Tourism and Rural Development

Madrid, Spain, 29 September 2020 – Tourism’s many benefits must be felt outside of urban areas for the sector to fulfill its potential to provide opportunities for all: That was the key message of World Tourism Day 2020 as UNWTO united the global community around the theme of “Tourism and Rural Development”.

Around the world, tourism is a lifeline for rural communities, providing jobs, supporting rural businesses and protecting natural and cultural heritage. World Tourism Day 2020 emphasized the role the sector will play in helping rural areas recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and build for the future.

Messages promoting the day were shared by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, His Holiness Pope Francis, UNWTO’s network of Ambassadors, including Spanish football star Iker Casillas, heads of Government including Spain’s Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, and UN agencies and international organizations, from UNESCO and ITC to the OECD and IATA.

‘A lifeline for rural communities’

UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili said: “Tourism has proven to be a lifeline for many rural communities, but its true force still needs to be fully deployed. This World Tourism Day highlighted our sector’s unique ability to reach those who would otherwise be left behind, providing opportunities for all, transforming lives and protecting the cultural heritage that makes us human.”

The celebration was hosted by the MERCOSUR nations (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Chile as associate member), the first time in the 40-year-history of history of the international day of observance that hosting duties have been shared.

Ministers show shared commitment

Germán Cardoso, Minister of Tourism for Uruguay, highlighted rural tourism’s importance for helping countries diversify their markets, noting it offers “sensitive and emotional experiences” for visitors alongside its benefits for the communities themselves. The Minister of Tourism for Argentina Matías Lammen noted that “tourism in South America is regional...whoever visits us usually visits more than one country”, making a joined-up approach to building a “greener future” essential. Marcelo Alvaro
Antonio, Minister of Tourism for Brazil, singled out the importance of innovation and investment and the “power of ecotourism and adventure tourism”. For Paraguay, Minister Sofía Elizabeth Montiel de Afara, reaffirmed her government’s “commitment to the Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, and its emphasis on working with local communities. The Under-Secretary of Tourism for Chile, José Luis Uriarte, similarly pledged to use tourism to “support rural communities suffering from the economic and social repercussions of this pandemic.”

Taking part in the round-table discussion that followed were Mario Alberto González Sanchez, Director of Mexican Secretariat of Tourism, and the Chilean chef and UNWTO Special Ambassador, Pilar Rodriguez. Joining them were Lisandro Menu-Marque, Director at Globalia, and Shannon Stowell, CEO of the Professional Adventure Travel Association and the Adventure Travel Fund of the USA.

**UNWTO: Guiding recovery and rewarding innovation**

UNWTO used the occasion of World Tourism Day to launch its new Recommendations on Tourism and Rural Development. The new publication outlines the key steps destinations can take to fully harness the potential of tourism to help drive social and economic recovery outside of urban areas.

Recognising the important role new ideas and technology will play in this, UNWTO also announced the winners of its Rural Tourism Innovation Competition. Organized with the Government of Spain, Google Spain and the Federation of Rural Women's Associations (FADEMUR). The competition attracted more than 130 applications from across Spain. Almost half of applications (43%) were put forward by women. My Street Book won the prize in the Innovation category, and the winner of the prize for the start-up with the biggest social impact was Van Woow.

**Related Links:**

- World Tourism Day 2020
- Recommendations on Tourism and Rural Development
- World Tourism Day: UNWTO Secretary-General Official Message
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