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Global tourism poised to grow

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DOHA, QATAR — The global travel and tourism industry should grow by nearly 6 per cent this year, showing it has bounced back from the effects of terrorism, war and the SARS epidemic, industry experts said yesterday.

The industry, which employs more than 8 per cent of the world's work force, is poised to grow at 4.5 per cent annually over the next decade, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council.

The council told a tourism conference of 800 delegates that it projected combined growth of 5.9 per cent for all travel-related industries this year, bringing them to an aggregate income of \$5.5-trillion (U.S.).

During the past three years, the industries have been hampered by the 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and an outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome in Asia and Canada.

But countries were learning how to entice tourists to return after such setbacks, council chairman Vincent Wolfington said.

"Travellers will travel even when they know there is a risk of terrorism, as long as they feel that countries they are travelling to are on top of it, and trying to minimize the risks," said Mr. Wolfington, speaking on the sidelines of the two-day conference that ended yesterday.

"The trend we have seen since

9/11 is that with each incidence of terrorism, the rebound and the resilience of the economy has been quicker."

Delegates from Turkey and Spain confirmed his point, saying their economies had taken only weeks to recover from recent terror atrocities.

Jose Luis Zoreda, who runs Exceltur, which represents the Spanish travel industry, said 80 per cent of firms in Spain have reported that they recovered within a month from the March 11 train bombings that killed nearly 200 people.

"Despite the events of March 11, our tourism forecasts for 2004 remain unchanged," Mr. Zoreda said.

The deputy undersecretary at the Turkish Ministry of Tourism, Ali Alp, said his country had also had recovered quickly from suicide bombings that killed 62 people in Istanbul in November.