

## ASPECTS REGARDING VACATION SPENDING IN THE ROMANIAN TOURISM

Lecturer Ph.D. **Liliana POPESCU**

Teaching Assistant Ph.D. Student **Amalia BĂDIȚĂ**

Teaching Assistant Ph.D. Student **Cristina ȘOȘEA**

Geography Department, University of Craiova, Romania

**Abstract**

*For most of the time, tourism has been the privilege of rich people however, during the last century; it became a mass phenomenon, as its genetic (economic, social and demographic) factors have changed considerably. Unlike the developed countries which account for the main international tourist flows, Romania is a state with a much lower number of potential tourists as a result of the lower income of the population, but which witness a revival of the tourist phenomenon at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Based on statistical data, the present paper focuses on the factors that influence the choice of holiday destinations for the Europeans and for Romanians as well, some aspects regarding vacation spending, types of destinations that Romanians choose and their expenses for holiday trips.*

**Key words:** *Trips, Vacations, Tourism destinations, Romania.*

**JEL Classification:** *F14, F59*

**1. INTRODUCTION**

During the last century, tourism has become a mass phenomenon, ever more people going on shorter or longer trips, depending on general as well as local economic, political and social factors that impinge upon the tourist flows. Romania has witness important political, economic and social changes during the last decades that influenced the travel options for most of its people. The index of human development, calculated by the united Nations, representing a synthesis of various economic, social and cultural indicators, has had a positive trend for Romania, increasing from 0.704 in 2000 to 0.781 at present (UN). Following the economic stability of the country at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there was an increase in the population income (the share of households that can afford to pay for a week of holiday has increased continuously during the last decade, reaching almost a quarter in 2008 and 2009 (NSI), as well as the percentage of those that were able to save money during the last year (from 7.6% in 2000 to over 10% in 207 and 2008) (NSI), before the economic crisis began. Consequently, the increase in the life standard and wages, as well as the EU enlargement, on the other hand, and the more diversified offer of tourism agencies and publicity opened new opportunities for spending a vacation and choosing a destination.

**2. FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE THE CHOICE OF HOLIDAY DESTINATION**

Selecting a destination for spending the holidays is one of the most important decision that the traveller must make (Pizam and Mansfeld, 1999), given the fact that the needs and expectations of the

tourists vary from one person to another, depending on age, cultural and social background. Every traveller has shaped an image about a particular destination depending on three major elements – attitude, multisensory components and cognitive maps (Pearce, 2005), selecting the destination that is seen as best suiting his needs and desires.

According to the survey carried out and published by the EU - *Europeans and Tourism – Autumn 2009. Survey on the attitudes of Europeans towards tourism*, the most important factors with impact on the choice of holiday destination of the EU citizens are value for money (44%), cultural attractiveness (31%), price (27%), quality of service (23%), safety and security (12%), eco-friendliness and social considerations. For Romanians, however, the situation is a bit different: price (44%) and value for money (39%) are the key factors that potential tourists focus on, followed by quality of service (35%), the cultural attractiveness having a much lesser impact on their choice (17.8%), not to mention the eco-friendliness aspect (7.4%) and the social considerations (i.e. labour conditions, respect for the host community) (6.6%) (Flash Eurobarometer). The stress Romanian tourists laid on price may be partially explained by the poor financial resources needed for the holidays, since only 12% of the interviewed persons considered that they would have the necessary financial resources to afford a holiday, a share which is almost three times lower than the EU average, Romania, together with Hungary, Bulgaria and Latvia being ranked last among the EU countries. Moreover, almost one fifth of the respondents acknowledged that they cannot afford a holiday during the difficult financial times (Flash Eurobarometer).

Considering the amount of money that every tourist can afford to spend, the choice of the transport means as well as the facilities offered by the

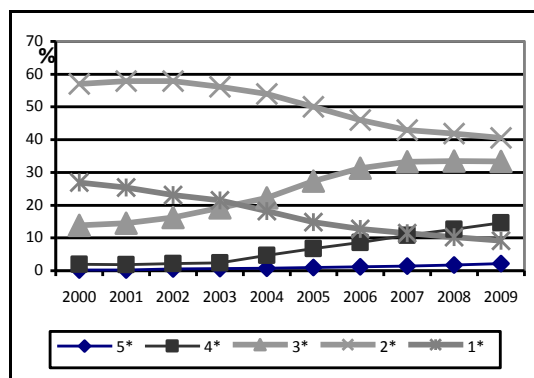
accommodation units vary from one category of tourists to the other.

### 2.1. Means of transport

Most of the outbound trips (more than three quarters) have been made using *passenger cars*, as a result of the cheap transport costs incurred and by the not so long distances covered within the continent. The *train*, while being a very popular transport means after the fall of communism, coming second after passenger cars, registered a negative trend during the last ten years, the number of people choosing to travel by train constantly decreasing. Thus, at present, it accounts for just 2% of the total number of travellers abroad, being outnumbered by *airplanes*, the share of which steadily increased from around 8% in 2000 to 18% in 2008 and 2009 (NSI).

### 2.2. Accommodation preferences

As a result of the ever expanding and diversifying accommodation establishments as well as the improvement of life standard, the number of tourists choosing to stay in 3, 4 and 5 star hotels and similar establishment continuously increased, parallel to the decrease registered by the 1 and 2 star establishments (Figure 1).



**Figure 1 - Share of Romanian tourists in accommodation units, by comfort degree**

Data source: TEMPO on-line database

The top hotels had the highest increase, the number of tourist staying in 5 star hotels multiplying by 17 times since the year 2000, and 9 times for the 4 star hotels, while it halved for the 1 star hotels. The 3 star hotels, although having a gain of almost 1 million tourists during the analysed period, had a much moderate increase (only 3 times) (NSI – Tempo on-line database).

It is worth mentioning the fact that, according to the studies conducted for drawing up the Master Plan for tourism development, Romanians consider

that the hotels throughout the country, and especially those on the seaside, are quite expensive and offer mediocre services compared to those provided in the hotels and similar accommodation establishments on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast (Master Plan, p.104).

## 3. ASPECTS REGARDING VACATION SPENDING

### 3.1. Number of holidaymakers

The number of Romanians that spent their vacation *within the country* during the 2000-2009 period registered a positive trend, although during the entire period there is an oscillating evolution: at the beginning of the analysed period, there is a slight decrease in the number of vacationers, followed after 2003 by a gradual increase until 2008, when the number of domestic travellers peaked at 5.66 million persons (a gain of more than 1.5 million persons compared to the year 2000, i.e. 40%), as a result of the positive trend of the national economy on the whole and of the economic stability that most people felt. However, in 2009, when the effects of the worldwide economic crisis appeared in Romania as well, there was a sudden drop in the number of domestic tourists, reaching only 4.9 million persons in 2009, which means that in just one year of economic crisis, it decreased by 16%, the trip volume being back to the level registered in 2006. The number of tourist arrivals shrank in almost all the Romanian counties (Figure 2), with up to 41% decrease, in Braşov and Prahova – two of the most popular holiday destination counties for the Romanians dropping by more than 20%.

### 3.2. Number of holidays

The number of domestic and outbound holidays (4 plus nights) registered an increase after 2007 compared to the previous years, oscillating around 5.4 million holiday trips per year. In economic crisis time, the number of holiday trips slightly decreased in 2009 as compared to 2008, mainly as a decrease in outbound holidays (NSI).

**The holiday trips abroad**, despite having a much lesser volume than the domestic ones (around 0.8 mil trips during the last years), registered a much faster increase during the analysed (it multiplied almost 3 times in just 10 years). The impact of Romania's integration into the European Union and the newly gained freedom for travel was considerable – the number of holiday trips abroad augmented from approximately 450,000 in 2006 to almost 800,000 the following year (NSI).

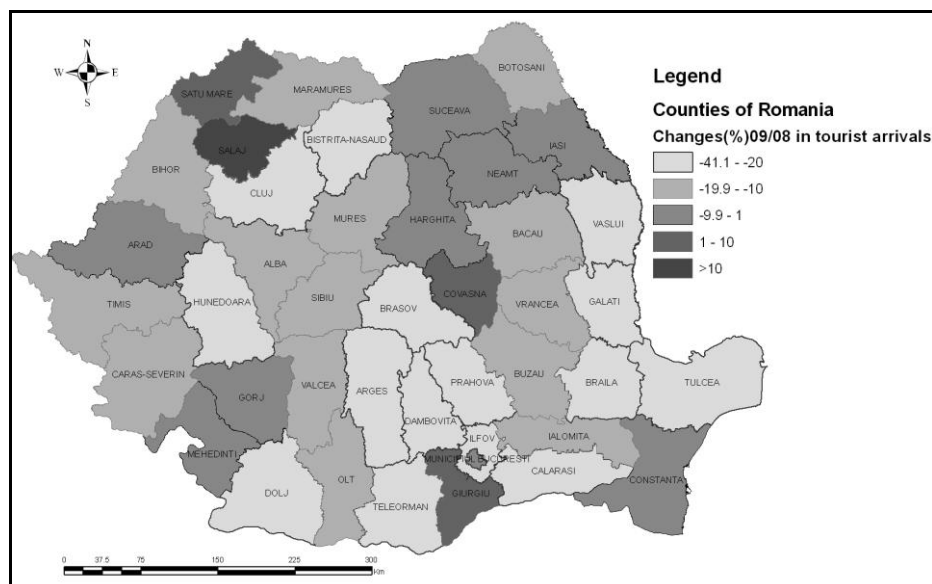


Figure 2 - Changes in tourist arrivals 2009/2008 (%)

### 3.3. Length of stay

The average length of stay registered slight variations for the analysed period, oscillating around 7.5 days for the domestic holidays and 6 days for the holidays abroad. When analysing the holidays by main destinations, some differences become quite obvious – health resorts have the longest stays of approximately 13-14 days, as a result of the peculiarities of the health tourism (treatments requiring longer stays), followed by the seaside resorts – around 7 days. Unlike these two most popular destinations, which registered a slight but continuous decrease during the last ten years, other destinations are becoming more popular among Romanian tourists. This is particular true for the mountain areas (villages and alpine routes) (from 4.1 days in 2000 to 5.3 days in 2009) (NSI).

In 2009, the average length of holiday trips (trips of at least 1 overnight stay) was 4.6 (Eurostat), which is less than the EU average (5.5 days), but similar to Bulgaria and Latvia (4.5 days) and higher than in Hungary (3.9).

### 3.4. Trip organiser

During the last years, Romanians have become ever more keen for taking a trip on their own account – an overwhelming 95% of the domestic travels were organized independently, the share of tourism agencies, unions and other organizers (professional, cultural, religious associations etc.) being very low (Table 1). Still, depending on tourism destinations, some variations are visible – tourists travelling to health resorts buy to a larger extent a tourism package from travel agencies, unions or ministry, while for the mountains resorts their role is quite minor.

Table 1 - Share of domestic trips by tourist destinations and trip organizer (2008)

Trip organizer	Total (%)	Seaside (%)	Mountain (%)	Health resorts (%)
Tourism agencies	3	10.4	2.8	8.3
Union	1	4.4	0.6	4.8
Pension offices, Ministry of Labour	1	2.1	0.3	4.2
On own account	95	82.1	94.8	78.7
Other means	1	0.9	1.5	4.0

Data source: Romanian Statistical Yearbook

It is interesting to notice that for the Romanians, the last minute offers are quite popular. According to the European survey, mentioned above, more than 20% of the interviewed tourists said they would book their holiday through a last-minute offer, which is almost double than the average for the EU, a third of them considering that in this way they would get a cheaper holiday (37.3%, unlike 53.9% in EU), and another third (36%) choosing this type of offer because of the late decision for going on holiday (Flash Eurobarometer).

## 4. TYPES OF HOLIDAY DESTINATIONS FOR SPENDING VACATION

### 4.1. Domestic holidays

Following a diverse natural and historical background of the country, there can be identified *traditional* tourist destinations, such as balneary spas (most of them in the Carpathians), seaside resorts and

mountain spas, and *non-traditional destinations*, such as rural and small urban settlements spread throughout the entire country.

When analysing the main destinations for the domestic holidaymakers, it is obvious that the non-traditional destinations, such as rural settlements and small land medium-seized towns, registered the highest increase of the number of tourist, from 484.6 thousand tourists in 2000 to 783,000 in 2009, peaking at 933,800 persons in 2008 (it almost doubled). The share of tourists that choose this type of destination for their vacation had the only positive trend for the analysed period (increasing from 12% in 2000 to 16% in 2009) (NSI).

However, traditional destinations are still the most important for the Romanian tourists, Braşov, Constanta and Prahova being ranked the first three counties in Romania when considering the number of tourist arrivals (Figure 3).

It is interesting to mention that just like in other European countries; the regions that are most popular for domestic holidays differ from those preferred by the inbound tourists. The South-Eastern region (including the seaside resorts) registered the highest number of nights spent by residents (26% of the total number of nights) in 2010, while it ranks only the 5<sup>th</sup> out of the 8 regions for the inbound tourists (only 9% of the total number of nights spent by non-residents within the country) (Statistics in focus, 49/2011).

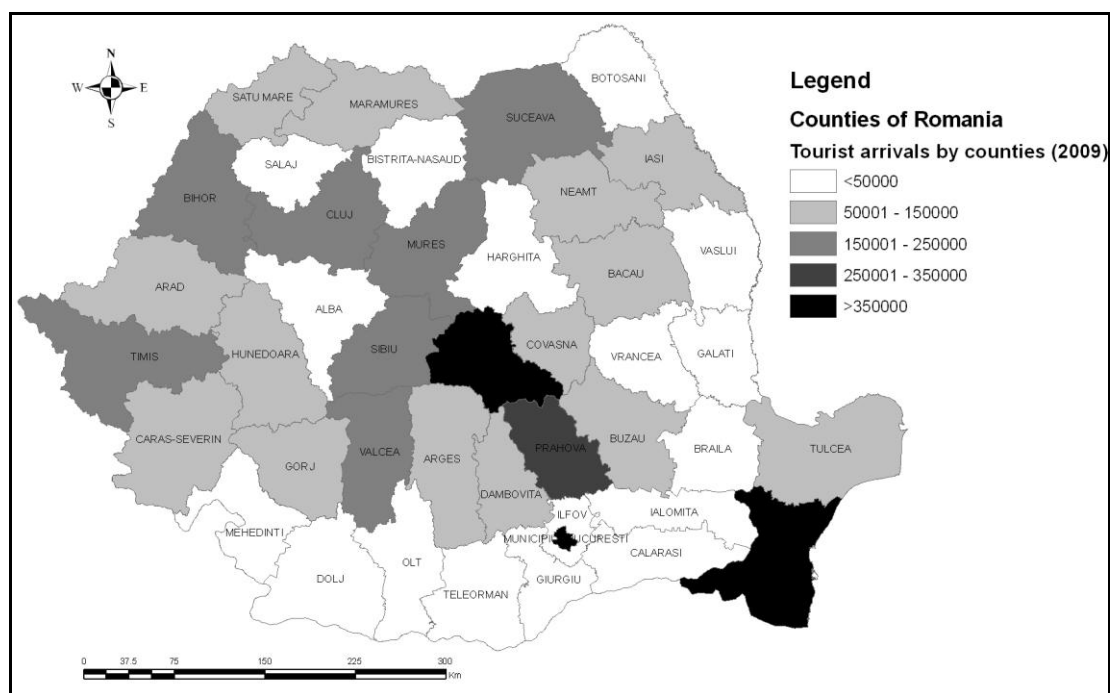


Figure 3 - Tourists arrivals by counties, 2009

Data source: Romanian Statistical Yearbook

Mountain spas registered the highest increase in the number of tourists, from 668,500 tourists in 2000 to 893,100 in 2008 and 750,000 in 2009. This is the result of the continuous increasing flows of weekend tourists from the major cities towards the mountains, with Braşov and the Prahova valley as the main polarizing areas for the tourist flows, especially during the cold season, this area being the most popular destination for skiing.

The resorts along the Romanian coast of the Black Sea welcomed around 650,000 vacationers per year during most of the analysed period, with an oscillating evolution, marked by quite a sharp increase in the number of holidaymakers during 2007 and 2008, when it peaked at 791,000 persons, followed by a slight decrease in 2009 (when there were registered 756,700 persons). Still, the seaside resorts in Romania cannot compete with other European resorts in the

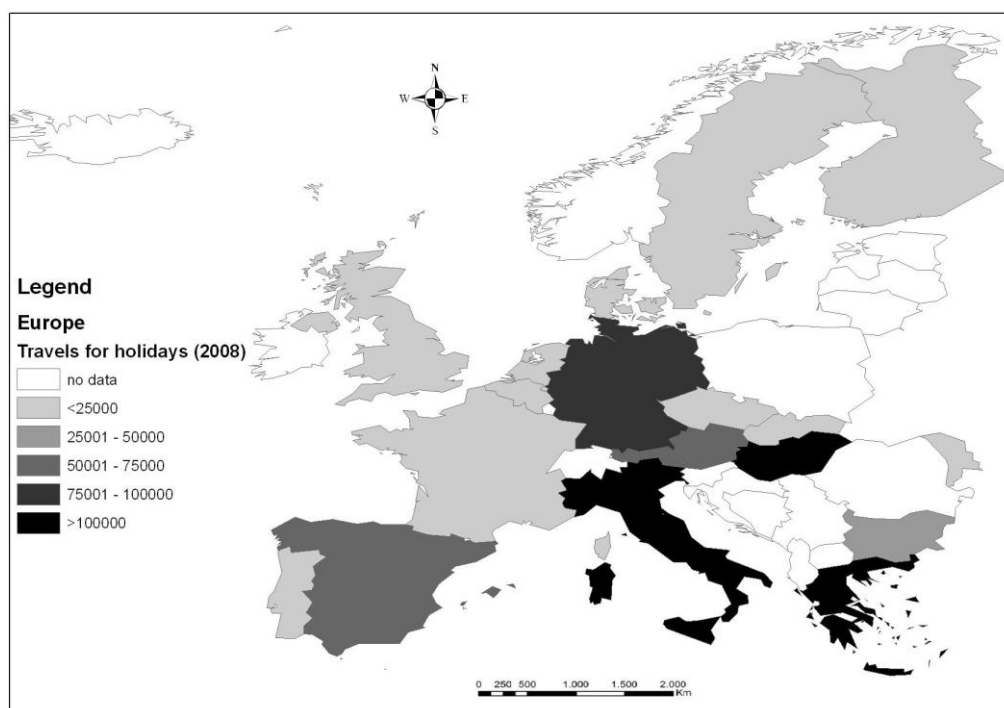
region and consequently have lost part of the autochthonous tourists as the destinations from abroad became more accessible and more attractive for the Romanian tourists (Master Plan, p.28).

Balneary spas had the least dynamic evolution of the number of tourists during the 2000-2009 period, just like the seaside resorts. They are targeted generally by the elderly tourists – mainly pensioners with low income that accept the treatment programmes offered by the social system (Master Plan, p.98). For the Romanian balneary spas, the highest number of holidaymakers reached only 705,800 persons in 2007, being the tourist destination (except for the Danube Delta) with the lowest number of tourists during the last three analysed years, in 2009 attracting only 617,000 tourists, much lesser (almost 25%) than the other traditional destinations. This fact may seem quite surprising since at the beginning of

the decade, balneary spas were ranked second after the mountain spas for the number of tourists. However, the poor and decaying specific infrastructure for most of the balneary spas in Romania, as well as the poor value for money of the services offered by the Romanian spas compared to those abroad explain this descendent trend. Moreover, since the balneary programmes focus mainly on medical and convalescence elements, these balneary spas are seen as resting and treatment places for the old and sick people (Master Plan, p.28).

#### 4.2. Outbound holidays

The main outbound destinations for Romanian holidaymakers are the European countries (97% of the outbound trips in 2008 and 96% in 2009 were made within the continent), and mostly the EU countries (around 85%). The top destinations for Romanians are Italy (more than a fifth of the outbound tourists in 2008 choose this country as destination of their trip), Hungary, Greece, Germany and Austria (Figure 4).



**Figure 4 - Romanians' travels for holidays**

*Data source: Romanian tourism Statistical Abstract*

Italy and Greece, countries with a rich and valuable heritage, but also with important natural resources in terms of tourism (thousands of kilometres of shoreline and numerous beaches which were awarded with *blue flag*, an appropriate climate) annually attract 100 000 Romanian tourists. Austria is, on the one hand, a favourite destination for cultural tourism, and on the other hand for winter sports, being an alpine state, with a proper tourism infrastructure.

A deeper analysis for the outbound holidays points to interesting findings. Considering the large number of Romanian ethnics working abroad, mainly in Germany, Italy and Spain – the main destination countries for the Romanian migrants, these countries have a large share for visits to relatives and friends in the total number of holiday trips (84%, 84.7% and 79.8% respectively) (Figure 5). Hungary has a particular situation, because over 50,000 Romanians visit their relatives and friends every year in this country. Unlike Germany, Italy and Spain where the majority of the Romanian ethnics go, in Hungary especially the Hungarian ethnics go, who are located

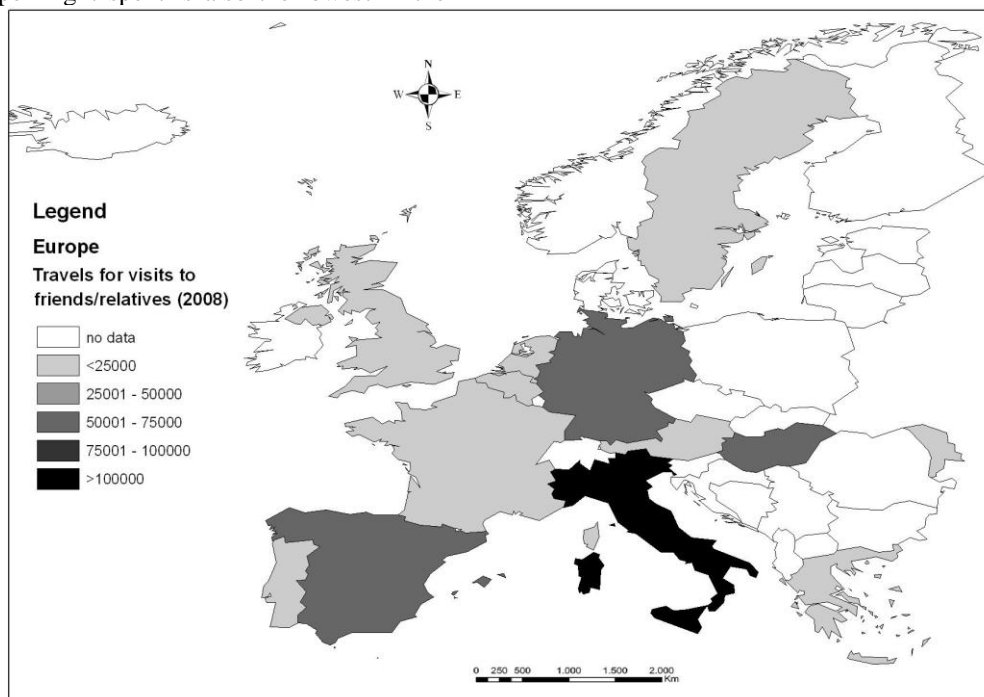
in large number in the counties from the north-western and central regions. Instead Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, France and Austria hold a small share of trips for visits to relatives and friends (0%, 3.3%, 17.3%, 19.6% and 21.7% respectively).

#### 5. VACATION SPENDING

According to the latest statistics, in 2010, Romanian holidaymakers spent just over 1 billion € (Eurostat) on holiday trips, with almost three quarters of this amount of money (738 mil €) for domestic trips, similar to the volume in Bulgaria. However, tourist expenditure per trip is different. Thus, with just 91 € spent per trip, the Romanian tourist is ranked the last in the European Union, our neighbours spending much more (Hungary 105€, Bulgaria 167 €). For the domestic trips, Romanians spent 70 €, which is more than the amount spent by Hungarians, Czechs or people from the Baltic states, while for the outbound trips they paid 411 € - much more than Hungarians

(274 €) or the Polish (257 €), but less than Bulgarians (523 €) (Statistics in focus, 49/2011). Tourist expenditure per night spent is also the lowest in the

EU – 21 € (19 b per domestic and 34 € for outbound holiday trip) (Eurostat).



**Figure 5 - Romanians' travels for visits**

Data source: Romanian tourism Statistical Abstract

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Depending on the available budget, free time and personal needs and desires, people travel for shorter or longer periods to experience new things, meet new people and cultures or simply to relax. Most of Romanians' holiday trips take place within the country borders, domestic tourism being the most frequent form of holiday, partly due to the lower costs incurred. Traditional destinations are targeted by most of the tourists, but the non-traditional destinations also become more and more popular as new forms of

tourism gain popularity among Romanian holidaymakers, such as rural, adventure or even shopping tourism. As the living standard improved for many Romanians for most of the decade and the citizens gained a new freedom of move when the country joined the European Union, the destinations diversified, as well as the travel preferences for means of transport, accommodation and services. Like other European peoples, the number of Romanian holidaymakers and trips follow the general ascending trend, marked by some specific elements, given the different social, cultural and economic background.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Bovagnet, F.C. (2006) *How Europeans go on holiday*, Statistics in focus, 18/2006, Eurostat.
2. Demunter, C., Dimitrakopoulou, C. (2011) *Domestic tourism*, in Statistics in focus, 49/2011, Eurostat.
3. Demunter, C. (2010) *A look at the seasonal bias in the tourism accommodation sector in 2009*, Statistics in focus, 53/2010, Eurostat.
4. Pizam, A., Mansfeld, Y. (eds) (1999) *Consumer behaviour in travel and tourism*, Haworth Hospitality Press, New York.
5. Pearce, P.L. (2005) *Tourist behaviour: Themes and Conceptual Schemes*, Channel View Publications.
6. \*\*\* (2011) *Turismul României. Breviar statistic*, Institutul Național de Statistică, București.
7. \*\*\* (2010) *Turismul României. Breviar statistic*, Institutul Național de Statistică, București.
8. \*\*\* (2010) *Anuarul statistic al României*, Institutul Național de Statistică, București.
9. \*\*\* (2009) *Europeans and Tourism – Autumn 2009. Survey on the attitudes of Europeans towards tourism*, Flash Eurobarometer, no.281.
10. \*\*\* (2007) *Turismul României. Breviar statistic*, Institutul Național de Statistică, București.
11. \*\*\* Tempo on-line database, <https://statistici.insse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo2&lang=ro&context=20>.