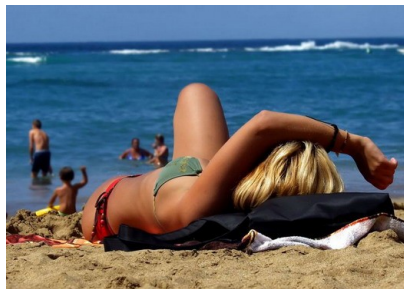


MEDITERRANEAN COAST IN DANGER: SUSTAINABLE TOURISM NEEDED



Crowds of tourists concentrated annually on the Mediterranean coast pose serious danger to the region's biodiversity. Eco-organizations call for sustainable tourism and diversification of the provided services.

Every year countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea attract about 30% of all international visitors. **According to the UNWTO, the tourist numbers in the coastal regions grew from 58 million in 1970, to 279 million in 2009 and it is expected these numbers will reach 637 million by 2025.**

The sun and sea tourism sector represents more than €143.8 billion (\$ 200 billion) in turnover, reported Econostrum.info. It is also a major provider of jobs contributing considerably to the regional economies. Besides the positive outcomes the dynamic development of tourism in the Mediterranean region however also represents a serious danger for the environment. **80% of tourists coming to the region are concentrated on 46,000 km of coastline.**

The Blue Plan, a France-based think-tank and Mediterranean Observatory for the Environment and Sustainable Development, has been warning for years this trend considerably threatens the biodiversity of the Mediterranean. The Sea represents only 0.7% of the total ocean surface, yet is home to 7.5% of animal species and 18% of marine flora. The continuous building of new ports and marinas lead to the formation of artificial coasts, not to mention the problems with waste management and freshwater scarcity.

As a reaction to the long-term negative impacts of tourism on the Mediterranean region in 2005 Barcelona Convention set out the "Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development". The aim of the strategy is to combine the economic growth of the region with sustainable development of tourism.

Diversification of tourism-related activities is one of the ways organisations like the Blue Plan explore in order to alleviate the dangers to the environment posed by the tourism industry. The Blue Plan supports further development of new forms of tourism - cultural, urban, rural as well as eco-tourism. Still, the experts warn that the situation is quite serious and requires immediate intervention.

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