

TOURISM DECLINE REPORTED BY SPAIN FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 2009



The Spanish Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism, María Reyes Maroto, has estimated that 2018 will close with the arrival of 81.2 million visitors, 0.8% less than last year, whose 81.9 million figure marked a historic record, meaning this is the first tourism decline since 2009.

Between 2010 and 2017, the sector has chained 8 consecutive years of increases in terms of international tourist arrivals.

However, the upward streak will stop at the end of the year. **This change in trend has been explained by the lower dynamism of the main issuing markets, the recovery of competing destinations in the Mediterranean, and the institutional crisis experienced in Catalonia**, the main autonomous region that, as a tourist destination, sees almost a quarter of the tourist influx.

As opposed to what will happen this year with the number of arrivals, expenditure made by these visitors in Spain will continue its upward trend.

The forecast regarding expenditure, released in advance by the minister, reflects that the year will close with 89,440 million euros, 2.8% more than 2017. The rise will be moderate this year, since in 2017 the income from foreign tourists rose by 12.4% compared to 2016.

The head of the tourism office has highlighted today that these data represent the “normalization of flows with an increase in quality of visitors.”

For the initial accumulated balance of the first eight months of the year (in the absence of official data for September), 57.3 million international tourists visited Spain, a figure similar to the same period of 2017 (a mere 0.1% less), with a total expenditure of 62,230 million, which is a 2.8% increase.

José Luis Zoreda, vice-president of EXCELTUR, emphasized in the presentation of a study prepared by the General Council of Economists that, by the end of September, tourism is slowing down in Spain, but that in no case this means a collapse or a significant tourism decline.

Zoreda explained that this behavior of the sector is due to the reduced dynamism of the main issuing markets, and the recovery of competing destinations (such as Turkey, Tunisia, and Egypt).

Between January and August, the average expenditure per tourist was 145 euros, 6.5% more than in the same period of 2017, while for the last quarter, the Government forecasts that international visitors will spend 17,539 million, 3.4% more than in the fourth quarter of last year.

Following COYUNTUR's quarterly report, between October and the end of the year, the country expects the arrival of 15.3 million visitors, 2.2% less than in the same period of 2017, which registered 15.6 million visitors.

Reyes Maroto, however, has described these data as "very promising" and that Spain remains "a great tourist destination."

Catalonia and the Balearic Islands, regarded in this order as the main tourist destinations by autonomous communities, reported drops in the number of tourists until the month of August, and compared to the first eight months of 2017.

In the case of Catalonia, the main destination for arrivals, it registered a 23.4% of total visitors until August, when the figure decreased by 5.5%, while visitors' expenditure soared by 6.6%.

Experts say that with little doubts the political instability is a fact and a reason for the Catalanian tourism decline.

However, Turespaña (TourSpain) has strengthened abroad its marketing campaign, promoting Catalonia as a destination with 196 performances.

As for the Balearic Islands, experts point that it is a "different" case than Catalonia, and has reported that her office is working together with the regional administration to prevent congestion, improve the destination, and the model of tourism. The model for the Balearic Islands is a bet for quality rather than quantity, due to the fact that it is a destination with limited space.

The Spanish Tourism Authority has also reported a "strengthening" of rural tourism, which until August has accounted for a 2.7% increase in overnight stays.

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