

COVID-19 AND TOURISM SITUATION IN PORTUGAL

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*Eduardo Moraes Sarmiento*¹

Lusófona University (Portugal)

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit tourism in Portugal, one of the main pillars of the economy. During the outbreak of pneumonia due to the new Coronavirus -COVID-19, the Portuguese government took all the necessary public health measures to protect the entire population. To avoid the spread of the virus and the possibility of contagion, all services had to start implementing hygiene and health measures in accordance with the instructions of the General Health Directorate, with specific recommendations for various sectors of activity. In tourism, the “Clean & Safe” seal was implemented, developed by Turismo de Portugal, which seeks to provide greater security and confidence in the use of accommodation, in various tourist services and in tourist attractions. This paper presents some elements of analysis regarding the impact that COVID-19 has left on the Portuguese tourism industry.

Key words: COVID-19, tourist situation, Portugal, economic crisis, “Clean & Safe” seal.

RESUMEN

La pandemia de COVID-19 ha azotado el turismo en Portugal, uno de los principales pilares de la economía. Durante el brote de neumonía por el nuevo Coronavirus -COVID-19, el gobierno portugués tomó todas las medidas de salud pública necesarias para la protección de toda la población. Para evitar la propagación del virus y la posibilidad de contagio, todos los servicios debieron empezar a implementar medidas de higiene y sanidad de acuerdo con las instrucciones de la Dirección General de Salud, con recomendaciones específicas para

¹ Teacher at Lusófona University and researcher in CEsa (ISEG – Lisbon University) and CIPES. E-mail: emoraessarmiento@gmail.com

diversos sectores de actividad. En turismo, se implementó el sello “Clean & Safe”, desarrollado por Turismo de Portugal, el cual procura dar mayor seguridad y confianza en el uso de los alojamientos, en los diversos servicios turísticos y en las atracciones turísticas. En el presente trabajo se exponen algunos elementos de análisis con respecto al impacto que ha dejado el COVID-19 en la industria turística portuguesa.

Palabras clave: COVID-19, situación turística, Portugal, crisis económica, sello “Clean & Safe”.

RÉSUMÉ

La pandémie de COVID-19 a frappé le tourisme au Portugal, l'un des principaux piliers de l'économie. Lors de l'épidémie de pneumonie due au nouveau Coronavirus -COVID-19, le gouvernement portugais a pris toutes les mesures de santé publique nécessaires pour protéger l'ensemble de la population. Pour éviter la propagation du virus et la possibilité de contagion, tous les services ont dû commencer à mettre en œuvre des mesures d'hygiène et de santé conformément aux instructions de la Direction générale de la santé, avec des recommandations spécifiques pour différents secteurs d'activité. Dans le secteur du tourisme, le label «Clean & Safe» a été mis en place, développé par Turismo de Portugal, qui vise à fournir une plus grande sécurité et confiance dans l'utilisation de l'hébergement, dans les différents services touristiques et dans les attractions touristiques. Cet article présente quelques éléments d'analyse concernant l'impact que COVID-19 a laissé sur l'industrie touristique portugaise.

Mots clés: COVID-19, situation touristique, Portugal, crise économique, label «Clean & Safe».

RESUMO

A pandemia do COVID-19 atingiu o turismo em Portugal, um dos principais pilares da economia. Durante o surto de pneumonia devido ao novo Coronavírus-COVID-19, o governo português tomou todas as medidas de saúde pública necessárias para proteger toda a população. Para evitar a disseminação do vírus e a possibilidade de contágio, todos os serviços tiveram que começar a implementar medidas de higiene e saúde de acordo com as instruções da Diretoria Geral de Saúde, com recomendações específicas para vários setores de atividade. No turismo, foi implementado o selo “Clean & Safe”, desenvolvido pelo

Turismo de Portugal, que visa proporcionar maior segurança e confiança no uso da acomodação, nos diversos serviços turísticos e nas atrações turísticas. Este artigo apresenta alguns elementos de análise sobre o impacto que o COVID-19 deixou no setor de turismo português.

Palavras-chave: COVID-19, situação turística, Portugal, crise econômica, selo “Clean & Safe”.

INTRODUCTION

Portugal is a country which has been benefiting from tourism activity over the last years. This activity has seen its importance growing and has been an alternative for the main crisis that the country has faced (until today). In major terms, the country has once again achieved in 2019 record numbers for tourism in what concerns different indicators: +7,3% tourists (26,9 million), +4,1% overnight stays (69,9 million), + 15,6% tourism receipts (€18,4 billion), + 8,1% cruise passengers (24,7 million), + 7,3% global hotel incomes (€4,3 billion) and +0,6% in room occupancy (65,6%). This meant that in 2019, tourism consumption in GDP accounted for almost 15%, the weight of tourism receipts in total exports achieved around 20% and the weight of tourism receipts in service exports totalized 52,3% (Banco Portugal, 2020). In the first two months of 2020, before the COVID-19 break down, tourism was once again accelerating: +13,7% tourists, +11,44% overnight stays, +6,5% tourism receipts, + 10,6% cruise passengers, + 7,2% global hotel incomes and +2,7% in room occupancy (Banco Portugal, 2020).

With the measures taken by the Portuguese Government in order to contain the pandemic, everything has changed dramatically. And we must not forget that in the first trimester of 2020, Europe (one of the main outbound tourism market towards Portugal) was the second most affected region in the world concerning tourist arrivals (the year-on-year variation was -36,4%). The first region was Asia Pacific (YoY Var. - 48,7%), Africa & Middle East (YoY Var. -29%) and Americas (YoY Var. -26,7%) (Forwardkeys, 2020).

Impact that the pandemic has left on the tourism sector

Since Portugal closed its borders and all flights in March, the country had to be confined. Therefore, all tourism activities, both: international or domestic simply stopped. Several international entities concluded that even though if tourism activities will be able to come back by September 2020, there will still be considerable losses (-20%-30%, WTO; -45%-70%, OCDE; -23% WTTC and -48%, IATA) (TP, 2020). So, Portugal, as many other countries is now facing a huge challenge. Under this context, the president of Portugal Tourism Confederation (CTP) said that the crisis due to COVID-19 pandemic was “extremely violent” and hence several companies had losses from 30-90% between March and May 2020.

Portugal was the 12th most competitive country in the world in Tourism (World Economic Forum in the 2019 World Economic Forum's Competitiveness in Tourism Report – WEF, 2020). Portugal achieved unprecedented results since for the first time it ranked 1st in terms of the quality of tourist infrastructure and 12th in the world competitiveness ranking. Portugal achieved the highest position ever, having climbed eight positions since 2013 (20th place) and three places since 2015 (15th place) (WEF, 2020). Despite all these prior indicators, even in the short term, it is expected that international tourism will be first replaced by domestic tourism. However, Portugal faces a very small internal market and, therefore, the international tourism flows are critical to its future development.

Measures taken to reactivate it

The Portuguese government defined several measures to fight this pandemic crisis such as a simplified lay-off for these companies or the creation of specific credit lines to the tourism sector. Hence, the government affected a total amount of €1,7 billion (€900 million for hotels, €600 for restauration, €200 million for travel agencies and tourism animation). However, despite these actions, they have been extremely slow in reaching the economy as it should (CTP, 2020).

So, several experts alert that the main success factors to overcome this problem are the following: (i) reopen aerial transport. In Portugal over than 90% of international tourists come to the country this way; (ii) sanitary security; (iii) reopening of restaurants, museums

and monuments which have already started in May 18. Finally (iv) the creation of a new stamp of “Clean & Safe” certified by Turismo de Portugal. This is a very important measure that intends to promote Portugal as a safe destination taking into consideration the virus challenges. With it, Portugal expects that every country can see that Portugal is strongly committed to safety, even though this strategy will raise hotel costs.

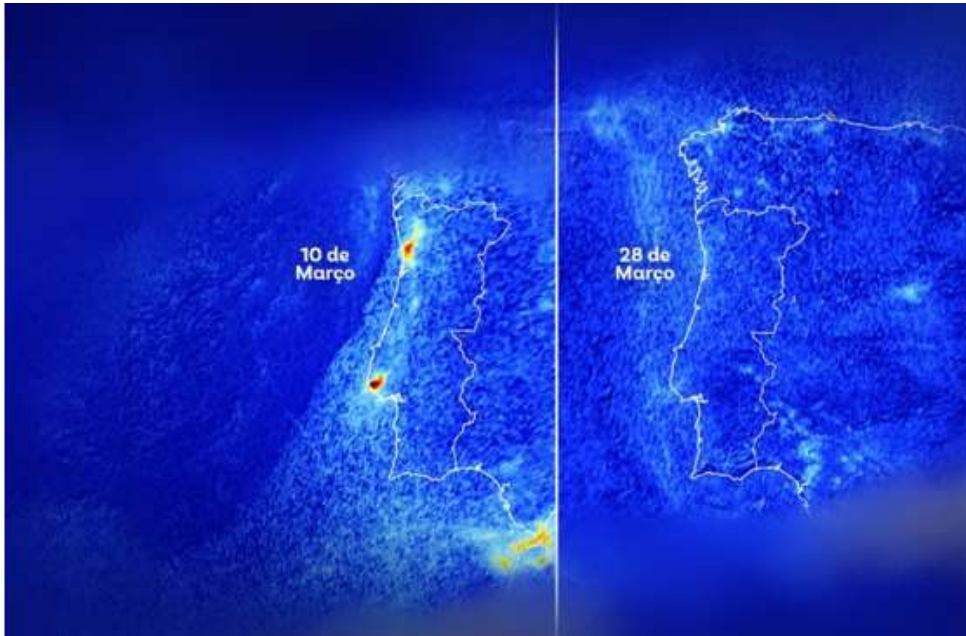
Benefits it has represented to the environment

The Covid-19 outbreak imposed several containment and reduction measures in economic activities as well as tourist activity. In this way, the current coronavirus is not only causing a strong reduction in economic activities, but on the other hand it is having a positive impact on the environment and climate in various forms. Through satellite images obtained by an investigation by the Polytechnic University of Valencia, it could be seen that there has been a considerable reduction in the levels of CO₂ and other pollutant gases in the Iberian Peninsula, including Portugal, with a significant reduction in the period between March and May.

Another Portuguese study also showed that the consequences of the economic downturn in Portugal are already visible from space. Over the past few weeks, there has been a reduction of 80% in emissions of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂ - one of the main pollutants in the atmosphere) to the atmosphere in the city of Lisbon and by 60% in Porto. These images captured by satellite, released by the AIR Center Earth Observatory (Azores) are quite important because the reduction of NO₂ is particularly beneficial for reducing respiratory problems, increasing immunity to lung infections and avoiding problems such as cough, colds and bronchitis (Moreira & Casanova, 2020).

Image 1.

Emissions of NO₂ in Portugal.



Source: Moreira & Casanova (2020).

In addition, there was a reduction in noise, traffic jams, an improvement in air quality and a curbing of uncontrolled consumption. However, we can also find those who alert to the appearance of other problems due to the increase in the massive production and consumption of masks and gloves, based on disposable plastic, either by ordinary people or in a hospital context. This new situation will require special care in terms of collection and management of waste, especially those that will be produced in households and local accommodations, companies, hotels and other accommodations with a high concentration of people, ports and airports.

CONCLUSIONS

So, we can conclude that despite the transitory nature of the supposed environmental benefits, some other reservations may arise. One doesn't know the effective duration of this outbreak and the best measures applied to contain it. We live in an unpredictable world. There are no doubts, from the Portuguese experience, as well as from other experiences in several countries that we are undoubtedly living at a stage where there is a positive impact on the environment. The problem is that this situation may be merely temporary. However, it is up to everyone in an individual aspect and to the Government to take advantage of this

unprecedented opportunity to change social habits and behaviors, reflect and rethink about consumption patterns and promote public and private policies that, in the long run, will not only guarantee a better quality of life, but that avoid some mistakes made in the past.

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