European Committee of the Regions and UN Tourism Break New Ground with Study on Rural Tourism and Development

Madrid, Spain, 15 April 2024 – UN Tourism has partnered with the European Committee of the Regions for a comprehensive study of the significant impact and potential of tourism in fostering socio-economic development in rural areas.

The report emphasizes the critical role of cooperation between these two organizations in bridging local and global efforts towards shared objectives. It showcases the potential of rural tourism to contribute to the resilience of regional and local communities, addressing challenges such as depopulation, inequality and limited access to basic services.

Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General of UN Tourism says: “Tourism has the potential to transform societies, stimulate local economic development, and empower local communities. This joint study with the European Committee of the Regions underscores the importance of rural tourism in contributing to sustainable development in Europe.”

Alves Vasco Cordeiro, President of the European Committee of the Regions says: “Free movement has always been at the heart of the European project. Tourism, as part of this mobility, has helped shape our European identity and is a powerful driver for growth and jobs, breathing new life into communities across Europe.”

Key Findings

The study offers a comprehensive understanding of rural tourism and its impact on European regions, with a focus on:

- **Resilience of Rural Tourism post-COVID:** The report sheds light on the remarkable resilience displayed by rural tourism during and post-COVID-19. Despite global challenges, rural tourism witnessed a surge in popularity, particularly among local travelers. This resilience underscores its potential as a robust economic driver and showcases its ability to adapt to changing circumstances.

- **Economic Diversification and Cultural Preservation:** A key insight is the potential of rural tourism to drive economic diversification and job creation in rural areas. The study also underscores tourism’s contribution to preserving cultural heritage. Rural tourism is seen as...
a bridge between tradition and modernity, fostering community participation and sustaining local services while preserving the unique identity of rural regions.

- **Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Development:** The study identifies challenges faced by rural areas, such as inadequate infrastructure, limited financial resources, and declining local populations. Simultaneously, it recognizes these challenges as opportunities for growth. By providing a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved, the report sets the stage for sustainable rural tourism development, urging stakeholders to navigate challenges thoughtfully.

**Recommendations**

The report offers a roadmap for policymakers, local governments, and stakeholders to harness the potential of rural tourism while addressing its challenges.

- **Integrated Rural Value Chains and Collaboration:** An overarching recommendation is the integration of rural value chains in tourism. The report emphasizes the need for collaboration between businesses and stakeholders to create synergies within the local economy. By maximizing economic benefits, this approach ensures a holistic and sustainable development trajectory for rural tourism.

- **Digital Connectivity and Skills:** Recognizing the digital divide in rural areas, the report recommends a focused effort on improving digital connectivity. It underscores the importance of digital skills development to empower rural stakeholders in leveraging technology effectively. By addressing these aspects, the report aims to enhance the digital readiness of rural communities, unlocking new opportunities in the digital era.

- **Alignment with Consumer Trends and Sustainable Practices:** Acknowledging evolving consumer trends and the need to place sustainability at the heart of tourism development, the report encourages responsible travel initiatives, that not only meet changing consumer expectations but also contribute to broader sustainability goals. This recommendation positions rural tourism as a catalyst for positive environmental and social impact.

**Background:**

UN Tourism: Tourism and Rural Development
“Tourism and Rural Development: A Policy Perspective”
“Tourism and Rural Development: Understanding Challenges on the Ground – Lessons learned from the Best Tourism Villages by UNWTO Initiative”
Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism
Studies (europa.eu)