

MEXICO SETS A GOAL OF 30 MILLION INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS THIS YEAR



Miguel Torruco Marqués, Mexico's Secretary of Tourism, announced that this year the country expects to welcome just over 30 million international tourists, which is a 33% drop compared to the 45 million visitors in 2019 before the pandemic began; even so, the number is 22% higher than 2020 figures, when the industry was badly hit by the virus and travel restrictions.

"No," said Torruco when asked if the forecasts were optimistic. "The prospects are based on growth, reservations and airlines' expectations; there are several points where calculations are made for the prospects one is expecting, as we have said in previous years, and they always more or less end with the forecasts that we announce," the Secretary explained.

Tourism has been one of the worst-performing industries in 2020 due to the restrictions that many countries imposed on travel, which resulted in a 46% fall of international tourists to Mexico in 2020. Paradoxically, in this horrible year, Mexico advanced positions and ranked as one of the three most visited countries in the world, only surpassed by Italy and France.

Experts point that international travel restrictions will begin to be lifted in the second half of 2021, so passenger traffic is expected to recover this year. Towards the second semester, Mexico expects a lower level of restrictions worldwide, which could be a catalyst for Mexican airlines, which at the moment have greater participation in travel to the United States.

According to experts, the pre-pandemic levels of tourism will recover between 2022 and 2023 or 2024, due to the size of the crisis and the difficulty of restoring normality.

The Center of Research and Tourism Competitiveness (CICOTUR) of the Anahuac University pointed out that, in the first four months of 2021, the three largest airports in international traffic had a 52.4% drop compared to 2019. The airports of Cancun, Los Cabos and Puerto Vallarta account for 60% of the international travelers in Mexico, and in April, the three reported a total of 1.4 million visitors.

"That figure surpasses by far that of the same period of 2020, but it is 36.7% lower than that of 2019," explained Francisco Madrid Flores, director of CICOTUR.

Despite this, Mexico is one of the countries with the best recovery of international travelers, especially compared with Latin America, where countries have pushed for several travel requirements that restrict demand.

Rafael Echevarne, Director General of Airports Council International (ACI) for Latin America, said that Mexico has a predominant role in the global airline industry because the country never closed its borders.

"The good thing about Mexico is that connectivity with the United States has not been interrupted, which is extremely fortunate; and Mexico, being the most open country in the world from the perspective of never having closed, will be a great support for the recovery of the airline industry and tourism," said Echevarne.

Echevarne also mentioned that Mexico could become an international hub for passengers if it takes advantage of the open border policy that it has maintained throughout the pandemic. "Mexico has the opportunity to position itself and take leadership in ensuring that there is coordination with other countries," said the Director-General.

Mexican airlines with international routes are still far from the levels before the pandemic in terms of international tourists.

Between January and April, Volaris, led by Enrique Beltranena, registered a 25% drop in international travelers compared to the same period in 2019, with a decline of almost 9% compared to the first four months of 2020.

Aeroméxico, one of the most important Mexican airlines in terms of international passengers, is still far from the 2.5 million travelers it had in January-April 2019. In the first four months of 2021, the 'Caballero Águila' aircraft flew 868,000 passengers on routes abroad, 65.4% less than during the same period prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, Viva Aerobus is the only airline that has reported an increase for the January-April period of this year when compared to those of 2019, showing an 11.2% increase in terms of travelers. Even though the airline is focused on the domestic market, Viva has opened new routes to the United States, the largest source market for Mexico.

Date: 2021-05-24

Article link:

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