

UNWTO and Italy Look Ahead as Official Visit Marks Restart of European Tourism

Rome, Italy, 3 July 2022 – *The leadership of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is on its first official visit to a Member State since restrictions on travel were introduced in response to COVID-19. The four-day trip to Italy (1-5 July) comes as the United Nations specialized agency for tourism guides the sector's restart and destinations across the Schengen Zone open their borders to tourists once again.*

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, UNWTO has led tourism's response through a series of high-level virtual meetings, uniting the sector, advocating for political and economic support and working with Member States to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and lay the foundations for recovery. Now, as borders in some parts of the world are carefully re-opening back to tourism, UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili is meeting face-to-face with political and tourism leaders to change gears. The official visit to Italy marks the start of this shift, comprising a series of high-level meetings in Rome, Milan and Venice.

Italy "world tourism leader"

Secretary-General Pololikashvili said: **"Italy is a world tourism leader, a strong ally of UNWTO** and committed to making tourism a pillar of sustainable economic development. We must build on the determination and solidarity that characterized our joint response to the crisis to grow back stronger and better with **sustainability and innovation** among our most important **guiding principles.**"

In **Rome**, Mr Pololikashvili held meetings at the highest levels of government. To further strengthen the bilateral collaboration on the road ahead to reactivate tourism and its economic and social benefits, was the connecting thread of the meetings held with **Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, Ministers of Culture, Cultural Heritage and Tourism, Dario Franceschini and of Foreign Affairs Luigi Di Maio, and the city's Mayor Virginia Elena Raggi**. The UNWTO delegation also met with Cardinal Parolin of the Vatican City, building on last year's audience with Pope Francis.

In **Milan**, the Secretary-General met with **Mayor Giuseppe Sala** – advancing the 2nd UNWTO Sports Tourism Start-Up Competition as the city prepares for the 2026 Winter Olympics - and with the **President Attilio Fontana of the Lombardy region**.

In addition to learning of Italy's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the official visit also offered the **opportunity to look to the future and further UNWTO's priorities of making tourism more sustainable, resilient and innovative.** On the opening day of the trip, Rome Fiumicino Airport was presented with a special plaque as UNWTO recognized its commitment to sustainability. Furthermore, all three cities were formally invited to become part of the UNWTO League of Cities for Sustainable Tourism Initiative.

New Special Ambassadors for Responsible Tourism Appointed

The official visit also presented the opportunity for UNWTO to highlight the role **gastronomy and fashion**, two of Italy's most celebrated industries, can play in **growing tourism and making the sector more diverse and relevant.** In recognition of their work, acclaimed chef Gino Sorbillo and fashion designer Giorgio Armani were appointed UNWTO Special Ambassadors for Responsible Tourism. In their new roles, they will use their status and influence to promote UNWTO's work in guiding tourism in these challenging times and highlight the sector's important role as an economic driver, leading employer and promoter of unique cultural heritage.

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