



OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SPA TOURISM IN MACEDONIA

Abstract: Spa tourism is one of the oldest organized forms of tourism, as evidenced by the many archaeological remains from the ancient period. This means that people have long ago realized the healing properties of thermo-mineral springs and built spas in those places, similar to the areas of Macedonia, such as: Katlanovo Spa, Bansko Spa, Debar Spas, Kosovrsti Spa, Spa near Kochani and many others.

The Romans and the Turks have given the greatest importance to the baths, from whose time the largest number of baths in Europe date, such as the Katlanovo bath near Skopje. Today, these are tourist places of great importance and realize a very large tourist turnover.

Health tourism has always been an escape from everyday life in search of health and happiness. While in the past, such trips had bourn attributes of prestige and luxury, the accessibility and affordability to the average man in tourism is becoming a mass phenomenon. Numerous reasons have contributed to it; namely, the increasing necessity for spa rehabilitation due to the changed mannerism in working and lifestyle of modern man and the awareness of people about taking care of their own health (Alfieri, 1994).

Spa tourism in many countries in the world is very highly developed and in some places it is also a carrier of the tourism economy. Every year, European health resorts and spas generate a turnover of around 20 billion euros and employ more than 500,000 people. Highly developed spa tourism has Hungary, Czech Republic, Belgium, France, Slovenia, Croatia, Bulgaria, etc. Unfortunately, in Macedonia it is only partially developed despite the great opportunities for its smooth development, given the great wealth of thermo-mineral and mineral waters.

In the past, the visit to the baths was characteristic only for the older generation of the population, ie the so-called "over 60", but today this structure of visitors has changed significantly, so that today the younger generations enjoy the beauties of the baths.

Baths and air conditioning are an indispensable part of the health system, cultural heritage and an important economic factor in European countries, similar to Macedonia. Due to which it is necessary to research systematically, systematically and in the long run and to valorize them in the right way.

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Republic of Macedonia is characterized by numerous natural treasures that can be inserted to the tourists. They are: the mountains, river valleys, attractive lakes, springs and other thermomineral springs. Few other countries in the world who have so little area and ample so many thermal springs. Thermomineral sources are heterogeneous composition of the water. This is a vast natural wealth so allows, primarily the development of spa and health tourism. In this scholarly work is processed and presented all possibilities and perspectives for development of thermal (spa) Tourism existing spas in the country: Bansko, Debar baths, Katlanovska bathroom Kezhovica Bath, Bath Kocani, Kumanovo bath, Bath Strnovac in Old Nagoricane Negorska and Bath.

Tourism in North Macedonia is in its early stages of development but saw solid year-on-year growth of 12.8 per cent in 2018 taking total visitor arrivals who stayed overnight to 1.13 million. Just over 700,000 or 63 per cent were international visitors staying an average of 2.1 nights. The number of Day Trippers have not been published and would significantly increase the total number of visitors. Visitors' 'Purpose of travel' also isn't published however as only 18 per cent of overnight stays are in the capital and business centre, Skopje, it could be assumed that a large proportion of business and government travel is day trips.

Skopje is a bustling city with a rich Hellenic heritage and a cityscape that is an incongruous mix of architectural styles and gigantic neoclassical statuary. Grandiloquent monuments sit beside monolithic socialist apartment blocks. Old Ottoman and Byzantine edifices recall the country's pre-communist history while the business hub, happening bars, clubs and the arts scene project its forward-looking aspirations. Global hotel brands are present amongst Skopje's 4 and 5-star properties including Marriot, Hilton, Holiday Inn and Accor.¹

The current condition of some spas is not promising, having in mind they operate with semi-ruined facilities and pools, decayed from the test of time. They are still considered natural healing centres, usually used for treatment of several diseases, as well as for therapeutic treatments in post-surgical phase. Operating as public institutions (under the state's umbrella), up until recently, the spa facilities were considered an addition to the hospitals. However, upon their transformation, part of these spas was privatized, which helped develop sports and recreational activities – opening a window of unused opportunities for this treasure given by nature. Macedonia numbers at least 64 springs with different water temperature, ranging between 20-72 degrees Celsius.

Thermo-mineral waters as a tourist value The southwest planning region of our country is very rich in thermo-minerals waters such as spa sites.

These springs are rich with sulphur, phosphorus, arsenic, iodine, bromine and other elements with medical and physio-therapeutic properties. There are eight spas in the country. In their immediate vicinity, or, as part of the complex can easily be found hotels, motels and other accommodation facilities with accompanying physical and rehabilitation centres. The Health Insurance Fund has signed agreements for continuous medical treatment with a number of these spas. In addition to using these services through the Health Insurance Fund, interested tourists may use private accommodation services, as well. Spa tourism is represented only partially in the overall tourist turnover in the Republic of North Macedonia The spa tourist percentage in the country in regard to the overall tourist turnover in the time period from 2010 until 2019 is in continuous decline (4,9% in 2010; 2,3% in 2019). This is the same for the overnight stays. The percentage of realized overnight stays in regard to the overall realized overnight stays declines from 10,7% in 2010, to 6,7% in 2019. The decline is not a result of a lower number of tourists and realized overnight spa stays, but rather a result of the larger percentage of realized arrivals and overnight stays in other tourist locations (such as mountains, lakes, capital of the county – the city of Skopje, etc.). The participation of tourists in realized overnight spa stays in the Republic of North Macedonia is considerably low.

¹ <https://travel2macedonia.com/tourism/macedonia-spa>

Negorci Spa (Negorska Banja) Negorci spa is located in the immediate surrounding of Gevgelija - settled in the foot of the Kozhuv Mountain at only 50m above sea level. There are three natural springs nearby, with large reserves of hot underground waters. The spa water features medical properties for seven types of illnesses.²The spa is considered to be healing all types of rheumatoid conditions to the bones and muscles; sterility; gastrointestinal diseases; cardiovascular diseases; inflammations of the peripheral nervous system; different types of dermatological conditions, etc. Drinking sulfuric acid water cures inflammation of the kidneys, gastritis, and the onset of gastric ulcer. The spa is equipped with modern electrotherapy equipment; Chinese and paraffin therapy, as well as underwater massage (Taskov, N., 2004). At depths of about 20-50 meters, thermo-mineral water splashes the surface, providing for the fact that in addition to the thermal water, the Negorci spa is also enriched with arterial-thermal-mineral water. In particular, this spa is known as the only spa in the country with thermal mud. Debar Spas (Debarski Banji) The Kosovrasti and Banjishte spas,³ better known as Debar Spas, are located in the immediate vicinity of the town of Debar. The waters (which temperature ranges between 38 to 48 degrees), contain sulfur-sulfide elements. Suitable for treatment of rheumatic diseases, high blood pressure, skin diseases and diabetes, the Debar Spa of Banjishte is located 4 km from Debar, and is known for its healing and radioactivity. The healing effect of the thermo-mineral water is a result of its chemical composition, which contains sulfate, a number of rare elements, hyperthermia, dissolved gases and high radioactivity. The spa includes the Center for Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation.

Kosovrasti Spa is one of the most attractive spas in our country. This is due to the properties of the water, the surrounding area in which it is located and the traffic connection of the spa area. Kosovrasti Spa is located at the exit of the river Radika, it is located next to the regional road Skopje - Debar - Ohrid. Her position in the Ohrid tourist region provides a combination of activities using the wider geographical area. The water temperature is 48 ° C. And in terms of chemical composition it is sulfuric - carbonate. The amount of water is 120 l / sec. which is the largest quantity in the Republic of Northern Macedonia. In this bath can be treated rheumatic diseases, gynecological diseases and various skin diseases.⁴

Spa Banishte This bath is located under the mountain Krchin, at an altitude of 870 meters, The road Skopje - Debar - Ohrid is nearby. The spa is filled from three sources: Nova Kaptaja, Gorni Bazen and Dolni Bazen. The water temperature is 39.3 °C, 36 °C and 38.8 °C The water contains anions of sulfate, chloride, hydrocarbonate and hydrocarbonate, cations of calcium, magnesium, sodium, potassium and iron, colloidal dissolved oxides of manganese dioxide and silicon dioxide, then dissolved gases of carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide, sulfur dioxide, sulfur dioxide, sulfur dioxide, sulfur dioxide, sulfur dioxide, rubidium and fluorine, as well as free gases of hydrogen sulfide, carbon dioxide, oxygen and hydrogen.⁵

The spa provides successful treatment of the following diseases:

- All types of rheumatism; Degenerative rheumatism of all joints and rheumatism of the spine;
- All forms of rheumatic diseases
- All extra-articular rheumatism;
- Muscle weakness after joint trauma and bone fractures;
- Skin diseases, psoriasis, fungal infections, etc .;
- Long-term gastric diseases and acid regulation;
- Biliary diseases,
- Lung diseases • Sand and smaller stones in the urinary tract and canals;

² <http://www.negorskibanji.com.mk/>

³ <http://bdcapa.com/mk/>

⁴ <http://bdcapa.com/mk/>

⁵ https://mk.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%91%D0%B0%D1%9A%D0%B0_%D0%91%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%88%D1%82%D0%B5

- Mild forms of diabetes;

Katlanovo Spa (Katlanovska Banja) The Katlanovo spa area has always been the „it“ place for strolls on the weekends, holiday celebrations and observances, picnics – while the spa itself has always been known for healing rheumatism and sterility both. Located 23km SouthEast from Skopje, on 230m above sea level. This healing spot feels so pleasurable for stay, because of the moderate continental climate and the fresh mountain breeze from the surrounding hills. As opposed to the natural healing spots, Katlanovo Spa is a Center for long-term treatments and rehabilitation. It belongs to the group of alkaline bicarbonate.⁶

Waters, highly mineralized – which makes the water used in the swimming pools not drinkable. There are a number of natural springs around the spa, featuring different degrees of thermality and minerality, used for treatment and rehabilitation. Part of these springs, enriched with sulfur, are used for drinking, and treating digestive organs. With its mineral and thermo-mineral waters, this Spa successfully treats digestive conditions, ailments of the digestive system, and cardiovascular diseases.⁷

Banje Spa (Banje Banja) Located just 5km from the town of Kochani, and 66km from the nearest border crossing, this Spa has thermo-mineral waters with temperatures reaching 70 degrees, which may drop to 37 degrees. These waters have excellent properties for the treatment of digestive, skin, and rheumatic diseases, as well as diseases of the liver.⁸

Kezhovica spa (Banja Kezhovica) The South-East exit from Shtip to Strumica leads towards thermal water springs with 62 degrees Celsius; 82 Mach units of radioactivity; favorable chemical composition including sodium chloride, sodium sulfate or silicon oxide. These waters are efficient in treating rheumatism, joint diseases, nerve diseases, diabetes, gout, infertility; in treating different skin diseases, arteriosclerosis, high blood pressure, etc. Physical therapy includes the latest physical methods of treatment. This Spa is of medical and recreational character, and its waters are used for drinking and bathing.

Proevo Spa (Banja Proevo) This Spa is located just 3km from the town of Kumanovo. There is a single spring with water temperature of about 30 degrees Celsius. The Spa includes an Olympic-size swimming pool, and a mineral water pool. The mineral water pool in Proevo Spa reaches temperatures between 29-31 Celsius, containing calcium and sodium. The water is considered healing for nervous diseases, troubles with the digestive system, kidneys and with diabetes.

The healing properties of the essential oils, have long been known in ancient times. The Romans enjoyed the benefits of the healing power of water, and the Turks built baths enjoyed by the pashas and their wives. Remains of former baths still exist, and some of them are still used for relaxation and enjoyment. The country abounds in 64 springs with varying water temperatures ranging from 20 to 72 degrees Celsius. Waters are rich in sulfur, phosphorus, arsenic, iodine, bromine - elements with huge healing physiotherapeutic properties.

Macedonia offers a unique opportunity to go back thousands of years and enjoy the benefits of mineral and thermo-mineral waters that gush from almost every inch of the earth. The mix of modern spa complexes and the remains of the former Roman and Turkish baths, offers a unique feeling. on the thermal mud of the Negorski baths, you will find out why this region is rare and why you will want to return to it again. As a souvenir, bring with you a bottle of rich minerals, which will bring you health, but also warm memories from the healing Macedonian baths.

The massive use of the healing properties of this water began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when Shukri Pasha, a high dignitary of the Turkish Empire, ruled the area. He built a building with two swimming pools and a rest room. He bathed in the first pool and his nine women in the second. One pool is larger with a round shape and the other is cube shaped. These facilities are still

⁶ <https://www.katlanovskaspa.com/>

⁷ <https://macedonia-timeless.com/mac/aktivnosti/setila/vid/spa/katlanovska-banja/>

⁸ <http://bdcapa.com/mk/%D0%B1%D0%B0%D1%9A%D0%B8%D1%88%D1%82/>

used today and are called "Pasha bath". Legend has it that the healing water in the bath was used long ago and that in it the mother of Alexander the Great bathed her child, which is why the locals call it "Alexander's Bath".

Around the baths on an area of 22 hectares there is a rare example of black ash, which purifies the air, beautifies the environment and allows long walks and relaxation of visitors. At 27 km is the locality "Smelly Water" where Negorski Bani have their own facilities at an altitude of 730 meters. The spa complex has three hotels, sports fields, and a gym, which have been completely renovated in order to offer a pleasant stay to visitors. The highest quality is the hotel "Jasen" with a capacity of 126 beds, followed by the hotel "Ilinden" which has 88 beds, while the hotel "Bozhur" offers accommodation for 68 people.

With the privatization, the stay of patients and guests in all Macedonian spas has more than doubled. In the Debar spa of 35 thousand in 2004, the number has more than doubled, 60% of the visitors to the spa are from abroad, from neighboring countries such as Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, but also from Switzerland, Sweden and Italy. In Katlanovska Banja, foreign guests are not in large numbers, but they are very important for the development of spa tourism in the country.

The Group of Spas (as part of the Economic Chamber of Macedonia) initiates regulation of the status of spas as natural healing spots. All of these, now, private entities established prior 1991, in line with the amendments to the old Law of Health and Medical Protection in 2004, have been deleted as terms and provisions from the Law – that is, are no longer considered part of the entities functioning as a medical organization performing medical activities, offering medical services.

The accommodation part of this engagement would include accommodation for the patients and their accompanying parties, which requires hotel facilities. The promotion of the spa tourism in the Republic of North Macedonia is a success-establishing element. Each of the medical institutions and tourist companies which already offer, or plan to offer packages for medical tourism abroad can and should individually promote themselves and the services they offer. However, an aligned, efficient, and targeted promotional campaign to the targeted markets on a country level is needed.

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