

## As 2020 ends, tourism looks forward with determination

We are almost at the end of what has been **the most challenging year** in the history of tourism.

Almost overnight, the pandemic brought global tourism to a **complete standstill**.

Millions of people **missed chances** to explore different places and embrace different cultures and customs. And **the world lost out on opportunities** for tourism to create jobs, support businesses, kick-start development, and to protect and preserve the very things we leave our homes to see.

However, in the face of such a downturn, tourism ends the year **more united and determined than ever**.

The **UNWTO Global Tourism Crisis Committee**, created in March soon after the pandemic was declared, recently met for a final time in 2020.

This unique cross-sector platform coordinates international efforts and has proven to be crucial in **guiding our response to COVID-19** and informing the measures and tools for mitigating its impact on jobs and businesses.

Notwithstanding new and ongoing developments of the pandemic, the Committee is **geared towards accelerating the restart of tourism**, always factoring in the most recent situation of global health.

**Harmonized, consistent travel protocols are essential** for restoring confidence in international travel and getting tourism moving again. UNWTO will maintain the momentum we gained in 2020 into the new year.

Over recent months, we have **made political and business leaders listen** and make tourism a part of their plans. We have emphasized the relevance of tourism to almost every part of our societies, most recently amplified through our partnership with CNN and reinforced through **high-level, in-person visits** to Member States including Portugal, Tunisia, Namibia, Brazil, Uruguay, Egypt, Italy, France, Belgium and Saudi Arabia.

This joined-up approach contributed to ensuring **tourism has been given record levels** of financial support and political goodwill and rewarded with public recognition. The **European Commission** has led the way in turning encouraging words into firm actions, most notably with its unprecedented economic support for tourism at this crucial time.

Through in-person **visits to leaders in the Americas, Africa and Europe**, and through welcoming the Vice President of the European Commission, Margaritis Schinas, to address the most recent meeting of the Global Tourism Crisis Committee, we now call on **governments to do more**. To show that **safe international travel** is not only possible but, given the social and economic benefits that only tourism can deliver, essential too.

Without doubt, news of a vaccine against the COVID-19 virus gives us reason for cautious optimism. However, the restart of tourism – and the many millions of people who depend on it – **cannot wait for mass vaccinations to become a reality**.

It is time now to **rethink quarantine rules for tourists**. To embrace innovation and new solutions for testing travellers before or after their journeys. Alongside this, restrictions on travel must be eased or lifted in a **responsible and coordinated manner** as soon as it is safe and feasible.

The important steps undertaken to ensure better coordination and **refusing to stand still**, are the precursors to prepare for the new year. **2021 could be a critical year for the restart** of tourism, but only if we continue along this path.

The foundations are there for this to be a turning point. It is a moment for directing our sector towards greater **sustainability and inclusivity** and realizing its massive potential to deliver lasting development and change for all. We cannot waste this chance.

Now, as we pause and reflect, I send you my best wishes from Madrid. Wherever you are, and however you celebrate, I wish you all a safe and restful festive period.

**ZURAB POLOLIKASHVILI**  
SECRETARY-GENERAL