

TOURISM GROWTH IN GREECE



Greece is witnessing continuous growth in its tourism industry with the number of visitors traveling to the country steadily rising. This is in spite of competition from its age-old rivals, Turkey and Egypt, and also in the face of a strong Euro which makes other destinations more attractive financially. There were more than 14 million visitors to Greece last year, which is an eight percent increase over 2005, and about 15 million are expected to come this year (2007). Industry and government officials are happy with this. Yannis Evangelou, President of the Hellenic Association of Travel and Tourist Agencies says that there could be a 50 percent increase in the number of Americans coming to Greece. More direct flights from the US have now become available and last year, some 230,000 Americans visited the country, up from 160,000 in 2005. Russian visitor numbers are also on the increase with a twenty percent rise expected this year. In 2006 there were 200,000 tourists from Russia. Government officials are also convinced that this year will bring in more funds than previously. Tourism Minister Fani Petralia said, "We expect a bigger increase than in 2006."

Success did not come of its own accord. The government spent huge sums of money on promoting Greece abroad. In fact, spending on international advertising campaigns increased tenfold in the last 4 years, with more than 40 million euros invested since 2003 to promote the image of a modern Greece abroad. Tourism is very important for the country's economy as it is responsible for 18 percent of the gross domestic product and roughly 20% of jobs. Greece would like to welcome tourists throughout the year, not just in the traditionally popular summer months, and funds are being invested in infrastructure and in attracting greater numbers of more affluent tourists.

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