

TOURISM IN LATIN AMERICA: CLOSED HOTELS, JOB LOSSES, AND VIRTUAL TOURS



From the beginning of the pandemic, it was known that tourism in Latin America would be the most affected sector in the region. At that time, no one could have imagined that after six months of social distancing and self-isolation, the possibility of traveling would still be distant and that there would be no certainty when this activity would resume completely.

Although the collective paranoia has diminished, the restrictive measures are expected to continue for the rest of the year and even well into 2021, making necessary a renewal of the industry in order to survive.

While its reinvention promises to reactivate Latin America economically, it will also benefit people and have an impact on health and well-being. After months of self-isolation, people will see the possibility of travel as something urgent and necessary to bring happiness and stability into their lives.

It seems to be necessary to deconstruct the concepts of “travel” and “tourism” as we know them in order to expand the possibilities and create new experiences under this new reality, allowing brands and companies to retain their place and importance.

The Situation in Latin America

At the regional level, international arrivals dropped by 36% between January and April of this year, while the approximate loss due to lower revenues from international tourism is US\$195 billion. In Argentina, for example, 65% of the hotel and hospitality industry and 75% of food businesses expect to file for bankruptcy if the current situation continues. Meanwhile, in Colombia 80% of the hotels have already closed, in Mexico 538,000 tourism-related jobs have been lost, and in Chile, losses of US\$3.9 billion are projected for 2020.

The region is clearly affected and the numbers show that global tourism has fallen sharply: for this year, worldwide revenues were estimated at US\$712 billion, but the number has been revised down to 447 billion. The impact will largely depend on the date for the reopening of international tourism, that is, if it opens in September, losses will be 70%, but if it does so in December, losses could be up to 80%.

What Tourists Look for in the New Travel World

The global lockdown increases the desire to escape and, as is known, traveling is key to well-being and health since it provides happiness and emotional stability. Going on vacation allows people to physically and mentally disconnect from everyday chores, reduce stress, enhance creativity, and increase satisfaction levels.

While it is true that the desire to travel has increased and people need this activity in their lives, the other truth is that fear prevails, so safety has become the priority in any experience.

77% of people across Latin America prefer to make national trips instead of international ones. When surveying which type of trip, the majority (32%), especially the youngest, look for options that

allow them to be in contact with nature, while 25% want to travel abroad, and only 20% venture to other cities.

The New Travel Trends

Connecting with nature, relaxing and disconnecting are the main aspects that people look for when organizing a trip. Some concepts that we will begin to hear more often are:

Staycation: this involves taking a vacation at home, or taking the concept of “home” to another destination. This trend increased in Argentina since there were no certainties about the possibility of traveling outside the country. Many of those who live in the cities decided to allocate that money to rent a house in the outskirts in order to continue working while the children have a chance of enjoying the outdoors.

Adventures with purpose: exploring remote natural sites in order to contribute to a social cause, in addition to offering the possibility of getting out of the routine and doing physical activities.

Glamping: this one mixes the concept of camping with luxury in ultra-equipped tents, including all comforts and amenities.

When it comes to lodging, people prefer private options, such as renting an Airbnb (26%) or a boutique hotel (21%). This is because these proposals turn out to be safer and generate greater trust. Another important priority for travelers is hygiene and following each of the health protocols in the different phases of the trip.

Technology, the Greatest Ally of Tourism

Tourism at home is what is happening in Latin America and it is here to stay, especially for the population at risk who seek liberating and satisfying experiences from the comfort of home.

There are different types that can be enjoyed without the need to physically travel to a destination:

Virtual tours: people turn to virtual tours for recreation, but they are also a way to obtain knowledge.

360° Tourism: this is a way to discover museums, monuments and points of interest of different cities. In addition, many hotels use this system for those who are already looking for their next accommodation, which allows them to know the facilities in depth.

Augmented Reality: this technology creates immersive and playful experiences so that users can be transported to any place at any time they want, in a detailed and realistic way.

Tourism in Latin America and elsewhere is reactivating slowly, and there is still a long way before tourists are able to travel with complete freedom again. The tourism industry, at all levels, has been implementing safety and health protocols for months to offer future travelers quality and reliability in their services. A new way of traveling has arrived, and everyone will have to adapt to continue enjoying new experiences despite the novel but strict protocols.

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