

# SPANISH TOURISTS INCREASINGLY INTERESTED IN ASIA AND CENTRAL AMERICA



According to a recent Skyscanner study, Asia and Central America have been the areas of greatest interest for the Spanish tourists in the past three years. The study comes out of an analysis of searches by more than 2.5 million unique Spanish internet users.

The authors of the study highlight Spain's increasing interest in exotic destinations over the last three years, although Europe is still the leader in reservations, with the UK, Germany, Italy and France tying with the US for second place.

Skyscanner points to a shift in the Spanish market based on the data collected. As a result, there are several emerging destinations, most notably Siem Reap, as the destination with a 137% increase in internet searches in the past year, and Myanmar, with a 71% increase.

"Spaniards are looking for more experiences and cultures, and want to live in the country itself," said Skyscanner spokesperson, Itziar Irazabal, during the presentation of the study in Spain.

## **Sri Lanka and Myanmar: Biggest Increases**

With respect to Colombo (Sri Lanka), in the past three years internet searches by Spanish travellers have increased by 49% compared to the global average of a 25% increase. The reasons identified by the Skyscanner study are the September 2014 Film Festival, improved infrastructure, and Chinese investment in the area which has increased the offerings for hospitality and leisure.

Another important increase in terms of searches is the 40% rise in the number of Spanish searches for Myanmar in Southeast Asia. Factors contributing to this trend are the opening up of the country to foreigners and the introduction of 3G earlier this year, which facilitates the processing of visas online.

Moreover, between 2011 and 2014, Siem Reap recorded a 38% increase. In 2014, the percentage is 137% because of the visa waiver in the countries known as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the expansion of hotels like the Park Hyatt.

## **Mykonos, the "Financial Ibiza"**

In Greece, Mykonos recorded 37% more visits in the last year. This was due to the presence of famous individuals in the area, such as Ronaldo, Jennifer Lopez and Lindsay Lohan, and music performers such as Afrojack.

First among coastal destinations, with 10% more searches, is Iceland, the setting for films like *Interstellar* and *Star Wars*. By May 2015 the country will also have the largest ice tunnel in Europe.

## **Over 20% Increase in Searches for Panama and Nicaragua**

With daily flights from Madrid to that country, Panama recorded a 29% increase in searches in the Spanish market compared to the 12% global average. The reasons for this are the opening of the subway this year, as well as the centennial celebration of the opening of the Panama Canal. In addition, the Hilton and Ritz-Carlton hotels are expected to open in the region.

In the case of Nicaragua, the increase is 25%, thanks to the opening of the country's first five-star hotel, Mukal, in 2013. For Brazil, the authors indicated that the increase was 7% among Spanish internet users, but the company expects infrastructure improvements to boost user interest.

### **Taipei and Seoul below Average in Global Interest**

In the case of Taipei (Taiwan), Spain is below the global average (56%) with a 14% increase in searches; this is despite the fact that Taiwan is a country with major international brands and five-star hotels.

The South Korean capital, Seoul, also excites the curiosity of the Spanish because of the 'Ghangham' effect, according to Irazabal. He further states that "the government is implementing a plan for budget hotels and the construction of over 38,000 rooms". Nevertheless, compared to a 50% increase in global searches, Spain recorded a much lower percentage (18%).

### **Argentina in the Reservations Ranking**

A new development this year is that Argentina is in tenth place, with Europe still their main destination. The UK and US are in the first and second place respectively, France is fifth, Thailand sixth and Holland seventh, just the way they were in 2013.

Italy has fallen to fourth place on the list compared to Germany, which has moved one place up, while Portugal is down to ninth place and Belgium is number 8.

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