

# TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRES -CASE STUDY- ACTIVITY OF THE TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE IN TIMIȘOARA

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**Abstract:** *Tourist activity worldwide has known a steady growth over the years due to the influence of several factors. Tourists, regardless of their nationality, want to know and admire new tourist destinations. Travel agencies offer support in choosing the place to spend the vacation or weekend. There are also specific websites, special publications and friends and relatives' experience. Once arrive in the chosen location, guests receive a "helping hand" at the front desk of their hotels and at the tourist information centers.*

*The role of information centres of tourism is particularly important in meeting tourists' needs and optimizing the flow of tourists to existing tourist sightseeing places. Timisoara is one of the largest cities in Romania that has several tourist anthropogenic resources and where various cultural and scientific events take place. Thus, the activity of the tourist information centre in this city is justified.*

**Keywords:** *tourism, tourist circulation, sightseeing, tourist information centre*

## **Introduction**

Factors that favoured the increase of tourism worldwide are varied and can be classified in terms of social economic nature:

- Economic – factors which refer to household income and its oscillation, the tourist offer, prices and tariffs;
- Social – factors related to the degree of urbanization, remunerated leaves;
- Technical – factors related technologies in construction, performance of means of transport;
- Demographic – factors referring to the evolution of population around the globe with average life changing structure by gender, age and socio-professional categories;
- Psychological, educational and civilizational – factors regarding the level of training, the thirst for knowledge, temperament, fashion;
- Political and organizational – factors aimed at border formalities, visa arrangements and facilities in organized tourism.

Tourists’ motivations are varied and depend on each individual, from the need to escape the crowded stressful urban environment to relaxation, to complete nature, to maintain or recover health, to practice sports, the need to know and get entertainment.

The number of tourists worldwide in 2015 was 1.184 billion, an increase compared to previous years (Table 1.)

Table 1 Evolution of number of tourist arrivals worldwide - millions -

Region	Year 2013-no. tourists	Year2014- no. tourists	Year 2015- no. tourists
Europa	566.8	580.3	609.1
Asia and Pacific area	249.9	264.4	277
America	167.6	181.7	190.7
Africa	54.7	54.9	53.1
Middle East	49.1	52.4	54.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1088.1</b>	<b>1133.7</b>	<b>1184</b>

Source: UNWTO World Tourism barometer, Volume 14, January, 2016

With the years in question, we may note that most tourists choose their holiday destination in Europe, as there is the possibility of practicing all forms of tourism.

The possibility of informing tourists at destination is particularly important has led to the necessity of tourist information centers.

### Tourist Information Centre

A tourist information center can be defined as an office that offers tourist information and that promotes local tourism. At an international level necessity and usefulness are appreciated.

In the U.K. there are information centers and organized as a national network. The Authority for British Tourism is represented online by Visit Britain website, and centers are run by local authorities through private organizations (local shops).

Poland is a country with rich experience in this direction. Polish tourist destinations have specialized offices to inform and promote tourism and there are tables arranged near each major tourist attraction. Volunteers ensure that things run smoothly.

In North America, these centers are located at the border of each state, usually in a parking lot along the highway and are operated by the state.

Australia has information centers in one-stop shops as information is provided by local experts.

In Romania, these centers run due to Order 1096/ 2008 that approved the Methodological Norms on Accreditation of national information centers

and tourism promotion, published in the Monitorul Oficial no. 658 dated 18 September 2008. In order to function, these centers are accredited by the National Tourism Authority, which validates them for 5 years. The validation criteria that must be met refer to:

- Location and signaling;
- Administrative and technical facilities;
- Staff and opening hours.



Fig.. 1. Sign for a tourist information centre

The staff will be trained, and will be formed of a director and at least one travel agent. Communication with guests is essential, staff must be sociable, friendly, well trained and must speak foreign languages

Services offered:

- Information about sightseeing in town and neighborhood areas, but also at a national level;
- -Information about organized cultural, scientific, sports events, etc.;
- Information about accommodation offers;
- Free brochures, tourist maps;
- Information about specialized guidance;
- Advice for tourists in choosing from existing tourism products;
- Information about authorities who can solve any complaints regarding the quality of tourist services;
- Sale of souvenirs.

The importance of such centers is obvious. They contribute to:

- Optimize the tourists' circulation towards local or national attractions;
- To sustain promotion of local and national tourism;

- To analyse tourists’ preferences;
- To identify events that positively influence the number of tourists;
- To inform potential tourists about upcoming events in real time;
- To increasing the number of tourists;
- To improve and update information material (maps, brochures, website);
- To collaborate with local, regional institutions and travel agencies to develop tourism;
- To obtain income from selling souvenirs.

### Timișoara – Tourist Information Centre

Timisoara is a city located in the west of Romania, in the south of West Plains; its coordinates are 45<sup>0</sup>44’58” north latitude and 21<sup>0</sup>13’38” East longitude. Its surface is 130.5 km, and the altitude is 89 meters above sea level. At the 2011 Census, the population recorded was 319 279 inhabitants. Timisoara is the third largest city in Romania.

The access routes to the city are road, rail and air (Traian Vuia International Airport Timisoara).

The city’s tourism resources are categorized as anthropic resources and are able to support the development of tourism.

Besides the multitude of tourist resources a series of events is organized, such as festivals, conferences, competitions, exhibitions, some traditional, annual, others occasional they all support tourism.

The accommodation offer is varied and includes hotels, hostel, villas, guest houses, motels and camping facilities. Catering outlets range from fast food outlets to restaurants and offers tourists the opportunity to satisfy their culinary desires.

Based on all the tourist offers of this city, the number of tourists arriving and staying has registered an increase annually (Table 2).

Table 2 Evolution in the number of tourists who arrived and accommodated in Timișoara

Year	No. Tourists (persons)
2010	176912
2011	210879
2012	227546
2013	224471
2014	235692

Source: [www.insse.ro](http://www.insse.ro) Tempo Online, TUR104E, updated 21.10.2015

This development shows the growing tourist interest for Timisoara and justifies the operation of a tourist information center. The Tourist Information

Center in Timisoara is located in Alba Iulia Street, number 2, in a central area, on the ground floor of an old building; the entrance is well signposted and it has a website ([www.timisoara-info.ro](http://www.timisoara-info.ro)), an e-mail and a phone number. As stipulated by the law, the center is subordinated to Timisoara City Hall. It was founded in 2003, it has two employees, one on the post of director and it is funded entirely by the City Hall. The opening hours are: in summer (May-September): Monday-Friday 9-19, Saturday 10-16; in winter (October-April): Monday-Friday 9-18, Saturday 10-15;

The staff working in this centre provides useful information on:

- Tourist attractions;
- Possibilities of accommodation;
- Catering;
- Recreational facilities;
- Urban transport;
- Museums, art galleries and cultural institutions;
- Current and annual events;
- Travel agencies;
- Consulates;
- Possibility of engaging local tour guides;
- Tourist attractions around the city.

The Timisoara Info Center offers tourists maps, bookmarks, brochures and other useful leaflets, free of charge. To prove the usefulness of the info center, the staff has a database related to the number of tourists who used the information services.

Table 3 Number of tourists who used the Information Centre services in Timișoara

<b>Month</b>	<b>Year 2011 (persons)</b>	<b>Year 2012 (persons)</b>	<b>Year 2013 (persons)</b>	<b>Year 2014 (persons)</b>
January	404	479	506	352
February	416	313	704	442
March	613	1045	787	658
April	1042	1329	1863	990
May	1332	1961	1567	1180
June	1072	1299	1336	1412
July	1479	1768	1669	1554
August	2246	2115	1679	2000
September	1629	1581	1488	1496
October	1193	1682	1100	994
November	773	907	893	746
December	470	462	555	612
<b>Total</b>	<b>12669</b>	<b>14941</b>	<b>14147</b>	<b>12436</b>

Source: Database of Tourist Information Centre in Timișoara

The majority of tourists were interested in visiting the city between April and October (fig.1).

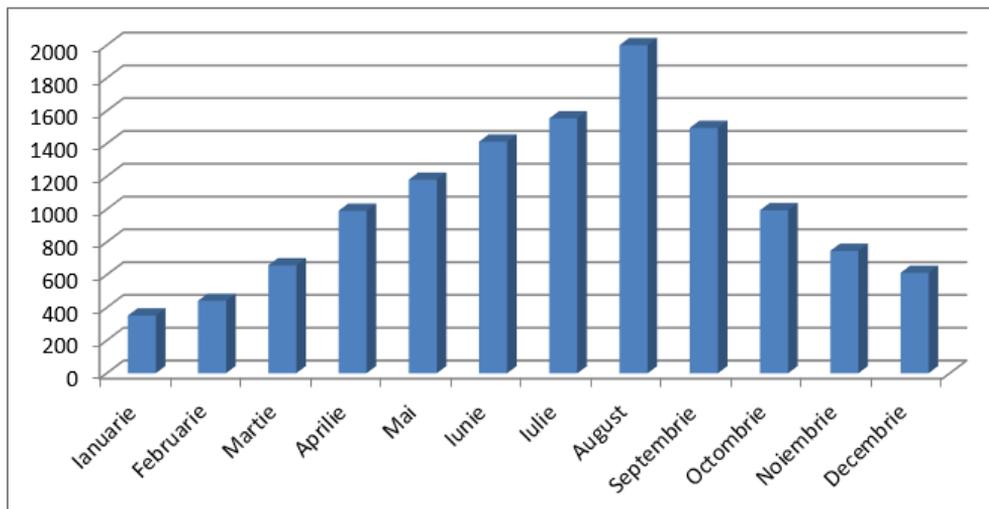


Fig. 2 The distribution of tourists who appealed to the info-center services in Timisoara (2014)

From the total of tourists who arrived and stayed in Timisoara in 2011, only 6% respectively 5.28% needed information from this center in 2014. The percentage is small, hence the conclusion that many tourists are informed at the receptions of hotels, from the internet, or come for business, and some have appealed in the past to the info center services, so it is not the first visit to Timisoara. Depending on the origin of tourists who visited the office, most were Romanian from other parts of the country (Table 4).

Table 4 Nationality of tourists who appealed to the info-center services in Timisoara

Nationality	Year 2011 (persons)	Year 2012 (persons)	Year 2013 (persons)	Year 2014 (persons)
German	1952	1910	1518	1293
French	763	669	710	574
Italian	600	553	465	397
Spanish	428	418	272	579
English	259	303	294	190
American (USA + Canada)	186	183	118	142
Serbian	684	2596	3428	3611
Hungarians	236	371	203	214
Bulgarian	395	329	220	262
Asian	125	145	165	157
Belgian+ Dutch	123	46	73	48
Portuguese	31	18	18	16
American (Latin America)	58	24	26	28

Indian	31	8	27	18
African	9	17	24	7
Australian (Australia+ New Zeeland)	22	9	13	28
Russian	9	74	45	47
Moldavian	6	4	16	6
Israeli	61	35	23	20
Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish	54	44	17	19
Greek	4	4	6	6
Turkish	70	29	73	22
Romanian	3853	4060	3967	2642
Not declared	2710	3092	2426	2110

Source: Database of Timișoara Tourist Centre

Even if the percentage of those who use the services of tourist information centre is low, it is useful. Europeans are the most numerous tourists, so they are extremely interested in sightseeing. (Table 4, Figure 2)

Table 5 Number of tourists from the geographic area who have appealed to the info center in Timisoara

Geographical area	Year 2011 (persons)	Percentage of tourists who used info-centre services	Year 2012 (persons)	Percentage of tourists who used info-centre services	Year 2013 (persons)	Percentage of tourists who used info-centre services	Year 2014 (persons)	Percentage of tourists who used info-centre services
Europe (including Russia)	9397	74,17	11399	76,29	11252	79,54	9904	79,64
America	244	1,92	207	1,39	144	1,02	170	1,37
Asia (including Turkey)	226	1,80	182	1,22	265	1,87	197	1,58
Middle East	61	0,48	35	0,23	23	0,16	20	0,16
Africa	9	0,07	17	0,11	24	0,17	7	0,06
Australia + New Zealand	22	0,17	9	0,06	13	0,09	28	0,22
Not declared	2710	21,39	3092	20,70	2426	17,15	2110	16,97

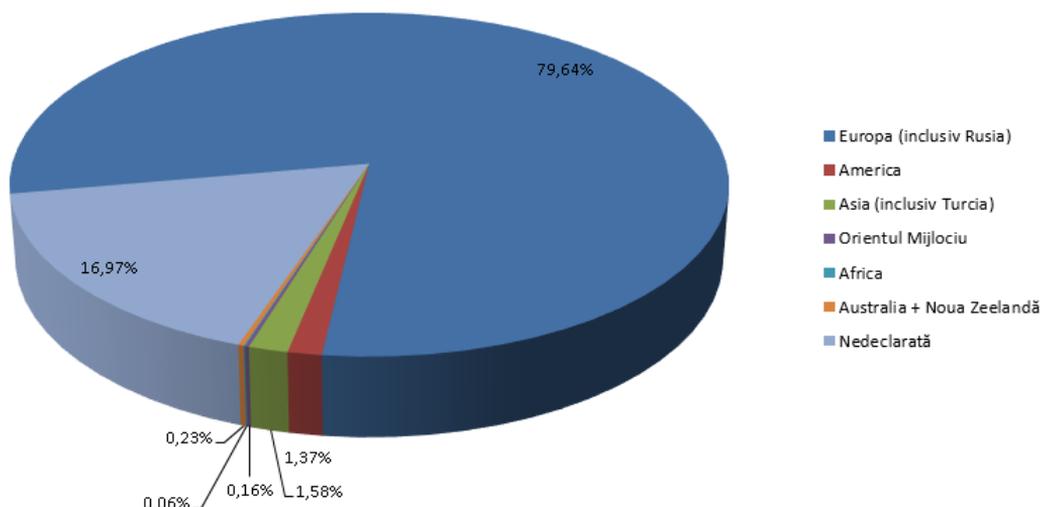


Fig. 3 Tourists who went to Timisoara info-center by geographical area (2014).

Timisoara is one of the cities applying for the title of European Cultural Capital of 2021 and, therefore, the importance of the tourist info center is emphasized.

### Conclusions

In Romania, national tourist information centers need to support websites, guides, travel agencies that present tourist attractions. They should be more visible, better equipped with information materials to sell locally-made souvenirs, to get involved in organizing events and to accept volunteers. The experience of other countries can be a model.

The tourist information center in Timisoara has an intense activity, it is well positioned and well-equipped. However, it could obtain an important income by selling souvenirs made in Romania. A collaboration with other info-centres in Romania could increase tourist circulation in the region.

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