

Spain attracts near 60 mln tourists in 2007-group

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MADRID, Jan 14 (Reuters) - The growth of city breaks and low-cost airlines helped Spain attract 59.7 million tourists last year, 2.2 percent more than visited the world's second most popular destination in 2006, its main tourism trade body said on Monday.

Exceltur, which groups the country's major hotel chains, travel agents, tour operators and airlines, said Spain should break the 60 million visitor barrier this year.

"For 2008, we expect 60.7 million tourists in Spain," said Exceltur Executive Vice-President Jose Luis Zoreda, announcing the body's estimate ahead of official government statistics.

Exceltur President Jose Maria Rossell said demand for urban hotels grew 6.3 percent during the year and did not appear to have slackened.

However, despite another year of growth, tourism bosses have expressed concern over falling receipts and the growing challenge posed by cheaper rivals to its traditional beach holiday offering. Real spending slipped 0.7 percent to 37.24 billion euros, while the average spend per tourist dropped 2.8 percent to 628.2 euros.

The sun and beach segment, which accounts for around 70 percent of Spain's tourism income, received 0.7 percent more visitors while tourist numbers in rival destinations like Turkey and Egypt rose 18 percent, said Zoreda.

With the rise of short city breaks, tourists spent less time and money in Spain, continuing the trend of recent years, Exceltur figures showed. (Reporting by Ben Harding, editing by David Christian-Edwards)