

ETC PRESIDENT MR. PETER DE WILDE'S SPEECH ON THE OCCASION OF THE ETC'S 70th ANNIVERSARY EVENT

Dear Friends,

Europe has always been the number one tourist destination in the world, and that is still the case today. In the first half of this year, the old continent received 7% more visitors than in the same period of 2017. The continent has done an excellent job in stimulating demand from China, a geographical market in which they invested because of the EU-China celebration year. That plan's success is already notorious, with a drastic increase in tourists from that country.

This growth in volume is what ETC previously defined as a success because it stimulates the economy in Europe. However, as tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world, ETC strives for more than just economic value and also look at other values, like the social value of tourism, taking into account the quality of life of residents who live in popular tourist destinations in Europe.

Sustainable economic growth is one of the main development goals that the United Nations promotes for tourism. The European Travel Commission is taking up this serious task by completely changing their marketing strategy.

The ETC now chooses more growth in value instead of a mere growth in volume. As from mid-2019, ETC will start to promote travel to Europe to specific targets based on their passion instead of their place of residence.

The new strategy is to invite visitors that have a specific passion for those travel experiences that reflect what Europe stands for. Therefore, ETC will be able to give more value to the travel experience for visitors and at the same time for the local residents who share this passion because it's in their hearts. Our new plan will therefore focus on connecting people.

With this program in action, Europe evolves from a multiple destination brand approach to a multiple passion brand approach. Now, instead of presenting Europe as a sum of destinations, the new brand Europe will promote the continent as a sum of passionate experiences in multiple destinations around the continent. This is how Europe's brand becomes more sophisticated and more meaningful, displaying its diversity while including its unity.

When the European Travel Commission was founded 70 years ago on the basis of shared interests, it was meant to be more than a collaboration to generate an economy of scale. Today, with our new marketing strategy, ETC will be able to generate more overall value for all its members. By enforcing brand Europe on the long-term, and by continuing to bring intercontinental travelers that are passionate about what Europe has to offer, we not only devise an ambitious plan but also set up a very necessary strategy for the European travel industry.

You cannot understand the present and plan for the future, if you have no knowledge of the past. You can read all about ETC's past in the book we present to you later tonight and in which, for the first time, the authors have outlined the seven decades that define the history of tourism in Europe and of the world's oldest intergovernmental tourism organization. It's an exciting journey that reflects how our beloved Europe has faced and overcome challenges.

It will also, I trust, give you a message of hope. As long as we're able to come together as Europeans and define our common dreams, unleashing the creative genius of our citizens, our leadership in the tourism field will open doors to a better world where people will view travelling as a conscious act of exploration and open-mindedness, as an experience of sharing values and respecting identities that can transform our lives. "Travel is like love, mostly because it's a heightened state of awareness, in which we are mindful, receptive, undimmed by familiarity and ready to be transformed". Travel and tourism can also transform the places where we live and the communities we live in. As travelling locals ourselves, we have an important part to play in the way we view tourism as a power for the good. And we have to be always conscious about that, especially when we travel ourselves. To quote Terry Pratchett:

“Why do you go away? So that you can come back. So that you can see the place you came from with new eyes and extra colors. And the people there see you differently, too. Coming back to where you started is not the same as never leaving.”

My dear friends, we have our challenges cut out for us at ETC. If we want to be ambitious about the task that we have set to ourselves, and if on this path of ambition we wish to travel far and fast, we need to travel light. So let's take off all our envies, jealousies, unforgiveness, selfishness and fears. Let's be bold in our friendship and forgiving in our differences. Europe needs us, and we need each other. So that future generations might benefit from all the treasures Europe has to offer.

*Mr. Peter De Wilde,
ETC President*