General Assembly Special Session on Smart Tourism

Chengdu, China, 14-15 September 2017

Technical Note

1. Introduction

General Assembly Special Session on Smart Tourism will be held in Chengdu, China from 14 to 15 September, 2017 within the framework of the 22nd Session of the General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). It is jointly organized by UNWTO and the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) in collaboration with Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Zhejiang DRORE Technology Co.,Ltd, Zhejiang University.

With the theme of 'A More Sustainable Tourism Future through Technology and Innovation', the Conference coincides with the celebration of the UN declared International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development 2017. It is aimed at building an understanding of the latest digital technologies and their applications to tourism, this subject being also one of the three pillar priorities of the UNWTO general programme of work.

2. Background

Over the past fifteen years, the digital world has transformed dramatically, with the emergence of smart mobile applications and social media, which have combined to bring about fundamental changes in the ways that consumers behave and services are delivered. Control of online activity has moved strongly towards the consumer. GPS and mapping services (notably Google Maps and Google Earth) became widely available for use on portable devices and navigation systems, enabling a major new set of geo-spatial applications, such as route planning, spatial search and location analytics.

Now a major new phase of technological development is emerging, bring many new opportunities for the travel and tourism industries. In the words of Fjord, an Accenture Design and Innovation consultancy: "Over the next five years, sensors, the cloud, connected smart devices and real-time analytics will combine to deliver a new layer of connected intelligence that will revolutionise the ability of organisations to offer interesting and increasingly indispensable digital services to travellers".

The new service platforms and applications include the Internet of Things, 'Living Services', 'Mobility as a Service', virtual and augmented reality, robotic devices, Big Data, new mobile payment applications,

voice recognition and instant and efficient mobile translation, among others. The new technologies will further change the ways in which people work and live, including their interaction with friends and family, with businesses and with tourism destinations.

With these changes come challenges to the travel and tourism industries, including disruption of traditional ways of doing business. At the same time, the changes also provide vast opportunities for those who are willing and able to innovate. One example of innovation, which is bringing about a fundamental shift in consumer behaviour, is the 'Sharing Economy'. This concept is already well established and will continue to have a much broader impact on the way in which society will work, in terms of goods and services available on a shared basis. It is important to understand those developments, identify opportunities and ensure that they are realised in a responsible way.

3. Objectives

The conference is designed to help tourism destination organisations and businesses to understand current and emerging technologies that are of primary relevance for them, in particular:

- Effective use of new technology in marketing, including the attraction of new markets and customer relationship management (including the role of social media); and content acquisition and distribution.
- Technologies that will enhance industry performance, through new business models, increased access to knowledge and skills, business networking and partnerships, strengthened sustainability and new applications, including robotics and location based intelligence.
- Enhancing the experience of visitors travelling to and within destinations and increasing access to travel opportunities, through more efficient transportation, automated processes and the use of techniques such as VR (virtual reality) and AR (augmented reality).

The conference will also seek to raise awareness in other sectors of the economy of the need and opportunities for new technological applications in different sectors of tourism.

4. Methodology

The Conference will begin with an opening session at which there will be welcome speeches and introductory comments by the Secretary-General of UNWTO, the CEO of PATA, and the Chairman of China National Tourism Administration.

This will be followed by the keynote session, with a presentation by the CEO of TripAdvisor on the implications of **smart technologies for tourism destinations and businesses.**

There will then be five conference sessions, on the following topics:

- New technologies to enhance tourism industry performance
- Smart destinations
- Destination case studies in smart tourism
- Smart tools for heritage conservation and sustainability
- Concluding session, setting out the 'big picture' of technology's potential impacts on tourism.

5. The Participants

1) The international participants are primarily National Tourism Administrations and National Tourist Organizations from all UNWTO Member States and Affiliate Members.

2) The national participants will include national and local government, tourism industry members; travel agents, transport services, Universities and media.

3) The audience will also include delegates from manufacturing and ICT sectors, in order to raise awareness about the importance of tourism.