

CORONAVIRUS AND POLITICAL CLIMATE THREATEN MICE TOURISM IN BARCELONA



Last week, the Hotel Association of Barcelona warned of the gradual fall of MICE tourism in Barcelona mostly due to the political climate in Catalonia. The association has also expressed its concern about the coronavirus outbreak as the Mobile World Congress (MWC) in the city draws near.

After ending 2019 with a hotel occupancy record of 82%, 1.7% above the 2018 figure, the local hotel managers fear a slowdown due to the coronavirus and Brexit. The association, however, highlighted the impact of the downward trend on MICE tourism, which adds 1.9 billion euros a year and attracts 27% of visitors to the city.

Jordi Mestre, president of this association, claims that, although Barcelona continues to host large events and fairs, such as the Fira de Barcelona and other mega-events, **the decline is mainly affecting business meetings and small congresses held in the hotels of the city.**

According to data and statistics from the Barcelona tourism report of 2018, the latest available, the city held 1,728 business meetings that year, 19% less than in 2017, when there were 2,134 meetings. And in 2017 there had already been a 12.5% fall compared to 2016, which was also preceded by a 23.8% drop compared to 2015.

Manel Casals, general director of the association, said that the decline in MICE tourism in Barcelona is explained by “the negative talks regarding tourism in Barcelona” that occurred a few years ago, due to “lack of tourism promotion” and “legal insecurity”, but he also pointed out that one of the main reasons is the political climate in Catalonia.

Mestre says that **when companies organize events, they don’t want to see “a conflict” in the city where they are held, so the political unrest is something that weighs heavily.**

Casals recalled that following the protests in the city against the sentence of the leaders of the Catalan independence movement, there were many cancellations due to the “sociopolitical climate”, so how the city is perceived after those incidents is a factor that still worries the hotel managers, as well as the image of insecurity depicted last summer.

Despite the slowdown of MICE tourism, Mestre says that 2019 ended with positive numbers since Barcelona broke the record in hotel occupancy – slightly above the occupancy levels of 2016, although not in terms of turnover – and noted that the average room rate rose by 7.5 euros, reaching 140 euros (5.7% increase) while Revenue per Available Room stood at 115 euros (7.5% more).

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