

Vietnam ranks among worst tourist hubs on bathroom wall of shame

Tropical country still struggling to shake travel blues amid visa rules, COVID



Ho Chi Minh City has one of the lowest restroom densities in the world, adding another challenge as Vietnam tries to shake off a disappointing year for the travel industry. (Photo by Lien Hoang)

LIEN HOANG, Nikkei staff writer January 21, 2023 12:06 JST

HO CHI MINH CITY -- The streets of Ho Chi Minh City offer everything a tourist wants: delectable food, history etched into the architecture, local life as motorbike drivers deliver chickens or play cards. Everything, that is, except toilets.

The metropolis, along with Hanoi, is one of the worst holiday cities for toilet access, according to a global index released this week as Vietnam emerged from an annus horribilis for the tourism sector. So who, exactly, would cross-reference data on 69 cities around the world to erect a bathroom wall of shame?

QS Supplies, a company that sells toilets, said its rankings help vacationers choose a "destination prudently" and "highlight this important but unglamorous issue."

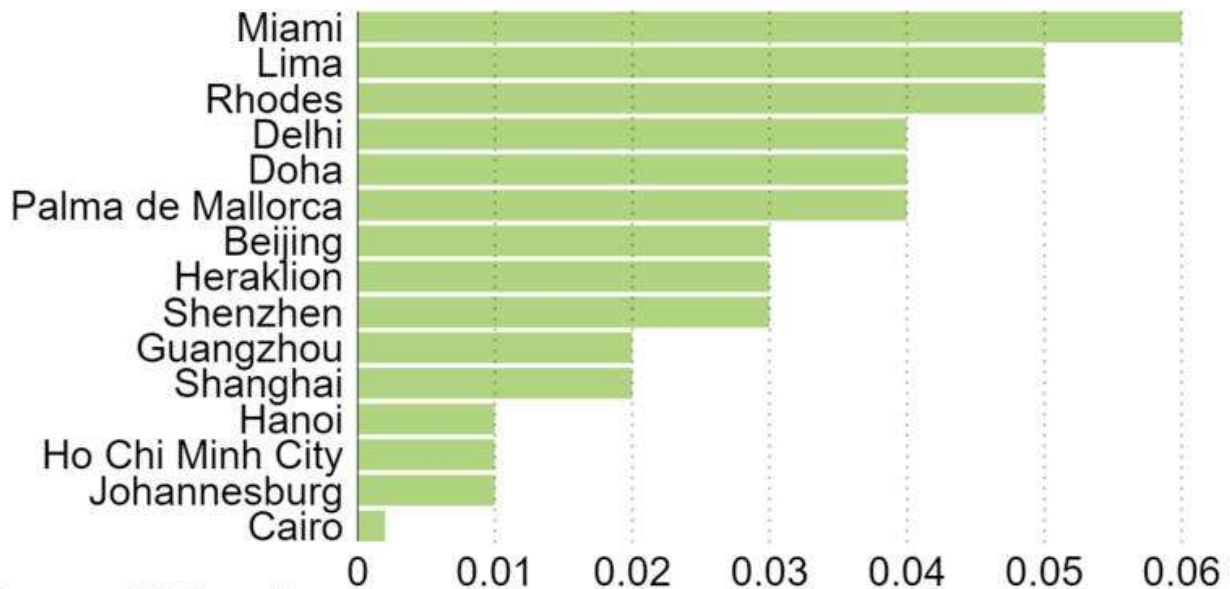
Only Johannesburg and Cairo fare worse than the Vietnamese hubs on the index, which measures public bathrooms per square kilometer.

Officials and hospitality businesses are doing some soul searching after Vietnam became one of Asia's least-visited destinations in 2022. The tropical country may boast mammoth caves,

snorkeling and jellyfish noodles, but it attracted just 3.6 million tourists last year after lifting COVID curbs. The issue has less to do with restrooms than with visa restrictions, which make Vietnam harder to reach than Thailand or Indonesia.

Worst 15 cities in restroom density index

(Number of public toilets per square kilometer)



Source: QS Supplies

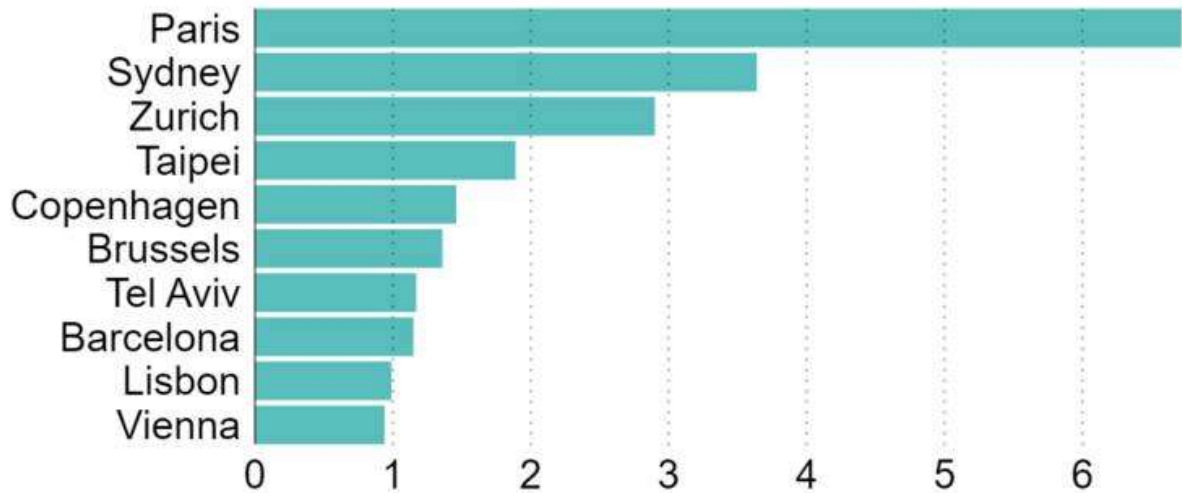
It is true, though, that after downing egg-cream coffee and strolling on Hanoi's pink stone sidewalks for an hour, travelers will find public restrooms none too abundant. Checklists remind them to bring foreign currency or save emergency numbers, but do not prepare people for this most basic task. In a take on Murphy's law, QS Supplies described the anxiety of needing a restroom just when one is farthest from it, and in a strange land, no less.

"This anxiety is well-justified," the U.K. retailer said. "Toilet access is not just a need and a right; It's a matter of dignity, inclusion and respect."

It is also a matter of socioeconomic. The top 10 cities on its restroom density index are mostly rich European capitals, led by Paris, while the bottom 10 are mostly in developing Africa or Asia, such as Shanghai and Beijing.

Top 10 cities in restroom density index

(Number of public toilets per square kilometer)



Source: QS Supplies

Elsewhere, lavatories become a totem of inclusion or social justice, as in the U.S. where there are debates about whether shops like Starbucks should let needy noncustomers use the facilities -- a legal obligation in some states.

But in Vietnam and other developing nations there are public priorities beyond the scatological. State spending is needed for services such as mass transit, water treatment and skills training. Loos for leisure travelers are further down the list, especially in the mountains, deltas and other remote areas that abound with tourists but not toilets.

Still the communist country is trying to claw back visitors and turn the page on a bleak year, especially once the end of next-door China's zero-COVID policy unleashes the region's biggest source of holidaymakers. Vietnam has introduced amenities from tourist hotlines to red double-decker buses a la London. There's not much talk of toilets. But if nature calls for any tourists stranded on a Hanoi street, they might try a shopping mall.

Number of public toilets per square kilometer		
1	Paris	6.72
2	Sydney	3.64
3	Zurich	2.90
4	Taipei	1.89

5	Copenhagen	1.46
6	Brussels	1.36
7	Tel Aviv	1.17
8	Barcelona	1.15
9	Lisbon	0.99
10	Vienna	0.94
11	Toronto	0.92
12	Munich	0.91
13	Milan	0.84
14	Athens	0.81
15	Vancouver	0.75
16	Berlin	0.73
17	Macao	0.69
18	Osaka	0.63
19	Stockholm	0.50
20	Prague	0.49
21	Dublin	0.45
22	Nice	0.43
23	Jerusalem	0.40

24	London	0.39
25	Moscow	0.38
26	Kyoto	0.37
27	Frankfurt	0.36
28	Seoul	0.36
29	Florence	0.33
30	Venice	0.33
31	Amsterdam	0.32
32	Budapest	0.32
33	Sapporo	0.31
34	Warsaw	0.31
35	Edinburgh	0.29
36	New York	0.28
37	Buenos Aires	0.26
38	Saint Petersburg	0.25
39	Krakow	0.24
40	San Francisco	0.24
41	Tallinn	0.22
42	Kuala Lumpur	0.21

43	Cape Town	0.17
44	Thessaloniki	0.17
45	Bangkok	0.13
46	Madrid	0.13
47	Marrakech	0.13
48	Rio de Janeiro	0.13
49	Los Angeles	0.11
50	Rome	0.10
51	Orlando, FL	0.09
52	Mexico City	0.07
53	Verona	0.07
54	Las Vegas, NV	0.06
55	Miami	0.06
56	Lima	0.05
57	Rhodes	0.05
58	Delhi	0.04
59	Doha	0.04
60	Palma de Mallorca	0.04
61	Beijing	0.03

62	Heraklion	0.03
63	Shenzhen	0.03
64	Guangzhou	0.02
65	Shanghai	0.02
66	Hanoi	0.01
67	Ho Chi Minh City	0.01
68	Johannesburg	0.01
69	Cairo	0.002

Source: QS Supplies