

UDC 338.48

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THE CURRENT STATE AND PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN AUSTRIA

Until 2019, tourism in Austria was a success story with 46.2 million guests and 152.7 million overnight stays. But the COVID-19 pandemic was a disaster for tourism and almost brought it to a standstill – due to corona-related closures of restaurants and hotels, leisure and cultural establishments, international travel restrictions and quarantine regulations, Austrian tourism suffered dramatic losses.

Since 2022, but especially in 2023, tourism has made an impressive comeback. Austria has lost none of its popularity as a travel destination.

In the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021, tourism almost came to a standstill, and in 2022 the tourism and leisure industry was still faced with enormous challenges due to the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2023 was the first year without restrictions. This year, a new record number of guest arrivals (45.2 million) and the second highest volume of overnight stays to date (almost 151.2 million) after 2019 (152.7 million) were recorded. This means that demand for overnight stays was only 1% below the peak, and the 2022 result was exceeded by 10.4% [1].

In the calendar year 2023, 151.2 million overnight stays by guests were registered in Austria and all federal states recorded increases compared to the previous year. The strongest increases were in Vienna (+30.7 percent compared to the previous year), Salzburg (+11.6 percent) and Lower Austria (+11.2 percent).

Tourism in Austria is traditionally dependent on three major source markets: Germany, Austria and the Netherlands. Around two thirds of the 152.7 million overnight stays are accounted for by guests from Germany (57.4 million) and Austria (39.9 million).

According to estimates based on the tourism satellite account concept for Austria, tourism spending by domestic and foreign guests in Austria is expected to have increased by around 87 percent to 35.9 billion euros in 2022, only 5.3 percent below the pre-crisis level of 2019. The resulting direct and indirect value creation

effects amounted to 27.9 billion euros (+ 92 percent) and their contribution to GDP was 6.2 percent.

On average in 2023, 224,711 employees were employed in the accommodation and catering sector (+7,240 or +3.3 percent compared to 2022), and 30,319 (+3.4 percent compared to 2022) people were registered as unemployed [2].

So, we can see, that tourism is one of the leading sectors of the country's economy, and the prospects for its development look quite optimistic due to several key factors:

1. Alpine tourism and winter sports.

Austria is traditionally associated with winter tourism, because the country's alpine resorts are among the best in the world. Alpine skiing, snowboarding and other winter activities attract millions of tourists every year. The development of modern infrastructures, in particular the construction of new lifts, the modernization of hotels and the promotion of ecological tourism practices, contributes to the fact that this direction will continue to grow. More and more resorts also offer summer programs for recreation in the mountains – hiking, cycling, paragliding.

2. Cultural and historical tourism.

Austria is famous for its cultural heritage. Vienna, Salzburg, Innsbruck and Graz are cities that are cultural centers with a rich history and numerous architectural monuments. Such tourist attractions as Schönbrunn Palace, St. Stephen's Cathedral, Hofburg, Museum of Art History in Vienna attract millions of visitors every year. Austria will continue to develop cultural tourism, attracting visitors to numerous classical music festivals, opera performances and exhibitions, including the Salzburg Festival, which is a world center of musical culture.

3. Ecological tourism.

One of the modern trends in world tourism is environmental awareness. Austria is actively implementing the concept of sustainable tourism development, which is becoming more and more attractive for tourists interested in ecotourism. National parks, nature reserves and green areas such as Hohe Tauern National Park and the Dolomites offer tourists the opportunity to enjoy natural landscapes and active

outdoor recreation with minimal impact on the ecosystem. The development of infrastructure for cycling tourism, hiking routes and eco-friendly hotels help position Austria as a leader in eco-tourism.

4. Health and spa tourism.

Austria is known for its health resorts and spas that offer a wide range of services for relaxation and recovery. Thermal springs, medical treatments, and infrastructure for relaxation make the country popular among tourists looking for places to heal and relax. The spas in Baden-Baden, Bad Gastein, Bad Ischl and other well-known locations have excellent prospects for further development as the demand for healthy living and wellness services increases worldwide.

5. Rural tourism.

Rural tourism is becoming increasingly popular in Austria, especially among those looking for a relaxing holiday in harmony with nature. Local farms offer tourists the opportunity to participate in agricultural work, taste organic products and get acquainted with the traditional culture of the village. This is a promising direction, as tourists increasingly value authentic experiences and the opportunity to get to know local traditions and cuisine.

6. International events and conferences.

Thanks to its cultural heritage and developed infrastructure, Austria is an attractive location for holding international events, conferences and business forums. Vienna is one of the leading cities hosting international congresses and conferences. Further development of the conference industry and business tourism will have a positive impact on the country's tourism sector, as large numbers of visitors also enjoy the country's cultural and recreational opportunities.

7. Development of transport infrastructure.

The improvement of transport infrastructure is of great importance for the development of tourism. Austria has a well-developed network of rail, air and road transport, which makes the country easily accessible to tourists from all over the world. High-speed railway routes and the development of regional airports, which contribute to convenient movement between cities and regions of the country,

deserve special attention.

The prospects for the development of tourism in Austria look very promising thanks to the variety of tourist products that the country offers. Investments in the modernization of infrastructure, the development of ecological, cultural, health and winter tourism, as well as an emphasis on sustainable development make Austria one of the most attractive tourist countries in Europe. The tourism sector will continue to be an important component of the country's economy, contributing to its development and strengthening its international image.

References:

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