

Tourist sector set for bumper year due to foreign demand

A. S., **Madrid**

Output in Spain’s key tourist industry is expected to increase strongly as a result of an influx of foreign visitors over the summer, according to a report released Thursday by leading lobby Exceltur.

Exceltur revised its estimate for the GDP growth of the sector to 2.6 percent from 2.2 percent previously, which translates into additional income of €2.896 billion.

“All of this growth is explained exclusively by the greater number of foreign visitors,” the report said, with Spain benefiting from visitors switching from rival countries in North Africa due to the unrest there. That more than offset weak domestic demand.

In the first eight months of the year, the number of foreign visitors to Spain was up 7.8 percent at just shy of 40 million, with a record increase of 9.4 percent in August when Pope Benedict XVI’s visit to Madrid attracted many people. Exceltur also noted “unusual growth” in the number of Russian visitors.

Exceltur said the €23.722 billion in revenues attracted by the sector from overseas visitors covered 51.4 percent of Spain’s external funding needs for this year.

It estimated the pick-up in the sector helped create over 36,000 jobs in the first eight months of the year, an increase of 1.8 percent, compared with a fall of 1.3 percent for the economy as a whole.