

# TOURIST SERVICES IN PERU: A SECTOR IN CRITICAL CONDITION



The plane crash in Nasca that caused the death of seven people, five of them foreign tourists (three Dutch and two Chileans) after taking off from the Maria Reiche aerodrome, the disappearance of a Belgian tourist in the Colca Valley, as well as the fall of an interprovincial bus into an abyss in La Libertad that left more than 20 people dead, are three of the recent sad events that reflect the worrying current situation of tourism in Peru.

In mid-January, a landslide in Machu Picchu Pueblo (Aguas Calientes) caused more than 850 tourists in need of rescue. The landslide also caused extensive damage to infrastructure, including the destruction of two railroad bridges and a pedestrian bridge, dozens of homes and hotels, as well as the interruption of several basic services in the area due to the destruction of telephone connections and electrical power transformers. Although there were no fatalities, **it was a warning about the lack of prevention and control in Peru in regard to tourist services**, where quality and safety are not guaranteed.

In a recent interview, the president of the Peruvian National Chamber of Tourism, Carlos Canales, estimated that 72% of tourist services in Peru are informal and events such as the one in Nasca are a serious blow to Peru's reputation as a safe tourist destination. He seems to be in the right as these types of news causes potential tourists to hesitate or desist from coming to Peru because of safety concerns.

Moreover, the pandemic had a serious impact on many tourism businesses, and although various financial support programs have been implemented, it is necessary to provide these businesses with guidance in order to ensure that service standards are adequate.

## Solutions for Early Recovery

In this context, it is urgent that the Central Government, through the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism (Mincetur in Spanish) and other governmental institutions, take action to reverse the damage to the country's brand, and for this purpose, it is essential to have greater control and support for the various tour operators to improve the quality of their services. If the safety of tourists is not guaranteed and if there is the latent possibility that they may suffer an accident, the chances that new tragedies may occur will be high.

It is vital for the State to guarantee safe access to the various tourist destinations through different air, land and rail routes. These security measures of tourist services should cover transportation, health services and, of course, protection against thefts. This is the only way to provide the necessary conditions for tourists to travel during vacations, holidays and long weekends.

The private sector, represented by lodging and transportation companies, must offer services that meet quality and safety standards. In this regard, lodging facilities need to offer services aimed at domestic tourists who can travel with their families and enjoy recreational areas that are safe from accidents. For their part, transportation companies need to comply with the corresponding technical revisions to their units, provide proper training to their pilots or drivers, and not allow unlawful practices.

Another consideration is that lodging, transportation and other complementary businesses should adapt their offerings to the different market segments. To this end, they need to take into account the traveler profiles - already identified by PromPerú- and provide services adapted in terms of duration (length of stay), distance (near and far destinations), comfort (differentiated offer), leisure (activities and entertainment), security (care of travelers and their belongings), among other variables to be considered within the businesses offer.

Throughout all the critical points to be improved for an adequate traveler experience, technology should be of extreme importance for all the actors involved in the tourist service, from the search for information to the after-sales service, with special attention to the experience at the destination (before, during and after the trip). Likewise, work must be done on promotion, through virtual fairs and intense presence on social networks and tourism marketplaces (online intermediaries) such as edreams, booking, Airbnb, among others.

### **Looking to the Future: New Trends to Consider**

With the rebirth of tourism both domestic and inbound, there are new challenges in terms of safety, sustainability, and the incorporation of technology. Peru should not lag behind this trend that involves greater solutions for digital transactions and greater knowledge of travelers along the consumption process: searching for tourist information, booking, arrival to the country and during the visitor's stay, as well as the after-sales services.

Travel and tourism companies need digital tools that integrate with their marketing strategies and actions to deliver personalized experiences that recognize the customer as unique based on data. This can translate into delivering more relevant content and promotions through the right channels at the precise moment, helping them to choose how they want to explore, buy and experience services and products.

**By combining these technologies with the right strategy for managing, analyzing and leveraging user consumption habits, companies will be able to bridge the gap between the physical and digital realms** and determine whether a digital contactless sales service or the human hand is the best option.

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