

THE ATTITUDES OF YOUNG PEOPLE TOWARDS VISITING SPA & WELLNESS HOTELS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Nada Vidanović^{1*},
Ivana Brdar²,
Katarina Ranković²

¹Ph.D. Student at
Singidunum University,
Belgrade, Serbia

²Singidunum University,
Belgrade, Serbia

Abstract:

Today's modern lifestyle makes people live a fast-paced life, bringing along a great deal of stress, so that they do not have much time to devote to their needs, and after these difficult times people strive to improve their health in every possible way. The unexpected Covid-19 pandemic that struck us about a year and a half ago made us set priorities in our lives. People spend more time taking care of their health and trying to improve it in various ways, and visiting spa & wellness centers is one way. The aim of the research is to point out the attitudes of young people towards visiting spa and wellness hotels during the pandemic. The results show that most of the respondents visited such hotels during the pandemic and felt safe in them, although it did not require mandatory Covid-19 testing. Also, they used all the services that were offered, swimming pools and massages the most, and although the provision of the service was difficult in these pandemic conditions, the clients were still satisfied with the service provided in spa and wellness hotels, as well as with the implemented safety measures, which made them feel safe.

Keywords:

spa & wellness hotels, Covid-19, safety, the young.

INTRODUCTION

The modern way of life can be very exhausting. People are exhausted by the lifestyle they lead, a fast, stressful life can have major health consequences, people need rest and time to relax. In the modern era, relaxation and refreshment of mind and body are becoming a trend. The announcement of the World Health Organization¹ in March 2020 about the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has greatly changed today's view of the world, they believe that the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have had an incredibly negative impact on tourism, and the data show that tourism has been backward for three decades due to this pandemic, there was a decrease of 73% during 2020, but this also brought many changes in people's lives (UNWTO, 2021).

Correspondence:
Nada Vidanović

e-mail:
nada.vidanovic.15@singimail.rs

¹ The World Health Organization is a special organization of the United Nations that acts as a coordinating body of international public health. It was founded in 1948 and ambushed in Geneva.



CHANGES IN TOURISM DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In order to renew tourism, it is necessary for travelers to be able to travel to other countries, but above all to feel completely safe and secure to travel in order to fulfil their needs during their traveling. Consequently, prior to lifting travel restrictions health criteria needs to be met (European Council, 2020): epidemiological criteria, sufficient health system capacity and appropriate monitoring capacity.

Different assumptions have been made based on the implemented measures according to the local development and characteristics of tourism, excluding the impact and dissemination of COVID-19; this led to the development of the following scenarios (OECD, 2020, pp. 3). The first scenario involves the return of international tourism in July with gradual progress (-60%). The second scenario involves the return of international tourism in September with gradual progress in the second half of the year (-75%). The last scenario predicts that international tourism will begin to recover in December (-80%).

It is assumed that the behavior of tourists will change greatly after the COVID-19 pandemic. Most tourists will avoid traveling far from home and will not cross a large number of international borders, they will not travel to distant destinations, as there is a high probability that due to unforeseen circumstances and the spread of the epidemic in certain areas, the borders will be closed. It would make returning home much harder for them. There will be a reduction in air travel, as airfare will become much more expensive, due to the reduced capacity of passengers, because it is necessary to respect safety measures and it is not possible to fill all the seats on the plane. Also, the hotel business will be largely limited, but also to some extent improved. In order to avoid crowds at the reception when registering, in a large number of hotels applications will be created, which will help guests with checking into the hotel in an easy, fast and safe way. (Luković & Stojković, 2020)

People gathered the courage to travel at the end of 2020, and in slightly larger numbers at the beginning of 2021; until then they had traveled almost exclusively for business reasons, and not for tourism and leisure. The necessity to escape from everyday life and the stress it brings with it, brings about the need to relax and unwind, and a visit to a spa and wellness hotel is one such option. Spa and wellness tourism is considered one of the rapidly growing tourism segments globally and is even expected to reach greater heights post COVID-19 (Mohan & Lamba, 2021). Very few people have been encouraged to travel and get out of their comfort zone over the last year, yet those who had the courage to do so were very pleased with the outcome of their travels. In the moments of pandemic measures, the number of those who decided to visit some spa and wellness hotels is not negligible, and the compliance with safety measures in these hotels was the most important thing for their visit. Hotels that continued to operate in these unforeseen circumstances brought by this pandemic had to make great efforts to make everything flawless, measures related to protection and prevention, had to be met to the last detail. (Jović Bogdanović et al. 2020)

Spa and wellness hotels offer different types of all-inclusive packages to meet the needs of different types of guests. Such hotel arrangements include exclusive spa packages that include a sauna, a steam bath, and also various types of medical oil treatments and massages for therapeutic purposes. They have achieved remarkable success by applying different types of guest segmentation as well as implementing the strategy. (Tran, 2021)

A large number of spa and wellness hotels offer various water treatments from thermal springs, it is possible to use them for preventive or curative purposes. Due to the COVID-19 attacks, in most cases on the respiratory system, these types of treatments can be very helpful. Various treatments can prepare the human body for the possibility of infection with COVID-19, as this would make it easier to fight the infection. Sulfur mineral water treatments can be used to strengthen the immune system of people who have faced the COVID-19 or for people with weak immunity system as a prevention from the COVID-19 disease (Foundation Bilbilis, 2020).

Due to the large decline in tourist visits during 2020, a large number of destinations have turned their attention to domestic tourism, in fact, they were trying to attract domestic tourists, as almost everywhere in the world movement between countries was forbidden. Certain countries provided incentive vouchers, which would be used to obtain a certain discount on accommodation or on one of the services provided. In this way, some destinations in Serbia have increased the number of tourists in 2020, compared to 2019, primarily due to domestic tourists (Bošković et al., 2020).



RESULTS OF CONDUCTED RESEARCH

The research we conducted provided us with an insight into the thoughts of young people and their attitudes regarding the visit to the Spa and Wellness Hotel during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was conducted on 110 respondents, of which 53% were male and 47% female, the largest number belonged to the age category of 25-35 years (37.5%), while there were approximately those in the category of 35-45 years (30.8), of these, 64.4% married or in a relationship, and 59.6% have children.

In these difficult times, which are very unpredictable and bring with them insecurity, there is a large number of those who had the courage to spend their vacations somewhere other than at home, as many as 69.2% of respondents traveled somewhere during the pandemic.(Table 1)

Table 1. Results to the question number 6 of the conducted research

Did you travel anywhere during the Covid-19 pandemic?	
Yes	69.2 %
No	30.8 %

Source: Authors' analysis

During the pandemic, a large number of countries introduced mandatory tests for coronavirus when entering the country. Now this testing has become a daily occurrence not only for entering certain countries but also when staying in certain hotels; when visiting various events, 49% of respondents had to be tested during their travels, and as many as 34.6% of them stayed in hotels that required a mandatory negative test during their stay in the same. At the beginning of 2021, scientists discovered vaccines against the Covid-19, a large number of people in our country used this protection option, so in some situations instead of a negative test for the coronavirus, it is enough to have a certificate of vaccination for visiting certain destinations. Although this practice has not yet been fully implemented in hotels, the respondents had the opportunity to encounter this, 33.7% of respondents during their stay had to show a certificate of vaccination to be able to stay in a particular hotel.

As a way to relax after a difficult year caused by the pandemic itself, a large number of people found visiting spa and wellness hotels; a large number of respondents visited this type of hotel, 56.7% of them found their peace right there, as they thought it was almost completely safe to visit them (75%). Spa and wellness hotels offer a variety of services, in addition to accommodation and food services, guests have at their disposal the services of a wellness center, such as swimming pools, saunas, various types of massages, gyms, salt rooms. All these services in non-pandemic conditions are the reason why guests visit this type of hotel. We tried to explore people's attitudes about using these services during the pandemic, to what extent, and in what conditions they feel completely safe to use them.(Table 2)

Table 2. Results to the question number 10 of the conducted research

Do you think it is safe to visit the Spa & Wellness Center in hotels?	
Yes	75 %
No	25 %

Source: Authors' analysis

Pool visit is probably the most visited service of Spa and Wellness hotels, depending on the size of the pool and its capacity hotel guests could use these services in a certain number, yet a large number of respondents felt completely safe to use it even though there are strangers(Highly-35.6%, Very Good- 15.4%, Good- 26%, Not at all – 16.3%).(Table 3)

**Table 3.** Results to the question number 13 of the conducted research

Do you think that the obligatory reservation of using a sauna would be a safe option when using it?	
Completely safe	44.6 %
Safe enough	26 %
Safe	18.3%
Not safe enough	1.9 %
Not safe	9.6%

Source: Authors' analysis

This also applied to the visit to the spa center during the stay at the hotel, although saunas are provided for a small number of people, this number still had to be revised in accordance with the protection and prevention measures of COVID-19, most respondents thought it was completely safe to use this type of service in the company of an unknown person, 61.5% of them, but, still, 44.2% believe that the reservation of this service would further improve the security of its use.

The service that is most used when visiting a spa and wellness hotel, apart from the spa center, is definitely the swimming pool. In most of these hotels, the space where the pool is located is a large space intended for a larger number of people, however, during such extraordinary circumstances, it is necessary to take into account the number of people who use this space, as well as whether they are completely safe. A large number of respondents; however, believe that it is completely safe to use the pools, although before that the hotel did not conduct additional tests on COVID-19 or ask for a vaccination certificate. 35.6% of them think that it is completely safe, 15.4% think that it is safe enough, 26% of respondents think that it is safe, 6.7% think that it is not safe enough, while 1.3% of them think that this way of using services is totally unsafe.(Table 4)

Table 4. Results to the question number 14 of the conducted research

Do you think it is safe to swim in the same pools with other hotel guests, if the hotel has not conducted mandatory testing or asked for a negative test upon arrival at the hotel or a vaccination certificate?	
Completely safe	35.6 %
Safe enough	15.4 %
Safe	26 %
Not safe enough	6.7 %
Not safe	16.3 %

Source: Authors' analysis

In addition to the sauna and pool service, spa and wellness hotels have many other services that complement their facilities, respondents are of the opinion that they would use other services besides these, 88 respondents would use other services, while 16 would not use other services that hotels have in their offer.(Table 5)

Table 5. Results to the question number 16 of the conducted research

What additional services of Spa & Wellness centers would you use?	
Massages	51.6 %
Jacuzzi	16.3 %
Salt rooms	15.4 %
Gym	16.3 %

Source: Authors' analysis



In the hotel rooms, hotel guests have at their disposal personal hygiene products that they receive when using the accommodation services, mainly towels, bathrobes, disposable slippers, disposable toothbrushes. Under normal, non-pandemic conditions, guests are happy to use this type of product when staying in hotels because it makes them feel at home, they feel relaxed, but it also allows them to pack easily without carrying a large number of things that are heavy and bulky. (Table 6) However, we can conclude that most of the respondents have nothing against the use of personal hygiene products that they receive for use during their stay in the hotel. 82.7% of them think that it is completely safe to use these things, while only 17.3% consider this use unsafe and are not ready for something like this.

Table 6. Results to the question number 17 of the conducted research

During your stay at the hotel, would you use the personal hygiene products that the hotel gives to its guests for use (towels / bathrobes)?	
Yes	75 %
No	25 %

Source: Authors' analysis

During the last year and a half, during the pandemic caused by Covid-19, people were forced to pay more attention to safety. In order to primarily preserve their health, but also the health of their loved ones, they had to worry more about safety and not take unnecessary risks. Hotels had to comply with a large number of health and safety measures in order to be allowed to have guests, and that they can use all the services that spa and wellness hotels have to offer. However, those who decided to travel and visit this type of hotel during this period believe that the conditions in terms of safety and health have been largely met. (Table 7) Most of the respondents felt completely safe during their stay in these hotels, as well as using their services, believing that all the necessary measures to preserve the health and ensure the safe stay of guests were respected. (Table 8)

Table 7. Results to the question number 18 of the conducted research

How safe did you feel during your stay at the hotel during the pandemic?	
Completely safe	48.1 %
Safe enough	23.1 %
Safe	19.2 %
Not safe enough	2.9 %
Not safe	6.7 %

Source: Authors' analysis

Table 8. Results to the question number 20 of the conducted research

To what extent are you satisfied with the service of the hotel staff, in terms of safety and security, during your stay?	
Completely safe	51 %
Safe enough	21.2 %
Safe	20.2 %
Not safe enough	1.9 %
Not safe	5.8 %

Source: Authors' analysis



DISCUSSION

The research we conducted led us to the results we did not fully expect. The troubles caused by the Covid-19 pandemic have led to great fear among people, and in the past year and a half, we have had to adhere to limitations that most people have almost never encountered.

The assumptions we had before the research were that people are still in great fear for their health and that they do not get involved so easily and decide to travel. However, the results were completely different. A large number of young people think that their immune system is stronger and they can pass COVID-19 disease with mild symptoms and recover faster, they felt free and safe enough to be able to travel without fear of endangering people from their close environment. The invention of the vaccine has greatly helped young people to move more freely and regain the need to travel as before the pandemic. Most of the respondents felt completely free to visit spa and wellness hotels and use the services they offer for relaxation and refreshment. The hotels they visited fully complied with the protection measures in place at the time to make guests feel as safe and secure as possible during their stay. Hotel guests were willing to fully enjoy the services provided, as long as the measures were complied with, and according to their responses, all measures were fully complied to provide the safest way to visit.

However, the research itself had some limitations that were not possible to overcome at this time. Primarily, it would be ideal if the conducted survey was filled out by a larger number of respondents, in order to have an insight into a larger group of people spread over a wider area. It would be ideal if some of the spa and wellness hotels could be involved in the survey, so as to gather the necessary data in the best possible way and give us a better picture of young people's current attitudes about visiting spa and wellness hotels during the Covid-19 pandemic.

CONCLUSION

The news that the virus was transmitted from China to Italy in February 2021 brought significant concern to the entire tourism sector, which turned out to be completely justified. As the virus spread extremely fast all over the world and across the economies of European countries that have traditionally relied on tourism, extremely negative indicators were recorded on tourism. In the following months, tourism in the whole world almost completely disappeared, it was almost impossible to travel anywhere outside their city as restrictions on movement were in force everywhere. People lived for months in fear of an unusual new virus for which there was not a cure, and a large number of people finally lost the battle with this serious disease.

Most people did not have the opportunity to travel for a long period of time, as travelling was forbidden or they had to go through certain types of quarantine or testing to be free to move around. When security measures were eased a bit, and the epidemic itself was somehow brought under control by the discovery of vaccine in January 2021, people dared and were ready to travel and get out of their comfort zone.

Although traveling was not completely safe, but by taking certain safety measures and taking certain steps, people felt free enough to engage in something like this. Although spa and wellness tourism has experienced a real expansion in recent years, as people have increasingly looked for an escape from everyday life, the stress they have experienced in the past few months has been enormous, and many people have sought solace in such hotels. What these hotels have to offer to their guests is peace, quiet, relaxation, a way to get away from the hectic life of living in cities, to enjoy nature, fresh air, to recover from the accumulated stress and rest from all the stresses they have experienced lately.



REFERENCES

- Bošković, N., Despotović D., Ristić L. (2020). Negativan uticaj pandemije COVID-19 na međunarodni turizam, *ECOLOGICA*, Vol. 28, No 102 (2021), 271-276, Retrieved on June 18, 2020, from <https://doi.org/10.18485/ecologica.2021.28.102.19>
- European Council. (2020). Joint European Roadmap towards lifting COVID-19 containment measures. Fan, Y. Y., Jamison, D. T., & Summers, L. H. (2018). Pandemic risk: how large are the expected losses? *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 96(2), 129–134
- Foundation Bilbilis. (2020). Project Inhalational and hydroponic therapies with sulphurous mineral-medicinal waters and respiratory physiotherapeutic intervention against the coronavirus Covid19. Reference 2020/0345. Retrieved 17 August 2021 from : www.fundacionbilbilis.es/pdf/proy-covid19-bilbilis-isci-ii-2020.pdf
- Freire Magarinos A. (2020). Utilidades preventivas y terapéuticas de la terapia termal respiratoria, riesgos y beneficios. Webinar – Termatalia. Retrieved 17 August 2021 from <https://galatermal.es/webinar-utilidades-preventivas-y-terapeuticas-de-la-terapia-termal-respiratoria-riesgos-y-beneficios/>
- IATA. (2020). Restarting aviation following COVID-19 - Medical evidence for various strategies being discussed at 09 June 2020 IATA Medical Advisory Group. Retrieved on June 18, 2020, from IATA web site www.iata.org
- Jović Bogdanović A., Pajić S., Janković M. (2020). UTICAJ PANDEMIJE COVID -19 NA TURIZAM U EVROPI, Volumen 2 , 247-260
- Luković, S., Stojković, D. (2020). Covid-19 pandemic and global tourism – Hotel and Tourism Management, Vol. 8, No. 2, 79-88, Retrieved on June 18, 2020, from <https://scindeks.ceon.rs/article.aspx?artid=2620-02792002079L>
- Mohan, D. & Lamba, S. M. (2021). HVS Monday Musings: Wellness Tourism Will Flourish in the Post COVID era. Retrieved 15 August 2021 from <https://www.hospitalitynet.org/opinion/4102574.html>.
- OECD. (2020). Tourism Policy Responses to the coronavirus (COVID-19). Retrieved on June 17, 2020, from OECD web site www.oecd.org/coronavirus
- Tran, K. U. W. (2021). WELLNESS TRAVEL MOTIVATION POST COVID-19 Case Vietnam, Bachelor Thesis, Lapland University of Applied Sciences, Rovaniemi
- United Nations World Tourism Organization. (2020). United Nations World Tourism Organization- World Tourism Barometer - May 2020 Special focus on the Impact of COVID-19. Retrieved on July 17 2021 from <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/book/10.18111/9789284421111>. The impact of Covid-19
- World Health Organization (2021). Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Vaccines safety- Retrieved on July 18 2021 from [https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-\(covid-19\)-vaccines-safety](https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-vaccines-safety)
- World Health Organization (2020). Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Vaccine research and development, Retrieved on July 18 2021 from [https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-\(covid-19\)-vaccine-research-and-development](https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-vaccine-research-and-development)