

Tourism? Overtourism? No Tourism - Azores, Evolution of Tourism

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Tourism activity is significant for countries and companies. As far as governments are concerned, tourism is crucial because it contributes to the economic development of nations. Tourism enhances social prosperity and helps national industries to develop, contributes to the increase of national production, and is a source of job development (Seabra, Lages and Abrantes, 2009). On the other hand, the unequal temporal distribution of the tourist flow throughout the year, also known as seasonality, occurs in practically all destinations, with a considerable increase in the number of visitors during the summer months and a drop in the winter months, as mentioned by Fortuna and Maciel (2020). The World Tourism Organization, also known as OMT (2005), defines tourist carrying capacity as the maximum number of people who can simultaneously visit a tourist destination without causing physical, economic, socio-cultural, and environmental destruction and an unacceptable decrease in tourists satisfaction. The application of carrying capacity has a significant incidence in protected areas, in cultural and natural attractions that are frequently visited, and in relation to the maintenance of the local community's lifestyle and the potential of the tourist destination in general (Zelenka and Kacetl, 2014). This situation allows community and ecosystem recovery (Krzyzanowski and Da Cruz, 2011). This paper aims to analyze excessive tourism in contrast to the current situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the Azores archipelago and the consequences for the tourism industry, such as decreasing income and occupancy rates and employment and socioeconomic stability status. The qualitative method, through exploratory research, using primary data collection will be the methodology support. Data from SREA (2020) confirm that in 2020, tourist revenue had an 80% drop in room occupancy rate in the Azores archipelago. Of the 2800 hotel units in activity in 2019, 100 closed in 2020, and the overnight stays decreased by 73.7%, according to data obtained up to August 2020. At the end of the 3rd quarter of 2020, overnight stays were less than 600 thousand. Santos (2020) states that 2019 was an excellent year in terms of tourism for the Azores. For the first time in tourism history in the Azores, 3 million overnight stays were exceeded. The tourist system coexists with seasonality and is directly affected by tourist flows. Seasonality occurs due to several factors, such as economic activities, weather, school holidays, and biosafety. Consumers' trust starts with the image the destination conveys, and the feeling of security is tested throughout the entire value chain. The scenario has changed radically, argues Santos (2020), as of March 2020, with the pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus and an unprecedented loss of confidence in world tourism demand. The situation for the sector is very worrying, and the perspectives given by the OMT point to a slow and gradual recovery until 2024. Besides the importance and impact of the tourism indicators to our knowledge, few studies were done regarding the impacts of Sars-Cov-2 on the Azores as a touristic destination. This study tries to fill that gap.

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