

# ZIKA VIRUS THREATENS PUERTO RICAN TOURISM



For a number of years, the island of Puerto Rico has relied heavily on tourism to boost its economy. The industry had been performing well, and it was one of the rising stars in the island. However, all the efforts that have been made by the industry are now in jeopardy as the sector faces a new threat, the Zika virus, which could altogether grind Puerto Rican tourism into a halt.

Puerto Rico is one of the regions that have been hit hard by the virus since an epidemic broke out in the Americas in 2015. Already, the island has recorded 1,170 confirmed infections and one casualty. **These high numbers of infection are now a source of concern for the tourism industry stakeholders, who are worried that the sector will suffer severely if the epidemic continues.**

While the virus is not considered a lethal disease compared to others such as the yellow fever and dengue fever, people are still afraid of getting infected.

As a precaution against contracting the virus, which is easily transmitted through mosquito bites, tourists from different parts of the world have shelved their plans to visit the island. The industry has experienced a big blow after recording about 42,000 hotel room cancellations that had been reserved for the next two years, causing the industry to lose at least \$28 million in revenues.

Puerto Rican tourism industry has been experiencing the effects of the virus for months now, ever since the epidemic started. According to Luis Alvarez Perez, an owner of a travel company based in San Juan, several tourists who had booked their hotel stay in the island have cancelled their trips, leading to very few arrivals.

However, it is not just cancellations from individuals that have dealt the tourism industry in the island a huge blow. In a move that cost the island to lose at least \$4.5 million in revenues, the Major League Baseball canceled two baseball games that were scheduled to be held in May and moved the venues to Miami, Florida.

A training camp by the US swimming team that was scheduled to be held in July was also cancelled as a result of the epidemic. Large corporations have also cancelled events that were scheduled to be held in the island, for example, Assigned Names and Numbers, an internet corporation based in California. This has further worsened the situation in the island by increasing fear and anxiety, causing more cancellations.

Ingrid Rivera, the Executive Director of Puerto Rican Tourism Company, said that **the cancellation of events by the large companies and organizations was significantly affecting the industry**, and they were working hard to ensure that the trend stops. However, blame was also laid on the US, especially on the Center for Disease Control. Some Puerto Rican officials proclaimed that their travel alerts were too alarming, leading to a significant drop in the number of tourist arrivals in the country.

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