

# Tourism and the Environment in Europe

An Introduction along with reports on some European projects in tourism



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# Tourism and the Environment in Europe

An investigation into the impact of  
tourism on the environment in  
some European countries

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## Foreword

The debate on an environmentally compatible pattern of tourism has now been in progress for over ten years. In 1992 this received fresh impetus through the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro. With the concept of sustainable development, this produced a model for global development affecting all sectors. This model puts the basing of all human action on the limits of tolerance of nature and society at the centre of all consideration. The maxim is "Only whatever can be sustained by nature and society in the long term is permissible."

This call may at first sight appear simple and plausible, yet its concrete application has proved no less difficult for that. The reason for the difficulty arises chiefly from the fact that in the tourism industry amongst many others, the players concerned have in the past either completely ignored this principle or have only given it marginal consideration.

Turning to the development of tourism in Europe, the consequences of tourist use can be seen to have produced strains which have either gravely threatened its very substance, or have already destroyed this. Polluted stretches of coast with inferior water quality, erosion in mountain areas, excessive depletion of water resources and the cumulative destruction of cultural monuments deserve mention here, along with the extensive transformation and dissolution of social ties in the vacation regions of Europe. This process of social erosion, especially, has created a situation which is frequently proving even more threatening to the development of tourism than the direct burden on the natural environment itself.

People often fail to understand that tourism especially is dependent on an unspoiled natural and cultural inheritance in holiday countries. Only an attractive range of services in surroundings offering natural and cultural attractions will in the long term provide a guarantee for economically viable tourism.

If a comparison is made between the substance of the concept of sustainability and the essentials mentioned by people engaged in tourism for the survival of an industry which is also commercially viable, these will be found to coincide to a large extent. This becomes all the more obvious when one remembers that tourism is a service industry impinging on many sectors and with manifold links with area planning, agriculture, trade and the transport sector, as well as being a central plank in efforts to boost regional economic potential in structurally more backward areas of Europe. That offers European tourism, especially, a fine opportunity of taking a lead in implementing sustainable development, whilst at the same time securing its own high earnings capacity in the long term.

In the year 1992 the immense significance of the theme "Tourism and the Environment" therefore prompted the European Commission to call for the submission of proposals for projects in this field. Of a number of projects conducted, 17 are presented in this dossier. In order to give this its rightful place as one element in the movement towards the development of sustainable tourism in Europe, the project descriptions have been preceded by an introductory paper. With appropriate brevity, this is designed to commend the concept of sustainability to all those involved in the field of tourism and the environment by advancing some ground rules for action along with some ideas for the corresponding measures. The selection made of projects for presentation also represented an attempt to present a broad-cross section of the manifold different aspects of the theme. The Commission's objective is to initiate a dialogue between those actually engaged in tourism, academics, and representatives of politics and public administration, resulting in the spread and continuation of these innovative pilot projects in other regions of Europe.

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