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Spain tourism in excellent health despite Madrid bombing

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In a presentation at the World Travel and Tourism Council's (WTTC) Fourth Global Travel and Tourism Summit in Doha, Qatar, Madrid's head of finance and tourism development, Miguel Angel Villanueva, declared Spain's tourism industry enjoyed "excellent health" despite the terrorism setback. The Spanish capital recovered rapidly from the effects of the train bombings on March 11, delegates were told, and the city's response set an example for the whole world.

Mr. Villanueva said the city's emergency plan for catastrophes was put into action on the day of the Madrid bombings and it worked effectively. "It is no easy task to find a city amongst the large cities of the world that is as outstanding in the face of such disgraceful events. Madrid has proven to be an example to the world of a civic city with solidarity, respect and a level head in bad times, but above all it has been an example of a coordinated, effective disciplined city that has excellent public services."

Mr. Villanueva paid tribute to the international support Spain had received in the aftermath of the bombings, and the large presence of foreign representatives at the demonstrations against terrorism in the days immediately following the attacks. "The large numbers of those attending and the international presence are the best signs of unanimous rejection of terrorism," said Villanueva.

"In the following days, there were spontaneous demonstrations of solidarity and protest in every workplace at public institutions and private organizations, both in Spain and in the rest of the world. More than one month has gone by since these terrible events, and our city has recovered its normality."

The Spanish authorities have introduced additional surveillance measures including an increase in the number of security forces in locations where there are large numbers of people, notably airports, train stations and the Madrid Metro system. Local police now patrol the Metro lines and the army is helping to monitor the railroad infrastructure throughout Spain. Sensitization campaigns have also been carried out for the population so that the people can report any abnormalities they have witnessed. This was fundamental to doing away with the terrorist cell in the weeks after what happened," said Villanueva.

The security measures that have been introduced not only restored normal life within the city, but are also turning Madrid into one of the safest cities in the world.

The WTTC Summit was told that Spain's tourism sector, like the rest of the world, started off 2003 within a scenario of international uncertainty, with threats from economic crises, the Iraq war and other conflicts. But the most pessimistic predictions were not confirmed and Spain ended the year with a 0.3 percent increase in the number of tourists visiting the country.

Spanish tourism representatives told the delegates that the most important markets for Spain were the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy and the Netherlands. 82 percent of visitors were on vacation, though the business tourism sector grew by about 11 percent in 2003.

Business tourism plays a significant role in Madrid with six out of every ten people visiting on business, in contrast to the rest of Spain where sun and beach vacations are the main attraction.