

Number of global tourists to top 1 billion this year

MEXICO CITY: The number of people vacationing abroad this year is expected to top a billion for the first time, the head of the global tourism authority said.

The forecast is higher than expected and presents an opportunity for governments to create jobs in difficult economic times, added Taleb Rifai, secretary general of the World Tourism Organisation.

"We will see more than a billion tourists this year, that's virtually a seventh of the world population," Rifai told a two-day meeting in Mexico of tourism ministers from the Group of 20 major economies. "It's a first in history."

Statistics for the first quarter of 2012 showed a 5.8 percent increase in the flow of tourists compared to the same period in 2011, Rifai said late on Tuesday. That's higher than a previously anticipated increase of about 3 to 4 percent over the course of the entire year, he added.

In 2011, the Spain-based World Tourism Organisation recorded 980 million international tourists, a 4 percent increase compared to 2010.

Rifai urged meeting participants to come up with ways to use tourism to create much-needed employment in "a world in need of growth and economic stimulation."

Source: AFP