

FLORIDA EXPECTS TOURISM RECOVERY TO COME IN THE MIDDLE OF 2021



Florida's vital tourism industry, like many others in the world, has been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic, but state experts forecast a possible tourism recovery by the middle of next year.

According to the analysis released by the Florida Economic Estimating Conference, the high number of visitors reported in 2019 could be reached again in 2022 once the long-awaited vaccine is introduced and the COVID-19 virus is finally overcome.

In fact, Visit Florida, the state's official tourism authority, reported a drop of almost 32% in visitors during the third quarter of this year, and a reduction of 34% so far this year after recording a 60.5% decrease in the second quarter of 2020 compared to the same period of 2019.

Just a couple of months ago, Amy Baker, coordinator of the state's Office of Economic and Demographic Research, noted that non-tourism sectors could see a faster recovery if a vaccine was available before the start of the fiscal year 2022 on July 1.

"We always talk about tourism and how sensitive the industry is when something happens," argued Baker. "So with the coronavirus outbreak, we've actually seen probably the worst that we could see in terms of shrinkage," she added.

In light of the situation, state analysts predicted that the tourism recovery could take at least two years given the circumstances and the general uncertainty.

"Previous economic studies on disease outbreaks have shown that it can take up to 12 to 15 months after the outbreak ends for tourism to return to pre-disease levels. The magnitude of what's happening now is greater," said the Joint Legislative Budget Commission last September.

"Current expectations are for leisure travel to recover first, and then, in order, business travel, domestic air travel and international travel," as found in the September report. "Timing will be further influenced by the actual course of the disease and the recovery from the recession."

Prospects released now at the end of November suggest that Florida could return to having 30 million visitors per quarter by mid-2021.

Tourism figures for the third quarter of 2020 show "some signs of recovery," said Visit Florida President and CEO Dana Young.

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