

# RURAL TOURISM – A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE FOR THE CONSUMPTION OF TOURISM SERVICES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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**Abstract:** *After the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, the world economy was affected on different levels. Many countries have been confronted with an unprecedented situation being forced to close borders and to apply the state of emergency. Thereby, due to travel restrictions and the specific characteristics of the sector, travel and tourism were among the most affected industries. The consequences of the coronavirus pandemic were largely reflected in the losses that the sector suffered both in terms of value, contribution to global GDP and jobs creation. Following the dynamic of the crisis, tourism companies try to identify solutions capable to picture a possible recovery for this industry. Based on these considerations, our study examines if the rural tourism can be such a solution, also for the Romanian market, measuring the perceptions of a 285 respondents regarding their consumption behavior and decisions during COVID-19 pandemic concerning such a destination. The study results validate the advanced hypotheses, namely the degree of anxiety caused by the COVID-19 pandemic positively influences the preference for rural tourism among respondents. Moreover, as the anxiety about the pandemic manifests itself, the respondents' preference for rural tourism-specific destinations is becoming even stronger.*

**Keywords:** *rural tourism, the COVID-19 pandemic, changes in tourists' behavior, anxiety*

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