

# QUITO SPEEDS UP PLANS TO RESTART TOURISM



The closure of hotels and restaurants in Quito, the capital of Ecuador, has led the city council to re-evaluate its strategies. National tourists are the key to restart tourism.

Six of the largest hotels in Quito have already closed their doors. The most recent of them, the Marriott, ceased operations after 21 years of customer service, following the Best Western Plaza, Barnard, Citimed, Akros and Plaza Grande hotels.

The news took the city by surprise, but not Quito's tourist association, who explained that the **closure is the result a problem that began with the health emergency, which has caused losses of US\$1.6 billion** to the industry at the national level, and the laying off of about 40,000 workers.

"The restart of tourism is a beautiful speech that has not borne fruit because there are no real measures to mitigate the enormous losses we have suffered," said Raúl García, president of the Pichincha Chamber of Tourism. García says that of the 25,000 tourist establishments in the country, 5,000 of them are located in the capital.

"Quito is the gateway to domestic tourism and it is the most affected city. Urgent and defined measures are needed so that businesses do not continue to go bankrupt or close temporarily," said García. And while the association has made requests (such as free movement and the suspension of taxes), these have not been implemented, so Quito's city council has taken certain measures in that direction.

The most recent ones were announced by Mayor Jorge Yunda. 80% reduction for the rent of public spaces in the historic center, 50% reduction in the payment of the municipal license for tourist businesses, 30% increase of capacity for events such as conventions, weddings and baptisms, removal of movement restrictions for rented cars, authorization for bars in the process of turning into restaurants to freely operate, and development of tourist programs and activities to encourage the arrival of visitors are the seven measures introduced by the city council.

But how much could this generate for the city? The numbers are uncertain, says Patricio Velásquez, technical manager of Quito Tourism.

"We know that the restart of tourism will begin with the domestic market and move on to the regional one. The last thing to reactivate will be international tourism, and we know that, according to World Tourism Organization figures, returning to pre-pandemic levels could take three to five years. For this reason, our emphasis until the first quarter of next year is on the domestic market, on Quito citizens," explained Velásquez. In any case, revenues will be far less than the US\$24,426,598 reported by Quito Tourism in the last quarter of 2019.

For now, Quito Tourism is focused on reactivating the industry. Within the city, there have been promotions of tours through the historic center, an area in which the health emergency forced the

closure of 36% of its premises. Likewise, plans have been activated for sectors such as La Mariscal and Cumbayá.

Velásquez says that visits to rural areas also show an upward trend, so the entity is working on campaigns for citizens to visit nearby towns such as Nanegalito, Guale, Guayllabamba and Machachi.

However, the association is still not satisfied. **The removal of overnight and occupancy fees was a well-received step, acknowledges the association, as well as the activation of conferences and fairs, and the increase in capacity in the premises.** But these measures, says Holbach Muñeton, president of the National Federation of Tourism Chambers, are not enough to offset the damage.

“37,500 jobs have been lost and other measures are needed, such as a further increase in capacity, extended hours and credits,” he stated.

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