

Tourism

Problem

The UK's share of world tourism is dwindling.

The share of international tourists coming to Britain has fallen by 7.7% since 1997. Our share of international tourism spend has declined by 9% over the same period.

Solution

We will change the way Government approaches tourism.

The current target based on the overall value of tourism to the economy is insular and outdated. Our primary focus will be on the world market and Britain's share of it. We are committed to achieving a reversal of the country's fortunes in the international market rather than employing an arbitrary target with no regard to strategy.

To make the most of this new focus we believe that VisitBritain should concentrate on the following areas:

- Establishing a presence in the emerging tourism markets of India and China
- Exclusively focusing on marketing Britain abroad

Problem

The UK has an escalating tourism balance of payments deficit

The UK's tourism balance of payments deficit has more than trebled since 1997.

Solution

Revised focus on marketing England as a tourist destination within the UK

We will transfer responsibility for marketing England within the British Isles to an English Tourist Consortium which would replace Visit England. Local authorities in England, who have the biggest stake in promoting domestic tourism, would own shares in the new body in proportion to their share of domestic tourist traffic. They would be responsible for its direction and priorities. We would transfer the £3.6m tourism funding that the DCMS allocates to regional development agencies to this new body.

Problem

There is a lack of government focus on tourism

The current DCMS Minister with responsibility for tourism, Margaret Hodge, is also the departmental lead on the arts; creative industries; heritage, architecture, royal parks and royal estate; museums, galleries, archives and libraries; IT and e-government; science and sustainability; volunteering and the voluntary and community sector; and finally human rights. It is not possible to give the focus necessary to tourism with such divisive responsibilities.

Solution

A designated Tourism Minister

He or she would properly represent the industry within and outside government. The Tourism Minister will have their objectives clearly set out by the Secretary of State and will work with the industry on the issues affecting tourism; they will provide a voice for tourism in Whitehall and assist local government in its development of regional and local tourism strategies.

Problem

Red tape and the burden of regulation

Small businesses make up a large proportion of the tourism industry, particularly in the accommodation sector. There are more B&Bs, almost by definition small, family run and owner-managed businesses, than there are hotels.

As a result, tourism has been hit hard by the Government's addiction to regulation. The lengthening tax code and an increase in small business taxes have also placed considerable additional burdens on the industry.

Solution

Low tax and light touch regulation

We will oppose any further tax increases for small businesses. We will ensure that the recommendations brought forward from the Conservative Party's Arculus Review are properly implemented by the tourism industry.

Problem

Tourism brings extra costs for local authorities

Local authorities have no incentive to invest in tourism. Councils receive no gains but are expected to provide the infrastructure and facilities required to develop tourism which can often be very expensive.

Solution

Local authorities and accountable regional bodies should more easily be able to tap into the expert knowledge of VisitBritain and the DCMS when evaluating tourism policies and marketing opportunities.

We would like to see the £45m pilot scheme announced by the Government to regenerate seaside towns to be used to incentivise local authorities to attract more tourists over a long term sustainable basis. We propose that these funds are allocated to pilot areas on the basis of each additional tourist that they attract to their area. This would remove the disincentive effect of attracting new tourists.

Problem

The length of the British tourism season

Our domestic tourism industry suffers as a result of the short length of our domestic tourist season.

Solution

Longer evenings would benefit the industry.

Research has shown that the implementation of Single/Double Summertime would provide a £1bn boost to the inbound tourism industry, bring an extra £2bn in spending to the tourism and leisure industry and provide an extra 55 minutes of daylight in the evenings. It would also reduce energy consumption and reduce the number of road deaths by around 100 each year. We would promote daylight saving if there was a consensus to do so in all parts of the UK.

Problem

Our tourism product needs protecting.

The UK's heritage and culture is our USP. We should preserve it, harness it and market it. National Lottery raids have robbed heritage and the arts of a share of £180m since 1997. Heritage will lose £90m because of Olympics overspend.

Solution

Lottery reforms will boost heritage and the arts

Returning the National Lottery to its founding pillars will unlock more funds for heritage projects as well as regional arts – potentially useful as a domestic tourism attraction.

Problem

The UK is losing out in attracting visitors from emerging markets.

Chinese visits to the UK in 2006 represented just 0.9% of all international visits to the United Kingdom but accounted for 1.8% of the spending by overseas visitors. Visits from India made up 1.1% of inbound tourists but their spending made up 2% of the total. We currently receive 367,000 and 296,000 visitors from India and Hong Kong & China respectively. This is compared to 956,000 from Australia; 351,000 from South Africa and 1.9m from Spain.

Solution

Emerging markets made a priority for the Tourism Minister

A priority for the new Minister for Tourism would be to secure bilateral tourism agreements with the China National Tourism Administration. Britain should become more 'China-friendly'. VisitBritain began providing a customised Chinese version of its website in 2004 and more needs to be done. Airport and attraction signage should develop accordingly. The Minister will work with airlines to ensure adequate services to and from the ever-expanding number of airports in China.

Problem

The process of applying for a visa is costly and complex.

According to the Tourism Alliance when visa prices increased in 2005, expenditure in the UK from visa markets fell by 11.1%.

Solution

More flexible visas The Tourism Minister will work with the Home Office to consider new visa arrangements where practical and consistent with immigration priorities.