


TOURIST EXPENDITURE EXPECTED TO GROW BY 3% IN SPAIN

 Spanish tourism authorities expect to close 2018 with a 3% increase in tourist expenditure, despite the fact that the arrivals will drop by 0.8% in comparison to the record year of 2017.

The information was disclosed by the Secretary of State for Tourism, Isabel Oliver, at the opening of the 4th edition of Summit Shopping Tourism, revealing that this year, the country will see roughly 900,000 fewer arrivals. **Despite of this, tourist expenditure will continue to rise and reach up to 90 billion euros compared to the 87 billion reported last year.**

“In the first nine months, tourism continues to grow in Spain,” said Oliver, speaking of similar figures to those reached in 2017 at this time of the year. The difference is that “expenditure has already grown by 2.5%,” against the drop in arrivals. However, it is considered a moderate growth compared to the 12.2% recorded in 2017, the year in which more than 81.8 million tourists visited the country.

The shopping tourism segment is critical in order to maintain this growth trend in expenditure, which is something the entire sector is after. And that’s why Oliver pointed out that about “74,500 people traveled to Spain exclusively for shopping” so “there is work to be done”. “We must raise the level of diversification and sophistication of the offer,” she insisted, especially since “this [type of] tourism helps fight seasonality”.

In 2017, Spanish tourism only saw 3.7% of Chinese visitors who arrived in Europe, about 515,000 out of the 13.6 million Chinese arrivals. The country ranks fourth as the preferred destination by shopping tourists, despite being the first in the world in travel and tourism competitiveness. “We are still lagging behind in shopping tourism,” acknowledged Oliver.

Long-distance countries, and especially the Chinese market, who remains positioned as the world's leading tourist market, are the main objective of the sector in order to increase tourism revenues.

The ambassador of China, Lyu Fan, in his speech at this year’s forum titled “What are the keys to a change of positioning in Spain? Outbound countries, destination competitiveness, and smart promotion”, has requested the streamlining of visa processing arrangements, saying that “it is a very important element”. Currently, they only represent 0.6% of the total visitors, but “the Chinese have their tourist eyes in Spain”.

According to Fan, “eight European countries have already taken new measures, and as they come in effect, they will stand above” Spain. In Spain, a Chinese tourist takes about 15 days to process their

visa, opposite to the 5 business days it takes in Italy or 3 in Germany.

Therefore, the Secretary of State has recognized that, although promotion is an important part, “issuing visas for people coming from these markets” is a critical element, which is also essential for the growth of tourist expenditure in Spain, as the sector highly anticipates.

Specifically, the Chinese embassy in Spain says that the prospects for Spain are “optimistic” when it comes to Chinese visitors. However, they demand some form of “easiness” that Chinese tourists consider important when it comes to choosing one destination over another. **According to the Chinese diplomat, this will be achieved with the implementation of new systems, such as mobile payment systems which they use regularly, that “can help increase arrivals”.**

Direct air connectivity is also a decisive factor for this market. Spain currently lists seven flights with China. “We are committed to increasing direct air connectivity,” mentioned Oliver, who in this regard highlighted that, for example, they are “working to reinstate the Bangkok–Madrid route”, which closed in 2015.

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