

## **THE IMPORTANCE AND VALUE OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN ALBANIA**

### **SUBTOPIC : WILL ALBANIA BE THE NEXT CHOSEN DESTINATION ?**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Albania, this pearl completely undiscovered by foreigners worldwide and hermetically sealed from the outside world, has stunned a large number of tourists those least years. Although the tourist season has barely ended, we still have an amazing overflow of tourists from different countries. For this scientific paper, we took the cause from a question that arises: Albania, this beautiful and unique pearl of Balkan, which is surprising the world with its splendor nature, will it be re-elected as one of the top choices of travellers as a trendy and exotic destination in 2024? As field researchers and professors, we rightly thought of drafting a study to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of mobile tourism, what must be developed and improved, and most importantly how the culture and traditional ways must be promoted by the locals and revealed as Albanians authentic gems. The purpose of the study is to bring an encouragement hand to the Albanian entrepreneurs on improving their service, conditions, prices, ethical behavior, and customary communication with the aim of not only increasing the tourist flow in the coming years, but also improve the quality of this service, leading to a better and value-added reputation of Albania.

**Key words:** *Mobile tourism, Service improvement, Price flexibility, Ethical behavior, Quality services*

#### **GENERAL INFORMATION AND PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER RESEARCH**

*Why is tourism an important element in Albania's economy?*

Albania is a country that in recent years has undergone remarkable development. Initially known as an isolated and emergent country with a modest economy, today it is returning to the eyes of tourists as a unique attraction and it is now seen by the nature lovers as a hidden paradise. Tourism in Albania has started to develop substantially over the past 20 years, with an annual growth rate of about 10–15 percent<sup>1</sup>. Originally in the eyes of the visitors, there was this inexplicable curiosity about what this nation lying between mountains, lakes, rivers, seas and lagoons could potentially have been hiding. The number of visitors has risen from a few thousand 20 years ago to 6.4 million visitors in 2019. Therefore it is important to mention that the increase has continued particularly during the post-Covid period. The Institute of Statistics of Albania has reported that in 2022 there were 7.5 million tourists from January to April, and especially this year, we have a three-fold increase, the year 2023 marked a peak in the arrivals of tourists from all over the world.

*This trend brought to our attention as researchers and academics, to examine the quantitative and qualitative indicators of Albanian tourism, and how it can become an exclusive destination of tourism among the Mediterranean countries.*

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<sup>1</sup>Albanian Report 2019, pg. 4

## INTRODUCTION

Our country has a four-dimensional geographical and tourist area: the north-eastern mountainous area, the north-western hilly area, the central coastal area extending to the Adriatic Sea and the southern central area extending to the Ionian Sea. Shkodra with stone chateau “Rozafati”, Berati with the rare beauty protected by UNESCO, the city of a thousand windows, Kruja with the sporadic attractiveness of the fortress of our national hero Skenderbeg, Petrela near Tirana with fantastic citadels, of the ancient illyrian style. The magnificent and distinctive Gjirokastra Castle, with its bastions above the city, serves as the "icing on the cake" introducing its visitors with one of the oldest cities of Albania, which still preserves today the traditional way of constructing their houses with hand-laid stones and carved wood windows and doors. Built entirely on the hillside the families still uphold a long-standing tradition whereby each house must place a tiny bench in front of their doors for people who are weary of the scaling and offer them a coffee or some water. Përmet is also a principal attraction in the region, and it is known for its food, river rafting, outdoor excursions and traditional music and celebrations. Ali Pasha Tepelena's Castle has a special style construction that honors his figure in excellence.

Distinguished by the style of stonework, which is carved by hand or with primitive tools, these wonders reveal an ancient and very mysterious culture for foreigners. Much of the tourism in Përmet and the region as a whole revolves around the Vjosa River. “The Vjosa and its tributaries are unrivalled in Europe. This river scenery requires the greatest level of natural protection because there are no other rivers like it left on the continent.” (Balkan Rivers ND). However, the natural exquisiteness of the last wild river in Europe is threatened by barrage construction plans<sup>2</sup>. In light of these natural wonders, it is important to note that we are currently doing a scientific investigation of this natural beauty in our capacity as a subject-matter experts and professors.

Summarizing some other coastal inventions, we may say that our nation combines coastal and mountainous geographical placement in the following ways:

1. The Alps of Albania merge with a fantastic beauty with Shkodra Lake, Prespa Lakes, Koman River, amidst greenery and natural forests.
2. The sandy sea shores start from Velipoja and extend to Karavasta Lagoon in Lushnje, another "pearl" among the natural coniferous plants and trees.
3. Rock seashores start from the beautiful city of Vlora, and extend to Saranda in the south of the country, another "treasure" between the rugged mountain area and natural 100-year-old pine trees.
4. It is worth mentioning the rock seashores and the antique amphitheater of Butrint, another prized "pearl" protected by UNESCO<sup>3</sup>.

## METHODOLOGY

This scientific work begins with the identification of “phenomenological” research, in which the researchers identify the “essence” of human experiences (a) concerning a phenomenon (*as in our study: increased interest, curiosity, rare natural beauty, virgin coastal areas, healthy natural food, etc*)

(b) “Lived experiences” marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method, and the procedure involves studying a small number of subject’s thorough extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationship meaning (Moustark, 1994): *As in our study: from observation, we concluded that satisfied tourists return again, but with larger groups, with more days of stay and enjoying new experiences, such as new delighting plates, trying extremes sports and discovering unknown nature spots and panoramic views.*

For example: The tour-based tourists are the highest-value market segment. About 70–80 per cent of them are between 20 and 55 years of age, coming mainly from Germany, Austria, France, the United Kingdom and Scandinavia, and to a lesser extent the United States, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. One interviewee who owns a hotel in Përmet that mostly serves guests from tour operators says that 60 per cent of its guests are German tourists, 30 per cent French and the rest English, Italian, and other, mostly European nationalities<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Towards sustainable tourism in Albania’s Vjosa River Region 10 Sector structure, pg. 10

<sup>3</sup> Dumi A. Jerm Journal Usa, Year 2020, pg. 345

<sup>4</sup> Syri Tv Publication, Albania and touristic attractions, year 2023

(c) Design and method: This paper research adopted qualitative method using interviews as an instrument for data collection. *In our study: for the period May- September 2023 we distributed 120 questionnaires, we conducted 80 interviews with tourist operators in Shkodra, Lezha, Durrës, Tirana, Vlora, Saranda and Ksamil..*

(d) Qualitative method was also used in our study's population and the sample is a target group of tourist operator, entrepreneur and vacationer. *For example, financial services, which are a supporting function, do not directly operate within the sustainable tourism value chain, but they strongly influence how tourism businesses set up, grow and operate, and how tourists access and pay for every transaction during their experience.*

*Main hypothesis:* How the development of a strategic plan on the improvement of tourism behavior and updatable economic techniques will help Albania to be a preferred destination above its neighbor's countries?

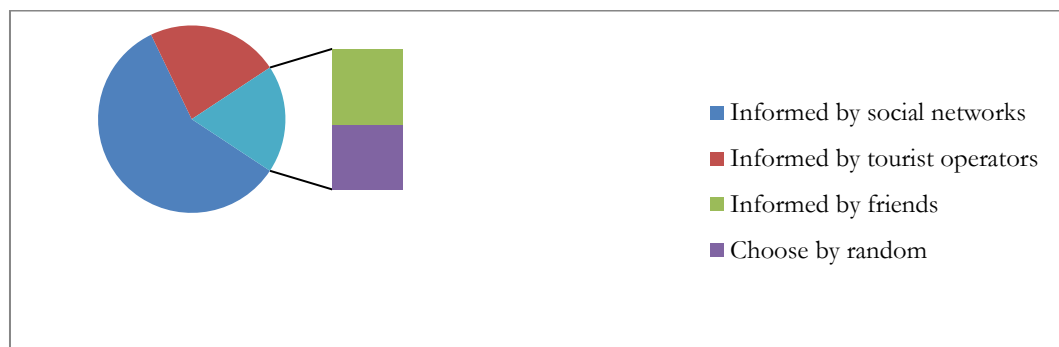
Auxiliary hypothesis 1: Does the local government have a considered strategy in place for the growth of tourism in 2024?

Auxiliary hypothesis 2: How and why we require a strategic plan that is customized to our objectives in order to enhance the quality of Albania's current tourist attractions as well as to draw in a wider spectrum of visitors, such as gastronomy tourism, aquatic and wildlife tourism, but also medical and sports tourism ?

### DATA ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY

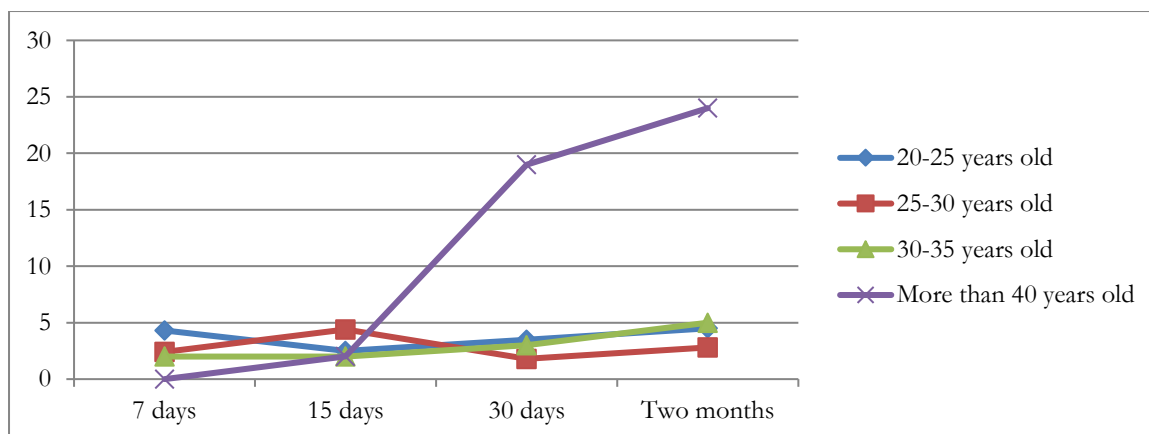
In our study analysis, we will be summarizing some questions in order to aim correct results. The first five questions are related to gender and age group. Data processing shows that 34 % of the interviewees are women, 46 % are men and 20 % are children.

1. *To the question: Are you coming to our country for the first time? 60 % answer: No, we have come more than once, 40 % answers: We are coming for the first time.*
2. *To the question: Have you been informed by social networks, tourist operators, friends, or did you choose our country by random? The answer is demonstrated below:*



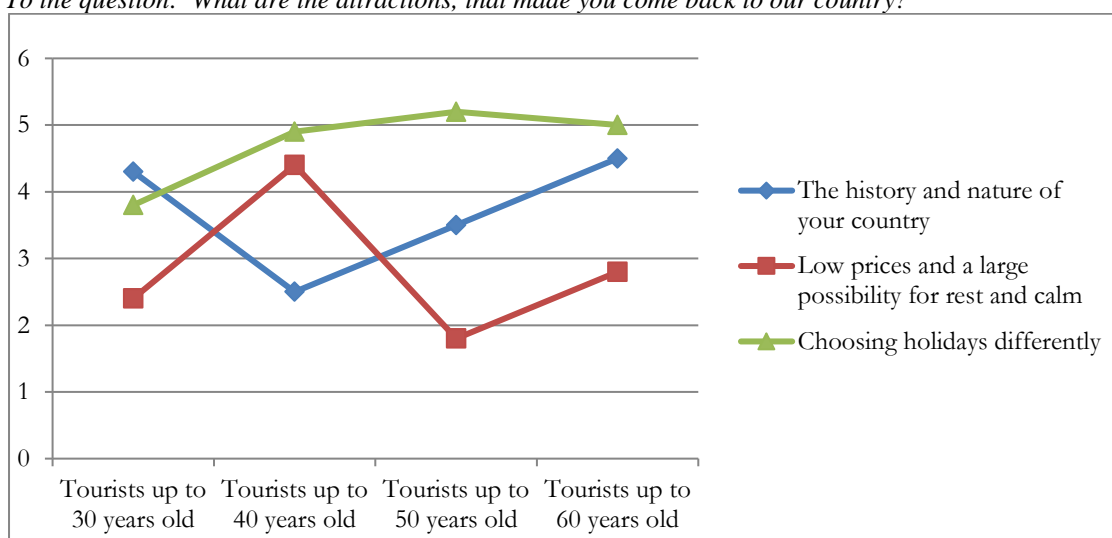
*Graph 1: The interviewees are more inclined to choose our country by showing reliability in online publications via social networks, evaluations given or evaluation systems. The largest percentage is this indicator. Refer to Chart no. 1*

3. *To the question: Have you chosen to stay in Albania for more than 15 days, 30 days, 60 days?*



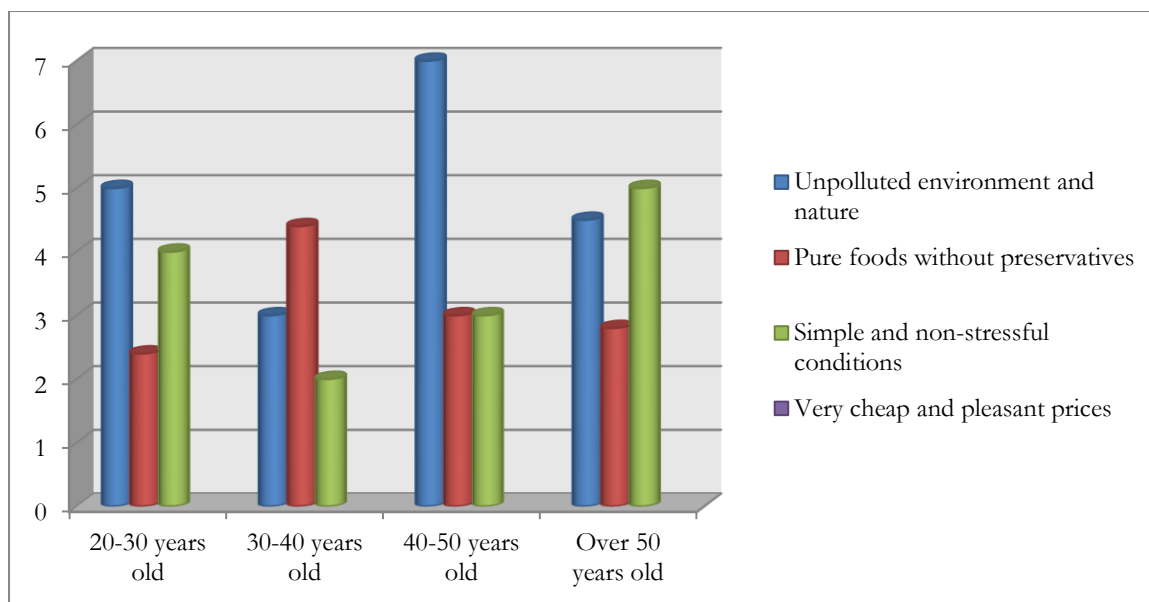
Graph 2: Referring to the chart above, we see that the age group with long-term residence is over 40 years old. This is because the need for rest and peace is greater in this age group. Another reason is that the younger age groups are more inclined to change destinations, in search of new attractions.

4. To the question: What are the attractions, that made you come back to our country?



Graph 3: Referring to the chart above, we see that our country is an interesting attraction and offers many opportunities for relaxation, food, beautiful places and opportunities for rest. About 45 % of the people who chose the tourist attraction option in the questionnaire think that it is more enjoyable to enjoy the environmental and cultural change than an "all inclusive" model. About 52 % of the people who in the questionnaire chose the option of peace and pleasant prices in the tourist vacation, they think it is more relaxing.

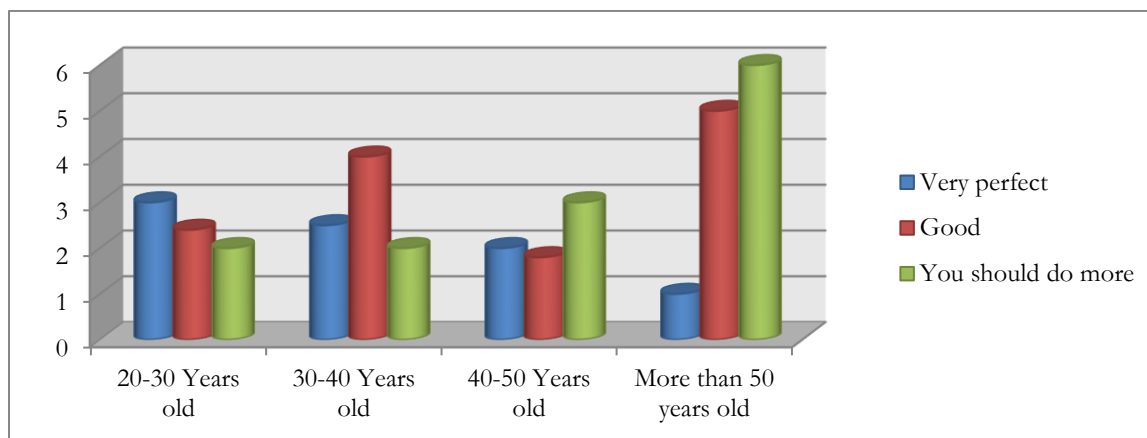
5. To the question: What are some positive advantages that make you choose our country, in contrast to Italy, Greece or Croatia?



*Graph 4: In this graph, we can observe that the natural purity of our country, free of pollution and harmful chemicals, has the highest percentage (66 % of respondents). We are, however, in the midst of a research quandary, as although many tourists find the "touristic side views" primarily clear and unaltered, they also notice that rubbish management in neighborhoods and less touristic areas requires immediate improvement.*

**Why does this opinion have the highest percentage as it is real and interesting?**

6. To the question: Do you think that the local government has properly played its role in the development of local tourism in Albania?



*Graph 5: In this graph, we see that, 37 % of respondents are very satisfied, but they think that the role of local government should be greater, 52 % of respondents think that the role of local government should be more beneficial to local entrepreneurs. From the interviews in this target groups (more than 50 years old), the reasons for giving this answer are as follows:*

1. The local government should be more present in the regional development, with the increase in the level of public cleanliness, the quality of drinking water and acoustic cleanliness and the noise of clubs and discotheques.
2. The local government should be more present in the control of prices, which in many cases are increased without cause by entrepreneurs.

3. The local government should be more present in the cleanliness of the centers of big cities.
4. The local government should be in support small and family managed business and activities for the promotion of new innovations that time demands. Those smalls business needs a better work of advertising and commercial communication as they are less known by foreigner tourists.
5. The government must help and assist the advertising of different attractions by the local television and social media.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the need to change and improve several aspects of the governance of internal and external tourism, in particular by the administration and regularization of uniform prices according to the attractiveness of the area concerned, the administration of advertising made to small traders and local businesses and the application of financial aid, this study's analysis revealed that this was a highly successful year for tourism in our nation.

Albania is a little nation with a territory of 28.748 km<sup>2</sup>, yet it has abundant natural and human resources. The weather is unique and worth highlighting because it is moderate and has more average sunny days. This benefit is provided by the location and size of the territory. This is a compelling feature that draws visitors to our nation, just like mountain and sea, valley and river, mountain tourism, and coastal tourism. This truth was reaffirmed this year, when there were almost 50 % more tourists visiting our nation than in any previous year.

There is a need to avoid being complacent, as we covered above. Nevertheless, let's begin creating a master strategy for 2024. We, as academic experts in the area, suggest the following actions to achieve this goal:

1. To ensure a better relationship of communication and coordination between local entrepreneurs and leaders in the districts.
2. To ensure greater participation of local entrepreneurs (small and medium-sized businesses, etc.) in local decision-making such as price politics.
3. It is primordial to follow other more developed western models, without of course leaving the local tradition and culture behind.
4. To work more with Albanian students and young people, towards new tourist markets such as film, festival, music and camping tourism.
5. Ultimately but most importantly we must develop our country with not only festival and short-term plans but also with profitable and long-term strategies.

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