

# The Black Sea Coast - Comparative Analysis of the Holidays Resorts of Mamaia and Albena

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*Abstract:* - We are very much like our neighbors, yet, they have often managed to be one step ahead of us. The World Tourism Organization made a top in which Romania is situated on the 149<sup>th</sup> position among 176 countries, according to the criterion of tourism's effective contribution to the national economy, with 5.8% of the GDP, compared to Bulgaria, which occupies the 65<sup>th</sup> place, with about 12% of its GDP coming from tourism. In this paper, we tried to identify these differences and so we made a comparative study between the Romanian and the Bulgarian Black Sea coast, using for comparative methods the SWOT analysis and the Benchmarking analysis. Even though Romania is at present "the land" and Bulgaria "the choice", by the implementation of the regional development projects on a national level, this situation can change and so Romania can really become "the land of choice".

*Key words:* - coast, tourism, regional development, sustainable development, SWOT analysis, Benchmarking

## 1. Introduction

In the analysis of competitiveness in tourism, carried out on the basis of the indicators of development elaborated by the World Bank, and also based on the UNO and WTTC (World Travel & Tourism Council) reports, 8 countries were considered to compete with Romania in the domain of tourism: Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Ukraine. Compared to these countries, Romania has an average competitiveness index in tourism of 58.91, lower than the values recorded in Hungary (78.44), the Czech Republic (74.47), Bulgaria (68.57), Croatia (68.04), Poland (66.03) and Slovakia (62.84), and higher than that of Ukraine and Montenegro [3].

World Travel & Tourism Council published on March 1, 2009 a research on the economic impact of tourism in the case of Romania and Bulgaria, and, according to the results, Romania is situated in the EU classification on the 18<sup>th</sup> position, with a prognosis of increase during the following ten years occupying the 3<sup>rd</sup> place, while Bulgaria is situated in the same classification on the 21<sup>st</sup> place [2].

## 2. Presentation of the tourist potential (Romania and Bulgaria)

Romania is situated in the south-east of Central Europe, inside and outside the arc of the Carpathian Mountains, on the lower course of the Danube (1075 km), with access to the Black Sea, at a distance compared to the extremities of the continent varying between 1050 km and 2800 km.

The Romanian Black Sea Coast has a complex makeup which increases its tourist value. At present, it is the main tourist area of our country. It extends on a 245 km long area, from the fascinating intact natural reserves of the Danube Delta and the lagoon complex Razim-Sinoe in the north, to the numerous modern holiday re-sort centers. While the Deltaic area is strictly protected, the southern area, 72 km long, has been turned into a chain of spas and holiday resorts able to satisfy the most exacting tastes, from those of children to those of grandparents [1].

Bulgaria, a small country with a picturesque atmosphere, is situated in the Balkan Peninsula, in South-Eastern Europe. Because of its natural landscape and cultural diversity, Bulgaria has a considerable potential for development in tourism. In point of tourism, Bulgaria is very much like Romania. The German influences have left a visible imprint on the organization of the holiday resorts in

Bulgaria, so that the tourist industry developed much faster than in Romania, and the quality of its services is higher. Just a few kilometers away from the Romanian border you can feel “abroad”.

Many of the Bulgarian beaches have received the “Blue Flag” prize even before the year 2000. “Blue flag” is a tag acknowledging certain beaches internationally, for the fact that cleanliness is strictly respected and impeccable services are offered on the beach. Bulgaria has 10 beaches decorated with this Blue Flag (some holiday resorts have two such beaches). At the moment, Romania has no such beach. We can mention that the most “awarded” from this viewpoint is Spain, with over 450 beaches decorated with “Blue Flag”.

### 3. SWOT analysis of the Romanian Black Sea coast

**STRONG POINTS:** the natural and anthropic Black Sea coast potential; natural landscape favorable to the development of tourist activities; the area of Dobro-gea presents a significant potential for the practice of many types of tourism, opportunities of diversification/ modernization of travel offers; high boarding capacity, in full process of extension; special tradition in tourist activities; high spa potential; appearance of new products for this region; qualified human resources with experience in tourism; accessibility of tourist areas, modern access ways linked to the main European transport corridors; modern lifeguard service and other specialized services meant for tourist security and protection, which has almost eradicated the delinquency in this area.

**WEAK POINTS:** resort overcrowding during the rush period of the summer season and during the weekends, and overcrowding of the roads going from the sea to the capital; relatively short span of the summer season; insufficient parking places, compared to the number of tourists during the summer season; lack of permanent tourist products; some economic agents practice high prices that discourage the infusion of foreign tourists, as they can choose on the market more advantageous products in point of the report quality/price; lack of adequate infrastructure for cruise tourism development; weak tourist valorization of the historical and cultural potential of this area; environmental pollution and degradation processes of the beach and Black Sea coast; presence of industrial platforms and of the commercial port nearby the tourist areas creates some problems of image and comfort and is an important factor of pollution for the environment;

lack of a common long-term strategy of the investors in tourism and of the central and local public administration concerning the sustainable and integrated development of this sector; lack of direct flights to the international airport of Constanța; little and poor quality travel guides and advertising materials;

**OPPORTUNITIES:** increased number of three/four stars hotels and fewer non-modernized ones; different cultural activities organized by the Ministry of Tourism, such as: „Lumină de la Malul Mării”/Black Sea Light, Goran Bregovic in live concert in Mamaia, on May 2, the Romanian Tourist Hymn was officially launched; an advertising spot was launched: Romania - The Land of Choice, and important sportsmen, such as Ilie Năstase, Nadia Comăneci and Gică Hagi, got involved in the promotion of the Romanian tourism abroad this year; operation “Crearea unei imagini pozitive a României prin dezvoltarea și promovarea Brandului Turistic Național”/ Creation of a positive Romanian image by developing and promoting the National Tourist Brand; involvement of significant tour-operators on the international market in incoming on the Black Sea Coast (the Ministry of Tourism signed an agreement with TUI for the return of the largest tour-operator worldwide on the Romanian market beginning with 2010. In November 2009 TUI Deutschland GmbH was to print a special brochure, integrally dedicated to Romania, which was to be distributed in 2010 in over 10.000 reselling agencies in Germany); the Ministry of Tourism negotiated with Air Berlin the operation, starting with the year 2010, of a low-cost charter course on the Mihail Kogălniceanu international airport in Constanța. The presence of this airline in Romania can be equated with the revitalization of the Romanian Black Sea Coast as tourist destination on the German market; “early booking” offers; attraction of investors, especially foreign, with management input; adhesion to the EU and increased access to occidental products; diversification of the costs for tourists according to comfort and season in order to promote tourism for young people, for low-income tourists, for school children; the vicinity of the Delta, of Măcin Mountains, of the Northern Dobrogea monasteries, the farming potential of this region and the ethno-folkloric features of the rural localities represent a significant support for the development of circuit tourism; organization of training of all levels for the personnel working in tourism, world-level curriculum, and teaching personnel.

**THREATS:** better development of the similar product in Bulgaria, Croatia and Slovenia and in other countries in this area; concurrence exerted on

the regional tourist market and low capacity of the local economic agents to adapt to a unique market; tendency of migration of the labor force abroad; decrease of the Romanian tourists' interest in the local tourist products; the phenomenon of beach and sea-coast erosion can affect in the long run the development of tourist activities in this area; the vicinity of the industrial platforms and of the commercial port constitutes an important risk factor which contributes to the environmental degradation generating continual air and water pollution and decreasing the tourist potential of this area; allotting of public funds for development in the domain of tourism based on criteria of political belonging and party clientele; lack of coherent policies and strategies for the integrated development of the sea-coast area (infrastructure and technical-administrative endowment, protection and rehabilitation of the natural and built environment, etc.), which discourages certain foreign investors who want to invest in the tourist sector in this area; decrease of the population's purchasing power; economic crisis worldwide and nationally; the Romanian image, somewhat "wrinkled" internationally.

#### **4. SWOT analysis of the Bulgarian Black Sea coast**

**STRONG POINTS:** natural, historical and cultural potential; natural conditions favorable to the development of marine holiday tourism - moderate climate, large beaches, fine sand; there are no strong currents in the water or life-threatening fauna and flora that could endanger the tourists' health; many organizations and institutions have got involved in the development of tourism in Bulgaria; regional action plans have been developed and strategies for the rural area and for eco-tourism are being updated; relatively well-developed tourist infrastructure; good balance between price and quality for the tourist products and services provided; large number of tourist operators offering packets of tourist alternatives; tourists can travel without worrying for their personal security;

**WEAK POINTS:** the resources allotted for advertising are very low; tourist associations find it difficult to mobilize the local population; there are no incenses for investments in tourism; small number of tour-operators working in this domain; the dirtiness in the urban area and the outskirts area is a serious impediment for tourism.

**OPPORTUNITIES:** improvement of the public infrastructure and high-quality services;

improvement of the tourist culture degree and creation of alternatives to raise public awareness concerning tourism; creation of new training centers for guides, hostesses and managers in the hotel domain; building of thematic itineraries and parks; a better use of the national resources and of the national parks for tourism; opportunities for balneo therapy, modern spa and wellness centers.

**THREATS:** it is usually concentrated during the summer season, which leads to the fact that the resorts are deserted and people remain without an income outside the summer season; pollution of the sea-coast areas; in many places the seashore is affected by landslides and erosion processes; the legal framework is old-fashioned and hostile to business tourism; the image of Bulgaria as a "cheap destination"; the economic crisis world-wide and nationally.

### **5. Benchmarking analysis - Mamaia vs. Albena**

#### **5.1. Mamaia holiday resort**

*The Mamaia holiday resort* is situated 3 km north of Constanța. It is the largest tourist resort in Romania (situated at 6-8 m altitude), being also called the Black Sea Pearl. Mamaia is a tourist holiday resort on the western Black Sea Coast. It is situated north of Constanța Town. Mamaia is not an autonomous locality, but a neighborhood of Constanța with very few permanent residents (less than 50), being however overcrowded during the summer. Mamaia has a very long beach, which can reach a width of up to 250 m, covered with fine-grain sand. Along this beach there are many shops, restaurants, terraces, clubs and discos. During the last few years, in the Mamaia resort, major investments were made both for renewing and endowing the hotel units and for the resort infrastructure.

#### **5.2. Albena holiday resort**

*The Albena Holiday Resort* is situated on the Black Sea Coast in north-eastern Bulgaria, 12 km away from Balçic and 30 km away from Varna. The international airport of Varna serves the Albena holiday resort. In Albena there are 43 hotels (2-4 stars), situated on the beach or on the nearby hills facing the sea and the national reserve of Baltata. The resort has a 5 km long and a 150 m wide beach, with fine-grain sand; the sea water is clear, calm and warm. The water depth does not exceed 1.6 m at a

distance of 100–150 m away from the shore. The visitors can opt for one of the 43 modern hotels (between two and four stars) that offer about 20 000 beds. The beach in Albena is, according to experts and visitors alike, the cleanest and safest even at night, and also the largest in Bulgaria (60m/3.5km). It is very well taken care of. In this holiday resort, the tags for tourists are written in 5 languages, and you find an excellent medical center. In Albena there are 3 hotels with the largest and most modern sun-energy collectors (310 m<sup>2</sup>).

### 5.3. Benchmarking analysis - boarding services – interpretation of results

The Mamaia holiday resort obtained a score of 9180 compared to Albena, which obtained a score of 9950. The differences between these two holiday resorts are given by: *personnel's seriousness*: Mamaia obtained a better score than Albena because its employees do their activity seriously and with a respectful attitude towards tourists; *professional training*: Albena obtained a better score because it

has a better prepared personnel. An ace of this holiday resort is the fact that it is home to an educational institution, namely the International College in Hospitality and Tourism of Albena; *promptness*: Albena obtained a better score as its personnel acts promptly when a tourist asks for help, compared to the personnel in Mamaia who does not really have an adequate attitude; *salary-related motivation*: the personnel in Albena has a much more attractive salary compared to the personnel in Mamaia, and consequently is more motivated; *room design* as well as the *chromatics and arrangements*: in Albena, hotel rooms have a modern design, with chromatic diversity, compared to those in Mamaia where white is dominant; in Albena hotel room decoration creates a pleasant atmosphere that makes you feel really on holiday; *complementary services*: the hotels in Albena provide tourists with a great number of complementary services, namely: check-in (24h), room service (24h), transport services (from the airport, luggage transport), safe underground parking, laundry, post service.

**Table no. 1 Boarding services**

Groups of features	Features	P <sub>i</sub>	P <sub>a</sub>	Mark (1-10)		ScP	
				Mamaia	Albena	Mamaia	Albena
<b>Personnel</b> 500	Kindness	100	50	8	8	400	400
	Professionalism	150	75	7	7	525	525
	Seriousness	200	100	7	5	700	500
	Professional formation	150	75	6	7	450	525
	Promptness	150	75	5	6	375	450
	Imposing app	100	50	7	7	350	350
	Salary motivation	150	75	5	7	375	525
<b>Conditions provided</b> 250	Cleanliness in the room	150	75	7	7	525	525
	Room surface	150	75	7	7	525	525
	Room design	150	75	6	7	450	600
	Room location	100	50	6	6	300	300
	Room security degree	150	75	7	7	525	525
	Chromatics and arrangements	100	50	5	6	250	350
	Complementary services *	200	100	6	7	600	700
<b>Room endowments</b> 250	Telephone	150	75	7	7	525	525
	Fax	100	50	5	5	250	250
	TV-set	150	75	7	7	525	525
	Safe	100	50	7	7	350	350
	mini bar	150	75	6	6	450	450
	air conditioning	200	100	6	6	600	600
	Access to the internet	150	75	6	6	450	450
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>General 1000</b>					<b>9180</b>	<b>9950</b>

**5.4. Benchmarking analysis – public food services – result interpretation**

Mamaia obtained a score of 7000 compared to Albena, which obtained a score of 7675. This time,

the differences are given by: personnel’s availability and attitude towards the client; food quality; way of presentation; prices.

Table no. 2 Public food services							
Groups of features	Features	P <sub>i</sub>	P <sub>a</sub>	Mark (1-10)		ScP	
				Mamaia	Albena	Mamaia	Albena
Personnel 250	kindness	100	25	8	8	200	200
	chef’s prestige	100	25	5	5	125	125
	availability	200	50	5	7	250	350
	food hygiene	100	25	7	7	175	175
	altitude towards the client	300	75	5	6	375	450
	dignified app	200	50	9	9	450	450
Food offer 500	menu diversity	200	100	9	9	900	900
	array of beverages	200	100	8	8	800	800
	food quality	200	100	6	7	600	700
	traditionalism	100	50	8	8	400	400
	way of presentation	100	50	5	6	250	300
	prices	200	100	5	7	500	700
Conditions provided in restaurants 250	inner design	300	75	8	9	600	675
	atmosphere created in the restaurant	200	50	8	8	400	400
	existence of differentiated areas	200	50	9	9	450	450
	table arrangement	300	75	7	8	525	600
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>General 1000</b>					<b>7000</b>	<b>7675</b>

**5.5. Benchmarking analysis – auxiliary services – result interpretation**

Concerning the auxiliary services, the differences are quite significant between the two holiday resorts, as Mamaia obtained a score of 4750 compared to Albena, which obtained a score of 6375.

The differences are visible, namely: Mamaia holiday resort does not have modern European-standards sports endowments compared to Albena, where there are specially arranged areas for sports like tennis, football, basketball, bowling, golf;

in Mamaia, there are no tourist circuits and no tourist guides, these attributions being incumbent to the hotel personnel who provides certain pieces of information when required; in Albena, every evening, there are Bulgarian traditional music and dance festivals; in Mamaia there is no specially arranged area for children, unlike in Albena, which is an ideal holiday resort for families, as there is also specially trained personnel specialized in taking care of children; the beach in Albena has the Blue Flag distinction while in Mamaia there is no beach having this distinction so far.

Table no. 3 Auxiliary services							
Groups of features	Features	P <sub>i</sub>	P <sub>a</sub>	Mark (1-10)		ScP	
				Mamaia	Albena	Mamaia	Albena
Personnel 500	kindness	100	50	8	8	400	400
	professionalism	150	75	7	7	525	525
	seriousness	200	100	8	7	800	700
	professional training	150	75	8	9	600	675
	promptness	150	75	5	8	375	600
	dignified app	100	50	9	9	450	450
	salary motivation	150	75	6	9	450	675

<b>Array of services provided 500</b>	sports endowments	100	50	5	8	250	400
	Blue Flag beach	100	50	0	9	0	400
	tourist guides	100	50	4	8	200	400
	tourist itineraries	100	50	4	8	200	400
	festivals organized	100	50	5	7	250	350
	playground for children	100	50	5	8	250	400
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>General 1000</b>					<b>4750</b>	<b>6375</b>

## 6. Conclusions and suggestions

The Romanian Black Sea coast is one of the few positive stories in this time of crisis. The modesty of the conditions provided proved to be a form of adaptation to the recession. Even though, in the case of the Romanian summer tourism, success means maintaining the business level at the same value as that obtained a few years ago, the performance is remarkable. In the case of our Bulgarian neighbors, the summer season of 2009 was one of the worst in the last decennium. The Bulgarians invested much more than the Romanians, but they did it irrationally, in their rush for profit, and now all the actors in the local industry suffer. By virtue of a surprising reasoning, the Romanian Black Sea coast received the shock of the crisis better than other countries that have a tradition in this domain. The decline of the revenues from tourism is estimated to be of about 20% in Greece and of at least 15% in Bulgaria. Only Croatia – the most wanted tourist destination for the Europeans during the last few years is expected to repeat its performance of 2008. This year: 1.3 million tourists visited the Black Sea coast in 2009, a result similar to that of 2008; 20% is the decline of the number of tourists in Romania in 2009 compared to 2008. The negative trend occurred in the alpine resorts, not on the Black Sea coast; 25% this is the percentage by which the number of the Romanians who spent their holidays abroad decreased in 2009, compared to 2008 (this figure corresponds to the date of July 31). Even though Romania is at present “the land” and Bulgaria “the choice”, by the implementation of the regional development projects on a national level, this situation can change and so Romania can really become “The land of choice”.

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