



# Impact of Pandemic on Tourism in Slovakia

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**Abstract:** *Tourism is one of the important sectors of the economy in which the effects of the COVID-19 spread have been most noticeable. In Slovakia, signs of coronavirus pandemic began in March 2020 and established travel restrictions with impact on tourism at national, European, and global levels. The main objective of the paper is the evaluation of selected factors of tourism and the impact of the pandemic on them in the Slovak Republic. Empirical data were processed by the method of analysis and synthesis. Accommodation of visitors reached the level of 49.9% in 2020 compared to 2019. A decrease in number of foreign visitors was reflected in a significant decline in sales with liquidation consequences for many accommodation facilities, hotels, restaurants, and related services. The enormous rise in unemployment was mitigated in 2020 by the state's financial support in coordination with European funds. Tourism companies are looking for different ways to manage this problem independently or with the state help.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the latest report of the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) (16/9/2021) “Travel & Tourism has been one of the sector’s most negatively affected globally due to COVID-19, suffering devastating losses in terms of both GDP and jobs. To achieve recovery and continue spreading socio-economic benefits, the sector will require investment which needs to be supported by an effective enabling environment.” Darázs & Šalgovičová (2021) state “Tourism and travelling are among the most affected sectors of national economies worldwide due to the pandemic caused by a disease called COVID-19. Nowadays, we still cannot accurately predict the effects of this negative impact.” According to Grančay (2020), “with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Central European region in March 2020, one of the hardest-hit economic sectors was the tourism industry which virtually came to a complete standstill.” The study by Williams & Kayaoglu (2020) illustrates the impact of an epidemic outbreak on the tourism industry and the supporting sectors to the tourism product and service delivery, as well as employment. According to Gössling et al. (2020), “Tourism is especially susceptible to measures to counteract pandemics because of restricted mobility and social distancing.” Kuo (2021) states “The threat of the virus has also caused a change in tourist travel consumption behavior.” Based on the research results of Orîndaru et al. (2021) indicate that “the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced travel patterns and habits regarding philological and economic factors. Psychological factors, primarily the fear of contamination, impact travelers’ willingness to travel and the conditions and preferences for vacation destinations. At least in the medium term, people will avoid traveling in large groups and being in crowded places.” Păcurar et al. (2021) point to “the wariness for future pandemics has brought into the spotlight the issue of overcrowded attractions inside a destination at certain moments.” Vaishar & Šťastná (2020) points out that

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“the catastrophic scenarios of the decline in tourism mainly concern urban destinations focused on foreign tourism. In contrast, rural destinations create an alternative.” Based on the results of their study, Gössling et al. (2020) caution how a pandemic outbreak can change society, national economies, and the tourism industry. Consequently, the tourism industry and government have an important role to play in the recovery efforts as the tourism industry will look different from post-pandemic (Assaf & Scuderi, 2020). Tomčíková et al. (2021) state “the impact of COVID-19 affects the changes in the performance development of tourism companies operating in Slovakia.” Based on the research results of Kvítková & Petrů (2021) “the best situation regarding domestic tourism as a factor of tourism recovery and business survival is in Slovakia and the Czech Republic of the V4 countries. However, even in these countries, it is very unlikely, that domestic tourism will replace outage of the international tourism in full scale.” Based on the research results of Machová et al. (2021) pointed out that Slovak respondents will prefer domestic tourism to foreign tourism. Kvítková & Petrů (2021) state “The real results of the tourism industry will be influenced also by the government support, current economic performance, unemployment change, availability of vaccination, etc.”

## **2. RESEARCH DATA AND METHODS**

Demonstrating economic effects in tourism is a difficult task because this sector is not organizationally unified and has a cross-cutting and multidisciplinary character. Tourism also acts as an important economic tool for the development of regions in order to increase the living standards of the local population in conditions of sustainability. Slovakia has significant potential for tourism development, especially for the considerable natural, historical and cultural wealth. One of the prerequisites for the development of residential tourism is the capacity of accommodation facilities, their size, and structure.

Empirical data for the research were obtained from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (<https://slovak.statistics.sk/>). Time series include data in the period of years 2014 to 2020 and were processed by the method of analysis, synthesis and linear regression trends. Analyzed factors were: number of visitors, comparison of domestic and foreign visitors, number of overnight stays, and capacity of accommodation facilities. The gradual growth of mentioned factors was stopped in the year 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic has started.

## **3. RESULTS**

The decline of tourism occurred not only in Slovakia but also in world-famous tourist locations. In the period before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the conditions for tourism in Slovakia enabled the rapid development and permanent growth of this sector. According to Tajtáková (2021), “in the period from 2009 to 2019, the number of visitors to Slovakia almost doubled, while 2019 was a record year in terms of overall attendance”. The pandemic year 2020 changed this situation and had an important impact on Slovak tourism.

### **3.1. Analysis of number of accommodated visitors and overnight stays number by regions in the Slovak Republic in 2020**

In Table 1 are summed up data about the number of accommodated visitors in the year 2020 and associated index 2020/2019. Presented values prove that in each region of Slovakia has occurred the decrease in the number of visitors.

**Table 1.** Number of accommodated visitors according to Slovak regions in 2020

Region	Number of visitors					
	Visitors together		Foreign visitors		Domestic visitors	
	Number of persons	Index 2020/2019	Number of persons	Index 2020/2019	Number of persons	Index 2020/2019
<b>Slovak Republic</b>	3 210 007	49.9	854 011	34.5	2 355 996	59.5
<b>Bratislava Region</b>	500 467	31.5	249 435	24.1	251 032	45.5
<b>Trnava Region</b>	212 772	49.1	65 446	34.7	147 326	60.3
<b>Trenčín Region</b>	200 811	47.8	36 757	33.2	164 054	53.1
<b>Nitra Region</b>	180 460	48.8	48 564	36.3	131 896	55.9
<b>Žilina Region</b>	815 868	62.0	212 021	50.9	603 847	67.1
<b>Banská Bystrica Region</b>	418 553	56.3	43 210	38.6	375 343	59.4
<b>Prešov Region</b>	654 554	59.1	151 002	47.2	503 552	63.9
<b>Košice Region</b>	226 522	49.6	47 576	29.8	178 946	60.2

Source: SO SR, own processing

In the year 2020, 3,210,007 visitors were accommodated in Slovakia, which was 3,222,872 less than in the year 2019 (a decrease of 50.1%). At the same time, the ratio of domestic and foreign visitors to the total number of visitors to Slovakia changed in favour of domestic tourism. The number of domestic visitors accounted for 73.39% of the total. The highest decrease was recorded in the Bratislava region by 68.5%, the second place is occupied by the Trenčín region (less by 52.2%) and followed by the Nitra region, where the number of accommodated visitors decreased by 51.2% compared to 2019. The lowest decrease in accommodated in 2020 was registered in the Žilina region (a decrease of 38% compared to 2019).

The development of the number of overnight stays is closely linked to the previous indicator - the number of accommodated visitors, which is related to the offer of tourism in the particular region. The pandemic had the same impact on the number of overnight stays. In Slovakia, the number of overnight stays decreased by 45% in 2020 compared to 2019 (Table 2). Foreign visitors accounted for 24% of the total number of overnight stays in accommodation establishments, 76% were domestic visitors. Among foreign visitors, it was mainly tourists from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Spain, and Hungary.

**Table 2.** Number of overnight stays according to Slovak regions in 2020

Region	Number of overnight stays					
	Overnight stays together		Foreign visitors		Domestic visitors	
	Number of nights	Index 2020/2019	Number of nights	Index 2020/2019	Number of nights	Index 2020/2019
<b>Slovak Republic</b>	9 790 597	55.3	2 347 568	37.6	7 443 029	47.6
<b>Bratislava Region</b>	1 139 586	34.8	493 996	25.7	645 590	47.6
<b>Trnava Region</b>	795 204	51.4	235 212	32.6	559 992	67.7
<b>Trenčín Region</b>	839 369	53.0	100 857	28.3	738 512	60.2
<b>Nitra Region</b>	560 856	51.8	154 113	36.8	406 743	61.3
<b>Žilina Region</b>	2 425 503	66.8	661 180	53.6	1 764 323	73.5
<b>Banská Bystrica Region</b>	1 335 801	62.4	118 048	41.6	1 217 753	65.5
<b>Prešov Region</b>	2 148 439	63.6	462 462	50.2	1 685 977	68.6
<b>Košice Region</b>	545 839	51.7	121 700	30.8	424 139	64.2

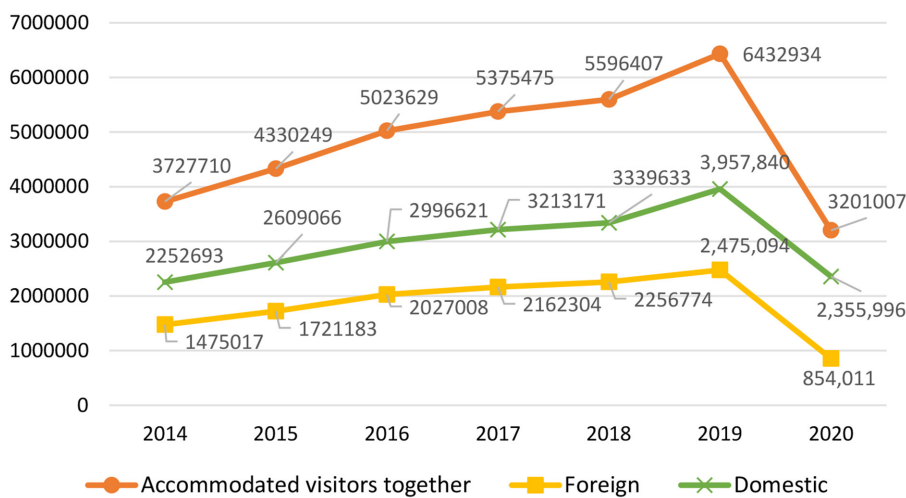
Source: SO SR, own processing

### 3.2. Selected factors of tourism in the Slovak Republic from a long-term perspective

Next analyzed factors were accommodated visitors, overnight stays and capacity of accommodation facilities in the Slovakia Republic in the period 2014 to 2020.

Data about accommodated visitors in the Slovak Republic in the period from 2014 to 2020 (Fig. 1) approved that by 2019 there were positive conditions for the gradual increase of domestic and foreign tourists. It is evident, that in individual years, domestic tourism was dominant in comparison with foreign visitors. A positive feature in Slovak tourism until March 2020 was the increase in the use of bed capacity. Weekend stays were popular among visitors, which was related to adapting to a fast pace of life with the possibility of fast and direct access to ordering accommodation with related services via digital technologies.

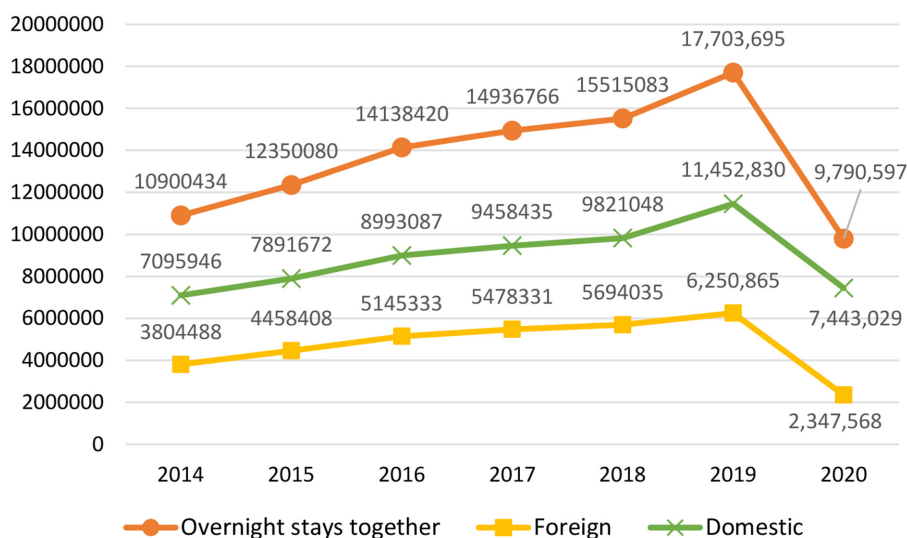
In March 2020, quick changes and travel restrictions have occurred due to the pandemic, which was reflected in a decrease in the total number of accommodated visitors in 2020 by half compared to 2019 (a decrease of 50.24%). In 2020, the number of domestic visitors decreased by 40.47% and foreign visitors by 65.50% compared to the previous year. The biggest problem of the tourism sector was the dramatic drop in the number of foreign visitors. There are significant restrictions on tourism facilities during a pandemic, which limit either the number of visitors or otherwise limit the tourism business.



**Figure 1.** Development of accommodated visitors in the Slovak Republic, 2014 - 2020

**Source:** SO SR, own processing

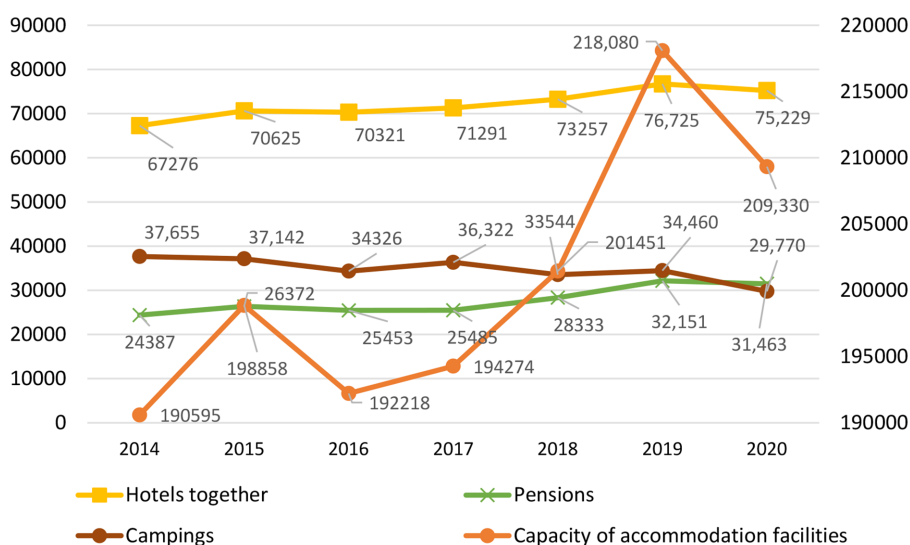
The number of overnight stays in accommodation facilities in the Slovak Republic copied the number of accommodated visitors. In the observed period from 2014 to 2020 (Fig. 2), the largest year-on-year increase in the total number of overnight stays occurred in 2019, by 2,188,612 overnight stays compared to 2018, which represents 14.11%. It was recorded a decrease in the total number of overnight stays in accommodation establishments in 2020 by 7,913,098 overnight stays, which is 44.70% compared to the previous year, while it was recorded an enormous decrease in foreign visitors by 62.44%. Overnight stays of domestic visitors were by 35.01% less in 2020 compared to 2019. The reason for the declining number of overnight stays is the population's fear of traveling, the changing pandemic situation in our country and abroad and the rules when arriving in Slovakia.



**Figure 2.** Development of overnight stays in the Slovak Republic, 2014 - 2020

Source: SO SR, own processing

The number of beds in accommodation facilities copies the number of accommodation facilities. The tourism sector in the Slovak Republic has already lost more than 40,000 workers due to the pandemic. The largest year-on-year increase in the total number of beds occurred in 2019, by 16,629 beds compared to 2018, which represents 8.25%. Pensions (13.47%) and hotels (4.73%) accounted for the largest percentage share. In 2020, the number of beds decreased by 8,750 compared to 2019, which means a decrease of 4.01%. In 2020 the decrease was recorded in hotels by 1.95%, in pensions by 8.7% and in campsites by 13.61% compared to the previous year (Fig. 3).



**Figure 3.** Development of capacity of accommodation facilities, 2014 – 2020

Source: SO SR, own processing

After completing the linear trends for the development of the investigated factors, via tools of MS Excel, it is possible to estimate their future development:

- Domestic accommodated visitor:  $y = 119660x + 2,000,000$ , increasing linear trend.
- Foreign accommodated visitor:  $y = -4479.6x + 2,000,000$ , decreasing linear trend.
- Overnight stays of domestic visitors:  $y = 321126x + 8,000,000$ , increasing linear trend.
- Overnight stays of foreign visitors:  $y = -8469.4x + 5,000,000$ , decreasing linear trend.

#### 4. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

In the area of tourism, which is the most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a rapid decline in demand and an increase in unemployment. This has devastating consequences for the tourism economy. Addressing the employment and competitiveness of tourism should be a top priority of the government's program statement. The introduced recreational voucher should serve to stimulate the demand for domestic tourism. Marketing activities should encourage domestic tourists to spend holidays and free time in Slovakia. The government should promote tourism by reducing VAT on all tourism services. When renting private rooms in family houses with a specified capacity of beds to prepare tax measures and financial support. The current crisis in tourism is leading to the construction of more resilient tourism, the digital and environmental transformation of the sector and the development of sustainability skills for tourism professionals.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

In the paper authors dealt with the impact of the pandemic on tourism in Slovakia. Based on secondary statistical data, the development of this sector in the years 2014 - 2019 was analysed and compared with the pandemic year 2020. Tourism contributes not only to regional development but also to the improvement of living standards, because create suitable conditions for the extent of new jobs in this sector, and is a source of income for families.

In the year 2021 tourism companies are still in bad conditions and looking for ways to improve the situation caused by the pandemic. Coping with the negative consequences of the pandemic, maintaining employment and competitiveness of tourism are among the main objectives of the program statement of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the period 2020 - 2024. To stimulate the demand for domestic tourism, the government will use the already established financial contribution for the recreation of employees in Slovakia.

The current coronavirus crisis is an opportunity to build a more resilient tourism industry and accelerate its digital and environmental transformation. An important element for the restart of the tourism industry will be marketing activities based on various geographical and localization options of individual regions of Slovakia, which will support economic growth and employment in tourism in the coming period. According to the presented results, domestic tourists are the most likely alternative to maintaining tourism in Slovakia.

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