New Products and Experiences: an opportunity for mountain tourism

Andorra, 21 March 2024 – Offering more diverse experiences and investing in talented people will play a key role in helping mountain areas grow tourism in a sustainable and responsible manner.

The 12th World Congress on Snow, Mountain and Wellness Tourism identified key challenges, among them climate change and evolving consumer trends, while recognizing the role tourism can play in the protection of the fragile mountain ecosystem, the building of resilience for mountain communities, and the preservation of the local heritage.

Five Years of Action

Held in the framework of the United Nation’s Five Years of Action for the Development of Mountain Regions, the Congress focused on medical and wellness tourism, sustainability, the promotion of premium segments in mountain areas, emerging tourism products and the attraction and retention of human talent.

Also on the agenda was ensuring the importance of measuring the flow of visitors to mountains, representing the vital step towards unlocking the potential of the sector, promoting evidence based policies and ensure its sustainable management, according to a UN Tourism report, jointly developed with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Mountain Partnership (MP) presented at the event.

Opening the Congress, Prime Minister, Xavier Espot, stated: “Tourism in Andorra has recovered pre-pandemic numbers, with more than 9 million tourists and 12 million overnight stays in 2023. However, it is important to seek a balance that ensures environmental continuity and the well-being of people, moving towards a model based on sustainability to find the balance between quantity and quality. Tourism should not be perceived as a problem, but as part of the solutions to the great challenges that the future brings, because a tourism that is respectful of nature, culture and society guarantees resources for the future.”

Natalia Bayona, Executive Director at UN Tourism, recalled that “Tourism is a lifeline for many communities in mountain regions. At the same time, it can play a leading role in protecting these important ecosystems. It can provide new opportunities for conservation and drive the development of local communities. I trust that this Congress will help us move towards a better, more innovative, inclusive and sustainable growth for people and planet.”
High-level panel looks into polices for mountain tourism development

A high-level panel on policies that promote diversification, innovation and sustainability for mountain destinations gathered Jordi Torres Falcó, Minister of Tourism and Commerce of Andorra, Rosana Morillo Rodriguez, Secretary of State for Tourism of Spain, and Alessandra Priante, President of the Italian National Tourism Board (ENIT). Participants stressed the importance of creating a strong framework that aligns all related stakeholders towards a common vision for the development of sustainable, resilient, and inclusive mountain tourism that benefits its communities directly.

Exploring health tourism for mountain development

As an outcome of the 2022 edition, the 2024 Congress included a new focus on health (medical and wellness) tourism, a segment where mountains can offer important added value and have a competitive advantage. This reflects the shift to diversify mountain tourism products, create demand all year around and address the demand of today’s tourist.

Experiences in this segment were presented by speakers such as Csilla Mezősi, Secretary-General of the European Spas Association, Lászlo Puczko, CEO of Health Tourism Worldwide, Joan Muro, President of the Health Tourism Association of Andorra Health Destination and Emma Haefeli, Marketing Director of CHENOT GROUP (Switzerland).

Tourism for rural development

Recalling how tourism can be a driver of rural development, promoting the valorisation and preservation of local culture and values of mountain communities, the Congress also counted with the participation of representatives from three Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism: Saas-Fee of the Swiss region of Valais (BTV in 2021), St. Anton am Arlberg of Austria (BTV 2023) and Ordino of Andorra (BTV in 2023). These villages presented how they stand out in addressing seasonality by diversifying tourism products in an innovative and sustainable manner.

Over 300 participants from 14 countries gathered in Andorra, with many also joining via livestreaming. Speakers included, among others, representatives from Slow Food Carinthia in Austria, National Geographic, l'Agence des Pyrénées, the Sustainable Alpine Tourism Initiative, Pic du Midi, the Creative Tourism Network, Mabrian (Spain), Horwath HTL, as well as leading education institutions such as CETT Barcelona and the Bella Vista Institute of Higher Education of Switzerland.

Minister of Tourism and Commerce of Andorra, Jordi Torres Falcó, concluded: “This year we have introduced a new segment, wellness, demonstrating that in the tourism sector we evolve and adapt to new tourism trends. We also face the need to continue working to advance the Congress, allowing us to respond to the needs of the sector, providing knowledge and tools to improve the mountain tourism offer and, at the same time, become a laboratory where we can delve deeper into topics as varied as the integration of tourism in local communities, or education and training”.
Related Links

- 12th World Congress on Snow, Mountain and Wellness Tourism
- UN Tourism Report 'Understanding and Quantifying Mountain Tourism'