

DYNAMICS OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISM AT GLOBAL LEVEL

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ABSTRACT. The core idea of the present paper is to analyse the evolution of international tourism during 2000-2015, simultaneously highlighting the factors that contribute to this dynamic. Thus, the aim of this paper is two-fold. The first is to analyse the evolution of international tourism at global level and at regional level. The second is to screen the dynamics of international tourism in the top tourism destinations countries. The main reason of focusing the research in this area is given by the important part played by tourism, a diverse and complex industry, in the global economy.

Keywords: international tourism, international tourist arrivals, international tourist departures, tourism development, global level

JEL Classification: L83, Z32

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Introduction and literature review

According to the *United Nations World Tourism Organization - UNWTO, 2008*, "Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes.

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These people are called visitors (which may be either tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents) and tourism has to do with their activities, some of which imply tourism expenditure. International tourism comprises inbound tourism plus outbound tourism, that is to say, the activities of resident visitors outside the country of reference, either as part of domestic or outbound tourism trips and the activities of non-resident visitors within the country of reference on inbound tourism trips”.

All debates related to the importance of tourism reveals the fact that tourism represents an engine of economic growth. Tourism provides around 292 millions of jobs at global level and contributes approximatively 10% to global Gross Domestic Product. Also tourism accounts for 7% of the world’s exports of services (US\$ 1.4 trillion a year) and 30% of the total export of services at global level (World Tourism Organization, 2017).

The travel and tourism industry has faced many changes throughout the last years. One of the main determinants can be found in the increased globalization which leads to an easier access and dissemination of information as well as a borderless world offering completely new opportunities for travellers nowadays (Buhalis and Law, 2008). Another major reason, is the e-tourism which encourages a more interactive relationship between tourism organizations and travellers, leading to new ways of developing and marketing tourism products (Buhalis and Licata, 2002). As a result of the easier access to information and the opening up of the travel and tourism industry, customers have greater expectations and therefore one can notice a shift from the old conventional to the new tourism (Stamboulis and Skayannis, 2003).

Moreover, in the past 10 years, the segment of young tourists market value has begun to increase significantly. Thus, the dynamics of the youth travel market, on a global level, taking into consideration the international youth arrivals, youth accommodation units and the behavioural habits of young tourists, is relevant (Demeter et al., 2015).

The trends in international tourism and economic implications were debated by many authors. The tourism industry will become one of the major players in international commerce and one of the main

income sources for many developing countries (Pantelescu, 2012). International tourism not only influences economics, it also affects social, environmental and land development policies. International tourism flows produce some of the most dynamic economic exchanges that occur between countries (Vellas and Bécherel, 1995).

Tourism competes in the global market, so it is important to understand its trends at the global level and at the regional level. Therefore, the present article offers insight into important trends of tourism during 2000-2015.

The evolution of tourism, respectively of international tourism, is characterized worldwide by a growth trend as a result of the favorable influence on the economic, social, demographic and political factors. People's desire to visit other countries/regions, their wish to experience other civilizations, as well as technical progress in the field of transport which allows faster and more comfortable journeys over longer distances, has led to a significant increase in international tourism worldwide.

This upward trend in international tourism, even in socially, economically and politically unfavorable times, has led tourism to be considered one of the most dynamic economic sectors. Furthermore, we emphasize the factors that determined the above mentioned, such as:

a) *Changing in consumer preferences for tourist destinations and expanding travel habits:* during the period 2000-2015, tourists started to move increasingly towards African countries such as Namibia, Tanzania, Nigeria, Gambia, Rwanda, Zimbabwe and Madagascar (this being mainly due to their initial low knowledge at international level). At the same time, China, together with Hong Kong and Macao, becomes unparalleled Asian tourism leader, followed by Malaysia. European countries such as Croatia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Georgia, Armenia and the BRICS members - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, and also Middle East countries like Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, experience a growing share as attractive tourist destinations. At the same time, destinations such as Vietnam, Singapore, Cambodia, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Maldives have seen significant increases in consumer preferences. The strong results recorded in 2015 related to international tourist arrivals in all

these new tourist destinations emphasize a significant growth of this indicator compared to 2000: Namibia +111.58%, Tanzania +140.52%, Rwanda +849.03%, China +82.16%, Hong Kong +202.77%, Macao +175.31%, Malaysia +151.62%, Croatia +117.51%, Bulgaria +154.90%, Georgia +1.424,81%, Armenia +2.548,89%, Thailand +212.38%, Vietnam +271.22%, Cambodia +924.68%, Sri Lanka +349.5% and Maldives +164.24%². From the point of view of consumers traveling habits, during the analyzed period, tourists preferred to travel more and more with the airplane (especially due to the increase of low-cost flights to many tourist destinations) at the expense of the train or the personal car;

b) *a significant increase in the number of countries and geographical areas included in the tourist circuit*, mainly driven by the demand from an increasing number of people who are always looking for authentic experiences or are motivated by the need to be in touch with the "new", the discovery of style locally, the need to escape the daily routine in places not yet visited by them, or the low cost of travel. For example, Solimar International is helping to create tourism destinations that are financially and socially sustainable, and good for the planet, such as Malawi, Cayman Islands, Campeche, Myanmar, Benin, Ethiopia, Bethlehem, Sri Lanka etc. In most of these countries we can find the most interesting and unique attractions (such as indigenous culture, wildlife, and nature reserves), always located in rural areas, where poverty is often the greatest;

c) *improving national legislation in many countries to stimulate tourism*: for example, visa policies create a barrier to travel and tourism. Easy visa facilitation is one of the basic ingredients for attracting foreign tourists. Visa costs (direct costs, such as monetary costs or indirect costs, such as waiting time and travel costs associated with obtaining the visa or the required documents) often discourage travel to the tourist destinations where a visa is required, and redirect the request to other destinations. According to the UNWTO Visa Openness Report³, in 2015 39% of the world's population could travel without obtaining a visa before departure compared to only 23% in 2008. As average, 18% of the world's population managed to travel to a

² Source: Author's own elaboration based on World Development Indicators Database, World Bank

³ UNWTO, Visa Openness Report 2015, available at: <https://www.eunwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/9789284417384>, accessed on June 18 2016

destination without visa in 2015, compared with 17% in 2008. Emerging economies continued to be more open than advanced economies. At regional level, Southeast Asia, East Africa, the Caribbean and Oceania were the most open areas, while Central Africa, North Africa and North America were the most restrictive sub-regions in 2015.

We emphasize some examples that highlight the improvement of visa policy in different countries and its impact on international tourist arrivals⁴.

- In 2007, Canada cancelled the visa requirement for Czech citizens. Touristic arrivals from the Czech Republic to Canada recorded an increase of 36.5% in 2007-2008, of which 20% is estimated to be the result of the lifting of the visa requirement;

- In 2008, the US extended visa waiver program including the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Korea. As a result, the number of tourist arrivals from these countries increased in US reaching 46% by 2011;

- In 2008, China was added to Korea's visa waiver program for Jeju Island, the largest island in Korea and an important tourist destination. Until 2009, Chinese tourists' arrivals in Korea increased by 64.5% compared to 2005;

- In 2009, Great Britain began allowing tourists from Taiwan staying less than six months to enter the country without a visa. Thus, ITA sharply increased in 2009 (39.6%) and the average yearly increase of Taiwan arrivals was 6.6% for the period 2009-2011;

- In 2010, India changed visa restrictions on arrivals from 11 countries (New Zealand, Finland, Luxembourg, Japan, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam). It was allowed a single entry in a 60 days period. The positive effect that occurred as a result of the program was an increase in combined arrivals from the 11 countries by 10.6% in 2010;

- In 2013, Japan adopted a visa relaxation policy and subsequently recorded a 169% increase in international tourist arrivals. This increase is largely due to tourist arrivals from Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, which have benefited from the visa waiver rule in Japan;

⁴ The Impact of Visa Facilitation on Job Creation in the G20 Economies, Published by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), June 2012

d) *increasing population income at global level*: for example, if we are considering strictly the average wage in the economy, it is important to note that in the last decade, average wages more than doubled in China, increased by about 60% in India and had an increase of 20 to 40% in Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa, Turkey and the Russian Federation. In China, wage growth has been faster than in other countries⁵;

e) *strong growth in tourist demand and supply in areas such as Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, New Zealand* (international tourist arrivals increased in 2015 by 71% compared with 2000, while international tourist departures increased by 88%) *and Australia* (international tourist arrivals increased in 2015 by 51% compared with 2000, while international tourist departures increased by 170%⁶);

f) *continuous professional training for tourism staff through the efforts of big hotel chains, cruise companies, etc*;

g) *education of the population such that to consume more and more tourist products*;

h) *increasing the average length of stay*⁷;

i) *Open Skies* - the liberalization of airspace and the increase in low-cost flights supply.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the evolution of the basic indicators of tourist activity for the period 2000-2015 by: 1) analysing the evolution of international tourist arrivals, international tourist departures, international tourism receipts and international tourism expenditures at global level and at regional level; and 2) emphasizing the evolution of international tourist arrivals and international tourism receipts in the World's Top Tourism Destinations. We highlight the evolution that the world tourism industry registered in the last 16 years. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 describes the research methodology that has been applied, Section 3 presents and discusses the research results, and finally, the last section of the paper concludes this research.

⁵ Global Wage Report 2016/17 - Wage Inequality in the Workplace, published by International Labor Office, Geneva, 2016

⁶ Source: Author's own elaboration based on World Development Indicators Database, World Bank

⁷ Average length of stay of visitors - Tourism indicators - UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics - Country Comparison available at <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com>. Data available for the period 1990-2007

Material and method

Considering this research goal, we used the data provided by World Bank - World Development Indicators database. The data was collected for a period of 16 years (2000 – 2015) and computed accordingly to our main research objective. We also used the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) document entitled *Tourism - Highlight 2017* which includes assessments on tourism development in 2016, as well as UNWTO documents entitled *Tourism 2020 Vision*⁸ and *Tourism Towards 2030*⁹, which include long-term assessments and forecasts on tourism development.

We consider the evolution of the basic indicators of tourist activity, relevant to the understanding of the global dimension of the tourism phenomenon. This has resulted in a dynamic map of tourism circulation internationally, which shows the main tourist flows worldwide and by destinations.

The development of international tourism can be analyzed on the basis of the following basic statistical indicators: international tourist arrivals (ITA), international tourist departures (ITD), international tourism receipts (ITR) and international tourism expenditure (ITE). These indicators allow the analysis and characterization of the sector's dynamics. We highlight the evolution that these indicators registered in the last 16 years at global level, at regional level and in the world's tourism destinations.

Results and discussions

The evolution of the basic statistical indicators which emphasize the development of international tourism was run for each year, from 2000 to 2015. This evolution and the descriptive statistics of the studied variables are presented in Table 1. By highlighting the annual percentage growth rate during 2000-2015 of ITA (average growth 4.19%), ITD (average growth 3.84%), ITR (average growth 6.37%) and ITE (average growth 6.59%) at global level, we compared the evolution

⁸ Available at <http://mkt.unwto.org>

⁹ Available at <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/book/10.18111/9789284414024>

of these indicators over time. We conclude that the minimum percentage growth rate for all indicators is registered in 2009, just after the economic crisis.

Table 1. ITA, ITD, ITR and ITE growth at global level (annual %)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	MAX	MIN	AVERAGE
ITA	7.80	0.03	2.98	-1.34	10.47	6.23	5.95	7.36	1.73	-4.20	6.64	4.26	5.08	4.84	4.90	4.31	10.47	-4.20	4.19
ITD	9.43	1.25	0.67	-0.14	8.51	6.54	2.50	6.98	2.61	-3.69	7.65	4.23	4.58	5.01	0.81	4.47	9.43	-3.69	3.84
ITR	3.39	-1.55	4.70	9.81	19.06	5.69	8.09	15.68	9.76	-9.92	8.93	11.93	3.76	7.95	8.91	-4.20	19.06	-9.92	6.37
ITE	4.95	-1.79	4.80	10.11	16.87	8.60	6.35	15.75	8.19	-11.15	9.12	11.40	5.80	7.01	12.32	-2.85	16.87	-11.15	6.59

Source: Author's own elaboration based on World Development Indicators Database, World Bank

Figures 1 and 2 highlights the expansion of international tourist arrivals and departures (measured in millions of people), as well as of the international tourism receipts and expenditure (measured in millions of USD) for the period 2000-2015.

International tourist arrivals is the main indicator used for the measurement of tourist traffic. There is a steady increase in both arrivals and departures of international tourists with low growth periods in 2003, respectively 2009. At global level, ITA has risen from 677 million in 2000 to around 955 million in 2010, reaching 1200 million in 2015 (a significant increase of about 77% compared to 2000). Similarly, ITD had an upward trend from 822 million in 2000 to around 1,129 million in 2010, reaching a threshold of 1.360 million in 2015 (an increase of about 65% compared to 2000). The ITD indicator shows a much higher increase compared to the ITA. The global gap between the arrivals and departures of international tourists is due to the different method of measuring these two indicators across the different countries.

Worldwide, between 2000 and 2015, the average ITA was 897.38 million, which corresponds to an average annual increase of 4.19%, while average ITD were 1,055.26 million, which corresponds to an average annual increase of 3.84%. The period 2010-2015 was marked by a continuous increase, the number of arrivals and departures of international tourists registering a much higher growth than the average one.

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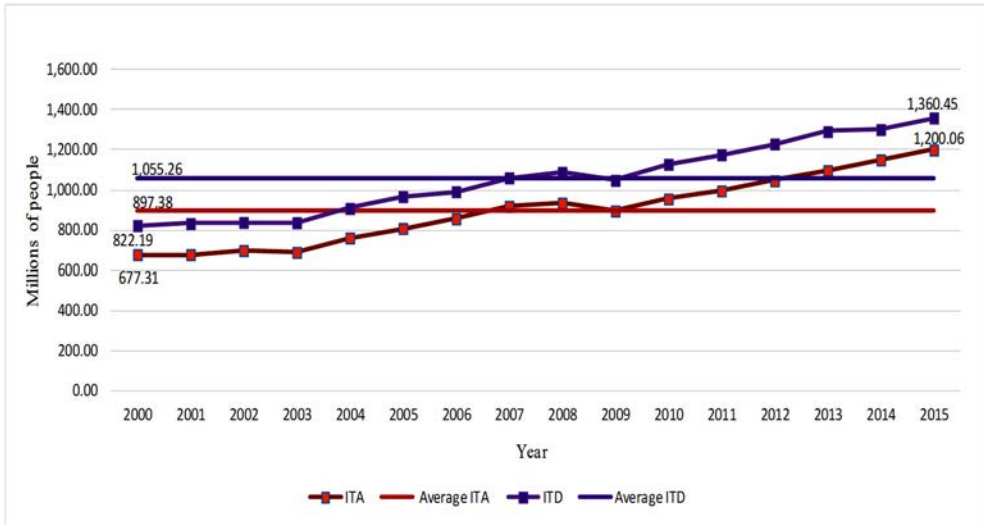


Figure 1. ITA and ITD at global level during 2000-2015 (millions of people)

Source: Author's own elaboration based on World Development Indicators Database, World Bank

The same conclusion can be highlighted in relation to the revenues from international tourism, respectively the expenditures for the international tourism: the continuous increase of these two statistical indicators, the most pronounced growth of which is the ITR, with a slowing of growth in the years 2001, 2009, respectively 2015. However, compared to the increases recorded for ITA and ITD, in the case of ITR and ITE the increases are amazing: ITR increased by about 151% in 2015 compared to 2000, while ITE increased by approximately 156%. ITR had an upward trend from \$ 572,778 million in 2000 to about \$ 1,436,984 million in 2015, while ITE had an upward trend from \$ 536,493 million in 2000 to about \$ 1,371,214 million in 2015. At global level, the difference between international tourism receipts and international tourism expenditure is due to the different way of measuring these two indicators across the different countries.

Average ITR were US \$ 994,535.22 billion (average annual growth was 6.37%), and average ITE were \$ 921,064.40 billion (average annual growth of 6.59%). This is due to the fact that over time many

countries have been focusing on attracting a significant number of tourists and turning tourism into a source of wealth.

Despite the many unfavorable factors, international tourism has grown steadily. 2015 was the most successful year in terms of ITA, respectively ITD, while 2014 was the most successful year concerning ITR, respectively ITE.



Figure 2. ITR and ITE at global level during 2000-2015 (million USD)

Source: Author's own elaboration based on World Development Indicators Database, World Bank

The vast majority of international travel takes place at the level of tourists' regions, with about four out of five arrivals from the same region. Source markets for international tourism were largely represented by the advanced economies of Europe, America, Asia and the Pacific. Europe is currently the world's largest source region, generating almost half of the ITA (48%), followed by Asia and the Pacific (26%), America (17%), Middle East (3%) and Africa (3%)¹⁰.

¹⁰ UNWTO Tourism Highlights, 2017 Edition

For a more complete characterization of the tourism phenomenon we studied also the evolution of the basic indicators of tourism activity at the regional level. In the evolution of these indicators, there are many determinants common to all regions, given that over time, many countries/regions have focused on the development of international tourism through investments in this sector, promotional activities, developed infrastructure, facilities granted, in order to attract an increasing number of international tourists annually.

Data available in the World Development Indicators - WorldBank database reveals the existence of the following six major tourist regions: Africa; East Asia and the Pacific (EAS); Europe and Central Asia (ECS); Latin America and the Caribbean (LCN); The Middle East and North Africa; and South Asia (SAS). Furthermore, we emphasize the evolution of the ITA, ITD, ITR and ITE of the following four regions: EAS, ECS, LCN and SAS¹¹.

We conclude that:

- the explosion of the tourist phenomenon is felt both at the level of international tourists arrivals/departures, as well as of the international tourism receipts/expenditures;
- of all regions, ECS occupied a peak spot during the analyzed period of time, representing the most popular and mature tourist destination at global level;
- until the economic crisis from 2008, all four indicators have steadily increased, but unfavorable effects have been felt in 2009 (as a percentage of annual growth are registered negative values for each region, for each indicator);
- in the period following the economic crisis of 2008-2010, in terms of ITD, ITR and ITE the oscillation at the ECS level can be observed, while the rest of the regions enjoy a steady and sustained growth trend, although they attract a small number of visitors and are emitters of tourists more modest compared to ECS. In contrast, concerning ITA, all regions enjoy a steady increase, although it is a moderate one;

¹¹ For the period 2000-2015, the data available in the WorldBank database is complete only for these four regions, which is why a comparative analysis of the six regions is not relevant from our point of view

➤ Asian destinations consolidated at the level of international tourist arrivals (an average increase of about 11% compared to ECS which recorded an average increase of about 7%) and departures (an average increase of approximately 10% compared to ECS which showed an average increase of about 7%). In 2014, the SAS region recorded surprising results at the level of the ITA (a strong increase of about 62% over the previous year) due to the growth as a tourist destination of the sub-regions of India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. These beneficial effects were felt at the level of ITR and ITE, this region also registering the most significant average increase among all the analyzed regions.

Table 2. ITA growth at regional level (annual %)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2015/ 2000	Average
EAS	0	5.51	8.15	-10.19	27.96	7.94	7.68	10.64	-0.73	-1.64	12.78	6.06	7.08	6.58	5.49	5.78	2.51	6.61
ECS	0	0.11	2.97	0.70	4.51	5.58	5.29	5.94	0.52	-5.20	2.82	6.60	3.81	5.24	2.33	4.43	1.56	3.04
SAS	0	-7.05	-3.67	14.92	21.96	5.11	13.59	11.55	3.70	-3.59	14.49	12.54	3.20	8.93	61.91	1.48	3.98	10.61
LCN	0	-2.67	-4.61	2.77	11.80	8.00	3.32	4.09	4.27	-3.64	3.99	5.29	3.53	2.13	11.13	7.85	1.73	3.82

Source: Author's own elaboration based on World Development Indicators Database, World Bank

Table 3. ITD growth at regional level (annual %)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2015/ 2000	Average
EAS	0	5.99	2.80	-1.56	16.56	6.22	7.26	8.95	2.35	-0.62	14.77	7.58	8.40	7.32	4.72	6.89	2.54	6.51
ECS	0	0.18	0.95	1.19	4.39	6.76	1.18	5.98	2.74	-5.74	2.23	3.49	1.92	4.65	-3.75	2.63	1.32	1.92
SAS	0	1.92	8.25	10.36	15.43	15.04	12.60	18.75	-1.11	12.08	12.88	8.02	6.56	5.21	9.80	10.65	3.98	9.76
LCN	0	1.98	-6.65	1.01	12.04	8.71	5.50	8.97	2.19	-3.48	8.01	11.77	7.27	4.06	7.27	6.67	2.05	5.02

Source: Author's own elaboration based on World Development Indicators Database, World Bank

Table 4. ITR growth at regional level (annual %)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2015/ 2000	Average
EAS	0	2.45	9.84	1.10	30.59	6.05	9.29	19.35	10.98	-4.88	22.37	16.31	9.88	8.77	19.78	-1.16	4.37	10.71
ECS	0	0.88	6.57	16.31	16.77	3.85	7.98	14.93	8.72	-13.03	-0.49	13.94	-2.06	9.31	3.59	-11.36	1.98	5.06
SAS	0	-6.62	4.11	31.96	32.02	18.43	17.19	22.35	10.13	-8.14	26.50	21.11	4.07	7.99	11.19	4.17	5.80	13.10
LCN	0	-0.92	-3.17	9.37	13.49	12.83	8.33	9.81	7.50	-8.16	5.28	7.77	6.43	5.61	6.97	4.33	2.25	5.70

Source: Author's own elaboration based on World Development Indicators Database, World Bank

Table 5. ITE growth at regional level (annual %)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2015/ 2000	Average
EAS	0	-3.84	7.60	0.36	25.92	6.41	1.23	13.32	9.24	-5.98	20.84	15.43	15.65	8.85	32.65	11.45	4.25	10.61
ECS	0	0.02	7.85	18.40	14.49	6.25	4.36	16.11	7.77	-13.76	1.85	10.27	-0.28	8.47	3.78	-13.32	1.91	4.82
SAS	0	10.77	-1.64	14.28	30.98	30.78	8.99	18.93	13.12	-23.53	14.06	26.31	3.99	3.60	19.57	2.52	4.55	11.52
LCN	0	-2.57	-11.11	3.34	13.19	18.19	10.82	18.26	11.75	-5.83	18.13	18.48	9.16	9.82	1.00	-13.00	2.43	6.64

Source: Author's own elaboration based on World Development Indicators Database, World Bank

Concerning 2016, the distribution of international tourist arrivals by geographical regions shows Europe's leading position (616.2 million), followed by Asia and the Pacific (308.4 million) and America (109.3 million). It follows Africa and the Middle East. The distribution of receipts from international tourism by geographical region reveals Europe's world leadership position (US \$ 447.3 billion), followed by Asia and the Pacific (\$ 366.7 billion), Americas (\$ 313.2 billion) Middle East (\$ 57.6 billion) and Africa (\$ 34.8 billion)¹².

Based on the annual evolution of the indicators analyzed over the period 2000-2015, we conclude that tourism was one of the economic sectors facing the global economic crisis of 2008-2010. To underline the previously highlighted aspects, we consider to be relevant the rankings of the world tourist destinations listed below (Table 6 and 7). When ranking top international tourist destinations, it is preferable to consider more than one indicator. Thus, the ranking is based on the two key indicators for recipient tourism: international tourist arrivals and international tourism receipts.

Comparing the Top 10 in 2015 to the Top 10 in 2000, we conclude that, in terms of ITA, top leaders have remained the same (the top three countries ranked in this top: France, USA, Spain); Italy and China have changed their place in the league; The United Kingdom, Mexico and the Russian Federation have come down in the rankings, while Germany has climbed three positions; the new ranked in the list is Turkey, while Canada left the Top 10. Significant percentage growth was registered in Turkey, Germany, China and United States.

¹² UNWTO Tourism Highlights 2017.

Tabel 6. The performance of the main countries sought by tourists according to UNWTO

World's Top Tourism Destination 2015	No. of tourists (mil.)	World's Top Tourism Destination 2000	No. of tourists (mil.)	Growth (2015/2000)
1 France	84.5	1 France	75.5	France: 11.9%
2 United States	77.5	2 United States	50.9	United States: 51.3%
3 Spain	68.2	3 Spain	48.2	Spain: 41.5%
4 China	56.9	4 Italy	41.2	Italy: 23.2%
5 Italy	50.7	5 China	31.2	China: 82.2%
6 Turkey	39.5	6 United Kingdom	25.2	United Kingdom: 36.7%
7 Germany	35.0	7 Russian Federation	21.2	Russian Federation: 47.7%
8 United Kingdom	34.4	8 Mexico	20.6	Mexico: 55.5%
9 Mexico	32.1	9 Canada	20.4	Canada: - Turkey: 311.8%
10 Russian Federation	31.3	10 Germany	19	Germany: 84.22%

Source: Author's own elaboration based on UNWTO data

Furthermore, comparing the Top 10 in 2015 to the Top 10 in 2000, in terms of ITR, the changes in the ranking reflect not only the relative performance, but also the fluctuations in the exchange rate between the local currencies and the US dollar. This was a special case in 2015, when the US dollar appreciated considerably against the euro and many other world currencies. The top four places in the ranking are occupied by the same countries as in the case of ITA, but in a different order. It is interesting to note that for some countries ITR have increased considerably: China (+ 604%), Hong Kong - China (+358%) and USA (+ 140%). At the bottom of the top are situated the two Chinese destinations, Hong Kong and Macao, which have special administrative arrangements. We emphasize that China, together with the two Chinese destinations, Hong Kong and Macao, occupies three positions in this top.

Tabel 7. The performance of the countries with the highest tourist receipts according to UNWTO

World's Top Tourism Destination 2015	ITR (billions USD)	World's Top Tourism Destination 2000	ITR (billions USD)	Growth (2015/2000)
1 United States	204.5	1 United States	85.2	United States: 140.0%
2 China	114.1	2 Spain	31.0	China: 604.3%
3 Spain	56.5	3 France	29.9	Spain: 82.3%
4 France	45.9	4 Italy	27.4	France: 53.5%
5 United Kingdom	45.5	5 United Kingdom	19.5	United Kingdom: 133.3%
6 Thailand	44.6	6 Germany	17.8	Thailand: n/a
7 Italy	39.4	7 China	16.2	Italy: 43.8%
8 Germany	36.9	8 Austria	11.4	Germany: 107.3%
9 Hong Kong (China)	36.2	9 Canada	10.8	Hong Kong (China): 358.2%
10 Macao (China)	31.3	10 Greece	9.2	Macao (China): n/a

Source: author's own elaboration based on UNWTO data

At global level, the ITA is estimated to grow on average by 3.3% by 2030, although the growth rate is expected to fall from 3.8% the start of the period 2010-2030 to 2.9% in 2030. In absolute figures, ITA will increase by about 43 million per year, compared with an increase of about 28 million per year for the period 1995-2010. Forecasts show that international tourist arrivals is expected to reach 1.4 billion in 2020 and 1.8 billion in 2030, according to the World Tourism Organisation report.

The most dynamic growth rates are projected to be recorded in regions with emerging economies such as Asia, Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa. The most significant development is expected to be recorded in the Asia Pacific region, where the ITA are projected to reach 535 million tourists in 2030, an increase of 4.9% per year by 2030. The Middle East and Africa are expected to more than double the international tourist arrivals (from 61 million in 2010 to 149 million in 2030). A relatively lower growth is estimated for Europe (from 475 million in 2010 to 744 million in 2030) and America (from 150 million in 2010 to 248 million in 2030).

The result will be an increase in the global market share for Asia and the Pacific (up to 30% in 2030 compared to 22% in 2010), Middle East (to 8% from 6%) and Africa (to 7% from 5%), while the share of the European regions and America decreases: to 41% from 51%, respectively to 14% from 16%. This is mainly due to slower growth in North America and North Western Europe.

Towards 2030, domestic tourism will grow as well, with the growth of international tourism, this phenomenon mainly affecting developing countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America. as well as in highly industrialized countries where the population will practice various forms of domestic tourism.

Conclusions

Tourism represents one of the pillars that should be supported by governments worldwide in order to stimulate economic growth, due to the fact that travel and tourism industry will become one of the major players in international commerce and one of the main income sources for many developing countries.

Based on the aspects presented in this paper, we conclude that during the period 2000-2015, the explosion of the tourism phenomenon was felt both at the level of international tourist arrivals, respectively departures, as well as at the level of international tourism receipts, respectively expenditure.

All this is the result of factors such as: changing consumer preferences for tourist destinations and expanding travel habits, significant increase of countries and geographical areas included in the tourist circuit, improving national legislation in many countries to stimulate tourism, considerable increase of tourist demand and supply in areas such as Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, New Zealand and Australia, airspace liberalization and increased low-cost flights supply.

We conclude that there is still considerable potential for expansion in the next period. New destinations can benefit from this trend if they adopt appropriate policies in terms of business environment, infrastructure, marketing and human resources.

In order to further support this upward trend, World Tourism Organization continues to encourage local governments to make many efforts to facilitate travel, simplify visa application and processing formalities, improve information and communication technologies with consumers.

Based on all aspects analysed in the present paper, it is important to highlight the new factors whose influence will accelerate the growth of international tourism and the role of the travel and tourism industry as an economic motor at global level:

- increase in low-cost carriers: global market share has risen from 7% in 2003 to 16% in 2013 and is projected to increase to 21% in 2033, according to Boeing data. As far as Europe is concerned, there has been an increase in the market share of 18% in 2013 compared to 2008. Low-cost transport companies focus on business and operational practices that reduce airline costs, such as: secondary airports, the use of one type of airplane, the increase in airplane use, the focus on direct sales, frequent avoidance of routes, the maintenance of low-cost labor costs, the sale of ancillary services. The immediate result is the increased flexibility in the "packaging" of tourist products: those who fly at a low cost can opt for accommodation at their destination in a 5-star hotel;

- demographic changes and migration;
- increasing population welfare and attitudes towards work and leisure (more and more people perceive holidays as a necessity rather than a luxury);

- ethical values;
- technological progress;
- a fragmentation of tastes (people are increasingly looking for unique experiences to express who they are, which increases demand for active holidays);

- a self-catering phenomenon (for example, AirBnB and Couchsurfing);

- Visa policy changes in many countries (visa facilitation) lead to an increase in international tourism (international tourist arrivals and international tourism receipts) and employment levels.

During the world economic crisis or in other political and social disturbing periods, tourism has proved to be the best engine of the economy in many countries. In the Caribbean, Pacific, East Africa and underdeveloped (or developing) countries, tourism is one of the main branches of the economy or even the main economic engine. Small or economically underdeveloped countries with natural potential and fewer natural resources have as an alternative to economic growth tourism. Compared with other sectors of activity, tourism has a great advantage, namely that it does not involve a production cycle and large material investments. Only tourist potential (natural, cultural, ecological, etc.) and infrastructure (access roads to the tourist destination), besides the intermediary and the merchant, i.e. the active element of the tourist system (travel agency, government, hotels, spaces accommodation, etc.).

The limitations of this study is given by the fact that does not provide a complete picture of the evolution of ITA, ITD, ITR and ITE at regional level due to the fact that data were not available at Worldbank - World Development Indicators database during 2000-2015 for all regions.

An important future research direction could consist in analysing the economic impact of tourism at global level and regional level during 2000-2015, such that to underline the role of economic engine that this industry plays worldwide: tourism is responsible for creating jobs and reducing poverty, contributes significantly to the Gross Domestic Product annually at the global level and adapts continuously to the changing environment.

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