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The Equestrian Tourism Valorisation in Romania

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Abstract

Our argument for this achievement took into account medical recommendations for this tourism product, giving tourists the possibility of treating major medical conditions (e.g. autism, depression, poliomyelitis squalors, encephalitis, neurological disorders, behavioral disorders, stress, etc.) and the fact that the first herds of horses in Romania are attested in documents since 1870. Romania holds a recognized potential to develop this tourism product, due to its natural setting that offers multiple equestrian tourism practice opportunities for Romanian and foreign tourists with multiple benefits for them. Admitting the fact that “the touristic space managing cannot be exclusively determined by its natural properties”, our paper aims a tourism marketing strategy portfolio within positive results for the Romanian equestrian tourism promotion and also may increase the local attractiveness of the regions/areas/localities of our country within potential to equestrian tourism development.

Keywords: *equestrian tourism, sustainable development, marketing strategy in equestrian tourism, local attractiveness, online tourism promoting.*

1. Introduction

Tourism acts as a factor stimulating the development of the economy, determining people’s will to spend their free time in quiet places in nature, visiting cities and villages or taking care of their health. Equestrian tourism is a new form of tourism practiced in Romania, with great chances

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of development for our country, which for many Westerners is considered an ideal place for refuge; moreover, it is accessible for all age categories, with a relaxation and therapeutic effect. Equestrian tourism can become an important factor increasing the attractiveness of the tourist destinations in Romania, because the number of horse-loving tourists is increasing, and the Romanian and traditional geographic features facilitate the development of this tourist product.

The first equestrian clubs were opened near the Bucharest town: Club de Echitație of Bucharest in 1994 year and also Ecvalahis during 1998 year. The creation reasons by these clubs it linked that tourism experience contributes not only to the change of the image, to the change of the positioning based on cognitive/perceptual and affective variables and also to the general level of attractiveness to improve the touristic image of the great cities of Romania because the creation of a leisure offer including the pleasure of riding and the emotion of adventures in the mountains/forest, and the agro tourism fashion.

Thus, within various Romanian regions, a lot of enterprisers emerged, who, with a few horses and many ideas, have managed to develop original businesses

2. Problem Statement

The benefits of the equestrian tourism practicing into Romanian services economy. Equestrian tourism is becoming a flourishing business for Romania, being in full development, in the future, in the Romanian tourism, the practice of this type of tourism being possible in all the areas of our country. Between the positive effects of the new age tourism development by equestrian tourism we can enumerate [2]:

- the creation of jobs and the increase of the revenues;
- increased competitiveness of the Romanian tourist products on the present and potential external markets;
- increase of the State budget, by the possibility of taxing prosperous economic activities through the development of equestrian tourism;
- promotion of the image of certain areas in Romania both nationally and internationally [3];
- development of the local traditional activities by the increase of the revenues in the zones where this type of tourism is practiced, generated by the valorisation of the local touristic and agro-food resources;

- environmental protection and conservation, and improvement of the infrastructure and living conditions of the inhabitants of these tourist areas;
- increased internal and international tourist circulation;
- meeting the tourists' demands by developing and promoting tourist activities such as: equitation, practicing equestrian sports, relaxation in the middle of nature, chariot rides;
- the increase of the standard of living, in time, makes it possible for an increasing number of people to participate in equestrian activities;
- the development of the equestrian touristic offer conditioned the increase of the demand, this has been realized by the extension of the initial equestrian complexes and by arranging other equestrian complexes and stations;
- the organization of events, sport contests attracting internal and international tourists constituting opportunities of equestrian tourism promotion;
- data base regarding the equestrian tourist offer (e.g. equestrian stations, equestrian attractions, itineraries, services provided etc.);
- organization of debates on equestrian tourism development;
- the valorisation of anthropic and natural touristic resources by certain projects and arrangements specific of equestrian tourism.

3. Research Questions/Aims of the research

A Romanian Equestrian Tourism Development Statement

- **Romanian anthropic potential within the equestrian tourism practicing**

In Romania, the country of so many mysteries still unrevealed, riding manages to bring in some of the mystery times when people were riding on horses through the mountains, the valleys and the plains as naturally as they do it today by car.

In our Western-type society, the horse is leaving behind its role in agriculture increasingly more, and we find it less and less often in the daily landscape. However, it remains a remarkably beautiful presence, being sometimes wild, sometimes gentle, sometimes mysterious, and at other times open and willing to play. With it, we can discover Romania, the roads in the mountains, the paths going through forgotten places, which, nevertheless, have not lost their greatness. We discover a rural Romania seen from a continuous gallop over alpine meadows or at a slow pace, looking for the old traditions.

The Romanian equestrian tourism is fully expanding but in comparison within other countries, especially our Hungarian neighbours, it is very poorly promoted, although its potential is much greater. Due to the lack of infrastructure and of people prepared for this domain and knowing, understanding and exploiting the phenomenon, Romanian potential to develop of this tourism product is not intensely valorised. The natural framework allows practicing equestrian tourism, during any season, being even possible to see Romania on horse, from one end to the other. Here, one can discover the traces of an ancient civilization that built its values in the natural fortified area of the Carpathians, where nature is generous, and the sky was closest to the earth.

Thus in this context, in Romania, the equitation can be practiced in the all country areas.

- **Romanian equestrian tourism offer**

Romania is among the first 11 European countries affiliated to the International Equestrian Tourism Federation, considered an interesting opportunity for the tourists interested in equitation. All the equestrian centres have a structure of tourist programs including horse rides, chariot rides and riding courses, for leisure. The rides are designed for different categories of tourists. Beginner riders can enjoy long slow-paced rides in an attractive natural environment, while experienced riders can live strong sensations taking fast-paced rides over long distances [5].

Romania is among the countries in Europe with the largest State-owned horse herds. The particularity of equestrian tourism is that anyone can do it, be he a champion or a beginner. Those fond of it can easily take relaxing rides, remaining in the saddle for many hours or can follow long roads or can participate in / organize very long travels. Everybody knows the fact that equestrian tourism offers a world full of knowledge, skill and experience.

The equestrian tourism offer is divided into diverse categories depending on the tourists' experience and possibilities, but all those who want to ride on a horse are welcome to enjoy this sport in Romania. Riding in nature is the only sport that can offer full freedom. Stress and fatigue after a week of work can be fought by relaxing with the family at pensions that can offer the possibility to ride on horses. Children feel that vibration, emotion experienced when they are face to face with the horses, called therapy, and the equestrian tourism activities rely on it [4].

Appeared in areas with a rich natural and economic potential, equestrian tourism has known, during the last period, a spectacular evolution in point of the demand for the areas where it takes place. Regarding the equestrian tourism offer, in our opinion there are necessary a lot of

measures: long-term programs valorising the Romanian areas with potential for this tourism; the control of the tourist arrangement projects and the improvement of the infrastructure in the respective areas; environmental protection and conservation; development of new tourist attractions meant to complete the equestrian tourist offer; optimizing the relationship between "services quality in tourism and tourists' satisfaction" [1].

4. Research Methods

Marketing Strategies To Sustainable Development Of The Equestrian Tourism In Romania. Tourism is a sector of the Romanian economy recording permanent changes [6]. A strategic objective of the Romanian tourism development must also pursue the creation of a competitive tourist destination on the national and international tourist market.

Equestrian tourism development is going through a process of improvement and adaptation by the implementation of marketing strategies for this tourist product that will allow:

- creating thematic equestrian tourism itineraries;
- launching unique products typical of the values and traditions of the neighbourhood;
- organizing sportive equestrian contests with national and international participation;
- improving the conditions of equestrian tourism practice in the State-run horse complexes;
- creating observation points, towers, ecological paths for environment protection;
- organizing and developing professional training courses in the domain of equestrian tourism;
- developing and keeping a network of institutions related to equestrian tourism, improving the transparency of other institutions and professional organizations;
- valorizing and intensifying inter-regional partnership relations;
- continually developing and creating tourist information and orientation services;
- realizing programs in partnership with tourist offices in Romania;
- systematically approaching the existing market and infrastructure, so as to group in a coherent framework, on a local and zonal basis, the development strategies of all the public and private actors involved in tourism;

- developing and modernizing the tourist product so that the Romanian equestrian tourism may be distinct from that of other countries;
- maximally optimizing and developing the cultural component of the equestrian tourist product;
- assuring high quality services to turn to good value attractive tourist products and stimulating the present and potential tourist markets

The new age tourists have in mind the authenticity and originality of the places they visit, the return to nature, themed or active holidays. Involving the tourist in the online environment has meant a substantial change in the market of tourism services which must be aligned with the digital environment. Tourist behaviour in the online environment starts from his basic needs, they want to find complete offers “just in time” available to give many data regarding the chosen destinations and how to purchase tickets at discounted prices.

The future of tourism according to estimates made by the main players on the tourism market, will belong entirely to the internet, online companies will be majority on the market and tourism will become the largest industry on the Internet. The new tourists generation specific of the digital age (people born between 1980-2000) that will represent over the next five years half of the world's workforce, determine the change of requirements in tourism services.

The basic characteristic of the new generation is the need for permanent connection with those around them; they are more educated, impatient and put more value on teamwork. The new generation of the Information Society and / or knowledge society will have a profound impact on our culture, because it frequently travels and explore more destinations, spend more on holidays, being in a permanent search of new thrills.

The equestrian tourism sector must respond to the new requirements, regarding the facilities that are offered. respectively, offering modern tourists applications that provide the possibility to book directly from the Smartphone, access reservation directly from the tablet, extensive loyalty programs on a commission basis that extend your stay and, of course, intense presence on social networks.

Sustainable tourism appeared "to manage resources so that the needs of economic, social and aesthetic are satisfied, while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems" [9].

5. Findings

Equestrian tourism promoting online in Romania. For the tourism economy, Internet designs an important vector through which the providers can promote their services and attract customers. Creating marketing via Internet will meet the wishes of customers, they are the ones who will have control through access to information, they will choose exactly what they want. Thus, the components of the tourism industry should apply the most modern methods for promoting and developing tourism, creating a permanent study of the requirements of tourism consumption, present and future, and trying to adapt their tenders to the requirements so as to achieve an optimum satisfaction.

Online promoting equestrian tourism becomes a necessity due to increased use of the Internet in Romania and that it is a relatively inexpensive medium of promotion, but with maximum relevance and effectiveness, because it offers a very wide geographical coverage. To promote this tourism product in the online environmental require: subscription in tourism portals, creation of presentation sites, optimization for search engines (SEO), sponsored links in Google (Ad words) campaigns of e-mails, with collecting contacts in advance from customers and the organization/development of promotional offers and presence on various social networks. More and more potential customers enter onto various forums, social networks (Facebook, Tweeter and Youtube).

To achieve the purpose for which it was created, the website must provide a friendly interface, relevant content to visitors' needs, where to find information structured about a wide range of travel services and flight information, car rentals and hotels, it should have a fair indexation to make it well-known, to attract more visitors to be easy to use and include the logical links for areas of main interest, it must be amended and updated regularly so that it will be exciting, for that the users to want to return again. An effective website includes, besides the presentation of tourism offers, the means to sell them, respectively the possibility of the customer to purchase them online, a number of general tips, guides containing information on attractions, local weather, exchange rates, maps, etc.

In recent years increasingly many tourism providers realized that Social Media improve the visibility and notoriety of the tourism destinations and thus, a promotion on social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus etc.) must do it. It's still an incipient way to promote, which doesn't have clearly defined goals and a clear strategy to follow.

Information age supposed that the hotel companies must implement integrated ERP, covering all activities (public alimentation, warehouses management, accommodation, purchasing, sales, accounting, finance, human resources, reservations, payment, financial reports etc.) that offers great adaptability and flexibility. Easy and rapidly access to a variety of information about destinations, products, services and prices transforms the tourists in some people more critical and meticulous in the choice of holiday destination.

Consumers of equestrian tourism procure the services via the Internet, using different dynamic tools for choosing tourist destinations, getting information online, comparing prices and finally the online purchasing.

E -Tourism clients search for opinions and personal experiences of other tourists on specialized forums or blogs and social networks and they are less interested in following certain preset excursions and they desire much more to make their own itinerary depending on their wishes. In the digital age the choices of independently destinations are multiplying than those organized.

Internet comes to meet their needs, helping them to build online their desired vacations, allowing direct and dynamic interaction between consumers and tourism organizations. Dynamic packages technology improve the opportunity for the customer to put together the elements of a trip/holiday because the new information technologies and communication (NTIC) can combine several travel components to obtain the desired holiday.

The travel package created like this requires only one customer's payment, hiding individual component prices. Tourist's reactions to opinions of other customers about certain destinations have become a feedback for tourism service providers, forcing them to make changes and service improvements. With all the progress of online tourism in recent years, sometimes there is a need of a specialized advice in the field and this can develop the so-called niche tourism. So it is believed that in the era of globalization and the digital economy, Romania is focused on two main areas: online tourism and niche tourism.

In the digital age, Romania must adapt the online tourism in the following directions: a. the mobile applications are in continuous development, so the number of active internet connections on mobile has increased, and a multitude of hospitality or tourism guide type applications have emerged, and (a) content optimization for mobile phones is desired; (b) the formation of tourism bloggers community that can collaborate with different travel agencies as consultants on destinations; (c) the construction

of websites for tourists agencies as an interface between tourists and the actual headquarters of the tourism agency; (d) use of social networks as main channels for promoting and sometimes selling (booking apps, f-commerce apps, call to action + landing page); (e) related projects in online tourism - examples - agencies that develop projects of content and blogs - travelbuzz.ro (Accent Travel), etc.

The major tourism brands will have the opportunity to rent consumers personalized e-agents as an integrated part of the tourism package. In this way, customers are permanently interconnected with the travel agency, and have the opportunity to make changes in real time and find solutions to any problem.

6. Discussions

Virtual becomes reality and a simple verbal command will trigger the entry into action of the "digital friend" so called "E-Agent" that will gather detailed and personalized experiences from the data published by users on various social networks will perform a scan of online searches and using predictive algorithms will offer personalized suggestions adapted to the user needs, intimate, personal and surprising itineraries.

The artificial intelligence system will connect online to Websites like "try before you buy" offered by the biggest tourism agencies and will present to the user a choice of examples of virtual reality, which will allow him to see the sights, to hear and even to feel the landscape.

The anticipation and excitement system will be started from a 3D, which will offer a multi-sensorial ride. That does not mean that the user will abandon the actual holiday, but rather it will awaken a stronger desire for him to live the real experience.

7. Conclusions

Equestrian tourism is a new age tourism form practiced in Romania, with high chances of development, considered by many Western tourists an ideal place of refuge/for rest, which may be used by almost all the age categories, with a relaxation and therapeutic effect.

Spending a vacation on a horse complex can mean a peaceful, relaxing vacation, far from the daily stress, out in the open, equitation, chariot trips or, depending on the season, trips on a horse-drawn chariot on the snow, or an adventure galloping or at a slower pace on the back of a horse on dream itineraries in the middle of nature.

Equestrian tourism is meant for meeting a variety of needs and undertaking many equestrian activities organized both in the summer and in the winter such as: equitation, chariot trips, sportive training in this domain. Another reason attracting tourists are the horse complexes endowments. Tourists come for recreation and rest, to practice diverse equestrian activities, for fun, for therapeutic treatment, by means of therapeutic riding.

Riding is more than a way of spending leisure time, it is a true therapy with a long list of beneficial effects on health. Consequently, for certain people, horses are an essential part of their physical recovery process.

In Romania, equestrian tourism development strategies are needed (using the experience of other countries), exploiting the advantages or strengths of the areas with development potential for this tourism.

The new generation of the Information Society and/or knowledge society will have a profound impact on our culture, because it frequently travels and explore more destinations, spend more on holidays, being in a permanent search of new thrills.

Romania must establish a tourism development strategy, corresponding with New Information and Communication Technology. In selling tourism products as in any sales process, tour operator should consider the demands of tourists (degree of comfort, means of relaxation, hiking trails, fun choices in serving mass, price, duration of residence, transport etc.), tourism offer, estimating competition in the area (what offers, prices, occupancy in season/ off season or on weekends vs. weekdays, how to promote), and analyze supply-demand ratio. Thus, after achieving a market research a better offer will be made and the best techniques to promote and selling that it will be chosen.

In nowadays of the digital age, the choices of independently destinations are multiplying than those organized. The customer satisfaction must be ensured alongside the online transactions and the quality and complexity of the services offered, the security and authenticity of the information and transactions. Creating marketing offer via Internet will meet the wishes of customers, they are the ones who will have control through access to information, they will choose exactly what they want. Thus, the components of the tourism industry should apply the most modern methods for promoting and developing tourism, creating a permanent study of the requirements of tourism consumption, present and future, and trying to adapt their tenders to the requirements so as to achieve an optimum satisfaction.

Promoting equestrian tourism in the online environment has become a necessity due to increased use of the Internet in Romania and that it is a

relatively inexpensive medium of promotion, but with maximum relevance and effectiveness, because it offers a very wide geographical coverage.

A World Tourism Organisation report on the role of local authorities noted that local authorities have a key role to play in many aspects of tourism development and operations. As countries become more decentralised, they are taking on more in this area and realising that the sector may assist local areas in achieving development.

Community involvement is referred to as a key part of this process – ensuring participation in planning and development, therefore increasing the possibility of achieving more local benefits from tourism e.g. employment, income, establishing tourism related enterprises. The report notes that many local authorities lack in experience for planning, nurturing and developing tourism however. This can result in wasted resources and opportunities. The report states that proper planning, efficient implementation and effective management are all essential to optimise generally the tourism benefits according “Towards Earth Summit” 2002.

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