



**Universitat**  
de les Illes Balears

## **BACHELOR'S THESIS**

# **POST-COVID TOURISM RECOVERY IN MEXICO**

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**Degree in Tourism**

**Faculty of Tourism**

**Academic Year 2021-22**

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## Abstract

This project tries to explain the impact of the Covid-19 on the economy, society and mainly on tourism companies in Mexico. From November 2019 to November 2021, a key period of the pandemic.

During a health crisis, aggravated by a lockdown, there is a fall in GDP and a decrease in demand since the restrictions affect both demand and supply. This fact causes the paralysis of industries, such as tourism, the closure of companies and the risk of going bankrupt. The variation in employment during the pandemic in the different tourism companies that operate in Mexico is also investigated.

The measures adopted by the different companies and the government to try to reactivate tourism, adapting it to the new normal, are contemplated. In addition, the appearance and subsequent evolution of vaccines in Mexico is observed.

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## 1. Introduction

During the pandemic, all countries in the world introduced mobility restrictions and there was a drop in international tourism never seen before. Globally, the arrival of tourists in 2020 decreased by 74% compared to the previous year. US\$1.1 billion (around €1 billion) of international tourism revenue was lost. And some 120 million jobs were put at risk.

The main reason that has led to the choice of the topic is the opportunity to study in detail the issues of the Covid-19 pandemic, from a perspective far from one's own country. It will be analysed from February 2020 to November 2021. In addition to expanding the knowledge about the economic and health impact that the pandemic is bringing, specifically on the tourism sector, that will mark a turning point for society.

In developing countries, tourism helps to get out of poverty, by generating foreign exchange and income. Many families depend on jobs in this sector for a good quality of life. Tourism is an important part of the Mexican economy, for this reason it is necessary to analyse how the pandemic has affected it, also observing the mismanagement that Government of Mexico has carried out facing Covid-19. As well as how they have coped with vaccination, to study how companies and society can get out of the crisis.

The interesting thing is that tourism has a great capacity for resilience, since it adapts to the new needs. It could be said that in all previous cases of crisis of any kind, this sector has managed to get out of the problem effectively and successfully. The new strategies to adapt to the changes, carried out by tourism companies have a fundamental role in the recovery of the global economy.

### 1.1. Contextualization and purpose

For the first time, on December 31, 2019, the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission, China, notified the appearance of some cases of serious respiratory problems that implied the appearance of the SARS-CoV-2 disease (WHO, 2020). SARS-CoV-2, officially named Covid-19, is highly contagious according to the World Health Organization. It is part of the coronavirus family, which can cause mild illnesses such as the common cold, and serious illnesses such as SARS or MERS-CoV respiratory syndrome (Retana, C. M. 2021). This virus has caused a global pandemic, given its level of spread. Millions of people have been infected over two years, so much so that it has not yet been stopped, despite the appearance of vaccines. This virus spread at great speed, and it has caused deaths and consequent illnesses to some affected. On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared Covid-19 a global pandemic, as there were more than 118,000 cases reported in 114 countries and nearly 4,300 deaths (Suárez, V., et al.). On February 27, 2020, the first case of Covid-19 was detected in Mexico and in four days there was a loss of MX\$400,000 million (around €18,660 million) (Hosteltur, 2020b).

This pandemic and a necessary quarantine to stop the spread of the virus, meant the closure of many borders of different countries, which made it impossible for tourists to flow between destinations and therefore a fall in the economy. Tourism is a very important source of income for Mexico and practically the main source for some of its regions, which is why it did not close its air domestic borders. In addition, tourism enhances national economic development, generates employment, and provides foreign exchange. That is why economic crises, such as the one brought by the pandemic, notoriously affect the development of this sector and its contribution to society.

The main objective of this work is to analyse the effects of the virus on tourism in Mexico, how it has affected the country's economy and employment, also how the country has implemented vaccines to recover from the health problem.

## 1.2. Methodology

To prepare this work a specific and detailed search related to tourism and Covid-19 in Mexico, dating from the start of the pandemic to the end of 2021 has been carried out for the news published on the Hosteltur website, where to find tourism news, the latest on hotels, the economy, travel agencies, airlines, and tourism companies. Other information about news has been extracted from the Spanish International News Agency EFE.

The information of the declaration of the pandemic and the health measures taken internationally, have been obtained from the World Health Organization (WHO) website. This about the cases of contagion and the protocols to follow have been taken from The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC). Information on vaccines in the US has been obtained from the Centre for Research and Tourism Competitiveness of the Anáhuac University. The sanitary measures of the Legislative Power have been taken from the portal of the Legislative Information System (SIL) of the Government Secretariat. The information about international tourism has been extracted from The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The statistical data and the information of the tourism in Mexico have been taken from the Mexican Secretary of Tourism (Sectur).

The compilation of statistical data for the preparation of tables and graphs to visualize and add value to the explanation of the subject matter, were extracted from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) public databases, from February 2020 to November 2020. In addition, all the results of the *Encuestas de Viajeros Internacionales* (EVI) located in their press releases have been thoroughly reviewed. The daily confirmed cases at the national and regional levels, found in the files of the download areas of the single portal of the Government of Mexico. The arrival of international tourists who entered the country pre-pandemic, during the pandemic and post-pandemic, also separated by type of arrival, either by air or by land. These data consider all international travellers, both tourists and hikers, who differentiate whether they spend the night or not. And also border or internment travellers, who differ according to whether they stay within the border strip or go beyond.

## 2. The impact of Covid-19 in the tourism sector of Mexico

In developing countries such as Mexico, tourism is a stimulus for their economic and social evolution (Telfer and Sharpley, 2015) since it collaborates with the increase in the GDP of the country. Normally the tourism activities in Mexico account for 8.7% of the national GDP (Hosteltur, 2021s) and generates 11 million jobs (Figueroa, E., et al., 2014).

In 2019, pre-covid times, the Mexican Ministry of Tourism (Sectur), seeing the growing trend in the sector, estimated for the 2020 the arrival of 46.2 million foreign tourists, a profit of US\$ 26,700 million (about €25,370 million) and 95,000 new jobs would arise, increasing employment by 2.1% (Hosteltur, 2020).

World society is afraid of the current health situation, a fact that significantly affects tourism, practically halving the international tourist flow. Jorge Arganis Díaz-Leal, Secretary of Infrastructure, Communications and Transportation, confirmed that the flow of passengers to Mexico was reduced by 90% in the first quarter of 2020. As predicted by the Association of Secretaries of Tourism of Mexico (ASETUR), in 2020 the Mexican tourism GDP fell to 8.3%, with losses of more than 10,000 million dollars (around €9 million) and in 2021 it went to 4.5% (EFE, 2020).

Health prevention measures in the face of the strong spread of the virus took time to be established in Mexico. President López Obrador, at the end of March, even if the health emergency was declared, urged citizens to continue their tourist activities during the first phase of the pandemic. Even though non-essential activities were suspended and almost the entire American continent adopted mandatory preventive isolation measures or curfews. As previously mentioned, Mexico was one of the few countries that did not close its air borders to contain the expansion. A fact that allowed President López Obrador to win a plaque of recognition from the World Tourism Organisation, for having allowed travel to the country and supporting tourism during the pandemic. However, the land border between the United States and Mexico was closed for tourist or recreational purposes on March 21, 2021, by decision of the North American country (Hosteltur, 2020k).

At the end of March, even though the Mexican air borders remained open, different places in the Mexican Caribbean decided to take their own measures to restrict the movement of tourists, since the lack of measures puts at risk visitors and employees of the establishments. Most hotel chains had to close practically all their establishments and many airlines were forced to cancel some air connections, due to mobility restrictions and confinements that were carried out in different countries of the world, which prevented the arrival of international tourists. In fact, associations such as the Mexican Association of Travel Agencies (AMAV) and the Mexican Association of Hotels and Motels (AMHM), requested financial aid from the Government to support the losses caused by the lack of activity. However, the fact that the Mexican government did not declare the pandemic prevented them from offering aid to companies (Hosteltur, 2020f).

In recent years, Mexico has been considered one of the main tourist destinations in the world, becoming the seventh country with the most visitors in the world in



pre-covid times. Despite having suffered the consequences of the pandemic, such as the drop in visitors, it maintained its position in the tourist rankings. (Gutiérrez, J. 2022). According to the classification of international tourist arrivals for 2020 of the UNWTO, Mexico was positioned as the third most visited country in the world, with more than 24 million people (Hosteltur, 2020a). And was the thirteenth country with the highest foreign exchange income, with almost 11 billion dollars (about €10,475 billion) (Sectur, 2022). This good world position may have been because the country's government ruled out suspending its air connections, thus being one of the few countries that did not close its borders internationally at the beginning of the pandemic (EFE, 2020). On the other hand, the Ministry of Tourism (Sectur) through the VisitMexico.com platform maintained the country's tourism promotion during the pandemic, to overcome the crisis, however, the website was suspended in July 2020 due to non-payment (Hosteltur, 2020z).

Table 1. Comparison of the number of arrivals in pandemic years (expressed in thousands):

	2020	2021	Ratio
January	8421	3801	-55%
February	8162	3400	-58%
March	6578	4209	-36%
April	2229	4185	88%
May	2385	4593	93%
June	2427	4886	101%
July	2855	5330	87%
August	2454	4622	88%
September	3444	4379	27%
October	3959	4942	25%
November	3917	5006	28%

Source: Own elaboration, based on *INEGI Encuestas de Viajeros Internacionales* data.

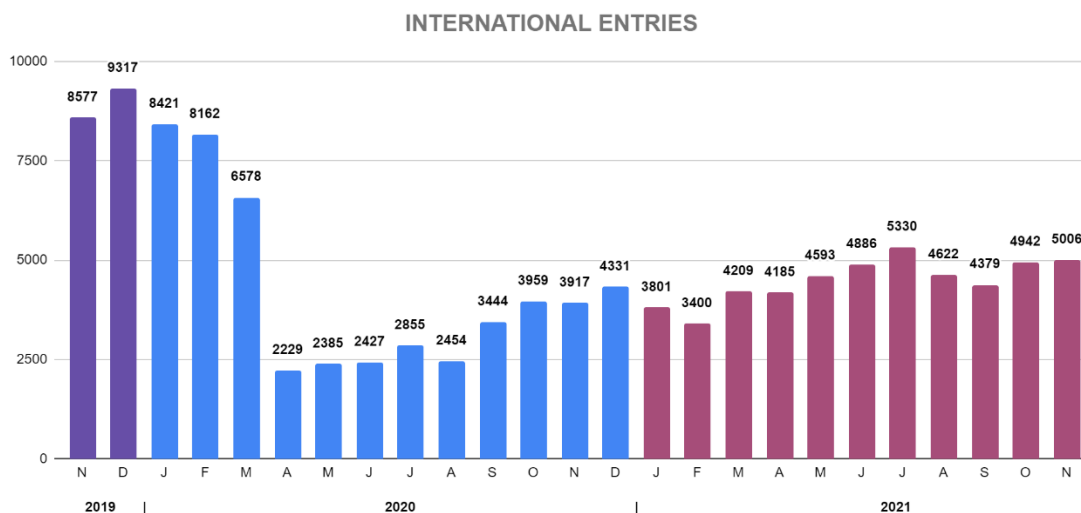
The most abrupt annual comparison is that of June, which went from 2,427 tourists in 2020 to 4,886 in 2021, that meaning an increase of 101%.

For the months of January, February and March, a negative percentage can be seen because the first figure, that of 2020, has not yet been affected by the effects of Covid-19, however, the figures for 2021 are in the midst of a wave of infections.

But from April to August included, a considerable annual rise can be seen due to the fact that in those months' of 2021 tourism began to recover little by little, especially in June when the de-escalation starts. Although instead of continuing to grow in the following months, there is a slight decrease in the percentages because a new wave began at the end of July.

In the comparison of the last months of the years, not so much difference is appreciated because the effects of the last wave of 2021 were still being felt and that in those months of 2020 the numbers of international tourists recovered a little, compared to the first months of the pandemic.

Graph 1. International entries (expressed in thousands):



Source: Own elaboration, based on *INEGI Encuesta de Viajeros Internacionales* data.

The total arrivals of international tourists in 2020 were 51.2 million and in 2021 49.4 million. In November 2019, the month in which the first case of SARS-CoV2 occurred in the world, the number of international tourists who entered in Mexico was 8,577, in the same month of 2020 a total of 3,917 tourists arrived, this represents a reduction of -54%. And in 2021, already in the new normal, there were 5,006, with a recovery of 28% compared to the same month in 2020.

From March to April 2020, the point at which the WHO officially declared the situation a global pandemic, there was a drop of -66%, going from 6,578 to 2,229 visitors, in just one month.

On June 1, 2020, when the de-escalation began and tourism began to recover, the figures began to recover. However, irregularities can be seen in the graph, instead of a stable and continuous rise, due to the new spikes that occurred.

In January 2021 there was another wave of infections, a fact that was reflected in the arrival of tourists that month with 3,801 visitors and 3,400 in February. For the following months, a recovery of the figures can be observed. But in August 2021 there was another upturn, therefore, there was also a drop in international tourists, although there was no significant reduction in arrivals.

### 3. Evolution of employment

The tourism sector is an ally against poverty, since in developing countries, it collaborates with business expansion and the creation of employment (Ferguson, L. 2010). However, poverty has not been eliminated due to poor working conditions (Ventura-Dias, 2011). In 2019 workers in the tourism sector earned \$8.7 (€8.29) a day according to the Labour Observatory (OLA) of the National Employment Service (SNE) of Mexico.

Although for years the country has suffered labour and economic instability, in 2020 the Mexican tourism sector suffered its greatest crisis, due to health insecurity and the global economic paralysis brought about by Covid-19. In 2020 there was an unemployment rate of 44%. In fact, the pandemic intensified the conflicts of social inequality and the weak public health network suffered by Latin American countries (Sass de Haro, 2020).

The most affected sectors at the start of the pandemic were shops, restaurants, transport, and tourism, representing 32.7% of the employed population (Amador, J., et al., 2020). In March, the Mexican Association of Hotels and Motels (AMHM) assured that the closure of hundreds of companies affected the proper functioning of the tourism sector, on which the country's economy depends to a great extent and caused about 200,000 employees, in the hotel sector, to lose their jobs in the first month (Hosteltur, 2020e). The lack of international tourist arrivals affects business and families since they lose money or jobs directly.

On April 21, 2020, the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS) offered economic aid of MX\$25,000 (around €1,165.84), with the "Support for Entrepreneurs in Solidarity" program for those companies that did not lay off their workers in the first months of the pandemic. Because according to Luis Humberto Araiza (2020), president of the Association of Secretaries of Tourism of Mexico (ASETUR), the sector could recover more efficiently, if employment is maintained and most companies are saved from the crisis, in addition to maintaining the tourist promotion of Mexican destinations (Hosteltur, 2020i).

### 4. Reactivation measures

Considering that the tourism sector powers the economy of Mexico, it was concluded that society and the Government should implement certain health and safety measures proposed by the WHO, to save the tourism industry and reactivate it. Creating an optimal environment where workers in the sector and visitors could carry out their tourist activities.

The Secretary of Tourism, Miguel Torruco Marqués, pointed out that to boost the local economy it was a good idea to offer short-stay tourist packages. Promoting domestic tourism, which in 2020 represented 82.5% of tourism consumption in the country (Sectur, 2020). And internationally, focus on attracting mainly American and Canadian visitors, the main countries that provide tourists to

Mexico, thanks to air connectivity. In pre-pandemic times, these two powers represented 67% of international visitors and generated a large part of tourist spending in the territory (Hosteltur, 2020j).

Through the Legislative Branch, it was proposed to the Secretaries of the federal government of Mexico to establish eight measures, among others, to reinforce tourism (Aguirre Quezada, J. P. 2020):

- Support micro and small tourism businesses.
- Avoid job losses in the sector.
- Promote credits for tourism and the promotion and modernization of air and urban passenger transport.
- Implement greater sanitary controls at borders and access points such as ports, custom houses, and airlines.
- Install a national tourism promotion scheme accompanied by fiscal and economic incentives, with the intention of reactivating the domestic tourism market to reactivate the economy.
- Create measures aimed at promoting tourism in the country.
- Develop a program for the economic reactivation of national tourism that contributes to strengthening the capacities of tourism companies and lessens the adverse economic consequences.
- Carry out a collaboration agreement with the hotel sector to provide lodging to health workers who care for patients with covid-19, to safeguard their integrity and the health of their families. (SIL, 2020)

Mr. Araiza pointed out (2020) that the time needed to recover tourism was inaccurate, but that it must adapt to new social needs in the way of traveling and interacting with people. With the current situation, new health and safety certificates will be valued, as well as care for the environment.

#### **4.1. “New normality”**

After the closure of non-essential services and two months of economic paralysis, on June 1, 2020, the de-escalation called new normality began in Mexico. Mr. Torruco Marqués, requested that tourism be declared an essential activity, to reactivate the industry in Mexico as soon as possible, taking the corresponding health and safety measures (Hosteltur, 2021g).

Said de-escalation began with a gradual reopening in phases, guided by an epidemiological traffic light proposed by the Sector to distinguish the health level of each region according to the number of infections and to determine whether it is convenient to open the establishments in each of the areas, marking the activities that can be carried out safely. Splitting in red, maximum risk; orange high risk; yellow, medium risk; and green, low risk.

As the Ministry of Tourism (Sector) pointed out (2020), tourists have changed their travel preferences because of the pandemic. Tourism activity has evolved after the pandemic and wanting to recover the usual tourism, previously known, would lead to stagnation and lack of adaptation. Manuel Butler (2020), executive

director of the UNWTO, commented that in the new normality, tourists seek destinations where sustainable, innovative, safe, and local tourism can be carried out, which is why national tourism in Mexico has increased (Gonzalez, T., 2020). Now visitors demand new tourist products, green destinations where the environment is preserved, cultural, with historical identity and with good gastronomy (Ruiz Hermoso, J., 2020). All of them are strong points of the *Pueblos Mágicos* of Mexico and its most touristic regions. At the moment 132 towns with history are part of this program, where the identity of the country can be appreciated. They are tourist powers with special charm for nationals and foreigners. These towns favoured domestic tourism during the pandemic and kept Mexico's economy active. Mexico sought to promote these destinations, trusting that they were the key to its recovery (Sectur, 2020). The Network of Smart Destinations with the aim of reactivating tourism in destinations, it sought to transform the traditional tourism model towards digitization to give it an international focus (Hosteltur, 2020ar).

Different entrepreneurs in the tourism sector, from the states of Quintana Roo, Nayarit and Baja California Sur, had to open their establishments quickly due to the lack of government support (Hosteltur, 2021w). On June 8, 2020, Cancun reopened its doors to tourism, with 120 hotels available at 30% capacity. But some companies still did not have a reopening date for their establishments, which depended on how the pandemic and demand evolved (Hosteltur, 2020u).

In mid-June 2020, the beaches of the Baja California Sur region were reopened. But when the 30% permitted occupancy was exceeded and no safety distance or hygiene measure was met, it was decided weeks later that these beaches should be closed again. This change of plans caused businesses to once again lose the money invested in reopening their establishments, thus falling into red numbers, even going bankrupt in some cases (Hosteltur, 2020x).

In mid-July, after different private sector companies took their own sanitary measures, together the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare of Mexico, announced the “2020 Clean Point Quality Seal. Good Practices for Hygienic-Sanitary Quality in the Tourism Sector”, with the aim of creating joint sanitary standards, creating protocols for establishments, and keeping customers safe in the different activities of the country, granting this seal to entities that voluntarily apply these measures (Hosteltur, 2020v).

On August 20, after four months of closure, three public beaches in the Riviera Maya were opened, with capacity for 500 people, complying with the appropriate sanitary measures. Interestingly, these beaches comply with environmental management standards, accredited with the “Blue Flag” (Hosteltur, 2020ac). On September 7, more beaches in the state of Quintana Roo were opened: Cancun, Holbox, Isla Mujeres, Cozumel, Puerto Morelos and Tulum (Puntí, E. M. 2020a).

In mid-October, President López Obrador (2020) commented that the recovery of the tourism sector was going faster than expected when the new normality began, largely thanks to the actions taken in the tourist areas of the state of Quintana Roo, considered the main destinations of the Mexican Caribbean.

Still in November, there was no unanimity to receive international visitors in Mexico, the only measure was the obligation to wear a mask, the lack of coordinated measures generated insecurity for tourists, however, it was the country that most reacted to reactivate tourism (Puntí, E. M., 2020b). Therefore, to promote the reopening of tourism by agreeing on the required sanitary measures together with the Government, in the state of Baja California Sur they created the "Tourist Route through Mexico" group, which was joined by several cities from at least 10 Mexican states (Hosteltur, 2020am).

The opening of the land border between the United States and Mexico was scheduled for November 8, which had been closed since March 21, 2020. This opening was only for all those people with the complete vaccination schedule, which would allow a flow of some 6 million travellers at the end of the year, a fact that would favour an efficient recovery of the Mexican economy, with a gain of some US\$ 247 million (about €234 million), Mr. Torruco Marqués estimates (Hosteltur, 2021ag). However, Mexico proposed to maintain the closure until February 21, 2021, due to a rebound in infections and a high death toll, in addition to the bad data from the epidemiological traffic light in some regions (Hosteltur, 2021c).

In April, the "World Travel and Tourism Council Annual Summit" was held in Cancun, which had to be delayed a month due to the restrictions of many of the countries of the tourism leaders summoned (Santana, M. 2021). More than 600 entrepreneurs from the world tourism sector met in person and online at the event, to set guidelines to recover tourism globally (Hosteltur, 2021j). There, Christopher Nassetta, president of the WTTC, announced to Carlos Joaquín González, governor of Quintana Roo, that several companies from the WTTC wanted to thank him for his work during the pandemic to overcome the crisis, investing US\$2.5 billion (around €2.3 billion) in Mexico, generating 180,000 new jobs (Hosteltur, 2021k).

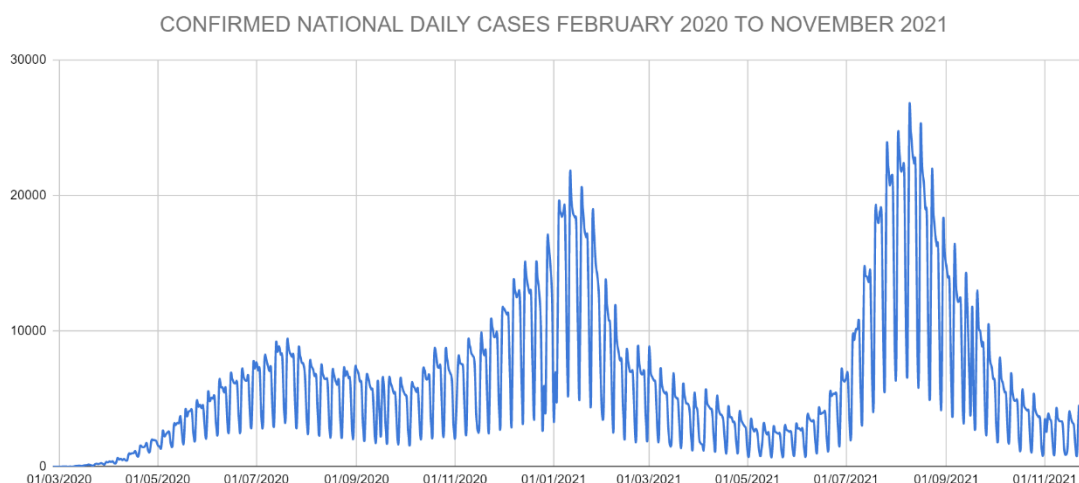
Roberto Cintrón, president of the hoteliers of Cancun, asked the hoteliers of Quintana Roo to renew the "Certification of Protection and Sanitary Prevention in Tourist Facilities" (CPPST) to attract tourists safely and ensure good working conditions for their workers (Hosteltur, 2021q). In June 2021, a year after the start of the new normality, the state of Quintana Roo was presented as one of the destinations that was recovering best, thanks to the number of visitors arriving on its shores. Darío Flota Ocampo, director of the Quintana Roo Tourism Promotion Council (CPTQ), indicated that some 6 million tourists were expected in the remainder of the year (Hosteltur, 2021t).

Mexico prepared for September 2021 the 45th edition of the "Tianguis *Turístico*", its tourism fair to promote and market its tourist destinations, this time based in Yucatán. However, this new edition could not be carried out on the scheduled date, since by wanting to do it in person, the participants from the different countries had to be vaccinated. So, they postponed it to November of the same year. This fair should have been held in March 2020, but with the outbreak of the pandemic it had to be cancelled. But, in September 2020 and March 2021 too was held virtually (Hosteltur, 2021r).

## 5. Vaccination

According to data from the WTTC for July 2020, Mexico was the fifth country most affected by Covid-19, in September it was the seventh and in December the fourth, with 1,325,915 infected (WTTC, 2020).

Graph 2. Confirmed national daily cases



Source: Own elaboration, based on *INEGI Encuesta de Viajeros Internacionales* data.

Analysing the graph, it can be seen how during 2020 there was a peak of 9,133 infected on July 20 and in the following months the cases decreased until mid-October, which was a rebound again. Reaching the highest peak of 2020 of those infected in December 28 with 16,224 infections in one day. Arriving until that day to accumulate 1,479,968 total cases and until the end of the year a total of 1,522,878.

This new rebound reached its highest peak on January 11, 2021, with 21,055 infected in one day. Then the cases began to decrease during the following months of this year, reaching the lowest daily number of the year on May 16, 2021, with 773 infected. However, on the last day of May a new wave began, reaching the highest peak of the year and of the entire pandemic on August 9, 2021, with 25,652 cases.

The total number of infected in 2021, from January to November 30 of the same year was 2,419,987. Therefore, during the entire period analysed, from February 26, 2020, to November 30, 2021, there were a total of 3,942,865 total cases.

At the beginning of 2021, the international flow of tourists was still affected by severe restrictions, PCR, and quarantines, however, the domestic flow did not have these sanitary requirements. Mr. Torruco Marqués, commented that Mexico

has been one of the main world tourist destinations with fewer infections in relation to the number of inhabitants (Hosteltur, 2021b).

Table 2. Total region cases by population:

	Population	Total cases	Ratio
<b>National</b>	127.792.286	<b>3.942.865</b>	3,09%
CIUDAD DE MEXICO	9.018.645	<b>992.322</b>	11,00%
MEXICO	17.427.790	<b>415.451</b>	2,38%
NUEVO LEON	5.610.153	<b>211.141</b>	3,76%
GUANAJUATO	6.228.175	<b>197.351</b>	3,17%
JALISCO	8.409.693	<b>163.705</b>	1,95%
TABASCO	2.572.287	<b>143.591</b>	5,58%
PUEBLA	6.604.451	<b>126.047</b>	1,91%
VERACRUZ	8.539.862	<b>124.354</b>	1,46%
SONORA	3.074.745	<b>118.664</b>	3,86%
SAN LUIS POTOSI	2.866.142	<b>105.949</b>	3,70%
TAMAULIPAS	3.650.602	<b>103.337</b>	2,83%
QUERETARO	2.279.637	<b>99.119</b>	4,35%
COAHUILA	3.218.720	<b>98.770</b>	3,07%
OAXACA	4.143.593	<b>83.091</b>	2,01%
BAJA CALIFORNIA	3.634.868	<b>81.955</b>	2,25%
GUERRERO	3.657.048	<b>77.076</b>	2,11%
SINALOA	3.156.674	<b>74.575</b>	2,36%
YUCATAN	2.259.098	<b>74.550</b>	3,30%
CHIHUAHUA	3.801.487	<b>74.163</b>	1,95%
MICHOACAN	4.825.401	<b>73.569</b>	1,52%
HIDALGO	3.086.414	<b>62.521</b>	2,03%
QUINTANA ROO	1.723.259	<b>59.884</b>	3,48%
BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR	804.708	<b>57.187</b>	7,11%
MORELOS	2.044.058	<b>50.381</b>	2,46%
DURANGO	1.868.996	<b>50.109</b>	2,68%
ZACATECAS	1.666.426	<b>41.996</b>	2,52%
AGUASCALIENTES	1.434.635	<b>37.327</b>	2,60%
NAYARIT	1.288.571	<b>34.204</b>	2,65%
COLIMA	785.153	<b>33.241</b>	4,23%
TLAXCALA	1.380.011	<b>29.455</b>	2,13%
CAMPECHE	1.000.617	<b>24.208</b>	2,42%
CHIAPAS	5.730.367	<b>23.572</b>	0,41%

Source: Own elaboration, based on *INEGI Casos Diarios Estado Nacional Confirmados* data.

From February 26, 2020, to November 30, 2021, at the national level, with 127,792,286 inhabitants, there were 3,814,909 infected with a ratio of 3.09%.



In that period, the most affected region was Ciudad de Mexico with a total of 992,322 infected and a ratio of 11%, thus being the highest of the percentages, in relation to the 9,018,645 inhabitants it has.

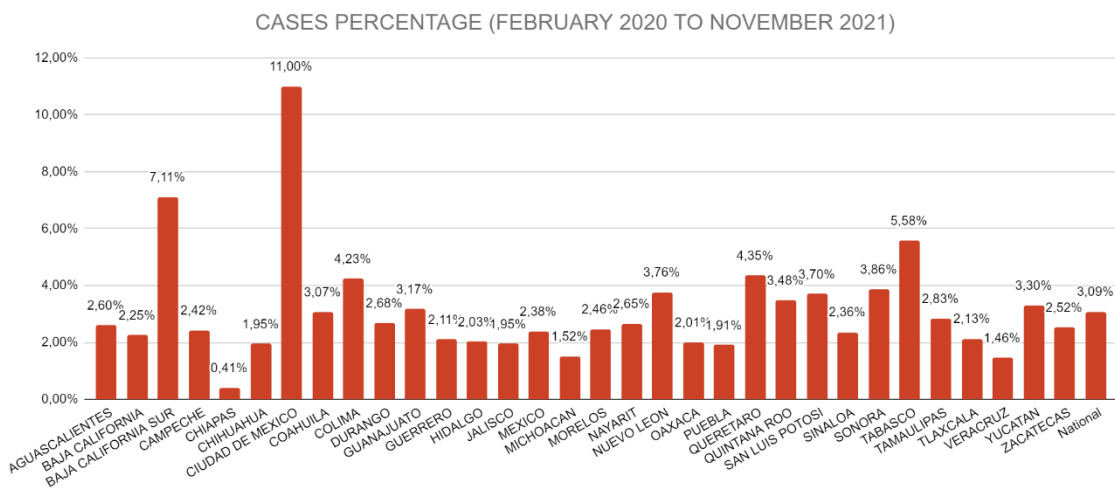
The second region that stands out for its high percentage of cases is Baja California Sur with a 7,11% ratio, as it is also the second with the fewest inhabitants with 804,708 but it had 57.187 infected.

Colima, being the region with the fewest inhabitants, 785,153, had a total of 33,241 cases until November, that is, 4.23%. The region of Mexico, the one with the largest population with 17,427,790, had a total of 415.451 cases with a ratio of 2.38%.

The state with the least infected was Chiapas, with 23,572 cases, with a ratio of 0.41%, being the lowest ratio of all the regions, having a total population of 5,730,367.

Comparing the total number of infections in each of the regions of Mexico with the total of their populations, the ratio of cases per region can be found. In addition to the ratio at the national level. The data from this table can be seen below in a more visual graph, to understand the magnitude of coronavirus infections throughout Mexico, from February 2020 to November 2021.

Graph 3. Ratio region cases:



Source: Own elaboration, based on *INEGI Casos Diarios Estado Nacional Confirmados* data.

Meliá Hotels International, in January 2021, offered free antigen and PCR tests to its clients who needed to return to their countries with negative tests. Also, together with Europ Assistance and Willis Towers Watson, it offered a complete assistance service for positive cases of Covid-19 with the "Travel Safe with Melia Insurance" (Hosteltur, 2021d).

On March 24, 2021, the Government of Quintana Roo, together with different hotel associations, intended to vaccinate all workers in the hotel sector to guarantee maximum safety to customers (Santana, M, 2021).

According to the Centre for Research and Tourism Competitiveness of the Anáhuac University, more than 900,000 Mexican citizens travelled, between March and May 2021, to the United States to get vaccinated against Covid-19 with AstraZeneca (Hosteltur, 2021x).

On August 12, 2021, Marcelo Ebrard, Mexican Secretary of Foreign Affairs, broke the news that work was being done on the first vaccines for Latin America. Which could be applied in the first quarter, that was the best news for achieving a firm's health and tourism recovery. The AstraZeneca laboratory and the British University of Oxford collaborated in its elaboration, to generate 250 million doses at a cost of US\$4 (€3,80). Hugo Sigman, director of the laboratory, approved that the vaccines would be ready in December and in January they could begin to be distributed throughout Mexico to health personnel, the elderly and risk groups, thus anticipating six months as expected (Hosteltur, 2020ab).

In Ciudad de Mexico, 92% of the population had the first dose inoculated as early as September 2021. However, in the rest of the country, only 58% of people over 18 had received one dose and in September not even 25% were vaccinated with both doses (Hosteltur, 2021). Since the vaccines did not arrive in Mexico, the airline Volaris joined "vaccine tourism", taking advantage of being a low-cost company offering a one-day trip to receive the vaccine for free (Hosteltur, 2021ae). The Volaris flyer promoted it with the slogan:

"Go get vaccinated at our destinations in the US, it's easy and fast. You can do it upon arrival, and even return the same day. Spare any nationality and it's also free. Get to know all our routes at Volaris.com". (Volaris, 2021)

Enrique de la Madrid, former Mexican tourism secretary, commented in October that vaccinating all inhabitants is essential to fully reactivate national tourism. He emphasized that a few years ago there was an insurance that protected the health of citizens, which was eliminated by President López Obrador and by not having it during the pandemic, 16 million Mexicans could not go to public health centres (Hosteltur, 2021af).

## **6. Situation of tourism companies during the pandemic**

At the end of March 2020, the hotel occupancy fell 51.8% and the plane seats scheduled to arrive in Mexico fell 24.3% (Hosteltur, 2020g).

During the months of April and May, mobility restrictions were intensified, and non-essential services were censored, tourism was almost completely paralyzed, as air, sea and partly land connections were closed (Sectur, 2021).

Graph 4. Evolution of the international arrivals in Mexico (expressed in thousands):



Source: Own elaboration, based on *INEGI Encuesta de Viajeros Internacionales* data.

This graph shows how most tourists arrive in Mexico by air. In addition, the curve of arrivals by air is much more variable during this period than that of arrivals by land, which is more stable.

The air curve shows a very sharp drop in March 2020, which fell -46% compared to February, going from 1,851,072 to 990,710, since Covid-19 was officially declared a global pandemic, quarantines began, and strong movement restrictions were put in place. This drop was even more pronounced in April with a drop of -97% compared to March, with only 31,100 air tourists arriving. The figures for April and May 2020 are minimal since only essential activity workers flew.

In June, thanks to the beginning of the new normality and the recovery of some flights, the number of tourists entering the country by air increased by 273% compared to May, going from 36,210 to 134,949 tourists. This increase in arrivals continued to grow until the end of 2020, reaching in December 1,054,098 arrivals.

However, due to a new wave of contagions, the first two months of 2021, the arrivals fell to 680,220 in January and 561,955 in February. The following months there were very good recovery data, approaching pre-pandemic data. Although in August and September international arrivals fell again due to a new wave, once again only approaching one million air tourists.

On the land curve, the same ups and downs can be observed as in the air, because of the two new waves of infections, the de-escalation, and the new normality. But all this is appreciated at a much less impressive level, since approximately 80% fewer tourists arrive by land to Mexico than by air. However,

in the first three months after the pandemic was declared worldwide, more tourists arrived by land than by air, in April 24,000 more, in May 72,580 and in June 38,511, since borders were kept open only for essential activities.

With the mandatory quarantine established in Mexico, tourism companies could no longer make reservations. They could only reach 15% occupancy with those essential workers, complying with all the necessary measures (Hosteltur, 2020h). On June 1, the quarantine ended, and the hotels of the Mexican Caribbean planned to restart their services, some hotel companies were encouraged to open new hotels apart from gradually reopening those that were closed during the pandemic (Hosteltur, 2020)

## 6.1. Hospitality

Due to the expansion of the coronavirus, the restrictions and the consequent drop in demand, at the end of March, Riu Hotels & Resorts, like many hotel companies, decided to start closing its hotels (Hinojosa, V., 2020a). Although Riu preferred to keep at least one establishment active per destination, initially four remained open in Mexico, for those reservations already scheduled, although international arrivals were restricted (Hosteltur, 2020d). This company has 20 hotels located mostly in Cancun and Riviera Maya and employs more than 10,000 people. However, Riu had to apply an ERTE to its employees in all its hotels and in its headquarters. At the end of April, Riu start taking bookings, since it planned to reopen eleven of its hotels in Cancún, Costa Mujeres and Playa del Carmen on June 1 (Hinojosa, V., 2020b). Although Barceló kept eight of its hotels open during the pandemic, the first Spanish chain to reopen its hotels in Mexico was Riu (Hinojosa, V., 2020c). In October, Riu Hotels & Resorts was able to open eight of its Mexican hotels, which allowed it to advance in its occupational recovery, in the absence of four establishments to complete their reopening in the state of Quintana Roo (Hosteltur, 2020an). The Riu hotels located in Mexico reached higher figures in May 2021 than those obtained in the pre-pandemic year 2019, largely due to the number of reservations made by American tourists (Hosteltur, 2021o).

Some other hotel companies were encouraged to open new hotels during the pandemic months:

- RCD Hotels inaugurated in March the bleisure hotel, Residence Inn Mérida by Marriott, in Yucatán. Thanks to having had a good strategy supporting essential workers with their tourist services (Hosteltur, 2020l).
- IHG, at the beginning of the de-escalation, opened its first Avid Hotels in Zacatecas. It incorporated its "IHG Clean Promise" program into this new hotel, which is already implemented in the rest of its hotels around the world (Hosteltur, 2020p).

- When flights resumed in July, the AMResorts chain opened the Dreams Vista Cancun Golf & Spa Resort, a new luxury resort on the coast (Hosteltur, 2020t).
- The Radisson company opened in July, under the measures of the Radisson Hotels Safety Protocol, the new Radisson Hotel Tapatio Guadalajara, in Jalisco, focused on optimal bleisure tourism for high-end business workers (Hosteltur, 2020y).
- In September Hilton debuted in the Riviera Nayarit with its new high-end resort, the Conrad Punta de Mita (Hosteltur, 2020ag). Also, Hilton opened its first hotel in Mazatlán, the DoubleTree by Hilton, in October. Even though the state of Sinaloa was at a yellow risk level, it was expected to be a destination with the potential to have high occupancy rates (Hosteltur, 2020ak).
- Due to the pandemic, long-term stays have been promoted, which is why IHG opens new suites in May at Staybridge Suites Guadalajara Novena, focused on business tourism (Hosteltur, 2021m).
- Marriott International, faced with the new normality, decided to bet on leisure and beach tourism that would recover more effectively than urban tourism. And it opened its first all-inclusive hotel in August, the Delta Hotels by Marriott in Riviera Nayarit (Hosteltur, 2021aa).

The tourism reactivation and the new openings made other companies consider reopening their own hotels:

- At the beginning of June, Riu Hotels & Resorts reopened the Hotel Riu Palace Peninsula in Cancún, the first to open of its 99 closed worldwide (Hosteltur, 2020n).
- The Velas Resorts chain, in June managed to reopen all its hotels in Los Cabos, Puerto Vallarta, Riviera Maya and Riviera Nayarit. Thanks to adhering to safe travels cleaning protocols, it receives the global security seal of approval. They also incorporate a new app into their services to reduce face-to-face contact (Hosteltur, 2020q).
- In the last fortnight of June, the AMResorts company, reopened in ten days four of its hotels in Cancun, Isla Mujeres and Puerto Vallarta, adapted to the new normal with the "360 degrees Clean Complete Verification" program (Hosteltur, 2020r).
- Palladium Hotel Group demonstrated in a virtual conference in August that its reopening in Costa Mujeres and Puerto Vallarta worked successfully. Thanks to following its own protocols in accordance with the new normality and the free medical assistance offered to its guests. Even though there were still travel restrictions, they filled the limited capacity, especially with American or Mexican guests (Hosteltur, 2020ad). The Palladium company reopened in October its TRS Yucatán, which was awarded by TUI as the best long-distance destination hotel, since it knew how to quickly adapt to the situation (Hosteltur, 2020aj).
- The Accor company planned to have all its hotels open again in the country in October, since it would open its last four hotels closed during the last months of the year. Following the health protocols with the "All Safe and Well" program and a free telemedicine service with AXA (Hosteltur, 2020ah).

- The Hard Rock Hotel Vallarta by RCD Hotels, reopened in October adapting its all-inclusive offer to the new normal, offering à la carte services under its “Hard Rock SAFE + SOUND and S.A.F.E.” protocols (Hosteltur, 2020al).
- The Piñero Group, wanting to have its four hotels located in Mexico open by April 2021, decided to reopen the doors of the Bahía Príncipe Grand Tulum in November, after taking advantage of the four months of closure to remodel it with an investment of US\$40 million (€33.5 million) (Hosteltur, 2020ap). But it was not until November 2021 that Grupo Piñero managed to reopen its Bahía Príncipe Luxury Sian Ka’an hotel in the Riviera Maya, with which it managed to recover all the activity of the Mallorcan company in Mexico (Hosteltur, 2021ah).

Some companies joined digitization to increase their chances of recovery, as is the case of Grupo Posadas that reinforces its technological alliance with Amadeus to improve its offer through “Digital Media Solutions” and promote value tourism as a recovery strategy. In addition, since June, through their new website “La Colección Resorts”, they manage to increase reservations (Hosteltur, 2020aa).

Through virtual reality and creating the “*vivicación*” (live + vacation) concept, Marriott wanted to promote Mexico by virtually transporting tourists to Mexican destinations during the wave of contagion experienced in May 2021 (Hosteltur, 2021p).

## 6.2. Aviation

Due to the drop in demand, in the middle of March Aeroméxico chose to reduce the frequency of its flights to Europe by almost half, but even so, it did not suspend any of its destinations (Hosteltur, 2020c). The airline intended to resume its flights in early June 2020 when the quarantine ended, considering the sanitary restrictions (Hosteltur, 2020m). But the reopening of tourism was an unsustainable situation for some airlines, so Aeroméxico began a process of voluntary financial restructuring on June 30, through Chapter 11 of the United States Bankruptcy Law and requested financing of US\$ 1,000 million (around €950 million) (Hosteltur, 2020s). Aeroméxico increased its number of flights in September, recovering 75% in domestic flights, restarting some connections, and creating new routes (Hosteltur, 2020af). The airline made a codeshare agreement with Latam Airlines Group in November, to market its flights and expand its services without increasing costs (Hosteltur, 2020ao). The company had to adopt drastic measures in April 2021, such as the dismissal of 2,500 workers and the reduction of wages, measures necessary to continue with the Bankruptcy Law (Hosteltur, 2021i). At the end of 2021 it seemed that the company was gaining strength, starting a route between Cancún and São Paulo in December, thus forming a strategic connectivity market with Brazil (Hosteltur, 2021ab).

Interjet received in June 2020 an investment of US\$ 150 million (about €142 million) to strengthen the airline, from two Mexican entrepreneurs. In August it made a commercial alliance with Aeromar for domestic tourism, with the two airlines covering their routes (Hosteltur, 2020ae). Interjet changed its president in December, businessman Alejandro del Valle, one of those who invested capital months ago. With this change, the aim was to face the years of crisis due to debt, defaults and cancellations, a situation aggravated by the pandemic (Hosteltur, 2020aq). During 2021 Interjet did not operate, due to a strike by its workers since January 8. To avoid the total closure of the company, the shareholders decided to enter bankruptcy proceedings (Hosteltur, 2021l).

The airlines resumed their air connections or created new routes in order to increase arrivals in Mexico:

- The state of Quintana Roo, reaching the yellow traffic light in September, sought to promote air reactivation through the company Copa Airlines, which managed to recover connections between Cancun and different Latin American countries (Hosteltur, 2020ai).
- From February to May 2021, Air Canada, WestJet, Sunwing and Air Transat suspended flights between Canada and Mexico to slow the flow of people traveling internationally and adapt to health requirements (Hosteltur, 2021e). By the end of 2021 the company Air Canada, thanks to the reopening of its borders, intends to transport to Mexico more passengers than in the previous two years (Hosteltur, 2021y).
- The Mexican government in February 2021, asked Qatar Airways to resume passenger flights between Mexico and the Middle East, to strengthen tourism and tourism investments. Starting to have a presence in 2022 at the Felipe Ángeles International Airport in Santa Lucía (Hosteltur, 2021f).
- In March 2021 Lufthansa managed to offer daily flights from Germany to Cancun again and reached 50% of reservations to the country (Hosteltur, 2021h).
- The flights between Sao Paulo and Cancun with Latam Airlines Brasil were replaced, which excited the hotel companies of Quintana Roo, such as Riu, to be able to complete the occupation of their Mexican hotels (Hosteltur, 2021n).
- The opening for October of several air routes of the low-cost company Volaris, from different points in Mexico to places in Colombia, was approved, which would help the economic recovery of Latin America with the exchange of tourists (Hosteltur, 2021u).
- The World2Fly airline intended in June 2021 to reactivate the sector by making flights from Lisbon and Madrid to the main destinations in the Mexican Caribbean (Hosteltur, 2021v).
- The Canadian airline OWG planned to fly to the Caribbean after the reopening of the borders of both countries in August, for those passengers who have complete vaccination schedules (Hosteltur, 2021z).
- Starting in September, LATAM Airlines reactivated flights between Santiago de Chile and Cancun, a fact that generated more than \$10 million (about €9.5 million) (Hosteltur, 2021ac).

- Iberia intended to carry out two daily flights between Spain and Mexico from September, to increase the flow of tourists (Hosteltur, 2021ad).

### 6.3. Agencies

The NexusTours platform was proposed as the leading regional Destination Management Company. With its “Be Safe with Nexus” plan, obtained the “Safe Travels” of the WTTC, and the “Certification in Health Protection and Prevention in Tourist Facilities (CPPSIT)” of the Ministry of Tourism and the “State Health Services” of Quintana Roo. Which certified that it complies with the hygiene and safety protocols adapted to the new normality, in its activities, transport and accommodation services (Hosteltur, 2020w).

Faced with 0.2% of online reservations through the Almundo agency destined for Mexico during the entire activity of 2020, the Brazilian operator CVC decided to close its operations with the country (Hosteltur, 2021a).

The Nuba Group opened a new agency in Polanco in February, its second flagship store in Mexico, which employed twenty travel consultants (Ortega, J. L., 2021).



## 7. Conclusion

As has been observed throughout the study, the Covid-19 pandemic brought with it a health and economic crisis that affected the entire world.

The closure of borders due to global mobility restrictions, generated a drop in tourism, since it made the flow of international and national tourists impossible, leaving dependent countries on tourism to experience an unsustainable situation, as is the case of Mexico.

Through this analysis, information has been collected on the actions of the Mexican Government and the different tourism companies to deal with the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic in the tourism sector, a key industry for the Mexican economy and society. This country having a population with a vulnerable socioeconomic situation, obtains most of its income from tourism, but this industry was paralyzed worldwide when flights were cancelled, hotel occupancy fell, and beaches were closed. So, the crisis experienced caused tourism companies to suffer high economic losses. Tourism The Government of Mexico avoided taking preventive measures to deal with the pandemic and did not offer financial aid to companies to face the difficult situation. Therefore, upon reaching a critical health situation and due to the lack of international tourists, companies in the sector decided to close their establishments.

Since the spread of the virus, especially in the municipalities with the highest tourist activity, there was a high number of infections, which affected both tourists and workers, Mexico reached 3,942,865 total confirmed cases from February 2020 to November 2021. Therefore, jobs were lost in the industry globally, this situation was aggravated in countries with added social problems, as is the case of Mexico, increasing the situation of poverty.

At the beginning of June, the tourist reopening began and many companies in the sector opened new establishments apart from reopening those that remained closed during the pandemic. This recovery could be started by taking the health measures established by the WHO and the UNWTO within the framework of a new normality. During this period, domestic tourism, and the arrival of international tourists by land gained importance. Tourists began to demand new safer experiences, of nature, gastronomy, culture, among other activities, qualities that the *Pueblos Mágicos* of Mexico have, which favoured a rapid post-pandemic tourist recovery.

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## 9. Appendix

Graph 1. International entries from November 2019 to November 2021:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1i22rpZPrNcF0EhazZ3hO9W7rb7l6UwLR8LvJpxu-MPU/edit?usp=sharing>

2019	N	D
	8577	9317

2020	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
	8421	8162	6578	2229	2385	2427	2855	2454	3444	3959	3917	4331

2021	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N
	3801	3400	4209	4185	4593	4886	5330	4622	4379	4942	5006

Graph 2. Confirmed national daily cases:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1A2lvvYSwf4llm7g-HHLpXuwFm18qe3VnY24Me4Tug4I/edit?usp=sharing>

Population	26/02/2020 to 31/12/2020	01/01/2021 to 30/11/2021	26/02/2020 to 30/11/2021
127792286	1522878	2419987	3942865

Graph 3. Ratio region cases:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1A2lvvYSwf4llm7g-HHLpXuwFm18qe3VnY24Me4Tug4I/edit?usp=sharing>

Graph 4. Evolution of the international arrivals in Mexico:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1bbCyr-JZ3-l7zix7EBnA09g8IUmt3dv\\_0bBK\\_mm\\_SMw/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1bbCyr-JZ3-l7zix7EBnA09g8IUmt3dv_0bBK_mm_SMw/edit?usp=sharing)

2019	N	D
BY AIR	1.612.478	2.060.880
BY LAND	386.284	654.360

2020	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
AIR	1.814.534	1.851.072	990.710	31.100	36.210	134.949	321.736	360.726	415.140	610.625	726.832	1.054.098
LAND	228.419	248.994	205.766	55.250	108.790	173.460	207.731	172.041	178.623	211.953	258.627	428.148

2021	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N
AIR	680.220	561.955	926.478	948.509	1.221.290	1.465.359	1.627.534	1.224.684	1.043.856	1.347.272	1.553.750
LAND	142.239	136.349	250.295	236.226	288.610	363.805	393.360	211.037	207.265	249.717	341.997