

## TOURISM

Tourism in Belgium is one of the service activities showing the most rapid rate of growth; we have defined it as follows: "an extra-regional phenomenon of leisure activities which involves travelling and visiting (with or without accommodation) irrespective of distance and of time" (1987).

The popular appeal of tourism developed after the Second World War (the Annual Paid Holiday Act of 8 July 1936), the appearance of mass tourism in the 1960s and its explosive growth since the 1970s, were all factors that strongly modified the spatial structure of tourism in the Belgian scene. In particular this was felt on the coast, where only a little remains of the natural landscape, apart from nature reserves such as the Zwin and the Westhoek. The tourist network here is among the world's most developed and pressure on space is very great. A sensible tourism policy, spreading out of holidays in time and space has become self-imposed. In a number of tourist centres in the Ardennes and the Campine (holiday villages are on the increase) and even in towns with a cultural heritage, such as Bruges, tourism is very clearly manifest, and has become a topic for impassioned geographical study.

In making this map of tourism a good many problems concerning the statistics were confronted. The official annual figures from the INS (National Institute of Statistics) show a notable number of gaps, such as

- a marked underestimation of the number of overnight stays (particularly in hotels, apartments and camp sites);
- a lack of figures for second homes (very numerous on the coast) for there has not been any census for second homes since 1981. Thus the study has to be limited to commercial paying accommodation;
- a delay in making the statistical material available.

All the figures on this map represent the period before the reform of tourist statistics that was brought in at the end of 1991.

However despite the technical imperfections we have succeeded in making an inventory of the complex relationships of Belgian tourist needs and resources, and this has provided the basis for five thematic maps and four graphs.

**Map A** shows the picture (1988) of accommodation capacity at commune level in the five commercial categories of accommodation. It should be emphasized that the apartments and villas out on hire are not shown on this map: an information about their accommodation capacity is not required neither of the owners nor of the estate agencies. Owing to the fact that this type of accommodation is missing on the map, relatively too much importance is given to the five types of accommodation quoted, particularly on the coast.

The hotel, the most traditional form of accommodation, shows a figure of 16.3 per cent in the total for 1988 (16.6% in 1990). It is best represented in towns with cultural and artistic attractions. In contrast, it is camping with 66.4% (66.2% in 1990) which has the highest figure and "social tourism" which has the most marked increase with a percentage rise of 11.8% in 1988 (12.3% in 1990).

The INS erroneously includes in this total the holiday villages. These errors should be corrected in the new statistical classification. As far as the type of accommodation is concerned, health resorts and holiday colonies are less important (particularly on the coast).

**Map B** gives a complete picture of overnight stays available by commune (1987) divided into six types of accommodation. As a matter of fact, this time, apartments and villas are included because the statistics about the overnight stays must be supplied every month to the INS.

The most important centres for holidays are:

- seaside resorts, led by De Haan – amalgamated with Wenduine and Knokke-Heist – with 2.4 and 2.7 million overnight stays respectively in 1987, 3.2 and 2.7 in 1990. There is here a striking subsequent specialisation in the types of accommodation: tourist apartments and villas in Knokke-Heist, Koksijde and De Panne; hotels at Ostend and Blankenberge; camping at Bredene and Middelkerke. De Haan has all types of accommodation;
- hotel accommodation predominates in the cultural and artistic towns. Brussels is in the lead (2.5 million in 1987 and 3.1 million in 1990), followed by Antwerp (0.9 and 1.1 million respectively), Bruges and Ghent;
- centres in the Ardennes such as Hastière, La Roche, Durbuy, Spa and in the Campine with rather old centres such as Mol, Kasterlee, Houthalen-Helchteren and the newcomers like Lommel and Peer.

In nearly all the remaining communes a great dispersion of overnight stay occurrences is a striking feature shown on this map as well as special concentrations such as the camping centres of Burdinne and of Stekene.

**Map C** provides an inventory of tourist centres and attractions. Our 1992 typology distinguishes between coastal resorts, cultural towns, pilgrimage centres, health resorts, winter sports towns (distinguishing between alpine skiing and cross-country skiing). Also shown are theme parks, major estates, natural scenic centres, and nature reserves (e.g. the Hautes Fagnes), caves, casinos, places of historic and cultural interest (such as abbeys, convents, museums) and centres for day tourists. Moreover, it provides a qualitative appreciation of the centres and attractions mentioned, especially based upon the comparison of the appreciations of the most important touristic guide-books.

**Map D** shows the number of overnight stays by visitors from other countries (1989); they stay particularly in the cultural centres with Brussels as the favourite destination (especially for business visitors and for conferences). This was followed by Antwerp (a world port) and the more attractive tourist centres, Bruges, Ghent, Lommel and Peer. With regard to the coast, because of the crowd of Belgian tourists, only a restricted number of foreign visitors (11.78%) are seen there; in order of importance: Germans, Dutch, French and British, Ostend had the greatest number with 84.8%.

**Map E** draws attention to the socio-economic importance of the sectors tourism and horeca (branch of the tertiary sector grouping HOTEL, RESTAURANT and CAFE industry). It shows the total volume of the salaried staff, in the two sectors, with the percentage of the sector horeca in that total.

There are also four statistical graphs with complementary information.

**Graph 1:** overnight stays by nationality and by type of accommodation (1989). The typical clientele of hotels consists of international overseas visitors (e.g. from USA) or from southern European countries (e.g. Italy and Spain). Amongst our neighbours, it is above all the British who prefer hotels, whilst those from the Netherlands choose camp sites or holiday villages. Belgian and Luxembourg tourists mainly stay in apartments or villas as well as in holiday settlements and in health resorts, which are less known by the foreign visitors.

**Graph 2:** overnight stays by month (or other period of stay) and by tourist region. In all the tourist regions there is a marked excessive concentration in the high season (july/august); it is clear that weather conditions and the school holidays play an important role. On the other hand, in the cultural centres (and above all in Brussels) there is little variation throughout the year; this is explained by the important role of business meetings and conferences both before and after the high season.

**Graph 3:** the evolution of overnight stays by nationality (1963-1989). The great increase shown by those from the Netherlands (9.9% of the total in 1953 compared with 36.9% in 1989) and from Germany (12.3% growing to 16.1%). From Britain the percentage declined from 27.2% to 9.7% and from France from 22.9% to 9.9%. In the 1960s these had been our major visitors but by the end of the decade there has been a great reduction. Since the mid 1980s their numbers are on the increase again. The most marked recent expansion is in visitors from Italy and Spain. Those from the USA form a typical example of unknown factors; at the time of a strong dollar fall (as in 1985) the number of overnight stays by American tourists also falls.

Finally, **graph 4** shows the evolution of the total employed in the tourism/horeca industry sector for the period 1973-1988. In 1988 there were 169 000 thus employed (but around 178 000 in 1990) of whom 26.7% were self-employed and 73.3% wage-earners. The well balanced distribution between male and female was 51% to 49% whilst those in horeca accounted for 66.8% of the total employed in this sector. By comparison with 1973 this amounted to an increase of 46.5%.