Middle East Members Focus on Tourism’s Sustainable Recovery

Cairo, Egypt, 28 March 2022 - UNWTO has successfully celebrated the 48th session of its Regional Commission for the Middle East. Returning to Egypt for the third time since 2018, the Commission addressed the pressing challenges faced by tourism and looked to the future as the sector’s recovery gathers pace across the region.

According to the latest UNWTO data, international arrivals to destinations in the Middle East were 52% higher in January than in the same month of 2021. UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili told Members that the return of tourism represented a chance to reassert the values of the sector as a pillar of peace and prosperity, particularly given the background of economic uncertainty and an armed conflict in Europe.

In his report, the Secretary-General provided an overview of UNWTO’s work in the Middle East and globally for the past year. The report also focused on UNWTO’s strategic objectives and core priorities for the year ahead, including making tourism smarter, promoting green investments and entrepreneurship, supporting education and jobs, building resilience and protecting natural and cultural heritage. In the coming year, several new projects will be directed out of the UNWTO Regional Office for the Middle East, opened in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in May 2021. The office will focus on guiding sustainable tourism recovery in the region, with a focus on rural development and on innovation, education and investments.

Mr Pololikashvili said: “Across the Middle East, tourism is growing in size and relevance, driving recovery and promoting sustainable development. UNWTO’s Members in the region are committed to realizing the unique potential of tourism, and the Organization is committed to working closely with its Members around innovation, sustainability, jobs and education as our shared priorities.”

UNWTO’s enhanced presence across the region was highlighted through reference to a wide range of country-specific projects and partnerships, including online training in Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, a special statistics workshop in Bahrain, crisis communications training in Lebanon and an action plan on women’s empowerment in Jordan.
Sustainability and capacity building

Members warmly welcomed updates on UNWTO’s actions in the region, designed to help the sector become more inclusive, sustainable and resilient. Through the Green Hotel Revitalization Programme, UNWTO is working with the International Finance Corporation to train more than 30 hotels in Egypt in adopting sustainability practices and reducing their carbon footprints. UNWTO is also stepping up capacity building across the region, with a focus on gender equality and youth empowerment.

In Cairo, delegates were provided with a comprehensive overview of the Organization’s work in this area, including through the creation of a UNWTO Knowledge Lab for the region and through the provision of a new range of training and educational courses in the Arabic language, most notably through a new e-learning project being implemented in partnership with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom will fund 1,300 scholarships for students from 13 Members States, to foster human capital development and youth empowerment across the region.

Strengthening high-level ties

UNWTO informed about the close collaboration with the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab Tourism Organization, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Islamic Development Bank.

Welcoming such collaboration, Dr. Khaled El-Enany, Minister of Tourism and Antiquities of the Arab Republic of Egypt credited the Regional Commission as a platform to draw a roadmap for the sector’s future. He said: “Basing our work on UNWTO’s guidelines, we protected jobs through the crisis and now are now in a strong position to recover and grow back better. Ahead of Egypt’s hosting of the COP27 climate summit, we will continue to make tourism a pillar of sustainability, as well as a vital protector of our famous heritage and culture.”

Members decided that the 49th Regional Commission for the Middle East will be held in Jordan in 2023, while Lebanon will host the 50th meeting in 2024.

Related Links:

UNWTO: Regional Department for the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General UNWTO’s Vision, Priorities and Programme of Work for 2022-2023