



TRENDS IN THE TOURISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROSE VALLEY UNDER CONDITIONS OF PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The pandemic restrictions have created conditions for the stagnation or collapse of a significant number of businesses in Bulgaria. One of the most attractive regions - the Rose Valley, is characterized as a leading touristic destination for both local and foreign tourists. The aim of the present work is to establish how the pandemic period has affected the touristic sites of a various nature in the Rose Valley and to make suggestions which could contribute to the implementation of measures for the future development of the region as a touristic destination. The method applied is a standard face-to-face interview with representatives of touristic sites in the Rose Valley. The results from the survey show that the touristic flow has shrunk during 2020-2021, except for the spa hotels included in the study. The structure of the tourists has also undergone some changes. In conclusion, the fact that all types of touristic sites intend to look for ways to maintain and increase the touristic flow in the near future is a favorable sign.

Key words: tourism, Rose Valley, pandemic

INTRODUCTION

Bulgaria is an exceptionally beautiful country famous for its traditions, folk costumes, Thracian tombs of great kings, fine yoghurt and oil-bearing rose which has become a symbol of the country. The object of analysis of the present work is the so-called Rose Valley and how the pandemic period has influenced the touristic sites of various type found within the Rose Valley. Suggestions will be made to contribute to the implementation of measures for the future development of the region as a touristic destination.

Under the conditions of pandemic restrictions, a significant number of businesses in Bulgaria have suffered a stagnation or collapse. One of the most attractive regions in the country, the Rose Valley is characterized as a leading touristic destination both for local and foreign tourists.

The Rose Valley is situated 60 km north of the second largest city in Bulgaria – Plovdiv, between Sredna Gora and Stara Planina mountains – from the town of Kazanlak to Klisura. The valley is famous for the cultivation of roses for industrial purposes and is one of the symbols of Bulgaria. Rose blossoms are harvested for the production of the famous rose oil – a main ingredient used in perfumery and cosmetic industry around the world. Each year during the first weekend of June the towns of Karlovo and Kazanlak celebrate the Rose Festival (1).

The Rose Valley is composed of two river valleys – the Styama river to the west, and the Tundzha river to the east. A centuries long tradition of cultivating *Rosa damascena*, a sort that is mainly used in pharmacy, perfumery has existed in the region. The valley has a specific climate with short mild winters and long warm springs. The rose needs moisture and warmth and that explains why almost all oil-bearing rose fields are situated here.

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Main cultural and historical destinations and sites in the Rose Valley

The Rose Festival in Kazanlak (2) The Rose Festival is one of the most notable festivals in Bulgaria, dedicated to beauty and flowers. It was celebrated first in 1903, and since then has taken place traditionally during the last week of May and the beginning of June. This is the period when the oil-bearing rose of Kazanlak is in full bloom. Today the Rose Festival has become an international celebration enjoyed by thousands of tourists and guests of the town. The programme includes a Rose Queen beauty pageant, the rituals “rose picking”, and “rose distillation”, festive parade – carnival, international folk festival “Balkan Youth”, etc. Rose picking starts early in the morning when rose blossoms are heavy with dew, which preserves the rose oil and is essential for the yield of the plant extract.

The Museum of the Rose. The rose is a main symbol of Bulgaria. The town of Kazanlak is the home of the only museum of the oil-bearing rose in the world. The Museum of the Rose is on the premises of the famous Institute of the Rose. The museum is part of the Iskra Museum of History in Kazanlak. In 1967 a small exhibition was created to commemorate the rose picking ritual in Kazanlak and the region. In 1969 the exposition grew into a separate museum. Today the Museum of the Rose stores over 15 000 objects related to rose picking and rose production from all over Bulgaria.

The Thracian Tomb. The original Thracian tomb, known as the Kazanlak Tomb dating back to IV-III century BC is located in the Tyulbeto Park in Kazanlak. It is under a specific conservation regime. Near it is situated an exact copy which shows the architecture, archeological materials and wall murals of the Kazanlak Tomb. It is one of the most significant monuments of Thracian culture in Bulgaria and was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1979. The tomb was discovered by chance in 1944.

Thracian Tomb ‘Golyamata Kosmatka’. The Thracian tomb is located 12 km away from Kazanlak, where on September 21, 2004 the archeologist Georgi Kitov found one of the most majestic and rich Thracian tombs with entirely

preserved grave of a Thracian king, buried with his horse.

Shushmanets Mound of Shipka. Three subsequent plasters indicating three construction periods when this complex was used can now be observed. Apart from the animals (4 horses and 2 dogs, sacrificed and documented on the floor of the atrium) no published information for the presence of another inventory, including dating materials has been found. It is believed that the tomb was built at the end of the 5th century BC and was used in the 4th century BC.

Ostrusha Mound near Shipka. This mound near the town of Shipka was built in the middle of 4th century BC and was a temple dedicated to the Thracian god of immortality Sabazios (Thracian/ Phrygian god of vegetation, agriculture and healing art, ancient god of living nature, of people and their health, of continuation of the family) until 4th century AD. The complex is situated on a territory of 100 m² and is composed of five rectangular and one circular rooms. Archeologists also found a horse skeleton, weapons, silver pitcher, silver decorations (ornaments) for horse ammunition, phial, coins of Philip II of Macedonia, ceramic vessels and other objects of high artistic value.

Damascena Ethnographic Complex, village of Skobelevo. Damascena Complex is located in the foothills of Stara Planina mountain at the very heart of the Rose Valley, in close proximity to the village of Skobelevo, 4 km to the north of the main road Sofia-Burgas.

Vasil Levski National Museum. Vasil Levski National Museum is found in the central part of the town of Karlovo. The museum complex includes Vasil Levski’s birthplace, a memorial chapel “Vsyah svetih bolgarskih”, Chardaklieva House, museum exhibition and a monument of Gina Kuncheva, Levski’s mother.

Karlovo Museum of History. The Karlovo Museum of History is found in the Old Town in one of the most representative buildings of the Revival period – the former five class male school, built in 1871. This is a place where visitors may enrich their knowledge for the past of Karlovo, the thriving life of its people

throughout the ages, the historical persons born there. The rich exposition offers the opportunity to trace the past of the Karlovo region from prehistoric, ancient and middle ages.

Starinno Karlovo Complex (Antique Karlovo). The touristic complex Starinno Karlovo was established under the project BG 161PO001/3.1-03/2010/046 for the operational programme Regional Development 2007-2013, co-financed by the European Union through the European Fund for Regional Development.

With an EU grant five buildings of high historical and esthetic value, symbolic for the town of Karlovo were restored and adapted (the inn “Buhalov Han”, the house “Byal Dvor”, the storehouse “Pateeva Maza”, and the houses “Rayno Popovich” and “Pateeva”). These are some of the most emblematic and unique cultural sites in town. Also, in Karlovo region one may visit Starinno Karlovo Complex, Thracian temple complex, the village of Starosel, Zhaba Mogila Thracian Tomb Complex, and the Strelcha Museum of History.

Among the other cultural and historical sites are the Kran Thracian Tomb, a temple in the Griffons Mound, Helvetia Mound, temple in the Golyama Arsenalka Mound, stonework tomb in the Svetitsa Mound. In addition, tourists may visit the following attractions in the town of Karlovo: Vasil Levski National Museum, Karlovo Museum of History, and Starinno Karlovo Complex. Naturally, many other touristic sites may provoke the interest of visitors on the territory of the 19 municipalities in the touristic region of the Rose Valley.

RESULTS FROM A STUDY ON THE TOURISTIC FLOW IN SELECTED TOURISTIC SITES UNDER CONDITIONS OF PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS

Pandemic restrictions brought a drastic fall in the touristic flow in general, by having only a partial number of foreign visitors, and reduced money flows, as a contrast of the results from an investigation in 2019 (3).

The aim of the present study applied the method of deep interview in order to collect information in the selected touristic sites. It was held in March

2021. There were seven questions in the interview: one of them related to information about the respondent. Three of the questions were open and elicited explanations about how the businesses were coping with the pandemic and what strategy and measures were taken in short term and midterm plan.

The touristic development of the Rose Valley is based on specific policy in recent years as a result of the adopted Concept for Touristic Regionalization in Bulgaria (4). The Rose Valley has the potential to become an attractive touristic destination, however, the main tourist flow is in spring and summer. Many cultural events lead to an improved level of tourist services and are a major factor for increasing the visitor flow in the region (5). One of the reasons for selecting the studied touristic sites is the greater popularity of several of them (6).

Information about the interviewed site representatives

Iskra-Kazanlak Museum of History, Kazanlak, respondent – director, profession – historian, male, age – 35-44, university graduate

Thracian Tomb – Kazanlak, Kazanlak – respondent- tour guide, profession – museum employee, female, age – 45-54, university graduate

Lema Rose Distillery – Kazanlak, respondent – owner, profession – mechanical engineer, male, age – over 65, university graduate

Golyama Kosmatka – Shipka, respondent – tour guide, profession – museum employee, female, age - 45-54, university graduate

Diana-Mar Spa Hotels – Pavel Banya, respondent – owner, profession – financier, male, age – 25, university graduate

Vasil Levski Museum – Karlovo, respondent – director, profession – historian, female, age – 55-64, university graduate

Damascena-Skobelevo – Skobelevo, respondent – manager, profession – technical engineer, male, age – not mentioned, education – not mentioned

Rooms for rent – recreation facility (anonymous) – Pavel Banya, respondent – manager, profession – rehabilitator, male, age – 45-54, university graduate

Answers to the interview questions

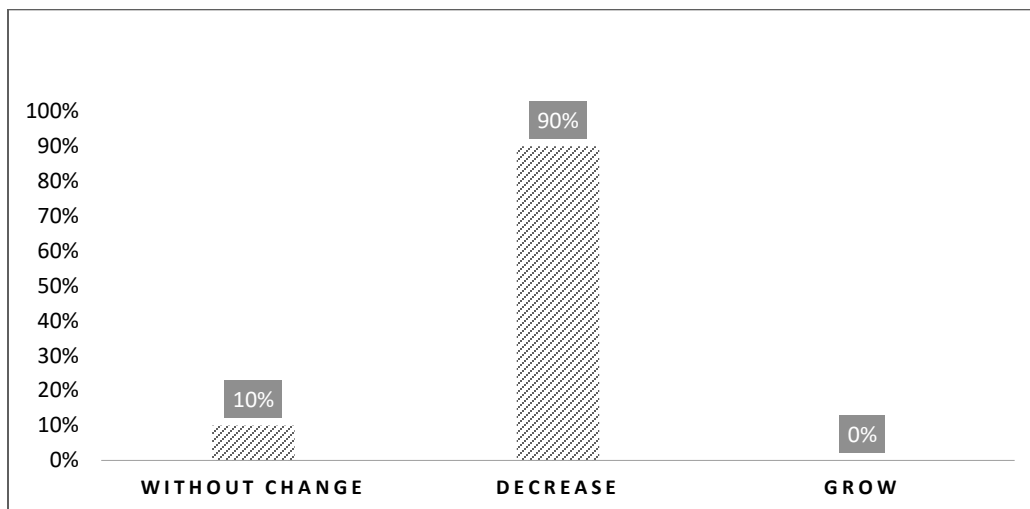


Figure 1. How did the tourist flow to your site change during the period of 2020-2021?

The answer “Remained the same” was given by Diana Mar Spa Hotel.

Table 1. Did the type of tourist flow change?

By nationality		By age	
yes	no	yes	no
Iskra Museum			Iskra Museum
Thracian Tomb			Thracian Tomb
Golyama Kosmatka			Golyama Kosmatka
	Lema Rose Distillery		Lema Spa Hotel
Diana Mar Spa Hotel			Diana Mar Spa Hotel
Damascena			Damascena
Rooms for rent – recreation facility		Rooms for rent – recreation facility	

Vasil Levski Museum did not provide any data
Did you receive any state aid during the period of 2020-2021 in relation to the pandemic crisis?

All sites gave a negative answer, except for the employee of Thracian Tomb – Kazanlak, who responded affirmatively.

Table 2: Indicate several key measures for maintaining and increasing the tourist flow on your site.

Sites	Explanation
Iskra Museum of History - Kazanlak	Active advertising on the internal market, new package services, enhancing exhibition set-up
Thracian Tomb - Kazanlak	To focus on individual tourists, offer complex programs that include cultural, spa, ecological and other types of tourism.
Golyama Kosmatka - Shipka	To keep being open! Better marketing would suffice.
Lema Rose Distillery	No explanation
Diana Mar Spa Hotel	High quality level of the service, highly qualified labour, cooperation between state and cultural sites and local businesses
Vasil Levski Museum - Karlovo	Travel agencies should organize trips in the Rose Valley that include more sites. Assistance to hotels and restaurants.
Damascena	No more lockdowns: a wish
Rooms for rent – recreation facility	Attractive looks: amenities

Table 3. What touristic sites in the Rose Valley are perspective to foster its development as a tourist destination?

Sites	Explanation
Iskra Museum of History - Kazanlak	All sites within the Iskra Museum of History; the Monument of Freedom and the Temple-monument, the future site "The World of Thracians"
Thracian Tomb - Kazanlak	All cultural and historical sites have growth potential, such as Petko Staynov Museum, the Valley of the Thracian Kings, Ethnographic complex
Golyama Kosmatka - Shipka	Thracian history sites; ethnographic complexes; history of rose oil production
Lema Rose Distillery	No explanation
Diana Mar Spa Hotel	The Central Balkan needs innovations: restoration of the Buzludzha monument. Koprinka dam is also an indicator of touristic activity
Vasil Levski Museum - Karlovo	Cultural sites; spa facilities; sites related to rose production and processing
Damascena	Hotels
Rooms for rent – recreation facility	Hospitality industry

Table 4. Your additional comments related to the problems of the study:

Sites	Explanation
Iskra Museum of History – Kazanlak Thracian Tomb – Kazanlak Golyama Kosmatka - Shipka	It is an extremely hot topic that will allow a serious analytical and research contribution; it may have an important projection on future studies.
Lema Rose Distillery Diana Mar Spa Hotels Vasil Levski Museum – Karlovo Iskra Museum of History – Kazanlak Thracian Tomb - Kazanlak Golyama Kosmatka - Shipka	It is a current topic, however, the emphasis should be placed on the period after the imposed pandemic conditions. Tourists will not return immediately after the end of the lockdown. There will be a period of fluctuating probing, especially with respect to the inevitable economic crisis which will take hold of the population. Despite it people are already used to travelling, and seeking exciting holidays and entertainment. In order to draw them back to the touristic destination, we must offer new and interesting forms of tourism to further satisfy their interests. For instance: programmes that include rest, entertainment, cultural tourism, spa, and ecological tourist paths. Within the space of history museums is will be nice to organize different events: exhibitions, concerts, conferences.
Thracian Tomb – Kazanlak Golyama Kosmatka – Shipka Lema Rose Distillery	The theoretical models are useful because tourism is an important historical element in the life of Kazanlak. More advertising is needed in the media and online to attract a greater tourist flow.
Diana Mar Spa Hotels Vasil Levski Museum – Karlovo Damascena	The work on increasing the number of tourists in Kazanlak and the region should be increased.
Rooms for rent – recreation facility Iskra Museum of History – Kazanlak Thracian Tomb – Kazanlak Golyama Kosmatka - Shipka	This paper will have a high contribution to the private sector in the region, if it could facilitate the relations between the cultural and the private sectors, such as hotel and spa branches; it may increase the tourist flow.
Lema Rose Distillery	No explanation
Diana Mar Spa Hotels	The economic crisis due to Covid-19 will pass
Vasil Levski Museum - Karlovo	It may have an impact on the tourist flow

MAIN CONCLUSIONS FROM THE STUDY

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the whole world faced new and unknown circumstances which had a damaging impact on tourism on a global scale. Not only the life of people and the economy

were put to the test, but also their mental health was at stake.

Under lockdown conditions a significant number of businesses in Bulgaria underwent a stagnation or a collapse. One of the most attractive regions in the country, the Rose Valley is characterized as

a leading touristic destination for local and foreign visitors.

The results of the study show that the tourist flow has shrunk also in the touristic sites from the Rose Valley selected for the study within the period of 2020-2021.

An exception is the number of tourists in the spa hotel included in the study which is a signal for the irreplaceable need for the services offered in this type of touristic sites. The structure of the tourists visiting the studied sites has changed mainly by a nationality factor with prevalence of Bulgarian tourists.

It is favorable that all types of touristic sites intend to look for ways to maintain and increase the tourist flow in the future. The measures proposed in this direction are related to a more active advertising campaign, more versatile touristic product, an individual approach to tourists, upgrading the qualification of the personnel employed in tourism and an adequate choice of pandemic measures.

The touristic sites that attract the visitors' attention the most and have the potential to expand the touristic sector in the Rose Valley are spa hotels, ecological tours, the sites for rose production and processing, cultural and historical sites. It is especially important to reach an optimal effect for the tourist industry which can be done only if the sites cooperate in this direction.

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