

TRAVEL BEHAVIOR IN TRANSITION DUE TO CORONA



The Corona pandemic has changed the holiday plans of many. Regional destinations instead of palm islands - sustainable trend or short-term emergency solution? What does the change in travel behavior mean for the tourism industry and the environment?

Corona pandemic has changed our lives in almost all areas - including travel behavior. If many people were drawn to faraway countries before Corona, most of them will choose a nearby holiday destination this year, ideally one that can be reached without a plane. **This is impressively demonstrated by the number of new registrations of motorhomes in Germany in May 2020: up by 29 % compared to the same month last year.**

Is this performance only due to the special Corona situation? Will long-distance travelers such as the Americans, Chinese, British and French soon be flying around the world again as they did before Covid-19 erupted? Or will the trend emerging here change the industry forever?

There are tourism experts who believe that we are only in an intermediate phase and that travel behavior will quickly return to its former level once the pandemic is over. They compare the corona shock with the slumps caused by one-time traumatic events such as the terrorist attacks of September 11.

No Long Distance Travel This Year

The Corona crisis is not a one-off event, however - it continues. Never before have we found ourselves in a situation like this. As long as no vaccine or effective drug against Covid-19 has been found, the current travel behavior of people is unlikely to change.

In the current situation, many people are reluctant to face the possible risks of travelling to more distant countries. Health care is not always at the same level and the news is too volatile. Therefore, due to the risk of a second wave of corona infections, regional tourism will remain the preferred holiday option this year, even after the further easing of travel restrictions.

The End of the Cruise Industry?

This has already had a huge impact on airlines. Airlines such as Lufthansa or Air France have had to accept state aid, and the consolidation of the sector is likely to continue. Although short-haul leisure travel should recover in the medium term, the sector is still in the process of consolidating. However, it will remain difficult to find providers who specialize in long-haul flights.

The cruise industry will be hit particularly hard: it will take several years before the revenues of 2019 can be reached again. The industry has traditionally had high investment costs, and at the same time revenues collapsed. The companies still have reserves. But a second corona wave would have disastrous consequences for operators and could lead to the decline of the entire industry. This is also reflected in the share prices of cruise ship companies, which have collapsed by up to 75 %.

Who Benefits from a Change in Travel Behavior

However, one man's suffering is another man's joy - in this case not only those of the bicycle and caravan manufacturers as well as the regional holiday providers but also those of the climate. Since emission-intensive travel such as cruises and long-distance travel by plane decreased during the Corona pandemic, CO2 emissions have fallen significantly. For example, an international research team reported in the trade journal "Nature Climate Change" that global CO2 emissions at the beginning of April were around 17 % lower than in the previous year. Aviation had even emitted around 60 % less CO2 than the average for the previous year.

Corona Accelerates Changes in Tourism

Such a drastic reduction will certainly not be permanent, as the "lockdown" measures of many governments are now being gradually eased. But it would already make a significant difference if only a part of the population were to adjust their travel behavior.

Moreover, temporarily giving up long-distance travel could lead people to discover the attractions of closer destinations: shorter journeys, lower costs, more flexibility and independence, for example when travelling by car, motorhome or bicycle. In the medium to long term, this could lead to a change in travel behavior - people may no longer take a long-distance trip every year.

This is also supported by the results of a study published in the European Journal of Social Psychology. According to the study, it takes between 18 and 254 days for people to establish a habit. The corona crisis will last longer and change consumer and travel behavior in the long term. This does not mean that from now on everyone will only travel by car or train - but in the medium to long term preferences are likely to shift.

What's more, this trend was not caused by the corona pandemic - it was already apparent before. Even before the crisis, people began to question mass consumption and travel behavior, often driven by cheap prices; the term "flight shame" was first used in a Swedish newspaper in 2018. Corona accelerates this change. The goal should not be to abandon consumption at the expense of growth but to strive for qualitatively better growth that is largely decoupled from CO2 emissions. A trend towards regional tourism could certainly help here.

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