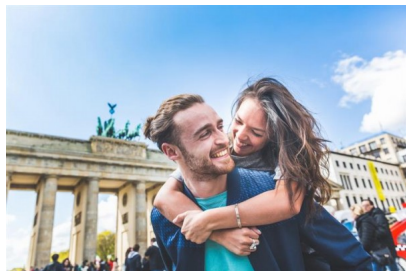


# GERMANY - THE MOST POPULAR DESTINATION AMONG ITS CITIZENS



The Federal Republic remains in demand of domestic tourists. Terrorist attacks seem to have no negative impact on visitor numbers. However, German cities have to deal with various issues.

There is a feeling that the world seems to be falling apart and last year was a confirmation. Terrorist attacks in Brussels or Nice, Brexit, Trump and a coup attempt in Turkey. **In times of chaos, German seems to be a safe haven - especially when it comes to holidays.**

The numbers speak clearly. A new record has been set for the seventh time in a row. The Federal Statistical Office counted around 447 million overnight stays of domestic and foreign guests in Germany in 2016. This is an increase of 3% compared to 2015 and the country remains a highly popular tourist destination.

However, the German Tourism Association does not want to consider a connection between global uncertainties and German tourism. According to President Reinhard Meyer, Germany is not an emergency holiday spot.

The trend of the past few years is, above all, short and spontaneous. Meyer especially emphasizes the urban areas. Germany has much to offer. Not only the big cities such as Hamburg, Berlin or Munich scored points. Even medium-sized cities such as Lübeck, Trier or Regensburg had much to offer - especially their specific architecture.

Torsten Kirstges, tourism expert and professor at Jade University in Wilhelmshaven, said: "Germany is still the most important tourist destination for holidaymakers." He also does not think that Germany is benefiting from terror attacks in other countries.

"If certain foreign destinations are now declining, they are not necessarily substituted by Germany." Countries in the south like Egypt or Turkey with beaches etc., could not be replaced by Germany.

Germany itself experienced terrorism in December last year, when a man drove a truck into a Christmas market in Berlin and killed twelve people.

Is it affecting tourism in the capital? "We currently have no evidence that the incidents have had a big effect on tourism," Burkhard Kieker, Managing Director of Visit Berlin, said. It is true that we still wait for the numbers, but a hotelier report, for example, reveals that it does not seem that there is a fall in holidaymaker numbers.

Kieker assumes that the way how Berlin dealt with the assassination plays an important role. "The city was defiant and did not want to be taken out of balance. Typical Berlin." What Kieker has been also observing for some time is the growth among visitors from Asia.

This was confirmed by the German National Tourist Board (DZT). In 2016, Europe recorded a one-digit decline in Asian travel to Europe. However, Germany is still well positioned with a 3% increase.

When it comes to security issues, Europe needs to be seen in the context, says DZT CEO Petra Hedorfer. Terror in Brussels, Paris and Nice - from a distance Europe is perceived as a destination. Travelers do not necessarily differentiate between individual countries.

And even before the terror attack in Berlin, Germany was in the headlines. In July 2016, a 17-year-old Afghan refugee with an axe and knife severely injured several people. The police shot the man, who was exposed as a "soldier of the IS". Not long after, a 27-year-old Syrian fired a rucksack bomb at the music festival in Ansbach.

However, tourism expert Kirstges does not believe in general uncertainty about Germany and does not assume that the urban dwellers of German tourists are affected by these developments. "Visiting cities, watching musicals - I do not think people are doing less of that," he says.

"Security concerns have played a role for Germany for the first time," says Bettina Bunge. Though Dresden has to deal with quite different problems, at home and abroad. The bad image through Pegida. "Our good reputation has suffered," she admits. **Dresden recorded more than four million overnight stays in 2016, but it was slightly less than in 2014 and 2015.**

Last year, the city made headlines once again. German Unity Day celebrations have to be remembered, but on the way to the Frauenkirche politicians were badly insulted.

Bunge emphasizes that amid such scenes, it is difficult to penetrate exciting cultural themes of the tourist destination. It was thus important to recognize the crisis on the one hand and not to hide the problems on the other. Bunge relies on an offensive approach to the issue, and also stresses that the developments will lead to more dialogue between citizens and politicians.

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