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## **GLOBAL HEALTH AND SAFETY TRENDS IN TOURISM**

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### **Abstract**

The growth of tourist traffic and income from tourism is highly conditioned by constant global crises (economic, financial, health, environmental, etc.). Although this is the case, it is estimated that tourism is the fastest recovering sector. People have the need and desire to travel both for leisure and business purposes. Safety is a very important criterion when choosing a destination or hotel, and there is no doubt that its importance will grow even more. Precisely for that reason, many world organizations give guidelines, adopt regulations and standards to maximally protect both guests and employees in tourist companies. This paper aims to look at current trends in the field of health and safety of all actors in tourism, with special emphasis on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Key words:* tourism, hospitality, human resources, crisis, health and safety, COVID-19

### **INTRODUCTION**

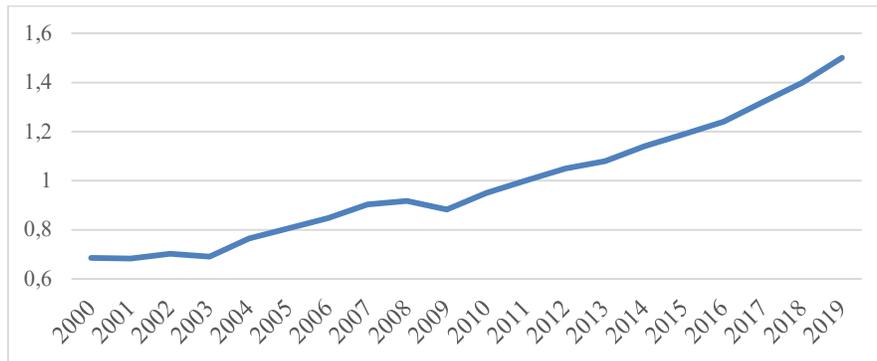
Tourism is a service activity in which the focus is on people, both tourists and those who provide services, all employees in the tourism sector. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), in 2019, 10% of all employees worked directly or indirectly in tourism (or about 330 million people), which generated about 10% of gross domestic product, and it is estimated that this sector will grow even more. In 2019, about 1.5 billion foreign arrivals were recorded in the world (WTTC, 2020). However, this large number of people in a relatively small place has been a suitable target for the numerous terrorist attacks in the past few years. The high concentration of tourists causes great pollution and also poses a danger to the possibility of causing infection. All these events cause crises that have a negative impact on tourism. People do not want to travel if they do not feel safe and do not want to endanger their health. Because of that health and safety is now one of the most important criteria when choosing a destination or accommodation.

### **TOURISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), foreign tourism turnover has been growing steadily in the 21st century since 2003, except for 2009 when the world was hit, first by the financial crisis and then by the global economic crisis (Chart 1). Since the beginning of the century, even with a slight decline in turnover between 2000 and 2001 (<1%), 2002 and 2003 (2%), as well

as that slightly more pronounced of 4% between 2008 and 2009, tourism has an average growth rate of about 4%. Based on the positive results, the experts expected that in 2020, tourism would reach the number of about 1.6 billion tourists. Unfortunately, the UNWTO estimates that, as a result of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the number of global foreign tourist arrivals in 2020 may fall by 60% to 80% (UNWTO International Tourism Highlights, 2019).

*Chart 1 International tourism, number of arrivals in billions*



Source: UNWTO, 2020.

#### THE IMPACT OF THE CRISIS ON TOURISM

Since the beginning of the century, the world has been hit by many crises. In the period from 2001 to 2006, large cities and tourist centers were the targets of terrorist attacks (USA (2001), Bali (2002 and 2005), Jakarta (2003), Madrid (2004), London (2005), Egypt, and Mumbai (2006)). Also, the great tsunami that affected a part of Southeast Asia in 2004, as well as the epidemic of the SARS virus and bird flu had a great impact on tourism, reducing the mobility of people. However, despite all these crises, tourism had tended to grow in this period as well, and research shows that these crises did not have a longer impact on it. (Pforr, 2006).

In the middle of 2008, the world was hit by the financial crisis, which developed into a global economic crisis and was largely present in 2009 as well. This crisis affected the decline in tourism turnover by 4%. How fast tourism is recovering from these economic crises is shown by the fact that, although the world economy was recovering from the crisis in 2010, tourism had a growth of as much as 7% that year compared to the previous year. According to the World Tourism Organization, the tourist traffic started to grow in the last quarter of 2009, after 14 months of decline (UNWTO, 2010).

Over the next ten years (2010-2019), tourism turnover was on a steady rise with the growth of 5% despite the impact of global proportions such as the wars in the Middle East and Africa and the migrant crisis. It was also thought that

Britain's exit from the European Union (Brexit) and the shutdown of one of the world's largest tour operators, Thomas Cook, as well as several low-cost airlines in Europe, could have a greater impact on tourism. Regardless of this, in 2019 there were about 1.5 billion international arrivals.

However, at the end of 2019, the very first case of the COVID-19 virus was recorded in China, and in mid-January 2020, the first cases were recorded in other countries, which led to the closure of almost the entire world in March this year. Tourism is considered to be one of the sectors that suffered the greatest losses due to this pandemic. Only in the first quarter of 2020, tourism was in decline by 22% and it is estimated that by the end of the year the decline in tourism will be from 60% to 80% (UNWTO, 2020).

It is still too early to assess the full impact of coronavirus on international tourism, but the World Tourism Organization is taking the 2003 SARS virus epidemic for comparison to assess further development and the impact of the virus on tourism trends, and it is certain that human health and safety is the prime goal (UNWTO, 2020).

#### HEALTH AND SAFETY MEASURES

Caring for health and safety is one of the basic human needs (Maslow, 2013). People want to feel safe wherever they are and they don't want to risk their lives and their health just to travel somewhere. They strive to choose the safest destinations, hotels, restaurants, or the safest possible mode of transport. However, in tourism (at destinations, tourist attractions, etc.), it is common for a relatively small area to have a large concentration of people, which calls into question their safety. That is why more and more attention is being paid to the issue of safety and health of people, and new measures are being adopted to protect them.

After the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, new measures were introduced, primarily concerning air safety. Measures and rules for air travel have been tightened both locally and internationally. To reduce the possibility of new terrorist attacks, measures for obtaining visas have been tightened also. (Goodrich, 2002). However, despite the new measures and new roles, these terrorist attacks represent one of the biggest crises in America that have affected tourist trends (the reduction in the occupancy of hotel capacities and passengers using air transport has dropped by about 50%). Therefore, it was decided to devise a new marketing strategy to promote this region as a safe and secure destination. Even with these measures, it took the industry about three years to recover (Fall, Massey, 2006).

After these terrorist attacks, new ones followed in big cities and tourist centers all around the world. According to data, in terrorist attacks in the world in the period from 2006 to 2018, over 268 thousand tourists were killed (Statista, 2020). This, of course, has had the effect of reducing the sense of security among tourists. Therefore, to reduce the number of terrorist attacks and to make people

feel safer, new measures and regulations have been introduced. The security of facilities where people gather in large numbers (shopping malls, stadiums, museums, etc.) has been strengthened. Metal detectors have been installed at the entrance to major tourist attractions (European Parliament 2018).

On the other hand, one of the biggest crises of global proportions, which almost completely prevented all tourist movements in the first half of 2020, is the health crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Strategies to combat the spread of the COVID-19 virus have resulted in the temporary closure of almost the entire world. At one time, the borders of most countries were closed, and also, a large number of countries decided to temporarily suspend the operations of all actors in tourism (hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, etc.) to preserve human health. (Bartik, et al., 2020). It is expected that in the coming period in the business of all entities in tourism will be major changes and that the focus will be on maintaining the health and safety of both tourists and employees (Gössling, et al., 2020).

Research conducted by the Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management has shown that the reopening of hotels, restaurants, and other tourist facilities will not immediately attract consumers. Around 50% of people do not want to visit restaurants and the same number do not want to travel anywhere or stay in hotels. One-third of the respondents think that they will not do that in the next few months either (Gursoy, Chi, 2020).

To preserve the health of people (tourists and service providers) and to make them feel safe, but also truly be safe, the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) in cooperation with governments, health professionals, and associations, and with the support of the World Tourism Organization, has developed the global brand "Safe Travels". Although safety cannot be fully guaranteed, it is considered necessary to have a common goal and follow the same rules, to enable people to travel as safely as possible. These guidelines can be used by organizations and destinations to ensure the highest security standards for their guests. (WTTC, 2020).

As it is stated, first of all, it is necessary to disinfect all rooms in the facilities in detail. Following the guidelines and regulations, determine the maximum number of people that can stay in the facility at the same time and clearly and visibly point out that number at the entrance. Also, it is necessary to determine the maximum number of people that can be in certain rooms within the accommodation facilities, such as restaurants or elevators. One person, or a family, should enter the elevators. It is considered that it is necessary to determine the directions of movement through the facilities and set clear signals for maintaining social distance. To additionally protect the employees, it is necessary to install transparent barriers at the receptions and other counters where the employees stay. At the entrance to the facilities, as well as in the toilets and other frequent locations in the facility, such as the corridors in front of the elevators, restaurants, kitchens, it is necessary to install hand sanitizers. It is also desirable to measure the body temperature of both employees and guests when entering the

facility. The most important thing is wearing masks and other forms of protection such as gloves or visors to protect all actors. It is recommended that all payments should be made primarily with cards and if there is a possibility to use contactless payment. It is also necessary to invest in new modern technologies and thus enable as much digital content as possible in facilities (menus in restaurants and cafes, digital maps and information, etc.). Of course, for all these, it is necessary to provide guests with a fast and free internet connection. There is a possibility of introducing contactless food delivery as well. It is necessary to increase hygiene in all facilities and rooms, and pay special attention to objects that are often touched, such as room cards. The aim of these protocols and the possession of certificates is to enable organizations to provide healthy and safe conditions, both for tourists and their employees (WTTC, 2020).

As a positive example in the fight for the recovery of tourism due to the consequences of the coronavirus, the Vienna Chamber of Commerce has developed the “Safe Stay” security stamp for its members to increase security in hotels by introducing additional preventive measures. First of all, they insist on the appointment of a representative for COVID-19 who would ensure that these measures are applied and followed, then mandatory body temperature measurement for employees as well as guests, additional cleaning and disinfection measures, and digitized menus, so that guests and employees come into contact with things which may be carriers of the infection as little as possible. The implementation of the measures is controlled by the Vienna Chamber of Commerce and the Vienna Tourist Organization (Hotel Manager, 2020).

To ensure maximum safety for their guests, hotels around the world are introducing new hygiene and safety standards, both globally and locally. One of the leading hotel groups, which is present in the Republic of Serbia with its hotels, InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG), strives to provide its guests and employees with safe and secure conditions by presenting “IHG Way of Clean” standards globally. They prescribe the manner of work of the reception, food and beverage sector, how to organize events and meetings, as well as detailed instructions for cleaning guest rooms, and all other hotel areas. Emphasis is on reducing interpersonal contact, more frequent use of modern technologies, and regular disinfection (InterContinental Hotels Group, 2020).

Another world-famous hotel chain, with a hotel in Belgrade as well, Hilton, has introduced its “CleanStay” standards. In cooperation with world leaders in the production of disinfectants, it strives to provide its guests with maximum safety standards (Hilton, 2020).

Some hotels and hotel chains, as Marriott, besides new health and safety measures, provide extended cancellation policies due to coronavirus pandemics (Marriott, 2020).

The first Serbian hotel chain A hotels adheres to all measures to protect its employees and guests. The hotel chain has also implemented “Safe Travel” (WTTC standards) in its business, as well as “Clean & Safe” standards prescribed

by the Business association of hotel and restaurant industry - Serbia (Hores) in cooperation with the Tourist Organization of Serbia (A hoteli, 2020).

Other, small owned family hotels are introducing measures and regulations to position themselves as safe destinations.

According to a survey conducted by the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AHLA), to feel safe in a hotel, 87% of guests expect employees to wear masks and other protective equipment, while 85% believe that hotels should provide masks to guests, who are also required to wear them. Besides, to reduce the possibility of infection, it is interesting that as many as 86% of respondents believe that the rooms do not need to be cleaned every day because it reduces contact with other people or employees in the facility. According to this research, one of the most important measures to prevent the spread of infection in accommodation facilities is to reduce the frequency of tidying up rooms. As many as 90% of respondents believe that maids should enter the rooms only at the invitation of the guest. Of course, that does not mean that hygiene in the facility will decline. Each room must be thoroughly disinfected each time the guest leaves the hotel. The other guest cannot enter the room if it has not passed the control and maximum hygiene has not been ensured. The possibility of contactless payment is also very important for passengers and more frequent use of credit cards over cash. Also, 85% of respondents believe that modern technology should be used to reduce contacts between tourists and employees in every sense. More than three-quarters of respondents believe that all additional facilities where the possibility of infection is greatest, such as gyms, swimming pools, or children's playrooms within accommodation facilities, should be temporarily closed (AHLA, 2020).

Research has shown that during a pandemic, the most important criterion when choosing a tourist trip (destination or hotel) is to take care of people's health and safety. As many as 40% of respondents agreed that they are willing to pay more money to stay in a destination where these measures apply (Gursoy, Chi, 2020). Research has also shown that 70% of hotel service users expect that human interactions should be reduced to a minimum, and modern technologies should be used as much as possible in all business domains. Therefore, it is considered that in the future one of the new trends in tourism will be the increase in use of artificial intelligence (AI) as a consequence of the COVID-19 virus and as one of the basic measures to protect the health and safety of guests and employees (Gursoy, Chi, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

Tourism is an sector in which about 10% of all workers are employed and it is believed that this sector will become even stronger. Since the beginning of the century, the turnover from foreign tourism has been almost constantly increasing by about 4%, although the world has been hit by many crises. Based on the

positive growth results in the previous period, experts estimated that in 2020, tourism could reach the figure of 1.6 billion foreign arrivals.

However, at the end of 2019, the first case of the COVID-19 virus was recorded in the world, which led to the closure of almost the entire world in March this year. Tourism is considered to be one of the sectors that suffered the greatest losses due to the pandemic. This is one of the biggest crises in history and it is still impossible to determine its full impact on tourism. Research conducted in the past few months has shown that people do not feel safe to travel and that the vast majority will not do so in the coming period. That is why major world organizations are adopting new guidelines, regulations, and standards to ensure maximum hygiene and health and safety care in all tourist facilities. It is expected that in the coming period, major changes will occur in the business of all entities in tourism and that the focus will be on preserving the health and safety of both tourists and employees in tourism companies. One of the safest ways to prevent the spread of the infection is to reduce the interaction between people, and therefore it is expected that in the coming period the use of modern technology will increase significantly in all spheres of business.

Although the situation in tourism is uncertain in the short term, experts say that a gradual recovery of international tourism can be expected over the next year.

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