

# Tourism - a major challenge for Europe

## Europe: the world's leading tourist destination

Europe is the world's leading tourist destination. It is where tourism was born and developed, due to the vast cultural wealth of the "Old Continent", the variety of its landscapes and hospitality and communications infrastructures, its extensive range of accommodation facilities and tourist attractions. These assets combine to make Europe the world's most visited region.

Tourism is also one of the most promising economic sectors in Europe. It accounts for 4% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the European Union, with this percentage varying between 2% and 12% for the 27 Member States (France: 6.4%, Malta: 12%). Its growth rate of over 3% is also above the European average.

This sector requires the services of more than two million businesses which employ around 8.6 million Europeans, i.e. 4% of the working population.

While Europeans prefer to spend their holidays in their own country, they tend to opt for Europe when they decide to go abroad. Europe's attractiveness as a holiday destination for its own citizens is shown by the fact that 91% of holidaymakers in Europe live in one of its Member States. Only 11% of European tourist activity concerns visitors from other countries (America, Asia, etc.), although their expenditure represents 30% of the EU's international trade in services.

## New challenges facing European tourism

This relatively positive picture must not hide the fact that European tourism is confronted with two major challenges: international competition, mainly from large emerging countries (China, India, Brazil, etc.) and environmental issues which apply at the global level.

The aim is to find the right balance between the harmonious development and protection of tourist destinations on the one hand, and the competitiveness of the tourist industry on the other.

Global trends and changing priorities... More than ever, the primary aim of the tourism sector is to remain **competitive within a sustainable development context**. The "European tourism model" must therefore account for both of these imperatives.

Competitiveness is achieved through **quality, innovation and matching the products** to the changing demands which are influenced by the following major trends:

- Demographic changes linked to globalisation and the growth of the "seniors" market. New customers (Chinese, Indian, etc.) with different expectations are emerging. The proportion of people over 60 years old will increase from 20 to 33% over the next fifty years in Europe. These people will remain independent for longer and certain forms of tourism (relating to health, well-being, spas, etc.) will benefit from this change.
- Changes to purchasing behaviours, such as the desire for "top-of-the-range" as well as low-cost destinations, the demand for high-quality services, the quest for authenticity, increased awareness of risks (safety and health-related), the faster pace of life or growing environmental awareness.

These changes require businesses and the different stakeholders in tourism to adopt dynamic and imaginative approaches to providing a tailored and more segmented tourism offer. This should cater to different themes including business, luxury, well-being, spas, sports, cultural (every aspect), historical, heritage, special events, commemorative, culinary and spiritual. This diversification of the products available must be accompanied by a quest for quality in every aspect of tourist services, along with a correspondingly high level of hospitality.

Major Pan-European projects, such as European routes (e.g. the “Eurovelo” network of “Veloroutes” for cyclists, the Saint Martin de Tours cultural footpath between France and Hungary, and cultural routes recognised by the Council of Europe) are a European response to these new types of demands.

These exemplary initiatives form part of a sustainable development policy which must be applied at all levels of the tourism chain and be present in all aspects of tourism, from mass-tourism to eco-tourism. Tourism must create the right balance between its economic, social, cultural and environmental dimensions.

### European Union strategy for sustainable tourism

In its communication of 19.10.2007 entitled “**Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism**”, the European Commission proposes a strategy in response to the seven major challenges for sustainable tourism:

- Reduce the seasonal nature of the demand by promoting out-of-season destinations
- Reduce the impact of tourism-related transport, which currently accounts for 8% of the equivalent CO2 emissions in the EU-15
- Improve the quality of jobs within the tourist industry in terms of pay, working hours and career development opportunities
- Maintain and improve the prosperity and quality of life of local communities, despite the changes, by being vigilant with regard to property developments and the replacement of traditional activities by tourism
- Minimise the use of resources and the production of waste by limiting energy consumption
- Preserve and promote all aspects of natural and cultural heritage
- Make holidays accessible for everyone, including people suffering from physical disabilities and economic hardship.

The response to these challenges is based upon a global approach shared by all stakeholders, including tourists, businesses, destinations, local populations and public authorities at the local, regional, national and European levels.

Public authorities can stimulate this new approach to development by carrying out awareness-raising activities and implementing regulations or offering incentives. Tourists can help to change consumer behaviour within the tourist industry by acting responsibly and demanding high standards. Businesses can modify production methods for the tourist industry through their ability to innovate and their need to remain competitive. In this respect, the European Union constitutes a vast laboratory in which sustainable development is not just a slogan, but a multitude of experiments that can be communicated and shared via **networks and the sharing of good practices**.

Europe offers this opportunity to pool our knowledge in order to build the new “European model for tourism”.