

European tourism has performed vigorously in recent years, although long-term projections point to a slower growth of international arrivals when compared to other regions. The European Travel Commission (ETC) announced a firm commitment to promote European destinations in overseas markets at the official opening of the 27th Annual Meeting of the ETC Market Intelligence Group (MIG) in Brussels on Wednesday, 20th February 2013.

Despite a turbulent economic environment, European tourism (+4%) demonstrated substantial growth in 2012, following a year of even stronger growth (+7%) in 2011. However, long-term projections point to a slow - but steady - decline in Europe's share of the global tourism market. Challenged by the increasingly fierce competition of emerging destinations in long-haul markets, and by the persistence of an uncertain economic climate in its internal market, Europe needs bold actions to realise its growth potential. The European Travel Commission – the organisation responsible for the promotion of Europe as a tourist destination in overseas markets – announced research-driven, innovative marketing strategies to promote 'Destination Europe' in four key markets: US, Canada, Brazil and China. "Our common goal", said Mr. Pedro Ortón, Director in charge of tourism in the Directorate-General Enterprise and Industry of the European Commission "is to reinforce public and private efforts at EU level to better promote Europe in the main and most promising origin markets, after an improved socio-economic knowledge of such markets".

Europe's diversified and high-quality tourism offerings present tangible growth opportunities, as demonstrated by the region's recent tourism performance. Europe's tourist industry exceeded expectations in 2012, with growth reported by the majority of both established and emerging destinations. Emerging destinations lead growth, falling in line with worldwide trends. Iceland (+20%), Lithuania (+12%), and Romania (+10%) topped the ranking with exceptional double-digit figures. Healthy growth was also reported by the more established European destinations such as Germany (+8%), Spain (+5%), and Austria (+5%).

In 2012, long-haul demand for travel to European destinations remained robust while travel from a few traditionally small origin markets steadily gained significance. Most European destinations reported robust growth from the US market, coupled with a strong rebound of Japanese travellers after the devastating earthquake of 2011. Among European outbound markets, Russia remained the fastest growing market for all reporting countries. This resurgence of the economies in key long-haul markets positively contributed to the rise of international arrivals to Europe.

"With shifting patterns in world tourism flows, Europe must respond to and capitalise on the potential of tomorrow's outbound travel markets", said Mr Peter De Wilde, ad interim President of ETC and CEO of Visit Flanders. "It is highly important that National Tourism Organisations strengthen their collective work under the auspices of a common European brand in order to be successful in promoting 'Destination Europe' to long-haul markets", added Mr Eduardo Santander, Executive Director of ETC "extensive market research as well as cooperation between public and public-private stakeholders is essential at the European, national, and regional level".

The long-established and internationally recognized value of ETC's research activities provides adequate tools to develop effective, research-driven strategies. For three decades the ETC Market Intelligence Group, consisting of the research directors of ETC's 33 members, has provided an active forum for sharing market intelligence and research on best practice; ultimately benefitting Europe as a whole. "We have worked together over the years to create an open network aimed at enhancing knowledge and understanding tourism in a healthy manner",

Écrit par sylvie.duval@finances.gouv.fr (Sylvie Duval)

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said Mr Leslie Vella, Chairman of ETC's Market Intelligence Group (MIG). "Our annual meetings have been undoubtedly established as one of the most important events in the European tourism research calendar. Aware of the current situation and future prospects for Europe, we feel the even greater responsibility of assisting our members in fulfilling their ambitious objectives".

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