

TOURISM

Tourist numbers could reach 637 million in 2025

Tourism is a crucially important sector of activity in the Mediterranean. Because of the numbers of tourists (international and domestic) and the economic importance of the sector, as well as its impact both positive and negative on the environment and society, tourism lies at the very heart of the Development/Environment issue in the riparian states, particularly their coastal regions.

- ✓ From 58 million international tourists in 1970 to 246 million in 2005 (294 in 2007)
- ✓ 30.5% of world tourism in 2005
- ✓ Income from international tourism: 195 billion dollars in 2005 (5.6 in 1970)
- ✓ Forecasts for 2025 talk of 637 million international and domestic tourists, 312 million in the coastal regions alone

Tourism is a cross-cutting issue, particularly as far as water, transport, urban areas, rural areas and the coasts are concerned.

The Mediterranean boasts four major tourist assets, which explain its great attraction:

- The diversity and wealth of its historical, cultural, natural and landscape heritage
- A sea and coastline with an excellent climate
- Cultural and physical proximity to the European market
- Long-standing tourist development, making for well-established know-how and a tradition of welcome.

The Mediterranean is marked by a major imbalance in the distribution of international tourist flows between the riparian states, leading to the same unequal distribution of tourist income and therefore the extent to which this activity contributes to employment and development.

In 2005, France, Spain and Italy received over 168 million tourists, i.e. 68% of international tourists in the Mediterranean and more than 20% of world tourism. The corresponding share in 1970 was 82%, 79% in 1980 and 75% in 2000. We are thus witnessing a certain rebalancing of flows towards the countries to the South and East of the Mediterranean.

In the Mediterranean coastal regions, the tourist population is added to the permanent one, more than doubling the numbers in high season. Density forecasts for both the permanent and tourist populations during the peak month reveal strong growth, rising from 158 inhab/km² in 2000 to 209 inhab/km² in 2025.

Generally speaking, tourist consumption patterns lead to over-sized facilities and services which are costly to operate and swallow up large amounts of space and investment. For example, an international tourist consumes more water than a resident (up to 600 litres/night in a luxury hotel compared with 130 to 150 litres/day) and produces 50% more waste. The building of secondary homes also consumes vast areas. The main environmental impact, however, is caused by tourist construction (hotels, yacht ports, marinas) directly on the coast. Air travel and cruising are also witnessing strong growth, creating further specific stresses on the environment.

The scale of tourist flows, the spending it brings and the number of jobs it creates mean that tourism nowadays is an essential sector of the economy for all the riparian states without exception. Without in any way underestimating tourism's major economic and socio-cultural importance, its benefits should be better distributed, tending on the whole to go to the carriers, tour operators and hotel chains,... due to the cut-throat competition which reigns in the sector.

In order to reorientate the development of tourism so that it can better contribute to sustainable development, the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD) with the Blue Plan as the main support centre has focused in its work on three main lines:

- Controlling the impact on the area and the environment,
- Promoting tourism as a factor for sustainable social, cultural and economic development,
- Developing and strengthening Mediterranean cooperation

Some progress has been made on environmental issues such as water consumption, combating pollution and waste management using differentiated billing systems, for example, or by creating the « Blue Flag », an ecological label awarded to « clean » beaches.

Some of the main areas of interest in terms of the issue of sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean have been the subject of regional studies- climate change, biodiversity, yachting and cruising, jobs and the creation of wealth, for example. Following a regional workshop held in Sophia-Antipolis on 2 and 3 July last, these issues are to be studied in greater depth in order to identify the ways and means to be implemented in order to reconcile tourism and sustainable development in the Mediterranean basin.