

Rural Development and Recovery Focus of Executive Training Programme

Madrid, Spain, 18 December 2020 - Tourism leaders from 18 countries met for the 14th annual UNWTO Asia-Pacific Executive Training Programme. In line with UNWTO's Year of Tourism and Rural Development, the three-day programme focused on sharing knowledge and good practice relating to harnessing the power of the sector to create opportunities for all outside of big cities.

Since 2006, UNWTO has organized the special training session with the support of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Korea. This Executive Training Programme **is the only initiative of its kind in the region** and is renowned for its stimulating content and thought-provoking discussions. Participants are able to design and formulate policies and programmes in their respective destinations to further stimulate tourism growth and enable the sector to be a viable force for good.

This 14th session, held virtually between 15-17 December, **welcomed 37 participants from 18 different countries**. The event was opened by Mr. Harry Hwang, Director for the Regional Department of Asia and the Pacific, followed by pre-recorded congratulatory remarks from both UNWTO Secretary-General, Zurab Pololikashvili, and Vice-Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Korea, H.E. Ms. Youn-he Choi.

Among the topics addressed were **governance and community development for enhanced rural development**, and product development and commercialization of tourism experiences in rural areas. Also, and in line with UNWTO's wider focus on innovation as a means of driving recovery, participants explored ideas relating to the **digital transformation of tourism**, including the potential to create new education and work opportunities. Furthermore, a special feature of this year's edition of the Training Programme was a Special Session on Restarting International Tourism which presented successful case studies China, Greece, The Maldives, Portugal and the Republic of Korea.

Finally, recognizing the unprecedented impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on global tourism, the training programme aimed to facilitate the **sharing of good practices for the recovery of tourism** with practical examples from the region and beyond. The Minister of Tourism of the Maldives, H.E. Dr. Abdulla Mausoom, presented encouraging numbers of international tourists in the Maldives, with over 35,759 international arrivals in November compared to 1,752 in July when the country started to reopen its borders. This was all thanks to the successful implementation of regulations and health protocols involving PCR testing, the creation of a tourist help desk at the airport, monitoring of inter-resort movements, and compliance training for tourism staff.