



United Nations General Assembly High-Level Thematic Event on Tourism

Tuesday, 16 April 2024, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
General Assembly Hall, UN Headquarters, New York

Concept Note

As part of the Sustainability Week, the High-level Thematic Event on Tourism will be convened by the President of the General Assembly for the seventy-eighth session, in cooperation with UN Tourism, and in accordance with General Assembly resolution 77/178 entitled “Promotion of sustainable and resilient tourism, including ecotourism, for poverty eradication and environmental protection”, as well as resolution 77/269 entitled “Global Tourism Resilience Day”.

As one of the largest sectors in the world, tourism is a major driver of economic growth, and social and cultural development, as well as an important contributor of decent job creation and entrepreneurship for all. For many developing countries, the tourism sector is a major source of employment, foreign currency earnings and tax revenues. In small island developing states (SIDS), tourism accounts for nearly 35% of all exports, reaching in some cases as much as 80% of national exports¹. It can be a great source of income to national economies and help eradicate poverty by creating employment opportunities, improve economic livelihoods in local communities, and facilitating socio-economic progress. It can also advance the empowerment of women, and other disadvantaged groups including indigenous communities, as well as generate economic opportunities for youth and people living in remote areas, while preserving tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

The year 2023 marked the midway point on the journey for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the current poly-crisis have hampered the world’s capacity to deliver on its commitments. While tourism is explicitly included in targets under SDGs 8, 12, and 14, as one of the world’s largest economic sectors, it can significantly contribute to fulfilling all 17 Goals.

According to the UN Tourism, measuring the sustainability of tourism will improve policy action for sustainable development, and promote one common statistical language, which can be compared across countries and economic sectors, as well as ensure tourism is factored into national and international development frameworks. The Statistical Framework for Measuring Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST), the sustainability indicators, form the foundation of a global approach towards evidence-based policies of sustainability of the global tourism sector.

Given the cross-cutting nature of tourism, the sector has strong linkages and a multiplier effect on other sectors, making it a powerful engine of economic growth, poverty eradication, and reducing inequalities among and within countries through jobs, opportunities for disadvantaged groups like youth and women, and community and rural development. Tourism is also a vehicle for cultural exchange and understanding, tolerance, and peace building. It requires a whole-of-government approach, strong public-private sector partnerships, and community engagement. As an economic activity, tourism has a significant advantage as it can be perfectly compatible with cultural and environmental protection -providing valuable income to sustain biodiversity and livelihoods even in remote areas.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which caused a significant reduction in international travel, has exposed the vulnerability of the tourist ecosystem. It revealed the importance of ensuring innovations in tourism for resilience and adaptability as well as the need to ensure sustainable investment opportunities for the sector. Conflicts, geopolitical tensions and ongoing humanitarian crises in various parts of the world further aggravates the economic and political landscape and poses the challenges to the tourism industry.

Objectives

The high-level thematic event on tourism aims to advance a concerted approach on strengthening tourism resilience at the highest level and maximising its contribution to the sustainability agenda. The event offers Member States, Observers, civil society, UN System and other stakeholders a platform to discuss strategies, share best practices and experiences to promote sustainable and resilient tourism and its contribution to achieving SDGs.

Format

The event will comprise an opening, a fireside chat, two high-level plenary segments, two thematic debates and a closing segment. The meeting will be open to the United Nations system, ECOSOC-accredited non-governmental organizations and other relevant stakeholders.

Fireside Chat: The Future of Tourism

The successive natural and man-made crises have improved the awareness and development impact of the tourism sector. At the same time, they have revealed its vulnerability to external shocks and the consequences thereof on economies, societies and our planet while underscoring structural challenges that need to be addressed if we want to boost the resilience of the sector and maximize its contribution to a more inclusive and sustainable future.

New business models and effective partnerships are emerging, calling for appropriate mechanisms to encourage more holistic policies as well as multistakeholder engagement and partnerships. The Fireside Chat will provide opportunities to involve non-state actors, private sector, academia and civil society to discuss how we can harmonize leadership in and of the tourism sector in order to ensure a prosperous and sustainable future.

Thematic debate 1 –Launch of the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism

The Statistical Framework for Measuring Sustainability of Tourism was adopted at the 55th Session of the United Nations Statistical Commission held in February 2024. A living example of moving beyond GDP to value what counts, the SF-MST, the sustainability indicators, respond to the information needs of more integrated tourism policy.

The key statistical data and indicators will be measured for three dimensions: economy, society, and environment. In addition, the data and indicators will be measured on a global, national, and sub-national levels. The SF-MST is to provide for a multipurpose conceptual statistical framework, which measures the impacts and dependencies of sustainable tourism.

Pilot studies of the SF-MST have been carried out in over 20 countries and has helped to further strengthen the Framework as well as helped destination managers and policymakers in the countries to develop strategies to enhance sustainable tourism in their respective countries. In the implementation of the SF-MST, there will be more robust data to ensure that sustainable tourism action on the ground really contributes to raising living standards and ensuring that no one is left behind.

Thematic debate 1 aims to launch the framework and provide a platform and give member states the opportunity to discuss the importance of such tools for sustainability in tourism. A commonly agreed evidence-based tool helps to engage with stakeholders across the board to jointly agree on where we stand, where we need to go, and how to get there. Harmonized and trusted data is critical to communicate progress more effectively, benchmark performance, align policy agendas and governance models, and promote innovative business practices and partnerships.

Thematic debate 2 – Fostering Resilient Tourism to facilitate and ensure global sustainability

As the largest industry globally, tourism, makes a substantial contribution to sustainable development. Nevertheless, tourism is intrinsically susceptible to several disruptive occurrences such as climate change, pandemics, cyber-security incidents, terrorism, and political instability and conflict. Therefore, it is crucial to safeguard the worldwide tourism industry by ensuring the resilience of the global tourism ecosystem, including the capacity of tourist destinations to endure shocks, promptly recover from crises, or even

prosper in the face of such difficulties. Developing resilience entails the process of planning, managing, and recovering from adversities. The corona disease (COVID-19) pandemic represents yet another episode in a series of global disruptions that has heightened the attention of global stakeholders to the inherent vulnerability of the tourism sector.

Concurrently, it has underscored the sector's remarkable capacity for rapid recovery and its potential to catalyse economic resurgence with even greater alacrity. It is imperative to investigate methodologies for fostering resilience within the global tourism sector, thereby facilitating and ensuring global sustainability.

During thematic debate 2 Member States will discuss potential strategies for building resilience in the tourism sector including the sector's ability to withstand and recover from various crises. The discussion will also focus on addressing vulnerabilities and risks, funding and investing in resilience and resilience-building frameworks and partnerships.

Outcome

The President of the General Assembly will circulate an informal summary of the high-level thematic event.
