

International tourism up 4% in first half of 2019 - UNWTO

By **Hibah Noor** on September, 10 2019 | Industry News



International tourist arrivals grew 4% from January to June 2019, compared to the same period last year, according to the latest UNWTO World Tourism Barometer.

Growth was led by the Middle East (+8%) and Asia and the Pacific (+6%). International arrivals in Europe grew 4%, while Africa (+3%) and the Americas (+2%) enjoyed more moderate growth.

Destinations worldwide received 671 million international tourist arrivals between January and June 2019, almost 30 million more than in the same period of 2018 and a continuation of the growth recorded last year.

Growth in arrivals is returning to its historic trend and is in line with UNWTO's forecast of 3% to 4% growth in international tourist arrivals for the full year 2019, as reported in the January Barometer.

The drivers of these results have been a strong economy, affordable air travel, increased air connectivity and enhanced visa facilitation. However, weaker economic indicators, prolonged uncertainty about Brexit, trade and technological tensions and rising geopolitical challenges, have started to take a toll on business and consumer confidence, as reflected in a more cautious UNWTO Confidence Index.

Regional performance

In the Americas (+2%), results improved in the second quarter after a weak start of the year. The Caribbean (+11%) benefited from strong US demand and continued to rebound strongly from the impact of hurricanes Irma and Maria in late 2017, a challenge which the region unfortunately faces once again.

North America recorded 2% growth, while Central America (+1%) showed mixed results. In South America, arrivals were down 5% partly due to a decline in outbound travel from Argentina, which affected neighboring destinations.

Europe grew 4% in the first six months of 2019, with a positive first quarter followed by an above-average second quarter (April: +8% and June: +6%), reflecting a busy Easter and the start of the summer season in the world's most visited region. Intraregional demand fueled much of this growth, though performance among major European source markets was uneven, amid weakening economies. Demand from overseas markets such as the US, China, Japan and the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) also contributed to these positive results.

Asia and the Pacific (+6%) recorded above world average growth during the January-June 2019 period, largely fueled by Chinese outbound travel. Growth was led by South Asia and North-East Asia (both +7%), followed by South-East Asia (+5%), and arrivals in Oceania increased by 1%.

In Africa, limited available data points to a 3% increase in international arrivals. North Africa (+9%) continues to show robust results, following two years of double-digit figures, while growth in Sub-Saharan Africa was flat (+0%).

The Middle East (+8%) saw two strong quarters, reflecting a positive winter season, as well as an increase in demand during Ramadan in May and Eid Al-Fitr in June.

Chinese outbound tourism (+14% in trips abroad) continued to drive arrivals in many destinations in the region during the first half of the year though spending on international travel was 4% lower in real terms in the first quarter. Trade tensions with the US as well as the slight depreciation of the yuan may influence destination choice by Chinese travelers in the short term, UNWTO said.

Outbound travel from the US, the world's second-largest spender, remained solid (+7%), supported by a strong dollar. In Europe, spending on international tourism by France (+8%) and Italy (+7%) was robust, though the UK (+3%) and Germany (+2%) reported more moderate figures.

Among the Asian markets, spending from Japan (+11%) was strong while the Republic of Korea spent 8% less in the first half of 2019, partly due to the depreciation of the Korean won. Australia spent 6% more on international tourism.

The Russian Federation saw a 4% decline in spending in the first quarter, following two years of strong rebound. Spending out of Brazil and Mexico were down 5% and 13% respectively, partly reflecting the wider situation of the two largest Latin American economies.