UNWTO Ministerial Roundtable on Tourism Resilience through Innovation and Digitalization in Asia and the Pacific

Concept Note

1500-1730, Male Time (GMT+5), 14 June 2022
Venue: Crossroads Maldives

(as of 16 May 2022)

Background

The Maldives was elected to host the 34th Joint Meeting of the UNWTO Commission for East Asia and the Pacific & the Commission for South Asia (34th CAP-CSA) at the 33rd CAP-CSA Joint Meeting held in 2021.

The year 2022 marks the 50th anniversary of the Maldives tourism industry. Therefore, in conjunction with the 34th CAP-CSA Joint Meeting and celebrating the Golden Jubilee, the UNWTO and the Ministry of Tourism of the Maldives agreed to organize the UNWTO Ministerial Roundtable on Tourism Resilience through Innovation and Digitalization in Asia and the Pacific and bring the highest levels of policymakers, including the Ministers and invited industry leaders for the Asia-Pacific tourism.

Concept Note

Today, we are emerging from the most severe crisis to hit the global tourism community in decades. Some destinations across Asia and the Pacific have rebounded from terrorist attacks, tsunamis and health alerts, but none have wrought as much devastation as the COVID-19 pandemic. International arrivals fell by 84% in 2020 compared to 2019, making it the worst affected region in the world. Communities across Asia and the Pacific heavily dependent on tourism for their livelihoods were most severely affected, resulting in loss of economic opportunity. This abrupt drop in tourism demand demonstrated the importance of economic importance tourism for the region but also placed a spotlight on its negative impacts of the industry. Decreased economic activity—including tourism—resulted in the most considerable annual reduction in CO_2 emissions in more than 70 years, for example. Furthermore, natural sites suffering from over-tourism prior to the pandemic started to recover.

As a result of this historic shock, host communities, national governments, and enterprises across the tourism value chain have started to engage in discussions on how to balance rebuilding

tourism to be more resilient to shocks and the need for great duty of care for the ecological boundaries of a destination.

There are myriad studies suggesting that consumers of travel and tourism products and services are emerging from the two-year crisis with enhanced appreciation of the importance of ensuring that tourism is sustainable and beneficial for all stakeholders. Consequently, there is now a unique window of opportunity to reflect on the lessons learned in the last two years and put in place reforms that enable tourism to contribute to more green, resilient, inclusive, and sustainable development pathways. After all, tourism is one of the best-positioned sectors to drive inclusive growth, create jobs, reduce poverty, and foster sustainable development and peace.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has created a historic opportunity to re-think tourism and "build forward better" based on lessons learned. To anticipate and overcome new challenges and address changing consumer trends affecting the global tourism sector, UNWTO is building a strategy for ***Innovation and Digital Transformation*** across the tourism value chain to maximize the contribution of tourism in terms of economic growth, job creation and sustainable development. Increasingly, climate change is also challenging tourism's ability to be accountable for the social and environmental impacts on host communities and eco-systems. And consumer reports indicate a growing trend for responsible and conscientious tourism.

On 14 June 2022, UNWTO will be supported by the Ministry of Tourism of the Maldives to unite sector leaders to discuss the innovation and digital transformation to tackle the new challenges we are facing and contribute to the sustainable development of the industry.

Objectives

1. To provide the in-person opportunity for the high-level officials and industry leaders to discuss one of the top and trendy priorities of tourism development – Innovation and Digitalization during the post-pandemic era.
2. To affirm UNWTO's commitment to tourism recovery through innovation and digitalization in Asia-Pacific.

Participants

Asia-Pacific Ministers/Deputy Ministers/Industry Leaders