

UNWTO: INTERNATIONAL TOURIST ARRIVALS EXPECTED TO INCREASE



Destinations around the world welcomed 369 million international tourists (overnight visitors) in the first four months of the year, an increase of 6%, according to the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer. International tourist arrivals for January to April 2017 increased by 6% relative to the same period during the previous year and the sector's confidence reached its highest level in a decade.

The positive results are mainly caused by the sustained growth of major destinations and to the sharp upturn in the growth of other destinations. **The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) underlined that expectations for the period from May to August remain high.**

The period spanning January to April generally accounts for nearly 28% of the annual total and corresponds to the winter season in the northern hemisphere and to the summer season in the southern hemisphere. It also includes the Chinese New Year and the Easter holidays, among other holidays.

Solid Growth

The majority of the destinations which were most successful in 2016 maintained their momentum and those destinations which had encountered difficulties during the previous years saw very positive growth during the first four months of 2017, as evidenced by the results of the Middle East (+10%), Africa (+8%) and Europe (+6%). The Asia Pacific region (+6%) and the Americas (+4%) also continued to experience solid growth.

“Destinations affected by negative events in 2016 are showing clear signs of recovery. This is very good news, especially for people whose livelihood depends on tourism in these destinations,” declared the Secretary-General of UNWTO, Taleb Rifai.

“As we celebrate the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development in 2017, we are pleased with the continued development of tourism and would like to remind people that growth is accompanied by an increased responsibility to ensure that tourism contributes to the three pillars of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental. Growth should never be regarded as an enemy and it is our duty to manage it in a sustainable way,” he added.

Results by Region

After mixed results last year, international tourist arrivals in Europe rebounded (+6%) during the period spanning January to April. Moreover, confidence has returned regarding certain destinations which had been affected by security-related incidents, while other destinations have maintained strong growth.

Results have improved namely in Southern and Mediterranean Europe (+9%, versus +1% in 2016) and in Western Europe (+4%, versus +0% in 2016). Northern Europe (+9%) maintained its strong growth, while Central and Eastern Europe saw its international tourist arrivals increase by 4%, an increase similar to that experienced during the previous year.

In the Asia Pacific region, tourist arrivals increased by 6% from the beginning of the year until April, with strong results for the four subregions. Growth was driven by South Asia (+14%), followed by Oceania (+7%), Southeast Asia (+6%) and Northeast Asia (+5%).

In the Americas, international tourist arrivals increased by 4%, with strong results for South and Central America (+7%), while arrivals in North America increased by 3% and by 2% in the Caribbean.

The limited data available for Africa suggest that it experienced an 8% increase of the number of international tourist arrivals, with a strong recovery (+18%) for North Africa. International tourist arrivals in the Middle East rebounded by around 10% after having experienced a 4% decline in 2016.

Positive Summer Outlook

The results showed that the sector reached its highest level in 12 years, far exceeding the expectations of experts already positive since the beginning of the period. **The highest numbers were recorded in Europe, verifying the growing number of travelers in the region.**

The experts also say they are very confident for the current summer (May to August), with prospects never as promising for a decade. This confidence is also fueled by optimistic forecasts from Europe. The May-August period corresponds to the peak tourist season for most of the major travel markets and tourist destinations around the world.

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