

WILL MEDITERRANEAN TOURISM SURVIVE GLOBAL WARMING?



With temperatures rising by 3 to 5 degrees, rainfall falling by 10 to 60%, and sea levels rising by 35 centimeters to one meter, kilometers of Mediterranean beaches will likely disappear before the end of the century. Will tourists follow?

Recent heat waves have indeed led vacationers to choose cooler destinations. For example, between 2018 and 2019, summer overnight stays in the northern departments increased by 5 to 10% in France.

Even today, the Mediterranean attracts twice as many tourists as Normandy and Brittany combined. By the summer of 2022, the Mediterranean will have returned to 83% of its pre-Covid levels, and this summer is expected to see an even more significant jump in incoming tourist numbers. This is a sign that Mediterranean tourism, even if it has to adapt, remains (for the time being) in good health.

The sea, the sun, and air conditioning: a recipe for resilience

The basin's success depends on its main asset: the sun. Tourists are deterred by rain. Humans tolerate the heat better outdoors, by the sea, with an aperitif than during a stroll in the city or at home.

With fifty years of Mediterranean tourism development behind it, the basin remains ready to welcome visitors despite the heat. Despite the environmental impact, the tourism sector accounts for 12% of the region's economy and has no qualms about installing air conditioning in its facilities.

Although the sea and air conditioning may provide some relief, a study predicts a 20% decrease in tourism in northern Europe between 2004 and 2080 due to climate change. Both public and private entities are taking steps to adapt to the industry to handle the negative development. One approach is to extend the tourist season from March to November, while another is to mitigate heat waves. In Athens, a "director general of heat" is appointed each summer to address rising temperatures, and urban planners are working to make the city more eco-friendly. Despite these efforts, tourism operators in the Mediterranean are still susceptible to unpredictable weather disasters, as seen in Italy when floods in 2022 led to tourists leaving early.

Mediterranean tourism still has a bright future. But until when? In northeastern Italy, erosion threatens the beach and its businesses. Experts admit that the sea still wins despite reconstruction.

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