

CHINA'S WAR WITH OMICRON MEANS AN OUTAGE FOR HONG KONG TOURISM



The new omicron variant is more contagious than the previous variants of the coronavirus. It is feared by China, which keeps insisting on its zero contagion policy, applying measures that in Europe and the United States would be considered insane: closing entire cities for weeks because of the identification of a few cases of the virus. Hong Kong tourism is one of the victims.

Where this policy is most visible is in Hong Kong, which is practically isolated from the world and whose airline, Cathay Pacific, is experiencing a very deep crisis as a result.

The company can no longer afford to operate because its staff is locked in endless quarantines. **For example at the begging of the year, the city had only 150 Cathay flights daily, while in normal times the figure is about four thousand.** And Cathay doesn't even have staff to fly the cargo planes anymore.

It all starts when the presence of an infected person on an airplane forces all other crew members to undergo a ten-day lockdown; similarly, every time you return from abroad, you must be confined. The first victim, logically, is the aircrew.

Foreign visitors are quarantined for three weeks, making travel almost impossible. Hong Kong tourism reaches zero levels.

All this, already very difficult to handle with the previous (Delta) variant, becomes even more so with Omicron, whose contagiousness is up to seventy times higher, according to some studies.

For this reason, airlines are cancelling flights to China en masse, partly to the satisfaction of the authorities, who are determined to maintain their zero-case policy.

British Airways, for example, has completely cancelled its flights to Hong Kong, where it used to be one of the leading operators. Of the eleven thousand flights that the city normally receives, it is now down to 791.

Many companies have been sanctioned for carrying infected passengers. This is the case of Air India, which was banned from flying to China for several weeks for this reason. Finnair, Turkish and Cebu Pacific were sanctioned last week with a two-week flight ban for non-compliance with health regulations.

China allows only a very limited number of airlines to serve certain airports in the country, a few times a month, to ensure the ability to process passengers with this extreme screening regime.

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