

DYNAMIC STUDY OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN IASI, ROMANIA, IN THE PERIOD 2011-2020

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Abstract

The study of the absolute and relative dynamics of arrivals in the period 2011-2020, in Iasi, Romania shows that the number of tourists decreased in 2020 compared to 2011, by 19.69%. Overall, the average level of arrivals was 218.89 thousand people, with an absolute average decrease of 3.46 thousand people and a relative decrease of 2.5%, in October the average level of arrivals was 243.54 thousand tourists, with an absolute average decrease of 4.96 thousand tourists and a relative decrease of 3.2%. The study of the absolute and relative dynamics of overnight stays in the same period of time, in Iasi reveals that their number also decreased a lot in 2020 compared to 2011, by 30.65%. Overall, the average level of overnight stays was 395.42 thousand people, with an absolute average decrease of 10.38 thousand people and a relative decrease of 4%. The study of the absolute and relative dynamics of the average length of stay in Iasi reveals that it showed fluctuations in the analyzed period and decreased in 2020 compared to 2011, by 13.55%. In total, the average level of average length of stay was 1.83 days, with an absolute average decrease of 0.03 days and a relative decrease of 1.62%. The average length of stay in October was 1.81 days, with an absolute decrease of 0.03 days and a relative decrease of 1.57%.

Key words: spiritual tourism, arrivals, overnight stays, absolute dynamics, relative dynamics

INTRODUCTION

Religious tourism, called faith tourism, soul tourism, or spiritual tourism, has gained an important place in the world in recent years (Sharpley et al., 2011; Țală, 2012; Parsons et al., 2019; Halim et al., 2021).

Religious tourism is a complex phenomenon, which is constantly changing, but which retains its basic element - religion (Bacal et. al., 2012; Cheer et al., 2017; Kujawa, 2017; Buzinde, 2020).

An impressive cultural heritage transforms Iași into a real open-air museum. The religious nucleus of this city, Iași, gives strength to the center mark of the international Orthodox pilgrimage, which it assumes every year on the feast of Pious Saint Parascheva, on October 14 and under normal conditions the city enjoys the presence of over 100 thousand annual pilgrims.

Since 1641, through the efforts of the faithful Lord Vasile Lupu of Moldavia, Iasi has been blessed by the presence and protection of the relics of Pious Saint Parascheva, to whom pilgrims from all over come to worship.

The pilgrimage to Pious Saint Parascheva from Iasi in 2020, took place under special conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, when the Iasi County Committee for Emergency Situations imposed a series of restrictions.

The purpose of this paper was to analyze the tourist demand in Iasi in 2011-2020 and a comparison of it by year with the demand in October, the month in which the most important pilgrimage of the Orthodox world in Romania takes place.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

In number of tourists (arrivals) accommodated in touristy boarding units are included all the persons (Romanians and foreigners) who travel outside their own residence locality, for a period less than 12 months and who stay at least one night into a touristy boarding unit in areas which they visit in the country; the main reason of the journey being other than to have a paid activity in the visited.

Touristy overnight is a 24 hours period, starting with hotel hour, for which a person is recorded in the bookkeeping of touristy unit and it is hosted for the paid price, even if effective sojourn stay is lower than the mentioned period. Are also included the overnights afferent to supplementary installed beds (paid by customers).

Mean duration of sojourn is determined by rate between numbers of days/tourist (NZT) to tourists' number (NT) and reflects the possibility of touristy offer to retain a tourist into a certain area, region or country (Neacșu et. al., 2012; Snak et. al., 2001; Minciu, 2004).

$$D_s = \frac{\sum NZT}{\sum NT}$$

where: D_s - mean duration of sojourn;

NZT - numbers of days/tourist; NT - tourists number.

Absolute indicators represent a basic form of dynamic series, based on which could be obtained general indicators (Anghelache et. al., 2012; Merce et. al., 2009; Petcu, 2005).

Level indicators are the terms of a series formed by absolute indicators ($y \dots y_t \dots y_{t-1}$).

Total level of terms ($\sum_{t=1}^n y_t$), only for time interval series with absolute measures.

The absolute modifications: with fixed base $\Delta_{t/1} = y_t - y_1$ where, $t = \overline{2, n}$; with in chain base (mobile or variable base) $\Delta_{t/t-1} = y_t - y_{t-1}$ where, $t = \overline{2, n}$.

Relative indicators

It is a presentation way, mainly percentage. In this situation is mandatory that in title or outside the table to be mentioned the rating based so the data interpretation to be correctly done.

Dynamic index: with fixed base $I_{t/1(\%)} = \frac{y_t}{y_1} \times 100$; with in chain base $I_{t/t-1(\%)} = \frac{y_t}{y_{t-1}} \times 100$.

Dynamic rhythm: with fixed base $R_{t/1} = I_{t/1(\%)} - 100\%$; with in chain base $R_{t/t-1} = I_{t/t-1(\%)} - 100\%$, $t = \overline{2, n}$.

Average indicators: \bar{y} – the average level of the interval time series $\bar{y} = \frac{\sum_{t=1}^n y_t}{n}$, $\bar{\Delta}$ – the average level of the absolute change (increase or decrease) $\bar{\Delta} = \frac{y_n - y_1}{n-1}$, \bar{I} – the average index of dynamics $\bar{I} = \sqrt[n-1]{\frac{y_n}{y_1}}$, \bar{R} – the average growth rate $\bar{R} = \bar{I} - 100$.

To adjust the number of tourists, the method of trends adjusted according to the polinomial trend, for the time period 2011-2020 was used.

Linear model: $y = a + bt$.

R is the correlation between the values predicted by the equation and the current values. The square R is used to indicate the variation of the values from the trend line (Panțiru, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Starting from the statistical data given by the National Institute of Statistics in Romania, regarding the tourist demand, we can study the level and dynamics of the following indicators: the level of total arrivals, the level of total overnight stays and the average length of stay. These indicators will be characterized both in dynamics and in structure.

The level and dynamics of arrivals and overnight stays

Studying the absolute and relative dynamics of arrivals in the period 2011-2020, in Iasi Municipality (Table 1), it can be seen that their number decreased in 2020 (pandemic year-COVID19) compared to the base year (2011) by 19.7%, in the rest of the period there were increases of up to 96.21% (in 2019). However, the dynamics rate registered a significant decrease of 59.07% in 2020, a pandemic year, compared to 2019.

Overall, the average level of arrivals reached the value of 218.89 thousand tourists, with an absolute average decrease of 3500 tourists and a relative decrease of 2.5%.

The absolute and relative dynamics of arrivals in October in the analyzed period (2011-2020), in Iasi Municipality (Table 1), reveals that the

number of tourists decreased even more than also in 2020 (pandemic year) compared to basic (2011) by 25.22%, in the rest of the period there were increases of up to 88.26% (in 2019). However, the dynamics rate registered a significant decrease of 60.28% in 2020, a pandemic year, compared to 2019. Overall, the average level of arrivals reached the value of 243.54 thousand tourists, with an absolute average decrease of 4,96 thousand tourists and a relative decrease of 3.2%. These decreases may be due to the existing pandemic context because by Decision 35 of the Iasi County Committee for Emergency Situations (October 6, 2020) a perimeter was established in which access is allowed only for pilgrims who have their domicile or residence in Iasi, access to persons being allowed in the area based on the verification of identity documents.

Table 1

Absolute and relative changes in arrivals by year and in October month, in the period 2011-2020, in Iasi

Year	Arrivals (thousands of tourists)	Absolute changes		Dynamics index%		Rhythm of dynamics%	
		$\Delta_{t/1}$	$\Delta_{t/t-1}$	$I_{t/1}$	$I_{t/t-1}$	$R_{t/1}$	$R_{t/t-1}$
Arrivals by year							
2011	158.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
2012	164.4	5.9	5.9	103.72	103.72	3.72	3.72
2013	163.0	4.5	-1.4	102.83	99.14	2.83	-0.86
2014	176.9	18.4	13.9	116.60	108.52	11.60	8.52
2015	223.4	64.9	46.5	140.94	126.28	40.94	26.28
2016	272.0	113.5	48.6	171.60	121.75	71.60	21.75
2017	290.0	131.5	18.0	182.96	106.61	82.96	6.61
2018	302.4	143.9	12.4	190.78	104.27	90.78	4.27
2019	311.0	152.5	8.6	196.21	102.84	96.21	2.84
2020	127.3	-31.2	-183.7	80.31	40.93	-19.69	-59.07
	\bar{y}	$\bar{\Delta}$		\bar{I}		\bar{R}	
	218.89	-3.46		0.975 (97.5%)		-2.5	
Arrivals - October							
2011	177.3	-	-	-	-	-	-
2012	195.0	17.7	17.7	109.98	109.98	9.98	9.98
2013	192.7	15.4	-2.3	108.68	98.82	8.68	-1.18
2014	212.2	34.9	19.5	119.68	110.11	19.68	10.11
2015	249.4	72.1	37.2	140.66	117.53	40.66	17.53
2016	301.0	123.7	51.6	169.76	120.68	69.76	20.68
2017	318.2	140.9	17.2	179.46	105.71	79.46	5.71
2018	323.2	145.9	5.0	182.28	101.57	82.28	1.57
2019	333.8	156.5	10.6	188.26	103.27	88.26	3.27
2020	132.6	-44.7	-201.2	74.78	39.72	-25.22	-60.28
	\bar{y}	$\bar{\Delta}$		\bar{I}		\bar{R}	
	243.54	-4.96		0.968 (96.8%)		-3.2	

Source: calculation according to insse.ro

Adjustment based on the graphical representation is a tool for assessing the development trend, depending on which one can choose the method (procedure) to be used in estimating the long-term and short-term trend (Anghelache et al., 2012).

To estimate the number of tourists arriving in the next five years (2021-2025) in Iasi, we used the adjustment function $y = -1.1648x^2 + 4708.5x - 5E+06$ obtained by the graphical method according to the polynomial trend.

The square R was used to indicate the variation of the values from the trend line, the value of the coefficient suggesting a less accurate approximation ($R^2 = 0.3842$).

The same graphical method according to the polynomial trend was also used to estimate the number of tourists arriving in October in the next five years (2021-2025) with the adjustment function $y = -0.9651x^2 + 3904.7x - 4E+06$; the variation of the values from the trend line was $R^2 = 0.4881$, the approximation being also less accurate (Fig. 1).

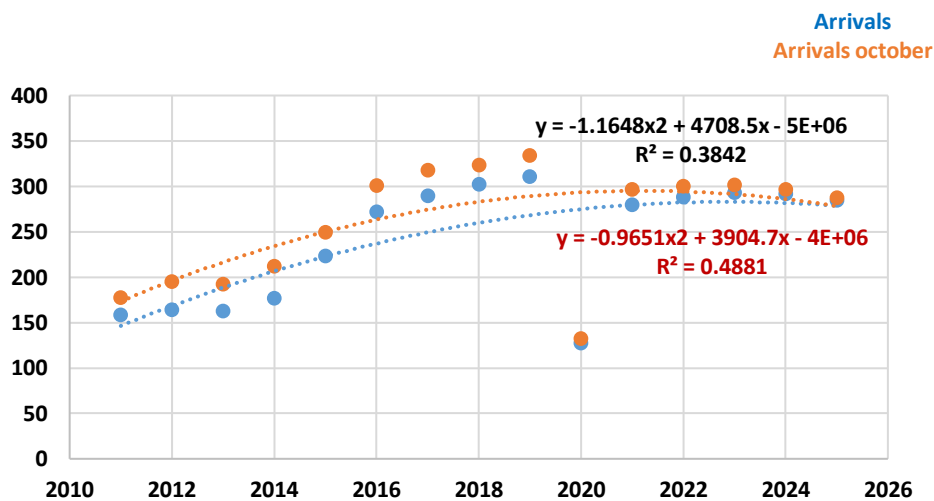


Fig. 1. Dynamics and estimates of arrivals by years and in October, in the Municipality of Iași, in the period 2011-2025

In the period 2011-2020, in Iasi, the absolute and relative dynamics of overnight stays were studied (Table 2), and in parallel it was compared with October (2011-2020). The number of overnight stays decreased by 30.7% in 2020 (2020 being a pandemic year) compared to the base year; otherwise, there were increases of up to about 71% (in 2019). Compared to the previous year, the most pronounced decrease was also registered in 2020 (when there was a decrease of 59.47% compared to 2019). The average level of overnight stays for the period 2011-2020 registered 395.42

thousand overnight stays, with an absolute average decrease of 10.38 thousand overnight stays and a relative decrease of 4%.

The dynamics of the dynamics of the overnight stays in October of the analyzed years registered a decrease of 34.86% in 2020 compared to the base year, otherwise there were increases that reached up to 64.22% in 2019 from the previous year, the most pronounced decrease was also registered in 2020 (when there was a decrease of 60.34% compared to 2019).

The average level of overnight stays in October, for the period 2011-2020, registered 436.63 thousand overnight stays, with an absolute average decrease of 13.5 thousand overnight stays and a relative decrease of 4.7%.

Table 2

Absolute and relative changes in overnight stays, by year and in October, in Iași, in the period 2011-2020

Year	Arrivals (thousands of tourists)	Absolute changes		Dynamics index%		Rhythm of dynamics%	
		$\Delta_{t/1}$	$\Delta_{t/t-1}$	$I_{t/1}$	$I_{t/t-1}$	$R_{t/1}$	$R_{t/t-1}$
Arrivals by year							
2011	305.1	-	-	-	-	-	-
2012	327.3	22.2	22.2	107.27	107.27	7.27	7.27
2013	316.2	11.1	-11.1	103.63	96.60	3.63	-3.40
2014	356.1	51.0	39.9	116.71	112.61	16.71	12.61
2015	407.0	101.9	50.9	133.39	114.29	33.39	14.29
2016	494.1	189.0	87.1	161.94	121.40	61.94	21.40
2017	501.4	196.3	7.3	164.33	101.47	64.33	1.47
2018	513.4	208.3	12.0	168.27	102.39	68.27	2.39
2019	522.0	216.9	8.6	171.09	101.67	71.09	1.67
2020	211.6	-93.5	-310.4	69.35	40.53	-30.65	-59.47
	\bar{y}	$\bar{\Delta}$		\bar{I}		\bar{R}	
	395.42	-10.38		0.9600 (96,0%)		-4	
Arrivals – October							
2011	348.6	-	-	-	-	-	-
2012	373.2	24,6	24,6	107.05	107.05	7.05	7.05
2013	369.6	21.0	-3.6	106.02	99.03	6.02	-0.97
2014	406.5	57.9	36.9	116.60	109.98	16.60	9.98
2015	448.1	99.5	41.6	128.54	110.23	28.54	10.23
2016	539.2	190.6	91.1	154.67	120.33	54.67	20.33
2017	522.3	173.7	-16.9	149.82	96.86	49.82	-3.14
2018	559.2	210.6	36.9	160.41	107.06	60.41	7.06
2019	572.5	223.9	13.3	164.22	102.37	64.22	2.37
2020	227.1	-121.5	-345.4	65.14	39.66	-34.86	-60.34
	\bar{y}	$\bar{\Delta}$		\bar{I}		\bar{R}	
	436.63	-13.5		0.953 (95.3%)		-4,7	

Source: calculation according to insse.ro

These decreases may also be due to the pandemic context, the access of pilgrims in 2020 being restricted (only pilgrims with domicile or residence in Iasi Municipality had access).

The adjustment according to the polynomial trend of overnight stays for the next five years (2021-2025) in Iasi, was made with the adjustment function: $y = -1.963x^2 + 7929.2x - 8E+06$, the square R was used to indicate the variation of the front values of the trend line: $R^2=0.2314$.

The adjustment according to the polynomial trend for the nights in October from 2021-2025, the adjustment function was made: $y = -1.8607x^2 + 7518.8x - 8E+06$, and the variation of the values compared to the trend line: $R^2 = 0.3052$. (Fig. 2).

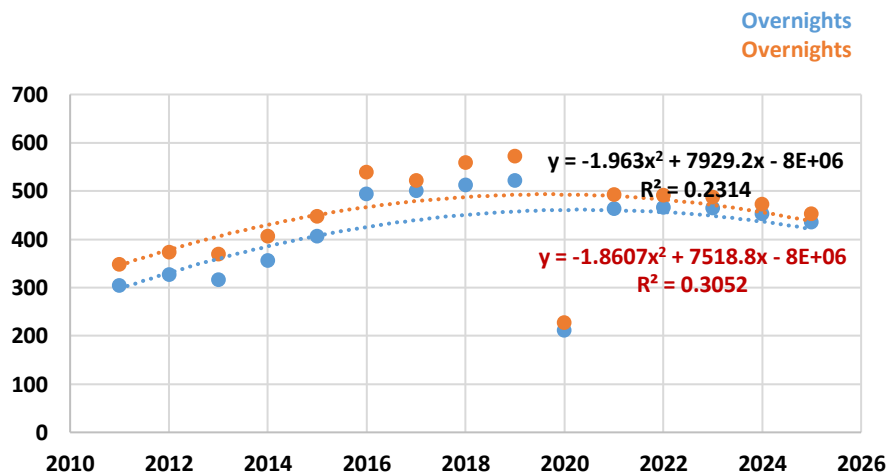


Fig. 2. Dynamics and estimates of overnight stays by year and in October, in Iasi, in the period 2011-2025

Given that the factors influencing the tourist activity will maintain the same pace in the next five years (Table 3), in 2025 in Iasi, the number of tourists will be about 285 thousand, and the number of overnight stays will be about 436 thousand.

Due to the manifestation of the largest pilgrimage in Romania (Pilgrimage of the Holy Pious Parascheva from Iasi) in October, in 2025 the number of tourists arriving in the city, could be about 287 thousand; and the number of overnight stays in October could be about 453 thousand.

Table 3

Estimation of arrivals and overnight stays, by year and in October, in Iași in the period 2021 - 2025

Year	t(x)	Arrivals (thousands of tourists) $y=1.1648x^2+4708.55E+06$	Arrivals (thousands of tourists-October) $y=-0.9651x^2+3904.7x-4E+06$
		2021	11
2022	12	288	300
2023	13	293	302
2024	14	292	297
2025	15	285	287
		Overnights (thousands of nights) $y=1.963x^2+7929.2x8E+06$	Overnights (thousands of nights-October) $y=-1.8607x^2+7518.8x8E+06$
2021	11	463	493
2022	12	466	492
2023	13	466	488
2024	14	453	472
2025	15	436	453

The average length of stay as an indicator that shows the average time (days) of tourists staying in accommodation and thus reflects the possibility of the offer to retain the tourist in a certain area or region (Turcu et al., 2008), showed fluctuations, in the analyzed period (2011-2020) (Table 4).

The dynamic pace of the average length of stay decreased by 13.55% in 2020 (pandemic year) compared to the base year, but there have been decreases since 2015 and ranged from 5.21-13.55.

Compared to the previous year, the most important decrease was registered in 2015 with 9.46%.

Table 4

Absolute and relative changes in the average length of stay, by year and in October, during 2011-2020, in Iași

Year	Arrivals (thousands of tourists)	Absolute changes		Dynamics index%		Rhythm of dynamics%	
		$\Delta_{t/1}$	$\Delta_{t/t-1}$	$I_{t/1}$	$I_{t/t-1}$	$R_{t/1}$	$R_{t/t-1}$
Average length of stay January - December							
2011	1.92	-	-	-	-	-	-
2012	2.00	0.08	0.08	104.16	104.16	4.16	4.16
2013	1.94	0.02	-0.06	101.04	97.00	1.04	-3.00
2014	2.01	0.09	0.07	104.68	103.60	4.68	3.60
2015	1.82	-0.10	-0.19	94.79	90.54	-5.21	-9.46
2016	1.82	-0.10	0.00	94.79	100.00	-5.21	0.00
2017	1.73	-0.19	-0.09	90.10	95.05	-9.90	-4.95
2018	1.70	-0.22	-0.03	88.54	98.26	-11.46	-1.74
2019	1.68	-0.24	-0.02	87.50	98.82	-12.50	-1.18

2020	1.66	-0.26	0.02	86.45	98.80	-13.55	-1.20
	\bar{y}	$\bar{\Delta}$		\bar{I}		\bar{R}	
	1.83	-0.03		0.9838 (98.38%)		-1.62	
Average length of stay – October							
2011	1.97	-	-	-	-	-	-
2012	1.91	-0.06	-0.06	96.95	96.95	-3.05	-3.05
2013	1.92	-0.05	0.01	97.46	100.52	-2.54	0.52
2014	1.92	-0.05	0.00	97.46	100.00	-2.54	0.00
2015	1.80	-0.17	-0.12	91.37	93.75	-8.63	-6.25
2016	1.79	-0.18	0.01	90.86	99.44	-9.14	-0.56
2017	1.64	-0.33	-0.15	84.77	91.62	-15.23	-8.38
2018	1.73	-0.24	0.09	87.81	105.48	-12.19	5.48
2019	1.72	-0.25	-0.01	87.30	99.42	-12.70	-0.58
2020	1.71	-0.26	-0.01	86.80	100.00	-13.20	-0.59
	\bar{y}	$\bar{\Delta}$		\bar{I}		\bar{R}	
	1.81	-0.03		0.9843 (98.43%)		-1.57	

Overall, the average level of the average length of stay registered, in the analyzed period (2011-2020), 1.83 days, with an absolute average decrease of 0.03 days, respectively a relative decrease of 1.62%.

The dynamic rhythm of the average length of stay in October of the analyzed years registered decreases for the entire analyzed period compared to the base year, decreases that varied between 2.54-13.20%, compared to the previous year, the most important decrease was registered in 2017 of 8.38%.

Overall, the average level of the average length of stay registered, in the analyzed period (2011-2020), 1.81 days, with an absolute average decrease of 0.03 days, respectively a relative decrease of 1.57%.

The variation of values for the average length of stay in Iasi, in the analyzed period (2011-2020), shows a decrease in the purchasing power of customers for the tourist services offered and probably the practice of too high rates inconsistent with the services offered.

To estimate the average length of stay in the next five years (2021-2025) in Iasi, we used the adjustment function $y=0.0028x^2-11.38x+11495$ obtained by the graphical method according to the polynomial trend.

The square R was used to indicate the variation of the values from the trend line, the value of the coefficient suggesting a less accurate approximation ($R^2=0.3248$).

The same graphical method according to the polynomial trend was used to estimate the average length of stay of October in the next five years (2021-2025) with the adjustment function $y=-0.0005x^2-2.1488x+2202.5$; the variation of the values from the trend line was $R^2=0.9295$, the approximation being quite accurate (Fig. 3).

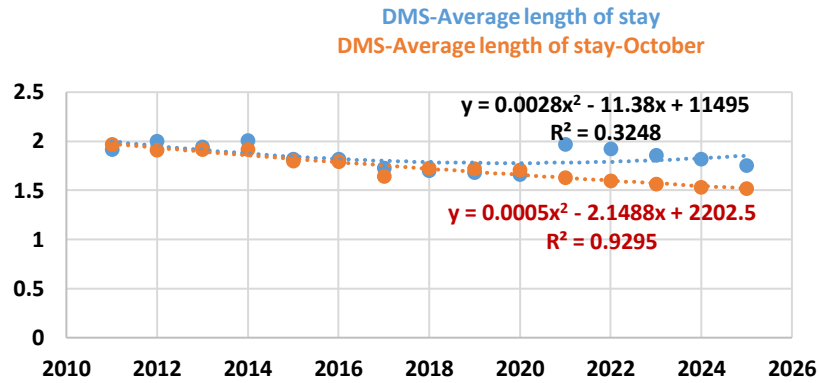


Fig. 3. Dynamics and estimation of the average length of stay per year and in October, in the period 2011-2025, in Iasi

Given that the factors influencing the tourist activity will maintain the same rhythm in the next five years (Table 5), in 2025 in Iasi, the average length of stay could be approximately 1.76 days, and the duration the average stay in October in 2025 could be around 1.52 days.

Table 5

Estimation of the average duration of the stay, by years and October, in Iasi, in the period 2021 - 2025

Year	t(x)	Average length of stay	
		Average length of stay January-December $y = 0.0028x^2 - 11.38x + 11495$	Average length of stay October $y = 0.0005x^2 - 2.1488x + 2202.5$
2021	12	1.97	1.62
2022	13	1.92	1.60
2023	14	1.86	1.56
2024	15	1.82	1.54
2025	16	1.76	1.52

CONCLUSIONS

The year 2020 (pandemic year) was a difficult year of the analyzed period, a year in which the lowest values of the number of tourists arriving in Iasi Municipality were registered (by 19.69%, less than in 2011, and for October by up to 25.22% less than the base year of the analyzed period).

Also, 2020 was a difficult year for overnight stays, a year in which the lowest values of overnight stays were recorded in Iasi Municipality

(30.65%, less than in 2011, and for October with up to 34.86% less than the base year of the analyzed period).

These decreases can be attributed to the pandemic context that affected tourism in general and religious tourism in Iasi.

On the occasion of the manifestation of the Pilgrimage of the Holy Pious Parascheva, in October, in 2025 in the Municipality of Iași, the number of arriving tourists could be approximately 287 thousand, and the number of overnight stays could be approximately 453 thousand.

The average length of holiday showed fluctuations, in the analyzed period (2011-2020), the dynamic rhythm of the average length of holiday in October of the analyzed years decreased, up to 13.20% (in 2020).

The analysis of this indicator for October of the analyzed period shows us values only slightly higher than the annual values, this can be attributed to the fact that those who come to Iasi on the occasion of Pious Saint Parascheva are largely pilgrims (the pilgrim being the one who travels without spending the night in a tourist reception structure), not tourists.

Given that the factors influencing the tourist activity will maintain the same level in the next five years, in 2025 in Iasi, the average length of holiday in October could be about 1.52 days.

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