

Europe needs return of long-haul travel to sustain recovery, says ETC



Long-haul travel has been a key weakness in the post-pandemic rebound

The [European Travel Commission](#) (ETC) has stated that the return of long-haul arrivals is necessary for complete recovery of visitor spend and the associated benefits needed to support the tourism sector in Europe.

The organization hosted a joint press conference with [Tourism Economics](#) and [European Tourism Association](#) (ETOA) at ITB Berlin on the state of long-haul travel recovery to Europe and expectations for 2023.

"According to the latest insights presented by ETC and Tourism Economics, European travel recovery began in earnest in 2022, and international arrivals increased to almost 80% of 2019 levels for the year on average," notes a press release. "Looking ahead, international travel to Europe is forecast to recover pre-pandemic levels in 2025. However, long-haul travel has been a key weakness in the post-pandemic rebound to date and continues to lag behind short- and medium-haul arrivals."

Long-haul visitors accounted for 25% of the international nights spent in Europe prior to COVID-19. On average, they tend to stay for longer and travel to multiple destinations, therefore providing higher economic gains. Notably, the share of nights and spend from overseas markets in Europe exceeds the proportion of arrivals thanks to the longer trips and higher associated budgets.

Commenting on the importance of long-haul travel to the tourism sector, Luis Araujo, President of ETC

said, "Considering the economic instability in Europe, it is crucial to boost long-haul travel demand in order to support and sustain tourism recovery in European destinations. Visitors who come from further away tend to spend more money and stay for longer periods of time, providing greater value to European destinations. We are teaming up with many of our member destinations this year to reactivate long-haul markets. 2023 will be a turning point for international tourism recovery, and this is the ideal moment to re-establish Europe as the top global travel destination."

David Goodger, Director, Tourism Economics, added, "Returning long-haul travel demand is essential for a complete recovery in European travel activity, including all associated economic benefits. The opportunity is particularly clear as intra-regional demand faces significant challenges from the economic slowdown. People worldwide are continuing to prioritize experiences, including travel, and European cities and countries should seize this opportunity to benefit as preferred destinations."

Tom Jenkins, CEO, ETOA stated, "The arrival of the Chinese visitors transformed some destinations in Europe. Their absence since 2019 has been sorely missed. The anticipated return of real volumes in 2024 enables these destinations to invest again in the services that these clients need. This recovery is not certain. All sorts of barriers lie in the way. Increased fuel costs, reduced capacity in Europe, the issuance of passports and the global political situation: all these count against a full recovery. So where we can do the right thing, we should. Visas must be simplified and issued promptly. Testing requirements (particularly when medically unnecessary) should be eased. Every effort must be made to make these visitors welcome."

Long-haul markets recovery to date

Looking at specific source markets, the US remains Europe's largest long-haul market and leads the way in recovery, supported by the strength of the US dollar. Travel from the US to Europe is expected to regain over 80% of pre-pandemic levels in 2023, with a full rebound of 2019 arrivals in 2024. Stronger recovery is expected in Western and Northern European destinations, while travel to Eastern Europe remains weak due to the ongoing war in Ukraine.

Following the long-awaited reopening, a gradual recovery is likely from China. Forward data on bookings shows that Chinese travelers still favor domestic travel. In 2023, travel from China to European destinations is projected to remain 60%-70% lower than pre-pandemic levels. Tourism Economics anticipates a full recovery of Chinese travel to Europe in 2026 in baseline outlook.

Other markets show a gradual recovery as well, with travel from India and Brazil to Europe expected to regain pre-pandemic levels during 2025.