

## **Tourism in the Coronavirus Era (Covid-19): Case of Morocco**

EDA OUDI Asma

*Ph. D Student, Laboratory of Business Management ENCGA, Department of data processing & quantitative techniques applied to management – Ibn Zohr University-Agadir, Morocco*

Dr. HOUSSAM' bark

*Professor of Management, Laboratory of Business Management ENCGA, Department of data processing & quantitative techniques applied to management – Ibn Zohr University-Agadir, Morocco*

Dr. LAHFIDI Abdelhaq

*Professor of Management, Laboratory of Business Management ENCGA, Department of data processing & quantitative techniques applied to management – Ibn Zohr University-Agadir, Morocco*

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### **Abstract**

Moroccan tourism is one of the most affected sectors by the Coronavirus disease 2019 (covid-19). Unfortunately, this is a new experience in which the entire tourist infrastructure suffers from an incalculable damage due to the coronavirus pandemic. The tourism sector of Morocco is experiencing a tough competition between the various destinations, in normal periods the main emitting countries are called upon by all touristic destinations to solicit significant flows of travelers. With Covid-19, the situation becomes more difficult; first of all, the borders of almost all countries have been shutdown causing a significant decline in the flow of travelers between 60% and 80% for 2020. Many countries are now entering a new phase in fighting the virus while at the same time managing the re-opening of the tourism economy. This article aims to understand the impact of COVID-19 on global tourism and what are the preventive measures adopted by Morocco to face the post-pandemic crisis?

**Keywords:** Moroccan Tourism, Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), Travelers, Global tourism, Post pandemic crisis.

### **Resumen**

El turismo marroquí es uno de los sectores más afectados para el Coronavirus (COVID-19). Desgraciadamente, es una nueva experiencia dura que el conjunto de las infraestructuras turísticas viven a causa de la pandemia. El sector turístico vive una competencia dura entre diferentes destinos. En temporada normal, los principales países emisores son solicitados para todas las destinaciones turísticas en busca de flujos importantes de viajeros. Con el COVID-19, la situación se vuelve peor. Primero, las fronteras de la casi totalidad de los países han estado cerradas. Causando una regresión importante de los flujos de viajeros entre 60% y 80% en 2020. Varios países entran ahora en una nueva fase de lucha contra el virus, mientras manejan la reapertura del sector turístico. Es una misión compleja de cuantificar su impacto sobre el sector turístico. Este artículo tiene como objetivo la comprensión del impacto del COVID-19 sobre el turismo global. Y también de conocer la estrategia adoptada para Marruecos frente al crisis postpandémica.

**Palabras clave:** Turismo marroquí, Coronavirus (COVID-19), Viajeros, Turismo global, Crisis postpandémica.

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### **I. Introduction**

In December 2019, an unknown virus from the coronavirus family emerged in central China which quickly took drastic confinement measures for nearly 60 million people. However, the virus, comparable to the Spanish flu, is spreading all over the world paralyzing the entire countries, causing psychosis and plunging the world into a crisis not seen since World War II.

On December 31, 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) alerted to several cases of pneumonia<sup>1</sup> in the city of Wuhan<sup>2</sup> (Hubei Province of China). But this virus was unlike any known virus. According to a

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<sup>1</sup>Pneumonia is an infection that inflames the air sacs in one or both lungs.

<sup>2</sup>Wuhan is the largest city in Hubei and the most populous city in Central China, a population of over 11 million.

report published on January 12, 2020 by the World Health Organization (WHO), the first cases were reported on December 31, 2019 by China. There were 41 known cases of infection. The majority of these people worked or frequently visited the Huanan Wholesale Fish Market, located in the city of Wuhan in China, 850 kilometers west of Shanghai. A market closed by the Chinese authorities from January 1, 2020.

On January 7, 2020, Chinese authorities confirmed that it was indeed a new virus from the coronavirus family. The epidemic linked to the new coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 was called temporarily "2019-nCoV" and then definitively COVID-19 (19 for the year of appearance).

In January 9 2020, Chinese state media reported that a team of researchers led by Xu Jianguo had identified the pathogen behind the mysterious outbreak of pneumonia in Wuhan as a new coronavirus. Although the virus was soon after named 2019-nCoV, and then renamed SARS-CoV-2, it remains commonly known simply as the coronavirus.

The pace is accelerating in Morocco to stem the spread of the virus which has plunged the entire planet into a major health emergency, causing nearly 16,000 deaths and 350,000 infections in a few months. Until it was relatively spared. Faced with the fast development of the pandemic, the country immediately has putted all of its stakeholders to work in a strong response plan in which every day is decisive.

On March 2, Morocco recorded the first coronavirus positive case. From then on, the country embarked on a real race against time to avoid the health drama.

On March 18, a few days after the announcement of the first local case of covid-19 contamination, the Minister of Health Khalid Ait Taleb decided to limit the population movements as much as possible and to apply voluntary confinement, during a press point broadcast live. It took just two more days for the country of nearly 35 million people to declare a state of health emergency and to establish a general lockdown. Since March 20 at 6 p.m., all travels have been conditional on presentation of an authorization. Taking the counter-example of Italy, Morocco quickly decides to deploy all of its health resources in anticipation of a possible worsening of the situation.

Already on March 17, Mohammed VI brought together the head of the government, Saâdeddine El Othmani, the Minister of Health, Khalid Ait Taleb, as well as the Minister of the Interior Abdelouafi Laftit, the Director General of the General Direction of the National Security Abdellatif Hammouchi and the General of the armed forces Abdelfattah EL Ouarak, inspector general of the FAR and Lieutenant-General Mohamed Haramou, commander of the Royal Gendarmerie, for a working session, devoted to monitoring the management of the spread of the coronavirus pandemic on the territory.

## **1. THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) ON GLOBAL TOURISM**

### **1.1 A Brief History of Human Coronaviruses:**

Coronaviruses take their name from the distinctive spikes with rounded tips that decorate their surface, which reminded virologists of the appearance of the sun's atmosphere, known as its corona. Various coronaviruses infect numerous species, but the first human coronaviruses weren't discovered until the mid-1960s. *"That was sort of the golden days, if you will, of virology, because at that time the technology became available to grow viruses in the laboratory, and to study viruses in the laboratory,"* says University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center pediatrician Jeffrey Kahn, who studies respiratory viruses. But the two coronaviruses that were identified at the time, OC43 and 229E, didn't elicit much research interest, says Kahn, who wrote a review on coronaviruses a few years after the SARS outbreak of 2003. *"I don't believe there was a big effort to make vaccines against these because these were thought to be more of a nuisance than anything else."*

The viruses cause typical cold symptoms such as a sore throat, cough, and stuffy nose, and they seemed to be very common; one early study estimated that 3 percent of respiratory illnesses in a children's home in Georgia over seven years in the 1960s had been caused by OC43, and a 1986 study of children and adults in northern Italy found that it was rare to come across a subject who did not have antibodies to that virus (an indicator of past infection). Coronaviruses' mild-mannered reputation changed with the SARS outbreak. Although related to OC43 and 229E, SARS-CoV was far deadlier; killing about 10 percent of people it infected a total of 774 worldwide, according to the United Kingdom's National Health Service. While it's still unclear exactly where SARS-CoV came from, similar viruses were later found in bats, and some studies suggested the virus could have jumped to humans via an intermediary such as civets.

### **1.2 COVID-19 and its impact on international tourism sector:**

Tourism is one of the most directly affected sectors in this current crisis, and this calls for an immediate and long-term responses. With international aviation standstill since March, the closure of tourism sites, the cancellation or postponement of major festivals and events, and restrictions on public gatherings (indoor and outdoor) in many countries, the impact of COVID-19 on global tourism has been overwhelming and immediate. Furthermore, despite the sector's proven resilience in response to previous crises, the sheer

breadth and depth of COVID-19 related impacts on tourism and mostly the wider economy means a quick recovery is unlikely. Reflecting the urgency of the situation, an extraordinary meeting of the G20 Tourism Ministers was held on 23 April, with Ministers making a statement welcoming national efforts to mitigate the economic and social impact of the pandemic, and promising to work together to provide support for sustainable and inclusive recovery of the tourism sector.

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has released an updated data measuring the impact of COVID-19 on the sector. The UNWTO emphasize on the importance of taking responsibility, safety and security, as travel restrictions are lifted. The Organization also reiterates the need for a credible commitment to support tourism as an economic pillar.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has impacted countries at different times, in different ways and in varying degrees. Yet, around the world, response to curb the pandemic has translated into national lockdowns and shutdown of borders making tourism one of the hardest-hit sectors. The extensive and deep impact of COVID-19 on tourism coupled with the relevance of the sector to the economy and jobs requires a strong support at national and international level through the relevant institutions.

Based on information from governments, international organizations and online official public sources, UNWTO has launched an Online interactive dashboard on country and international policy responses to COVID-19 covering 220 countries and territories and more than international and regional institutions.

According to World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) Report on COVID – 19 Related to Travel Restrictions, as of 20 April, 100% of all worldwide destinations have introduced travel restrictions in response to the pandemic; 97 destinations (45%) have totally or partially closed their borders for tourists, 65 destinations (30%) have suspended totally or partially international flights, 39 destinations (18%) are implementing the closing of borders in a more differentiated manner by banning the entry for passengers from specific countries of origin.

UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili said: *“The sudden and massive fall in tourist numbers threatens jobs and economies. It is vital, therefore, that the restart of tourism is made a priority and managed responsibly, protecting the most vulnerable and with health and safety as a sector’s number one concern. Until tourism’s restart is underway everywhere, UNWTO again calls for strong support for the sector in order to protect jobs and businesses. We therefore welcome the steps undertaken by both the European Union and individual countries including France and Spain to support tourism economically and build the foundations for recovery.”*

## **2. THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) ON MOROCCAN TOURISM:**

A total of 844 cases of COVID-19 have been registered in Morocco until 04/03/2020, of which 83.1% are indigenous cases. The 1st imported case was detected on 03/02/2020, while the 1st case of local transmission was recorded on March 13, 2020. The number of confirmed cases has gradually increased, leading our country to implement measures consisting of closing air and sea borders since March 15, 2020; the end of studies for all school and university levels from March 16, 2020; closing of mosques since March 16, 2020; the gradual confinement of the population since March 20, 2020, which nevertheless remains partial.

The impact of these measures which must be observed within 10 to 14 days of their entry into force, probably allowed a relative slowdown in the spread of the epidemic, from March 29, 2020, to be confirmed over the next few days. It should be remembered that a new definition of "possible cases of COVID-19" was adopted on March 24, 2020 in order to detect more infected people early on.

The two peaks recorded on March 23 and 28 are linked to active detection, carried out around two foci of grouped cases, one among people who have been on an organized trip to Egypt and the other among Moroccan Jews who participated in a ceremony family. At the same time, examination among medical staff was organized. The impact of the shutdown of borders probably took place around March 27-28, an effect immediately masked by local transmission of the disease among their contacts (see Graph 1)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup>Published by the Ministry Of Tourism report 2020



Figure 1: Temporal evolution of imported and local in Morocco, 02 March-03 April

However, the evolution of the pandemic on a global scale combined with the drastic measures taken by the public authorities (borders shutdown, suspension of passenger flights, closures of spaces of entertainment, etc.) have put the sector in danger. In terms of numbers, 3,500 tourist accommodation companies, 500 tourist catering companies, 1,450 travel agencies, 1,500 tourist transport companies and 1,500 car rental companies are living in shock today. Faced with this unprecedented situation, the National Confederation of Tourism send a red flag, estimating that the sector could suffer losses estimated at 138 billion dirhams between 2020 and 2022. Professionals, forced to suspend all their activities since mid-March, quickly found themselves facing a cash flow deficit, unable to honor their commitments even those of the short term (salaries, bank and insurance payments, etc.).

### 3. PREVENTIVE MEASURES ADOPTED BY MINISTRY OF TOURISM OF MOROCCO IN ORDER TO FACE THE POST-PANDEMIC CRISIS:

#### 3.1 Ministry of Tourism strategy in Morocco

From the first alerts, on January 27, the Ministry of Tourism of Morocco set up a monitoring unit which has been working 7 days a week to supply the global system for almost 3 months.

This internal unit is made up of administrative executives, delegates in the Moroccan provinces, establishments under the supervision of the Ministry of Tourism but also private operators.

In January 27, Ministry of Tourism implemented a daily reporting system to provide all local or international information and to have a review of the source markets' situation as well as nearby destinations (number of tourists, reservations, cancellations, etc.). The ministry was also mobilized in the global strategy of Morocco guided by His Majesty the King Mohammed VI who put forward, before any other priority, the health and safety of citizens. It is in this context that the Ministry of Tourism was a part of the Economic Monitoring Committee (EMC) to provide measures in order to be respected.

In addition to the work of EMC, the Ministry of Tourism is very involved at the international level (UNWTO, IATA, ICAO, OECD, etc.)<sup>4</sup> to have the updates on the measures taken by other countries, and to stay in contact with donors with whom partnerships will make it possible to manage future crisis as well as possible.

Another important component concerns the awareness and the support of operators, firstly, in term of updating their knowledge in relation to what is happening internationally. This axis is managed within the framework of a project which is being finalized by the Ministry of Tourism.

The ministry has developed an integrated and participatory plan to fight against the repercussions of the new coronavirus, to revive the sector and to promote the Kingdom's positioning in the post-Covid-19 world. In this sense, the Minister of Tourism explained that internal tourism is one of the priorities of her department, as a strategic engine to revitalize the niche, through the revision of the offer and its adaptation to the demand of local tourists, the launch of an intense promotional campaign aimed at restoring confidence, without forgetting the promotion of the local product. This action plan includes, other measures currently being

<sup>4</sup>UNWTO: World Tourism Organization

IATA: International Association of Air Transport

ICAO: International Civil Aviation Organization

OECD: Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development

negotiated on financial, social and governance aspects, noting that restoring the confidence of visitors and investors remains a top priority.

In addition, Ms. Fettah<sup>5</sup> said that the indicators of the tourism sector have experienced a sharp decline in the first four months of the year 2020, since the number of tourists has shown a decrease of 45% compared to the same period of last year. As for tourism receipts, they fell by 15% in the first four months of the year.

In case of proactive measures to fight against the spread of the coronavirus, the Minister of Tourism highlighted the Moroccan approach that was welcomed by the international community based on privileging the security of Moroccan citizens and foreigners, adding that Morocco has taken other important measures to combat the socio-economic repercussions of the pandemic.

On the legislative level, the Ministry of Tourism intervened to avoid the bankruptcies of tourist companies and to guarantee the rights of consumers through the law of 30-20 enacting specific provisions for travel contracts, tourist stays and travel contracts of air passenger transport.

In the same context, and to strengthen the capacities of professionals and prepare them for a fast tourism activity retake which requires improving competitiveness, a digital platform has been developed to support them by offering a digital platform in a number of areas that focuses on excellence through quality, innovation and commercial capacity.

The Minister of Tourism also recalled that her department is working on the development of health and safety manual for the resumption of tourist activity, the structuring of the sector and the gradual generalization of social coverage, in addition as a preparation of a sector plan.

On the register of tourism promotion, the Ministry of Tourism has initiated a series of measures in collaboration with the Moroccan National Tourist Office (MNTTO), focuses on a relaunch of internal tourism based, in one hand, on the implementation of a strategy towards the internal market with the aim of bringing the touristic products to citizens. On the other hand, it is a question of encouraging Moroccans to travel, especially in summer and during weekends, according to an approach involving different regions. In this regard, UNWTO has made an interactive platform available to professionals providing the necessary data and information on the international market, for regular monitoring of the impact of the epidemic around the world.

### **3.2 Internal Tourism and its role to save the Tourism sector from the breakdown:**

Internal tourism will participate in limiting the damage that has impacted this sector, but this still depends on the visibility concerning the timetable for lifting the confinement, the authorization of inter-city traffic as well as support measures for the benefit of tourism operators and of the Moroccan consumer. It is true that during the past crises since 2001, Moroccans living abroad and national tourists have played an important role in the survival of the sector. The volume of overnight stays by national tourists rose from 2.27 million in 2000 to 4.07 million in 2010 (+1.8 million overnight stays, + 79% growth over the entire period) while overnight stays by foreign tourists increased from 11.27 million in 2000 to 13.95 million in 2010, (+2.68 million overnight stays, + 24% growth over the entire period). During the period 2010-2019, the volume of overnight stays by national tourists rose from 4.07 million to 7.84 million (+3.78 million overnight stays, + 82% growth over the entire period) while overnight stays by foreign tourists rose from 13.95 million in 2010 to 17.41 million in 2019, (+3.46 million overnight stays, + 24% growth over the entire period). That said, Morocco has an interest in developing a strategy in which internal tourism plays a more important role like the OECD countries for which Internal Tourism represents on average 75% of the sector's activity (85% for Germany, 83% for the United States, 81% for the United Kingdom).

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<sup>5</sup>Ms. Fettah : Minister Of Tourism of Morocco

## II. Conclusion:

Although the current health crisis has seriously affected the tourism sector, it also represents a golden opportunity to ensure a complete overhaul of the industry. Indeed, the crisis has succeeded in revealing the flaws of a sector considered vital for the Moroccan economy but which is handicapped by multiple structural constraints which hamper its development (governance problems, under-capitalization of companies, weight of taxation, predominance of the informal sector, etc.). In order to mitigate the impact of Coronavirus (Covid-19), some few alignments could be proposed:

- To review the fiscal pressure that the tax institutions carry out to the companies that act or are related in the tourist and commercial scope, facilitating the fiscal fulfillments that affect directly on the development of the tourist industry.
- To maximize the financial, operational and image resistance of commercial and tourism companies in the short term.
- To govern through a new leadership framework with an integrative vision, reinforcing existing actions and programs and incorporating other lines of innovative proposals.
- To detect the value proposals of companies and transform the business model of companies with a short-term vision, but with the intention that they can be strengthened in the medium term and consolidated in the long term.
- Suspension of refunds for a certain period (one year is proposed from the beginning of the crisis in each territory) and of support granted with the own resources of each promoting institution in order to ensure the liquidity and viability of tourism and commercial enterprises, without any penalty.

The coronavirus is accelerating the ad hoc adoption of video conferencing, cloud collaboration and teleworking. Companies that consistently adopt these digital tools and flexible working practices will become more agile, save money, reduce their carbon footprint and attract talented young employees.

Covid-19's response can become the catalyst for reinventing the supply chain in the tourism industry. The aim is to preserve those elements of the current struggle in the short term that can serve as a basis for a more reactive and flexible operation in the future.

The significant of this study is, to apprehend the impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on the worldwide tourism and how did the government manage the dynamic behavior of economic sector in tourism industry. In the same time, government policy still needs to address a proper solution in preventing the spreading of COVID-19 and elevating the status of economy activity in tourism industry.

This research has some limitations. The limitation is that a part of the data used in this review are collected from scholarly journals, which exclude conference proceeding papers, master's dissertations, doctoral theses, textbooks, and unpublished working papers in the Tourism literature. This may imply that this review is not thorough; however, it provides a comprehensive review since the majority of papers published by scholarly journals are included. Therefore, this paper offers to academic researchers and practitioners a framework for future research.

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