UNWTO Calls on Start-ups to Join “Awake Tourism Challenge”

Madrid, Spain, 21 April 2022 – UNWTO has launched the second edition of its global flagship competition under the name of “Awake Tourism Challenge”. The competition will identify innovators who are advancing solutions to 6 different challenges, as well contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

For the 2022 challenge, UNWTO will focus on specific areas that can help the recovery of the tourism sector in a disruptive way, and which deserve extra attention right now, namely:

1. **Community involvement**: 80% of people living in ‘extreme poverty’ live in rural communities while domestic, rural and eco-tourism have emerged as the most popular travel choices.

2. **Green and blue economies**: Tourism can be a source of economic opportunities and at the same time protect natural ecosystems.

3. **Ecological and Sustainable Capital Creation**: Sustainable capital has the potential to optimize resource usage, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and provide a competitive advantage for businesses.

4. **Tourism Tech for Good**: Advancements in technology have revolutionized the sector, especially since the start of the pandemic. Artificial Intelligence, crypto, blockchain, metaverse, NFTs are welcome in this category.

5. **Tourism Education**: Despite representing 10% of the world’s jobs, there is a need for updated data, and new tools for education and skills development.

   - **Women Empowerment**: Women tend to be concentrated in the lowest paid and lowest status jobs in tourism. Startups with a gender focus can be an important contributor to equality.

Organized in collaboration with Wakalua, the first global innovation hub for tourism, powered by Avoris, the competition also counts on the support of a number of major partners, including: SPARK, the Innovation Hub of Les Roches from the Sommet Education group, and Ankh Impact Ventures (AIV), an impact-driven venture capital investment platform with a gender and racial equity lens. It also counts on strong public
and private sector backing, with Qatar Airways and Qatar Tourism, Singapore Tourism Board, KPMG, MasterCard, Amadeus, IE University, Telefonica, Wayra, ClarkeModet, The FarCo, BBVA, MentorDay, Finnova, Google for Startups, The Valley Digital Business School, Nest, the Future Food Institute and the Inter-American Development Bank all on board.

UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili said: “The return of tourism is a chance to awaken its potential to transform lives. UNWTO is calling on startups everywhere to put forward their ideas for meeting the biggest challenges our sector is facing and for making tourism a champion of the Sustainable Development Goals.”

Startups are invited to participate provided that they:

• Apply to 1 of the 6 challenges
• Include 1 or more SDGs
• Are innovative in nature and provide value-added solutions
• Are sustainability-driven
• Are scalable, with potential for international growth and potential to be applied in corporations and destinations (countries, regions)
• Are an Early Stage or Series A startups
• Have a tested pilot and business plan
• Have been accelerated before
• Have a full-time team already in place

The 12 most disruptive startups (2 for each of the Challenges) will be given support to scale-up. UNWTO will present the best ideas to its Member States, Affiliate Members and investors, providing them with a unique networking opportunity. Additional benefits include the chance to pitch at a special UNWTO Demo Day and access to technological support and to the UNWTO Innovation network, as well as a curated mentorship programme with both one-on-one and group training sessions on key topics such as Intellectual Property, sustainability in business and leadership, possible seed funding for female Startup founders from Ankh Impact Ventures, and incubation for 3 months at the SPARK Innovation Lab.

Applications are now open and will close 30 June 2022. The winning startups will be announced in October. To find out more and to apply, visit the webpage of the UNWTO Awake Tourism Challenge.
UNWTO SDGs Global Startup Competition 2020 Edition:

The 2020 edition was supported by more than 25 partners from across the global innovation ecosystem and attracted over 10,000 participants from 150 countries. The winners had the opportunity to meet Ministers, corporations, investors at the Final Event in Madrid and they have been connected to funding opportunities and pilot projects.

Since 2018, top startups have raised over US$214 million in funding through the UNWTO Innovation Network.

Related links:

UNWTO Awake Tourism Challenge

UNWTO: Innovation, Education and Investments