

TOURISM IN COSTA RICA FELL BY ALMOST 70% IN 2020 DUE TO THE PANDEMIC



In 2020, Costa Rica received just over a million foreign tourists (1,011,912), a third of the average for previous years, due to the impact of COVID-19, according to a government announcement.

Migration data published by the Costa Rican Tourism Board (ICT) show that the number of foreign visitors has gradually recovered since August, when the country opened its borders after the total closure in March, when the first cases of coronavirus appeared.

Tourism in Costa Rica is one of the engines of the country's economy, contributing about 10 percent of GDP and generating 600.000 direct and indirect jobs before the pandemic.

"The uncertainties and restrictions of the pandemic have caused the collapse of world tourism and the country has received a third of the tourists who normally arrive to Costa Rica," said Tourism Minister Gustavo Segura.

The institution's figures show that 71.000 foreign visitors entered Costa Rica in December, almost double the number compared to November when the high season began. The increase was made possible by the return of 20 airlines operating in Costa Rica again.

To speed up entry, the country eliminated the requirement for a negative COVID-19 test in October. On November 1, it opened its borders without restrictions, removing the last impositions on the countries most affected by the pandemic.

Segura says the increase in visitor numbers was mainly due to the United States (45,641 tourists) and, to a lesser extent, to Europe, where mobility limitations still exist due to the spread of COVID-19. Throughout the year, Europe contributed 149,023 tourists coming mainly from France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain and the Netherlands, among others.

The ICT assured that there are some signs that show that the sector is gradually resuming its activities, although at a slow pace, since the pandemic is still in force worldwide.

"Each tourist who visits Costa Rica contributes to recovering tourism in Costa Rica, a process that, as we have repeatedly pointed out, will be gradual. Tourist visitation also activates a series of productive chains in the culture, agriculture, fishing, and commerce sectors, among others," added the minister.

As challenges for 2021, the ICT proposed **to keep the Costa Rican brand in force in international markets, guarantee the safety of tourists through specific health protocols for the sector and support tourism companies** so that they can overcome the crisis.

The country of 5 million inhabitants maintains a high level of COVID-19 infections. Since the beginning of the pandemic, there have been 181.093 cases and 2.367 deaths.

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