



PROJECT REPORT

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to discuss how the hospitality industry has been changed by the COVID 19 pandemic. COVID 19 is a global pandemic that started in China at the end of 2019 and beginning of 2020. This report will see how a well-known hospitality company, Meliá International Hotels, have done during this crisis and what changes have been adopted in order to apply it for future pandemics. Changes that Meliá International have made include refunding all the booked hotel nights that people had decided to cancel because of the pandemic. In addition, free hotel nights were given to key workers that included hospital and army staff and used social media to advertise themselves.

In this report, it has been clearly seen that it is a difficult time for the hospitality sector in the pandemic. Figures from the United Nations World Tourist Organisation (UNWTO) show that the hospitality sector has seen a 60-80% drop in international tourists. In these circumstances, leadership and management in the hospitality sector have become crucial and help to ensure that enterprise continues and is able to protect livelihoods. The pandemic has increased the amount of debt in this type of enterprises are facing. This may mean that some hotels may face closure soon due to their rising debt.

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Introduction

COVID 19 or coronavirus is a global pandemic that started in Wuhan (China) at the end of 2019 and beginning of 2020 (*El pais*, 2020). The global and tourism industry has grown exponentially in the last few years. The number of global international tourist arrivals rose from approximately 541 million in 1995 to 1161 million by 2014 (Hung et al., 2018). One of the biggest components of the tourism industry is hotels. Online bookings for travel accommodation expanded by +10% globally and this growth was influenced by some of the world's largest online travel agencies such as Booking.com, Expedia, Trip.com and by sharing accommodation platforms such as Airbnb (Online Marketplaces, 2020).

According to the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) (2020) in 2019, 1.5 billion tourists were recorded to have been travelling around the globe. This was a 4% increase from 2018 and it was predicted that the records would increase by a further 4% by 2020. However, since the pandemic, the tourism industry has been on standstill and the UNWTO reported that there could be a drop down between 60-80% in international tourists (UNWTO,2020) (See Appendix D). As a result, the market has seen more last-minute reservations and a focus on domestic rather than international tourism (Inturea, 2020).

This report aims to analyse the effects of the pandemic on the hotel industry. For this report, an analysis of the impacts of Covid- 19 on Meliá hotels on particular, will be conducted. The objectives of this report are:

- Analyse the financial impact Covid-19 has had on Meliá Hotels
- Assess how Meliá Hotels is dealing with crisis management
- Outline the new operational guidelines and contingency planning of Meliá Hotels
- Explore how Meliá Hotels is adopting effective leadership and management to deal with the crisis.

One of the limitations of this report is that research is sourced online from Meliá Hotel itself. The information published by the hotel is limited and therefore, confines the scope of the aims and objectives being investigated.

Meliá International Hotels

Meliá Hotels is a Spanish hotel chain with 391 hotels, across 41 countries through the world, from Latin America to China and the United States. It is ranked amongst the best top 20 hotels globally, offering both resort and city hotels (Melia, 2020a). The company has hosted over 30 million stays and in 2018, Meliá Hotels earning a net profit of 140.1 million euros (Melia, 2019). The stakeholders of Meliá International Hotels is divided 52% of the shares belong to the Escarrer family, who founded the company, and 48% is from free float (Estructura Accionarial - Web Corporative Official de Meliá, 2020).

According to the CEO of Meliá Hotels, pandemic has resulted in a sharp decrease in business, leading to the closure of nearly all its hotels, apart from a few in Asia which have not been as affected by the virus (Reuters, 2020). The company uses the Spanish ERTE scheme to maintain many of its employees (See Appendix B & C).

The European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS, 2020) indicates that the EU tourism industry is set to lose around one billion euros in revenue per month. The UNWTO approximates that in 2020, global international tourist visitors could reduce by 20-30% compared to 2019, leading to a potential \$300-400 billion loss within the industry. The hospitality sector has seen many hotels deserted or closed, some have stayed open to offer services to healthcare workers and some have been converted into temporary hospitals, Meliá is one (Sesay, 2020).

Finance

Meliá Hotels reported a net profit of 11.5 million in the first quarter of 2019 but reported a net loss of 79.7 million euros in the first quarter of 2020. COVID-19 has forced many of its international hotels to close; as of March 2020, 40 hotels are operating. In Spain, tourism represents one of the largest economic drivers, creating 12% of economic output and generating vast employment. Since March 2020, however, international visitors dropped by 64.3%. The company noted that the coronavirus outbreak would have a substantial impact on its operations because 43% of Meliá's hotel rooms are in Spain, although it currently does not have sufficient information to make comprehensive estimates (Reuters, 2020).

The net debt of Meliá Hotels has increased up to 155.1 million euros in comparison to 2019. The liquidity of the enterprise increased by 220 million euros by the end of March and an undrawn credit line of 230 million euros. In a bid to claw back sales, Meliá Hotels have advertised flash sales, offering up to 45% discounts with the option to cancel at no extra cost, at any time in the year (See Appendix B) (Robbins, 2020).

The Spanish Government recently announced a guarantee of 250 million euros for the tourism industry from the Institute of Official Credit (ICO) (Holtesur, 2020). Furthermore, the government notified the industry that apart from the ICO help, the government will also introduce 4.26 million euros into the sector (Further discussion in Appendix C) (Gutiérrez, 2020). However, in comparison to other European neighbours, this falls short. In France, the government will introduce up to 18 million euros to save the tourism industry (Agencias, 2020).

Contingency Planning & Operations

Faulkner (2001), states that all organisations and businesses will at some point, need to deal with change and all destinations will need to deal with a disaster. It is imperative that disaster planning is at the centre of any business, particularly within the tourism industry, so that they are better equipped to tackle changes put forward by external events (Hystad & Keller, 2006, as cited in Ritchie, 2008).

According to Ritchie (2008), although the risk of natural disasters cannot be completely eradicated, it can be better managed so that any further risks can be prevented. This can be managed through planning and preparation and by constructing a risk assessment. This may deescalate the risk of linked events or 'ripple effect' from occurring within an already chaotic and complex inter-related tourism system. A pestle in appendix B and C can be used to complete the risk assessment.

To support the gradual reopening, Meliá Hotels has constructed a programme known as "Stay safe with Melia" for the post-COVID recovery period (See Appendix E). The hotel chain is working closely with Bureau Veritas to help it comply and maintain stringent health and safety measures and effectively apply the World Health Organizations (WHO) recommendations (PAX News, 2020).

"The hotel has prepared a global contingency plan to ensure health and safety, as well as continuity in its operations and all the required legal and financial coverage." (Davies, 2020, para 11).

As part of its post-COVID strategy, whilst outlining measures and protocols to enhance hygiene, the disinfection of resources and operational facilities, the programme further aims to promote a positive customer service experience. To do this, the Stay Safe with Meliá programme intends to designate an ambassador responsible for the emotional well-being of its guests and to assess the compliance of the new processes to preclude the further spread of Covid-19 (Melia, 2020b).

In the food and beverage department, actions within the following areas were considered:

- Cleaning and disinfection plan approved by Diversey, a leading cleaning and hygiene supplier.
- Proposals on occupational health to ensure the safety of employees and management if cases of infection arise.
- Guidance on all new operations and procedures with relevant training materials
- Brand standards applied in different departments, e.g wellness, entertainment, food and beverage, in-room experience etc.
- Use of innovation and technology to ensure the safety of provisions.

As a way of testing that the new procedures are effective, the company has already applied some of these procedures in particular areas, such as the food and beverage department, new cleaning procedures for hotel rooms and public spaces, customer check-in and out simulations, swimming pool areas and car parks. Digitalised applications are also being used to limit direct customer contact. The company has also taken into account the needs of the customer by involving them in the adaption process through the launch of a customer survey (PAX News, 2020).

As part of their special prevention and maintenance plan, specific procedures for water systems, refrigerators heating and air conditioning have been outlined. Customers will be given the option to have their room cleaned during the day, all paper and stationery will be replaced with a digital directory, manual bins will be replaced with automatic ones with lids, interior items that are not in line with the new cleaning measures (washing above 60 degrees) such as cushions will be removed. Hand sanitiser dispensers will be available in communal areas and customers will be able to purchase 'prevention kits' that contain gloves, masks, hand gel) (Melia, 2020c).

Meliá hotels company and other private company such as Iberia have started to work with the government to launch the campaign "*Spain for sure*". This campaigning uses Spanishes celebrities for example: Carolina Martin, Ana Botín, Iniesta, Teresa Perales or Paul Gasol. The message that the Spanish government is promoting is that Spain is a trustworthy and a secure destination offering a quality product to its visitors (Campaña 'Spain For Sure', 2020; See Appendix A). This campaign started in the Prado museum and it was officiated by the King and Queen from Spain along with the Spanish government (ABC, 2020).

Crisis Management

Crisis Management consists of preparing, guiding and applying action to minimise the effects of a threat; making contact and cooperating with outside agencies and encouraging 'work arounds' when pre-existing resources and routines are no longer working (dos-Santos, de-Mello & de Almeida Cunha, 2016).

Public institutions, critical infrastructure and reducing the impacts of risk are the three elements in which a crisis is calculated. Successful crisis management can save lives, protect infrastructure and recovers the trust in public organisations. In most cases, negative outcomes of a crisis are directly related to poor crisis management (Boin, Kuipers and Overdijk, 2013as cited in dos-Santos, de-Mello & de Almeida Cunha, 2016).

According to Lopez-Quesada (2017), when a crisis begins, it is important, to be honest and make decisions quickly, as the first hours of a crisis are crucial. It is also important to assign specific tasks to each member of the crisis team and communicate with the board of directors, employers, customers, shareholders etc. for effective management.

According to Bilic, Pivcevic and Cevra (2017), the preparation and knowledge of a company's management for a possible crisis, plays a fundamental role in the deterrence and effective crisis management amid and after the crisis.

Coombs (1995, cited in Mansour, 2013) states that one of the most influential crises management models, is that of the three-stage model: pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis. The pre-crisis stage consists of preventative measures; planning, management, monitoring and other pro-active actions. The crisis stage relates to the action taken to deal with and respond to the crisis, recognising the crisis, sharing information, reputation management. In Meliá Hotels this meant that the company used social media to maintain its profile and provided supportive content, for example, how to stay fit or cook a recipe from their menu. The company did not attach any advertising to these posts, in recognition of the importance of safety and the Covid-19 restrictions. Cancellations were also accepted, and no charges were made. Meliá Hotels were also used as temporary accommodation for medical staff and other key workers.

The post-crisis stage occurs when the crisis has passed and involves informing the public of any new safety measures/regulations and knowledge learnt from the crisis experience. This was completed by using online facilities to keep in contact with clients and recruit new clients as well as show the safety procedures that have been adopted to protect customers and workers.

In an interview with Annie Wang – the manager responsible for branding, marketing and communications, explained that the crisis phase posed challenges as there were many unanswered questions relating to the extent of the pandemic. In the second phase, more information about the virus was made apparent and Meliá began following local guidance, developing opening protocols and working with the Bureau Veritas. During the third phase plans for reopening were developed.

Leadership and Management

When an organisation is faced with a significant crisis, leadership is necessary to guide the organisation through the phase, or in this case, the coronavirus pandemic to ensure business survival (Mumford et al., 2007).

According to Waugh and Streib (2006, cited in Demiroz & Kapucu, 2012), successful management during a crisis involves effective interactions with all departments and other agencies or government officials and network to achieve a common goal through strategic action. One of the most vital tools required for networking, particularly during a crisis is communication. It is through communication, that coordinated efforts are made, leading to successful outcomes. Meliá Hotels is actively engaging with administrative bodies and health authorities in Spain to construct a guide for hotel operation in dealing with Covid-19 (Hospitality Net, 2020).

D'Auria and De Smet (2020), state that the first thing leaders should do, is to recognise the occurrence of a crisis. Once the crisis is acknowledged, preparation for a response can be made. The responses can range from temporary actions such as working from home policies to adjustments for future business practices such as using innovative tools, which can be useful to maintain post-crisis. One such example of this practice in Melia Hotels can be seen from their new digital concierge service which enables customers to contact customer services via WhatsApp – a tool that may prove beneficial even after Covid-19 (Melia, 2020d).

According to D'auria and De Smet (2020), encourage problem solving and working practices under high stress, leaders can organise chains of teams. A chain of teams is united by a mutual aim and work together similarly to individuals working in a sole team. As an international company, Melia International Hotels aims to be operating at a high-quality level. This is done by encouraging its managers to offer an efficient and effective service to give a memorable experience to the guest. To guarantee that the teams are prepared to operate in the new “normality”, the head office has started to share their program, “Stay safe with Melia”, with their hotel managers. Managers will be responsible for sharing it and putting it into practice within their teams (Hospitality Net, 2020).

A crisis is a transformational process which is unexpected, manifesting a whole organisation into a state of cessation as their assets, goals and resources face threat;

tension among members as well as time pressure and uncertainty increases (Fragouli, 2016). Zhang, Jia ang Gu (2012), state that taking precautions to minimise the consequences of the crisis in the minimum time. In a crisis, support and leadership are crucial, the leader is the person who can make a difference in managing a team and an enterprise.

Transformational leaders make an impact on their followers as well as being motivated to give the best version of themselves. Additionally, leaders are well respected and trustworthy (Yukl, 2010 cited in Shadraconis, 2013).

Transformational leadership is a form of leadership which empowers followers, leaders can seek to create new solutions when dealing with a crisis using the collective skills of their followers (Shadraconis, 2013). At the beginning of the crisis, Melia Hotels International applied transformational leadership in their hotels. They took a few days to decide what they were going to do and then they began to work with Bureau Veritas to maintain the safety of their employees and clients. For example, Melia Hotels as a Worldwide organisation recognises the importance of diversity and uses it to ensure that their leaders take on a range of different opinions and contributions. In 2017, the company launched a program to become a transformational enterprise. In this program, the enterprise wanted to invest in new technologies to promote the creation of social and economic value (Melia International Hotel, 2017 & 2019). The company used e-Melia in the pandemic to train their staff and find different ways to solve problems. Additionally, the company trains people who are at risk of social exclusion, disabled or victims of gender-based violence. This creates huge advantages that give job opportunities to people who need them, as well as boosting the talent in the company. Furthermore, this investment and training policy can increase productivity, as it increases the commitment from the company team members and improves the working environment (El Observatorio Empresarial contra la Pobreza apuesta por el Impact Hiring: diversidad e inclusión en la gestión de personas, 2019). Meliá International hotels invest in local communities by encouraging diverse working forces to train and work with them, enable the economy to flow.

Additionally, they decided to think less as an enterprise and more as a people uniting with the people who needed them most. They were one of the few enterprises who cede their facilities to become medicalise hotels, providing gave a free night's stay to people who had

been working in the front line of this pandemic. Zhang, Jia and Gu state that transformational leaders show *“reorganize all the resources and reallocate human capitals, to decrease the disorder degree”* equally they have a *“bird’s eye view to make an encompassing evaluation toward the whole situation and take actions in a short period of time”* (2012: p. 4087). Therefore, it can be said that transformational leaders need to be encouraged to make a notable difference in the organisation’s performance at all levels (Bass, 1990, cited in Fragouli, 2016).

Future Recommendations

In order to attract more guests in order to visit your destination, it is recommended to apply the following recommendations:

- Extend the cancellation policies
- Invest on new technologies and use social media in order to give recommendations as well as to show the security measurements that they are taking place
- Keep training staff
- Invest money into the community
- Keep the economy circular so that there is a pattern of re-investment that supports staff and customer loyalty
- Use discounts in order to keep the prices low and attract tourists
- Invest money into safety procedures which will help maintain staff and customer confidence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, operations inside hotels have changed. The new era will be more digitalised and contactless, as well as implementing health measures. Many of these new systems have been based on creative ideas from the staff. The role of leaders and managers is crucial because they have had to take key decisions without knowing about the virus and what measurements to follow. Meliá International hotels decided to focus more on what people need rather than the enterprise. The company understands it will have to wait for clients but in the meantime, has been taking steps to raise confidence and to encourage future customers. A lot of this work has had a community focus.

After analysing Meliá, it can be said that this company is a model to follow as they were pioneers in taking new measures by allowing their facilities to be used by medical and army staff. They also collaborated with the Spanish government initiative, Spain for Sure, to regain confidence in the country as well as in Spanish brands. The company's management has shown how leaders should always tell the truth and if any mistakes are made to apologise. Therefore, it can be said that Melia Hotels is a good company to work for and to demonstrate how the hospitality industry can survive in a time of crisis.

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Appendix

Appendix A- Link for Spain for Sure campaign

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=goVhJmlwzgw>

Appendix B- SWOT Analysis

<u>Strength</u>	<u>Weakness</u>
• Facilities inside a hotel can be renovated and restoration can take place. • Domestic tourism increases, in addition, people prefer nature and the beaches (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development & European Union, 2020). • Cancellation policies are widened. People can cancel and given a free refund if they cannot enjoy the experience (Tourinews, 2020). • Budget increases in for health and safety measures such as masks, protectors, gloves. As well as to adapt to workspaces (Hardy, 2020).	• People are afraid to travel (Reed, 2020). • Slow recovery from the crisis (Burn-Murdoch, Romei and Giles, 2020; Queen University Belfast, 2020). • Discrimination can take place; managers can refuse to allow people from areas where the virus is more present (Suárez, 2020; BBC, 2020). • Need to put in more discounts to attract customers to book rooms (Page, 2020). • Prices decrease due to the fact there is no demand (Baskas, 2020; Sampson, 2020). • The company fires people due to the COVID 19 situation as well as the wages from their employees decreases (Ubieta, 2020).

Opportunities

- Become more sustainable and eco-friendlier. (UNWTO,2020).
- Become more active in local activities and help them. Do donations to hospitals (Mulvihill, 2020).
- Use extra time created by low occupancy to give additional training to employees (Dong, 2020).
- Offer free night stay to medical staff and people who work in the pandemic. This will gain trust in the brand plus reactivate the economy and demonstrate that it is secure to travel (Rodríguez Veiga, 2020).
- Use of social media to maintain guest services (Farazad, 2020).

Threats

- Loss of jobs as enterprise cannot afford to recruit new staff. (Franck, 2020).
- Second wave of COVID 19 comes (Gallagher, 2020).
- Closure of borders, including the Schengen area (Temporary Reintroduction of Border Control - Migration and Home Affairs - European Commission, 2020).
- Some enterprises take advantage of the furlough situation (ERTE – the Spanish term for the government support) and make employees work for more time than they should under the scheme (De La Fuente, 2020).
- A guest can develop Covid 19 inside a hotel (Cronica Balear, 2020).
- Hotels can close again due to a Covid 19 outbreak (BBC News, 2020).
- Low occupancy in high season due to people not wanting to travel (Gutiérrez, 2020).
- Clients do not respect sanitary procedures (Bousmaha, 2020).

Appendix C- PESTEL Analysis

<u>Political</u>	<u>Economical</u>
• Brexit meetings on hold (BBC News, 2020). • Governments give out more money, for example, in Spain there is a change of income from annual tax declaration (ABC, 2020) . • People are not dependent on one country. In Spain, some factories have changed their production and they are producing respirators and masks (Gutiérrez, 2020). • Political crisis, people do not believe what their politicians tell them. (Herranz, 2020). • Negotiation becomes important. Political parties will need to negotiate with other political parties in order to take forward policies. • Develop a medical passport (Webb and Daily, 2020). • Governments such as: UK or Norway put a quarantine (Euronews, 2020) meanwhile other governments such as the German or Holland recommend not to travel to certain regions (Gispert, 2020).	• Partial wages are paid to workers (Wood, 2020). In Denmark, government has announced moves to cover 75% of wages bills, however, employees must take five days of their vacation entitlement or time off from work. This is to last for 3 months. • Spain applied an ERTE. Workers who are in this are entitled to 70% of the base salary in the first six months and 50% from their salary in the seventh month (Smith, 2020). • Unlimited loans in Germany for companies (Wood, 2020). • The stock markets drop down more than in the crisis of 2008 (Gutiérrez, 2020). • Oil prices drop down (Team and Speculations, 2020). • Some business may close due to the fact they are ruined. • Loss of money in the hospitality industry due to the fact festivals and fairs are suspended. (Janel,2020). • Drop down in exchange of money (Smith, 2020). • Global trade will decrease between 13% up to 32% according to the WHO (Blenkinsop, 2020).

Social

- Buying habits change. Buying of alcohol increases, toilet paper runs out, yeast runs out, bleach drops down (Alcohol consumption increases during COVID-19 crisis, 2020).
- People buy more products in neighbourhood stores as well as they look more on purchasing local products (Álvarez, 2020).
- Increase on buying on the internet (Evans, 2020).
- Change of habits inside a cultural habit, for example: distance from people from 1.5 meters, when people meet do not give two kisses (Los curiosos nuevos saludos para evitar el contagio del coronavirus - BBC News Mundo, 2020).
- Families bond more, they have time to spend with their children (Levs, 2020)
- Racism can increase due to the fact some people blame Chinese people who live with them for causing the virus. (Ellerbeck, 2020)
- Some adults would not like to go to the office when they can due to the fact they can work from home (Hern, 2020)
- Domestic violence has increased during the lockdown (The Economist, 2020)

Technological

- Increase on videoconferencing by double (Rincón, 2020)
- Teleworking, some jobs and universities have adapted their jobs and courses to do it from home (Teleworking: COVID-19 could revolutionise the world of work, 2020)
- Increase on cyber-attacks against hospitals (Winder, 2020)
- Technology gap between people who do not have access to the internet, or they do not have a computer (Gil Pecharromán, 2020)
- Increase on fake news (Investigating the spread of fake coronavirus news, 2020).
- Up to 55% increase in social media in Spain (Rincón, 2020).
- Contactless payment increases during COVID 19. MasterCard states that there has been up to 40% increase in this method of payment (Rooney, 2020).

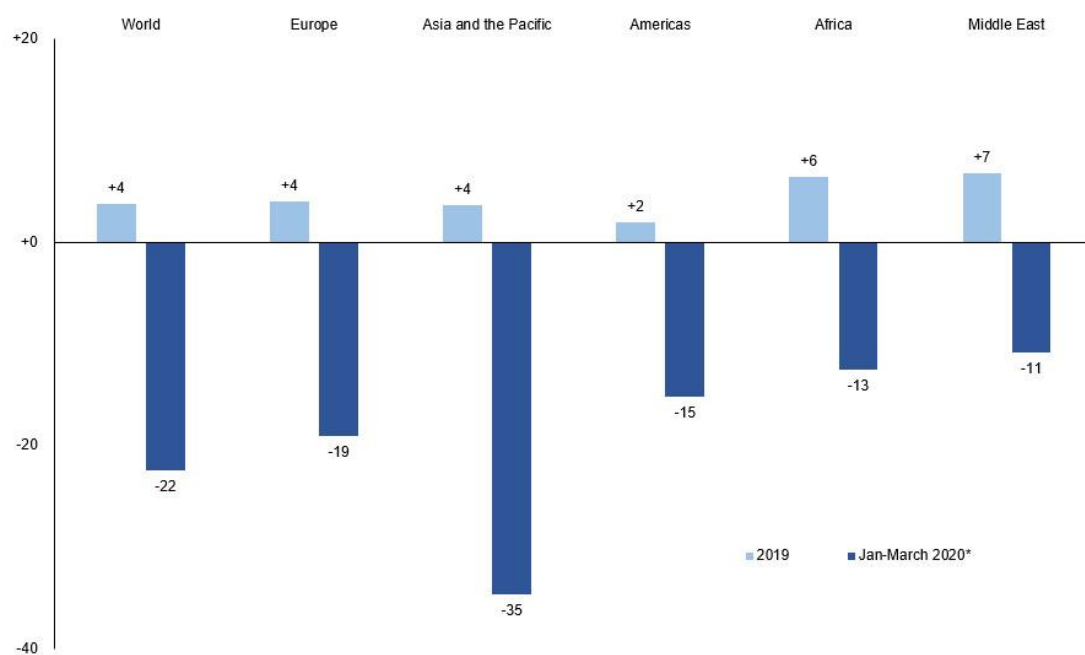
Environmental

- Decrease in global warming (McGrath, 2020).
- Waters are cleaner. For example: Venice canals are cleaner (Guy and Di Donato, 2020).
- Pollution drops down. CO₂ emissions in China reduce by up to 25% (ELCACHO, 2020).
- Animals return to their habitats (Main, 2020).

Legal

- Market intervention in the price of masks and in the cost of funerals by the Spanish government (B. GARCÍA, 2020; Page, 2020).
- Fines have been applied to people who do not respect the restrictions and they can be arrested. In France, fines can reach from 135 euros up to 3,700 euros and you can go to prison. Austria can fine up to 3,600 euros. Russia can fine between 1,000 to 40,000 roubles (12,50 euros to 499 euros) (Deutsche Welle, 2020).
- Masks are compulsory to wear (De Benito, 2020).

Appendix D- Graph of the drop down of international tourist



Appendix E- Stay Safe with Melia

https://www.melia.com/covid-19/campaign/generic/docs/Stay_Safe_with_Meliá.pdf