Tourist Numbers Down 83% but Confidence Slowly Rising

Madrid, Spain, 2 June 2021 - International tourist arrivals were down 83% in the first quarter of 2021 as widespread travel restrictions remained in place. However, the UNWTO Confidence Index shows signs of a slow uptick in confidence.

Between January and March 2021 destinations around the world welcomed 180 million fewer international arrivals compared to the first quarter of last year. Asia and the Pacific continued to suffer the lowest levels of activity with a 94% drop in international arrivals over the three-month period. Europe recorded the second largest decline with -83%, followed by Africa (-81%), the Middle East (-78%) and the Americas (-71%). This all follows on from the 73% fall in worldwide international tourist arrivals recorded in 2020, making it the worst year on record for the sector.

Lack of coordination harms #RestartTourism

UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili comments: “There is significant pent-up demand and we see confidence slowly returning. Vaccinations will be key for recovery, but we must improve coordination and communication while making testing easier and more affordable if we want to see a rebound for the summer season in the northern hemisphere.”

The latest survey of the UNWTO Panel of Tourism Experts shows prospects for the May-August period improving slightly. Alongside this, the pace of the vaccination rollout in some key source markets as well as policies to restart tourism safely, most notably the EU Digital Green Certificate, have boosted hopes for a rebound in some of these markets.

Overall, 60% expect a rebound in international tourism only in 2022, up from 50% in the January 2021 survey. The remaining 40% see a potential rebound in 2021, though this is down slightly from the percentage in January. Nearly half of the experts do not see a return to 2019 international tourism levels before 2024 or later, while the percentage of respondents indicating a return to pre-pandemic levels in 2023 has somewhat decreased (37%), when compared to the January survey.

Tourism experts point to the continued imposition of travel restrictions and the lack of coordination in travel and health protocols as the main obstacle to the sector’s rebound.
**The Impact of COVID on Tourism cuts worldwide global exports by 4%**

The UNWTO World Tourism Barometer also shows the economic toll of the pandemic. International tourism receipts in 2020 declined by 64% in real terms (local currencies, constant prices), equivalent to a drop of over US$ 900 billion, cutting the overall worldwide exports value by over 4% in 2020. The total loss in export revenues from international tourism (including passenger transport) amounts to nearly US$ 1.1 trillion. Asia and the Pacific (-70% in real terms) and the Middle East (-69%) saw the largest drops in receipts.

**Related Links:**

- UNWTO Opens Call for ‘Best Tourism Villages’
- UNWTO and IATA Collaborate on Destination Tracker to Restore Confidence in Travel
- UNWTO Tourism Data Dashboard