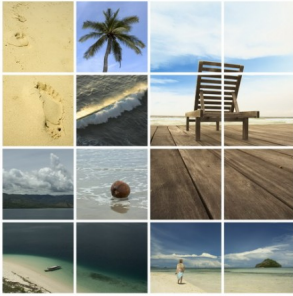


KEEPING AN EYE ON EUROPE'S BEACHES



Although it is fair to say that the vast majority of visitors to European cities and resorts do not come solely for the beach, beaches are still regarded as an important factor in European tourism. Many take high standards for granted and sometimes make the mistake of not checking what countries have the best and cleanest beaches.

However, the European Environment Agency's 'Eye on Earth' site now does what its title suggests. It specializes in keeping holiday-makers informed in terms of where the water is most favourable and where the sand is least victimized by litter. There are also special features on the site, such as 'Water Watch', which gives sometimes vital information as to whether the water of a certain country is suitable for certain skin types or not.

'Eye on Earth' manages to keep track of 21,000 bathing sites in Europe and is even capable of providing data spanning back several years. Thanks to the archives, users are able to keep up-to-date with facts about the countries that are trying the hardest to maintain and/or improve the standards. The biggest winners in this area are certain to be Belgium and Malta, where the standards have improved dramatically in the course of just a few years.

The site gives Greece to be the number one European beach country. The Greeks may boast a 99.5% level of cleanliness on their coastline, closely followed by Spain and Cyprus respectively. There are also some surprise packages in the top ten, notably Sweden.

Few would place the word 'beach' in the same sentence as Sweden, yet it is often forgotten that the Swedes may also enjoy hot summers and have a high level of cleanliness in keeping with the Swedish high standard of living.

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