

THE MUSEUM INDUSTRY IN PANDEMIC AND POST-PANDEMIC TIMES



The Covid-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on the tourism industry worldwide. Indeed, the crisis has put the sector in disarray, with very few exceptions.

A subsector that has been significantly influenced by the health emergency is the museum industry. But what is the entire picture of the situation? To find out more, we have to take a look at TEA's and AECOM's Museum Index, which analyzed the situation of the sector across all continents.

Drastic Decrease But More Innovation

According to the Museum Index, **the most popular museums in the world registered a decrease of 78 %, which makes the sector one of the most heavily affected ones in the entire tourism industry.**

While it is true that the ongoing recovery is promising, the high number of visitors, especially during the weekends, has also shed light on another problem of the sector - staff shortage.

Despite these worrying indicators, the museum industry has also shown a lot of resilience and a sense of innovation during a very tough time.

Many museums started to expand their offer online with the aim to connect with a wider audience, especially the younger generation. Thus, even despite their closed doors, museums were able to survive and provide the public with invaluable content and experiences.

Regional Particularities

Regionally speaking, Europe registered a decrease in visitors of 76 % in the most popular museums on the continent. The Louvre remained on top of the list with a decrease of "only" 72 %, mainly due to a positive start of 2020.

London's British Museum and Tate Modern, in the meantime, saw a decrease of 80 % and 77%, respectively. Italy's museum industry was most struck by the pandemic in Europe, with the Vatican Museums having registered a fall of 81.1 %.

North American museums were even worse off than European ones, with an average decrease of 81 % for the 20 most popular ones on the continent. The National Museum of Natural History in Washington, for example, saw an incredible decrease of 86.4 %.

However, American museums have shown great resilience and are gradually recovering, as evidenced by the data in 2021, with some museums even obliged to turn away some visitors after reaching their capacity.

Asian museums have also been hit hard by the pandemic (-72 %), though less than the European and North American ones. While China's attendance was boosted by high domestic demand, Taiwan

almost escaped the effects of the pandemic due to its geography.

Nevertheless, the decreases in China were still significant. The National Museum of China in Beijing, for example, saw a drop of 78.3 % in attendance, while the China Science Technology Museum registered a decrease of 82.3 %.

It is, however, interesting to note how some Chinese museums coped with the lockdown. For example, the Sanxigdui Museum in Sichuan was forced to close just one day after opening in 2020, but it responded with a fully virtual opening ceremony, which attracted about 160 thousand “visitors”.

Digital Revolution in the Sector

In connection to the above mentioned, it must be mentioned that there is a digital revolution ongoing in the sector, which goes hand in hand with the general trend in society.

The pandemic has created a high demand and offer of digital and virtual products and while some activities will likely return to their in-person format, others have changed completely to the point that things will likely stay the same in the future.

The report indicates that technological development has taken place in all regions analyzed, though it is especially noticeable in North America and China. Museums in the latter country have used popular social media platforms such as WeChat and Weibo to promote themselves.

These developments have helped museums to reach the unreachable audience, for example, younger people, working mothers, the disabled or older people with mobility problems. Nevertheless, there are still some concerns with regards to the access to digital platforms, with stakeholders calling for a more equitable solution.

Post-pandemic Prospects

The advantages of digital and virtual formats are clear, from their flexibility to the fact that they simply cost less. However, the current high demand for in-person museum experiences clearly indicates that the public is eager to return to the museums.

In this context, as mentioned above, **it seems rational to say that virtual platforms will not prevail in all the categories of the museum offer.** However, it should be viewed as an investment for the future in an extremely competitive market.

While the pandemic has brought a lot of difficulties and struggles for the museum industry, the report generally believes that museums will return as a stronger part of the cultural sphere, mainly with their creativity and ingenuity.

Top 5 Museums Worldwide

- 1 Louvre, Paris, France
- 2 National Museum of China, Beijing, China
- 3 Vatican Museums, Vatican, Vatican City
- 4 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, U.S.

5 British Museum, London, U.K.

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