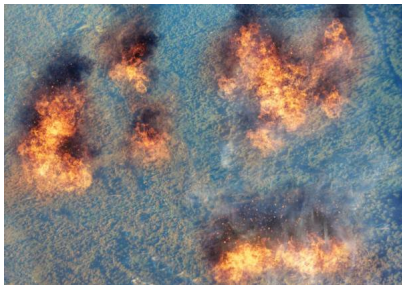


ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS MAY SERIOUSLY COMPROMISE BRAZIL'S TOURISM



Rich in biodiversity and natural landscape, Brazil is the number one country in natural attractions in Latin America and the second in the world, according to the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019 of the World Economic Forum. The environmental risks present in the country however seriously endanger local tourism.

The tourism industry accounts for 8.1% of Brazil's GDP, totaling US\$152.5 billion, according to a study by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). The survey also shows that the industry currently employs 6.9 million people, representing 7.5% of all jobs created in Brazil.

However, certain events - many caused by human activities - that put nature at risk, may harm Brazil's tourism and the revenues it generates for the country.

"There is a clear relationship between the protection of nature and economic development, not just in Brazil, but in the whole world," explains Marion Silva, Director of Protected Areas at the Boticário Grupo Foundation for Nature Protection.

"We take advantage of the products offered by nature such as tourist attractions, and develop strategies to stop environmental risks and problems that may endanger this opportunity. For this, we need the involvement of people from different sectors of society, such as entrepreneurs, government agencies, researchers, private institutions and civil society," he says.

The following are the four main environmental risks that may harm both tourism and overall Brazil's economy:

Oil spill

Among the most recent environmental disasters in Brazil is the oil spill in the Atlantic Ocean, which reached the coast in August and continues to affect the beaches and coastline in the Northeast. Despite being the worst oil spill in Brazilian history, researchers have stated that in some cases there will be no permanent damage to the marine life or to humans, although it will still take decades to mitigate.

A study by the Brazilian Ministry of Tourism reveals that tourism-related activities in that region generate approximately R\$45 million (about US\$10.7 million) each year, which is mainly from visitors to beaches and natural landscapes. This disaster has also affected fishing and cooking.

Wildfires

In 2019, Brazil recorded the highest number of fires in the last seven years, according to the National Institute for Space Research (INPE, in Spanish). The INPE reported more than 100,000 fires across the country, with 20,000 in Mato Grosso, and most occurring in the Amazon basin.

According to the Amazon Environmental Research Institute (IPAM), economic losses in the biome resulting from fires could reach up to R\$97 million (about US\$ 23 million) per year due to the tons of

carbon dioxide released to the atmosphere, the potential impacts on biodiversity, the imbalance of ecosystems, climate change, soil erosion and damage caused by plumes of smoke moving to other regions.

But the problem is not limited to the Amazon. Other biomes such as the Atlantic forest, Pampa, Cerrado, and Pantanal have also seen a rise in fires throughout the year.

‘Predatory’ tourism

As opposed to sustainable tourism, ‘predatory’ tourism is the concept in which visits create adverse environmental, cultural and social impacts on tourist destinations. This practice directly affects the economic development of the region. On the one hand, predatory tourism is associated with tourists who do not follow the rules, contributing to the depletion of natural resources, social and economic imbalance, as well as cultural deterioration.

Tourist sites must be prepared with adequate infrastructure to welcome visitors and protect local heritage, with the goal of finding a balance between revenues and quality of life. The damage to historical and cultural heritage, natural resources and urban planning may be irreversible, and the cost of repairing it can be far more expensive than investing in infrastructure to host the visitors. The economic damages become even greater if the destination gains a bad reputation due to the lack of tourism management, which later translates into fewer visitors and revenues.

Deforestation

As it happens with wildfires, deforestation also represents great economic, social and environmental impact, causing loss of biodiversity, habitat destruction and worsening of the global climate crisis.

Soil erosion caused by poor practices has been responsible for the loss of productivity in 23% of the land area, which represents the loss of approximately 10% of the total annual gross national income. The data is taken from the report of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) of the United Nations (UN).

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