

MOROCCO TOURISM: CHINESE INFLUX

MOMENTUM RUNS OUT OF STEAM



While Chinese tourist inflow has increased exponentially since visas were lifted in 2016, the air demand has run its course and the growth is more moderate now. According to experts, Morocco tourism businesses expect to host 200,000 Chinese in 2019 compared to 180,000 a year earlier. This is a far cry from the 500,000 figure promised by Mohamed Sajid in 2020.

After 2 years of reaping the benefits of visa-free travel for Chinese travelers, Morocco is facing a slowdown in the number of visitors to an emerging market with enormous potential.

While waiting to have the final figures of Chinese arrivals during the first 4 months of 2019, a ministerial source announced that the most likely estimate is between 60,000 and 70,000.

Compared to the 100,000 received during the same period in 2018, this figure gives the impression of a real disaffection with the Chinese market, but according to another expert, this decrease is completely normal because it simply signals a return to normal.

Indeed, according to the source, during the two years following the lifting of visas, Morocco tourism experienced a sharp acceleration in Chinese arrivals, which had literally exploded.

After this low base effect, the country moves on to a more natural and simpler growth phase that contrasts with 2017 and 2018. Today, the previous three-digit annual growth rates are a thing of the past because this emerging market has stabilized and normalized, but its growth is still very interesting.

If during the period January–April 2018, inbound travel had a tremendous acceleration, some estimates show that the same period in 2019 it will be much more modest in terms of numbers of arrivals.

Pending a direct air route between Morocco and China, the new Istanbul–Marrakech route provided by Turkish Airlines is to be welcomed as it will greatly improve air connectivity with China, particularly for long-haul travelers who prefer combined stays.

Very present in the major Chinese provinces, this Turkish company will allow Morocco to benefit from the international hub of Istanbul to bring more Chinese citizens to Morocco via Marrakech.

Until the opening of a Morocco–China route, it is certain that the new flight between Turkey and the Kingdom will boost the number of Chinese arrivals, as Turkey has 25 daily flights to China.

Having already maximized the initial potential, Morocco tourism really needs new air connection channels with a direct flight that will boost the development of this market, which still has largely under-

exploited potential.

It's estimated that by the end of the year, even without new air routes between Morocco and China, Morocco will end 2019 with about 200,000 Chinese arrivals, about 20,000 more than in 2018 which recalls that in 2015, Morocco welcomed only 15,000 Chinese tourists.

It should be recalled that at a press conference, the Minister of Tourism, Air Transport, Handicrafts, and Solidarity Economy announced that Morocco would receive 500,000 Chinese in 2020.

Indeed, even with the opening of a direct airline, the Kingdom will not be able to win 300,000 additional tourists in one year.

In addition, several tourism industry professionals complain about competition from the illegal market (run by the former Chinese guides) that offers poor services and does not encourage these tourists to return.

The potential is huge. Chinese arrivals are increasing, and their revenues are falling because of the unfair competition that is being made in China is not being tackled by the authorities.

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