

# MEXICAN MINISTRY IS VERY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS



In less than a year, the coronavirus pandemic wiped almost a third of the world's air routes off the map, and in Mexico it caused an estimated 52% drop in international tourists arrivals, going from 45 million in 2019 to just over 21.6 million by the end of 2020.

Even though several countries have begun vaccination campaigns against the SARS-CoV-2, the pandemic is still strong as infections rise and lockdowns return following the discovery of novel strains that are more contagious, which have resulted in new border closures for some countries and, again, putting tourism into a complete halt.

This year, the travel industry was forced to revise its forecasts once more as thousands of workers in the sector lost their jobs or their source of income due to the newest lockdowns.

Mexico's Ministry of Tourism (SECTUR) estimated that this year, in the most optimistic scenario, **the arrival of international tourists would reach 42.7 million travelers, a figure still 5% below pre-pandemic levels**, when Mexico welcomed 45 million international travelers in 2019.

On the other hand, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and several business organizations predict that Mexico's recovery of international arrivals to pre-pandemic levels will be possible in 2024.

Rafael García, president of the Association of Hotels of Mexico City (AHCDMX), said that in the first quarter of this year it will be difficult for businessmen in the industry because there are no customers given the new 'limit' on leisure activities and the small influx of business travelers.

García explained that the outlook for this year is still complicated, since as of the first quarter, hoteliers who received loans at the beginning of the pandemic will have to make the first payments and do not have the necessary income to do so.

"For hoteliers, the first quarter will not surpass 25% [occupancy] and the second we will not surpass 30% occupancy, trying to close the year with 40% while we are very optimistic. It is a hard outlook for the year that begins," said García.

In a moderate scenario, the number of international tourists would reach 34.5 million at the end of the year, a figure 23% lower than in 2019.

In a pessimistic scenario, which foresees a longer duration of the pandemic, the recovery of travelers from North America would be slower, with only 26.3 million tourists projected for this year, or 41% less than in 2019.

Braulio Arsuaga, president of the National Tourism Business Council (CNET), predicted that this year's recovery will not only be gradual but also low, and will depend on the vaccination stages,

which in some way will boost travel confidence from abroad and within the country.

The vaccination campaign includes 5 stages, said Arsuaga, and indicated that stage 4 involves vaccinating people between 40 and 49 years old, that is, a group with the means to pay for their trips and those of their families.

This year, tourists from the U.S. traveling by air will reach 8,571,000, that is, 3,390,000 more than 2020 estimates in the optimistic scenario; the moderate one projects 6,359,000 tourists, or 1,177,000 more than in 2020; while the pessimistic one expects 5,234,000, only 51,800 above 2020 or a 1% increase.

One of the plans of the Ministry of Tourism and the Association of Tourism Secretaries (ASETUR) is **to increase the promotion of national destinations among U.S. citizens, its most important market and which Mexico relies on to recover foreign currency revenue.**

Given the limited participation of the government, the efforts have been focused on promoting destinations through local alliances: each of the states with a tourist offer focused on advertising their security and attractive protocols; however, Mexico as a brand has been fading from the minds of tourists.

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