

EUROPEAN TOURISM REGAINS LOST GROUND DESPITE PERSISTENT HEADWINDS

- European foreign tourist arrivals were 18% below 2019 levels for the full year of 2022
- Recovery in flight volumes across Europe continues to stall in the early months of 2023, as supply lags demand
- The ongoing war in Ukraine continues to hinder travel recovery in Northern and Eastern European destinations

Brussels, 9 May: European tourism demand entered 2023 on a strong footing despite ongoing challenges, with international tourist arrivals 18% below 2019 levels. This is according to the latest edition of the *‘European Tourism Trends & Prospects’* quarterly report from the European Travel Commission (ETC), which monitors Europe’s tourism recovery, macroeconomic developments and other major factors having an impact on the European tourism outlook.

Year-to-date data shows that almost one third of reporting destinations have surpassed 2019 levels of tourist arrivals, while one fourth are 10% below. In arrival terms, Serbia (32%) and Türkiye (21%) outperformed other destinations, mostly due to the influx of Russian travellers taking advantage of the visa-free regime in both countries. Similarly to Türkiye, Bulgaria also saw a strong performance (+27%), supported by its perception as a good value holiday destination in times of rising travel costs.

Despite increasing demand, flight volumes have continued to plateau, signalling that supply constraints are still stalling recovery. Data from Eurocontrol indicates that European air traffic remained down 14.4% in January 2023 compared to January 2019. Other challenges from 2022 are expected to spill into 2023 in terms of elevated food and jet fuel prices, as well as higher operating costs for airlines and hospitality establishments.

Commenting following the publication of the report, Luís Araújo, ETC’s President, said: *“It is encouraging to see healthy levels of recovery as we hurtle towards the summer peak season. However, many challenges still hinder the travel industry. From battling inflation, to dealing with the fallout from the war in Ukraine, the travel industry has its hands full at the moment. Nonetheless, we must also focus on tackling longer term challenges. To preserve the sector for future generations, tourism businesses, policymakers, and destinations must strengthen their efforts to encourage responsible tourism practices, minimise negative impacts on the environment and create positive impacts on the wellbeing of our populations.”*

Ukraine War Fallout Continues to Impact Markets

A year on from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the war and its geopolitical consequences weigh on the travel industry and the recovery of some European destinations.

Travel restrictions on Russian arrivals continue to redirect travel flows to other destinations across Europe. Türkiye, for instance, has seen a strong influx of Russian visitors, ranking as the most popular destination for this market so far this year. As one of the few destinations in Europe that does not have sanctions in place, Türkiye is garnering the benefits of a reduced selection of destinations for Russian travellers.

In contrast, the absence of Russian travel has been a factor slowing down tourism recovery in some Northern and Eastern European destinations. This has mostly been felt in Finland and the Baltic states. Some Eastern European countries are also being impacted by perceptions that they are closer to the conflict zone than they are. Krakow, Budapest, and Riga are all cities reporting visitors showing hesitancy due to the war in Ukraine.

Britons Brave Travel Disruptions

The most recent data suggests that two in five reporting countries have surpassed 2019 levels of British tourist arrivals. Whilst the cost-of-living crisis is not deterring Brits from travelling, it is causing price-sensitive travellers to choose more cost-effective travel alternatives. Türkiye saw the fastest growth in British tourist arrivals, up 69% compared to 2019, helped by the declining value of the Turkish lira over major currencies, including sterling. Croatia (64%) and Montenegro (54%) also attracted sizable numbers of British arrivals.

It is predicted that the rapid recovery of UK travel demand will continue to pressure Britain's airports, ports and railways as they try to meet demand and minimise delays. Indeed, over Easter, Britons were challenged by travel chaos at UK ports and airports brought on by strikes, understaffing, delays and more thorough post-Brexit border controls. Industry experts predict that summer 2023 could see a similar level of disruption to summer 2022.

The summary report can be downloaded from ETC's corporate website under the following link: <https://etc-corporate.org/reports/european-tourism-2023-trends-prospects-q1-2023/>

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Note to editors

The **European Travel Commission** (ETC) represents the national tourism organisations of Europe. Established in 1948, ETC's mission is to strengthen the sustainable development of Europe as a tourist destination and to promote Europe in third markets. Its 35-member tourism boards work together to build the value of tourism for all the diverse European destinations through cooperation in sharing best practice, market intelligence and promotion. For more information, visit www.etc-corporate.org and follow [@ETC_Corporate](https://twitter.com/ETC_Corporate).

Media contact

Shane Bradley
Penta Group
etc@pentagroup.co
Ph: +32 (0)2 234 6860