

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PUT TO THE TEST



The two years of the pandemic and the cohorts of restrictions have not changed anything: travel is still a dream come true. And holidays are more popular than ever, as the latest barometer from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) shows. More than 474 million international tourists have travelled since the beginning of 2022, 65% of whom have gone to Europe.

To date, the sector has already recovered nearly 60% of pre-Covid levels. With one important nuance: aspirations are changing rapidly. While the desire for the beach and the sun continues, environmental, ethical and social issues are gaining ground in the concerns of travelers.

The Multiple Paradoxes of the Traveler

There has been no shortage of figures to try and pinpoint the phenomenon. Among the most interesting studies is one conducted by Google and the Australian airline Qantas, on a sample of 17,000 people from six countries. The result? **66% of travelers did not necessarily choose the cheapest offer, a sign that they would be willing to pay for more quality.** And by quality, they mean different criteria: an "inspiring" and easily accessible experience, a high degree of trust in the trip organizers, the places and communities they will visit, and a "sustainable" trip.

However, this last criterion is not yet decisive in the choice of stays, especially among young people aged 18 to 25. While ecological awareness is there, behavior is not necessarily up to the task. And price is not the only explanation. Some cite the complexity of the 570 existing labels identified.

The Radisson hotel group, which operates more than a thousand hotels in some sixty countries, has made this observation: 73% of their customers say they want to book sustainable stays but do not necessarily take action. The group's vice-president, Inge Huijbrechts, who is in charge of business, recommends that "concrete actions become more visible in the establishments", a bit like organic products in supermarkets.

Cruise and Aerial in Motion

Among all the sectors present, the cruise industry obviously had a lot to say about sustainable tourism. Already perceived as a polluter and a vector of mass tourism, the sector must, on paper, also deal with the criterion of social distancing inherited from the pandemic. But how can we explain the fact that cruises are still attracting so many passengers, even after the announcement of their gradual resumption after the health break?

According to Davide Triacca, director in charge of sustainable development at Costa Cruises, which has promulgated a charter for sustainable and inclusive tourism, all the conditions are in place for an increasingly qualitative experience. And in the face of the recurrent criticism that the arrival of these giants of the seas in the ports of France, Italy or Spain has provoked, he argues that "it is neither the will nor the investments of the group that are lacking", but that "the technology is not there".

For example, he lists only 29 ports in the world that provide cruise ships with an electrical power supply. Other cruise lines, such as the group Ponant, whose ships have a capacity of no more than 200 passengers, have waste recycling rates on board of around 60%, and only distribute seawater on

board that has been treated so that it can be used.

These efforts must be publicized and recognized by travelers. Will they really and severely penalize those who are perceived as big polluters in 10 or 20 years? Apart from cruises, air travel is obviously on everyone's mind.

Air transport currently accounts for 40% of greenhouse gas emissions in the tourism sector, just ahead of the car. The first finding of a European study conducted by the Roland Berger consultancy is that the majority of travelers want to continue to fly, but they are demanding progress in terms of the environment and biofuels, and 90% of those questioned said they were prepared to pay the price. This should encourage the sector in its transition toward sustainability.

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