

MEXICO: INTERNATIONAL TOURISM DOWN 46% DUE TO THE PANDEMIC



In 2020, Mexico welcomed 20 million fewer foreign tourists compared to 2019, accounting for a loss of more than 13 billion dollars.

Mexican tourism was one of the industries hit hardest by the current global health crisis. The 2020 account of the National Tourism Business Council (CNET) reveals that **the country welcomed 20 million fewer foreign tourists, which represents a 46% drop in international tourism compared to 2019.**

This collapse translates into a loss of US\$13 billion. The outlook for 2021 is not very promising: the industry estimates that reaching pre-pandemic levels will take between 30 and 48 months.

Before the crisis, the Mexican tourism sector had been registering a good run for years, even surpassing the expectations of the government. In 2019, the country welcomed 48 million tourists, which represented an 8% increase compared to the previous year. The turnover from these visits exceeded 24.8 billion dollars, a figure that was celebrated by both the authorities and the businessmen of the industry.

The goal was to continue promoting Mexico as a destination (the 'destino Mexico' campaign) at the main international tourism fairs, with an eye on the Chinese market, waiting to receive up to 158,000 tourists from the Asian giant. But the only thing the country received was bad news.

Following the announcement of the new coronavirus in Wuhan and the contingency measures that governments took to deal with the pandemic, world tourism took a severe blow: according to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), international arrivals in the world plummeted between 70 and 75%, representing losses of between 143 and 174 million jobs.

Domestic tourism also experienced a significant reduction in Mexico. The CNET report shows that the decrease in domestic arrivals to hotel rooms would have been 55%. "With all this, the decline in tourism activities in the country by 2020 would amount to 1 trillion Mexican pesos (about US\$5 billion)," states the report.

The future of the industry is surrounded by uncertainty, despite the fact that low prices and fewer travel restrictions have made the country attractive to those running away from lockdowns in their home countries. Preliminary numbers show that this year there could be a slight improvement, with gains in foreign exchange of 24.1% compared to 2020, but 44.5% below 2019 levels. The industry expects an 11% increase in arrivals from abroad that is 40% below 2019. "The road to tourism recovery is without a doubt very long," concludes the report.

Businesses requested aid to the federal government, adding a list of requests that they consider urgent in order to get the industry afloat. One of the main demands is to put workers in the industry first in the vaccination processes, at a time when health authorities seek to diversify the options

amid the global vaccine shortage, which is why they have closed an agreement with Russia to receive the first 200,000 doses of Sputnik V soon.

The vaccination of tourism workers also worries the National Restaurants Association (CANIRAC), which on January 25 sent a letter to the Secretary of Health, Jorge Alcocer, requesting to be provided with “the pertinent information to purchase vaccines from companies authorized so far by the Federal Commission for Protection against Sanitary Risks (COFEPRIS)”. The demand from the restaurateurs comes days after President Andrés Manuel López Obrador announced the possibility of the private sector to acquire vaccines.

Even if the request to vaccinate workers in the industry was accepted, the expectations of recovery are discouraging, as reflected in the report’s conclusions. **“The vaccines for the prevention of COVID-19 are a light of hope at the end of the tunnel for the troubled tourism industry.** However, the light is dim and the tunnel is very long since achieving herd immunity on a global scale will most likely take longer than 2021”. The sector estimates that a full recovery could be possible in 2023, but not before leaving heavy damage to the industry and international tourism.

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