

SOUTH ASIA NEEDS CHINESE TOURISTS BUT THE BORDERS ARE CLOSED



Countries in South Asia are announcing one after another the return of visitors, after a year and a half of border closures. Chinese tourists are being attracted to various destinations the most. Does it show a favorable health context or an imperative to save their tourism sectors?

Indonesia has just reopened Bali. From November 1st, Thailand will allow vaccinated people to bask on its beaches. **Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, India, Sri Lanka all want to gradually return to the "world of before".**

Experts highlight the nuances of this underlying trend. Each country has its own reasons for reopening, whether they are sanitary or economic. In Singapore, where the vaccination rate has reached 80%, it is not necessarily a question of leisure travelers. What the country's authorities are interested in is bringing back the business world, which was kept away until now.

In other countries, such as Indonesia, it is not the improved health situation that explains this reopening. The vaccination rate is very low, it is less than 30%. There, the will is clearly to relaunch the tourism industry.

Dependence on Tourism Varies

It should be clear, however, this East Asian trend should not be seen as a strict question of survival. Indeed, tourism is not necessarily the only source of national income. In the case of Indonesia, the industry weighs relatively low, indeed it depends on the region. For example, in the case of Bali, tourism is very important for the budget, but in the overall Indonesian economy, it does not weigh much overall.

In general, South Asian countries have all opted for a cautious approach to welcoming visitors. Progressiveness and selectivity are the keywords. Countries in the region are reopening to certain source markets where the vaccination rate is high, i.e. European countries, but Chinese tourists are also welcome.

Impact of Visits from China

Chinese tourists are quite important for the economies of South Asian countries. However, the Middle Kingdom still prevents the cross-border movement of people. There are fears that there will be another outbreak of the epidemic. The vaccination rate in China is high, but the effectiveness of the vaccine seems questionable. The Chinese are not allowed to travel abroad as usual.

This restrictive policy has a definite impact on the tourism sector. Europeans represent a very small proportion of the tourists who come to Southeast Asia. Chinese tourists would come in great numbers if they could. Moreover, they spend the most when compared to other groups of visitors.

So, the impact of the gradual return of people from the West is just one factor in an economic recovery. European tourists are generally blamed for not bringing in enough foreign currency, because they don't spend enough.

The Middle Kingdom at the Center

In general, the sudden stop of Chinese tourists traveling the region has had a considerable impact on the Asian economy and not only on the tourism sector. **Shortages of products and components and sluggish Chinese demand, combined with the pandemic, have led to negative growth in East Asia in 2020.**

Travel forecasts for 2021 are encouraging, with a return to positive growth, even if it will not reach pre-crisis levels: a 4% increase in tourism numbers is expected in the Philippines and Malaysia. About 2.5% in Vietnam and only 1% growth in Thailand.

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