

ITALY: BORDERS ARE OPEN BUT TOURISTS MISSING



After a tough period in the tourism industry, the sector is gradually reviving, especially in Europe. Countries of the European Union and Schengen are easing most of the restrictions on air and land travel and thus, the expectation is that the summer season will take place at least in a somewhat restricted form.

One of the countries most affected by the pandemic was Italy. And it is also a country that relies greatly on the tourism sector as a source of income. Tourism generates EUR 153 billion a year in Italy, as per data from 2017, with 33.5% represented by international tourists. In 2019 the sector employed 4.2 million people and generated 13.2% of the country's gross domestic product.

31 Million Tourists Missing

All the above-mentioned numbers are a clear sign of how tourism is important in Italy and the current situation will not benefit the Belpaese. According to ENIT (National Tourism Board), there will be 31 million fewer foreign tourists in the summer of 2020 in Italy.

International overnight stays will decrease by 49% and will return to pre-Covid-19 levels in 2023. A survey conducted by Statista predicts a fall of 29%, with Veneto (-3.9 million), Tuscany (-3.3 million), Lazio (-2.9 million) and Emilia Romagna (-2.5 million) being the top five most affected regions.

Empty City Centers and Hotels

In Via del Lavatore, which leads to the legendary Trevi fountain in the center of Rome, it is usually difficult to avoid crowds of tourists. Now, however, it is quiet. Only a few bars and souvenir shops are open. While life and restaurants in the residential areas of the capital are picking up speed again, there are almost no guests in the city center.

"We will not open for the time being," says a restaurant owner standing between stacked tables. "Maybe we won't open until next year." 80% of his guests are American, he explains.

Hotels are also dealing with a difficult situation. Many bookings were cancelled during the lockdown and new ones are arriving very slowly, with little support granted from the government to support the struggling businesses.

In addition, the hotel industry has to cope with the rising popularity of holiday homes. The reason for this is that many travelers think that they are safer there from the virus and can move more freely.

The Mafia to Take Advantage?

This somewhat dire situation in the tourism industry could result in a collateral effect in which the Italian mafia would play a principal role. **A recent report by the Italian police warns that criminal organizations will benefit from the current tourism crisis.**

The reason for this is that only they currently have excess capital to invest in the businesses of

desperate hoteliers, beach bar operators and restaurant owners. This infiltration can only be prevented by the government with immediate capital injections and pragmatic projects for the revival of the industry.

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