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“Thermal-spa tourism in Republic of Macedonia”

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Abstract

The subject of this paper shall be thermal tourism in Republic of Macedonia. In the paper, the authors will give a definition of thermal tourism, and thermal spas shall be classified by the regions they are situated in, the quality of the water, natural and anthropogenic resources, medical conditions they treat etc. It shall also discuss the thermal tourism enterprises. Provide statistics and define the profile of thermal tourist. The paper will provide recommendations for further development of thermal tourism in Republic of Macedonia.

Key words: thermal tourism, thermal spas, Republic of Macedonia.

1. Introduction

The people from East Europe were using thermal water for bathing and other needs more than a thousand of years (Lawrence, Stoyanov, 1996). Archaeological researches from Asia are showing that thermal waters were used for bathing even before 5000 years (Lund, 2009). Even on the other continents like North and South America (Indians), Africa (Egyptians), Australia and Europe (Greeks and Romans), the situation is similar. In Europe the Romans have left the biggest heritage of spas (Puczkó, Smith, 2009). Some authors are indicating that thermal water began to be used for health aims in the 6-th century B.C. (Aslihak, 1998). Archeological studies in R.M. are indicating that thermal water for bathing is used initially by Romans, and later by Turks who were known as connoisseurs of spas.

Between the natural resources with the epithet of prominent convenience for satisfying the tourism needs in R.M. are included thermal mineral waters. On the area that covers the country (25, 713 square km) there are many of these hydrographic facilities. The

number of thermal mineral springs in R.M. is among 65, and for touristic needs are used 8 (Chart No.1). There are several springs of thermal water which are used by the tourists as the spa in the village of Strnovac, but do not have a medical staff and buildings for accommodation, only a pool and showers for bathing (Gjurovski, 2009). Spa centers are such touristic motives that attract tourists with hydrological characteristics expressed primarily from the chemical composition and thermal mineral properties, and the water flow of the springs which provide minimum terms for their use (Marinoski, 2006). According to the European Spa Association, in Europe there are over 1200 spa centers (Frost, 2004).

Chart No.1, Review of the spa centers in Macedonia

| Ordinal number | Name of the spa | Location | Region | Water flow | Water temperature |
|----------------|-----------------|------------------------------|-----------|------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | Bansko | v. Bansko | Southeast | 40 l/sec | 72 C° |
| 2 | Debar spas | v. Banishte v. Kosovrasti | Southwest | 51 l/sec 68.8 l/sec | 38.8 C° 48 C° |
| 3 | Kocanska* | v. Banja | East | 65 l/sec | 64 C° |
| 4 | Katlanovska | v. Katlanovo | Skopski | 1,5-2 l/sec | 41 C° |
| 5 | Kezovica | v. Novo selo | East | 36 l/sec | 64 C° |
| 6 | Kumanovska | v. Proevci | Northeast | 2,5 l/sec | 30,4 C° |
| 7 | Negorska | v. Negorci | Southeast | 1,1 l/sec | 40 C° |

Source: Taskov, N., "Tourism valuables of thermal spas in Republic of Macedonia", Stip, 2004

From chart can be noted that the majority of the baths (5) in the Macedonia are found in the eastern part of the country, two are located in the west and one in the central part. According to Taskov, the capacity of accommodation in spa centers is around 1600 beds, and the usage of these facilities is small and is about 23% (Taskov, 2004). The spas in Macedonia have good road connection, because they are near freeways, border crossings and the airports.

2. Natural and anthropogenic values of baths

The baths in Macedonia are located in rural areas. The new tendencies in tourism activities lead to increased concern of nature and increased benefits for the local community. The spa centers in Macedonia except its healing matter of water have much to offer to the tourists, and above all the beautiful nature, anthropogenic resources and local traditions, customs and national gastronomy. Together they make the tourism product. Near of the spa centers you can see animals such as deer, pheasant, partridge, hare, wild boar, deer, wild sheep, bear, wolf, fox, frou, catfish, carp, barbell and others.

From flora in spa centers we can see: clear black (which grow up to 30m height), pine, elm, hornbeam, drain, hazel, oak, fig, marsh plants, reeds, etc. Above mentioned animals and plants, enriched with landscapes, rivers and lakes, ancient churches and

monasteries, monuments, archeological localities, traditional handicrafts and customs, cultural heritage, we believe that are the motive plus for attracting tourists in spa centers in Macedonia.

3. Illnesses which are healed by waters in the spas

One of the primary motives for visiting the spa centers by tourists is the healing effect of the water. Research has shown that spas in Macedonia, treat various diseases (due to higher levels of minerals), and No. 2 in chart (below) are shown some of the diseases that can be treated in most spas. Thermal water is used to treat in several ways: by bathing, drinking, inhalation and mud coating.

Chart No. 2, Illness funded by waters in the spas

| | Bansko | Katlanovska spa | Kezovica | Negorska spa | Kumanovska spa | Kocanska spa | Debarska spa |
|------------------------------------|--------|--------------------|----------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Nerve illnesses | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Rheumatism | √ | √ | √ | √ | | √ | |
| Diabetes | | | √ | | √ | | √ |
| Allergies and skin infections | | √ | √ | | | | √ |
| Kidney and urinary tract illnesses | | √ | | | √ | √ | √ |
| Breathing tract illnesses | | √ | | √ | | √ | √ |
| Inflammation of gallbladder | | | | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Gynecological illnesses | √ | √ | √ | √ | | √ | √ |
| Bronchitis | √ | | √ | √ | | | |
| Cardio-vascular illnesses | | √ | | √ | | | |
| Digestion tract illnesses | √ | √ | | √ | √ | √ | √ |

Source: Taskov, N., "Tourism valuables of thermal spas in Republic of Macedonia", Stip, 2004.

4. Stats and profile of the tourists

Although there are problems in defining tourism (due to his constant development and more aspects), thermal or spa tourism can be defined as visit and staying in specialized facilities that provide an opportunity for healing and relaxation with the use of the thermal water. According to the Bureau of Statistics, in 2009 in the spa centers stayed 20,041 tourists, including 15,954 domestic and 4087 foreign tourists.

There has been realized 128,626 overnight stays, of which 101,100 domestic and 27,526 foreign tourists¹. Foreign tourists who stay in the spas are visiting individually, are craftsman by profession and other related workers, length of stay amounting to 9 days, the average cost per day is 2221 denars (around 36 Euros) and the visit is usually because of health reasons. Vehicle which they use is a car, previously stayed in the spa center, most are fed in a room or outdoor spas, pay in cash, and according to tourists prices are appropriate to the service and would like to stay again. Most often are staying with a partner, and most of the tourists are above 50 years old. Nature, personal safety, service by the personnel and diet are rated as very good, and the possibility of excursions, congresses and road infrastructure as good. The only negatively rated are the opportunities for sports and cultural events².

As for foreign and domestic tourists primary motive for visiting the spas is the healing of the water. Profile of domestic tourists does not differ greatly from that of foreign tourists. The prevailing visitors are with secondary education, most are under the age of 50 years, regular customers who believe that the natural environment and anthropogenic resources are not fully utilized. Tourists are satisfied with housing, nutrition and hygiene in the spa (Taskov, 2004).

5. Conclusion of observations and recommendations

In the National Strategy for tourism development, for spas they mentioned that treatments are offering almost exclusively of a medical nature and except (to a limited degree) Debar, Katlanovska and Negorski spas are not offering relaxation and beautifying, for which there is an increasing demand in Western Europe and around the world. There are no other recreation centers or other offer outside the spa complexes. Tourists may feel bored and isolated, sharing the space with "sick" people. Ownership and management of some spas is public, and of other is private. The legal regulation is under preparation, but is waiting for a decision whether they will be pure medical facilities, which are not subject to standards and classification of accommodation. It is assumed that the current accommodation in most spas should be classified at the level of quality from one or two stars. Although they serve mostly domestic guests, many foreign visitors, mostly from the Macedonian Diaspora also staying in the spas. In terms of promotion, they primarily rely on word of the public and local advertisements.

¹ "Tourism in the Republic of Macedonia, 2005-2009", State statistical office of Republic of Macedonia, 2010

² "Survey on foreign tourists in accommodation facilities, 2009", State statistical office of Republic of Macedonia, 2010

Some spas are improving their treatment and accommodation facilities are thinking expand. Considering the continuing domestic demand, this is quite logical strategy. With it you can enable expansion of business beyond national markets. However, expansion to other markets will require providing a unique treatment that cannot be found anywhere else and /or development of additional facilities for relaxation and beautifying, with accommodation with quality level of at least 4 stars. All the decisions to expand in this direction should be made based on research of market potential, considering that there is strong competition for markets, both in Hungary and Bulgaria.

Similarly as in Romania, where the state through social policy is covering the pensioners up to 70% of the cost for staying in the spas (Turtureanu, 2007), in Macedonia each year about 10,000 pensioners (with lower pensions) get a free seven-day stay on the basis of full board and treatments in spa centers.

Spa tourism meets a series of problems in their own development that can be divided in two groups:

- Problems that are not under direct influence of spa centers (the standard of the population, amount of income tax, employment, leisure, benefits for treatment); and

- Problems that are under direct influence of spa centers (medical personnel, hotel accommodation, food, additional activities).

The directions for the development of spa tourism should move to the next:

- Development of information systems (e.g. banjesrbije.net);
- Connection and common range of foreign markets (e.g. bubspa.org); and
- Development of a wellness and spa programs.

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