

TOURISM SECTOR ENDANGERED BY THE CRISIS IN NICARAGUA



A large number of hotel reservation cancellations by tourists who planned to visit Nicaragua in April affected the entire national hotel chains. The projected fall of the tourism sector is expected to reach 20% during the year, due to the crisis in Nicaragua caused by the repression against the protests and demonstrations of the citizens, mostly students.

Gonzalo Hernández Cáceres is very concerned about the **current stagnation of the tourism sector since President Daniel Ortega's repression against the self-organized protests by university students, supported by most of the citizens.**

“Before the Government’s brutal repression of the young students and the population that supported them, our company received every month between 400 and 500 domestic and foreign tourists to the Somoto Canyon, and since April 17, we’ve hardly received about five tourists,” explained Gonzalo Hernández Cáceres, owner of Namancambre, a tour operator company in the city of Somoto.

Hernández Cáceres, who is also the president of the National Chamber of Tourism (CANATUR) in the department of Madriz, said that other business owners who offer tour packages in the city of Somoto currently experience the same situation.

“Here, the foreign tourist has been scared off, let alone the domestic ones, out of fear of something happening in the canyon area or during the trip from Managua, where our offices are located, because of the images they’ve seen about our country’s situation and insecurity,” he said.

This alarming number of cancellations of hotel reservations not only had an adverse effect on the hotel sector, but the entire chain that works in that particular market, according to reports by the representatives of the Leather and Footwear industry of the country.

At least for the last two weeks, they report a 60% fall in sales of leather products that are purchased by tourists as a souvenir of their trip to Nicaragua.

Alejandro Delgado, president of Nicaragua’s Chamber of Leather and Footwear (CAMCUNIC), said that 80% of the workshops have put their production to a halt because sales are not sufficient to continue operating, which puts the businesses’ sustainability at risk.

“Tourists support us a lot, especially in Granada and Masaya, by purchasing some souvenirs to take

back home, so this decline in tourism is drastic and it has also affected us,” said Delgado.

Since it is a low season for international tourists, the tourism sector is mostly sustained by the arrival of Central American and national tourists. Delgado points out that Costa Ricans are the ones who buy the most Nicaraguan-made shoes.

The vice president of the Nicaraguan Council of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (CONIMIPYME), Freddy Cruz, admitted that the companies **most affected by the political crisis in Nicaragua are the small hotels, because virtually all hotels at national level have reported low to no occupancy.**

For his part, Ariel Brenes Alfaro, owner of the famous Colonial hotel in the city of Somoto, said that most restaurant, hotel and hostel owners are experiencing a worrisome decrease in their number of customers, mostly foreign tourists, due to the delicate and unstable situation that has developed throughout the country.

“Very few people are coming to the hotels or visiting the restaurants because of the latest events that have occurred in our country,” insisted Brenes Alfaro.

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