

Characteristics and motivational patterns of tourist trips to the Croatian region Gorska Hrvatska

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Despite its attractiveness and potential for tourism valorisation, Gorska Hrvatska (Mountainous Croatia) is currently one of the less-developed tourist regions in Croatia, making it necessary to work towards the better promotion and visibility of the region's tourism supply and attracting potential tourists. A prerequisite for high-quality and sustainable management of further tourism development is understanding the motivational patterns and characteristics of targeted consumer segments to create effective tourism development strategies for the region. Therefore, the main research objective is to identify the general characteristics of tourist trips and motivational patterns of tourists visiting Gorska Hrvatska, to determine visitor profiles but also to further profile the tourist region and its main tourist destinations. Additionally, specific objectives include exploring the differences between the three analysed destinations – the municipality of Fužine, the town of Otočac, and the municipality of Rakovica, as well as the link between the specific motivation of tourists for visiting Gorska Hrvatska and their general travel preferences. The stated objectives were achieved through a direct survey conducted in the three

above-mentioned local self-government units, selected as case studies. In addition to descriptive statistics, the one-way ANOVA and the Pearson's correlation coefficient were used to analyse the data collected. The results confirmed that natural heritage is a key motivating factor attracting tourists to Gorska Hrvatska. In addition to a strong inclination towards natural heritage and leisure, tourists generally share similar preferences regarding characteristics of tourist trips and other motivating factors for visiting the region. Consequently, it is concluded that stronger profiling of tourist destinations has not yet occurred, as illustrated by three case studies that ultimately share more similarities than differences. Nevertheless, the analysis indicates some specific differences between them, which, although not significant, suggest the possible existence of certain tourist subtypes in the region that should be further examined.

Keywords: tourist motivation, tourist trip, tourism supply, Gorska Hrvatska

INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced lifestyle, where quality leisure time is of ever-increasing value, there are consequent globally present, dynamic changes in tourism trends. Tourists are increasingly seeking lesser-known destinations whose diverse tourism supply can provide them an escape from the everyday life routine while simultaneously offering them new, personalised tourist experiences that they have not had the opportunity to experience before (Capar et al., 2022; Horvat, 2000; Mesić et al., 2022). As a result, alongside highly developed, well-known destinations that are mainly characterised by high visitation and a long tradition of tourism, there is a growing demand for some less developed destinations that tourists visit motivated by certain specific interests and preferences. At the same time, less developed rural and mountainous regions often see tourism as an important component of their potential economic growth, in conditions of generally limited development opportunities. Such trends are present today in numerous geographically marginalised areas that lack sufficient resources for stronger development of some other activities while being characterised by the richness of preserved natural and/or cultural features, based on which various alternative forms of tourism are developing in those areas. One of the examples is Gorska Hrvatska, which in recent years, despite numerous developmental challenges, has been recording continuously positive tourism trends, as

well as the increasing development of alternative forms of tourism through the emergence of new tourist attractions and activities.

However, Gorska Hrvatska still represents one of the less developed tourist regions in Croatia, which is why it is necessary to work on better promotion and visibility of the tourism supply and the attraction of potential tourists. The prerequisite for high-quality and sustainable management of further tourism development is knowledge of motivational patterns and characteristics of targeted consumer segments, as well as their behaviour, satisfaction, and intentions of future behaviours, in order to create effective strategies for the tourism development of the region (Lončarić et al., 2023). Therefore, this paper contributes to identifying the general characteristics of tourist trips and motivational patterns of tourists visiting Gorska Hrvatska, with the aim of determining visitor profiles, as well as further profiling of the tourist region and its main tourist destinations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Motivation for alternative forms of tourism in mountainous areas

In recent years, several scientific studies in Europe and beyond have focused on identifying specific motivational patterns of tourists visiting mountainous areas. Hibner et al. (2018), for instance, investigated motivational patterns and the profile of tourists visiting two national parks in the Tatra Mountains. Focusing on the summer season and the zones within the national parks that are also accessible by cable car, they identified four types of tourists visiting these areas. A large proportion of them are primarily motivated by relaxation, leisure, and spending time with family and friends, showing little interest in nature as such. This type of tourist also tends to be less physically active, alongside those who are interested in being in a natural environment but are not drawn to sports or recreational activities. In this case, active tourists have proven to be less represented. Preliminary results from a study conducted among visitors to Kranjska Gora in Slovenia (Pintar, 2015) also indicate potential differences in the preferred intensity of active engagement at the destination among tourists with different socio-demographic characteristics.

Taczanowska et al. (2019) concluded that only a minority of tourists visiting the Tatra National Park in Poland could be considered ecotourists primarily motivated by direct enjoyment of nature and its unique features. The majority of tourists, by contrast, visit the national park to enjoy the scenery or participate in various tourist activities in a natural setting. Furthermore, Giachino et al. (2019) confirmed the existence of differences in motivational patterns between summer and winter tourists while focusing on millennials who visit mountainous destinations in the Piedmont region in Italy. In addition, they further observed specific characteristics of millennials, who, as tourists, tend to show a great interest in nature, wildlife, peace and relaxation, local gastronomy, and sport.

Regarding tourists visiting a destination to participate in sports events, Hungenberg et al. (2016) observed in the mountainous tourist destination of Vail in Colorado that only a small portion of visitors are solely motivated by the competition aspect, while most of them are additionally attracted by the location of the event and the opportunity to explore the destination and its tourism offer. Moreover, examining the tourist motivation for cycling in national parks in Thailand, significant differences were observed in motivational patterns between national parks in mountainous and coastal areas. In mountainous areas, there is more emphasis on motivating factors such as the need for exploration and physical challenge, and less on social interaction factors (Watthanaklang et al., 2016). A study conducted among hikers visiting the Beskid Mountains, a mountain range in the Carpathians, found that their primary motivation for active engagement at the destination was physical activity, while ambition was identified as the least important motive. Notably, the motives of physical activity and escaping interpersonal environments were more pronounced among women than men (Tomik et al., 2015). Different types of hikers based on their primary motivations were also identified by Ng and Hsu (2024), while the importance of relaxation-related motives was further confirmed in a study of visitors to the protected forest area of Pirongia in New Zealand (Pan & Ryan, 2007).

Gu et al. (2015) and Gu et al. (2018) investigated the motivational patterns of domestic tourists visiting protected areas, focusing on the Changbaishan Biosphere Reserve in China. Gu

et al. (2015) emphasised the importance of the distinction between an average tourist visiting a protected area and an ecotourist, while Gu et al. (2018) identified four different types of tourists in the study area, classified according to their motivation in the following categories: (1) nature travellers, (2) cultural landscape tourists, (3) food and shopping enthusiasts, and (4) eclectic adventurers. The relationship between the motivations of tourists visiting mountain areas and the demand for ecotourism was explored by Strobl et al. (2015) using the example of the Alps. In high mountain areas where tourists come to visit glaciers, there is a distinct motivation driven by the increased awareness of climate change (Salim et al., 2023). Finally, Putri et al. (2021), in their study of the Patuha mountain area in Indonesia, observed that tourist motivation is not necessarily linked to the level of attractiveness of individual tourist sites.

Some authors do not focus their research on tourism in mountainous areas explicitly on defining motivational patterns for a tourist visit but explore topics directly or indirectly related to this matter. For example, Hussain et al. (2018) aimed to explore the role of social media in the sustainable development of tourism in the mountain region of Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan, while Hussain et al. (2024) further investigated the impact of social media usage on tourist behaviour in rural mountain regions, as well as their risk perception and the decision to visit a destination, focusing on the same study area during the COVID-19 pandemic. Risk perception, preferences, and tourist behaviour were also studied by Pröbstl-Haider et al. (2016) in the context of climate change in the Alps, highlighting the importance of differentiating average tourists in mountainous areas from experienced mountaineers. Tourist behaviour in mountainous areas was also addressed by Hu et al. (2018), focusing on litter management and pro-environmental behaviour in the Huangshan National Park in China, as well as in Mauri and Nava (2021) in the context of experiencing boredom during a stay in the mountain region of the Aosta Valley in Italy. The relationship between destination choice, satisfaction with the stay, and tourist loyalty in winter tourist destinations was investigated by Ul Islam et al. (2023), while factors affecting tourist satisfaction in mountain destinations were the focus of research by Vindiana et al. (2020). Hodeck and Hovemann (2015), using the example of highland destinations in

Germany, highlighted that differences in the types of active winter tourists exist depending on age, noting that tourists visiting highland areas tend to travel shorter distances to reach their chosen destination compared to those visiting high mountain destinations. Age and income level were also statistically significant determinants in the choice of tourist activities among active tourists on the island of Madeira (Soares et al., 2015).

Finally, there is a considerable number of other studies on tourists' motivational patterns that are not focused on tourism in mountainous areas, but rather on other types of tourist destinations. Although the results of these studies may not necessarily be comparable to the ones exploring tourist visits to mountainous areas, the fundamental motivation of tourists to travel to various destinations is often very similar. In this context, Silva et al. (2020) offered curious insights into the characteristics, motivation, and satisfaction of tourists visiting the Azores, focusing on senior tourists, while Ponte et al. (2021) explored the preferences and expectations of tourists in the Azores concerning adventure tourism activities. When it comes to rural tourism, Farmaki (2012) profiled different types of tourists in the rural area of the Troodos in Cyprus, and Berbel-Pinedaa et al. (2019) offered research results on the importance of gastronomy as an attractive motivating factor.

Although some scientific research on tourist motivation in Croatia has already been conducted (Krpina, 2015; Lončarić et al., 2023; Mesić et al., 2022), none of these studies, based on current knowledge, has specifically been focused on determining motivational patterns for visiting Gorska Hrvatska. Tourism is generally a poorly represented research topic regarding Gorska Hrvatska. Previous research has mainly focused only on some parts of the region or specific forms of tourism present such as sports tourism (Milohnić et al., 2018; Perić et al., 2016; Perić et al., 2017), agrotourism (Marušić, 2017), and transit tourism (Knežević & Grbac Žiković, 2013) in Gorski Kotar, as well as rural tourism (Bušljeta Tonković, 2019) and farm tourism (Žafran & Radeljak Kaufmann, 2022) in Lika.

The results of the conducted research were compared with the results of the research on attitudes and expenditures of tourists in Croatia included in the TOMAS 2022-2023 study

(Institute for Tourism, 2024b). The TOMAS surveys are fundamental, comprehensive surveys on the characteristics, attitudes, and expenditures of tourists in Croatia, whose methodological framework was established by the Institute for Tourism in Zagreb in 1987 and which are still conducted regularly today. Although the TOMAS surveys were designed with the intention of determining the attitudes and expenditures of tourists every 3-4 years, especially in coastal tourist destinations, they have been conducted throughout Croatia since 2019 and, among other things, provide users with a detailed insight into the characteristics of tourists' motivational patterns in Kontinentalna Hrvatska (Continental Croatia) as well. It should be emphasised that in addition to the TOMAS surveys at the level of the whole of Croatia and Adriatic Croatia, specialised sub-surveys of TOMAS are also conducted (e.g. nautical tourists, tourists in road vehicles travelling to coastal destinations, visitors to protected areas, tourists on cruisers, visitors to cultural attractions and events, visitors to health tourism facilities, tourists and one-day visitors in Zagreb and Dubrovnik) (Institute for Tourism, 2024b), which represents an indispensable source of data and a starting point for related research.

Recent characteristics of tourism in Gorska Hrvatska

The two fundamental natural-geographic features defining Gorska Hrvatska are its predominantly high relief compared to the rest of Croatia and its central geographical location, making it a natural link between the Pannonian-Peripannonian and coastal parts of Croatia. The region consists of three distinct units: Gorski Kotar, Lika, and Ogulin-Plaški submontane valley (Blažević, 2003; Pavić, 2008). Due to its favourable geographical location, the region has always been a strategically important transit area between the continental and coastal parts of Croatia, as well as between Central Europe and the Mediterranean in a broader sense (Lukić et al., 2009; Perić et al., 2016). Today, modern road connections are of key importance for the region's economic development, mainly the state road D1, and Zagreb-Rijeka and Zagreb-Split-Dubrovnik motorways (Lukić et al., 2009; Magaš, 2016).

The natural-geographic characteristics of Gorska Hrvatska can be considered relatively unfavourable and limiting, especially in terms of settlement and nodal-functional spatial

organisation. The region is characterised by the vertical fragmentation of karst relief, a lack of arable land, and specific hydrological and geomorphological features. But those characteristics, at the same time, represent the main comparative advantage of the region for the development of various alternative forms of tourism in the area (Bušljeta Tonković, 2019; Lajić & Klempić Bogadi, 2010; Živić & Turk, 2009). The region's greatest tourism potential lies in its valuable and well-preserved natural heritage, much of which is nowadays under various levels of national and international protection. The most significant tourist site in Gorska Hrvatska is the oldest and most visited Croatian national park – Plitvice Lakes National Park. In addition, valuable protected natural heritage with high tourism potential includes Risnjak National Park, Northern Velebit National Park, and Velebit Nature Park. Notable natural heritage sites in Lika also include Cave Park Grabovača, Cerovac caves, Gacka spring, Una spring, and Barać caves in Rakovica Municipality. In the areas of Gorski Kotar and Ogulin-Plaški Valley, key attractions include the forest parks Golubinjak near Lokve and Japlenški Peak near Delnice, and the significant landscapes of Vražji prolaz and Zeleni vir, Kamačnik near Vrbovsko, and Klek near Ogulin. Apart from its natural heritage, the region increasingly attracts visitors due to the expanding offer of various alternative forms of tourism. One example is Gacka River valley, which draws tourists with its picturesque scenery and preserved cultural heritage (including traditional mills in the village of Sinac), as well as opportunities for fishing and active tourism. The central part of Gorski Kotar is a popular destination for winter sports and recreational tourism, while Fužine, for example, increasingly attracts numerous day excursionists and tourists seeking an active vacation, even during the summer season (Curić et al., 2013; Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, 2024).

Although Gorska Hrvatska unquestionably offers a rich tourism attraction base and has great potential for the development of various forms of tourism, these advantages are still insufficiently recognised at the regional level. This is reflected in official data showing that, as of early 2022, the largest share of employees in Gorska Hrvatska works in manufacturing (16.80%), public administration, defence, and compulsory social security activities (13.25%),

education (12.12%), and agriculture, forestry, and fishing (10.50%). The share of employees in the category of accommodation and food service activities is only 5.12%, indicating a relatively lesser importance of tourism and hospitality activities in the region. At the local level, the largest share of employees in this category is present in the municipalities of Rakovica (31%), Plitvička Jezera (27%), and Vrhovine (17%), which is directly conditioned by intensive tourism development present in the wider area of Plitvice Lakes National Park¹ (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2024b).

Regarding accommodation capacities, the municipalities of Plitvička Jezera and Rakovica, along with the towns of Otočac, Gospić, and Ogulin, had the highest number of permanent beds (beds regularly available to tourists) in 2022. Over 70% of permanent beds in the region were registered in these five local self-government units, with approximately 57% belonging to the municipalities of Plitvička Jezera and Rakovica. This pattern is also reflected in the distribution of accommodation units, i.e., rooms, apartments, and camping sites, which are again most concentrated in these two municipalities. The towns of Otočac and Gospić have significantly fewer accommodation units, followed by Ogulin, Delnice, Fužine, and Vrhovine. The number of accommodation units in remaining municipalities can be considered small to insignificant in comparison to the total accommodation capacities in the region (Tab. 1).

¹ It should be noted that the above figures refer to the period outside the summer season, when the share of employees in the accommodation and food service activities at the national level is only 5%, consequently excluding seasonal workers from the analysis.

Tablica 1. Smještajni kapaciteti u Gorskoj Hrvatskoj 2022. godine po jedinicama lokalne samouprave**Table 1** Accommodation capacities in Gorska Hrvatska in 2022 by local self-government units

Jedinica lokalne samouprave (JLS) / Local self-government unit	Broj stalnih postelja 2022. / Number of permanent beds 2022	Udio JLS u GH (%) / Unit's share in region's total	Broj soba, apartmana i mjesta za kampiranje 2022. / Number of rooms, apartments, and camping sites 2022	Udio JLS u GH (%) / Unit's share in region's total
Brinje	44	0.27	30	0.47
Brod Moravice	59	0.36	23	0.36
Čabar	189	1.17	69	1.07
Delnice	628	3.88	229	3.56
Donji Lapac	41	0.25	17	0.26
Fužine	617	3.81	222	3.45
Gospić	931	5.75	408	6.34
Gračac	305	1.88	128	1.99
Josipdol	125	0.77	54	0.84
Lokve	157	0.97	56	0.87
Lovinac	205	1.27	71	1.10
Mrkopalj	317	1.96	125	1.94
Ogulin	665	4.11	248	3.85
Otočac	933	5.76	412	6.40
Perušić	135	0.83	60	0.93
Plaški	113	0.70	44	0.68
Plitvička jezera	4,777	29.51	2,039	31.68
Rakovica	4,494	27.76	1,667	25.90
Ravna Gora	422	2.61	140	2.18
Saborsko	91	0.56	33	0.51
Skrad	114	0.70	40	0.62
Udbina	65	0.40	28	0.44
Vrbovsko	248	1.53	95	1.48
Vrhovine	513	3.17	198	3.08
Gorska Hrvatska ukupno / Gorska Hrvatska in total	16,188	100.00	6,436	100.00

Izvor / Source: Državni zavod za statistiku, 2024a / Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2024a

Analysing the spatial distribution of tourist arrivals at the local level, in 2022, more than 40% of all arrivals were recorded in the Municipality of Plitvička Jezera, while over 30% of arrivals were additionally recorded in the neighbouring municipality of Rakovica. Concurrently, they are the only local self-government units in Gorska Hrvatska receiving more than 100,000 arrivals per year. They are followed by the town of Otočac, with a share of 5.54%, and the towns of Ogulin, Gospić, and Delnice, as well as the municipalities of Fužine and Ravna Gora. All other local self-government units account for less than 2% of tourist arrivals in Gorska Hrvatska. There are no significant variations in the spatial distribution of tourist nights compared to arrivals, which indicates a strong polarisation of tourism activity within the region (Tab. 2).

Tablica 2. Dolasci i noćenja u Gorskoj Hrvatskoj 2022. godine po jedinicama lokalne samouprave

Table 2 Tourist arrivals and tourist nights in Gorska Hrvatska in 2022 by local self-government units

Jedinica lokalne samouprave (JLS) / Local self-government unit	Dolasci 2022. / Tourist arrivals 2022	Udio JLS u GH (%) / Unit's share in re- gion's total	Noćenja 2022. / Tourist nights 2022	Udio JLS u GH (%) / Unit's share in re- gion's total
Plitvička Jezera	193,675	41.29	321,992	37.17
Rakovica	146,647	31.27	262,711	30.32
Otočac	25,966	5.54	44,971	5.19
Ogulin	20,097	4.28	35,309	4.08
Gospić	17,205	3.67	37,066	4.28
Delnice	10,608	2.26	28,119	3.25
Fužine	9,988	2.13	29,971	3.46
Ravna Gora	9,446	2.01	19,695	2.27
Vrhovine	6,811	1.45	11,392	1.31
Mrkopalj	4,658	0.99	13,808	1.59
Ostale JLS ukupno ² /	23,916	5.10	61,309	7.08

² Except for the municipalities of Brinje and Donji Lapac, for which official data from the State Bureau of Statistics from 2022 are protected as both indicators have considerably low values.

<i>Other local self-government units in total</i>				
Gorska Hrvatska (GH) ukupno / <i>Gorska Hrvatska in total</i>	469,017	100	866,343	100

Izvor / Source: Državni zavod za statistiku, 2024a / Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2024a

Such spatial distribution of accommodation capacities and tourist traffic is consistent with the categorisation of local self-government units according to the Tourism Development Index.³

According to data from 2022, the municipalities of Plitvička Jezera (32.39) and Rakovica (30.76) are the only two units in Gorska Hrvatska with a tourism development index greater than 30, which classifies them into the first category. Six local self-government units are then sorted into the second category, namely the town of Otočac (23.22), the municipality of Fužine (23.01), the town of Gospić (21.99), the town of Delnice (21.48), the town of Ogulin (20.82), and the municipality of Ravna Gora (20.82). More than half of the local self-government units in Gorska Hrvatska are characterised by poor tourism valorisation, falling into the third and fourth categories. This indicates that tourism activity still does not play a significant role in the economic development of most part of the region (Institute for Tourism, 2024a).

OBJECTIVES, METHODOLOGY, AND SPATIAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

An analysis of recent characteristics of tourism in Gorska Hrvatska clearly demonstrates that not all parts of this tourist region have exploited the potential of their tourist attractiveness with equal success. However, the data also indicate that the tourism offer of several local self-government units within Gorska Hrvatska attracts a significant number of visitors. Their travel

³ The Tourism Development Index (TDI) is a composite indicator calculated annually for all towns and municipalities in Croatia, based on five basic indicators expressed in absolute and relative values: (1) number of beds, (2) number of beds in hotels and similar establishments, (3) number of tourist arrivals, (4) number of tourist nights, and (5) number of employees in the accommodation and food service activities. The index values range from zero to a maximum of 40, with all local self-government units classified into five categories according to the degree of tourism development, from the least developed ones with an index value of zero to the most developed ones where the TDI value exceeds 30 (Opačić et al., 2022).

characteristics, as well as the motivation for visiting this part of the country, remain insufficiently explored. This lack of understanding consequently hinders informed management and further development of the tourism offer in the region that is in line with tourist expectations. In this context, the questions arise as to what attracts tourists to Gorska Hrvatska, what types of tourists visit the region, and what their general preferences are. Does the primary motivation of these tourists differ depending on the destination where they stay? Are visitors to Gorska Hrvatska driven by specific interests that might not typically influence their choice of destination? Finally, does the region's tourism offer align with the factors that motivate tourists to spend time there?

The need to answer these research questions leads to the following objectives of this study: (1) to identify the characteristics of tourist trips and tourists' motivation for visiting Gorska Hrvatska, (2) to examine the differences in the characteristics of tourist trips and tourists' motivation for visiting Gorska Hrvatska between the three analysed tourist destinations (Fužine, Otočac, Rakovica), and (3) to examine the correlation between tourists' specific motivation for visiting Gorska Hrvatska and the importance of certain segments of the tourism supply and the practising of certain activities during their stay in a tourist destination.

The above-mentioned objectives of the research were achieved through a direct survey of tourists' motivational patterns for a tourist visit to Gorska Hrvatska. The sample used for the research is a non-probabilistic convenient sample consisting exclusively of adult tourists who have spent at least one night in the area of the municipality of Fužine, the town of Otočac, and the municipality of Rakovica and have visited or intended to visit at least one tourist attraction in Gorska Hrvatska. The total sample included 160 respondents, of which 64 respondents (40%) were surveyed in the area of the municipality of Rakovica, 58 (36.25%) in the area of the town of Otočac, and 38 (23.75%) in the area of the municipality of Fužine. The survey was conducted in August and September 2023 in cooperation with the owners of 9 tourism and hospitality establishments in the research area in Croatian and English, depending on the country of

residence and the preference of the respondents.⁴ For the purpose of this research, the three local self-government units in Gorska Hrvatska were chosen as case studies (Fig. 1).



Slika 1. Jedinice lokalne samouprave u prostoru istraživanja

Figure 1 Local self-government units in the research area

Izvor / Source: Državna geodetska uprava, 2015 / State Geodetic Administration, 2015

⁴ There are three tourism and hospitality establishments in each of the three local self-government units. Of these, two are hotels, two are facilities for accommodation services in a household (room/apartment) and one is a camping site, a hostel, a hunting lodge, a tourist centre, and a holiday resort.

The case studies were selected after a detailed analysis of current statistical indicators of tourism trends and accommodation capacities for 24 local self-government units in Gorska Hrvatska, which are included in the spatial framework of the research. The municipality of Rakovica was chosen as an example of a local self-government unit that is one of the most developed tourist destinations in Croatia, even at the national level. Together with the municipality of Plitvička Jezera, it represents the area with the most visitors in the region, with the biggest accommodation capacity and the largest share of employees in the tourism and hospitality industry. It is also an example of a municipality where alternative forms of tourism are being developed to enrich and diversify the tourism supply in the wider vicinity of the region's main tourist site, Plitvice Lakes National Park. On the other hand, the supply of alternative forms of tourism in the other two case studies is being developed independently of the surrounding areas. Of the three case studies, the town of Otočac is the local self-government unit with the largest area and population, and according to the shares of realised tourism flow and accommodation capacities, it ranks third in the region. Compared to the two previously mentioned local self-government units, the municipality of Fužine has the smallest accommodation capacity and a significantly lower share of tourist mobilities, but is also much smaller in terms of area and population. Therefore, the intensity of tourism in its area is not negligible. With the above-mentioned selection, an even spatial distribution of the case studies in the research area was achieved, whereby the main concentration zones of the tourism supply in the region were taken into account.

As the sample included respondents from 22 countries, it is not surprising that the majority of respondents, namely 70.6%, completed the questionnaire in English, while 29.4% of respondents filled out the questionnaire in Croatian. Of the 156 respondents who answered the question about their country of residence, most tourists were from Croatia (32 respondents or 20.5%), followed by tourists from Germany (29 respondents or 18.6%), Italy (21 respondents or 13.5%) and Hungary (11 respondents or 7.1%). Fewer than 10 respondents from other countries were included in the sample. The vast majority of respondents are tourists from European

countries (144 of them or 92.3 %), while tourists from other continents are represented by only 12 respondents (7.7 %). When asked whether they live in an urban or rural area, 152 respondents answered, of which 111 (73%) live in an urban area, while 41 (27%) come from a rural area.

In terms of gender, there are slightly more women (83 or 52.5%), than men (73 or 46.2%), while 2 respondents (1.3%) did not want to answer this question. The sample includes people between the ages of 18 and 77, with the average age of respondents being 38.48 years ($SD=11.584$). In the sample, the younger mature respondents (31-45 years old; 64 respondents or 42.7%) predominate over the younger respondents (18-30 years old; 42 of them or 28.0%), the older mature respondents (46-60 years old; 40 of them or 26.7%) and the older respondents (over 60 years old), who are only slightly represented in the sample (only 4 or 2.6%). The age structure of the respondents, in which the under 45-year-olds predominate (106 respondents or 70.7 %), coincides with the age structure of tourists who prefer natural attractions and forms of tourism based on them, which was also confirmed by some previous studies (Gu et al., 2018; Hibner et al., 2018; Pröbstl-Haider et al., 2016).

According to the highest level of education, the majority of respondents belong to the group with a diploma in university graduate studies or professional graduate studies (50 of them or 32.7%), followed by the groups of respondents with secondary education (46 of them or 30.1%), university postgraduate or specialist study (35 of them or 22.9%), university or professional undergraduate study (14 of them or 9.1%) and primary education (2 of them or 1.3%), while six respondents (3.9%) did not want to answer the question about the highest level of education. The educational structure, according to which the majority of tourists visiting mountainous and hilly regions have a high level of education, is also consistent with the results processed by Gu et al. (2018) using the example of a nature reserve in China, but also with those from studies in the Alps (Pröbstl-Haider et al., 2016) and the Tatra Mountains (Hibner et al., 2018).

The IBM SPSS tool was used to analyse the collected data. In addition to descriptive statistics (determining the mean values and the frequency of the respondents' answers), the one-way ANOVA and Pearson's correlation coefficient were used. One-way ANOVA was used to determine the differences between tourists in the aforementioned tourist destinations. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to determine the correlation of the specific motivation of tourists for visiting Gorska Hrvatska with the importance of certain segments of the tourism supply and the practise of certain activities during their stay in a destination. When interpreting the results and contextualising the conclusions, the limitations of the conducted research must also be taken into account. These relate primarily to the relatively small number of respondents (160), small number of the locations of the survey (Rakovica, Otočac, Fužine) and the small number of tourist-hospitality facilities in which the survey was conducted (9), as well as the fact that the survey was conducted in the summer season of only one year, 2023, which makes it difficult to generalise the results. It could be assumed that the structure of tourists and their motivation and characteristics for travelling to Gorska Hrvatska outside the summer season are somewhat different. Despite the mentioned limitations, we believe that the obtained results are sufficiently relevant and illustrative to support the presented conclusions and shed more light on the topic of characteristics and motivational patterns of tourist trips to Gorska Hrvatska by achieving the research objectives, but also to open up potential topics for future research, which we listed in the conclusion.

RESULTS

The characteristics of tourist trips and tourists' motivation for visiting Gorska Hrvatska

Based on the results of the survey, it is possible to identify the main characteristics of tourist trips and motivational patterns during a tourist visit to Gorska Hrvatska. Although only 56 (or 35.9%) of the 156 respondents who answered this question stated that they were visiting Croatia for the first time, 99 of them (63.5%) also stated that they were visiting Gorska Hrvatska for the first time. Respondents for whom this is at least their third visit to Croatia are slightly more represented (65 or 41.7%), including domestic tourists. Respondents for whom this is

their second visit to Croatia are the least represented (35 or 22.4%). Only 25 respondents (16.0%) were visiting Gorska Hrvatska for the second time, while 32 respondents (20.5%) stated that they have visited Gorska Hrvatska three or more times. Comparing the answers to the question about the number of visits to Gorska Hrvatska and Croatia as a whole, it is noticeable that more foreign tourists surveyed have visited Croatia as a whole than Gorska Hrvatska, which leads to the conclusion that Gorska Hrvatska is not the first destination in Croatia that most foreign tourists visit. This is not surprising, considering that the Adriatic coast and the islands are the most visited parts of Croatia.

Most respondents, 58 out of 155 who answered this question (37.4%), plan to stay two nights in their accommodation in Gorska Hrvatska. Slightly fewer, namely 36 respondents (23.2%) plan to spend one night in their current accommodation, and an equal proportion of those who answered that they would stay three (19 of them or 12.2%) or four nights in their current accommodation (22 of them or 14.2%). Five nights were planned by 10 respondents (6.5%), and a total of 10 respondents (10 of them or 6.5%) plan a tourist stay of more than five nights in the current accommodation capacity. The average length of stay planned by the respondents in the current accommodation capacity is 2.94 nights ($SD=3.011$). The results of the answers to the question about the number of planned nights in Croatia during this tourist stay clearly show that the planned stay in Croatia is significantly longer, as the average length is 7.97 nights ($SD=6.565$). The above results confirm the fact that the average length of a tourist's stay in Gorska Hrvatska is shorter than in coastal areas (Institute for Tourism, 2024b) and that these are mostly destinations aimed at shorter stays or weekend tourism in other parts of the year. According to the survey on attitudes and expenditures of tourists in Croatia included in the TOMAS 2022-2023 study, tourists stay in Croatia for an average of 7.8 nights, but the length of stay is very different in Adriatic Croatia (on average 8.0 nights) and Kontinentalna Hrvatska (on average 3.4 nights) (Institute for Tourism, 2024b).

Regarding the type of accommodation capacity, most respondents (50 out of 159 who answered this question, or 31.4%) stayed in private accommodation (a room or apartment)

during their stay in Gorska Hrvatska, than in a camping site (46 of them, or 28.9%), in a hotel (37 of them, or 23.3%), while 11 respondents (6.9%) opted for a combination of several different types of accommodation. Seven respondents (4.4%) stayed in holiday homes, while the remaining respondents (8 of them or 5.1%) opted for another accommodation option.

When asked with whom they were visiting Gorska Hrvatska during this tourist trip, most respondents answered 'with their partner,' 55 of them or 34.4%. Slightly fewer respondents, 49 of them or 30.6%, answered 'with family,' while 31 respondents or 19.4% of them were travelling with friends. Some of the respondents, 19 of them or 11.9%, stated that they visited Gorska Hrvatska in a different social setting or with several people. For example, in combination with friends and partner, family and partner, friends and family, and the like. The lowest percentage is those who decided to visit Gorska Hrvatska alone (only 4 respondents or 2.5%) or with colleagues (2 respondents or 1.3%). From the above answers, it can be seen that Gorska Hrvatska is a destination that tourists mostly visit with their partner or family, which is consistent with Kontinentalna Hrvatska as a tourist destination overall (Institute for Tourism, 2024b).

The respondents' motivation was included in the question asking them to rate the extent to which the offered factors motivated them to visit Gorska Hrvatska as a tourist. A Likert scale was used in which the answers were coded from 1=not at all to 4=completely. The offered motivating factors included a total of ten variables, which comprised various motivating factors that could, to some extent, influence the respondents' decision to visit Gorska Hrvatska (Tab. 3).

Tablica 3. Ocjena važnosti pojedinih motivacijskih faktora za turistički posjet Gorskoj Hrvatskoj**Table 3** Assessment of the importance of certain motivating factors for a tourist visit to Gorska Hrvatska

Motivacijski faktor / Motivating factor	n	M	SD
Prirodna baština / <i>Natural heritage</i>	155	3.67	0.704
Odmor i opuštanje / <i>Rest and relaxation</i>	157	3.48	0.781
Kulturno-povijesna baština / <i>Cultural and historical heritage</i>	154	2.82	0.889
Sport i rekreacija / <i>Sport and recreation</i>	153	2.61	1.089
Autohtona gastronomska ponuda / <i>Local gastronomic offer</i>	154	2.59	1.088
Upoznavanje s lokalnim stanovništvom / <i>Getting to know the local population</i>	152	2.51	1.023
Upoznavanje s tradicijom i običajima / <i>Getting to know traditions and customs</i>	153	2.42	1.011
Prisustvovanje lokalnim manifestacijama / <i>Attending local events</i>	153	1.89	0.977
Zabava i noćni život / <i>Entertainment and nightlife</i>	152	1.88	1.018
Mogućnosti kupovine / <i>Shopping opportunities</i>	153	1.63	0.879

Izvor / Source: Anketno istraživanje (kolovoz, rujan, 2023.) / Survey (August, September, 2023)

The mean values of the ratings lead to the conclusion that the natural heritage motivates the respondents to visit Gorska Hrvatska (3.67) the most. Rest and relaxation as a motivating factor also have a high mean value (3.48). These are also the two factors with the smallest standard deviation values, which means that they have the smallest deviations of individual respondents' answer values from the average value of all answers. After natural heritage and rest and relaxation, next in importance motivating factors are cultural and historical heritage (2.82), sport and recreation (2.61), the local gastronomic offer (2.59), getting to know the local population (2.51) and getting to know traditions and customs (2.42). The respondents rated attending local events (1.89), entertainment and nightlife (1.88), and shopping opportunities (1.63) as the least important motivating factors in connection with a visit to Gorska Hrvatska. The ratings of motivating factors from this research are somewhat in line with the ratings of motivating factors for tourist visits to Kontinentalna Hrvatska (Institute for Tourism, 2024b). According to the above-mentioned research, 'nature' is the third most important motive for

visiting Kontinentalna Hrvatska, and ‘culture and art’ is in fifth place. However, if we exclude motives such as ‘city break’ and ‘work,’ which are ranked first and second, and ‘visiting relatives and friends’ in fourth place, which are not as important when visiting Gorska Hrvatska, it becomes clear that the two highest-ranking motives in this survey are the same as those in the TOMAS 2022-2023 study (Institute for Tourism, 2024b).

Respondents also answered the question about the importance of certain segments of the tourism supply and the practise of certain activities during their stay in a destination in general. The offered segments of the attraction basis and tourist activities were rated using Likert scales, with the response grading coded with scores from 0=not at all important to me to 10=extremely important to me (Tab. 4).

Tablica 4. Ocjena važnosti pojedinih segmenata turističke ponude i upražnjavanja pojedinih aktivnosti tijekom boravka u nekoj turističkoj destinaciji

Table 4 Assessment of the importance of the segments of the tourism supply and the practice of certain activities during a stay in a tourist destination

Segment turističke ponude i upražnjavanje pojedinih aktivnosti / <i>Segments of the tourism supply and the practising of certain activities</i>	n	M	SD
Prirodna baština / <i>Natural heritage</i>	153	8.77	1.764
Odmor i opuštanje / <i>Rest and relaxation</i>	152	8.74	1.952
Kulturno-povijesna baština / <i>Cultural and historical heritage</i>	150	7.54	2.224
Autohtona gastronomska ponuda / <i>Local gastronomic offer</i>	152	7.36	2.595
Upoznavanje s tradicijom i običajima / <i>Getting to know traditions and customs</i>	151	6.46	2.727
Sport i rekreacija / <i>Sport and recreation</i>	150	6.23	3.143
Upoznavanje s lokalnim stanovništvom / <i>Getting to know the local population</i>	150	6.06	2.855
Prisustvovanje lokalnim manifestacijama / <i>Attending local events</i>	152	5.20	2.935
Zabava i noćni život / <i>Entertainment and nightlife</i>	149	4.30	3.316
Mogućnosti kupovine / <i>Shopping opportunities</i>	148	4.25	3.147

Izvor / Source: Anketno istraživanje (kolovoz, rujan, 2023.) / Survey (August, September, 2023)

The mean values of the respondents' ratings clearly support the thesis that for tourists visiting Gorska Hrvatska, natural heritage is the most important segment of the tourism supply during their stay in a destination (mean value of importance 8.77), and the activity they prefer to practise during their stay in the destination is rest and relaxation (8.74). It is therefore not surprising that the respondents rated these two factors with the highest scores as motivating factors for a visit to Gorska Hrvatska. The order of importance of other segments of the tourism supply and the practising of certain activities during a stay at a destination largely corresponds to the ranking of motivating factors for a tourist visit to Gorska Hrvatska. Thus, it can be concluded that Gorska Hrvatska was the tourist destination of choice for the majority of respondents, i.e., that they deliberately chose it based on their general preferences when travelling as tourists.

The differences in the characteristics of tourist trips and tourists' motivation for visiting Gorska Hrvatska between the three analysed tourist destinations (Fužine, Otočac, Rakovica)

Using a one-way ANOVA, it was confirmed that the characteristics of the trips of tourists who visited Gorska Hrvatska are very similar, regardless of the area of survey (the municipality of Fužine, the town of Otočac, the municipality of Rakovica). Statistically significant differences were only found in relation to the number of planned overnight stays in Croatia during the current visit ($F=6.019$; $df=2$; $p=0.003$) and the number of planned overnight stays in the current accommodation, i.e., in the survey destination ($F=4.788$; $df=2$; $p=0.010$).

The most overnight stays in Croatia during the current visit were planned by tourists surveyed in the municipality of Rakovica (9.95 overnight stays), followed by the tourists in the municipality of Fužine (7.76) and the least by tourists in the town of Otočac (5.87). Conversely, the respondents in the town of Otočac planned the shortest stay (2.40 nights) in the current accommodation capacities, followed by the respondents in the municipality of Rakovica (2.65), and the respondents in the municipality of Fužine planned the longest stay (4.21). The observed differences can be explained by the fact that the main motive for a tourist stay in the municipality of Rakovica is a visit to the nearby Plitvice Lakes National Park, the most visited

protected area in Croatia, and the municipality of Rakovica is thus one of the most visited continental units of local self-government in the country. Since Plitvice Lakes National Park is one of the most popular tourist sites in Croatia in general, the majority of tourists, especially the foreign ones, stay in the municipality of Rakovica for 2-3 days (2.65 nights on average) on their way to coastal and island destinations, mostly in Dalmatia, or on their way back from holidays on the Adriatic coast and islands, which is also confirmed by the longest planned stay in Croatia (9.95 nights) compared to respondents from the town of Otočac and the municipality of Fužine. Accommodation, i.e., the targeted component in the characteristics of the trip, is more pronounced among respondents in the municipality of Fužine, as it is evident that they intend to spend most of their nights in Croatia in their current accommodation, on average 4.21 nights out of the planned 7.76 nights in Croatia during the current visit. Tourists who stayed in their current accommodation in the area of the town of Otočac intended to spend about half of their planned nights in Croatia during their current visit (on average 2.40 nights in the area of the Town of Otočac out of 5.87 nights in Croatia). The latter suggests that Otočac is a more targeted destination, i.e., according to the characteristics of the tourist visit, it is more similar to Fužine than Rakovica.

The differences in the assessment of the importance of motivating factors for a tourist visit to Gorska Hrvatska between the respondents in the local self-government units in which the survey was conducted were analysed using one-way ANOVA. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 5.

Tablica 5. Razlike u ocjeni važnosti pojedinih motivacijskih faktora za turistički posjet Gorskoj Hrvatskoj između ispitanika u jedinicama lokalne samouprave u kojima je provedeno anketiranje*

Table 5 Differences in the assessment of the importance of motivating factors for a tourist visit to Gorska Hrvatska between the respondents in the local self-government units where the survey was conducted*

Važnost pojedinih motivacijskih faktora za turistički posjet Gorskoj Hrvatskoj / Importance of motivating factors for a tourist visit to Gorska Hrvatska	Jedinica lokalne samouprave / Local self-government unit	n	M	SD
Prirodna baština / <i>Natural heritage</i>	Rakovica	63	3.68	0.758
	Otočac	56	3.71	0.563
	Fužine	36	3.58	0.806
	Ukupno / <i>Total</i>	155	3.67	0.704
Kulturno-povijesna baština / <i>Cultural and historical heritage</i>	Rakovica	61	2.62	0.778
	Otočac	58	2.97	0.955
	Fužine	35	2.91	0.919
	Ukupno / <i>Total</i>	154	2.82	0.889
Sport i rekreacija / <i>Sport and recreation</i>	Rakovica	61	2.51	1.149
	Otočac	56	2.64	1.119
	Fužine	36	2.75	0.937
	Ukupno / <i>Total</i>	153	2.61	1.089
Autohtona gastronomska ponuda / <i>Local gastronomic offer</i>	Rakovica	61	2.26	0.947
	Otočac	57	2.60	1.163
	Fužine	36	3.14	0.990
	Ukupno / <i>Total</i>	154	2.59	1.088
Prisustvovanje lokalnim manifestacijama / <i>Attending local events</i>	Rakovica	61	1.75	0.869
	Otočac	58	1.97	1.075
	Fužine	34	2.00	0.985
	Ukupno / <i>Total</i>	153	1.89	0.977
Upoznavanje s tradicijom i običajima / <i>Getting to know traditions and customs</i>	Rakovica	60	2.13	0.853
	Otočac	58	2.74	1.069
	Fužine	35	2.37	1.031
	Ukupno / <i>Total</i>	153	2.42	1.011
	Rakovica	60	2.30	0.908

Upoznavanje s lokalnim stanovništvom / <i>Getting to know the local population</i>	Otočac	57	2.75	1.090
	Fužine	35	2.49	1.040
	Ukupno / <i>Total</i>	152	2.51	1.023
Zabava i noćni život / <i>Entertainment and nightlife</i>	Rakovica	60	1.87	0.982
	Otočac	58	1.91	1.113
	Fužine	34	1.82	0.936
	Ukupno / <i>Total</i>	152	1.88	1.018
Odmor i opuštanje / <i>Rest and relaxation</i>	Rakovica	62	3.40	0.664
	Otočac	58	3.50	0.884
	Fužine	37	3.59	0.798
	Ukupno / <i>Total</i>	157	3.48	0.781
Mogućnosti kupovine / <i>Shopping opportunities</i>	Rakovica	61	1.49	0.788
	Otočac	58	1.83	1.045
	Fužine	34	1.56	0.660
	Ukupno / <i>Total</i>	153	1.63	0.879

* Istaknuti su motivacijski faktori kod kojih su utvrđene statistički značajne razlike. / Motivating factors with statistically significant differences are highlighted.

Izvor / Source: Anketno istraživanje (kolovoz, rujan, 2023.) / Survey (August, September, 2023)

Statistically significant differences in the assessment of the importance of motivating factors for a tourist visit to Gorska Hrvatska between the respondents in the local self-government units where the survey was conducted were found only for the factors ‘local gastronomic offer’ ($F=8.018$; $df=2$; $p=0.000$) and ‘getting to know traditions and customs’ ($F=5.722$; $df=2$; $p=0.004$). On average, both motivating factors were rated higher by respondents in the town of Otočac and the municipality of Fužine than by respondents in the municipality of Rakovica, which confirms the previously highlighted more purposeful and residential character of the latter two destinations compared to the random, transitive character of the destination in the case of Rakovica. Namely, Otočac and Fužine place a stronger emphasis on the tourism valorisation of all available attractions, including the local gastronomic offer and local traditions and customs, in their tourism supply, which emphasises the unique identity of the destination. On the other hand, the municipality of Rakovica as a tourist destination in essence ‘lives off’ the proximity of Plitvice Lakes National Park, which, as an attraction of international hierarchical level,

is the main motive for a tourist stay in the area of the municipality of Rakovica, so that all other tourist attractions in the destination have a harder time coming to the fore. This is more the case in Fužine or Otočac, where there are no such attractive and world-renowned tourist attractions as Plitvice Lakes National Park. This is also confirmed by the average ratings of motivating factors for tourist visits, which are generally lowest in the municipality of Rakovica compared to the three analysed destinations. In addition, Rakovica is located on the D1 state road connecting Zagreb and Dalmatia, which brings a large number of travellers to local restaurant owners, so they do not have to invest as much in higher quality and more diverse gastronomic offer based on local products and traditional dishes.

However, it should be noted that the three mentioned destinations are very similar and that they attract tourists with the same motivations, as no statistically significant differences were found between them for the vast majority of motivating factors. The fact that these three destinations are similar in terms of tourism supply and satisfy the interests of tourists with similar motives is also reflected in the differences in the assessment of the importance of segments of the tourism supply and the practising of certain activities during a stay in a tourist destination in general between respondents in the municipality of Rakovica, the town of Otočac, and the municipality of Fužine. The differences were tested using one-way ANOVA. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 6.

Tablica 6. Razlike u ocjeni važnosti segmenata turističke ponude i upražnjavanja aktivnosti tijekom boravka u nekoj turističkoj destinaciji između ispitanika u jedinicama lokalne samouprave u kojima je provedeno anketiranje*

Table 6 Differences in the assessment of the importance of segments of the tourism supply and the practising of activities during a stay in a tourist destination between the respondents in the local self-government units in which the survey was conducted*

Važnost segmenata turističke ponude i upražnjavanja aktivnosti / <i>Importance of segments of the tourism supply and the practising of activities during a stay in a tourist destination</i>	Jedinica lokalne samouprave / <i>Local self-government unit</i>	n	M	SD
Prirodna baština / <i>Natural heritage</i>	Rakovica	58	9.22	1.579
	Otočac	58	8.53	1.967

	Fužine	37	8.43	1.591
	Ukupno / Total	153	8.77	1.764
Kulturno-povijesna baština / <i>Cultural and historical heritage</i>	Rakovica	56	7.25	2.242
	Otočac	57	7.40	2.456
	Fužine	37	8.19	1.681
	Ukupno / Total	150	7.54	2.224
Sport i rekreacija / <i>Sport and recreation</i>	Rakovica	56	6.21	3.345
	Otočac	57	5.86	3.232
	Fužine	37	6.81	2.644
	Ukupno / Total	150	6.23	3.143
Autohtona gastronomska ponuda / <i>Local gastronomic offer</i>	Rakovica	57	6.89	2.491
	Otočac	57	7.25	2.621
	Fužine	38	8.21	2.570
	Ukupno / Total	152	7.36	2.595
Prisustvovanje lokalnim manifestacijama / <i>Attending local events</i>	Rakovica	57	5.19	2.943
	Otočac	57	5.47	2.934
	Fužine	38	4.82	2.958
	Ukupno / Total	152	5.20	2.935
Upoznavanje s tradicijom i običajima / <i>Getting to know traditions and customs</i>	Rakovica	56	6.05	2.645
	Otočac	57	6.84	2.902
	Fužine	38	6.50	2.555
	Ukupno / Total	151	6.46	2.727
Upoznavanje s lokalnim stanovništvom / <i>Getting to know the local population</i>	Rakovica	55	5.84	2.686
	Otočac	57	6.35	3.003
	Fužine	38	5.95	2.903
	Ukupno / Total	150	6.06	2.855
Zabava i noćni život / <i>Entertainment and nightlife</i>	Rakovica	55	4.07	3.355
	Otočac	56	4.32	3.449
	Fužine	38	4.58	3.116
	Ukupno / Total	149	4.30	3.316
Odmor i opuštanje / <i>Rest and relaxation</i>	Rakovica	58	8.64	1.734
	Otočac	57	8.42	2.420
	Fužine	37	9.38	1.233
	Ukupno / Total	152	8.74	1.952
Mogućnosti kupovine / <i>Shopping opportunities</i>	Rakovica	55	4.24	3.012
	Otočac	55	4.42	3.446
	Fužine	38	4.03	2.945
	Ukupno / Total	148	4.25	3.147

* Istaknuti su segmenti turističke ponude i upražnjavanje pojedinih aktivnosti tijekom boravka u nekoj turističkoj destinaciji kod kojih su utvrđene statistički značajne razlike. / The segments of the tourism supply and the

practising of certain activities during the stay at a tourist destination with statistically significant differences are highlighted.

Izvor / Source: Anketno istraživanje (kolovoz, rujan, 2023.) / Survey (August, September, 2023)

Statistically significant differences in the assessment of the importance of certain segments of the tourism supply and the practising of certain activities during a stay in a tourist destination in general between the respondents in the local self-government units in which the survey was conducted were only found for the factors 'natural heritage' ($F=3.207$; $df=2$; $p=0.043$) and 'local gastronomic offer' ($F=3.096$; $df=2$; $p=0.048$). It is not surprising that the respondents in Rakovica rated natural heritage as a factor of the tourism supply higher in their general tourist motivation than the respondents in Otočac and Fužine. The reason for this lies in the proximity of Plitvice Lakes National Park, which is a must-see for all nature-loving tourists visiting Croatia and is also a strong motive for domestic tourists. The importance of the local gastronomic offer as part of the tourism supply during a stay in a destination was rated highest by the respondents in Fužine, followed by the respondents in Otočac, and the respondents in Rakovica. The above results also support the thesis that Fužine and Otočac are destinations that are intentionally visited by tourists and have integrated several different attractions into the tourism supply, at a slightly lower hierarchical level, while Rakovica primarily relies on the great attraction and tourist popularity of Plitvice Lakes National Park, so that visiting natural heritage there is the most important motivating factor for tourists. However, it should be emphasised once again that the analysed destinations have many more similarities than differences. Therefore, stronger profiling of tourist destinations in Gorska Hrvatska has not taken place yet.

The correlation between tourists' specific motivation for visiting Gorska Hrvatska and the importance of certain segments of the tourism supply and the practising of certain activities during their stay in a tourist destination

The data in Table 7 show that the specific motivation of tourists visiting Gorska Hrvatska corresponds to the general importance of certain segments of the tourism supply and the practice of certain activities during their stay in a tourist destination. It shows correlation

coefficients between pairs of statements analysing tourist motivation and the importance of the same factors during a tourist stay in Gorska Hrvatska and in general.

Tablica 7. Povezanost specifične motivacije turista za posjet Gorskoj Hrvatskoj i važnosti segmenata turističke ponude i upražnjavanja aktivnosti tijekom boravka u nekoj turističkoj destinaciji

Table 7 The correlation between tourists' specific motivation for visiting Gorska Hrvatska and the importance of segments of the tourism supply and the practice of activities during their stay in a tourist destination

Parovi tvrdnji / Pairs of statements	n	R	p
U kojoj Vas je mjeri za posjet Gorskoj Hrvatskoj motivirala <u>prirodna baština</u> ? / To what extent did the <u>natural heritage</u> motivate you to visit Gorska Hrvatska? Koliko Vam je tijekom boravka u nekoj turističkoj destinaciji važna <u>prirodna baština</u> ? / How important is <u>natural heritage</u> for you during your stay in a tourist destination?	150	0.466	0.000
U kojoj Vas je mjeri za posjet Gorskoj Hrvatskoj motivirala <u>kulturno-povijesna baština</u> ? / To what extent did <u>cultural and historical heritage</u> motivate you to visit Gorska Hrvatska? Koliko Vam je tijekom boravka u nekoj turističkoj destinaciji važna <u>kulturno-povijesna baština</u> ? / How important is <u>cultural and historical heritage</u> for you during your stay in a tourist destination?	147	0.538	0.000
U kojoj su Vas mjeri za posjet Gorskoj Hrvatskoj motivirali <u>sport i rekreacija</u> ? / To what extent did <u>sport and recreation</u> motivate you to visit Gorska Hrvatska? Koliko su Vam tijekom boravka u nekoj turističkoj destinaciji važni <u>sport i rekreacija</u> ? / How important are <u>sport and recreation</u> for you during your stay in a tourist destination?	146	0.674	0.000
U kojoj Vas je mjeri za posjet Gorskoj Hrvatskoj motivirala <u>autohtona gastronomska ponuda</u> ? / To what extent did the <u>local gastronomic offer</u> motivate you to visit Gorska Hrvatska? Koliko Vam je tijekom boravka u nekoj turističkoj destinaciji važna <u>autohtona gastronomska ponuda</u> ? / How important is <u>local gastronomic offer</u> for you during your stay in a tourist destination?	148	0.536	0.000
U kojoj Vas je mjeri za posjet Gorskoj Hrvatskoj motiviralo <u>prisustvo vanje lokalnim manifestacijama</u> ? / To what extent did <u>attending local events</u> motivate you to visit Gorska Hrvatska? Koliko Vam je tijekom boravka u nekoj turističkoj destinaciji važno <u>prisustvo vanje lokalnim manifestacijama</u> ? / How important is <u>attending local events</u> for you during your stay in a tourist destination?	146	0.555	0.000

<p>U kojoj Vas je mjeri za posjet Gorskoj Hrvatskoj motiviralo <u>upoznavanje s tradicijom i običajima</u>? / <i>To what extent did <u>getting to know traditions and customs</u> motivate you to visit Gorska Hrvatska?</i></p> <p>Koliko Vam je tijekom boravka u nekoj turističkoj destinaciji važno <u>upoznavanje s tradicijom i običajima</u>? / <i>How important is <u>getting to know traditions and customs</u> for you during your stay in a tourist destination?</i></p>	145	0.655	0.000
<p>U kojoj Vas je mjeri za posjet Gorskoj Hrvatskoj motiviralo <u>upoznavanje s lokalnim stanovništvom</u>? / <i>To what extent did <u>getting to know the local population</u> motivate you to visit Gorska Hrvatska?</i></p> <p>Koliko Vam je tijekom boravka u nekoj turističkoj destinaciji važno <u>upoznavanje s lokalnim stanovništvom</u>? / <i>How important is <u>getting to know the local population</u> for you during your stay in a tourist destination?</i></p>	144	0.673	0.000
<p>U kojoj su Vas mjeri za posjet Gorskoj Hrvatskoj motivirali <u>zabava i noćni život</u>? / <i>To what extent did the <u>entertainment and nightlife</u> motivate you to visit Gorska Hrvatska?</i></p> <p>Koliko su Vam tijekom boravka u nekoj turističkoj destinaciji važni <u>zabava i noćni život</u>? / <i>How important is <u>entertainment and nightlife</u> for you during your stay in a tourist destination?</i></p>	143	0.709	0.000
<p>U kojoj su Vas mjeri za posjet Gorskoj Hrvatskoj motivirali <u>odmor i opuštanje</u>? / <i>To what extent did <u>rest and relaxation</u> motivate you to visit Gorska Hrvatska?</i></p> <p>Koliko su Vam tijekom boravka u nekoj turističkoj destinaciji važni <u>odmor i opuštanje</u>? / <i>How important is <u>rest and relaxation</u> for you during your stay in a tourist destination?</i></p>	150	0.673	0.000
<p>U kojoj su Vas mjeri za posjet Gorskoj Hrvatskoj motivirale <u>mogućnosti kupovine</u>? / <i>To what extent did <u>shopping opportunities</u> motivate you to visit Gorska Hrvatska?</i></p> <p>Koliko su Vam tijekom boravka u nekoj turističkoj destinaciji važne <u>mogućnosti kupovine</u>? / <i>How important is <u>shopping opportunities</u> for you during your stay in a tourist destination?</i></p>	143	0.663	0.000

Izvor / Source: Anketno istraživanje (kolovoz, rujan, 2023.) / Survey (August, September, 2023)

The Pearson's correlation coefficient for determining the correlation between the specific motivation of tourists to visit Gorska Hrvatska and the importance of certain segments of the tourism supply and the practice of certain activities during a stay in a tourist destination is high for all pairs of statements. However, the correlation is significantly higher for certain factors (r greater than 0.65), which were categorised as similar for the level of Gorska Hrvatska and the

general distribution of responses. For the factor ‘entertainment and nightlife’ and the factor ‘shopping opportunities,’ the distribution of responses is shifted to the left, which means that these factors are not particularly important for respondents either at the level of Gorska Hrvatska or at the general level. For the factor ‘rest and relaxation,’ the distribution of answers is shifted to the right, which means that this factor is particularly important for the respondents both at the level of Gorska Hrvatska and in general. For the factors ‘sport and recreation,’ ‘getting to know the local population’ and ‘getting to know traditions and customs,’ the distribution of responses shows an equal number of respondents who gave the above factors high rates and those who gave them lower rates on the importance scale.

Slightly lower, albeit still high, correlations were determined for the three factors (r between 0.5 and 0.55). These factors are: ‘attending local events,’ ‘cultural and historical heritage’ and ‘local gastronomic offer.’ It is characteristic of the factors mentioned that they were rated higher at the general level than at the level of Gorska Hrvatska. At the same time, the factors ‘cultural and historical heritage’ and ‘local gastronomic offer’ are quite important for the respondents at the general level, while in Gorska Hrvatska they were rated with average rates. On the other hand, the factor ‘attending local events’ was not rated as very important at the level of Gorska Hrvatska, while respondents rated the same factor as average at the general level.

The lowest correlation coefficient was recorded for the factor ‘natural heritage,’ which received higher scores for Gorska Hrvatska than at a general level. This can be explained by the fact that a large number of respondents are motivated to come to Gorska Hrvatska by visiting protected natural areas, especially Plitvice Lakes National Park, the main tourist attraction of the entire region.

DISCUSSION

The survey results showed that the majority of respondents visited Gorska Hrvatska for the first time, although only for a small portion of respondents it also represented their first tourist stay in Croatia. Regardless of the fact that some of the respondents were domestic tourists, the above indicates that Gorska Hrvatska, as a tourist region, is not typically the first choice

for tourist stays in Croatia, neither for foreign nor domestic tourists. The research also showed that tourists usually spend only a fraction of their trip in Gorska Hrvatska, planning to spend an average of 2.94 nights in their current accommodation, compared to an average of 7.97 nights planned for their entire stay in Croatia. Given that the survey was conducted at the end of the summer season, it can be concluded that the majority of respondents decided to combine their tourist visit to Gorska Hrvatska with a summer vacation on the coast, with only a small number of respondents considering it as their sole destination of choice. Most tourists visit Gorska Hrvatska with their partners or families, indicating that the region's tourism offer primarily appeals to those seeking a peaceful vacation with their closest ones, as well as a safe and interesting destination suitable for children.

Regarding the motives for visiting Gorska Hrvatska, the most important motivating factor proved to be the destination's natural heritage, followed by the factor of rest and relaxation, which turned out to be much more important than sport and recreation, both in general and specifically in the context of Gorska Hrvatska. This is in line with some previous research which also confirmed that a large portion of tourists generally seek an active vacation and stepping out of their comfort zone, but in a moderate way, not being particularly inclined towards physically demanding activities. Ponte et al. (2021), in the case of the Azores, concluded that from a tourism management perspective, it is important to differentiate true adventurers from tourists who are inclined towards adventurous experiences but in a commodified manner. This can also be compared with the tourist subtype identified by Taczanowska et al. (2019) as casual tourists, who seek to enjoy the natural setting and scenic landscape, but in an efficient and undemanding manner. In the case of Gorska Hrvatska, it is evident that sport and recreation as motivating factor is highly correlated with the importance of this segment of the tourism supply for choosing a tourist destination. However, the results also indicate that the distribution of these responses is wide-ranging, meaning that Gorska Hrvatska is equally visited by tourists for whom sport and recreation are important when visiting a tourist destination and by those for whom this segment is not of great importance, both in general and during that

trip. This is comparable to the results of the research by Hibner et al. (2018), who also concluded that in the national parks in Tatra, several different types of tourists are represented, some of whom have a preference for physical activity, while others do not. As for the results of this study, a similar situation occurred regarding the factors related to traditions and customs and getting to know the local population. Therefore, it can be concluded that these factors are not necessarily determinants of the general profile of tourists visiting Gorska Hrvatska, but rather specific motives and preferences of tourists that vary individually.

Furthermore, what can undoubtedly be seen as a determinant that contributes to further defining the profile of tourists in Gorska Hrvatska is the limited relevance of factors related to entertainment and nightlife, and shopping opportunities. It has been shown that tourists visiting Gorska Hrvatska do not generally have a greater preference for these segments of the tourism supply, regardless of the destination. Therefore, these segments of the tourism supply do not require any significant improvements since they do not affect the attractiveness of the region as a tourist destination, nor does the region attract those tourists for whom they would represent an additional motivating factor for visiting. On the other hand, what would be worth improving in the context of the tourism supply in Gorska Hrvatska are cultural and historical heritage and gastronomy. Although cultural and historical heritage does not have nearly as much importance for the tourist attractiveness of the region as its natural heritage, it is undeniable that it is still insufficiently recognised and valorised, despite its potential to enrich and diversify the tourism supply. In particular, this applies to numerous remains of medieval fortresses, which are present throughout the whole area, as well as to the rich intangible heritage, traditional architecture, and notable individuals. All this represents a heritage that, in the context of tourism valorisation, is only of local or regional significance, mainly due to the lack of investment in its conservation and promotion. Consequently, the majority of tourists visiting the region are not aware of such tourist attractions when planning their visit, even though they would certainly add to their motivation to visit. The research indeed showed that cultural and historical heritage is generally of greater importance to the respondents when choosing a destination than was evident in the case

of Gorska Hrvatska. Similarly, local gastronomic offer is currently insufficiently recognised and has only a minor complementary role in the region's tourism supply, despite the great importance that local gastronomy holds in relation to traditions and lifestyle in this area. In addition, tourists expressed their generally significant affinity towards this segment as well. Only in the case of the municipality of Fužine does local gastronomic offer have slightly greater importance as a motivating factor for tourists. However, it is not a key motive for tourist arrivals, as is the case in some other destinations (Berbel-Pineda et al., 2019). In the town of Otočac, a more important motivating factor for tourists' visits proved to be traditions and customs. Moreover, tourists visiting Gorska Hrvatska showed no significant interest in local events rating them very low, both in terms of motivation and preferences. Although the region has a rich tradition that could be better incorporated into the overall tourism supply, there are no local events with considerable tourism potential being held throughout the region, neither of international nor national significance. It is somewhat atypical for a continental tourist region as local events are often one of the main attractive factors for visiting many other tourist destinations in continental parts of Croatia.

As previously mentioned, the most important motivating factor for visiting Gorska Hrvatska is its natural heritage. However, this factor is concurrently in statistically significant, but the smallest correlation with the overall assessment of the importance of natural heritage as a segment of tourism supply in a destination. So even though tourists mostly come to Gorska Hrvatska because of its valuable natural heritage, it does not necessarily imply their preference and interest in natural heritage in general. In the case of this region, tourists' inclination towards natural heritage primarily comes to light due to their intention to visit Plitvice Lakes National Park, a world-renowned tourist site that stands out as one of those attractions that should not be missed when visiting Gorska Hrvatska, as well as Croatia in general. Drawing a parallel with the research of Gu et al. (2015), it can be concluded that most of these tourists are not ecotourists in a narrow sense, for whom valuable and protected natural heritage is genuinely of great interest. Rather, they are more often the type of tourists who would visit a national park because

of its visual attractiveness, popularity, and wide recognition, but not necessarily for its valuable natural features as such. It is precisely for that reason that the motivational patterns of tourists who stayed in the municipality of Rakovica differ to some extent from tourists in two other case studies. Since they primarily visit the destination because of the main tourist site in the region, the motivating factor of natural heritage is more evident among these tourists than among others, albeit with some other motivating factors for visiting Gorska Hrvatska being less significant. Accordingly, in the municipality of Rakovica, tourists spend less time on average than in the other two destinations that tourists more often visit purposefully, driven by various motives. In comparison to Otočac and Fužine, Rakovica thus has more pronounced characteristics of a transit, stopover destination on the way to the coast, in which tourists do not stay for long after visiting the national park, despite the increasingly rich supply of alternative forms of tourism in the municipality and the efforts to extend their average stay. Similar differences in the motivational patterns of tourists were observed in the case of the rural area of Troodos in Cyprus, where it was shown that domestic tourists mainly visit the destination seeking a change or escape from urban hustle and bustle, while foreign tourists can generally be divided into those who visited Troodos purposefully and those who visit it only in passing. The former can be considered special interest tourists, and the latter are called generic tourists who visit it with no specific motives, on their way to the final destination or as part of shorter excursions (Farmaki, 2012).

CONCLUSION

The research results confirm that the valuable and preserved natural heritage is a key motivating factor that attracts tourists to Gorska Hrvatska, thus unquestionably representing the fundamental basis for further development of the tourism supply in this area. In addition to the pronounced inclination towards natural heritage, and rest and relaxation, tourists visiting destinations within the region generally share similar preferences regarding characteristics of tourist trips and other motivating factors for visiting Gorska Hrvatska. It could, therefore, be concluded that there has not yet been a stronger profiling of tourist destinations at the

regional level. It is clearly illustrated by the example of the three analysed case studies, which ultimately share significantly more mutual similarities than differences. In recent years, efforts have been made to enrich and diversify the tourism supply in the region, where the mere existence of natural heritage is no longer the only comparative advantage that deserves attention. Even though, the fact remains that other segments of tourism supply lack quality promotion, and they are still insufficiently recognised by both domestic and foreign tourists. The promotion of tourism in tourist destination, which is the main task of local tourist boards, ensures its visibility and attractiveness, and thus has a direct impact on the motivation of tourists to visit it. Therefore, the local tourist boards in Gorska Hrvatska should be more actively involved in the future to increase the visibility and profile of the tourist destinations there. However, the analysis of the results reveals some specific differences between the case studies, which, although not large, point to the possible existence of certain subtypes of tourists that should be further examined. This particularly relates to differences in the characteristics of tourist trips of tourists visiting the municipality of Rakovica compared to tourists in the two other case studies.

Future tourism research in Gorska Hrvatska should further focus on additional profiling of specific types of visitors in the region, which could not have been covered by this research. In this regard, it would be interesting to explore the characteristics and motivation of day excursionists who come to the region only for a half-day or one-day trip but do not stay in the destination overnight. Due to this factor, for instance, many visitors in the municipality of Fužine had to be excluded from the research. Most of them explained that they went on an excursion from nearby coastal towns where they vacation or live, mainly motivated by the need to escape from the summer heat and crowds. Given the specificity of such push factors, which are contrary to the usual motivation for spending vacations in coastal towns, more in-depth research of day excursionists' motivation, especially during the summer season, could potentially yield some new important insights. Moreover, many organised tourist groups arrive in Gorska Hrvatska for a short overnight stay on their way to the next destination. It was challenging to include these tourists in the survey, as they often do not have sufficient knowledge of the English

language to complete the questionnaire, and they mostly arrive at accommodation facilities in the late evening hours. Additionally, the importance of school tourism was noticed in the form of numerous excursions where school groups visit the region for educational purposes. Since only adult respondents were included in this research, that group of tourists could not be a part of it, except for tour leaders. Considering that, in this research, the tourists' structure according to the type of accommodation they stayed in is conditioned by the survey locations, recommendations for future research also include further profiling of tourists depending on their accommodation preferences. In conclusion, it would be useful to examine in more detail the differences between domestic and foreign tourists and explore the differences in the motivation of tourists visiting Gorska Hrvatska at different times of the year.

Author Contributions: The scientific contribution of Ivana Žafran is reflected in the implementation of the survey (collection, entry, and processing of data from the questionnaires), the processing and analysis of statistical data from secondary sources, the collection of literature sources, as well as the authorship of the chapters *Introduction*, *Theoretical Framework*, *Discussion*, and *Conclusion*, and parts of the chapter *Objectives, methodology, and spatial framework of the research*. The scientific contribution of Vuk Tvrko Opačić lies in defining the research methodology and structure, conducting statistical analysis and interpretation of the data obtained through the survey, and authorship of the chapters *Objectives, methodology, and spatial framework of the research* and *Results*, as well as in the final editing and structuring of the manuscript.

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