

## **European Charter for Sustainable and Responsible Tourism**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **II. OBJECTIVES**

#### ***Working together to make European tourism more sustainable***

The purpose of this Charter is to encourage sustainable and responsible tourism policies and actions across Europe, and to promote these policies worldwide. It is intended that the Charter will provide a common reference point for all stakeholders. It is directed primarily at tourism within Europe but is intended also as a guide for European investors, operators and travellers in the conduct of tourism elsewhere in the world.

The Charter presents the general principles and lines of action which the European Commission endorses and is committed to promote within Europe and at international level. It will strive to follow these principles and to encourage the other public and private tourism stakeholders within Europe to endorse the Charter and to commit to respect its principles and implement its lines of action.

#### ***Tourism – a major force for good in Europe***

Tourism is of major importance to Europe's economy, model of society and quality of life.

- It accounts for 5% of the EU GDP and supports 9.7 million jobs. It also provides both directly and indirectly a market for goods and services in sectors as diverse as: transport, retailing, construction, culture, food processing, fishing and agriculture.
- Support from tourism is of vital importance to the preservation of our heritage sites and the conservation of our natural landscape. It supports and stimulates leisure activities and the arts and assists in the maintenance of cultural identity.
- By bringing together people from diverse backgrounds and nationalities it fosters a deeper understanding of the common values and of the possible differences. Tourism provides people with enriching experiences and contributes to their health and general wellbeing.

#### ***The need for sustainable and responsible tourism***

Tourism is based on people and places and the interaction between them. For this reason, it is particularly sensitive to the conditions of the social and physical environment. It depends on the provision of destinations that are attractive, diverse, safe and welcoming. For this reason also, the industry itself must ensure that its impact on people and sites is of benefit and provides renewal and resilience.

**Responsible tourism** refers to the awareness, decisions and actions of all those involved in the planning, delivery and consumption of tourism, so that it is sustainable over time. To be sustainable, tourism must be economically viable, meet the needs of society and the environment, and in this way, to continue to deliver benefits without detriment to current and future generations. The sustainable competitiveness of the tourism sector is fundamental in the short, medium and long term.

Tourism in Europe faces many **sustainability** challenges. Amongst these, there are the problems caused by pressure on resources, the detrimental effect of seasonality in tourism demand, economic uncertainty, and the manner in which it both influences and is affected by climate change. With concerted action these challenges can be met. Indeed, much has been achieved in recent years. Amongst public and private stakeholders there is a growing awareness of the need for sustainable and responsible action.

### **III. KEY FUNCTIONS AND TARGET GROUPS**

This Charter impacts on four main functions:

- 1) the planning of national/regional tourism policies**
- 2) the planning and management of tourism destinations**
- 3) the operation and performance of all businesses within the industry**
- 4) the choices made and actions taken by tourists**

Key players influencing these functions include:

- International and European agencies
- Public authorities at European, national, regional and local level
- Tourism service providers – accommodation, catering, attractions etc.
- Travel agents, tour operators and transport providers
- Businesses providing associated services and supplying the tourism sector
- Tourism trade bodies and Chambers of Commerce
- Trade Unions and employees in tourism
- Destination Management / Promotional Organisations and similar partnerships
- Public institutions, NGOs and civil society bodies
- Educational, research and professional advisory bodies
- Community bodies and residents' groups
- Consumer bodies and individual tourists
- Media, providing travel advice or general news.
- European Tourism networks and Tourism Clusters organisations
- Any other stakeholders related to the tourism sector

### **IV. PRINCIPLES FOR A SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE TOURISM**

The following general principles should guide the approach to sustainable and responsible tourism:

- a) Ethical concerns should underpin European tourism policy and activity.
- b) Equal weight should be given to economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects of sustainability.
- c) The significant impact of tourism on other industries and activities and on the environment and society, especially at a local level, should be recognised.
- d) Tourism development should be planned with a long term vision, avoiding short term approaches and solutions that cannot be sustained over time.
- e) Objective assessment and evaluation should be undertaken of the impact of potential tourism development and of all ongoing tourism activity.
- f) The direct beneficiaries of tourism, including businesses and tourists, should be aware of the external costs associated with their activities and be prepared to contribute to their mitigation.
- g) National and regional policies should pursue the sustainable and responsible development of the tourism sector.

## **V. 10 LINES OF ACTION FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE PRINCIPLES**

### **1. To involve all stakeholders in the planning and management of tourism**

A responsible and sustainable approach requires everyone within the industry to work together in its development and management.

- Public Authorities should co-operate by exchanging best practices and where possible coordinating their efforts to tackle the challenges of sustainability.
- Destination management partnership bodies, bringing together public, private and civil society, should exist at different levels. These bodies should include organisations which represent environmental, cultural and local community interests.
- Tourism businesses should support and participate in destination partnerships and be kept informed of their activities.
- Tourists should be treated as stakeholders in destinations. They should be informed of matters relating to sustainability within the destinations and their views obtained.
- Residents and civil society have to be involved in tourism planning.
- All partners should work together on strategies and action plans for sustainable tourism in their destinations.

### **2 To respect the rights of all citizens to safe and fulfilling holidays and travel**

The ability to enjoy holidays and travel safely is a right not a privilege of all European citizens. A responsible and sustainable approach to tourism attends to the needs of all travellers.

- Highest priority should be given to the safety and welfare of tourists in the provision of tourism and transport infrastructure, facilities and services.

- There should be no impediment to access to travel and tourism facilities which is based on gender and gender preference, race, religion, ability or age or any other form of unjust discrimination..
- Travel by physically and economically disadvantaged people should be enabled and encouraged.
- Tourists and residents should treat each other with mutual respect.

### **3. To ensure the competitiveness and viability of the tourism industry**

European tourism needs to be competitive and efficiently used throughout the year.

- All tourism facilities should meet a consistent service quality level, with a focus on the promotion of high quality products, services and activities.
- Legal and fiscal requirements of tourism businesses should be fair, simple and transparent. They should be co-ordinated and avoid the duplication of taxes and regulation.
- Business advice, training and support services, especially for small enterprises, should be developed and delivered in close liaison with the business community.
- Tourists should be encouraged to travel at all times of year, by spreading holiday periods and by using innovative marketing and product offers to stimulate demand during low seasons.

### **4. To provide a wide range of well supported and satisfying jobs**

Tourism provides millions of jobs in Europe. It should be developed as a satisfying, well re-numerated and secure career.

- Tourism businesses of all sizes should treat their employees fairly, respect their rights and those of their representative bodies.
- Businesses should go beyond legal and contractual obligations and involve employees and trade unions in environmental and social initiatives within and outside the enterprise, implementing responsible practices in these areas.
- Effective social dialogue should be maintained between trade unions and employers' representatives.
- Employees in tourism should meet their responsibilities to their employers and strive to deliver a high quality service to tourists.
- Destination partnerships should actively support training and the local promotion of tourism as a career.

### **5. To mitigate and adapt to climate change**

Tourism both contributes to and suffers from the effects of climate change. The industry is reliant on air and road travel, both of which contribute to greenhouse-gas emissions. In addition, the enterprises themselves have a significant impact. However, the industry itself is adversely affected by the changing weather patterns which are symptomatic of climate change. The industry must therefore, play its part in reducing greenhouse-gas emissions while still developing a robust and prosperous industry.

- In liaison with transport providers, destinations should develop a range of environmentally friendly modes of travel to and within their areas. Where possible, they should pursue strategies to encourage longer stays and visits from proximate markets.
- Adaptation to climate change should include policies on the location of new development, on adaptive management and on product and market diversification.

- Research into, and the development and implementation of new green technologies should be supported by the tourism industry.
- Tourism businesses should provide guests with information on transport options and carefully manage their own sourcing and consumption of energy.
- Tourists should seek to minimise emissions through their travel choices and pay compensation in respect of those that cannot be avoided.

#### **6. To control and manage the use of natural, scarce or finite resources**

Tourism is a significant consumer of resources. These include water, oil, land and food. It generates waste and can be a significant source of pollution. This has the potential to affect adversely the local physical environment and local communities; the latter through competition for resources in scarce supply.

- The volume, nature and location of tourism development should be controlled to prevent undue pressure on natural resources and local biodiversity.
- Destinations should provide efficient services and infrastructure for the supply and management of water and energy and the handling of solid and liquid waste.
- Tourism businesses should implement environmental management systems. Their staff should be involved and guests informed.
- Tourists should be aware of their direct and indirect use of water and other resources and should take care to recycle and dispose of waste properly.
- Tourists should have access to and be aware of the environmental policies and credentials of enterprises they use. This awareness should influence the choices that they make.

#### **7. To celebrate and conserve natural and cultural heritage and diversity**

Europe has a wealth of cultural and natural heritage. This includes tangible cultural heritage such as historic buildings and artefacts and intangibles like cultural traditions and language. In addition, it has a wide range of landscape and is host to a rich and bio-diverse range of natural species. Conservation of all types of heritage is of great importance both for its own sake and in the interests of tourism. The industry in turn should be a key force in achieving this by stimulating awareness and appreciation of this resource and by generating economic benefits and funding from sustainable use.

- Destinations should ensure that their natural and cultural heritage is protected by sound planning controls and sufficient management capacity.
- Tourism, heritage and arts interests should work together on the management of sites and should promote the celebration of culture and diversity.
- Business should support the conservation of their local natural and cultural heritage.
- The cultural and natural differences and the common heritage within Europe should be promoted as incentives for travel.
- National parks and other protected areas should work in partnership with local tourism enterprises and other stakeholders on responsible tourism management.
- Tourists should appreciate the heritage of the places they visit, avoid damage to ecosystems and cultural monuments and artefacts, and support conservation through admission fees, purchases, participation and voluntary giving.

#### **8. To ensure that tourism respects and benefits local communities**

The maintenance of sustainable and responsible tourism requires a positive relationship between tourists, tourism businesses and host communities. Tourism should maximise its economic and social benefits for local communities while

minimising negative impacts such as noise, congestion, cultural intrusion, pollution and competition for property and services.

- Representatives of local communities should be closely involved in tourism planning and destination management.
- Tourism businesses should recruit staff and source supplies locally wherever possible, engage with the community and make their facilities available to them.
- Tourists should favour local products and make sure that their behaviour is not intrusive and does not offend against local customs.
- All tourism stakeholders should ensure the protection of children and minors and work towards the elimination of all forms of sexual and labour exploitation in travel and tourism.
- Taxes and charges collected locally from tourism enterprises or tourists should be used to benefit the community and provide amenities for residents and visitors.

#### **9. To monitor the impacts of tourism and seek continuous improvement**

For responsible policies to be efficient and useful the impact of tourism must be measured and changes over time assessed. Full sustainability or rapid change might be difficult to achieve, but there should be a requirement to seek identifiable year on year improvement. Results should be disseminated and should influence future action.

- Destinations should apply a system of indicators to measure their sustainable management and development.
- Information should be gathered from residents on how they are affected by tourism.
- Tourism businesses should participate in data gathering and monitoring and be prepared to measure and report on their own performance.
- Tourists should provide information on their activities through feedback and surveys.
- Destinations and businesses across Europe should be prepared and helped to share their results and experience, and given opportunities for benchmarking and comparative assessment.

#### **10. To promote awareness and commitment to responsible tourism**

Many opportunities exist to strengthen commitment to responsible tourism across Europe. For this to happen the knowledge base must be extended and there should be an engagement in effective communication and promotion.

- Politicians and key decision makers should be made aware of the contribution responsible tourism makes to sustainable development.
- Sustainability criteria should be included in the disbursement of funds to support tourism development.
- Knowledge about tourism impacts and sustainability should be incorporated in all forms of tourism education and training.
- Research that extends understanding of tourism sustainability issues should be encouraged and supported.
- The use of certification and award schemes, to provide businesses and destinations with sustainability criteria, examples of good practice and targets and to inform tourists' choice-making, should be encouraged.
- Information and marketing should raise tourists' awareness of how to travel responsibly and should promote responsible destinations and businesses.

- Tourists and businesses should use the medium of social networking and user-generated content responsibly when conveying any assessment of quality and sustainability.

## **VI. IMPLEMENTATION AND PROMOTION OF THESE PRINCIPLES AND ACTIONS**

These guidelines and actions should be implemented by European tourism public Authorities, businesses and tourists.

The European Commission commits itself to promote them within Europe and at international level. The Commission also encourages other public and private tourism stakeholders in Europe to endorse the principles of this Charter and to commit to its implementation following its lines of action. These endorsements and commitments have to be made public by each stakeholder in the most adequate way and most appropriate form (letter, website, publication etc...).