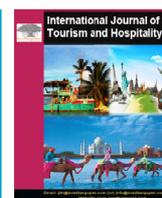




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Tourism Diagnosis: An Approach to Actual Context of Brussels Hospitality Industry

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the perspectives of turning the crisis into opportunities for Brussels tourism industry. The tourism sector in Brussels has been facing significant challenges in recent years, particularly due to the Covid-19 pandemic. According to data from the Tourism Observatory, the number of overnight stays in Brussels decreased by 72% in 2020 compared to the previous year. This sharp decline can be attributed to the travel restrictions and lockdown measures implemented to contain the spread of the virus, as well as the overall reduction in demand for business travel and tourism. The pandemic has also had a significant impact on the hotel industry in Brussels, with many hotels that was forced to temporarily close or operating at reduced capacity due to decrease in demand. However, some hotels adapted by offering new services such as workplaces, outdoor dining options, and enhanced hygiene measures to attract customers and meet their changing needs. In addition to the pandemic, the tourism sector in Brussels has also been affected by other factors such as the increase in short-term rentals and the rise of alternative accommodation options such as Airbnb. This has led to concerns about the impact on the hotel industry and the overall quality of life for residents in certain areas of the city. In 2020, the city launched initiatives to support the hotel industry and promote the safety and well-being of tourists, such as the Brussels Health Safety Label, which certified hotels and other tourism businesses that complied with strict hygiene and safety measures.

Keywords: *Hospitality, Tourism, Brussels, Industry, Opportunities, Infrastructure, Statistics, Tourism, Improvements, Audit*

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1. Introduction

Brussels, the capital of Belgium, is an attracting and fascinating city known for its wide and rich history, multiculturalism, rich-own-culture, and mouthwatering food. The city has become a major tourist destination in the last decade, attracting visitors from all over the world. In this paper, we will explore the context of tourism in Brussels, including its history, attractions, infrastructure, and the impact of tourism on the city.

The paper is presented as follows: (1) Tourism in Brussels, some history; (2) Tourism attractions in Brussels; (3) Infrastructure for Tourism in Brussels; (4) Tourism context and employment statistics; (5) Brussels Hospitality Industry Statistics; (6) Ways to improve hospitality in Brussels; (7) Conclusion; and (8) Webography and Bibliography.

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2. Tourism in Brussels, Some History

Tourism in Brussels can be traced back to the late 19th century when the city began to attract visitors from neighboring countries. At the time, Brussels was known for its historic landmarks, including the “Grande Place”, which was built in the 12th century and known as “Nedermerckt” (“Low Market”), and the Manneken Pis, a small statue of a urinating small man that has become one of the most popular tourist attractions in the city together with the Atomium, a monument (historical museum inside) built in 1958 and representing the conventional iron crystal lattice magnified 165 billion times.

During 20th century, tourism in Brussels continued to grow, fueled in part by the city’s role as the headquarters of the European Union, and NATO. The development of the Eurostar train service in the 1990s made Brussels more accessible in terms of tourism, bringing UK and other parts of Europe closer and leading to a further increase in visitor numbers.

Today, Brussels is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Europe, attracting millions of visitors each year. The city’s tourism industry is a major contributor to its economy, generating billions of euros in revenue and supporting thousands of jobs.

3. Tourism Attractions in Brussels

Brussels is home to a wealth of tourism attractions, from historic landmarks to modern museums and galleries. Some of the most popular attractions in the city includes:

3.1. The Grand Place

The Grande Place is the central square of Brussels and one of the most beautiful squares in Europe. It is surrounded by magnificent (some of them gold covered) buildings, including the Town Hall, the King’s House, and the Guildhalls.

3.2. The Atomium

The Atomium is a building, considered as a technical prowess that combines science, culture and architecture, and designed for the 1958 World Expo. It is a giant model of an iron atom, standing at 102 m tall. Visitors can take a lift to the top panoramic views of the city and visit the museum inside.

3.3. The Royal Palace of Brussels

The Royal Palace of Brussels is the official residence of the King and Queen of Belgium. It is open to the public during summer, allowing visitors to explore its opulent interiors and beautiful gardens.

3.4. The Museum of Fine Arts

The Museum of Fine Arts is one of the largest museums in Europe, with an extensive collection of paintings, sculptures, and decorative arts. It includes works by Belgian artists such as Magritte and Ensor, as well as international masters like Rubens and Rembrandt.

4. Infrastructure for Tourism in Brussels

Brussels has a well-developed infrastructure for tourism, with a range of accommodation options, transportation links, and tourism services. The city has a wide variety of hotels, from budget-friendly hostels to luxury five-star hotels as the Steigenberger Icon Wiltcher’s or the Rocco Forte Hotel Amigo.

Transportation in Brussels is efficient and affordable, managed by STIB-MIVB, with a network of buses, trams, and metro lines covering the city and its suburbs. The Brussels Airport is located just 12 km from the city center, providing easy access for international visitors. The city has also a high-speed train connection to other major European cities, including Paris or London.

Tourist services in Brussels are well-organized and professional, with a range of tour operators, travel agencies, and tourism information centers available to help visitors plan their trips. The city also offers a range of guided tours, including walking tours, bus tours, and bike tours, allowing visitors to enjoy the city with an easy and environment friendly mobility. Almost everyone talks English in Brussels, adding the fact that Belgium owns three official languages, French, Flemish (Dutch) and German.

5. Tourism Context and Employment Statistics

As the vibrant city that attracts millions of tourists every year from all over the world, Brussels’s rich history, beautiful architecture, and its unique culture, make it a beautiful destination for tourists. In addition to providing visitors with unforgettable experiences, tourism also has a significant impact on the economy of Brussels, creating employment opportunities and generating revenue for local businesses.

According to recent statistics, the tourism industry in Brussels is a major employer, providing jobs for thousands of people. In 2021, the tourism industry in Brussels accounted for approximately 5.8% of total employment in the city, with over 40,000 people employed in various tourism-related activities.

The hospitality sector, which includes hotels, restaurants, and bars (known as HO-RE-CA), is one of the largest employers in the tourism industry in Brussels. In 2021, the hospitality sector accounted for approximately 70% of total employment in the tourism industry, with over 28,000 people employed in HO-RE-CA sector.

Other key sectors that provide employment opportunities in the tourism industry in Brussels include travel agencies, tour operators, museums, and tourist attractions. These sectors provide employment opportunities for a diverse range of people, from tour guides and hospitality staff to marketing professionals and administrative staff as other examples.

Brussels has long been a cherished destination for tourists seeking a taste of European charm and culture. However, the tourism landscape in the city has undergone a significant transformation in recent times, largely due to the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The graph below (Figure 1) presents a compelling visual narrative of the last 12 years, illustrating the fluctuations in visitor numbers and the stark drop in tourism during the pandemic. While Brussels remains an alluring destination, the graph provides a poignant reminder of the challenges that the city, like so many others around the world, has faced in the wake of the coronavirus crisis.

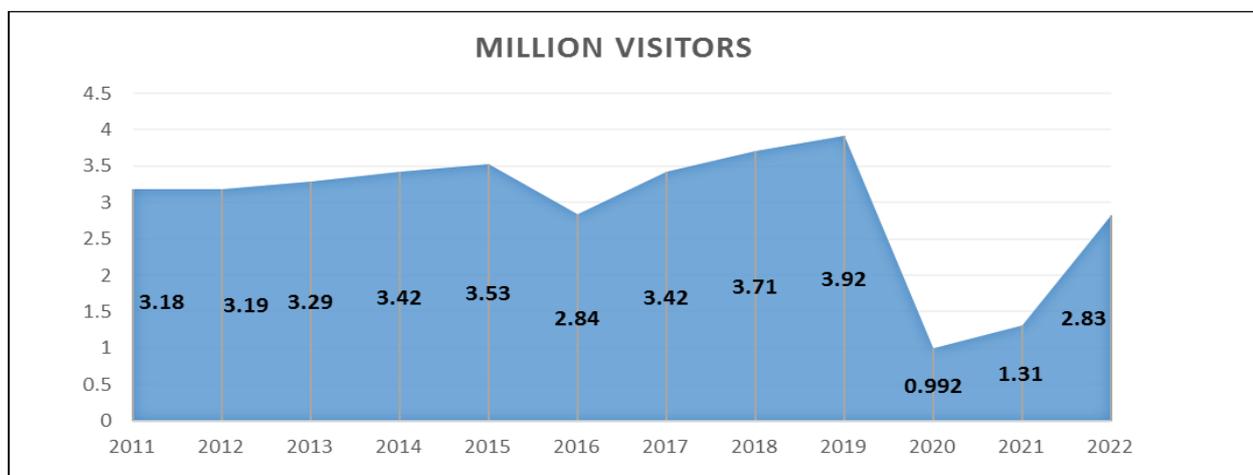


Figure 1: Brussels Visitors Arrivals

Source: Own Elaboration based on Directorate-General Statistics – Statistics Belgium. www.ceicdata.com

6. Brussels Hospitality Industry Statistics

According to the official website of Visit Brussels, the number of visitors to Brussels has been increasing steadily since the 1980s, with some fluctuations due to events such as the 9/11 attacks and the global financial crisis of 2008.

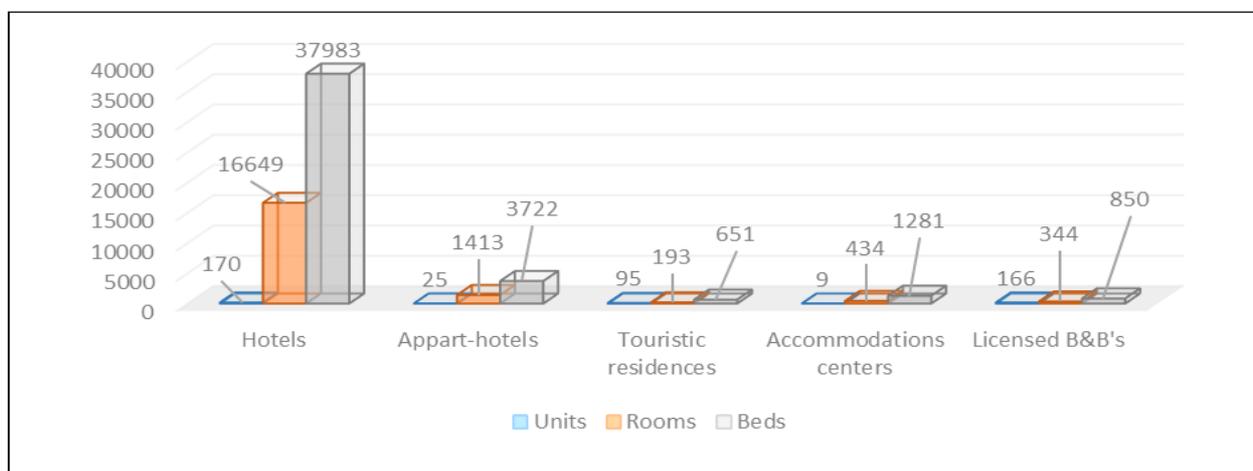


Figure 2: Brussels Licensed Accommodations 2021

Source: Own Elaboration based on last Annual Report Available, 2021 Brussels Tourism Observatory

In 2021, Brussels (city) had a total of 465 (licensed) accommodations units (220 were registered hotels) with a total of 19,033 rooms and 44,487 beds available for tourist. These hotels ranged from budget friendly options to luxury five star buildings (Figure 2).

Table 1: Analyzed Hotels in Brussels Center and nearby Postcodes		
Postcode	Region	Hotels Analyzed#
1000	BRUSSELS	99
1020	LAEKEN	3
1030	SCHAERBEEK	10
1040	ETTERBEEK	6
1050	IXELLES	30
1060	SAINT-GILES	18
1070	ANDERLECHT	12
1080	MOLENBEEK-SAINT-JEAN	4
1081	KOEKELBERG	3
1083	GANSHOREN	1
1090	JETTE	1
1120	NEDER-OVER-HEEMBEEK (BRUXELLES)	1
1130	HAREN (BRUXELLES)	2
1140	EVERE	3
1150	WOLUWE-SAINT-PIERRE	2
1160	AUDERGHEM	1
1170	WATERMAEL-BOITSFORT	2
1180	UCCLE	4
1190	FOREST	1
1200	WOLUWE-SAINT-LAMBERT	3

From the Table 3, we analyzed Hotels in Brussels center and nearby postcodes:

According to Brussels annual report 2021 (Figure 2) and as per our analysis and survey (Table 1), the occupancy rate of hotels in Brussels in 2021 was around 34%, which was significantly lower than the pre-pandemic levels. This was due to the impact of Covid-19 pandemic, which led to travel restrictions and a decline in tourist arrivals.

However, despite the challenging conditions, the hospitality industry in Brussels has shown resilience and adaptability during the pandemic (Figure 3). Many hotels in the city have implemented measures to ensure safety and well-being of their guests, such as enhanced cleaning protocols and social distancing measures. The outlook for 2023-2024 is also promising, Brussels is well-positioned, recovering its tourism industry from traces of Covid, and working to promote

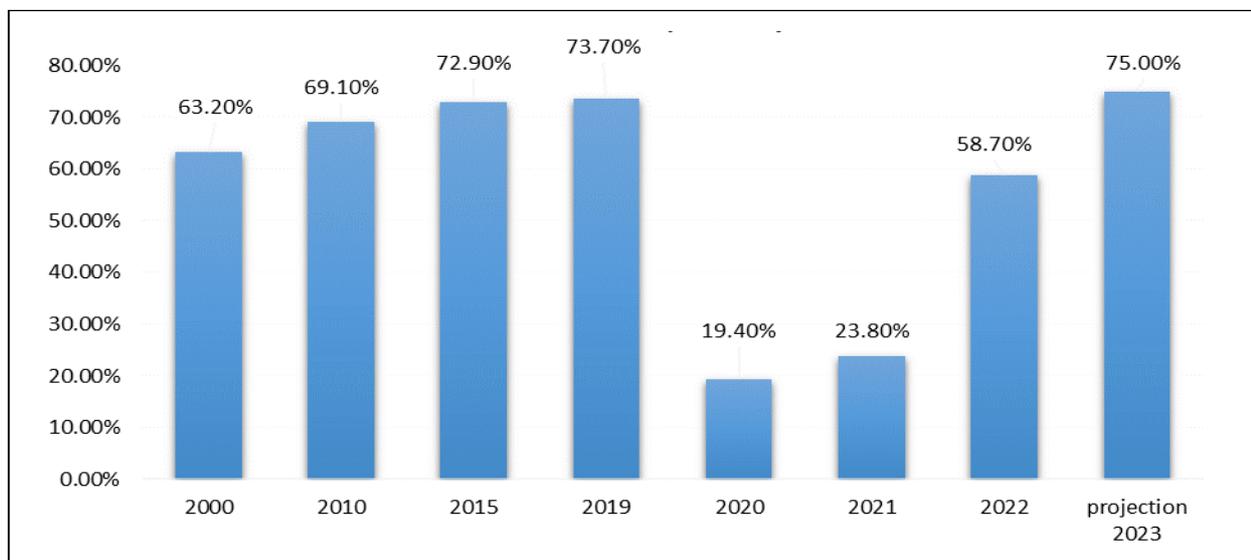


Figure 3: Brussels Occupancy Rate

Source: Own Elaboration based on the Brussels Times, <https://www.brusselstimes.com/>

itself as a safe and attractive destination for visitors. As per Schengen Visa Info, flight bookings 2023 increased 27% compared with last year, and that also shows that many Italians, French and Spaniards will make a touristic transit in the Belgian capital.

In Brussels, each overnight is taxed by the called ‘city tax’, which creates a value of 4.24€/room that represents over +15 M€ for the public interest of the City of Brussels, together with the VAT (called TVA) that is charged at a rate of 6% (in each rented room, sold service or product) and recharged to the tourist. This Value Added Tax generated roughly +40 M€ to Brussels (approximate calculations made based on data from the Brussels Tourism Observatory 2021 by applying the average price of a room rented in 2021).

In addition to hotels, Brussels also has a variety of other accommodation options for tourists, including hostels, guesthouses, and serviced apartments. These options provide visitors with a range of choices to suit their budget and preferences.

7. Ways to Improve Hospitality in Brussels

The hospitality industry is a critical component of city’s tourism industry, providing visitors with comfortable and enjoyable experiences. As such, it is essential that hospitality services are of the highest quality to ensure that visitors leave with positive memories of the city. Next, some ways to improve:

7.1. Invest in Staff Training and Development

One of the most effective ways to improve hospitality in Brussels is to invest in staff training and development. Hotel and hospitality staff should be trained in customer service, communication, and conflict resolution to ensure they can handle a range of customer needs and request. We remind that hospitality environment defines customer as “KING/QUEEN” in capital letters. This quote highlights the importance to offer high quality standards to customers.

By providing regular training opportunities, employer can improve the skills and knowledge of their staff, which will ultimately lead to a better customer experience.

7.2. Enhance the Guest Experiences

In the hospitality industry, guest experience is critical being as the key factor to success or the element that repels customers. Hotels and restaurants should work to create a warm, welcoming, and comfortable environment that makes

guests feel at home. This can be achieved by improving amenities, offering personalized services, and ensuring that staff are attentive to guest need.

7.3. Embrace Technology

Technology can be an effective way to enhance hospitality. For instance, hotels and restaurants can use digital check-in and keyless entry systems to speed up the check-in process and improve security. They can also use data analysis tools to gain insights into customer behavior and preferences, allowing them to offer tailored services and experiences.

7.4. Promote Sustainability

Sustainability is an increasingly important issue in the tourism industry. Hotels and restaurants should take steps to reduce their environmental impact. This can include reducing energy and water consumption, using sustainable materials, sourcing food locally or by small daily gestures like asking customers to collaborate by indicating, with a small panel, if they prefer to not have the room cleaned (Hotels).

7.5. Collaboration with other Businesses

Collaboration is a key to improving hospitality in Brussels. By working together, hotels and restaurants can create a unified tourism experience that encourages visitors to explore more of the city. This can include cross-promotion, joint marketing initiatives, and the creation of Hubs, shared spaces and services.

7.6. Focus on Safety and Security

Safety and security are essential for a positive hospitality experience. Hotels and restaurants in Brussels should take steps to ensure that their properties are secure, including installing closed-circuit television cameras and training staff to handle security incidents. They should also implement high standards safety measures, such as enhanced cleaning and give preference to social distancing protocols.

8. Conclusion

Tourism is a key driver of the economy in Brussels, creating employment opportunities and generating revenue for local businesses. The hospitality sector, which includes hotels, restaurants, and bars, is one of the largest employers in the tourism industry in Brussels, providing jobs for thousands of people.

Improving hospitality in Brussels requires a commitment to providing excellent customer service, enhancing the guest experience, embracing technology, promoting sustainability, collaborating with other businesses, and prioritizing safety and security. By implementing these measures, hotels and restaurants can create a welcoming and memorable experience for visitors, helping to support the growth of the tourism industry in the city.

Despite recent years challenges, there are also opportunities for the tourism sector in Brussels to bounce back and thrive in the post-pandemic era. One such opportunity is the increasing demand for sustainable and responsible tourism practices, which can help to promote the city's cultural heritage and natural resources while minimizing the negative impact on the environment and local communities.

Another opportunity is the growing interest in digital and immersive experiences, which can provide visitors with new and engaging ways to discover the city's attractions and history. This can include virtual tours, interactive exhibits, and augmented reality experiences, among other innovations.

In conclusion, the tourism sector in Brussels is waking up from the complex and challenging context, with opportunities to innovate and adapt to meet the changing needs of visitors and promote sustainable tourism practices. By working together and embracing a forward-thinking and responsible approach, the city can continue to thrive as a top destination for travelers from around the world, and thus continue building new renowned hotels worthy of the 'Brussels signature'.

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