

# Actual tourism strategy of South Aegean Area

## **Weaknesses & Strengths**

The condition for the achievement of key strategic choices and operational objectives in the field of tourism is the implementation of a strategic plan for tourism in the islands, which:

- 1) Will address the hitherto weaknesses of tourism development (low quality services and low product differentiation that focuses solely on sun and sea, only providing basic services to tourists with an ineffective promotion system).
- 2) Will take into account the external risks (development of new competing destinations that offer a similar product with better quality and lower prices).
- 3) Will exploit the existing opportunities (change preferences of tourists that express the need to acquire new experiences with personalized services within a quality environment).
- 4) Will highlight the comparative advantages of each island-destination separately (unique natural and cultural environment), creating a new and distinct products for the consumer.

### **1. Weaknesses**

- The problems in maritime transport (frequency of itineraries, speed, transportation costs, seasonal variation) directly affect tourist traffic. Also, a major problem is the lack of adequate port facilities and provision of services that are prerequisites for the development of cruise tourism, servicing yachts etc. Shortages in land (internal) transport and the inadequate road network constitute additional problems. In some islands, the lack of adequate infrastructure for air transport is also a negative factor for the development of tourism.

- The problems of access to public services relate to both tourism entrepreneurship (hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, etc.), which depends heavily on the resolution of issues of licensing, accounting, funding or participation in funding programs etc., as well as to the visitors themselves, when they need to resort to public services for an emergency issue that may arise.

- Shortages in healthcare for dealing with emergencies and the lack of specialist doctors largely concerns tourism and its special forms. The problem is intensified particularly in small islands.

- Access to educational structures related to tourism (school of tourism professions, tourist guides school) or to special seminars is limited because of insularity.

- The small size of many islands limits the growth potential of external economies, since they do not have sufficient market size and number of similar enterprises, as well as proper facilities and services as appropriate. As a consequence, the cost and time of dealing with arising problems relevant to tourism activity are increased.
- The heavy reliance of the local economy on tourism, which is limited mainly in the summer months, creates an intense problem of seasonality in employment. This has as a result an increase in unemployment and decline in population during the winter months.
- Qualified personnel in tourism professions can be found in the larger islands while, in the smaller ones, the lack in specific disciplines (hotel employees, chefs, experts in marketing, etc.) and especially those associated with designing and implementing actions for specific forms of tourism (mountain guides, lifeguards, diving instructors, etc.) is evident.
- Over the last two decades a stabilization or slight increase in population is observed. However, the seasonal decline in population during winter causes problems. Entrepreneurship and employment in tourism are significantly affected, since the relatively few skilled personnel hamper the development process.

## **2. Strengths**

The tourist resources of the islands of the South Aegean include a wide grid of natural resources, archaeological sites and monuments, residential complexes, traditions and modern infrastructure of tourism, culture and recreation. Especially the built environment of the Aegean is one of the poles of attraction for tourists and visitors. Each island has a unique character regarding its built environment, from the traditional Cycladic and the "neoclassical" to the Italian school, the industrial architecture, etc. Beyond the particular coastline, which is a very important attraction, the Cyclades as well as the Dodecanese islands are characterized by significant and diverse natural resources that include habitats, volcanic areas etc., while a large number of sites is included in the Natura network. Finally, the modern culture, museums, festivals, gastronomy, nightlife and sporting events offer specific opportunities to visitors. These features make the tourist product of the South Aegean diverse and multifaceted, making the need for tourism planning and marketing based on any form of tourism imperative.

The islands of the region are characterized by different development "speeds" and this is particularly evident in the tourism sector on the islands, where different models and forms of tourism development are

promoted. The selection and planning of the trip (individual tourists, tour package through a travel agency, all inclusive, last minute, etc.), the type of destination (mountainous, coastal, island tourism etc.), the purpose of the trip (business tourism, recreational, sports, etc.) and age, social or economic characteristics of the tourist (juvenile tourism, luxury tourism, gay tourism, etc.) can be used as criteria in order to classify the different forms of tourism. The combination of the above criteria results in a wide grid of tourism subcategories. In the case of the South Aegean, we have a rare combination of different forms of tourism hardly found in other tourist destinations worldwide.

The new products, thematic and diversified, which respond to the consumers' new trends and needs, are the following:

- **Cultural tourism**. It's our strongest element; it binds yesterday with today and adds value to every corner of the South Aegean.
- **Gastronomic tourism**. The rich cultural heritage of our islands can be found in the fruits of the earth, the high-quality products and the flavors of the Aegean cuisine. Day by day they take over the international markets with the flavors and aromas combined with the precious ingredients that give longevity and health.
- **Religious tourism**. It's gaining ground across Europe and now, with the significant increase of the Russian market, there is an opportunity to highlight the places of worship and pilgrimage such as Patmos, Tinos, Symi etc.
- **3<sup>rd</sup> age tourism**. The most dynamic and financially robust part of the market is looking for proposals. Our islands have the climate, the temperatures, the food, the services, the cultural interest for the welfare and the activities they seek. This is the solution to the problem of heavy seasonality because they travel at the beginning and at the end of the season.
- **Student tourism**. The Southern Aegean is the ideal destination for this kind of tourism due to its educational and cultural product, its history and environment.
- **Marine tourism** on all the islands of the region.
- **Sports tourism**. The climatic conditions, the infrastructure and the services, mainly on the larger islands, enhance its development.
- **Medical tourism**. An opening to this market is being organized on the initiative of the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels and NTO. In the South

Aegean we are mainly aiming to the recovery period because we offer very good conditions and services of accommodation and support.

- **MICE** (incentive trips). With creative, imaginative and unique suggestions, each island has its own personality in order to offer personal experiences.

### **Overview about the product of South Aegean Area**

The Strategic Planning of the Region of South Aegean is based and structured on the following three principles: **Development – Sustainability – Competitiveness.**

Its main concerns include, among others:

- Forming long term goal policies for the next 10 years,
- To improve the accessibility of the islands in the Region,
- Creation of an investment friendly environment,
- Definition of a competitive advantage for each island,
- Specialization in added value products, such as gastronomy, culture and so on,
- To increase the manpower,
- The New Business,
- Forming a Business Action Plan,
- To reinforce the agents that are charged with coordination, collaboration and synergies,
- To make important suggestions for significant change in institutions and regulations,
- To develop a differentiated product,
- To develop Strategic Marketing promotion
- To invest in facilities directed at tourism and, of course,
- To develop human resources.

## **1. What are the actual goals**

The Region of South Aegean, through its Strategic Planning, is aiming at several objectives:

- To establish a Sustainable Development Strategy of the Region through creating our destination identity,
- Creating an integrated Promotion system (Destination Marketing Organization- DMO),
- The forging of a strong local tourism identity,
- Creating an interface for tourism, the primary and the secondary sector
- The establishment of the Triptych :
  - Traditional Products
  - Traditional Arts &
  - Culture

The Strategic Planning of the Region of South Aegean is also aiming at:

1. The Quality Upgrade of the tourism product through other forms of tourism, such as Alternative tourism,
2. The development of the market and attracting tourists of a younger age,
3. Combating seasonal employment, mainly by elongating the tourism season in the Region,
4. The development for each island as an autonomous tourism destination through creating it's individual identity – Destination Branding
5. Promoting the South Aegean Region as a tourism destination in tourism markets inside the country and abroad – Aegean islands, Place Marketing

## **2. What are the challenges for the future**

The Strategic Action Plan for Tourism of the Region of South Aegean includes the following four very important actions:

- Creating of agents and modern tools for the coordination and observation of the local tourism product. One of these tools is the Sustainable Tourism Observatory, which was founded in the South Aegean under the umbrella of the World Tourism Organization (**WTO**) and the scientific direction and guidance of the Aegean University.
- The establishment of cooperating relations with municipalities and tourism related agencies,
- Applying Marketing and Communication strategy and last but not least,
- Educating manpower.

### **ACTIONS OF THE OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR THE TOURISM PROMOTION OF SOUTH AEGEAN REGION**

#### **1. Marketing Actions and promotion of the tourism product**

A.1 Creation of communication infrastructure and content production

A.2 Public relations and promoting actions in order to promote the destination

A.3 Publicity actions

A.4 Operation of the South Aegean Tourism Council

A.5 Integrated plan for the designation of alternative tourism in the Dodecanese

#### **2. Creation of a Destination Brand for the South Aegean islands**

#### **3. Production of promotional material & publicity campaigns in Greece and Abroad**

#### **4. Integrated plan for the designation of alternative tourism in S.Aegean Region**

#### **5. Mechanism for the monitoring and support of the tourism promotion project**

A.1 Coordination and monitoring of the project (project management)

A.2 Services of Permanent Harmonization and Accordance of SAR's Marketing Strategy and communication with the global tourism market trends

#### **6. Designation of the gastronomy and the Aegean Cuisine in the Cyclades**

A.1 Upgrade and global promotion of the Aegean Cuisine Standard

A.2 Creation of institutions for global promotion and support of the Aegean products and gastronomy

A.3 Actions of communicative promotion

#### **7. Designation of the gastronomy and the Aegean Cuisine in the Dodecanese**

A.1 Certification and global promotion of Dodecanesian enterprises through the Aegean Cuisine Standard

A.2 Participation in institutions for global promotion and support of the Aegean products and gastronomy

A.3 Actions of communicative promotion

A.4 Scientific diligence of the project

#### **8. Establishing mechanisms for the scientific monitoring of tourism in the South Aegean Region**

### **OBSERVATORY ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**

The **tourist product** offered (in all its levels: infrastructure, services, products, etc.) **must** from now on **be in harmony with** the environment (natural, cultural and human), while for **tourism development to be characterized as sustainable**, it is required to **adopt practices** that -

always respecting the environment and the identity of the area- will **render it economically viable and socially equitable** for local communities.

The only way to ensure effective decision making and implementation of good measures to this end, is to use appropriate / specialized scientific tools that can be provided by the Observatory on Sustainable tourism development. The establishment of such a structure in our region is significant not only for the future of tourism, which is our basic industry, but also for the local community in general and that is why It is very important to engage all the tourism stakeholders in this effort, since the operation of the observatory affects us all and the achievement of its objectives depends on the good cooperation between all of us.

As highlighted by the World Tourism Organization, the observatory is a structure where **the political will and strong commitment of national and local government agents**, in combination with **the active participation of tourism stakeholders and a specific academic or scientific institution**, are the key ingredients of success.

**The World Tourism Organization is leading this effort and we, as regional authority, have the will and the means to begin operating the observatory while the University of the Aegean has the scientific expertise to make the Regional Observatory on Sustainable Tourism of South Aegean, located in Rhodes, a model of operation and efficiency.**

## **9. Pilot program to designate quality and social economy in the islands**

- A.1 Detection of needs
- A.2 Creation of quality / social economy products
- A.3 Organization of mentoring workshops for social economy enterprises
- A.4 Program / social economy promoting actions
- A.5 Support of the subproject management



## **10. Online promotion – SAR official tourism portal**

A.1 Application development and accompanying services

A.2 Collection of content (Greek and English) and upload to the portal