

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

### **THE PARAHOTELERY IN THE TOURIST, CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL DISTRICT OF SANTA MARTA (COLOMBIA) AND ITS SURROUNDINGS<sup>1</sup>**

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The Tourist, Cultural and Historical District (D.T.C. and H.) of Santa Marta is one of the vacation preferences in Colombia for nationals and foreigners. Within its territory, two types of accommodation services are offered to tourists; on the one hand, those framed in compliance with the tourism legislation of the country and the area; and on the other hand, those developed without any type of formal permit, the latter known as parahotels. In this context, this research focused on characterizing the parahotel services developed in the D.T.C. and H. de Santa Marta and its surroundings. Methodologically, the study was carried out through quantitative work, considering a rigid design for the projection of the findings presented through statistical figures and mathematical reasoning. As conclusions, parahotel services in the area are carried out on the basis of economic informality, not the illegality of their activities, their focus is focused on serving a young target market, in climates consistent with the generation of an environment of family accommodation and the privacy that the client demands, the costs offered are lower than the rates of formal hotels, its conceptual vision is important to evaluate from three fundamental categories, which include the economic, legal and tourist spheres.

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<sup>1</sup> Trabajo de investigación desarrollado como parte de la ejecución del proyecto de investigación titulado “Impacto de las plataformas digitales de hospedajes en la para-hotelería en el D.T.C e H de Santa Marta y sus alrededores”, presentado ante la Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The city of Santa Marta in Colombia was recognized by the Senate of the Republic as a Tourist, Cultural and Historical District (D.T.C. e H.) in 1989, since then, its population has distinguished itself, among other aspects, for being the capital of the department of Magdalena, and also for being the oldest city in South America. It is the tourist destination of choice for nationals and foreigners; it offers visitors captivating beaches, access to the Sierra Nevada, and an architectural and cultural heritage that dazzles visitors and takes them back to the times of the colony and the banana boom.

Its tourist approach has developed over the years, reaching the point of offering excursion packages and boat rides to the inhabitants of this population and to the visiting public that profiles the enjoyment of its natural resources. Santa Marta, offers a diversity in the development of lodgings that go from luxury hotels, to modest hotel settlements constituted in the region to offer the tourist an excellent attention in function of leaving a good impression of this Colombian city.

The tourism profile offered by the D.T.C. e H. of Santa Marta includes approximately 69 beaches, of which “15 are used for fishing activities, 22 for tourism and 32 are not registered among these activities and are considered virgin beaches” (Iglesias et al. (2008), p. 33). Tourist activity in the area is developed through the three main bays of this city, which are: Concha, Rodadero and Taganga.

Sabogal and Vásquez (2008) argue that the Rodadero Bay has the largest concentration of lodging offered by this D.T.C. and H. According to the authors, this bay has experienced a significant increase in the number of visitors; the seasons that have had the greatest impact include: Easter, vacations between June and July, and the end-of-year period; whose affluence has awakened the need to visualize the tourist carrying capacity of the district in order to strengthen governmental strategies consistent with the social, cultural and tourist progress of the population.

In this context, the development of the D.T.C. and H. of Santa Marta, is of national public interest, since the progress of its tourist inventions represents the strength of Colombia's projection through its natural resources, lodging and comfort care. According to Guardiola (2019) this city “is nationally recognized as a place of exotic beaches and quiet seaside resorts, besides having in its surroundings the mountain at the foot of the sea, the highest in the world in the Sierra Nevada” (p. 22). Its surroundings offer places like the Tayrona National Natural Park and the Ciénaga Grande, where Colombians and foreigners can visit, and its attractiveness increases when considering the possibilities offered by the population for bird watching.

The tourist exploitation of the area is contextualized by the governmental infrastructure, since guaranteeing optimal conditions of enjoyment allows seasonal visitors to invest money in the region, which translates into an increase in sources of employment and the accelerated economic and social progress of Santa Marta.

In effect, the development of the D.T.C. and H. of Santa Marta is focused on offering food services, lodging and the enjoyment of the beauties of its beaches and natural resources, which, in the opinion of Guardiola (2019), contributes to the development of the employment rate of the population, however, the author refers that, in most cases, the

tourist activity of the D. T.C. and H. of Santa Marta is given by the informal economy, since the proliferation of para-hotel services represents the fundamental door for the economic understanding of the region.

Based on the above considerations, the present research aims to characterize the parahotel services developed in the Tourist, Cultural and Historical District of Santa Marta and its surroundings; which is achieved through the presentation of a work divided into four clearly differentiated sections: on the one hand, the research methodology applied in the development of the work is presented, on the other, the theoretical body, the discussion of the results and the presentation of the conclusions regarding the topic of parahotel services, whose theoretical context represents the fundamental axis of this study.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The methodological aspect of the present study considered a quantitative approach since it observed the opinions of Saduy (2006) who expresses that research of this typology “is dedicated to collecting, processing and analyzing quantitative or numerical data on previously determined variables” (p. 22). Thus, the characterization of the parahotel services developed in the Tourist, Cultural and Historic District of Santa Marta and its surroundings was achieved by taking information on numerical and statistical data of the characterized area.

The research design applied in the present study was rigid, focused on the quantification of the findings through the presentation of the statistical measurements made by the Tourism Information System of Magdalena and Santa Marta D.T.C. e H., obtained through the consultation carried out by this body in the month of April 2021, which allowed the confrontation of the findings provided by other researchers, as well as, the refutation and credibility of the empirical evidence of the hotel services provided in the area.

The understanding of the findings obtained was carried out taking into account the initial categorization of the theoretical foundations made by the researchers, through this, it could be evidenced that the parahotel perspective should be characterized following three approaches: economic, legal and tourism, the same that are presented in the following table

**Table 1**  
**CATEGORIZATION OF THE RESEARCH**

<i>Objective of the research</i>	<i>Comprehension category</i>	<i>Comprehension perspective</i>
Characterize the para-hotel services developed in the Tourist, Cultural and Historic District of Santa Marta and its surroundings.	Parallel hospitality	Economic
		Legal
		Tourism

Source: Own elaboration, based on the theoretical approaches considered (2021).

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

With the objective of characterizing the parahotel services developed in the Tourist, Cultural and Historical District of Santa Marta and its surroundings, the present research was executed from the consideration of a quantitative work typology, considering, on the one hand, the latent need to understand the studied topic through the interpretation of the theoretical postulates exposed by the authors, and by other researchers who on the basis of their findings have expressed opinions on parahotel services in Colombia and other Latin American countries.

In the research it was considered pertinent to apply a quantitative approach focused on the graphic representation of the findings and the statistical measurement of the results, which were contributed by serious institutions committed to the tourist development of the D.T.C. and H. of Santa Marta, among them the Tourist Information System of Magdalena and Santa Marta D.T.C. and H. (2021) organization that have focused on measuring and controlling the hotel activity and the development of tourism in the Department of Magdalena.

Within the framework of the conclusions of the work, it can be expressed that the parahotel services in the Tourist, Cultural and Historic District of Santa Marta and its surroundings is characterized as a lodging service offered through the informality of the records, the constitution of this type of establishments does not obey the normative particularities of the formal hotel business, which impregnates this service with the conditions developed by the informal economy.

The para-hotel industry in Santa Marta, even when it does not adhere to legal compliance in its constitutive essence, complies with some particularities of operation, among them the conditions of habitability offered by the registry kept by the System of Tourist Information of Magdalena and Santa Marta D.T.C. e H.

As any informal activity presents adversaries that deny the possibility of development obtained from this economic exploitation, the protection of adverse conditions to its operation is centered on regulatory compliance, which imprints on the para-hotel industry a purely legalistic and tributary character, considering that this type of establishments resort to the regulatory gaps to operate and avoid the high costs inherent to the formality of the institutions.

The target market for parallel hotel services in Santa Marta is visitors to the area, both nationals and foreigners, whose access routes include sea, air and land transit. The promotions and customer attraction are focused on attending tourists who wish to enjoy the natural beauties of the area, of which the most visited are the bays of Rodadero, Concha, Taganga, and the National Natural Parks of Tayrona and Sierra Nevada, as well as the Fauna and Flora Sanctuary of Los Flamencos.

The main clientele of this type of lodging are young couples and families, with vacationing desires, their ages range between 19 and 38 years, whose average pernocta is equivalent to five days and four nights, its main distinction from formal lodging is that they offer the seasonal tourist lower prices in the services offered, in addition to the privacy and regulations of the lodging are less than the legally established hotels.

The type of lodging offered by the para-hotel industry in Santa Marta is represented by hotels, family houses, apartments, hostels, lodges, shelters, as well as houses or cabins, camping sites, apart-hotels, and even rooms in family homes, which are reserved in most cases through the use of travel agencies and tourist service houses.

The concentration of this type of establishments is located throughout the territory of the Tourist, Cultural and Historic District of Santa Marta, with the highest concentration of hotels in the Historic Center of the city and around the Rodadero Bay, and to a lesser extent in Bello Horizonte, Taganga, Mamatoco, Once de Noviembre, Universidad del Magdalena, Gaira, Bonda, Neguanje, Los Naranjos, Parque Nacional Natural Tayrona, Minca and Guachaca.

In summary, it can be stated that the para-hotel services present in the Tourist, Cultural and Historic District of Santa Marta represent a social, cultural, economic, legal and tax phenomenon that focuses the offering of lodging and accommodation of people towards the informality of the fact of providing the service, can be analyzed as an answer offered from the commercial enterprise towards the tourist development of the area.