



ON THE GROUND

Fostering Tourism for Development

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Message of the Executive Director

We enjoyed a strong end to 2020 in terms of technical assistance we provided to UNWTO Member States. Seven projects were successfully completed in Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Aruba, Myanmar, UAE, Seychelles, and Saudi Arabia. Together, these projects had a total value of US\$ 365,000.

The release of the “**COVID-19 Tourism Recovery Technical Assistance Package**” in May 2020 allowed UNWTO to both strengthen existing partnerships and forge new ones, expanding the network of donors for the implementation of technical assistance projects. Structured around three main pillars: economic recovery; marketing and promotion; and institutional strengthening and resilience building, the package offers guidance to public and private tourism sector stakeholders in their crisis response. Firstly, it outlines UNWTO's range of technical assistance, and, secondly, it details potential areas of intervention, including impact assessment, roles and responsibilities.

Among the first to collaborate with UNWTO in the implementation of the COVID-19 Tourism Recovery Package was the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). The Bank signed a framework Agreement with UNWTO to deliver technical assistance to a selected group of priority countries for the swift recovery of their tourism sectors post COVID-19. Target countries include Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Uzbekistan, Croatia, and Montenegro. In the Dominican Republic, Greece, Maldives, and Zambia other COVID-19 related projects are being launched or implemented in 2021.

In the new year, UNWTO expanded its network of donors with ADB and IADB and the current portfolio of the UNWTO Technical Cooperation and Silk Road Department. Through this network, 51 projects are being implemented on the ground, with a total budget of US \$9.5 million.

I hope this edition of “UNWTO On the Ground” gives an overview of the extent and range of technical assistance that UNWTO is providing to its Member States during this most challenging time for the tourism sector.



Shanzhong Zhu
Executive Director

Evaluation of Tourism Statistics System in Saudi Arabia

UNWTO, in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, is implementing a project to evaluate the use of tourism statistics system in the country.

The aim of project is to provide guidance to the Tourism Intelligence Center of the Ministry of Tourism in the collection of tourism statistics. It will also help make the process as innovative as possible, making full use of UNWTO methodology, as well as Artificial Intelligence, mobile phone data and data on credit card use.

The project kick-off meeting between UNWTO, the Ministry of Tourism of Saudi Arabia and its five-member expert team was held online on 20 January 2021. On the back of this, online workshops gave stakeholders and project partners the chance to share their visions and the guiding principle of the Tourism Intelligence Center as well as providing an overview of the current system of tourism data collection system used in the country. All of this proved extremely insightful and provided a solid foundation for the ambitious work to be carried out by UNWTO.

This project is a follow up to the mission carried out in February 2020. Here UNWTO carried out an assessment of the current tourism statistics collection methodology to review inbound tourism data. Based on that mission, a large-scale project was formulated with a view to providing a more detailed evaluation of data methodology for Inbound, Outbound and Domestic Tourism and preparing a road map for further improvements based on both traditional tourism statistical methodologies and the possibility of other data sources. All of this was done with the consideration that the Government of Saudi Arabia is changing many, if not all, of its data collection and reporting procedures while also recognizing the recent establishment of the Tourism Information Center by the Ministry of Tourism.

So far, all activities are being carried out remotely through several online consultation meetings per week and desktop research. The UNWTO team recently presented to the Ministry of Tourism of Saudi Arabia and relevant stakeholders the draft Situation Analysis report, as well as the first draft on proposed recommendation for a new tourism statistics collection methodology.

Lesotho Council of Tourism

Driven by the need to position the private sector as an engine of growth and development in Lesotho tourism, the Government recognizes the need to re-establish the Lesotho Council of Tourism (LCT) through the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture.

UNWTO is assisting the Ministry in this endeavor through research and stakeholder participation to devise a model for the new and revived LCT. This will include a working policy document with an overall outline of the mandate and organizational structure of the LCT, its mission, and how it will work and be funded. The working document will serve as the basis for the LCT to be registered with the Law Office. Funded by the African Development Bank, the implementation of this project will contribute to guiding the Government of Lesotho in managing the impacts of COVID-19 on its tourism sector and paving the way to recovery.

As a first step, UNWTO is carrying out a thorough review of Lesotho tourism laws, plans, policies, and other documents relevant to this assignment. Subsequently, consultative meetings and virtual interviews will be conducted with target stakeholder groups guided by key thematic areas. This will be followed by research and benchmarking on similar bodies in nearby countries.

Once finalized, the LCT Model, Strategic Plan and Funding Strategy will be presented to the Government and relevant stakeholders.



Maseru, Lesotho

UNWTO and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) join forces to promote sustainable tourism development across Central Asia

UNWTO and ADB share a simple yet far-ranging philosophy: cooperation, as opposed to competition, is key to socio-economic progress. This is especially true in times of COVID-19 and among countries with strong cultural and historical ties. In an age of fierce global market competition, where travelers share their experiences in real time, issues such as service quality and excellence, professionalism, customer care and products capable of matching expectations strongly determine how a destination and its people are viewed. Similarly, a favorable perception of a country or destination influences the investment climate, economic growth prospects, efficient connectivity and overall peaceful relations between neighbors.

With this in mind, UNWTO and ADB have signed two cooperation agreements focused on developing the Almaty-Bishkek Economic Corridor (ABEC) as a “travel and tourism bubble”. Alongside this, and under the aegis of ADB, UNWTO and the Committee of Tourism Development under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan are currently implementing three transformative tourism activities: statistical support to prepare the country for its first experimental Tourism Satellite Account (TSA), an international and domestic Tourist Profile Study, and the development of a Sustainable Tourism Development Plan.

Preparing Tajikistan for its first experimental Tourism Satellite Account (TSA)

For tourism development to be both sustainable and competitive, countries need a thorough understanding of their tourism sector and its role in the economy. This can only be achieved through a reliable and accurate System of Tourism Statistics (STS). By ensuring compliance with internationally recommended frameworks and through specialized expert training, UNWTO will assist Tajikistan in preparing its first experimental TSA.

Tourist Profile Study

The pandemic has had a significant impact on the who, where and how of travel. Notwithstanding the current volatile situation, accurate information on the perceptions and attitudes, travel patterns, demographics and satisfaction levels of both international and domestic visitors will assist countries in preparing for the post-pandemic scenario. Through expert training in data collection and tourism surveys, and the elaboration of a Tourist Profile Study, UNWTO will support Tajikistan in gaining a concise understanding of its present and future tourism market prospects.

Sustainable Tourism Development Plan

Strategically positioned within a region that is growing in awareness and attractiveness, profiting from its historic Silk Road linkages, and with eco-tourism and related heritage, primarily Arts & Crafts, as distinctive features, Tajikistan has the potential to become a travelers’ favorite. However, to enhance the length of stay of visitors and strengthen Tajikistan as a tourism destination of international standards, it is essential to thoroughly review the country’s touristic offer, study the effectiveness of marketing activities being undertaken, assess whether services delivered within the sector meet expectations, and evaluate current tourism training and education standards. Through the development of a Sustainable Tourism Development Plan and the organization of a series of national, bilateral and regional workshops, a decisive step will be taken towards achieving the goals of the country’s National Development Strategy 2030.

The Almaty-Bishkek Economic Corridor (ABEC) travel bubble

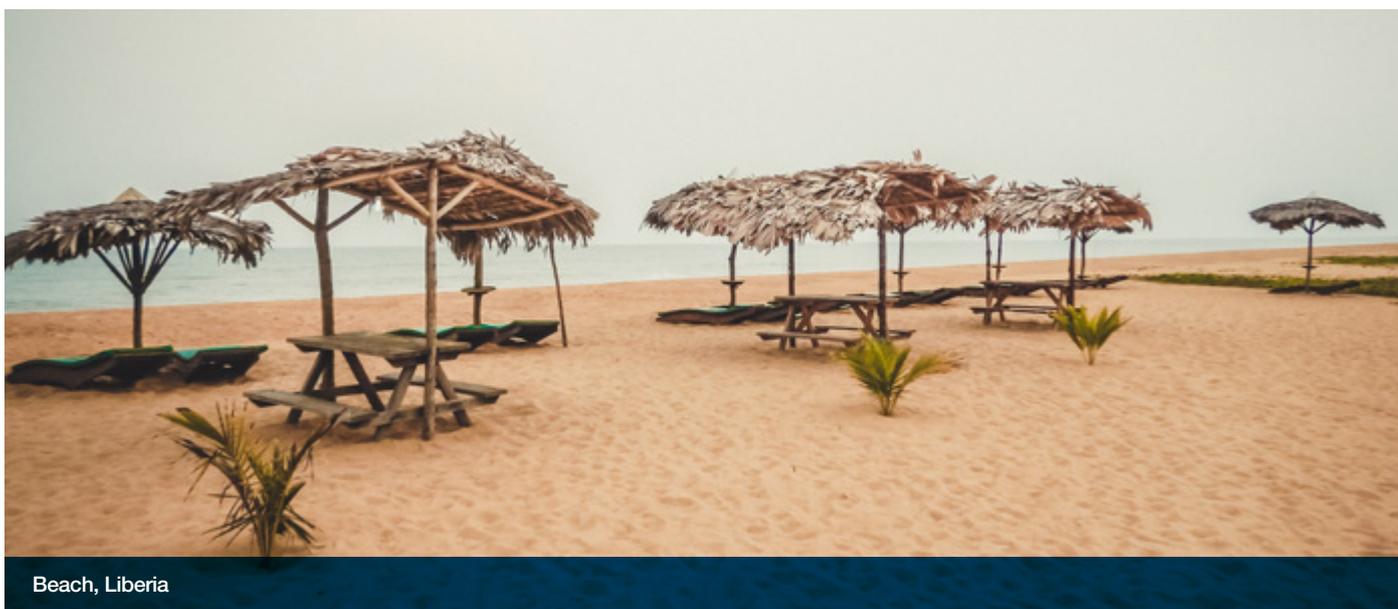
While a withdrawal behind national borders may seem a logical recourse during an international health crisis, other, less disruptive alternatives exist – for example, the “travel bubble” concept. Key components of the travel bubble are: trust, broad stakeholder cooperation mechanisms, and common sector regulations and enforcement methods. Together with ADB, UNWTO will be working on two central travel bubble components: firstly, common COVID-19 health and safety protocols and measures will be developed, followed by an assessment of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz accommodation sector that is to lead to the adoption of a common Accommodation Classification System (ACS). Ultimately, both activities will strengthen country-specific regulations through the adoption of international best-practices and recommendations, guide public and private tourism stakeholders in adapting business and service operations to the new realities of COVID-19, and improve coordination and exchange amongst tourism stakeholders, thus fulfilling a prime requisite for the successful development of an ABEC travel bubble.

Supporting Marketing and Sustainable Tourism Governance in Liberia

UNWTO and the International Trade Centre (ITC) are collaborating on a tourism development project for Liberia, with a particular focus on the development of coastal and surf tourism. The project is being implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and receives funding from the Enhanced Integrated Framework.

UNWTO focuses on the implementation of project components related to “Marketing and Branding” and “Sustainable Tourism Governance”. For the Marketing and Branding component, a Marketing Strategy was formulated, and a new logo and slogan were created entitled “Amazing Discoveries”. Alongside this, a new tourism brochure was developed, and tourism stakeholders received advice and training on using e-marketing activities, and insights on search engine optimization (SEO) practices that will help position Liberia in the mind of travelers. The Marketing Strategy and the brand identity were developed and discussed with key tourism stakeholders from across the country in various hybrid workshops organized jointly with ITC. In a similar hybrid format, a two-day capacity building seminar on e-marketing was delivered to tourism professionals from the public and private sector. The Marketing Strategy focuses on four key regional nodes, apart from the capital Monrovia, and four niche products: surf tourism, ecotourism, wildlife tourism and cultural tourism.

The Sustainable Tourism Governance component is based on a methodology developed by UNWTO for assessing the level of sustainable tourism governance and management in coastal destinations. The recommendations that come from this can help strengthen governance and management mechanisms towards sustainable coastal tourism development. Several hybrid focus group meetings were held with experts and organizations dealing with tourism, environmental management and sustainable development. Based on these meetings and the desk research undertaken, an assessment was made of how the policy and strategy framework in Liberia facilitates the long-term sustainability of the tourism sector and sustainable livelihoods of local communities in general and the development of coastal tourism in particular. The findings were presented in a report which includes detailed guidelines for sustainable tourism development in the Liberia Coastal Zone. The guidelines will be widely disseminated among tourism stakeholders in Liberia.



Beach, Liberia

Assessing Human Resources Needs in the Tourism Sector in Fiji

The tourism sector is a significant economic driver in Fiji. To sustain its growth, the Fijian government established a development plan for the sector – called Fijian Tourism 2021 it includes a strategic recommendation to carry out a Human Resources needs assessment, with the aim of identifying challenges and opportunities for current and future skills development in the tourism workforce. The need for a skilled labor force that can meet international demands has become even more urgent following the COVID-19 outbreak. The pandemic has revealed the importance of equipping workers with the right skill sets to deal with dynamic environmental conditions and support destination resilience and recovery.

Against this backdrop, the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport of Fiji requested that UNWTO undertake a Rapid Assessment of the Human Resources needs in the tourism sector in Fiji, with an emphasis on recovery post-COVID-19. In the first quarter of 2021, UNWTO collaborated with a team of researchers at Victoria University in Australia to conduct the assessment. This was carried out remotely due to the travel restrictions related to the pandemic. Data was collected from secondary sources (policy papers, reports, etc.) and primary sources (in the form of individual interviews, a focus group, and the completion of a skills checklist by interviewees).

The assessment uncovered key findings in Labour Demand and Labour Supply, covering topics such as deskilling challenges and the loss of talent resulting from the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector; workforce development in remote communities; alignment of tourism education and industry needs, and barriers to career progression for local staff. Based on the findings, detailed recommendations were presented to strengthen Human Resources development for the tourism sector in Fiji.

The Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport of Fiji and UNWTO will use the assessment report to explore possibilities for further collaboration on this important topic.



Performance of music and dance, Fiji

Capacity Building Seminar on Restarting International Tourism in Indonesia

In the second half of 2020, UNWTO actively exchanged information with the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (MTCE) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) of Indonesia on the UNWTO Technical Assistance Package for COVID-19 Tourism Recovery with a view to identify priority areas to address for restarting international tourism to the country. Based on this, UNWTO collaborated with the two Ministries to prepare a program, identify speakers and organize a capacity building seminar on Restarting International Tourism to Indonesia, which took place on 7 and 8 December 2020 in Bali.

The Director of the Regional Department of Asia and the Pacific and the Manager of the Technical Cooperation and Silk Road Department undertook a mission to Indonesia to make presentations at the seminar and facilitate technical sessions on protocols, consumer confidence, marketing and promotion, and crisis management and communication. The seminar was organized in a hybrid format, with 30 key tourism stakeholders attending at the venue and over 100 tourism professionals participating online.

During the mission, the UNWTO team held meetings with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and senior officials of MTCE and MOFA to exchange views and experiences on the process of restarting international tourism. They also participated in inspection visits to selected tourism facilities and attractions and provided feedback on arrangements made to facilitate a responsible re-opening of the tourism sector. The Director of Regional Department for Asia and the Pacific further represented UNWTO in the High-Level Panel at the 13th Bali Democracy Forum on 10 December, 2020, and delivered a presentation at the Press Conference organized by MOFA and MTCE.



UNWTO/EBRD Projects in Morocco and Tunisia on Tourism Recovery

In May 2020, UNWTO launched a tourism recovery technical assistance package to provide guidance to Member States in response to the pandemic. Structured around three main pillars: economic recovery; marketing and promotion; and institutional strengthening and resilience building, and widely disseminated, Member States and donors alike have expressed interest in the package.

Among the first to collaborate with UNWTO on the implementation of the COVID-19 Tourism Recovery Package was the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). It signed a Framework Agreement with UNWTO to deliver technical assistance to a selected group of priority countries, including Morocco and Tunisia, to accelerate the recovery of their respective tourism sectors.

In Morocco, EBRD appointed UNWTO to improve and strengthen the Dashboard of the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) to better reflect qualitative data related to the measurement of the impacts of COVID-19 on the sector. This will also be used to develop a Tourism Recovery strategy, prepare a marketing and product development strategy for domestic and near-shore markets; review the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) prepared by MoT for COVID-related safety, hygiene and security and trainings put in place for the adoption of the SOPs, and develop trainings for SMEs on key areas identified through the Recovery Program to support its implementation.

In Tunisia, UNWTO will be responsible for the development of a Tourism Recovery Roadmap; a Digital Strategy for the promotion and communication to for domestic and near-shore markets; the promotion of gender equality through tourism; and initiatives to support the work of the National Agency for Tourism Training through a Train-the-Trainers program.



Ben Youssef Medersa at Marrakech, Morocco

Integrated Cultural Heritage Framework – Capacity Building for Tourism Development in Khiva and Khorezm Region

UNWTO and EBRD, enhancing their continuous collaboration in Uzbekistan, designed and implemented the project Uzbekistan: Integrated Cultural Heritage Framework – Capacity Building for Tourism Development in Khiva and Khorezm Region which was completed in December 2020 after a year-and-a-half of on-the-ground technical assistance.

The project focused on the region of Khorezm and the Silk Road gem of Khiva, supporting the regional development of the Uzbek region bordering Turkmenistan. The project focused on four main activities aimed at supporting integrated and sustainable tourism development in the regions:

1. Tourism Planning and Capacity Building for Tourism Development in Khiva and Khorezm Region

Based on consultation and research held both on-line and on the ground with key national, regional and local tourism stakeholders, UNWTO assessed the current situation concerning the Tourism Planning practices in the Region of Khorezm and developed a report of recommendations. In addition, as the COVID-19 outbreak occurred during the implementation, UNWTO revised the current tourism planning system and structure under the kaleidoscope of the challenges presented by the pandemic. Alongside this, elements in the new system that will allow the tourism planning system to become agile and resilient were introduced, as were elements to maintain the stakeholders on-board and propel the synergies necessary to address the volatile situation that affected the region.

2. Assessment of the Tourism Research Practices in the Region of Khorezm

UNWTO reviewed the current tourism research practices in the region and explored the improvements necessary for the destination to ensure that it makes use of contemporary research tools available and generates the market intelligence needed to monitor the ever-evolving tourism trends. UNWTO created a report outlining the current situation and the way forward.

3. Tourism Profile Study on Domestic and International Markets in Khorezm and Khiva

Based on the results of the tourism research assessment, UNWTO, with the support of Urgench State University and the regional office of the State Committee for Tourism Development of Uzbekistan conducted surveys in Urgench and Khiva to

generate new knowledge on the international and domestic markets visiting the region and develop tourism intelligence through in-depth research on the profile of the tourists. UNWTO surveyed 1,392 international tourists and 691 domestic tourists who visited the region of Khorezm and the city of Khiva during October and November 2019, and February 2020. Among the overall insights, the study revealed that one of the soundest characteristics of Khiva and Khorezm is its hospitality and the welcoming nature of its residents and tourists' feelings of safety and security. This is also even more apparent when compared to expectations and experiences; both aspects were considered to be a lot better than initially thought.

4. Itchan Qala Residents Study

To measure the socioeconomic impact tourism has on the local communities of Itchan Qala within the ancient city of Khiva, UNWTO conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups among residents. The study left no doubt that the economic benefits of tourism have reached the locals and have given them reason to expect a prosperous future. Residents unanimously agree that tourism has become a catalyst of local development and growth. There is a plethora of surprising insights that will help authorities understand the hidden potential of community-based tourism, as well as accurately identify the challenges residents face. The report proposed the introduction of new institutional changes that will encourage collaboratively addressing the challenging phenomena the local tourism sector faces, and manage the threats that have emerged following the tourism impact of the COVID-19 crisis.



Khiva and Khorezm Region