
LEGAL ISSUES OF THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON RUSSIAN TOURISM IN INTERNATIONAL LAWS

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Abstract

Tourism is a global activity that, while having specific laws in each country, has a global platform, and in this regard, there are general and universal laws to continue tourist activities and protect the rights of tourists. The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the development of the tourism sector is considered in this article. Special focus is put on the development of tourism in the Russian Federation. The authors examined the current state of the tourism industry in the world, including statistics on event and cultural tourism, as well as UNWTO forecasts regarding the development of tourism after the end of the pandemic. Measures of support for the industry by the Russian Government and the shift of the travel vector from foreign countries to domestic travel are considered. Significantly higher prices, as well as a significant drop in the purchasing ability of the middle class in Russia, will also boost domestic travel. International law has been one of the most important reasons for the significant growth of the tourism industry in recent years. The existence of some international treaties and agreements in the fields of protection of natural, cultural and historical centers and places for the purpose of educational and social exploitation can be considered as one of the ways of influencing international law in this field. The authors of the study concluded that tourism would no longer be the same, and that the Covid-19 pandemic, along with a large number of negative factors, had spurred digital development, increase in the number of independent travellers and the development of services for booking air tickets, booking accommodation, etc. It is likely that in the coming years, the trend towards home-based travel will continue, leading to the bankruptcy of tour operators and the emergence of a new tourist market.

Keywords: Law, International Law, Legal Issues, tourism, domestic tourism, tourism economy, Covid-19 pandemic, tourism during the pandemic.

1. Introduction

In today's world, tourism plays an important role in the world economy. In many countries, tourism has a major impact on the country's gross domestic product and employment. It is worth noting that tourism is directly linked to economic sectors such as transport, communications, agriculture, trade, construction and many others

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The impact of various factors on tourism has a direct impact on the economy of the country. Thus, in 2020, the world economy faced a crisis due to the spread of the virus (COVID-19). An outbreak of the disease was

registered for the first time in China in Wuhan. As of 20 October 2021, more than 33 million people had been registered worldwide with the virus, 593,000 had died [1]. Due to the rapid increase in coronavirus infection, the Government of many of the world's countries has had to resort to a number of restrictions, including the imposition of a lockdown when the economy is almost completely shut down.

The government of the Russian Federation and the authorities of the country are engaged in the provision and organization of a set of measures in connection with the coronavirus (COVID-19) in accordance with paragraph 1 of the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated 11.05.2020 No. 316 "On determining of an order of extension of action of measures for ensuring sanitary and epidemiologic wellbeing of the population in the regions of the Russian Federation in connection with the spread of the new coronavirus infection (COVID-19)". Social assistance was provided to citizens of the Russian Federation who had airline tickets or tickets for other forms of international transport to return to the Russian Federation from March 16 to May 31, 2020, but could not return due to transport restrictions imposed during the coronavirus pandemic [2].

A number of countries have closed their borders to reduce the incidence of COVID-19. The Chinese travel agency suspended group visits on 25 January 2020. Already in February 2020, Russian airlines began operating in charter mode for flights to China, and later suspended railway passenger traffic. The spread of coronavirus infection around the world has become one of the factors that reduce, and sometimes completely stop, tourist flows.

2. Method

It should be noted that for many countries, event tourism is a social and economic priority [3]. Event tourism is a type of tourist activity associated with visiting various public events and unique natural phenomena that attract tourists with their uniqueness [4]. In 2020, in connection with the worsening of the epidemiological situation, mass events on the world scale were cancelled: the Eurovision Music contest, the International Cannes Film Festival, and the Festival of Natural Beauty, the Oktoberfest, etc. In addition to direct losses due to not holding the event, local private companies also suffer, which are often completely dependent on event tourism.

World cultural tourism accounts for about 40% of total world tourism income. It is no secret that almost every tourist, even going on a beach holiday or for medical treatment, seeks to mix up their trip with a visit to a museum or an excursion. At the same time, World Heritage sites are particularly popular with tourists. However, at the height of the self-isolation regime, that is, in March and April 2020, 95 % of museums were forced to close their doors. Experts estimate that 13 % of them may never open again.

Many World Heritage sites, which were closed in 90% of countries, also lost their visitors. Due to the closure of attractions and cultural institutions, there is a reduction in jobs and an increase in unemployment.

3. Results

Between January and May 2021, international tourism declined by 85% compared to the same period in 2019. In 2020, this figure was 65 % (see Figure 1).

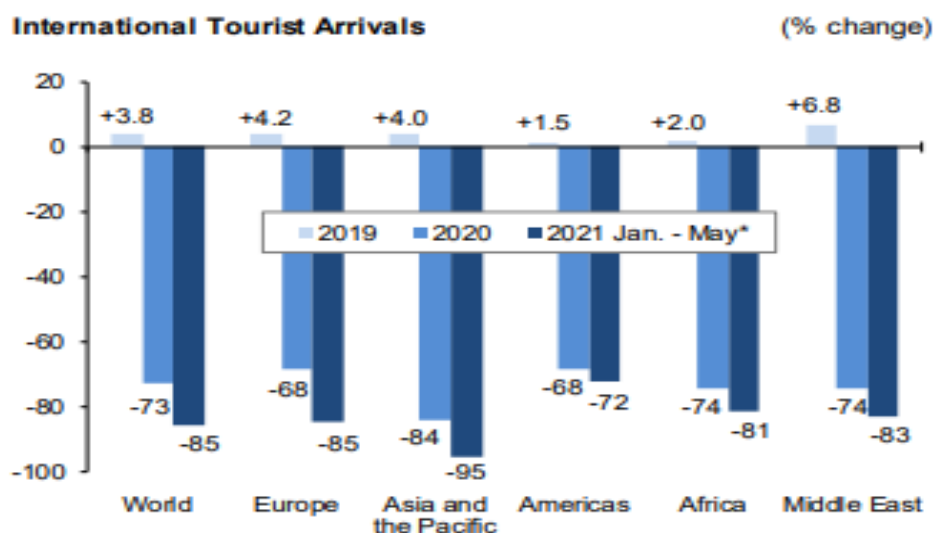


Figure 1. International tourist arrivals

The largest decline in international arrivals for the first half of 2021, compared to 2019, is observed in Asian-Pacific Region (–95%). Due to reduced tourist arrivals Europe ranks second (–85%), followed by the Middle East (–83%), Africa ranks fourth (–81%), and America ranks fifth (–72%).

It should be noted that some countries recorded a slight increase in tourism revenues in May 2021, due to an increase in the number of arrivals. The demand for tourist services cannot fall for a long period of time, as people need to restore their labor resources. Therefore, during the crisis, there is also a demand, but often only for tourist products with low consumer value. To create such products, tour operators resort to reducing the cost of a tourist package or excluding certain services from it.

At present, tourism is the most severely affected industry, due to the closure of many countries' borders and restrictions on movement. The tourism industry plays a major role in Russia, but not a small one, as it provides employment to more than 4 million people and its contribution to GDP in 2019 was 5.2 %.

According to the Federal Tourism Agency, 6 358 959 tourists visited Russia in 2020, which is almost 4 times less than in 2019 [4] (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Number of foreign citizens trips to the Russian Federation

The number of departures from Russia has also significantly decreased. In 2019, this figure was 45 330 443 people, in 2020 – 12 360742 [4] (see Figure 3). The decline in tourist visits is directly related to the fact that many mass destinations remain closed to Russians. And due to the limited air transportation, even open tourist destinations do not allow growth to 2019.



Figure 3. Number of tourist trips of citizens of the Russian Federation abroad

In 2017-2019, there was an increase in the number of tourist trips. According to the Federal State Statistics Service, the number of foreign trips reached 39.6 million in 2017. Often, Russians choose such countries as Turkey (4.5 million trips), Abkhazia (4.3 million trips) and Finland (3.3 million trips) [5]. The positive dynamics of foreign trips was also revealed in 2018 (+5.9%). As a result of the declared pandemic, a global crisis caused by the force majeure factor occurred, and therefore the number of foreign trips decreased by 72.73% compared to 2019. Such a decline leads to job losses, a sharp decline in foreign exchange earnings and tax deductions, which in turn negatively affects the state's ability to support the tourism industry.

A sharp decrease in people's earnings, the inability to purchase tourist services in this regard, and the cyclical nature of repeated outbreaks of Covid-19 – are factors that will determine the trajectory of tourist flows and tourist demand in the near future [6].

It should be noted that due to the closure of the borders of many countries, domestic tourism has begun to develop actively in the Russian Federation. Tour operators began to develop completely new and unique routes, charter flights were launched from Saint Petersburg and Moscow to previously unpopular tourist destinations: Republic of Khakassia, Buryatia, Altai, as well as resorts on the Baltic Sea. The list of destinations to which the Government provides subsidies for flights has been expanded, thereby encouraging domestic travel.

Government of the Russian Federation has introduced a number of measures to support the tourism business. According to the Federal Law, tour operators in the field of foreign tourism must make annual payments to the reserve fund. In 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic Covid-19 the government exempted tour operators from contributions to the association fund "TourAssistance". Also in 2021, participants in the tourism industry received an extension of the opportunity to use the fund's resources in order to refund money to tourists for the tours, which they purchased, but were unable to use them due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Within the framework of the support of domestic tourism in Russia, the Federal Tourism Agency developed the program of state subsidy of travel in Russia - «Tourist Cashback». This program provides for a refund of 20% of the price of the tour in Russia to the national payment card "Mir", which was used to pay online. The maximum cashback amount for a single payment is 20,000 rubles. The fourth stage of the program was completed on September 10, 2021. Tourists could receive the subsidy an unlimited number of times.

Today, despite various tourism support programs, the overall number of both out-of-country and domestic tourist arrivals has remained relatively low. A number of factors contribute to this: a decrease in the purchasing ability of the population; fear of infection among potential tourists; and rising prices for tourist services.

In 2020, the World Tourism Organization experts estimated that it would take 2 to 4 years to return to the 2019 tourism indicators. In the long run, after 2021, with a decrease in the incidence of coronavirus infection, a sharp increase in demand for tourist services was expected. Experts proposed three main scenarios for the growth of international tourist arrivals (see Figure 4)

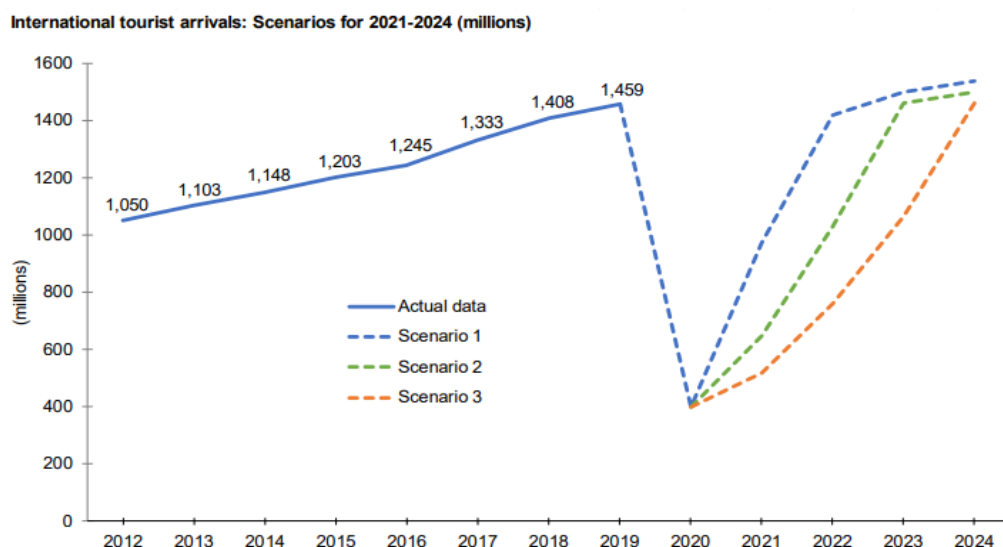


Figure 4. International tourist arrivals: scenarios for 2021-2024

4. Summary

Unfortunately, to date, the UNWTO forecasts are not being implemented. International tourist arrivals are declining. The growing incidence of new strains of coronavirus is leading governments to return back earlier restrictive measures.

Due to the unstable situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, it is difficult to predict how tourism will develop in Russia. However, it should be that after the pandemic, the demand for a tourist product will change. In 2020, the demand for domestic tourism increased significantly. This trend will continue in the near future. Due to the economic crisis, the purchasing ability of tourists will also decrease, so budget tourist products will become the most relevant. Changes in consumer demand in the context of its general reduction will lead to a decrease in the flow of tourists in many directions. The market supply of tourist products will also be affected by the crisis. The increase in the cost of a complex tourist product will result from the fact that tour operators will adapt to the new requirements associated with the risk of the spread of coronavirus infection.

The increase in the prices of the tourist product will make it possible for the out-flows generated mainly by the middle class of the paying population to be significantly reduced and transformed into domestic flows. With a high degree of probability, it can be argued that potential tourists will pay great attention to their health after the end of the pandemic. Consumers will pay more attention to tour operators' compliance with sanitary and epidemiological measures when purchasing a tourist product, and the demand for health tourism will increase.

It should be that the sales channels of tourist products will change. Despite the fact that Covid-19 pandemic has caused a huge damage to the tourism sector, it has also served as an impetus for the development of digital technologies. The introduction of various innovations in the tourism sector began even before the Covid-19 pandemic. Skyscanner, Booking.com, Airbnb services, allowed tourists to independently form a tour package and plan trips. As a result, the world continues to see an upward trend in the number of tourists purchasing individual instead of package tours. During the quarantine restrictions within the framework of the coronavirus pandemic, virtual tours of cities and museums around the world became very popular. This direction of digital

tourism allows bypassing the world's famous museums (Louvre, Hermitage), picture galleries, and visit unique theatres, watch performances and listen Vienna Opera without moving tourists to other countries and cities.

This trend will continue in the post-pandemic period, with fewer group tours worldwide in favour of individual tours, increased demand for online tours and more online sales. Online sales of travel products are the most promising in the modern world. Online sales of travel products is the most promising in the modern world. This sales channel allows to launch virtual consultations with the client, conduct surveys to identify destinations that are in demand, develop directions for self-booking and forming tours.

The Innovation Agency of Moscow predicts the growth of demand for online platforms, which allow organizing a trip by combining the possibility of booking not only tickets and accommodation, but also leisure activities in the very place of departure. The example of such a product is the RUSPASS service, which allows the user to create an individual travel route throughout Russia [7].

5. Discussion and conclusion

Summarizing the above, it should be noted that the tourism sector has suffered quite a lot due to the spread of coronavirus infection. The increase in morbidity in the Russian Federation is on the rise, which is why there are far from optimistic predictions about the fate of the tourism industry in the coming months. The main negative consequences of the Covid-19 are a decline in world GDP, a significant decline in international tourism, and temporary conservation of tourist facilities, the decline in foreign investment in tourism enterprises by 40%, the increase in unemployment in tourism and related industries, etc.

However, along with the negative consequences, there are also positive features. Many tourism enterprises began to adapt to the new requirements of sanitary-and epidemiological requirements and to innovate to ensure the safety of people. The closure of the borders of many countries has stimulated the development of domestic tourism and increased the flow to unpopular tourist destinations. It is clear that psychology and global understanding of consumption are being strongly reformed following the pandemic, and demand for tourism services will change accordingly. Moreover, a new phase of competition in tourism will begin, as the pandemic has clearly accelerated the development of new technologies, and most of them involve real travel.

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