

Editor's comment from *City Profiles* No. 11 – June 2003

New European cities website should stimulate consumers' interest

The launch of a new consumer website (www.visiteuropeancities.info) by European Cities Tourism (ECT), the federation of European city tourist offices, is intended to make things a lot easier for travellers looking to research and book city breaks. The site, which complements ECT's trade-oriented site, groups some 200 cities across more than 30 countries – members and non-members of ECT – highlighting their main attractions, as well as key events and exhibitions taking place around Europe.

Most importantly, although there are still gaps (not all cities have uploaded all the required information yet), the site is well presented and easy to use. It has links to all the respective city websites and provides answers to many frequently asked questions, such as the distance/travelling time to a particular city, whether it offers a city card/pass and, if so, how to book it, etc.

What a pity the low-cost airlines are not interested in co-operation

However, there is one very useful type of information that the site does not offer – and this is not through a lack of effort on the part of ECT or the creator of the site, the Institute for Tourism and Leisure Studies at the University of Vienna (which was also the mastermind behind the TourMIS site). There is nothing on airline access to the respective cities, and there are no links to airline websites or, indeed, from airline sites to the ECT or city tourism sites.

At the recent annual conference of the ECT in Göteborg, two leading low-cost airlines confirmed that they have absolutely no interest in working together with cities to facilitate online booking of city breaks, although easyJet says it might consider providing a link to the ECT website from its own site in the future.

But while Ryanair is eager to benefit from promotional campaigns undertaken by the cities to which it flies – and even demands upfront cash from cities and their airports to support the launch of new routes – it says it is not willing to provide links to any city sites, carry any city brochures on its planes, or work together in any way to promote tourism. After all, its argument goes, its job is to sell airline seats, not destinations.

Selling the idea of city-breaks

If airlines have no interest in selling destinations, neither have cities any interest in selling other cities. But airlines and cities both have an interest in selling the concept of city breaks as a consumer good, to be bought much more frequently by a wider public. And so do lots of other sectors/components of the leisure industry.

Here the new website could play an important role but, to be successful, it will have to win two closely related battles. One is to make itself known to millions of consumers – and get them to use the site. This will not happen by itself. How many well-intentioned but essentially ignored websites are there out there? The second is to make a real difference. It will have to be more ambitious than simply providing a front-end to city tourism websites.