Seminar on the International Code for
the Protection of Tourists
Punta del Este, Uruguay, 20 May 2022

Concept note

I. Background

Uncertainty and lack of confidence in travel are among the biggest challenges we face when working to restart tourism. The COVID-19 crisis has exposed the absence of an international legal framework to help international tourists in emergency situations and the lack of consistency at the international level regarding the protection rights of tourists as consumers.

During the crisis, border closures, announced with little or no notice, left thousands of tourists stranded abroad, with millions of flights cancelled and a situation that soon worsened. The lack of clarity regarding the obligations, duties and responsibilities of assistance in emergency situations created great uncertainty regarding the rights of tourists, which adversely affected tourists’ confidence in international travel.

In addition, the introduction of measures such as vouchers and the rise of new digital tourism services – without a clear, transparent and harmonized framework – as well as the sharp increase in litigation in travel and tourism disputes, pose additional challenges to restoring consumer confidence.

In light of the above, the International Code for the Protection of Tourists aims to restore consumer confidence and help the recovery of the tourism sector by offering all tourism stakeholders, both in the public and private sectors, a common and harmonized framework for the protection of tourists affected by emergencies – whether health-related or of a different nature – and the rights of tourists as consumers in the environment arising as a result of COVID-19.

In the framework of the 67th meeting of the UNWTO Regional Commission for the Americas, an event that annually brings together the tourism ministers of the region, the UNWTO is organizing together with the Ministry of Tourism of Uruguay this Seminar on the International Code for the Protection of Tourists, which will take place in Punta del Este, Uruguay, on 20 May 2022.

The objective of the Seminar is to address gaps in existing legal frameworks and disparities between countries in terms of the protection of tourists in emergency situations and the rights of tourists as consumers, as well as to explore opportunities for the harmonization of minimum international standards for the protection of tourists in the post-COVID-19 world.

Along with the 67th meeting of the Commission and the aforementioned Seminar, the 1st International Tourism Congress will also be organized by the Ministry of Tourism of Uruguay, and will take place in Punta del Este, Uruguay, on 18 and 19 May 2022.
II. Objectives

The Seminar will address the current challenges and opportunities to restore confidence in travel and accelerate the recovery of the tourism sector in the Americas, paying special attention to assistance to tourists affected by emergencies and the protection rights of consumers of tourism services, through:

- a debate on the specific challenges and opportunities for the recovery of the tourism sector in the Americas in the environment arising as a result of COVID-19;
- the exchange of experiences in crisis containment and management in the tourism sector, with particular attention to measures taken to deal with emergencies, both health-related and otherwise;
- the formulation and implementation of policies and laws for the protection of tourists as consumers, focusing on the disparities between countries;
- the development and harmonization of minimum standards at the international level through the promotion of the International Code for the Protection of Tourists.

The Seminar will address issues such as:

- What was the impact of COVID-19 on the Americas region? How did the health crisis affect the tourism sector in the region’s countries?
- What are the main challenges in the world after COVID-19 and how are they being faced?
- What measures have been taken to deal with emergencies and assistance, and how can tourists affected by emergencies be assisted?
- What is the status of consumer protection in the countries of the Americas? Are there policies and laws for the protection of tourists as consumers?
- What is the International Code for the Protection of Tourists? Why is the Code considered a “flexible instrument”?
- How will the Code improve the protection of tourists in the post-COVID-19 environment? What advantages does adherence to the Code offer to States?
- What is the Code’s relationship with the private sector? What advantages does adherence to the Code offer to a private sector actor?