

# THE BALTIC AND NORTH SEAS SWAPPING PLACES WITH THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

Currently, countries in the Mediterranean are the most popular travel destinations. According to the ministry's report, the Mediterranean region is the top tourist destination, with nearly 400 million visitors, over 20 million employees, and 32 percent of international arrivals worldwide. Nevertheless, there are signs that this trend may change in the future.

Despite the heat waves and forest fires, vacationers have continued to flock to popular Mediterranean destinations. However, this trend could shift with the ongoing effects of climate change, and there are early signs of this occurring.

Due to drought and high temperatures, the Mediterranean region is experiencing heat waves in Spain and Italy and forest fires on the Greek holiday island of Rhodes. This has raised concerns about whether tourists will continue to choose these destinations or opt for more astounding alternatives like Sweden or Ireland. A recent survey suggests that some travelers may postpone their plans, but it remains to be seen how this will impact bookings in the tourism industry.

## Thriving Tourism

Despite the prolonged heat wave in southern Europe, booking behavior has not changed significantly. The Italian Tourist Board (Enit) reports a booming tourism industry, predicting a record-breaking summer season in the Mediterranean region. Similarly, Spain has not seen any tourists avoiding the popular destination due to the heat. In fact, according to the agency INE statistics, the country has seen a 23.7% increase in foreign visitors in the first six months of the year compared to the same period last year, with a total of 37.5 million visitors.

Climate change will cause a rise in extreme weather occurrences, including wildfires, droughts, floods, and more. The significance of early and late seasons is expected to increase. Travel businesses are already taking action, with Tui, a prominent player in the industry, extending the booking season for Greece until mid-November.

## Price Beats the Heat

According to Torsten Kirstges, a tourism researcher at the Jade University of Applied Sciences (Wilhelmshaven), many tourists are not deterred by the heat when choosing a holiday destination. Popular countries like Turkey, Greece, Tunisia, and Morocco have been known to attract visitors even during the summer months, despite the high temperatures. Kirstges notes that these destinations often offer cheaper summer holiday options, which contributes to their popularity. In essence, the price outweighs the heat factor for many tourists.

Recently, the European Travel Commission (ETC), a group of European tourism organizations and authorities, conducted a survey that revealed some interesting trends. The survey showed that Spain remained the most popular destination for travelers between June and November, followed by France, Italy, Greece, and Croatia. However, the number of people planning to visit the Mediterranean region has decreased by 10% compared to last year, according to a survey of approximately 6,000 people across Europe. On the other hand, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Ireland, and Denmark have seen increased interest from travelers, which the ETC attributes to

people seeking less crowded places and milder temperatures.

### **North-South Patterns in Tourism Demand**

According to Eduardo Santander, the Executive Director of ETC, unpredictable weather conditions are likely to impact travel in Europe in the future significantly. During heat waves, travelers may avoid southern destinations and opt for Central and Eastern Europe destinations for cooler temperatures in the summer. This could increase travelers to southern destinations during spring and autumn.

According to the study, there could be a noticeable shift in travel behavior. The report highlights a clear pattern of changes in tourism demand between Europe's north and south regions. More minor changes are expected, with a temperature increase of 1.5 - 2 degrees compared to pre-industrial times. However, if the temperature increases to 3 or 4 degrees, Central and Northern Europe may become more attractive for tourist activities throughout the year. At the same time, the southern and Mediterranean areas may see a decline in tourism.

### **The Baltic and North Seas Are the New Caribbean**

If there were a decrease in demand for Mediterranean vacations, it would negatively impact numerous travel businesses. Spain and other countries in the region make substantial profits from package tours that attract millions of tourists. However, Scandinavia and Eastern Europe destinations have not yet become popular package holiday spots. Additionally, many vacationers plan their trips to the Baltic and North Seas by car or train.

Northern Europe could become a popular travel destination if the summers remain hot. The Baltic and North Seas may become comparable to the Caribbean, and people might choose to vacation in areas like the German and Polish Baltic Sea, northern France, Ireland, England, Scandinavia, and Denmark. However, this would only happen if the region became warmer, as the desire for sunny weather will always remain a significant factor in choosing a vacation site.

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