

## ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON SEASIDE TOURISM IN ROMANIA AND LEBANON

**Iulian TENIE**

*The Bucharest Univeristy of Economic Studies, 71131, Romania  
iulian\_tenie@yahoo.com*

**Oana-Diana CRISĂMARIU**

*The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, 71131, Romania  
oandianacrismariu@gmail.com*

**Awatef ABDALLAH**

*The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, 71131, Romania  
awatef\_abdallah@hotmail.com*

### Abstract

*The hospitality industry has been severely affected by the health crisis. The World Tourism Organization recently indicated that the decrease in the volume of international tourism, in terms of the number of arrivals and receipts, respectively, was 74% compared to 2019. The year 2020 meant a loss of 1 billion international tourists and 1.3 trillion dollars, compared to 2019, a collapse about 11 times more drastic than in the case of the 2009 crisis. This dramatic decline was also reflected in the case of seaside tourism, internationally.*

*Our paper tries to provide an image on the effects of the pandemic on coastal tourism in Romania and Lebanon, based on existing statistical data in the two countries. Thus, the analysis of the databases provided by the National Institute of Statistics in Romania shows that the occupancy rate for August - the month with the best occupancy rate on the coast - decreased by 23.91% in 2020 compared to from the previous year.*

*In Lebanon, according to the reference survey by Economena Analytics, Ernst and Young, the third quarter recorded the highest occupancy rate of the year in the coastal area reaching the maximum value in 2019 of 78.5%. The same quarter recorded the lowest value of 25.3% in 2020. The seaside tourism industry was severely affected in both countries.*

**Key words:** Covid, pandemic, Romania, seaside tourism, Lebanon.

**JEL Classification:** L83, Z32

### I. INTRODUCTION

In the recent decade, the way people spend their spare time has become a more common topic of conversation. Because of the difficult work that is done during the year, people are more interested in traveling on weekends, during school holidays, and on special holidays.

The SARS COV-19 epidemic has created a problem unlike any other in the tourist industry's history. To begin with, it signaled a drop in tourism and the worldwide hotel business, not just in local places. Second, the current economic collapse is more severe. Third, the SARS COV-19 problem has the potential to create significant changes in the operation of numerous tourism categories. Last but not least, because the conclusion of the epidemic cannot be anticipated, it causes long-term uncertainty. (Collins-Kreiner & Ram, 2020)

The health issue has had a significant impact on the hotel business. According to the World Tourism Organization, foreign tourism volume decreased by 74% in terms of visitors and revenues in 2019 compared to the previous year. In comparison to 2019, 2020 will see a loss of 1 billion foreign tourists and 1.3 trillion USD, a fall 11 times worse than the 2009

catastrophe. This sharp drop was mirrored worldwide in the case of coastal tourism.

In the case of seaside tourism, this severe drop was also mirrored. If 1,219,597 visitors visited the Romanian shore in 2019, the number would drop by 23.91 percent in 2020, and the average occupancy rate will drop from 71.91 percent in August 2019 to 54.65 percent in 2020. (August 2020).

In the coastal area of Beirut, Lebanon, the third quarter has the greatest occupancy rate of the year, reaching a maximum of 78.5 percent in 2019. In 2020, the same quarter saw the lowest value of 25.3 percent. According to an EY benchmark study, the average occupancy rate of Beirut's four- and five-star hotels was 13% in the first half of 2020, down from 70% in the same period of 2019.

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Most lodging units were closed due to the pandemic, resulting in severe losses for many hospitality companies. However, this isn't the only reason why lodging units are in trouble. Once the crisis has calmed, they will need to restructure their whole operations.

First and foremost, it is imperative that the situation be maintained under control at the unit level.

In this regard, each department's personnel must be notified of the new regulations that must be observed for their own safety as well as the safety of the visitors.

The entire activity should be carried out with greater prudence, as it may result in changes, including in the establishment plan of the concerned lodging unit. As a result, the personnel who will be in charge of following the new processes must be identified. 2020 (World Health Organization)

In two ways, economic growth can be linked to an increase in the number of tourists arriving. First and foremost, via the money spent on lodging, food, shopping, attractions, souvenirs, and transportation, which benefits companies (profit, investments), households (services, wages), and the government (goods, services, taxes, duties).

Second, tourist arrivals have an indirect impact on GDP due to productivity spillovers in circumstances when multinational hospitality businesses operating in new places bring new ideas to the table. In comparison to big worldwide chains, the new influences might inspire and drive local companies, creating new norms. (Groes, Ridderstaat, Bak, & Zientara, 2021)

The sanitary, economic, and social catastrophe that followed the introduction of the novel COVID-19 virus has significantly reduced tourism activities across the world. Despite the potential worth of Romania for tourist growth, the industry does not contribute much to Romania's Gross Domestic Product (only 2,8 percent). However, tourism is not an undervalued industry, since it may be assessed in a broader sense by concentrating on its multiplicative effect. Lebanon is experiencing a similar scenario.

The vulnerability of tourism has been discussed in connection to climate change, terrorist acts, natural catastrophes, and economic shocks in the literature. We are currently vulnerable as a result of the SARS COV-19 epidemic. (Duro, Perez-Laborda, Turrion-Prats, & Fernandez, 2021)

The most important choice made during the pandemic is quarantine, which has a huge impact on the hotel business. Quarantined-area decisions have a direct impact on national economy. They have the potential to influence all industries, particularly the tourist industry and supply chain. Prioritizing causal relationships across areas is critical for mitigating the harmful repercussions of the pandemic scenario. As a result, it is advisable to take a methodical approach to deciding whether or not to quarantine a certain region. (Altuntas & Gok, 2021)

Because civilization has never encountered a worldwide pandemic like COVID-19, its implications

are impossible to anticipate. Travel bans and border closures are being enforced by governments. The current findings are based on prior pandemics, but their ability to forecast the current pandemic's effects on tourism is limited. Using quarterly / yearly data from one or more nations, studies can examine the long- and short-term effects of the pandemic on tourist arrivals.. (Karabulut, Huseyin, Demirc, & Dokerd, 2020)

The image of a destination, as well as the loyalty of tourists, influence the choice of a vacation spot. People's perceptions of danger are linked to the destination's image, which is impacted by media coverage and graphic images. Previous epidemic and pandemic outbreaks have continuously influenced how people vacation.

Amid the first phase of COVID-19, we investigated tourists' perceptions and behaviors with the goal of determining how preferences and loyalty for different types of locations (seaside, mountain, art cities) alter during health problems. (Osti & Nava, 2020)

We divided travelers into groups based on their risk perceptions, which we tracked over months and across different sorts of locations. Mountain regions are regarded as safer than coastal resorts and art cities, according to our findings. Despite their expressed devotion to the same place, tourists have switched destination categories, shifting their preferences from coastal to mountain destinations in times of respiratory disease-related risk perception. (Osti & Nava, 2020)

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to analyze the impact of the pandemic on the coastal tourism in Romania and Lebanon, we chose some indicators of the tourist circulation that we analyzed in the following lines.

According to the latest Tourism Ministry data, just 199,722 people visited Lebanon in the first half of 2020. The figure was 923,820 in the same period last year, up 8.3 percent from the prior year. (Ministry of Tourism Lebanon, 2020)

The seaside tourism market in Romania has registered an increase in demand in the last four years (2016-2019). Implicitly, in order to satisfy a higher demand, new accommodation structures have appeared. So if in 2016 there were 701 accommodation structures with a capacity of 60,996 places, in 2020 their number increased by 10.12% to 772 while the number of accommodation increased by 8.68% to a total amount of 66,290. (table1)

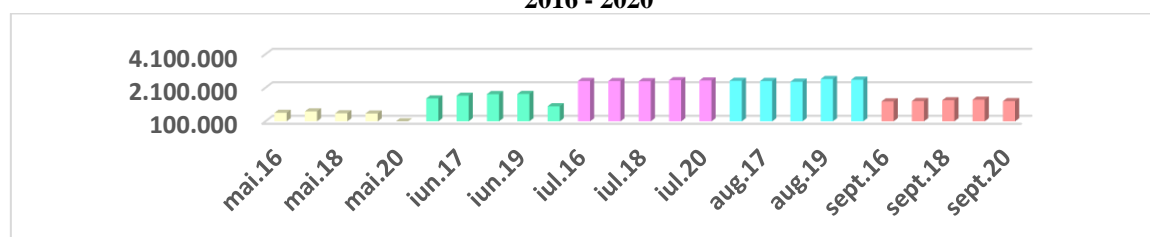
**Table 1: The evolution of accommodation structures in the period 2016 - 2020**

Accommodation structures	Accommodation structures				Accommodation offer			
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2017	2018	2019	2020
Seaside, exclusively Constanta								
Hotels	281	290	291	293	62.783	62.862	65.477	66.290
Hostels	52	54	53	45	3.861	3.914	3.300	2.679
Apartments hotels	6	5	5	2	752	704	704	1.116
Motels	1	2	2	2	291	161	155	159
Tourist villas	160	146	156	170	4.534	4.692	4.848	4.695
Bungalows	235	232	284	204	1.763	1.769	1.880	1.740
Campings	10	9	12	13	4.366	3.883	5.815	6.305
Tourist stops	2	2	2	1	194	619	619	136
Tourist houses	7	7	10	8	506	506	482	316
Camps for students and preschoolers	3	3	3	3	1.012	1.012	1.012	1.012
Tourist pensions	14	10	15	19	372	329	427	453
Agrotourism pensions	5	6	15	12	184	214	362	299
Total of which	776	766	848	772	80.618	80.665	85.081	85.200

Source: INS

As a consequence, the capacity in operation on the coast (number of places - days) registered a progressive increase in the period 2016 - 2019 (figure 2) Taking into account the seasonal character of the Romanian coast, we focused the analysis strictly on the period May - September. We consider that this approach is much more appropriate in the interest of conducting a secondary research on conclusive data on benchmarks on the Romanian coast.

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. It is expressed in places-days. Places in rooms or units temporarily closed due to lack of tourists, for repairs or for other reasons are excluded. (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2021)

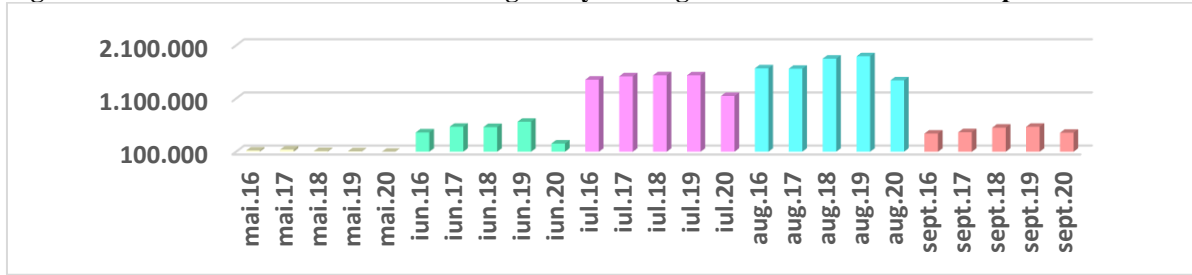
**Figure 2: The evolution of the tourist accommodation capacity during the seasonal months in the period 2016 - 2020**

Source Institutul National de Statistica

The most appropriate analysis on the databases of the National Institute of Statistics to highlight the impact of the pandemic on coastal tourism is the number of overnight stays. It is visible the progressive increase of the number of overnight stays during 2016-2019 and then the collapse of this indicator in 2020 (figure 3)

The overnight stays on the coast registered the same positive evolution until 2019, reaching a maximum (compared to the analyzed interval) of 1,896,755 for August 2019. The pandemic affected the number of overnight stays. The number of overnight stays in August 2020 stood at 1,443,334, down 23.91% compared to the same period last year.

Figure 3: Evolution of the number of overnight stays during the seasonal months in the period 2016 – 2020

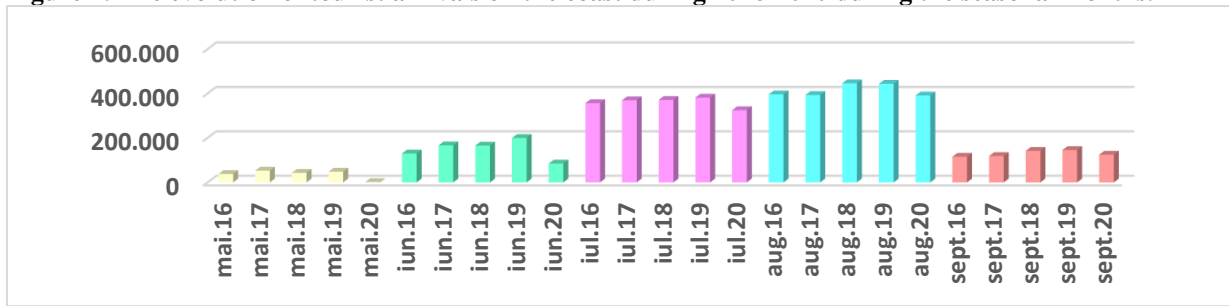


Source Institutul National de Statistica

The number of overnight stays is the most relevant study on the National Institute of Statistics databases to illustrate the impact of the pandemic on coastal tourism. The number of overnight stays increased steadily from 2016 to 2019, until finally collapsing in 2020. (figure 3)

Also, the number of overnight stays on the seaside increased steadily until 2019, peaking at 1,896,755 in August 2019 (relative to the examined timeframe). The epidemic had an impact on the number of people who stayed overnight. In August 2020, 1,443,334 overnight stays were recorded, down 23.91 percent from the same month the previous year.

Figure 4: The evolution of tourist arrivals on the coast during 2016-2020 during the seasonal months.

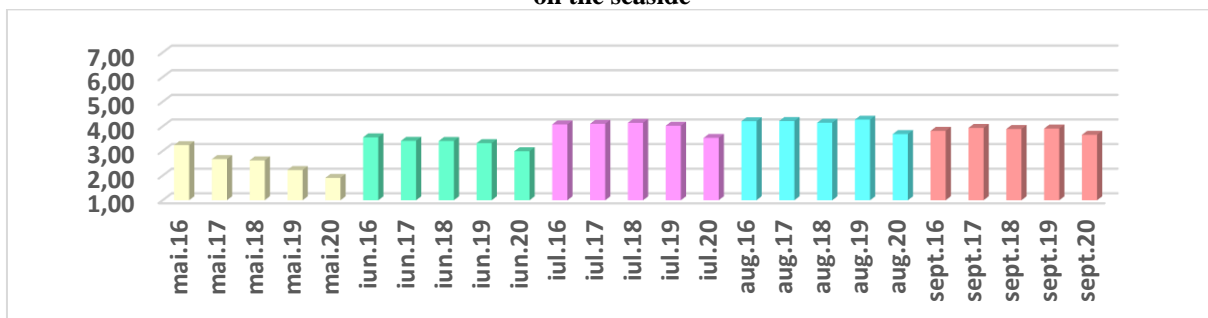


Source Institutul National de Statistica

It has been shown that the average length of stay on the Romanian shore varies depending on the season. It ranges from 2,534 days (average May 2016-2020) to 4,108 days (average May 2016-2020). (average August

2016-2020). The pandemic had an impact on the average duration of stay. If the average stay in August 2019 was 4.27 days (the highest in the study period), it fell to 3.6 days in August 2020. (Figure 5)

Figure 5: The situation of the average stay during the seasonal months in the accommodation structures on the seaside

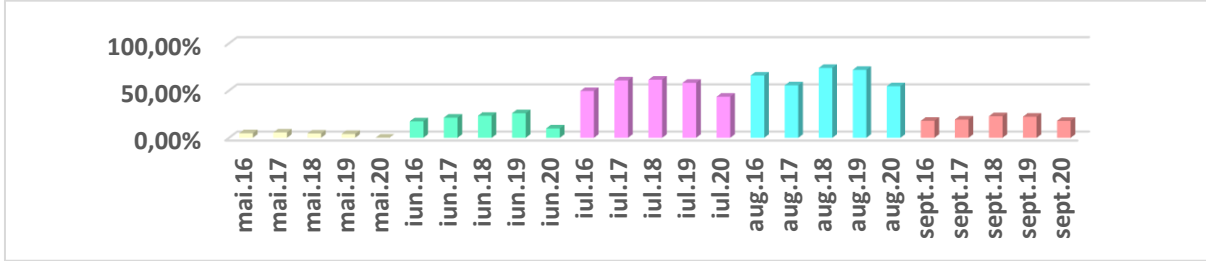


Source Institutul National de Statistica

Based on the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, we were able to determine the average occupancy rate of accommodation structures on the coast during the seasonal months. It registers important variations between May and June - the

months of the beginning and end of the season (low season) and the months of high season (July and August). The variation is important from a minimum of 4.08 (May 2018) to a maximum of 73.99% recorded in August 2018. (Figure 6)

Figure 6: Average occupancy rate related to seaside accommodation structures in the seasonal months.

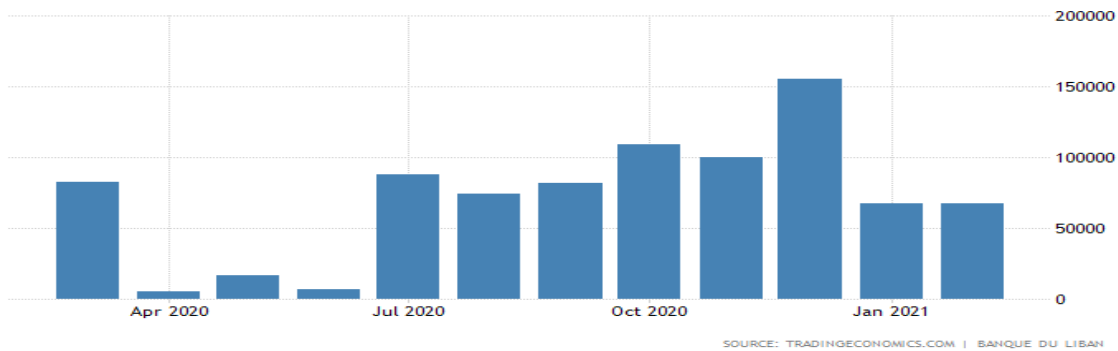


Source Institutul National de Statistica

February 2021, the number of visitors coming in Lebanon increased to 67395, up from 67076 in January.

This information comes from the Banque du Liban. (Banque du Liban, 2021)

Figure 7: Number of tourist arrivals in Lebanon

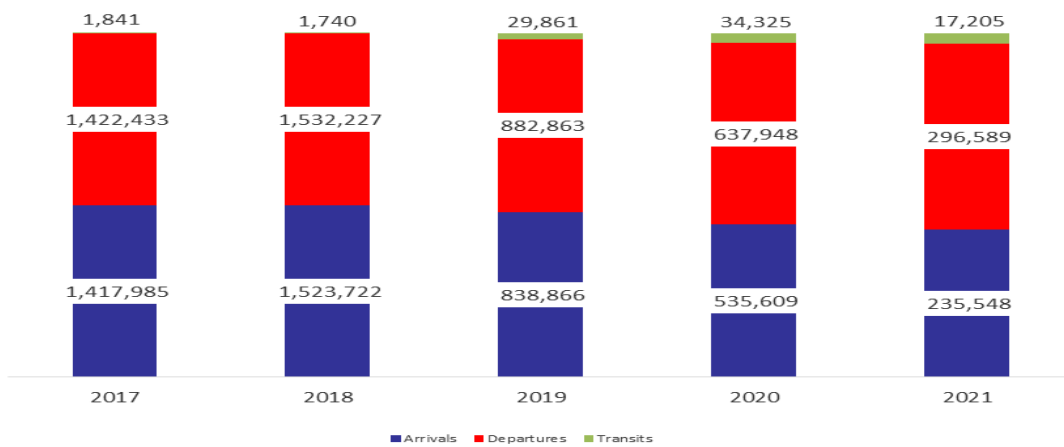


SOURCE: TRADINGECONOMICS.COM | BANQUE DU LIBAN

By March 2021, the number of passengers had dropped dramatically, from 1,207,882 in March 2020 to 549,342 in March 2021. In specifics, overall arrivals decreased by 56.02 percent year over year to 235,548. Departures, on the other hand, fell by 53.51 percent (YOY) to 296,589 passengers. In turn, by March 2021, the number of transit users had decreased by 49.88% year over year to 17,205. (Blominvest Bank, 2021)

Furthermore, according to statistics from an E&Y benchmark study, the occupancy rate at Beirut's 4- and 5-star hotels plummeted to a low of 29% in January 2021. In addition, from \$88 in January 2020 to \$213 in January 2021, the average room rate increased by 142.1 percent. The rise is exaggerated, however, because the lodging prices are calculated at the overvalued official exchange rate of 1,500 LBP per USD.

Figure 8: Beirut's Airport Activity By March 2021



Source: Blominvest Bank, 2021

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The tourist sector has seen substantial development in recent years, which may be attributed to a variety of factors. As a result, tourism is an activity that has aided global economic growth; many governments regard tourism as a growing sector that generates jobs; tourist flows were directly proportional to the quality of life in each state; and, over time, global tourism has become accessible to people of all social classes (by diversifying low-cost travel, price reductions, etc.).

In the contemporary environment, the development of the novel Covid-19 coronavirus has resulted in tourism's quick and severe collapse, making it the world's most impacted sector. As soon as the limitations are lifted and travel is restored, one visible impact of this scenario will be a shift in visitor behavior.

In the first half of 2020, just 199,722 visitors visited Lebanon, according to the latest Tourism Ministry figures. In the same period last year, the number was 923,820, a rise of 8.3 percent over the previous year. (Ministry of Tourism Lebanon, 2020)

The number of tourists arriving in Lebanon climbed to 67395 in February 2021, up from 67076 in January. Banque du Liban is the source of this information.

Political unrest creates unfavorable press, resulting in an unavoidable reduction in visitor arrivals. However, mass media plays a critical role in projecting a destination's image in order to attract or repel potential tourists. (Thapa, 2003).

This industry will remain robust as long as development occurs in a coordinated and sustainable manner, despite the emergence of a number of tough headwinds. Tourism destination planners must continually evaluate their country's image and collaborate with national governments to ensure stability, safety, and protection for both tourists and locals.

The weakening of the Lebanese lira versus the dollar, along with the easing of restrictions as a result of fewer corona virus cases, may entice additional visitors this summer. For the most part, Lebanon has become inexpensive. For the summer of 2021, we anticipate an increase in the number of tourists in Lebanon. In the event of a stable political scenario, we have an optimistic view. (Blominvest Bank, 2021)

Integrating tourist crisis management planning into the country's overall sustainable development and marketing plans with local mass media might assist to maintain and reestablish the country's reputation of safety and attractiveness.

#### References

1. Altuntas, F., & Gok, M. S. (2021). The effect of COVID-19 pandemic on domestic tourism: A DEMATEL. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*.
2. Banque du Liban. (2021). *Banque du Liban*. Retrieved from <https://www.bdl.gov.lb/>
3. Blominvest Bank. (2021). *The research blog*. Retrieved from <https://blog.blominvestbank.com/40124/cheaper-lebanon-might-attract-new-tourists-for-summer-2021/>
4. Collins-Kreiner, N., & Ram, Y. (2020). National tourism strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Annals of Tourism Research*.
5. Duro, J. A., Perez-Laborda, A., Turrion-Prats, J., & Fernandez, M. (2021). Covid-19 and Tourism Vulnerability. *Tourism Management Perspectives*.
6. Institutul Național de Statistică. (2021). *Institutul Național de Statistică*. Retrieved from <https://insse.ro/cms/>
7. Karabulut, G., Huseyin, B. M., Demirc, E., & Dokerd, A. C. (2020). How pandemics affect tourism: International evidence. *Annals of Tourism Research*.
8. Ministry of Tourism Lebanon. (2020). <http://www.mot.gov.lb/>. Retrieved from <http://www.mot.gov.lb/>
9. Osti, L., & Nava, C. R. (2020). LOYAL: TO WHAT EXTENT? A shift in destination preference due to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Annals of Tourism Research Empirical Insights*.
10. Thapa, B., 2003. *Tourism in Nepal: Shangri-La's troubled times*. Florida: University of Florida.