

## MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF INCOMING TRAVEL PACKAGES IN ROMANIA. STUDY CASE: TOURS INCLUDING CLUJ-NAPOCA

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**ABSTRACT. Main Characteristics of Incoming Travel Packages in Romania. Study Case: Tours Including Cluj-Napoca.** The main purpose of this study is analyzing the features of tourist packages (tours) created and marketed by tour operators to foreign tourists visiting one of the main cities in Romania, Cluj-Napoca. The secondary objectives are identifying the characteristics of the travel packages, the features of tourists' stay in Cluj-Napoca and the presence of this travel destination in tourist products.

Thus, the focused territory is the city of Cluj-Napoca. Nevertheless, we analyzed the whole tourist package, in order to place the stay in this travel destination in the general context.

An analysis grid was designed, choosing the proper variables. Data was collected by content analysis of the description of tourist packages existing on the websites of the incoming travel agencies in Romania. 394 tours of at least 2 overnights, 8 tours with one overnight and 45 one day trips could be found and analysed.

Information was found regarding aspects such as: length of stay, access and chosen means of transportation, accommodation type and meals included, the extent to which tour guiding services are included and other services, facilities and activities provided. Collected data was processed, graphs were created and analysis and interpretation of results was performed.

We opted to use Microsoft Excel to create the table of the analysis grid where data regarding the chosen variable was introduced and the graphs were created in the same program.

For tours with at least 2 overnights, there are tours including 7 overnights in Romania and only one night or without overnight in Cluj-Napoca, plane to arrive in Romania and road access to Cluj-Napoca, preference for hotels, half-board for meals, tour guiding services for the whole circuit and few activities, facilities and other services included. Also, there are few one-day trips or trips with one overnight and they provide especially transportation, accommodation, meals and tour-guiding, being provided few and poor diversity of other activities, services or facilities.

**Keywords:** *incoming tourism, tourist packages characteristics, travel destination, Romania, Cluj-Napoca.*

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## INTRODUCTION

We are in the age of travel (Postelnicu & Dabija, 2016), noticing the growth of international tourism, a sector of the economy registering growth in both international tourism (5% in general and in Europe) and earnings (4% in general and in Europe) in the year 2018 (UNWTO, 2019). Nowadays, tourism does not represent only recreation and leisure, but also culture, education, peace and cooperation at an international level (Postelnicu & Dabija, 2016).

During the next years, international travel will become more frequent and easier to be realized due to three trends: an expanding global middle class, an aging global population and, last but not least, improved technology and infrastructure (World Economic Forum, 2017).

In this context, inbound tourism is a popular topic for research. Inbound or incoming tourism represents the activities realized by a person in another country than the one where he/she resides (UNWTO - Understanding Tourism: Basic Glossary)

Romania is a travel destination for incoming tourism, being located in one of the four “vacation lakes” created after 1990 mentioned by UNWTO. Also, this country can be a travel destination due to its various potential suitable for both sunlust and wonderlust tourists. It has as principal features: the diversity of the natural or anthropogenic potential and the tourist arrangement of the heritage (Păcurar, 2018). Also, 8 categories of attractions are on the UNESCO World Heritage List: the Danube Delta, the ancient and primeval beech forests of the Carpathians, 8 painted churches in Moldavia, the monastery of Horezu, the Dacian fortresses of the Orăștie Mountains, 8 wooden churches in Maramureș region, 7 villages with fortified churches in Transylvania, the historical center of Sighișoara (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/ro>). There are good air connections (also by low-cost flights) and the country is a popular destination to be discovered (both in terms of physical tourist objectives and habits).

The tourism from this country went through almost all the phases and trends that existed in the European tourism, excepting the years 1945-1990 when it developed in the conditions of the centralized (not market) economy (Ciangă & Pătrașcu, 2010). Also, in the present, the number of incoming tourists is growing steadily. In Romania the growth percentage of incoming tourism is lower than the one at global or Europe’s level, being, nevertheless, positive. The international tourist arrivals amount to 2797 thousands of tourists in 2018 (in comparison with 2760 thousands in 2017) and, if in 2017 the international tourism receipts were of 2527 million dollars, in 2018 they were of 2896 million dollars (UNWTO, 2019).

According to Romania's Statistics National Institute, in 2018, the main sources of incoming tourists in Romania were the neighboring countries: Republic of Moldavia -2330 thousands of tourists, Bulgaria – 1600 thousands, Hungary – 1491 thousands, and Ukraine – 1466 thousands (<http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>, 2019).

Regarding the provenance of foreign tourists, there can be said that the majority are from Europe (92.37 % from total) and out of the tourists with residence on this continent, more than half (53.29%) are from the European Union. Concerning tourists from other continents, the situation is the following: Asia - 531 thousands of tourists, North America - 260 thousands, Africa – 39 thousands, Central and South America – 37 thousands, Australia and Oceania 26 thousands (<http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>, 2019).

The international travel circulation should be encouraged by the importers of tourism (the stakeholders) which address to those who represent the tourism exporters (Cristureanu, 1992; Păcurar, 2018). Among the stakeholders in tourism, there are the travel agencies which are creating and marketing travel packages. Even if nowadays there is a trend that tourists organize themselves their travels, an important part of them still use travel agencies, especially if it is about an international travel. It brings advantages such as more security, professionalism and commodity.

Because the number of incoming tourists is growing both in Romania in general and in Cluj-Napoca in particular and a part of these tourists arrive in Cluj-Napoca by purchasing travel packages from travel agencies, the main purpose of this study is analyzing the features of tourist packages (tours) created and marketed by tour operators to foreign tourists visiting one of the main cities in Romania, Cluj-Napoca. Also, the research has the following secondary objectives: analyzing the presence of Cluj-Napoca travel destination in the tourist products, identifying the characteristics of the travel packages, identifying the characteristics of the arrival and stay in Cluj-Napoca.

Travel packages represent a combination of at least 2 services from various categories such as: transportation, accommodation, food, recreation (Gherasim & Gherasim, 1999), medical, business, congresses, etc. They satisfy the needs and desires of travelers during the period between leaving the residence and their return to the destination where the travel started (Stănciulescu & State, 2013). The basic services are considered the ones related to transportation, accommodation and food (Nicoară, 2010). Nevertheless, in order to be competitive, it is necessary for travel packages to include also other types of services.

Travel packages imply visiting one or more travel destinations, so this concept will also be approached. A travel destination is an administrative-territorial unit having one or more travel attractions, whether natural or anthropogenic (Neacșu et al, 2011)

In the following lines, the chosen methodology, the results, the answers to the research questions and the analysis of data will be presented.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This research started with the formulation of the research topic which was identifying and analyzing the characteristics of incoming travel packages that include also Cluj-Napoca. This would lead, later on, to identify and analyze features of incoming tourism.

The main objective was formulated: to analyze the features of tourist packages (tours) created and marketed by tour operators to foreign tourists visiting one of the main cities in Romania, Cluj-Napoca.

Also, the study had the 3 secondary objectives mentioned below:

1. analyzing the presence of Cluj-Napoca travel destination in the tourist products;
2. identifying the characteristics of the travel packages;
3. identifying the characteristics of the arrival and stay in Cluj-Napoca.

The fulfillment of the secondary objectives would lead to achieving the main objective and, after choosing the objectives, research questions were formulated.

To analyze the presence of Cluj-Napoca travel destination in the tourist products, the research questions were:

- How many travel agencies have tours including Cluj-Napoca?
- How many tours including Cluj-Napoca are per travel agency?

Next, to identify the characteristics of the travel packages there were the following:

- Which is the tourists' travel availability taking into account the duration of tours?
- Which are the tourists preferences regarding travel services, facilities or activities?

Last but not least, in order to obtain information regarding the features of tourists' arrival and stay in Cluj-Napoca we had the following questions:

- How do tourists arrive in Cluj-Napoca?
- What services and/or activities do they have included in Cluj-Napoca?

The following step in our research was choosing the research method used in order to answer the research questions and to accomplish the main and secondary objectives.

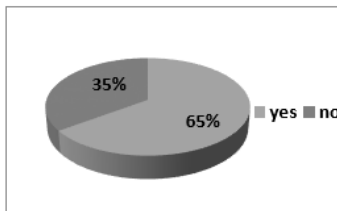
As a research method, we have chosen the content analysis of the description of travel packages existing on the web sites of the incoming travel agencies in Romania. The proper variables have been chosen.

An analysis grid was designed in Microsoft Excel. A table was created which contained the variables in the first line above the columns, and information about a tour was written in every line of the table.

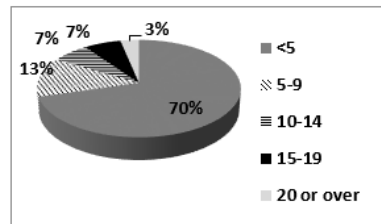
Data was collected by content analysis of the description of tourist packages existing on the websites of the incoming travel agencies in Romania in the months of April and May 2019. The collected data was processed, graphs were created in Microsoft Excel and the analysis and interpretation of the results was performed.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Regarding incoming travel agencies, it was found that 94 incoming travel agencies, having their headquarters in Romania, had incoming travel packages on their websites. From these agencies, 61 had tours (one day tours or tours with one or more overnights) in Cluj-Napoca as travel destination, representing only about 2/3 of the agencies analyzed. We identified 394 tours with at least 2 overnights, 8 tours with one overnight and 45 one day trips. All these 61 agencies had tours with at least 2 overnights, but, in the most of cases, an agency had less than 5 tours with at least 2 overnights. The majority of agencies had their headquarters in Bucharest (59.01%), being followed by the ones located in Cluj-Napoca (19.67%), and there are 1-2 agencies also in other cities.



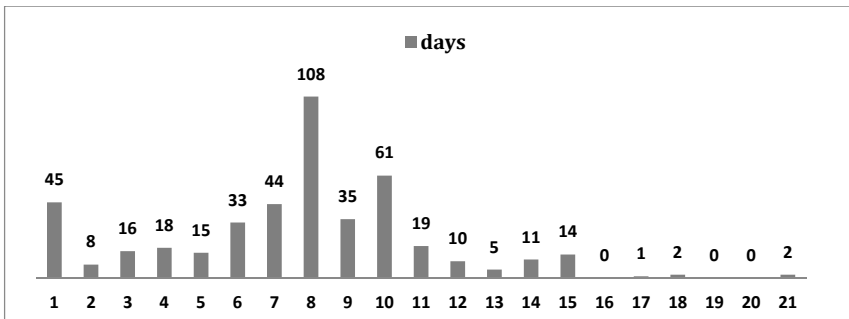
**Fig. 1.** Incoming travel agencies creating tours with at least 2 overnights



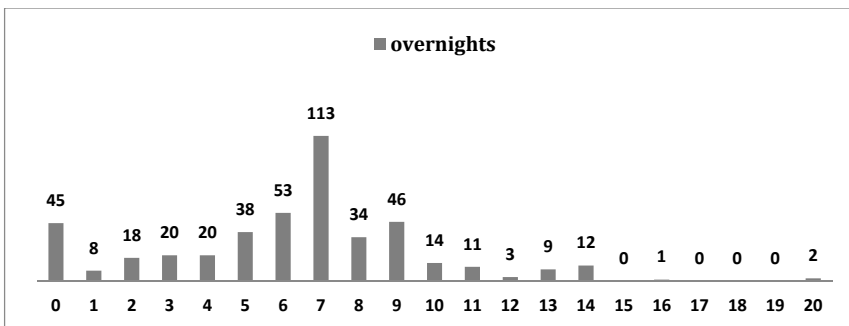
**Fig. 2.** Number of tours with at least 2 overnights/agency

Only 4 agencies had tours with one overnight, being 1,2 or 3 packages/ agency. Also, 9 agencies created and promoted one day trips on their websites, but there were both situations with few and many trips, from agencies with under 5 one day trips to ones offering 8 or more packages of this type. Thus, it can be mentioned that this travel destination is insufficiently exploited by being included in travel packages.

Regarding the duration, the length in days of the tourist package, and the number of overnights spent both in Romania and in Cluj-Napoca were analysed. It resulted that the majority of tours had 8 days and 7 overnights in Romania. An explanation could be the fact that it is easier to organize tours only in Romania and 8 days is a proper duration to visit various travel destinations in the country and to have an idea about the features of the chosen travel destination (local specificities, traditions, lifestyle).

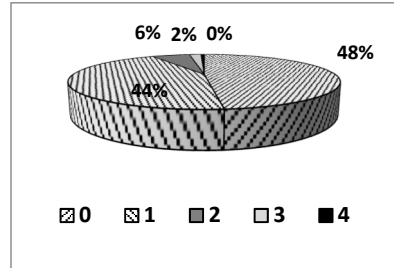


**Fig. 3.** The duration of the tours in days



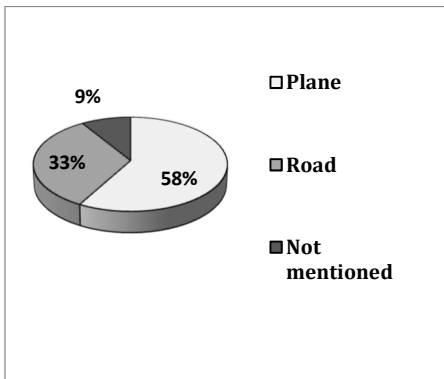
**Fig. 4.** The number of overnights in Romania in the tour

Analyzing the tours with at least 2 overnights, because the ones with one overnight started in Cluj-Napoca and had an overnight somewhere else, it can be noticed that, in the majority of situations, tourists did not stay overnight in this city or spent here only one night. This aspect may have various explanations: tourists preferred tours with one overnight in a certain city/village to visit more places in the same tour, the insufficient development of the tourism potential in the nearby area of Cluj-Napoca (except for Turda Salt Mine), the bigger prices in Cluj-Napoca compared to other cities/villages in Transylvania, the geographical position, far from Bucharest (the location of the airport where tourists from the biggest number of tours are landing), far from the UNESCO World Heritage places in Transylvania and the lack of connection with Dracula story. Nevertheless, from the obtained data, it resulted that tourists have time availability of taking part in travels.

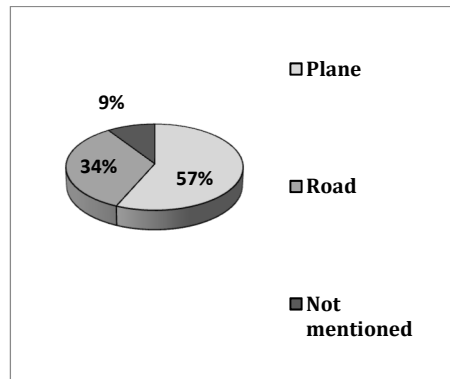


**Fig. 5.** Number of overnights in Cluj-Napoca

Regarding the means of transportation chosen to arrive in Romania, we found information regarding only the tours with at least 2 overnights. So, as one can see, for the majority of these 394 travel packages, the plane was preferred to arrive in Romania and the road means of transportation to arrive in Cluj-Napoca.



**Fig. 6.** The means of transportation used to arrive in Romania

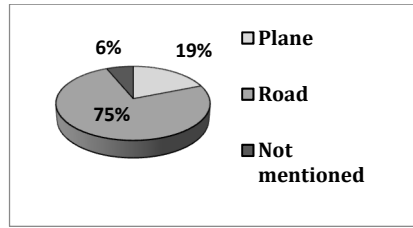


**Fig. 7.** The means of transportation used to leave Romania

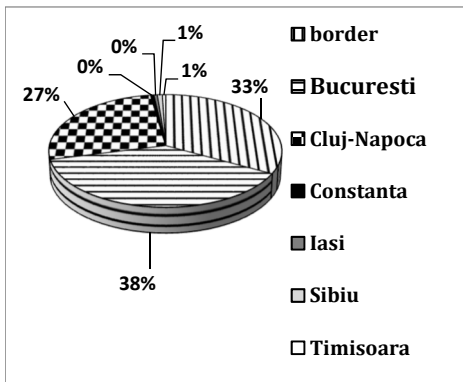
Possible explanations for the preference to arrive in Romania by plane could be: the comfort it provides (shorter time to arrive at the destination, less tiring than road means of transportation, the existence of many direct flights or flights with good connection) or the prices lower than in the past.

Nevertheless, in most cases, tourists arrived in Cluj-Napoca by road means of transportation. This situation shows the preference for the airport in Bucharest to arrive in Romania by plane and is explained also by the fact that a significant number of tourists still arrive in Romania by road.

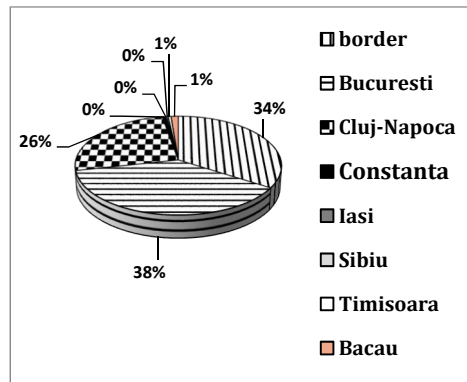
Regarding the first destination in Romania, the majority of routes started in Bucharest, as the capital of the country and having also the airport with the biggest number of routes, followed by those starting at the border. Cluj-Napoca was on the third place as the starting point of a tour. For leaving Romania, the order was the same.



**Fig. 8.** The means of transportation used to arrive in Cluj-Napoca



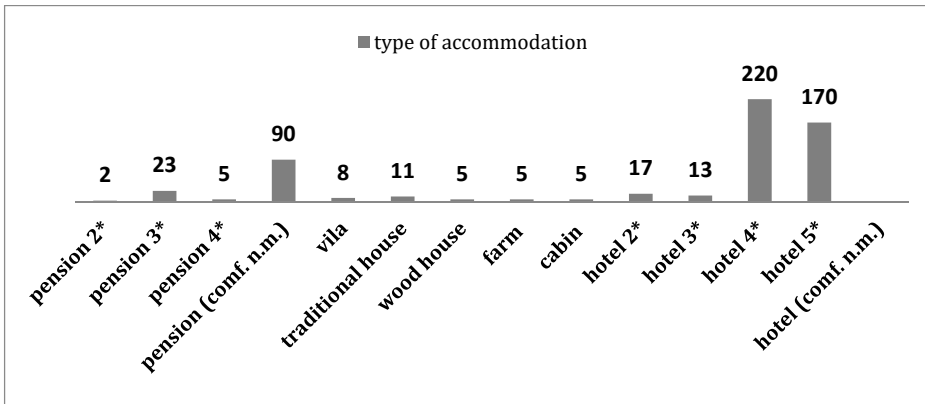
**Fig. 9.** The place where the route starts in Romania



**Fig. 10.** The place where the route finishes in Romania

After approaching access and transportation, the accommodation services were analysed.



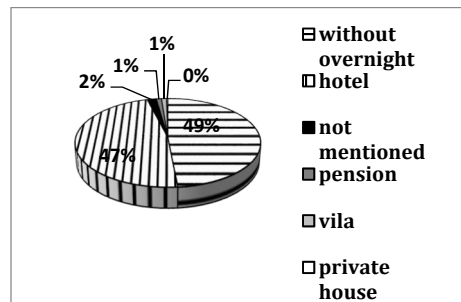


**Fig. 11.** The types of accommodation units used during the stay in Romania in tours with at least one overnight

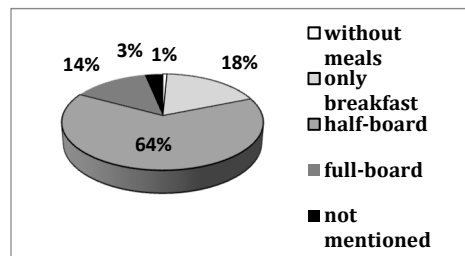
For tours of at least 2 overnights, hotels were preferred both in general and in Cluj-Napoca, and for the travels with one overnight, people opted for pensions.

Furthermore, we searched for information about the meals included in the tourist packages and it resulted that, in tours with 2 or more overnights, half-board was most frequently chosen. Also, for travels with one overnight, breakfast and dinner were provided and tourists received lunch in the one-day trips.

The preference for half-board may be due to the fact that it is comfortable to have breakfast in the accommodation unit, one meal (usually lunch) may be taken with the group to socialize, to taste traditional food and to avoid wasting time searching for a place



**Fig. 12.** The types of accommodation units used during the stay in Cluj-Napoca

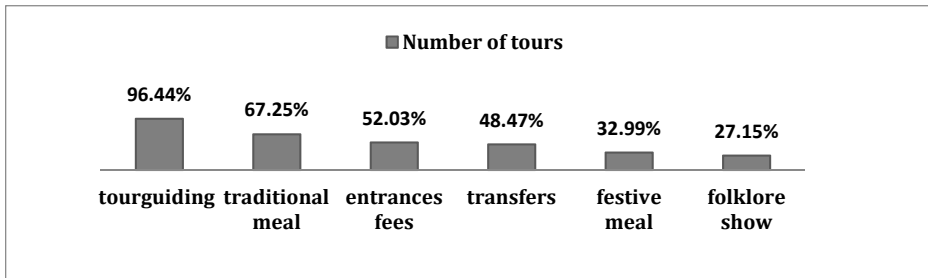


**Fig. 13.** The meals included in the tourist packages with at least 2 overnights

where to eat and one meal may be taken on their own to feel that they do not have all day planned, they have free time and liberty of organizing it as they prefer.

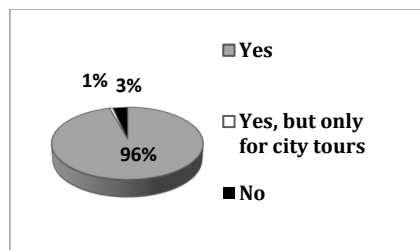
Related to other types of services, activities and facilities included, first we analysed the 394 tours with at least 2 overnights. These tours started in various locations and, at a certain point, tourists arrived also in Cluj-Napoca.

Analyzing the other services, activities and facilities, it resulted that the most popular were the ones included in the graphic: tour-guiding, traditional meals, entrance fees at tourist attractions, transfer between the airport and the accommodation unit, festive meal and folklore show, only the first 3 ones being present in more than half of the tours with at least 2 overnights.



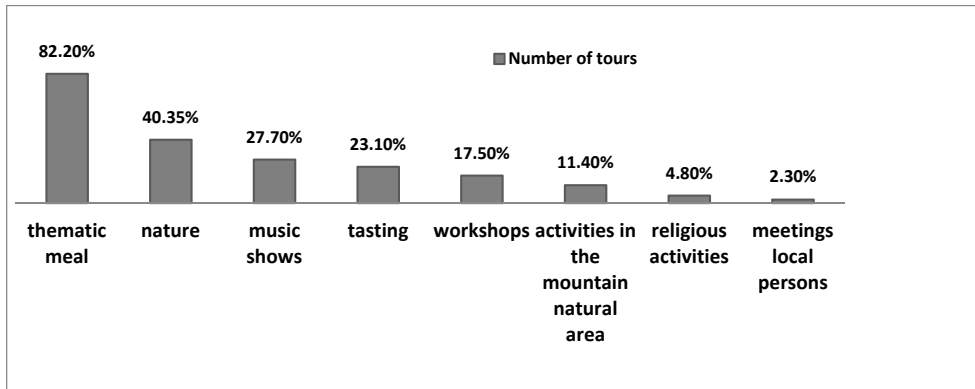
**Fig. 14.** Other services, activities or facilities included in more than ¼ tours with at least 2 overnights

It resulted that the majority of tourist packages included tour guiding services during the whole circuit. There is, nevertheless, a small percentage of situations where this service was used only for city tours. Tour guiding services were included also for travels with one overnight or one day trips.



**Fig. 15.** The existence of tour guiding services in tours

Also, for this type of tours, we grouped the activities/services/facilities into categories to see how various categories were present in the travel packages offered to foreign tourists. The results can be seen in the following graphic.



**Fig. 16.** Categories of activities included in tours with at least one overnight

Concerning meals, more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of tours had thematic meals, the most popular being the traditional meals, included in 72% of tours with at least 2 overnights. The other types of thematic meals were present, each one, in less than 5% of the tours: festive meal, festive Dracula dinner, monastic meal, Easter meal, Christmas meal.

There were various activities related to nature, in 40.35% of the total number of these tours. Nevertheless, none of them was included in more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the tours. The most frequent ones were boat trips in the Danube Delta – 11.92% or hiking – 11.16%. Other such activities were traditional carriage ride, heritage train ride, picnic, bicycle ride, horse riding, cave visit, boat ride on the lake or the Danube, climbing by cable car, campfire, guitar songs, horse-driven sled riding, zipline or kayak. The large number of activities mentioned shows the wide range of activities possible to be performed in nature and whose suitability in being included in travel packages is checked, as they had already existed in some tours created and marketed to incoming tourists.

A bit more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  of these travel packages included music shows. From the total number of tours with at least 2 overnights, 27.15% had included folklore shows. The other types of shows were included, each one, in less than 2% of the travel packages: symphonic music shows, opera shows, Christmas Carols shows, religious music events, or philharmonic orchestra performance.

Also, almost  $\frac{1}{4}$  of these tours included tasting activities (23.10%). There were both food and drinks tastings. Nevertheless, the poor diversity must be mentioned, as there was only wine, palinka/tuica (Romanian brandy), beer, cheese and fruit jam tasting. One notices that wine tasting was quite popular, being present in almost 20% of tours with at least 2 overnights (19.28%). Each one of the other types of tasting were included in less than 5% of these tours.

The workshops were another type of activities presented (in 17.50% of these tours). The workshops were related to traditional crafts, traditional eating products or drinks. The most popular type of workshop was the ceramic one (13.19%), the other ones representing less than 4% each: egg painting, carpet, wood crafts, embroidery, fruit jam, Romanian alphorn (tulnic), gastronomic, beer making, blacksmith workshops. Even if each type of workshop was included in a very small number of tours, the workshops' diversity of types and the fact that they appeared in tours shows the interest of tourists in taking part in experiential tourism and the potential of diversifying the travel packages by including workshops.

We found also some activities realized in the natural mountain areas (11.40%). The most popular activity from this category was hiking, in 11.16 % of the tours, followed by activities present in a small number of travel packages: kayak, climbing by cable car, zipline and cave visit, campfire and guitar songs.

Moreover, there were activities related to the religious area (4.8%). They consisted of attending religious ceremonies (either Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant) or meeting with personalities from the religious domain. Also, approaching meetings with local persons, there were 2.3% of tours with at least 2 overnights including this type of activity: meeting with religious living personalities – 1.26% of tours and visiting a Romani family - 1.01% of packages.

Also, in terms of facilities/services related more to logistics and comfort, it can be mentioned that some travel packages included things such as: entrances to tourist attractions, airport-accommodation unit transfers, luggage services, 24/24 hours assistance, rented car, motorcycle, bicycle, plane ticket, travel insurance, travel guide book. Among these, only entrance fees at tourist attractions and airport-accommodation unit transfers were included in about half of these tours (52.03% and 48.47%), the other ones being much under ¼ of travel packages.

Next, we analyzed the other services, activities and facilities in travels with one overnight and one day trips.

In the 8 travels with one overnight, the entrance fees at tourist attractions were included, and in 7 out of 8 tours, tour guiding services were included. There were few activities and a poor array of them: in 4 tours workshops were organized (of wood products, blacksmith or egg-painting), 3 of them included traditional meals, tastings of traditional food or drinks were not organized and in 3 tours activities in nature (hiking, bear-watching and heritage train ride) were organized.

Regarding the 45 one day trips, it was noticed that tour guiding services were included in all tours and entrance fees at tourist attractions were included in 30 tours. Also, here the variety of activities included was poor, as there were

traditional meals in 12 tours, activities in nature (hiking, bicycle ride, boat ride on the lake or heritage train ride) in 9 travel packages, hiking activities in 5 tours and, unfortunately, no workshops.

So, other services, activities and facilities were included also in tours (one day tours or tours with one or more overnights), apart from the basic services, but their number and diversity was still poor.

The destinations visited during the tours were analyzed also for the one-day travel packages or those with one overnight.

Concerning the 45 one day tours, it resulted the existence of a large number of travel destinations, nevertheless, few of them were included in more than 1-2 tours. Also, unfortunately, only few packages included destinations in Cluj county and only Turda Salt Mine was present in 12 packages, Turda Gorges in 5, while the other destinations in this county (Negreni, Mărișel, Mănăstireni, Nadășu, Tarnița Lake or Beliș-Fântânele) being, each one, present in a single tour. Except for Satu Mare and Bistrița-Năsăud counties, the analyzed one day tours included destinations in the neighbouring counties (Alba County – 10 destinations, Sălaj County – 9 destinations, Maramureș County – 7 destinations, Bihor County – 3 destinations, Mureș County – 1 destination). Also, the most popular destinations for one day trips starting in Cluj-Napoca were: Turda Salt Mine (12 tours), Alba Iulia (10 tours), Rimetea (9 tours), Sighișoara (6 tours), Turda Gorges (5 tours), and Sibiu (5 tours).

A similar situation resulted regarding trips with one overnight starting and finishing in Cluj-Napoca: a wide variety of destinations, most of them included in only 1-2 tours, in the following counties: Maramureș - 8 destinations, Suceava - 5, Cluj - 3, Alba - 3, Sibiu - 3, Mureș - 2, Bihor - 2, Harghita - 2, Hunedoara - 1). Again, the number of destinations in Cluj County was very small – only 3 destinations (Turda Salt Mine, Huedin and Izvorul Crișului). Last but not least, regarding the overnights, they were in other counties than Cluj and each overnight destination was presented in only one tour (Rimetea, Sibiu, Săcel, Breb, Căpățânenii Pământeni, Corund, Gura Humorului, Sucevița).

Thus, from the analysis of both one-day trips and trips with one overnight, it resulted that there is the low capitalization of the tourism potential of Cluj County.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the main and the secondary purposes of this research were fulfilled.

It can be mentioned that this travel destination was included in less than 2/3 of the incoming travel agencies analysed and, in the most of cases, an agency had less than 5 tours with at least 2 overnights. Also, there were few one-day trips or trips with one overnight that included Cluj-Napoca. So, this travel destination is insufficiently exploited in travel packages.

Regarding the features of tours, access and services provided in Cluj-Napoca, in most situations the travel packages lasted 8 days. Out of 7 overnights in Romania, there was only one night spent in Cluj-Napoca or none. Also, the plane was chosen to arrive in Romania while other means of transportation on the road were preferred to arrive in Cluj-Napoca, the first and last point of the route in Romania was either Bucharest, the border or Cluj-Napoca. For accommodation, the hotel was chosen both for the overnights in Romania in general and in Cluj-Napoca, the packages including half-board. The tour-guiding services were included for the whole tour. Activities (and facilities) were included also, but their number and diversity were still poor.

Analyzing the results of this study, in our opinion, an ideal tour with at least 2 overnights, created and marketed to foreign tourists, could include what will be mentioned in the following lines. First of all, the package would comprise the basic services: transportation during the tour, accommodation and half-board (breakfast in the accommodation unit to be more comfortable, lunch with the group to have traditional food prepared, to socialize with other travelers and to save time, dinner being taken by tourists on their own to feel they have free time, not all day planned). In the tour there should be tour-guiding services (for explanation and problems solving) and, for comfort, entrance fees to tourist attractions and airport – accommodation transfers would be included. Moreover, in order to increase the quality of tourists' experience in Romania and their level of satisfaction, it would be recommended to include at least one activity from the following categories: thematic meal (e.g. traditional meal or thematic meal related to the event that would take place then/soon – Easter, Christmas), activities in nature (eg. hiking, or maybe a traditional carriage ride or heritage train ride for persons without a good physical condition), a music show (e.g. folklore show), a tasting activity (food and drinks), a workshop – to be involved in creating something typical for the place they visit (eg. ceramic products) and to get in touch with the religious or secular customs, they could attend a religious ceremony and visit a family belonging to one of the many nationalities living in this country.

Regarding one day trips and trips with one overnight, starting from Cluj-Napoca, it can be mentioned that they were few: 45 one day trips and 8 trips with one overnight. Regarding the basic services, transportation and lunch were included in the one-day tours and transportation, accommodation in hotel or pension and half-board (breakfast and dinner) existed in the tours with one

overnight. In both types of tours tour guiding services and entrance fees to tourist attractions were included but, unfortunately, there were few other services, facilities and activities and, also, few destinations in Cluj County.

Thus, for these tours it would be recommended to create and market more one day trips or tours with one overnight to extend the duration of stay in Cluj-Napoca, if possible, including destinations in Cluj County to raise the awareness of the tourist potential of the area near the city of Cluj-Napoca or, at least, to include more services, facilities and activities.

In the following years, other studies may be conducted on this topic in order to analyze the evolution of the features of travel packages addressed to foreign tourists which include also the city of Cluj-Napoca on their route.

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