

TOURISM IN PORTUGAL: 62% OF ACCOMMODATION FACILITIES CLOSED



Tourism is one of the sectors most affected by the coronavirus pandemic in Portugal. Figures revealed by the National Statistics Institute (INE) show constant falls in guests, overnight stays and profits in tourist accommodation units. February 2021 is no exception.

Preliminary data from the statistics office show that, in February, tourist accommodation facilities had received 208.200 guests and 472.900 overnight stays, falls of 86.9 percent and 87.7 percent respectively over the same period last year.

“Since the beginning of the pandemic, February was the third month with the largest reduction in the number of overnight stays, surpassed only by April and May 2020 (-97.4% and -95.8%, respectively),” the INE indicates. **Most of the guests and overnight stays are from residents in Portugal.** Of the approximately 208.000 guests, only 33.565 were not residents in Portuguese territory. These foreign guests were responsible for almost 143.000 overnight stays last month.

The North region was the one that registered the most guests in February (a little over 62.000 and almost 102.000 overnight stays). But the Lisbon Metropolitan Area was the region that had the most overnight stays (58.600 people and 129.400 overnight stays).

Unlike what happened with other activities, hotels did not have to close down in the first lockdown nor in the second one which began in January this year. But the lack of demand has forced many facilities to keep their doors closed, trying to reduce the damage. INE data reveals that in February, 61.8% of tourist accommodation establishments were closed or did not register guests, slightly up from 57% in January.

The falls in profits of tourism in Portugal in February are still unknown. In a few days, the statistics office will publish the final data on tourism activity, including profits.

Current Situation Is Positive Again

Portugal emerged from a critical phase in January 2021, when it led all the worst scenarios in the world, its hospitals were full and the daily statistics were dismay that seemed to have no end, to become the country with the best scenario in Europe, title that it occupies now. The radical improvement in infection numbers was caused by the second lockdown in effect since January. Leisure travel is currently prohibited, flights are banned for certain destinations (UK, Brazil), restaurants are closed; museums and art galleries are also closed but should open on April 5

Improvements in 2021

In recent days, the government revealed to be more optimistic about tourism activity this year. The Secretary of State for Tourism, Rita Marques, told Lusa that the “best estimates” for national tourism until the end of 2021 point to a “growth of 20 to 30%” compared to 2020.

Answering a question about the estimates for tourism in Portugal in the year 2021, Rita Marques indicated that the “best estimates [of the Government] are aligned with those of international

organizations". **"Most international organizations say that, if vaccination continues to evolve reasonably in Europe, we will probably end the year 2021 with a growth of 20 to 30% when compared to 2020"**, she stressed. According to her, Portugal hopes to soon be able to allow unrestricted travel again, but that should not happen before mid-May. The opening depends on the vaccination passports to be launched by the EU.

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