

The financial crisis has tempered the appetite of most Romanians with lower budgets than last year, for summer holidays abroad. This year 70% of the Romanians are expected to spend their summer holidays in the country and most of them are not willing to allot more than 1,000 Euro for this purpose, according to a study released by GFK. Those who can still afford to leave the country chose cruises and guided tours to exotic destinations, such as China, Japan, Singapore, South America, Canada or USA, but also trips to European capitals such as Athens of Ankara, Javier Garcia del Valle, vice president of the tour- operator Happy Tour, told Bucharest Herald. The activity of Happy Tour, owned by the Spanish group GED, has become more complex this year, after GED acquired 80% of the shares of corporate and leisure tourism agency Travel House and also bought the online tickets agency paravion.ro.

BH: When will the expansion of Happy Tour in eastern Europe, in countries like Bulgaria, Hungary and Serbia begin and what are the targets on these new markets?

Javier Garcia del Valle: There is no time to “start” the process. What Happy Tour wanted, was to consolidate its position as the indisputable leader on the Romanian market. After the acquisition of paravion.ro and Travel House (pending the approval of the Competition Council), we have positioned ourselves to be able to offer the full range of services: from corporate travel and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Congresses and Events), to on-line and leisure. After the approval and the integration, we can start considering expansion possibilities outside Romania. For the moment we are not targeting a certain country or company.

BH: Both business and leisure tourism were seriously affected by the financial crisis last year and companies and individuals cut significantly their travel budgets. How did Happy Tour sales perform last year, compared with 2008?

Javier Garcia del Valle: The travel sector, in general, was indeed seriously affected last year by the crisis and Happy Tour, as part of that market, also suffered. The good news is that, despite the crisis, Happy Tour managed to generate enough cash to buy these two companies and, of course, to fully maintain the operation, without any issues. We saw a drop in our sales but both business lines performed well enough. We took 2009 as a year of opportunities and we were successful.

BH: How have the budgets of the corporations for business trips changed and what kind of travel and accommodation services are they asking under lower budgets?

Javier Garcia del Valle: Travel budgets, as I said before, were affected. It is true that some companies, not all, moved from 5* properties to 4* and some others from 4* to 3* properties, in terms of accommodation. In terms of flights, our corporate customers have tried to extend their accommodation as much as possible, in various destination, to be able to book more restrictive fares. There was a reduction in travel budgets but also in prices, and the sum of both is what brought down the total sales.

Romanians buy cruises and guided tours to exotic destinations for the summer holidays

Written by Administrator

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BH: Which of the options offered by Happy Tour for vacations (city break, charter, cruises etc) sell best and what are the reasons?

Javier Garcia del Valle: Everything sells well. Although in many cases we are perceived as a corporate travel company, we have a very good leisure/vacations department. We sell charters, a lot of city breaks and cruises but we also sell guided tours to exotic destinations that no other travel agency sells, such as China, Japan, Singapore, South America, Canada, USA. Many tourism companies sell these destinations but no one offers guided tours like we do.

BH: What are the top three vacation destinations, offered by Happy Tour, in most demand in Romania this year?

Javier Garcia del Valle: Cruises, no matter where, are very demanded as well as our guided tours. Clients are a bit tired of going always to the same place and they prefer to buy tours because they know they can relax, the same happens with the cruises. Of course, Turkey, Spain, and the capitals of Europe are also very much in demand.

BH: The past few years have brought a large number of tourism agencies on the Romanian market, many of them small and with weak financial potential. What is your perspective on the future of these agencies if the crisis continues in 2010 and in 2011?

Javier Garcia del Valle: The crisis is performing a "natural selection" on the market. Indeed there are far too many agencies in Romania: around 3,000 if my figures are not wrong. But out of them, only 290 are IATA accredited agencies, which is less than 10%. Those able to restructure their companies, turn them into more professional, transparent, trustful and competitive businesses will survive and even increase. Those which still have the old mentality, waiting for clients to come, instead of going after them, unfortunately will not survive long. This has also happened in Spain, Germany, USA, France or UK. We have seen in the last years how big agencies, such as UK based Thomson merged with Swedish's Fritidsresor, then TUI acquired Thomson and then they merged with First Choice. There were too many big tour operators and they realized that. In Spain the crisis forced more than 1,800 travel companies to close.

Javier Garcia del Valle: Romanii cumpara croaziere si circuite cu ghid in destinatii exotice pentru vacanta de vara

Criza financiara a temperat apetitul majoritatii romanilor cu bugete mai mici decat anul trecut, pentru vacantele de vara in strainatate. Anul acesta, 70% dintre romani isi petrec vacanta de vara in tara si majoritatea nu sunt dispusi sa aloce mai mult de 1.000 de Euro in acest scop, potrivit unui studiu realizat de GFK. Cei care isi permit inca sa plece din tara aleg croaziere si circuite cu ghid in destinatii exotice, precum China, Japonia, Singapore, America de Sud, Canada sau SUA, dar si calatoriile in capitale europene, precum Atena sau Ankara, a declarat pentru Bucharest Herald Javier Garcia del Valle, vicepresedinte al tur-operatorului Happy Tour. Activitatea companiei Happy Tour,

detinuta de grupul spanilo GED, a devenit mai complexa anul acesta, dupa ce GED a achizitionat 80% din actiunile agentiei de turism Travel House, specializata in sejururi corporatiste si de leisure si a cumparat de asemenea agentia de bilete online paravion.ro.

BH: Cand va incepe expansiunea Happy Tour in Europa de Est, in tari precum Bulgaria, Ungaria si Serbia si care sunt tintele pe aceste piete noi?

Javier Garcia del Valle: Nu avem timp "sa demaram" procesul. Happy Tour a vrut sa isi consolideze pozitia ca lider pe piata romaneasca. Dupa achizitia paravion.ro si a Travel House (care asteapta inca acordul Consiliului Concurentei), ne-am pozitionat pentru a putea oferi intreaga gama de servicii: de la turism corporatist si MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Congresses and Events), la rezervari on-line si leisure. Dupa aprobarea achizitiei si dupa integrare putem lua in considerare posibilitatile de expansiune in afara Romaniei. Pentru moment nu tintim o anumita tara sau companie.

BH: Atat turismul de afaceri, cat si cel de leisure au fost afectate serios de criza financiara, iar companiile si turistii individuali si-au redus semnificativ bugetele de calatorii. Cum au evoluat vanzarile Happy Tour anul trecut, comparativ cu 2008?

Javier Garcia del Valle: Turismul, in gereal, a fost afectata serios de criza anul trecut si Happy Tour, fiind parte din aceasta piata, a suferit de asemenea. Vestile bune sunt ca, in ciuda crizei, Happy Tour a reusit sa obtina venituri suficient de mari pentru a putea cumpara aceste companii si pentru a mentine toate operatiunile, fara probleme. Am inregistrat o scadere a vanzarilor, dar ambele linii de business au avut rezultate destul de bune. Am considerat 2009 un an cu oportunitati si am avut succes.

BH: Cum s-au modificat bugetele companiilor pentru calatoriile de afaceri si ce fel de servicii de cazare si calatorie solicita in limita acestor bugete? □

Javier Garcia del Valle: Bugetele de calatorii, asa cum am mentionat, au fost afectate. Este adevarat ca unele companii, nu toate, si-au schimbat optiunile si au trecut de la cazare in hoteluri de 5* la 4* sau de la 4* la 3*. In ceea ce priveste zborurile clientii nostri corporate au incercat sa isi extinda sejururile in diverse destinatii, cat de mult a fost posibil, pentru a putea rezerva bilete la preturi mai mici. Reducere s-a manifestat atat in cazul bugetelor de calatorii, cat si in tarife si suma acestor a condus la scaderea vanzarilor.

BH: Care dintre optiunile oferite de Happy Tour pentru vacante (city break, charter, cruises etc) se vinde cel mai bine si care sunt motivele?

Javier Garcia del Valle: Toate ofertele se vand bine. Desi in general suntem percepti ca o agentie de turism corporatist avem un departament de leisure/vacante foarte bun. Vinde chartere, multe city break-uri si croaziere, dar vindem si circuite cu ghid in destinatii exotice, pe care nicio alta agentie de turism nu le vinde. Printre destinatii se afla China, Japonia, Singapore, America de Sud, Canada si SUA. Multe agentii de turism vand aceste destinatii, dar nimeni nu ofera circuite cu ghid, asa cum facem noi.

BH: Care sunt cele mai solicitate trei destinatii de vacanta oferite de Happy Tour, anul acesta?

Javier Garcia del Valle: Croaziere, indiferent de destinatie, sunt foarte solicitate, precum si circuitele cu ghid. Clientii s-au cam saturat sa mearga mereu in acelasi loc si prefera sa cumpere circuite, pentru ca stiu ca se pot relaxa astfel, acelasi lucru se intampla si in cazul croazierelor. Desigur Turcia, Spain si capitalele europene sunt si ele foarte solicitate.

BH: Ultimii ani au adus un numar mare de agentii de turism pe piata din Romania, multe dintre ele de dimensiuni mici si cu potential financiar mic. Care este persepectiva dvs asupra viitorului acestor agentii in cazul in care criza continua in 2010 si in 2011?

Javier Garcia del Valle: Criza realizeaza o "selectie naturala" pe piata. Este adevarat ca sunt mult prea multe agentii de turism in Romania: in jur de 3.000, daca cifrele mele sunt corecte. Dar dintre acestea, doar 290 sunt agentii acreditate IATA, ceea ce reprezinta mai putin de 10%. Cei capabili sa isi restructureze companiile, sa creasca nivelul de profesionalism, transparenta si incredere vor supravietui si chiar vor creste. Cei care vor avea o mentalitate inechita si vor astepta sa fie cautati de clienti, nu vor supravietui pe termen lung, din pacate. Acest lucru s-a intamplat si in Spania, Germania, SUA, Franta sau Mare Britanie. Am vazut in ultimii ani cum agentile mari, precum compania britanica Thomson a fuzionat cu operatorul suedez Fritidsresor, dupa care TUI a achizitionat Thomson si a fuzionat cu First Choice. Au fost prea multi tur- operatori mari si au realizat acest lucru. In Spania, criza financiara a fortat mai mult de 1.800 de agentii de turism sa isi inchida afacerile.