

China stands as world's biggest tourism source market for 2012: UNWTO

MADRID, April 4 (Xinhua) -- The United Nations World Tourism Organization this Thursday confirmed that 2012 saw China become the top tourist source market in the world. In 2012 Chinese expenditure on travel abroad climbed to 102 billion U.S. dollars, culminating a period in which it has been the most rapidly growing source market for tourism in the world. Since the turn of the century, there has been over an eightfold increase in the number of overseas trips made by Chinese travelers from 10 million who travelled to other countries in 2000, up to 83 million who went abroad in 2012. This huge increase, which has been made possible by increased disposable income for Chinese people, which has created greater opportunities to visit other parts of the world, has also seen Chinese people spending more money on their foreign trips with the 102 billion dollars they spent in 2012, up an impressive 40 percent from the previous year when Chinese people spend 73 billion US dollars on foreign tourism. This data echoes the expectations of Taleb Rifai, the General Secretary of the UNWTO when he spoke to Xinhua at in their Madrid headquarters the start of the year. "The Chinese economy is opening up, it is growing and the rise of the middle class in China is a very important phenomenon, it is probably one of the main reasons behind this absolutely impressive growth in the outbound figures and data," he said in an interview which also saw him praise what China has to offer as a tourist destination for people from other parts of the world. "The outbound market of China being a source of tourism for the world has grown tremendously: 42 percent was the growth in 2012. Almost 80 million Chinese traveled out of China: That is a tremendous achievement." "But, even as an inbound destination, we have almost 60 million people visiting China. China is the third visited destination in the world today and all of this makes China very special to us," he added. In 2005, China had ranked in seventh place in terms of international tourism expenditure, behind Italy, Japan, France, Britain, Germany and the United States. It had moved into the third place by the end of 2011 and overtook Germany and the U.S. last year. However, China is not the only country to increase its importance as a source market; Russia and Brazil have also seen their significance increase with Russia, seeing a 32-percent rise in international tourist spending in 2012, while Brazil moved up to 12th place with expenditure of 22 billion U.S. dollars in a movement Rifai said would "surely continue to change the map of world tourism."