

# FOREIGN TOURISTS IN SPAIN DROPPED BY 88.5% IN THE FIRST QUARTER



The Spanish tourism industry remains at a standstill, and will continue to do so until the end of the first semester amid the travel restrictions in the country and the rest of Europe.

During the first quarter of the year, Spain recorded 1.2 million international arrivals, as reported by the National Statistics Institute (INE). This figure translates into an 88.5% drop in foreign tourists in Spain compared to the same period of 2020 (back then, the country welcomed almost 10.6 million), including the two weeks of March where traveling was almost impossible due to the lockdown.

**Regarding expenditure, the collapse is even greater (down by 89%), not even reaching 1.3 billion in revenue.**

2021 is expected to be a better year since borders are expected to open in the second semester thanks to the successful vaccination campaigns. The government, employers and large associations of the industry have agreed on this, and all seem optimistic and committed to achieving 50% of the international arrivals in 2019, although the current gap might be large enough to make this goal unachievable.

In fact, the Stability Program published a few days ago by the Spanish government already revised its forecasts down to 42.4% during the year, a figure that will also be difficult to obtain given the terrible first months of the year.

On the bright side, the data seems to point upwards, with the fall in March (down by 75.5%) being the lowest since July 2020. Even so, these numbers should be taken with a grain of salt, since it is compared to March, a month in which the country was closed tight for two weeks. If compared with July 2019, the drop in arrivals and expenditure of foreign travelers is over 91%, which is in line with the recent drops. However, the bad side of the statistics is that the country has already registered 13 months of consecutive setbacks in both indexes, and this trend is expected to continue at least until summer.

## Fewer Travelers, Less Spending

The drop in expenditure is somewhat higher than that of international arrivals. This trend has been repeating since the start of the pandemic: traveling is less common, and tourists spend less; but this is also experienced in domestic tourism. In the first quarter of 2021, the average daily expenditure per traveler was 117 euros, more than 20% less than the 149 euros on average in 2020. At the moment, the only index that grows (although not enough to offset the drop in spending) is the duration of trips, which goes to just over 9 days compared to seven and a half days during the first quarter of 2020.

By markets, the figures continue to be affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The two largest tourist source markets for foreign tourists in Spain are France and Germany, from where 302,069 and 187,470 travelers have arrived in the first quarter of 2021. The United Kingdom, the former largest market to Spain, only added 55,752 travelers (down by 97.2%) due to the country's tight restrictions

on international travel, being surpassed by Italy (72,757 travelers) and Portugal (72,315 travelers).

### **More Than 700,000 Leisure Travelers**

Despite the strong travel restrictions in Spain and Europe, **704,750 international tourists visited Spain for leisure in the first quarter of the year**, at a time when traveling between autonomous communities was not possible due to the closed borders to contain the spread, minus a few exceptions. This contradiction has been difficult to justify at this time, but it has somewhat been maintained by the bureaucratic and political reasons that the measures involved.

The most visited community was Canarias (233,883 visitors), one of the few places in Europe that offers 'sun and beach' tourism in the first half of the year. It is followed by Catalonia (108,452 visitors), the Valencian Community (70,302 visitors) and the Community of Madrid (62,353 visitors). While many criticize the arrival of foreign tourists when traveling between communities is strictly prohibited for nationals, this contradiction seems like the only way to help the industry.

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