

Experience Tourism as a Smart and Sustainable Form of Tourism in the Twenty-First Century



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Abstract Experience tourism is a form of tourism in which participants are motivated to seek experiences that are different from everyday life. It has two extreme approaches. The first is seeking and experiencing social contacts and contact with nature and cultural environments, which supports sustainable development of the destination, and the second is seeking experiences within attractions. Experiential tourism is associated with a personal and subjective experience in which main attribute is interactivity. Experience tourism can be distinguished from traditional tourism by the fact that it engages all human senses. In experience tourism, it is important to place greater emphasis on reconciling the economic, social and environmental objectives of the destination in order to ensure its sustainable development. It is essential that visitor gains unforgettable experiences, i.e., different from everyday life. The aim of this paper is to examine the supply and demand of experiential tourism products in a selected region with respect to smart and sustainable tourism development. Promoted visitor experience can be an important tool for destination marketing communication in the twenty-first century. If the destinations want to be competitive in a dynamically developing tourism market, they must adapt to this situation and offer the visitors an unforgettable authentic experience in a smart and sustainable way. The goal is to create an offer that allows the visitors to actively engage in tourism activities and thus to intensify their emotions.

Keywords Destination · Experience · Sustainability · Tourism

JEL Classification L83 · Z32 · M31

1 Introduction

Participation in experience tourism is a personal and highly subjective experience for everyone. Visitors are primarily motivated by seeking out experience they do not

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V. Katsoni (ed.), *Tourism, Travel, and Hospitality in a Smart and Sustainable World*,
Springer Proceedings in Business and Economics,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-26829-8_12

yet know and are interested in experiencing new situations. The aim of experience tourism is to offer visitors different types of attractions, ranging from adrenaline to sightseeing. Tourism businesses that offer such activities do not only make money from entrance fees or other activities, but also raise awareness of the destination and their brand. This motivates the visitor to stay longer in the destination, leading to increased tourism revenue and a longer season in the area. Experience tourism is a smart and sustainable type of tourism, it differs from mass tourism, and it offers something special and personal to every visitor.

Experience tourism and its attendance are currently a trend that greatly affects the supply of tourism products and provides the transition from mass tourism to sustainable and smart tourism, from offering products to everyone to offering products tailored to individual customer requirements, from consumption to experience (Adillon, 2019). The desire to experience something new, unrepeatable, exceptional stems from today's fast and often stereotypical way of life. The experience creates in each person personal feelings and emotional experiences that cannot be transferred to other people and are a guarantee of the satisfaction of the visitor. Getting a complex experience is one of the main conditions for tourism realization.

2 Literature Review

Experience tourism is a subject of interest of many domestic and international authors, especially from Kotíková (2000, 2013), Seaton and Bennett (2001), Gúčík (2006), Tarssanen (2009), Sharpley and Stone (2012), Tangeland and Øystein (2011), Dubská (2012), Zelenka and Pásková (2012), Nowacki (2013), Goeldner and Ritchie (2014), Voříšková and Indrová (2015), Pomfret (2018), Bergstrom (2021) and others.

Experience tourism is generally based on a number of basic principles: the added value of activities, experiences, catering services and accommodation or infrastructure (Tangeland & Øystein, 2011; Seaton & Bennett, 2001). Authors Sharpley and Stone (2012) claim that tourism in general is about experience. According to them, the experience consists of four components—emotions that relate to the choice of destination, excitement from planning and route preparation, sense of adventure and a set of emotions that visitors get after experiencing the tourism product. An experience can represent the inner state of an individual resulting from something he or she personally met or survived (Nowacki, 2013). Every tourist expects to experience something extraordinary, exciting and unrepeatable. Therefore, experience is a prerequisite for his satisfaction (Gúčík et al., 2006, p. 209, password Experience). The experience can be defined by several attributes. It is a strong emotional engagement (excitement), it only takes place at a certain time and under certain conditions (finiteness), it cannot be replaced by another experience, and it is always unrepeatable (uniqueness) and cannot be transferred to another person (Kotíková, 2000). According to Gúčík (2006), experience can be an exploratory (something new, unusual), somatic and physiological, social (social contact, society) and additional

(to be successful as a person), and like Kotíková (2013), he claims that experience is associated with emotional engagement of individual, which is unrepeatably and passable.

In tourism, the “experience environment” is made up of all the people and things surrounding the tourists. It does not only include the time when people travel, but also the period before they decide to travel and after they return home. Consequence of this is that every person is surrounded by the unique “tourist experience network” of all the participants included in his or her experiences, whether real, virtual or even fictitious. Various actors contribute in gaining tourist experiences. Tourist experience networks are enormous and connect human beings with the people they travel with (friends, partners, family, interest groups, colleagues), with the internet, with a virtual travel community, travel agencies, tour operators and travel service providers, hoteliers, guides, local businesses offering activities in a given destination, with local residents, monuments, activities and various attractions, typical landmarks, museums, places of cultural heritage, events, natural scenery, techniques, and so on (Bergstrom, 2021; Valeri, 2021).

To the theoretical definition of experience tourism is paid more and more attention. To the experts in the field of experience tourism belongs Tarssanen (2009), who considers experience tourism for a phenomenon of the twenty-first century. She characterizes it as a positive, extensive and multi-sensory perceived emotional experience that evokes in every visitor various personal feelings. According to the author, individuality, authenticity, story, perceptions of multiple senses, interaction and contrast are basic elements of the experience tourism.

Czech authors define experience tourism as a form of tourism, in which visitors are motivated to find experiences different from their normal life. We can divide it according to two approaches. The first approach is to find and experience social contacts, contacts with nature and the cultural environment in the destination. The second approach is to find experiences in the different types of attractions. Among the categories of experience tourism, they include gastronomic, adventurous, gambler, meditation, sport, virtual or cosmic tourism (Zelenka & Pásková, 2012).

The tourism product is defined by UNWTO (2022a, b). The product of experience tourism and its categorization is also discussed by Pine and Gilmore (1999). They divide experience tourism products into four categories, based on the identification of two basic dimensions. One dimension is activity–passivity in the sense of whether the consumer of an experience tourism product is actively engaged in an activity or is merely a passive spectator. The second dimension distinguishes between mental and physical participations, namely whether the consumer of the experiential tourism product is mentally immersed in the consumption of the product or whether he or she is also physically engaged in participating in experiential tourism.

The biggest difference between traditional tourism and experience tourism is in human perception. In the case of traditional tourism, people look in particular at a pleasant and stimulating environment, and the experience is only the result of their traveling. Conversely, in the context of experience tourism, emphasis is placed on personal subjective experiences, where the main attribute is interactivity (Voříšková & Indrová, 2015). The source of the tourist experience can be something

else for different people. It can be nature and the natural environment, the social environment and contact with the local population, the quality of services or the level of programs—cultural, sport, cognitive, social or educational. In order for all these components to become an experience, they must be new and unusual for the visitor or at least perceived in a new environment or situation. In this case, for somebody, a common phenomenon can be an experience, such as sunset or service, the first flight by airplane, accommodation in a first-class hotel (Kotíková, 2000). Based on their research, Voříšková and Indrová (2015) identified four main groups of the experiences—gastronomic experiences, adrenaline adventure experiences, unusual visits of historic and natural places and wellness and health.

3 Methodology

The aim of the paper is to characterize experience tourism on the example of selected region, as well as to analyze the supply and demand for experience tourism products in the region. The aim of experience tourism is to evoke in the visitor the most intense authentic experience combined with strong emotions. We understand the experience tourism as a form of smart and sustainable tourism.

We evaluate the potential for the development of experience tourism in the Liptov region, based on the market research, demand and supply analysis. The subject of exploration is experience tourism. The object is the destination of Liptov region in Slovakia. Liptov region (2022) belongs to the three most tourism developed areas in Slovakia, whether in terms of number of overnights, visitors or tourism attractions. It has wide primary (natural attractions, cultural and historical monuments, organized events) as well as a secondary offers (accommodation, catering, sports and recreation facilities, public and private institutions). It has borderline with Poland in the north (Fig. 1).

We are asking following research questions: What is the offer of experience tourism products in Liptov region? What is the demand for experience tourism products in the Liptov region?

We get an answer to the first question by analyzing the secondary resources which we obtain by reviewing the websites of the experience tourism product providers. By supply analyzing, we focus on the tourism businesses and institutions operating in the region and the offer of their activities. Individual activities of adventure tourism will be divided according to the themes (adventure, sport, cognition, culture, health, recreation and gastronomy), on the basis of which selected businesses provide them to the visitors to ensure their complex experience.

We obtain the answer to the second question by analyzing the demand for experience tourism in the Liptov region through the sociological survey method. The data collection technique was a questionnaire survey. We have distributed the questionnaires electronically. The survey was realized in the months of March–May 2022. We were able to get 154 responses. The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions and was divided into two parts. The first part was focused on finding out whether visitors



Fig. 1 Liptov region localization. *Source Liptov region map, 2022*

and residents of Liptov region use the offer of experience tourism products. We used closed and semi-closed questions with the choice of one or more answers. In the questions, we have found out from where the visitors have received the necessary information about the region, how often and with whom they visit the region, what are their main motives and reasons for selecting this destination or what factors affect them in their selection. We have also found out which services and specific activities were performed during their stay in the Liptov region. In the second section, we have aimed on the demographic and other visitors' data. At the conclusion of the questionnaire, we have left the space for the opinions of the respondents who visited Liptov region and have experienced the offer of the products of experience tourism.

Based on the answers to the research questions, we evaluate whether there is potential for the development of experience tourism in Liptov region.

4 Results

The Liptov Region is located in the northwestern part of the Slovak Republic, on the north it borders with Poland, thanks to the excellent natural conditions, cultural and historical monuments and preserved folk architecture; Liptov is one of the most beautiful and most sought-after regions in Slovakia. The combination of natural attractions, cultural and historical richness, opportunities for sporting activities and active leisure time together with the possibilities of relaxation and experiences make the Liptov region an attractive destination not only for international but also for domestic visitors. Experience tourism could not be developed if the region itself did not have suitable potential for its development.

Experience tourism supply in the Liptov region

The region has excellent natural and cultural conditions for the development of experience tourism, even in winter or summer months. The Liptov region offers mountaineering, alpine hiking, trekking, cycling, yachting, water skiing, wakeboarding, swimming, fishing, caving, bungee jumping, horse riding, hunting, gyms, tennis, squash, badminton, ballooning, sport flying, sightseeing flights helicopters, quad biking, archery, downhill skiing, cross-country skiing, ski mountaineering, snowboarding, mountain scooters, go-karting, bowling and many other activities. The typical adventure or adrenaline activities include paintball, wakeboarding, paragliding, rafting, wakesurfing and others. For canoeing and rafting, there is also a modern water slalom area with artificial canal and major international events are held here every year.

Thanks to the rich primary offer, the region is also visited for hiking or cycling. In the Liptov region, there are over 50 hiking trails and marked trails with a total length of up to 1 185 km. Liptov is surrounded on all sides by mountains, but hiking in them is more focused on medium and less physically fit hikers and thanks to the cable cars to Chopok and Malinô Brdo, even the youngest children can manage the trips. In order to not to forget the youngest visitors, the Liptov region has created the experience tourism product called Liptov with children, which consists of a list of selected places in Liptov where families can spend a pleasant time.

Adventure activities are often combined with sports activities. These are provided mainly by operators of ski resorts. Although in this case it is mainly the winter season, they try to extend their offer to summer sports and thus ensure that the resorts are used all year round. Ski resorts offer skiers excellent conditions for downhill and cross-country skiing. Jasná connects both the north and south sides of Chopok, creating an unrivaled number of ski slopes in Slovakia. The resort also includes freeride zones for skiers. In the region, there are also valleys that meet the conditions for ski mountaineering. Within the ski resort, there are a number of hotels in the immediate vicinity of the ski slopes, which offer a large capacity accommodation beds at a high level. After-skiing activities are also catered for through the after-ski bars and the recently built Music Club, which hosts concerts and parties of all kinds all year round. There are also shops with souvenirs or sporting goods for skiing or hiking in summer. The resort offers many leisure activities even in summer, such as a bike park with bike rental or a rope course, archery and various other activities (www.visitliptov.sk, 2022).

Experience tourism also includes activities related to exploration. These activities include tours of castles, chateaus, open-air museums, manor houses, etc. Visits to these monuments are often associated with various events that are organized in their vicinity. For example, there may be demonstrations of traditional crafts or folk customs, in which case visitors can actively participate and try out the crafts or customs themselves. Traditions are also followed by many events that are organized throughout the year, from folklore festivals to concerts, sports and adrenaline events. Every year the most famous folklore festival is held in the village of Východná. It is the largest folklore event in Slovakia attracting thousands of visitors from all

over Europe. Vlkolínec was listed as a world heritage site by the UNESCO, as a monumental reservation of folk architecture. Liptov is also known for its gastronomic specialties, which are worth tasting in typical cottages or modern restaurants. The modern gastronomic facilities are focused on the experience gastronomy, which includes interconnection between Slovak and international cuisine, serving of quality wines and seating in a pleasant environment.

By analyzing the offer of adventure tourism in the Liptov region, we have focused on the tourism enterprises and institutions operating in the region and their offer of activities. We have divided the various activities of experience tourism according to the motives on the basis of which they are provided to the visitors to secure their complex experience. We have identified several main themes—adventure, sport, cognition, culture, health, recreation and gastronomy. The motive of adventure mainly includes activities taking place in the nature (water areas, rivers, mountains) and in artificially created recreational facilities. These activities are provided by interest associations or private companies.

Conditions for the tourism development and the supply of experience tourism activities at the level of the Liptov region are represented by destination management organization Region Liptov.

Demand analysis of experience tourism in the Liptov region

The analysis of the demand for experience tourism in the Liptov region was obtained through the method of sociological inquiry. We have found out that the most common purpose of participation in experience tourism was the experience connected with sport activities (53.2%). Under this experience belong various adventure sports or participation in a sporting event. The second most common reason was cultural experience (41.6%), where it was an unusual visit to a museum, gallery, theater or castle. Respondents in the region also sought adrenaline experiences (17.6%), gastronomic experiences (13.6%). The purpose of their visit was also wellness stays, family visits, recreational stays or tourism itself (26.6%). After identifying the main purpose of the visit of the respondents, we were interested to know that on the basis of what they decided to participate in the experience tourism in the Liptov region. Almost half of the respondents stated that based on their own experience (43.5%), they either come from the region or visit the region frequently. As many as 33.8% of respondents decided to participate on the basis of the information found on Internet and social networks, a quarter of respondents chose to participate in an experience tourism based on recommendations from family or friends (16.2%). Respondents were least influenced by the other media (4.5%), the poster (1.3%) and also by the travel offer agency (0.6%).

More than a half of the respondents are tourists on a short stay (51.9%), who spent at least three nights in the Liptov region. Approximately 27.8% of the respondents stayed in the region for more than four nights. Another group of respondents consists of day-trippers (14.3%) who spent less than 24 h in the region without overnight stay. The last group is respondents who come directly from the Liptov region (5.8%), i.e., they are residents. With the length of visit, we were interested in the survey to know how often the respondents visit the Liptov region or whether they return to a given

destination. The majority of respondents visit the region occasionally (37%), i.e., 1 to 2 times a year. Fewer respondents (29.2%) visit the region more than once a year. Approximately 27.8% of respondents rarely visit the Liptov region. In the survey, we also received the responses from the above-mentioned residents (5.8%).

Furthermore, in the survey, we were interested in how the respondents got to the region. More than 88% of respondents had traveled to the region by car, which is not the most sustainable way of transportation, but it is the most efficient when traveling or visiting several places at once. The second mode of transport was the train (4.5%), and this mode of transport is particularly worthwhile for students, as they can travel by train for free. Some respondents used the bus (1.3%). The rest of the respondents answered that they were directly from the region (5.8%).

Naturally, the respondents used a variety of services during their visit to the region. Therefore, in the survey, we were interested to know what services they used, as everyone's needs during travel are different. The services mostly used by respondents included food services (91.6%) and accommodation services (76.6%). As mentioned above, almost half of the respondents visited the region for a cultural experience, i.e., approximately 52.6% of the respondents used services related to exploring the natural and cultural heritage in the region. In the case of holidays, these were services related to rest and recreation (45.5%) and related wellness services (48.7%). Transport services were used by 16.2% of respondents. Only 26% of respondents in the region used services that related to sports activities. Less used services included information services (10.4%), guide services (7.1%) and health tourism services (3.2%). Based on findings on the services used, we were further interested to know whether the respondents were satisfied with these services. As many as 96.1% of them were satisfied with the services. Only four respondents were unable to judge, which leads us to conclude that they did not use as many services to be able to rate them sufficiently. Two respondents were not satisfied with the services (1.3%) and gave us the reason as too high prices and poor sanitary facilities.

A positive finding of our survey was that more than half of the respondents (78.6%) are looking for tourism activities that offer some form of experience. Only 8.4% of respondents do not seek these activities and 13% of respondents could not judge, whether they did or not. Having established the answers to the above question, we next investigated what experience tourism products they consumed in the region. Most respondents (96.8%) were looking for hiking experience in the Liptov region, as thanks to the excellent natural conditions, this region is the most sought after by tourists. Among the most popular products of experience tourism belong also visits to caves and other natural attractions (73.4%), castle or museums tours (59.1%). In winter, respondents visit the region for wellness (50%), skiing or snowboarding (37%). Organized sports (14.9%) and cultural events (18.2%) are also a draw. Horseback riding is a less popular product of experience tourism in the region (3.9%). Respondents also visit the region for experience gastronomy (16.2%). The longest river in Slovakia, the Váh, which flows through the region, also has great potential and is used for sightseeing cruises, which respondents identified (19.5%) as a popular product of experience tourism. Almost 30% of respondents visit the region because of the cycling routes located there. Other products of experiential tourism

that respondents mentioned in the open question were mountaineering or rafting (3.9%).

At the end of the questionnaire, we were interested in respondents' insights and suggestions for improvement experience tourism offer in the region. The most frequently mentioned suggestions included agro-tourism, rural tourism, building more cycle paths (better signposted and landscaped), more sport activities (bungee jumping, water skiing). There should also be focus on adventure activities (snow kiting adventure cave tours) or organize adventurous stays in nature (surviving alone in the forest), for example. In the case of hiking trails, more hiking maps or better signage should be developed. As we have already mentioned above, there is a well-known water reservoir in the region, the Liptovská Mara, and better access to it or its use could attract more visitors not only domestic but also foreign visitors. In the case of better use of the reservoir, the boat trips could be organized. The Liptov region has not only natural but also cultural heritage. It is therefore important to preserve this heritage and folk traditions of the region and to promote it. To show visitors how life used to be in the region, organize more cultural events or invite people to visit farms, ranches, or shepherds' huts, that are self-sufficient and produce their own products, and thus teach visitors make these products.

About 61.7% of women and 38.3% of men were participated in the questionnaire survey. From the perspective of age, most people were in the age group from 36 to 45 (28.6%) and 26 to 35 years (26.6%). People aged 46–55 created 18.8% of all respondents, people from 18 to 25 years 14.3%, people over 56 years 11.7%. The most responses were from people with university education (48.7%), people with secondary school education (43.5%), respondents with university third degree (PhD.) education (2.6%) and primary education (0.6%). According to the social status, the most numerous group of respondents is employed (71.4%), and then, we have students (10.4%), entrepreneurs (8.4%), retirees (5.2%), respondents on parental leave (3.9%). More than 37% of the respondents have monthly incomes between 500 and 999 €. Right behind were the respondents that earn between 1,000 and 1,500 €. More than €1,500 is earned by approximately 18.2% of respondents and less than €500 by approximately 13%.

5 Conclusion

On the basis of our analysis, we can conclude that the Liptov region has a great potential for the development of experience tourism. Suitable conditions are created in particular by natural, cultural and historical assumptions. In this paper, we asked two research questions. On the basis of our research, we found that the offer in the field of experience tourism in the Liptov region is attractive not only for domestic and foreign visitors but also for the local population. The region has not only an attractive offer but also a suitable potential for the development of experiential tourism. In terms of products that would stimulate the interest of visitors, these are mainly cycling,

hiking and cultural and historical monuments, with the intention of adapting products to individual needs.

Liptov region belongs to the most visited parts of Slovakia, and it has many tourist attractions which are exploited in experience tourism. The task is to develop the tourism in smart and sustainable way—as the experience tourism is based on individual expectations, we assume that with the coordination of subject interested in the development of tourism in the region, this could be the appropriate way. The trend of short-term stays has also been reflected in our questionnaire survey, we have found out that visitors prefer shorter stays. Most visitors visit the region with their family, partner or friend. We have also examined the reasons for selecting the destination, where we have found out that to the main ones belong a previous visit and positive recommendations. This fact results from the satisfaction of the visitors and the subsequent spread of the positive image about the region. Among the motives of the visit clearly dominated the theme of recreation. According to our findings, the most important factors on the basis of which the visitors have chosen the destination were the natural and cultural conditions of the region. Visitors consider the quality of services, health and wellness services, sports services or adventure activities for less important factors. The most popular services from the visitor's point of view are recreation and leisure services and natural heritage recognition services. Visitors prefer visits of caves and natural beauties, tours of castles, museums, galleries and open-air museums.

The visitors consider the offer of the experience tourism products as sufficient, and they would use this offer again. According to the respondents, prices correspond to the quality of the services provided. From respondents' opinions, we have found out that there is a need to improve the infrastructure, especially for cyclists, to make cultural–historical sights more attractive and to improve the promotion of individual attractions in the region. According to the views of visitors and exploring the supply of experience tourism in the Liptov region, we think that the region has great potential for the further development of experience tourism.

Liptov is a destination offering many tourism opportunities. Destination management organization tries to bring the tourism subjects to cooperate. The aim of the collaboration is to jointly promote the region as a “green” region for active and adventurous leisure time. Such cooperation is essential for the region, as they can create joint smart and sustainable experience tourism products. In this case, we would recommend focusing mainly on the needs of the visitors by adapting new trends in the development of experience tourism.

Acknowledgements This research was funded by the Scientific Grant Agency of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of Slovak Republic VEGA, grant number 1/0368/20 “Sharing economy as an opportunity for sustainable and competitive development of tourist destinations in Slovakia”.

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