

Editor's comment from *City Profiles* No. 16 – February 2004

European cities could teach their NTOs a thing or two

Given its meagre resources, European Cities Tourism (ECT) – formerly known as the Federation of European Cities' Tourist Offices (FECTO) – does a pretty good job on behalf of its 90-plus members. It has made enormous progress in the field of research, for example, both in developing meaningful statistics for the benefit of its members and the industry, and in helping to standardise and harmonise such data across countries.

Admittedly, in this area it owes much to the Austrian National Tourist Office and the Austrian Society for Applied Research in Tourism (ASNART), which jointly developed TourMIS, the 'intelligent' website that gathers European city (and country) data and carries out comparative analyses and benchmarking. But what is important is that, through TourMIS and the ECT's internal marketing efforts, its members have come to recognise the value of compiling timely statistics.

Among the ECT's other achievements are the growth and spread of European city cards, which are increasingly bookable through its dedicated website www.europeancitycards.com. More than 40 European cities now offer discount city cards, or visitor passes, which typically offer travellers free admission to, or discounts at, museums, attractions and other tourist services. Their joint consumer website, www.visiteuropeancities.info, has also facilitated travellers' access to up-to-the-minute information on cultural attractions available around Europe.

Understanding the value of partnership ...

Even more importantly, however, members claim to have learnt through their ECT membership how to increase their effectiveness in terms of marketing and promotions. Amsterdam, Berlin and Vienna, for example, joined forces last year to launch a major promotion in the USA, Cool Capitals. A US\$2 million venture supported by American Express and Pioneer Electronics, the partnership was deemed an unprecedented success by each of the three city tourist offices – so much so that the campaign is being repeated this year by Amsterdam and Vienna, although with Zurich replacing Berlin.

Partnership is also seen as key to a number of other planned ventures, notably the proposed joint establishment of a representative marketing office in China. Some members feel the plan should be presented to their respective national tourism organisations (NTOs) – some of which (the Nordics) have favoured this kind of partnership in the past – but there is little confidence that the NTOs will recognise the value of such a partnership and join them.

... not to mention urban tourism's contribution to national economies

"Few of us are happy with the way our NTOs handle our cities," Claes Bjerke, ECT President and head of Göteborg & Company, said at a recent meeting of the organisation. "Yet, in Sweden, the three main cities account for 50% of total tourism turnover in the country and 75% of visitor exports (international tourism receipts)."

The decision by the European Parliament to invest euro 1.8 million in the development of a European Destinations website is a prime example of EU

members' lack of real comprehension of tourism's role in the European Union. There has been absolutely no consultation between the European Commission, EU member countries and the consultants developing the site with any other third parties (such as ECT) over the content of the website, which is expected to be up and running by this autumn. And until now, at least, there has been no mention of including European cities within the website, which will simply provide access to each member country's own site/s.

Yes, it is a pity, the Commission's head of the Tourism Unit at DG Enterprise, Reinhard Klein, admits. "But the member states are not yet as progressive as Europe's cities."