

## Things are looking up for global tourism industry

**Travellers are taking terror attacks, war and Sars in their stride, with air traffic growing by 10 per cent in the first quarter**

DOHA - Global tourism appears to have recovered from the triple whammy - terrorism, war and the Sars epidemic - with the latest figures predicting strong growth across the board.

Air traffic climbed 10 per cent in the first quarter and experts forecast growth of nearly 6 per cent this year.

'The industry is on track to outperform our forecast of 6.9 per cent growth in passenger volumes over 2003 levels,' Mr Giovanni Bisignani, director-general of the International Air Transport Association (Iata), told 600 delegates at the Global Travel and Tourism Summit in Doha on Sunday.

'More importantly, the industry is showing clear signs of its ability to match capacity to demand.'

Traffic grew in all regions, said Iata, which represents 270 airlines or about 98 per cent of global scheduled air traffic.

Middle-Eastern carriers posted March year-on-year, same-month jumps of 40.2 per cent for passenger traffic, it said.

North American passenger traffic was up 15 per cent while Asia was up 10.2 per cent, the organisation said.

During the past three years, the industries had been set back by the Sept 11, 2001 terror attacks in the United States, wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the Sars epidemic in Asia.

But countries were learning how to get tourists to return after such setbacks, said Mr Vincent Wolfington, chairman of the World Travel and Tourism Council.

'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 minimise the risks,' he said.

'The trend we have seen since 9/11 is that with each incidence of terrorism, the rebound and the resilience of the economy have been quicker.'

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

For example, 80 per cent of firms in Spain had reported being able to recover within four weeks from the March 11 Madrid train blasts, said Mr Jose Luis Zoreda of Exceltur, which represents the Spanish travel industry.

Mr Ali Alp, Deputy Undersecretary of Turkey's Tourism Ministry, said his nation also recovered quickly from the November suicide attacks in Istanbul.

'Just after the incidents in Istanbul, there was a roughly 50 per cent drop in tourist arrivals to Istanbul,' he said. 'But we have recovered and tourist arrivals are above last year's.'

Iata's Mr Bisignani took up the summit theme of Driving Change and urged the travel and tourism sector, battered by three tough years, 'to unite to push forward an agenda for change'.

'Together, we must drive the changes needed to ensure sustainable profitability,' he said.

'To survive, airlines reduced their cost structure and improved efficiency. It is now time for the air transport and tourism industries to strengthen their partnership.'

'Together, we must ensure that our monopoly infrastructure providers share our drive for cost-reduction and efficiency and that governments understand the need for greater liberalisation.' -- AFP, AP

