

AUSTRIAN CHRISTMAS SEASON CURBED BY LACK OF SNOW



During the Christmas season in Austria, the booking situation in the winter resorts left a lot to be desired mostly because of the lack of snow.

"This is the second time in a row that we did not have the snow we had hoped for in December", Petra Nocker-Schwarzenbacher, the chairwoman of tourism economy of Wirtschaftskammer Österreich (WKÖ) told journalists in Vienna.

For the rest of the winter season however, she believes the industry is capable of reaching the last year's booking levels again. In a positive scenario, **the total number of overnight stays in hotels, hostels and apartments could see an increase of 1 to 2 percent.** The pre-Christmas season with its advent markets was received positively. Another positive influence on the winter bookings should be the early weeks of Easter in late March.

"The Christmas season did not perform as well as we expected thanks to the lack of snow," Nocker-Schwarzenbacher reported. "Most visitors come here to ski, but they also enjoy spas and the offers we catered around skiing," said the industry spokeswoman.

Despite the lack of snow, a third of Austrians (34 percent) planned to make a winter vacation, according to a survey based on 500 telephone interviews carried out by the market institute. This number of potential vacation customers roughly equals the numbers of 2014 and 2015.

For 88 percent (2015: 90 percent, 2013: 86 percent) of all participants, Austria's image as a winter sports destination – closely followed by the beautiful scenery – still remains the special strength of the tourism market. 58 percent rated Austria as a "very attractive" winter destination as opposed to 59 percent in 2015 and 65 percent in 2013. Another third rated the country as "rather attractive" (2015: 38 percent, 2013: 29 percent).

"After the strong first week of 2015, we're now experiencing a small gap in our bookings. The next ten days will be a bit slower," Nocker-Schwarzenbacher remarked. This January reportedly has slightly fewer bookings than last year's.

Some regions, such as winter sports destination Ischgl, especially suffer from the drastic drop in the number of Russian tourists, whose new year's holidays last until January 14th. Instead, hotels tried their best at filling their beds with guests from other countries. "However, Russian guests have an entirely different net value," Nocker-Schwarzenbacher said. Russians spend much more money than the average tourist.

According to the chairwoman, the numbers in late January and February, which are the weeks of spring break, had a "very good" booking situation. The current winter season (November 2015 to April 2016) however, will probably still be stemmed by the booming city tourism.

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