

WINTER TOURIST SEASON IN AUSTRIA NOT VERY SUCCESSFUL



In the current season 2016/17, the number of overnight stays in Austrian hotels, guesthouses and apartments has declined by 1 percent to 29 million compared to the year before. Although the number of holidaymakers recovered slightly by 0.4 per cent to 8.6 million, the stays decreased according to preliminary statistic data for the winter tourist season in Austria.

The two most important markets - Germany and the Netherlands - decreased quite considerably. **In terms of overnight stays by Germans, there was a drop of 3.3 percent to 11.2 million** compared to the previous year, while the Dutch recorded a slump of 5.2 percent to 1.8 million. Italian visitors also booked significantly fewer hotel nights during the winter tourist season - here was a sharp drop of 6.5 per cent to 661,900.

The amount of overnight stays increased with respect to tourists from Switzerland and Liechtenstein (up to 3.3 per cent to around 926,200) and from the UK (plus 0.9 per cent to around 887,300). However, these increases did not make up for the lack of the Germans and Dutch.

Overall, the number of overnight stays by international visitors during the winter tourist season in Austria (November to April) dropped to 1 percent to 21.9 million. The amount of domestic holidaymakers also went down; the overnight stays decreased nearly by 0.9 percent to 7.1 million.

In the month of January, which was important for winter tourism, the situation for the accommodation providers improved a little. The number of overnight stays rose by 2.2 percent to 14.6 million. However, the increase is due to holiday makers from abroad, with an overnight rate of 4 percent to 11.8 million. Bookings by guests from Austria declined to 4.8 per cent to 2.7 million. Although only 3.5 million vacationers came in January.

Michaela Reitterer, President of the Hoteliers Association commented the results as nothing to be worried about. "The holidays were on days that were not very favorably and the snow came very late. As a result, the holiday regions are under pressure, but we can counter this," says Reitterer, who himself owns a hotel in Vienna. The President of the Austrian hotel association advocates to reduce the tax burden on the hotels.

The hoteliers would be burdened by the increase in the value-added tax, the cancellation fee and the cancellation of the energy tax rebate or compensation. The value-added tax on overnight stays in hotels or accommodation establishments was increased from 10 to 13 percent in 2016. The reduction in wage costs was "designed in such a way that hotels do not benefit from it."

In Vienna, for example, last year's overnight stays were up 4.4 percent, but sales were down by 0.2 percent. A night in a hotel represented less money for the hotel owner but also at higher costs.

In addition to a lower tax burden, Reitterer advocates for an intensified offensive towards all year tourism. Closing times in tourism should be bridged by innovative offers that were also well marketed. "We can't reverse the downturn in the winter, but we should do everything we can to make up for it and position ourselves well for the next few years with a wider offer," the

spokeswoman said.

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