

SPANISH TOURISM TAKES OFF AGAIN



According to the president of the Exceltur - Spanish Federation of tourism professionals (Tourism Excellence Alliance), the Spanish tourism sector contributed EUR124 billion to the country's economy in 2015. This represents 14% of the national GDP.

The data are up 3.7% compared to 2014 and represent the strongest growth since 2007 and the economic crisis and thus marks a sharp recovery in the sector.

Catalonia was the most visited region in Spain with 16.3% of all bookings made in 2015, according to data provided by the rural tourism website Clubrural.com. Castile and Leon followed with 15% of the bookings, Andalusia with 13.4%, Castile-La Mancha (8.4%), Valencia (7.8%), Asturias (7.5%), the Madrid Region (7.3%), Aragón (6.5%), Cantabria (9%) and Extremadura (2.9%).

Although the world's second most popular tourist destination (68 million tourists) after France, the Exceltur survey shows that in 2015 **there has been a decrease in average spending per tourist of 2.1% compared to 2014, bringing it to EUR741**. Still, for 2015, 84.7% of professionals surveyed believe they have had a better year in sales compared to 2014. 56% of them evaluate their progress at over 5%.

The Exceltur investigation notably attributes these results to the political instability in competing countries such as Egypt, Tunisia and Turkey, which lost 2.1 million tourists, in addition to the 5.7 million lost since January 2011 and the Arab Spring.

"With each new episode of instability, we see an acceleration of the arrival of foreign tourists in Spain," the study authors said.

According to Exceltur, uncertainty dominates 2016 as well. **The employers' federation expects an increase between 2.7% and 3.4% in Spanish tourism**. The gap between these two figures is due to the political uncertainty in a country still in search of a government and facing the pressures of Catalan independence. If this continues, Exceltur fears that Spaniards will spend less on their holidays and that foreign investors will become reluctant to come to Spain. However, 89.3% of professionals surveyed expect a further increase in sales in 2016 and 92.2% expect improved results.

Moreover, in 2015 the amount of new businesses in the Spanish tourism sector rose by 8.44% over the previous year with the birth of 2,299 businesses, while the hospitality sector grew by 9.6% with another 576 business, according to Infocif-Gedesco. The total number of new companies from all industries increased by 3% compared to 2014 after the creation of 85,167 businesses.

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