

21ST CENTURY, THE RISE OF TOURISM AND TOURISMOPHOBIA



The annual number of travelers in 2017 could surpass the 1.3 billion mark. With the rise of low-cost airlines, the number of annual flights has also grown: more than 37 million per year. Right now, 4.2 million seats are available for those who travel by plane. The rise of tourism is evident.

According to experts, within a decade, 10,000 new aircraft will be added to the world's commercial fleet. Only in air tickets, tourists will invest more than 630,000 million dollars in 2017. Tourism represents 10% of the world's GDP.

However, all this huge growth does not happen without generating new problems and debates. Looking at the whole, **the rise of tourism could be one of the most emblematic phenomena of these first years of the 21st century.** A quick look at the matter can shed some ideas about it.

Several reports indicate that more than 5,000 cities are facing reforms to attract as many visitors as possible. This refers not only to infrastructure and urban planning, but also to the structuring of historical and cultural stories, to the development of local gastronomy, to the education of people trained to receive tourists.

These investments and responses have, in contrast, severe critics: architects, urban planners, sociologists and historians, who maintain that the real city is destroyed to replace it by stage devices, that supposed gastronomic traditions are invented. They are nothing but fakes to attract tourists. An example says it all: someone visiting the tourist city of Barcelona is in La Rambla, a Pakistani street vendor, who sells handicrafts from Mexico, which has been made in China.

While some cities aspire to become poles of tourism attraction, others question it. One of the reactions occurs against tourism that does not produce dividends for cities. For example, the large cruise ships that arrive at ports in the Caribbean and Europe: travelers get off, go around the place, visit places of interest, do not drink a coffee, and return to their ship, where they travel under the all-inclusive mode. Authorities, resident associations, merchants and citizens, especially in Europe, have begun to wonder what is the benefit of receiving tourists who do not consume, but simply walk and watch.

In the case of emblematic destinations, a reaction known as "tourismophobia" has begun to appear. In cities of Spain - a country that has been recognized by the World Economic Forum as the best tourist destination in the world - such as Barcelona and San Sebastian, attacks against visitors have begun: posters demanding that they leave, punctures on bicycles and tourism buses, and other forms of open rejection.

There have even been actions of a physical nature: groups of parishioners have prevented tourists from entering certain bars, occupied by them. In a report made by Radio Televisión de España, a Basque citizen claimed: I have the right to have a coffee with my friends in town, without any tourists nearby. Is it, perhaps, an expression of xenophobia?

A curious phenomenon is beginning to take place, typical of the contradictions of the 21st century: that success becomes a source of difficulties. In places that are large receivers of tourists, authorities and citizens must face new problems: illegal offer of tourist housing, establishment of drug distribution bands, increase in the amount of garbage, tourists who travel to drink wildly and impede the rest of the residents. The growth of tourism, in addition, has served for terrorists and gangs of criminals to move to other countries, settle and start operating.

Another current that should not be ignored: the concern for the protection of the environment. The year 2017 was declared by the UN as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. Some government decisions are exemplary. This is the case of Iceland, a country that is increasingly visited by international holidaymakers, which is advancing in the process that will convert more than 70% of its territory into a national park. Or Canada, which this year hopes to complete the construction of The Great Trail, a route of 24,000 kilometers - yes, 24,000 kilometers - that travelers can travel on foot, by horse or bicycle, but never by car. Or the case of the historic decision of President Obama, in August 2016, which ordered the expansion of the Papahānaumokuākea National Monument, Hawaii, which means establishing a protected territory of 1,500,000 square kilometers - a territory larger than Peru - , where between 7,000 and 8,000 animal species live.

This exhibition of issues, to which many others could be added, is representative of the economic, cultural, urban, environmental, social and cultural problems that are present in our time. Some of these conflicts will tend to worsen in the coming years. It does not seem that the decision of the authorities of the countries can be sufficient. Too many interests are at stake. The search for equilibria allows no other path than that of dialogue and agreements.

Date: 2017-11-06

Article link: <https://www.tourism-review.com/the-rise-of-tourism-causes-problems-news10360>