UNWTO Launch Women in Tech Startup Competition: Middle East

Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 16 March 2023 - UNWTO has launched a new Startup Competition to support women tourism tech entrepreneurs and innovators across the Middle East.

Announced at Biban 2023, Saudi Arabia’s largest SME conference, the Women in Tech Startup Competition: Middle East, will further advance UNWTO’s work to make tourism a pillar of women’s empowerment. The initiative gives innovators the chance to compete for enhanced capacity building and visibility. Finalists in each category will join the UNWTO Innovation Network, giving them access to the UNWTO Member States network, mentorship programs and to UNWTO scholarship opportunities.

UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili, says: “Tourism startups have the power and agility to transform the sector in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. Tourism startups are also leading the way in advancing women empowerment, in the Middle East and globally, and UNWTO is delighted to support the region’s best innovators and digital entrepreneurs.”

Who can apply?

- Startups must be led, owned or managed by women residing in any of the following countries: Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen.

- Idea Stage, Early Stage or Series A startups with a minimum viable product or idea that is ready to be developed and funded.

- Have a full-time team, a tested pilot and business plan.

- Be scalable with potential for international growth.
Startups must also belong to at least one of the following categories:

- **Social Impact:** For startups that focus on technology in wellness, health, urban development, rural development, sustainability, and education with cross-cutting benefits with tourism.

- **Tourism and Travel Experience:** Startups focusing on the food and beverage, transportation and accommodation, travel, and retail industries to participate.

- **Future Tech:** Startups that leverage fintech, AI, AR/VR, cryptocurrency, Internet of Things, blockchain technology, digital twinning and the Metaverse.

- **Events and Community:** Startups focused on social and messaging platforms, e-sports and gaming platforms, community-based applications, events-related platforms, and education technology.

Applications close at the end of July 2023 and the winners will be announced at the Tourism Tech Adventure (TTA), to be held on World Tourism Day (27 September Riyadh, Saudi Arabia).

Startups can apply at: UNWTO Women in Tech Startup Competition: Middle East

**UNWTO and Innovation**

Since 2018, UNWTO’s IEI department has launched more than 21 startup competitions and innovation challenges, covering over 150 countries around the world. With over 10,000 participants and more than US$214 million in funding, UNWTO continues its efforts to support digitalization and innovation in line with the global entrepreneurship ecosystem. Tourism has the opportunity to improve inclusiveness, local community development, and resource efficiency by leveraging innovation and digital advancements.

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