

Tourism growth will continue, says UNWTO

World tourist destinations that have been slow to recover from the economic downturn can expect to see more demand towards the end of the year, according to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) World Tourism Barometer. International tourist arrivals grew by 4.5% in the first four months of 2011, according to the latest issue of the UNWTO report.

“Global tourism continues to consolidate the recovery of 2010 despite the impact of recent developments in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as the tragic events in Japan, which are temporarily affecting travel flows to these regions,” said UNWTO secretary General Taleb Rifai.

The Barometer found growth in all regions with the exception of the Middle East. Europe exceeded expectations (6%) and posted the highest growth in the first four months of 2011. In the Americas, international tourist arrivals increased by 5%, driven by the strong results of South America, which contrasted with the below average growth of North and Central American destinations, according to the Barometer. Some sub-regions achieved double-digit growth: South America (17%), South Asia (14%), and Southeast Asia (10%).

Between January and April 2011, destinations worldwide recorded 268 million international tourist arrivals, some 12 million more compared to the 256 million registered in the same period in 2010. April was the strongest month with an estimated increase of 6%.

“As the peak tourist season gets underway in the northern hemisphere, short-term prospects remain positive,” the barometer predicts.

UNWTO maintains its forecast for international tourist arrivals in 2011 at between 4% and 5%, slightly above the long-term average and in line with previous assessments. The developments in the Middle East, North Africa, and Japan are not expected to significantly alter the global forecast.

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