

# Sudden Accommodation Tax in Florence Will Damage Business, ETOA Warns



Various hotel associations and other representatives of the travel industry were told in a special meeting yesterday with city authorities that Florence plans to introduce an accommodation tax as of the 1st July this year. The tax will be based on 1 euro per person, per night, per star of category for up to a maximum number of nights (5 has been suggested). Therefore a family of four (children under 10 will be exempt) staying in a 4 star hotel for 4 nights would pay an extra €64. Hoteliers would be responsible for making sure the tax is collected and then passed on a monthly basis to City Hall. It had been hoped that any accommodation tax would be offset by a reduction or abolition of coach permits for groups staying in the city, but this has not been forthcoming so far. One Florence city councillor put it very simply by running through the figures and suggesting that it will bring the city close to 18 million euros a year. It has not been made clear how this money would be used.

ETOA held a City Tourism seminar in Florence in March focussing on good practice and examining challenges for city tourism. Much concern was expressed, above all from local hoteliers, about the possibility of displacement, particularly from the group sector. At the meeting it was made clear to political representatives that above all the industry needed proper consultation and due notice that respected business planning cycles.

“It seems nothing has been learnt from the Rome experience, except perhaps how to run roughshod over tourism. For our industry to be told with what is risible short notice that this tax is going to be in place in a little over five weeks, just as the high season starts, puts us in an impossible situation.”, said Nick Greenfield, Head of Tour Operator Relations at ETOA. “Initially the authorities had mentioned that such a tax might be planned for 2012. They now talk of the transparency and simplicity of the system but that completely overlooks the lack of clarity in decision making and uncertainty that we have had to endure. An operator bringing groups of tourists to Florence already pays high coach permits daily, for which they get a checkpoint by a flyover with a couple of toilets and inadequate drop-off and pick-up points. Our question now is: where is this money going to be reinvested?”.

There will be another meeting tomorrow (25th May) with the Mayor of Florence. Hotel associations have already warned that they will take legal proceedings if there is no change. ETOA will keep members up to date on developments.

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