

TOURISM IN EL SALVADOR: THE CHALLENGE OF CONSOLIDATING AS AN EMERGING DESTINATION

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The changes that have been taking place since the end of the 20th Century in the motivations of tourist demand have impacted in the emergence of new trends in tourism. These constant transformations are associated with exhaustion, saturation and obsolescence of the traditional model of tourism development. New production and consumption processes of leisure have been configured; in them the singularization and the differentiation of the product are the main features compared to the previous guidance range tourist production to consumption for massive and undifferentiated. The tourists base their choice on the possibility of getting the best competitive advantages which includes the enjoyment of unique and unforgettable experiences. So, it has led to the insertion of new destinations in the international tourist scene. There are some new destinations that were hidden in the international tourist map until recently. In some cases, their emergence has meant a great competency to other destinations with an acknowledged trajectory in this field. Since the beginning of mobility because of leisure purposes the increase in diversification and differentiation of destinations has been a recurrent constant, although not with the same intensity as that of recent years. At the moment, these emerging destinations are becoming more relatively important compared to most established destinations because of the increase in the international arrivals. These exotic destinations combine with aspects can be found in traditional tourist destinations, so they can enter into strong competition.

One of those destinations, recently incorporated to the worldwide tourist scene is El Salvador. Absolute figures registered are little compared to international and regional level, but they have reached a considerable dimension because of its high annual average growth in relative terms over the past decade. Being a territory with almost no tourist orientation until so close a time, it can be appreciated, due to the rapid increase of numbers, that tourism has found a relevant place as an emerging activity.

The end of the civil war in the early 90's established the beginning of a new phase in Salvadorean society. One of the most violent and turbulent periods in recent history of El Salvador was over. From then on, a significant progress was made towards the recovery of political, social and economic stability, that was almost unknown to the Salvadorean

territory along the 20th Century. This new phase was also reflected in tourist behavior. The arrival of a relative calm to the country and the institutional strengthening of the industry, especially after the creation of the Salvadorean Tourist Corporation, were take-off factors for the development of tourism in El Salvador during the latter years of the 20th Century. In contrast, entry into the 21st Century there was a break in the continuity of increase in tourism in El Salvador. Several years marked by uncertainty went by a time characterized by the recovery and increase of tourism. The explanation lies in a succession of events with negative impact on tourism, as earthquakes in early 2001, in El Salvador, and the terrorist attacks of September, in the United States. In addition, the poor maintenance of the value of natural and cultural heritage, high air fares and hotels, the country's negative image projected abroad as a "dangerous tourist destination" or the lack of budget to promote El Salvador... contributed to the decline in tourist arrivals. Even so, the proposed target from the official authorities was to keep the actions in tourism promotion and diversification of tourism products developed in previous years. Also, there were improvements in access and communications to and within the same country. The private sphere supported these initiatives, as tourism was considered as an agent for development, generating employment opportunities and improving living conditions. It showed signs of confidence in a sector that was resisting circumstances that could affect international tourist demand. At the precise moment, the decrease in the number of international tourist arrivals has entered a new stage marked by the flu epidemic and the international economic crisis.

The actions carried out in tourism during the first decade of the 21st Century have boosted and have established the basis for strengthening tourist industry in El Salvador. Among these, include an increase in tourist offer with adaptive capacity to the requirements and needs of demand. There have been improved connections from the outside by air and land. Thus, new airlines have been added, bus fleet has been upgraded, domestic transportation service has been increased... Promotional campaigns in El Salvador as a tourist destination held by the administration have played a key role in improving the image of this country abroad. These have been carried out through the attendance and participation in various international tourism fairs. In terms of planning and tourism policy, the most important event is the putting into operation of the Ministry of Tourism in 2004. Its establishment resulted in accelerated the process of adoption and entry into force of the Law on Tourism which eventually happened in 2005. There were launched tourism strategies, non-existent in the country until 2006. There were also signed several cooperation agreements between various national institutions to undertake joint projects for tourism development. Similarly, there have been promoted joint cooperation initiatives in tourism at regional level.

These initiatives and actions implemented are not the only integral in the process of tourism development. In the tourism system are involved a variety of elements, factors, economic sectors... that confers this activity an enormous complexity. The same characteristics of El Salvador engaged in conditioning factors of tourism development. Therefore, it is a fundamental condition to know the territorial, demographic, historical, economic and institutional context which is El Salvador in order to know the conditioning factors to which the tourist development is facing. There have been identified three types of conditioning factors: environmental, human and institutional factors.

First of all, it must be said that El Salvador is a country threatened constantly by natural disasters. This contributes to the projection of an image outside the country that could damage the development of tourism. Environmental risks posed by natural processes are latent: seismic, volcanic eruptions, landslides, floods, droughts... Its location on the Pacific Belt of Fire gives a higher proportion of exposure to such phenomena, it has one seismic activity rates highest in the world. In addition, various weather phenomena occur with disastrous consequences for the population.

In contrast to these environmental risks, deforestation threatens socio-natural, where human action is critical for the origin of phenomena such as erosion, landslides or mudslides. It is the result of human actions on the stability of the ground. In this case, the main cause is the country's population growth. Salvadorean population is characterized by high birth rates are declining and a progressive decrease in mortality. It provides for the maintenance of a high rate of population growth over the coming years, although it will be gradually slowing. At present its population is estimated at 6 million. It presents the highest values of population density of all Central American countries coming to the 300 inhabitants per km². The scarcity of resources and lack of response to demands for access to land, the use of water resources and food, sanitation, construction and transport infrastructure ... have caused a strong pressure on the Salvadoran territory that has made differences between their populations grow. In fact, a large proportion of this population has seen have not been able to meet even their most basic needs. The hardest hit segment of the population has been living in rural areas. This country has been established as an exporter of population. These movements are intensified when political tensions and social conflicts escalated since 1979. Currently, the causes of Salvadorean migration are in the socio-economic of their population. The lack of employment opportunities, poverty status, next to the search of new horizons, improving their income and achieving their living conditions are at the bottom of the Salvadorean migration. Salvadorean migration has been found in the consignment its most familiar form of expression. They are helping to improve the quality of life of Salvadorean families, although they have not managed to get out of their poverty. Remittances have become the main engine and sustain their economy surpassing the revenue from other activities such as exports of traditional products.

The third type of conditioning factor that faces the development of tourism is the youth that have their institutions and regulations. The perspectives for increasing and development have forced the regulation and standardization of the activity. With these objectives have been recently established governing institutions and managers of tourism. Major Salvadorian institutions regarding tourism are: Salvadorean Institute of Tourism, Salvadorean Tourist Corporation and Ministry of Tourism, which are ascribed to public sphere, and Bureau Convention and Visitors and House Salvadoran Tourism, two private non profit.

With the objective of promoting the orderly development of the activity, set a legislative framework that became reality with the establishment of the Law on Tourism in 2005. Until 2005, El Salvador was the only Central American country had no law on tourism. The legislation was the most delayed in relation to the consolidation of a tourism strategy. The lack of a legal framework which this activity was found under a process of impasse in the work of promoting and attracting foreign investment and tourism in the country's

legal system. Other legislation has been those which have been commissioned to fill a gap in the regulation of tourist activity. Thus, laws and responsible for the protection and conservation of natural and cultural resources, ensuring their protection, conservation and promotion, and responsible use of them. The diversity of legislation which deals with a variety of topics ranging from public health, through the preservation of the environment, to transportation security or municipal ordinance... Overall, this is a young policy, because a large number of these laws were released during the decade of the 90's. These contain the ideas that emerged since the end of the 20th Century, so they proclaim the principles established by the concept of *sustainable development*.

To sum up, the current context of global tourism is appropriate for strengthening the development of tourism in countries like El Salvador. Their poor course has not been an obstacle to the country which is reaching a more importance because of volume of arrivals for leisure and tourism and the tourism receipts that is generating, as well as the dedication and involvement in efforts from part of the governmental and private initiative. In recent years the attention has been paid in this sector because is considered an opportunity for economic and social development. The potentials and prospects for its increase and development have forced the regulation and standardization of the activity. One difficulty for the development of tourism is the high vulnerability of El Salvador. During its history has happened all kinds of disasters in which, ultimately, the victim was the Salvadorean society who has been further aggravated the situation because these natural and human phenomena make their appearance occasionally. Social groups that occupy the lowest level are those who have suffered those impacts with greater notoriety.