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Reception Operations in Ports of Nautical Tourism

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Abstract. Nautical tourism as the dominant selective form of tourism is gaining on share in international tourism. Despite the importance of nautical tourism in tourism development and lengthening the tourist season, a theoretical gap in tourism literature was identified, especially in business operation. The purpose of this paper is to foster theoretical knowledge of reception operations in ports of nautical tourism. Research goals were achieved by conducting a personal interview survey. Specifics of reception operation in ports of nautical tourism were identified in the field of accommodation facilities, reservation procedure, arrival, stay and departure procedure. This paper provides understanding of reception operations in ports of nautical tourism and fills an identified gap in the nautical tourism literature. Research findings are an important contribution to nautical tourism theory and practice.

Key words: *reception operations, port of nautical tourism, nautical tourism*

1. Introduction

Nautical tourism, also known as "yachting" or "marine" tourism is a syntagm used to define a selective form of tourism that covers a variety of activities related to different types of waters: seas, rivers, lakes or canals. It can be defined as a set of activities, features and relations, whose common goal is to satisfy boaters need for sports, pleasure and relaxation. In addition, all other services provided at sea or in ports of nautical tourism, which are related to the boater or his (rented) vessel, can also be considered a part of nautical tourism. Nautical tourism is a sum of poly-functional activities and relations that are caused by the tourists boaters' stay within or out of the ports of nautical tourism, and by the use of vessels or other objects related to the nautical and tourist activities, for the purpose of recreation, sports, entertainment or other needs (Luković, T. i Gržetić, Z., 2007). As a branch of tourism, nautical tourism is a compound touristic and maritime activity whose definition is complex because of its intensive connections with maritime and navigational activities (Luković, 2007). The main characteristics of nautical tourism are: the boaters' mobility in destination, a wide spectrum of activities they engage in and services they use. Nautical tourism covers the entire spectrum of activities given that boaters are not stationary, but guests are characterized precisely by their mobility (Gračan et al., 2016). Nautical tourism is developing rapidly on regional and local level and is considered as one of the most propulsive kinds of recreational tourism. Its growth has developed some sub types, shaped in special selective types, and as such, they have been developing on their own, those are nautical tourism ports, charter and cruising (Luković, 2008). This form of maritime tourism is gaining momentum and is becoming one of the leading forms of tourism with significant economic implications

(Ćorluka, Matošević Radić, Geić, 2013.). Nautical tourism contributes to economy development by fostering their growth and development through both their current activities and those related with them horizontally (excursion tourism, diving tourism, photo safari, servicing) or vertically (handicrafts, shipbuilding), implying contribution to the growth in employment of domicile inhabitants, which is particularly important for insular economy (Jugović et al., 2011).

Besides the given factors, such as nature and landscape beauty, clean environment and climate conditions, any nautical destination needs to develop a wide set of infrastructure to accommodate boaters needs. The base of this infrastructure is the ports of nautical tourism with all the services they provide for boats and for boaters. Croatian legislation recognizes four types of ports of nautical tourism: Anchorage, Dry storage, Dry marina, and Marina (Pravilnik o razvrstavanju i kategorizaciji luka nautičkog turizma, 2008), where anchorages and dry storages offer only basic services for vessels, while dry marinas and marinas offer a variety of services for vessels as well as for boaters. Marinas are rated with anchors (two to five) where higher ratings denote higher quality of services, more facilities, greater focus on environment and clients' needs. The need for excellent staff to provide these services grows proportionally to the growth of nautical tourism share. Nautical tourism port is essentially a tourist facility, which from a business, spatial, construction and functional aspect, provides a venue and service in its entirety for satisfying the requirements of nautical tourism and nautical tourists, namely boaters (Kasum, et al., 2010). The quality, equipment and infrastructure itself of Croatian harbor and marina, still greatly lags behind other countries that nautical constant investment each year boosts its ports and marinas to raise to a higher level. (Gračan, et al., 2016). Also, the Action plan of nautical tourism development, published by Croatian Institute for Tourism, states that the level of skills and competencies in yachting tourism, as well as the general public knowledge of the importance of yachting tourism for economy and social development, is insufficient. It proposes introducing multiple improvements in educational system, in order to override these problems. The problem identification is the first step in implementing proposed improvements. The aim of this paper is to identify the specifics of reception operations in ports of nautical tourism and create a guideline for writing educational materials. By fostering theoretical knowledge of reception operations in ports of nautical tourism the identified theoretical gap will be covered. At the same time the paper is an important contribution in satisfying requirements made by practical sector. As the main workflow and hospitality settings are quite similar to the hotel procedures, corresponding hotel literature was used as a guideline for creating this paper.

2. Research Methodology

Qualitative research method in the form of in-depth interview with four reception staff members including the reception manager as industry professionals was used. Desk research about hotel and marina offers and currently available educations for receptionists and reception managers in ports of nautical tourism was also conducted with purpose of ascertaining current educational opportunities. The same methodology was used in creating introduction that is based on nautical tourism theory. In presenting the findings, the authors have used descriptive and comparison methods.

3. Research Results and Discussion

Specifics of reception operation in ports of nautical tourism were identified in the field of accommodation facilities, reservation procedure, arrival, stay and departure procedure.

3.1 General

All reception office spaces in ports of nautical tourism must meet certain standards as stated in Rules on classification and categorization of ports of nautical tourism published in National gazette number 72/2008. Higher marina ratings (higher number of Anchors) denote higher quality and larger scale of offered services. However all the ports of nautical tourism base their reception operations on similar, if not the same, principles. Specifics of reception operation in ports of nautical tourism were identified in the field of accommodation capacities, reservations, customer reception, stay and departure activities.

3.2 Accommodation facilities

Accommodation facilities in marinas are called berths (on the water) or dry storage (on land). We can define berth as a space on the quay equipped with maritime bollards, anchor blocks and mooring lines. Dry storage can be defined as an area on land equipped with cradles, posts or racks. All must be equipped with water and electricity supply. Use of berth can be agreed upon for different periods of time – annual, half-year, month, day or even half a day. The type of accommodation primarily depends on the type of the watercraft and after that the clients wishes are taken into consideration. To allocate a berth to the specific vessel following factors must be taken into consideration:

- Vessel dimensions (length over all (LOA), width, draft)
- Vessel weight
- Period of use of the berth
- Weather conditions, sea currents, tides and lows in the period of use
- Skippers sailing abilities, skills and experience
- Special needs/demands from crew members, passengers or the vessel itself (ie. Presence of disabled persons, pregnant women, small children, non-standard hull construction etc.)

3.3 Reservation procedure

3.3.1 Reservations classification

Reservations can be classified according to different criteria. Based on business activity and depending on their offer, marinas can make reservations for berthing services, dry storage, crane or travel lift (lifting/lowering) services, restaurant services and other services such as laundrette services, transportation, accommodation, sports or wellness facilities etc. Depending on length of stay, reservations can be classified as long-term and short-term ones. Long-term reservations usually need to be made several months in advance and require term contracts with full vessel data. Short-term reservations are made several days or even just hours before the vessels arrival to marina. These usually refer to transit berthing options. Number of users' classification implies three options: (i) individual reservation for one vessel, for both short and long-term stay and one or more boaters; (ii) flotilla reservations made for several vessels, more boaters and short-term periods of use and (iii) charter fleet formation. The latter implies negotiations regarding use of facilities, prices and conditions; in most cases involvement of higher management is required. Based on distribution channels, reservations are direct – directly at the marina reception and indirect trough online reservation systems, booking agencies and similar intermediators.

3.3.2 System complexity

The reservation process in marinas is complex due to the accommodation of both vessels and guests. The most significant difference comes from the fact that hotels can sell one room to one client at any given point in time, while marinas can sell the same berth several times over.

Most long-term contracts include the clause that marina is entitled to use the berth while the users vessel is out from marina. Basically this means that if a berth is sold on annual basis, and becomes available during longer period of time, it can be resold on monthly basis and then again on daily basis. This process is quite dynamic and requires excellent organizational skills from the person conducting the reservation. Besides the information on vessels coming in and out of the marina, information on the weather in the following 72 hours also need to be taken into consideration. The receptionist needs to be a quick-thinking person who is able to simultaneously communicate in several languages and trough different communication channels, which knows the marina facilities to detail and is able to predict short-term demand and consumer behaviour. Reception staff is often the coordinator and organizer of activities and processes in marina, so investing in their training and knowledge is the key to success. Preferred communication channels in marinas are: e-mail for long-term periods and phones or VHF for transit berth use.

3.3.3 Information sources, proofs and data processing

To book a transit berth marinas will need information on vessels owner/skipper, period of stay, name and length of the vessel, contact details and special demands. For long-term contracts additional information are needed: owners passport for natural person or Trade Court Statement if the vessel is company owned, certificate of registry, proof of payment for permit for sailing in Croatian waters, proof that the tourist tax has been paid, insurance details (third parties insurance), proof that the vessels customs status is clear, proof that the vessel is seaworthy, the authorization to use the vessel if owner is not present or the vessel is company owned etc. Skipper needs to provide his skippers licence that is issued by competent authority. If the vessel has a nonstandard hull, construction plans are required in order to avoid hull damages. All the information are stored in marina PMS (Property Management System), while document copies are stored in accordance with marina policies and General Data Protection Regulation. Every marina has their own terms and conditions, house rules, business policies and procedures, but all are based on similar presumptions. Waiting lists in marinas are quite specific as not all berths are suitable for all vessels. “First come – first served” rule is applicable, but only after taking vessel dimensions and special construction details into consideration. On daily basis receptionists will provide other departments on occupancy rate and details on new arrivals. Preregistration process is the process of entering available details on vessels and its crew in the marinas data base. It is used to shorten the amount of time that a client needs to spend at the front office. Daily monitoring of the fleet in the marina is conducted several times every day and it is used to control if all the vessels in the marina are registered in the system, as well as if all those who left have actually registered their (temporary) departure. These logs used to be manual, but nowadays modern solutions such as RRFID, QR codes, ultrasonic sensors, mobile apps etc., which reduce staff engagement, are available. Accurate information on vessel movements is subject to controls from different Government institutions (Customs department, Harbour master etc.)

3.4 Arrival, stay and departure procedure

3.4.1 Arrival procedure

Marinas are not obliged to take in any unannounced arrival, but will try to avoid declining berthing options, especially in cases of bad weather. On daily basis during the sailing season, a limited amount of berths is available for transit use depending on marina location, day of the week, fleet structure, weather conditions and other factors. Process of admission to marina differentiates depending on the period of stay, services used and the type of client. In comparison to a hotel, marinas have the advantage of not needing extra time to prepare the

berth for the next client, except in cases of exceptional damage to the mooring lines or supply points.

Marina provides different types of services to clients. In most of the marinas they can be split into 5 main categories:

- Berthing/ dry berthing services
- Hoisting / crane services
- Vessel service and maintenance (engine service, sails service, rigging, hull maintenance, cleaning etc.)
- Bar and restaurant services
- Other (waste collection, chandlery, broker, grocery shop, wellness, fitness and training, accommodation facilities etc.)

3.4.2 Stay procedure

All the services provided by the marina must be recorded in the PMS in a timely manner. Depending on the marina procedures and the type of PMS every department can enter their own services into the system or can report it to the reception staff that will enter the data. The former way is considered more effective as employees have a greater sense of responsibility and awareness of the results. The accuracy of the entered data (both on vessels and guests) is of utmost importance not only for charging the client, but also in respect to many regulatory institutions who control this branch of tourism such as Customs and Tax department, Police department, Harbour master etc. Boaters and their vessels tend to create large amount of (hazardous) waste. While staying in the marina boaters have to be provided with adequate facilities for waste disposal and tracking.

3.4.3 Check-out procedure

Check-out procedures in marinas depend on type of contract (long-term or short-term). Keys to successful check out procedure are confirming all the services entered into PMS actually belong to certain user and that there are no complaints regarding the quality of provided services. Some of the possibilities during the check-out are (i) both vessel and client are leaving the marina after unspecified period of time. In this case full payment of all the provided services is required prior to leaving the marina, (ii) vessel stays in the marina while the client is leaving in which case the marina will need to check that both vessel documents and keys are deposited at the marina reception and water and electricity plug-ins are disconnected for safety reasons. Client can instruct the reception on the required services that are to be done while he is away from the marina. In this case client can pay for prior services but the full payment is not mandatory as the marina has a safety deposit in form of the vessel. This means that marinas retain the right to keep the vessel until the due debt is settled, and in some extreme cases they have the right to sell the vessel in order to cover their fees.

The “value for money” is one of the most important aspects of studying customer satisfaction and accordingly, creating a good name for the marina among boaters. Prior to concluding their stay in the marina, every boater should be interviewed in regard to his stay. Receptionists should be instructed and trained on obtaining satisfaction feedbacks from customers in order to identify and correct eventual problems or discrepancies in quality of service. Many ports of nautical tourism are therefore introducing quality standards such as ISO, Golden Anchor scheme and similar.

4. Conclusion

Croatian coast is one of the most attractive sailing areas in the Mediterranean. During the last two decades it has become one of major nautical tourism forces in the world with significant charter and private boats fleet. Nautical tourism is making a significant share of all tourist

arrivals and overnight stays, as well as in Croatia's national income. As much as it is contributing to the local economy, increased numbers of tourists and their vessels is creating a deep ecological impact on the environment of the Adriatic coast. Therefore the creators of National development strategy see the future of nautical tourism in development based on sustainable development principles. When compared to Mediterranean competitors, one of the biggest disadvantages for Croatia is the "value for money" aspect. The main goal after identifying our weaknesses is to rectify them through proper education and creation of quality product. To complete this task, all parties involved must take steps to improve the system and all the links that make a chain of nautical tourism. We firmly believe that the answer to these challenges lays in quality educational programs and training possibilities for all levels of employees, especially those who are most often in contact with clients. Reception staff, as a parts of the nautical port puzzle, need to be adequately educated, knowledgeable and well trained to meet all the customer demands and answer their questions and problems in a timely and accurate manner. To achieve these goals, schooling system and training centres need to, on one side, create such programs that will provide their students with unique set of knowledge and skills, but also, on the other side, engage theory and field experts to create adequate learning materials.

In this paper we have listed the basic differences that prove that reception operations in nautical tourism are specific and need to be studied apart from similar operations in other selective forms of tourism. Specifics of reception operation in ports of nautical tourism in the field of accommodation facilities, reservation procedure, arrival, stay and departure procedure were identified. Therefore, a wider study that would include theory and field experts should be conducted as a base for creating study materials for reception staff. Also, schools and higher educational institutions should create courses for receptionists that will include selective forms of tourism, nautical tourism in particular.

The paper files the identified theoretical gap in nautical tourism literature is and is a contribution to nautical tourism practice. Further activities to boarder the knowledge and gain the awareness of theoretical knowledge are needed, as this selective form of tourism is rapidly growing.

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