

LANGUAGE TOURISM IN SPAIN: STILL FAR FROM PRE-PANDEMIC LEVEL



Language tourism is struggling to overcome the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although in 2021 the revenue generated by this sector tripled compared to the previous year, it was still 60% below the results recorded in 2019.

The 55,435 students who enrolled in the centers belonging to the Spanish Federation of Associations of Spanish Schools for Foreigners (Fedele in Spanish) last year generated around 95 million euros, **compared to the almost 237 million totaled before the health crisis thanks to the 140,000 students who choose Spain to learn Spanish two years ago.**

Looking ahead to 2022, the language tourism industry expects the first half of the year to close with losses of 40%, which will reduce to 20% in the second part of the year if compared to 2019 data.

An improvement compared to 2021 that Fedele describes as "insufficient" since it is far from "the exponential growth curve following the pandemic that other sectors are experimenting".

The average stay of students was 3.42 weeks last year, so the companies included in the report account a total of 189,600 weeks, at an average of 500 euros per student per week (course, accommodation, meals, activities and internal transfers in Spain), according to statements of the manager of Fedele, David Trigo.

"This will be an uncertain year, but with a lot of possibilities," said Trigo, who believes it is a drawback that these trips have not been included in the student group programs for 2022 as much of their income depends on them.

The federation, made up of six associations that bring together a hundred schools that teach Spanish, expects the language tourism sector to reach normal figures by the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, when they even expect to exceed the figures of 2019.

More than 580 million people, 7.6% of the world's population, speak Spanish, a language that ranks second only behind English in international communications and is the third language on the Internet, where it has great potential. In addition, some 22 million people in 110 countries study Spanish, although it is estimated that the real demand is 25% higher, according to data from the Cervantes Institute.

According to Fedele, interest in studying Spanish is increasing in countries such as Germany, India, China and the United States.

For this reason, language tourism has a potential market "of more than 1.2 million people" in the world, in which Spain has a leadership factor thanks to the fact that it is "the cradle of modern Spanish", said the manager of Fedele. He also pointed out that this activity helps to deseasonalize tourism.

Not to mention the impact this activity has on the destination, which is defined as the set of educational, social and cultural activities that people carry out in another country with

the main purpose of learning the language of the place they are visiting. Therefore, it has a wide impact on hotels, restaurants and other leisure centers. For every euro they spend on the association's courses, they spend 1.7 euros on the related sectors (transportation, museums, etc.).

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