

Foreign tourist trips of Polish residents in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract. The article addresses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourist behaviour of Polish residents traveling abroad. Based on publicly available data for 2018–2023 from mass surveys conducted by the Statistics Poland (GUS), it was found that the COVID-19 pandemic in reduced the number of Poles traveling abroad for tourist purposes 2020–2021 by more than half and partially changed their tourist behaviour in terms of the frequency, purposes and season of traveling abroad; the choice of accommodation facilities and means of transport; travel expenses: and destinations of foreign trips compared to the pre-pandemic period (2018–2019). The changes in tourist behaviour of Polish residents caused by the COVID-19 pandemic were largely similar to the changes observed in the societies of many European countries. The change in Poles' tourist behaviour resulting from the pandemic turned out to be temporary. In 2022–2023, the numbers of foreign-destination tourist trips recovered, and there was a return to and continuation of the trends in tourist behaviour of Poles traveling abroad that were observed in the period preceding the COVID-19 pandemic.

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, especially in its initial period (2020–2021), represented a serious threat to socio-economic development. In 2020, no vaccine was available, and it was necessary to introduce traditional methods of physical isolation to prevent the spread of the virus. Periodic closures of state borders, travel bans, lockdowns, quarantines, mandatory testing, supply-chain disruptions, the introduction of remote learning and remote working, etc. resulted in a drop in production, consumption and investment and rises in unemployment, inflation and public debt in almost all countries of the world. The restrictions had a particularly adverse effect on tourism and related industries, especially in air transport, the hotel industry, catering, event organisation and access to museums, cinemas, theatres, operas, shopping malls, etc. These restrictions significantly limited international mobility and made traveling inconvenient, which severely weakened tourism demand (Dupeyras et al. 2020; Uğur, Akbıyık 2020; Farzanegan et al. 2021; Gössling et al. 2021). The availability of COVID-19 vaccines in 2021 led to a gradual easing of travel restrictions, which, together with the surplus of deferred demand during the pandemic, allowed tourism to resume (Beben et al., 2021; Boto-García & Baños Pino, 2022, Ansarinasab & Saghaian 2023; Kışla et al. 2023; Yopez & Leimgruber, 2024). In 2022, the gradually subsiding pandemic (which was formally declared “over” in 2023, with the disease now treated as endemic) was joined by new global threats: geopolitical, military (in Ukraine, the Middle East), climate change, etc. Despite this, there was a systematic recovery in tourism, first domestically and then internationally, which indicates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism having been exceptional compared to the other threats mentioned above.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a sharp decline in international travel. The number of foreign tourists (making overnight stays) fell from 1.5 billion in 2019 to 0.4 billion in 2020. From 2021, there was a renewed (first slow and then accelerated) increase in the number of international trips, which in 2023 reached 1.3 billion international arrivals (involving overnight stays). International tourism recovered to 88% of its pre-pandemic level, thanks in part to strong deferred demand and increased mobility (especially by air). The level for 2024 is expected to have exceeded the 2019 level by 2%. In 2023, foreign mass tourism was recovering rapidly;

for example, arrivals to Mediterranean Europe exceeded pre-pandemic levels. The pandemic also caused a deep decline in tourism spending. In 2020, global tourism revenues fell by 63% compared to 2019 (i.e., by USD 1.1 trillion to USD 0.6 trillion in 2020). By 2023, they already amounted to USD 1.6 trillion, which was almost 95% of the USD 1.7 trillion recorded in 2019. Many developed countries saw demand for international travel increase sharply in 2023 to beyond 2019 levels (UNWTO 2024). All this confirms the great resilience of tourism, including to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study aims to analyse the number, forms and destinations of foreign tourist trips of Polish residents before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic and to examine whether the pandemic actually changed their travel preferences and whether there has been a return to pre-COVID-19 habits. The main challenge facing the tourism industry after the pandemic is identifying changes or a lack thereof in the demand for international travel. And if changes did occur, how did the COVID-19 pandemic affect Poles' foreign tourist trips?

2. Literature review

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on the tourism industry, which has led to, among other things, a rapid increase in academic research. Platforms such as Google Scholar, Scopus, etc. contain hundreds of articles on this topic (Gösling & Schweiggart, 2021), and the number is still growing. The rapidly growing number of publications does not make it easy to identify a general outline or understanding of the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on tourism, especially regarding the behaviour of tourists traveling abroad (Bausch et al., 2021). Many reviews (regarding the entire tourism industry and parts thereof) of academic studies to date addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism have been presented (Kumudumali, 2020; Zopiatis et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2021; Lin, 2021; Persson-Fischer & Liu, 2021; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021; Sharma et al., 2021; Utkarsh & Sigala 2021; Yang et al., 2021; Kim & So, 2022; Viana-Lora & Nello-Andreu, 2022; Huang & Wang 2023; Viana-Lora et al., 2023; Ye et al., 2023; Drammeh, 2024; Sann et al., 2024). They indicate a temporal evolution in the main intellectual foundations of research on the impact

the COVID-19 pandemic had on tourism and the strategy for regaining resilience in tourism. They also raise awareness of the importance of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact in changing tourist behaviour.

The COVID-19 pandemic increased travel concerns and risks, which contributed to research being focused on its impact on tourist behaviour (Chua et al., 2020; Neuberger & Egger, 2020; Bae & Chang, 2021; Bratić et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021; Farzanegan et al., 2021; Golets et al., 2023). The research highlights a general decrease in desire to travel due to the risk of infection. Fear of infection was a barrier to undertaking travel. This fear is reduced when tourists adopt protective behaviours that make them feel more secure during their trip (Das & Tiwari, 2021; Qiao et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2021). By increasing the perception of the risk of infection during travel, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a decline in overall tourism demand, as well as a change in preferences for the various forms of tourism and travel destinations (Neuberger & Egger, 2020; Pinos-Navarrete & Show, 2021). Tourists sought products and facilities that increased their safety, addressed risk aversion, improved cleanliness, and included fewer crowds and more open spaces. They looked for variety, a change in lifestyle, safety, and hygiene (Shin & Kang, 2020; Wen et al., 2020; Bae & Chang, 2021; Jang et al., 2021; Park et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2022a; Kim et al., 2022b).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, significant changes in tourist travel patterns and behaviour were detected (Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020). In many countries, tourist preferences reflected a search for green and protected areas (McGinlay et al., 2020) and a move away from mass tourism (Renaud, 2020; Arora & Sharma, 2021; Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2021). This severely restricted international travel while creating a preference for domestic travel (Das & Tiwari 2021; Jacobsen et al., 2021; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021). Zenker and Kock (2020) noted that the change in attitudes towards crowding during the pandemic is initiating a tourism trend towards avoiding mass tourism destinations in favour of remote and less-populated destinations. Jeon and Yang (2021), similarly, point out that tourists are more avoiding crowded destinations in favour of open spaces where social distancing can be maintained.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, tourists became more interested in a change in accommodation facilities (Craig & Karabas 2021; Ššastná et al., 2024; Traino, 2024), preferring

smaller accommodation facilities that provided greater social distancing. Sigala (2020) indicates an increase in the use of second homes and in staying with friends and relatives during tourist trips. There was also a change in transport usage due to fear of infection, with tourists generally avoiding public transport. The pandemic therefore created a preference for individual means of transport for tourist trips in many countries (Li et al., 2020; Sigala, 2020; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021). Tourists preferred to travel by private transport and with their own families, and they also chose places with reliable safety systems. The pandemic also popularised new technologies (e.g., robots, virtual travel) aimed at reducing COVID-19 infection through convenient, fast, contactless service for travellers or virtual travel from one's own home (Shin & Kang, 2020; Zeng et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2022; Choi et al., 2023).

There is growing interest in issues of rebuilding tourism, especially international tourism (Zaika & Avriata, 2024; Musić & Nurikić, 2024; Ansarinasab & Saghaian, 2023; Ye et al. 2024), and in the durability of changes in tourist behaviour and their impact on the introduction of the idea of sustainable tourism (Orîndaru et al., 2021; Seabra & Bhatt, 2022; Ansarinasab & Saghaian, 2023; Aschauer & Egger, 2023; Davtyan, 2023; Kışla et al., 2023; Yepez & Leimgruber, 2024.) The New Normal refers to the future of tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic. The sooner we return to pre-pandemic normality, the more likely it is that we will recreate the patterns of consumption of tourism services that existed then. The authors ask whether tourism will return to normal (i.e., the previous state) after the pandemic, or whether it will change – and in what direction. However, the answers are inconsistent. Many researchers (as well as non-governmental organisations) believe that participation in, and the nature of tourist travel will be transformed. They see the COVID-19 pandemic as an event that may significantly change the existing paradigms (Galvani et al., 2020; Ioannides & Gyimóthy 2020; Niewiadomski, 2020; Prideaux et al., 2020; Romagosa, 2020; Sigala, 2020; Zenker & Kock, 2020; Zenker et al., 2021) that are deeply rooted in the current tourism model, which is based on the constant growth of tourist trips generating high income at the cost of the devastation of nature, local communities, etc. They have long called for a change to this model, pointing out that the COVID-19 pandemic should ultimately convince society to adopt a sustainable tourism model. Other researchers, as well as international,

governmental and local organisations and institutions, believe that participation in and the nature of tourist trips will not be transformed by the COVID-19 pandemic and that, after a period of shock, these will return to a slightly modified pre-pandemic state. Brouder (2020) indicates that the potential for tourism transformation is low. Many researchers do not expect the COVID-19 pandemic to change the nature of tourism, but there is hope for addressing the global tourism problems revealed by this pandemic (Persson-Fischer, Liu 2021). The prevailing view is that tourism is highly resistant to crises. Tourism should therefore receive government support for rapid rebuilding, preferably in a sustainable manner. This is indicated by ongoing discussions on global paths to tourism recovery (Kennell, 2020; UNWTO, 2021; WTTC, 2021, 2022; Jones, 2022; OECD, 2024).

Research to date shows that the COVID-19 pandemic, through the introduction of travel restrictions, the increased risk of viral infection and its worsening of the economic situation of many households, etc., not only caused a temporary decline in overall tourism demand but also changed the behaviour of tourists. It remains an open question whether the changes in tourist behaviour seen under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic are temporary (and, after the pandemic, will return to the pre-pandemic model) or permanent (and will constitute a transformation of the current tourism model). So, what direction (model) will the reconstruction of tourism, especially international tourism, follow after the pandemic? In the present study, the authors attempt to establish whether and to what extent the pandemic has changed the model of foreign tourist travel of Polish residents.

3. Data

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on foreign tourist trips of Polish residents was analysed based on data published in the industry yearbooks *Turystyka* for the years 2018–2023. They include results of studies monitoring the level of Polish residents' participation in tourist trips and the characteristics of foreign trips with one or more overnight stays, divided into short-term (2–4 days) and long-term (5 days or more) trips to particular countries. The participation of Polish residents in tourism (including foreign tourism) has been studied systematically every year for

many years using roughly the same research methods, which allows for basic comparative analyses. In these studies, Statistics Poland (GUS) uses a random sample that was employed for a survey of household budgets. The random sample covers many thousands of members of these households². However, this sample excludes people who are not present in these households (schoolchildren, students, social welfare housing residents, etc.). Hence, there are minor differences in the selected socio-demographic characteristics between the study sample and the broader Polish population, which implies certain limitations in generalising the results of the research conducted by GUS in this area. The results of these surveys are made available in the yearbook, in the section entitled "Polish residents' participation in travel". The publication contains synthetic results and tables of studies conducted, thus limiting the scope of more detailed analyses. However, it allows for sufficient assessment of changes in the size, structure and directions of foreign tourist trips in the years preceding and during the pandemic up to its ending (in 2018–2023). It enables comparisons of Polish residents' level of participation in foreign tourist trips, the number of trips made, their purposes, the type of accommodation used during the stay abroad, the means of transport used in foreign trips, seasonality, expenses incurred and the destination countries of foreign trips. Taken together, these data allow us to synthetically indicate the dynamics of changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the tourist behaviour of Polish residents aged 15 or over with regard to their foreign trips. The scope of available data determines the method of their analysis, which uses a comparative and generalisation method based on statistical description and inference.

4. Results

4.1. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on level of tourism participation

Since the beginning of the 21st century, there has been a systematic increase in Polish residents' participation in tourism (Matczak & Szymańska, 2022). In 2019, the year preceding the COVID-19 pandemic, 64.1% (i.e., 20.8 million) of Polish residents aged 15 or over undertook at least one private tourist trip with at least one overnight stay. The

COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 dramatically reduced this participation to 43.6% (i.e., to 14.1 million). Since 2021, despite the current travel restrictions, there has been a gradual recovery in Polish residents' participation in tourism. Following the formal end of the COVID-19 pandemic on 1 July, 2023, and the lifting of travel restrictions, 65.6% (i.e. 20.5 million) of Poland's residents had participated in tourist trips already that year. This was roughly the same as in the year before the pandemic.

The pandemic's impact on Polish residents' level of participation in tourism varied by travel destination. The pandemic reduced the level of participation more in foreign tourism (by 55% in 2020 compared to 2019) than in domestic tourism (by 30.1% in trips lasting 2–4 days and by 32.7% for trips lasting 5 days or more, respectively). Similarly, in the following years, the level of participation of Polish residents bounced back far faster for domestic tourism than for foreign tourism (Matczak & Szymańska, 2023). In 2023, the level of participation of Polish residents in both domestic and foreign tourism not only reached the 2019 level but slightly exceeded it (Fig. 1). Forecasts from June 2024 indicate (*Plany wakacyjne Polaków...*, 2024) that 70% of Poles are planning a tourist trip in the holiday season (June 21 – September 30). Of these, two thirds of respondents declared more than one trip. Sixty-six percent of Poles want to spend their holidays in Poland and 28% abroad. Tourism participation once again proved resilient to crises, including

the global health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic temporarily changed the proportional breakdown of reasons for not engaging in tourism among Polish residents aged 15 or over. Whereas a sense of insecurity was a marginal factor in not participating in tourism in the years preceding the COVID-19 pandemic (being reported by 0.7% of Polish residents in 2019), by 2020, the lack of security resulting from the COVID-19 threat was the single most important reason for not taking a tourist trip (reported by 36.9%). However, as of 2021 (though still reported by 32.3%) its importance as a factor limiting tourist activity fell rapidly. The threat of COVID-19 has moved down the list as a reason limiting tourist trips, both domestic and foreign. In Polish society, financial reasons and lack of time and motivation to travel have traditionally accounted for a high share of people's reasons for limiting their tourist trips – in pre-pandemic, pandemic and post-pandemic periods alike. In 2023, these reasons (financial for 37.7%, lack of free time due to work or study obligations for 16.7%, or lack of motivation to travel for 13%) clearly outpaced the threat of COVID-19 infection as a reason for not participating in tourism. Thus, the financial and socio-economic factors that had been limiting participation in tourism before the pandemic have now regained dominance.

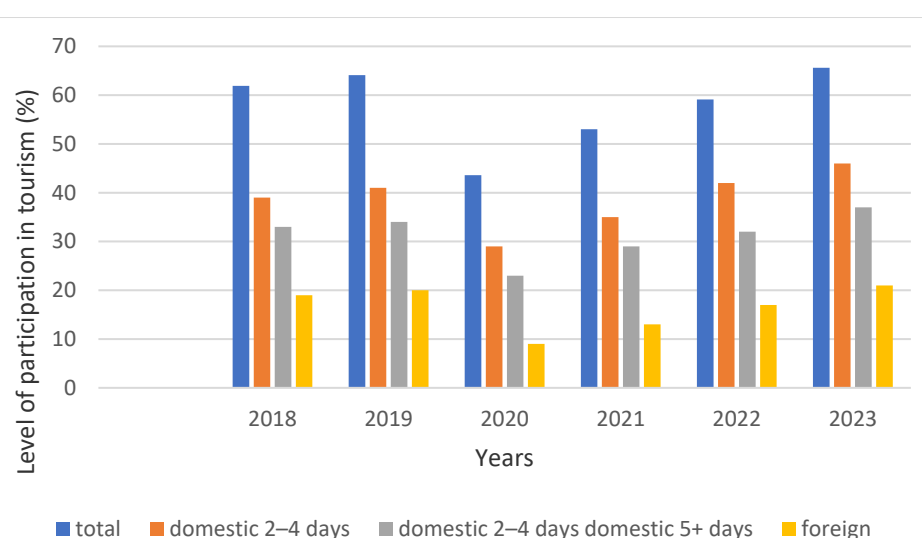


Fig. 1. Participation of Polish residents aged 15 or over in at least one private tourist trip with at least one overnight stay in 2018–2023 (in %)

Source: own elaboration

4.2. Number of tourist trips

The dynamics of decline in the number of tourist trips made by Polish residents aged 15 or more in 2020 and their recovery in the following years were similar to those of their overall participation in tourism (Fig. 2). In 2019, domestic tourist trips reached 50 million in number, and foreign trips reached 13.5 million (21.2%). In 2020, the number of domestic trips decreased by 22.8% (to 38.6 million) compared to 2019, and the number of foreign trips decreased by as much as 54.1% (to 6.2 million). The decline in tourist trip numbers in 2020 and their recovery in subsequent years varied depending on trip duration. In 2020, the numerical decline was greater for short-term domestic trips (at 24.7%) than long-term domestic trips (by 20%), whereas the opposite held for foreign trips, with the decline being smaller for short-term trips (at 50%) than long-term trips (by 55.7%). In turn, the recovery in numbers of domestic trips, both short- and long-term, was already complete by 2022, whereas the recovery in foreign trips came a year later (in 2023). The introduction of the vaccine in 2021 contributed greatly to the gradual recovery of international travel.

Polish residents' tourist trips abroad were mainly long-term, being four times more numerous than short-term trips. The COVID-19 pandemic, although it temporarily caused

a drastic fall in the number of foreign trips, did not change the ratio of long- to short-term trips.

4.3. Travel purposes

The COVID-19 pandemic brought temporary changes to the numbers of trips undertaken for personal and business purposes. In 2020, it reduced the number of personal domestic trips by 22.8% and personal foreign trips by 55.3%, while, for business purposes, domestic trips were reduced by 23.5% and foreign trips by 42.7%. The 2022 number of domestic private trips greatly exceeded the 2019 level, whereas foreign trips reached their pre-pandemic level only in 2023.

Polish residents travelled abroad mainly for leisure purposes (leisure, recreation and holidaymaking), which accounted for more than half of all tourist trips abroad (Fig. 3). This proportion was initially slightly reduced by the pandemic, though by 2022, at 56.7%, it had already exceeded the 2019 level and then followed a further upward trend (to 58.8% in 2023). The second most important purpose of foreign tourist trips of Polish residents was to visit friends and relatives living abroad. The pandemic temporarily increased the share slightly (from 30.4% in 2019 to 34% in 2020), which then dropped sharply again (to 27.1% in 2023). Poles also travelled abroad for health, religious (including pilgrimages), educational, shopping

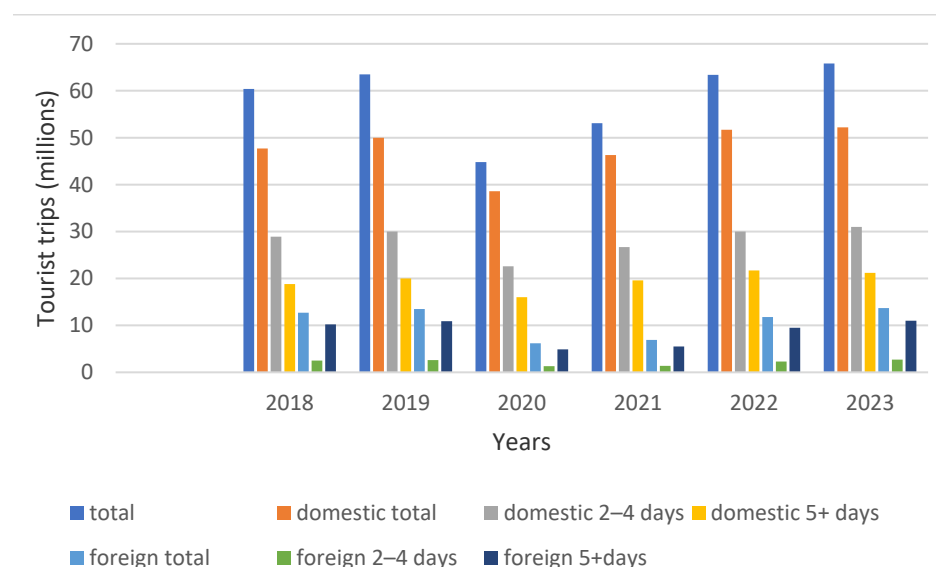


Fig. 2. Number of tourist trips by Polish residents aged 15 or over in 2018–2023 (in millions)
Source: own elaboration

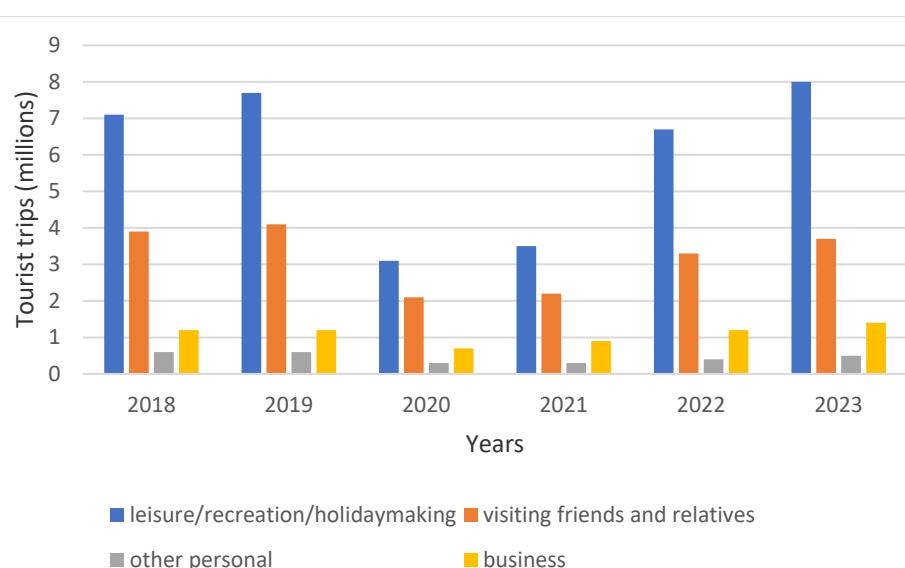


Fig. 3. Foreign tourist trip destinations of Polish residents, 2018–2023 (in millions)

Source: own elaboration

and other reasons, but the share of such trips was marginal and did not exceed 5%. The pandemic temporarily reduced the number of trips for such purposes, but did change their share in foreign trips. The breakdown of preferred purposes of personal foreign travel during the pandemic (as well as before and after it) was generally similar for short- and long-term trips alike.

In turn, despite a decline in absolute numbers, the share of business trips both domestic and foreign showed a systematic increase during the pandemic. The number of business trips from before the pandemic had recovered by 2022 and increased markedly in 2023 (domestic by 11.8% and international by 25% relative to 2019 levels). The pandemic did not change the ratio of short- to long-term business trips. Domestic business trips were predominantly short-term, whereas foreign business trips were mostly long-term (Fig. 3). Business travel was less affected by the pandemic than was private travel. It also recovered considerably more quickly.

4.4. Accommodation

The above-mentioned purposes of foreign travel were also reflected in preferred accommodation. Accommodation was dominated by hotels that generally catered to leisure and business trips (Fig. 4). The COVID-19 pandemic reduced the number of trips handled by hotels by nearly 60% in 2020 (from 7 million in 2019 to 2.8 million

in 2020) and their share by 5.5% (from 51.7% to 46.2%, respectively). However, by 2023, the number of trips handled by hotel facilities had not only recovered but also exceeded 2019 levels by 0.25 million (to 7.25 million) and their share in handling foreign trips had increased to 53.1%. The lead position in servicing foreign trips was tied between friends' and relatives' homes and other non-rented properties (such as second homes, etc.); in 2019, these types of accommodation handled one third of foreign trips (4.5 million), whereas in 2020, despite a decrease in number of trips accommodated (to 2.3 million), their share increased to 38%. In the following years, there was a steady increase in the absolute number of trips serviced (up to 4.3 million in 2023), but with a steady decrease in the share of the types of non-rented accommodation (to 31.3%). Such accommodation did not completely regain its importance in servicing foreign travel after the pandemic. In 2019, other types of accommodation (such as holiday accommodation, private rental accommodation, agritourism accommodation, etc.) accounted for only 15% of foreign trips (just over 2 million). After a decline in 2020 to just below 1 million, the following years saw a systematic increase in their servicing of trips abroad, and in 2023 they reached 2.1 million (increasing their share to 15.5%).

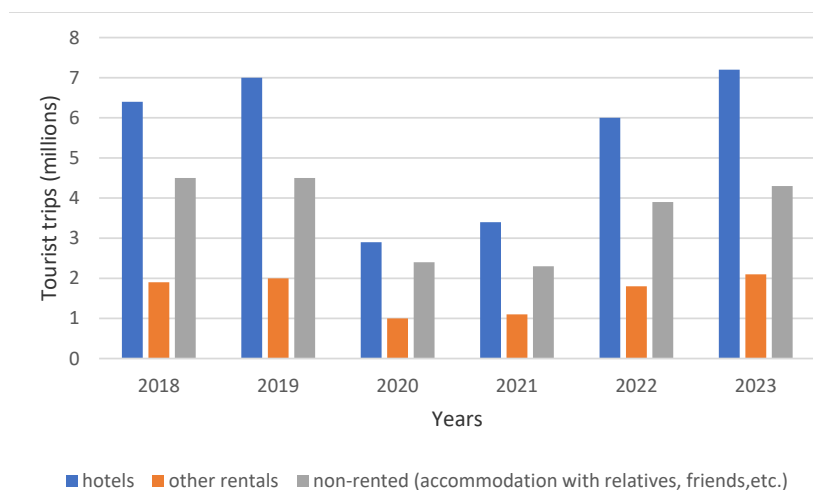


Fig. 4. Accommodation facilities serving foreign tourist trips of Polish residents, 2018–2023 (in millions)
Source: own elaboration

4.5. Means of transport

Tourist trips abroad by Polish residents require that greater distances be covered than domestic trips. Hence the dominance of air transport in handling foreign trips. In 2019, air transport handled 55.9% of all foreign trips (i.e., 7.6 million). Early in the pandemic, in 2020, the share of air transport in handling foreign travel decreased to 48.2% (handling only 3 million such trips).

However, since 2021, it has been systematically increasing its share in handling foreign trips and in 2023 reached a 63.3% share (handling 8.6 million such trips). In turn, road transport, mainly coaches and passenger cars, handled 5.6 million foreign trips in 2019 (holding a 41.5% share in servicing people travelling abroad). However, the pandemic lessened the importance of road transport in servicing foreign travel. In 2020, road transport handled only 3.1 million foreign trips, despite a temporary increase (up

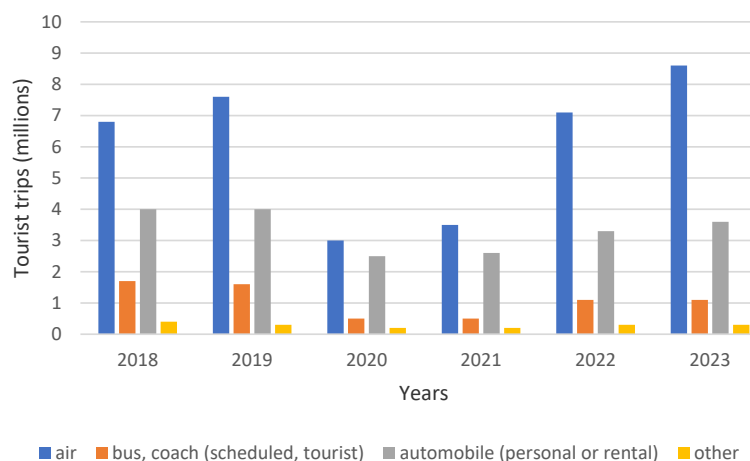


Fig. 5. Means of transport serving foreign tourist trips of Polish residents, 2018–2023
Source: own elaboration

to 50%) in its share in serving foreign trips. In subsequent years, despite the steady numerical increase in foreign trips made by these means of transport (up to 4.7 million in 2023), its share systematically decreased to 34.4% in 2023. Thus far, road transport has not regained its importance in servicing the foreign trips of Polish residents. This applies particularly to transport by buses and coaches and, to a lesser extent, passenger cars. Other means of transport were already of marginal importance in servicing foreign travel and, after a deep decline in 2020, have not yet reached their pre-pandemic level (Fig. 5).

4.6. Seasonality of tourist trips

The COVID-19 pandemic's proceeding in waves had a clear impact on the seasonal distribution of foreign tourist trips. Cases peaked in the colder

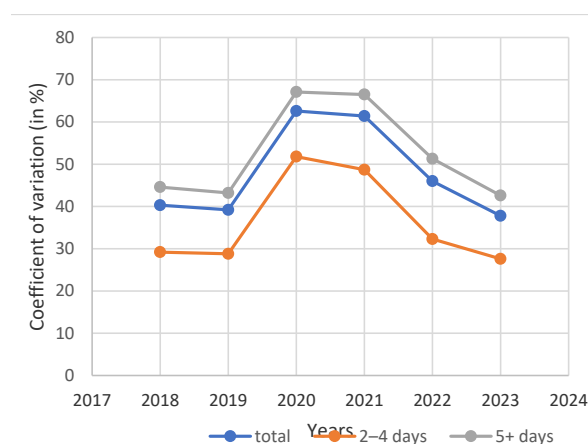


Fig. 6. Changes in the seasonality of foreign tourist trips of Polish residents, according to coefficient of variation, 2018–2023

Source: own elaboration

seasons, which raised the risk of infection and resulted in stricter restrictions in many countries, limiting tourist travel. In turn, the lower risk of infection in the summer contributed to reducing restrictions, causing trip numbers to increase. This resulted in a sharp increase in foreign trips in the summer (June, July, August), but a decrease in the winter months (December, January, February). The number of foreign trips in the summer months decreased by 3.3 million in 2020 compared to 2019. In the following years, these numbers recovered steadily, almost reaching their 2019 level of 5.3 million by 2023 (5.2 million).

The share of summer months increased from 39.9% in 2019 to 43.7% in 2021, and in 2023 it had returned to its pre-pandemic level (38.2%). In turn, winter trips were lower relative to 2019, in both 2020 and 2021 (by 0.6 and 0.9 million, respectively, and their share from 19.2 to 16.6%). In 2023, they increased to 2.5 million (18.4%). The ratio of summer to winter foreign trips increased from 2.0 in 2018–19 to 2.6 in 2021, and in 2023 it reached the pre-pandemic level (2.1). The scale of changes in seasonal distribution of foreign trips was smaller for short-term trips than long-term trips, which is illustrated by the values of the coefficients of variation (Fig. 6).

4.7. Expenditure on tourist trips

Until 2020, there had been a steady increase in spending by Polish residents on foreign tourist trips with overnight stays (in current prices). In 2019, expenditures reached PLN 30.7 billion. In 2020, they decreased to PLN 13.2 billion. In 2021, there was a slight recovery to PLN 15.1 billion. However, in the following years this growth accelerated significantly, and in 2023 the expenditure on foreign trips with overnight stays amounted to PLN 35.2 billion (Fig. 7). The relationship between spending on domestic and foreign travel changed. Before the pandemic, more was spent on foreign travel than domestic travel. During the pandemic, this relationship reversed. Expenditures on domestic travel (64.2% share in 2020) exceeded those on foreign travel (35.8%). In the following years, the difference decreased, but the total spent on trips with overnight stays remained higher for domestic trips (with a share of 54.7% in 2023) than foreign trips (45.3%).

The above amounts of expenses for foreign travel do not include expenses for trips abroad without an overnight stay (i.e., day trips). Their share in the total amount of expenditure on foreign trips in the period preceding the pandemic constituted almost one third of all expenditure on foreign trips. In the first two years of the pandemic (2020–2021) this share increased to over one third, and then in 2022–2023 it dropped to around one quarter. Expenditures on day trips in 2019 amounted to PLN 13.4 billion but decreased during the pandemic to just below PLN 8 billion, and in 2023 recovered reached PLN 11.3 billion (Fig. 8). These figures cannot be compared against expenditures on domestic day trips because no statistical data on domestic day trips exist. Day trips are far less costly when

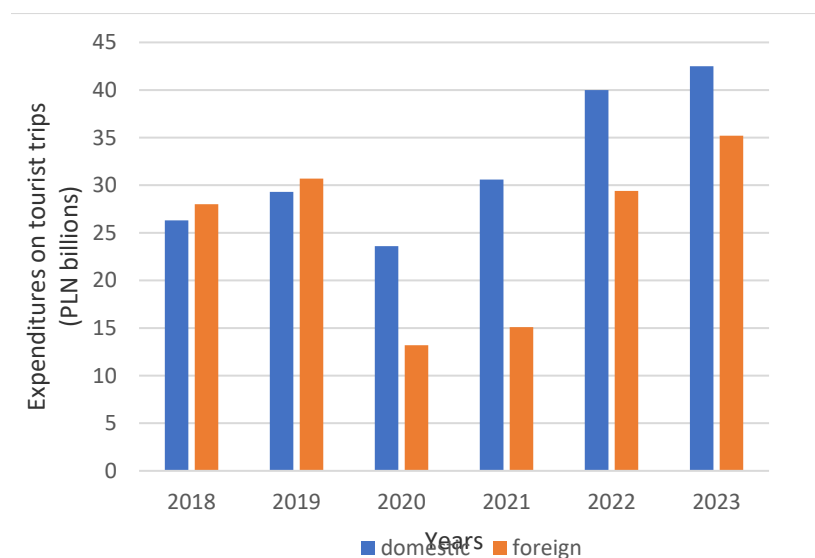


Fig. 7. Expenditure of Polish residents on tourist trips with at least one overnight stay, 2018–2023 (PLN billion)
Source: own elaboration

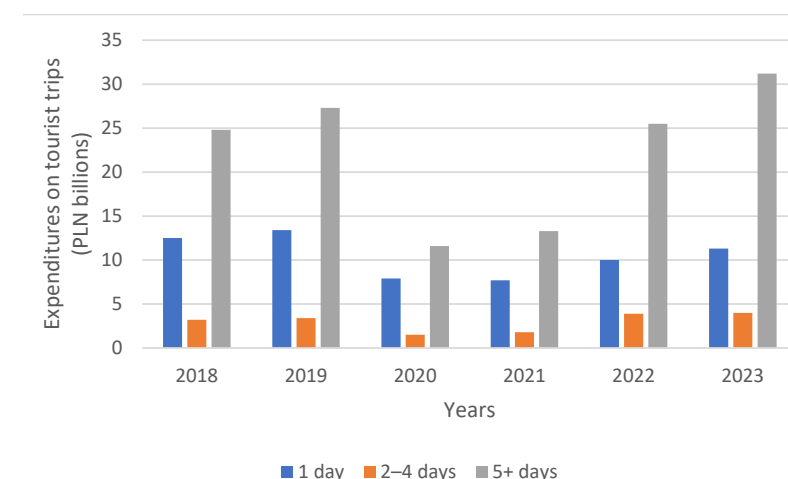


Fig. 8. Expenditure on foreign tourist trips by Polish residents, 2018–2023 (PLN billion)
Source: own elaboration

made domestically than abroad, but they are far more numerous, so it should be assumed that the total expenditures on domestic day trips are higher than for ones abroad.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic caused a decrease in expenditure on foreign tourist trips (of 57.1% for expenditures during overnight stays, and of 52.4% when adding in day trips) among Polish residents, it did not lead to major, lasting changes in the relative proportions among categories (Fig. 9). Prior to the pandemic, the largest categories of expenses were transport

and purchase of goods (in 2019, PLN 12.9 and 12.4 billion, respectively) followed by food and accommodation, each accounting for about one third less (PLN 8.5 and 8.4 billion). In 2020–21, the pandemic reduced expenses by half without changing their proportional breakdown. In the subsequent years 2022–2023, there was a significant increase in expenditure on transport, purchase of goods and food (in 2023 to PLN 13.8, 11.1 and 10.5 billion, respectively). In turn, in 2023, at PLN 8.9 billion, expenditure on accommodation slightly exceeded the pre-

pandemic level, as did expenditure on other services (PLN 2.2 billion).

The breakdown of expenses varied depending on the duration of the stay abroad. Apart from reducing the amounts spent, the pandemic did not have a major, lasting impact on their breakdown. On day trips, about two thirds was spent on purchasing goods and less than one fifth each on food and transport. The impact of the pandemic temporarily increased spending on the purchase of goods by 2–3 percentage points (p.p.) and reduced spending on transport and food by a similar proportion. In 2023, the breakdown of expenditures on day trips returned to its pre-pandemic state, although there was a slight decrease in the share of expenditure on the purchase of goods (to 60%) and an increase in the share of expenditure on food (to 17.8%). Short-term trips (2–4 days) broke down differently. Travel costs accounted for the highest share of expenses. Despite an absolute decline in travel expenditures, the pandemic increased their share from 28.2% in 2019 to 39.5% in 2020 and then remained at a slightly lower level (37.9%) until 2023. On the other hand, it reduced the share of expenditure on accommodation and the

purchase of goods and other services, but did not change the share of expenditure on food. In 2022–2023, this expenditure returned to its pre-pandemic proportion. Similarly, despite reducing total expenditure on long-term trips (5 days or more), the pandemic did not cause any changes in their breakdown. Expenditures on transport had a stable share of one third. The share of expenditure on accommodation and meals was slightly lower but stable (around one quarter each), while the share of expenditure on the purchase of goods was halved and the share of other services was marginal (~5%).

4.8. Foreign trip destinations of Polish residents, 2018–2023

Geographically, foreign tourist trips of Polish residents have for many years been highly concentrated (Matczak, 1992). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, one third of Poles' foreign trips were to just three countries (Germany, Italy, Great Britain). The first two years of the pandemic increased this concentration, though it modified the breakdown of destination countries,

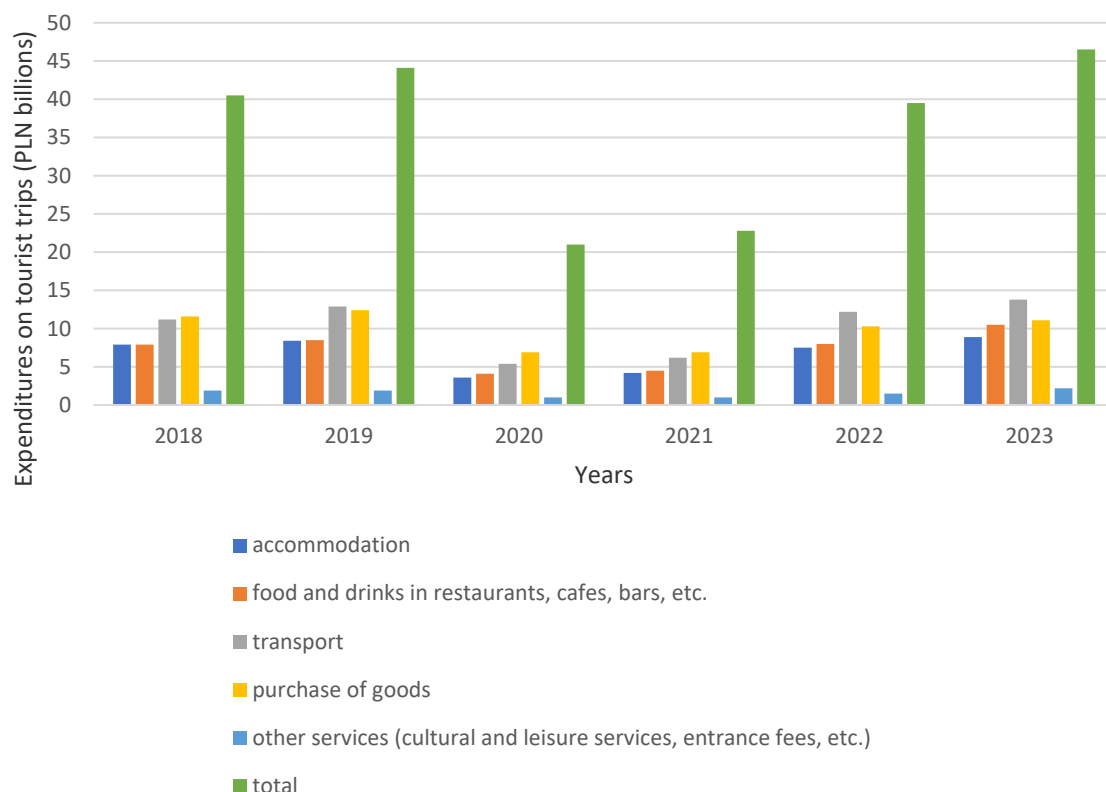


Fig. 9. Structure of expenditures by Polish residents aged 15 or over on foreign trips for personal purposes (with overnight stay), 2019–2023 (PLN billion)
Source: own elaboration

regardless of the decline in trip numbers. The share of the first three countries to which Poles travelled increased to 40%. In 2020, Italy (and in 2021 also the United Kingdom), which recorded particularly high levels of infection in 2020–2021, dropped out of the top three most popular foreign travel destinations for Poles. They were replaced in 2020–2021 by Croatia and in 2021 by Greece, with the latter retaining its place in 2022. Italy rejoined the top three in 2022, and the UK in 2023. Thus, in 2023, Germany, Italy and Great Britain were again the most popular foreign travel destinations for Poles, and their total share again reached their pre-pandemic level of one third.

The spatial concentration of foreign trips by Polish residents in 2018–2023 was clearly differentiated by travel purposes. Almost one third of trips undertaken before the pandemic for leisure, recreation and holidays were to Italy, Greece and Croatia (this last being replaced by Czech Republic in 2019). In the period 2020–2021, Italy dropped out of the top three due to its particularly high number of infections and travel restrictions. In these two years, Croatia, the Czech Republic and Greece handled just over one third of foreign leisure trips. In 2022, Italy returned to the leading position, followed by Greece and Croatia, forming a top 3 that together hosted almost one third of such trips. In 2023, Croatia was replaced by Spain and became, alongside Italy and Greece, one of the top three countries in attracting the most tourists for rest, recreation and holidays.

Trips to visit friends and relatives were far more spatially concentrated. Prior to the pandemic, three countries: Germany, Great Britain and Ireland hosted nearly two thirds of these trips. During the peak years of the pandemic (2020–2021), Ireland dropped out of the top three. It was replaced by the Netherlands, which together with Germany and Great Britain handled exactly two thirds of these trips. In 2022–2023, these three countries continued to dominate, but their combined share fell to pre-pandemic levels.

The relatively small number of trips abroad made by Poles for health, religious (including pilgrimages), educational, shopping and other purposes showed a similarly high level of spatial concentration. Before the pandemic, the top three comprised Germany, Italy and Israel, who received 42.5% of these trips. The top three grew to account for 56.8% in 2021 (with Lithuania replacing Israel in the top three). In 2023, despite falling to 46.7% (Czech Republic replacing Lithuania), the share of the top three

(now Germany, Italy, Czech Republic) was still significantly higher than in 2019.

Business trips were also highly geographically concentrated. In the period 2018–23, Polish residents travelled for business purposes mainly to Germany, Czech Republic and France. The share of these three countries increased from 49.5% in 2019 to 58.5% in 2020 and decreased to 54.1% in 2023.

Foreign tourist trips of Polish residents were mainly directed to neighbouring countries and those located in the Baltic Sea basin at a distance not exceeding 1,000 km (measuring straight-line distance from Warsaw to country capital) (Table 1 - see p. 157). The COVID-19 pandemic (despite causing a significant decline in the number of foreign trips) increased the importance of this distance zone for Polish residents travelling abroad. In 2019, 42.6% of journeys went to this distance zone, whereas in 2020 the figure was 57.5% before dropping to 44.4% in 2023. The share of this zone increased especially for visits to friends and relatives (an increase of 13.5 p.p. during the pandemic) and business trips (an increase of 8.7 p.p.). In the final phase of the pandemic, despite declining, this share was still slightly higher than before the pandemic. However, the pandemic had a lesser impact on increasing the geographical concentration of leisure, recreational and holiday travel. The share of this zone for these trips increased by 8.5 p.p. in the initial period of the pandemic, but in 2021 began a rapid decline to a significantly lower share than before the pandemic. This is in line with the clear longer-term tendency for Poles' travel preferences to gradually shift to longer distances, to the zone of countries whose capitals lie 1,000–3,000 km from Warsaw. The pandemic only temporarily stopped this trend, which became clearly visible again in the years following. In turn, about one third of all foreign tourist trips went to countries located mainly in the eastern and western Mediterranean basin, within the range 1,000–2,000 km from the Polish border. The COVID-19 pandemic caused only a slight decline in this zone's share in the total number of foreign trips. However, the purpose of trips clearly modified the impact that the pandemic had on this zone's share in servicing the foreign travel of Polish residents. After a decline in 2020, trips for leisure, recreational and holiday purposes recovered their pre-pandemic share in 2021 and increased it significantly in 2023. The pandemic had a different effect on the share of this zone in servicing visits to friends and relatives, business

trips and other travel purposes. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly limited this zone's share in serving these groups of travellers. However, by 2023 this loss had almost entirely bounced back. Countries more than 2,000 km from Poland had been handling a significantly smaller share of foreign tourist trips by Poles in the period

preceding the pandemic. The pandemic reduced this share by one third. In 2023, this zone of destinations for Poles not only recovered its pre-pandemic share but also showed a further upward trend. To this zone, people travelled mainly for recreational purposes; at the end of the pandemic, this zone was accepting one fifth

Table 1. Foreign trips of Polish residents aged 15 or more by travel distance in 2018–2023 (millions)

Travel range (km)	Year					
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total						
up to 1,000	6.0	6.1	3.4	3.7	5.2	5.7
1,000–1,999	4.8	5.2	2.1	2.3	4.7	5.4
2,000–3,000	1.1	1.3	0.4	0.5	1.2	1.5
over 3,000	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.3
Total	12.1	12.8	6.0	6.8	11.3	12.9
Leisure, recreation, holidays						
up to 1,000	2.9	3.2	1.5	1.6	2.4	2.7
1,000–1,999	2.6	2.9	1.0	1.4	3.0	3.3
2,000–3,000	1.0	1.1	0.3	0.4	1.0	1.3
over 3,000	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.2
Total	6.5	7.2	2.8	3.5	6.5	7.5
Visiting friends and relatives						
up to 1,000	2.0	2.1	1.3	1.4	1.8	1.9
1,000–1,999	1.6	1.7	0.8	0.7	1.3	1.5
2,000–3,000	0.1	0.1	0	0	0.1	0.1
over 3,000	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1
Total	3.8	4.0	2.1	2.1	3.3	3.6
Other/other private						
up to 1,000	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3
1,000–1,999	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
2,000–3,000	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1
over 3,000	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	0.5	0.6	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.5
Business/professional						
up to 1,000	0.7	0.7	0.5	0.6	0.8	0.9
1,000–1,999	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.4
2,000–3,000	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1
over 3,000	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	1.1	1.1	0.7	0.8	1.2	1.4

Source: own elaboration based on: data in the tourism industry yearbooks *Turystyka* for 2019–2024, published by Statistics Poland in Warsaw

of such travellers). Other travel purposes (visiting friends and relatives, business trips, and others) to this zone had marginal shares (despite the abundance of Polish emigrants in American countries). The pandemic slightly reduced the share of trips for leisure purposes but reduced the share of trips for other purposes by almost half. However, by 2023, these shares had recovered for almost all forms of foreign travel.

5. Discussion & conclusions

The political changes introduced in Poland in the late 20th century set in motion a gradual transformation of the model of Polish residents' foreign tourist travel (Matczak 1991). Related studies by Statistics Poland (GUS) (*Turystyka i wypoczynek* ... 1999, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, *Turystyka* 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023) indicate that Poles are gradually adopting the model of tourism popularised in Western countries.

The studies by Statistics Poland indicate that, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly two thirds of Polish residents took at least one overnight tourist trip per year, and one fifth took such a trip abroad. The frequency of tourist trips abroad has also increased significantly. The purchase of foreign trips organised by domestic and foreign tour operators and made available by numerous travel agencies has rapidly become popular. For many Poles, the affordability of mass foreign travel (i.e., package trips) has popularised air travel and hotel accommodation. As Poles have become more affluent, so too has their spending on foreign tourist trips increased. People travelled abroad mainly for recreational purposes (rest, recreation, holidays) to countries in the western and eastern Mediterranean basin (and, in winter, increasingly to Alpine countries). A steadily growing group of higher-earning Poles could afford tourist trips abroad to mass tourism centres due to the affordable price of such package trips. In the last half-century, the large outflow of Polish emigration abroad has also resulted in numerous trips abroad to visit friends and relatives (VFR) who have settled abroad permanently, especially in Western European countries. VFR trips were the second most important stream of foreign tourist trips of Polish residents (accounting for almost half of foreign leisure trips). The growing internationalisation of Polish emigrants' families has supported and will continue to support the number of foreign trips for mutual visits. The developing economic cooperation with European countries, the

USA and Canada generates a relatively large stream of business trips. There has also been a growing interest among Poles in long-distance tourist trips to many exotic countries and regions, especially for recreational purposes. The result has been a steady extension of foreign tourist trips. In 2019, half of all foreign trips made by Poles took place within a radius of up to 1,231 km (straight-line distance from Warsaw airport). Among Poles, the radius within which half traveled to visit friends and relatives, or for other private or business purposes, was no more than 1,000 km. Those travelling for leisure purposes travelled further, with a radius of up to 1,241.4 km encompassing half of this category. This confirms the general pattern observed in international tourism in major regions of the world, which is essentially intra-regional in nature (Pearce 1987). The effect of the number of international tourist trips falling with increasing distance also reflects the tendency to prefer mutual exchange of foreign trips between nearby countries, especially neighbouring ones.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly changed this model of tourism for Polish residents, as it did in many other countries. On 20 March 2020, a state of epidemic was introduced in Poland in response to COVID-19. On May 16, 2022, the state of epidemic in Poland was lifted and replaced by a state of epidemic threat, which was finally lifted on July 1, 2023. During the COVID-19 epidemic, demand for tourist trips fell among Polish residents, especially for foreign trips, as in many other countries (Neuberger, Egger 2020, Chua et al. 2020, Bae, Chang 2021; Bratić et al. 2021, Farzanegan et al. 2021; Kim et al. 2021, Golets et al. 2023). Preferred forms of tourism and travel destinations also changed, as also observed in Western countries (Neuberger, Egger 2020; Pinos-Navarrete, Show 2021). Mindful of their own safety and that of their families, Poles, like most international tourists, started to adopt protective behaviours (Zheng, Luo, Ritchie 2021; Das, Tiwari 2021, Qiao, Ruan, Pabel 2021). Participation in trips involving overnight stays abroad dropped to 10%. Domestic tourist trips became preferred. Distances abroad were much shorter (half of all foreign trips were within a radius of 1,000 km, regardless of destination). Travel to countries with high levels of COVID-19 infection was avoided (especially travel to Italy and the UK). Attempts were made to avoid mass tourism destinations (although Poles still preferred trips to mass tourism destinations in Mediterranean countries, but in half their pre-pandemic numbers). Countries neighbouring Poland gained in popularity. Trips abroad occurred mainly during

the holiday months. The share of private means of road transport in servicing foreign trips increased (i.e., an increase in trips to countries near Poland). The share of accommodation provided by hotels decreased, while the share of accommodation in smaller facilities such as guesthouses, private lodgings, and agritourism facilities increased. The indicated changes in the nature of foreign tourist trips by Polish residents during the epidemic in Poland were also been observed in many other countries (inter alia, Ioannides, Gyimóthy 2020; Sigala 2020; Craig, Karabas 2021, Traino 2024; Štastná et al. 2024; Rogerson, Rogerson 2021)

The widespread use of COVID-19 vaccines and the gradual lifting of restrictions on foreign travel have already resulted in a considerable increase in the number of such trips (foreign) undertaken by Polish residents in 2022. A year later (in 2023), the number of foreign tourist trips by Polish residents had fully recovered. The risk of COVID-19 infection is no longer a factor limiting travel abroad, being cited by Poles once again far behind factors such as financial constraints, lack of free time or lack of need to undertake a tourist trip. The pent-up demand for foreign travel deferred due to the pandemic entered a phase of being released in 2023 after the significant freeze during the COVID-19 epidemic. Massive surveys monitoring the participation and tourist behaviour of Polish residents (Turystyka 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023) indicate that the pandemic had only a small and temporary impact on their tourist behaviour, which in 2023 essentially returned to the pre-pandemic state. Surveys of Poles' holiday plans in 2024 (Plany wakacyjne Polaków ... 2024) generally indicate a continuation in the upward trend in foreign travel and a return of tourist behavior to the pre-COVID-19 pandemic travel model.

The case of the inhabitants of Poland indicates that many researchers' expectations (Sigala 2020, Niewiadomski 2020, Zenker, Kock 2020, Zenker, Braun, Gyimóthy 2021, Prideaux, Thompson, Pabel 2020, Galvani, Lew, Perez 2020, Romagosa 2020, Ioannides, Gyimóthy 2020) that the COVID-19 pandemic would profoundly transform participation in and the nature of tourist trips have not been fulfilled. The possibility of transformation in tourism has been shown to be low (Brouder 2020). Tourism is highly resistant to crises. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has raised hopes that the global tourism problems it has revealed may be addressed (Persson-Fischer, Liu 2021). Ongoing

discussions on global paths to tourism recovery after the pandemic (UNWTO 2021, WTTC 2021, 2022, OECD 2024, Kennell 2020, Jones 2022) indicate that it should receive government support to be rebuilt quickly, preferably in a sustainable manner.

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