

2017 IS THE YEAR OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM



In December 2015, the UN General Assembly declared that 2017 would be the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. The general idea is to raise awareness about the importance of promoting tourism and of doing so responsibly.

The official launch of the Year of Sustainable Tourism will be held in Madrid on January 18. Since 2009, international tourist arrivals have recorded an annual increase of four per cent or more. **In 2014 alone the numbers grew by 4.3% and in 2015 they were up 4.6%.**

With these numbers, the volume of tourism business was expected to equal or even exceed that of oil, food or automobile exports, according to the World Tourism Organization.

Tourism ranks third as a global export category, after fuel and chemical products, and ahead of food and the automotive industry. In many developing countries, tourism is even the primary export sector. In macroeconomic terms, international visitor spending is counted as an export for the destination country.

Hence its importance in international trade. According to the UNWTO World Tourism Highlights 2016, international tourist arrivals worldwide have risen from 25 million in 1950 to 1.186 billion in 2015.

In 2015, the number of international tourist arrivals increased by 52 million compared to the previous year. Of this total, 54% arrived at their destination by plane and 53% travelled for vacation, recreation "or other forms of leisure." Total international visitor spending on accommodation, food and drink, entertainment, shopping and other goods and services reached 1.26 billion US dollars.

In the same year, France, the US, Spain, China and Italy were ranked as the world's leading tourist destinations. Mexico placed ninth. According to the records, tourism generates one in eleven jobs worldwide and employs almost twice as many women as other sectors.

Given the role of tourism as one of the largest and fastest growing socio-economic sectors, it is expected to stimulate economic growth, help generate jobs and business opportunities so that millions of people can get out of poverty and improve their livelihoods and quality of life.

The focus of the International Year of Sustainable Tourism will be on five key areas. In addition to continuing to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, work on human, ecological, cultural and peace issues will form part of the activities of this 12-month period.

This work will range from social inclusion, employment and poverty reduction to resource efficiency, protection of the environment and climate change, and will include cultural values, diversity, heritage, mutual understanding, peace and safety.

Among the proposals for the sustainable tourism year is a commitment to reduce global CO2 emissions by five percent by 2030, in addition to raising funds to protect heritage, wildlife, ecosystems and natural resources.

It is also expected that through sustainable tourism, biodiversity will be protected and restored.

All of the above will be done while managing the expected 1.8 billion international tourists estimated by 2030.

Thanks to the launch of this Year of Sustainable Tourism, it is hoped to improve consumer behavior in the tourism sector, change policies to encourage sustainable practices and boost green tourism on the part of service providers.

"This is a unique opportunity to build a more responsible and committed dedicated tourism sector that can capitalize on its immense potential in terms of economic prosperity, social inclusion, peace and understanding, cultural and environmental preservation," said UNWTO Secretary General, Taleb Rifai.

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