

International Tourist Numbers Down 65% in First Half of 2020, UNWTO Reports

Madrid, Spain, 15 September 2020 – *International tourist arrivals plunged 93% in June when compared to 2019, with the latest data from the World Tourism Organization showing the severe impact COVID-19 has had on the sector. According to the new issue of the World Tourism Barometer from the United Nations specialized agency, international tourist arrivals dropped by 65% during the first half of the year. This represents an unprecedented decrease, as countries around the world closed their borders and introduced travel restrictions in response to the pandemic.*

Over recent weeks, a growing number of destinations have started to open up again to international tourists. UNWTO reports that, as of early September, **53% of destinations had eased travel restrictions**. Nevertheless, many governments remain cautious, and this latest report shows that the lockdowns introduced during the first half of the year have had a massive impact on international tourism. The sharp and sudden fall in arrivals has placed millions of jobs and businesses at risk.

Counting the economic cost

According to UNWTO, the massive drop in international travel demand over the period January-June 2020 translates into a loss of **440 million international arrivals** and about **US\$ 460 billion** in export revenues from international tourism. This is around five times the loss in international tourism receipts recorded in 2009 amid the global economic and financial crisis.

UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili said: "The latest World Tourism Barometer shows the deep impact this pandemic is having on tourism, a sector upon which millions of people depend for their livelihoods. However, safe and responsible international travel is now possible in many parts of the world, and it is imperative that governments work closely with the private sector to get global tourism moving again. Coordinated action is key."

All global regions hit hard

Despite the gradual reopening of many destinations since the second half of May, the anticipated improvement in international tourism numbers during the peak summer season in the Northern Hemisphere did not materialize. Europe was the second-hardest

hit of all global regions, with a 66% decline in tourist arrivals in the first half of 2020. The Americas (-55%), Africa and the Middle East (both -57%) also suffered. However, Asia and the Pacific, the first region to feel the impact of COVID-19 on tourism, was the hardest hit, with a 72% fall in tourists for the six-month period.

At the sub-regional level, North-East Asia (-83%) and Southern Mediterranean Europe (-72%) suffered the largest declines. All world regions and sub-regions recorded **declines of more than 50% in arrivals** in January-June 2020. The contraction of international demand is also reflected in double-digit declines in international tourism expenditure among large markets. Major outbound markets such as the United States and China continue to be at a standstill, though some markets such as France and Germany have shown some improvement in June.

Looking ahead, it seems likely that reduced travel demand and consumer confidence will continue to impact results for the rest of the year. In May, UNWTO outlined three possible scenarios, pointing to declines of 58% to 78% in international tourist arrivals in 2020. Current trends through August point to a drop in demand closer to 70% (Scenario 2), especially now as some destinations re-introduce restrictions on travel.

The extension of the scenarios to 2021 point to a change in trend next year, based on the assumptions of a gradual and linear lifting of travel restrictions, the availability of a vaccine or treatment and a return of traveller confidence. Nonetheless, despite this, the return to 2019 levels in terms of tourist arrivals would take between 2½ to 4 years.

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[More than 50% of Destinations Have Eased Travel Restrictions](#)

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[UNWTO and COVID-19: Measures to Support Travel and Tourism](#)

[World Tourism Barometer - Volume 18 • Issue 5](#)

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