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## Nautical Tourism During the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Opinion of German Sailors

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Aleksandra Łapko<sup>1</sup>, Ewa Hącia<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The purpose of the article is to present the results of the analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the behavior of German sailors in 2020.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The survey was conducted in February and March 2021 using the CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) survey. The survey form was made available on German sailing forums and Facebook profiles of sailing associations. 263 completed forms were collected during this time. Based on the survey, the behavior of German sailors in pandemic conditions was analyzed. The main focus was on three aspects of sailing, i.e. the frequency of cruises, cruises routes, and crew composition.

**Findings:** The results of the conducted research indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic largely influenced the behavior of German sailors. Due to the epidemic situation and applicable restrictions, they were often forced to modify their cruise routes and crew. The pandemic also affected the frequency of sailing.

**Practical Implications:** The results of the analysis can be useful for tourism authorities, not only in Germany but also in other European countries developing nautical tourism where German sailors are frequent visitors.

**Originality/value:** The conducted research concerns a pandemic situation, the impact of which on various spheres of life and economy has so far been unprecedented. They fill the research gap by showing, using the example of Germany - one of the most active sailing countries in Europe - how the epidemic situation in 2020 influenced the behavior of sailors.

**Keywords:** Nautical tourism, COVID-19 pandemic, German sailors, tourism management.

**JEL classification:** Z32, Z39, L80.

**Paper Type:** Research study.

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<sup>1</sup>Maritime University of Szczecin, Poland, e-mail: [a.lapko@am.szczecin.pl](mailto:a.lapko@am.szczecin.pl);

<sup>2</sup>Maritime University of Szczecin, Poland, e-mail: [e.hacia@am.szczecin.pl](mailto:e.hacia@am.szczecin.pl);

## **1. Introduction**

Germany is one of the most willingly sailing nations in Europe. It is estimated that in 2020 nearly 0.5 million people were actively engaged in water sports and sailing among the population aged 14 and over in Germany (Statista, 2021a). The German Sailing Association (Deutschen Segler-Verbandes) in 2020 had 188,000 members. In Germany there are waters and facilities for sailing and leisure boating along the Baltic and North Sea coastlines of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein and on the many lakes and rivers dotted around the country (Angloinfo, 2021).

However, German sailors are also eager to discover waters belonging to other countries. They sail, for example, in the Mediterranean, for example, they are one of the largest groups of foreign sailors visiting Croatia and the largest group using the services of local charter companies. In 2020, they constituted as much as 18% of yacht charterers in this area, and it is worth noting that these services were used by representatives of 160 countries (Łapko, Hącia, and Lučić, 2021). They are also frequent visitors to the ports located in the Baltic Sea basin, especially those belonging to Sweden, Denmark and Poland. In Poland, they most willingly visit ports located in the territories of the West Pomeranian and Pomeranian provinces. Here, too, they are the most numerous group of foreign sailors, it is estimated that they can constitute up to 20% of all guests calling at ports in these regions (Łapko and Müller, 2018). Some of them even decide to keep their yachts in Polish ports, buying year-round residences with the possibility of wintering. It is dictated by various factors, such as e.g. attractive prices, convenient access to a given port, availability of parking spaces or the location of the port being a good starting point.

German sailors are an important group of participants in nautical tourism in many European countries. Their behavior has an impact on the local and regional tourism economy.

The article analyzes the opinions of German sailors on sailing during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Attempts were made to determine to what extent the risk of infection and the restrictions and prohibitions applicable in connection with the epidemic had influenced the behavior and decisions made by German sailors. Due to the fact that their activity is of great importance for the economies of many countries, the discussed topic should be considered important for the European tourism economy.

## **2. Literature Review**

For the purposes of the article, the definition of nautical tourism proposed by T. Luković was adopted, according to which nautical tourism means the navigation and stay of tourists –sailors on vessels (yachts, recreational small crafts and boats for

both personal use and commercial activities, and the like), as well as their stay in the ports of nautical tourism for rest and recreation (Luković, 2013). It is a form of tourism that has been dynamically developing throughout Europe in recent years, gaining more and more participants. According to the theory of the multiplier effect, the growing tourist traffic and hence the increased expenses of tourists at the place of reception (ports visited) contribute to the development of local economies (Rusu, 2011; Nowaczyk, 2018). Sailors visiting ports constitute a great purchasing power and generate demand for various services, thus constituting a factor stimulating the development of local entrepreneurship (Moreno, Otamendi, 2017).

The most desirable services due to the development of nautical tourism include catering, hotel and transport charter services (Pearce, 2008; Gračan, Bardak, and Rudančić-Lugarić, 2011; Kivela and Crotts, 2006). Of course, the development of sailing tourism also requires an appropriate port infrastructure that provides parking spaces and service for yachts, as well as sanitary facilities for tourists. In recent years, numerous projects have been implemented to build and expand the infrastructure of yacht ports, not only in Germany itself, but also in countries such as Poland and Lithuania (Harbor guide for the South Coast Baltic, 2020). Due to the transboundary nature of such reservoirs as the Baltic Sea and the Szczecin Lagoon, the improvement in the condition of the infrastructure in these countries has significantly influenced the behaviour of German tourists. They began to more eagerly sail in foreign waters and visit new ports. The increase in sailing mobility was also supported by the implementation of various international projects and local initiatives (Hącia and Łapko, 2017; SCB, 2021; Kizielewicz and Luković, 2013).

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected various areas of human functioning. Tourism has become one of the hardest hit, and nautical tourism was no exception. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) International tourism dropped by 74% in 2020 as compared to the previous year (Alam, Parveen, 2021), however, domestic tourism also recorded significant declines everywhere. The COVID-19 pandemic started on November 17, 2019, in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, Central China and was caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus COVID-19 caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 began as an epidemic on November 17, 2019, in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, Central China (Ma, 2020). The beginning of the pandemic was announced by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, (WHO, 2020). In Germany, the first case of SARS-CoV-2 was diagnosed on January 28, 2020 (Statista, 2021b). In the period from March 9 to September 19, 2021, 92 971 people died as a result of the disease, and 4 145 852 got sick (Bundesregierung, 2021). Worldwide, more than 229.8 million people got sick during this time, over 4.7 million of which died (Worldometers, 2021).

The virus was spreading around the world at an alarming rate, which was supported by its specific features, including such that in some infected people it may be asymptomatic and may infect others unknowingly. Research has confirmed that the transmission of the virus is favored by physical contacts, staying in crowded places

and in closed spaces - such conditions are often used by tourists. A link has therefore been found between travel, tourism and the spread of the virus (Craig, 2021; Jang, Kim, Kim, and Kim, 2021). Introducing various restrictions, including concerning assemblies and movement, has become one of the main methods of slowing the pandemic (Schäfer, Wijaya, Rockenfeller, and Götz, 2021).

In Germany, as in most other countries, restrictions and limitations were introduced, the application of which was variable over time, and there were often differences between individual federal states in this respect. Their introduction depended on the current epidemic situation in the country and abroad. Restrictions and restrictions concerned, *inter alia*, freely crossing borders, using personal protective equipment or using the hotel and restaurant base (Tourismus, 2021). The tourism industry in Germany was one of the first (alongside transport and entertainment) to be affected by the pandemic (Fritsch, Greve, and Wyrwich, 2021). The manner of media communication, intrusive, often chaotic information about the restrictions in force, the spread of the virus, statistical data on morbidity and deaths, as well as more or less reliable opinions of experts played an important role (Leuker, Fleischhut, Hertwig, Kozyreva, and Gubernath, 2021) – made many people feel confused, fear for their lives and the lives of their family, which certainly does not was conducive to making tourist decisions.

As the pandemic continues, it is not yet possible to assess and summarize what its real impact on tourism was. However, research on this issue is still being conducted all over the world and the first scientific articles showing the current results are already published (Hoque, Shikha, Hasanat, Arif, and Hamid, 2020; Bakar and Rosbi, 2020; Farzanegan, Gholipour, Feizi, Nunkoo, and Andargoli, 2021). When it comes to a rather specific form of tourism, which is nautical tourism, not many publications on this subject have been published so far. The ones that are available usually refer to a specific country or region (Cavalheiro, Mayer, and Luz, 2021; Agbaba, 2020; Łapko, Hącia, and Lučić, 2021). Each subsequent publication fills this existing research gap and makes the picture of the crisis caused by the pandemic clearer.

Theoretically, sailing tourism has features that make it possible to be practiced even during such a global health crisis as a pandemic. Yachts can be both a means of transport, be a place to stay, and even allow you to become independent from eating places due to the usual kitchen facilities - so they provide many opportunities to isolate yourself from other people and avoid infection. Additionally, sailing tourism is characterized by great flexibility in terms of route planning and crew selection (Łapko, 2021). The article - based on the example of research conducted among German sailors - will present the extent to which these features were actually conducive to sailing tourism during the pandemic and what difficulties were experienced by sailors in connection with the applicable restrictions.

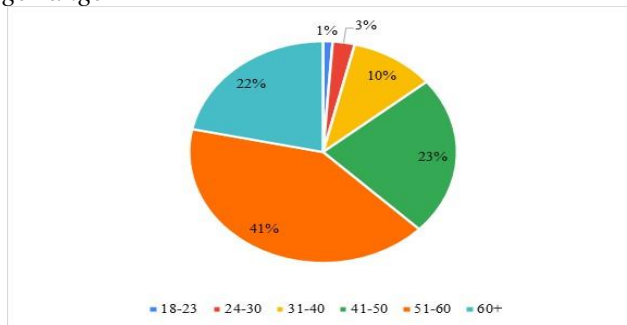
### 3. Methodology

The survey was conducted in February and March 2021 using the CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) survey. The survey form was made available on German sailing forums and Facebook profiles of sailing associations. 263 completed forms were collected during this time. The respondents were asked the following questions:

1. How did the pandemic affect your sailing frequency in 2020?
2. How did the pandemic affect your cruise routes in 2020?
3. How has the pandemic affected your crew on your voyages in 2020?
4. Your plans to go sailing in 2021

The first was a single-choice closed question, while the remaining ones allowed more than one answer. The answer to the questions was obligatory. Figure 1 shows the percentage distribution of the respondents taking part in the study, taking into account their age range. As many as 63% are people over 50, while only 4% were at most 30 years old.

**Figure 1.** Percentage distribution of respondents taking part in the study, taking into account their age range



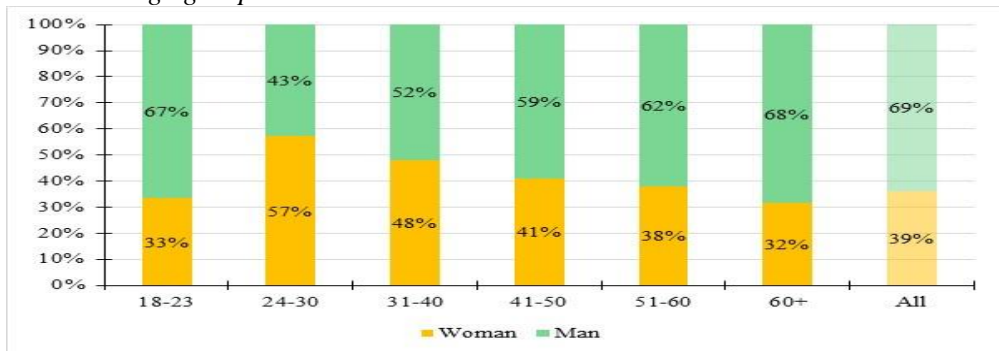
*Source:* Own study.

Among the respondents, there were 39% of women and 61% of men. These shares were slightly different in particular age groups (Figure 2). The most divergent in this respect is the age range from 24 to 30 years - one of the least numerous among the studied groups. Figure 3 shows the percentage age distribution of respondents within each gender. Both show left-hand asymmetry, and the median values are similar and amount to 53 years for women and 54 years for men.

### 4. Results

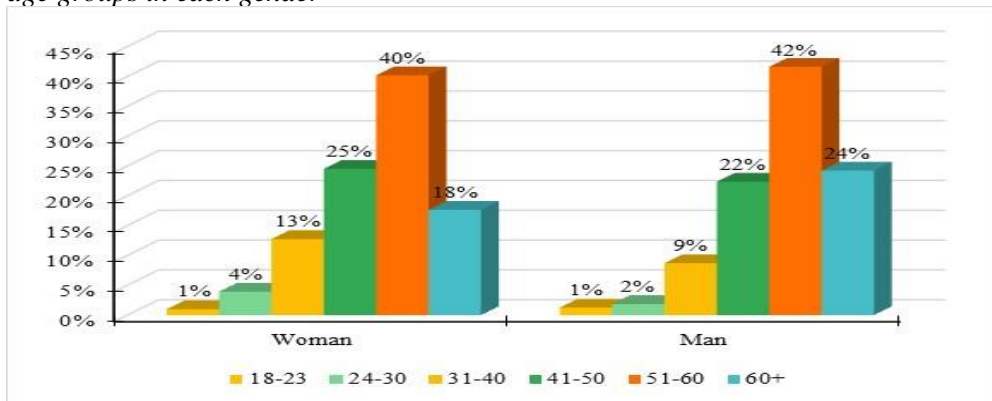
Based on the survey, the behavior of German sailors in pandemic conditions was analyzed. The main focus was on three aspects of sailing, i.e. the frequency of cruises, cruises routes, and crew composition. This was examined in the first three questions of the survey.

**Figure 2.** Percentage of respondents participating in the study: share of gender in individual age groups



Source: Own study

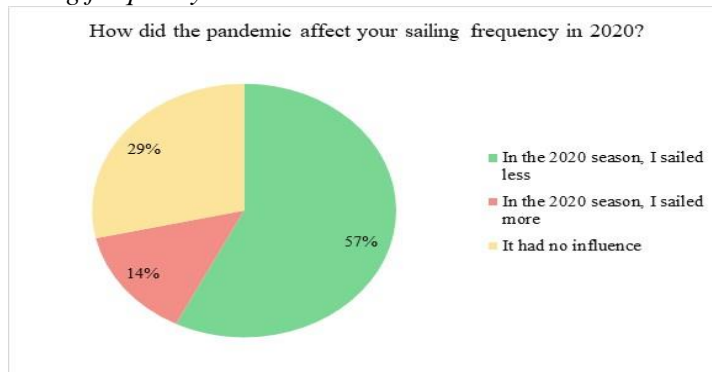
**Figure 3.** Percentage of respondents participating in the study: share of particular age groups in each gender



Source: Own study.

Figure 4 shows the percentages of answers to the first question of the survey related to the frequency of sailing in 2020. As many as 86% of the respondents changed their behavior in this aspect of sailing. For as many as 57% of German sailors, the frequency of their voyages decreased, and 14% sailed more despite the pandemic. On the other hand, 29% of respondents did not change their behavior in this regard in 2020. The shares of these responses are slightly different if we divide the respondents by gender. As many as 64% of the surveyed women sailed less, 15% more, and 21% of them did not change the frequency of sailing in the pandemic. In the case of men, these shares were respectively: 53, 14 and 33%. It is interesting to note that men were more likely to remain unchanged in their sailing frequency behavior in a pandemic. Taking into account the age of the respondent, it can be concluded that younger sailors, i.e., those aged 40 or less, showed a greater tendency to practice sailing at the previous frequency. And among the oldest age group, the percentage of those who sailed more was the smallest.

**Figure 4.** Summary percentage of responses to the question 'How did the pandemic affect your sailing frequency in 2020?'



*Source:* Own study.

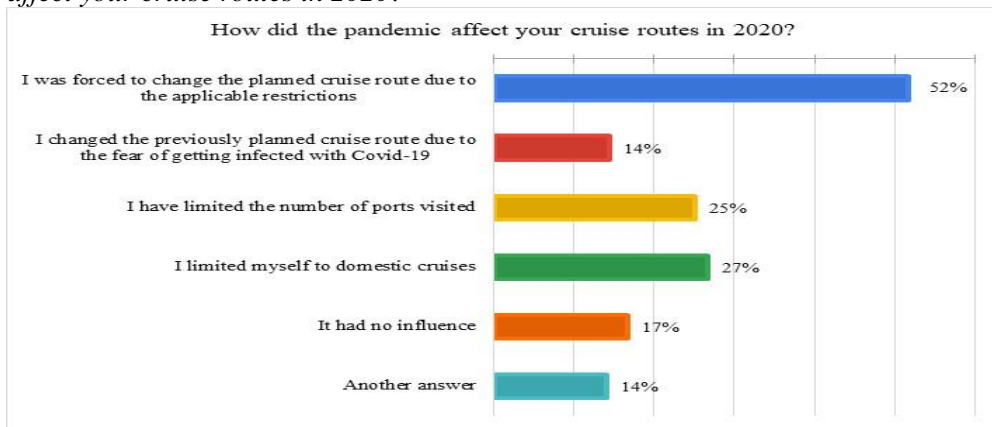
Analyzing the second of the indicated aspects of sailing (Figure 5), it can be concluded that the majority of German sailors (52%) were forced to change the planned voyage route, because it was caused by the applicable restrictions. About a quarter of respondents limited their sailing to domestic cruises. The share of responses indicating a limitation in the number of visited ports was at a similar level. Only 14% of those polled changed their cruise route plans for fear of Covid-19 infection.

Among the surveyed German sailors, 17% did not change their behavior regarding sailing routes in 2020. Considering that the other answers suggest some changes in their behavior, and some respondents indicated more than one answer, it can be concluded that 83% of surveyed Germans nautical tourism pandemic has had an impact in this aspect. A similar percentage distribution was observed among both women and men separately, hence gender is not a feature differentiating the studied population. The situation is slightly different in the case of the respondent's age. The percentages of responses closest to the total were obtained for two age groups, i.e. from 31 to 40 years old and from 51 to 60 years old. On the other hand, in the case of younger sailors (24-30) as many as 71% said that the pandemic did not affect the sailing routes, and in the oldest group (60+) as many as 89% had the opposite opinion.

Figure 6 shows the results of the analysis of answers to the question related to the crew composition during the cruise in 2020. Almost half of the surveyed German sailors limited the crew to their immediate family. Another 27% indicated that they sailed with their closest friends with whom they keep in touch on a daily basis. These responses confirm a fairly high discipline in meeting the imposed pandemic restrictions on minimizing social contacts. Only 21% stated that in a pandemic situation, they did not change their behavior in the last of the examined aspects of sailing, i.e. the composition of the crew. The remaining 79% made some modifications. In this case, gender can be considered a feature that differentiates the

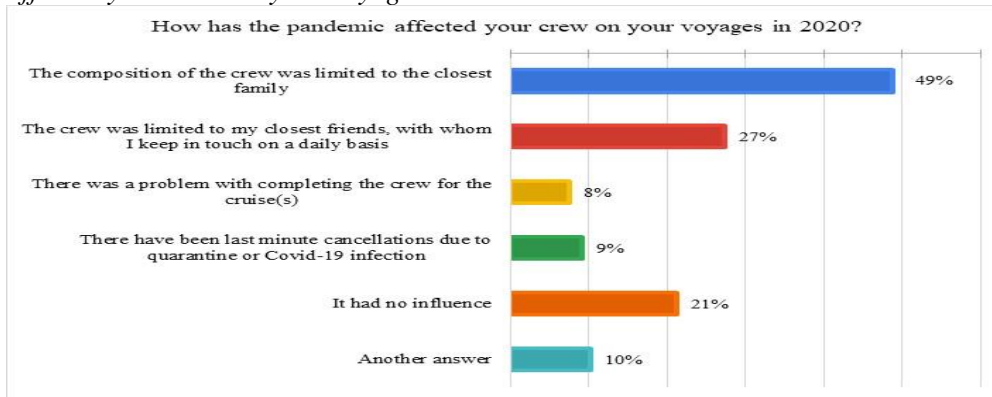
studied community. Men were more likely to keep their crew decisions unchanged during the pandemic - as many as 25% of them gave such an answer. As for the respondent's age, the shares most similar to the total were obtained in the age ranges from 31 to 40 years and in both groups representing the oldest, i.e., 51-60 and 60+. The least susceptible to changes in the crew composition due to the pandemic turned out to be younger, i.e., up to 30 years.

**Figure 5.** Summary percentage of responses to the question 'How did the pandemic affect your cruise routes in 2020?'



Source: Own study.

**Figure 6.** Summary percentage of responses to the question 'How has the pandemic affected your crew on your voyages in 2020?'

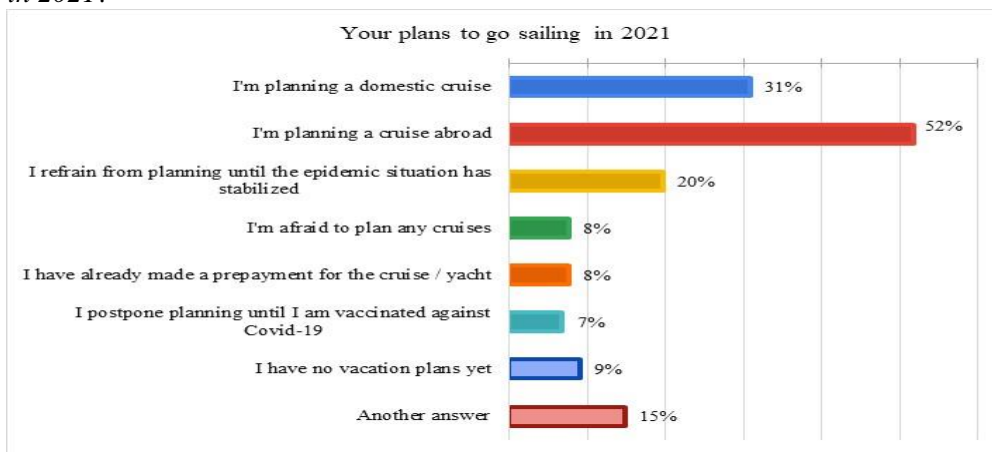


Source: Own study.

The last question of the survey concerned plans to go sailing in 2021. The results may be a bit surprising, because as many as 52% of German sailors indicated in the survey that they are planning a foreign cruise (Fig. 7), while 31% have a domestic one. A small percentage of them do not smoke to do gel works in 2021 - only 9%.



**Figure 7.** Summary percentage of responses to the question 'Your plans to go sailing in 2021?'



Source: Own study.

## 5. Conclusions

The analysis of the results of the conducted research shows that the pandemic largely influenced the behavior of German sailors regarding sailing tourism. Behavioral changes are visible in all analyzed aspects, sailing frequency, selection of cruise routes and selection of the crew. The impact of the ongoing pandemic on planning and making decisions about sailing in the next season is also visible. More than half of the respondents reduced the frequency of sailing, but it is interesting that 14% of the respondents sailed more often. This may indicate that they chose nautical tourism as an alternative to other forms of tourism that were impossible or hampered by the ongoing pandemic.

Sailors were forced to have a flexible approach to planning the cruise route. The restrictions and restrictions that often appeared overnight, as well as the fear of infection forced changes in routes - this was the case for 52% of respondents. As many as 25% of the respondents resigned from trips abroad - considering the fact that German sailors are active participants of foreign sailing tourism, this fact is also important in the aspect of international sailing tourism.

During the pandemic, a lot has changed in terms of the selection of the crew. The willingness to reduce the risk of contracting the SARS-Cov-2 virus was manifested mainly by limiting the crew members to the closest family (49%) or closest friends (27%). Interestingly, 9% of respondents experienced a situation in which they found out at the last minute that due to illness or the need to undergo quarantine, one of the crew members would not be able to take part in the cruise. the cruise. Not all forms of tourism offer this possibility.

The respondents' answers may indicate that they were quite optimistic about the next sailing season. More than half of the respondents planned a cruise abroad, probably hoping that the epidemic situation would improve by then. The survey, the results of which were presented, ended in March 2021. It would be interesting to compare the results of plans for cruises with their actual implementation, therefore the research will be continued after the end of the sailing season in 2021.

The obtained results show that even in the case of a form of tourism as flexible in terms of planning as nautical tourism, the impact of the pandemic was very felt by tourists. However, they were very determined and did not want to give up sailing, for this purpose they made modifications to their original plans, if possible, so that the implementation of the cruise would be possible. The role of domestic nautical tourism has also increased. Information on the behavior of tourists in this crisis situation is valuable to tourism management authorities. In the future, if a similar situation occurs, they will allow for more informed decisions and better communication with tourists.

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