

# Using the power of tourism to further promote sustainable development in Germany and in tourist destinations

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## Background

The topic of tourism garnered little attention at the federal level until the coronavirus pandemic made traveling impossible in some cases and shook the entire industry to its foundations. The global standstill of an entire sector, which extended across a wide variety of businesses from travel agencies to restaurants to tour operators, has highlighted the importance of the tourism industry, however – for Germany as well as for tourist destinations and their local populations. Travel brings people and cultures together. Tourism is also a bridge in an economic sense: It is an important economic driver around the world, one that ensures employment and prosperity. For example, tourism accounted for 10.4 percent of the global economy in 2018. Broken down in terms of employment, ten out of every 100 employees has a job that is directly connected with the tourism industry. In Germany, 2.92 million people work in the tourism industry. This represents 6.8 percent of all employees.<sup>1</sup>

Now that the pandemic restrictions are gradually being lifted, **however, tourism policy cannot be allowed to return to the back burner**. Instead, we must face the enormous challenges in the travel industry and prepare the sector for the future. **We must decisively address climate change and make both domestic and international travel more sustainable. At the same time, crisis management – not only in Germany, but overall – must be made more resilient internationally in cooperation with tourist destinations, and support must be given to the development of preventive plans and concepts.**

**This can only be done in close collaboration with those politicians who view tourism policy as a multifaceted issue and take both domestic**

<sup>1</sup>[The tourism industry – facts and figures \(die-tourismuswirtschaft.de; German only\)](https://www.die-tourismuswirtschaft.de/)

**and international tourism into account.** Focusing solely on domestic tourism would do justice to neither the diversity of the German tourism industry nor the major challenges facing the sector – particularly as regards sustainability. We very much welcome the willingness, highlighted in the coalition agreement between the Social Democrats, Free Democrats, and Greens, to seek progress and be creative when it comes to the tourism industry – a willingness which can also be seen in the key points and programme for the National Tourism Strategy. **Now these concepts must be backed by concrete actions and measures. At DER Touristik, we want to assume our responsibility and take advantage of our many years of practical experience by proactively contributing ideas and thoughts to the current debate. In this connection, we also welcome the planned establishment of the national “Zukunft Tourismus” (“Future of Tourism”) platform, attesting to the sector’s economic significance and conceivably serving as a central element in tackling the major challenges of our time, such as climate change and strengthening human rights.**



## Our approach

At the DER Touristik Group, which includes more than 130 companies with over 8,000 employees in 16 European countries, we want to live up to our responsibility as the second-largest tourism company in Europe. **For this reason, we have an ambitious sustainability strategy and combine our activities in our “DER Welt verpflichtet” (“DER is committed to the Earth”) sustainability programme.** As part of this programme, we set strategic priorities in order to achieve an impact in our products and along the entire value chain: (1) mindful travel, (2) energy, (3) climate & environment, (4) employees and social commitment. With this strategy, we systematically address the key sustainability issues by pursuing goals, such as creating jobs with fair conditions, promoting local cultures, protecting the environment and nature in the travel destinations, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions caused by travel. In view of the multilayered and complex nature of this issue, however, it is clear that **sustainability is a long and continuous process of transformation that will require the input and cooperation of all stakeholders.** For this reason, the DER Touristik Group has for many years been working with our service providers as part of industry initiatives and with members of civil society on developing lasting change and improvement. **But this transformation also needs both German and European politicians as strong partners to create clear, legally secure, and reliable framework conditions.**

### Tourism is a driver of sustainability in tourist destinations.

Ideas discussed among politicians and in the media, such as simply limiting the number of flights or calling for people to generally forgo travel to far-off destinations, are not a feasible solution in our view, as they fail to take account of several key points: **The freedom to travel and mobility are important considerations – particularly for the development of more sustainable trade in holiday destinations. Tourism brings people together and replaces prejudices with experiences. Travel gives the traveller a cosmopolitan and tolerant outlook, and it is an important economic pillar in many countries.** Particularly in less developed countries and destinations, tourism is an engine of development and provides people with a relatively low-barrier point of entry to more formal employment. For example, every 15 German tourists create one job in an emerging or developing country.<sup>2</sup> Tourism thus gives significant momentum to the “cleaner” and “more sustainable” development of regions because – in contrast to industry – not only is tourism itself capable of preserving an intact environment, society, and culture (for example with the designation of protected areas), but the sector is also dependent on their preservation. **Tourism thus offers many countries economic prospects and a source of income. This also creates certain incentive to realise sustainability goals and drive local change.**

<sup>2</sup> [The tourism industry – facts and figures \(die-tourismuswirtschaft.de; German only\)](https://www.die-tourismuswirtschaft.de/)

In our guidelines, we define a mandatory operating framework for ourselves and for our business partners. On the basis of the measures and goals described in the guidelines, we strive to ensure fair tourism, strengthen human rights, improve working conditions, and campaign for animal welfare and environmental protection. For example, the animal welfare guidelines, which were published in 2017, present clear rules for handling animals. Offers that do not meet the standards of the animal welfare guidelines are removed from the programme. Elephant rides have been removed, for example. At the end of 2022, comprehensive guidelines on protecting children's rights will be added to our long-time commitment to ending the sexual exploitation of children in the tourism industry. As part of this effort, we are examining the entire product range of DER Touristik with a view to safeguarding children's rights. Our clear goal is to align the entire DER Touristik Group product portfolio with the guidelines by the end of 2023, and to make adjustments where necessary. These efforts are accompanied by targeted training for employees at our head offices, in sales, and in the target regions and countries.

With the goal of improving and safeguarding the social and economic conditions and the ecological habitats of less developed tourist regions, **the DER Touristik Group also founded the charitable DER Touristik Foundation in 2014**. The Foundation's objective is to use the power of tourism to protect the Earth's diversity, while promoting economic development in the host countries. In partnership with other associations, foundations, and aid organisations, often established by locals at the tourist destinations, the DER Touristik Foundation works to promote the education of children and young people, preserve ecological habitats and the diversity of species, and ensure sustainable development aid. These activities involve helping others to help themselves, enabling locals to create future opportunities for themselves and their families. We aim to provide aid totalling EUR 3 million by 2023.

#### **Climate protection and mobility of the future go hand in hand**

In addition to protecting people and the environment in tourist destinations, we also focus on protecting the climate. Around five percent of all emissions that harm the climate are produced by tourism. Of this amount, around 40 percent come from flights, 32 percent from road traffic, and 21 percent from hotel accommodation.<sup>3</sup> These figures clearly show that the issue of mobility is inextricably bound up with the tourism sector. Tourists can only reach their destinations with the help of mobility options – whether they're travelling domestically or abroad. As one of the leading travel operators in Europe, catering to 7.1 million travellers before the pandemic, we interface directly with customers and therefore view ourselves as part of the solution. For this reason, we concluded a strategic partnership with the Lufthansa Group and are the first operator in Germany to offer travel via CO<sub>2</sub>-neutral flights. Eighty percent of the emissions are offset via high-quality climate protection projects in Germany and other countries around the world, and 20 percent through the use of sustainable aircraft

<sup>3</sup> [Holiday travel | German Environment Ministry \(German only\)](#)

fuel. Such fuels are produced using biogenic residue, such as used cooking oil. **However, in order to truly create the future of mobility, there must be more targeted investment in the research and development of climate-friendly alternatives, such as synthetic fuels or biogenic fuels. The goal must be to use innovation, efficiency, and close collaboration among modes of transport to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> sustainably and over the long term. Doing so will require the involvement of all modes of transport and, in particular, political coordination at European and international level.**

#### Involving travellers through the creation of an EU-wide sustainability label for travel

The goal of greater climate protection in the tourism industry can, however, only be achieved if everyone works together. For us as a travel operator, this means involving our customers every step of the way. And this, in turn, means creating the necessary transparency to help customers make more sustainable decisions. For this reason, the DER Touristik Group has worked together with Futouris e.V. to conduct a feasibility study looking at the creation of a CO<sub>2</sub> register, which is now being transitioned into an industry project with the aim of supporting a uniform basis for calculating the carbon footprint of travellers. We want to provide our customers with clear information about the impact of various travel offerings on the climate. With this in mind, we will be presenting information about product emissions to our German-speaking customers by the end of 2023. **However, achieving the broadest possible impact here will, in our view, require a clear political framework – ideally at the European level. We are therefore working to create a uniform and mandatory sustainability label for travel at EU level.** Initially, the label will focus on the climate. In the second stage, the label will be enhanced to take account of other sustainability factors. The long-term goal must be to provide travellers with a clear overview of the various sustainability factors of a travel product, enabling them to make a direct comparison.

#### Creation of industry resilience in Germany and abroad

But sustainable business has another key component for us that has so far gained little attention: **resilience of the industry in Germany and abroad as well as well-functioning disaster management strategy.** In view of the economic crises in some countries as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it is necessary to help some destinations to reopen their tourism markets in order to ensure that the sector remains an important part of sustainable development. At the same time, regions, including those in Germany, must be prepared for crisis situations, such as the consequences of flooding and severe weather. In this connection, we can use our many years of expertise to help develop the resilience plans of destination countries. Based on our long-term experience, we have been able to help increase the resilience of destinations to various crisis situations.

## Our view on the appropriate way forward

- Establish **tourism policy over the long term as a cross-cutting issue** in order to be able to meet the challenges across the breadth of the industry.
- In the further development of the National Tourism Strategy and in the establishment of the “Zukunft Tourismus” (“Future of Tourism”) national platform, **consider foreign tourism as a key economic factor in Germany and abroad** and **closely involve the tourism industry**.
- **Create a mandatory uniform sustainability label for travellers at the EU level** in order to help customers make more sustainable travel decisions.
- **Ensure that the mobility of the future is coordinated across Europe and internationally** through, among other things, the improved coordination of rail and air travel as well as targeted research into more sustainable fuels rather than limiting flights or drastically increasing prices.
- Make the creation of **industry resilience in Germany and abroad a priority** and support it consistently.