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Spain's tourism bounces back

Spain's tourism industry has bounced back after the Madrid bomb attacks in March which killed 191 people.

In a study released at the Global Travel and Tourism Council Summit in Qatar, travel sector figures indicate a prompt and full recovery.

Following the 11 March disaster, Spain has compared well with other countries that suffered similar attacks.

"The effects were concentrated exclusively on the city of Madrid" the report said.

" In tourist areas of the Mediterranean coast the impact has been negligible" "
Jose Luis Zoreda, chief executive Exceltur

In the study undertaken by Exceltur, a lobby group of 29 of Spain's main tourist groups and companies, sector growth for the first quarter was between 3% and 4%.

Tourism would have been "extraordinarily good" had the attacks not happened, said Jose Luis Zoreda, chief executive of Exceltur.

Figures are most encouraging in the tourist areas of the Mediterranean coast and the Canary Islands where only around one third of businesses noted an effect on sales in the days following the blasts.

For almost half of businesses the impact was less than 5% and it was "business as usual" by 8 April, the report said.

Main damage

In Madrid, 82% of tourist operators suffered sales losses following the attacks and 61% of Madrid hotel operators had not returned to normal sales three weeks later.

The study noted that tourist business shares recovered on the Madrid stock exchange within days and some rose to levels even higher than before the attacks.

This is welcome news after figures showed that tourism in Spain had plunged 13% in March 2003 following the launch of the US-led invasion of Iraq.

The tourism industry accounts for 12% of Spain's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or total economic output and supports over one and a half million jobs.

The 4th World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) Summit in Qatar has 600 delegates attending, including chief executives of over 100 of the world's top companies in the industry.