

SPAIN REMAINS TOP DESTINATION FOR ITS MAIN SOURCE MARKETS



Despite a terrible year for travel and hospitality, the image of Spain hasn't been affected by the pandemic and the country remains a top destination for its source markets.

The main European markets (UK, Germany, France and Italy) have confirmed that Spain continues to be the preferred destination and that the country's image has not been damaged by the pandemic.

The recovery of tourist flows from these main source markets is expected to begin gradually in spring, if vaccination rates are optimal. **In short, once the vaccination campaigns move forward and connectivity is possible, tourists will return to Spain.**

A change in demand is however expected and the Spanish industry must be prepared. Therefore, the new trends and demands after the pandemic must be reflected in the Spanish offer, which represents an opportunity to develop and launch new products.

United Kingdom: A Strong Desire to Travel

Spanish tourism board officer in London, Javier Piñanes, pointed out that the British market is paralyzed by the restrictions taken to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. However, he is hopeful that travel will resume since "there is a strong desire to travel on the part of the British and they emphasize that Spain is the destination they want to travel to, it is their top destination for holiday."

Piñanes said that "tour operators want to resume activities at the end of March 2021, which is a first sign that there could be some movement by Easter."

Despite the fact that reservations are increasingly late, Piñanes has good prospects for the summer of 2021 since "the three major players, JET2, TUI and EasyJet, are already scheduling [flights] to Spanish destinations for this summer, winter 2021 and summer 2022."

However, he warned that the tourist flow calls for a balance between the inbound and outbound markets since "if Spain is not in a positive situation in terms of pandemic control and is still a country at risk, it will be hard to see the tourists coming."

Germany: More Sustainable Travel

Arturo Ortiz, the Spanish tourism board officer in Germany, explained that 51% of Germans plan to make a trip this year, so despite the fact that the country is facing its worst moment of the pandemic, the intention to travel remains and Spain is one of the top destinations for international travel, although reservations are delayed.

"Reservations in advance have changed: before, they were made in the first quarter of the year. The turnover of the agencies has fallen by 85%, but it does not mean that [tourists] are not going to buy their holiday, only that they have delayed the purchase, which makes us moderately optimistic," says Ortiz.

The sun-and-beach offer is and will continue to be what the Germans look for, but one adapted to social changes, especially sustainability. For this reason, German tour operators have included more independent accommodations in the 2021 catalogues.

According to Ortiz, the most favorable prospects would be for Christmas, but always depending on school holidays, so that “the next possible recovery is the summer months, with school holidays lasting 4 to 6 weeks and an average duration of 11-12 days”.

Top Destination for France

Spain has become the first international destination in 2020 for France, given its geographical proximity and cross-border travel, said Tatiana Martínez, Spanish tourism board officer in Paris. This agrees with the fact that “French tourists like to travel by car and 60% of them enter Spain by road.”

While France is currently betting on domestic tourism, “more than 70% of French tourists plan to make an international trip as soon as the health situation allows it, and the decision factors will be having their own vehicle, the health security, mandatory CRP tests, and flexibility in cancellation policies. The French tourist will demand more sustainable, individual and inclusive trips, and at first, they will opt for close destinations,” explained Martínez.

For the officer, “Spain has not lost its appeal or image” in the French market. This means that in the last part of the year there has been a rising demand towards Spain, translated into sales in the Canary Islands.

On the other hand, Martínez says that neither the public nor French professionals show disapproval of the negative CRP test requirement to travel to Spain. “For the public, it is a health protection measure” adds Martínez.

Italy: Reactivation in Summer

In recent years, Italy has established itself as the fourth-largest source of tourists to Spain, with a continuous growth trend. However, the pandemic saw a steep fall as the Italian government asked citizens to travel within their own country, explains Isabel Garaña, Spanish tourism board officer in Milan.

“Due to the important Italian travel restrictions and the incentive for domestic tourism, the short-term forecasts are not good,” she adds.

However, for Garaña there is hope because according to data from the Italian Federation of Travel & Tourism Enterprises (FIAVET), “destinations such as Spain could be reactivated for the summer, as long as the health situation turns favorably,” although she points out that “the true recovery in demand could start from September.”

Regarding travel trends to Spain, Garaña admits that they are “trips to immerse in the culture of the place, nature trips, adventure sports, cycling, trekking and trips that seek a total disconnection, and long stays for smart working (digital nomads).”

Calm in the Face of Brexit

As for the official exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union in January 2021 and the coming into force of a new framework of political and commercial relations, experts ask the tourism industry to stay calm because the repercussions should be minimal. **The major issues, which are**

the existence of direct flights, visa requirements, and other provisional issues, are being resolved promptly between the EU and the UK.

Issues such as healthcare already known to be guaranteed and the validation of driving licenses will be recognized at least during the first half of the year. In addition, those who travel with pets between the UK and EU should also stay calm because only a certificate will be required.

Regarding a possible devaluation of the pound, experts point out that it would be a different scenario because there would be less spending capacity, less consumer confidence and even a decrease in stays.

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