

THE 'TRUMP EFFECT' DECREASES THE TOURISM NUMBERS IN THE US



Several months ago various critics pointed at President Trump's rhetoric against Mexicans, Muslims and other ethnic groups warning that it would harm the American tourism industry. Now, the official data are available showing the impact of president Trump on the tourism numbers.

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, **the number of international visitors that arrived to the United States during the first six months of this year decreased by almost 4 percent, over the same period last year.** Comparatively, international tourism worldwide increased by 4 percent during the same period, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) based in London.

This is bad news for the United States. Tourism is the second largest export industry in the country and supports 15 million jobs, according to the U.S. Travel Association. For every 4 percent decrease in tourism revenue, around 344,000 jobs are lost in the country, says the WTTC.

International arrivals to the United States during the first half of the year fell by 30 percent from Middle Eastern countries, 16 percent from Mexico, 14 percent from Central and South America, and almost 2 percent from Europe.

Miami was the exception to the rule. The tourism numbers increased 4 percent in Miami and 20 percent in Fort Lauderdale, during the first semester of this year, but this was due to an increase in available flights to South Florida from Germany, Argentina and other countries.

According to Gloria Guevara, WTTC's President & CEO, the decline of international tourism numbers in the U.S. could be explained by a combination of several factors, including "the feeling of not being welcome", President Trump's travel ban for citizens of several countries in the Middle East, and a relatively strong US dollar.

Interestingly, Mexican tourism to Canada has increased by 53 percent this year. This is because, among other things, the Canadian government lifted the visa requirements for Mexican tourists, earlier this year.

While Trump promises to build a wall on the border, and offends almost all Mexicans by saying that the majority of the nearly 6 million undocumented Mexicans are 'criminals' and 'rapists', Canada has sent a strong message that Mexicans are welcome.

Then there is Trump's constant negative rhetoric against Muslims which results in many tourists from Arab countries to go to Europe. Tourism to Spain and Portugal is reaching historic records, according to WTTC figures.

Simultaneously, the number of international students in US universities - around 1.1 million - will fall by 7 percent in 2018, according to preliminary estimates from the Institute of International Education (IIE). This is, among other things, because "the current social and political environment in the US makes people feel unwelcome," the IIE report stated.

The US as a country brand is suffering under the first populist president of the United States in a long time. A survey by the Pew Research Center found that only 49 percent of respondents in 37 countries had a positive view of the United States, compared to 64 percent at the end of the Obama administration.

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