

15th IFTM – UNWTO TRAINING PROGRAMME LEVERAGING THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY AND GASTRONOMY TO CHAMPION THE AGENDA OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

MACAO, CHINA, 18 – 23 September 2023

Venue: MGM Cotai (TBC)

CONCEPT NOTE

1. Background

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism.

In 2015, UNWTO signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Macao SAR Government, aiming to enhance collaboration in nurturing tourism talents and advancing the sustainable development of the tourism industry. Subsequently, in 2016, the Macao Institute for Tourism Studies (IFTM) established the Global Centre for Tourism Education and Training to engage in joint initiatives with UNWTO, elevating the quality of human capital and bolstering the competitiveness of tourism destinations. Through tailored training and support, these programmes address the unique needs of the Member States, equipping tourism officials and industry representatives with the essential skills and knowledge to contribute to the sustainable development and competitiveness of tourism destinations, particularly in Asia and the Pacific.

The Training Programme is an exclusive gathering of high-level government officials from Asia and the Pacific region. Through a comprehensive series of lectures, discussions, debates, and presentations, this programme provides a dynamic platform for sharing knowledge and experience, with a focus on the success in capacity building. Participants of the Training Programme gain a valuable opportunity to enhance their strategic tourism skills and cultivate a network of regional contacts that will be beneficial for their future development. The programme equips participants with the ability to develop sustainable tourism in their respective destinations, thus fostering tourism growth and transforming the sector into a powerful force for positive impact.

Tailored to the ASEAN countries' sub-regional context, the 15th edition of the IFTM – UNWTO Training Programme will be held under the theme of “Leveraging the Meetings Industry and Gastronomy to Champion the Agenda of Sustainable Tourism Development”.

2. Context

During the first quarter of 2023, international tourist arrivals reached 80% of pre-pandemic levels (a decline of 20% compared to the same quarter of 2019), driven by robust performance in Europe and the Middle East. Overall, international tourism experienced a 66% recovery in 2022. In the first quarter of 2023, international tourism witnessed an impressive year-on-year growth rate of 86%, signalling a resilient start to the year. Approximately 235 million travellers embarked on international journeys in the first three months, more than doubling the figures from 2022¹.

Tourism plays an important and leading role in global trade, accounting for 28% of the world's services exports in 2019, amounting to \$1.7 trillion from international tourism. Consequently, it has become the fifth largest traded services sector. While multiple factors influence tourism growth, the meetings industry have the potential to significantly attract visitors to a country and destination².

In light of the above, the meetings industry brings direct influence on tourism spending, and governments worldwide are increasingly recognizing the vital role of the sector in fostering global trade and intellectual collaboration. This, in turn, lays the groundwork for the advancement of knowledge and creative economies. As a result, it is foreseeable that national governments will actively engage in fortifying their business events market development³.

Furthermore, the relationship between gastronomy and tourism has undergone significant changes in recent decades. Gastronomy tourism encompasses visitors' experiences related to food, culinary products, and activities while travelling. Alongside authentic, traditional, and innovative culinary encounters, gastronomy tourism may include engaging in other associated activities such as visiting local producers, participating in food festivals, and attending cooking classes. Wine tourism, a subtype of gastronomy tourism, refers to travel experiences centred around visiting vineyards, wineries, and engaging in wine tasting, consumption, and purchasing, often at or near the source⁴.

Developing and promoting the culinary identity of a destination has become a prevailing trend and a critical strategy for numerous destinations worldwide. Gastronomy possesses a captivating influence on tourists' decision-making when selecting a travel destination, attracting a particular group of travellers known as gastronomy tourists who seek immersive experiences in local food culture.

¹ World Tourism Organization (2023), UNWTO World Tourism Barometer and Statistical Annex, May 2023

² World Tourism Organization (2023), "UNWTO Startup Competition for Mega Events and MICE Tourism", available at: <https://www.unwto.org/unwto-startup-competition>

³ World Tourism Organization, Overview of the Meetings Industry in Asia (2017)

⁴ World Tourism Organization (2019), UNWTO Tourism Definitions, UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284420858>

3. Objectives and Topics

With this call, the power of the Meetings Industry and Gastronomy to a memorable travel experience and the development of host destinations have brought new opportunities. To that end, this edition will focus on the role of the meetings industry and gastronomy tourism to:

- Provide participants with a profound understanding of the Meetings Industry and Gastronomy Tourism principles and successful practices.
- Foster sustainable Meetings Industry planning practices and promote local food systems.
- Develop expertise in both the Meetings Industry and Gastronomy Tourism.
- Facilitate destination branding, marketing, and development through the Meetings Industry and Gastronomy Tourism.
- Establish a platform for exchanging knowledge, insights, and best practices.

4. Participants

The 15th IFTM-UNWTO Training Programme will bring together professionals and experts in the fields of the Meetings Industry and Gastronomy from Asia and the Pacific, including:

- Ministries of Tourism and National Tourism Organizations from UNWTO ASEAN Member States.
- International and Regional Organizations.
- Regional and Local Destination Management Organizations.
- Academic institutions (universities, research facilities) specializing in tourism and gastronomy.