

OUTLINING THE CONSUMER PROFILE –DEFINING ELEMENT IN PROMOTING RURAL TOURISM AND AGRI-TOURISM

Simeanu Cristina*, Avarvarei Bogdan-Vlad*, Simeanu Daniel*

*University of Agricultural Science and Veterinary Medicine of Iasi, Animal Science Faculty, 8 Mihail Sadoveanu Alley, Romania, e-mail: csimeanu@uaiasi.ro; bvavarvarei@uaiasi.ro; dsimeanu@uaiasi.ro

Abstract

The study shows that the profile of the consumer of rural tourism and agri-tourism can be a young person (a student/pupil) aged between 15-24 years, with a monthly family income between 2500 and 3500 lei and who allocates, for a stay of 3-4 days, an amount between 500 and 1000 lei. The consumer wants to be satisfied, to taste the adventure, but also to relax, to have appropriate accommodation and to know the traditions.

Key words: consumer profile; rural tourism; agri-tourism

INTRODUCTION

By entering in third sector of the national economy, tourism is often defined as the most profitable industry from the end of twentieth century. Specialists refers to tourism as an important component of the services sector aimed population being one of the branches with the highest growth potential and which recorded over the time the highest growth rate.

Romania's tourist potential has always been varied, rich, offering multiple options. Agri-tourism is the act of moving a person in an unpolluted, picturesque rural locality, with an agricultural specificity, completed by staying (sojourn) for at least 24 hours in a peasant household and consuming local food and non-food products, cohabitation, observation, assistance and co-participation in the local social community (Alecă I.N., Constantin M., 2006; Ghereș M., Nistoreanu P., 2010; Ghereș M. et al., 2006, 2011).

Romania has landscapes, a variety of accommodation possibilities, special traditions, festivals, but there is no clear information about the wishes and needs of the consumer. Poor knowledge of the consumer of rural tourism and agri-tourism leads to in-depth research on this issue that requires immediate remediation. This is because the tourist in these areas is a very special one, which makes a discordant note among the other travellers. Thus, the study of the market through the study of consumers (who are they, how old are they, what are consumers looking for in rural

and agri-tourism products, what are their motivations, reluctance?) comes to shed light on this issue.

Consumer behaviour is an important part of marketing a “multidimensional concept covers all acts decision made on an individual or group directly linked to obtaining and useful utilization of goods and services, in order to meet current and future, including decision-making processes that precede and determine these acts (Teodorescu N., 2005).

The study of tourist behaviour is a fascinating journey into the world of human behaviour. The study of tourist behaviour, as a theoretical effort, must be completed in practice with concrete observations, with the experience of people who know this behaviour after direct contacts and many years of experience, with the results of research conducted systematically to highlight changes in needs, the desires and behaviours of tourists, in their lifestyle, in the social contexts they come from, in the technologies used, etc. (Coita D.C., Nedelea Al.,2006; Csoz I., 2007; Brezuleanu S. et al., 2008).

One of the results of the study of tourist behaviour is the identification of tourist classification criteria and the provision of tools used for market segmentation. Marketing people have a predisposition to classify some items in order to divide them into categories. Working with a category is more efficient than working with a heterogeneous and unorganized whole. In the case of tourists, marketers consider that each of the criteria based on which tourists can be divided is a segmentation criterion. It depends on the knowledge, experience, creativity and ingenuity of marketer within a company to identify the best suited market to offer. The following classification criteria are frequent in tourism marketing: age, motivation, tourist behaviour, lifestyle, income allocated for tourism and nationality (Ciurea I.V. et al., 2004; Coita D.C., Nedelea Al., 2006).

Although tourists get to know the country life and to prefer their vacations, there are still impediments to the development of rural tourism and agri-tourism, the problem is a general one that is insufficient prepare single tire owners pensions and personnel. In addition to this, the weak knowledge of the tourist profile comes, because in Romania not much research has been done necessary to outline this profile. And then, how do we want to practice quality tourism if we do not know what are the features of the tourist that crosses our threshold? Here is the question that launches the motivation of the study undertaken, a question that aims to formulate clear answers and constructive suggestions (Ungureanu G. et al., 2008).

As a result, the study aims to meet this need, by outlining a concise profile of the consumer of rural tourism and agri-tourism, a consumer who is visibly distinguished from others. Once shaped the tourist profile, tenders will be much simpler, will know the wishes and expectations and rural areas

will get the attention it deserves. A real loss would mean that Romania has the necessary resources to practice rural tourism and quality agri-tourism, but it lacks the information base to formulate the offers expected by tourists.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The instrument on which the foundation of research was made was the questionnaire in which were respected the specific rules of drafting. It began with familiarity questions aiming the frequency which tourists choose rural tourism or agri-tourism and staying in tourist boarding houses accommodation, the accompanying persons, reason for travelling, booking method, means of transport used. Followed then more complex questions which put the interviewed persons in situation of ordering of factors that they have in mind when choosing a touristy or agri-tourism boarding house. This question was the most complex because it opens a series of derived questions, referring to the quality of services, the auxiliary possibilities for spending free time, menus, prices. Questions followed that verify the importance of certain factors, but also to identify the weaknesses of the pensions at which the respondents were accommodated. The last questions in the questionnaire were the identification ones. One is related to the family's income and aims to identify the amounts paid for 2-3 days of stay and the other is related to the preferred payment methods.

Respondents of the questionnaire were represented by students from specialization Engineering and management in public food service and agri-tourism within Faculty of Animal Science (UASVM Iași) during March to April 2019 and was analysed the tourist area of Vatra-Dornei from Suceava County.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Initial analysis

First results shown that regarding the frequency of choosing the way of accommodation touristy or agri-tourism pensions, most of tourists choose pensions from rural areas "several times per year" (66.66% of respondents) and only 6.66% come "once in a month". The consumer tends to be greatly influenced by the internet 56.66% and friends 30%. On the other hand, agencies do not influence its choice. Such advertising via the internet seems that running operate most effective. As companions, "friends" were on first place 66.66% and family on the second place 23.33%, as a result must have in mind both the people attending with friends, as well as the ones who arrive with the family. Regarding the transport used for arriving at pension, 70% said they go by private car, 16.66% by rail and 10% by bus (only 6.66% being satisfied by the quality of access roads to the pension).

After that was analysed a series of factors with influence on decision making process. Those factors were: quality of the services, landscape area, playground for children and parking space as well as the auxiliary possibilities for and leisure and menu variety. Factor “quality of services” was considered the most important by almost 74% of those questioned, factor “landscape area” affect pretty much, factor “playground” was considered without any importance for 70% of respondents, almost 47% considered that “auxiliary possibilities for leisure” being quite important and menu variety had a quite significant influence (43.33% found it very important).

Analysis of some key factors in the decision making process

In this section of investigation were taken into consideration three factors: (quality of services, auxiliary possibilities for leisure and menu variety). Asked for their opinion regarding the quality of services at the pension in which they were accommodated, over half of respondents (66.6%) said that services have been of medium quality, 30% said they were of high quality and only 3.33% believe they were on a poor quality.

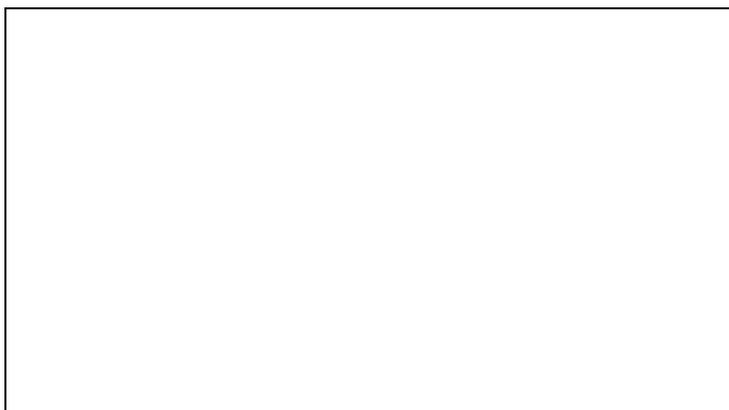


Fig. 1. Quality of services at pension

Another important aspect aimed to identify the preferences of tourists regarding the mater to spend time and the menu. As a result, regarding preferred auxiliary possibilities for leisure, tourists could choose from several options: cultural sports events, sport entertainment, trips, rentals of objects or variant “I have no preference”. Apparently trips were considered most interesting ones, this variant being chosen by 87% of respondents and cultural sport events seems to be without any attractiveness (0%), then 70% of tourists say there were satisfied by the possibilities offered by pension in which they were accommodated while 10% did not feel satisfied with the offer.

Analysis of tourists' preferences regarding the menu shows that 83% of them prefer to serve traditional menus when staying in pensions from VatraDornei area, 13% prefer the classic ones and only 7% prefer exotic menus.

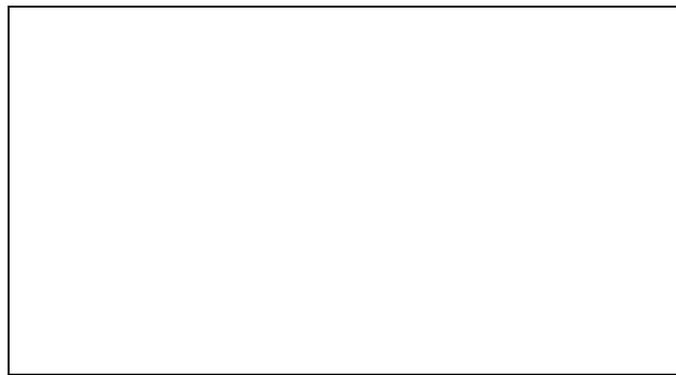


Fig. 2. Preferred type of menus

Thus there is a clear preference for traditional menus from VatraDornei area, Bucovina. This is due to the specificity of area and tourists' curiosity to taste meals specific to the area. As a result, 63% of the clients have said "pretty satisfied" by the menu offered by the pension, 33% were very satisfied and only 3% were totally dissatisfied.

When it comes to price 87% found it acceptable in relation to services and only 13% have said that prices were very good. Asked if used to attend the same pension, 40% have said "no" and they used to relocate to know other areas, 33% said that the return depends on sojourn and only 27% have said "yes", and they will be back to same pension if they are satisfied by the offered conditions. So we have a consumer who is not loyal to rural pensions, this may be due to the fact that the offers are not convincing enough or that the services do not fully meet consumers' expectations.

Analysis of the elements of authenticity and hospitality.

Weaknesses of pensions

Research continues with two factors considered important in the selection or return to the same pension, and those factors were chosen on the basis of the identity of the rural Romanian space: authenticity and hospitality. Results show that 100% of respondents consider that those 2 factors influence their decision to choose or return to pension.

Another question put the problem of combining the authentic elements with the modern ones, yet when it comes to keeping the authentic 70% of respondents considered that this item should remain intact and only 20% have choose a combination.

Taking in study an analysis of the weaknesses founded at boarding houses in which tourists were accommodated were investigated options selected at a question with multiple answers, respondents could choose more options from a list of weak points which weren't chosen by chance, a part reflects the problems related services' quality, others are connected with the area, planning, etc.

Table 1

Weaknesses of pensions	
Weaknesses	Percentage
Lack of clean	36.66%
The menu is a bit varied	40%
Lack of signal on mobile telephones	6.66%
Lack of guides	36.66%
Unfriendly staff (waiters, chefs)	26.66%

Less varied menu seems to be the most common weakness of the pensions from VatraDornei area, Suceava County (40%) followed by “lack of clean” and non-existence of guides with 37% each. The consumer seems to seek various menus and clean and also the presence of guides and the current situation tends to provide otherwise. Among the weaknesses that do not mind the tourists we can count: lack of signal for mobile phones (7%) and this because the rest it is the main reason for the stay, and communication with the people from home can go on the second place. Another weakness, easily overlooked is unfriendly staff, because hosts from VatraDornei tourist area apparently are able to communicate effectively with the guests.

Identification of respondents

Their analysis shows that 37% of tourists have a monthly household income between 2500 and 3500 lei and the majority of them allocated (63% of respondents) between 500 and 1000 lei for a stay of 2-3 days, 90% prefer cash payment. The respondents fall into the category of pupils-students. With regard to the age category 97% are between 15 and 24 years and 3% were between 25 and 49 years.

CONCLUSIONS

The profile obtained from the analyses draws a consumer who chooses to stay at the boarding houses in the VatraDornei area, Suceava County as many times a year, most often choosing the Internet as a source of information.

Majority of those questioned said they used to go on holiday with friends and family to rest, booking being made usually by telephone and preferred payment method is cash. In order to reach the pension, the tourist

uses his personal car, fact for which the quality of the access roads must be emphasized.

The quality of services is the factor that most influences the decision to choose a pension, followed by the landscape of the area and the auxiliary possibilities for spending time.

The identified consumer declares himself to be satisfied with the quality of services at the boarding house where he is staying, but a number of drawbacks such as the slightly varied menu, lack of cleanliness and lack of guidance are leading to total un-satisfaction.

The excursions organized by the pensioners seem to be interesting for the consumer of rural tourism and, as a result, a point of attraction. Moreover, the traditional meals and events of the area offer him the chance to integrate more easily among the locals.

Prices were considered acceptable, and the consumer has already formed the habit of making recommendations if is satisfied.

Authenticity and hospitality are two elements taken into account when the consumer chooses a pension.

The tourist wants to keep the authenticity, this being one of the symbols of the Romanian rural tourism, but for returning to a pension he opts for a more modern variant.

The consumer of rural tourism is a student/pupil aged between 15-24 years, with a monthly income of the family between 2500 and 3500 lei and who allocates, for a stay of 3-4 days an amount between 500 and 1000 lei.

The passenger in rural areas is characterized by a preference for holidays spent “in country” for the custom to merge with, the taste of the known traditional dishes and the traditions of the area.

However, the tourist who strictly chooses VatraDornei area often complains about the lack of a virtual symbol that refers to the attractions of the place. For them, the area must acquire a strong visual identity represented by a series of graphic elements that appear on all promotional materials, be easily recognizable and become the brand of the area.

It is necessary to satisfy the need of the rural tourism consumer to always have access to quality information.

In order to make known the materials related to VatraDornei area, they must exist and be transmitted through all channels, tourist offices, tour operators, internet.

The brand of the area could be presented on any type of promotional material.

Once choosing VatraDornei area, the tourist expects to new experiences and not just relax. Meeting the nature and countryside of the area can easily be turned into an adventure.

VatraDornei has some special symbols that must be exploited in order to develop rural tourism in the area. Those eager for adventure are tempted with hikes that can be made in Călimani National Park. Other tourists can choose to practice winter sports on the Park Slope or the Squirrel Slope. These proposals dream, in fact, to attract the tourist, but also to familiarize him with the specifics of Dorna.

Regarding the traditional atmosphere, it is recommended to focus on the sphere of authenticity. It was shown that the tourist wants to keep it, not to alter the habits, the values.

The consumer of rural tourism chooses this area with a specific reason: to live authentically. However, he wants to sleep in clean rooms and be able to benefit from the minimum conditions of comfort.

The guesthouses must be arranged in such a way as to preserve the authenticity, the traditional aspect, but also to satisfy all the requirements of the tourist.

Perhaps the most important suggestion for improving rural tourism services in VatraDornei is aimed at boarding house owners and staff. They need to attend as many training courses and workshops as possible to learn how to meet the needs of tourists who cross their threshold.

Many times, the reasons for dissatisfaction concern a poor organization, a poor management, a service that makes it so desirable. Several excursions could be organized, themed evenings, where tourists can discover the traditions of the area.

The wishes of tourists are multiple, so it is necessary to be able to achieve them all, through the variety of activities and services. For example, in order to be up to date, a calendar can be drawn up with all the events, holidays and festivals of that period, a calendar that every tourist will receive when they stay.

Feedback is also important. Conceivable short questionnaire can be administered in tourist arrivals (to find out what they want them, waiting at the hostel) and departure (to find out what they enjoyed and what didn't). Their impressions and recommendations can be signed in a guest book.

The consumer wants his wishes to be satisfied, to taste the adventure, but also to relax, to have appropriate accommodation and to know the traditions. And in all this, authenticity must be kept unaltered. Once his needs are met, the tourist in VatraDornei will start to give another idea to the idea of rural tourism and to attribute value to the vacation spent "in the country".

REFERENCES

1. Alecu I.N., Constantin M., 2006, Agroturism și marketing agroturistic. Ed. Ceres, București
2. Brezuleanu S., Brezuleanu C.O., Moraru R.A., 2008, Methodologies used to assess the development of rural and agri-tourism in the NE of Romania. Universitatea de Științe Agricole și Medicină Veterinară, Facultatea de Zootehnie, Lucrări Științifice, pag. 1454-7368
3. Ciurea I.V., Ungureanu G., Moraru R.A., Popovici L., 2004, Studii privind fundamentarea tehnico-economică a unei pensiuni agroturistice în zona Bran, județul Brașov, Lucrări Științifice-seria Zootehnie, vol. 47, Facultatea de Zootehnie, UȘAMV Iași, pag. 563-567
4. Coita D.C., Nedelea A., 2006, Comportamentul turiștilor și naționalitatea – criterii de clasificare a turiștilor și de segmentare a pieței turistice, Management & marketing No.3, pag. 87-98
5. Csosz I., 2007, Agroturismul și turismul rural. Ed. Mirtron, Timișoara
6. Ghereș M., Nistoreanu P., 2010, Tratat Turism Rural, Ed. C.H. BECK București
7. Ghereș M., Ciornea R., Pop I., 2011, Mapa întreprinzătorului în agroturism, Ed. Risoprint, Cluj-Napoca
8. Ghereș M., 2006, Agroturism, Ed. Risoprint, Cluj-Napoca
9. Teodorescu N., 2005, Marketing. Dicționar explicativ, Ed. Economică, București
10. Ungureanu G., Brezuleanu S., Ștefan G., Moraru R.A., 2008, Strategies of tourism development regarding Vatra Dornei, Lucrări Științifice, Seria I, vol. X (4), Management agricol, USAMVB Timișoara, pag. 61-68.

