

International Tourism 2010: Multi-speed recovery

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International tourism recovered strongly in 2010 according to the Advance Release of the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer. International tourist arrivals were up by almost 7% to 935 million, following the 4% decline in 2009 – the year hardest hit by the global economic crisis. The vast majority of destinations worldwide posted positive figures, sufficient to offset recent losses or bring them close to this target. However, recovery came at different speeds and was primarily driven by emerging economies.

Multi-speed recovery for international tourism in 2010

Boosted by improved economic conditions worldwide, international tourism has recovered faster than expected from the impact of the global financial crisis and economic recession of late 2008 and 2009. International tourist arrivals were up by 6.7% compared to 2009, with positive growth reported in all world regions. Worldwide, the number of international tourist arrivals reached 935 million, up 58 million from 2009 and 22 million more than the pre-crisis peak level of 2008 (913 million).

While all regions posted growth in international tourist arrivals, emerging economies remain the main drivers of this recovery. This multi-speed recovery, lower in advanced economies (+5%), faster in emerging ones (+8%), is a reflection of the broader global economic situation and is set to dominate 2011 and the foreseeable future.

“The recovery in international tourism is good news, especially for those developing countries that rely on the sector for much needed revenue and jobs,” said UNWTO Secretary-General, Taleb Rifai. “The challenge now will be to consolidate this growth over the coming years amid a still uncertain global economic environment”.

Asia (+13%) was the first region to recover and the strongest growing region in 2010. International tourist arrivals into Asia reached a new record at 204 million last year, up from 181 million in 2009. **Africa** (+6% to 49 million), the only region to show positive figures in 2009, maintained growth during 2010, benefiting from increasing economic dynamism and the hosting of events such as the FIFA World Cup in South Africa. Results returned to double digits in the **Middle East** (+14% to 60 million) where almost all destinations grew by 10% or more.

In **Europe** (+3% to 471 million) recovery was slower than in other regions due to the air traffic disruption caused by the eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano and the economic uncertainty affecting the euro zone. However, the sector gained momentum from the second half of the year and some individual countries performed well above the regional average, but this was not sufficient to bring overall results above the losses of 2009.

The **Americas** (+8% to 151 million) rebounded from the decline in 2009 brought on by the economic hardship suffered in North America and the impact of the influenza A(H1N1) outbreak. The return to growth in the US economy has helped improve the region's results as a whole, as did the increasing regional integration in Central and South America and the vitality of Latin American economies. Growth was strongest in South America (+10%).

Subregional results clearly reflect this multi-speed recovery. A few subregions such as North and Sub-Saharan Africa and South-East Asia were not impacted by the global crisis and reported continuous growth throughout 2009 and 2010. Among the subregions affected by the crisis in 2009, North-East and South Asia, North and South America, and Western Europe saw growth in arrivals in 2010 fully compensate for previous losses and exceeding pre-crisis peak levels. The Caribbean and Central America are just back at 2008 levels, while in Central and Eastern Europe, and Southern and Mediterranean Europe growth was still insufficient to make up for the lost tourist flows of 2009. In contrast, Northern Europe did not return to positive growth in 2010.

Growth in international tourism receipts continued to lag somewhat behind that of arrivals during 2010, as is the trend during periods of recovery. Among the top outbound tourism markets in terms of expenditure abroad, emerging economies continue to drive growth: China (+17%), the Russian Federation (+26%), Saudi Arabia (+28%) and Brazil (+52%). Of the traditional source markets, Australia (+9%), Canada (+8%), Japan (+7%) and France (+4%) rebounded, while more modest growth at 2% came from the USA, Germany and Italy. On the opposite side of the spectrum, expenditure abroad from the UK was still down by 4% in 2010.

2010 in review

International tourism demand held up well in 2010, despite persistent economic uncertainty in some major markets, the natural disasters suffered in some countries, political and social unrest in others, the serious disruption of air travel following a volcanic eruption in Iceland last April and the problematic weather conditions in parts of Europe and the USA in December.

“Tourism has once again proven to be a highly resilient sector. Nevertheless, we need to work closer and better towards increased integration and cooperation between all players involved in the tourism value chain to increase our competitiveness and respond more effectively to challenges such as the ones that emerged from the closure of European air space last April”, said Mr. Rifai.

2010 also saw the rise in importance of mega-events – sport, culture and exhibitions - in terms of their extraordinary ability to attract visitors and position host countries as attractive tourism destinations. Notable examples include the Winter Olympics in Canada, the Shanghai Expo in China, the FIFA World Cup in South Africa and the Commonwealth Games in India.

Confirming these trends, the over 300 experts from around the globe who constitute the UNWTO Panel of Experts evaluated 2010's overall performance very positively and much above their expectations at the beginning of the year. The Panel maintained this positive outlook for 2011.

Growth to continue in 2011

Following a year of global recovery in 2010, growth is expected to continue for the tourism sector in 2011 but at a slower pace. UNWTO forecasts international tourist arrivals to grow at between 4% to 5% in 2011, a rate slightly above the long-term average.

Persistent high unemployment remains a major concern, with the gradual recovery in employment expected for 2011 still too weak to compensate for the jobs lost during the economic crisis.

The recent tendency towards introducing and increasing taxation on travel as a means of balancing public accounts represent a further challenge to the sector. “While we fully understand the need for fiscal consolidation, UNWTO will continue to alert governments to the fact that these taxes seriously affect tourism’s proven capacity to stimulate job creation and economic growth, impacting negatively on their own economies and on the development possibilities of emerging economies,” said Mr. Rifai.

Relevant links:

[More information on 2010 International Tourism Results and Prospects for 2011](#)

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International Tourist Arrivals: by (Sub)region

	Full year			Share 2010 ^a (%)	Change	
	2008	2009	2010 ^a (million)		09/08	10 ^a /09 (%)
World	913	877	934	100	-4,0	6,7
Advanced economies	489	468	493	52,7	-4,3	5,3
Emerging economies	424	409	442	47,3	-3,5	6,2
<i>By UNWTO regions:</i>						
Europe	480,6	456,9	471,5	50,4	-5,0	3,2
Northern Europe	56,4	53,4	53,3	5,7	-5,5	-0,1
Western Europe	153,2	148,6	156,1	16,7	-3,0	5,1
Central/Eastern Eu.	100,0	89,9	93,7	10,0	-10,1	4,2
Southern/Mediterr. Eu.	171,2	165,1	168,4	18,0	-3,5	2,0
Asia and the Pacific	184,1	181,0	203,8	21,8	-1,7	12,6
North-East Asia	101,0	98,1	111,7	11,9	-2,9	13,9
South-East Asia	61,8	62,1	69,6	7,4	0,5	12,1
Oceania	11,1	10,9	11,6	1,2	-1,6	6,0
South Asia	10,2	9,9	10,9	1,2	-3,4	10,1
Americas	147,6	140,5	151,2	16,2	-4,9	7,7
North America	97,7	92,1	99,2	10,6	-5,8	7,8
Caribbean	20,1	19,5	20,3	2,2	-2,8	3,9
Central America	8,2	7,8	8,3	0,9	-7,4	8,3
South America	21,6	21,3	23,5	2,6	-2,3	10,4
Africa	44,6	45,6	48,7	5,2	3,2	6,4
North Africa	17,1	17,6	18,6	2,0	2,8	5,8
Subsaharan Africa	27,2	28,2	30,1	3,2	3,6	6,9
Middle East	55,9	52,7	60,0	6,4	-5,7	13,9

Source: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) ©

(Data as collected by UNWTO January 2011)