News Release

MADRID, **17 SEPTEMBER** 2026

UN Tourism

International tourism holds steady with 0.4% growth in first half of 2026 as Middle East conflict and rising costs weigh on momentum

Madrid, Spain, 17 September 2026 - International tourism grew modestly in the first half of 2026, with global arrivals up by 0.4% even as insecurity in the Middle East, elevated oil prices, and broader inflationary pressures tested the sector's resilience.

According to the latest World Tourism Barometer from UN Tourism, an estimated 690 million tourists travelled internationally between January and June 2026, some 3 million more than the same period last year. While global arrivals increased by 2% in Q1 2026, they then dropped by 1% in Q2, following a 3% decline in April. That drop was largely due to the calendar effect of the Easter holiday period starting in March and because of the impacts of the Middle East conflict.

Globally, arrivals then dropped 3% in June. That was driven by a 6% decline in Western Europe, partly due to a heatwave in some destinations. South-East Asia recorded 5% fewer arrivals in June as a result of weaker demand from Asian markets, geopolitical tensions, air travel disruptions through the Middle East, and increased travel costs. Some destinations in Oceania (-6% in June) were also impacted by Typhoon Sinlaku in Q2.

UN Tourism Secretary-General Shaikha Al Nuwais said: "The latest data shows a sector absorbing real pressure and finding a way forward. Tourism has not stopped growing, but that growth is fragile. The Middle East situation has touched destinations far beyond the region itself and serves as a clear reminder that, in such a connected world, resilience needs to be built everywhere and not just when a crisis begins."

Performance by region

The World Tourism Barometer breaks down performance by region and sub-region. The data shows:

- In the first half of 2026, **Africa** (+4%) and **Europe** (+3%) recorded solid growth in arrivals, while the **Americas** saw a 2% increase, with mixed results across sub-regions.

- Arrivals in **Asia and the Pacific** grew by 1% over this six-month period but remained 11% below 2019 levels as disruptions to air connectivity, higher air fares, and uncertainty affected intra-regional demand.

UN Tourism is a specialized agency of the United Nations
World Tourism Organization
C/ Poeta Joan Maragall 42, 28020 Madrid, Spain – Tel: (34) 91 567 81 00 – info@unwto.org / unwto.org

- **North-East Asia** saw 3% growth in the first half of 2026, while South Asia (-5%) and South-East Asia (-1%) recorded declines when compared with the same period in 2025.

- The **Middle East** saw a 22% drop over this period, as it was directly impacted by the conflict.

Although the conflict has negatively affected international tourism in the Middle East and other regions since early March 2026, disruptions to air traffic gradually eased in May and June following the announcement of a ceasefire. That resulted in the reopening of some air routes and led to an uneven rebound in consumer sentiment.

Looking ahead

In view of the latest data and current geopolitical volatility, international tourist arrivals are now expected to grow by between 1% and 2% globally in 2026, compared to UN Tourism's January forecast of 3% to 4%. However, this will depend on the conflict's actual duration and its effect on oil prices and overall inflation.

At the same time, international travellers are expected to continue to seek value for money and travel either closer to home or domestically, again in response to elevated prices and uncertainty.

Related Links

World Tourism Barometer September 2026