

FUTURE TOURISM

Spanish initiative

A new plan is set to spend millions in developing a new kind of tourism for Andalusia.

Funded in the main by the Spanish Ministry of Tourism, the initiative wants to transform the local tourism industry. Two new projects and three programmes are designed to enhance business innovation in the area's tourism industry. Services included are consulting, helping travel companies to design their product and innovate and advice on how to incorporate new strategies or processes into their existing activities.

The first of the programmes, Research Lab is supposed to identify the needs of tourism business management, market research and technology. The first two strategic projects being operated by Research Lab have

already begun with funding from central government of €13.5 million. The Demo Lab will be launched later in the year. This initiative will allow tourist businesses to try out various technological solutions that are available in the current market that they may be able to use in their own companies to improve profitability.

There are also new programmes on E-Commerce to show companies how to promote themselves more efficiently and effectively on the Internet and a Consultancy Platform to provide tourism businesses with consulting services. In total there are 25 public and private companies which will be providing services to 5,000 companies to improve the standard and variety of Andalusian tourism.

Bully for them. What about the Canaries where

the level of unemployment is the highest in the country and the alternatives to employment in the tourism industry far fewer?



BUSINESS TRAVEL

No change

London, Paris and Frankfurt are still the most popular destinations for business conferences and trade fair hosts according to the latest survey by Cushman Wakefield, European Cities Monitor.

The only change is that the gap between first placed London and second placed Paris has widened – the cheaper pound is probably a strong factor in this strengthening of London's lead.

It is a sector of the travel business that takes around 10-15 years and a lot of dedication to develop.

The survey lists several issues which are taken into account by hosts: the availability of qualified staff, the standard of telecommunications and transport links and the reputation of the city. Whilst the Canaries could star in the first and last categories, the telecommunications and transport links remain poor and expensive in comparison with our northern Euro-

pean competitors. In the middle of the table Birmingham, Munich, Milan and Leeds are noticing a significant upturn in conference business (Leeds is the main base of Jet2.com). Whilst Birmingham has not had any significant changes since the Bull Ring shopping centre was built, they and Leeds are in the centre of the UK and as such a popular choice for UK hosts. This is a part of the travel sector that is of a great deal of interest to businessmen in the Islands. Business travellers spend more per head than ordinary tourists (usually as cynics point out because the cash they are spending is not their own). They will always choose a taxi over the bus and a top restaurant over fish and chips in a newspaper.

Economy

Negative growth

• The latest figures from the Spanish National Statistics Centre show poor results for the Canaries in 2009.

It is the only Spanish community with negative gross domestic product figures, closing the year at -0.4 per cent, a position of deflation. In Spain overall a growth of 0.8 per cent was achieved, the lowest level of growth since 1962.

Visa changes

USA travel

• All 35 countries that enjoy visa waiver status with the USA including the UK will now have to fill in an online questionnaire at least 72 hours before they fly or face being turned back at the airport.

Once approved, the Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (ESTA), will last for two years and takes over from the old green card system. It can be used for multiple entries into the States. British Airways and American Airlines have both warned that they will not accept any passengers who have not got ESTA approval. You are advised to complete the online form at least 72

hours before you are due to travel. ESTA is currently free, although a fee of \$10 has been mooted.

Employment

Job creation

• The Canarian government's Minister for Employment has promised 80,000 new jobs over the next 18 months.

Although a drop in the ocean of the depressing level of unemployment in the Canaries, it does at least hold out a little hope to some people. Funds have been made available to the tune of €420 million, of which €60 million will be used in grants towards Social Security payments.

Home finance

New mortgage

• La Caixa are offering a new mortgage called Rompesuelo – ground-breaker.

Fixed interest at a much lower rate than many other banks is guaranteed for the first three years at 2.85 per cent (2.48 APR) followed by euribor plus 0.5 per cent. These rates are offered irrespective of whether it is a new mortgage or a remortgage. In the second case La Caixa will pay the costs of the subrogation.

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