The Middle East Region, strategically situated at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa, with its substantial natural resources and oil reserves, has long been a central player in the global trade.

Today, this tricontinental hub not only maintains its strategic positioning but also boasts robust infrastructure and government-backed initiatives aimed at economic diversification, paving the way for significant growth and development.

While safety, security and confidence are prerequisites for tourism; negative perceptions of a tourist destination can persist for years and affect a whole country. Despite the fact that the road to recovery can be long and difficult, the scale of the economic benefits from tourism makes investing in travel and tourism worthwhile.

Considering that the Middle East Region has been enduring a series of global shocks since the 2020 pandemic, the Middle Eastern economies have demonstrated exceptional resilience, painting a positive economic outlook for the region.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, UNWTO has been taking measures to assist its Member States to respond effectively to its impact on their tourism sectors through initiatives such as the formation of a Global Crisis Committee and the formulation of recommendations to mitigate the impacts on travel and tourism.

This Panel Discussion on “How to build a Regional Tourism Brand in Times of Uncertainty”, with regard also to “Securing the Tourism’s Resilience in the Region”- as part of UNWTO’s initiatives in supporting Tourism recovery - will be led by Ministers in charge of the tourism in the Middle East, as well as prominent stakeholders representing the Tourism Sector in the region. Also, UNWTO will promote the event through its channels and partners.

The discussions will focus on exploring the current landscape of the Middle East region, shedding light on the opportunities, challenges, and evolving economic prospects in the face of the ongoing events.
The discussions will also highlight the current trends and short-term prospects in the region - in the context of a challenging scenario. It will review policies and strategies to consolidate recovery and to step up Tourism’s contribution to inclusive and sustainable socioeconomic development, as well as to advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

According to the UNWTO Barometer released in November 2023; The Middle East continues to lead the recovery by as it witnessed the strongest performance (120%) among other regions and was the first world region to recover pre-pandemic numbers in the nine months through September 2023. The Middle East remains the only world region to surpass 2019 levels this period, with several destinations enjoying extraordinary results, among which Qatar (+91%) and Saudi Arabia (+50%). Visa facilitation measures, the development of new destinations, investments in new tourism related projects and the hosting of large events, are some of the factors underpinning this remarkable performance.

Key topics to be addressed:

- How can governments in the ME Region promote tourism while in times of uncertainty?
- What are the key messages to address to media, private Sector (Travel agencies, tour operators) and to the public?
- How can destinations re-emerge?
- Demonstration of adopted plans in such critical times.
- What steps did the private sector have taken to maintain the tourism flow and the arrivals share?
- How to motivate both policymakers and investors to support the tourism sector in times of such uncertainty?
- What are the financial investment mechanisms and tools available to support tourism in the ME region in times of uncertainty?