

PM unveils plans to boost Greece's tourism

BY STATHIS KOUSOUNIS
 Kathimerini

The number of foreign tourists in Greece could rise by 50 percent in the next decade, exceeding 30 million visitors per year, Prime Minister Antonis Samaras said during the annual general meeting of the Association of Hellenic Tourism Enterprises (SETE) at the Athens Concert Hall on Wednesday.

The premier also announced plans for the government to invest 500 million euros per year over the next six years in major tourism infrastructure and similar activities, while the private sector will invest at an additional annual rate of 3 billion euros, he added.

"Such investment rates are necessary for our investment plan and are seen by the tourism sector as being feasible," he said. As far as taxation in the sector is concerned, Samaras said "we will gradually head toward lower tax rates," adding that "this will be as slow as required in order to avoid a return to deficits."

For 2014 Samaras estimated that Greek tourism will break the record it registered last year, when arrivals

from abroad, including cruise passengers, climbed to 20.1 million, according to Bank of Greece figures released this week.

Citing studies and estimates, Samaras said that the government's strategic plan for the sector will result in a major increase in tourism by raising annual demand by 10 billion euros within five years and by 25 billion in a decade. This will become possible via an increase in the number of foreign visitors by about 50 percent and growth in average daily tourist expenditures by 30 percent. Such a boom in tourism could add 18 billion euros to the gross added value of the economy and create 220,000 jobs in 10 years, while bolstering the trade balance by 9 billion euros and state revenues by 3 billion on a yearly basis, Samaras noted.

A key condition for this to happen, however, is the stability of the country, warned the premier.

He included among the government's immediate priorities the creation of major conference centers in Athens and Thessaloniki as well as multiple cruise ship mooring points. He went on to note that cruise tourism could constitute a



Prime Minister Antonis Samaras told the SETE general meeting on Wednesday that in the next six years the government will invest 500 million euros per year in major tourism infrastructure and similar activities.

crucial source of revenues for the country and reminded of the problems the sector had faced in Greece before the lifting of restrictions.

Samaras added that the number of marinas in Greece will grow from the current 32 to 70 within the next

few years and then beyond 100 in 10 years' time. Among the targets set is also the development of integrated tourism development such as holiday residences.

Regarding the structural interventions planned by the govern-

ment, the prime minister stressed that progress is being made with the Forest Registry, the Land Registry, in clarifying the ownership status of coastal areas and in determining areas that can obtain protected status by being on the coast.