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CRISES - NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE TOURISM AND TRAVEL INDUSTRY

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For more than two years, the tourism sector has been analyzed from the perspective of the impact of the recent health crisis on an industry that was on an upward trend until the beginning of 2020. But the 2020 health crisis was not the first crisis tourism faced, nor will it likely be the last. Tourism began to emerge completely transformed from a long black series of events: H5N1, SARS, September 11 attacks, wars, kidnappings, etc.

Before the crisis that started in 2020, the year 2019 recorded a significant increase in international arrivals. However, this increase was partially offset by events with a significant impact on global tourism: Brexit uncertainty, geopolitical and trade tensions, and the global economic slowdown. Furthermore, 2019 was the year of the collapse of the Thomas Cook Group and several low-cost airlines in Europe, events that generated changes in the tourism industry. In this context, Europe, the region with the highest number of international tourists, recorded a decrease of about 68% in international arrivals in 2020.

Did these events, along with the health crisis, affect people's desire to travel? As far as I can tell, not. But the behavior seems to have changed, and that change will continue for a long time. Tourists, for example, are showing a clear distrust of booking a trip, due to the large number of canceled flights and outstanding refunds, situations that may in other ways prolong the effects of the health or other crisis.

In the midst of so many crises, could there also be an opportunity for tourism? Most likely, the answer is yes. Companies in the tourism and travel industry should be very transparent about their cancellation and pricing policies.

Asking tourists to leave positive reviews can prove to be an even better investment than in the past, especially if they are related to good hygiene and health practices. The offer of refund guarantees for situations that are not the fault of tourists could also be a new opportunity.

In uncertain times, people need security. The feeling of security can also come from the memory of a pleasant experience. Therefore, traveling to familiar destinations could be an important opportunity for tourism in the current situation. To attract the attention of those seeking a familiar experience, destinations should emphasize the feeling of home, and tour operators should target old customers because they are more familiar with their services.

Other observable trends in tourist behavior include: the reduction in length of stay, the fragmentation of vacations, the increasing demand for personalized vacations, and the shift to double-experience vacations (e.g., acquiring new knowledge and experiencing authentic emotions).

All these profound changes that the tourism and travel industry is undergoing could appear as real threats, or at least as significant challenges that could test the sector's players. But it is also true that all these changes can become real sources of competitive advantage. In short, they can be summarized as follows: transparency, flexibility, and familiarity. This can be the new "marketing mix" of modern tourism.

The tourism of the future must integrate the challenges faced by today's society and offer them the right response. In this way, players who offer the fastest and most appropriate response will succeed in differentiating themselves and creating new types of competitive advantage. Only in this way will tourism not only survive all crises, but also contribute to their solution.