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## **Global tourism continues to rebuild, UN data reveals**



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International tourism continues to recover from the global financial crisis and downturn of 2008-09, rising in every region of the world except the Middle East and North Africa during the first two months of this year, according to new United Nations figures.

The latest update of UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) barometer, [released yesterday](#), show that international tourist arrivals grew by almost 5 per cent to more than 124 million in January and February this year compared to the same period in 2010.

South America and South Asia were the best performers, with international visitor numbers leaping by 15 per cent in both regions, while sub-Saharan Africa (13 per cent) and Central and Eastern Europe (12 per cent) also posted strong gains.

Europe overall performed better than expected, partly because of travel redirected to Southern and Mediterranean Europe following the unrest in many nations in North Africa and the Middle East, where visitor numbers slumped by 9 per cent and 10 per cent respectively.

Taleb Rifai, the Secretary-General of the UNWTO, said the latest data indicates that the tourism sector is consolidating the recovery begun last year.

“News is especially positive for emerging economies and developing countries, particularly for Africa, where tourism is increasingly recognized as a driver of development, exports and jobs,” he said.

Mr. Rifai said the fall in visitor demand in Tunisia and Egypt after the recent unrest there, and a similar slump in Japan following the March earthquake and tsunami, is now “expected to have

bottomed out and the recovery of these important destinations will surely be consolidated during the year.”

The Secretary-General took part earlier this week in a special event in Istanbul, Turkey, linking tourism with sustainable development and poverty reduction. This was held on the sidelines of the UN conference on the world’s least developed countries (LDCs).

He said it was surprising that the development agenda has given such a low priority so far to tourism, despite the industry’s “proven contribution to foreign exchange generation, job creation and socio-economic development.”

The gathering brought together 15 tourism ministers from LDCs as well as senior UN officials and representatives of donor countries to discuss ways to integrate tourism into development plans.

Receipts from international tourism are estimated to have topped \$919 billion last year, up from \$851 billion a year earlier.

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[Global tourism posts strong recovery in 2010, says UN agency](#)