



The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Tourism

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus disease a pandemic and this affected every sphere of human life including the global economy. Tourism was amongst the worst hit sectors due to the collapse of international travel. Prior to this time, tourism was one of the fastest growing sectors of the global economy. According to estimates published by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), in 2019, the tourism industry accounted for 10.4% of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and nearly 1.7 trillion dollars of global trade in goods and services. 330 million people were also employed in the industry. Based on these trends in the industry, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) made projections of about 3 to 4 percent growth margin for the year in January 2020. Major sporting events, including the Tokyo Olympics and cultural events such as Expo 2020 Dubai were expected to have a huge impact on the sector. However, in the wake of the pandemic, there were significant disruptions in the tourism sector as countries scrambled to impose travel restrictions and close their borders. Hotels were temporarily shut down and authorities advocated that people stay home and observe social distancing. As the World Health Organization led the fight against the pandemic, and with no cure in view, major events including the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, Award shows, and conferences were cancelled or postponed in a bid to contain the spread of the virus. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), there has been a severe backlash against globalization but global solidarity is the way forward towards building back the tourism industry.

How the Industry has fared:

- As of April 2020, 100 percent of all worldwide destinations introduced travel restrictions in response to the pandemic.
- There was a marked decrease in international tourists arrival in the first quarter of the year, with international arrivals in March down by 57 percent. This translates into a loss of 67 million international arrivals and about USD 80 billion in receipts.
- Between January and May, the sudden fall in tourist arrivals cost an estimated \$320 billion. Recent estimates by the United Nations World Tourism Organization forecast a loss of about 100-120 million jobs. Women, youth, and workers in the informal economy are most vulnerable to job losses and business closures due to the pandemic.
- In the accommodation and food services subsectors, 51 million businesses are facing a difficult business environment with major impacts on employment opportunities.
- The industry faces about US\$ 910 billion to US\$ 1.2 trillion loss in export revenues according to the UNWTO.
- With 90% of World Heritages Sites closed as a result of the pandemic, humanity's cultural heritage is at risk in all parts of the world.
- The global economy is also expected to contract by 3 percent in 2020

Restarting the Tourism sector

- UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili's call to action: No time for timid leadership - The safe restart of tourism is possible: ([Learn more](#))
- The effort of the UNWTO Global Tourism Crisis Committee to formulate a sector-wide response: ([Learn more](#))
- The UNWTO's range of technical assistance and potential areas of intervention in mitigating the effect of the pandemic: ([Learn more](#))
- UN Secretary-General António Guterres on overcoming the pandemic: ([Watch here](#))
- UNWTO Launches Global Guidelines to Reopen Tourism: ([Watch here](#))