

European Tourism Grows above Expectations



January-August 2011: Positive note despite increased uncertainty

International tourist arrivals grew by 4.5% in the first eight months of 2011 to a total of 671 million (29 million more than in the same period of 2010).

The Northern Hemisphere summer peak season months of July and August showed encouraging results with growth at close to 4% over 2010, corresponding to an extra 8 million arrivals. At 118 million, July saw the highest number of international tourist arrivals ever recorded in one month (August: 112 million).

Contrary to the trend in recent years, growth in arrivals during the first eight months of 2011 was higher in advanced economies (+4.9%) than in emerging ones (+4.0%), due largely to the particularly strong results of Europe (+6%). In Northern Europe (+7%) and Central and Eastern Europe (+8%), recovery from the 2009 decline, which began in 2010, gained momentum this year. The same is true for some Southern European destinations (+8%), which this year also benefited from the shift of travel away from Middle East (-9%) and North Africa (-15%).

Contrasting with growing economic uncertainty, European Union destinations (+6%) benefited strongly from this growth, bringing some relief for those destinations facing major economic challenges such as Greece (+14%), Ireland (+13%), Portugal (+11%) or Spain (+8%).

“Despite current volatility, international tourism is proving to be an important economic driver for many European economies, bringing much needed foreign exchange and helping to ease the pressure on their balance of payments,” said UNWTO Secretary-General, Taleb Rifai. “UNWTO encourages European governments to support tourism and consider the sector as one that can back economic recovery given its capacity to distribute wealth and create jobs across the region,” he added.

In Asia (+6%), destinations in South-East (+12%) and South Asia (+13%) remained the rising stars, with double-digit growth rates, while arrivals slowed in North-East Asia - partly due to the decline in Japanese outbound tourism - and in Oceania.

South America (+13%) continues to lead growth in the Americas (+5%) benefiting from positive economic trends in the region and increased regional integration. Results in the other sub-regions - North America (+3%) Central America (+4%) and the Caribbean (+4%) - were slightly below average.

In Africa arrivals were down by 4% as a result of the downturn in North Africa; Sub-Saharan African destinations grew by +4%.

In spite of the current situation in the Middle East, some destinations such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates continue to grow steadily. Results of recent months (July and August) also show an improvement in arrivals to Egypt.

Source markets: Emerging economies lead among spenders

Data on receipts from and expenditure on international tourism for the first eight months of 2011 confirm the positive trend in arrivals.

Among the top ten destinations in international tourism receipts, the two main earners - the USA (+11%) and Spain (+10%) - show exports from tourism growing above the rate of arrivals, while growth in Italy (+6%), Germany (+6%) and the UK (+7%) was also significant.

In terms of source markets, expenditure on travel abroad continued to be very strong from the emerging economies of China (+30%), Russia (+21%), Brazil (+44%) and India (+33%). Major mature markets such as Germany (+4%), the USA (+5%), Canada (+6%) and Italy (+4%) also performed positively, while growth in expenditure on travel abroad from the Scandinavian markets, the Republic of Korea and Australia was particularly strong.

Outlook for 2012

Growth is expected to soften in the remainder of 2011 and international tourist arrivals are projected to end the year at between +4.0% and +4.5%, in line with UNWTO's forecast at the beginning of the year. For 2012, growth is forecast to be in the range of +3% to +4%, slightly lower than in 2011 but sustaining the positive results of 2010 (+7%) and 2011.

"A stalled economic recovery and increased financial and fiscal challenges have brought growing uncertainty to the tourism market. Nevertheless, the trends of recent months make us confident that though at a slower pace, international tourism will continue to grow in 2012, creating much needed exports and jobs in many economies around the world," said Mr. Rifai.

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