

COMPARATIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF TOURIST SECTOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS AND ITALY

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Tourism is one of the most dynamically developing sectors of the global economy playing a critical role in the formation of gross domestic product (GDP), job creation and infrastructure development. The Republic of Belarus and Italy represent two different examples of the development of the tourism industry. Italy being one of the leading tourist countries in the world has a rich cultural heritage and a well-developed infrastructure. Belarus, on the contrary, is at the initial stage of tourism development, though having a significant potential due to its natural resources and cultural attractions. This article will provide a comparative analysis of the tourism economies of Belarus and Italy using up-to-date statistical data.

As reported by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), tourism contributed 2.5% to the global GDP in 2022. In Italy, tourism plays a crucial role in the economy. The UNWTO states that tourism's share of Italy's GDP in 2022 was approximately 6% [1]. Meanwhile, in Belarus, the National Statistical Committee estimated that tourism accounted for around 2.5% of the country's GDP in 2022. This indicates that Belarus is significantly lagging behind in the development of the tourism industry compared to Italy [2].

Italy receives more than 60 million foreign tourists annually, which ranks it fifth in the world in terms of the number of tourist arrivals. In 2022, 62 million people visited the country, which is 15% more than in 2021, thanks to the recovery of tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Ministry of Sports and Tourism, about 1.5 million foreign tourists were registered in Belarus in 2022. This is significantly less than in Italy which can be explained by the country's lower popularity in the international arena, as well as limited infrastructure [3].

Italy is famous for its cultural and historical landmarks such as the Colosseum, Venice, Florence and Rome. In addition, the country attracts tourists with its beach resorts (for example, the Amalfi Coast) and ski resorts (the Dolomites). In Belarus, the main areas of tourism are ecological tourism (Belovezhskaya Pushcha, the Braslav Lakes) and cultural and historical attractions (Mir Castle, Nesvizh Castle).

Further on, let us compare the duration of the tourist season. In Italy, it lasts all year round due to the variety of services offered. The peak season falls during the summer months when tourists visit beach resorts, as well as on Christmas holidays when ski resorts are popular. In Belarus, tourism is seasonal with its peak in the summer months when ecological and rural tours are popular.

Italy has a developed hotel infrastructure including more than 33 thousand hotels and other accommodation facilities. In 2022, the total number of beds in the country's hotels was about 2.5 million. According to the data for 2022, there are about 1.5 thousand hotels in Belarus which is dramatically less than in Italy. The average occupancy rate of hotels in Belarus accounts for about 50% which indicates an incomplete use of the potential [4].

One of the main factors when choosing a vacation destination is transport accessibility. Italy has a well-developed transport network, including international airports (Rome, Milan, Venice), high-speed railways and highways. This makes the country easily accessible to tourists from different countries. In Belarus, the main transport hub is Minsk National Airport, which handles a limited number of international flights. This creates certain difficulties for attracting foreign tourists. At this stage, we would like to note that Belarusians can get to Rome from Minsk for 10,000 BYN per person.

In 2024, Italy's tourism revenues amounted to about 3,000 euros, which is 20% more than in 2023. This is due to the restoration of the tourist flow after the pandemic [5]. In 2022, tourism revenues in Belarus totaled approximately 500 million US dollars, which is considerably lower than in Italy. The primary revenue sources come from domestic tourism and tourism from the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) [6].

The final comparison factor is the number of people employed in the tourist industry. In Italy, tourism employs more than 4 million people which makes up about 15% of the total number of people involved in the

country's economy. In Belarus, the tourism industry employs about 100 thousand people, or 2% of the total number of employees. This indicates a significant potential for the employment growth in this area.

The analysis allows us to conclude that there is a notable difference in the development of the tourism industry in both countries. Italy, with its rich cultural heritage and well-developed infrastructure, holds a leading position in global tourism. Belarus, despite its significant potential, is still in the early stages of developing this industry. To enhance competitiveness of our Republic in the international tourism market, it is essential to improve infrastructure, actively promote tourism products abroad, and enhance transport accessibility.

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