

IS MEXICO A SAFE TOURIST DESTINATION?



The recent murder of three young foreigners in Baja California has again raised concerns about tourist safety in Mexico.

Undoubtedly, Mexico is one of the most popular tourist destinations worldwide and ranks sixth in tourist arrivals. According to INEGI (Mexican National Institute of Statistics and Geography), **the country welcomed almost 55 million visitors last year.** This sector is crucial for the country's economy, generating 4.7 million jobs in 2023.

However, the tourism industry has to deal with a significant challenge: the crisis of generalized violence in Mexico. The country has alarming figures of violence and insecurity, with a murder rate of 25.9 per 100,000 inhabitants, which is one of the highest in the continent. In 2023, more than 35 thousand murders were recorded.

Violence in the Paradise

Although violent crimes are more prevalent in certain states, such as Guanajuato, the State of Mexico, and Baja California, they are also occurring in tourist destinations that were previously considered safe, such as Acapulco and the region around Cancun.

Experts have stated that the epidemic of violence in Mexico, caused by the "undeniable detriment of security institutions," would inevitably spread to these tourist areas. They believe that these incidents were unavoidable.

Tourism Amid Shootings

According to the research agency TResearch, the number of homicides in Quintana Roo, the state where popular tourist destinations Cancun and Tulum are located, has increased significantly in recent years. In 2016, there were 193 homicides, but by 2017, the number had risen to 455 and reached a peak in 2018 with 841 homicides. Since then, the number of murders has remained consistently high, with over 600 each year.

Acapulco, once a peaceful vacation destination for Hollywood stars in the mid-20th century, has experienced a violent surge in recent years. In 2018, it was ranked as the second most violent city in the world by Mexican NGO Security, Justice, and Peace, with a homicide rate of 110.5 per 100,000 inhabitants. Although the situation has improved somewhat, Acapulco remains one of the top ten most violent cities in the world as of 2022, according to the same NGO.

Cartels' Disputes

It is no secret that tourist destinations in Mexico have long been associated with drug sales, both for domestic and international tourism. Unfortunately, over the last decade, the violence in Mexico has increased, mainly due to the cartels' dispute over control of these popular tourist resorts.

As a result of this drastic increase in violence, tourists are sometimes caught in the crossfire. In early April 2023, four people were found dead on the beach in Cancun in front of a hotel popular

with Americans. At the same time, a shootout in Acapulco resulted in four more deaths.

Militarization of Beaches

The United States warned against traveling to several Mexican states, including Colima, Michoacán, Sinaloa, Tamaulipas, Zacatecas, and Guerrero, where Acapulco is located. The Mexican Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs also strongly advises against travel to these states. In response, the government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador has deployed over 8,000 troops in the main Mexican tourist destinations.

Despite these warnings, tourism in Mexico appears to be relatively unaffected, according to Marco Antonio Mireles of Mexico's Ministry of Tourism. Mireles notes that in the January-March 2024 period, over 6.6 million international tourists arrived by air, a 7.4% increase compared to the same period last year and a 23% increase compared to the same period in 2019.

Mixed Authorities' Responses

Another disincentive to targeting foreigners could be the authorities' quick response in these cases, suggests Tyler Mattiace, a researcher at Human Rights Watch in Mexico. According to data from the organization México Evalúa, in 2022, **96.3 percent of crimes known to the Public Prosecutor's Office went unpunished.**

"It's very exceptional that, in the case of the surfers, we've seen so much action from the prosecutor's office and that three people have already been arrested," says Mattiace.

At the same time, according to the Ministry of the Interior, there are still more than 2,700 missing people in Baja California. In the same well where the bodies of the three young surfers were found, another body of a stranger had been lying for a longer time.

Date: 2024-05-12

Article link:

<https://www.tourism-review.com/mexico-tourist-destination-with-safety-concerns-news14377>