

## HEALTH TOURISM IN TWO SPA RESORTS: BAILE FELIX (ROMANIA) AND BALARUC-LES-BAINS (FRANCE). A COMPARATIVE VIEW

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**Abstract:** *Health tourism is becoming more important as people are more concerned about their health. Meanwhile, traveling for healthcare and consuming medical tourism packages has increased significantly in the last decades. Moreover, many tourists travel abroad, with the intention of benefiting from quality treatments at lower prices, and sometimes benefiting from medical procedures which are unavailable in their home countries. Consequently, health and medical resorts make constant preparations to provide services conforming to the customers' standards. In this article we present in a comparative perspective the case of two health resorts, i.e. Baile Felix (Romania) and Baladuc-les-Bains (France). Both resorts benefit from rich natural resources, especially thermal waters, but also accommodation and treatment facilities enabling them to provide high quality medical and tourism services.*

**Key words:** health tourism; spa resort; Baile Felix; Baladuc-les-Bains.

**JEL Classification:** Z30; L83; I11; P36.

### 1. Introduction

Medical tourism is the activity of traveling in order to receive medical care. High costs, poor medical services, or long waiting times in one's home country, and, e.g., state-of-the-art technology, in the destination country, on the other hand, are the main drivers of medical tourism.

Medical tourism offers a special type of services, health being a priority; the range of options is narrow, balancing in favor of medical services in the event of constraints on those who make the choice (Oltean & Gabor, 2015).

The determinants of the demand for this type of tourism are motivation, income and leisure time. In the case of medical tourism, motivation is linked more to necessity, free time can be obtained depending on the severity of the health problem, while income remains the main inconvenience. Medical tourism is not seasonal because health problems do not take into account the season or the weather.

Perhaps even more than other types of tourism, in the case of medical tourism, the elasticity of demand is manifested in terms of revenue growth, but its inelasticity in rising prices, as well as the elasticity of demand for falling prices and its inelasticity in lowering revenues. This is explained by the nature of the motivation, which is not just relaxation, recovery or the purpose of the acquisition of goods, which is based on a much more pressing cause for the individual (Oltean & Gabor, 2015).

If, in general, the workforce involved in tourism requires a medium or even low qualification, in the case of tourism for medical purposes, it is necessary to have a highly qualified

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workforce, preferably in internationally recognized centers, in order to gain patient confidence.

This article is organized as follows: in the second section we present a theoretical overview on medical tourism, in the third section we present a comparative view on two medical tourism resorts, i.e. Baile Felix (Romania) and Balaruc-les-Bains (France), while in the last section we conclude.

## **2. Medical tourism: theoretical considerations**

### **2.1. Characteristics of medical tourism**

A medical trip is based on a particular procedure: the person seeking treatment abroad contacts a medical tourism provider. Usually, the patient is asked for a medical report, including the nature of the disease, the General Practitioner's diagnosis, various laboratory analyzes. Physicians consult with the patient about the necessary treatment and then discuss the approximate expenses, hospital choice and length of the stay. After signing certain arrangements, the patient receives a letter of recommendation for a medical visa to be obtained from the embassy in question. The patient moves to the destination country where a physician assigned by the healthcare provider takes care of accommodation, treatment and any other form of care.

Although medical tourism has existed for many years, i.e. since ancient Greece, following some opinions, see Oltean and Gabor (2015), its potential growth has been reduced by constraints on the capacity to support a limited number of tourists, as well as those related to infrastructure issues (including communications, water and sanitation, electricity, etc.) in developing countries.

Due to the fact that healthcare and health preservation have always been considered as basic concerns of people, we can see that a well-developed medical system that benefits from a solid medical infrastructure is not enough to fully meet the demand for medical services. Other important factors to be taken into consideration are: quality-price ratio, accessibility and convenience.

People who want to travel to receive medical care first and foremost follow the quality of the services and not their cost. Increased access to official reports on the safety and effectiveness of the medical services offered, as well as the questionnaires completed by patients about the quality of the services they received (both from the doctors and from the institutions as a whole) helped to improve patient awareness of the differences in the quality and safety of medical procedures (Voigt & Pforr, 2014).

Thus, a Joint Commission International (JCI) has been set up to effectively assess the quality and safety of medical services at an international level. Today, over 120 hospitals and medical centers around the world benefit from 1 or more JCI accreditations. Other organizations such as the International Society for Quality Care (ISQUA), the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA), the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the European Society for Quality in Healthcare (ESQH) are increasingly involved in ensuring that people who choose to practice medical tourism will receive the highest quality medical care (Kelly, 2013). Also, the World Tourism Organization and European Travel Commission/UNWTO/ETC (2018) have an important contribution to a better understanding of the growing segment of wellness and medical tourism, providing a practical toolkit to assist various investors, decisions-maker and stakeholders with their planning and management of health-related tourism activities.

According to recent research in the field, the main reasons for increasing demand in medical tourism can be structured according to the following formula: demographic reasons (people live longer); medical reasons (an increase in the number of non-communicable diseases requiring the help of a specialist); economic reasons (higher incomes, health insurance,

sometimes even transferable from one country to another); social reasons (an increased willingness to travel) (Oltean & Gabor, 2015).

People travel to benefit from care services that are not available locally or simply because they would spend less than at home. On the other hand, it is equally important that all these increases in medical tourism supply are directly related to the liberalization of trade in services, increased cooperation between the public and private sectors, the spread of information on this issue globally kind of products and services and, most importantly, the successful combination of the tourism and health sectors.

## **2.2. Medical tourism – a global industry**

Many countries offer discounts for medical tourism globally. However, some of the most popular international destinations are India, Thailand, Singapore, Turkey and Mexico. Countries such as Costa Rica, Panama, Brazil, Argentina are growing rapidly, not only because they can provide top medical expertise, but also because they are great destinations for enjoying a medical vacation.

African and Middle Eastern countries involved in medical tourism include Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Tunisia. Israel is an emerging medical tourism destination. In 2016, around 15,000 tourists traveled to the country for medical procedures, bringing a revenue of \$40 million. Jordan is a developing destination with a \$1 billion income in 2017, reaching about 250,000 patients in other countries. It is a destination for tourists from Palestine and Sudan (25,000), USA (1,800), United Kingdom (1,200) and Canada (400). In the Americas, the main destinations are Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Uruguay. Brazil is well known for plastic surgery, but for other types of procedures it is new on the global market. The first hospital accredited to JCI outside the US is Albert Einstein Jewish Hospital in Sao Paulo. Also, many Asian countries are destinations of medical tourism. In India, the medical tourism sector in this country will have an annual growth rate of 30%, to about \$95 billion, by 2020. The main treatments are bone marrow transplantation, cardiac bypass surgery, ophthalmology and orthopedics. India is known, in particular, for heart surgery, hip replacements and other advanced areas of medicine. China is a rapidly developing and desirable destination for people seeking treatment in a wide range of medical specialties including cardiology, neurology, orthopedics and others. Several private and state hospitals in large cities have established international departments. Many leading (well-known) hospitals offer treatments combining traditional Chinese medicine with Western medical technologies and techniques. China is leading in stem cell research, and hospitals offer the possibility of such treatments, while they are considered experimental or not yet approved in the country where tourists come from (Kelly, 2013).

In Europe, countries with active sectors in the field of medical tourism are Turkey, Cyprus, Germany, Hungary, Belgium, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Spain and Ukraine. The Czech Republic built its medical tourism based on spas and medical care compatible with international standards (an example is Ostrava University Hospital). Germany is also a destination for patients who are looking for advanced medical technology, superior standards, safety and immediate care. Since joining the EU in 2004, Poland has become an important location for patients interested in cheap medical treatments (Kelly, 2013).

## **2.3. Wellness – a complementary form of health tourism**

Wellness tourism is a form of leisure tourism that has undergone a significant development over the past decades, coupled with an increase in the number of occupational diseases caused by the stress of modern life. It combines relaxation with various forms of cure and

treatment and is practiced in balneomedical and climatic resorts with rich natural resources of cleanliness: mineral waters, thermal waters, muds.

Wellness tourism represents one of the most important tourist activities, with a relatively stable clientele and relatively longer average stays (12-30 days). It also contributes to increased average daily/tourist earnings (Voigt & Pforr, 2014).

The Master Plan for the Development of Wellness Tourism was developed by Détente Consultants and was published in November 2009 after about 4 months of research. The consultants visited 15 spa resorts where meetings were held with both public and private actors. The consultants also met with officials of the institutions and organizations involved in health tourism sector, such as the Ministry of Tourism and several stakeholders, trade unions, NGOs, governmental agencies etc, Ministerul Turismului, 2018).

The essential aspects that define the wellness tourism market in other countries are as follows: social wellness tourism is declining everywhere, but the average budget allocated by Europeans for disease prevention and health treatments is on the increase. This shows that short free treatment sessions develop (between 3-10 days and unsubsidised).

It was found that it is necessary to add the wellness component. For competitive wellness tourism, heritage-based medical centers were developed. These thermal cities are mainly developed in Central and Eastern Europe: Russia, Hungary, the Czech Republic. The thermal cities with an important historical heritage and using water as tourist attraction became famous thermal resorts: Amnéville in France, Baden-Baden, Karlovy Vary or Abano Terme (Ministry of Tourism, 2018).

Balneary tourism is, as a rule, a national and proximity tourism (for example, thalassotherapy develops in Tunisia and Morocco for a French clientele). Private investments were made in Tunisia, Hungary and Thailand, which gave them a decisive advance on the spa tourism market.

### **3. A study case: Baile Felix resort (Romania) and Balaruc-les-Bains resort (France)**

#### **3.1. History and localization**

Băile Felix concentrates all the attributes of a real spa resort. The first historical mention oldest evidence of the baths, called *Termae Varadiensis* or Baile Oradiei, stems from 1221. The healing effect of the hot springs is mentioned in the writings of Romanian humanist Nicolaus Olahus. Later, between 1700 and 1721, Felix Heldrex discovered and used the Felix spring, whose name generalized with time to the whole resort. In 1731, the first analysis of the waters and their unique curative properties is made. At the World Exhibition in 1896, the waters of this resort were awarded the gold medal and honorary diploma. The healing quality of bathing waters is well known throughout Europe. In the eighteenth century balneal treatment began to take the form of organized tourism.

The first certification of the resort dates back to 1763 and contains a doctor's notes on the construction of a swimming pool. In 1771, the wooden basin has been turned into a stone basin, and bath cabins were attached. The first building was built between 1766 and 1772. In 1857 a treatment fee is introduced for people who have been sitting for more than four days. This is the starting point for spa tourism, even though the most spectacular developments would only begin 100 years later. The resort began to develop after the first modern drilling from the Main Spring in 1885.

Băile Felix is the largest spa resort in Romania. It is located in the northwestern part of Romania, at the meeting of the Crișuri Plain with the hills extending the Pădurea Craiului Mountains, at an altitude of 150 m. The settlement is administered as part of Sânmartin commune and is ranked second regarding the number of accommodation places in Romania after the Black Sea coast's resorts. The resort is located in Bihor County, 9 km from Oradea and at 22 km from the Romanian-Hungarian border, and is also interesting for

Hungarian tourists (Badulescu, Badulescu and Borma, 2014). The resort has a temperate continental climate, with mild winters and temperate summers with Mediterranean influence, ideal for balneary tourism.

Regarding Balaruc-les-Bains, its ancient name was Maimona (Mannonna, Mannonam). This name appears in the cartulary of Maguelone in 1130. In 1187, appear the indications Apud Aix, Ecclesiam of Aquis, Sancta Maria de Aquis, apud Aix in 1226, of Aquis in 1228 where vestiges of a thermal establishment were discovered in 1863 and 1865.

On December 11, 1886, Balaruc was divided into two communes; Balaruc-le-Vieux and Balaruc-les-Bains was born. From 1836 to 1886, population censuses count the population of the two sections which constitute the commune of Balaruc-les-Bains: Balaruc-le-Vieux and Balaruc-les-Bains. The census of 1856 explicitly distinguishes the section of Balaruc-les-Bains from that of Balaruc-le-Vieux with 376 inhabitants for the first against 285 for the second.

### **3.2. Thermal waters and treatments**

The mineral waters of Băile Felix are mainly used in the form of baths, covered pools, valves or swimming pools, being used in diseases of the locomotive apparatus.

Due to the sedative climate, the resort is recommended for patients with poor neurovegetative reactivity. The sedative and relaxing-muscular effect of the thermal waters from Băile Felix are used for the elongation of the spine under the water. The effect of these elongations under the thermal water is superior to those performed at the elongation table. Scapulo-humeral periarthritis treated at Băile Felix has been very good if or associated with balneal treatment and decontracting galvanizations.

Băile Felix resort has a great experience in the treatment of degenerative and inflammatory rheumatism, experience based on a resort-specific methodology. The therapy of rheumatic diseases is quite complex. Along with the methods of pharmacotherapy, diet and rest in rheumatic diseases, it is almost always necessary to use therapeutic means capable of maintaining and subsequently restoring diminished functions as a result of disease progression. In this area, physiotherapy is an important part, as is the use of other methods of physical therapy, which in many cases is the basic therapeutic methodology.

A study was conducted on the patients here and it was found that in 90% of cases the treatment of degenerative rheumatism resulted in good accomplishments (Verhagen et al., 2015). Compared to other spa resorts, rheumatic inflammatory diseases found in Băile Felix the best conditions for treatment and recovery. The sedative climate of the resort, as well as the thermal water pools, are factors that enable efficient medical recovery of these forms.

The introduction of kinetherapeutic recovery methods in pools and in the controlled anti-inflammatory room gave superior results to classical methods of treatment. The beneficial effects of thermal waters are used for the following conditions: inflammatory rheumatic diseases (rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis); degenerative rheumatic diseases (cervical, dorsal and lumbar spondylosis, polyarthrosis); abnormal rheumatic diseases; post-traumatic conditions; peripheral neurological disorders; central neurological disorders; gynecological disorders; associated diseases (nutrition and metabolism diseases, endocrine diseases).

In Băile Felix, the tourists who come for treatment have the following treatment facilities: baths with thermal water in valleys and pools, kinetherapy with water in valves and pools, vertebral elongation in water and on the table; hydrotherapy, electrotherapy, paraffin wraps; inhalations and aerosols, medical recovery gyms; laboratories for tests and functional exploration; treatments with Gerovital and Aslavital, cosmetics cabinets with Gerovital products.

Patients accessing treatments have a wide range of therapeutic procedures using both natural cleansing factors and a number of artificial physical factors. The external cure with

thermal mineral water is the therapeutic use of bathing water at the bathtub or pool, to which the therapeutic procedures indicated by the treating physician are associated.

The mineral water bath acts on the body through mechanical, thermal and chemical factors. If mineral water is used in the pool, the movement of the body in water is itself a therapeutic factor with an effective role in complex treatment.

The thermal action of the mineral bath that has a calming effect on the pain, resorbable to the chronic and relaxing inflammation of the muscles, is conditioned by some water properties.

The indoor thermal mineral thermal bath uses the specially designed cuvette water. Mineral waters drunk at 39-40° C exert a soothing action on stomach movements, diminish gastric secretion and relieve digestive pain. The ingestion of mineral water in the form of hydromineral is done according to a schedule established by the physician.

The therapeutic sludge is applied in the form of general or partial packaging. For the body, sludge treatment is a general non-specific excitant and is a highly intense therapeutic procedure, individually prescribed in terms of temperature, frequency, duration of application, region.

The way of designing treatment bases allows the simultaneous development of different and complex procedures and treatments.

To prevent rheumatic, respiratory or cardiovascular disease, a prophylactic spa treatment can be followed in the resort, under the supervision of specialists.

The beneficial effects of thermal waters for certain conditions can be harmful and contra-indicated for other conditions. These conditions are: infectious-contagious diseases; STDs; malignant tumors; haemorrhages; psychological diseases.

Pindar, a Greek poet (518-438 BC) and later, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Rabelais, in *Gargantua*, mentions the waters of Balaruc. In 1579, Dr. Dortoman, first doctor of Henri IV, and professor at the University of Montpellier wrote a monograph on the waters and therapeutic indications of Balaruc-les-Bains.

In 1927, the city is classified as "Climate Station" which will officially confirm the benefits of the Mediterranean climate. In 1969, the municipality inaugurates a new spa, Athéna, that allows the treatment 3,700 patients per year.

In 1973, the station is classified as "New Tourist Station". In 1985, faced with the success of the baths and the growing number of guests, the city began the construction of a second establishment: Hesperides, which will open in July 1987.

In February 2015, the new spa is inaugurated. Since January 1, 2012, the Baths of Balaruc-les-Bains, formerly managed by communal management with financial autonomy, are managed by the Local Public Operating Company of Baths of Balaruc-les-Bains (SPLETH). The SPL has three public shareholders: the Balaruc-les-Bains Town Hall (85% of the capital), Thau Agglo (14%) and the Hérault General Council (1%). This public limited company aims at the management and the exploitation of the Baths and all the ancillary activities, annexes or complementary. SPLETH is the first SPL in France to be created to manage a thermal activity.

At Balaruc-les-Bains are treated rheumatic diseases, as degenerative joint diseases, as vertebral arthrosis and its consequences: cervicobrachial neuralgia, cruralgia, lumbosciatica; swelling vertebral hyperostosis; painful consequences of static vertebral disorders; peripheral degenerative disorders (coxarthrosis, gonarthrosis etc.); abarticular disorders: tendinitis and bursitis; inflammatory rheumatism - ankylosing spondylitis, polyarthrititis, psoriatic arthritis; osteopathies - consequences of osteoporosis, endocrine osteopathies, Paget's disease, fibromyalgia; algodystrophies and post-traumatic osteoarticular sequelae.

### 3.3. Medical facilities

In the Băile Felix resort, there are 9 treatment bases. The Crișana-Poenița treatment base was built in 1981. The medical assistance is provided by five physiotherapy booths, two in the Poenița hotel, one of them being treated in Pell-Amar, one in the Crișana hotel and two in the proper base. The base has an Emergency Medical Office, a Functional Exploration Cabinet, and a laboratory. There are two outdoor swimming pools at the Crisana Hotel, one for adults and one for children.

The treatment base of the Felix Hotel is the most important one in the resort where there is the Spa "Policlinica nr.1", which has in operation since 1970. The treatment base serves the patients accommodated in the Felix and Lotus hotels, being connected to the two hotels through a covered passage. It is functional throughout the year, with a capacity of 1,000 patients per day in a single shift, in addition to those accommodated in Felix and Lotus hotels, serving ambulatory patients. The base has 12 specialized medical practices, 5 in Felix Hotel, 5 in Hotel Lotus, 2 in its own premises, profiled on balneo-physiotherapy and medical recovery, as well as doctor's offices: dentistry, ENT., gynecological and functional exploration services (ECG, EMG) as well as a sterilization area..

The Termal treatment base has been operating since 1970 for the patients staying in Termal and Nufărul hotels. The capacity is 500 patients only in the morning shift. Care is provided by 5 cabinets, being profiled on the Pell-Amar treatment. In the base there is an ECG laboratory and a section of the Bucharest Institute of Gerontology and Geriatrics. There is also a medical cosmetics cabinet with Gerovital. Swimming and heliotherapy can be practiced in Termal Hotel's uncovered pool.

The International Treatment Base was inaugurated in 1979, serving the patients of the International Hotel. Its capacity is 500 patients in the morning shift. For the provision of medical assistance, the base has 4 balneo-physiotherapy offices, of which 2 are specialized in Pell-Amar and Gerovital treatment. In fact, there is also a pediatric cabinet, a Gerovital medical cosmetics department, a specialized section for digestive diseases using Ulcosilvanic treatment, a cabinet for specialist consultations, and offices for functional explorations (endoscopies, surveys) belonging to the same basis.

The Mureș treatment base serves the patients accommodated in the hotel, operating since 1987, treating a maximum number of 800 patients per shift. It has five balneo-physiotherapy offices, as well as ophthalmological, dental, gynecological, functional exploration practices and a laboratory.

Treatment base Pavilion II is the oldest base in the resort, functioning since 1896. In 1966 it was modernized and renovated, serving the patients from several pavilions, and ambulatory patients. Its capacity is 500 patients in two shifts, with 3 balneo-physiotherapy cabins.

The Muncelul treatment base has been operating since 1972 for patients accommodated in the hotel of the same name. Base treatment capacity is 1,700 places. It has 19 offices for balneo-physiotherapy, a dental office, EKG, chemical laboratory, the treatment is done in two laps. The Padis treatment base belongs to the Padis hotel and was put into use in 1986. The capacity amounts to 2,050 places with 12 balneo-physiotherapy cabins.

The children's sanatorium with a capacity of 1,050 seats is a section of the children's sanatorium "1 Mai", providing balneo-physiotherapeutic and rehabilitation treatment in 30-day series, during which school classes with specialist teachers continue.

The clinical recovery hospital Băile Felix, put into use in 1987, is the property of the Ministry of Health. It has a capacity of 150 seats in one and two bed rooms. The hospital has a permanent program of clinical sanitation. The wards have dining rooms, bathrooms and furniture, being adapted for patients with locomotor and neo-motoric rheumatic deficiencies, each ward being provided with a warning and control panel. There is a balneo-physiotherapeutic and complex rehabilitation treatment with a wide range of therapeutic procedures and clinical services such as radiology, functional explorations,

clinical laboratory. The hospital also provides methodological assistance to the resort, as well as to the resorts in neighboring counties.

In Balaruc-les-Bains, the thermal baths cover 16,000 m<sup>2</sup>, seven areas of care, including collective pools, individual treatments: baths and mud baths, showers, compresses and restrooms on 4 floors.

In shower, bath, steam or diffused in the form of thermal mud in a patented application bed, the Baths of Balaruc-les-Bains welcome the tourists in the best conditions for an effective cure, within an innovative establishment, evolving, and adapted to the new demands and challenges of health.

There have been done investments of 60 million euros (50% financing by Sète Agglopolie Méditerranée, Occitanie Region, Conseil Général de l'Hérault). In addition to the spa, the SPLETH manages an O'balia thermal spa, the dermo-cosmetic brand, a laundry, which represents 414 jobs.

As the largest employer in the Thau Basin, the company generates more than 1,000 direct and 2000 induced jobs, as well as significant economic spin-offs on the territory.

Dedicated to modern hydrotherapy, the new baths of Balaruc-les-Bains respond to new demands and new challenges in public health, putting at the heart of their approach, the technological evolution of thermal care in line with therapeutic education. In the ancient landscape, the waters of the pond were lower than today and made more visible and impacting two natural curiosities: the chasm of "the Vise" and "the Inversac" ("Inverse waters" of which there is no other case in France), underground and submarine resurgences of fresh water..

The thermal spring of Balaruc-les-Bains is a resurgence of the West fold, the karstic aquifer, which is the region's main source of drinking water and thermal water. The reservoir is more than 2000 meters deep and the thermal water naturally rises to the surface through geological faults.

Its composition is a mixture of very old (approximately 150.000 years) waters and newer waters (before 1950) from shallower reservoirs. Filtered over millennia in rocky layers that enrich them with trace elements, thermal waters naturally rise at roughly 7 to 9 meters per hour and are renewed over the centuries. They gush at a temperature of 50 °C, which is explained by the depth of the tank in which they are accumulated. At 2500 meters below the surface, the thermal water pool would reach 80 to 100 °C, which decreases as the water rises and mixes with newer waters.

The capacities of the two spa resorts are synthetized in the following table:

**Table 1:** Treatment capacities, Baile Felix vs. Balaruc-les-Bains

	<b>Băile Felix</b>	<b>Balaruc-les-Bains</b>
Number of treatment basis	9	7
Physiotherapy booths	5	5
Total capacity/day	5100 patients/day	4400 patients/day
Total number of balneo-physiotherapy cabins	51	112

Source: [www.bailefelix.ro](http://www.bailefelix.ro), [www.balaruc-les-bains.com/](http://www.balaruc-les-bains.com/)

We can notice that Băile Felix spa has two more treatment bases than Balaruc-les-Bains, while the two spas have the same number of physiotherapy booths. Also, Băile Felix is, apparently, in a better position than Balaruc-les-Bains concerning the total daily capacity of balneary tourist reception, with 700 places, but the French spa has the double of balneo-physiotherapy cabins.



### 3.4. Accommodation facilities

The accommodation network of Băile Felix resort is made up of the main accommodation types: hotels, villas and pensions. Hotels within the resort range from one to four stars, depending on endowment, quality of service, reputation and location.

In the resort there are 12 hotels, of which 2 are one star hotels, 8 are two-star hotels and 2 are three-star hotels, and four category I, II and III pavilions. The accommodation capacity is 5900 places.

The accommodation units are the following: Crișana Hotel with a capacity of 213 places; Nufarul Hotel with a capacity of 150 places; Termal Hotel with a capacity of 300 places; Felix Hotel with a capacity of 291 places; Lotus Hotel with a capacity of 400 places; International Hotel with a capacity of 408 places; Mureș Hotel with a capacity of 650 places; Unirea Hotel with a capacity of 306 places; Someș Hotel with a capacity of 344 places; Poeneni Hotel with a capacity of 306 places; Padiș and Muncelul Hotels with a capacity of 1464, respectively 1040 places; four villas with a capacity of 508 places; private pensions.

In Balaruc-les-Bains, there are also 1-4 stars hotels, villas and private pensions. We will mention the most important hotels recommended in the resort. At 100 m from Balaruc-les-Bains thermal baths and beaches, the Best Western Hotel des Thermes, recently renovated, is ideally located in a peaceful setting to allow the guests to fully enjoy the benefits of the spa treatment or their vacation. Open since May 2017, the Hotel Opéralia les Pins welcomes its guests on the edge of the Charles De Gaulle Park and 350 m from the thermal baths. Hotel Restaurant Martinez downtown is situating accross the park and a few minutes away from the new spa and beaches. The hotel consists of 25 renovated rooms with Wifi, air conditioning, free private parking and a shaded garden with its patios. Neptune Hotel is situated in the heart of the Balaruc-les-Bains spa, both for a curist stay only or for a tourist circuit. It is a three-star hotel located about 500 meters from the New Thermal Establishment. Hotel Pension Bel Air Conveniently located close to the New Thermal Establishment, in the city center, the hotel is one of the first Balearic establishments. Azur Hotel is located in the city center, less than 300 meters from the thermal baths and beaches. The Central Hotel is located close to the thermal baths and the beach and in the heart of the village, so it enjoys a privileged location. Hotel du Golfe is located in the heart of the town, a few minutes from the thermal baths and beaches. Ibis Hotel Modeling and beauty center has an indoor heated pool and a steam room. The accommodation facilities are synthetized in the following table:

**Table 2:** Accommodation capacities, Baile Felix vs. Balaruc-les-Bains

	<b>Băile Felix</b>	<b>Balaruc-les-Bains</b>
Hotels	12	19
Private pensions	15	28
Total accommodation capacity (places)	5900	4400

Source: [www.bailefelix.ro](http://www.bailefelix.ro), [www.balaruc-les-bains.com/](http://www.balaruc-les-bains.com/)

Concerning the accommodation facilities Balaruc-les-Bains spa has 7 more hotels than Băile Felix spa, but the ranking of hotels is similar in both spas. Additionally, the French spa is beeter placed than the Romanian one regarding the private pensions. Given the steady increase in the number of tourists who visit Balaruc-les-Bains, the French spa plans to increase the number of accommodations.

Despite this, one can notice that the total accommodation capacity of Băile Felix spa are 1.500 patients/day (higher than the Balaruc-les-Bains) and the hotels in the Romanian spa have a higher capacity than in the French one.

#### 4. Conclusion

In both cases, the Romanian resort Băile Felix and the French resort Balaruc-les-Bains, to the natural resources are added the material base and technical infrastructure, in order to make them as useful as possible: sanatoriums, hospitals, clinics, medical offices, pools and swimming pools, recreational facilities and entertainment.

In parallel with the natural factors of treatments, spa resorts also have a wide range of therapeutic procedures that use physical factors. Complex treatment bases include kinesitherapy, electrotherapy, hydrotherapy, mechanotherapy, pneumotherapy and others. Prophylactic sessions in spa resorts are authentic methods, useful not only for the elderly or individuals with various affections, but also for young people, as more and more young people are now suffering from various cardiovascular diseases to stress-related illnesses. Prophylactic treatments tend to become the dominant type of spa activity and provide valuable support to human health.

Balneary tourism has had a distinct evolution from other forms of tourism due to natural resources, longer stays, and year-long interest. The length of the stay in this form of tourism is one of the highest: 14-21 days / year, sometimes even twice a year.

Balneary tourism and balneal medicine acquire new aspects every day, in parallel with the development and modernization of reception facilities for accommodation, public catering, treatment and recreation in resorts.

Both Băile Felix and Balaruc-les-Bains are resorts where health tourism can be traced back to the ancient times, when the properties of mineral waters were used for wellness and medical purpose.

The social aspect of spa tourism is exploited in both spas through programs for the elderly population, the main consumers of these services, the tariffs for the accommodation packages being different only by a small amount.

Based on several reports and studies we could assert that the image of the Balaruc-les-Bains balneary resort is better than the image of the Băile Felix balneary resort, the services provided being considered better, even if the quality of treatments is more or less equal (Office de Tourism, 2019; Baile Felix, 2019).

The rates for services not included in the social program packages do not differ significantly, if we take into account the fact that the minimum wage levels in the two countries do differ significantly, the French minimum wage being higher than the Romanian one.

Also, Balaruc-les-Bains is better known, due to the fact that the tradition was maintained, as well as a better publicity. Spa tourism is a key segment for all the spas included in this study. The local authorities are also involved in promoting spa tourism, through a range of social programs. Even though the minimum wages in France are significantly higher than in Romania, the tariffs do not differ much, which means that both hotel establishments offer equal quality standards that require similar investments in specific infrastructure. Thus, the Romanian resorts Băile Felix must take advantage of their strengths (such as an exceptional natural environment and the possibility to treat a wide range of diseases and medical conditions) in order to attract tourists from other countries and increase their notoriety in this domain.

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