

AUSTRIA'S TOURISM NEEDS TENS OF THOUSANDS OF EMPLOYEES



Alarm bells are ringing in domestic tourism ahead of the winter season in Austria. After the previous season was a total failure, there is now a shortage of tens of thousands of employees in the accommodation industry, a sector of the economy that is of above-average importance for Austria.

During the corona crisis, an exodus of employees took place in Austria's tourism. According to information from the management consultancy mrp Hotels, **Austria is missing 50,000 to 55,000 skilled workers in the industry, according to projections.**

Especially wellness hotels feel the impact of the lack of staff due to the all-round care expected by guests. Many employees moved to other industries from November last year due to the uncertain situation and will probably be gone forever. This is the case of health care providers such as masseurs and beauticians as well. Many have opened their own practices; or they have migrated to other facilities. In some houses, up to a third of the staff has not returned from short-time work. The wellness stays are now 8% more expensive.

Until December, the accommodation industry still has to fill up to 20,000 positions for the new season, said the chairwoman of the professional association of the hotel industry in the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKÖ), Susanne Kraus-Winkler. In some Tyrolean valleys, thousands of employees are still missing. Several hoteliers consider scaling back their offerings due to the lack of staff. That could concern for instance the "A la carte" enterprise in the houses.

Kraus-Winkler now reiterated the demand for an opening of the seasonal worker quota in order to be able to employ more non-EU foreigners. Currently, a seasonal worker quota of 1,263 employees applies, which may be exceeded by a maximum of 20%. The suspension of this rule could bring relief in the cleaning and kitchen sectors, among others.

According to mrp, there is an abundance of job offers that, in addition to financial incentives that are significantly above the collective agreements, also entice with additional "benefits" to lure local employees. The incentives would be, for example, a reduction in weekly working hours, leisure time offers and the like.

Long before the Corona pandemic, Austria's tourism industry had been suffering from a lack of skilled workers and young talent due to steady growth that training capacities at all levels could not keep up with, mrp says. This phenomenon is now being exacerbated by **uncertainties surrounding the return of tourism in general and the loss of confidence in job security**, it said. Temporary workers, who traditionally make up a large portion of the hospitality workforce, have also often changed their direction during the pandemic, it said. The lockdowns would have exacerbated the apprenticeship problem: "The industry is missing almost two full years of training."

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