

2018 totals 1.4 billion international tourist arrivals

According to the latest UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, international tourist arrivals grew by 6% in 2018, totalling 1.4 billion, above the 3.7% growth registered in the global economy. The Middle East (+10%), Africa (+7%), Asia and the Pacific and Europe (both at +6%) led growth in 2018. Arrivals to the Americas were below the world average (+3%).



ArtemBali on [Unsplash](#)

"The growth of tourism in recent years confirms that the sector is today one of the most powerful drivers of economic growth and development. It is our responsibility to manage it in a sustainable manner and translate this expansion into real benefits for all countries, and particularly, to all local communities, creating opportunities for jobs and entrepreneurship and leaving no one behind" said Zurab Pololikashvili, UNWTO Secretary-General. "This is why UNWTO is focussing 2019 on education, skills and job creation."

UNWTO's long-term forecast published in 2010 predicted the 1.4 billion mark of international tourist arrivals for 2020. Yet stronger economic growth, more affordable air travel, technological changes, new businesses models and greater visa facilitation around the world have accelerated growth in recent years.

Results by region

International tourist arrivals in **Europe** reached 713 million in 2018, a notable 6% increase over an exceptionally strong 2017. Growth was driven by Southern and Mediterranean Europe (+7%), Central and Eastern Europe (+6%) and Western Europe (+6%). Results in Northern Europe were flat due to the weakness of arrivals to the United Kingdom.

Asia and the Pacific (+6%) recorded 343 million international tourist arrivals in 2018. Arrivals in South-East Asia grew 7%, followed by North-East Asia (+6%) and South Asia (+5%). Oceania showed more moderate growth at +3%.

The Americas (+3%) welcomed 217 million international arrivals in 2018, with mixed results across destinations. Growth was led by North America (+4%), and followed by South America (+3%), while Central America and the Caribbean (both -2%) reached very mixed results, the latter reflecting the impact of the September 2017 hurricanes Irma and Maria.

Data from **Africa** points to a 7% increase in 2018 (North Africa at +10% and sub-Saharan +6%), reaching an estimated 67 million arrivals.

The Middle East (+10%) showed solid results last year consolidating its 2017 recovery, with international tourist arrivals reaching 64 million.

Growth expected to return to historical trends in 2019

Based on current trends, economic prospects and the UNWTO Confidence Index, UNWTO forecasts international arrivals to grow 3% to 4% next year, more in line with historic growth trends.

As a general backdrop, the stability of fuel prices tends to translate into affordable air travel while air connectivity continues to improve in many destinations, facilitating the diversification of source markets. Trends also show strong outbound travel from emerging markets, especially India and Russia but also from smaller Asian and Arab source markets.

At the same time, the global economic slowdown, the uncertainty related to the Brexit, as well as geopolitical and trade tensions may prompt a "wait and see" attitude among investors and travellers.

Overall, 2019 is expected to see the consolidation among consumers of emerging trends such as the quest for 'travel to change and to show', 'the pursuit of healthy options' such as walking, wellness and sports tourism, 'multigenerational travel' as a result of demographic changes and more responsible travel.

"Digitalisation, new business models, more affordable travel and societal changes are expected to continue shaping our sector, so both destination and companies need to adapt if they want to remain competitive", added Pololikashvili.

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