

The Mexican Caribbean: 2,000 rooms emptier today than a year ago

By Yucatan Times on July 23, 2019

CANCUN Quintana Roo (Agencies) – The Mexican Caribbean shows this 2019 an average of 2,000 occupied hotel rooms less than in the same period last year. According to Jorge Hernandez, president of the Mexican Federation of Tourist Associations (Fematur), the main destinations of Quintana Roo have recorded a drop in hotel occupancy of between 2 and 4.8 percentage points, which means an amount of between 1,000 and 2,000 rooms less.

Hoteliers have already lowered prices by up to 25% to try to maintain last year's occupancy levels. However, it seems that the idea is not yielding the expected results. "Roberto Cintrón Gómez, president of the Hotel Association of Cancún, Puerto Morelos and Isla Mujeres, complained: *"We've already lowered rates by 25%, what else can we do?"*

The president also noted that, despite the reduction in hotel rates, hotel occupancy during the first week of July registered a decrease of 3.1 points, after standing at 79.4% compared to 82.5% during the same period last year.

Meanwhile, Marisol Vanegas, Quintana Roo's State Secretary of Tourism, shows an attitude totally contrary to that of entrepreneurs and says that the state has confirmed 3,890,000 tourists who have already booked their flights with airlines and travel agencies. And they plan to close 2019 with up to 20 million visitors, 4% more than in 2018.

As for sargasso, the main problem that is hitting the tourism industry in the country, Vanegas denies that the scenario is a "tourist catastrophe" and says that this year the state government expects to collect up to one million tons of this seaweed, 100% more than in 2018. *"The tourists who come this summer will be our best spokespersons on how beautiful the beaches of Quintana Roo are,"* said Vanegas, who also noted that the images posted on social networks do not coincide with those of the current situation.



Cancun's beaches (Photo: riviera-maya-news.com)

However, tourists do not think the same as the official. A hotel worker from Playa del Carmen explained that tourists are deceived with photos that do not match the real situation. *"In the agencies they show them pictures of I don't know how many years or months back, and tell them: look, the beach is clean, there is no problem. And it's not true. That's why, when they arrive here, they tell us: 'It's not possible, you deceived us'. And for that, they stay one night and the next day they say thank you and go quickly to another place,"* said a hotel employee, according to **Animal Político**.

"Tourists arrive thinking they are coming to the turquoise waters. And yes, the turquoise water is there, but it is one mile away from the beach. You have to pay for a tour or a boat to get there and enjoy it, because while standing on the shore, you can't bathe in the sargasso," said another resident of the area.

The sargasso problem is causing the hotel sector to reinvent itself with alternative options to maintain occupancy levels. After lowering rates between 15% and 25% to try not to lose tourists, now Riviera Maya hotels choose to temporarily move guests to other accommodations of the same chain or even others, where the beaches are clean of sargasso.

The business also offers services not related to the beaches such as archaeological sites, colonial cities and ecological recreation centers.