

TOURISTS HEADING TO ROME NEXT YEAR WILL PAY MUCH MORE



With the holy year celebrations approaching fast in 2016, the city of Rome is taking desperate measures to cope with the huge volume of tourists and pilgrims for the event. One of the dramatic steps taken by the city in this regard is raising the taxes for visitors during the jubilee year.

A coach permit to enter the city for one day to give the tourists access to sites such as the Vatican will now cost **€1,000, which is essentially five times higher than the current price, which is €200.**

Obviously, travel agents and tour managers who have already booked holidays for their customers have risen up in protest against this step by the city council. To make things worse for tourists, the taxation on accommodation will also be going up by double the current charge.

The ETOA (European Tourism Association) has already expressed its concern regarding this decision stating that imposing a fivefold hike on current charges for the daily permit defies all logic. They went further to add that it would pose a threat to prepaid contracts for 2016 and future tourist contracts as well, translating eventually to Rome becoming a destination that is too expensive and unpredictable for most people.

The ETOA gave a breakdown of the cost for the average traveler to Rome in the holy year celebrations. Apparently, an individual in a group comprised of 40 would end up paying €33 for a package that includes a night in a four-star hotel and a night on the coach. Tom Jenkins, CEO of ETOA termed the behavior "vicious and irrational" and that it lacked any sense of practical planning.

The Holy year in Rome was announced as a year of mercy by Pope Francis, and this is bound to attract thousands of pilgrims into the city. Keeping this in perspective, the step to hike the visitor taxations might actually bring a bit of relief to take off some pressure from the already highly congested streets.

Last year the city streets were clogged up with more than 90,000 coaches and in 2016, it is expected to go up to an impossible 170,000 coaches even with the steep hike in charges.

The current plan is far from adequate to handle the situation in any measure. According to experts, there needs to be a practical strategy to deal with what will invariably be a catastrophe in terms of tourist management.

Although there are more than adequate parking sites out of the center, there is no practical system to bring tourists from these sites to the center where the tourist destinations are situated. There is also no link from the main train stations to the smaller St. Peter's station. The funding to implement anything worthwhile is inadequate and has arrived too late.

All said and done, if Rome is serious about their bid for the 2024 Olympics, they need to demonstrate through the Holy Year celebrations in 2016 that they are indeed capable of handling an event of this magnitude.

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