

# TOURISTS' PERCEPTION OF ROMANIA'S SALT RESOURCES. CASE STUDY: PRAID SALT MINE

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## Abstract

The development of tourism has produced the entry into the tourist circuit of new objectives, as is the case for salt mines. Praid Salt Mine is one of the most important objectives that uses the salt resources in Romania, through intense flows of tourists, who arrive in the area for health benefits or leisure activities. To conduct the study, the reviews provided by visitors on the Google platform were analyzed. The central objective of the study was to identify the main dysfunctions, the satisfaction rate of visitors, the main positive points of the Praid Salt Mine, for a sample of one hundred reviewers. The aim of the study is to increase the level of awareness regarding the need to insert tourist objectives in a tourist circuit as authentic as possible, but adaptable to the requirements of visitors, as the online environment has made it easier to get feedback from a large mass of people. The study reveals that most visitors are satisfied with the experience they had in the Praid Salt Mine and feedback can be a starting point in the process of rethinking the marketing opportunities to create a new updated brand, to get even more visibility and benefits.

**Key words:** tourism, natural resources, sustainability, environment, social media

## Introduction

Natural resources have been introduced more and more in the tourist phenomenon, through the growing interest of people in escaping from the urban daily life, with the main purpose of relaxation. Precisely for this reason, tourist flows increase on weekends or in the summer season to forests, rural areas, national parks, nature reserves or even salt mines. The salt resources are extremely important, first of all for their use in the food industry or other related industries, but also by capitalizing on the former salt mines for tourist or cultural purposes, as is the case of the Praid Salt Mine. By using salt resources, health benefits can be combined, by inhaling aerosols loaded with salt particles, and the possibility to obtain impressive income from selling local food, promoting the local brand, but also by selling souvenirs with the signs of Praid Salt Mine. The attraction of the tourists towards the Praid Salt Mine is justified by the large flows of tourists who arrive on the territory of Praid during the summer season, for therapeutic purposes, who visit the salt mine at least once, for the purpose of relaxation or health. An important advantage of Praid Salt Mine is the combination of entertainment activities for adults, such as ping-pong tables, restaurants or even playrooms, along with special playgrounds for children, the opportunity to visit the church within the salt mine, such as and the opportunity to taste local products from local vendors. (Morea et al., 2016; Teodorescu et al., 2020; Teodorescu et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2015)

## Material and methods

The research was conducted by analyzing the perception of tourists who previously visited Praid Salt Mine and provided a personal review through the Google Reviews platform, where they could provide a number of stars between 1 and 5 stars, as well as personal comments on previous experiences. . The study proposed to identify the most recent sample of one hundred people with positive reviews and one hundred people with negative reviews, after which the main advantages mentioned by the reviewers were identified, the most important disadvantages, but also the number of stars they have offered in the most recent one hundred comments. The graphics were created using the Microsoft Office bundle, especially Microsoft Excel, while the localization map was created using inkScape 0.91 software.

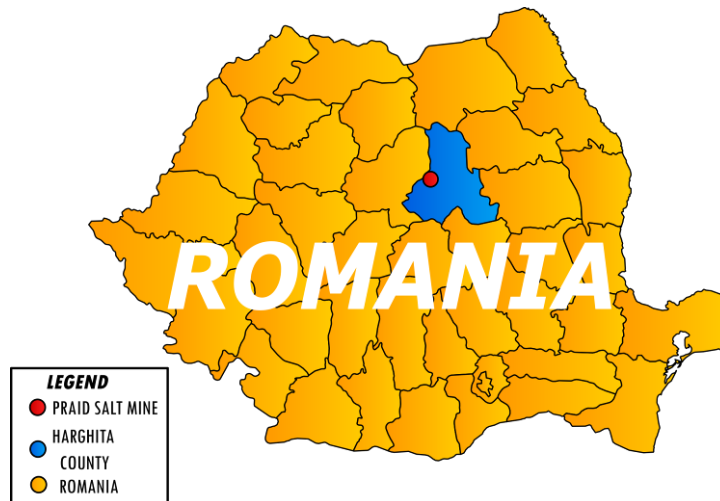


Fig. 1: Localization map of Praid Salt Mine (at local, regional and national level)

## Results and Discussions

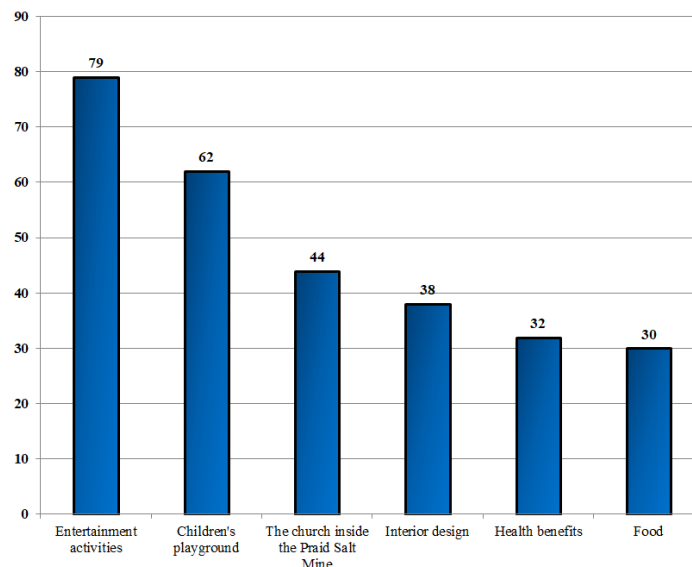


Fig. 2: The main advantages of Praid Salt Mine, according to tourist reviews  
Source of data: Google Reviews

79 tourists specified that the leisure activities inside the Praid Salt Mine offer the character of entertainment to the tourist objective, among which the ping-pong tables, playroom, rest area or restaurant, while for 62 of them they were extremely satisfied that they had could offer an interactive activity to children, through the playground organized for them. The cultural objectives are extremely important for 44 tourists, who pointed out that the main plus of the Praid Salt Mine is the church inside, and 38 tourists appreciated the way the Praid Salt Mine is organized, as well as the fact that you can achieve diversified and complex activities that can provide a long time to relax. Only 32 of the tourists who gave reviews through Google Reviews reported that the health benefits were the main plus of the visit to the salt mine, while 30 of the reviewers specified that the food deserves a positive mention. (Figure 2)

The most mentioned dysfunction of the Praid Salt Mine is the overcrowding, which is manifested both in the transport from the surface to the interior, and the overcrowding in the salt mine, manifested by very long waiting times to purchase products, to allow children to enter playgrounds or to get a place in the rest area. At the same time, 71 of the tourists who offered reviews specified that the prices are high for transport, which has an average cost between 5 - 8 euros, but also for the purchase of products inside the Praid Salt Mine, with an average food price of 5 euros per product. Not only organizational or overcrowding aspects can offer unpleasant experiences, but also the interaction with the some staff of Praid Salt Mine or with other tourists, who often do not have the most appropriate attitude, by throwing garbage on the floor, by talking extremely noisy, non-compliance with the waiting

line for the purchase of products or services etc. 14 of the tourists indicated that they would like more local products inside the Salt Mine, as the large number of non-authentic products decreases the value of the local brand, for which many tourists also arrived in Praid. 6 of the tourists specified that they would like the exit or entry routes in Salina Praid to be much easier to identify and follow. (Figure 3)

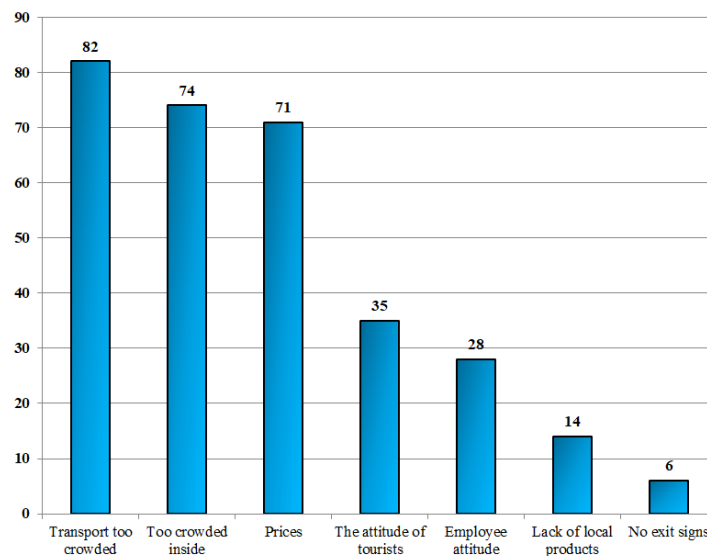


Fig. 3: The main disadvantages of Praid Salt Mine, according to tourist reviews  
Source of data: Google Reviews

Most of the tourists who visited the Praid Salt Mine were satisfied, as 78% of the respondents gave the maximum rating for the services, products or experiences they purchased or lived within the tourist objective, while at the opposite pole we can identify only one person per hundred reviews who was not at all satisfied with what she experienced or purchased at the Praid Salt Mine. 16% of the one hundred respondents who gave ratings to the salt mine encountered small malfunctions, but which did not completely affect the experience within the tourist objective, such as the long waiting time in queues or for the bus to the surface, the overcrowding within the bus to the inside of the salt mine or the high transport prices. In total, only 5% of respondents gave an average rating, consisting of two and three stars, represented by people who encountered significant dysfunctions, but who managed to benefit from the advantages of Praid Salt Mine, during the short visit. (Figure 4)

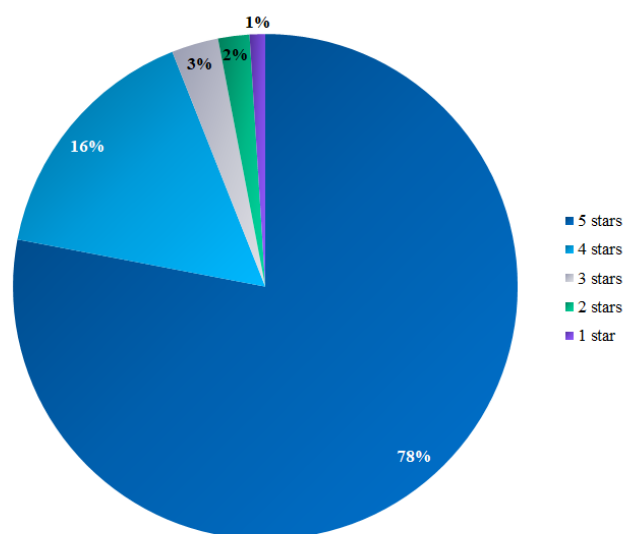


Fig. 4: The number of stars offered by tourists on Google Reviews for a sample of one hundred people  
Source of data: Google Reviews

## Conclusion

Salt resources are extremely important for tourism, especially when local products, culinary experiences or the hospitality of the locals are promoted, which produces a customer loyalty for a tourist objective that is not in a very active change. It is important to mention that the main way in which tourists would return to salt resources would be the health benefits or a large number of leisure activities that they could re-experience, in case of a new visit. The study met all the proposed objectives, by identifying the main advantages of Praid Salt Mine, namely the large number of activities, the presence of a playground for children, good food, the mix with cultural tourism through the church inside the salt mine, but also health benefits. The study also led to the identification of the main disadvantages, among which the most mentioned being the overcrowding during the transport to the salt mine and also inside it. The study also identified the degree of satisfaction of tourists with the services and products of the Praid Salt Mine, with an average of 4.68 stars per one hundred reviewers, which places the Praid Salt Mine in the top of the most important tourist objectives in Romania related to natural resources. In conclusion, Praid Salt Mine can be an important model for other former areas that have exploited natural resources, such as other salt mines or former coal mines, which could enter into the tourist circuit and could be presented and promoted for a new niche of tourists, who would really appreciate their beauty and uniqueness.

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## Souhrn

Rozvoj cestovního ruchu vedl ke vstupu nových cílů do turistického okruhu, jako je tomu v případě solných dolů. Solné doly Praid jsou jedním z nejdůležitějších cílů, které využívají zdroje soli v Rumunsku, a to prostřednictvím intenzivního přílivu turistů, kteří do oblasti přijíždějí za účelem zdravotního prospěchu nebo volnočasových aktivit. Za účelem provedení studie byly analyzovány recenze poskytnuté návštěvníky na platformě Google. Hlavním cílem studie bylo na vzorku sta recenzentů identifikovat hlavní dysfunkce, míru spokojenosti návštěvníků, hlavní pozitiva solného dolu Praid. Cílem studie je zvýšit úroveň povědomí o potřebě vložit turistické cíle do turistického okruhu co nejautentičtěji, ale přizpůsobit se požadavkům návštěvníků, protože online prostředí usnadnilo získání zpětné vazby od velké masy lidí. Ze studie vyplývá, že většina návštěvníků je spokojena se zážitky, které v solném dole Praid zažili, a zpětná vazba může být východiskem v procesu přehodnocování marketingových možností pro vytvoření nové aktualizované značky, aby se ještě více zviditelnila a získala výhody.

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