Cave), Bálványos fortress, Apor Lányok Spa for about 6 days would be best suited for the Centre region (in the area of Covasna).

An animation program has been proposed for each evening to present local traditions and habits. Four of the respondents would include volunteer activities, such as practicing sports or relaxing activities for those who wish them.

An agent said he could not figure out a suitable tourism package for the Covasna area because he believes tourists are different and have different needs, so they would choose personalized tourism packages appropriate for each tourist according to their wishes.

### **3.3. Promotional Campaigns of the Centre Region**

The analysis of the travel agents' answers reveals the following results, described below, on the promotion campaigns for the Centre region "The city of mofettas and of the 1000 mineral springs", "2017 - The Year of Tourism in Covasna County".

Four of the travel agents interviewed have no knowledge of any campaign to promote the Centre region, so they cannot formulate opinions or proposals.

Three of the travel agents know the promotion within the Centre region through:

- *Promotional materials*: Promotional materials of accommodation units in Covasna (hotels, hostels, camping, category, facilities, prices), which are gathered by employees of the Information Center. The descriptions about the mofettas and mineral waters that are edited by the Association for Tourism Development in Covasna County.
- *Maps and tourist guides* from Covasna County, in which the touristic objectives and thematic tourism products are presented (leisure, sport, culture, spa tourism) in the city and the county.

The three respondents, who know the promotion of spa tourism and mineral waters, have identified as their strong points that they have succeeded in highlighting, have ingenious ideas on the subject and effect, the materials are of good quality and, as weaknesses, the fact that they do not organize events, people and students are not aware of the treasure that they have.

These agents learned the promotion campaign on the Internet. Proposals for improving the campaign were also identified: intensive publicizing to ensure the visibility, modification of the brand "City of Mofettas and of 1000 mineral springs" by identifying and promoting representative, unique symbols of the Centre region because

this would distinguish the brand clearly in the minds of the consumers of all the resources in order to attract them.

Three of the interviewees consider online promotion (through an official site, information portal, booking and virtual tours) to be the most suitable for the Centre region due to the accessibility to a large number of consumers at relatively low costs.

Three respondents consider the most appropriate, an advertising clip containing specific, representative elements of the area, promoted on the Internet and on TV, which sends a clear message because it provides great visibility and a strong impact even if the costs are high.

Two subjects believe that in addition to online promotion, it would be advisable to distribute the leaflets at information centers in the country and abroad, because they do not require high costs, can be easily distributed and easily reachable to tourists.

#### **4. Attitudes and Opinions of the Tourist Agents regarding the Tourist Development of the Centre Region**

As a result of the analysis of all answers of the respondents, their following opinions can be summarized on the development of the Centre region:

- Standard programs including optional excursions are considered the most suitable for the Centre region
- The freedom to travel is important for tourists, especially for young people regardless of the purpose of their stay.
- Existing facilities in the Centre region are considered sufficient and at the same level as those offered in other European regions. The emphasis on information should be improved by developing and distributing more promotional materials and implementing subsidy tourism programs.
- The most popular tourist destinations: Covasna, "The town of mofettas and of the 1000 mineral springs", The Valley of Fairies in Covasna, Ghelinta – Saint Emeric Church, which is a UNESCO monument, Count Mikes Estate from Zăbala, Mestecănișul de la Reși, Lake Sfântu Ana, Tinovul Mohoș, Peștera Puturoasă (Stinking Cave), Bálványos fortress, Apor Lányok Spa and many mineral water treatment centers: Belin, Malnaș, Mărtunuș, Hătuica, Haszmann Pal Museum and the water mill in Cernat.
- Most tourists, who visit the Covasna area, are of Romanian origin, both women and men, aged 25 to 65, with average incomes and at least average studies. Most foreign tourists who visit this area are 40 years old, have medium, large incomes and higher education, have visited many places and are interested in discovering new destinations.
- The most suitable tourism package for the Centre region is for a duration of about 6 days and consists of basic accommodation and dining services, a sightseeing circuit of the town of Covasna and the surrounding places.
- There have been initiatives to promote the area of Covasna as 2017 being year of tourism in Covasna. Interviewed agents considered it a good, ingenious initiative. Proposals to improve the campaign have been identified: intensive publicizing to

ensure the visibility of the brand of Covasna as the "Town of Mofettas and the of 1000 Mineral Springs" as the unique representative symbol of Covasna for establishing a clear segment of tourists, focusing on Covasna as a destination, and the concentration of all resources to attract them.

- The online promotion (through an official site, information portal, reservations and virtual tours) is considered to be the most appropriate for the area of Covasna due to its accessibility to a large number of consumers at relatively low costs. It was also proposed to design an advertising clip containing specific, representative elements of the area, to be promoted on the Internet and TV, and promotion by distributing the leaflets to all the information centers in the country and abroad (Zig Zag Team through Romania made an advertising clip including specific and representative elements of the area of Covasna in February 2018).
- The balneological cluster as a brand in tourism is known by seven interviewed agents. Seven agents believe that the impact of this cluster association in the Centre region has been significant both on the Romanian market and on the foreign market. This cluster is based on regional potential, tradition and history. Three agents did not make any comments.
- All interviewed operators considered that the Centre region offers the opportunity of practicing several forms of tourism: cultural, historical and religious due to the multitude of monuments; ecological, mountainous, adventurous due to the special natural landscape due to the presence of the Transylvanian villages; sports because of the possibility of practicing winter and summer sports, business trips due to the accommodation with conference rooms, and last but not least health tourism due to the natural rich in mineral waters and mofettas.
- Five travel agents would include cultural tourism, two would opt for a varied offer that includes all forms of tourism to attract more tourists, others would focus on rural tourism and agritourism.
- Brand promotion that embraces all forms of tourism would be the most appropriate.

It is considered that tourism in Europe will see an upward trend in the near future and local development depends on solving problems of promotion and infrastructure.

##### **5. Conclusions - Identification of a Promotional Mix used by Tourism Operators in the Centre Region**

The term "promotion" is considered a descriptive term for the mix of communication activities that tourism organizations use to influence those people who depend on their sales. You should also be influenced by suppliers or other people on the market.

The entire activity of the travel company is inconceivable without proper promotion through which consumers, users and the general public are informed about the characteristics of the products and services they offer.

The promotion of tourism services is aimed at attracting new customers and keeping existing customers. Promoting must target potential tourists and precise targets by applying the abilities at different levels: local, regional, national and international.

The promotion of tourist services consists in the transmission of different messages and information about tourist products, tourist services and instruments to attract tourists: offers, promotions, etc.

The promotion of tourism at national level is carried out within the Ministry of Economy through the National Tourism Authority (NTA) both on the Romanian market and on the foreign market.

Another tourism promotion emerged in recent years are tourist information centers. In the Centre region of Romania, these tourist information offices operate in all six county seats and subordinate cities, which are closely related to local authorities.

The tourism trader can launch a wide range of promotion methods; that is why it is necessary to clearly define the marketing objectives in order to use the most efficient methods of promotion.

In order to get the most favorable response from the target market, an important part of the effort put into the promotion activity is building a brand and launching it on the market.

Promotional activities in tourism require significant investment due to stretching large geographic markets, the manifestation of fierce international competition and the intangible character of the tourist product.

The promotion of tourist services consists of the transmission of various messages and information about tourist products, tourist services and instruments to attract tourists: offers, promotions, etc.

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