

STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING TOURIST LOYALTY AT DASCAMPING VÂRCIOROG

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the strategies used to increase tourist loyalty at DASCamping Vârciorog and to identify the factors that influence tourists' decisions to return.

The research is based on both quantitative and qualitative methods, including observation, interviews, case studies, statistical data analysis, and online review analysis. The study highlights the importance of service quality, the natural environment, and personalized experiences in attracting and retaining tourists.

The results show that tourists are more likely to return when they benefit from a pleasant atmosphere, authentic experiences, and recreational activities. Strategies such as discounts for loyal customers, promotion through social media, and improved customer interaction significantly contribute to increasing tourist loyalty and the likelihood of recommending the destination to others.

Keywords: strategies, tourist loyalty, camping, authentic experiences.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 21st century, the industry of tourism and travel has represented the most dynamic sector of activity in the world and, at the same time, one of the key sectors for the generation of jobs. (Pătrașcu, 2008; Balasescu, 2019)

Tourism is one of the best-developed domains in the service sector, as it is a sector where the client is part of the creation of experience and where, due to the growing competition and to the desire of the population to travel, innovation is becoming more and more a necessity. (Olteanu, 1999; Balasescu, 2019)

Rural tourism is a small scale type of tourism, a high concentration of accommodation facilities in one or few localities would have an undesired impact on the environment and on the traditional culture. (Pop, Coroș & Bălint, 2017, p. 86).

However, rural tourism, due to its rather smaller scale by serving various niches, is expected to have lesser negative effects upon the environment and natural landscape. (Pop, Coroș & Bălint, 2017, p. 73).

Customer loyalty has become a crucial factor in the sustainability and development of businesses operating in the tourism sector. It involves creating positive experiences that encourage tourists to return and recommend the destination to others (Wikipedia).

In tourism practice, increasing emphasis is placed on customer retention and loyalty. One

of the indicators commonly used by large hotels is the analysis of the frequency with which guests return to the same accommodation establishment (Niță, 2019, p. 234).

In recent years, tourists' preferences have increasingly shifted towards forms of tourism centered on nature, tranquility, and authentic experiences. This trend reflects the growing demand for destinations capable of offering personalized services, meaningful interactions, and a closer connection with the natural environment.

Recent studies „reflect the development of the rural tourism segment and the growing interest of tourists in alternative forms of accommodation.” (Sugiama, A. G., 2024, p. 1200)

There is a growing demand for sustainability and uniqueness of vacations. (Stanciu et al, 2023)

Campgrounds and accommodation facilities located in rural areas have become increasingly attractive due to the opportunity they offer visitors to spend time in a less crowded environment and in closer proximity to nature. In this context, tourist loyalty has become a key component of sustainable tourism development, as tourist satisfaction significantly increases the likelihood of repeat visits and positive recommendations.

Vârciorog Commune is located in Bihor County, at the north-western foothills of the Pădurea Craiului Mountains, within the contact zone of the Vârciorog Hills (www.varciorog.ro, accessed in 2026). This geographical location provides an attractive natural setting that is highly conducive to the development of tourism

activities. The commune is situated at an average altitude of approximately 402 meters above sea level and comprises four villages, covering an area of 80.81 km² and including 1,174 households. The characteristics of the landscape and natural environment contribute significantly to the development of outdoor recreational activities.

The population of the commune is relatively small, which is characteristic of rural areas and contributes to maintaining a peaceful and authentic atmosphere that is highly valued by tourists.

The commune has potential for tourism thanks to some representative resources, such as the Orthodox Church “Sfint , ii Archangeli”—one of the most notable works of wooden architecture in the Apuseni Mountains, Osoi Cave, and Crisului Repede Gorge-Padurea Craiului (included in the European Natura 2000 Network). (Popescu et al, 2024)

The settlement has a long history, having been first documented in 1492, and is distinguished by the preservation of local traditions and authentic rural characteristics (www.varciorog.ro).

At present, Vârciorog Commune offers several well-regarded accommodation facilities suitable both for families and for visitors seeking peace and relaxation in a natural environment, including Pensiunea Mihaiu Sasului, Cabana Casa Simut, Complex CRAI, DAScamping, Casa Valea Râului, Camping AGP, and Sky Resort.

For the purpose of this study, DAScamping was selected as the subject of analysis. Established in 2022, DAScamping is a tourist accommodation facility located in Vârciorog Commune, occupying an area of approximately 3,000 square meters. The campsite provides visitors with a variety of accommodation options designed to meet the needs of both nature enthusiasts and tourists seeking a basic level of comfort (Data provided by the owners of DAScamping).

The facility comprises three chalets, as well as designated areas for tents and caravans. In addition, visitors can benefit from various amenities, including sanitary facilities (toilets and showers), a campfire area, and spaces dedicated to recreational activities. and retaining customers. This method enables a comprehensive understanding of the specific context in which the tourism unit operates.

The camping area features fruit trees and a variety of traditional objects, whose presence enhances the authenticity and attractiveness of the destination. The authenticity of the tourist experience and the effective use of elements specific to the rural environment are important factors influencing tourists’ destination choices, contributing to the increased attractiveness of small-scale accommodation facilities. Maintaining authenticity is essential for the sustainable development of rural tourism. As noted by Pop, Coroş, and Bălint (2017, p. 74), excessive adaptation to tourists’ demands may lead to the degradation or distortion of authenticity, traditional lifestyles, and cultural heritage, which constitute the principal attractions of a rural destination. „The rural tourism might destroy or pervert the very authenticity, traditional lifestyle and cultural heritage that constituted one of the main tourist attractions in the attempt to adapt to modern times and to meet the demands of tourists” (Pop, Coroş & Bălint, 2017, pag. 74).

An important advantage of the campsite is its location in an area with low pollution levels and numerous opportunities for recreational activities.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The research is based on a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. This approach allows for both the statistical measurement of tourist satisfaction and loyalty, as well as an in-depth understanding of tourists’ perceptions and experiences.

The first stage of the research consists of a literature review on tourist loyalty, consumer satisfaction in tourism, revisit intention, and relationship marketing applied to tourist accommodation establishments. The bibliographic research provides a theoretical foundation for the study and identifies the main concepts, models, and factors influencing tourists’ post-consumption behavior.

The case study method is used to analyze DAS Camping Vârciorog, examining the characteristics of the location, the range of services offered, available facilities, market positioning, and current practices for attracting

To complement the collected information, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the campsite manager.

Direct observation was also employed to assess the campsite facilities and the manner in

which tourism services are delivered. This method allowed for the identification of aspects such as staff-tourist interaction, the condition of the infrastructure, and the overall atmosphere of the location.

Additional research methods included the analysis of online reviews and the processing and analysis of statistical data. The content analysis of reviews enables the identification of key elements appreciated by visitors, as well as aspects that generate dissatisfaction and require improvement in order to strengthen tourist loyalty.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

DAScamping Vârciorog is a tourism enterprise located in a peaceful natural setting,

offering visitors the opportunity to spend time outdoors, away from urban crowds. Due to its location and the facilities provided, the campsite attracts tourists interested in recreational activities.

The campsite covers an area of approximately 3,000 square meters and offers various accommodation options. Thus, visitors may choose to stay in one of the three available chalets, each equipped with two or three beds, or opt for camping in tents or caravans. In addition, the tourism facility is equipped with sanitary amenities such as toilets and showers, which are essential for a comfortable stay.

The main components of DAScamping Vârciorog are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Main components of DAScamping Vârciorog	
Component	Description
Chalets	3 chalets, each with 2-3 beds
Camping area	Space for tents and caravans
Sanitary facilities	Toilets and showers
Recreational area	Campfire zone
Other facilities	Fruit trees, traditional objects

Source: Data provided by the owners of DAScamping Vârciorog

Within the site, there are specially designed recreational areas, such as the campfire zone, where tourists can socialize and spend quality time. Moreover, the presence of fruit trees and traditional objects contributes to the creation of an authentic atmosphere, highly appreciated by visitors.

Tourists have the opportunity to engage in various outdoor activities, such as hiking or recreational experiences like fruit and vegetable picking, which contribute to a pleasant and enjoyable tourist experience.

The pricing policy of DAScamping Vârciorog is affordable and adapted to tourists' needs. Accommodation prices are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Accommodation prices (1 May-30 September)	
Service type	Price
Chalet (3 persons)	150 RON/night
Camping (tent/caravan)	30 RON/person/night

Source: Data provided by the owners of DAScamping Vârciorog

Accommodation in a chalet costs 150 RON per night for up to three persons, while camping with a tent or caravan costs 30 RON per person per night during the period 1 May-30 September 2026.

An important aspect is customer loyalty. Loyal tourists benefit from discounts and

additional facilities, which encourages repeat visits. Moreover, the positive relationship between tourists and the owners contributes to creating a pleasant experience.

The evolution of tourist arrivals is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3

Evolution of tourist arrivals		
Year	Number of tourists	Growth%
2022	100	-
2023	140	40%
2024	180	28,6%

Source: Data provided by the owners of DAScamping Vârcioro

The data indicate an upward trend in the number of tourists visiting DAScaming Vârciorog during the analyzed period. From 100 tourists in 2022, the number increased to 140 in 2023, representing a 40% growth compared to the previous year. In 2024, the number of tourists reached 180, marking an approximate increase of 28.6% compared to 2023.

This continuous growth can be explained by several factors. First, promotion through social media has contributed to increased visibility of the location. Second, recommendations from satisfied tourists have had a positive impact on the destination's

image. On the Airbnb platform, the property is rated 5 out of 5, which reflects a very high level of tourist satisfaction.

Finally, the facilities offered and the family-like atmosphere created by the owners have contributed to building a relationship of trust between tourists and the accommodation unit.

In order to highlight the position of DAScaming Vârciorog within the tourism market, a comparative analysis of camping structures in Romania over a six-year period (2020–2025) was conducted.

Table 4

Camping structures in Romania and occupancy rate			
Period	Number of structures	Accommodation capacity (beds)	Net occupancy rate
2020	61	11521	24,3
2021	67	10636	20,4
2022	71	10677	19,7
2023	84	11406	16,3
2024	107	12845	21,9
2025	113	11266	18,3

Source: Data provided by the owners of DAScaming Vârcioro

The net occupancy rate of tourism accommodation capacity is calculated as the ratio between the number of overnight stays and the available tourism accommodation capacity during the reference period.

The data presented in Table 4 highlight the evolution of the camping sector in Romania during the period 2020–2025, analyzed in terms of the number of campsites, accommodation capacity (beds), and the net occupancy rate of tourism accommodation.

Regarding the number of camping structures, a continuous increase is observed throughout the analyzed period, from 61 units in 2020 to 113 units in 2025. This evolution reflects the development of the outdoor tourism segment and the growing interest of investors in alternative forms of accommodation based on direct contact with nature and authentic tourist experiences.

A similar trend is observed in accommodation capacity. In 2020, campsites provided 11,521 beds, while in 2024 capacity reached 12,845 beds, representing the highest value in the analyzed period. However, in 2025, a decrease to 11,266 beds is recorded, possibly due to restructuring processes, reclassification,

or modernization works carried out in certain units.

Regarding the net occupancy rate, the evolution is more fluctuating. In 2020, it recorded a value of 24.3%, the highest in the analyzed interval. Between 2021 and 2023, a gradual decline is observed, from 20.4% to 16.3%, indicating that the growth rate of tourist demand was insufficient to fully utilize the available capacity. This situation can be explained by the expansion of camping supply, strong seasonality of tourism activity, and diversification of tourism options on the market.

In 2024, an increase in the occupancy rate to 21.9% is observed, suggesting a recovery in tourist interest in this type of accommodation and a more efficient use of existing infrastructure. However, in 2025, the indicator decreases again to 18.3%, signaling fluctuations in demand and the need to implement stronger marketing and loyalty strategies to increase occupancy rates.

Overall, the data analysis indicates that the camping sector in Romania has experienced significant growth in terms of the number of units and accommodation capacity. However, occupancy rates have not followed

the same upward trend, highlighting the need to strengthen strategies for attracting and retaining tourists. These aspects are particularly relevant for the case study on DAScAMPing Vârciorog, as they provide a national context for assessing the effectiveness of measures aimed at increasing tourist loyalty and retention.

CONCLUSIONS

The future development of tourism requires the consideration of all transformations that will occur within the broader context of civilization at the beginning of the third millennium. Consequently, a form of tourism oriented towards leisure, order, and "loisir" will become increasingly important. Through well-designed facilities, such tourism will serve as a source of regeneration for individuals affected by the pressures of urban life (such as overcrowding, noise, etc.) and the demanding pace of intensive activities. Furthermore, tourism based on harmony with nature will gain prominence, as environmental quality becomes a key factor for discovery, education, initiation, as well as scientific, artistic, and sporting performance (Niță, 2019, p. 17).

The study conducted by Sugiyama (2024), *Quality, Satisfaction, and Loyalty: A Powerful Trigger for Rural Tourists' Revisit Intention*, demonstrates that service quality leads to increased tourist satisfaction and loyalty, while satisfaction and loyalty positively influence revisit intention.

The results obtained in this study highlight that the success of DAScAMPing Vârciorog is based on a combination of its natural environment, the quality of services provided, affordable pricing, and the loyalty strategies implemented.

Tourist loyalty represents an essential element for the development and sustainability of tourism units, particularly in the case of small-scale structures such as DAScAMPing Vârciorog.

The trend toward nature-based tourism offers favorable prospects for small camping facilities. An increasing number of tourists seek authentic experiences, direct contact with nature, and personalized services, aspects that are often difficult to find in large-scale tourism structures. Therefore, DAScAMPing Vârciorog has the opportunity to strengthen its market position by maintaining quality standards and diversifying the activities offered to visitors.

The analysis highlights that being located in an attractive, peaceful, and accessible natural environment is a major advantage in attracting tourists. In addition, the facilities provided, although simple, contribute significantly to creating a pleasant visitor experience.

An important role in tourist loyalty is played by the price-quality ratio and the diversity of available activities. The affordable prices offered by DAScAMPing Vârciorog, together with opportunities for recreational activities, generate a high level of tourist satisfaction.

Moreover, loyalty strategies such as discounts and additional benefits for returning customers contribute to building a stable relationship between tourists and the accommodation unit. The positive interaction between tourists and the owners is another key factor influencing the decision to return.

In conclusion, the success of DAScAMPing Vârciorog is based on the valorization of natural resources, the provision of services adapted to tourists' needs, and the implementation of effective loyalty strategies, which ensure favorable long-term development prospects. The small-scale nature of DAScAMPing Vârciorog can represent a competitive advantage, as the literature indicates that rural tourism, due to its niche character and small-scale operation, generates lower negative impacts on the environment and natural landscape compared to mass tourism forms (Pop, Coroș & Bălint, 2017).

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