

Travel & Tourism | Cities

COVID-19: pandemic impacts on North American city tourism

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An estimated 107 million fewer domestic visitors and 42mn fewer international visitors will travel to North American cities in 2020.

Key points

- The COVID-19 global pandemic has led to one of the largest global crises since the second world war. The spread of the virus spans 185 countries, many of which have implemented a range of measures to slow the spread, at a cost of major disruption to the global economy and to global travel.
- Inbound arrivals to North America are expected to decline 40% in 2020, with a loss of 59mn visitors compared to 2019.
- Collectively, North American city visitor arrivals are also forecast to decline 40% in 2020 compared to 2019, equating to a loss of 42mn visitors for the 64 cities included in our GCT service.
- North American cities are considerably exposed to the unpredictable nature of the global travel outlook, with long-haul source markets accounting for almost half of all international visitor arrivals. Therefore, they may encounter a more volatile recovery path, as the easing of travel restrictions and sentiment towards international travel (especially long-haul) will take longer to recover than domestic travel.
- The declines in the 15 largest North American city destinations for international visitor arrivals represent a decline of 29mn visitors compared to 2019, with the largest declines in New York (5.5mn), Los Angeles (3.2mn) and Orlando (2.6mn).
- Domestic city visitor arrivals are forecast to decline 24% in 2020, a loss of 107 million visitors. Domestic tourism is particularly important in North America, accounting for on average, 84% of total visits to North American cities in 2020 and will play a crucial role in the recovery of the region's city tourism.

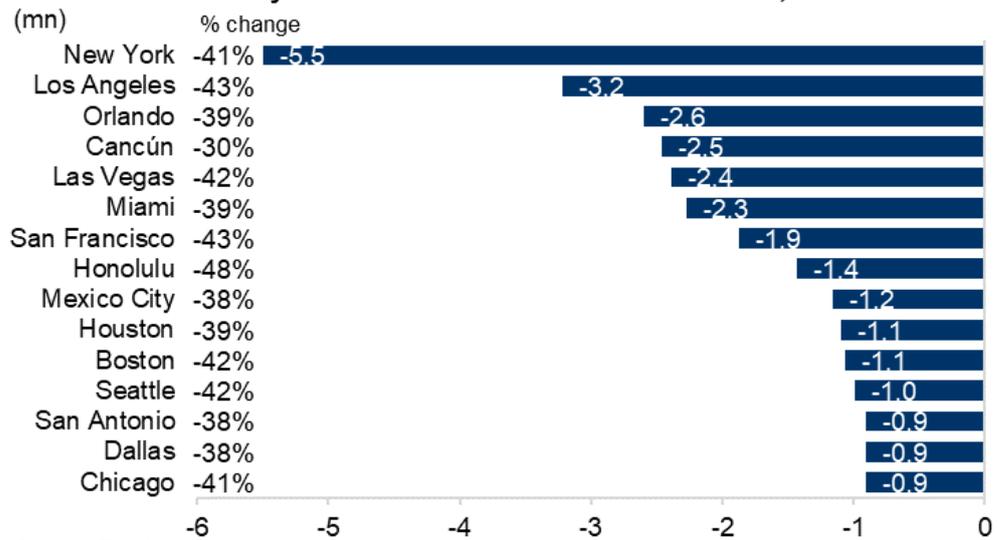
Decline in international North American city tourist arrivals (mn), 2019-2020



Impact on city inbound travel

The United States is currently the focal point for the coronavirus, with the highest number of reported cases and deaths globally. The intense spread of the virus is having adverse consequences on the US economy and is set to devastate inbound travel in 2020, with the three hardest hit cities in North America coming from the United States. New York, as the worst affected city within the region, is unsurprisingly forecast to suffer the greatest decline in international visitors at 5.5mn, followed by the tourist hot-spots, Los Angeles and Orlando at 3.2mn and 2.6mn.

North American city international visitor arrivals decline, 2019-2020



Source: Tourism Economics

The top 10 cities in North America ranked by international visitor arrivals will remain largely unchanged in 2020, with most cities holding their position, while Honolulu and Houston are forecast to swap positions at 9th and 10th. New York is forecast to maintain its position as the most popular city in 2025, receiving 14.2mn international visitors.

North American city international visitor arrivals							
	2019 Regional Rank	2019 Global Rank	2019 (mn)	2020 Regional Rank	2020 (mn)	2025 Regional Rank	2025 (mn)
New York	1	6	13.5	1	8.0	1	14.2
Cancún	2	17	8.2	2	5.8	2	10.3
Los Angeles	3	20	7.4	3	4.2	3	8.0
Orlando	4	22	6.6	4	4.0	4	7.1
Miami	5	28	5.8	5	3.6	6	6.0
Las Vegas	6	30	5.7	6	3.3	5	6.0
San Francisco	7	39	4.4	7	2.5	7	4.7
Mexico City	8	55	3.0	8	1.8	8	4.0
Honolulu	9	56	3.0	10	1.6	10	3.0
Houston	10	62	2.8	9	1.7	9	3.2
Boston	11	67	2.5	13	1.5	11	2.7
San Antonio	12	72	2.4	11	1.5	13	2.7
Dallas	13	73	2.4	12	1.5	12	2.7
Seattle	14	74	2.4	14	1.4	14	2.7
Chicago	15	80	2.2	15	1.3	15	2.3

Source: Tourism Economics

Key: ■ Moved up rankings relative to 2019 ■ Moved down rankings relative to 2019

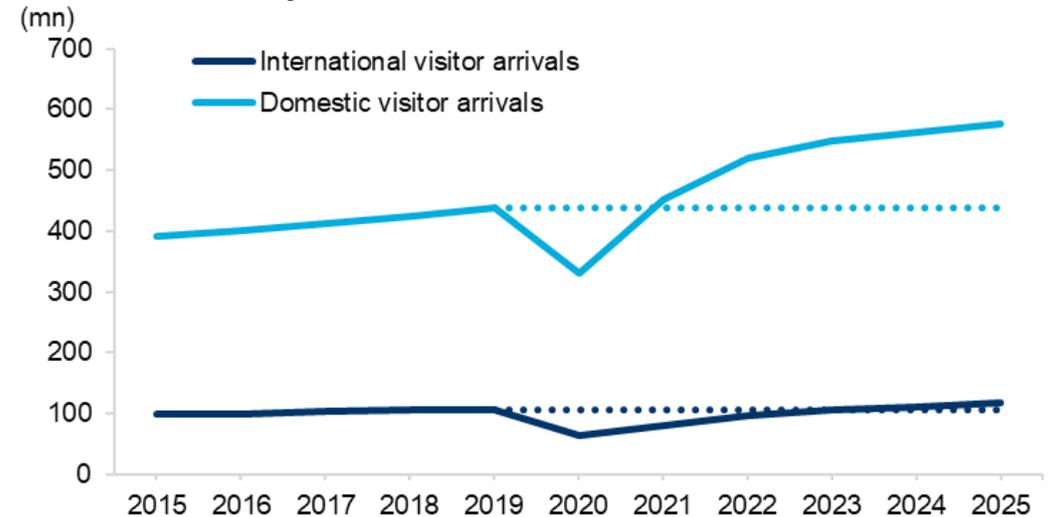
The largest declines in international visitor arrivals in 2020:

**New York 5.5mn
Los Angeles 3.2mn
Orlando 2.6mn**

Recovery of city travel

Tighter travel restrictions and the extension of travel bans imposed across North America are having a damaging impact on international visitors; the desire to travel internationally may also take some time to bounce back. Therefore, international visitors to North American cities are not expected to surpass 2019 levels until 2024, while domestic visitors will see a quicker recovery rate, exceeding 2019 levels in 2021.

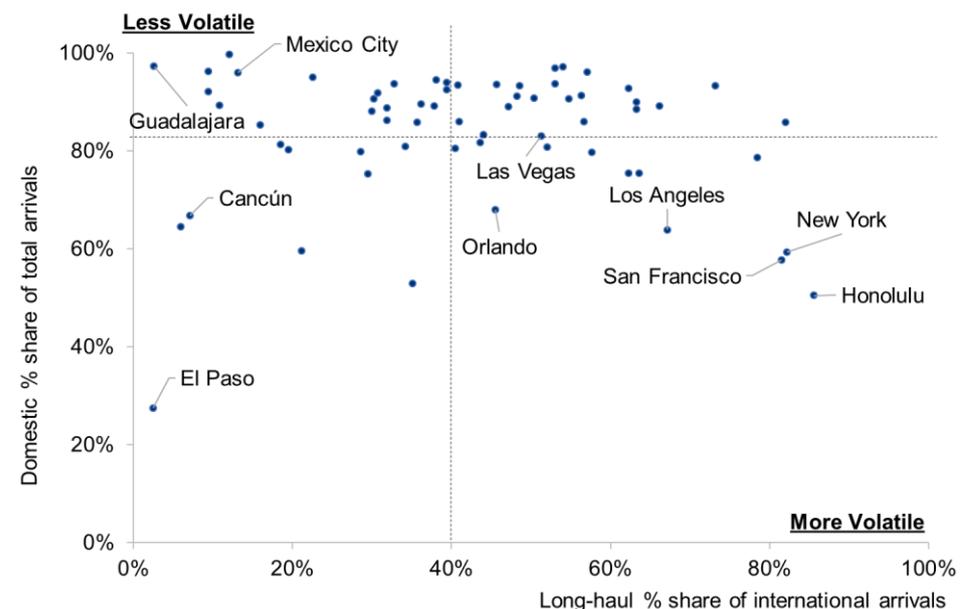
North American city international vs domestic visitor arrivals



Source: Tourism Economics

On average, domestic visitor arrivals account for 84% of total visitor arrivals to North American cities, with cities such as Mexico City and Guadalajara gaining over 90% of their arrivals from domestic visits. A greater dependency on domestic tourism may ease the region's recovery period, as travel restrictions are likely to be lifted for domestic travel prior to international travel. However, a significant share of international visits to the region are from long-haul markets. On average, long-haul visitor arrivals account for 42% of international visits to North American cities. Honolulu, New York, and San Francisco may encounter greater challenges in their recovery compared to other North American cities, as long-haul visits account for over 80% of total international visits.

City reliance on domestic and long-haul arrivals, 2020



Note: Annotated cities are those ranked in the largest cities for international visitor arrivals and match the criteria of a less or more volatile recovery

Source: Tourism Economics

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Domestic visitor arrivals to cities will surpass 2019 levels in 2021 but international visitor arrivals will not until 2024.