

THE EVOLUTION OF TOURIST PREFERENCES IN POLAND IN 2022-2025: A CASE STUDY OF OKUNINKA AT LAKE BIAŁE

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Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to analyze the evolution of tourist preferences in Poland between 2022 and 2025, using the case of Okuninka at Lake Białe. The research seeks to identify key trends such as the shortening of stays, the growing role of social media in decision-making, the demand for premium amenities, and demographic differences in leisure expectations.

Design/methodology/approach: The study is based on a mixed-methods design combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. The empirical data were collected through (1) content analysis of social media posts and comments, (2) in-depth interviews with accommodation providers, and (3) participant observation conducted on-site during the tourist seasons of 2022-2025. Triangulation of methods increased the robustness of findings. Statistical analyses (t-tests, χ^2 tests) were used to identify significant patterns, while thematic analysis provided deeper insights into motivations and perceptions.

Findings: The results reveal a clear shift from week-long vacations to short-term, weekend-oriented stays, often booked less than a week in advance. Premium amenities such as jacuzzis, saunas, and wellness zones have become decisive competitive factors. Tourist expectations are strongly differentiated by age and gender: younger visitors seek entertainment and social interaction, older groups prioritize peace and comfort, women emphasize aesthetics and amenities, while men focus on price–location balance. Observations highlight the contrast between families and younger tourists, as well as the popularity of cottages that enable private gatherings and barbecues. Rising perceptions of an unfavorable price-to-quality ratio indicate increasing consumer sensitivity to costs.

Research limitations/implications: The study is limited to one seasonal destination and to the period of 2022–2025, which may restrict generalizability. Data from social media capture public discourse but not necessarily private motivations. Future research could broaden the scope by including comparative analyses of other Polish tourist regions, longitudinal studies beyond 2025, and deeper exploration of the environmental and cultural impacts of short-term tourism.

Practical implications: The findings suggest that accommodation providers must adapt to a new consumption model by offering short-stay packages, investing in premium amenities, and adopting flexible pricing strategies. Effective use of social media for last-minute marketing becomes crucial. For regional policymakers, the results indicate a need to support

diversification of tourism products and year-round attractions to mitigate the risks of seasonality.

Social implications: The growing popularity of short, intensive leisure trips affects local communities by concentrating noise, traffic, and crowding in peak periods. Families staying close to the entertainment center often face conflicts between accessibility and the need for quiet. The rising number of tourists traveling with pets highlights new challenges for infrastructure and service design. Findings may inform community discussions on sustainable tourism, public space management, and coexistence of diverse tourist groups.

Originality/value: (The paper provides one of the first comprehensive analyses of post-pandemic tourist behavior in a Polish seasonal resort, combining social media analytics with interviews and field observations. It offers both theoretical insights into changing patterns of tourism consumption and practical recommendations for local businesses and policymakers.

Keywords: tourist preferences; short-term tourism; social media; Okuninka; Lake Białe.

Category of the paper: Research paper; Case study.

1. Introduction

Changes in tourist preferences represent one of the key challenges for the contemporary tourism economy. Dynamic social, economic, and technological processes significantly affect the way destinations are chosen, trips are planned, and expectations regarding stays are defined. Short-term trips, often organized spontaneously, are gaining increasing importance, while consumer decisions are more frequently based on information available in social media and reviews shared by other Internet users.

In Poland, this phenomenon is particularly evident in seasonal destinations that have long attracted visitors from both the region and beyond. Okuninka, located at Lake Białe, provides an example of a microregion where tourist traffic is concentrated mainly during the summer season. Along with the growing popularity of this location, visitors' expectations are also changing: in addition to basic accommodation services, there is a growing demand for higher standards and premium amenities, such as hot tubs, jacuzzis, or saunas.

The analysis of tourist preferences also reveals clear generational and gender-based differences in approaches to leisure. Younger tourists primarily seek entertainment, a dynamic lifestyle, and opportunities for social integration, whereas older groups attach greater importance to peace, quiet, and comfort. Women tend to emphasize the aesthetics of the place and additional amenities more often, while men are more focused on the price–quality ratio and convenient location.

Tourist decisions are increasingly shaped by economic factors, including inflation and rising living costs. Visitors expect high-quality services while simultaneously optimizing expenditures, which forces accommodation providers to flexibly adapt their offerings—both in terms of the length of stay (e.g., weekend packages) and the diversity of additional services.

The dynamic transformations in tourist behavior in Poland after 2020 give rise to new research challenges related to adapting traditional models of tourism consumption to socio-economic and technological realities. Phenomena such as the shortening of stays, the growing importance of last-minute bookings, the influence of social media on decision-making, and the rising demand for premium amenities indicate the emergence of a new paradigm of domestic tourism. The research problem of this study focuses on the question of how tourist preferences in Poland evolved between 2022 and 2025 using the example of Okuninka at Lake Białe, and what social, economic, and cultural factors determine these changes. This case study makes it possible to capture both the local specificity of the phenomenon and the broader processes of transformation in short-term tourism in Poland.

The aim of this article is to provide an in-depth analysis of changes in tourist preferences in the years 2022-2025, based on the case of Okuninka and Lake Białe. The empirical basis of the study consists of social media posts, interviews with accommodation providers, and field observations. The results make it possible not only to capture the specificity of local tendencies but also to indicate broader directions of change in domestic tourism.

2. Contemporary Changes in Tourist Preferences – A Literature Review

Changes in tourist preferences are the subject of intensive research in the international literature. Particular attention is paid to the growing popularity of short-term weekend trips, which in many regions are beginning to dominate over traditional, longer forms of leisure. An example is research conducted among tourists from Budapest visiting waterside destinations, where the predominance of short-term travel was clearly confirmed, resulting, among other things, from time and economic constraints, as well as studies carried out in Barcelona (Kádár, Gede, 2022; Suriñach et al., 2019). These findings correspond with trends observed in Poland, where recreational trips lasting only a few days, often organized spontaneously, are increasingly chosen.

A second important area of research is the role of social media in the process of selecting tourist destinations. As scientific analyses indicate, the impact of content published online is particularly strong in the case of new and unfamiliar places, whereas for well-established destinations this influence may be weaker (Johan Andersson, 2024; Tham et al., 2020; Wang, Yan, 2022). In the Polish context, this issue has also been studied, and researchers emphasize that although influencers and user-generated content are important sources of inspiration, they are not always treated as fully reliable decision-making tools (Zawadka, Liwińska, 2022). Similar conclusions are presented by Barbu and co-authors, who highlight the key role of social media marketing activities in shaping tourist choices, especially among young audiences (Barbu et al., 2024).

The importance of younger age groups in shaping new patterns of tourism consumption is also emphasized in Asian studies. Researchers point out that among young tourists in Malaysia, social media plays a crucial role in trip planning, selecting attractions, and ways of spending leisure time (Siti Yuliandi Ahmad, Nur Qasdina Asyura Pg Idris, 2024). These findings are consistent with observations concerning young Polish tourists, who prefer active forms of leisure and attach great importance to integration and entertainment aspects.

Another widely discussed element in the literature is the growing role of premium and luxury amenities in the accommodation sector. Available analyses show that the attractiveness of such services is strongly linked to tourists' emotional attachment to a destination brand ("Destination Brand Love"), which enhances their loyalty and willingness to incur higher expenditures (Morando, Platania, 2022; Swanson, 2017; Tang et al., 2023). Premium amenities thus become not only a factor of competitiveness but also a means of building lasting relationships between visitors and the place of stay.

The problem of seasonality in tourist traffic, which is one of the key challenges for summer holiday destinations, is also of great importance. According to scientific analyses, seasonality is a global phenomenon generating both opportunities and threats for local tourism economies (Duro, Turrión-Prats, 2019). Researchers point out that it is associated with difficulties in managing tourism infrastructure and providing stable employment, making local economies particularly sensitive to fluctuations in demand (Butler, 1998). The literature also emphasizes that seasonality affects not only economic but also social and environmental aspects—it leads to overuse of resources in peak season and their underutilization outside of it (Zvaigzne et al., 2022). Empirical analyses further indicate that in rural tourism, the intensity of seasonality is determined by both natural factors and the structure of the local service offer (Li, 2023). Other studies show that the development of cultural tourism can reduce seasonal fluctuations, attracting visitors even outside the summer period (Zhang et al., 2022). Practical recommendations, in turn, focus on the need to apply seasonality management tools, such as diversification of tourism products or organizing events outside the high season, which can stabilize demand and increase the attractiveness of a destination throughout the year (Hutsal, Stoliar, 2023). Researchers also point out that seasonality is rooted not only in economic and natural factors but also in cultural and institutional conditions, as confirmed by historical-anthropological analyses highlighting the role of demand distribution policies in shaping tourist flows (Rudihartmann, 1986). In destinations such as Okuninka, dependence on the summer season determines accommodation strategies and forces the adaptation of offers to a short period of intense demand, while at the same time creating a need to develop year-round products and implement measures to mitigate the effects of seasonality.

Polish studies on tourist preferences have examined leisure forms, accommodation choices, sources of information, and destination selection factors. Research indicates that price, user reviews, word-of-mouth marketing, and social media are increasingly decisive in shaping tourist behavior in Poland (Herbik, 2024). Other analyses show that tourists seek peace, contact

with nature, and cultural assets, with agritourism and “emotion tourism” (e.g. thematic villages) becoming more popular (Wojciechowska-Solis et al., 2022). In the context of sustainable development, studies highlight the extent to which Polish lodging facilities adopt low-emission practices and communicate these efforts to tourists (Rutecka et al., 2023). However, there are relatively few works covering the period 2022–2025 that focus on short-term weekend stays, premium amenities (e.g. jacuzzis, wellness zones), and demographic segmentation of preferences. The Okuninka case study therefore fills an important gap in the national tourism literature.

In summary, the literature clearly indicates three dominant trends in contemporary tourism: (1) the shortening of stays and the growing popularity of short-term travel, (2) the increasing role of social media in destination choice, and (3) the growing importance of premium amenities as a competitive differentiator. All these phenomena are reflected in the case of Okuninka at Lake Białe, which makes it an interesting case study for analyzing changes in tourist preferences in Poland.

3. Research Methodology

The research was conducted between 2022 and 2025 and employed three complementary data collection techniques: content analysis of social media, in-depth interviews, and participant observation. The application of methodological triangulation made it possible to obtain a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon, while the combination of qualitative and quantitative data increased the reliability of the findings.

The first technique was a content analysis of social media, focused on the Facebook group titled “Okuninka Jezioro Białe – noclegi (domki, pokoje, kwatery, pola namiotowe)”, which at the time of the last data collection had nearly 40,000 members. This group served as one of the main online forums for the exchange of information, opinions, and offers related to tourism in the Lake Białe region of Okuninka. The analysis covered both accommodation advertisements and tourists’ reactions in the form of questions, comments, and opinions, as well as interactions (likes, shares). A qualitative content analysis was applied, aimed at identifying dominant themes, communication patterns, and ways of presenting the tourism offer and participants’ experiences. The material was purposefully selected and included posts published during the peak tourist season (June–August), when activity was the highest, and outside the season (November–February), to capture differences in the intensity and character of discussions. In total, 1250 posts and 4860 comments were analyzed. The analysis was conducted in line with the principles of internet research ethics—data were collected from the public domain, without interfering with the content of the publications and without disclosing any personal information.

The second technique consisted of in-depth interviews conducted with 25 owners of accommodation facilities (holiday cottages, guest rooms, boarding houses). The conversations focused primarily on changes in customer behavior, length of stay, expectations regarding amenities, and booking methods.

The third element comprised participant observations, carried out on-site in Okuninka during the summer seasons of 2022–2025. They concerned tourist behavior and the use of tourism infrastructure, which made it possible to capture the dynamics of social interactions and recreational practices in the tourist space.

The collected empirical material was subjected to statistical analysis. The analysis covered the following quantitative data: length of stay, timing of reservations, and the importance of amenities in relation to tourists' demographic characteristics. Student's t-test for independent samples was applied to compare the average length of stay in 2022 and 2025, and χ^2 tests were used for qualitative variables (timing of reservations, expectations regarding amenities, demographic differences). The significance level was set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

The analysis of online data was based on publicly available content; all personal identifiers were removed, and quotations were presented in a generalized form. In interviews, respondents were assured anonymity and confidentiality, and participation was voluntary, in line with research ethics standards.

In light of the identified issues and research gaps, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: Between 2022 and 2025, the average duration of tourist stays in Okuninka decreased, with short-term trips (2-3 days) becoming the dominant form.
- H2: Social media constitutes a key source of information influencing decisions regarding the choice of accommodation and timing of reservations.
- H3: The growing importance of premium amenities (jacuzzis, saunas, wellness zones) has become one of the main factors of competitiveness for accommodation facilities in the region.
- H4: Tourist preferences differ significantly depending on demographic characteristics such as age and gender.
- H5: Economic pressure related to inflation and rising living costs leads to an increasing number of tourists perceiving the price-to-quality ratio as unfavorable, which forces flexible pricing strategies.

The verification of the research hypotheses was carried out using both quantitative and qualitative analyses of the collected empirical material. Hypothesis H1 (shortening of stays) was verified using Student's t-test for independent samples, comparing the average length of stays in 2022 and 2025. In the case of hypotheses H2-H4, concerning the role of social media, the importance of premium amenities, and demographic differentiation of preferences, χ^2 tests of independence were applied, allowing for the determination of statistical significance of observed differences between qualitative variables (e.g., timing of reservations, choice of

amenities, preferences of women and men). An additional tool was the analysis of posts and comments in social media, which made it possible to capture not only the frequency of particular phenomena but also their contextual occurrence. Hypothesis H5, concerning the perception of the price-to-quality ratio, was verified using the χ^2 test and triangulated with the results of in-depth interviews, in which accommodation owners confirmed growing tourist expectations combined with cost pressure. The adoption of a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ enabled a reliable statistical evaluation of the data and limited the risk of type I errors.

4. Results of Own Research on Tourist Preferences in Okuninka

This chapter presents the results of empirical research conducted between 2022 and 2025, aimed at capturing changes in the preferences of tourists visiting Okuninka at Lake Białe. The analysis includes both quantitative and qualitative data obtained through field observations, in-depth interviews, and content analysis of posts published on social media. The results are presented in the form of tables and analytical commentary, which highlight the key trends regarding length of stay, booking strategies, the importance of premium amenities, demographic differences, and the perception of the price-to-quality ratio. This introduction serves as a starting point for a detailed presentation of the data, which illustrates the transformation processes of tourism consumption in the studied microregion.

4.1. Results of the Analysis of Posts and Comments on Facebook

Since 2022, the average length of tourist stays has been systematically decreasing. In 2022, week-long trips dominated, whereas in 2024 and 2025 shorter, weekend stays clearly prevailed. The year 2025 indicates a slight stabilization of this trend, which suggests the formation of a new model of tourism consumption (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Changes in Tourist Stay Duration (2022-2025)

Year	Average Stay (days)	Dominant Category	Statistical Test
2022	5.6 (SD = 1.9)	5-7 days	t(198) = 7.84; p < 0.001
2023	4.2 (SD = 1.4)	3-5 days	t(198) = 6.31; p < 0.001
2024	2.9 (SD = 1.1)	2-3 days	t(198) = 8.12; p < 0.001
2025	3.1 (SD = 1.2)	2-3 days	t(198) = 7.46; p < 0.001

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Facebook group data analysis.

The average length of tourist stays decreased from more than five days in 2022 to around three days in 2024-2025. The data indicate a clear transformation of the leisure model, from traditional week-long holidays toward short-term weekend trips. This shift may be linked both to rising living costs and inflationary pressure, as well as to the lifestyle of younger generations, who prefer spontaneous, frequent, but shorter trips. The stabilization of the trend

in 2025 suggests that this model of tourism consumption is becoming the new norm, requiring accommodation providers to adjust their offers to short-term packages.

The data (see Table 2) show the growing spontaneity of tourist decisions—while in 2022 only 45% of bookings were made less than a week before arrival, by 2025 this share had already reached 64%. This trend is linked to the widespread availability of mobile booking applications and increased economic uncertainty, which discourages tourists from planning far in advance. In practice, this means the necessity of flexible capacity management, intensified marketing activities on social media, and the promotion of last-minute offers.

Table 2.
Timing of Reservations (2022-2025)

Year	>30 days (%)	7-30 days (%)	<7 days (%)	Test χ^2 (df = 6)
2022	25	30	45	$\chi^2 = 62.8; p < 0.001$
2023	21	26	53	
2024	18	21	61	
2025	16	20	64	

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Facebook group data analysis.

The percentage of tourists interested in premium amenities increased more than threefold between 2022 and 2025 (see Table 3). The largest growth in demand concerned jacuzzis and wellness/spa zones, which are becoming one of the main competitive differentiators. This phenomenon indicates that even in seasonal destinations traditionally associated with simple leisure by the lake, tourists are increasingly expecting high standards and additional services that enhance comfort. Accommodation providers therefore need to incorporate investments in premium infrastructure into their strategies, which may raise the region's attractiveness in the longer term.

Table 3.
Importance of Premium Amenities (2022-2025)

Amenity	2022 (%)	2023 (%)	2024 (%)	2025 (%)	Test χ^2 (df = 9)
Jacuzzi	12	20	34	38	$\chi^2 = 54.2; p < 0.001$
Sauna	9	14	27	31	
Hot Tub	7	11	21	25	
Wellness/Spa	10	16	29	34	

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Facebook group data analysis.

Tourist preferences vary significantly depending on age and gender (see Table 4). Young people (18–30 years old) prefer activity, social integration, and social life, while older groups (40+) seek peace and relaxation. Women more often emphasize the aesthetics of a place and the importance of amenities, whereas men place greater emphasis on price and location. Such differentiation suggests the need for market segmentation – accommodation facilities should prepare diversified service packages tailored to different target groups in order to compete more effectively in the market.

Table 4.*Demographic Differences in Tourist Preferences (2022-2025)*

Group	Dominant Preferences	Test χ^2
18-30 years	Parties, group activities	$\chi^2(4) = 33.4; p < 0.01$
31-39 years	Activity + comfort, price flexibility	
40+ years	Peace, comfort, relaxation	
Women	Aesthetics, amenities	$\chi^2(1) = 18.6; p < 0.05$
Men	Price, location	

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Facebook group data analysis.

In the years 2022–2025, the share of tourists who believe that prices exceed the quality of services increases from 15% to 21% (see Table 5). At the same time, the number of people perceiving a balance between price and quality decreases. This trend shows that cost pressure, resulting among others from inflation and rising business operating costs, is reflected in customer perceptions. For accommodation owners, this means the need to implement flexible pricing strategies, offer promotions, and place greater emphasis on the added value of services (e.g., family packages, seasonal discounts, or bonuses for longer stays).

Table 5*Price-to-Quality Ratio in Tourist Perceptions (2022-2025)*

Year	Price > Quality (%)	Price \approx Quality (%)	Price < Quality (%)	Test χ^2 (df = 6)
2022	15	60	25	$\chi^2 = 27.5; p < 0.001$
2023	16	55	29	
2024	18	52	30	
2025	21	49	30	

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Facebook group data analysis.

4.2. Results of the In-Depth Interview Analysis

The thematic categories presented in Table 6, together with sample respondent quotations, illustrate the main problem areas identified in the course of the in-depth interview analysis. In the area of length of stay, respondents emphasized the predominance of short-term weekend trips, which are gradually replacing longer forms of leisure. They also pointed to the practical consequences of this phenomenon, including increased tourist turnover and the resulting higher organizational burdens for accommodation owners.

Table 6.*Thematic categories and sample statements of respondents*

Thematic category	Subcategory / Conclusion	Sample interview quotes*
Length of stay	Dominance of short weekend trips	“In the past people came for two weeks, now it's mostly Friday–Sunday” (R7)
	Higher guest turnover – more workload	“We have more cleaning and changeovers, but occupancy is almost full throughout summer” (R12)
Client expectations	Proximity to beach and gastronomy	“The most common questions are: how far is the lake and are there bars nearby” (R4)
	Growing importance of aesthetics and modern interiors	“Guests increasingly choose based on photos – it has to look nice and modern” (R16)

Cont. table 6.

Premium amenities	Popularity of hot tubs, jacuzzis, saunas	“When someone sees a jacuzzi in the listing, they book immediately, even if it’s more expensive” (R8)
	Economic challenges of maintenance	“The problem is the electricity and service costs – the season is short, and bills are high” (R20)
Booking strategies	Dominance of online and social media reservations	“95% of our bookings are online, mainly via Facebook and Booking” (R3)
	Growing importance of last-minute bookings	“Often they call on Thursday for the weekend – we must be ready” (R14)
	Decline in phone reservations	“Older people still prefer calling, but young people do everything in apps” (R22)

Note. Quotes from respondents’ interviews (*anonymized by assigning respondent numbers).

Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on Facebook group data analysis.

Within the category of customer expectations, two primary directions can be distinguished. On the one hand, the significance of basic locational attributes (e.g., proximity to a lake, access to dining facilities) remains evident; on the other, increasing importance is attached to aesthetic considerations and the quality of furnishings. This tendency appears particularly relevant in the context of the digitalization of booking processes, where visual materials play a decisive role in shaping consumer choices.

The analysis of premium amenities highlights their growing role in the competitive positioning of accommodation facilities. Features such as hot tubs, jacuzzis, and saunas constitute important market differentiators, facilitating the attraction of more demanding clientele and enabling higher price levels. At the same time, respondents emphasized the economic risks associated with maintaining such infrastructure, particularly in the context of short tourist seasons and rising operational costs.

With regard to booking strategies, digital channels clearly dominate, including online booking platforms and social media, which have assumed a central role in guest acquisition. Respondents also noted the increasing prevalence of last-minute reservations, which necessitates flexible management of availability and pricing policies. Only a minority of owners reported the continued, though diminishing, role of telephone bookings.

Overall, the collected statements provide clear evidence of an ongoing process of adaptation among accommodation providers to evolving consumer preferences and shifting market conditions. At the same time, the analyzed categories reveal a tension between the rising expectations of tourists and the economic as well as organizational constraints of operating in seasonally dependent destinations.

The data presented in Table 7 allow for capturing the frequency of occurrence of the identified thematic categories, thereby adding a quasi-quantitative dimension to the qualitative analysis. The highest proportion of responses relates to the area of length of stay, with as many as 84% of respondents confirming the predominance of short-term trips (2-3 nights). This result indicates a substantial shift in patterns of tourist consumption compared to previous years, when week-long or two-week stays were the prevailing standard in domestic tourism. This phenomenon finds confirmation in the existing literature, which underscores the growing significance of weekend tourism and spontaneous travel.

Table 7.*Frequency of occurrence of thematic categories among respondents (N = 25)*

Thematic category	Subcategory / Conclusion	Number of respondents	% of total sample
Length of stay	Dominance of short trips (2–3 nights)	21	84
	Growth of guest turnover and workload	15	60
Client expectations	Proximity to beach and gastronomy	19	76
	Aesthetics and modern interiors	14	56
	Safety and family-friendly facilities	10	40
Premium amenities	High interest in hot tubs/jacuzzis/saunas	18	72
	Economic challenges of maintenance	9	36
Booking strategies	Dominance of online reservations	20	80
	Growing role of last-minute bookings	17	68
	Decline of phone reservations	11	44

Note. Data based on structured interviews with 25 respondents. Quotes anonymized by assigning respondent numbers (R1-R25).

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Facebook group data analysis.

With regard to customer expectations, the importance of location and access to dining facilities (76%) emerges particularly clearly, aligning with classical conceptualizations of factors determining the choice of holiday destinations. At the same time, more than half of respondents (56%) identified interior aesthetics and modern design as differentiating features of the offer, which may be interpreted as an expression of the aestheticization of tourist consumption. The relatively smaller proportion of references to issues of safety and family-oriented infrastructure (40%) suggests that these expectations are characteristic of selected market segments but do not determine choices on a general scale.

The analysis of the premium amenities category revealed that more than 70% of respondents recognize their growing competitive importance. At the same time, over one-third of respondents drew attention to the high maintenance costs of such infrastructure. These findings point to a structural tension between the pressure exerted by customers—seeking attractions that enhance comfort—and the financial and organizational constraints faced by entrepreneurs.

In the area of booking strategies, the dominant theme remains the digitalization of reservation processes. Eighty percent of respondents confirmed the predominance of online channels, while 68% highlighted the increasing significance of last-minute bookings. Both phenomena confirm the tendency toward shorter planning horizons and greater flexibility in consumer decision-making. The relatively low share of references to telephone bookings (44%) indicates their marginalization, although they remain important for certain clients with more traditional behavioral patterns.

In summary, the quantitative aggregation of qualitative data points to the dominance of three interrelated trends: the shortening of length of stay, the growing importance of aesthetics and premium amenities, and the digitalization of booking processes. These tendencies reflect profound transformations in the model of tourist consumption in seasonal destinations, including Okuninka.

4.3. Results of Observations

Observations conducted in Okuninka between 2022 and 2025 provided a multidimensional picture of tourist life at Lake Białe, revealing a pronounced differentiation in needs and leisure practices across age and social groups.

Daytime activities were dominated by recreational pursuits, with pedal boats and kayaks playing a particularly prominent role. These were most frequently chosen by young people and groups of friends, but also by families with children. Older tourists, by contrast, tended to prefer quieter forms of leisure, such as walking along the lakeshore, relaxing in cafés, or passive sunbathing. Increasing popularity was also observed in the cycling infrastructure developed around Okuninka, which enabled families with children to organize short excursions that diversified their lakefront stays.

After 10 p.m., the character of the locality underwent a marked transformation. The center of Okuninka became a space of nightlife, appropriated by youth and adults oriented toward entertainment. Bars, clubs, and food outlets in the central area played the dominant role, whereas venues located on the lakeshore but further from the center held less integrative significance. Social gatherings were often associated with alcohol consumption, generating noise and conflicts with families accompanied by children. Nevertheless, many families opted for accommodation near the center, which intensified their later dissatisfaction due to nighttime disturbances. Around midnight, tourist activity remained high both in venues and on the sidewalks leading to the center, which were congested with pedestrian traffic in both directions, including many children.

Regardless of visitor age or profile, summer cottages enjoyed widespread popularity, offering greater freedom than hotel rooms or compact guesthouse accommodations. They hosted social gatherings, barbecues, and music-filled parties, which constituted an important element of integration during stays. The choice of cottages facilitated flexibility from quiet family celebrations to loud youth gatherings underscoring the role of tourist preferences in shaping leisure forms.

Another significant aspect of observation concerned tourists traveling with pets, primarily dogs. This phenomenon necessitated adjustments in accommodation and recreational offerings, such as pet-friendly facilities or designated walking zones. Owners who introduced such solutions gained a noticeable competitive advantage.

Overall, the observations highlight the highly diverse needs of tourists visiting Okuninka ranging from peace and tranquility, through active family recreation, to intensive nightlife. This diversity represents both an asset and a challenge: while it allows the locality to attract a broad spectrum of visitors, it also generates spatial conflicts and requires carefully considered measures in managing tourist flows and tailoring the offer to heterogeneous audience segments. These observations are closely aligned with the studied tourist preferences (H1-H5), pointing, among others, to the shortening of stays, the significance of accommodation quality,

the growing role of additional amenities, and the differentiation of behaviors according to age and lifestyle.

4.4. Verification of Hypotheses

The process of verifying the research hypotheses was based on methodological triangulation, encompassing field observations, content analysis of social media, and the examination of secondary data. The application of diverse sources of information allowed for the construction of a highly reliable picture of the phenomena under study and minimized the risk of bias resulting from a one-sided research perspective.

In the case of H1 (shortening of tourist stays), convergent results were obtained both through observations (high tourist turnover, frequent changes in the occupancy of cottages and guesthouses) and through the analysis of social media content, where posts referring to weekend stays predominated. This confirmed the tendency toward short-term forms of leisure, consistent with the hypothesis.

Hypothesis H2 (the role of social media as an information source) received unequivocal confirmation. Content analysis on Facebook revealed that these platforms function as the primary channel for recommendations and the exchange of experiences concerning accommodation and attractions. Field observations supplemented these findings, indicating that booking decisions were frequently made on the basis of suggestions found online.

With regard to H3 (the growing importance of premium amenities), positive verification was provided by both qualitative data and observational findings. Mentions of jacuzzis, saunas, and wellness zones systematically appeared in social media content as decisive factors in the attractiveness of accommodation facilities. Observations further demonstrated that establishments offering such services achieved higher occupancy rates, thereby enhancing their competitive advantage.

Hypothesis H4 (differentiation of preferences by age and gender) was likewise confirmed. Observations indicated a clear diversification of activities (youth – water sports and nightlife; seniors – walking and tranquil leisure), while online content analysis revealed an additional gender-related dimension: women more frequently emphasized the need for family-oriented offers and child-friendly amenities, whereas men highlighted the importance of entertainment infrastructure.

Hypothesis H5 (economic pressure and assessment of the price–quality relationship) was also positively verified on the basis of triangulated sources. Secondary data analysis highlighted the growing impact of inflation on living costs, while social media posts repeatedly raised concerns about the high prices of accommodation and dining. Observations, in turn, pointed to a tendency to replace paid attractions with cheaper alternatives, confirming the subjective perception of a deteriorating price–quality ratio.

In summary, all research hypotheses were positively verified. The triangulation of methods enabled mutual reinforcement and complementarity of findings, as well as the capture of phenomena within their multidimensional context. The applied research approach confirmed the validity of combining observational methods, social media content analysis, and secondary data analysis in studies of contemporary forms of local tourism.

5. Discussion of Results

Economic changes, including inflation and the war, have contributed to the shortening of tourist stays and the optimization of expenditures, consistent with findings on domestic tourist preferences in Poland (Chomać-Pierzecka, Stasiak, 2024). In addition, the growing cost pressures and the perception that prices exceed quality highlight the need for flexible pricing approaches and the reinforcement of value-added elements in tourism offerings. The prevalence of short-term, weekend stays, increasingly observed in Okuninka, corresponds with trends promoted in small towns as efficient tourist destinations built upon cultural, natural, and social assets (Ostrowska-Tryzno, Pawlikowska-Piechotka, 2016). The spatial contrast between the lively center and quieter surrounding areas echoes observations of the “tourist field” in Amsterdam, where restaurants and services form complex segmentation patterns based on class and space (Terhorst, Erkuş-Öztürk, 2015). These short visits align with global trends of travel fragmentation and the rising importance of micro-trips. At the same time, as research on coastal tourism suggests, short-term travel often entails the intensification of activities and the compensation of reduced length of stay through the choice of attractions and services that enhance comfort (Carvache-Franco et al., 2025).

In Okuninka, a clear shift toward summer cottages has been observed, as they facilitate integration and social life (e.g., barbecues, gatherings), corresponding with trends noted in urban recreational spaces, where tourism increasingly prioritizes communal experiences. To some extent, Okuninka also aligns with patterns of rural tourism (Salvatore et al., 2018), yet with preferences more characteristic of urban tourism. The rising demand for premium amenities, such as jacuzzis and wellness zones, confirms the growing importance of luxury experiences as tools for building emotional bonds with destinations, the so-called Destination Brand Love (Morando, Platania, 2022).

The increasing interest in premium amenities such as jacuzzis and wellness areas resonates with global findings on the need for luxury experiences and the cultivation of emotional attachment to destinations (Destination Brand Love), which foster loyalty and greater willingness to incur higher costs (Morando, Platania, 2022; Tang et al., 2023). The results from Okuninka are consistent with trends in other regions, where premium amenities are perceived

not only as competitive differentiators but also as compensatory elements, intensifying experiences within shortened stays.

Demographic and spatial differentiation of preferences in Okuninka, youth oriented toward nightlife, families with children seeking tranquility, tourists traveling with dogs, and individuals preferring nature-based activities, finds ample confirmation in the literature. In practice, this translates into families choosing central locations despite the risk of noise, reflecting urban nightlife tourism patterns in which attractiveness concentrates around entertainment and communal spaces (Liu et al., 2023).

An increasingly important factor differentiating tourists in Okuninka is the growing number of visitors traveling with dogs. This phenomenon aligns with the expanding trend of pet-friendly tourism, highlighted in recent research that points to the role of pet-oriented amenities and infrastructure as determinants of destination choice and repeat visitation. The presence of dogs also alters recreational and spatial practices. In Okuninka, the needs of pet owners should be integrated into destination planning and infrastructure design to avoid conflicts between user groups. In Poland, a significant increase in dog ownership was observed during the COVID-19 restrictions, as a response to social isolation and reduced interpersonal contact (Drózdź et al., 2021). This was accompanied by the rise of pet parenting among young adults, who increasingly opt for dog ownership in place of starting a family, framing care for animals as a lifestyle marker (Guo et al., 2021; Volsche, 2021).

Finally, economic changes, including inflation, uncertainty linked to the war in Ukraine, and rising living costs, exert a strong influence on the shortening of stays and the optimization of tourist expenditures, consistent with findings on national travel preferences in Poland (Zawadka et al., 2023). The growing share of tourists perceiving that prices exceed quality underscores the necessity of introducing flexible pricing strategies and enhancing value-added elements, such as service packages or last-minute promotions (Kashyap, Hong, 2025). In this context, market segmentation and precise targeting emerge as crucial tools for accommodation providers seeking to maintain competitiveness under dynamically changing market conditions.

Observed trends such as shorter stays, concentration of tourist flows in peak seasons, and growing demand for premium amenities (wellness zones, jacuzzis) pose risks of increasing environmental pressure on local ecosystems. Potential negative impacts include higher waste generation, increased per-unit water and energy consumption, shoreline degradation, noise, and stress on infrastructure (sewage, roads). Similar effects have been documented in Polish national parks, where heavy tourist traffic necessitates enhanced infrastructure management to avoid environmental degradation and landscape pressure (Adach et al., 2022). Although some facilities implement pro-environmental measures such as communicating low-emission initiatives (Rutecka et al., 2023), these are often insufficient given the growing scale of short-term tourism. The development of such tourism therefore requires stronger environmental safeguards, seasonal regulations, systematic monitoring of ecological effects, and the promotion of sustainable practices among both tourists and service providers.

6. Conclusions

Between 2022 and 2025, tourism in Okuninka and the White Lake area consolidated into a model of short, spontaneously organized weekend trips, with most reservations made less than one week prior to arrival. The shortening of stays has been accompanied by the rising importance of premium amenities, which compensate for limited leisure time and serve as a key competitive differentiator. Quantitative data confirm marked demographic differences in preferences: younger tourists seek entertainment and activity, older visitors prioritize peace and comfort, women emphasize aesthetics and additional services, while men focus on the price–location ratio. Simultaneously, a growing share of tourists perceive that prices exceed quality, and increasing cost pressures compel accommodation providers to implement flexible pricing strategies, invest in value-added services, and improve customer targeting.

Content analysis of social media has demonstrated the dominant role of visual aspects in shaping tourist decision-making. The aesthetics of facilities and surroundings, along with opportunities to share appealing content online, increasingly determine the choice of accommodation. Posts highlighting premium amenities, wellness infrastructure, and cultural or entertainment events generated the highest engagement, underscoring the growing significance of promotion based on visual narratives and authentic tourist experiences.

In-depth interviews confirmed tourists' expectations for high levels of comfort, even during short stays. Respondents emphasized the growing importance of service quality, while simultaneously expressing concerns that prices often outweigh value. Field observations revealed spatial segmentation of recreational areas, with younger groups concentrating around entertainment zones and the beach, while older visitors preferred quieter locations. Accommodation providers are increasingly aware of the need to modernize and differentiate their offerings through design and additional services.

The study is subject to certain limitations, including its focus on a single locality, reliance on publicly available social media content, and the qualitative nature of interviews, which provide in-depth but not fully representative insights.

Future research directions include comparative analyses across different tourist centers in Poland, studies on the potential to extend the tourist season, and further investigations into the role of social media and influencer marketing in shaping tourist decision-making.

Theoretical implications concern the development of tourism theory related to short-term stays and the aestheticization of tourist consumption, as well as the integration of social media analysis into consumer behavior research. The Okuninka case contributes to ongoing debates on managing seasonality and competitive strategies in micro-regional tourism contexts.

Practical implications emphasize the need to tailor offerings to short stays and last-minute bookings, invest in premium amenities, and strengthen visual promotion in social media. Equally important are the implementation of flexible pricing strategies and the development of year-round offerings supported by cultural events and wellness infrastructure, which may mitigate the effects of seasonality and enhance regional competitiveness.

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