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Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2021

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **RIT Croatia / RIT Croatia**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:229:851654>

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-04-25**



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The Impact of COVID-19 on Pet-Friendly Tourism

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HSPT-490: Senior Capstone Project

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May 3rd , 2021

Abstract

The pandemics of COVID-19 have immensely affected today's world, and most businesses are either completely ruined or in the position to be reorganized and should adapt to the new circumstances. This can be especially seen in the sector of tourism and hospitality where many new regulations had to be applied to people who are traveling to prevent and set limitations to the spreading of the virus. The research has analyzed 20 hotels to find out if their current measures and policies have been changed due to the pandemics. The research used a content analysis method to investigate what changes have been introduced and to see if pet-friendly destinations in Dubrovnik have also implemented those measures. The research did not identify any new policies that are the result of the current situation, but has only found grounds for new measures and policies that could be recommended to pet-friendly destinations in Dubrovnik to improve the quality of the services they offer and to satisfy the needs of dog owners.

Keywords: COVID-19, pet tourism, pet-friendly accommodation, pet policy, hotel regulations

Pet-friendly tourism

Pet friendly can be defined as an accommodation that allows specific types of pets to accommodate their owners during their stay in a hotel, according to (Kirillova et al., 2015). Everyone is aware that tourism is a growing industry, but according to the research, pet-friendly hotels are in the early stage of growth and development. Customers are willing to travel with their dogs, but most of them are not encouraged to do so.

The problem is the lack of accommodation since not so many hotels have the certificate of pet friendly and there does not seem to be enough information about this type of accommodation. The purpose of this research was to find out whether hotels have changed or introduced new measures when it comes to COVID-19, and the focus was on pet-friendly hotels. Since I have already a dog and I know that there is a procedure for bringing pets on vacation and in the hotel I wanted to know does anything changed since COVID-19 changed everything.

“When traveling with pets, over 64% of pet tourists wish to stay at an accommodation instead of a friend's or relative's house (Trip Advisor, 2013). This is the main reason why many properties and accommodations, reshape themselves into pet-friendly. According to (Harris, 2013) thirty-two percent of pet owners are willing to take shorter vacations and 21 percent take fewer vacations.

It is a great chance for owners, to pay an extra fee for certain service or to an extra charge on pet's cake, birthday and needs because most of the pet owners consider their pets as their kid and part of the family. “Most pet owners consider their pets as part of their family, like their kids” Another author states that pet owners are ready to pay a lot to make their dogs satisfied and spoiled them on vacation and that a major motivation to travel with pets is to enhance the owner's tourism experience (Carr& Cohen, 2009).

These days, many people have pets and they consider them as family members. The Pet tourism industry is growing more and more, but traveling with pets is more complicated in some countries. Most people take shorter vacations because of their pets, but on the other hand, bringing pets is not an easy task because of the fees and extra charging in the hotels which offer this type of accommodation.

The research shows that this type of traveling has become a new trend and more fashionable. The hotel industry welcomes these changes as well. It is a new "trend" and people are mostly traveling with their pets. The hotel industry is positive on that side, they are not just pet-friendly but also are welcome.

To meet and satisfy the needs of their customers, the hotel industry tries to find out the main reasons why people travel with their pets. Pet owners are ready to pay a certain amount for their family members and it is a nice experience. Being together encourages pet owners to travel together and enjoy many activities while they are on holiday or vacation.

According to Nieminen (2015), the main reasons pet owners wanted to travel with their pets are that it increased their satisfaction with the journey and also helped them not feel stressed out for leaving their pets behind. Traveling with pets makes them being more satisfied and making loyal customers who are very valuable for every hotel or any accommodation that allows pets.

When it comes to hotel regulations and policies, it is important to protect pet owners and as well as guests who are not pet owners. Some people are not dog lovers so they can be angry or frustrated, especially because of barking which can ruin their “peace”.

Incidents such as biting or allergies, which, even if they are not too common, can be dangerous to the credibility of the hotel and show the need that a hotel establishes a clear and effective set

of policies(Zhang,2012). According to that, it is important to establish in advance a certain set of pet policies to define or prevent any kind of problems with pets.

It is relevant to mention that research shows that pet owners stay in the hotel more than people who came without a pet and they are becoming more loyal to the certain hotel where they will come always. The customers are mostly not traveling with their pets because of accommodation and information about it.

The report from (Trip Advisor, 2008) forecasts that pet travel is set to grow by an estimated 6% year-on-year for the next five years. Dogs represent almost 80% of all holidaying pets in the UK. It has shown us those pet owners are not in some kind of force to leave their pets at home because the pet industry is growing.

Everything is changing and pets are playing a big role in human life. According to the same report from 2008; for example, 81% of those surveyed consider their dogs to be true family members, equal in status to children.

According to (Corner, 2017) it appears that dogs have become such an important part of the family that 54% of Americans now consider themselves to be "pet parents" rather than "pet owners".Not just children consider that their pets are like humans, but adults are doing that also. According to Morrov (1998), most children are considered their pets like family.

According to TripAdvisor (May 2008), "Twenty-five percent of pet owners cited animal stress as their biggest concern about traveling with a pet and 23 percent said the fact that no one can look after their pet while they are sightseeing/touring is their biggest concern. ". When it comes to activities, also it is mentioned that pet owners are concerned that they cannot socialize with other pet owners while on holiday, and to satisfy these demands, Disney opened the first luxury resort in 2010 offering air condition in every room, VIP luxury suites, daycare, grooming salon, etc.(Bachand, 2010).

According to Harnes (2013) states that any type of this service is not cheap, but many owners are ready to spoil their pets and without doubt pay extra for something. The author states that some hotels are avoiding being pet-friendly because of people who do not want animals in their nearness, and that out of more than 52,000 U.S. hotels that were surveyed in 2012 by the American Hotel and Lodging Association's Lodging Survey, 61 percent of properties claimed they were pet friendly (Harnes, 2013).

In 2011, according to TripAdvisor, the biggest problem for pet owners was the price of accommodation, which was too expensive. Nowadays, it seems that there are many more hotels that offer this type of accommodation and introduced different pet policies to increase the satisfaction of their guests.

Another researcher, Belcher (2011) states in his research that some people do not trust that pet owners will respect policies and follow rules, and they rather choose not to come to hotels that accept pets.

According to Newton (1999), UK, introduces the "Pet travel scheme" which was brought in 1999 in the UK, which means that they allow dogs to enter the UK without having to go into quarantine. Canada is also the first country who applied for a national certification program for pet-friendly accommodations. (Canadian Tourism Commission, 2003).

The research shows that both, North-Western Europe and North America try to make this type of accommodation more popular and encourage other people to bring their pets with them on holidays. Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide were becoming the best dog-friendly company in the world (Sakakeeny 2004). According to a US study, they find out that owners are bringing their pets with them because the pets suffer or be in depression if they are without their owner.

The hotel industry has to adapt to the new situation related to COVID 19 and they introduced new policies. According to the Valamar web site; All persons coming to their vacation in the Republic of Croatia must have a confirmation of booking accommodation and fill out the online form Enter Croatia.

People who come to their vacation in the Republic of Croatia from green countries/regions do not need to present a test or have the obligation of self-isolation.

Persons from other countries must present a negative PCR or BAT (rapid ANTIGEN) test not older than 48 hours upon entering the Republic of Croatia or perform testing immediately upon arrival in the Republic of Croatia with the obligation of self-isolation until a negative result arrives. In the case of a rapid antigen test and a stay longer than 10 days in the Republic of Croatia, the test must be performed again by the tenth day from the date of issue of that test.

Feel free to come to your booked accommodation and contact us to help you organize the test and make it easier to stay in your accommodation unit while you wait for the results.

Children under the age of seven travelling accompanied by a parent are exempt from the obligation to present a negative test result and the obligation to self-isolate if parents have a negative PCR or BAT (rapid ANTIGEN) test, confirmation of the illness, or vaccination against COVID-19.

People who have had COVID-19 for the past 6 months are exempt from the obligation to obtain a negative PCR test and self-isolation. To prove that they have had COVID-19, passengers must present a positive PCR or BAT (rapid ANTIGEN) test result or a medical certificate that they have had COVID-19, and this certificate is valid no earlier than the eleventh day after the positive test result arrives.

Persons who have a certificate of vaccination against COVID-19 are exempted from the obligation to obtain a negative test and self-isolation (proof should be provided that at least 14 days have passed since receiving the second dose of vaccine, for vaccines received in one dose only 14 days from 1. doses)

The measures apply to all nationals of EU / EEA Member States and third-country countries.

Hotel pet policy

According to Pettravel.com, the Hotel pet policy includes only small pets under 15 lbs, maximum of 2 pets per room, the pet must comply with the requirements of local legislation. The pet should be kept on the water when in a hotel or on hotel property unless it is in a guest room. Pets must not be left unattended. If a guest needs pets or pet supplies, they should contact the receptors with prior notice.

Pets are not allowed in any food and beverage store, in the hotel club, and at the pool. This exemption does not apply to guide dogs. Guests are responsible for cleaning pets on the hotel property and in the neighborhood. All disturbances such as barking must be reduced to ensure that other guests do not cause inconvenience. Guests are responsible for any property damage and/or personally following their pets.

Guests undertake to indemnify the hotel and its owners and its operator for liability and damages suffered as a result of the guest pet. The hotel reserves the right to charge the guest's bill in proportion to the cost of such damage.

Since it is a new trend, hotels have to adapt to a new type of tourism and applied offers and regulations to meet guest's needs.

The hypothesis is that those changes are reflected in this type of hotel industry, and finally say that this research will try to define if these changes that are common to the hotel industry and related to the pandemics can also be seen in pet-friendly destinations in Dubrovnik region.

Method

This research will use content analysis (online observation) as the method of data analysis and will apply the quantitative method of data analysis. This type of method is recommended because it is important because of discovering new things and it helps in searching relevant data for any purpose needed. The research was based on the official hotel website where I was looking for new measures when it comes to pet-friendly policy.

The research has identified 20 different pet-friendly hotel accommodations, out of which 10 were worldwide, and 10 in Dubrovnik areas. The categorization of hotels was based on Dubrovnik's pet-friendly hotels, so the world hotels were based on the same categorization and they were chosen randomly on Booking.com.

The data analysis was focused on identifying whether the hotels are independent or corporate, then the names of the hotels, location of hotels, is it in Europe or not, categorization, do they have any pet policy on their web page, do they have any information or did they updated measures about COVID 19 and did they have any changes due to pet policy.

The data were collected primarily by observing the hotel's official websites. To identify the accommodations that were pet friendly and offered specific services to guests with pets and information are taken from Booking.com. I primarily got the information by observing the hotel's official websites.

Results

The research has not provided relevant data that could prove the hypothesis. Neither of the pet-friendly accommodations investigated in the research introduced any new measures that were caused by the pandemics or could be related to the changes in the hotel industry that are relevant to the pandemics.

The research has, however, identified different measures and policies that are offered to dog owners in hotel accommodations worldwide that are not offered in any of the hotel accommodations in the Dubrovnik area (such as Bone appetite where they offer specialties such as tuna steak, caviar or hamburgers, second is paw-some packages which include massages and pedicure, petsonalization, pet treats such as leashes, treats and toys, paws for thought and they offer dog walking, washing, doggie daycares and the last one is surrogate pets which means that they have dogs in the hotel which can cuddle and enjoy together if owners are willing to go somewhere without them.

Therefore, the research recommends that some of these policies and measures get implemented also in Dubrovnik hotel to improve the quality of the service and better satisfy the needs of dog owners. Pet packages are a great offer for all pets and pet owners since they increase guests' satisfaction and experience. I find out that every hotel that I took from the world; has a certain type of offer of service for the dog which was interesting.

Discussion

The research was based on the hypothesis that corona had an overall impact on tourism. The purpose of this research was to find out did any hotel changed its pet policy related to COVID-19. Hotels have to apply new regulations and policies and the focus was primarily on pet hotels. In research, it was chosen 10 hotels in the world and 10 hotels in Dubrovnik. I intended to take different hotels with different services.

I chose on purpose different types of hotels, with different categorizations (3-5 stars). I primarily got the information by observing the hotels' official websites trying to find out if they listed any new measures and policies related to COVID-19. It was found out that all hotels did update their pages and introduced new measures, but none of these measures were related to their pet policy.

Therefore, it was not possible to find any relevant data that would prove the hypothesis. It was surprising and unexpected to see that this area of tourism still has not adapted to the new situation. When it comes to my qualitative data, I found out that people are willing to pay a nice amount of money for their fluffy friends. Some of the hotels have pet packages that include different offers for their pets.

What is interesting is that none of the hotels in Dubrovnik do have any kind of packages. Dubrovnik has a lot of space for improvement when it comes to this type of tourism. This research recommends that some of these policies and measures get implemented also in Dubrovnik hotel to improve the quality of the service and better satisfy the needs of dog owners since it is not so developed.

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