



Guidelines on Press Trips

1. The guiding principles for the Tourism industry are enshrined in the *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism* – a document approved by countries belonging to the World Tourism Organization in 1999 and recognised by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2001.

2. Article 6 of the *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism* – Obligations of Stakeholders in Tourism Development – outlines the responsibilities of tourism professionals, governments and the media. Regarding the media, it says:

The press, and particularly the specialized travel press and other media, including modern means of electronic communication, should issue honest and balanced information on events and situations that could influence the flow of tourists; they should also provide accurate and reliable information to the consumers of tourism services.

3. The key concepts in this brief mention of the media in the GCET are honesty, balance, accuracy and reliability in reporting – the very same ideals that journalists set out for themselves in their own ethical codes.

4. It is therefore not within the scope of the World Committee on Tourism Ethics to develop a new Code of Ethics for journalists, nor is it necessary as 215 such codes are already in existence around the world. (For more information see the web-site of the International Journalist´ Network www.ijnet) All media outlets and associations have codes of ethics or codes of conduct that set out professional responsibility to guide reporters and editors when dealing with sensitive or complex moral issues.

5. The four basic concepts - mentioned above - reoccur in one way or another in the existing media codes that were scrutinised: **Honesty** as the foundation for credibility; **fairness** in the use of the tremendous power that is wielded by the media; **independence** or objectivity which implies freedom from obligations and conflicts of interest; and **accountability** for what is reported.

Honesty

6. Honesty is the foundation of professional journalism. Honesty in reporting is the basis for credibility, and media that is not credible and reliable is not worth reading, listening to or watching.

7. The tourism industry and its marketing and promotion institutions understand today that it is better to work pro-actively with the media than to criticise and attack them for perceived biases or distortions. The tourism

industry has three primary objectives in working with the media. First and foremost the correction of any factually wrong or distorted perceptions; Secondly, providing a broader, more balanced and positive context in which the negative issues or incidents can be understood. And thirdly, generating a more objective, positive and if possible a more sympathetic understanding of the situation.

Fairness

8. Fairness in the media implies that the event should be reported in the context of the whole, and not in a selective or one-sided way. There are many complex situations and a simplistic report giving only one perspective - where a multiplicity of perspectives exist – would be unfair and a distortion of reality.

9. Fairness demands that no false accusations be made and that information be verified and the views of all sides be considered and reflected.

Independence

10. Independence and objectivity is another of the fundamental principles of good journalism. Media consumers want to know that the publications they read or TV reports they view can be trusted. They want to have confidence in the impartiality and even-handedness of the journalists. They want to be assured that the reports of destinations are the objective and balanced views of honest reporters and not the results of free trips and lavish entertainment by host destinations and countries.

11. It is also important for tourism officials to remember that independence is a cornerstone of good journalism and they should therefore refrain from any actions that could impinge on that independence of journalists, such as asking to see articles before they are published.

Accountability for what is published or broadcast

12. Reporters and media managers are held responsible for the stories they publish or broadcast. Journalists should recognize the potential impact their stories can have on the tourism industry, causing the possible loss of tourist flows and lost of jobs - or persuading tourists to go to destinations that are not worth the trip and the expense. This should not diminish their objectivity but increase the weight of their ethical responsibility.

13. Part of accountability also involves making biases known, for example, when accepting a free trip or other facilities for travel writing. If a reader or viewer discovers the reporter's conflict-of-interest he or she may feel deceived and the media will lose credibility. If the media consumer is advised of the potential bias, that piece of information will be taken into account when reading or viewing the rest of the story.

14. Against this background stakeholders in the tourism industry, including the media, should again take cognisance of the spirit and letter of the existing ethical codes and act in the most responsible way possible.

15. UNWTO acknowledges the value and importance of Press trips and will continue to assist member states to rectify wrong perceptions about their destinations by utilising Press trips as a powerful marketing and promotional tool. This should be done in a way that allows full expression of the values referred to in the preceding paragraphs.

16. UNWTO therefore:

- Calls on stakeholders in the Media (journalists, editors, publishers etc.) to adhere to their professional codes of ethics and/or codes of conduct and to report and write on tourism related issues in an objective, honest, balanced and independent way ;
- To be transparent regarding the nature of the trip and the benefits involved without sacrificing an objective and independent evaluation of the destination and the issues involved.
- Calls on Tourism Administrations and other agencies that arrange Press trips to recognise and respect the ethical values of journalists and accept their rights and duties to write independently about the events they see and experience;
- To give them as broad a perspective of the situation and afford them the opportunity of a wide exposure to write/report on the destination or situation in a way that complies with the letter and spirit of Art. 6 of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism.

* * *