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# **IS LOVE IN THE AIR?**

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**ABSTRACT.** Love and romance have always been very popular in the history of mankind, as a result of which participation in romantic tourism is not new to tourists. The best known types are the wedding and honeymoon tourism. It is also a known fact that changes in the macro environment have a significant impact on tourism. Terrorist acts, particular speeches of a politician, the instability of the political environment, forms of governments can affect the number of tourists visiting a given country. Of course, the natural environment can also significantly influence the entrepreneurial spirit of tourists, not only in a negative but also in a positive way: disaster tourists travel specifically to places where there has already happened or may happen a natural disaster. However, a pandemic is a phenomenon which impact on tourism is a dramatic one. The aim of this paper is to answer the following questions: (1) can the demand for romantic tourism be perceived via advertising campaigns made during the pandemic? Furthermore, (2) what are the criteria of differentiation of the most popular four-star hotels for wedding venues or accommodation compared to their rivals? More specifically, what can create the added value of hotels?

**Key words**: destinations, wedding and honeymoon tourism, advertisements, hotels

JEL classification: M37, L83

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#### Introduction and review of literature

In addition to classic romantic destinations - such as Paris and Verona -, the exotic islands - such as the Caribbean (Bahamas, Greater and Lesser Antilles) or the Maldives-, also occupy a prominent place. In countries with these destinations tourism makes a significant contribution to the GDP. In Italy the direct contribution of travel and tourism to GDP was 119.7 billion US dollars in 2019, while in France it was 112 billion US dollars (Tourism worldwide, Statista, 2020). In the case of the Maldives, the share of GDP generated by direct travel and tourism worldwide was 32.5% in 2019, and in the Bahamas it was 19.5% (Tourism worldwide, Statista, 2020). The islands are very popular among tourists because they enhance the trip with an exclusive character due to their unique culture and local environmental conditions (Hall, 2010).

Paris and romance are two inseparable concepts, perhaps nothing better proves this than the fact that part of the parapet of the world famous Pont Des Arts in Paris collapsed under the weight of the growing number of locks that had been attached to it (https://voila.cafeblog.hu/2015/05/29/szerelmesek-hidja-parizsban-vegleg-vege/). At the same time, there are such high expectations regarding Paris, especially of Japanese tourists, that reality comes as a shock when they finally meet it. This phenomenon is known as the Paris Syndrome: it is mainly due to cultural differences (Hegyeshalmi, 2016, https://index.hu/tudomany/til/2016/02/17/amikor\_a\_japanok\_rajonnek\_hogy\_nem\_a\_meseben\_vannak/).

Verona became world-renowned for Shakespeare's drama *Romeo* and Juliet. The city may also be familiar to modern society from the movie *Letters to Juliet*. In addition to the many notable sites and buildings that appear as tourist attractions for participants in romantic tourism, the city celebrates Lover's Day on February the 14<sup>th</sup>, when a special festival is organized for lovers (https://www.thetravel.com/20-reasons-why-verona-is-the-most-romantic-city-in-italy/).

In terms of wedding tourism, Italy was characterized in 2019 by some interesting facts, namely:

- arrival of a total of 18,037 individuals, who got married, and 137,081 guests were invited,
- a total of 422,065 guest nights for individuals and 1,646,055 for guests were recorded,
- there was a recorded "continuous" growth of the turnover of the wedding tourism sector from 2015 to 2019,
- arrival of the majority of tourists (23.1%) from the UK in 2019, with the aim of getting married,
- ranking large hotels as the 5th most popular international wedding celebration locations,
- regarding the profession of those who were to be married, the proportions were as follows: freelancer (14.5%), business manager (11.1%), industrialist (10.6%), lawyer (7.2%), moreover,
- the most preferred marketing channels of wedding locations to reach wedding tourists in Italy in 2018 was the search engine (23%). At the same time, advertisements and magazines also appear as marketing channels (Wedding tourism in Italy, Statista, 2020).

Not only France and Italy boast about the most romantic destinations in Europe, but Portugal (Sintra), Greece (Santorini), Belgium (Bruges) and Hungary (Budapest) as well. In fact, France and Italy rank first with 3-3 destinations, (https://www.europeanbestdestinations.com/top/bestromantic-destinations-in-europe/).

For honeymoon couples, "safety", "excellent quality of accommodation" and "reasonable travel cost" appear as important selection criteria when selecting a particular destination (Lee et al., 2010, p. 676). At the same time, honeymoon couples are more flexible, less worried about their trip budget (Winchester et al., 2011), as the goal is to have a lifetime romantic experience (Fakfare and Lee, 2019) which largely depends on the nature of the tourist destination. The choice of the ideal destination is therefore a priority, even if it is far from the permanent residence (Kim and Agrusa, 2005). It is a fact, that "honeymoon tourism market under the background of experiential tourism should be developed to high-quality standard" (Liu et al., 2019, p. 327) "because of its increasing economic importance for host destinations and their specific niche market characteristics" (Ünal, et al., 2017, p. 65). Honeymoon tourism participants choose their destinations based on the following criteria:

- 1. "long duration and plan process",
- 2. "own period",
- 3. "young target",
- 4. "particular needs", as well as
- 5. "shared decision making process." (Jericó and Wu, 2017, p. 639)

In case of honeymoon tourism "people, place, and preparation are the foundation of the wedding, as couples design a ceremony that tells their story" (Breg, 2013, p. 1).

As already mentioned, the role of movies is significant in terms of positioning a particular destination in the tourism market. It is enough to think of the movie *Blue Lagoon*, as it was this particular movie that positioned Turtle Island as a romantic destination; therefore, now the island specifically tailors its offerings to fully accommodate the needs of couples in love. Of course, the natural environment also plays a significant role in triggering the satisfaction of the target group. Guests are accommodated in small luxury bungalows (Kiss, 2006). At the same time, hotels are also very popular: let it be a location for a wedding, a honeymoon or a bachelor party. For the latter, it is enough to recall the scenes from *The Hangover*, which were shot at the Caesars Palace Hotel.

# Material and method(s)

- Advertising campaigns aimed at promoting Hungary as a tourist destination were analyzed.
- We chose Hungary because,
  - it has recently become increasingly popular with regard to romantic tourism. Moreover,
  - the Hungarian government has a strong immigration policy, which increases tourists' sense of safety. Sense of safety has proved to be one of the most important selection criteria among romantic tourism participants.

- Only advertising campaigns that were created during the pandemic were included.
- > The following advertising campaigns were analyzed:
  - A. From the 'Wonderful Hungary' series:
    - Tokaj and Nyíregyháza https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3VLZ7WA\_Wg
    - Balaton https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyRO-qgU3QY
    - Pécs Villány https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nqkk4y0vUkU
  - B. Carry on with your adventure at home, even in autumn! [Folytasd a kalandozást itthon, ősszel is!] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4SZtsdVHr0 – rural region https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nqYGmvBUke0 – urban region
  - C. Let us take care of each other and we will succeed! [Vigyázzunk egymásra, és sikerülni fog!] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-vGT5FaDMI
  - D. *Hungary welcomes you back!* [Magyarország visszavár!] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOuL5gWQFnQ
  - E. Budapest welcomes you back! [Budapest visszavár!] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5nbIXdJIG4
- Content analysis was carried out in order to analyze the presence or absence of romantic tourism during the pandemic with the help of the advertising campaigns involved in the analysis.
- The analyzed advertisement campaigns are available on the YouTube video-sharing website.
- The content analysis was performed by the same person to avoid multiple interpretations.

- In case of each advertising campaign, only factors related to romantic tourism were listed, and these elements are considered to be the essential components of romantic tourism.<sup>5</sup>
- Content analysis does not assume opinions about advertising campaigns, but examines the series of images displayed in advertisements. An exception is the Let us take care of each other and we will succeed!, and Hungary welcomes you back! advertising campaigns. The results obtained via the analysis of the two advertising campaigns are presented in the Conclusions.
- We chose four-star hotels because they are popular among romantic tourism participants. Based on literature data, participants in romantic tourism are flexible in terms of their budgets.
- However, only hotels recommended by the European Best Destinations website were included in the analysis. These hotels are listed in the *Most romantic destinations in Europe* section. Furthermore, it should be noted that only the four-star hotels on the first page of the website were analyzed, based on the variables that can be found in a structured way on the websites of each hotel. A total of eight hotels were included in the analysis. Furthermore, the hotels are analyzed in the order in which they appeared on the European Best Destination website.

#### **Results and discussions**

As a first step, the results obtained through content analyzes based on advertising campaigns will be presented. As a second step, four-star hotels will be analyzed in order to present and describe all the criteria that are valued as outstanding ones by tourists.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Of course, these elements also apply to other tourist segment(s), as well as to honeymoon and wedding tourism participants. It should also be noted that they were only identified as elements of romantic tourism if they were presented by young couples in advertisements.

#### IS LOVE IN THE AIR?

# Advertising campaigns created during the pandemic: Hungary

#### A. Wonderful Hungary: Tokaj and Nyíregyháza

Young couples participate in leisure activities such as the following:

- o walking,
- o wellness,
- Nordic walking.

The following elements appear in the advertising campaign:

- o use of meals/gastronomic offer for two, as well as
- a church, being a significant component of wedding tourism.

# Wonderful Hungary: Balaton

Young couples participate in leisure activities such as the following:

- o biking,
- o cruising,
- o going on boat trips,
- sightseeing by horse-drawn carriage / walking.

A church also appears in the images of the advertising campaign.

# Wonderful Hungary: Pécs-Villány

Young couples participate in leisure activities such as the following:

- revitalization of children's dance,
- o walking,
- o stone throwing into the water,
- o motorcycling.

The church is an integral part of the advertising campaign.

#### B. Carry on with your adventure at home, even in autumn!

**Rural region** 

Young couples participate in leisure activities such as the following:

- o "tree climbing",
- o wine tasting,
- enjoying the scenery (lookout).

#### Urban region

Young couples presented as actors in the following scenes:

- visiting churches,
- o visiting built heritage tourist attractions,
- o going on boat trips.

#### ERIKA KULCSÁR, BRIGITTA BOGYOR, MARIA DENISA CSIKI, EDINA TÖRÖK

# C. Let us take care of each other and we will succeed!

The advertising campaign lists elements that refer to romantic tourism:

- o arrangement of a table with two chairs,
- o presence of two young couples in a church,
- o kissing at sunset,
- sightseeing selfie-taking.

# D. Hungary welcomes you back!

The advertising campaign lists the elements that make up the toolbox of romantic tourism:

- red hearts lying on a table,
- $\circ$  a table with two chairs,
- o a huge red heart at the end of a bridge,
- o a key-chain with a heart,
- o two red sunbeds,
- $\circ~$  a vase with red roses,
- o a young couple with travel bags,
- o a young couple dancing: with a church in the background,
- $\circ~$  a young couple as guests of a tree-house accommodation.

# E. Budapest welcomes you back!

The advertising campaign includes the following:

- a young couple cycling with pink balloons in their hands (the balloon is an element of celebration),
- concrete wedding image: one in the middle of the advertising campaign, one at the end,
- a young couple drinking champagne with fireworks in the background (both components are typical elements of a celebration).

# Evaluation of four-star hotels in Budapest

Hotels can differentiate themselves from their competitors in many ways. These accommodation units can differentiate themselves primarily through their employees (Kulcsár, 2014) and the physical environment (Kulcsár and Majos, 2014). At the same time, the physical attributes of hotels can also indicate the quality of the service, although the external environment of hotels is not yet part of the front line, but they have the opportunity to make the first impression on the guests. Consequently, their role is indisputable in case of romantic tourism, as the location and the façade of the hotel greatly contribute to the quality of the experience.

A total of 3,170 hotels await those who are participants in romantic tourism in Budapest<sup>6</sup> (https://www.europeanbest destinations.com/top/best-romantic-destinations-in-europe/).

In the following, the four-star hotels included in the analysis will be examined based on the variables that play a significant role in the assessment of the services provided by a particular hotel. The Monastery Boutique Hotel Budapest (Table 1), despite having one of the lowest scores on the location criterion (9.5), still managed to rank on second place, as the hotel management was able to successfully compensate for this "weakness" with facilities, cleanliness, comfort and price-quality (value for money) balance.

	Barceló Budapest	Monastery Boutique Hotel Budapest	Stories Hotel	Hotel Clark Budapest**
Facilities	9.2	9.3	8.9	9.2
Cleanliness	9.3	9.6	9.2	9.4
Comfort	9.4	9.5	9.2	9.3
Value for money	9.1	9.3	8.8	8.6
Location	9.8	9.5	9.7	9.7
Total	9.3 (1,483)*	9.4 (1,117)	9.1 (1,181)	9.2 (2,944)

**Table 1.** Evaluation of four-star hotels (1)

\* reviews, \*\* adults only Source: References \*

Interestingly, in the case of Maison Bistro & Hotel (Table 2), there is not a single variable that indicates that the hotel received the best rating, and yet it is one of the hotels that has proven to be the most successful among tourists, as it received a score of 9.5 out of 10. Hotel Moments (also noted one of the highest ratings: 9.5) outperformed its competitors based on two variables, it received the same ranking based on two very same variables as its competitors, while receiving the lowest score on the *Value for money* criterion.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Hungary's most romantic destination.

	The Three Corners	Callas	Maison	<b>Hotel Moments</b>
	Lifestyle Hotel	House	Bistro & Hotel	Budapest
Facilities	9.2	9.0	9.4	9.5
Cleanliness	9.5	9.3	9.7	9.7
Comfort	9.5	9.3	9.6	9.6
Value for money	9.0	8.9	9.3	9.2
Location	8.6	9.7	9.6	9.9
Total	9.1 (2,483)	9.2 (1,258)	9. 5 (1,819)	9.5 (2,621)

**Table 2.** Evaluation of four-star hotels (2)

Source: References \*\*

Based on the values of the two tables, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- the outstanding value of a variable, such as *Location*, does not compensate for other shortcomings of the hotel, even if this appears as an important selection criterion among tourists interested in romantic tourism,
- in case of tourism services, an even evaluation<sup>7</sup> is necessary for all the criteria that fundamentally determine the level of tourist satisfaction.

The two tables below present the structured variables that ranked best for the hotels included in the analysis. Based on the data presented (Tables 3 and 4), it is the human factor that constitutes the added value of a hotel.

	Monastery Boutique Hotel Budapest	Stories Hotel	Hotel Clark Budapest
"friendly staff" (53)***	"friendly staff" (45)	"helpful staff" (38)	"river view" (137)
"comfortable bed" (39)	"perfect location" (41)	"perfect location" (36)	"friendly staff" (132)
"excellent location" (39)	"great breakfast" (30)	"comfortable bed" (28)	"perfect location" (128)

**Table 3.** Added value of hotels (1)

\*\*\* related reviews Source: References \*

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Even evaluation in this case means that the difference between the rankings obtained is minimal or very small.

In addition, based on order of importance (Tables 3 and 4): hotel location, breakfast quality/variety, cleanliness, comfort, and view are also criteria that increase the value of hotel services. And this value is reflected in the loyalty of tourists.

The Three Corners	Callas House	Maison Bistro &	Hotel Moments
Lifestyle Hotel		Hotel	Budapest
"clean room" (80)	"friendly staff" (66)	"friendly staff" (80)	"friendly staff" (192)
"friendly staff" (76)	"perfect location" (54)	"great breakfast" (73)	"great breakfast" (160)
"great breakfast"	"great breakfast"	"clean room" (50)	"excellent location"
(71)	(47)		(129)

Table 4. Added value of hotels (2)

Source: References \*\*

Consequently, the results of Breg's (2013) research are valid up to this day, since even in the case of four-star hotels included in the analysis, the quality of people (employees), place and breakfast is what primarily adds value to a given hotel.

#### Conclusion

It is a fact that a pandemic has a significant impact on the tourism sector, but that does not mean that no tourism advertising campaigns are made during the pandemic. These campaigns are primarily designed to raise awareness of the country as a tourist destination among both international and domestic tourists. Furthermore, they are designed to introduce new landscapes, new values, and to stimulate domestic tourism and, last but not least, to strengthen self-image.

In case of the advertising campaigns *Let us take care of each other and we will succeed!*, and *Hungary welcomes you back!* this kind of aspiration can be perceived, as several people who expressed their opinions felt that these advertising campaigns had awakened in them a love for their homeland. Strengthening self-image is also important because in this way the population also participates in the promotion, and thus they become "propagandists" of the given destination (Kovács, 2004).

Based on the advertising campaigns included in the analysis, factors have been identified that invite and attract the audience to engage in romantic tourism. However, the *Budapest welcomes you back!* advertising campaign not only listed references, but it also illustrated specific wedding moments.

Hotels play an important role in romantic tourism, as they not only provide accommodation for guests, but can also provide a venue for the wedding. Hotels must continue to focus on their staff, accommodation/physical environment and gastronomic offers as these are the elements that add value not only to tourist experiences but also to hotels.

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#### IS LOVE IN THE AIR?

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#### ERIKA KULCSÁR, BRIGITTA BOGYOR, MARIA DENISA CSIKI, EDINA TÖRÖK

#### \* (Table 1, Table 3)

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#### \*\* (Table 2, Table 4)