

HELLENIC REPUBLIC
HELLENIC CHAMBER OF HOTELS

PRESS RELEASE

Senior Tourism

The world population is expected to increase about 2.3 bn. until 2050. Nevertheless, this increase will vary between age groups. Young and middle-aged population (up to 55 years old) will increase only by 900 million. At the same time, elderly population will increase by 1.4 bn., and that they will more than double in the next 40 years, from 1.07 bn. (2010) they will become 2.6 bn. at 2050. By then, the age distribution of world population will be similar to the picture of Europe today.

Another very interesting result is that after 1990 the annual number of births remains the same. In other words, the explosion of elderly population will be temporary and the age distribution in Europe will be stable after 30 or 40 years.

From today and for the next 20 to 30 years an abnormal increase in the ratio of the elderly will be observed between the populations of economically developed countries. After 2050 the situation will become normal.

Global economy will be forced to enter the phase of silver economy.

Developed countries are facing a demographic change, from an environment of high mortality rate and equally high fertility rate to a new era of low mortality rate and equally limited fertility rate.

These demographic changes will probably cause an important increase in the frequency rate of leisure trips per resident.

In the last five years, tourism activity in Europe remains the same. The only population group with increasing frequency of trips and travel expenses are the seniors (more than 65 years old). The rate of European tourists decreased, in absolute values, the last five years. In 2011, young people aged between 15-24 years old, travelled 10% less, while the tourists who belong to the age group of 25-44 years old travelled 9.7% less. Tourists over 65 years increased by 10% between 2006 and 2011. Those five years, older people made 29% more trips and spent 33% more money. On the other side, the trips of the most productive ages (25-44 years old) decreased by 9.5% and their travel expenses decreased by almost 20% the last decade.

Forecasts of the evolution of European market of elderly tourism

In the future, the shares of the elderly will continue to increase. On condition that the consumer habits of Europeans remain at 2011 levels, it is expected that:

- Senior tourists will form 24% of the total market of 2030 and 28% of 2050.
- The percentage of trips made by older people is expected to increase by 26% in 2030 and by 32% in 2050.
- By 2050, 1/3 of total tourist expenses in Europe will come from individuals over the age of 65.
- The market share of young people will remain unchanged.
- The participation of middle-aged groups in tourism market will be reduced by 10 percentage units between 2011 and 2050.

Based on the total number of trips made by the elderly every year and on the ratio of those who travel to a foreign country, it turns out that:

- The largest elderly tourism market is German market. Every year Germans over the age of 65 make 11.5 million trips abroad.
- Germans are followed by English 4.6 million, French 3.1 million, Dutch 1.7 million and Italians with almost 1 million trips of elderly abroad.
- Swedes, Finns, Belgians, Czechs and Austrians make numerous trips abroad compared to their population.

The changes of family structure cause large changes to tourism demand.

For instance, as the number of individuals traveling alone (without partner or children) increases, the demand for single rooms increases to.

Accordingly, when a trip is an opportunity for family members to meet in the same place and tighten their relationships, it is very likely that three generations travel together. In that case, a furnished house with three main rooms might be the best accommodation option.

Older people are the population group with the largest and most rapidly expanding consumer potentials in all the economically developed countries of the world.

Trips are the most desirable form of entertainment for the elderly. They positively affect their physical and mental well-being (Lee and Tideswett 2005).

Participation in travel activities helps an individual to stay physically and socially active. This is proven to positively affect life expectancy and delay the signs of aging.

Furthermore, trips contribute to avoid loneliness which causes anguish to the elderly in the last stages of their lives.

The elderly travels regularly (54%) out of tourist season since they have less work and family obligations. As a result, they are the only ones who can choose more easily their vacation time.

Senior people form the market share with the least seasonality in their travel behavior. As a result, all political efforts to reduce negative effects of seasonality in tourism industry in our country must rely on the attraction of many tourists with specific demographic features.

Older people (over the age of 55) are less interested in holidays for bathing and sunbathing. It is indicatively mentioned that the percentage of the age group 15-24 years old is 32% and of the 55+ group is 29%.

Contrary to what is believed, the elderly does not prefer entertainment trips to big cities, compared to other age groups.

In conclusion, a very important inference is that individuals over 55 travel more often than other age groups for cultural and religious reasons (18% over 11-13% for other age groups).

Austrians (26%), Dutch (22%), Belgians (22%), and Germans (21%) are the nationalities that travel the most for cultural reasons.

Infrastructures and services friendly to the elderly

Greece receives 67% negative reviews and performs better only compared to Hungary. Even more worrying is the fact that the other competitor countries in Mediterranean South are ranked in a much better position than our country. Italy receives 64% positive reviews, Spain and France 58%, Portugal 52% and Turkey 53%.

In a more detailed analysis of the factors that make Greece unfriendly for elderly, it turns out that our country is significantly behind concerning the accessibility of public infrastructure and not the commercial premises, including hotels.

Attraction policy applied by Greek hotels

34.6% of Greek hotels, are willing to offer special package prices for the elderly during low demand periods. On the contrary, only 9,5% attend to include in the offered service packages additional activities interesting for the elderly, such as dance parties, traditional cooking nights or other creative activities.

- 13.9% of hotels are willing to change their breakfast and adjust meals to the requirements of the elderly, without any relevant request.
- Only 6.1% of businesses can offer a form of basic medical care in hotel premises, in order to attract a larger number of senior clients.
- 8% of businesses encourage senior clients to attend artistic events or local festivals organized by local authorities.
- Even more worrying is the fact that only 2.5% of Greek hotels have special pages in their business websites addressing exclusively to the elderly or to individuals with special needs.
- Since elderly is the most varying group of tourists, it is difficult to adjust an advertising message suitable for everyone. Marketing addressing to a massive audience is not appropriate for attracting senior tourists. The feeling they should receive from advertising in order to make a destination attractive to the elderly is that they are offered freedom of choice and that they have total control of the situation. More specifically, they need to know that they can experience adventures without surprises. Also, it is significant to show that the destination attracts creative people, is suitable for reuniting and making the interpersonal relationships more essential and exudes nostalgia.
- On the contrary, the message that a tourism accommodation should pass has to be affordable luxury and complete satisfaction of expectations, like the slogan "We will fulfill more than we promised". What should not be underestimated is the fact that, seniors are frequent readers of newspaper's and magazine's tributes about tourist destinations. The ones who use the internet spend time looking for information about the destination they are about to visit.