

TOURISM. RAFFAELE LAURO: IDEAS AND PROJECT TO SUPPORT THE ITALIAN TOURISM INDUSTRY

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Pubblichiamo, per gentile concessione di Emanuela Zini, caporedattore del magazine svizzero EXCELLENCE LUXURY, un'intervista allo scrittore sorrentino Raffaele Lauro sulla crisi del turismo italiano (e internazionale), causata dalla pandemia da coronavirus, e sulle misure necessarie, da lui proposte - finora invano! - al governo per superare l'attuale fase drammatica di uno dei comparti più significativi dell'economia nazionale e per preparare la fase ricostruttiva, quella che lui definisce "a sort of recovery-revenge", secondo gli auspici del recente "Manifesto del Turismo Italiano", elaborato e promosso dagli operatori del settore.

by Emanuela Zini

Tour operators, travel companies and event promoters are taking the industry lead, and

appealing to institutions, to anyone living off tourism, and to all Italians through their Manifesto del Turismo Italiano (Manifesto of the Italian Tourism).

The Coronavirus emergency has been causing a serious crisis for the Italian tourism industry, occupying 13% of the country's GDP, equal to 232.2 billion euros; starting from late February, the severe, necessary restrictions imposed to stop the virus spread have led to the progressive shut-down of all the industry's activities, making it thus impossible to generate new income flows. What is concerning, though, is that this situation will presumably last for several months, and a slow, long recovery is expected.

Sounding the alarm are the associations ASTOI Confindustria Viaggi (representing 90% of tour operating in Italy), FTO (representing tourist supply, including networks, independent agencies and other segments), and key industry players: Alpitour World, Gruppo Gattinoni, Robintur Travel Group, Alidays, Bluserena, Futura Vacanze, GiverViaggi e Crociere, Idee per Viaggiare, Viaggi Del Mappamondo, Naar, Nicolaus-Valtur, Ota Viaggi, TH Resorts, Trinity Viaggi Studio, Uvet, and Veratour.

These are the promoters of Manifesto del Turismo Italiano, an initiative with the hashtag #ripartiamodallitalia ("let's restart from Italy") that calls together institutions, those living off tourism, and anyone – including ordinary citizens and travelers – willing to support and help revive what is overall a key economic sector for Italy, as well as one of its greatest prides, and one of the strongest elements of the country's identity.

Writer Raffaele Lauro shared his thoughts on this matter with us.

Born in Sorrento, Lauro comes from a family involved in hospitality (his brother, Aniello, used to be an international hotel manager in Switzerland). He has worked in hotels since he was a boy as a working student, in addition to being Sorrento's Councilor for Culture and heading the local hotel and catering school, endorsed by the Campania region. Lastly, but not least, all his novels (www.raffaelelauro.it) honor his beloved homeland for offering premium hospitality; for its natural beauties and old traditions, both historic and religious, celebrated by the greats of music, painting and literature; for the legacy of legendary hospitality entrepreneurs, of generations of extraordinary hotel managers, maîtres, chefs, porters, waiters, housekeepers, tour operators, managers of B&Bs and beach facilities, craftsmen, traders, and famous restaurateurs. His pages are populated with hardworking humanity, dedicated to business, work, and creativity, who has made Sorrento and all the Amalfi coast – from Vico Equense to Massa Lubrense and Capri, from Positano to Amalfi – renowned all around the world. A valuable example all are the personal and entrepreneurial deeds and feats of Costanzo Alfonso Iaccarino and his heirs, narrated in the novel "Don Alfonso 1890 - Salvatore Di Giacomo e Sant'Agata sui Due Golfi", published in 2017.

Raffaele, in an article published in the past few days, you expressed your strong concerns for the lack of measures supporting the tourism and hospitality industry.

I was hoping that our government would amend April's decree by passing urgent, appropriate,

feasible, immediately enforceable measures, both for the present and the future, covering two to three years (2020-2022), in order to fulfill the main requests from the local councils of those cities whose economies mainly rely on tourism, as well as from the national industry representatives, and all economic players and trade unions of tourism, entertainment and all satellite activities.

Inexperience and a scarce knowledge of the industry were surely behind the omissions in the first decree. The industry needs to be supported, particularly in those regions where tourism and any related business are key to the local GDP. It should be kept in mind that this sector has reported absolutely zero incomes and zero employment growth, and we are not talking about industries where redeployment is possible, whose total recovery will not happen before two to three years, given the global nature of this pandemic. Unfortunately, the second decree earlier this April, despite suggestions by tourism operators, turned out to be a farce, a bluff for what concerns tourism. We are now trusting in the Parliament's amendments, but I am pessimistic about this. Tourism, which our government celebrates in words, remains in fact, alongside the entertainment industry, the Cinderella of the country's economy.

What measures do you think are necessary?

For the complex, highly structured tourism supply chain and its satellite activities, additional measures should be added to the general ones, strong measures able to protect the economic and productive fabric of the areas where tourism is key, occupying 80% of the local GDP and employing a just as high percentage of professionals – generally for seasonal work – in hospitality facilities (hotels, boarding houses, B&Bs), travel companies, tour operator offices, tour guide organizations, local crafting businesses, beach facilities, and trade and services, strongly anchored in tourism flows, both domestic and international.

How do you reckon employment levels could be preserved?

First, we should preserve employment levels by taking two specific actions:

1) for what concerns the social safety net (redundancy funds, wage funds, solidarity contracts, etc.) we need a single social shock absorber functioning without any trade union consultations, as it is already the case with businesses employing up to 5 employees;

2) for what concerns seasonal workers, the NASPI (New Employment Social Insurance Benefit) should be extended indefinitely and, whenever expired, it should be reactivated immediately, once again indefinitely, until all businesses in the field can reopen, for all those employed in the 2019 tourist season.

And what financial measures should be adopted?

In order to compensate for the liquidity crisis that has affected businesses and families in the tourism industry, a specific decree for tourism is needed for:

1) opening additional further-reaching, prompter low-interest or interest-free credit lines for the

next two years;

- 2) suspending mortgages, including interest rates, at least until businesses can reopen;
- 3) adding tourism as a primary supply chain to the so-called plan for Southern Italy presented by the government last February, which allocated 120 billion euros to relaunch the South of Italy;
- 4) allocating all European Funds as per the Framework for 2021-2027 to the coronavirus economic crisis only, while giving priority to the tourism supply chain (around 35 billion euros, of which 3.5 for the Campania region.)

What fiscal measures would you see as appropriate?

As a consequence of the total lockdown imposed on the tourism supply chain, the short-term postponement to May of the fiscal deadlines for businesses and families alone truly appears to be mockery.

For 2020, at least until manufacturing is resumed, we should:

- 1) cancel, or at least completely suspend, payments of all taxes including the local ones, payments due to the Revenue Agency, collections, trade-in payments, State fees, water, gas and electricity bills, and special fees, as well as other taxes like IMU, TARI, TARSU, IRAP and IRPEF, etc;
- 2) immediately introduce a 70% tax credit for lets and all expenses that the tourism supply chain operators will have to maintain in order to restart their businesses.

The Manifesto launched by tourism operators suggests that there might be – at last, allow me to say that – some awareness that will lead to lower levels of direct competition, so as to create mindsets enabling the sector to start again.

Mindsets that, matched with tangible actions, could allow to relaunch tourism, possibly through promotional marketing plans to be applied nationwide.

What is your opinion about this?

From now on, for seasons 2020 and 2021 (June, July, August and September), it would be necessary to outline a national marketing plan targeted on the domestic demand for 2020, with promotional packages for the Italian families, and on the foreign one as well for 2021, focusing on those countries that will have overcome the pandemic's peak phase. If well planned, a sort of recovery-revenge of the overall tourism industry, and the Italian one in particular, could be expected as soon as people will be allowed to go back to breathe, and live, in freedom.

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