

How Free Are We To Travel?

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As millions of people prepare to take a spring holiday break, there are mutterings in the background: from governments wanting to raise taxes, environmental groups decrying excessive leisure travel, and destinations fearing for the survival of local culture.

The freedom to travel can be viewed as a major political freedom, comparable to the right of freedom of expression. It is essential to human contact for business or leisure, and it widens the horizons of individuals both literally and figuratively.

But how free is it? Over and above the financial cost to the individual traveller, there are clearly other factors to take into account.

The environmental and cultural impact of increased numbers of travellers can be either positive or negative, depending on how the flows are managed. Travel & Tourism can sustain, support and nurture the environments and cultures it touches - but without the right strategies it can also do harm.

The fact that many people in the world have neither the freedom nor the funds to travel is another obvious challenge. How far can Travel & Tourism play a role in the economic, social and even political developments that can widen access to its benefits?

Pricing carbon into products and services may offer some scope for solutions - but if conducted as a policy in isolation it risks increasingly restricting Travel & Tourism to an elite few rather than widening access.

Leading businessmen and politicians from around the world will discuss these issues at the Global Travel & Tourism Summit in Dubai from 20 to 22 April, 2008 under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai. Their aim is to explore the approaches that can balance the prizes of freedom and opportunity to travel with sustainability in a changing world.

Bringing public and private sector leaders together should throw new light on their respective roles in this issue - and, indeed, on the role of the individual - in achieving the hallowed balance. The summit itself is the consequence of a major public/private partnership comprising the Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, Emirates Group, Jumeirah Group and Nakheel.

For a full list of speakers and the programme, please visit www.globaltraveltourism.com/programme

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