

Tourist Voucher Effectiveness and Perception Among Entrepreneurs in The Tourism Sector in Poland*

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Abstract

The poor situation on the Polish-Belarus border may be contributing to a decline in demand for tourism services in the border region. The regional government has initiated an intervention tool in the form of a tourist voucher valid in selected region. The newly created Podlasie Tourist Voucher functions in 2025 and is financed from the budget of the local government unit. It aims to increase tourist interest in staying in accommodation facilities in Podlasie in 2025. The article provides an overview of reports on the new intervention tool and a review of the literature on tourism support in Poland.

Keywords: Tourism, Intervention tools, Poland, Hotel industry.

Introduction

Tourism plays a significant role in regional development, influencing employment levels, shaping the income structure of local communities, and contributing to infrastructure development. In peripheral regions, such as the Podlaskie Voivodeship, tourism has additional significance—it serves as a key alternative to heavy industry and large-scale infrastructure investments, which are typically concentrated in central and western Poland.

Podlaskie is perceived as a region of exceptional natural, cultural, and ethnographic values (Barwiński 2004; Kiryluk, 2015; Gralak, 2020). The presence of sites such as Białowieża National Park, Biebrza National Park, and Narew National Park, as well as rich multiculturalism and borderland traditions, make the voivodeship an attractive holiday destination for tourists seeking peace, contact with nature, and authentic experiences (Niewiadomski, 2009; Siedlecka and Guziuk, 2017). Despite this potential, Podlaskie has remained outside the mainstream of domestic tourism for many years. This was due to various factors: poorer transport accessibility, lack of intensive promotion, and the stereotype of the region as "remote" and "underdeveloped" (Barwiński, 2014; Kochanowski, 2020) and the concentration of tourist traffic in more popular destinations, such as Masuria, Pomerania, the Tatra Mountains or Lower Silesia (Pilichowska and Gładąła, 2021).

In response to these challenges, the Podlaskie Voivodeship government decided to implement a tourism demand support instrument in the form of the Podlaskie Tourist Voucher (Podlaski Bon Turystyczny, 2025). This program aimed to increase the number of tourists visiting the region by subsidizing accommodations in facilities located within the voivodeship. In this way, the regional government decided to influence demand rather than invest directly in infrastructure, encouraging tourists to visit while supporting local businesses.

In March 2025, the Podlaskie Voivodeship Government launched the Podlaskie (Podlasie) Tourist Voucher (PTV)—a program aimed at increasing visits to Podlaskie and supporting local accommodation facilities (Ministry of Sport and Tourism, 2025). The voucher provides subsidies ranging from PLN 200 to PLN 400 per

night, depending on the facility category (e.g., agritourism, guesthouse, 3-5* hotel). The program was operated by the Podlaskie Regional Tourist Organization, with communication and voucher registration taking place via the program platform. The local government initially allocated approximately PLN 2 million for the first editions of the program (Podlaskie Tourist Voucher, 2025).

The program operated in phases—in the first edition, the voucher pool sold out within hours, demonstrating significant interest from potential tourists. Subsequent reports indicated that a total of over 13,000 voucher codes were generated in the three phases (Business Insider Polska, 2025). This provides important context for assessing the economic effects and the opinions of entrepreneurs who were both beneficiaries (accepting vouchers) and market participants reacting to changes in demand.

Methodology and sources

This article is a synthetic review based on official program sources, industry reports and analyses published by the Polish Tourism Organization and industry media, press articles on the tours and the impact of the program, and available commentary and interviews with entrepreneurs (local media, industry portals). Due to the program's recent nature, extensive, peer-reviewed academic research does not yet exist—hence, the review relies primarily on administrative data, expert reports, and press materials. The purpose of this review article is to analyze the effectiveness of the Podlasie Tourist Voucher and discuss its perception among tourism sector entrepreneurs. The article addresses the following research questions:

1. Has the Podlasie Tourist Voucher contributed to an increase in the number of tourists in the region?
2. What benefits have businesses benefiting from the program experienced?
3. What problems and challenges have arisen during its implementation?
4. How has the program influenced the perception of the region as a tourist destination?
5. How can similar initiatives be improved in the future?

To answer the research questions, the following research methods were used: analysis of Podlasie Tourist Voucher program documents, publications on tourism support instruments, and opinions of tourism sector entrepreneurs (reports, statements, comments). The article is based on secondary data (desk research), attempting to collect and organize available information into a single, coherent study.

Characteristics of the Podlasie (Podlaskie) Tourist Voucher

The Podlasie Tourist Voucher (PTV) was introduced as a regional initiative aimed at stimulating tourism by encouraging visitors from outside the region to visit and use local accommodations. The program provided tourists with a one-time voucher worth between 200 and 400 PLN, which could be used exclusively for booking accommodation at properties registered in the program. The amount of the subsidy depended on the type of property:

- PLN 200 – agritourism farms, youth hostels, campsites,
- PLN 300 – guesthouses, apartments, 1-2 star properties,
- PLN 400 – higher standard hotels.

The voucher was redeemable on condition that a person from outside the Podlaskie Voivodeship booked at least two nights' stay [Podlaskie Regional Tourist Organization, 2025]. The program was targeted at tourists (direct beneficiaries) and accommodation industry entrepreneurs (indirect beneficiaries). Participants in the program included:

- hotels,
- guesthouses,
- private accommodations,
- agritourism farms,
- apartments for rent,
- other legally operating accommodation facilities.

The condition was to have a registered business activity and an entry in the register of accommodation facilities [Podlaski Bon Turystyczny, 2025].

Interest in the Podlaskie Tourist Voucher exceeded the organizers' initial expectations. Subsequent voucher pools were exhausted very quickly, demonstrating the high level of demand for this type of support. Within the first few months of the program's operation, several thousand vouchers were generated, resulting in a significant influx of tourists and an additional burden on the local tourism infrastructure [Kurier Poranny, 2025].

The effectiveness of the Podlasie Tourist Voucher in economic terms

One of the key indicators of the program's effectiveness is the increase in the number of tourists visiting the region. Empirical data and reports from accommodation owners indicate that during the voucher's operation, the following have been observed: increased weekend bookings, higher occupancy during the spring and summer season, greater interest in the region in the media and online [Business Insider Polska, 2025].

In many cases, properties that previously struggled to maintain high occupancy began to see full bookings weeks in advance. The program's economic impact wasn't limited to the voucher itself. Tourists using the subsidy generated additional expenses: for food (restaurants, bars, local products), for tourist attractions (museums, kayaking, horseback riding), for transport and local services.

From the perspective of entrepreneurs, this meant a so-called multiplier effect, which actually increased the revenues not only of accommodation facilities, but also of other entities operating in the region. It is worth paying attention to the indirect social and economic effects of the program:

- greater demand for seasonal workers,
- increased importance of tourism as a pillar of the local economy,
- stimulation of entrepreneurship (creating new offers, packages, services),
- improving the infrastructure and aesthetics of accommodation facilities.

The rapid depletion of the voucher pool in the first rounds (e.g., within a few hours) and the thousands of codes generated suggest that the program generated immediate additional demand, especially from outside the voivodeship [Prawo.pl, 2025]. Media reports and official announcements indicate that the largest number of vouchers were activated by residents of the Masovian, Łódź, and Silesian voivodeships, which is typical for short weekend trips to regions with easy access [Business Insider Polska, 2025]. For accommodations, the voucher meant a real influx of customers and increased occupancy during periods when tourists used the program. Increased occupancy translates into additional revenue (amounts above the voucher value: meals, attractions, excursions). However, the net impact on revenue depended on the customer mix—if the voucher attracted additional tourists (net), revenue increased; on the other hand, if some vouchers replaced bookings that would have taken place anyway, the effect was smaller. In practice, local reports and industry commentary more often point to a positive effect in the form of a short-term increase in overnight stays. The program also serves a promotional purpose: thanks to the voucher, Podlasie reached new groups of tourists, which is especially important for regions with lower tourist awareness. Industry and local government media outlets assessed that the voucher contributed to increasing the region's visibility and paving the way for future return tourists, which could result in long-term benefits if the facilities maintain their high-quality services.

Perception Of the Program Among Entrepreneurs

Businesses reported (in local interviews and industry commentaries) satisfaction with the actual increase in bookings during the voucher validity periods. Smaller establishments, such as agritourism farms and guesthouses, particularly experienced an increase in weekend bookings. This improved short-term cash flow and partially offset seasonal demand fluctuations. For many entrepreneurs, the greatest value is the opportunity to attract new guests who, if they experience a positive stay, may return beyond the program or recommend the property further. This "first-time" effect is valued here as a marketing investment directly financed by the local government. The program encouraged some businesses to create short packages (accommodation + local attractions), which fosters cooperation between facilities and tourist attractions. This can lead to better distribution of benefits across the region (not only hotels, but also restaurants and service outlets). Some businesses cited administrative burdens related to facility registration, code acceptance, and billing requirements. Smaller businesses without dedicated office staff, in particular, felt the increased burden. Furthermore, industry reports highlighted concerns about reimbursement deadlines and liquidity (whether operator subsidies are delivered quickly to the facility). Such operational barriers may dampen the enthusiasm of smaller businesses.

The introduction of a voucher can influence customer price expectations—some guests begin to prefer offers "with a voucher," which creates pressure to maintain lower prices or promotions. If the program lasts longer, businesses may fear that some demand will become dependent on subsidies, making pricing planning outside the voucher period more difficult. This leads to discussions about the potential dilution of the value of other offers and competition based solely on price.

Table 1. Strengths and weaknesses of Podlaskie (Podlasie) Tourist Voucher

Strengths of the program	Weaknesses of the program
Rapid increase in demand	Settlement logistics and administration
Promotion of the region	Geographical inequalities
Support for small objects	Monitoring long-term effects
Greater focus on local entrepreneurs	Prioritization of people operating a computer and the Internet

Source: Own study.

Recommendations for entrepreneurs, decision-makers and program operators

First and foremost, consider simplifying the voucher acceptance process internally—developing a standard workflow: code registration, documentation, and settlement procedures. Reducing processing time minimizes the burden on staff [Podlaskie Regional Tourist Organization, 2025]. Build an offer "beyond the voucher" - prepare packages containing elements that the customer will pay above the value of the voucher (trips, meals, additional services) to increase average revenue per user. Decision-makers should also consider monitoring customer profile - collect short surveys (where they came from, how they found out about the voucher, whether they will come back) - this will help with marketing in the future. Additionally, collaborating in local clusters - connect with other service providers (transport, catering, attractions) to offer more comprehensive experiences and share promotion costs should be started. Targeted promotion of less visited places is also very important - support for the promotion of smaller towns, co-financing combined transport + accommodation offers to disperse the impact. Educational activities for entrepreneurs – webinars and instructional materials on registration, settlements and use of the program for marketing purposes should be taken into consideration.

Limitations of the review

This article is based primarily on official announcements, press materials, and industry commentary; there is currently no extensive, peer-reviewed empirical research on the long-term effects of PTV. The following research is needed: surveys among businesses (quantifying changes in revenue and voucher processing costs), analyses of booking data (comparing occupancy rates before and after the voucher's introduction), research on tourist behavior (whether the voucher leads to subsequent, independent visits).

Conclusions

The Podlasie Tourist Voucher has proven to be an effective instrument for short-term demand stimulation and regional promotion, as evidenced by the rapidly depleting voucher pools and thousands of generated codes. Entrepreneurs appreciate the influx of customers and the marketing benefits, but they also point to administrative barriers, concerns about pricing pressure, and the uneven distribution of benefits across the region. To move from a one-time "surge" to sustained tourism growth, simplified procedures, better monitoring of outcomes, traffic dispersion measures, and support for smaller businesses are essential. A well-designed, flexible voucher program can be a valuable tool for regional tourism policy, provided it is complemented with mechanisms for evaluation and operational support for entrepreneurs.

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