Concept note: **International Forum on Sustainable Development of Tourism and Innovation**

Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, 24 June 2014

The importance of tourism as a vehicle for social and economic development has been ratified by the international community through numerous initiatives. Its heavy dependence of natural heritage and biodiversity, and its effectiveness as a strategic tool has generated a change in the mind-set of society, which seeks the conservation of the environment as an essential element for the promotion of tourism destinations.

Increasingly, the tourism sector needs to create unique experiences in order to be competitive. Mass tourism, which required simple products without excessive complexity, has given way to better informed customers, who demand and seek to experience unique and enriching solutions, which are obviously more complex and involve the periods before, during and after their travel experiences.

The tourism sector needs to evolve and adapt to new market trends and preferences, but in many cases the industry lacks the innovative tools to foster creativity in the development of products and their promotion and marketing via the Internet and social networks, thus increasing the profitability of operations.

Moreover, sustainability is a key element in tourism development and therefore it is important to link to this notion to our definition of sustainable tourism: "Tourism that takes fully into account current and future economic, social and environmental impacts in order to satisfy the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities."

The concept of innovation is related to that of a change that provides added value to the product in order to achieve maximum competitiveness and to improve productivity and sustainability, thus contributing to the welfare of our society.

Tourism destinations are the reference points of tourism activity and constitute the setting in which the tourist experience unfolds. Within them, there is a confluence of numerous stakeholders with diverse interests, which sometimes conflict. Sustainability is the challenge par excellence of the sector in the long term, and is based on the quest for balance and compatibility of interests, demands and expectations from three perspectives: economic, environmental and socio-cultural.
Among the factors that help a destination to be sustainable and also more competitive in the market are a good level and quality of tourism infrastructure and transport systems at different scales (local, national, international), connectivity, the quality of the product offered, accessibility, in addition to cross-cutting public policies, partnerships between the public and private sectors and green investments.

Moreover, the private sector has a key role in driving changes in the planning, management and development of a destination, as well as in fostering consumer demands through the production and consumption of innovative products.

Another aspect worth mentioning is the efficient transmission of these innovations, which would result in greater competitiveness of the destination.

The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Tourism of Colombia and the UNWTO are jointly organizing the International Forum on Sustainable Development of Tourism and Innovation in the context of the 57th meeting of the Commission for the Americas (CAM) in Cartagena de Indias, on 24 June 2014.

The forum aims to provide a space for the technical discussion of advances in the fields of innovation and sustainability in the tourism sector, with emphasis on Latin American countries, in order to strengthen the sector's competitiveness, in both destinations and enterprises, bringing together current trends with the expectations and demands of consumers. Among the topics to be addressed we can mention:

- Tourism in the green economy: investments are essential to facilitate and enhance the transformation towards a “greener” economy and to contribute to increased productivity of the tourism sector in addition to contributing to the responsible use of essential resources—such as biodiversity—and to reinforce the concept of sustainability. This panel will analyse the current situation of green investments in the tourism sector, experiences with national and international policies that are key for innovation, investment and the competitiveness of the sector, as well as existing challenges and opportunities.

- New trends: green markets and green investments. This panel looks into the generation of new products, processes and production methods that cause less damage to natural resources.

- Sustainable technologies applicable to the accommodation sector: Energy solutions and management of key resources for hotels and their effective use.

- Sustainable tourism observatories, under the auspices of the UNWTO, whose objective is to help improve quality and competitiveness through the measurement and monitoring of the sustainability of tourism destinations. In this panel it would be possible to give a presentation on this initiative and perhaps on other similar experiences in the region.
• Innovation and sustainability in community-based tourism: In recent years, changes are being seen in the alternatives that exist for practising tourism, new modalities of tourism that are emerging such as community-based tourism, which are being embraced by tourists who seek to get to know places where they can explore and learn about a different local culture, where they can find different offerings in terms of natural or cultural diversity, which they welcome as a form of experiential enrichment.

• Innovation in the teaching of sustainable tourism that could be divided into two parts: one related to teaching and the inclusion of sustainability concepts into educational curricula, seeking ways to highlight the attractiveness of the sector as an opportunity for personal and professional development and focusing on recognizing and attracting talent to the tourism industry, and on the other hand communication and marketing techniques for both sustainability and innovation.