

TRAVEL IN EUROPE TO RETURN TO PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS IN 2024



Although travel demand in Europe has revived since last summer after the chaos of the pandemic, there is still "a long way to go" to achieve similar activity levels to those prior to the pandemic. This is the main conclusion of the report of the third quarter of 2021 on 'Trends and prospects for European tourism' issued by the European Travel Commission (ETC), which warns that the travel volumes of 2019 will not be achieved until 2024.

Europe currently has the best travel numbers in the world thanks to having the highest vaccination rate of all continents, but this is not enough as long-distance travel have not yet recovered.

The ETC points out that European destinations already enjoyed a better-than-expected summer season thanks to the success of vaccination programmes. In addition, **the creation of the European Union's digital COVID certificate has been crucial for ensuring safe travel in Europe within the EU and helped to simplify cross-border mobility.**

As a result, [intra-EU travel](#) recorded an increase and is expected to account for 85% of European international arrivals in 2021, 8% more than in 2019.

The recovery has differed between destinations. The countries that reopened their borders earlier to vaccinated travelers were the most favored in terms of travel.

As the first country to reopen to non-COVID tourists was Greece, it recorded the strongest rebound in overnight stays, although it ended up falling 19% in August when compared to 2019 and foreign arrivals were very weak (-66.6%).

Spain ended the summer with a 77% drop in international overnight stays compared to 2019, while international arrivals plummeted by 88.7%.

The situation in the Czech Republic was worse (-94%), the country experienced the steepest drop due to the strict anti-COVID measures put in place by the authorities throughout the year.

No Long-haul Travelers

Although travel in Europe has gained terrain in 2021, there is still a long way to go as international tourist arrivals to Europe were still down 77% mid-year compared to 2019.

For the ETC, the slower vaccination rate in Eastern Europe and in some large, long distance source markets could delay the recovery.

The report also notes a notable absence of long-haul travelers. Arrivals from the US to Europe remained 90% below their 2019 levels on a third of European destinations.

The absence of Chinese tourists was also "painfully" felt across Europe with all countries recording drops of more than 90% compared to 2019.

Thus, the report forecasts that international tourist arrivals to Europe will be 60% less than in 2019

by the end of this year.

Meanwhile, many threats to travel remain: ever-changing restrictions, outbreaks, confusion over the color-coded EU travel system that is applied differently in European destinations and the adoption of different systems for accepting vaccinations.

The president of the ETC, Luís Araújo, has pointed out the importance of vaccination to recover international mobility, but calls for more measures.

"As the winter months approach, it is imperative that Europe strives to further restore freedom of movement by implementing more consistent approaches to travel within and outside the EU," he emphasized.

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