

Vatican urges tourists to have eco-friendly vacations

VATICAN CITY - In time for the summer holidays, the Vatican urged tourists to pack less luggage, leave the car at home and have a greener vacation.

Tourists have to choose whether they are “for or against the planet,” said the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Travelers in a message for World Tourism Day Sept. 27.

They can “contribute toward the preservation of life on our planet and slow down the process of climate change” or they can pursue “a kind of insane narcissism” that selfishly ignores recognizing the earth “is at risk of destruction,” the council said in the June 18 message signed by the council’s president, Cardinal Renato Martino, and secretary, Archbishop Agostino Marchetto. The message was released to journalists June 23.

World Tourism Day, sponsored by the U.N. World Tourism Organization, is dedicated to the theme “Responding to the Challenge of Climate Change.”

“It is extremely important to return to a sense of limits, against mad progress at any costs, and escape the obsession to own and consume,” the council said.

It suggested some ways tourists could be more environmentally friendly this summer: “travel on foot, opt for hotels and hospitality facilities that are closer to nature, and carry less luggage.”

Such efforts are aimed at burning less fossil fuels, which emit carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, it said. Carbon dioxide traps heat in the earth’s atmosphere and is seen as a prime cause of global warming.

The council said tourists should make sure their “rubbish is adequately disposed (of)” and try to “eat more eco-friendly meals, plant trees to neutralize the polluting effects of our journeys, choose local handicrafts rather than more costly and poisonous items, and make use of recyclable and biodegradable materials.”

Tourists and the international community should “comply with and encourage a green culture that respects the environment,” it said in the message.

The council also denounced nations that have been reluctant to endorse policies aimed at protecting the environment and ratify international protocols aimed at reducing greenhouse gases.

Vatican City has become the first sovereign state to have zero carbon dioxide emissions thanks to the creation the Vatican Climate Forest in Hungary, it noted. Two companies donated the forest to the Vatican in 2007 as a way to offset all of the Vatican’s emissions of carbon dioxide. The Vatican also is fitting the top of the Paul VI audience hall with solar panels to produce electricity for a considerable part of the Vatican’s total consumption.