

Bucharest hospitality market is experiencing occupancy decline as of October 2008, but it is much less affected than other international markets. Food& beverage segment with increasing revenues supports the accommodation segment and helps maintaining a certain balance between profits and losses. If the new Government plays its cards well and manages to absorb enough EU money to improve the infrastructure and revamp the city, Bucharest could see a new tourism boom in 2010- 2011. Furthermore the capital has chances to become a leisure destination as well under a new image, Kurt Strohmayer, general manager of JW Marriott Grand Hotel tells Bucharest Herald.

BH: Occupancy rates in Bucharest hotels have dropped by 15 per cent in the final part of 2008, according to a study concluded by Deloitte. Has JW Marriott Bucharest Grand Hotel experienced important customer traffic slump as well?

Kurt Strohmayer: The financial crisis has affected all the European countries as well as the USA, so there has been a world economy decline, which affected Romanian relatively late, starting from October-November 2008. This has lead to lower income on the hospitality market both in Romania as well as in any other eastern European country. It is true that there has been a slight drop in the occupancy rate, which has affected our hotel as well. But the occupancy rates have not plunged so much as in other countries.

BH: Was food& beverage segment negatively affected as well?

Kurt Strohmayer: It is very interesting, because we haven't noticed any decline in the food& beverage sector. We had just as many customers in our bars and restaurants in 2008 as in 2007. The hotel was fully booked for New Year's Eve party as well: we had 1,200 people celebrating here. Also a lot of Christmas events were organized by companies and not only, in December. So we haven't faced any decline in this segment yet. As far as accommodation is concerned the premium sector, including expensive rooms and suits, has dropped.

BH: What is your perspective on the evolution of this crisis on the hospitality market?

Kurt Strohmayer: I am optimistic about it, because now Romania has a new government which can turn into reality the projects funded by the European Union, that have been ignored up to now. I am talking about infrastructure development, tourism master plan and other projects for which the EU has 40 billion Euro allotted for Romania. If Romania manages to absorb these funds the economy, including the tourism sector will be boosted. I feel that Romania's economy will definitely improve over the next years. So 2011 will be a good year and even part of 2009, 2010 can be positive for Romania.

Kurt Strohmayr: “ This is the perfect time to invest in new hotels”

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BH: Will some new brands within JW Marriott chain, such as Renaissance and Courtyard enter Romania in the near future?

Kurt Strohmayr: Yes, we are still under negotiations with potential investors and now it's the time to invest, because land prices are going down. Also the whole development process from the design stage to the delivery takes between 2 and 2.5 years, which means that the hotels could open when the crisis ends, a perfect timing. These hotels will open in Bucharest and in other cities like Timisoara, Cluj and Brasov as well.

BH: Does Bucharest have right now enough 4 and 5* rooms?

Kurt Strohmayr: For the time being, considering the evolution of the crisis, there are enough hotels and during the low season, in January and August there might be too many. But I think in the future, when the crisis ends, there will be enough space for additional hotel rooms.

BH: What do you think about the initiative of the new Tourism Minister Elena Udrea to exploit the balneary potential of Bucharest and turn the capital into a “wellness” center as she called it?

Kurt Strohmayr: I think this is a new approach which will improve the knowledge about Romania and about Bucharest. It is very important for the capital that the Tourism Ministry is looking for key factors which could attract more people here. And one of them could be health and spa, why not?

BH: Could business tourism on which Bucharest relies right now step in the shadow and leave more room for the balneary tourism to develop?

Kurt Strohmayr: If investments are made in infrastructure and city renovation, leisure tourists will be attracted here automatically, because foreign businesspeople who travel to Romania have families and friends and can spread news about Bucharest's tourism potential and beauties. Other cities like Paris, London, Vienna have more leisure visitors than business visitors, so this is possible.

BH: What other ingredients does Bucharest need to become a leisure destination as well?

Kurt Strohmayr: The most important thing is to create a good image of the city, which means a great renovation process and infrastructure improvement. The metro stations should reach

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the airport and some interesting remote areas of Bucharest as well. There should be fast trains to Snagov and other areas around Bucharest, because there are a lot of beautiful things to see around the capital, but they need to be easy accessible for any type of tourists as well.

Kurt Strohmayer: “Acesta este momentul perfect pentru investitii in hoteluri noi “

Piata hoteliera din Bucuresti trece printr-un declin al ratelor de ocupare care a debutat in octombrie ,dar este mult mai putin afectata decat alte piete internationale. Segmentul de food& beverage cu venituri in crestere spijina segmentul de cazare si contribuie la mentinrea unui echilibru intre profit si pierderi. Daca noul guvern isi joaca bine cartile si reuseste sa absoarba suficienti bani europeni pentru imbunatatirea infrastructurii si pentru modernizarea orasului, Bucurestiul ar putea experimenta un nou boom turistic in 2010- 2011. Mai mult chiar, capitala are sanse reale sa devina o destinatie de leisure cu o imagine noua, a explicat intr-un interviu pentru Bucharest Herald , Kurt Strohmayer, manager general al JW Marriott Grand Hotel.

BH: Ratele de ocupare in hotelurile din Bucuresti au scazut cu 15 la suta in ultima parte a lui 2008, potrivit unui studiu realizat de Deloitte. JW Marriott Bucharest Grand Hotel s-a confruntat cu o scadere importanta a traficului de clienti?

Kurt Strohmayer: Criza financiara a afectat toate tarile europene si SUA, prin urmare a exista un declin economic global, care a afectat Romania relativ tarziu, incepand din octombrie-noiembrie 2008. Acest fapt a condus la venituri mai reduse pe piata hoteliera atat in Romania cat si in alte tari din estul Europei. Este adevarat ca ratele de ocupare au scazut, iar acest fenomen a afectat si hotelul nostru. Dar nu au scazut atat de mult ca in alte tari.

BH: Segmentul de food& beverage a fost si el afectat negativ?

Kurt Strohmayer: Este foarte interesant, pentru ca nu am observat niciun declin pe acest segment. Am avut la fel de multi clienti in barurile si restaurantele noastre in 2008, ca si in 2007. Hotelul a fost rezervat complet pentru petrecerea de Anul Nou: am avut 1.200 de clienti care au sarbatorit aici. Companiile si nu numai au organizat, de asemenea, multe evenimente de Craciun in decembrie. Prin urmare nu am inregistrat nicio scadere pe acest segment inca. In ceea ce priveste cazarea, sectorul premium, care include camere si apartamente scumpe a inregistrat scaderi.

BH: Care este viziunea dumneavoastra asupra evolutiei crizei pe piata hoteliera?

Kurt Strohmayer: Sunt optimist, pentru ca Romania are acum un guvern nou care poate transforma in realitate proiectele finantate de Uniunea Europeana si care au fost ignorate pana acum. Ma refer la dezvoltarea infrastructurii, la master planul pentru turism si alte proiecte pentru care UE a alocat 40 de miliarde de Euro in cazul Romaniei. Daca Romania reuseste sa absoarba acesti bani intreaga economie, inclusiv turismul vor fi impulsionate. Cred ca economia

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Romaniei se va imbunatati in urmatoorii ani. Asa ca 2011 va fi un an bun, si chiar 2009 si 2010 pot fi partial ani pozitivi pentru Romania.

BH: Existenta de a aduce brand-uri noi din cadrul lantului JW Marriott precum Renaissance si Courtyard in Romania in viitorul apropiat?

Kurt Strohmayr: Da, suntem inca in negocieri cu potentiali investitori , iar acum este momentul ideal pentru investitii, pentru ca preturile terenurilor sunt in scadere. De asemenea intregul proces de dezvoltare a unui hotel de la stadiul de proiect pana la livrare dureaza intre 2-2,5 ani, ceea ce inseamna ca acesta s-ar putea deschide la finalul crizei, ceea ce ar insemna un moment perfect. Aceste hoteluri vor fi deschise in Bucuresti si in alte orase precum Timisoara, Cluj si Brasov.

BH: Are Bucurestiul suficiente camere de 4 si 5* in acest moment?

Kurt Strohmayr: Pentru moment, avand in vedere evolutia economica, sunt suficiente camere, iar in afara sezonului, in ianuarie si in august ar putea fi prea multe. Dar cred ca in viitor, cand se va incheia criza, va fi suficient spatiu pentru camere noi de hotel.

BH: Cum vi se pare initiativa noului Ministru al Turismului Elena Udrea de a exploata potentialul balnear al Bucurestiului si de a transforma capitala intr-o destinatie de “wellness” asa cum a numit-o?

Kurt Strohmayr: Cred ca este o abordare noua care va imbunatati cunostintele despre Romania si despre Bucuresti. Este foarte important pentru capitala ca Ministerul Turismului cauta factori cheie care ar putea atrage mai multi turisti aici. Iar turismul de wellness ar putea fi unul dintre acesti factori.

BH: Ar putea trece turismul de afaceri, pe care se bazeaza capitala, in umbra pentru a lasa spatiu de dezvoltare turismului balnear?

Kurt Strohmayr: Daca se fac investitii in infrastructura si in renovarea orasului, turistii vor fi atrasi aici automat, pentru ca oamenii de afaceri straini care calatoresc in Romania au familii si prieteni si pot promova potentialul turistic si frumusetile Bucurestiului. Alte orase precum Paris, Londra, Viena au mai multi turisti de vacanta decat tursiti de afaceri, deci acest lucru este posibil.

BH: Ce alte ingrediente ii mai lipsesc capitalei pentru a deveni o destinatie de vacanta?

Kurt Strohmayr: Cel mai important lucru este crearea unei imagini bune a orasului, care presupune un proces complex de renovare si de dezvoltare a infrastructurii. Metroul ar trebui sa ajunga la aeroport si in alte zone indepartate din Bucuresti. Ar trebui sa existe si trenuri accelerate catre Snagov si alte zone din jurul Bucurestiului, pentru ca sunt multe lucruri frumoase de vazut in jurul capitalei, dar trebuie sa devina usor accesibile pentru toate tipurile de turisti.

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