

Visitor Arrivals to Turkey Decline Amid Protests

In the month of June, the slowest increase in arrival of visitors to Turkey was recorded in as many as seven months. The slowing down of visitor arrivals is attributed to the anti-government protests that raged for weeks in major cities of the country. However, tourist arrivals to the coastal areas were not seriously impacted.



The increase in visitor arrivals was 4.93% (the slowest since November 2013) in June on year-over-year basis, after recording double-digit growth in the months of April and May. Though the unrest has eased, the decline in visitor arrival growth is likely to impact the economy of the country which is experiencing a slowdown. This is because tourism revenues help Turkey finance the current account deficit, the main reason for its economic weakness.

Data provided by the central bank showed that tourism revenue for the one year period to end May was US\$22.8 billion and the current account deficit was US\$53.6 billion.

According to Mehmet Simsek, finance minister, there were risks to Turkey's growth outlook. The Turkish government expects the economy to grow at the rate of 4% in 2013, registering a 2.2% increase over last year. However, it is less than 50% of the growth recorded by the economy in 2011.

In the months of April and May, the growth in tourism on year-over-year basis was 13% and 18%, respectively. According to data revealed by the tourism ministry, the number of visitor arrivals in June was 4.07 million.



For many nights in June, the riot police fired water cannon and tear gas against demonstrators as some of them resorted to throwing stones. The protests against the plans of redeveloping a square in Istanbul started peacefully, but unexpectedly turned into a show of defiance against the government led by Tayyip Erdogan, prime minister.

The epicenter of protests was Taksim Square in Istanbul where there are a number of hotels. However, Aegean as well as resorts in the Mediterranean coast and other highly popular destinations largely remained free from protests.

Antalya recorded an increase of 8% in visitor arrivals in June from a year ago, whereas Istanbul registered a mere 2% increase.

However, visitor arrivals have increased in the current year from last year with a rise of 1.04% to 31.78 million.

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