

THE FUTURE OF THE INDUSTRY - LUXURY TOURISM OR SUSTAINABILITY?



For some companies, the coronavirus crisis was a gold mine, even in a hard-hit sector like tourism. Some experts predict far-flung destinations could be a new trend for luxury tourism.

How far can you go for an experience away from the crowds? What about a safari, where you'll have your own camp built and be alone in the jeep with your family. Or a private yacht that will take you wherever you want to go, away from the hotels and other tourists.

Mass Tourism vs. Luxury Tourism

This is far from mass tourism, which will need more time to recover. **If it were up to the tourism ministers of the southern European countries, mass tourism could even disappear.** They have taken advantage of the coronavirus crisis and the money from the European recovery fund to reposition their tourism offer towards a more affluent class that spends more and stays longer than a long weekend.

This strategy is part of a general ambition to make tourism more sustainable and to fight against the "overtourism" faced in the past by cities like Barcelona or Venice.

"We are moving to premium tourism," said Spain's tourism minister. In Italy, the government is banking on more sustainable tourism, with the first result being a ban on large cruise ships in Venice. Greece's tourism minister expects tourists to prefer less crowded destinations for another two to four years and believes this increased focus on health will continue for a generation.

Business Model

If successful, this transformation would be one of the lasting consequences of the pandemic for the tourism sector. But Jan van der Borg, professor of geography and tourism at KU Leuven, is sceptical. "Last year I participated in a debate that postulated that the tourism sector had time to think about its business model. Everyone agreed that it had to become more sustainable, more qualitative, of longer duration and with more security. But in reality, everyone wants to get the train back on track as quickly as possible and then see if there is room for sustainability. This is understandable in a way, but it is a pity that we are letting this momentum slip," says Jan van der Borg.

The professor also has reservations about the ambitions of Southern Europe. "Quality and luxury tourism are two different things. You should not only look at the income, but also at the total cost to society, and in this case, luxury tourism is not the most valuable option. By quality tourism I mean for example young travelers, looking for cultural added value, who may spend less, but who give more importance to the social structures of their destination, to the local society and to enriching discussions with the population. This is very different from the exclusive, golf-course vacation village bubbles, whose maintenance is not sustainable."

Luxury tourism is also known for placing more emphasis on the local experience. Before the

pandemic, "slow travel" was already on the rise and would have received a boost from the crisis. This concept excludes quick "must-see" visits and tends to immerse visitors in a place to capture its "authenticity" through encounters and experiences, which has the practical benefit of reducing travel - and the risk of contamination.

It's also due to a change in mindset following periods of lockdown, say market observers. The pandemic has made us think about our personal goals - including travel - and has led us to pay attention to our physical and mental health. The reduction in CO₂ emissions during the lockdown period has prompted us to pay attention to the environment and sustainability.

All this has yet to translate into a more conscious way of traveling. Slower, more meditative, healthier (sports, fitness, spa), deepening the hobbies discovered during the lockdown. Hotels can offer these activities, including "local" experiences, such as a moonlit camel ride in the uncontaminated areas of the hotel, as the Ritz-Carlton near Dubai offers.

More Hygiene

After the pandemic, luxury tourism players will have to customize their offerings even more and take other variables into account, says Vicky Steylaerts, head of the tourism training program at the Thomas More Institute. "In the past, luxury was all about a fancy hotel. Now travelers want to live in their own bubble, with personalized social distancing. Customers want more privacy, more hygiene, more personal experiences. Travel agents will need to do a better job of listening to their clients and preparing for trips, which is unique to the luxury segment."

To meet the demand for a more hygienic - and virus-free - environment, hotels have installed touchless reception desks that allow "check-in" via an app, in addition to smartphone-powered room keys. It's also possible to create your own bubble by renting an entire floor for the family. This floor is even easier to fill now that "multigenerational" travel is on the rise. Many families, who were far away during the crisis, now want to make up for the lost time by traveling, to celebrate events that had to be postponed.

Another new trend: the "working vacation". A formula born thanks to telecommuting that became the norm during confinement and may remain so, at least in part. Why not spend a month or more in a villa or hotel and work from home while enjoying the local atmosphere? Alone or with family. Some hotels are riding this wave by providing workspaces and secure Wi-Fi connection.

Road Trips

Finally, some people are extending their vacations because of the flexibility offered by airlines and the elimination of deferral fees. Travel by car is also on the rise in the United States. Because of the danger of coronavirus on public transportation, but also because more and more consumers have bought a car after moving from the city to the countryside. This could put less crowded cities on the tourist radar at the expense of megacities and their supposed hotbeds of infection.

The "regenerative" tourism sector is also waiting for a boost from the coronavirus. **While sustainable tourism ensures that destinations are not further damaged, regenerative tourism goes one step further by ensuring that tourists leave the vacation destination in better condition than when they arrived.** As long as the economy is not fully back to normal, we will travel more locally and more slowly, by car, by train, by bike. But will this trend continue when the borders reopen?

Date: 2021-06-14

Article link:

<https://www.tourism-review.com/luxury-tourism-became-the-focus-of-several-destinations-news12069>