High-Level Summit on Innovation and Sustainable Development in Tourism

Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation, 12 September 2019

CONCEPT NOTE

Tourism is one of the best positioned sectors to drive inclusive growth, create jobs, reduce poverty, and foster sustainable development, peace and understanding. Accounting for 10% of the world GDP and one in every ten jobs, tourism has a significant impact on exports, job creation, investment, and the development of infrastructure, cultural preservation and social inclusion.

UNWTO expects international tourist arrivals to reach 1.8 billion by 2030, if not before. As the sector is growing faster than the world economy or international trade, the need to decouple its growth from the use of natural resources is becoming even more pressing. Advancing sustainable consumption and production (SCP) patterns is therefore essential as well as taking into account emerging opportunities, such as the application of technology and innovation, to promote changes at scale in the tourism sector and maximize the sector’s contribution to sustainable development.

Given its cross-sectorial nature, tourism's wide reach also stimulates entrepreneurship and the growth of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), which along with start-ups, are important drivers of innovation and job creation. Furthermore, tourism engages all sectors to contribute to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations.

The 2030 Agenda was specifically designed to highlight the complexity of sustainable development and the interconnectedness of the economic, social and environmental aspects. It is now widely understood by the global community that an integrated approach is needed to implement the SDGs. Ensuring full alignment and coordinated efforts to achieve both the SDGs and the Paris Agreement is critical to maximize co-benefits.

Objectives

The multiple inter-linkages between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement indicate that integrated and synergistic implementation of both would lead to many benefits. To this end, the High Level Summit on Innovation and Sustainable Development in Tourism will rethink, optimize and demonstrate solutions and approaches which countries could apply to effectively decouple the tourism sector’s growth from resources use, while addressing a range of relevant topics such as the competitiveness of the tourism sector and the criticality of education, innovation and sustainability. It also aims at encouraging dialogue and action, to
sensitize decision-makers about raising sustainable transportation policies as a priority for sustainable development and climate action through innovation pathways.

**Methodology**

The Summit will begin with presentations from the 10 most disruptive start-ups that are transforming the way people travel and experience tourism. These start-ups represent important drivers of innovation and job creation and were brought together by the 1st UNWTO Tourism Startup Competition, an initiative launched in June 2018 in collaboration with Globalia. After the presentations, an interactive discussion will focus on their potential impact, business model, team profile, solution uniqueness, feasibility as well as their potential for scalability and overall sustainability.

As innovation and technologies transformed the way we analyze and support evidence-based tourism policies, the following keynote will focus on the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to tackle the complex challenges of climate change and help decarbonizing the tourism sector.

UNWTO’s research on global CO₂ emissions of the tourism sector and its impacts particularly in the transport sector will be discussed during the ensuing Panel on Sustainability, Climate Change and Innovation, which will explore how development can be achieved in a context of sustainability using innovative solutions for increased efficiency and acceleration of climate action, and policies based on timely, accurate and relevant information.

**Participants**

The High-Level Summit takes place within the framework of the 23rd session of the UNWTO General Assembly in Saint Petersburg, Russia. Held every two years, the General Assembly is attended by Ministers and senior delegates from UNWTO Full and Associate Members, as well as representatives from UNWTO Affiliate Members. It is considered the most important global meeting of senior tourism officials and high-level representatives of the private sector.