WHY DO PEOPLE TRAVEL TO INLAND WATER RESORTS AND HOW DO THEY SELECT THEIR DESTINATION? DO AGE AND TRAVEL COMPANIONSHIP MATTER?

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Abstract: *This study explores the demographic profile, motivations, and preferences of visitors to Băile Figa, an inland water resort in Northwestern Romania. Data were collected using a convenience sampling method. The 200 questionnaires gathered were subsequently processed and analyzed using SPSS 26, a statistical software designed for social sciences. The majority of respondents were male, under 45 years old, with lower education levels and incomes. Most were repeat visitors, staying for at least two days and spending over 100 lei daily, primarily traveling by car with family or friends. The study found that key motivations for visiting included relaxation, swimming, sunbathing, and socializing, while medical treatment and boredom were cited less frequently. The resort's freshwater pools, affordable entry fees, and natural surroundings were identified as the most appealing features, whereas proximity to home and therapeutic facilities had a lesser influence on visitors' decisions. Băile Figa attracts a diverse audience, but motivations vary significantly by age and travel group: younger visitors (aged 18–29) prioritized socializing with friends, while older visitors were more motivated by health benefits, therapeutic facilities, and proximity to home. Family travelers valued the resort's scenic environment and therapeutic offerings, whereas those traveling with friends showed less interest in these aspects. These findings underscore the importance of tailoring marketing strategies to different demographic segments. For younger visitors, campaigns should emphasize leisure and affordability, while for older and family-oriented tourists, the focus should be on health benefits and therapeutic offerings. By addressing the distinct preferences of each group, Băile Figa can enhance its appeal and better meet the needs of its diverse visitor base.*

Keywords: *tourism motivation; inland water resort; push and pull motivation factors.*

JEL Classification: *Z32.*

1. Introduction

Water has historically been a significant draw for tourists. Two millennia ago, Roman baths not only catered to local residents but also drew visitors from beyond the town. Water was valued for its aesthetic, physical, and spiritual appeal, and water-based activities were considered an integral part of Roman life (Jennings, 2007). By the late Middle Ages, spa towns emerged as popular destinations for the upper classes, and by the late 18th century in England, they began to attract the lower-middle class as well (Jennings, 2007). In the latter half of the 20th century and the early 21st century, the demand for water-based experiences surged, particularly in more developed Western nations grappling with the impacts of urban and industrial pollution (Jennings, 2007).

Although water is increasingly central to many tourism and leisure activities, the topic of water-based experiences in tourism has received limited attention so far (Sánchez-Martín et al., 2020). The majority of existing research focuses on water tourism in coastal areas, while publications on inland water resorts remain scarce. However, this trend is gradually shifting, as recent years have seen a growing interest in developing tourism connected to water in inland regions (Sánchez- Martín et al., 2020).

Water-based tourism encompasses any tourist activity that takes place in or is connected to water resources (Jennings, 2007:10). In the context of inland water tourism, this excludes activities and experiences along coastal areas of oceans and seas but includes all other continental water resources such as rivers, lakes, springs, thermal waters, and similar.

Research has highlighted the significant importance of water-based tourism in inland areas (Sánchez-Martín et al., 2020), as it can enhance quality of life, satisfaction, and loyalty toward both the experience and the destination (Folgado-Fernández et al., 2019; Jennings, 2007). Overall, the natural attraction humans feel toward water resources (Sánchez-Rivero et al., 2020) could prove to be a crucial factor in the development of inland rural areas (Răcăşan & Egresi, 2019; Răcăşan et al., 2016).

Until recently, the majority of studies on inland water tourism were conducted in more developed Western countries. However, over the past decade, a growing body of literature has begun to emerge from developing nations (Ogunjinmi & Binuyo, 2018; Kazembe et al., 2015) as well as emerging economies (Jin et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2017).

To our knowledge, there has been no study conducted on inland water resorts in Romania to date. Additionally, there is a notable lack of research that provides insights into the profile of tourists visiting these destinations (Sánchez-Martín et al., 2020), and no published studies have explored the motivations behind people's visits to inland water resorts. Understanding tourist motivation is crucial for effective tourism destination management and marketing (Pesonen & Komppula, 2010), as it helps identify the needs and desires of travelers (Crompton & McKay, 1997). By uncovering what drives tourists to visit a destination, marketers and planners can tailor their offerings to meet those specific needs and preferences (Murphy et al., 2000), thereby enhancing the destination's competitiveness (Oh et al., 1995). This, in turn, positively influences tourist satisfaction (Navrátil et al., 2010) and

encourages repeat visits and word-of-mouth recommendations (Crompton & McKay, 1997).

The primary goal of this study is to explore the motivations behind people's decisions to travel to inland water resorts and to examine the reasons they choose Băile Figa as their vacation destination. A second objective is to examine whether age and the type of companionship have an impact on tourist motivation.

Băile Figa (The Figa Spa Complex) was inaugurated in 2010, funded by the European Union's PHARE program (Beclean Townhall, n.d.). Nestled in a forested depression just 3 km from the town of Beclean in Bistrița-Năsăud County, Northwestern Romania, the resort spans 15 hectares. Designed as a health and relaxation oasis, Băile Figa features saltwater and mud with therapeutic properties similar to those found in Techirghiol. The air is infused with salt aerosols, creating a beneficial saline effect. A rustic wooden area, complete with benches and salt blocks, provides a serene space for mud treatments, known to help alleviate various health conditions (Beclean Townhall, n.d.).

One of the resort's most popular attractions is its large freshwater pool. Opened at the start of the 2014 summer season, the pool is heated to 31-32°C, making it accessible to visitors even during cooler weather. This facility complements the resort's other amenities, catering to the increasing number of tourists, particularly on weekends and holidays. In 2012, a small Aqualand was inaugurated, and in 2020, a giant slide was added to enhance the visitor experience. Additionally, children can enjoy a spacious playground within the park. The resort's beautifully landscaped grounds, featuring grass, flowers, stones, and rustic decorations, create a charming and vibrant atmosphere (Beclean Townhall, n.d.).

Despite being a relatively recent addition to Romania's tourism offerings, Băile Figa has proven to be highly successful. In its first decade of operation, the complex welcomed over 1.5 million visitors from across the country. Today, it continues to attract hundreds of thousands of tourists annually, solidifying its reputation as a premier destination for relaxation and wellness. In 2021, Băile Figa was officially recognized as a tourist resort of local interest, further cementing its status as a must-visit location (Beclean Townhall, n.d.).

The paper is structured as follows: following a comprehensive review of existing literature, we will outline the methodology used for data collection and analysis. Subsequently, we will present our findings. In the final section, we will summarize the key findings, discuss their implications, highlight practical applications, and acknowledge the study's limitations.

2. Literature review

Motives are generally understood as the internal factors that arouse, direct, and integrate a person's behavior to achieve potential satisfaction (Iso-Ahola, 1982: 257; Chang, 2007). Simply put, motives are the forces that drive a person to travel (Pearce, 2005). Furthermore, motives influence destination choice (Josiam et al., 1999), shape tourist behavior (McKercher et al., 2021), and determine the activities they engage in at the destination (Mehmetoglu & Normann, 2013).

Most studies analyzed tourism motivation through the framework of "push" and "pull" factors, as introduced by Dann (1977). Push factors refer to the internal, socio-psychological drivers and conditions within tourists' home environments that inspire them to travel. In contrast, pull factors are the external attributes of a destination that draw tourists to it after they have decided to embark on a journey (Dann, 1977). The significance of "push" and "pull" factors in shaping tourist motivations was further highlighted by Crompton (1979) and has since been supported by numerous studies (e.g., Cha et al., 1995; Fodness, 1994; Ritchie et al., 2010, among others). For example, in a study conducted on tourists visiting Barbados, Dann (1977) identified two primary categories of "push" motivations: anomie and ego-enhancement. Anomie reflects the urge to overcome the sense of isolation experienced in daily life and to "get away from it all." In contrast, ego- enhancement stems from the need for recognition and status, which travel can provide. This motivation involves fulfilling personal desires, such as exploring new destinations or achieving a sense of accomplishment through travel. Another early investigation into tourism motivation by Crompton (1979) highlighted nine key motives: escape, exploration, relaxation, prestige, regression, strengthening family bonds, fostering social connections, seeking novelty, and pursuing educational experiences. The table below outlines the key push and pulls motivations for tourism, as identified in the literature (Table 1). It seems that many researchers emphasize push factors while downplaying the significance of pull factors, even though the latter play a crucial role in influencing an individual's decision to travel to a specific destination (Chang, 2007).

Table 1: Push and pull motivations in the literature

Push motivation	Study	Pull motivation	Study
Desire to escape	Chiricheş & Egresi, 2024; Dolnicar & Leisch, 2003; Frochot, 2005; Guillet & Kucukusta, 2016; Kassean & Gassita, 2013; Kim & Prideaux, 2005; Mak et al., 2009; Nikijoo & Ketabi, 2015; Nilsen, 2013; Park & Yoon, 2009; Pearce & Lee, 2005; Ritchie et al., 2010	Pleasant weather/climate	Carvache- Franco et al., 2020; Kassean &Gassita, 2013
Rest and relaxation	Bansal & Eiselt, 2004; Beh & Bruyere, 2007; Chiricheş & Egresi, 2024; Frochot, 2005; Guillet & Kucukusta, 2016;	Attractive (unspoiled) nature	Andreu et al., 2005; Beh & Bruyere, 2007; Carvache- Franco et al., 2020; Chan & Baum, 2007; Kassean &
	Gustavo, 2010; Joppe, 2010; Kamata & Mitsui, 2015; Kassean & Gassita, 2013; Kim & Prideaux, 2005; Mak et al., 2009; Pearce & Lee, 2005; Ritchie et al., 2010		Gassita, 2013; Park & Yoon, 2009; Pesonen et al., 2011; Yuan & McDonald, 1990
Seeking health, beauty and fitness	Gustavo, 2010; Kim & Prideaux, 2005; Mak et al., 2009; Ritchie et al., 2010	Variety of activities and events	Bal & Erdélyi, 2019; Baniya & Paudel, 2016; Carvache Franco et al., 2020; Chan & Baum, 2007; Dolnicar et al., 2008; Furr & Boon, 2006; Hu & Wu, 2007; Pesonen et al., 2011
Social interaction (including family and friends' togetherness)	Chiricheş & Egresi, 2024; Egresi & Kara, 2014; Kassean & Gassita, 2013; Kim & Prideaux, 2005; Nilsen,2013; Pearce & Lee, 2005; Ritchie et al., 2010	Accessibility	Bal & Erdélyi, 2019; Duong et al., 2023; Nikijoo & Ketabi, 2015; Pesonen et al., 2011; Yuan & McDonald, 1990
Self-development/ self-reward/Prestige	Kim & Prideaux, 2005; Mak et al., 2009; Nikijoo & Ketabi, 2015; Pearce & Lee, 2005; Ritchie et al., 2010	Affordability	Bal & Erdélyi, 2019; Egresi & Kara, 2014; Pesonen et al., 2011); Yuan & McDonald, 1990
Adventure	Kim & Prideaux, 2005	Facilities	Bal & Erdélyi, 2019; Pesonen et al., 2011; Yuan & McDonald, 1990

Source: Compiled by the authors

Tourists travel for different reasons (Bieger & Laesser, 2002) and may place varying levels of importance on the factors influencing their decision to travel (Yuan & McDonald, 1990). Motivation can differ based on geographic origin (Reid & Reid, 1997), expenditure (Mok & Iverson, 2000), demographics (Moscardo et al., 1996; Fan et al., 2015; Aziz et al., 2018), and travel characteristics (Aziz et al., 2018). Previous studies have shown that various demographic characteristics may influence why people travel (Moscardo et al., 1996; Aziz et al., 2018; Egresi, 2017).

In this research, we focus on how age influences tourism motivation and destination choice. The literature, however, is inconclusive on this matter. Some studies suggest that age is not a significant factor in differentiating travel motives (Andreu et al., 2005), while others indicate that age can be an important discriminant in tourism motivation studies (Ma et al., 2018; Irimiás et al., 2016; Park & Mok, 1998; Mohsin, 2008; Aziz et al., 2018).

Research has highlighted that younger travelers tend to be more interested in physically demanding activities (Jönsson & Devonish, 2008; Spence, 2002), whereas older tourists are more likely to seek relaxing activities and nature exploration (Ma et al., 2018). Older travelers are also more novelty-driven (Jönsson & Devonish, 2008) and are often motivated by a desire to learn, more so than younger tourists (Fleischer & Pizam, 2002; Horneman et al., 2002; Irimiás et al., 2016; Jang & Wu, 2006; Jönsson & Devonish, 2008). Additionally, older tourists are more inclined to travel for socialization and cultural experiences (Jönsson & Devonish, 2008).

When examining inland water tourism specifically, some researchers argue that most water tourism participants are young (under 35 years old) (Sánchez-Rivero et al., 2020), while others contend that water-motivated tourists tend to be older (over 55 years of age) (Folgado-Fernández et al., 2019).

Furthermore, previous studies have found that different tourist groups exhibit distinct motivational attributes (Hall et al., 2016; Sánchez-Rivero et al., 2020). For instance, Sánchez-Rivero et al. (2020) found that most people travel to inland water resorts as couples or with family. Jamrozy and Uysal (1994) observed that German overseas travelers display variations in push motivations depending on their travel companions. The study determined that those traveling alone or with friends were motivated by "novelty," "experience," and "adventure," whereas family groups were driven by "luxury" and the desire to "do nothing.".

3. Methodology

Data were collected using a convenience sampling method. In the end, 200 questionnaires were collected and further processed using the SPSS 26 statistical software for social sciences. We applied descriptive statistical methods to examine the socio-demographic profile of our sample, their travel behavior, and their motivations for visiting an inland water resort, including their reasons for selecting Băile Figa. Additionally, we used the Kruskal-Wallis H Test to assess whether there were statistically significant differences in motivation based on age and travel group categories.

4. Findings

4.1. Socio-demographic and traveling characteristics of our respondents

There were more male (54%) than female respondents. Approximately two-thirds were under the age of 45 and had a lower level of education (high school or less). Additionally, the majority had lower incomes, with over 75% earning less than 2,500 lei (the equivalent of 500 euros) and only 9% earning more than 3,500 lei (approximately 700 euros) (table 2). A quarter of the respondents were visiting Băile Figa for the first time, while the majority were frequent visitors. Most stayed for at least two days and spent more than 100 lei (20 euros) per day. The vast majority traveled by car with family and/or friends. Finally, our study revealed that word-of-mouth may be the most effective marketing tool for the resort, with more than three-quarters of respondents having learned about Băile Figa through this method (table 3).

Table 2: Socio-demographic characteristics of our respondents

Attribute	%	Attribute	%
Gender (n= 200)		**Education** (n= 200)	
Male	54.0	High School and less	65.0
Female	46.0	University and more	35.0
Age (n= 200)		**Income** (n= 200)	
18-29 years	38.0	Up to 1499 lei	33.5
30-44 years	29.0	1500-2499 lei	42.0
45-59 years	23.5	2500-3499 lei	15.5
60+ years	9.5	3500+ lei	9.0

Source: Resulted from the study

Table 3: Traveling characteristics of our respondents

Attribute	%	Attribute	%
How many times have you been in BF in the past? (n= 200)		**How long do you usually stay/intend to stay in BF (n= 200)**	
Never	25.5	One day	43.5
Once	18.0	Two days	37.0
2-5 times	34.0	Three days or longer	19.5
6 times or more	20.5		
How did you hear about BF? (n= 200)		**Who did you come with? (n= 200)**	
Word-of-mouth	74.5	Alone or with my partner	24.5
Mass media	25.5	With family	47.5
		With friends	28.0
How did you get to BF? (n= 200)		**How much money do you intend to spend per day? (n= 200)**	
By car	83.0	Less than 100 lei	44.5
Bu other means (train, bus, etc.)	17.0	100 lei and more	55.5

Source: Resulted from the study

4.2. Motivation to vacation in an inland water resort

Our study shows that nearly all potential motives included in our survey were considered important. Most people visit inland water resorts to swim, sunbathe, socialize with friends, and spend time with family. However, the primary reason for visiting such a resort is to rest (table 4). Very few respondents chose to visit a water resort for medical treatment or because they were bored at home (table 4).

Table 4: Motivation to vacation in an inland water resort

Motivation to vacation in an inland water resort	Totally disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Not sure (%)	Agree (%)	Totally agree (%)	Mean	Median	IQR
Spend more time with family	18.5	3.5	12.0	19.0	47.0	3.73	4.00	2
Socialize with friends	6.0	6.5	16.0	29.0	42.5	3.96	4.00	2
Escape everyday life (routine)	8.5	7.0	18.0	27.5	39.0	3.82	4.00	2
Rest	4.0	6.5	15.5	25.5	48.5	**4.08**	**4.00**	**2**
Out of boredom	25.0	14.5	22.5	16.0	22.0	2.96	3.00	3
For medical treatment	34.5	12.5	16.0	12.0	25.0	*2.81*	*3.00*	*4*
Sunbathe on the beach	5.0	7.5	22.0	21.0	44.5	3.93	4.00	2
Swim	7.0	7.0	15.5	24.5	46.0	3.96	4.00	2

Source: Resulted from the study

4.3. Motivation to choose Băile Figa for the vacation

The table below shows that people choose Băile Figa for their vacation for a variety of reasons. The most important factors include the presence of pools with cold and heated freshwater, affordable entry fees, and the beautiful natural surroundings of the resort (table 5). On the other hand, very few respondents chose this resort based on a doctor's recommendation (table 5). Additionally, most respondents were uncertain about the importance of other motivators, such as the availability of treatment facilities or therapeutic mud. Proximity to home was important to only 41% of respondents (table 5).

Table 5: Motivation to choose Băile Figa for the vacation

Motivation to choose Băile Figa for the vacation	Totally disagree (%)	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Totally agree	Mean	Median	IQR
Proximity to home	18.0	12.0	29.0	18.5	22.5	3.16	3.00	2
Beauty of the environment	2.0	6.5	22.0	24.0	45.5	**4.05**	**4.00**	**2**
Therapeutic mud	23.5	11.0	21.0	13.5	31.0	3.18	3.00	3
Physical properties of the water	7.0	9.0	18.5	28.5	37.0	3.80	4.00	2
Pools with salt water	7.0	9.0	20.0	23.5	40.5	3.82	4.00	2
Pools with cold and heated freshwater	3.5	3.5	19.5	22.5	51.0	**4.14**	**5.00**	**2**
Heard about the place and was curious	11.5	12.0	21.0	23.5	32.0	3.53	4.00	2
Affordable entry fee	6.0	5.0	13.0	25.5	50.5	**4.10**	**5.00**	**1**
Recommended by my physician	53.5	5.5	12.0	11.0	18.0	2.35	1.00	3
Recommended by others	23.5	7.5	17.5	23.5	28.0	3.25	4.00	3
Facilities for treatment	26.5	10.5	22.5	17.5	23.0	3.00	3.00	3
Facilities for leisure	9.0	5.5	24.5	27.5	33.5	3.71	4.00	2
Facilities for children	25.5	7.0	17.0	17.0	33.5	3.26	4.00	4

Source: Resulted from the study

4.4. Differences in motivation among age groups

We found statistically significant differences among age groups for three push motivations. Specifically, our study shows that younger respondents (18–29 years) are the least likely to travel to Băile Figa to spend time with family (p = .000) and the most likely to socialize with friends (p = .002) (table 6). Additionally, unlike older groups, very few young people visit Băile Figa for medical treatment (p = .000). No significant differences were found among age groups for the other five motivations: escaping the routine of everyday life, resting, boredom, sunbathing on the beach, and swimming (p > .05) (table 6).

Table 6: Differences in motivation to vacation in an inland water resort among age groups

Motivation to vacation in an inland water resort	Mean ranks for age groups				Test statistic (DoF=3)	P value	Pairwise comparison**
	18-29 (N=76)	30-44 (N=58)	45-59 (N=47)	60+ (N=19)			
Spend more time with family	69.33	120.96	120.64	112.92	40.685	**.000***	18-29/60+ (p=.011) 18-29/45-59 (p=.000) 18-29/30-44 (p=.000)
Socialize with friends	119.33	91.43	85.91	88.95	14.770	**.002***	45-59/18-29 (p=.006) 30-44/18-29 (p=.021)
Escape everyday life (routine)	96.24	107.90	96.93	103.82	1.753	.625	
Rest	95.93	97.79	109.23	105.42	2.089	.554	
Out of boredom	111.30	89.72	92.35	110.39	6.433	.092	
For medical treatment	74.07	103.68	129.20	125.53	33.283	**.000***	18-29/30-44 (p=.014) 18-29/60+ (p=.002) 18-29/45-59 (p=.000)
Sunbath on the beach	93.85	102.59	106.14	106.76	1.961	.581	
Swim	103.89	98.06	97.80	101.05	.530	.912	

* Significant at 95% confidence level
** Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction
Source: Resulted from the study

In terms of pull motivations, we found that age can be considered an important discriminant. The table below shows that proximity to home is a more significant motivation for older tourists visiting Băile Figa (table 7). Similarly, all items related to Băile Figa as a destination for treatment or therapy—such as mud therapy, saltwater, and water with specific properties for medical treatment, the availability of treatment facilities, and recommendations from physicians—are more motivating for older tourists than for younger ones (table 7). Finally, the presence of facilities for children is a less important motivator for the youngest age group compared to older tourists (table 7).

Table 7: Differences in motivation to choose Băile Figa for the vacation among age groups

Motivation to choose Băile Figa for the vacation	Mean ranks for age groups				Test statistic (DoF=3)	P value	Pairwise comparison**
	18-29 (N=76)	30-44 (N=58)	45-59 (N=47)	60+ (N=19)			
Proximity to home	85.03	104.01	114.76	116.34	10.451	**.015***	18-29/45-59 (p=.027)
Beauty of the environment	90.09	101.53	115.80	101.16	6.543	.088	
Therapeutic mud	75.43	105.43	123.76	128.18	28.182	**.000***	18-29/30-44 (p=.013) 18-29/45-59 (p=.000) 18-29/60+ (p=.002)
Physical properties of the water	87.28	94.99	115.35	133.45	14.954	**.002***	18-29/45-59 (p=.038) 18-29/60+ (p=.007)
Pools with salt water	85.60	103.05	109.39	130.32	12.399	**.006***	18-29/60+ (p=.010)
Pools with cold and heated freshwater	99.76	103.90	98.30	98.55	.356	.949	
Heard about the place and was curious	97.39	94.46	109.59	108.89	2.558	.465	
Affordable entry fee	95.35	98.70	107.64	108.95	2.086	.555	
Recommended by my physician	88.57	96.38	117.63	118.39	11.279	**.010***	
Recommended by others	97.28	100.44	114.98	77.74	6.462	.092	
Facilities for treatment	84.39	104.51	120.69	102.76	12.526	**.006***	18-29/45-59 (p=.003)
Facilities for leisure	90.06	105.59	107.52	109.37	4.383	.223	
Facilities for children	81.46	111.29	107.72	125.84	15.620	**.001***	18-29/30-44 (p=.013) 18-29/60+ (p=.012)

* Significant at 95% confidence level
** Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction
Source: Resulted from the study

4.5. Differences in motivation among travel groups

The more interesting finding is that those who travel with their family are more likely to be motivated to vacation at an inland water resort for medical treatment compared to those who travel with friends (table 8). The other two items with statistically significant differences between groups are more obvious and expected, requiring no further discussion.

Table 8: Differences in motivation to vacation in an inland water resort among travel groups

Motivation to vacation in an inland water resort	Mean ranks for travel companions			Test statistic (DoF=2)	P value	Pairwise comparison**
	Alone or couple (N=49)	*With family (N=95)*	*With friends (N=56)*			
Spend more time with family	80.01	130.04	68.32	54.685	**.000***	friends/family (p=.000) Alone/family (p=.000)
Socialize with friends	93.81	89.46	125.08	15.890	**.000***	Family/friends (p=.000) Alone/friends (p=.010)
Escape everyday life (routine)	111.46	99.17	93.16	2.965	.227	
Rest	107.29	102.84	90.59	2.856	.240	
Out of boredom	108.45	90.91	109.81	5.215	.074	
For medical treatment	95.78	114.26	81.29	12.687	**.002***	Friends/family (p=.001)
Sunbath on the beach	106.66	100.98	94.29	1.353	.508	
Swim	105.34	95.05	105.52	1.818	.403	

* Significant at 95% confidence level
** Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction
Source: Resulted from the study

Travelers who visit Băile Figa with friends are the least likely to choose the resort due to its proximity to their homes (table 9). They also show the least interest in Băile Figa for reasons such as the beauty of its environment, the health benefits and facilities it offers, and the availability of amenities for children (table 9). On the other hand, those who travel with their families are the most inclined to select Băile Figa as their vacation destination for the resort's scenic surroundings, the therapeutic

properties of its water, the variety of pools (including saltwater, cold freshwater, and heated freshwater options), and the leisure facilities available (table 9).

Table 9: Differences in motivation to choose Băile Figa for the vacation among travel groups

Motivation to choose Băile Figa for the vacation	Mean ranks for travel companions			Test statistic (DoF=2)	P value	Pairwise comparison**
	Alone or couple (N=49)	*With family (N=95)*	*With friends (N=56)*			
Proximity to home	107.38	109.45	79.29	11.029	**.004***	Friends/alone (p=.033) Friends/family (p=.005)
Beauty of the environment	96.72	110.86	86.22	7.560	**.023***	Friends/family (p=.021)
Therapeutic mud	106.65	114.45	71.45	21.378	**.000***	Friends/alone (p=.004) Friends/family (p=.000)
Physical properties of the water	92.51	112.14	87.75	8.153	**.017***	Friends/family (p=.027)
Pools with salt water	97.61	110.59	85.91	7.204	**.027***	Friends/family (p=.024)
Pools with cold and heated freshwater	92.62	112.45	87.12	9.374	**.009***	Friends/family (p=.014)
Heard about the place and was curious	96.10	105.88	95.21	1.669	.434	
Affordable entry fee	92.16	103.62	102.50	1.596	.450	
Recommended by my physician	112.17	107.21	78.21	13.200	**.001***	Friends/family (p=.005) Friends/alone (p=.004)
Recommended by others	98.32	105.86	93.31	1.848	.397	
Facilities for treatment	111.92	106.52	80.29	10.259	**.006***	Friends/family (p=.017) Friends/alone (p=.013)
Facilities for leisure	95.77	110.58	87.54	6.495	**.039***	Friends/family (p=.042)
Facilities for children	107.45	115.06	69.72	24.100	**.000***	Friends/alone (p=.002) Friends/family (p=.000)

* Significant at 95% confidence level
** Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction
Source: Resulted from the study

5. Discussion of results and conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the motivations behind individuals' decisions to visit inland water resorts, with a specific focus on understanding why they chose Băile Figa as their vacation destination. Key motivations for visiting included relaxation, swimming, sunbathing, and socializing, while medical treatment and boredom were cited less frequently. The resort's freshwater pools, affordable entry fees, and natural surroundings were identified as the most attractive features, whereas proximity to home and therapeutic facilities had a lesser influence on visitors' decisions.

From a theoretical perspective, our findings highlight that age and companionship significantly influence travel motivations and destination selection. Younger visitors (aged 18–29) prioritized socializing with friends, while older visitors were more motivated by health benefits, therapeutic facilities, and proximity to home. Family travelers valued the resort's scenic environment and therapeutic offerings, whereas those traveling with friends showed less interest in these aspects.

Our results also carry important implications for destination management and marketing. We found that the majority of Băile Figa's visitors are young, less educated, and have lower incomes. Marketing campaigns should therefore target these demographics, emphasizing leisure and affordability for younger visitors and health benefits for older and family-oriented tourists.

Additionally, the study revealed that most visitors stay for only 1-2 days, suggesting that Băile Figa is not their primary vacation destination but rather a short-term getaway. This raises important questions for resort managers: Why do tourists not extend their stays? Is it due to a lack of adequate accommodation or limited activities at the destination?

Another noteworthy finding is that over 75% of respondents learned about Băile Figa through word-of-mouth, underscoring the effectiveness of this organic marketing tool. These insights emphasize the need for tailored marketing strategies and potential improvements in infrastructure and activities to enhance visitor experiences and encourage longer stays.

The primary limitation of this study lies in the relatively small number of questionnaires collected, which was a result of budget constraints. Additionally, the sample population is not fully representative of the broader population visiting Băile Figa. This lack of representativity stems from the absence of prior information on the demographic profile of visitors to the resort, which made it challenging to construct a representative sample. Despite these limitations, they do not diminish the value of this study. Instead, this research serves as a foundational starting point for future investigations into the motivations behind visiting inland water resorts.

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