

# ITALIAN TOURISM COULD GROW FASTER



Arrivals in Italy increased to a smaller extent than in other European countries. Italian tourism still heavily relies on Rome which remains among the top ten most popular international destinations.

Recent data show that international arrivals increased in Italy by 3.5% in 2017. **The growth rate is smaller than in other South European countries, such as Portugal or Greece.** Here the increase accounted for more than 10%. In Spain, for example, the increase reached a substantial 9.1%. The average of the entire European continent is much higher than Italian tourism figures – more than 8.4%. This is a record acceleration. A total of 671 million people arrived in Europe last year.

Italian tourism did better in terms of nights spent in respective countries. In this case, the increase is greater than of arrivals – 6.4%. This is a sign that tourists arriving from abroad are extending their stays. Even in this case, however, there are countries that did better, such as Portugal (+8.5%) or Greece (+9.6%).

The report of the European Travel Commission, however, points to an important factor. The destinations in Europe that improved the figures last year and in general in the post-crisis period, are those that have planned effective investments. They have managed, in particular, to improve the network of air connections. This explains the acceleration seen in recent year by countries such as Spain, whose international arrivals have exceeded 80 million. In contrast, Italian international arrivals were equal to 54 million.

The lack of national strategies is one of the most critical aspects of Italian tourism. Surprisingly, the problem of the sector is not the lack of money. 1 billion euros per year are invested in Italian tourism.

The question is, rather, how the money is spent. There is clear absence of regulatory principles at the central level. All the regions move on their own and few have been able to sell themselves effectively. Each territory has sought its own way – often improvising – to position itself on different markets. In this chaos, Italy has lost competitive ability on the world markets.

In order to overcome these difficulties, in recent year various reforms have been tested. Often with disappointing results. A symbolic case is that of the national agency for tourism promotion which was led by Evelina Christillin, who promoted the 2006 Winter Olympics.

Almost three years after its launch the reform had remained on paper, despite the fact that the government had allocated a budget of 84 million euro for the 2016–2018 period. After the transformation

into a public economic entity, a great part of the former employees fled and today only 24 employees work at the central office in Rome, on an expected total of 80 seats.

The selection procedure for 21 profiles opened in autumn 2016 has not yet been closed and many of the announced projects are unfinished, like the umpteenth remake of the Italia.it website, for which 4.3 million euro has been allocated. And much more examples can be presented, such as the “School of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism” or the 2017–2022 Strategic Tourism Plan, that have been criticized greatly.

In this context, therefore, it is not surprising that Italy has managed to follow the European boom, without however riding it as a protagonist. It must be said that even in the case of tourism the situation varies greatly from region to region. There are territories that have been working well for a long time. Among the best-known cases are Trentino and alto Adige. These have for years firmly focused on seasonal adjustments and on raising tourism expenditure, with favorable results arriving.

Another example is Puglia, which is still enjoying the investments made in past years, or Sardinia, which recently launched a new regional law in an attempt to create new tourism products capable of attracting people even outside the already very busy summer season. However, these are initiatives that should be sustained in a more continuous way at the level of the government.

It is somewhat paradoxical, because **Italy, compared to other more popular destinations in Europe, could attract visitors throughout the year thanks to its boundless cultural heritage.** However, the heritage is often not valued enough. Many are left neglected and not taken care of, which takes away thousands of visitors from Italy’s total inflow every year.

#### **European countries by international arrivals in 2017** (% of growth to the previous year)

Iceland 24.2% Montenegro 18.6% Croatia 13.7% Finland 13.5% Netherlands 12.4% Belgium 11.9% Portugal 11.5% Greece 10.3% Spain 9.1% **Europe 8.4%** **World 7.0%** Germany 5.0% Austria 4.7% **Italy 3.5%**

Source: European Travel Commission

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