

Sustainable tourism can offer mountain communities a path to prosperity and inclusion

FAO and UNWTO launch new publication at high-level event to celebrate International Mountain Day 2021

Rome, Italy, December 10, 2021 - *Sustainable tourism plays a key role in boosting livelihoods, poverty alleviation, and environmental conservation in mountainous areas, according to a new report launched by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and UNWTO at an International Mountain Day 2021 celebration event.*

Mountain tourism - Towards a more sustainable path, jointly developed by FAO, the Mountain Partnership Secretariat and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), highlights the role of tourism in the sustainable development of mountain regions. The publication features examples of innovation, best practices and initiatives from all over the world, as well as practical guidelines and recommendations in the context of building back better for sustainable mountain tourism.

“For many mountain communities, tourism is their livelihood,” FAO Director-General QU Dongyu stressed at the event. “Promoting sustainable eco-tourism, agri-tourism and wellness tourism can help generate new jobs, diversify income, build robust micro-economies and revitalize products and services,” he added, encouraging everyone to work together to protect fragile mountain ecosystems and “rethink and reshape mountain tourism for the benefit of mountain communities, global wellbeing and the planet’s health.”

“Sustainable tourism can serve as an important driver of socio-economic development in mountain areas. Well managed, community-based tourism increases and diversifies household incomes, enhances job and livelihood opportunities, supports traditional systems, builds resilience and helps to conserve and promote natural and cultural heritage across landscapes,” said UNWTO Secretary-General, Zurab Pololikashvili.

The theme of International Mountain Day 2021

The United Nations has designated 11 December as International Mountain Day, with FAO as the lead agency for its coordination. Celebrated every year, it creates awareness about the importance of mountains to life, highlighting the opportunities and constraints in mountain development and building alliances that will bring positive change to mountain peoples and environments around the world.

With mountain destinations attracting around 15-20 percent of global tourism, International Mountain Day 2021's theme of sustainable mountain tourism recognizes the sector's role in valuing the natural and cultural heritage of mountains and mountain peoples, promoting sustainable food systems, and protecting mountain ecosystems and their biodiversity.

The Year's theme also draws attention to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how it can be an opportunity to rebuild mountain tourism in a greener and more sustainable and inclusive way. This means ensuring community empowerment, effective measurement of the impact of tourism in mountains, the effective management of resources and waste, and the definition of carrying capacity for destinations.

A joint effort

Today's high-level International Mountain Day event was opened by the FAO Director-General QU Dongyu and UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili. Other participants included Maria Ubach, Andorra's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Christine Bulliard-Marbach Swiss Parliamentarian, Member of the National Council and President of the Swiss Association for Mountain Regions, Roberto Natali, Plenipotentiary Minister and Directorate General for Development Cooperation for the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Maria Anthonette Velasco-Allones, Chief Operating Officer of the Philippines Tourism Promotions Board and mountaineer Reinhold Messner. FAO Deputy Director-General Maria Helena Semedo gave the concluding remarks. Stella Jean – an Italian-Haitian fashion designer was appointed Mountain Partnership Goodwill Ambassador in recognition of her work with mountain women artisans from Kyrgyzstan. Dilshodbegim Khusravova, a Tajik young activist, was named Youth Mountain Partnership Goodwill Ambassador for her work in early warning disaster prevention systems in the mountains of Tajikistan.

The event highlighted the need to promote dialogue and cooperation to tap mountain tourism's full potential to contribute to sustainable development. It highlighted the work that many Mountain Partnership members and UNWTO member states are doing to ensure that mountain communities are not left behind in the spirit of the UN 2030 Agenda.

Sustainable best practices

According to the study, sustainable mountain tourism products and services should shift from high-impact tourism to low-impact, climate-sensitive ones, and create new opportunities, bringing tangible benefits to local communities, while helping to enhance the conservation of the unique mountain heritage. They should also be inclusive, providing a good quality of employment and decent work. The publication highlights projects from across the world that are doing just that, including in the Cordillera region of the Philippines, where the country's Department of Tourism, the Mountain Partnership Secretariat and Slow Food are connecting tourism service providers to small-scale producers so visitors can discover high-quality mountain products, and 'astrostays' in the Himalayas, which are homestays provided by local communities that include stargazing activities.

FAO and UNWTO

FAO and UNWTO have a long history of working together, boosted by a recent Memorandum of Understanding between the two parties. This establishes further commitment to nurture innovation and entrepreneurship, drive sustainable development, and strengthen livelihoods through rural tourism, agritourism, nature tourism, outdoor activities and other forms of landscape-based tourism. It envisages, among others, collaborative activities within the framework of FAO's [Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems \(GIAHS\)](#), the [Coalition of Fragile Ecosystems](#) and the [Green Cities Initiative](#).

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