

World

Magazine

TRUMP 2.0

AND ITS EFFECTS ON TOURISM



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EDITOR’S LETTER

Hanni Tran,
Editor in Chief of The World Magazine

Dear Esteemed Readers,

I am delighted to present Issue 13 of World Magazine, where we explore the evolving landscape of global tourism investment. This edition features insights from industry leaders on strategies, challenges, and opportunities shaping the sector.

As discussions around a second Trump term unfold, Bulut Bağcı, President of the World Tourism Forum Institute, examines potential shifts in visa regulations, travel agreements, and tourism infrastructure. We also highlight Malta’s tourism investment strategy with Dr. Ian Borg, Korea’s MICE sector innovations with Danny Hyundae Shin, and sustainable growth insights from Dr. Amir Ali Salemi and Mr. Ousmane Dione of the World Bank.

Anouk van Eekelen shares how the Netherlands’ Perspective 2030 framework prioritizes sustainable tourism, while Natthriya Thaweevong discusses Thailand’s marketing strategies for diversification. We explore the transformative power of technology in tourism, with insights from Wego’s Bernard Corraya and Khiva’s sustainable tourism potential, as analyzed by Derya Soysal.

This issue also delves into public-private partnerships, consumer trends, and financial technology’s role in travel. Experts like Sergio Guerreiro (OECD) and Florence Mélique (Visa) offer perspectives on fostering investment and enhancing the travel experience. Additionally, Dr. David Vequist highlights opportunities in medical tourism.

We hope this edition provides valuable insights and inspires you in navigating global tourism’s dynamic future.

Happy reading!

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WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM 2025 INSIGHTS



Bulut Bağcı
President of WTFI

The World Economic Forum (WEF) 2025, held in the snow-clad Swiss Alps of Davos, brought together global leaders to address the world’s most pressing challenges. Under the theme “Rebuilding Trust in a Fragmented World,” the discussions were diverse and forward-looking. For those invested in the tourism-aviation-travel nexus, the insights were nothing short of transformative. Attending numerous panels, including the standout Bloomberg Trumpeconomic session, I found the event to be a profound exploration of connectivity, innovation, and sustainability.

This article unpacks the key takeaways from the forum through the Tourism-Aviation-Travel Triangle, a framework critical for understanding the economic and environmental implications of global mobility.

Tourism: Embracing Sustainability and Resilience

The tourism industry, rebounding from the pandemic,

emerged as a vital force in global economic recovery. The forum emphasized the sector’s critical role in sustainable development and community empowerment.

Economic Vitality of Tourism: Tourism contributed \$9.5 trillion to global GDP in 2024, accounting for 10% of the world’s economy. Projections indicate this could grow to \$16 trillion by 2034, outpacing the global economy’s overall growth rate.

Sustainability as a Strategic Imperative: Sustainable tourism models were at the forefront of discussions, with examples from countries like Costa Rica and Bhutan demonstrating how eco-tourism can drive economic growth while preserving natural and cultural heritage.

Technology-Driven Evolution: Innovations such as AI-guided travel platforms, virtual reality previews, and blockchain-based transparency systems were highlighted as tools to enhance traveler experience and ensure ethical practices across the value chain.

Aviation: Decarbonization and Passenger Experience Redefined

The aviation industry, central to global mobility, is under increasing pressure to decarbonize while meeting growing consumer demand. The discussions at WEF 2025 showcased the strides and struggles of this dynamic sector.

Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAFs): SAF adoption dominated aviation panels as a near-term solution for reducing carbon emissions. However, scaling production to meet global demand remains a significant challenge. Industry leaders urged public-private partnerships to lower costs and expand infrastructure.

Innovations in Aircraft Design: Electric and hydrogen-powered planes garnered attention as potential game-changers for short-haul flights, though commercial deployment is still years away. Panelists highlighted ongoing pilot projects, including Airbus’ ZEROe hydrogen concept aircraft.

Passenger-Centric Transformation: Digital technologies like biometric check-ins, predictive AI for maintenance, and hyper-efficient scheduling systems were presented as critical advancements to improve operational efficiency and customer satisfaction.

Global Travel: Shaping the Future of Mobility

Travel, as a sector deeply influenced by geopolitical and consumer trends, was explored in depth. Discussions centered on evolving traveler expectations, demographic shifts, and the role of policy in shaping seamless global mobility.



The Rise of Experiential Travel: Post-pandemic travelers are seeking authentic, meaningful journeys. This trend is driving demand for unique destinations and eco-conscious itineraries, signaling a shift from mass tourism to experience-first travel models.

Geopolitical Dynamics: Visa liberalization and regional partnerships, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and streamlined EU visa frameworks, were lauded as enablers of smoother cross-border mobility. However, geopolitical tensions remain a barrier to fully unlocking global travel potential.

Luxury Meets Sustainability: The growing luxury eco-tourism market is reshaping travel paradigms, as high-end travelers prioritize carbon-neutral options and exclusive, sustainable experiences.

The Interdependence of the Triangle

The Tourism-Aviation-Travel Triangle emerged as a critical framework for addressing the challenges and opportunities presented by global mobility. The sectors are deeply intertwined, and their collaboration is essential for sustainable growth.

Economic Synergy: Tourism depends on aviation for connectivity, while airlines rely on tourism demand to drive profitability. For example, long-haul destinations like the Maldives and Seychelles depend on direct international flights for their tourism-driven economies.

Sustainability in Tandem: Green initiatives, such as SAFs in aviation and carbon-offset programs in tourism, require harmonized efforts to achieve collective climate goals. The

WEF panelists emphasized aligning industry strategies with global climate agreements like the Paris Accord.

Technology Integration: The potential of AI-powered travel planning, real-time aviation analytics, and blockchain-based ethical certifications to unify these industries is immense. Technology offers a pathway to efficiency, transparency, and enhanced customer trust.

Bloomberg Trumpeconomic: A Personal Highlight

Among the plethora of sessions, the Bloomberg Trumpeconomic panel stood out as a tour de force. The discourse revolved around recalibrating global economic strategies in response to fragmented geopolitics and inflationary pressures. The panel shed light on policies that could bolster industries reliant on global mobility, such as easing trade barriers and incentivizing green investments in aviation and tourism. The discussion was a masterclass in economic foresight, leaving a lasting impression.

A Connected and Sustainable Tomorrow

The World Economic Forum 2025 spotlighted the pivotal role of the tourism-aviation-travel triangle in shaping a connected and equitable world. While the road ahead is fraught with challenges — ranging from climate change to geopolitical tensions — the discussions at Davos underscored the transformative power of collaboration, innovation, and sustainability.

As I reflect on the wealth of insights gained from the panels, especially the Bloomberg Trumpeconomic session, it’s clear that a united approach among these interdependent sectors will pave the way for a brighter, more resilient future. The blueprint for success lies in our collective ability to reimagine global mobility — not just as a convenience, but as a cornerstone of shared prosperity.



Ousmane Dione,
Regional Vice President, Middle East and
North Africa (MENA), World Bank

TOURISM IN MENA: RESILIENCE, GROWTH AND THE ROAD AHEAD

Ousmane Dione,
Regional Vice President, Middle East and
North Africa (MENA), World Bank



Q *What is the economic impact of tourism in the MENA region, and what is the outlook for growth?*

A Tourism-related activities account for an important share of GDP, foreign exchange earnings and employment in many developing countries and MENA is no exception. Globally, tourism generates 9 percent of global GDP, and 330 million total jobs. In MENA, the contribution of tourism to GDP varies from a low of 2.8 percent in Libya to a high of 21 percent in Jordan. Employment contribution is similar, with highest tourism employment at 22 percent in Lebanon.

Despite unrest in the region, last year MENA welcome over 95 million arrivals. The strong tourism performance can be attributed to initiatives such as visa streamlining and improved connectivity. In the Gulf, Qatar saw a 141% increase in tourist arrivals compared to 2019. In North Africa, tourism growth has been unprecedented—Egypt for example doubled its tourism revenue in the past decade—and its spillover impact helps boost global credit ratings, bolsters the local currency, and creates jobs.

Looking ahead, the outlook for growth remains positive, as

tourism has fully recovered from the COVID pandemic and continues to exhibit higher growth rates than many services and merchandise trade. Travel-related inflation has also been decreasing, as shown by consumer price index data in key source markets such as the US, UK and China. Further, countries are investing heavily in infrastructure. Morocco, which will host the World Cup in 2030 with Spain and Portugal has already allocated \$13 billion to infrastructure improvements.

Q *What are the key policy reforms and investments needed to create an enabling environment for the tourism sector, and how has the World Bank supported countries in these efforts?*

A Creating a thriving tourism sector requires a stable macroeconomic environment, strategic infrastructure investments, good governance and sustainable planning, and a business-friendly regulatory framework. These focus areas are where the World Bank is supporting countries through policy advice, capacity-building initiatives, and financing.

In Saudi Arabia, the Bank has been working with the Ministry of Tourism to develop a National Digital Tourism Strategy,

implement regulatory reforms to improve investment conditions, and create a sustainable tourism global center. In Jordan, efforts have focused on business climate improvements, urban infrastructure, and workforce upskilling. In Lebanon, historic sites have been made more accessible with public squares, sidewalks, and rehabilitated historic facades. In Tunisia, regulatory streamlining and improved access to land for tourism projects have been key priorities.

Transport too plays a vital role in enabling tourism and contributing to economic development and growth. The Lebanon Roads and Employment Project has rehabilitated and maintained around 525 km and 800 km of roads, respectively, in 25 districts across the country. These roads are located near protected areas, including four UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Safe infrastructure not only facilitates smoother and safer travel for tourists to these historically significant sites, but it is also essential for preserving cultural heritage, fostering tourism, and contributing to local economies.

Sustainability is also at the forefront. In Morocco, the World Bank's Blue Economy Program is investing \$350 million in financing to enhance coastal tourism resilience, improving ecotourism planning, and supporting small, local businesses.

Q *Public-private partnerships are essential for tourism development. Can you provide examples of successful PPPs in the MENA region facilitated by the World Bank Group, and what lessons have been learned from these collaborations?*

A Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are critical in enhancing tourism infrastructure across the MENA region, driving economic growth, creating jobs, and improving service quality. One notable example is the Queen Alia International Airport (QAIA) in Jordan. The World Bank Group's private sector arm IFC, in partnership with the Jordanian government, structured and financed the airport's expansion, leading to a record 9 million passengers annually post-COVID. QAIA became the first airport in the Middle East to achieve Level 4+ Transition status in the Airport Carbon Accreditation Program, aligning with global sustainability goals.

Another success is Saudi Arabia's Prince Mohammed Bin Abdulaziz International Airport in Madinah, developed under a PPP model with IFC advisory services. Initially challenged by the pandemic-induced decline in passenger traffic, a rebalancing agreement helped sustain operations, showcasing the resilience of PPPs in crisis situations.

The key takeaway from these initiatives is that well-structured PPPs drive long-term economic benefits, improve service quality, and attract investment, but they require robust regulatory frameworks and flexibility to adapt to economic shifts.

Q *Conflict has significantly affected tourism in parts of the MENA*

region. How has the World Bank assessed the economic impact of these conflicts on tourism-generated income, and what is the outlook for recovery?

A Conflict is a major disruptor of tourism but it's a resilient sector overall. Analysis of previous crises in the MENA region suggests a short period of most acute effects, followed by slow overall sectoral recovery in affected countries. In the three weeks following October 7, 2023, flight bookings to the Middle East dropped 26% below 2019 levels. Its spillover impact has severely impacted Lebanon, losing over \$1.1 billion in travel receipts in 2024. Q3 2024 data shows a year-over-year decline in estimated passenger arrivals with Lebanon down 20%.

Despite these challenges, the region overall has demonstrated remarkable resilience, supported by policy reforms, investment incentives, and strategic tourism recovery programs. The region closed 2023 with tourist arrivals 22% above pre-pandemic levels, and North African destinations like Tunisia and Morocco saw an influx of European travelers. Tourism revenues in Egypt remained strong, reaching \$4.8 billion in Q3 2024. Although some areas remain vulnerable, investments in infrastructure, digital transformation, and market diversification are fostering gradual recovery.

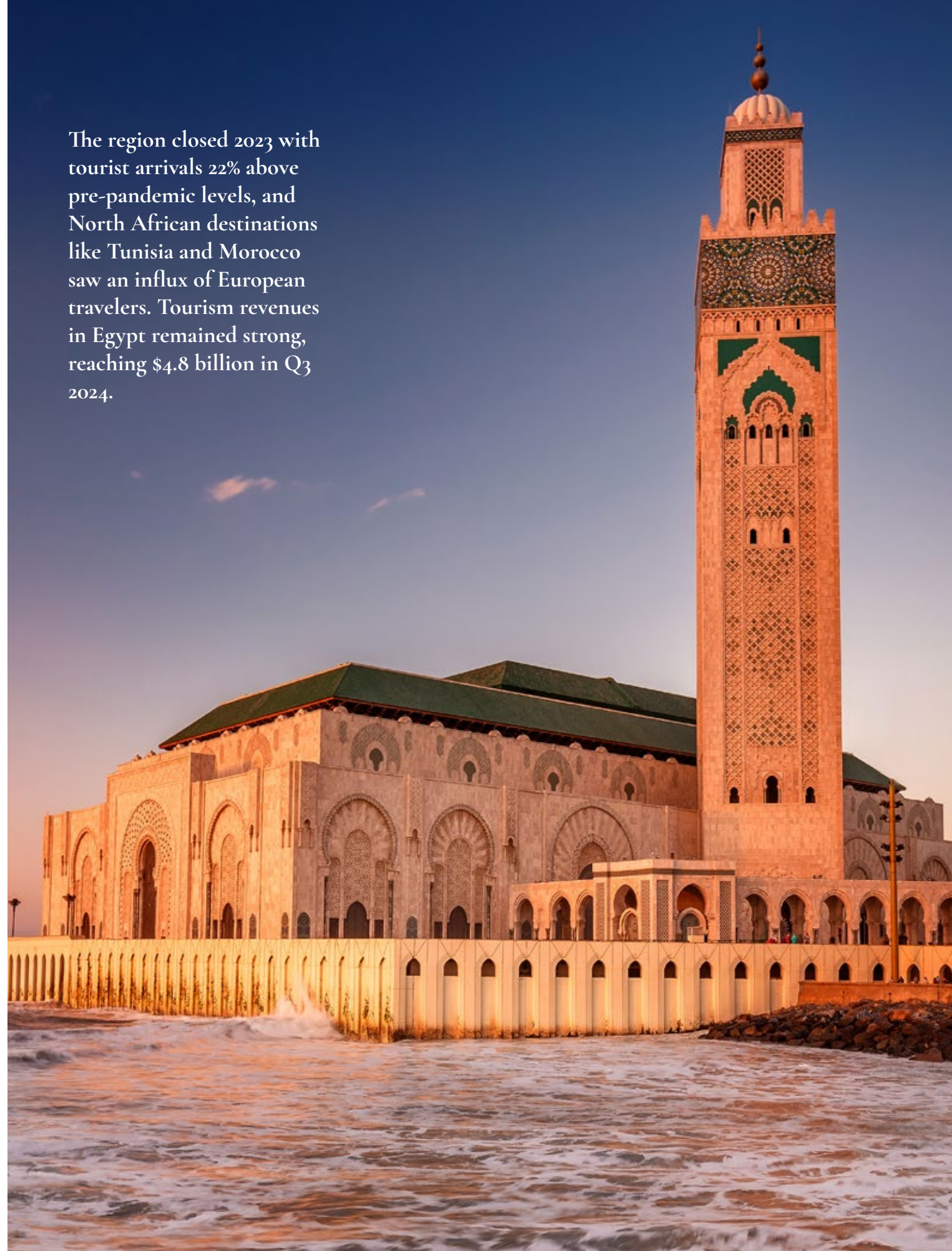
Q *How is climate change affecting tourism in the MENA region, and what measures are being taken to mitigate its impact?*

A The intensifying impacts of a changing climate pose severe risks to MENA's tourism sector, including rising temperatures, coastal erosion, droughts, and extreme weather events. In Morocco, 65% of the population and major tourism activities are concentrated along the coast, making the sector vulnerable to sea-level rise, erosion and storm impacts. Lebanon's winter tourism industry is under threat due to declining snowfall, while increased summer wildfires risk eco-tourism areas.

To address these challenges, the World Bank is working with regional partners to implement Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) plans, focus on sustainable coastal tourism and resilience-building initiatives. These efforts enhance tourism infrastructure, protect biodiversity, support climate adaptation strategies, and promote sustainable ecotourism. The Red Sea's conservation, in collaboration with PERSGA, is an example of nature-based tourism fostering economic and environmental benefits.

Tourism in the MENA region is at a transformational juncture, presenting both challenges and unprecedented opportunities for sustainable growth. The sector's resilience, backed by strategic investments, regulatory reforms, and sustainability initiatives, offers a promising pathway to create jobs and grow the economy. **W**

The region closed 2023 with tourist arrivals 22% above pre-pandemic levels, and North African destinations like Tunisia and Morocco saw an influx of European travelers. Tourism revenues in Egypt remained strong, reaching \$4.8 billion in Q3 2024.



DRIVING TOURISM INVESTMENT IN A CHANGING WORLD AN OECD PERSPECTIVE



Sérgio Guerreiro , Chairman of Tourism Committee, OECD



Tourism is a key driver of economic growth, regional development, and sustainability efforts across OECD member countries. However, attracting and managing investments in the sector requires a strategic approach that balances economic opportunities with environmental and social responsibilities. In this exclusive interview, Sérgio Guerreiro, Chairman of OECD Tourism Committee, shares insights into the organization's policy priorities, investment facilitation strategies, and best practices from member states. He discusses the challenges in tourism financing, the role of digitalization, and how emerging trends—such as AI and sustainable infrastructure—are shaping the future of tourism investment worldwide.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR TOURISM INVESTMENT

Q Mr. Guerreiro, given the diverse landscape of tourism across OECD member countries, what are the key strategic priorities that the OECD Tourism Committee is currently advocating for to guide and attract sustainable tourism investments? How do these priorities align with broader goals such as economic diversification, regional development, and environmental sustainability within member states?

A Effective policy approaches to enhance both the quantity and quality of investment in tourism include establishing robust and integrated governance arrangements to guide quality investments in tourism assets, leveraging private sector and other sources of funding to maximize the impact of tourism investment policies, integrating environmental and social considerations into investment decision-making frameworks to foster sustainable tourism development, and building capacity to future-proof investments, ensuring the sector's resilience and alignment with the green and digital transitions.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INVESTMENT FACILITATION:

Q The OECD plays a key role in influencing policy.

What specific policy recommendations is the Tourism Committee actively promoting to member countries to reduce barriers and facilitate both public and private tourism investments?

I believe that investment into supporting tourism, such as increasing the use of digitalisation to facilitate travel and accommodation services, infrastructure development, promoting sustainable tourism initiatives, among others, is important to improve destination attractiveness and increase the revenue generated from these activities.

In terms of potential policy approaches to support investment and financing for sustainable tourism development, I would mention promoting access to finance for sustainable tourism investment projects, whether larger projects or smaller SME investments.

On the other hand, it is recommended to incentivise the transition towards low carbon, climate resilient investments and encourage more responsible business practices in tourism.

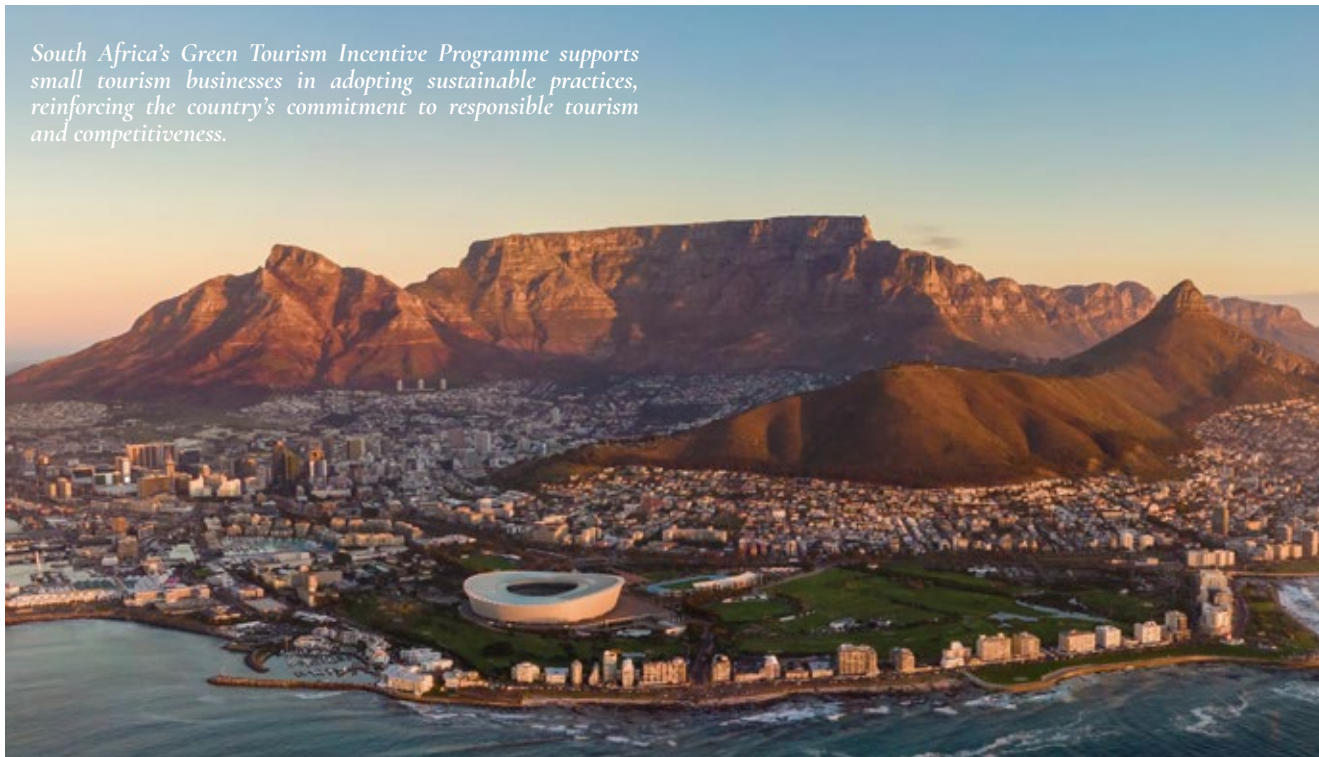
Also worth mentioning is the recommendation to build capacity and better co-ordinate actions across government to support the shift to more sustainable tourism investment and financing practices and to improve data and analysis on finance and investment in sustainable tourism development, including the use of green finance in tourism.

Enhancing tourism investment requires strong governance, diversified funding, sustainability integration, and capacity building to ensure resilience and alignment with green and digital transitions.

Interview

Sérgio Guerreiro,
Chairman of Tourism Committee, OECD

South Africa's Green Tourism Incentive Programme supports small tourism businesses in adopting sustainable practices, reinforcing the country's commitment to responsible tourism and competitiveness.



Q Could you highlight any examples of successful policies or best practices implemented by OECD members in this regard?

A Collecting and sharing good practices to promote tourism development is one of the ongoing activities of the Tourism Committee. From this work, I would highlight some cases that illustrate relevant measures in this field.

On top of other more traditional funding instruments, Portugal has implemented the REVIVE programme, a collaborative initiative by the Ministries of Economy, Culture, and Finance, designed to promote the rehabilitation and revitalisation of vacant public properties. Through a public tendering process, these properties are opened to private investment and transformed into tourist attractions. The programme not only drives economic activity in tourism but also enhances the attractiveness of regional destinations, spreading demand and fostering economic and social cohesion by generating jobs and wealth across the national territory.

In New Zealand, the Tourism Infrastructure Fund, introduced in 2017, provides up to NZD 25 million annually in co-financing for developing essential tourism-related infrastructure, such as walkways, car parks, and camping facilities. This fund specifically targets local communities disproportionately impacted by visitor growth, where the small ratepayer base limits their ability to respond quickly.

Complementing this initiative, New Zealand also introduced the International Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy in 2019. This levy invests in sustainable tourism and conservation projects, ensuring tourism growth enriches the lives of New Zealanders while fostering a productive, sustainable, and inclusive tourism system that protects the environment.

Iceland has taken a strategic approach to address tourism infrastructure needs through its National Infrastructure Plan and Tourist Site Protection Fund. Initiated in 2018, the Infrastructure Plan adopts a long-term, holistic perspective on developing infrastructure at tourist sites of natural and cultural heritage importance under pressure from high visitation. This 12-year strategic plan includes rolling 3-year investment cycles to fund improvements such as paths, viewing platforms, parking, and toilets across the country, ensuring sustainable development and visitor management.

In South Africa, the Green Tourism Incentive Programme, launched in 2017, supports small and micro-tourism businesses in adopting sustainable tourism practices. Aligned with South Africa's National Tourism Sector Strategy and the White Paper on Tourism Development and Promotion, this resource efficiency programme underpins the country's commitment to responsible and sustainable tourism, enabling smaller operators to contribute to environmental preservation while maintaining competitiveness.

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES IN TOURISM INVESTMENT:

Q What are the most significant challenges that OECD member countries currently face in attracting and managing tourism investments? This could relate to areas such as access to finance, regulatory frameworks, infrastructure gaps, or skills development. How is the OECD Tourism Committee supporting member states in addressing these challenges?

A At the Tourism Committee, we have sought to work on different components of public policies to improve the business environment for companies and the competitiveness of the tourism sector.

We have carried out several projects in the area of policies to promote sustainable tourism development and destination resilience, dimensions that we consider relevant to guarantee an investment framework focused on the long term and that improves the attractiveness of destinations for investment.

I would also like to highlight the work we have recently developed in the area of digitalization of tourism, another essential dimension for the competitiveness of companies and tourist destinations.

The rapid evolution of new technologies, such as generative AI, extended reality (XR), and blockchain, is transforming the way people plan and experience travel. These advancements create opportunities to engage new consumer segments with innovative tourism products and services, enhance business operations and performance, and accelerate the shift towards greener and more sustainable business models. However, while the potential benefits are significant, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) often lag behind larger firms in adopting these digital technologies. In the tourism sector, digital adoption among SMEs remains predominantly focused on basic services, highlighting a growing digital divide between SMEs and larger, technology-driven businesses.

Bridging this adoption gap is critical to ensuring SMEs can fully benefit from the digital revolution. This requires a multifaceted approach, combining investments in digital infrastructure, human capital development, and innovation in business models and processes. For tourism SMEs to succeed in this transition, they need support not only in acquiring the

technical skills and tools to adopt these technologies but also in implementing organisational changes, process innovation, and new business strategies tailored to a rapidly changing digital landscape.

Recent policy initiatives, such as Tourism Trends and Policies 2024, Artificial Intelligence and Tourism, and Preparing the Tourism Workforce in Portugal for the Digital Future, address these challenges. These papers provide actionable insights to support the digital transition, ensure the tourism workforce is equipped with the necessary skills, and help SMEs and other stakeholders in the tourism ecosystem adapt to a technology-driven future.

MEASURING THE IMPACT OF TOURISM INVESTMENTS:

Q From the OECD's perspective, how do you assess the long-term economic, social, and environmental impact of tourism investments in member countries?

A Tourism investment policies and programmes should be evaluated regularly to judge their impact and effectiveness, and to guide programme development as appropriate. It is also important to monitor the impact of tourism investment, not just on the economy but also on the environment and local communities.

Limited information is available on the quantity and quality of investment in the tourism sector. A review of OECD databases and consultation with national tourism administrations and statistical offices has identified weaknesses in the evidence base to support tourism investment policy and decision making. Data collection on tourism investment needs to be significantly improved to provide meaningful information for policy makers and investors.

Q What are the key metrics and indicators the OECD Tourism Committee recommends for measuring the effectiveness and sustainability of these investments?

A Usual measures include internal or external policy reviews or evaluations to assess if programmes are meeting their objectives.

Regular qualitative surveys which can generate time-series data are another mechanism to assess if a tourism development is progressing in a positive way, and in turn inform investment decisions.

Interview

Sérgio Guerreiro,
Chairman of Tourism Committee, OECD

THE FUTURE OF TOURISM INVESTMENT IN THE OECD:

Q Looking ahead, what are the emerging trends and opportunities in tourism investment that OECD member countries should be paying attention to?

A Significant investments are essential to mitigate the environmental impact of tourism activities and to adapt to the growing challenges posed by climate change. At the same time, tourism destinations and businesses must be supported to keep pace with rapid technological advancements, alongside securing resources to develop the infrastructure and mechanisms needed for more effective tourism management. These efforts must be contextualized within the broader budgetary constraints and priorities of individual countries. Gaining the necessary support will depend on clearly demonstrating the economic growth potential of tourism measures while aligning them with broader policy objectives and sustainability goals.

Q What role do you see the OECD Tourism Committee playing in helping its members adapt to these trends and ensure that tourism investment continues to be a driver of sustainable and inclusive growth?

A The Committee has been working closely with its members to identify instruments and good practices that can support governments in addressing these challenges.

As recent examples of work in this field, I would mention the latest version of tourism trends and policies 2024, which focus one of its chapter on strengthening the tourism workforce and highlights the actions governments can take to create the right framework conditions to enable policy-led change, in collaboration with the private sector to build a more resilient tourism, considering the impacts of the green and digital transitions. On the other hand,

the G7/OECD policy paper on Artificial Intelligence and tourism discusses the opportunities and risks AI brings, and what this means for tourists, businesses, destinations and governments.

PORTUGAL'S SUCCESSFUL TOURISM INVESTMENT STRATEGY AND PUBLIC-PRIVATE COLLABORATION:

Q In your capacity as Senior Director on Strategy & Knowledge Management at Turismo de Portugal, can you share insights into Portugal's successful strategy for attracting tourism investment, including the key elements of your approach? Furthermore, how has effective public-private collaboration played a role in driving successful tourism investments in Portugal, and what lessons can other countries learn from Portugal's experience in fostering such partnerships?

A In terms of investment promotion, Portugal has developed an investment support system that combines various financing solutions, including incentives, credit, venture capital or mutual guarantee. These instruments are financed by Turismo de Portugal's own funds, in partnership with the banking system, the mutual guarantee system and the Banco Português de Fomento, Portugal's public development bank. Some of these instruments are also financed by EU structural funds.

This system of financing instruments has proven to be very positive, allowing action aligned with the tourism development strategy, acting as an accelerator of the strategic priorities of public policies. A virtuous example of a public-private partnership is the "Offer Qualification Line", launched in 2024 by Turismo de Portugal, in partnership with the banking system, as an instrument for medium and long-term financing of tourism projects that qualify the offer and demonstrate compliance with environmental and social sustainability requirements, favoring the development of low-density territories.

Portugal's investment support system, combining various financing solutions through public-private partnerships, has effectively accelerated tourism development by aligning with strategic priorities, including sustainability and regional growth.



MALTA'S VISION FOR TOURISM INVESTMENT

Dr. Ian Borg, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for
Foreign Affairs and Tourism

Q *Malta's Strategic Tourism Investment Priorities: Malta has a unique position in the Mediterranean. Could you elaborate on the key strategic priorities that guide tourism investment in Malta, particularly regarding infrastructure development, sustainability, and diversification of the tourism product beyond traditional offerings? Are there specific sectors or initiatives that the government is actively encouraging investment in, and what incentives are available?*

A Malta's tourism investment strategy is guided by the National Tourism Strategy 2021–2030, which emphasises three key pillars: infrastructure development, sustainability, and diversification. The overarching goal is to ensure that Malta remains a high-quality, competitive destination while preserving its natural and cultural heritage.

One of the government's priorities is improving accommodation standards. In the coming months, the Government will be launching consultations with the aim of reforming the touristic accommodation sector. Our focus is on high-end tourism that delivers better economic returns while minimising environmental strain.

Another critical area is human capital development, with initiatives like the Tourism Skills Pass designed to equip workers with the necessary skills to meet evolving industry demands. This initiative ensures that service quality remains a hallmark of Malta's tourism sector.

Diversification is also crucial. While Malta has long been associated with its sun-and-sea appeal, the government is working to broaden the tourism product by developing niche sectors, including cultural tourism, sports tourism, and military heritage tourism. These initiatives help distribute tourism more evenly throughout the year, ensuring a more sustainable and profitable industry.

We have investment incentives to attract businesses into these priority areas, including tax credits, grants, and financial support schemes that encourage the development of innovative tourism projects. The government remains proactive in seeking private-sector collaborations to expand and diversify Malta's tourism offering.



Interview

Dr. Ian Borg, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for
Foreign Affairs and Tourism

Q *Balancing Growth with Sustainability in Malta's Tourism Sector: Tourism is vital to Malta's economy, yet it also poses challenges in terms of resource management and environmental impact. How is the Maltese government balancing the need for continued growth in the tourism sector with its commitment to sustainability and responsible tourism practices? What concrete policy measures and investment programs are in place to ensure a more sustainable future for Maltese tourism?*

A Sustainability is at the heart of Malta's tourism policies. The Maltese government is committed to ensuring that economic growth does not come at the expense of the environment or social well-being. Through the National Tourism Strategy, tourism is being developed in line with the three pillars of sustainability, being the economic, environmental, and social dimensions.

One of the key strategies is managing tourism seasonality by promoting Malta as a year-round destination. Efforts include targeting off-peak travel through festivals, sports events, and cultural initiatives to balance visitor numbers throughout the year, thereby reducing environmental strain and easing pressure on local infrastructure.

The government strongly supports efforts to enhance energy efficiency and reduce the carbon footprint across the sector. Policies are in place to encourage the adoption of renewable energy, alongside initiatives that promote waste reduction and water conservation measures. Additionally, there is an increased focus on sustainable transport solutions, including electric vehicle adoption and improvements in public transport connectivity to key nodes in the country, naturally also including tourist hotspots.

Social sustainability is equally important. The strategy promotes inclusive tourism by ensuring that tourism development benefits local communities, preserving cultural heritage while fostering job creation and economic opportunities for residents.

Q *Attracting International Investment in the Maltese Tourism Sector: What strategies and policies is the Maltese government employing to attract international investment into the tourism sector, and how are you showcasing Malta's potential to foreign investors? Furthermore, are there specific regulatory or policy changes underway to further streamline or incentivize this investment process? Beyond general investment incentives, could you detail the specific incentive policies or programs Malta has in place to encourage Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) specifically within the tourism sector? This could include tax*

breaks, grants, access to funding, or other support mechanisms aimed at attracting foreign capital and expertise.

A To attract international investment, Malta offers various incentives, including tax breaks and grants, particularly for high-tech manufacturing and related sectors. The government actively promotes Malta's potential to foreign investors, highlighting the benefits of investing in a wide range of sectors, including the tourism sector.

In recent years, Malta has successfully attracted global hotel brands, boutique investors, and high-profile leisure developments, often in collaboration with local partners and business leaders. To streamline investment, the government has over the past decade simplified and continues to simplify regulatory processes wherever possible, to ensure that investors have clear guidelines on how to establish and expand their operations. The strategic location of Malta, its EU membership, and favourable business environment make it a highly attractive destination for tourism related foreign direct investment.

“
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Dr. Ian Borg,
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister
for Foreign Affairs and Tourism

Interview

Dr. Ian Borg,
Deputy Prime Minister and
Minister for Foreign Affairs and Tourism

Q *The Role of Innovation and Technology in Shaping Malta's Tourism Future: How is the Maltese government supporting the adoption of innovative technologies and digital solutions within the tourism sector? Are there specific initiatives or investment programs aimed at fostering technological advancements, improving the visitor experience, and enhancing the competitiveness of Maltese tourism on the international stage?*

A Technology is playing an increasingly vital role in shaping the future of Malta's tourism industry. The government is investing in digital transformation projects to enhance visitor experiences and boost competitiveness.

One of the most innovative initiatives is the use of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) to provide immersive experiences for tourists. A recent VR project, developed in collaboration with one of Malta's regional councils, offers visitors a digital recreation of historical and cultural sites, bringing Malta's rich heritage to life in new and engaging ways, also offering the chance to visitors a compelling and life-like experience of these sites, without necessarily having to visit the site physically. Through technology, we are enabling visitors to make the most of their visit to Malta, while being more sustainable by maintaining and optimising visitor flows to certain sites.

This project is just one example of the potential of digital solutions to enhance the visitor's experience in Malta and strengthen the islands' competitiveness internationally. We are not simply aiming to improve the overall visitor experience, by helping tourists navigate Malta more efficiently, but also supporting sustainable tourism planning.

Q *Addressing the Future Challenges and Opportunities for Malta's Tourism Investment: Looking ahead, what do you see as the most significant challenges and opportunities for the investment of the Maltese tourism sector in the coming years, particularly in the context of global trends and emerging market demands? How is the government working to address these challenges proactively and capitalize on the opportunities to ensure the long-term prosperity and relevance of Maltese tourism?*

A As a small island nation, Malta faces both challenges and opportunities in its tourism investment strategy. One of the biggest challenges is environmental sustainability, particularly managing overtourism in peak seasons. The government is proactively addressing this through sustainable planning, better infrastructure, and diversification of tourism products.

The key message is this, while Malta will always be the island of sun and sea – owing to its climate – it is now time to take full advantage of our islands being a destination for every season, with activities and attractions that may vary from season to season, but still offer to visitors something different and distinct from our competitors, particularly those in the Mediterranean.

Another challenge is the shifting nature of global travel trends. A key lesson that the pandemic taught us was the requirement to be resilient and adaptable to sudden changes. Consumer patterns and behaviours can change on a whim and economic realities may suddenly turn on their heads, so we must not fall in the trap of thinking that what worked for us now, will keep working indefinitely or for a long time in the future.

On the opportunity side, luxury tourism, experiential travel, and digital tourism solutions present major growth areas. There is also significant potential in wellness tourism, which aligns with the global trend of travellers seeking holistic, health-oriented experiences.

We are also aiming to continue expanding our air connectivity to long haul markets, to tap more effectively in the lucrative Transatlantic and Asian markets.



Q *The Role of the Foreign Affairs Ministry in Facilitating Tourism Investment: Given your dual role as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Tourism, how does the Foreign Affairs actively support the attraction and facilitation of tourism investment in Malta? What specific diplomatic or international engagement activities are undertaken to promote Malta as an attractive destination for tourism investors, and how does the ministry collaborate with other government bodies to ensure a smooth investment process?*

A The Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Tourism plays an essential role in attracting and facilitating tourism investment. Through diplomatic and international engagement, Malta actively promotes itself as a prime location for tourism-related ventures, including Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (M.I.C.E) travel, which is a key driver of business tourism.

This involves strategic collaboration with international business delegations, trade missions, and investment forums to highlight the opportunities Malta offers to foreign investors. By leveraging diplomatic relations, the ministry helps build stronger connections between international investors and local stakeholders, fostering partnerships that support long-term growth in Malta's tourism industry.

In addition, the ministry works closely with other government bodies, such as the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA), Malta Enterprise, and the Ministry for the Economy, to ensure a seamless investment process. Through VisitMalta Incentives & Meetings, the MTA actively supports the expansion of Malta's M.I.C.E sector by providing tailored incentives to event organisers and businesses looking to host conferences and corporate events in Malta. These efforts help enhance Malta's reputation as a leading destination for business tourism while driving economic benefits for the broader tourism sector. **W**



BEYOND PAYMENTS: HOW VISA IS TRANSFORMING CONNECTIVITY

*Florence Mélique,
Senior Vice-President and Regional Managing
Director, Visa*



Q *Visa is a global leader in payment technology. But beyond transactions, what role do you see Visa playing in shaping the future of the tourism industry? And How is Visa strategically investing in the tourism sector, beyond just facilitating payments?*

tomorrow's travelers.

Q *What are consumers expectations in terms of payments in the tourism industry?*

A Visa is indeed a global leader in payment technology, present in over 200 countries and territories. Our mission is to support the movement of money worldwide, thereby uplifting everyone everywhere one transaction at a time. 234 billion of these were processed on our network in 2024.

A Just like any purchase, consumers now demand personalized, convenient, and secure experiences throughout their entire journey. They follow the path of least resistance to save time and effort. This impacts where and how they shop, and clearly, the pandemic has reset the baseline higher than ever!

We enhance travel experiences through advanced solutions like mobile wallets, cross-border services and contactless payments. Notably, we enable over 650 cities around the world, from Vancouver to Athens, with a tap-to-pay system for public transportation, making it easier for residents and tourists to navigate and buy local.

These trends also drive the uptake of new practices, like digital wallets. In 2023, they comprised 50% of global e-commerce spend in the US according to the Global Payments 2024 Report, with younger consumers at least twice as likely to use them than other generations.

Digital payments open up new horizons to meet customers' expectations for more personalization, fluidity, and security. At Visa, we help all players of the ecosystem respond to those needs, particularly thanks to our behavioral data which provide unique insights into what matters to today's and

Simplicity drives the rise of digital payments, whether tapping to pay on a terminal, on a phone, or in a metro. But convenience should come with security. 80% of consumers declare the protection of sensitive information from intruders as their highest priority.

*Florence Mélique,
Senior Vice-President and
Regional Managing Director, Visa*

Interview

Florence Mélique,
Senior Vice-President and
Regional Managing Director, Visa

Q *Regarding safety, what measures does Visa have in place to prevent fraud for tourists using their cards abroad?*

A Security is at the heart of what we do every day. With \$10 billions invested in technology over five years, Visa ensures the highest standards of reliability and safety. Visa’s AI-powered detection systems analyze over 500 data sets in milliseconds from 4.2 billion accounts worldwide, preventing \$27 billion in fraud annually.

Tourists using Visa cards are also protected by zero liability policies, ensuring they are not held responsible for unauthorized or fraudulent charges.

Q *We’ve seen Visa launch initiatives to support SMEs. Can you give specific examples of how these programs are directly impacting tourism businesses, particularly smaller players within the industry?*

A We are convinced that tourism and commerce thrive when they also benefit small businesses.

A recent example was the Olympic and Paralympic Games Paris 2024, for which Visa was the Official Payment Technology provider. A focus for our team in France was making sure small businesses could reap the impact of such an event.

More than 16,000 participated in a national contest we organized aimed at giving merchants and consumers who made a purchase with their Visa card the chance to win tickets. Hundreds of retailers were also featured in a mobile app that we launched to encourage fans to visit local shops. Our data showed that during the first weekend of the competition, the local economy saw a 26% year-on-year increase in sales from Visa cardholders, which illustrates the impact of such an event.

Q *Sustainability is a growing concern for travelers. Could you elaborate Visa’s vision on how to build an equitable future?*

A Expectations as regards sustainability offer significant opportunities for travel spend. A striking figure is that 43% of consumers are willing to pay extra for eco-conscious options. For merchants, it can translate into offering green choices or

providing authentic local activities.

To illustrate, we led an initiative with Tourism Barcelona and Sustainable Gastronomy Barcelona to encourage the city’s restaurants to adopt more sustainable practices. In fact, as one of the most popular destinations in the world, Barcelona’s dining establishments attract millions of people each year.

Why focus on gastronomy? Our Global Travel Intentions Study, which analyses the preferences of international tourists, showed in 2023 that 88% of them ranked it as a main attraction when travelling, in particular daily food and cafes (66%) as well as haute cuisine (31%). The data extracted from the Visa network highlighted restaurant consumption as the category with the highest volume of spending for international visitors.

To meet the growing demand, it is essential for local businesses to be prepared to offer durable and experiential moments. We are proud to promote sustainable commerce with our clients and partners whilst supporting SMEs in their digitalization. **W**



Anouk van Eekelen,
Director Destination Development,
Netherlands Tourism and
Conference Bureau

NETHERLANDS' PATH: BALANCING GROWTH, EXPERIENCE, AND LOCAL IMPACT

Anouk van Eekelen,
Director Destination Development,
Netherlands Tourism and
Conference Bureau

Q *How does Perspective 2030 prioritise sustainability, responsible visitor management, and the long-term well-being of destinations? How do you see the development of the Netherlands as a tourist destination in 2030, balancing the needs of visitors, communities, and the environment?*

A The Netherlands recognised the growth of tourism early on and, in response, introduced a new vision for the Netherlands as a destination in 2018: Perspective 2030. This vision was developed through collaboration with more than one hundred experts working in tourism, mobility, education, and culture, alongside local populations, and various levels of government.

The vision focuses on the sustainable development of the Netherlands as a destination, with five priorities:

- Benefits and burdens are in balance, more benefits from tourism than burdens.
- All of the Netherlands is attractive: put more cities and regions on the map as attractive destinations.
- Accessible and achievable: easily accessible cities and regions. Sustainability is a must: a living environment with less waste and pollution.
- A hospitable industry: the Netherlands as a welcoming destination.

Perspective 2030 is embraced by many parties, including the Dutch government, and advocates for an approach that balances tourism's social, environmental, and economic

impacts. The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the importance of sustainable tourism and responsible visitor management, making these principles more relevant than ever. Collaboration between public and private partners is crucial in maintaining this balance. Many provinces and cities have integrated principles of Perspective 2030 into their own strategies, working collectively towards a future-proof sector that benefits visitors, residents, and businesses alike.

Q *Overtourism presents significant challenges for many destinations. What innovative strategies has NBTC developed to sustainably manage visitor flows, enhance visitor experiences, and distribute tourism's economic and social benefits more evenly? Can you provide examples of initiatives aligned with your long-term goals?*

A NBTC has embedded the principles of Perspective 2030 into its own strategy, which focuses on visitor dispersion, sustainability, and resident benefits.

Some examples of the outcomes of this approach are:

- **Hotspots:** Within a network of municipalities and regions experiencing overcrowding, we collaborate to exchange knowledge and strengthen control over visitor flows. We explore ways to better regulate these flows and reduce their impact on the environment. This is done both strategically and practically, for instance by guiding visitor flows effectively and improving visitor information.

“ Within a network of municipalities and regions experiencing overcrowding, we collaborate to exchange knowledge and strengthen control over visitor flows. We explore ways to better regulate these flows and reduce their impact on the environment. This is done both strategically and practically, for instance by guiding visitor flows effectively and improving visitor information. ”



Interview

Anouk van Eckelen,
Director Destination Development,
Netherlands Tourism and Conference Bureau

• **Resident benefits:** We work with a pioneering group of local destinations, destination marketing organisations, and research institutes to identify the benefits of tourism for residents. To measure these benefits, we explore relevant indicators and methodologies, which we present in the form of a decision-making tool. Additionally, we assess practical interventions to increase resident engagement. This supports policymakers in making informed choices for their destination's development, ensuring that tourism contributes positively to the local community.

• **Promoting dispersion:** We focus on regions that have potential for growth and support them in positioning themselves more attractively. We also encourage the arrival of visitors who provide social, environmental, and economic value.

A concrete example is the 'Welcome to the Slowlands' campaign, promoting the Dutch countryside as an appealing destination. We are also working on agritourism, an initiative that connects the agricultural and tourism sectors. This provides farmers with an additional source of income while offering visitors the opportunity to engage directly with the origins of their food – from farm visits to local tasting events. In addition, we actively promote knowledge-sharing and cooperation with regions that are still relatively unknown to many visitors. Successful dispersion requires making these regions not only more accessible but also better known among visitors. A good example is our collaboration with the Hanseatic cities, where we have helped draw attention to lesser-known historical towns. Another success is our partnership centred around Vincent van Gogh, one of the Netherlands' most iconic artists. We have increased the visibility of Van Gogh-related destinations in Drenthe and Brabant, allowing visitors not only to admire his art in museums but also to experience the landscapes that inspired him – on foot or by bike.

By fostering innovation, collaboration, and strategic promotion, NBTC ensures tourism is spread more evenly and provides positive impacts for visitors, residents, and businesses alike.

Q *How does NBTC ensure that economic growth does not come at the expense of long-term sustainability? What specific policies or mechanisms are in place to protect natural and cultural heritage,*

promote community well-being, and create a resilient tourism sector?

A NBTC is committed to ensuring that tourism contributes to broader societal goals, such as preserving cultural heritage, strengthening local communities, maintaining local facilities, fostering community pride, and promoting a more sustainable tourism industry.

An example is our collaboration with UNESCO World Heritage sites in the Netherlands. New heritage sites, like the Colonies of Benevolence, remain unknown. Visitors can have a positive impact here by contributing to the preservation of these historical locations and the surrounding communities. Tourism can play an essential role in protecting these heritage sites while supporting local businesses and boosting employment in these regions.

In addition, the Netherlands adheres to strict sustainability guidelines for new developments in the tourism sector. New investments must meet environmental standards, while natural and cultural assets are protected through national strategies. As NBTC, we also promote sustainable mobility, for instance, by collaborating with partners to enhance international train connections to the Netherlands. The Netherlands is already a European frontrunner in renewable energy in transport, which helps make tourism more future proof eventually.

By combining policy, collaboration, and innovation, we ensure that economic growth goes hand in hand with sustainability and societal value.

Q *How does NBTC use data and technology to foster smarter, more sustainable tourism development? Can you provide examples of how data-driven strategies help optimise visitor management and contribute to the long-term objectives for tourism?*

A Perspective 2030 highlights the need for more data and insights to measure tourism's broader impact and guide it more effectively. Beyond figures on overnight stays and expenditures, there is a growing need for data on tourism's social impact, crowd dynamics, and ecological footprint. NBTC plays a facilitating and coordinating role by bringing together knowledge, sharing data sources, and building partnerships.

To improve visitor management, we employ several data-driven strategies:

• **Providing essential visitor data:** Data-driven decision-making starts with reliable basic data. Our data provides policymakers and entrepreneurs with insights into visitor behaviour and experiences, as well as the available tourism offerings. This allows them to better respond to visitors' preferences and minimising the impact on the environment.

• **Developing indicators for impact and balance:** We are developing relevant indicators to track tourism's impact and provide policymakers with insights to help maintain balance in destinations. An example is the Tourism Impact Monitor, which offers insights into tourism's economic, social, and ecological effects. In collaboration with partners in the Data & Development Lab, we have also published guidelines for measuring destination balance.

• **Data-driven segmentation and marketing:** By combining and modelling data from various sources, we gain a better understanding of how different visitor segments impact destinations. For instance, we use the Glocalities Model to identify different visitor types, based on values and lifestyles. This helps us target those visitors who generate the greatest positive impact – such as travellers interested in nature and culture, who respect local communities, choose sustainable transport options, or are open to exploring less-visited areas.

• **Collaboration and knowledge-sharing:** NBTC acts as the programme office and contact point of contact for the National Data Alliance. This alliance coordinates national data collection efforts, ensuring consistency and better-informed decisions in visitor management and sustainable tourism development.

Data is crucial for managing visitor flows, but measuring alone is not enough. The challenge lies in how policymakers, entrepreneurs, and regional stakeholders use this data to develop future-proof tourism strategies. This is why NBTC focuses not only on technological innovation but also on fostering cooperation and knowledge-sharing, ensuring that data-driven insights genuinely contribute to a sustainable and well-managed tourism landscape in the Netherlands.

Q *The success of tourism depends on collaboration between different sectors. How does NBTC work with local communities, businesses, and policymakers to create a shared vision for the future? What are the key components of these partnerships, and how do they contribute to a sustainable and inclusive tourism sector?*

A To achieve the objectives set out in Perspective 2030, NBTC, together with many partners, has developed the destination management model. This model outlines seven steps for effective destination management. It supports municipalities and provinces in implementing and applying

the vision. Together with provincial governments, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, destination and city marketing organisations, and industry organisations, we make destination management more concrete and applicable.

One of the most important partnerships is the National Council for Recreation and Tourism. Within this council, governmental bodies, educational institutions, businesses, and social organisations work together to shape the future of tourism in the Netherlands. This broad, integrated approach ensures that economic, ecological, and societal interests are all considered.

We also collaborate closely with partners to maximise the positive impact of tourism in the Netherlands. A good example is our collaboration with Deutsche Bahn and destination marketing organisations to promote sustainable train travel between Germany and the Netherlands. This initiative encourages visitors to take the train for city trips, contributing to more sustainable tourism while also helping to spread visitors to destinations where they can make a positive contribution to the local economy.

Additionally, we collaborate with other sectors to strengthen the Netherlands' international position. New Dutch is one such initiative – a broad positioning strategy through which the Netherlands will present itself in 2026 as an open, inclusive, and innovative destination. This initiative connects tourism with other industries, such as business and the creative sector, to highlight the Netherlands' innovative and creative character on the international stage.

By joining forces with both public and private partners, we ensure that tourism in the Netherlands contributes to a future-proof destination, where the balance between visitors, residents, and businesses remains a central focus.



THAILAND'S TOURISM REVOLUTION

Thailand has long been a global tourism powerhouse, renowned for its breathtaking landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and world-class hospitality. As the travel industry evolves, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) is spearheading new strategies to attract high-value travelers, promote sustainable tourism, and integrate cutting-edge technology into the visitor experience. In this exclusive interview, Natthriya Thaweevong, Chairperson of TAT, shares insights into Thailand's tourism vision, innovative marketing initiatives, and how the nation is positioning itself as a premier global destination for years to come.

Natthriya Thaweevong,
TAT's Chairperson



Q How has TAT adapted its marketing and promotional efforts to reach new audiences and target emerging travel trends?

A We focus on attracting quality foreign tourists by presenting distinctive attractions including the “Five Must-Do” experiences, which spotlighted Thailand’s unique charms in both renowned and lesser-known destinations, and tourism products and services. The approach is to promote long-haul markets by penetrating new markets and expanding the quality tourist base to deliver meaningful experiences. Our efforts also include facilitating travel into the country and increasing flights to Thailand as demonstrated by granting visa exemptions to nationals of 93 countries and territories, this is an increase from the previous 57 countries. Visitors under this scheme will be allowed to stay for tourism purposes, short-term business engagements or urgent work/ad-hoc work for a period not exceeding 60 days, which can be

extended at the Immigration Office for another period not exceeding 30 days. For short-haul markets, we are actively targeting the new gen group, creating a new image for Thai tourism, stimulating the spending of tourists to be more consistent with the behavior of the target group.

Q What are the TAT’s priorities for diversifying tourism offerings and promoting responsible and sustainable travel?

A TAT actively promotes “Hidden Gem” cities by attracting major global events and developing new products and routes catering to diverse interests and market segments, including wellness tourism and low-carbon travel. We are creating fresh experiences for visitors and reducing seasonal tourism fluctuations while bringing economic benefits to all regions.

Interview

Natthriya Thaweevong,
Chairman of Tourism Authority of Thailand



We are working closely with our partners within and outside the tourism sector to shape supply and lead Thai tourism towards sustainability through various initiatives such as the Thailand Tourism Awards and Sustainable Tourism Goals (STGs).

Promoting eco-friendly and low-carbon tourism is also a priority. TAT is working with luxury hotels to reduce their carbon footprint and add value to their offerings. This aligns with our BCG (Bio-Circular-Green) tourism model, which emphasizes good living and sustainability, we will focus on the five essential experiences in Thailand, from foods, fashions, arts and crafts to our culture and beautiful scenery, each representing a facet of the kingdom's unique charms which are our selling point to promote meaningful travels

Q *Could you share the initiative of TAT CG and CSR? How does it help to address concerns about overtourism in popular destinations and promote responsible visitor management?*

A Our initiatives play a crucial role in shaping Thailand's tourism industry as a responsible and sustainable destination. We actively engage in various activities such as 'Reduce World Mess' or in 'Thai' Lod Lok Loe '. These initiatives promote responsible tourism among the younger generation and drive the trend of enjoying nature and engaging with local

communities.

Our initiatives have reiterated Thailand's commitment to achieving the SDGs, in which zero waste management can contribute to the realization of many goals and promote Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) Economy Model. We recognise the significance of raising awareness of the importance of reducing the amount of waste to landfills to a minimum or zero. Our "Responsible Tourism" campaign focuses on environmentally and socially conscious travel. The campaign offers enriching and beneficial experiences for both travelers and local communities. This type of tourism not only allows visitors to enjoy beautiful destinations but also helps preserve nature sustainably. The campaign includes three key principles of; 1. Creating a Responsible Travel Trend, 2. Incorporating CSR in Tourism, and 3. Sustainable Tourism.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand also organizes the annual Responsible Thailand Awards. These awards honours Thai tourism operators demonstrating best practices in environmental conservation, social responsibility, and sustainable tourism. The award categories were streamlined this year to align with TAT's responsible tourism vision, covering five areas: Responsible Animal Welfare, Responsible Community Tourism, Responsible Conservation, Responsible Local Guide, and Responsible Tourism Accommodation

Q *What role does technology play in the TAT's efforts to enhance the visitor experience?*

A In today's world, technology plays an integral in our lives and we fully recognise this phenomenon thus TAT utilizes technology to enhance the visitor experience through the customer journey. Here are some key trends driving digital demand in tourism:

E-commerce and Online Travel Agencies (OTAs):

-Booking Platforms: OTAs e.g. Booking.com, Expedia, and Airbnb have revolutionized the way people book travel.

-Mobile Bookings: The rise of mobile technology has made it easier for travelers to book flights, hotels, and activities on the go.

-Personalized Experiences: OTAs use data analytics to offer personalized recommendations and deals.

Social Media and Influencer Marketing:

-Destination Marketing: Social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok are used to showcase destinations and inspire travel.

-Influencer Partnerships: Tourism boards and businesses collaborate with influencers to reach a wider audience.

-User-Generated Content: Travelers share their experiences on social media, influencing other potential travelers

Mobile Apps and Augmented Reality:

-Mobile Apps: Tourism apps provide information on attractions, transportation, and local experiences.

-Augmented Reality: AR can enhance the travel experience by providing interactive information about historical sites and cultural landmarks.

Smart Tourism and Internet of Things (IoT):

-Smart Cities: Cities are using IoT to improve infrastructure and services for tourists.

-Cashless Transactions: Digital payments are becoming increasingly popular in the tourism industry.

-Smart Hotels: Hotels are using IoT to automate services and enhance guest experiences.

TAT have recently launched a new platform "TAT CONNEX" which serves as the official online marketplace that makes business promotion easier and faster via its application (Android and iOS) and website. We also have a wide range of up-to-date tourism information platforms for tourists, whether its "TAGTHAi", the All-in-One Thailand Travel Pass, "Entry Thailand" Web Portal: information regarding the entry process into Thailand, "Thailand Tourism Directory", trusted information source from government organizations, "Police I Lert U", the app is linked to the Tourist Police 1155 Emergency Response Centre, where there are also interpreters

and translators ready to provide tourist assistance in other languages.

Q *Could you share with our global readers the TAT Intelligence Center?*

A TAT Intelligence Center is a research center that provides data and insights on the Thai tourism industry. It offers information on market trends, visitor behavior, and the economic impact of tourism.

Q *What are the TAT's long-term goals for positioning Thailand as a top destination for international travelers?*

A Our vision is to be a strategic leader in driving Thailand towards experience-based and sustainable tourism through this mission:

- Promote Thailand's tourism industry through marketing and communication to expand high-value markets, restore confidence in traveling to Thailand, and deliver high-quality tourism experiences.
- Deliver high-quality tourism products and services to increase tourist expenditure.
- Develop marketing information technology systems and tourism-related databases to meet the demands of tourists and stakeholders.
- Develop TAT to become a high-performance organization based on innovation and good governance.

Thailand has unique, diverse, and beautiful festivals that make the country a world-class festival destination. Furthermore, the government is exploring the possibilities of additional incentives and approaching organizers of major international festivals, concerts, and events to ensure there is always something exciting happening in Thailand.

Q *How does TAT plan to contribute to the growth of the Thai economy and create jobs through tourism?*

A TAT will put our best efforts into driving demand and shaping supply to accelerate Thailand's tourism ecosystem. Our ambition is to highlight Thai tourism's pivotal role as a critical driver of the country's prosperity and socio-economic development while securing the kingdom's position as a world-class tourist destination.

When tourism grows, it drives significant job creation across multiple sectors. While we see direct employment growth in hotels, transportation, and tour operations, there is also substantial job creation in our supply chain, from food vendors and textile suppliers to souvenir manufacturers who support the tourism ecosystem.

Interview

Natthriya Thaweevong,
Chairman of Tourism Authority of Thailand

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Thailand must embrace innovation and sustainability by leveraging technology to enhance the visitor experience, such as AI-powered travel planning tools. Moreover, prioritizing sustainable practices, from eco-friendly accommodations to responsible tourism initiatives, will resonate with environmentally conscious consumers.


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Looking beyond the immediate recovery, what are your thoughts on the future of travel and how will Thailand remain competitive in a globalized marketplace?

The future of travel is dynamic. As technology advances, we are witnessing a shift towards personalized, sustainable, and immersive experiences. Travelers are increasingly seeking authentic and unique cultural experiences, plus opportunities to give back to the communities they visit.

Thailand must embrace innovation and sustainability by leveraging technology to enhance the visitor experience, such as AI-powered travel planning tools. Moreover, prioritizing sustainable practices, from eco-friendly accommodations to responsible tourism initiatives, will resonate with environmentally conscious consumers.

What message would you give to international travelers considering visiting Thailand in the coming years?

TAT is committed to transforming our tourism industry by prioritizing high-value and sustainable experiences that benefit travelers and local communities. Through strengthening our tourism supply chain, enhancing infrastructure, and building resilience, we will continue to offer meaningful travel experiences that create lifelong memories for our visitors. Our dedication extends beyond just promoting the country—we ensure that tourism positively impacts our visitors, communities, and planet. We are an all-year-round destination; we warmly welcome visitors anytime of the year whether in the winter, summer, or rainy season. You can always enjoy Thailand and our many exceptional seasonal activities. 





Danny Hyundae Shin,
Chairmanman of Korea
MICE Association and CEO
EXPORUM



INSIGHTS FROM MR. SHIN ON INVESTMENT, INNOVATION, AND GLOBAL EXPANSION

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF KOREA’S MICE INDUSTRY

Q STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR MICE INVESTMENT IN KOREA

A *Mr. Shin, given your dual role as Chairman of the Korea MICE Association and CEO of EXPORUM, what are the key strategic priorities that you believe should be prioritized for attracting and managing investments specifically within Korea’s MICE and event sector? How do these priorities align with broader national tourism and economic development goals?*

Korea’s MICE industry has experienced rapid growth over a short period, driven by proactive government investment. In 1996, the Korean government established the legal foundation for the development of the MICE industry by enacting the Act on the Promotion of the Convention Industry, followed by the Exhibition Industry Development Act in 1997. Additionally, the government formulates the Basic Plan for the Promotion of the Convention Industry and the Basic Plan for the Promotion of the Exhibition Industry every five years

to support the continuous growth of the MICE sector.

Among the key themes of the 5th Basic Plan for the Promotion of the Convention Industry, announced last year, the most important are “regional cooperation” and “globalization.” Economic slowdown and population decline are global challenges and pressing issues for Korea as well. The government envisions the tourism and MICE sectors as both a solution to regional decline and a new driver of economic growth.

To this end, it has outlined strategic directions, including the development and promotion of regional MICE hubs, integration with K-culture and support for global expansion, industry diversification and talent cultivation, and sustainable policy improvements.

In line with this vision, investments in Korea’s MICE sector should prioritize the development of regional MICE initiatives and the global expansion of MICE enterprises.

Korea's MICE industry has experienced rapid growth over a short period, driven by proactive government investment. In 1996, the Korean government established the legal foundation for the development of the MICE industry by enacting the Act on the Promotion of the Convention Industry, followed by the Exhibition Industry Development Act in 1997.



Q ATTRACTING DIVERSE MICE INVESTMENTS:

What strategies does the Korea MICE Association and EXPORUM employ to attract diverse types of investments to the sector, including not only infrastructure and venues but also technology, event platforms, and sustainable initiatives? How do you ensure that these investments support the innovation and competitiveness of Korean MICE offerings?

During the pandemic, the adoption of smart technologies and the acceleration of digital transformation (DX) became a pivotal trend in the MICE and tourism industries. This shift was not merely about transitioning to online or hybrid models; rather, it involved the emergence of online platforms, the expansion of big data and AI transformation (AX), and the enhancement of efficiency and automation. Ultimately, these advancements have strengthened the customer experience and driven innovation in MICE events and the tourism sector.

Korea has been actively developing and utilizing MICE and travel technologies to establish a sustainable and eco-friendly MICE industry ecosystem. In particular, collaboration between the government and the private sector has played a crucial role in this transformation. The government has formulated digital transformation policies and secured financial resources, while the private sector has actively participated by implementing training programs, offering consulting services, and supporting capacity-building initiatives for digital transformation.

Although there is still a long way to go, the Korean MICE industry is striving to enhance digital competitiveness, explore new business models, and expand into global markets. In line with this effort, Exporum has established an internal DX Business Division to develop an integrated online and offline platform.

Q PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS IN MICE INVESTMENT

In your experience, what are the critical success factors for effective public-private partnerships in driving MICE-related investments? Could you share some examples of successful partnerships that have significantly contributed to the growth of the Korean MICE sector and what lessons can other destinations learn from these experiences?

One of the key success factors in public-private partnerships is communication. Providing opportunities for the private sector to participate in the policymaking process and actively gathering their feedback is the first step toward effective collaboration. A notable example of this is the transfer of publicly incubated MICE events to the private sector. The

KOREA MICE EXPO, which had been organized by the Korea Tourism Organization for nearly 20 years, was transferred to the Korea MICE Association in 2023. Over several years, discussions between the public and private sectors took place, leading to a shared understanding that KOREA MICE EXPO should evolve into Korea's premier global MICE exhibition. The upcoming KOREA MICE EXPO 2025 will mark the third edition organized by the private sector. With continuous innovation each year, the event is steadily growing while fostering collaborations with international organizations in preparation for global expansion.

Notably, in 2024, the first-ever Korea-China-Japan MICE Forum was launched, and the second edition is scheduled to take place in Japan this November. These initiatives serve as successful examples of how public and private sectors can complement each other's inherent limitations and create synergy.

Additionally, in Korea, Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs) are taking the lead in increasing investment in the development of regionally specialized MICE events. These efforts are being carried out in close collaboration with private organizers and Professional Congress Organizers (PCOs) to drive meaningful business initiatives.

Q MEASURING ROI AND IMPACT OF MICE INVESTMENT

How do you measure the return on investment (ROI) and the broader economic, social, and environmental impacts of MICE and event investments in Korea? What are the key performance indicators (KPIs) that you use to evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of these investments? What are the key differences in measuring these impacts compared to other forms of tourism investment?

The outcomes of investment in Korea's MICE industry can be categorized into financial and non-financial performance. In the early stages of MICE industry development, the sector gained significant attention simply because MICE participants were found to spend more than three times as much as general tourists. As a result, quantitative indicators such as the number of participants, length of stay, expenditure, and job creation were primarily used to measure success.

However, beyond its proven economic value, there is now a growing focus on qualitative growth, particularly in terms of social impact. A concrete example is the "Social" component of the MICE ESG Operating Guidelines, which evaluates whether an event contributes to community development, utilizes local tourism resources, and collaborates with local businesses.

Interview

Danny Hyundae Shin,
Chairmanman of Korea MICE Association and CEO EXPORUM

Unfortunately, a statistically valid qualitative performance measurement system has not yet been developed. Currently, the industry is in the research phase, exploring the social and environmental impact and value of MICE events. In some regions, incentive programs that reward ESG implementation have been introduced, and policies are being formulated to create long-term regional legacies through MICE initiatives.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES AND TRENDS IN MICE INVESTMENT

Looking ahead, what are the emerging trends and opportunities in the MICE and event sector that should be on the radar of potential investors? How is the Korea MICE Association and EXPORUM positioning itself to leverage these opportunities and ensure that Korea remains a leading destination for global MICE events?

In the future, digital transformation (DX) and content will be the most critical factors in the MICE and tourism industries. In this regard, Korea holds significant strengths in both areas. Visitors attending MICE events, performances, or tourism activities in Korea will experience technology-driven, user-friendly solutions throughout their journey, from arrival to departure, both directly and indirectly.

Moreover, K-culture, which is creating a global phenomenon, serves as a highly effective tool for rebranding Korea as a premier destination for MICE and tourism.

At Exporum, we are committed to continuous digital transformation, focusing on enhancing our core competencies and digital literacy while developing hybrid business models that seamlessly integrate online and offline experiences. Additionally, we are preparing events that combine Korea's advanced technology and cultural content, making bold moves for global expansion and market development. Through these efforts, we aim to establish ourselves as a leading MICE company representing Korea on the global stage. **W**

“The government has formulated digital transformation policies and secured financial resources, while the private sector has actively participated by implementing training programs, offering consulting services, and supporting capacity-building initiatives for digital transformation.”

“K-culture, which is creating a global phenomenon, serves as a highly effective tool for rebranding Korea as a premier destination for MICE and tourism.”



TRUMP 2.0

HOW HIS NEW TERM WILL SHAPE U.S. TOURISM?

As Donald Trump embarks on his second term, the U.S. tourism industry stands at a crossroads, shaped by a complex interplay of policy-driven opportunities and challenges. While domestic travel may see a boost from economic policies favoring tax cuts and infrastructure development, the international tourism landscape appears far more turbulent. A mix of stringent immigration policies, a strong dollar, and global political tensions could significantly affect inbound travel, potentially reshaping the nation's tourism sector for years to come.

As Donald Trump returns to the White House for a second term, the U.S. tourism industry faces a complex and evolving landscape. While some of his economic policies could stimulate domestic travel and infrastructure investment, his hardline immigration stance, trade disputes, and divisive global image may deter international tourists. This article examines how Trump’s policies are likely to impact both inbound and outbound tourism, international travel perceptions, and the domestic tourism economy.

INTERNATIONAL TOURISM TO THE U.S.: A DECLINING INTEREST?

Trump’s presidency is polarizing on the global stage, and his return to office may have immediate effects on inbound tourism. A recent YouGov survey across 16 global markets found that 35% of respondents are less likely to visit the U.S. under Trump, compared to 22% who are more likely. A significant 43% remained indifferent. This suggests a net negative effect on U.S. tourism from international markets, with some regions more affected than others.

Regional Reactions to Trump’s Presidency

Europe: Strong opposition is evident, with countries like Sweden (50%), Denmark (44%), and Germany (39%) expressing reduced interest in visiting the U.S. Canada: 44% of Canadians indicate they are less likely to visit the U.S., with 49% of Canadian women expressing a stronger aversion.

Mexico: While 36% of Mexicans express reluctance, among those with active passports, 42% indicate they are more likely to visit—showing a divided sentiment.

Asia: The Middle East and South Asia remain more favorable to Trump’s America. India (53%) and UAE (55%) see an increased likelihood of travel, while Singapore stands as an exception, with 46% expressing reluctance.

Visa Challenges and Border Scrutiny

Trump’s previous term saw heightened immigration policies, travel bans, and increased border scrutiny, particularly for travelers from Muslim-majority

countries. With promises of stricter immigration policies and increased deportations, tourists and business travelers alike may face longer processing times, stricter visa approvals, and extended scrutiny at points of entry. Even routine crossings, such as those from Canada and Mexico, are expected to become more cumbersome, potentially discouraging travel.

ECONOMIC POLICIES: BOOSTING DOMESTIC TOURISM

While international tourism may face challenges, domestic travel within the U.S. could see a surge due to Trump’s economic policies.

Tax Cuts and Increased Disposable Income

Trump’s tax policies have historically focused on reducing corporate and personal income taxes, which could lead to increased disposable income for American households. If these policies materialize again, it is likely that middle- and upper-class Americans will have more discretionary income, potentially leading to higher spending on domestic leisure travel.

Infrastructure Investment and Tourism Growth

A key focus of Trump’s second term is expected to be infrastructure investment. Improving highways, airports, and public transit systems will enhance accessibility to less-visited regions, encouraging more domestic travel and potentially increasing international visits. This could particularly benefit rural areas, national parks, and lesser-known cities, helping distribute tourism revenue more evenly across the country.

SURVEY REVEALS NET NEGATIVE EFFECT

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INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

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Stronger Dollar and Its Mixed Impact

A stronger U.S. dollar, driven by Trump’s economic policies, could make the U.S. a more expensive destination for international travelers, further reducing inbound tourism. However, this would also increase Americans’ purchasing power abroad, possibly encouraging more outbound travel.

TRADE WARS AND THEIR EFFECT ON TOURISM

The potential for trade wars, particularly with Canada and China, poses another challenge.

Canadian Travel and Economic Retaliation

With Canada facing a potential 25% tariff on its exports to the U.S., the cost of Canadian goods—including oil, food, and tourism-related services—could rise. Canada has signaled retaliatory measures, including removing U.S.-made liquor and beer from shelves and reducing electricity exports to the U.S. If tariffs lead to economic strain, fewer Canadians may

be willing or able to afford U.S. travel, dealing another blow to inbound tourism.

Impact on Chinese Tourism

China remains a critical tourism source market for the U.S. However, under Trump’s first term, U.S.-China relations soured, resulting in fewer Chinese tourists. If tensions continue to escalate, it is likely that Chinese tourism numbers—once a major contributor to U.S. tourism revenue—will continue to decline.

THE FUTURE OF MAJOR INTERNATIONAL EVENTS IN THE U.S.

Despite these challenges, the U.S. is set to host major global sporting events, including:

- 2025 Ryder Cup
- 2026 FIFA World Cup (with Mexico and Canada)
- 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles

These events have the potential to bring massive tourism revenue, but Trump’s

isolationist stance and possible visa complications could make it harder for international fans and participants to attend. If businesses and global partners feel alienated by his policies, sponsorships and international tourism revenue from these events may take a hit.

THE HOSPITALITY AND SERVICE INDUSTRY CHALLENGE

A major concern in the travel industry is the impact of Trump’s immigration and labor policies on the hospitality sector. The industry heavily relies on immigrant labor, especially in hotels, restaurants, and tourism services. Mass deportations and a restrictive work visa environment could lead to staff shortages, increased operational costs, and reduced service quality, affecting the overall visitor experience.

Additionally, his hiring freeze on national park services, as seen in his first term, may lead to understaffed parks and reduced visitor experiences, making national park tourism less appealing to both domestic and international travelers.

A MIXED FUTURE FOR U.S. TOURISM

Trump’s second term presents both opportunities and challenges for the U.S. tourism industry:

Inbound tourism faces headwinds due to stricter immigration policies, trade tensions, and global perception issues.

Domestic tourism may thrive due to tax cuts, infrastructure improvements, and economic incentives.

Major international sporting events could still bring significant tourism revenue, though their success may be influenced by global partnerships and visa policies.


The hospitality industry may struggle with labor shortages due to immigration crackdowns, affecting overall service quality.

While some segments of the industry may benefit, the overall tourism sector remains vulnerable to policy-driven uncertainties. Industry leaders must remain agile and prepare for the potential shifts in both inbound and outbound travel under Trump’s second term.

A TOURISM INDUSTRY IN FLUX

Ultimately, the U.S. tourism industry under Trump’s second term is poised for a mix of gains and setbacks. Domestic tourism may benefit from economic incentives and infrastructure development, while international tourism faces headwinds from visa policies, trade tensions, and global perceptions. The hospitality sector, a backbone of the travel industry, could struggle with labor shortages, potentially impacting service quality and visitor satisfaction.

As the industry navigates these shifting dynamics, adaptability will be key. Tourism businesses must prepare for potential declines in inbound travel by diversifying their market strategies, enhancing domestic tourism appeal, and leveraging major global events to maintain economic stability.

While some segments of the industry may experience growth, the overall trajectory remains uncertain. Whether the benefits of domestic travel can outweigh the losses in international tourism will largely depend on how Trump’s policies unfold—and how the world responds to a U.S. tourism sector under his leadership once again. 

A mix of stringent immigration policies, a strong dollar, and global political tensions could significantly affect inbound travel, potentially reshaping the nation’s tourism sector for years to come.

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STRONGER DOLLAR AND ITS MIXED IMPACT

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FROM SILK ROAD TO INVESTMENT HUB: KHIVA’S TOURISM POTENTIAL

Derya Soysal, Expert at Diplomatic World Institute

The Uzbek government has designated Khiva as the tourist capital of the Islamic world in 2024. This recognition highlights not only its well-preserved architecture and rich history but also its vast potential as a tourism investment hub. For investors and stakeholders in the tourism industry, Khiva presents a unique opportunity to develop sustainable tourism infrastructure while preserving the cultural and historical heritage of this ancient city.

A HISTORIC CITY WITH MODERN INVESTMENT POTENTIAL

Khiva, an oasis city with over 2,500 years of history, is one of the most well-preserved stops along the Silk Road. With its UNESCO World Heritage status, it offers an unparalleled cultural and historical experience. However, beyond its aesthetic and historical charm, Khiva stands as an emerging destination for tourism investment, particularly in hospitality, infrastructure, and experience-based tourism.

Currently, visitors reach Khiva by flying into Urgench, a 1.5-hour flight from Tashkent, followed by a 45-minute road journey. Enhancing accessibility through improved transport infrastructure, such as direct international flights and upgraded roads, would significantly boost visitor numbers and investor interest.

Tourism Growth and Economic Impact
Tourism has become a vital sector in Uzbekistan’s

economic diversification strategy. According to recent government reports, Uzbekistan welcomed over six million tourists in 2023, with numbers projected to rise sharply in the coming years. The government has introduced various incentives, such as tax benefits and simplified investment procedures, to encourage foreign and domestic investments in the tourism sector. Khiva, with its historical landmarks like the Ichan-Kala fortress, Kalta Minor minaret, and Islam-Khoja complex, attracts cultural and heritage tourists. However, the city still requires more high-quality accommodations, restaurants, and experiential attractions, creating lucrative opportunities for investors.

In addition, the increase in cultural tourism has led to a growing demand for specialized tour services, such as heritage walks, interactive history sessions, and guided expeditions showcasing the architectural marvels of Khiva. Developing high-quality, immersive experiences for tourists is another avenue for investors looking to tap into the city’s cultural wealth.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND HOSPITALITY INVESTMENTS

With increasing tourist footfall, the demand for modern hotels, boutique guesthouses, and eco-friendly accommodations is rising. Currently, Khiva has a limited number of high-end accommodations, making it an ideal market for investment in luxury and mid-range hotels. Boutique heritage hotels that blend traditional Uzbek architecture with modern amenities could attract high-spending travelers.

Investments in local dining experiences, themed restaurants, and cultural cafes can further elevate the tourist experience. Traditional Uzbek cuisine, featuring dishes like plov, shashlik, and samsa, is a significant draw for international tourists. Developing high-end restaurants and authentic food experiences that incorporate local flavors and traditions would enhance visitor engagement and extend their stay duration.

Additionally, experiential tourism, such as guided Silk Road-themed tours, immersive cultural experiences, and local craft workshops, can be developed further to increase visitor engagement and spending. Tourists today seek unique, personalized experiences, and investors who can provide curated, high-quality offerings will be well-positioned to capitalize on this growing demand.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND INCENTIVES

To accelerate tourism-related investment, the Uzbek government has launched various initiatives, including:

Tax exemptions for tourism businesses: Investors in hotel construction and tourism services enjoy several years of tax relief.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs): Government collaboration with private investors in infrastructure and hospitality projects.

Simplified visa policies: Over 90 countries now benefit from a simplified visa process, increasing tourism demand.

Heritage preservation funding: Financial support for businesses that incorporate heritage conservation into their development projects.

Moreover, special economic zones have been established to attract international investors. These zones offer tax reductions, duty-free import allowances, and streamlined business registration processes, making it easier for foreign entities to enter the market.

SUSTAINABLE AND SMART TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Investors must consider sustainability when entering



Khiva’s tourism sector. Green energy initiatives, eco-friendly accommodations, and responsible tourism practices will be key to ensuring long-term success. Uzbekistan’s focus on sustainable tourism aligns with global travel trends, making Khiva a prime location for eco-conscious investments.

Additionally, leveraging smart tourism technologies such as augmented reality (AR) guides, digital ticketing, and AI-driven tourist analytics can enhance visitor experiences while optimizing resource management. The integration of AI-powered chatbots and mobile applications for tourist information services can also provide seamless navigation and customized itinerary suggestions, ensuring a high-quality visitor experience.

Moreover, investment in environmental sustainability can provide long-term benefits for both businesses and the community. Water conservation projects, waste management solutions, and solar-powered tourism infrastructure are key areas where investors can contribute to Khiva’s ecological preservation while maintaining profitability.



EXPANDING CULTURAL AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

For Khiva to remain competitive as a tourist destination, it needs to offer more than just historical sightseeing. The development of entertainment hubs, cultural performance centers, and recreational areas will be crucial in attracting a diverse range of visitors.

Themed events and cultural festivals celebrating Khiva’s rich heritage could be organized to enhance the city’s appeal. Traditional dance performances, historical reenactments, and night markets with local handicrafts could make Khiva a more dynamic destination that encourages repeat visits.

CONCLUSION: A TIMELY OPPORTUNITY

Khiva’s designation as the Islamic world’s tourist capital in 2024 provides a timely opportunity for investors to participate in the city’s tourism boom. With strong government support, an increasing number of visitors, and untapped investment potential in hospitality and infrastructure, Khiva is poised to become a major tourism and investment hub in Central Asia. For investors looking to be part of an emerging market that blends cultural preservation with economic growth, Khiva offers an exceptional prospect. The combination of historical significance, government incentives, and rising tourist interest makes this the ideal time to invest in the future of tourism in this historic Silk Road city. [W](#)

TOURISM INVESTMENT KEY TO TACKLING GLOBAL CHALLENGES



by Alexander Ayertey Odonkor,
Global Economist & Columnist


Trump's presidency is polarizing on the global stage, and The travel and tourism (T&T) sector faces formidable hurdles in a world fraught with myriads of global challenges including climate change and geopolitical tensions. However, as is often said, "In the midst of every crisis, lies great opportunity." Global challenges present countries worldwide with an unusual opportunity to collectively transform businesses and communities, and concurrently restore and protect the natural environment. By leveraging international cooperation to help spur inclusive and sustainable global growth and development, countries around the world have the opportunity to provide lasting solutions to daunting global challenges. For T&T, considered a potent driver of global growth, concerted effort to foster tourism investment worldwide, and make the sector more inclusive, innovative and sustainable aligns with international attempts to address global challenges. According to fDi markets, the Greenfield investment monitor of the Financial Times, between 2019 and 2023 foreign investors announced a total of 1,943 FDI projects in the tourism cluster. Overall, these projects garnered an estimated US\$106.7 billion in capital investment and created 259,800 jobs.

In Europe, home to the leading destination region for tourism FDI projects, the bloc attracted 867 projects between 2019 and 2023 worth an estimated US\$25.8 billion, accounting for 44.6 percent of the global total of 1,943 and created nearly 66,000 jobs. In Asia-Pacific, the second-most attractive market for tourism FDI projects, between 2019 and 2023, the region attracted 366 projects, representing an estimated US\$36.2 billion in capital investment and created approximately 65,000 jobs. In a similar fashion, for the five-year period, other regions including Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), Middle East and Africa (MEA) and North America attracted tourism FDI projects worth US\$20.5 billion (73,400 jobs), US\$18.1 billion (40,700 jobs) and US\$7.2 billion (14,700 jobs), respectively.

Over the period, tourism FDI is identified as an important source of capital, infrastructure financing, skills transfer and technology transfer – unlocking new growth opportunities in tourism FDI recipient countries. For countries around the globe, especially Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), tourism FDI provides unique opportunities for these nations to foster productive and inclusive jobs, enhance innovative capacities, build modern infrastructure, finance the conservation of cultural and natural assets and alleviate poverty. Benefiting from tourism FDI, developing countries with limited or no resources have also leveraged the

T&T sector to embark on economic diversification and market-creation, fostering job creation, driving productivity and stimulating economic growth. Data from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) show in 2023 the T&T sector contributed 9.1 percent of the global GDP, marking a 23.2 percent year-on-year increase and created 27 million new jobs, representing a 9.1 percent rise compared to the previous year.

From 2024 to 2034 WTTC forecast a promising future for T&T, with the sector expected to be a source of robust growth and unparalleled career opportunities. By 2034 the T&T sector will supercharge the global economy with a staggering US\$16 trillion, accounting for 11.4 percent of the entire economic landscape – and providing employment for 449 million people worldwide. To safeguard projected growth in the T&T sector, especially in the long-run which undoubtedly is critical for the world economy, it is imperative for policymakers and relevant stakeholders worldwide to collectively seek redress, and where necessary scale up concerted action to tackle daunting tourism constraints. For example, while the T&T sector could be a potent enabler for biodiversity conservation and heritage protection – particularly as many tourism destinations worldwide depend largely on nature-based attractions – this potential is yet to be fully unlocked.

In fact, T&T is not only impacted by climate risks but also the sector is a source of greenhouse gas emissions. According to UN Tourism report by 2030 transport-related carbon emissions from tourism will grow 25 percent compared to 2016 levels. Considering transport-related carbon emissions from the tourism sector accounts for 22 percent of the entire global emissions from transport, it is important for stakeholders in the T&T sector to strengthen cooperation with their transport sector counterparts, in a problem-solving process. Beyond transport, enhanced cooperation with other sectors such as energy, which accounts for more than three-quarters of total greenhouse gas emissions globally, is crucial to T&T's transition towards low emissions and highly efficient operations. In fact, enhanced cooperation with key sectors will guide investors, policymakers and stakeholders in the T&T sector in making informed tourism investment decisions pertaining to new technologies, industry challenges and opportunities, and other resources. Ultimately, this input is not only essential for the shift toward a more inclusive, innovative and sustainable tourism sector but also indispensable to solving global challenges. 

MEDICAL TOURISM IN 2025 AND BEYOND: WHAT INVESTORS NEED TO KNOW

Medical tourism is expanding rapidly, with a projected 12.7% CAGR from 2024 to 2034. From cosmetic surgery to pharmaceutical access, investors are eyeing new opportunities. In this interview, Dr. David Vequist, founder of the Center for Medical Tourism Research, shares key trends, investment strategies, and the impact of emerging technologies on the industry’s future.

ASIA-PACIFIC

The medical tourism landscape is rapidly evolving. From your perspective, what are the most promising areas or sub-sectors within medical tourism that are currently attracting significant investment, and why? Are there specific types of medical procedures, technologies, or patient demographics that are particularly ripe for growth and investment right now?

Overall, medical tourism throughout the world appears to be growing. Future Market Insights, suggested that the industry could achieve a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 12.7% from 2024 to 2034. One area that is increasing across the globe is cosmetic surgery. In the United States alone, domestic demand for all plastic surgery has gone up 23% in the last four years. Some of this market will most likely find its way to foreign providers. Anywhere from .55% (according to a US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) survey) or 1.5% (based on the International Trade Association (ITA) sample of American air travelers). Turkey’s medical tourism, which increased around 12% from 2022 to 2023 (Turkish Ministry of Healthcare) included nearly 50% hair transplant surgeries and 15.6% cosmetic surgeries. A majority of these patients came primarily from Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, and African countries. In addition, we see growing international pharmaceutical sales with patients crossing country borders or using global shipping to access medications. Recently a report from British Columbia (BC), Canada showed 15% of all 2023 Ozempic sales went to US patients. Finally, the number of retirement tourists that are planning on retiring abroad is expected to grow dramatically. Many older residents of economically advanced countries have been hit hard by inflation and are looking for places with an overall lower cost of living to increase the sustainability of their retirement.

Dr. Vequist, given your extensive research at the Center for Medical Tourism Research, what are the key indicators that investors should

look for when assessing the potential of a medical tourism destination or facility? Beyond the obvious cost savings, what factors truly signal a sustainable and profitable investment opportunity?

Health travelers are attracted to facilities that offer the best value to them. Regions want these health tourists that spend approximately 300% more than a traditional tourist (data from Korea). Facilities find that these tourists contribute as much as 100% more to their margins than domestic patients



Dr. David George Vequist IV
Founder/Director of the Center
for Medical Tourism Research



(examples from India). Medical tourists are searching for a value-based proposition rather than making decisions based on just price, quality, or availability separately. They look for a combination of these factors to determine the value of traveling for a procedure. Both wealthy and economically insecure patients are likely to travel if they can find the quality of care that is acceptable to them at the price that they are willing to pay. This is truly the consumerization of healthcare. Based on our research around 70% of medical tourists would also like to engage in some tourism activities while traveling for a procedure. That is why many health-related facilities need to join a medical tourism cluster or develop partnerships in their communities. The packaging of the medical or dental care along with hospitality, transportation, tourism, and other amenities is very important. For example, our research, a few years back, showed that medical travel facilities having a hotel attached to the hospital/clinic were more profitable (NYT article). Investors should look for a recognized center of excellence (COE) which is preferred by patients worldwide. In addition, identifying savvy healthcare administrators familiar with quality operations and also how to market their organizations. Most healthcare managers and clinicians are not classically trained in marketing and don’t have any substantial experience. This is incredibly necessary in health travel to attract foreign patients.

Q *You’ve spent a considerable amount of time analyzing healthcare management standards through the Journal of Healthcare Management Standards. How crucial is accreditation and adherence to these standards when attracting and retaining investments in medical tourism facilities and services? How does the presence or absence of such standards impact investor risk profiles?*

A Accreditation has its place in healthcare management and can

help with improving clinical outcomes. However, when it comes to attracting foreign medical tourists – accreditation appears to be more akin to a signaling strategy. What I mean by this is it does not seem to have a major impact on increasing the medical tourists to a location. It is helpful- but excellence without communicating this to potential patients across the globe leads to a limited response. A facility has to become a ‘focus factory’ (clinical excellence and continuous improvement) and a ‘friendly factory’ (commitment to patient experience, also called PX) then it needs a good marketing department, particularly digital marketing, to help spread the word.

Q *Beyond direct investment in hospitals and clinics, are there other avenues within the medical tourism ecosystem – such as specialized insurance products, technology platforms, or ancillary services – that present attractive investment opportunities? Where do you see the biggest potential for disruption and innovation in this space?*

A As mentioned above, investments in digital marketing infrastructure such as a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and both paid & organic content postings are helpful. As for insurance, the CDC survey cited earlier found that 80% of American medical travelers had some form of health plan. Also, European and Canadian nationals with government administered healthcare are even more likely to travel for health (approximately 3 to 4% per year) than Americans. Therefore, insurance does not appear to be a strong predictor or inhibitor of health travel. One of the biggest barriers for health facilities and regions/countries seeking to grow medical tourism is the lack of trained human capital. Investments in the training of clinicians and hospital administrators are needed to remedy the current supply issues.



Q CMTR has looked at the ethical dimensions of this sector. Could you provide insights into a specific finding your team has uncovered in that realm?”

A Some unpublished research that we are working on includes data from Colombia that shows that private and public investments made in healthcare to attract foreign patients also lead to better health outcomes for their own citizens. In other words, where there are attempts at growing medical tourism, we also see increasing attainment of the United Nation’s (UN) Healthcare Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This may mean that international health tourism is an overall plus positive for the economy, the foreign patients, and the domestic populations that receive better care as a result of increased clinical capabilities.

Q Looking ahead, what are the biggest challenges and opportunities you foresee for investors in the medical tourism sector over the next 5-10 years? What key trends or developments should investors be tracking to ensure a successful and impactful investment strategy?

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(SDGs). This may mean that international health tourism is an overall plus positive for the economy, the foreign patients, and the domestic populations that receive better care as a result of increased clinical capabilities.

Looking ahead, what are the biggest challenges and opportunities you foresee for investors in the medical tourism sector over the next 5-10 years? What key trends or developments should investors be tracking to ensure a successful and impactful investment strategy?

The impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on medical tourism may be significant. First, in combination with big data, it will be able to create value-based algorithms from clinical outcome data, procedure pricing, and the cost of transportation to make recommendations of the best care at the best price, both domestically and internationally. Secondly, it will disrupt search engine marketing in ways that could be very difficult for many in the health and wellness industry. Increasingly, it is altering how and what tools potential patients utilize to look for healthcare information. Finally, it has the possibility of bringing pre-coded biases or regulatory/liability restrictions to searches for international providers. For example, asking Google Gemini’s AI tool will not give me specific recommendations of bariatric surgeons in Mexico (it states that I should ask my domestic primary care physician) but a search using Google’s search engine still finds many options. Overall, I believe these technologies are poised to change the game in medical travel. **W**



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Dr. Amir Ali Salemi,
Co-Founder and CEO of JTA
International Holding Qatar

SHAPING GLOBAL INVESTMENTS

AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH DR. AMIR ALI SALEMI, CEO OF JTA INTERNATIONAL HOLDING QATAR

As global markets evolve, strategic investment plays a critical role in shaping the future of industries ranging from tourism and energy to infrastructure and healthcare. Dr. Amir Ali Salemi, Co-Founder and CEO of JTA International Holding Qatar, shares insights into JTA's investment philosophy, risk management strategies, and commitment to sustainability. In this exclusive interview, he discusses the opportunities and challenges facing international investors and how JTA is driving impactful growth in emerging markets.

Q *Could you briefly describe your journey to becoming the CEO of JTA Investment Holding? How has your vision shaped the core mission and investment philosophy of the organization?*

A My journey to becoming CEO stems from a deep passion for creating innovative solutions, identifying unique opportunities, and fostering global partnerships. Over the years, I've honed my expertise in diverse industries, which has shaped my leadership at JTA. My vision has been to position JTA as a leader in global private equity by aligning our investments with innovation, sustainability, and long-term growth. This vision drives our focus on impactful sectors such as tourism, real estate, energy, health, and infrastructure development.

Q *In today's rapidly changing global economy, what are the key trends shaping investment decisions at JTA? What regions or sectors are you currently most bullish on and why?*

A We're closely monitoring trends in sustainable tourism, digital transformation, energy transition, and advancements in health and civil infrastructure. Emerging markets, particularly in Africa and Asia, offer vast untapped potential for economic and social growth. By focusing on these areas, we aim to capitalize on opportunities that align with JTA's mission to create value while contributing to global development.

Q *Given the current market volatility, how does JTA approach risk management and maintain a strategic edge? What is your approach to diversifying your portfolio to mitigate risk?*

A JTA approaches risk management with a strategic and proactive mindset. We mitigate risks by diversifying our investments across multiple sectors and geographies. Comprehensive due diligence and scenario planning enable us to adapt to volatile

markets while maintaining a competitive edge. Our approach emphasizes balance—maximizing opportunities while safeguarding our investments

Q *What are the primary criteria that JTA considers when evaluating potential investment opportunities? What key metrics do you use to determine the attractiveness of a project?*

A When evaluating investment opportunities, we prioritize projects with strong long-term potential, clear market impact, and alignment with JTA's values. Key metrics include return on investment (ROI), scalability, and sustainability. We also assess how each project contributes to economic growth, healthcare improvements, and community development in the regions we operate.

Q *We are observing a growing interest in sustainable and ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) investing. How has JTA incorporated ESG principles across its portfolio, particularly in projects like the HPD Green City and real estate ventures? Additionally, in sectors like tourism and hospitality, what does sustainable investment look like in the current market, and how do you define success in these ventures?*

A JTA has embedded ESG principles across our entire portfolio to ensure responsible and sustainable investment practices. For example, in projects like our real estate ventures, we prioritize environmental preservation, energy efficiency, and community engagement. In tourism, energy, and health, sustainable investment focuses on creating eco-friendly destinations, advancing renewable energy, and improving healthcare accessibility. Success is defined by a combination of financial returns, environmental stewardship, and social impact.

Interview

Dr. Amir Ali Salemi,
Co-Founder and CEO of JTA International Holding Qatar

Q *JTA Investment Holding has a diverse portfolio. Could you provide your insights on the interconnectedness of the oil and gas sector with petrochemicals, minerals and natural resources, construction and infrastructure, transportation, health, sports and wellbeing, information technology, education and entertainment, as well as food and agriculture, and fashion and lifestyle, in relation to supporting tourism development?*

A Our diverse portfolio creates synergies across industries such as oil and gas, petrochemicals, infrastructure, health, and agriculture. These interconnections enhance tourism and energy development by building robust ecosystems. For instance, infrastructure projects like transportation networks and sustainable construction directly support tourism while boosting healthcare and local economies

Q *What are the biggest challenges that international investors face in today’s environment? How is JTA addressing these challenges and adapting to geopolitical shifts?*

A Today’s investors face challenges such as geopolitical uncertainties, regulatory complexities, and shifting market dynamics. JTA addresses these by fostering local partnerships, maintaining regulatory compliance, and staying agile in our strategies. Our ability to adapt quickly to changing environments ensures we remain resilient and effective.

Q *Looking ahead, what do you see as the greatest opportunities for growth and development globally? Where do you believe investors should be focusing their attention?*

A The greatest opportunities for growth lie in sustainable projects, technological innovation, and expanding into untapped markets. Africa and Asia, in particular, are regions with immense potential for investment in infrastructure, energy, healthcare, tourism, and digital economies. Investors should focus on opportunities that balance profitability with long-term societal benefits.

Q *As CEO, what are your priorities for JTA in the coming years, and how do you envision the organization evolving? What key principles do you think investors should follow?*

A My priorities include expanding JTA’s global footprint, fostering innovation, and embedding sustainability into our core operations. Looking ahead, I envision JTA evolving as a global leader in private equity, driving impactful investments worldwide. I believe investors should uphold principles of integrity, adaptability, and a forward-thinking approach to achieve enduring success. **W**





Bernard Corraya,
General Manager
in India, Wego



Interview

INDIA'S TOURISM INVESTMENT BOOM: INSIGHTS FROM WEGO'S BERNARD

India's tourism sector is undergoing a dynamic transformation, driven by increasing domestic travel demand, evolving traveler preferences, and strategic infrastructure investments. As one of the fastest-growing travel markets globally, India presents immense opportunities for investors looking to capitalize on emerging trends such as sustainable tourism, adventure travel, and wellness experiences. In this exclusive interview, Bernard Corraya, General Manager, India at Wego, shares valuable insights on the latest tourism investment trends, key infrastructure developments, and the role of technology in shaping the future of India's travel industry. He also highlights how Wego is leveraging data-driven solutions to enhance traveler experiences and optimize investment decisions in this rapidly expanding market.

Q *Wego has a unique perspective on the travel market given its role as a platform. What trends in tourism investment are you observing in India, particularly regarding domestic vs. international, and are there any emerging areas that excite you?*

A India's tourism market is experiencing a remarkable transformation, fueled by a blend of domestic and international travel growth. Domestically, there's a surging demand for experiential travel, with tier-2 and tier-3 cities, along with unexplored destinations, capturing the imagination of travelers. Internationally, tourism is rebounding strongly, particularly in regions such as the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and new focus areas like Eastern Europe and Northeast Asia, including Japan. Exciting developments include the rise of sustainable tourism, championed by environmentally conscious millennials and Gen Z travelers, and the increasing appeal of wellness tourism, with individuals prioritizing mental and physical rejuvenation through yoga, Ayurveda, and wellness retreats. Adventure travel is also on the rise, with travelers seeking immersive, off-the-grid experiences like trekking in the Himalayas, exploring desert landscapes in Rajasthan, and the breathtaking white salt expanses of the Rann of Kutch, along with marine adventures in places like Lakshadweep and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. These trends position India as a dynamic hub ready to cater to the evolving preferences of modern travelers.



Q *India's tourism sector is experiencing rapid evolution. In your opinion, what types of infrastructure investments (e.g., hotels, airports, transport) are most crucial for India to attract a greater share of global tourism investment, and what challenges need to be addressed to unlock their full potential?*

A India has made significant strides in transforming its tourism landscape by investing heavily in infrastructure and connectivity. World-class airport facilities now serve not just major metros but also tier-2 and tier-3 cities, enabling seamless domestic and international travel. Highways and expressways, including the development of high-speed rail networks like the Mumbai-Ahmedabad corridor, are enhancing inter-city connectivity, while digital payment systems such as UPI have revolutionized convenience for tourists. The government has prioritized sustainability by promoting eco-friendly resorts, waste management systems, and green transportation solutions. Tourist-centric initiatives, such as streamlined e-visa processes, upgraded sanitation facilities, and uniform safety standards across states, have improved the overall visitor experience. Adding to this momentum are upcoming tourism destinations, including Lakshadweep and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, which are being developed with world-class infrastructure under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision to highlight India's pristine beaches, marine biodiversity, and eco-tourism potential. With focused efforts on promoting lesser-known destinations and providing diverse accommodation options ranging from budget-friendly stays to luxury resorts, India is now poised to become a global tourism hub. Moving forward, the introduction of Smart Gates and Digi Yatra for international travelers should be prioritized to enhance efficiency, ensure a seamless travel experience, and position India as a leader in technologically advanced tourism services.

Q *Beyond traditional hotel and resort developments, what other opportunities for tourism investment are you seeing in India? For instance, are there emerging areas like sustainable tourism, adventure travel, or wellness tourism that offer attractive returns for investors?*

A Beyond traditional hotels, India offers numerous opportunities for tourism investment. Sustainable tourism is an area with significant potential, particularly with the government's focus on eco-friendly tourism and the increasing traveler preference for responsible tourism. Adventure tourism, including trekking, wildlife safaris, and cultural immersion, is also growing rapidly, with increasing demand for off-the-beaten-path experiences. Wellness tourism is becoming another lucrative sector, as people focus on health, yoga, and holistic wellness retreats. These emerging areas provide attractive returns due to the rising global interest in health, adventure, and environmental consciousness.

Q *Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) plays a vital role in shaping the*

tourism landscape. Based on your analysis, what are the key factors that encourage foreign investment in India's tourism sector, and how can these be optimized to attract more international capital?

Several key factors attract foreign direct investment (FDI) into India's tourism sector. These include the country's rich cultural heritage, a rapidly growing middle class with increasing disposable income, and government initiatives such as the 'Incredible India' campaign and infrastructure development. Additionally, India's tourism market is poised for growth due to rising interest in both domestic and international tourism. To optimize these factors, policies must focus on easing regulatory frameworks, providing tax incentives, and fostering public-private partnerships to support large-scale tourism projects. Transparency in business operations and a clear investment roadmap will also be crucial.

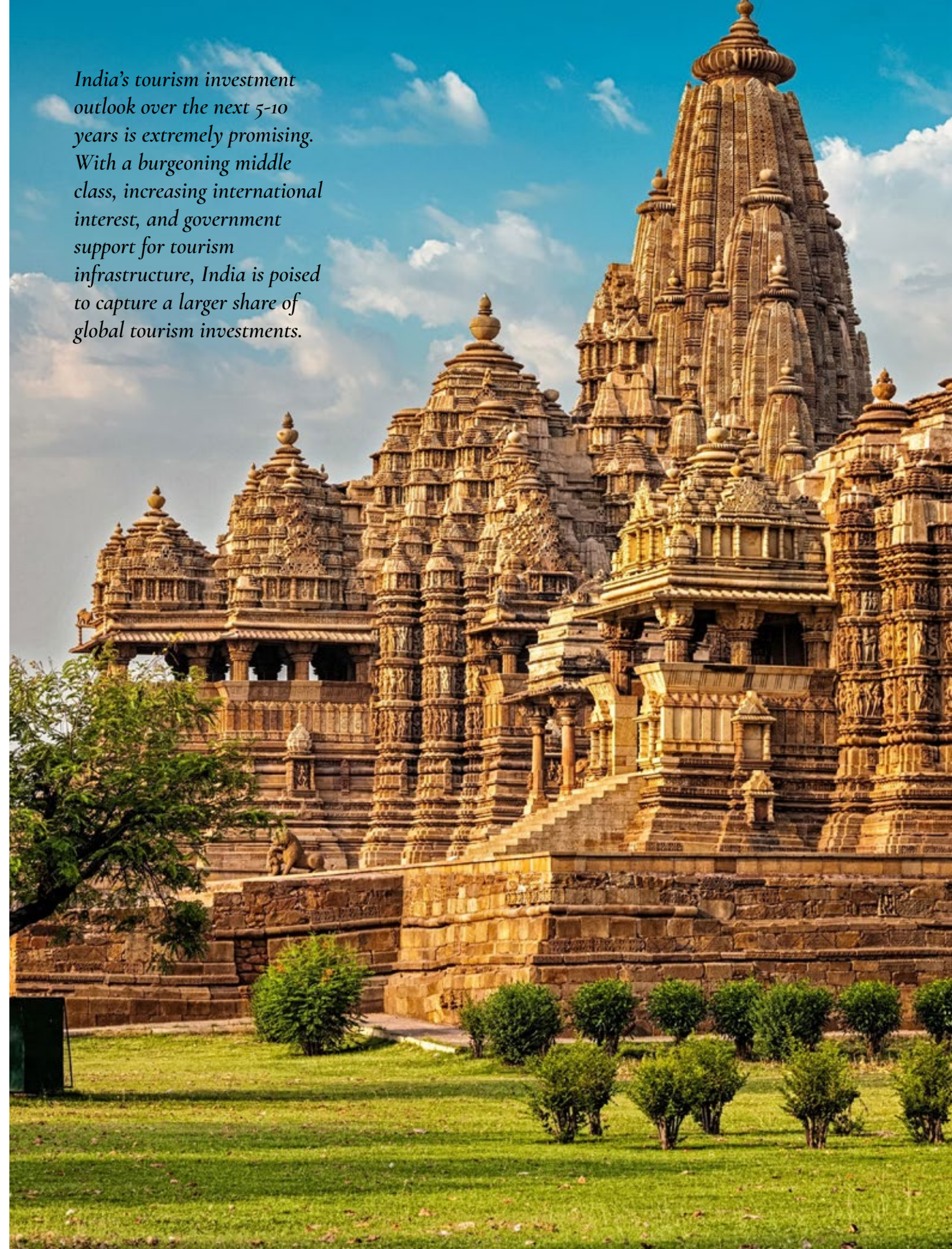
Q *Technology is revolutionizing the travel industry. How is Wego leveraging technology to facilitate and potentially drive investments into the tourism sector? Are there any specific technological advancements that you believe will significantly impact future tourism investment in India?*

A Wego leverages technology to enhance the user experience by offering personalized recommendations and seamless booking experiences, which help travelers make informed decisions. By utilizing AI and big data, we help both suppliers and consumers optimize their travel planning. For investors, this level of data-driven insight can improve market forecasts and yield better returns on investments. In terms of technological advancements, the adoption of artificial intelligence for predictive analytics, blockchain for secure transactions, and virtual reality (VR) for immersive travel experiences will significantly impact future tourism investments, making travel more interactive, efficient, and transparent.

Q *Looking ahead, what is your overall outlook for tourism investment in India over the next 5-10 years? What role do you see Wego playing in shaping this future landscape, and what advice would you offer to potential investors considering India's tourism market?*

A India's tourism investment outlook over the next 5-10 years is extremely promising. With a burgeoning middle class, increasing international interest, and government support for tourism infrastructure, India is poised to capture a larger share of global tourism investments. Wego's role will be to connect travelers with the right opportunities through technology, enhance the travel experience, and provide real-time data for investors to make informed decisions. For potential investors, I would advise focusing on emerging tourism sectors like wellness, adventure, and sustainable tourism, as well as looking into regional markets beyond traditional destinations like Goa and Rajasthan. Investing in technology-driven travel solutions will also be key to capturing the growing tech-savvy traveler demographic. **W**

India's tourism investment outlook over the next 5-10 years is extremely promising. With a burgeoning middle class, increasing international interest, and government support for tourism infrastructure, India is poised to capture a larger share of global tourism investments.





Ambassador a.h. Michael B. Christides
Secretary General of the BSEC
Organization (2015-2021)

MITIGATING THE CHALLENGES OF OVER-TOURISM IN CERTAIN POPULAR DESTINATIONS IS OF CRITICAL IMPORTANCE

Ambassador a.h. Michael B. Christides
Secretary General of the BSEC Organization (2015-2021)

For years, many analysts dismissed concerns about over-tourism as exaggerated, arguing that better management of tourist flows could resolve the temporary surges of visitors that overwhelm popular destinations worldwide.

However, 2024 saw a wave of complaints and even large-scale protests from residents of tourism hotspots like Ibiza, Venice and Barcelona, prompting state and regional authorities to introduce new regulations. Yet, it also became evident that reducing and managing tourist flows is a highly complex - and sometimes controversial - endeavor.

Looking ahead to 2025, several countries have announced measures to limit tourist numbers, particularly in destinations where visitor influxes have long been concentrated within a short summer season. This is especially true for many scenic coastal resorts in the Mediterranean. Whether these measures will prove effective remains to be seen, given the entrenched economic interests that resist change. Some believe that, for certain destinations, the situation has already passed the point of no return.

For years, governments and private tourism stakeholders have promoted a model centered on continuous growth - increasing both visitor numbers and tourism revenue. Even the World Tourism Organization measures industry "success" by tracking the number of arrivals, reinforcing the prioritization of quantity over quality. This philosophy has contributed to unchecked development in many tourism hotspots, leading to over-construction, labor shortages, and the

depletion of vital resources - issues that are now beginning to backfire.

A recent study identified the Mediterranean nations of Cyprus, Croatia, Spain, Italy, France, and Greece as among the European destinations most affected by over-tourism during peak summer months. In response, several of these countries are introducing new regulations in 2025 to address the strain on local resources. For instance, Pompeii will cap daily visitor numbers at 20,000, while cruise-ship passenger limits will be imposed on trendy island destinations like Ibiza, Santorini, and Mykonos. Studying the impact of these measures will provide valuable insights into their effectiveness.

Experience suggests that such interventions take time to yield results. Venice and Barcelona, for example, introduced their first tourism taxes years ago, restricted short-term rentals in 2015 (Barcelona), and banned large cruise ships from Venice's lagoon in 2021. Yet, visitor numbers continued to rise until early 2024, with only a slight decline recorded at the end of the year.


Perhaps the biggest challenge in tackling over-tourism lies in the economic significance of the travel industry. Tourism remains a crucial source of revenue and employment for many of these nations, significantly contributing to their GDP. The stakes for regulating visitor flows are therefore high, and resistance from vested economic and political interests is substantial. Convincing governments and local authorities that, in the long run, over-tourism will degrade the quality of their tourism product

- altering the very characteristics that initially attracted visitors and ultimately driving them away - is a critical and overdue effort.

It may be time to redefine success in the tourism industry using more comprehensive indicators - such as the seasonal distribution of visitors, the expansion of tourism into lesser-known destinations, and the promotion of alternative forms of travel, including adventure tourism, gastronomy tourism, wine tourism, and cultural tourism.

Encouragingly, the concept of sustainable and resilient tourism is gaining traction in many developed tourism markets. In Greece, for instance, there is a noticeable shift in traveler preferences toward less-visited, off-the-beaten-path locations. More tourists are seeking quieter, more authentic experiences, creating opportunities for Greece to diversify its tourism offerings and promote sustainable travel. Lesser-known islands like Lesvos, Chios, and Samos, which offer fewer crowds, milder weather, and good value, saw significant visitor increases in 2024.

Yet, these positive trends alone are not enough to mitigate the challenges of over-tourism in certain hotspots - especially as international arrivals are projected to rise sharply in 2025.

It is the shared responsibility of all stakeholders to ensure that global tourism remains a powerful driver of economic and cultural exchange while also making it sustainable and resilient to the pressures that threaten its long-term viability. 




KUBANYCHBEK OMURALIEV RECEIVES “LEADER IN TOURISM AWARD 2024”

The World Tourism Forum Institute (WTFI) proudly presented the “Leader in Tourism Award 2024” to Ambassador Kubanychbek Omuraliev, Secretary General of the Organization of Turkic States, in recognition of his remarkable contributions to global tourism development and fostering collaboration among nations. The award ceremony, held at the elegant Alici Restaurant on Bluewaters Island, brought together high-level delegates, industry leaders, and distinguished guests to celebrate this significant milestone. Among the notable attendees were Bulut Bağcı, Chairman of WTFI, H.E. Ahmed Adeeb, Minister of Tourism (2012-2015) and Vice President (2015) of Maldives.

In his opening remarks, Bulut Bağcı emphasized Ambassador Omuraliev’s instrumental role in promoting regional integration and advancing tourism initiatives within the Turkic States. “This award highlights not only Ambassador Omuraliev’s dedication to the tourism sector but also the critical importance of collaboration in driving sustainable development and cultural exchange,” Bağcı stated.

H.E. Ahmed Adeeb, underscored the significance of leadership in transforming tourism into a catalyst for economic growth. “Tourism is a bridge that connects people, cultures, and economies. Recognizing visionary leaders like Ambassador Omuraliev inspires us all to strive for excellence in this vital sector,” H.E. Ahmed Adeeb remarked.

The event also provided an opportunity for participants to engage in discussions on advancing sustainable tourism, investment opportunities, and future partnerships across the Turkic States and beyond. The Leader in Tourism Award is one of WTFI’s flagship initiatives, celebrating individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the tourism industry. This year’s honoree, Ambassador Omuraliev, has been a driving force in promoting regional tourism cooperation and unlocking the economic potential of member states. The evening concluded with a toast to continued progress and innovation in global tourism, setting the stage for future collaborations that will shape the industry’s future. 





Annual Meeting

2024 - BRUSSELS

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GLOBAL TOURISM FORUM ANNUAL MEETING SUCCESSFULLY CONCLUDES 4TH TIME IN BRUSSELS

Brussels, Belgium – The World Tourism Forum Institute proudly hosted the Global Tourism Forum (GTF) Annual Meeting 2024 on December 10, 2024, at the prestigious Hilton Brussels Grand Place. The event, themed “Peace, Resilience, and Humanity,” brought together global leaders, industry experts, academics, government officials, and media representatives to address the pressing challenges and opportunities in the travel and tourism industry.

The summit featured a robust agenda, focusing on key topics shaping the future of tourism, including:

- Revolutionizing the Tourism Landscape with AI and Digital Solutions
- Sustainable Tourism Development
- The Power of Destination Marketing
- Green Tourism and Sustainable Practices
- Investment and Infrastructure in Tourism

The event was skillfully moderated by Barış Kışlak, CEO & Producer of SKOPOS Creative, who served as Master of Ceremonies. Adding to the prestige of the summit, Farhod Fayzillayev, Advisor to the Chairman on International Affairs

at Uzbekistan’s Tourism Committee, co-hosted the event as a destination partner, representing Uzbekistan.

Bulut Bağcı, President of the World Tourism Forum Institute, announced exciting plans for the future, revealing the Global Tourism Forum, World Travel Week. This ambitious event aims to be the largest tourism exhibition in Brussels, hosting over 5,000 attendees across a 10,000 square meter venue at Brussels Expo.

Reflecting on the success of the 2024 Annual Meeting, Bağcı remarked, “The summit not only showcased innovative solutions for the challenges facing tourism but also emphasized the power of collaboration, sustainability, and resilience. We are excited to further our impact with the upcoming World Travel Week, which promises to set new benchmarks in global tourism.”

The Global Tourism Forum Annual Meeting 2024 has once again solidified its position as a premier platform for fostering dialogue, innovation, and partnerships in the global tourism sector.



Yulia Stark, President of European Women Association

INVESTMENT IN PAYMENT SYSTEMS FOR THE FUTURE OF TOURISM

*Florence Mélique,
Group Senior Vice-President & Regional Managing Director, Visa*

The future of tourism lies not only in captivating destinations but also in creating seamless, secure, and personalized experiences for travelers. Florence Mélique, Group Senior Vice-President and Regional Managing Director at Visa, brought this vision to life during her keynote speech at the Global Tourism Forum Annual Meeting 2024. Addressing key decision-makers in the tourism sector, she highlighted how innovative payment systems are pivotal to shaping the industry's future.

Understanding the Evolving Consumer Landscape
Florence began by identifying three key trends shaping the future of tourism: personalization, convenience, and safety. She emphasized that understanding evolving consumer behaviors is critical for businesses and governments alike. These trends, supported by advanced payment systems, can drive sustainable economic growth while elevating the traveler experience.

1. Personalization:

Consumers increasingly demand tailored experiences, particularly when traveling. Florence shared compelling data from Visa, revealing that 70% of surveyed travel advisors reported higher demand for personalized add-ons and experiences. Furthermore, tour operators have responded to this demand, offering 20% more customizable options in 2023 compared to 2019.

This shift is further accelerated by technologies such as artificial intelligence and data analytics, which enable businesses to create bespoke experiences for travelers. Florence highlighted Visa's partnership with local communities to support sustainable initiatives, such as the "Sustainable Gastronomy" program in Barcelona. By connecting visitors with eco-friendly restaurants and authentic local experiences, Visa is helping reshape tourism ecosystems.

2. Convenience:

Today's consumers seek frictionless and time-saving experiences, whether booking trips online or making payments during their travels. Florence underscored the growing adoption of digital wallets, which accounted for 50% of global e-commerce spending in 2023. These apps allow users to securely store card credentials, make payments without

disclosing financial details, and track their spending.

Interestingly, younger generations are driving this trend, being twice as likely as older generations to use digital wallets. Convenience emerged as the primary reason for adoption, followed by benefits such as rewards and loyalty programs. This shift towards digital payments reflects a broader demand for seamless, tech-driven travel experiences.

3. Safety:

Security remains a cornerstone of modern tourism. Travelers want reassurance that their financial and personal information is safeguarded. Florence stressed that safety should not come at the cost of convenience. Visa's secure payment solutions are designed to protect consumers while maintaining an effortless shopping and travel experience.

Supporting Sustainability and Authenticity

Florence also emphasized the growing demand for sustainable and authentic travel. A remarkable 90% of travelers now seek sustainable options, with 43% willing to pay a premium for environmentally friendly experiences. These preferences open up significant opportunities for tourism operators to integrate sustainability into their offerings.

Visa has been instrumental in this shift, partnering with local authorities worldwide to enable contactless payments in public transit systems. From Brussels to Mexico City and New York to Marseille, Visa is supporting urban mobility projects that promote greener journeys and community inclusion. These initiatives align with consumer expectations for authentic, localized travel experiences that respect and celebrate host communities.

Leveraging Data for Tourism Growth

As Florence pointed out, data is a powerful tool for understanding consumer preferences and behaviors. Visa's rich dataset allows businesses to predict purchase patterns, enabling them to craft targeted strategies that resonate with their customer base. She invited attendees to explore how Visa's insights can help them better connect with travelers and unlock new growth opportunities.

Conclusion: A Payment-Driven Future for Tourism

Florence Mélique's keynote underscored the transformative role of payment systems in shaping the future of tourism. By addressing consumer needs for personalization, convenience, and safety, and by championing sustainability and authenticity, Visa is paving the way for a more connected and inclusive global tourism ecosystem.

As decision-makers in the tourism sector, embracing these trends and investing in innovative payment solutions will be key to driving economic growth and delivering exceptional travel experiences in the years to come.



*Florence Mélique,
Group Senior Vice-President & Regional
Managing Director, Visa*

TOURISM AS A CATALYST FOR GLOBAL UNITY

Dimitri Avramopoulos,
European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and
Citizenship (2014–2019), and former Minister of Tourism of Greece

The Global Tourism Forum Annual Meeting 2024 hosted a remarkable address by Dimitris Avramopoulos, European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs, and Citizenship (2014–2019). Drawing from his extensive career—including his early tenure as the founder of the Greek Ministry of Tourism—Avramopoulos delivered a profound reflection on the multifaceted impact of tourism on global society. His speech underscored tourism’s role not just as an economic powerhouse but as a bridge connecting cultures, fostering mutual understanding, and driving sustainable development.

Tourism: A Bridge to Global Understanding

“Tourism is maybe the most important factor, not only for business, but also for bringing people, citizens closer to each other,” Avramopoulos emphasized. He elaborated on how tourism fosters cultural understanding and mutual respect among nations. This human connection, he argued, is essential for building initiatives from the grassroots level that contribute to peace and stability across societies.

Highlighting the profound significance of tourism, he described it as a bridge that not only facilitates cultural exchange but also drives economic growth and stability. In a world where interconnectedness defines progress, tourism stands as a beacon of global unity.

Seven Pillars of Tourism’s Global Impact

Avramopoulos outlined seven key areas where tourism can make a transformative impact:

Economic Growth: Tourism remains one of the largest and fastest-growing sectors in the global economy, creating jobs and spurring development.

Recovery from Shocks: Countries with robust tourism sectors often recover more quickly from economic crises, demonstrating the sector’s resilience.

Sustainable Development: By promoting environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and social inclusion, sustainable tourism ensures long-term economic and ecological resilience.

Regional Development: Tourism attracts investments, enhances infrastructure, and revitalizes regions, driving balanced growth.

Overcoming Competition: In Europe, Avramopoulos urged countries to embrace a unified vision that celebrates cultural heritage and natural beauty while enhancing diverse tourism experiences.

International Cooperation: Tourism offers a unique platform for countries—both within and outside the European Union—to collaborate in ways that are respectful and impactful.

Tourism Diplomacy: Introduced in 2004, this concept uses tourism as a diplomatic tool to foster peace and international relations. Avramopoulos cited successful examples, such as past collaborations between Greece and Turkey, and envisioned greater possibilities in the future.

Uzbekistan: A Rising Star in Global Tourism

Avramopoulos shifted his focus to Uzbekistan, the host country of the forum, praising its remarkable strides in transforming its tourism sector. Recalling his personal experiences visiting the country, he lauded Uzbekistan’s cultural and historical treasures as assets that are gaining global recognition.

Since launching its comprehensive tourism development strategy in 2018, Uzbekistan has seen significant progress. Landmark destinations like Samarkand and Bukhara—both UNESCO World Heritage Sites—have attracted increasing numbers of international visitors. Avramopoulos credited the Uzbek government’s commitment and substantial investments for these advancements.

“Uzbekistan has recognized its rich cultural and historical treasures. By showcasing these assets effectively, it can draw in a large number of international visitors,” he noted.

Leveraging Digital and Sustainable Tourism

The rise of digital marketing and social media has opened new avenues for promoting tourism, particularly among younger generations. Avramopoulos acknowledged Uzbekistan’s progress in leveraging these tools, noting that travelers who share their experiences online become de facto ambassadors for destinations.

He also emphasized the importance of sustainable tourism practices, urging global stakeholders to preserve cultural and natural heritage for future generations. “Sustainability must remain at the heart of tourism development to protect world heritage sites and local resources from exploitation,” he said, echoing concerns raised by the United Nations World Tourism Organization.



Dimitri Avramopoulos,
European Commissioner for Migration,
Home Affairs and Citizenship (2014–2019),
and former Minister of Tourism of Greece



EUROPEAN HOTEL INDUSTRY: A STEADY PATH TOWARD GROWTH

Thomas Emanuel, Senior Director – STR

At the recent GTF Annual Meeting 2024 conference, Thomas Emanuel, Senior Director at STR, delivered an enlightening keynote presentation on the future of the European hotel market. Drawing on extensive data and analysis, Emanuel provided a detailed outlook on the trends, challenges, and opportunities shaping the hospitality sector across Europe.

A Strong Recovery Driven by Resilient Demand
The European hotel industry has made impressive strides in recovering from the pandemic’s impact. With international arrivals, particularly from the Asia-Pacific region, steadily increasing, the sector is well-positioned to maintain its status as the world’s leading travel destination.

Emanuel highlighted that occupancy rates in Europe are currently the highest in the world. This success is underpinned by several factors, including the resurgence of corporate travel, the rise in group bookings, and Europe’s enduring appeal as the “event capital of the world.” The region continues to attract and host major international events, underscoring its global prominence.

Emerging Investment Hotspots
In his presentation, Emanuel identified key markets driving investment and development. Uzbekistan is rapidly gaining attention as a promising destination, attracting significant interest from investors. London leads the way in Europe with 24,000 hotel rooms in the pipeline, followed by Dublin with 10,000. Additionally, cities across Germany and the UK continue to draw developers, while Istanbul and Batumi, a Black Sea resort city in Georgia, have emerged as dynamic growth markets.

Future Growth: Steady but Unspectacular
Emanuel forecasted that while 2024 will bring strong growth in revenue per available room (RevPAR), the following years are likely to see slower but steady expansion. This normalization signals a return to pre-pandemic industry dynamics, with low single-digit growth—a hallmark of mature markets—expected to characterize the sector.

Germany, in particular, is predicted to experience a slight RevPAR decline in 2025 due to the absence of major events like the European Football Championship and large-scale trade fairs. However, most other European cities are projected to sustain growth, reflecting the sector’s overall resilience.

Opportunities in a Limited Pipeline
Despite active development in key markets, the overall hotel pipeline in Europe remains relatively limited compared to other regions. This scarcity presents a valuable opportunity for investors and developers to address unmet demand, particularly in secondary cities and emerging destinations.

Confidence in the Future
Emanuel concluded his keynote with an optimistic outlook for the European hotel sector. With strong occupancy rates, a growing influx of international travelers, and increasing demand for corporate and group travel, the industry is well-positioned for continued success.

Although growth may moderate in the coming years, Europe’s unparalleled appeal as a global tourism hub and event destination ensures a bright future for its hospitality market. As Emanuel emphasized, the industry has returned to stability and remains on a positive trajectory, inspiring confidence among stakeholders and investors alike.



TOURISM AS A CATALYST FOR PEACE AND PROSPERITY

Dr. Aslam Gurukkal, Vice Chairman of the Board & CEO
MOAZA AL MAKTOUM INVESTMENT GROUP. DUBAI UAE

In a defining moment at the Global Tourism Forum (GTF) Annual Meeting 2024, Dr. Aslam Gurukkal, Vice Chairman of the Board and CEO of Moaza Al Maktoum Investment Group, Dubai, UAE, delivered a powerful keynote address that underscored the transformative potential of tourism as a force for economic growth, cultural exchange, and global harmony. As an executive member of the World Tourism Forum Institute (WTFI), Dr. Gurukkal brought a compelling vision to the stage, combining business acumen with a deep commitment to sustainable and peaceful tourism.

Tourism: A Bridge Between Cultures and an Economic Powerhouse
“Tourism contributes nearly 10% of global GDP and is a lifeline for millions of people,” Dr. Gurukkal began, highlighting the industry’s dual role as both an economic powerhouse and a cultural bridge. He emphasized that for tourism to remain viable in a rapidly changing world, it must evolve to meet new challenges and opportunities.

Sustainability: A Business Necessity
Dr. Gurukkal’s speech stressed that sustainable tourism is no longer just a moral imperative but a business necessity. He pointed out that destinations prioritizing environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and community engagement are poised to thrive in the decades ahead. Under the banner of Moaza Al Maktoum Investment Group, he revealed initiatives channeling resources into green infrastructure, renewable energy projects, and innovative startups that are redefining the travel experience.

Tourism as a Driver of Global Peace
Beyond financial metrics, Dr. Gurukkal identified tourism’s unique ability to foster global peace. Drawing on insights from the United Nations’ “Summit of the Future,” he described tourism as a vehicle for understanding and harmony. To this end, he passionately proposed the establishment of a Global Peace Tourism Framework under the auspices of the WTFI.

The framework will focus on three pillars:

Promoting cultural exchanges to reduce misunderstandings and conflicts.

Developing tourism models in post-conflict and vulnerable regions to restore stability and hope.

Leveraging collaboration among businesses, policymakers, and communities to advance peace tourism initiatives.

“Peace is not just a moral pursuit; it is an economic multiplier,” Dr. Gurukkal stated, emphasizing that safe and welcoming destinations experience consistent growth in both tourist arrivals and investments.

Innovation and Youth Leadership: Key to the Future of Tourism
Innovation emerged as a central theme of Dr. Gurukkal’s vision. He outlined WTFI’s efforts to integrate cutting-edge technologies, such as artificial intelligence and data analytics, into global tourism strategies. Equally critical, he noted, is the role of youth in shaping the industry’s future. Through initiatives like the Youth Tourism Leadership Forum, WTFI aims to empower young intellectuals and entrepreneurs, ensuring that tourism remains dynamic and inclusive.

A Vision for 2025 and Beyond
Looking ahead, Dr. Gurukkal shared his aspirations for the future. These include fostering global partnerships aligned with sustainable development, creating climate-resilient tourism models in collaboration with like-minded investors, and launching the World Tourism Investment Forum. This platform will bring stakeholders together to explore profitable and impactful opportunities in sustainable and peaceful tourism.



THE POWER OF DESTINATION MARKETING IN A COMPETITIVE WORLD

The Global Tourism Forum Annual Meeting 2024 hosted a highly engaging session titled “The Power of Destination Marketing in a Competitive World.” Moderated by Luca Favetta, International Advisor of WTFI, the discussion brought together prominent speakers, including Kristina Nyström, Head of Partnerships at Visit Sweden, and Özgül Özkan Yavuz, Turkey’s former Deputy Tourism Minister (2017–2023). This session shed light on the critical elements shaping the future of destination marketing, with a special focus on sustainability, authenticity, and collaboration.

Turkey’s Leadership in Sustainable Tourism
Özgül Özkan Yavuz highlighted Turkey’s pioneering efforts in sustainability. Turkey has become the first destination in the world to implement a comprehensive sustainability certification program approved by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). This bold initiative underscores the country’s commitment to integrating sustainability at a national scale, setting a benchmark for other nations to follow.

“This is a huge step,” noted Yavuz, adding that sustainability is not a distant goal for the future but a pressing priority for today. While sustainability is often associated solely with

environmental conservation, Yavuz emphasized its broader implications, encompassing local products, agriculture, suppliers, and culture. “We should protect our environment, yes, but also our local culture and producers,” she said. This holistic approach is vital for fostering resilient and inclusive tourism ecosystems.

Authenticity: The Key to Standing Out
Kristina Nyström provided valuable insights into the evolving expectations of global travelers. In an increasingly competitive landscape, authenticity has emerged as the single most critical factor for destinations aiming to differentiate themselves. “It’s about being authentic and planning for the long term,” she stated, stressing the importance of sustainability in its three dimensions—environmental, social, and economic—as a cornerstone for enduring success.

The Role of Public-Private Partnerships
The session also underscored the importance of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in advancing sustainable tourism. Yavuz credited Turkey’s success to strong collaboration between the public and private sectors, stating, “We should be hand in hand.” Effective PPPs ensure that the interests of

stakeholders align, enabling innovative solutions and shared accountability in achieving sustainability goals.

The Urgency of Action
Both speakers agreed on the urgency of acting now to address sustainability challenges. “When we are talking about sustainability, we are usually talking about the future. Actually, it’s already here. We should do something now, not tomorrow,” Yavuz asserted. This sentiment reflects a growing recognition that procrastination in addressing sustainability risks undermining the long-term viability of the tourism industry.

A Holistic Vision for Sustainable Tourism
The session concluded with a shared vision of sustainability as a comprehensive framework that integrates environmental protection, cultural preservation, and economic vitality. As Nyström and Yavuz demonstrated, successful destination marketing in today’s world requires more than just showcasing attractions—it demands a commitment to authenticity, inclusivity, and sustainability.

This insightful discussion not only highlighted the innovative strides taken by leaders like Turkey but also served as an inspiring call to action for destinations worldwide. As the tourism industry continues to evolve, embracing these principles will be key to creating meaningful and memorable experiences for travelers while ensuring the well-being of communities and ecosystems.





DATO’ SERI MAIMUNAH MOHD SHARIF ADVOCATES CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION

Dato’ Seri Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Mayor of Kuala Lumpur

Kuala Lumpur Mayor Highlights the Role of Sustainable Innovation and Twin Cities Model in Shaping Global Tourism

The 2024 Global Tourism Forum (GTF) Annual Meeting became a powerful stage for thought leaders and policymakers to chart the future of global tourism. Among the highlights was a keynote speech by Dato’ Seri Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Mayor of Kuala Lumpur, who passionately outlined her vision for sustainable and inclusive tourism.

Addressing the audience, Dato’ Seri Maimunah began by expressing gratitude to the World Tourism Forum Institute for the opportunity to share Malaysia’s story of innovation and sustainability in tourism. She underscored the importance of forums like GTF in fostering global cooperation to collectively shape the future of the tourism industry.

Sustainability at the Core of Tourism Innovation
The theme of this year’s GTF, “Sustainable Innovation in Tourism,” resonated deeply with Dato’ Seri Maimunah, who drew on her extensive experience as a former Mayor of Penang Island City Council and President of Seberang Perai Municipal Council. During her tenure in Penang, she championed culture-based urban tourism, particularly in Georgetown, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and introduced nature-based initiatives like the Pry River Festival and the Habitat Center at Penang Hill.

“These efforts were not only about attracting visitors but about creating meaningful connections with Malaysia and ensuring repeat visits through culturally enriching experiences,” she said.

She emphasized that sustainable tourism, when managed well, has the power to strengthen cultural identity and preserve natural assets for future generations. “As a grandmother and advisor to COP29, I appeal to all of you to innovate and develop new models of tourism that prioritize sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience,” she urged.

The Twin Cities Model: A Blueprint for Collaboration
Dato’ Seri Maimunah spotlighted the Twin Cities Model as a cornerstone of her vision for cross-border collaboration. She described the model as a proven strategy for fostering partnerships between cities across borders to create unique and inclusive tourism experiences.

Highlighting Kuala Lumpur’s partnerships with cities such as Ankara (Turkey), Casablanca (Morocco), Chennai (India), Isfahan (Iran), and Osaka (Japan), she explained how these alliances transcend symbolic agreements to serve as platforms for cooperation in cultural exchange, trade, education, and sustainable development.

“For instance, our partnership with Ankara and Casablanca has enabled us to explore heritage preservation techniques, while collaborations with Chennai and Osaka focus on urban tourism innovations,” she said.

Tourism as a Catalyst for Economic Growth
Dato’ Seri Maimunah revealed ambitious projections for Kuala Lumpur’s tourism sector, expecting visitor numbers to grow from 20 million in 2023 to 35 million by 2040, generating RM 77 billion in revenue. However, she stressed that tourism’s success must go beyond numbers.

“Tourism must generate jobs for locals, and we must ensure that public funds used for conservation projects create tangible benefits for the poorest communities through job creation and the circular economy,” she stated.



*Ambassador Michael B. Christides,
Secretary General of the Black Sea
Economic Cooperation Organization - BSEC
(2015-2021)*



THE TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE OF AI IN HOSPITALITY: EFFICIENCY, PERSONALIZATION, AND THE FUTURE

The hospitality industry stands at the cusp of a significant transformation, driven by artificial intelligence (AI). As businesses strive to enhance customer experience and optimize operations, the integration of AI is proving to be a game-changer. From improving communication to streamlining services, the adoption of AI is reshaping the industry in unprecedented ways.

Sustainability Through Digitalization

While sustainability is a prominent topic across industries, its integration with AI in hospitality is subtle yet impactful. Digitalization, facilitated by AI, reduces the need for physical interactions and optimizes resources. For instance, fewer back-and-forth communications and streamlined staffing processes result in resource conservation and reduced environmental impact. Though not always measured directly, the optimization introduced by AI contributes to a more sustainable operational model.

Personalization at Scale

One of the most remarkable advancements brought about by AI is in the realm of personalization. Luxury hospitality, which thrives on tailored experiences, is now leveraging

AI to exceed customer expectations. Unlike humans, who may struggle with multitasking and emotional biases, AI systems excel at analyzing vast datasets to predict customer preferences and needs. Specialized AI agents, trained on specific tasks, can provide highly customized services, offering recommendations, resolving issues, and even anticipating future needs based on past behavior.

For example, AI-driven systems can analyze guest reviews and feedback to craft responses that are both empathetic and professional, devoid of emotional biases. This level of precision not only enhances customer satisfaction but also reinforces brand credibility.

Real-Time Problem Solving

In an industry where timely service is paramount, AI's ability to provide instant responses is invaluable. From addressing room issues to answering guest queries, AI ensures that problems are acknowledged and acted upon immediately. While the actual resolution may take time, the assurance of swift acknowledgment improves the overall guest experience.



Moreover, AI's ability to operate 24/7 ensures uninterrupted service. This round-the-clock availability is especially beneficial in scenarios like early check-ins, late check-outs, and other time-sensitive requests.

Efficiency and Revenue Generation

AI is not just enhancing customer service; it's also proving to be a significant revenue driver. By analyzing guest behavior, AI systems can predict and suggest upselling opportunities, such as room upgrades or personalized packages. These predictive capabilities, combined with data-driven insights, enable hospitality businesses to optimize their revenue streams while simultaneously improving guest satisfaction.

Additionally, AI-powered solutions can significantly reduce operational costs. A single AI agent, costing a fraction of a full-time employee, can perform tasks equivalent to those of several staff members, ranging from answering queries to managing bookings. This efficiency not only improves the return on investment but also frees up human resources to focus on higher-value tasks.

The Future of AI in Hospitality

While concerns about job displacement due to AI are valid,

the industry is more likely to witness a shift rather than a reduction in employment. As AI takes over repetitive and operational tasks, new roles focused on managing, refining, and leveraging these technologies will emerge. Training staff to adapt to these changes will be essential, fostering a workforce that is both technologically savvy and customer-focused.

Collaboration between AI and human staff is key to maintaining the personal touch that defines hospitality. Luxury segments, in particular, will continue to prioritize human interaction, complemented by AI's efficiency and accuracy.

A Collaborative Vision

As industry leaders explore the potential of AI, collaboration between technology providers, hoteliers, and experts is essential. The integration of AI into hospitality is not just about automation; it's about enhancing human potential and creating a seamless experience for guests. With continuous advancements, the possibilities for AI in hospitality are limitless, promising a future where technology and tradition coexist harmoniously.



MALDIVES STRENGTHENS TOURISM TIES: MINISTER THORIQ IBRAHIM VISITS WTFI DUBAI OFFICE

H.E. Thoriq Ibrahim, Minister of Tourism and Environment of the Maldives, recently visited the Dubai office of the World Tourism Forum Institute (WTFI) to engage in high-level discussions on the future of the Maldives’ tourism industry. During the meeting, Minister Ibrahim and his counterparts explored key opportunities for collaboration, emphasizing strategies to enhance sustainable tourism, attract investment, and diversify the country’s tourism offerings beyond its renowned luxury resorts. The discussions also touched on emerging market trends, digital transformation in the hospitality sector, and initiatives to strengthen the Maldives’ position as a premier global destination.

The visit reinforced the strong ties between the Maldives and WTFI, opening new avenues for cooperation in tourism development and environmental sustainability. Both parties expressed their commitment to fostering strategic partnerships that align with global best practices while preserving the Maldives’ natural beauty. Minister Ibrahim highlighted the importance of innovation and adaptability in an increasingly competitive tourism landscape, while WTFI

representatives shared insights on leveraging international expertise to drive growth. The meeting concluded with a mutual understanding to explore further collaborations through upcoming global tourism events and industry initiatives.



BULUT BAĞCI EXPLORES PAST AND FUTURE OF ARABIAN TOURISM AT ARAB AVIATION SUMMIT

Bulut Bağcı, President of the World Tourism Forum Institute (WTFI), delivered a compelling keynote presentation on the past and future of the Arabian tourism market at the Arab Aviation Summit in Riyadh. In his address, Bağcı highlighted the region’s remarkable transformation over the past two decades, emphasizing the rapid infrastructure development, the rise of mega projects, and the growing influence of Gulf nations as global tourism powerhouses. He also underscored how strategic investments in aviation, hospitality, and entertainment have positioned the Arabian market as a leading force in the global travel industry.

Looking ahead, Bağcı outlined key trends shaping the future of Arabian tourism, including the impact of digital innovation, sustainable development, and the increasing role of cultural tourism. He stressed the importance of strategic collaborations between governments and private stakeholders to maintain the region’s momentum while adapting to shifting traveler preferences. His insights provided a roadmap for industry leaders to navigate the evolving landscape, ensuring long-term success and resilience in an increasingly competitive global market.



WTFI HONORED AT ALBANIA TOURISM AWARDS 2025

STRENGTHENS TIES WITH ALBANIAN TOURISM LEADERS



Bulut Bağcı,
President of WTFI



The World Tourism Forum Institute (WTFI) has been honored at the Albania Tourism Awards 2025 for its outstanding contributions to global tourism development. The prestigious ceremony, held in Tirana, brought together key industry leaders, government officials, and international stakeholders to celebrate excellence in tourism. WTFI President Bulut Bağcı, along with the institute's delegation, attended the event to receive the award, reaffirming WTFI's commitment to fostering innovation, investment, and sustainable growth in the global tourism sector.

Following the awards ceremony, Bağcı and the WTFI delegation engaged in high-level discussions with Ilva Gjuzi, Deputy Minister of Tourism of Albania. The meeting focused on Albania's growing tourism industry, opportunities for collaboration, and strategies to position the country as a premier destination in the Balkans. Discussions also highlighted the importance of international partnerships, investment in tourism infrastructure, and promotional efforts to attract a diverse range of travelers.

WTFI's recognition at the Albania Tourism Awards 2025 further strengthens its role as a key player in shaping the future of global tourism. By engaging with government leaders and industry stakeholders, the institute continues to drive initiatives that support destination marketing, investment facilitation, and sustainable tourism growth.

The visit to Albania marks another step in WTFI's mission to connect emerging tourism markets with international expertise and opportunities.



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