

# World

## Magazine

A portrait of Apostolos Tzitzikostas, a middle-aged man with short grey hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a blue patterned tie. He is smiling slightly. The background is a dark blue field with several yellow stars, reminiscent of the European Union flag.

AI, ETHICS, AND SUSTAINABILITY:  
**A EUROPEAN VISION FOR  
THE FUTURE OF TRAVEL**

**APOSTOLOS TZITZIKOSTAS,**  
EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR  
SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT AND TOURISM

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# EDITOR'S LETTER

Hanni Tran,  
Editor-in-Chief of The World Magazine

## AI-Tech and Investment in Global Economic Growth through Tourism

Dear Esteemed Readers,

Welcome to the 14th edition of World Magazine, where we spotlight the growing influence of AI, technology, and strategic investment in advancing the global tourism economy.

Tourism today stands at the frontier of transformation. As AI reshapes how we plan, book, and experience travel—and as sustainability becomes a non-negotiable foundation for growth—our sector is challenged to think boldly, act responsibly, and innovate at every level. This issue reflects that spirit of reinvention.

We are proud to feature Apostolos Tzitzikostas, Commissioner for Sustainable Transport and Tourism at the European Commission, on our cover. Alongside him, this edition brings together influential voices from across the tourism landscape—including public leaders, entrepreneurs, economists, and sustainability advocates—each reflecting the dynamic shifts redefining travel and its role in global development.

This issue is also marked by two deeply significant contributions: a forward-looking perspective from Harry Theoharis, candidate for Secretary-General of the UN World Tourism Organization, and a special message from Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, underscoring the power of purpose-driven travel and collaborative impact. Their presence in this edition reflects the high-level global dialogue surrounding tourism's future role in economic resilience and environmental responsibility.

Additionally, we're honored to include a timely piece by Ambassador (a.h.) Michael B. Christides, offering a regional lens on travel trends among Europeans and the enduring pull of the Mediterranean and beyond.

As digital disruption meets a new era of investment and values-led leadership, World Magazine remains committed to amplifying the voices shaping the future of travel. We hope this issue fuels ideas, provokes dialogue, and encourages action.

Happy reading!

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# World Magazine

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# EUROPE'S TOURISM AND MOBILITY IN 2025: A CONTINENTAL REAWAKENING



Bulut Bağcı  
President of WTFI

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As Europe moves confidently into 2025, the region is witnessing a dynamic revival in both tourism and mobility. The aftermath of the pandemic, coupled with strategic recovery efforts and shifting global travel patterns, has set the stage for one of the most comprehensive transformations in European tourism history. From record-breaking arrivals to the evolution of urban mobility, the continent is adapting rapidly to the demands of modern travelers and environmental imperatives.

## **Inbound Tourism: Stronger Than Ever**

Europe maintained its standing as the most visited region globally, registering approximately 747 million international tourist arrivals in 2024, nearing pre-pandemic highs. This surge was bolstered by strong intra-European travel, increasing long-haul arrivals from Asia and the Americas, and the region's resilient tourism infrastructure.

Spain led the continent with a historic 94 million international visitors, contributing over €126 billion in tourism revenue.

Greece welcomed 40.7 million visitors, with receipts rising by 4.8% to €21.59 billion, reflecting its growing appeal beyond seasonal travel.

Turkey, a transcontinental hub, hosted 52.6 million foreign tourists, generating a record \$61.1 billion in revenue, marking it as a global tourism heavyweight.

The EU collectively saw over 3 billion overnight stays at tourist accommodations, signaling a healthy and competitive travel market.

## **Outbound Travel: Changing Preferences**

Outbound tourism from Europe also rebounded, albeit with evolving preferences. While travel volumes approached pre-2020 levels, European travelers became more discerning, emphasizing affordability, lesser-known destinations, and sustainability.

Rising inflation and cost concerns led to a dip in transatlantic interest from the U.S., with American intent to visit Europe dropping from 45% in 2024 to 37% in 2025.

Emerging European destinations such as Albania, Bulgaria, and Georgia saw significant increases in visitation due to their value-for-money propositions and rich cultural offerings.

This behavioral shift reflects a broader trend: tourists are increasingly prioritizing authenticity, nature, and off-the-beaten-path experiences.

## **Mobility: Europe's Green Transition**

Parallel to the tourism rebound, Europe's mobility sector is undergoing a strategic shift toward sustainability and innovation:

- Electrification is at the core of EU mobility policies, with electric vehicle infrastructure expanding rapidly to meet ambitious climate goals.
- Urban transportation is transforming with the rise of smart mobility systems, expanded public transport, and car-free zones in cities like Amsterdam, Paris, and Copenhagen.

- Rail travel is experiencing a renaissance, supported by night train networks and cross-border digital ticketing platforms that encourage eco-conscious travel across the Schengen area.

Such developments reflect Europe's commitment to making mobility smarter, greener, and more integrated across borders.





### Challenges Ahead

Despite its successes, Europe faces several persistent challenges in aligning tourism growth with sustainability and inclusivity:

Overtourism continues to strain iconic cities such as Venice, Barcelona, and Dubrovnik, prompting authorities to consider restrictive measures like visitor caps, tourist taxes, and reservation systems.

Economic imbalances mean that while some countries reap immense benefits, others—particularly in Eastern Europe—struggle to attract and retain high-value visitors.

Environmental degradation poses long-term risks, with climate change threatening coastal destinations and mountain resorts alike.

Addressing these issues requires not only policy innovation but also regional cooperation and private sector alignment.

### Outlook: A Balanced and Bold Future

The road ahead in 2025 and beyond is one of cautious optimism. Europe is not just reviving tourism—it is reinventing it. Key themes shaping the future include:

Diversification of destinations, promoting lesser-known regions to ensure balanced economic gains.

Sustainable tourism practices, including green certifications, carbon offsetting programs, and local community engagement.

Technological integration, especially AI-powered travel planning, mobility-as-a-service (MaaS) platforms, and real-time language and navigation tools.

As travelers seek meaningful, efficient, and responsible journeys, Europe is positioning itself not only as the world's favorite destination but also as the benchmark for next-generation tourism and mobility.



*Angela Gerekou,  
President of the Greek National Tourism  
Organization (GNTO)*



# FROM THE ACROPOLIS TO AI: GREECE'S TOURISM REVOLUTION

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*Interview with Ms. Angela Gerekou, President  
of the Greek National Tourism Organization  
(GNTO)*

*Given to Ambassador (a.h.)  
Mr. Michael B. Christides*

## Sustainability & Green Tourism in the Digital Age

**Q** *Greece is committed to advancing sustainable tourism. How is the Greek National Tourism Organization leveraging digital tools, AI, and green technologies through initiatives like the “Green Greek Islands” and “Ecolabel Greece” to promote eco-friendly travel, reduce carbon footprints, and foster regenerative tourism? How do these efforts align with the EU’s Green Deal and sustainable tourism goals?*

**A** All EU member states, including Greece, are fully aligned with the European Green Deal—Europe’s new growth strategy centered on sustainability. In this context, the Greek government—led by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis—alongside the Ministry of Tourism, the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO), and other key stakeholders, is committed to shaping a new model of tourism development. This model is founded on three core principles: respect for the environment, respect for culture, and respect for the authentic character of local communities. This is both our strategy and our message.

To support this vision, the GNTO employs a range of digital tools. Our “Sustainable Greece” microsite highlights

exemplary projects and best practices from across the country. Meanwhile, our primary digital platforms—including the Visit Greece portal and social media channels—regularly showcase curated, sustainable travel experiences across the nation.

You mentioned the “Green Greek Islands”—I warmly invite you and your readers to explore inspiring destinations like Tilos, Halki, Ai Stratis, Astypalaia, and Kythnos, all part of the iconic GR-eco Islands initiative. This flagship program, launched by Prime Minister Mitsotakis in Halki and funded by the EU’s Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), aims to create a unified framework enabling all Greek islands—beginning with the smallest—to participate in the green transition.

Tilos, for example, is the world’s first zero-waste island. In Astypalaia, innovative mobility services like AstyBus (ridesharing) and AstyGO (carsharing) are being rolled out—soon to be powered entirely by electric vehicles. And let’s not forget Rhodes, home to the emblematic Rhodes Co-Lab Sustainable Destination project—an exemplary collaboration between the TUI Group and the South Aegean Region.



*Ms. Angela Gerekou and  
Mr. Michael B. Christides*

## Personalization in Tourism: Crafting Tailored Experiences

**Q** *With travelers increasingly seeking personalized experiences, how is the GNTO using AI, big data, and digital marketing tools—such as the “Greek Tourism App” and “Destination Marketing Programs”—to deliver customized travel recommendations and immersive visitor experiences? Can you share specific outcomes?*

**A** Greece offers an endless kaleidoscope of authentic experiences, year-round and nationwide. The Greek Tourism App is a prime example of how we’re embracing technology to enhance the visitor experience. It uses AI algorithms and real-time data analytics to deliver tailored travel suggestions based on users’ preferences, current location, past travel behavior, and even weather conditions. Whether you’re looking for off-the-beaten-path destinations, local events, cultural insights, or sustainable travel options, this app serves as a dynamic, interactive travel companion.

Both the Greek Tourism App and our Destination Marketing Programs have significantly boosted awareness and engagement across diverse tourism segments such as cultural tourism, gastronomy, ecotourism, agrotourism, creative tourism, and diving. Most importantly, they’ve played a key role in shining a spotlight on lesser-known regions of Greece, encouraging more balanced and sustainable travel patterns.

## Cultural Heritage Preservation through Digital Innovation

**Q** *Considering Greece’s vast cultural heritage, how are digital innovations being used to preserve and showcase the country’s history via virtual tourism platforms, augmented reality, and digitized museums? Could you discuss projects such as the “Virtual Acropolis” or the “Digital Museum of Ancient Olympia”?*

**A** Greece—widely recognized as the cradle of Western civilization—is harnessing digital innovation not only to promote but also to preserve its rich cultural legacy. Projects like the Virtual Acropolis and the Digital Museum of Ancient Olympia exemplify how emerging technologies—such as 3D modeling, augmented reality, and interactive storytelling—can faithfully recreate the original grandeur of ancient monuments while offering immersive visitor experiences.

One particularly exciting upcoming initiative is “Blooming Routes – Lafcadio Hearn.” This project centers on the promotion of intangible cultural heritage through a Unified Digital Platform, featuring web map services, multimedia content, and open data tools. It will allow global travelers to discover where and when breathtaking floral events are taking place throughout Greece and plan their visit accordingly. These natural phenomena become the gateway to immersive, authentic experiences—exploring pristine landscapes, tasting local cuisine, and engaging with regional traditions and folk arts.

We firmly believe that through such innovations, Greece is strengthening its role as a global cultural leader in the digital era. **W**







UN Tourism

*Shaikha Al Nowais*



# SHAIKHA AL NOWAIS ELECTED AS NEW UN TOURISM SECRETARY-GENERAL IN LANDMARK VOTE

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In a decisive and historic election, Shaikha Al Nowais of the United Arab Emirates has been elected as the new Secretary-General of the United Nations Tourism Organization (UN Tourism), marking a new era of leadership and reform for the global tourism body.

Al Nowais secured a commanding 24 out of 35 votes during the 123rd Executive Council session held in Segovia, Spain, overcoming her rivals with a clear majority and strong backing from member states across multiple regions. Her victory signals a significant shift in international confidence and a resounding call for transparency, innovation, and inclusive development in global tourism governance.

## A Landmark Victory for the UAE and the Tourism World

This is the first time a candidate from the Gulf region has been elected to lead UN Tourism, making Al Nowais's win not just a personal achievement but a geopolitical milestone. It demonstrates the UAE's growing influence in international organizations and underscores its commitment to sustainable tourism, digital transformation, and cross-cultural exchange.

Observers hailed the result as a clear departure from the turbulence of recent years. Al Nowais's candidacy gained momentum amid widespread calls for institutional reform following allegations of manipulation, a lack of transparency, and political interference under outgoing Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili.

## A Mandate for Reform and Renewal

With her background in tourism policy, international diplomacy, and sustainable development, Shaikha Al Nowais is expected to prioritize:

- Institutional transparency and good governance
- A renewed focus on regional equity and collaboration
- Promotion of sustainable and resilient tourism models
- Engagement with the private sector and digital innovators

Speaking after her election, Al Nowais expressed gratitude to the Executive Council and pledged to serve all member states equally. "This is a moment of unity and forward-looking ambition. Together, we will restore credibility, foster innovation, and build a tourism sector that empowers communities and protects our shared heritage," she said.

## The End of a Controversial Chapter

The election also marks the formal conclusion of Zurab Pololikashvili's divisive eight-year tenure. Despite being ineligible for re-election under the current statutes, recent reports suggested Pololikashvili was attempting to reset the election process to run again, possibly under a new nationality. His alleged maneuvering was widely condemned by senior diplomats and private sector leaders alike.

"The outcome of this election is not just a choice of leadership; it is a stand for integrity and legitimacy in global tourism," said one European diplomat in Madrid.

## Looking Ahead

The global tourism sector is emerging from a period of uncertainty and seeks stable, credible leadership to navigate challenges ranging from climate change and digital disruption to geopolitical tensions and post-pandemic recovery. With the election of Shaikha Al Nowais, the international community is signaling a desire for fresh thinking, balanced representation, and ethical stewardship.

Her first 100 days in office are expected to include high-level consultations, structural audits, and the launch of a global roadmap focused on inclusivity and long-term resilience.

As the world watches closely, Shaikha Al Nowais steps into her role with both hope and high expectations — promising a new chapter in the future of global tourism.

# SHAIKHA AL NOWAIS NOMINATED AS FIRST WOMAN TO LEAD UN TOURISM AMID MILESTONE REFORMS AND GLOBAL GROWTH

In a historic move, the UN Tourism Executive Council has nominated Shaikha Al Nowais of the United Arab Emirates to become the next Secretary-General of UN Tourism, marking the first time in the organization's 50-year history that a woman is set to lead the global tourism body. Her mandate is scheduled to begin in January 2026, pending formal approval by the General Assembly.

Shaikha Al Nowais, a prominent Emirati business leader, currently serves as Corporate Vice President at Rotana Hotels, where she oversees owner relations across the Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Turkey. A graduate in Finance from Zayed University, she also holds key leadership roles on the Abu Dhabi Businesswomen Council, the Tourism Working Group of the Abu Dhabi Chamber, and the advisory board of Les Roches Hospitality Academy.

Her nomination comes at a time of renewed momentum for global tourism. According to the latest UN Tourism World Tourism Barometer, over 300 million international tourists traveled in the first quarter of 2025—14 million more than the same period last year—underlining the sector's robust recovery.

### **A Transformative Legacy**

During the Executive Council meeting held in Segovia, outgoing Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili presented a comprehensive report summarizing his eight-year tenure. Under his leadership, UN Tourism has undergone a major transformation, placing tourism at the center of global economic and sustainable development agendas.

"We have put tourism at the forefront of the global agenda to enhance its competitiveness and economic value," said Pololikashvili. "Our focus has remained steadfast on education, investment, rural and sustainable development, women empowerment, new technologies, and expanding our global reach."

### **Key achievements of the past eight years include:**

- *Strengthening global tourism data systems*
- *Expanding rural tourism through flagship programs like Best Tourism Villages and STAR*
- *Launching initiatives in gastronomy, urban, and sports tourism*
- *Advancing Artificial Intelligence and social innovation in policy frameworks*
- *Rapid growth in the UN Tourism Online Academy and new International Academies*
- *Record levels of foreign direct investment into tourism economies*

### **Innovation and Global Presence**

In another major development, UN Tourism signed an agreement with Morocco to launch its first Thematic Office on Innovation for Africa, to be based in Rabat. The office, established in collaboration with Moroccan Tourism Minister Fatim-Zahra Ammor, aims to accelerate tourism-driven innovation and development as part of UN Tourism's 2030 Agenda for Africa.

The Council also received updates on the expanding network of thematic and regional offices, highlighting the organization's efforts to decentralize its operations and better serve member states on the ground.

As UN Tourism celebrates this milestone in gender equality and sectoral innovation, the nomination of Shaikha Al Nowais symbolizes a new chapter for the organization—one rooted in diversity, leadership, and a commitment to building a more resilient and inclusive tourism future.





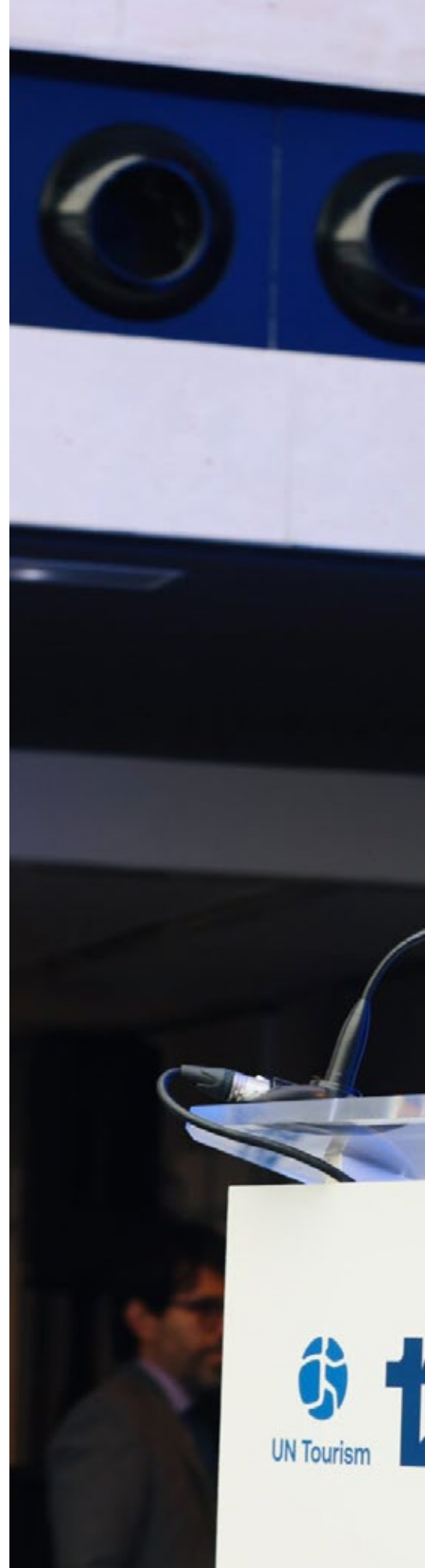
# A PROVEN LEADER IN GLOBAL TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

Shaikha Al Nowais is widely recognized as a distinguished figure in the global tourism and hospitality landscape, bringing over 16 years of hands-on experience across corporate governance, sustainability, economic development, and strategic leadership.

As Corporate Vice President of Owner Relationship Management at Rotana, she has led regional teams across the Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Turkey—developing key partnerships, driving inclusivity, enhancing operational performance, and championing sustainable tourism practices throughout the network.

Her influence reaches far beyond the corporate world. Shaikha Al Nowais serves as Chairwoman of the Tourism Working Group at the Abu Dhabi Chamber, Board Member of the Abu Dhabi Businesswomen Council, and Advisory Board Member of the UAE Tourism Council. She also sits on the Board of Trustees of Les Roches Hospitality Academy, where she actively contributes to policy development, education, and the promotion of economic inclusion in the industry.

A graduate in Finance from Zayed University, her academic background is complemented by deep operational experience and a strategic vision for the future of tourism. Her nomination to lead UN Tourism reflects not only a breakthrough in gender representation but also the appointment of a leader uniquely equipped to guide the sector through its next phase of growth and innovation.





**23** EXECUTIVE  
COUNCIL  
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Segovia, Spain  
29-30 May 2025





*Prince Harry, The Duke of Sussex*  
*Founding Partner, Travalyst*

# THE FUTURE OF TOURISM IS A FUTURE OF PURPOSE

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This year marks five years since we launched Travalyst — a coalition built on the belief that we can change the way the world travels for the better. We began with one shared goal: to make sustainable travel more accessible, more transparent, and more meaningful — for both people and the planet.

Tourism, as we know, has the power to transform communities, protect cultures, and preserve natural ecosystems. But for that potential to be realized, the travel industry must evolve — and it must do so urgently.

Over the past five years, we've brought together some of the world's most influential travel brands to rethink what responsible travel can look like. We've developed standardized sustainability frameworks, engaged with destination communities, and created tools that allow travelers to make better-informed choices — choices that support regeneration, climate goals, and cultural respect.


This is not about one organization changing everything — it's about

creating an open, shared system that gives everyone, from tourism operators to travelers themselves, the ability to act responsibly.

And now, we look ahead.

Our mission is clear: to accelerate the industry's transition toward a more equitable, more conscious, and more tech-enabled future — one that values impact over volume, authenticity over convenience, and local leadership over top-down models. We're committed to ensuring that innovation in travel doesn't come at the cost of the environment or community well-being.

At Travalyst, we believe in partnership over competition. That's why we're inviting more brands, destinations, and governments to join this movement — to be part of the change, rather than wait for it to happen.

As we reach this milestone, I want to thank all those who have believed in this journey. And to those just discovering it — welcome. The future of tourism is not just about where we go, but how we get there, and what we leave behind. 

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# TRAVALYST

## PUBLISHES FIVE-YEAR MILESTONE REPORT, CALLS ON TRAVEL INDUSTRY TO DEEPEN COLLABORATION, ALIGN AROUND THREE CORE GOALS

Founder Prince Harry, The Duke of Sussex, urges the industry to grow inclusively and minimise negative impacts in order to protect the destinations that the business depends upon

New research demonstrates that industry leaders remain committed to sustainability efforts, want more collaboration and support ahead of incoming regulation

Flight emissions information has been displayed by Travalyst partners in 130 billion searches globally, empowering travellers to make more informed choices

Certifications, standards and schemes compliant with Travalyst criteria are now visible on partner platforms

Travalyst, a not-for-profit coalition of some of the biggest names in travel and technology founded by Prince Harry, The Duke of Sussex, has published its Five-Year Milestone Report. In the report, Travalyst outlines its achievements since its founding, sets the course for the years ahead, and reveals new research on how both travellers and travel companies view sustainability efforts.

In his foreword, Prince Harry highlights the industry's power to drive positive change at a critical moment: "Last year saw a staggering 1.4 billion international tourist arrivals globally. As more people travel, they have huge potential to drive inclusive growth in the destinations they visit. But they must be empowered with the information they need to make those trips count, ensuring that their travel plans – and spending – contribute to creating thriving ecosystems and prospering communities."

He also calls on the travel industry to align behind a set of three key goals focused on climate, nature, and communities:

**Climate:** Reducing the industry's carbon emissions by 50% by 2030.

**Nature:** Protecting and restoring at least 30% of the planet,

land, and sea by 2030.

**Communities:** Promoting truly sustainable tourism that enables a just transition of inclusive economic benefits, reduced inequality, and which preserves local culture and fragile ecosystems.

This call follows research from Travalyst, which demonstrates widespread commitment within the industry for continued action on sustainability. A survey of industry leaders conducted by Travalyst found:

- *More than 9 in 10 agree that governments should ensure that travel and tourism companies report on their sustainability and environmental impact.*

- *More than 7 in 10 say that the recent backlash against environmental, social, and governance (ESG) efforts in some countries has had no impact on sustainability efforts within their organisation.*

- *However, they need more support and collaboration to take their efforts to the next level. Only 3 in 10 said they feel very well-equipped to deal with incoming sustainability regulations.*



Sally Davey, CEO, Travalyst, said: “Since our founding, we have brought together some of the world’s biggest travel and technology companies to deliver consistent, credible, and compliant sustainability information at scale. Over the next five years, we will expand and future-proof our existing efforts, roll out new and impactful initiatives, and support the industry to align with incoming regulations. This report outlines our plans – and the impact we aim to achieve.”

The report includes new data showing that flight emissions information has been displayed by Travalyst partners in 130 billion searches globally, powered by the Travel Impact Model (TIM). The report also details Travalyst’s work with certifications, standards and schemes, highlighting that Google and Booking.com both display certifications that are aligned to Travalyst criteria – raising visibility amongst the millions of travellers who use their platforms. This type of consistent information is critical to empower travellers to make more informed decisions about the sustainability of their travel choices.

Previous research from Travalyst’s partners has demonstrated that travellers care about sustainability, with 83% saying that sustainable travel is important to them. However, new research that Travalyst commissioned from YouGov for the report demonstrates that travellers are not yet taking action at the level needed to deliver impact at scale.

Of those who have travel plans for 2025, 30% of UK travellers and 42% of American travellers considered accommodation providers’ sustainability efforts. But, only 13% of UK travellers and 18% of American travellers factored this into their decisions.

During its next phase, Travalyst will deepen its collaboration with partners aiming to close the gap between travellers’ desire to be more sustainable and the action they take.



*Sally Davey –  
CEO Travalyst*





*Apostolos Tzitzikostas,  
European Commissioner for  
Sustainable Transport and Tourism*

# BRIDGING BYTES AND BORDERS: AI, ETHICS, AND EUROPE'S SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY REVOLUTION

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*Interview with Apostolos Tzitzikostas,  
European Commissioner for  
Sustainable Transport and Tourism*

## AI-Powered Smart Mobility & Sustainable Transport

**Q** *How is the European Commission leveraging AI and digital technologies to enhance sustainable transport infrastructure?*

**A** I am glad you ask about infrastructure, as this is often overlooked when discussing about transport and technologies. High-tech vehicles – as important as they are – are less attractive without the infrastructure on which they rely. For example, it is the ability to receive analysed data that allows a car to plan the best route.

We support research and innovation, and also ensure that the conditions are right for the Member States and transport operators to invest in and roll out innovative technologies, including those involving AI. Doing so, can make transport safer, more efficient, more sustainable, more resilient and accessible.

On our roads, for example, eCall and automated cars can save time, lower emissions, improve journey planning and reduce road accidents. And we ensure that deployment is

coordinated, for smooth cross-border travel. We will also accelerate the roll-out of intelligent transport services and the use of more accurate and complete data.

In aviation, we are supporting research on trajectory optimisation, where AI can factor in real-time traffic information and meteorological conditions to reduce delays and save fuel. Expect also to see increased automation in air traffic management, human-machine collaboration for complex scenarios, and cyber-resilience, as well.

What makes AI so interesting is its ability to handle immense volumes and complexities of data, finding synergies and patterns that might otherwise remain unnoticed and untapped.

In April the European Commission adopted an AI Continent Action Plan, which is our roadmap for AI development and deployment in Europe. To ensure access to the high-quality, structured data that will ensure we really make the most of AI, we will also launch a Data Union Strategy this year.



# Interview

*Apostolos Tzitzikostas, European Commissioner for Sustainable Transport and Tourism*

## Investing in Green Transport & Tourism Infrastructure

**Q** *What are the EU's major investment priorities in green transport and tourism infrastructure? How do initiatives such as the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) and sustainable aviation align with the EU's Green Deal?*

**A** Our priorities are competitiveness, sustainability and resilience.

Through the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) we support infrastructure projects along the TEN-T, which is the transport network linking railway lines, ports, inland waterways, roads and airports. For 2021-2027, CEF has a budget of €25.8 billion. Over 80% of this is being used for modernising rail infrastructure and supporting the creation of multimodal hubs.

CEF projects also support the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure, including the supply of electricity and hydrogen at airports. But our work to increase the sustainability of aviation does not end there. The ReFuelEU Aviation Regulation introduces binding targets for the supply of sustainable aviation fuels (SAF) to European airports. SAF and particularly advanced biofuels and synthetic fuels, can significantly reduce emissions. The share of SAF will gradually rise to 70% by 2050 and is expected to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from flights leaving EU airports by around two-thirds by 2050.

Beyond regulation, we are investing in the technologies and infrastructure needed for long-term transformation, supporting the development of cleaner aircraft, more efficient air traffic management, and greener airport operations.

## AI & Sustainable Tourism Development

**Q** *How is AI shaping the future of sustainable tourism in Europe? Could you share examples of AI-driven visitor management systems, predictive analytics for tourism demand, or smart destination solutions?*

**A** Using AI technologies strategically, destinations can improve the visitor experience while protecting cultural and environmental assets for future generations. Using technologies to manage visitor flows, for example, can ease pressure on overcrowded sites and guide tourists toward lesser-known destinations. Also, with content from different sources digitised, tourists can make informed decisions in line with their priorities, price, sustainability or something else.

I'd like to mention two very different destinations, both leading the way.

The EU's 2025 Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism, Benidorm, has a smart office that gathers and monitors urban management and tourism data, essentially building a data-powered governance model and tourism strategy for effective green solutions.

Meanwhile, in Dublin, the 2024 European Capital of Smart Tourism, the AI-generated "Brendan" communicates in Irish and in a Dublin dialect and will advise visitors and tourists in real-time.

AI is a technical challenge. But it is also a powerful opportunity to strengthen our destinations. This will mean high-end applications, but our current focus is on supporting destinations as they embrace digital transformation. Through our innovation lab, we support them in how to share and interpret data, align it with sustainability objectives, and ultimately harness it as a tool for strategic empowerment and informed decision-making.

## Public-Private Collaboration for Future Mobility

**Q** *How is the European Commission working with the private sector and start-ups to drive innovation in sustainable transport and tourism?*

**A** First, let's recognise the role that the private sector and start-ups and scale-ups play in driving innovation across Europe. In tourism alone, we have 4.5 million companies. Around 92% are microenterprises.

In transport, we have companies pushing the boundaries everywhere. Take Airbus, for example, which plans to bring the first hydrogen-powered commercial aircraft to market.

It is important that we support competitive companies, big and small, because they are central to European growth and prosperity.

The 2025 European Competitiveness Compass announces a Start-up and Scale-up Strategy to remove growth barriers and red tape for innovative companies. The European Innovation Act promotes access to European research and technology infrastructure for innovative companies.

Horizon Europe, with its substantial budget, is our main

funding programme, supporting transport innovation, particularly for start-ups and SMEs. The European Innovation Council is its key instrument. Its substantial funding, primarily targeting SMEs, supports them throughout the innovation lifecycle. It recently launched the Mobility Challenge, supporting scalable, deep-tech breakthroughs to reduce mobility-related emissions.

We also support numerous public-private partnerships, on urban mobility, air traffic management and rail to name just a few.

## Digitalization of Transport: Enhancing Efficiency and Accessibility

**Q** *How do initiatives like multimodal ticketing and AI-driven logistics contribute to economic growth?*

**A** Multimodal ticketing can make travel more seamless, efficient and sustainable. Easy access to booking can also encourage the use of collective transport – lowering traffic congestion and environmental impact – and increase the resilience of our transport system. Simplifying travel across different transport modes can also improve access to jobs, services and local businesses.

AI-driven logistics can improve how our supply chains work, creating cost savings. AI's ability to handle complexity is key: the logistics industry is complex and dynamic and involves multiple actors. AI can capture complex relationships and make processes and logistics operations more efficient by improving demand forecasting, inventory management, and route optimisation.

Ticketing and logistics are two very different areas. But in both, it is clear how AI can help EU businesses to be more competitive in the global market, and thus drive economic growth.

## The Ethics of AI in Transport & Tourism

**Q** *AI presents both opportunities and challenges, particularly regarding ethics, transparency, and accountability. How is the EU addressing ethical concerns in AI-driven transport and tourism? Beyond regulations, what concrete actions are in place to ensure responsible AI development? Additionally, while much focus is placed on making AI ethical, how is the EU guiding human responsibility in using AI ethically within these sectors?*

**A** The EU is at the forefront globally in shaping the ethical governance of AI, especially in sensitive sectors like transport and tourism, where AI decisions can impact safety, accessibility, privacy, and fairness. We are addressing both the design ethics of AI systems and the human responsibility in their application.

The EU AI Act, adopted last year, classifies AI systems by risk, with 'high-risk' applications, like autonomous vehicles and intelligent traffic control systems, which are subject to strict requirements. Moreover, it demands transparency, human oversight, risk management, bias mitigation, robustness, and accountability in AI deployment, which is particularly relevant in AI for public transport or customer profiling in tourism.

Beyond regulation, the EU is funding and facilitating practical measures to embed ethics into real-world AI systems, like the AI-on-Demand Platform, Living Labs and Regulatory Sandboxes. **W**

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*Paul Griffiths, ,  
Dubai Airports CEO*



## Interview

# AIRPORT 2.0: THE FUTURE IS BOARDING NOW

Interview with  
Paul Griffiths, Dubai Airports CEO

*Dubai Airports has been a global pioneer in adopting biometric technology and AI-powered systems. Could you share how innovations like Smart Gates and the integrated Airport Operations Control Centre are shaping a more seamless, secure, and intelligent passenger experience at DXB?*

At Dubai Airports, technology is not only a means of enhancement, it's the backbone of our vision for future travel. We were among the first airports globally to introduce biometric-enabled Smart Gates in the early 2000s. These Gates offer swift, contactless immigration clearance. Dubai Airports also collaborated with Emirates for an end-to-end biometric pathway at Dubai International (DXB) Terminal 3, enabling guests to check in, access lounges, clear immigration, and board using facial recognition alone. This is part of a wider ambition to create a truly seamless guest journey.

**A** A key enabler of this transformation is our Airport Operations Control Centre (AOCC), a high-tech nerve centre that brings together representatives from all operational stakeholders in one space. By using real-time heat maps, predictive analytics and AI flow modelling, the AOCC helps us manage guest movement, allocate resources, and reduce queue times. The result is a more agile, coordinated response to demand surges. We've also adopted advanced security screening machines that allow laptops and liquids to remain in hand baggage, doubling throughput and reducing guest inconvenience. These solutions allow us to boost capacity without expanding our physical infrastructure, which is critical in a landlocked airport like DXB. Ultimately, our digital transformation is about marrying operational efficiency with guest satisfaction.

We reduce friction, eliminate queues, and create dwell time that can be enjoyed rather than endured. We adapt the

technology in a way that increases flow rates at DXB and keeps everyone happy. More people are coming every year—93.6 million in 2024, and we're looking like we could top 100 million annual guests by 2027, which would be another massive milestone for us.

*How is Dubai Airports leveraging digital twin technologies, productive data platforms and machine learning to manage growth while maintaining world-class service standards?*

Our in-development Disruption Digital Twin will give us a live, integrated view of our operations, enabling dynamic re-planning of flights, staffing, and resources in real time. This is part of a wider shift towards data-led, predictive airport management. Machine learning forecasts guest flows for accurate manpower planning, while AI cameras on aircraft stands improve departure predictions and gate readiness. But data alone is not enough. It must be paired with purpose. That's why we see ourselves first and foremost in the hospitality business. Technology supports our people in delivering service excellence by streamlining processes, improving information flow, and empowering better decision-making. We measure our success not by throughput alone, but by how our guests feel as they move through our airport.

*As a major hub for global travel and tourism, what investment priorities are you setting to strengthen Dubai Airports' infrastructure and digital ecosystem, especially as the world moves into a more AI-driven, hyperconnected era?*

Our investments focus on increasing capacity and elevating the guest experience without building unnecessarily. This includes biometric touchpoints, smart baggage systems, predictive modelling tools and AI-assisted operations.

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With DWC, we have the rare opportunity to build a future-facing airport from the ground up. Considering the speed with which air travel and technology are evolving, the ten-year timeline for the project means that we are probably talking about innovations, concepts and ideas that have either not been conceived yet or are in their nascent stage.

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“Airport Operations Control Centre (AOCC), a high-tech nerve centre that brings together representatives from all operational stakeholders in one space.”

The development of Dubai World Central – Al Maktoum International (DWC) will be a multimodal, biometrically enabled hub with seamless links to road, rail and aerial mobility solutions. Our ambition is to deliver an airport that reflects future travel trends. That means designing for personalisation, sustainability and interoperability.

*Sustainability is becoming an integral part of aviation’s future. How is Dubai Airports integrating green technologies and energy-efficient infrastructure into its growth strategy? Could you also share more about your goals around reducing environmental impact?*

Sustainability is a design principle across every facet of our operations. Progress has been driven by strong collaboration with our partners, enabling key initiatives such as the installation of over 62,000 solar panels to offset 23,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> annually, the transition of all non-electric airside vehicles to biodiesel, and a waste management programme that has significantly reduced landfill waste. These are part of a coordinated, airport wide approach to decarbonisation delivered through collective action across the ecosystem. In recognition of this commitment, DXB was awarded Level 4 ‘Transformation’ under the ACI Airport Carbon Accreditation programme.

*Beyond sustainability, your organisation is also known for its community-focused and socially responsible programs. How does Dubai Airports approach corporate responsibility — particularly in areas such as workforce development, accessibility, and partnerships with local communities?*

We are proud to be one of the UAE’s largest employers, and our employees are the heartbeat of our success. Earlier this year, we received the Gallup Exceptional Workplace Award. A testament to our sustained focus on employee wellbeing, engagement and career development. We’ve also embedded accessibility into our guest journey. DXB is the world’s first international airport to earn the Certified Autism Centre™ (CAC) designation, awarded by the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES). With dedicated quiet rooms, employee training, and awareness campaigns like “We All Meet the World Differently”, we’re continually improving services for guests with visible and hidden disabilities.

*You’ve led Dubai Airports through incredible expansion and transformation over the years. What has personally driven your long-standing dedication to the aviation industry, and what leadership values continue to guide your journey at the helm of one of the world’s most dynamic airport networks?*

Aviation is a great connector, bringing people, ideas and cultures together. When I joined Dubai Airports, we had a bold ambition: to turn a regional hub into the world’s leading aviation gateway. That required not only infrastructure and investment, but a collective mindset committed to excellence. We made decisions to innovate, to take risks, and to unite behind a shared vision. We work in a sector that is constantly evolving— success lies in embracing that change and in being proactive about shaping the future rather than reacting to it. I believe in trusting teams, empowering people, and making decisions with clarity and conviction. Most of all, I believe in putting the guest at the centre of everything we do.



“We were among the first airports globally to introduce biometric-enabled Smart Gates in the early 2000s. These Gates offer swift, contactless immigration clearance.”

*Looking ahead, where do you see the most exciting intersections of AI, tourism, and infrastructure investment — and what role will Dubai Airports play in shaping the global travel experience of the future?*

AI, tourism and infrastructure are no longer separate conversations, they are converging to redefine how the world moves. Airports are becoming more than transit spaces. They’re becoming interconnected networks, designed to deliver experiences, not just process passengers. Our focus is on building intelligent systems that anticipate demand, remove friction and enable personalisation. That includes everything from automated baggage handling to predictive maintenance and biometric corridors.

With DWC, we have the rare opportunity to build a future-facing airport from the ground up. Considering the speed with which air travel and technology are evolving, the ten-year timeline for the project means that we are probably

talking about innovations, concepts and ideas that have either not been conceived yet or are in their nascent stage. Airports have a habit of legacy processes, but we are determined to set an example and engineer this out. This decision will have a significant bearing on Dubai’s position as the world’s hub of choice and its reputation as a leader in the aviation sector, and we will have to be very diligent to get it right, but we aim to retain our edge over the competition for the foreseeable future.

We’re integrating smart mobility, AI, and real-time data flows to create a dynamic, scalable environment. I’m particularly excited about advanced aerial mobility, including the potential for pilotless air taxis to become part of the airport travel journey. As travel becomes more hyperconnected, seamless, and sustainable, we remain committed to shaping that future, ensuring every journey through Dubai is not only efficient, but memorable. **W**

*Astrid Steharnig-Staudinger,  
Chief Executive Officer of Austria Tourism*





# AUSTRIA 2030: A TOURISM MODEL FOR THE DIGITAL AND SUSTAINABLE AGE

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Interview with  
Astrid Steharnig-Staudinger,  
Chief Executive Officer of Austria Tourism

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## Austria's Vision for the Future of Tourism

**Q** *Digital transformation is shaping the global tourism landscape. How is Austria integrating AI and digital innovations into its national tourism strategy to enhance visitor experiences, improve destination management, and strengthen Austria's position as a top travel destination?*

**A** Austria Tourism is leveraging AI and digital innovation in our national tourism strategy to maintain its competitive edge. We are focusing on three key areas: enhancing the visitor experience, advancing destination management, and strengthening Austria's global position by using technology in marketing to strengthen human connection, storytelling, and brand relevance.

For example, our AI Concierge, an intelligent chatbot, provides on [austria.info](https://austria.info) personalized travel recommendations and helps visitors intuitively connect with Austria's diverse offerings - tailored to their interests and powered by smart technology. We also drive innovation through initiatives like the Change Tourism Austria community, which brings together more than 1,500 stakeholders to co-create data-driven solutions for a more resilient and responsive tourism landscape. Our AI Radar, a continuous knowledge-sharing platform, identifies emerging AI trends and translates them into practical use cases - empowering destinations to make smarter, data-driven decisions and ensuring that innovation is accessible at every level, from local to national. Austria's true competitive advantage lies not only in its breathtaking

landscapes, but also in its unique way of life - our Lebensgefühl. Through digital and AI-powered marketing tools, we want to bring this feeling to life globally.

## Personalization in Tourism: Creating Tailored Experiences

**Q** *Travelers today seek unique and personalized experiences. How is Austria leveraging AI, big data, and digital marketing tools to provide customized recommendations and immersive experiences? Could you share specific initiatives like Austria's Data-Based Tourism Insights Platform or Smart Destination Austria that showcase this transformation?*

**A** Personalization in tourism depends on high-quality data. At Austria Tourism, we've made data excellence a cornerstone of our strategy for years. Through initiatives like our flagship Tourism Data Space, we provide a secure environment for stakeholders to share data and create richer insights for personalization. It turns this shared data into actionable intelligence, enabling tourism stakeholders to better understand visitor preferences and deliver tailored experiences. In addition, we support the industry with traditional market research and insights from our global experts. Our research platform provides easy access to visitor behavior data, emerging trends and market potential. By connecting these insights directly to customer touchpoints, such as our AI Concierge, we ensure that visitors receive real-time, personalized recommendations that enhance their travel experience. Ultimately, our goal is to turn data into meaningful, tailored travel experiences.

# Interview

Astrid Steharnig-Staudinger,  
Chief Executive Officer of Austria Tourism

## Sustainability & Green Tourism in the Digital Age

**Q** *Austria is a global leader in sustainable tourism. How is the Austrian National Tourist Office using digital tools, AI, and green technologies to promote eco-friendly travel, reduce carbon footprints, and support regenerative tourism initiatives such as Austria's Green Tourism Certification Program?*

**A** To sustain Austria's leadership in sustainable tourism, we are driving a transformation that harmonizes environmental, socio-cultural, and economic factors. We use digital tools and AI to promote eco-friendly travel by showcasing best practices, managing tourist flows, directing visitors to less crowded areas or off-peak times, and encouraging eco-friendly mobility options like public transport and bike sharing. With our annual Sustainable Tourism in Austria Summit, we bring together tourism stakeholders and sustainability experts to share knowledge, explore regenerative tourism solutions and drive collaborative projects. That's how we strengthen Austria as a global leader in sustainable tourism.

We also support regenerative tourism initiatives like the Austrian Ecolabel, which highlights clear environmental and social criteria and certifies sustainable tourism businesses. AI and digital tools play a key role in meeting these standards, particularly in energy use, waste reduction, and regional sourcing.

## Smart Destinations & Digital Innovation

**Q** *Austria has been at the forefront of smart tourism solutions. How is your office collaborating with regions and cities to implement digital innovations such as Vienna's Smart City Tourism Strategy or Salzburg's AI-Driven Visitor Flow Management? How do these initiatives balance tourism growth with local community well-being?*

**A** We work closely with regions and cities to implement digital innovations such as Vienna's Smart City Tourism Strategy and Salzburg's AI-driven visitor flow management. These initiatives aim to balance tourism growth with the well-being of local communities by optimizing visitor flows and promoting sustainable development. Through these collaborations, we are fostering innovations that ensure tourism remains beneficial for both visitors and locals.

## Investment & Business Opportunities in Austria's Tourism Sector

**Q** *Technology and innovation are opening new investment avenues in tourism. What are the key investment trends shaping Austria's tourism sector, and how can global investors engage in Austria's tech-driven tourism projects, digital hospitality solutions, and sustainable infrastructure developments?*

**A** In the Austrian tourism sector, the most important investment trends center around AI, Web 3.0 and blockchain. AI enhances personalization and operational efficiency, while blockchain ensures secure, transparent, and sustainable tourism services. Web 3.0 enables immersive, decentralized experiences. Sustainability remains key, with a focus on climate-resilient infrastructure and future-ready tourism.

To give global investors access to Austria's tech-driven tourism ecosystem, Austria Tourism connects innovative startups with industry opportunities through events such as hackathons and the Inno-Days 2025, which bring together companies with young talents from universities and colleges. That's how we make sure to foster future-ready solutions and open direct pathways to investments in digital hospitality, seamless travel, and sustainable infrastructure.

## Fraud Management & Cybersecurity in Digital Tourism

**Q** *With the rise of digital transformation in tourism, cybersecurity and fraud prevention have become critical. How is Austria implementing secure digital solutions to protect travelers' data, prevent fraud, and ensure safe digital transactions in tourism services?*

**A** As part of the European Union, Austria operates within one of the most robust digital regulatory frameworks in the world. Compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation and alignment with upcoming legislation, such as the EU AI Act, are central pillars of our digital tourism transformation. These frameworks ensure that traveler data is handled with the highest standards of security, transparency, and accountability. Beyond compliance, Austria Tourism actively promotes digital literacy and ethical innovation within the industry. 







# TOURISM BEYOND THE SHORELINE

## HOW MARINE INNOVATION IN FLOATING SOLUTIONS ARE CHANGING GLOBAL TOURISM

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*By Wael Joujou, Founder  
& CEO, V-Marine*

Tourism is changing. Around the world, people are looking for new kinds of travel experiences—and countries are searching for smarter ways to grow their tourism industries without harming the environment.

At V-Marine, we believe the future lies beyond the shoreline. We're building floating resorts, floating villas, and water-based tourism hubs that don't require land.

As the Founder of V-Marine, a marine innovation and floating solutions company based in the Kingdom of Bahrain, I have spent the last decade exploring how floating infrastructure can reshape the future of tourism. With climate change, urban density, and shifting traveler expectations forcing the sector to evolve, floating ecosystems offer a blueprint for expansion that is both scalable and sustainable. Today, thanks to the convergence of AI, modular design, and green technology, we are no longer dreaming of the future—we are building it.

### **Why Build on Water?**

Water offers new possibilities. Floating structures open the door to developing tourism experiences in locations that were previously untouched—along coastlines, near islands, or in calm offshore zones. These floating resorts and marinas provide unique guest experiences that feel immersive, peaceful, and close to nature.

That's why floating structures are a smart solution. They can be installed near beaches, islands, or city waterfronts without disturbing the environment. Because they're modular and

movable, they can be adapted to fit different environments and expanded over time based on demand.

It's not about replacing what's on land—it's about adding a new layer of opportunity on the water.

### **Exploring Smart Technology for Floating Tourism**

At V-Marine, we're actively researching how technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), smart sensors, and automation can improve floating living environments. We're in early-stage development of systems that could assist with boat docking, monitor energy and water use, and help predict maintenance needs. Importantly, we're also exploring how AI can enhance operational safety on the water—by detecting early warning signs, weather patterns, and navigation risks in real time. These technologies are still in the R&D phase, but they represent an exciting step toward intelligent, connected marine tourism.

### **Designing for Sustainability**

We are also testing concepts that support eco-friendly, off-grid tourism on water. These include solar energy systems, onboard filtration units, and nature-positive architectural designs. As part of our research, we're conducting materials testing in marine environments to better understand how sustainable composites, veneer finishes, and corrosion-resistant alloys perform under long-term exposure to sun, salt, and humidity. While these features are not yet in commercial use, we are building a roadmap toward floating structures that are both environmentally responsible and structurally resilient.



*Wael Joujou,  
Founder and CEO of V-Marine*

## Tourism that Boosts the Economy

Floating tourism isn't just exciting—it also brings real economic benefits. It gives coastal countries a new way to grow without using more land. It even attracts international investment.

Floating structures can become year-round income sources, especially for places affected by seasonal tourism or rising sea levels. For example, floating beach clubs or water villas in calm zones near island nations can generate tourism revenue year-round while preserving onshore space.

## What We're Doing at V-Marine

At V-Marine, we're building a range of floating products: Floating hotels and house yachts; Modular floating beach clubs; Luxury arrival jetties and smart marinas; Floating cafes, spas, and wellness centers.

Our systems are scalable, meaning they can start small and grow over time. From the eco-sensitive lagoons of the Maldives to the tourism corridors of the Gulf and emerging waterfronts in Africa, V-Marine designs floating systems that adapt to regional goals.

## Why Investors Are Interested

More investors are showing interest in floating tourism—not just for the novelty, but for the long-term value it offers. Floating structures are modular, revenue-generating, and adaptable to many global markets. At V-Marine, we call these assets floating properties—a new category of real estate that lives on water. With the right frameworks in place, floating properties can offer secure returns and lease-based revenue models. We believe this represents the rise of a new asset class—one that blends lifestyle, sustainability, and economic resilience. As climate change reshapes coastlines and urban expansion meets natural limits, floating properties offer a future-proof way to grow tourism and hospitality investment.

## Tourism in a Changing Climate

As sea levels rise and weather becomes less predictable, many coastal cities face serious challenges. Floating infrastructure can help. It rises with the tide, resists floods, and can be designed to handle storms.

Floating tourism is more than just an exciting opportunity—it's a practical response to the changing needs of travelers, governments, and the planet.


## Our Vision

At V-Marine, we believe tourism should evolve. Floating resorts and marine destinations give countries a new way to grow, protect nature, and offer unforgettable guest experiences.

We're inviting governments, investors, tourism boards, and developers to imagine what's possible—then build it with us.

Because the next great destination might not be found on land...

It might be floating on the sea.

We invite you to collaborate with us—to shape a new tourism frontier and redefine what's possible at sea. 

Floating tourism is more  
than just an exciting  
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practical response to  
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# AI, TECHNOLOGY, AND STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS: REDEFINING GLOBAL TOURISM THROUGH SMART

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*By Musa Toktas,  
Board Member & CTO, HOI Holding*

The global tourism landscape is undergoing a transformative shift, driven by the rapid advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), smart infrastructure, and strategic investments in digital ecosystems. As travel behavior evolves and sustainability becomes a core priority, technology leaders must pioneer solutions that not only enhance economic growth but also foster responsible tourism practices.

At HOI Holding, we have embraced this challenge by integrating cutting-edge technology into our tourism platforms and infrastructure projects. One of our flagship initiatives, Guide of Dubai, stands at the forefront of this transformation, offering a next-generation TravelTech ecosystem powered by AI to meet the demands of modern travelers and industry partners alike.

## **The Rise of AI-Driven Travel Experiences**

AI is no longer a future concept—it is a present necessity. Travelers today expect personalized, seamless, and efficient experiences. Through Guide of Dubai, we have developed and integrated an advanced AI-powered assistant called go.ai, designed to transform how travelers plan and experience their journeys.

go.ai analyzes user preferences, travel history, budget, and timing to provide fully customized travel itineraries. From obtaining tourist visas to booking hotels, excursions, transfers, and even yacht rentals, the platform offers a unified and intelligent solution—saving both time and resources for travelers and agencies.

This level of personalization not only enhances customer

satisfaction but also significantly increases conversion rates for our B2B partners, creating a win-win scenario that promotes economic growth across the tourism value chain.

## **Smart Marine Infrastructure: A New Frontier for Coastal Economies**

Beyond digital platforms, we are actively investing in smart marine infrastructure and floating properties to reshape coastal tourism economies. Floating hotels, marinas equipped with IoT technology, and sustainable marine tourism hubs are no longer futuristic concepts—they are viable, investable realities.

These developments create new tourism destinations without disrupting natural coastal ecosystems. By integrating AI and IoT-based management systems, we optimize resource consumption, reduce environmental footprints, and offer unique experiences that attract high-value tourists.

Floating infrastructure also opens up investment opportunities in regions where traditional land-based development is limited, enabling new economic growth corridors along global coastlines.

## **Driving Sustainable Tourism through Digitalization**

Sustainability is at the heart of our innovation strategy. Platforms like Guide of Dubai play a critical role in promoting responsible tourism by encouraging digital transactions, minimizing paperwork, and reducing the carbon footprint associated with traditional travel agency models.



*Musa Toktas,  
Board Member & CTO, HOI Holding*



# Article

*By Musa Toktas,  
Board Member & CTO, HOI Holding*

Our AI-driven itinerary planning promotes off-peak travel and alternative destinations, helping to reduce over-tourism in crowded areas and distribute economic benefits more evenly across lesser-known regions.

Furthermore, by consolidating services into a single digital ecosystem, we reduce logistical inefficiencies and promote more eco-friendly travel behaviors, in line with global sustainability goals such as the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## **Strategic Investments: Building a Scalable and Inclusive Tourism Economy**

Investment in smart tourism technologies is no longer optional; it is a strategic imperative for countries and businesses aiming to stay competitive. At HOI Holding, we are committed to building scalable platforms that not only cater to luxury markets but also create accessible solutions for emerging markets and underserved communities.

The Guide of Dubai platform exemplifies this inclusive approach by offering a robust B2B program with exclusive pricing, rebate structures, and credit incentives. This empowers smaller agencies and entrepreneurs to access premium travel products and services, fostering economic inclusion and supporting local business ecosystems.

With plans for global expansion to markets such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bali, and beyond, our vision is to establish a worldwide network of interconnected tourism economies powered by advanced technology.

## **The Future of Tourism is Intelligent, Sustainable, and Inclusive**

With plans for global expansion to markets such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bali, and beyond, our vision is to establish a worldwide network of interconnected tourism economies powered by advanced technology.

The tourism industry stands at a pivotal crossroads. Technology, when leveraged responsibly, has the power to unlock unprecedented economic growth while preserving cultural heritage and protecting our planet.

Through initiatives like Guide of Dubai, the integration of AI, smart infrastructure, and strategic investment is no longer

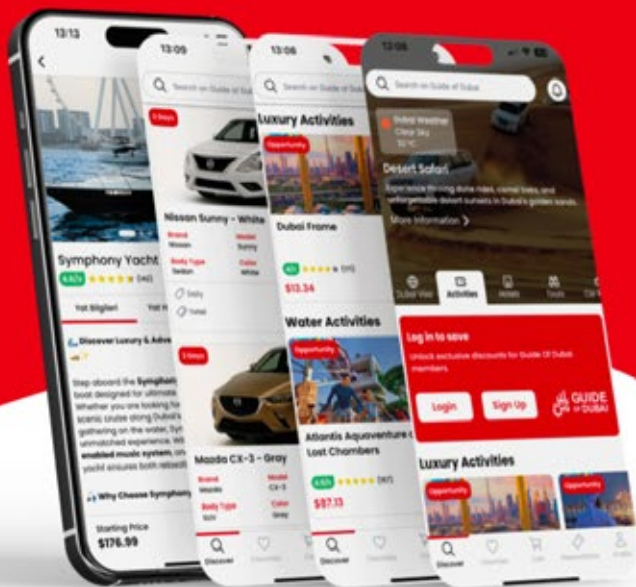
an abstract vision—it is a living reality shaping the future of global tourism.

As we continue this journey, our mission remains clear: to lead the transition towards a smarter, more sustainable, and inclusive tourism economy that benefits travelers, businesses, and communities worldwide. **W**

Investment in smart tourism technologies is no longer optional; it is a strategic imperative for countries and businesses aiming to stay competitive. At HOI Holding, we are committed to building scalable platforms that not only cater to luxury markets but also create accessible solutions for emerging markets and underserved communities.



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**HOI**



VISIT OMAN

*Shabib Al'Maamari,  
Managing Director - Visit Oman*



# BALANCED BY NATURE, POWERED BY TECH: OMAN'S NEW TOURISM NARRATIVE

*Interview with Shabib Al'Maamari,  
Managing Director - Visit Oman*

**Q** *How has Visit Oman enhanced Oman's tourism industry, and what future digital innovations can we expect?*

**A** A study was conducted for the tourism sector, where a gap analysis pointed out that the sector's supply chain is fragmented; as such, Visit Oman was launched to digitize the entire booking experience and access to the entire travel supply chain in Oman.

Visit Oman offers a seamless bridge between local tourism offerings and global demand. We're not just a marketplace, we're a digital ecosystem connecting vetted travel and tourism SMEs in Oman with well-established trade partners from key source markets worldwide.

Activated in November 2023, Visit Oman's innovative Digital Travel Hub (DTH) is enhancing and adding value to how travelers experience Oman. Our platforms are connected with 80+ airlines, 100+ hotels, and over 200 authentic experiences, including 80% captivating experiences crafted by local SMEs; these aren't just numbers, they represent the diversity and richness of Omani tourism, now readily accessible to the world.

As a leading aggregator, the DTH empowers Omani tourism providers and SMEs by scaling the digital distribution of the entire Omani travel supply chain across continents. This initiative fuels global expansion, accelerating the reach of digital tourism products directly from their source. Through Visit Oman's DTH, our local partners gain immediate and seamless connectivity with a vast network of global distributors and online service providers, serving both B2B and B2C segments.

Currently, Visit Oman distributes local Omani products through a multi-channel approach, reaching a global audience in over 170 countries and engaging a user base exceeding 110 million.

**Q** *Oman's Integrated Tourism Complexes (ITCs) are attracting global investors. How do these projects align with the country's vision for sustainable and tech-driven tourism?*

**A** Visit Oman is part of OMRAN Group, where the group's mandate is to create sustainable and authentic tourism assets, lifestyle communities and destinations that drive economic growth and contribute to the diversification of the economy. The group's portfolio encompasses 5 master developments, 29 hospitality assets, 8 strategic partnerships, 5 nature & heritage sites, and 5 subsidiaries.

Notably, the Sustainable City Yiti, a world-class mixed-use project that meets the highest standards of social, environmental, and economic sustainability is Oman's First Net Zero Energy City, and aspires to be the largest operational sustainable community in the world.

Yiti presents opportunities for research and learning, empowering residents to lead the change towards minimizing our carbon footprint, realizing the goals of the future today.

OMRAN Group recently launched its ESG Framework earlier this year, where the sustainability component contributes to 2 of the National Priorities of Oman Vision 2040, namely the Development of Governorates and Sustainable Cities, and the Environment and Natural Resources priorities.



Through Visit Oman's Digital Travel Hub initiative, we have partnered with a leading travel technology company to implement a plug-and-play solution. This solution will focus on the scaled distribution of properties across major channels for short stays, further enhancing the variety of accommodation options for travelers that includes properties situated in ITCs, and beyond.

**Q** *With AI-driven personalization shaping the travel experience, how is Visit Oman using data and smart technologies to deliver customized visitor journeys?*

**A** With our core focus being on B2B, our enhanced booking platform includes a smart trip planner feature. Offerings our clients countless options for flights, accommodations, tours, and travel ancillaries, accompanied by the latest tech features to ensure a seamless booking experience.

The smart trip planner acts as a guide, recommending the best places, activities, and information on distance, making it easier for our users to create well-crafted, personalized packages based on their customers' preferences.

**Q** *Sustainability is a key pillar in Oman's tourism development. How is AI being leveraged for smart destination management while ensuring long-term resilience?*

**A** Visit Oman is in a position to strategically leverage AI intelligence in advancing sustainable tourism development and ensure long-term resilience. Through the Digital Travel Hub, tech-driven data analysis is central to this effort; the algorithms optimize route planning by considering scenic spots, rest areas, public amenities, and fuel stations, promoting efficient resource utilization and minimizing environmental impact.

As such, the ability to manage tourist flow, and preventing over-tourism by intelligently distributing visitors across

diverse destinations; this leads to supporting a more balanced and sustainable tourism experience.

This distribution of tourist traffic also contributes to equitable economic benefits, ensuring that the wealth generated by tourism is spread across local communities, aligning with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This integrated approach to AI implementation facilitates smart destination management, fostering a tourism sector that is both environmentally conscious and economically inclusive.

**Q** *Looking ahead, how will AI and smart tourism technologies shape Oman's position as a leading tourism destination in the Middle East by 2040?*

**A** By 2040, AI and smart tourism technologies will significantly enhance Oman's position as a leading Middle Eastern tourism destination through strategic data utilization and targeted development. Leveraging high-volume, clear data, AI will enable dynamic influence over tourist flow via booking engines, directing visitors to specific locations. This allows for targeted development, where, for instance, a gas station can be incentivized to improve its facilities (restrooms, restaurants) based on predicted visitor traffic.

Access to such data unlocks investment opportunities for SMEs, fostering job creation. By analyzing demographic and psychographic data, AI will pinpoint emerging needs and preferences, such as the demand for certified drone operators for videography or specialized dining experiences. This data-driven approach will stimulate the creation of diverse tourism-related services and infrastructure.

By effectively harnessing AI's capabilities to extract actionable insights from vast datasets, Oman will create a highly personalized, efficient, and sustainable tourism ecosystem, solidifying its status as a premier destination in the region. **W**







# INDIA'S TRAVEL REVOLUTION: EMOTIONAL LUXURY REPLACES LAVISH TRADITIONS



In a striking shift that reflects broader cultural evolution, Indian travellers are transforming the global tourism narrative, prioritising emotional luxury over material traditions. A new report by FINN Partners, in collaboration with GSIQ, titled “The Future of Travel 2025: From Dreamers to Doers – India’s Global Travel Generation,” paints a vivid picture of India’s emerging travel identity—one driven by emotion, experience, and connection over status or ritual.

## Luxury Over Lavish Weddings

According to the study, a staggering 81% of Indian travellers now prefer investing in luxury travel experiences rather than hosting extravagant weddings. The sentiment is clear—today’s Indian globetrotters are trading ceremonial grandeur for immersive getaways that create lasting memories. In fact, 74% said they would choose travel over designer purchases, and 56% prioritise hotel upgrades instead of flight class upgrades. Shivani Gupta, Managing Partner at FINN Partners, aptly summarises this shift: “Indian travellers are no longer just dreaming. They are doing—with emotional clarity and rising global fluency.”

## The Rise of Emotional Travel Personas

One of the report’s most profound insights is the emergence of five emotional personas that guide travel decisions beyond demographics:

- Fun-Seeking Explorer (22%) – Craves adventure and socially driven experiences
- Self-Improving Idealist (16%) – Seeks growth and cultural enrichment
- Balanced Indulger (21%) – Enjoys luxury with a focus on balance and beauty
- Story-Seeker (22%) – Pursues authentic, narrative-rich journeys
- Culturalist (19%) – Values heritage, bonding, and shared legacy

These personas reflect a deep psychological alignment with travel—where the goal isn’t just to see, but to feel, to connect, and to transform.

## GenZ: The Vanguard of India’s Global Travel Identity

Perhaps the most dynamic element in India’s outbound travel boom is the emergence of GenZ as global tourism’s trendsetters. With 95% of this digitally native generation factoring international travel into their financial plans, they are fuelling a rise in boutique accommodations, aesthetic-driven planning, and spontaneous itineraries.

GenZ’s mantra is simple: “Live the dream now.” Whether it’s desert safaris in Dubai or tranquil retreats in Japan, their focus is on emotionally enriching, shareable experiences.

## Emotional Storytelling as Commerce

India’s outbound tourism growth is no longer driven by traditional brochures or agency ads. Instead, emotional content is king. YouTube vlogs influence 55% of travel decisions, while Instagram dominates among GenZ for its visual storytelling. GenX travellers still lean on planning tools and blogs, but even here, trust and emotional clarity are key. Debbie Flynn, Global Travel Practice Leader at FINN Partners, puts it bluntly: “Every global travel brand now needs an India strategy.”

## What This Means for the World

This is not just a consumer trend—it’s a global shift. Indian travellers are shaping the tourism industry with high-spending intent, emotional intelligence, and cultural fluency. Destinations, luxury platforms, and tourism boards must now tailor offerings that speak to emotion, not age; to identity, not income. Customisation, flexibility, and authentic storytelling will be the pillars of successful engagement with this audience. As Eva Stewart of GSIQ explains: “From local startups to global airlines, brands are redesigning travel to serve India’s evolving needs—and they must. The Indian middle class is the next giant of global travel.” 

## Key Takeaways from “The Future of Travel 2025”

*Top Travel Motivations:: Fun & adventure (48%), Cultural discovery (47%), Emotional rejuvenation*

*Top Inspiration Platforms: YouTube (55%), Instagram (41%)*

*Emotional Drivers: Connection, self-expression, storytelling, and well-being*

*As India’s influence on global tourism accelerates, the world’s travel ecosystem is on notice. The future of travel is not just Indian—it is emotionally Indian.*









Talal Khan,  
Director of Operations, SuperPark United

## ENTERTAINMENT AS THE PULSE OF TOURISM: A KEY DRIVER FOR MODERN TRAVEL

In today's global tourism landscape, the demand for immersive, engaging, and emotionally resonant experiences has never been greater. While natural beauty, cultural heritage, and culinary delights remain staples of travel, entertainment has emerged as a powerful force shaping tourism patterns, spending behaviors, and destination appeal.

As someone deeply involved in the development and operations of indoor entertainment parks across Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region, I've witnessed firsthand how entertainment hubs have transformed from mere add-ons to central pillars of tourism ecosystems.

### The Experience Economy Is Here

We are no longer in the age of passive sightseeing. Travelers—especially families and younger audiences—seek interactive experiences that leave lasting memories. Entertainment businesses, particularly those offering physical, digital, or hybrid play experiences, serve this demand perfectly. Parks like SuperPark are not just indoor activities; they are engagement magnets, often becoming the highlight of a family's itinerary. Whether it's theme parks, adventure centers, escape rooms, or edutainment attractions, these experiences enhance a destination's brand and extend the average stay of tourists, contributing directly to hotel occupancy, transportation, and F&B sectors.

### The Saudi Vision and the Entertainment Wave

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 recognizes entertainment as a strategic sector for diversification and cultural expression.

With landmark events, giga-projects, and entertainment cities on the rise, we are witnessing a tourism rebirth led by immersive entertainment experiences.

My journey with SuperPark—a Finnish-origin brand adapted for the Saudi market—has shown that when international expertise meets local cultural relevance, the result is powerful. Entertainment doesn't just entertain—it connects, educates, and inspires repeat tourism.

### The Ripple Effect on Local Economies

Every successful entertainment center fuels local job creation, supports small businesses, and opens doors for cross-sector partnerships. It creates a multiplier effect, as tourists who come for play also dine, shop, and explore.

Moreover, entertainment helps destinations become year-round tourism hubs—especially indoor formats that can operate regardless of season or weather.

### Looking Forward

As global tourism redefines itself post-pandemic, entertainment stands tall as a resilient and versatile pillar. For tourism boards, developers, and investors, the message is clear: entertainment is not optional—it's essential.

To build truly future-ready tourism models, we must integrate entertainment into our core strategies, creating destinations that are not just visited—but remembered, loved, and revisited. **W**





# FROM TEMPLES TO TECH: REIMAGINING INDIA'S TOURISM THROUGH AI AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Harjinder Singh Kukreja,  
*Cultural Ambassador of India - Sikh Travel Influencer*

**Q** *With over 4 million followers, how do you see the role of digital influence in shaping travel trends, especially in cultural and heritage tourism?*

**A** Social media has revolutionized the way people discover and experience travel. With over 86% of travelers influenced by platforms like Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube, digital storytelling plays a crucial role in shaping travel trends.

As a Sikh travel influencer, I have used my platform to bring global awareness to India's rich cultural heritage, from showcasing the serene spirituality of the Golden Temple to capturing the historical significance of Sikh forts and monuments. My content allows audiences to experience heritage tourism in a way that is engaging, interactive, and deeply personal.

AI-powered analytics help influencers like me track engagement trends, optimize content based on user preferences, and create personalized travel recommendations. The future of cultural tourism lies in digital storytelling combined with AI-driven insights, ensuring that destinations remain authentic yet innovative in their approach.

**Q** *The 'Dekho Apna Desh' campaign has leveraged digital storytelling to promote Indian heritage sites. How do you see influencer-driven content shaping travelers' perceptions of India's cultural tourism?*

**A** The 'Dekho Apna Desh' initiative by the Indian government is an excellent example of how digital storytelling can enhance cultural tourism. Through webinars, interactive social media campaigns, and influencer collaborations, the campaign has brought lesser-known heritage destinations into the spotlight. Influencer-driven content plays a pivotal role in shaping travelers' perceptions by offering authentic, experience-based narratives. Instead of traditional brochures or government

advertisements, people today trust real-life experiences shared by travel influencers. My travel videos, for instance, offer a personal and immersive look at Sikh heritage sites, Indian palaces, and historical landmarks, encouraging followers to explore India beyond mainstream attractions.

With AI-powered audience segmentation, content creators can tailor tourism campaigns to specific demographics—such as adventure seekers, history buffs, or spiritual travelers—enhancing the effectiveness of initiatives like 'Dekho Apna Desh' and 'Incredible India 2.0.'

**Q** *With AI-driven content personalization on platforms like Instagram and YouTube, how do you engage audiences with curated cultural travel experiences?*

**A** AI-powered tools allow for hyper-personalized engagement, helping travel influencers and tourism boards create customized content based on audience interests.

- AI-driven analytics help me track which cultural travel experiences resonate most with my audience.
- Automated AI tools on platforms like Instagram suggest the best time to post, improving engagement and maximizing reach.
- AI-based personalization ensures that my travel content is served to the right audience, whether they are looking for spiritual tourism in Punjab or luxury travel experiences across India.

Additionally, AI-powered machine learning models analyze comment sentiment, user behavior, and engagement rates, enabling creators to refine their storytelling techniques to keep audiences engaged.



# Interview

*Harjinder Singh Kukreja,  
Cultural Ambassador of India - Sikh Travel Influencer*

**Q** *As India's Cultural Ambassador, how is the government leveraging technology and AI to promote Indian tourism on a global scale?*

**A** India is actively integrating AI-driven initiatives to make its tourism sector more accessible, immersive, and engaging. Some key government-led AI innovations include:

- The Incredible India Digital Platform (IIDP) – Uses AI-based recommendation engines to offer personalized travel itineraries.
- AI-powered virtual reality (VR) experiences – Allow global audiences to explore Indian heritage sites remotely.
- Augmented Reality (AR) heritage walks – Enabling tourists to experience India's historical monuments through interactive storytelling.
- AI-powered chatbots – Assisting international tourists with real-time travel recommendations and information.

Through these initiatives, India is leading the charge in AI-enhanced tourism, ensuring that visitors can experience India's cultural richness through smart, seamless, and personalized engagement.

**Q** *How do initiatives like 'Heritage Walks with AI-powered Augmented Reality' in major cities enhance visitor engagement with India's cultural sites?*

**A** AI-powered Augmented Reality (AR) heritage walks bring historical landmarks to life by overlaying digital narratives, audio guides, and 3D reconstructions onto physical locations.

For instance, in Amritsar, visitors can experience AI-powered Sikh heritage tours, where historical events from Guru Nanak's era are digitally reconstructed using AR, offering an immersive experience beyond traditional guided tours.

Such innovations increase visitor satisfaction by up to 40% (according to the Archaeological Survey of India), proving that AI-enhanced tourism boosts engagement, learning, and retention.

**Q** *From your experience as an entrepreneur in hospitality and manufacturing, how do you see AI and smart tourism technologies impacting the future of business and tourism investment?*

**A** AI is reshaping hospitality, food services, and tourism investments through:

- AI-powered concierge services – Providing real-time, hyper-personalized guest experiences.
- Smart hotels with automated check-ins – Reducing human dependency while enhancing guest convenience.
- AI-driven data analytics – Helping businesses predict travel trends, optimize pricing models, and improve customer retention strategies.

For entrepreneurs like me, investing in AI-driven tourism solutions is key to future-proofing businesses in an increasingly digital world.

**Q** *How do you envision AI, social media, and digital storytelling redefining the global tourism landscape?*

**A** The future of AI in tourism will be defined by:

- Interactive Virtual Tours: AI-driven 3D experiences allowing tourists to "walk" through destinations before visiting.
- AI-powered Smart Travel Assistants: Personalized travel planning chatbots predicting traveler preferences.
- AI-Generated Travel Content: AI tools creating hyper-personalized travel itineraries based on historical behavior.

For Sikh heritage tourism, AI-powered translation tools will allow global tourists to navigate Sikh pilgrimage sites seamlessly, preserving cultural authenticity while making heritage sites more accessible.

## Final Thoughts

AI is not replacing the human experience in travel; rather, it is enhancing it. With AI-driven personalization, digital storytelling, and smart tourism investments, the global travel industry is becoming more inclusive, immersive, and seamless.

**W**







*Sami Dağıstanlı,  
General Manager, 7 Luxury*



By Sami Dağıstanlı,  
General Manager, 7 Luxury

# THE FUTURE OF LUXURY: INNOVATION, SUSTAINABILITY, AND PERSONALIZED EXPERIENCES

Luxury is no longer defined solely by price tags or rare materials. In today's fast-evolving landscape, true luxury embodies values, emotions, experiences, and purpose. At 7 Luxury, we are not merely following this transformation—we are shaping it. As General Manager, I have the privilege of witnessing firsthand how our clients' expectations have evolved and how we, as a brand, continue to innovate while remaining anchored in timeless elegance.

## Beyond Products: Crafting Exceptional Experiences

At 7 Luxury, we often say: "Luxury is not what you buy, but how it makes you feel." Today's affluent consumer wants more than a prestigious name—they want to feel understood, seen, and catered to on a deeply personal level. That's why experience is at the core of everything we do.

Our approach is experiential rather than transactional. Whether it's a bespoke villa rental in the Mediterranean, a high-end curated travel journey, or an exclusive fashion consultancy, our mission is to immerse clients in an atmosphere of comfort, beauty, and individuality. Every detail, from interior design to customer service, is crafted with precision and passion.

## Sustainability Is the New Luxury

Sustainability is no longer an option; it is a requirement. The new generation of luxury consumers—particularly Gen Z and Millennials—prioritize ethical sourcing, ecological responsibility, and social impact. This is a challenge and an opportunity for legacy brands and boutique luxury houses alike.

At 7 Luxury, we've made sustainability a central pillar of our operations. From working with artisans who use renewable resources to partnering with eco-conscious hospitality providers, we ensure our offerings are aligned with responsible practices. For us, luxury must serve not just the individual—but the planet.

## Hyper-Personalization: The Art of Listening

In the age of mass customization, personalization is the highest expression of luxury. Our clients don't want "options"—they want unique solutions built around their lifestyle, passions, and values.

To achieve this, we invest in deep client relationships. We learn about their habits, tastes, dreams, and aspirations. Whether they're requesting a private chef with a specific culinary background or seeking investment opportunities in luxury real estate, we tailor each experience with care and creativity. Our mission is simple: deliver more than expected, always.

## Embracing Technology Without Losing Soul

Luxury must evolve, and part of that evolution includes embracing technology in meaningful ways. At 7 Luxury, we incorporate AI-driven insights, virtual concierge systems, and immersive digital experiences to enhance convenience without sacrificing human connection.

For instance, we use predictive data to anticipate client needs even before they articulate them. At the same time, we believe that technology should enhance, not replace, the soul of service. Luxury is still about human warmth, eye contact, empathy, and storytelling.


## The Role of Leadership in Luxury

As a leader in the luxury sector, I believe it is our responsibility to inspire and guide—not just within our own organizations but across the industry. We must be bold enough to take creative risks, question outdated norms, and build ecosystems that support artisans, innovators, and communities.

7 Luxury's future lies in collaboration. We're expanding globally by forming strategic alliances with visionary brands, designers, and investors who share our belief in ethical prosperity. Our goal is not to be the biggest—but to be the most trusted, admired, and forward-thinking name in luxury lifestyle.

## A Personal Note

What excites me most about the future is the possibility of redefinition. Luxury is entering its most dynamic era—where heritage and innovation, purpose and pleasure, exclusivity and inclusivity, coexist.

To our clients, partners, and peers: thank you for believing in what we do. We promise to continue setting new standards, pushing boundaries, and celebrating the art of living beautifully—with conscience, elegance, and integrity. 

Article

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# BEYOND SUSTAINABILITY:

## EMBRACING THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY FOR REGENERATIVE TOURISM IN THE AGE OF AI AND TECHNOLOGY



By Anna Köhl & Harald Friedl – Circular Economist

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Tourism has long grappled with its substantial environmental and social impacts. In 2019, the sector contributed approximately 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions—a critical challenge underscored further by the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, from this disruption has emerged a powerful opportunity: to reimagine tourism not merely as sustainable but as regenerative and future-ready.

Enter the circular economy: a systemic, innovation-driven model that aligns seamlessly with the digital revolution, including Artificial Intelligence (AI). Far from being a buzzword, the circular economy reflects a paradigm shift away from the traditional linear “take-make-dispose” model. It offers a structured and scalable framework to minimize waste, extend product life cycles, and restore ecosystems—a model made even more agile and impactful through the integration of AI technologies.

**At its foundation, the circular economy rests on three essential principles:**

- **Designing out waste and pollution from the outset.**
- **Keeping products and materials in continuous use through reuse, repair, and recycling.**
- **Regenerating natural systems to build long-term resilience.**

When thoughtfully applied to tourism, and bolstered by digital innovation and data intelligence, these principles open a new chapter of prosperity, positioning tourism as a catalyst for inclusive, tech-enabled, and regenerative economic growth.

## A Circular Shift: Transforming the Tourism Economy

According to the World Economic Forum, circular economy strategies could unlock \$1 trillion in material savings globally by 2025. This bold potential extends across the tourism value chain, where intelligent systems, smart infrastructure, and local partnerships redefine how we build, consume, and experience travel.

Examples of circular economy principles in tourism are increasingly visible:

**Resource Intelligence:** Hotels using AI-enhanced systems for smart energy management and water recycling, while transport operators adopt electric vehicles powered by renewables to cut emissions.

**Closed-Loop Experiences:** Restaurants sourcing from regenerative local farms, where food waste is composted and reinvested in agricultural soil health—creating a virtuous cycle of nutrition and sustainability.

**Circular Design:** Reimagining tourism infrastructure through adaptive reuse, energy-efficient buildings, and eco-lodges crafted from sustainable materials—all while integrating local culture and biodiversity protection.

AI's role? Optimizing circular strategies through data analytics, predictive modeling, and customer engagement. Smart systems help track resource use, personalize low-impact itineraries, and scale regenerative best practices across borders.

## More Than Greenwashing: Circular Tourism with Tangible Impact

Embracing the circular economy unlocks a multi-dimensional impact:

**Environmental Resilience:** Lower carbon footprints, zero-waste operations, and restoration of natural ecosystems through sustainable infrastructure and responsible resource management.

**Economic Renewal:** Enhanced profitability via resource efficiency, reduced costs, and the birth of new circular business models and green jobs—especially relevant in a tech-augmented tourism economy.

**Social Connection:** Stronger, more authentic ties between travelers and communities. Cultural preservation meets participatory development, improving the quality of life for residents.

This is no longer theoretical. As demand for authentic and purpose-driven travel rises, circular tourism offers not just a feel-good narrative, but measurable results that appeal to investors, policymakers, and next-generation travelers alike.

## The Rise of the Circular Tourist

Is there a market for this? Absolutely.

**A 2023 Booking.com study found:**

- **83% of travelers consider sustainable travel vital.**
- **61% intend to travel more sustainably in the coming year.**

These consumers are increasingly tech-savvy and values-driven, open to AI-personalized experiences that reduce their environmental impact and deepen cultural exchange. In this sense, circular tourism becomes both a market strategy and a moral imperative.

In economic terms, circular adoption promises not only cost savings but also increased resilience to global shocks, diversified income streams, and new job creation. AI integration further enables predictive decision-making and agile responses to consumer trends and environmental constraints.



## Turning Vision into Reality: Action Points for Stakeholders

To scale circularity in tourism, we must act across five pillars:

**Policy and Governance:** Governments must develop clear incentives—from tax benefits to sustainable procurement policies—and enforce circular-friendly regulations.

**Investment in Tech and Innovation:** Direct funding toward AI-driven circular solutions and R&D to support breakthrough business models.

**Circular Business Models:** Encourage hotels, operators, and destinations to adopt design-for-reuse principles, integrate regenerative supply chains, and measure success through impact metrics.

**Ecosystem Collaboration:** Foster alliances between public institutions, private enterprises, and local communities to co-create circular value chains.

**Education and Capacity Building:** Equip tourism professionals, policymakers, and travelers with the knowledge and skills needed to implement circular thinking.


### A Call to Action: A Regenerative Future Powered by AI & Circularity

The future of tourism lies not just in sustainability but in regeneration—and the circular economy is our blueprint. AI and technology provide the tools to accelerate this shift at scale.

We call upon all stakeholders—from policymakers and destination managers to business leaders and tech entrepreneurs—to embrace circular innovation as a shared mission.

Let us co-create a tourism sector that not only minimizes harm but actively contributes to planetary health, cultural richness, and economic resilience.

Now is the time to transcend traditional models.

Let's reimagine tourism as a circular force for good—one that gives back more than it takes, and builds a legacy of regeneration for generations to come. 



The future of tourism lies  
not just in sustainability  
but in regeneration—and  
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tools to accelerate this  
shift at scale.







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



# TRAVEL TRENDS AMONG EUROPEANS: THE MEDITERRANEAN AND BEYOND

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

The European Travel Commission (ETC) published recently an interesting survey, titled “Monitoring Sentiment for Intra-European Travel: Spring & Summer 2025,” which provides insights into European travel intentions, preferences, and concerns for the period between April and September 2025.

**The survey is based on data collected in March 2025 from 5,974 respondents across 10 key European markets. Below is a summary of some of its key findings which I find more interesting, especially for Southern European countries:**

Popular destinations, including major cities, tourist villages, and resorts, continue to dominate European travel preferences, attracting 53% of spring and summer holidaymakers. However, a notable shift is underway: according to the survey, 35% of Europeans are opting for less conventional locations, while 13% plan to explore off-the-beaten-path spots within their chosen country.

Interestingly, travellers selecting lesser-known destinations tend to stay longer. 38% of them are planning trips of more than 10 days, compared to 21% among those heading to traditional hotspots. These travellers also tend to spend more, with many budgeting over €2,500 per trip.

One increasingly influential factor in travel planning is the weather. Climate awareness is playing a growing role in how Europeans make their travel decisions. This year, 81% report that changing climate conditions are affecting the way they travel—a 7% increase compared to last year.

**So how exactly is weather shaping these decisions?**

- 17% of respondents say they monitor weather forecasts more frequently.
- 15% actively seek milder climates.
- 14% avoid destinations known for extreme heat.

**This heightened awareness may be one of the key drivers behind a growing interest in cooler or alternative destinations during the peak travel season.**

The report highlights evolving travel trends, preferences, and challenges, offering actionable insights for destinations and businesses to adapt to changing traveller behaviours. I can summarize its recommendations as follows:

**For Destinations:** Promote multi-stop itineraries, events, and local culinary experiences to attract diverse travellers and balance visitor flows.

**For Businesses:** Target older Millennials with offers for longer stays and focus on flexible booking policies to address weather-related concerns.

Interestingly, while respondents cited inflation (17%), economic uncertainty (14%), and geopolitical tensions—specifically the Russia-Ukraine war (14%) and unrest in the Middle East (9%)—as their primary concerns, they appeared to overlook a growing issue: the rising anti-tourism sentiment in several key destinations across Southern Europe.

On June 15, a wave of coordinated protests is scheduled to take place in cities such as Barcelona, Venice, Lisbon, and Palermo, organized by the Southern Europe Network Against Touristification. These demonstrations aim to draw attention to the social and environmental consequences of mass tourism.

Activists argue that unregulated tourism has triggered a surge in housing costs, exacerbated shortages, overwhelmed infrastructure, and contributed to environmental degradation. Although some municipalities have begun introducing measures—such as restricting Airbnb listings and limiting hotel development—critics claim these efforts are slow-moving and insufficient.

In conclusion, while tourism remains a vital economic pillar and an important grassroots tool for building cross-cultural understanding, the increasing backlash in certain hotspots highlights a critical challenge: ensuring that economic and other benefits do not come at the expense of livability and sustainability for local communities. **W**

*Şekip Hardal,  
VP of Legal Affairs - WTFI*



# VISA, POLICY, AND PROFIT:

## NAVIGATING TOURISM IN AN ERA OF IMMIGRATION REFORM

Şekip Hardal,  
VP of Legal Affairs - WTFI

**Q** *How do you think the recent immigration policies in the US, under President Trump, will impact the tourism industry?*

**A** The policies may have a negative impact on the US tourism industry, particularly if they lead to increased scrutiny of visa applications or longer processing times. However, some argue that stricter immigration policies can also enhance national security and protect domestic industries.

**Q** *What are the potential benefits of stricter immigration policies for the tourism industry?*

**A** Some potential benefits include increased national security, reduced strain on public services, and protection of domestic workers. However, these benefits may be offset by negative impacts on tourism and economic growth.

**Q** *How do you see European countries responding to the US's immigration policies, and how might this impact tourism in Europe?*

**A** European countries may adopt different approaches to immigration, potentially attracting tourists and businesses looking for more welcoming policies. This could lead to increased tourism in Europe, particularly if countries like Germany and Sweden continue to promote open and inclusive societies.

**Q** *In Asia, countries like Japan and Singapore are known for their strict immigration policies. How do these policies impact their tourism industries?*

**A** Despite strict immigration policies, Japan and Singapore have both seen significant growth in tourism in recent years. This suggests that well-managed immigration policies can coexist with a thriving tourism industry.

**Q** *As a lawyer specializing in citizenship by investment, how do you see these policies affecting demand for residency and citizenship programs?*

**A** Demand for residency and citizenship programs may increase as individuals and families seek greater mobility and security in response to changing immigration policies. Citizenship by investment programs can offer a valuable option for those looking to secure a second passport.

**Q** *What advice would you give to tourism boards and industry stakeholders looking to navigate these changing immigration policies?*

**A** I would advise them to stay informed about policy developments, engage with government stakeholders, and adapt their marketing and operational strategies to respond to changing circumstances.

**Q** *How can countries balance the need for security with the need to attract tourists and businesses?*

**A** Countries can achieve this balance by implementing efficient and secure visa processes, investing in border management technology, and promoting clear communication about immigration policies and requirements.

**Q** *Looking ahead, what trends do you see emerging in the intersection of immigration policy and tourism, and how might these trends shape the industry in the coming years?*

**A** I see a growing focus on digital transformation, streamlined visa processes, and more nuanced approaches to immigration policy. These trends could lead to increased efficiency, security, and cooperation between countries, ultimately benefiting the tourism industry. **W**





*Mateo Bartolini,  
Contributing Economist*

# IN THE LAST 20 YEARS, COMMERCIAL AIR ROUTES HAVE DOUBLED. TODAY, TOURISTS DON'T CHOOSE CITIES, CITIES CHOOSE TOURISTS

*Mateo Bartolini,  
Contributing Economist*

Over the past two decades, the number of commercial air routes has nearly doubled, increasing from approximately 11,000 in 2004 to over 20,000 routes operating worldwide today (Boeing Commercial Outlook). This expansion reflects a significant transformation in global tourism, driven by the growth of international transport infrastructure, airport networks, aircraft fleets, and airline operations. These developments have dramatically enhanced global connectivity, enabling broader circulation between destinations and a substantial increase in international arrivals.

However, diversification remains a serious challenge to global tourism — particularly for the growth of the Global South.

According to Boeing's latest Commercial Outlook, the world will need 42,970 new commercial passenger aircraft over the next 20 years. Yet, only 3% of these aircraft will be required for routes across Africa, and just 5% for Latin America. This means that, despite the global growth in tourism, there is an urgent need to develop more competitive destinations in the Global South. Otherwise, infrastructure development benefits will remain concentrated in Eurasia, China, and North America — regions expected to account for 63% of new aircraft over the coming two decades.

These projections are consistent with recent air traffic data from International Air Transport Association (IATA): in 2023, 51% of all global air traffic was concentrated in Europe and North America, while Africa represented only 2%, and Latin America just 5%. The challenge is enormous. For example, the UNWTO's latest statistics show that international arrivals in Spain alone (124 million) were nearly double the total number of arrivals in all of Sub-Saharan Africa combined (63 million).

As we used air traffic data to understand the intensification of global competition and the strategic role of tourism policy to promote diversification, we can also look at the global hotel pipeline. In 2024, there were 6,100 hotels under construction worldwide — and 64% of them were located in just two countries: The United States and China.

This data matters — especially for those investing in tourism — because the competition to attract travelers is intensifying but not yet geography diversification. Having spectacular natural or cultural assets is no longer enough; you must become a destination. When people choose where to travel, your city needs to be on their minds. For that, active management and promotion through well-designed public and private policies are essential to becoming visible, attractive, safe, and accessible to global travelers.

Tourism is not spontaneous. It is an economic decision made by individuals willing to invest their money in spending a few days away from where they live. That's the first thing to understand when designing a destination: the traveler is the final investor.

Second, we must understand the motivation behind that investment: is it for leisure? MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions)? Sports? Proximity? Shopping? Culture? Biodiversity?

These questions might seem too micro, but they reflect a powerful macroeconomic perspective. Just as tourism is an economic decision made by travelers, becoming a destination is a deliberate decision made by cities through public policy. You can have the most beautiful beach in the southeast of Africa, but without the necessary conditions — infrastructure, airports, human capital, safety, and digitalization — no one will come.

## Opinion

*Mateo Bartolini, Contributing Economist*

Conversely, even without remarkable natural or cultural assets, if you offer the right incentives — such as targeting MICE tourism, launching digital marketing campaigns, and ensuring safety and accessibility — your city can become a competitive destination.

Let me share an example from a city in the Global South — San Isidro, Argentina. A small town just 40 minutes from Buenos Aires. Three years ago, I led a professional team in launching a set of mixed public-private strategies aimed at positioning San Isidro as a tourism destination. This experience shows how governance — when structured with coordination and a clear vision — plays a key role in shaping the tourism economy.

The first step was to bring together all relevant stakeholders into a public-private tourism board. We then formalized the board through legislation, making it responsible for defining the city's strategic direction and tourism brand.

We engaged tourism universities, the city's three hotels, its eight museums, the UNESCO-managed Victoria Ocampo House, major art galleries, the Chamber of Commerce, and leaders in gastronomy. We also involved theatres, cinemas, certified tour guides, artisans, political leaders, and NGOs working to protect the city's heritage and environment.

Once the board was established, we implemented two new regulations to protect the city's two most important assets. First, its natural treasure: the three delta islands in the Río de la Plata — the world's widest river. A new law prohibited solid construction, declared the local ecosystem protected, and required the municipality to offer at least one boat tour to promote sustainable tourism.

Second, we acted to preserve the city's colonial heritage. We proposed restoring the Plaza Mayor in the historic center, regulating tour bus traffic, registering all monuments and linking them to QR codes, and adding smart signage with walking distances and Bluetooth-enabled directions for smartphones.

To further strengthen tourism, we created new incentives: tax reductions for hotels that include convention centers, tax discounts for expanding accommodation capacity, and a system to link hotel staff with the city's cultural agenda. We also developed training programs in

partnership with local universities to improve the skills of hospitality workers.


With the board active, the assets protected, and incentives in place, we launched the final stage: attracting visitors. We designed six thematic circuits to generate demand, encouraged local theaters and cinemas to broaden their offerings, and began reaching out to private art collectors — many of whom live in San Isidro — to support a new contemporary art museum that could position the city as a regional cultural hub.

Finally, we strengthened our marketing strategy with a predictable event calendar so visitors could plan in advance and combined festivals with gastronomic promotions or ecotourism initiatives with sports events, seeking synergies to boost tourism momentum.

Results are beginning to show. After 25 years, San Isidro returned to the International Tourism Fair of Latin America. The city also became the first in the region to declare tourism a strategic sector by law — with unanimous political support. Since then, has launched its first tourism master plan, which sets goals for sustainable growth, monitors key metrics, and strengthens tourism as a driver of economic and cultural development.

So, we have seen a concrete example of how cities can choose to become competitive destinations. We began this article by discussing how global tourism is being reshaped by intensified competition and the challenge this poses to diversification. In this context, we highlighted the essential role of well-managed, mixed public-private policies in transforming a city into a destination and promote a global diversification of destinations.

In conclusion, more planes, more hotels, and greater digitalization are necessary for the growth of global tourism — but they are not sufficient to ensure its geographic diversification. It is also essential to implement ambitious, well-designed public-private strategies that can turn places into destinations.

Only then will we achieve real global diversification of tourism investment and increase the share of international arrivals to the Global South. The future of global tourism will depend not only on who travels, but on who is invited to the global stage. 



In 2023, 8.8 million people visited the Louvre in France — equivalent, for example, to the total number of international arrivals to all of the following countries combined: Angola, Botswana, Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Namibia, Seychelles, and Zambia.



A portrait of Susanna Hakobyan, a woman with dark hair, wearing a white blazer, resting her chin on her hand. The background is dark and textured.

Opinion

# ARMENIA'S MOMENT:

## A RISING DESTINATION FOR INVESTMENT AND TOURISM

*Susanna Hakobyan -  
Deputy Head of Tourism Committee  
of the Ministry of Economy, Armenia*



# HOW A SMALL NATION IS QUIETLY BUILDING ONE OF THE REGION'S MOST INVESTOR-FRIENDLY CLIMATES?

At the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Armenia is rapidly emerging as a serious contender in the global investment landscape. With its millennia-old heritage, stunning natural beauty, and a government committed to economic reform, the country is positioning itself as both a compelling tourism destination and a smart bet for international investors.

While many nations compete for global capital, few offer what Armenia does: political will for reform, a business-friendly regulatory environment, and untapped tourism potential. As more investors seek opportunities beyond saturated markets, Armenia offers a rare combination of authenticity, affordability, and long-term upside.

Armenia has taken measurable steps to open its economy and improve the investment experience. According to the World Bank Doing Business indicators, Armenia ranks 47th globally in starting a business, with registration procedures taking as little as one day. Foreign direct investment (FDI) has shown consistent upward momentum. In 2023, Armenia attracted over USD 1.2 billion in FDI inflows, a 25% increase from 2022, reflecting growing investor confidence across sectors, including energy, infrastructure, and tourism. The Armenia Investment Guidebook highlights a range of investor incentives: tax holidays in free economic zones, customs exemptions, and simplified procedures for repatriation of profits. Double taxation treaties with over 45 countries provide additional security for cross-border investments.

Tourism is emerging as one of Armenia's most promising sectors. In 2023, tourism contributed 11.3% to Armenia's GDP, generating over USD 1.6 billion in direct and indirect revenues. With 2.3 million international arrivals, up 16% year-on-year, Armenia is steadily becoming a key destination in the South Caucasus.

But these numbers only hint at what's possible. Armenia offers a rare combination of authentic cultural heritage, striking natural landscapes, and rising regional visibility—yet much of its tourism economy remains underdeveloped. Outside the capital Yerevan, infrastructure gaps persist, and high-potential destinations such as Lake Sevan, Dilijan, and Gyumri still lack adequate hospitality offerings.

This presents a strategic entry point for global investors. Demand is rising for quality accommodations, integrated winter resorts, and curated travel experiences, particularly in cultural, nature-based and adventure tourism. With favorable returns and first-mover advantage in many sub-segments, Armenia's tourism sector is not only ripe for

investment—it's positioned to lead the country's next wave of inclusive economic growth.

## **Hospitality and Destination Development:**

Several landmark projects are currently shaping Armenia's regional tourism landscape. In Dilijan, a growing cultural and eco-tourism hub, new boutique hotels and mixed-use hospitality concepts are under development, capitalizing on the town's national park setting and creative economy appeal. Gyumri, Armenia's second-largest city, is seeing a revival through heritage hotel renovations and cultural infrastructure investments aimed at attracting both domestic and international visitors.

## **Mountain and Wellness Tourism:**

The MyLer Winter Resort in Yeghipatrush represents Armenia's most ambitious alpine tourism project to date - a four-season mountain resort designed to international standards, with ski facilities, lodging, and wellness infrastructure.


In Lake Sevan, the Winds of Armenia resort is creating a premium lakeside experience combining sustainable design, water sports, and nature-focused tourism.

## **Urban and Mixed-Use Projects:**

In Yerevan, the upcoming World Trade Center complex is positioned to become a major business and hospitality anchor. With hotel, conference, retail, and office components, the project reflects Armenia's growing appeal as a regional hub for trade, tourism, and professional services.

## **Niche and Rural Ventures:**

Opportunities are also abundant in rural tourism, including eco-lodges, farm-to-table hospitality, and experiential travel linked to Armenia's rich wine, food, and craft heritage—particularly in the Vayots Dzor, Tavush, and Lori regions.

Armenia's tourism pipeline is real, investable, and expanding. For investors seeking authentic markets with scalable opportunities, the country offers more than promise—it offers projects ready to shape the next chapter of regional tourism growth. For investors looking to get ahead of the curve, Armenia offers more than just a foothold in a new market—it offers a meaningful role in shaping a country's tourism future. With the right mix of reforms, strategic vision, and natural endowments, Armenia is no longer just a destination to discover; it is one to invest in. 



Opinion

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# LUXURY TRAVEL IN THE GCC



by Dr. Serdar M. Bas,  
Destination Strategist

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The GCC isn't simply catering to luxury travelers, it's defining new standards of experiential wealth. With curated access, cultural nuance, and a relentless pursuit of excellence, the Gulf is no longer just a transit zone, it's where the luxury journey begins.



The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have long been synonymous with wealth, grandeur, and architectural marvels. But in recent years, they have evolved into global playgrounds for luxury travelers, offering experiences that rival and often surpass, those found in Europe or Southeast Asia. From desert palaces to private islands, here's what the luxury segment finds irresistible in the Gulf.

### **A Hotel Scene That Redefines Opulence**

Across the GCC, luxury is not an aspiration, it's the baseline. In Dubai, travelers can check into the iconic Burj Al Arab, often called the world's only seven-star hotel, or enjoy beachfront serenity at One&Only The Palm. Abu Dhabi's crown jewel, the Emirates Palace Mandarin Oriental, delivers palatial grandeur, while Saudi Arabia's hospitality ambitions are coming to life through resorts along the Red Sea and at Diriyah Gate.

Even Oman's remote coastal retreats like Six Senses Zighy Bay and Alila Jabal Akhdar cater to the world's most discerning guests, blending rugged nature with barefoot luxury.

### **Desert Dreams and Island Escapes**

For those seeking exclusivity, the GCC delivers in spades. Imagine sundown camel rides across the Empty Quarter, followed by a private dinner under the stars, complete with live oud music and curated Middle Eastern menus. Zaya Nurai Island in Abu Dhabi offers the Maldives experience just minutes from the mainland, while Saudi Arabia's new ultra-luxury projects promise untouched beauty with VIP treatment.

### **Gastronomy with Global Prestige**

Fine dining is no longer confined to Paris or Tokyo, Michelin-starred chefs and culinary icons have set their sights on the Gulf. From Ossiano's underwater tables in Dubai to LPM in Riyadh and Zuma's multiple locations, the region now offers a rich menu of international cuisine and refined service. Private chef dinners in desert villas or yacht decks add an extra layer of exclusivity.

### **Retail Therapy, Reimagined**

The GCC is a paradise for those who measure luxury in carats and couture. Malls like The Dubai Mall, Galleria Al Maryah Island, and Doha's Place Vendôme house flagship stores for Hermès, Cartier, Chanel, and Van Cleef & Arpels. For an ultra-personal experience, travelers are offered private lounges, after-hours shopping, and bespoke fittings.

### **Mind, Body & Beyond**

Wellness has taken a premium turn. From the Talise Spa at Burj Al Arab to Zuhair Wellness Resort in Qatar, guests receive more than massages, they're offered transformation. Increasingly, medical luxury is emerging too, with Dubai and Riyadh offering preventive health packages, longevity therapies, and regenerative treatments wrapped in five-star comfort.


### **Sea, Sky, and Seamless Access**

Luxury travelers in the GCC move with fluidity. Private jet terminals, helicopter transfers, Rolls-Royce fleets, and chauffeur-driven Bentleys are the norm. Marinas like Yas Marina in Abu Dhabi or The Pearl in Doha allow guests to charter superyachts for coastal escapes or sunset events.

### **Culture for the Cultivated**

While luxury often connotes indulgence, the GCC also offers cultural depth. Private tours of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, National Museum of Qatar, or ancient Nabatean sites in AlUla provide rare insight into the region's heritage. Luxury travelers can enjoy calligraphy workshops, falconry sessions, or pearl diving demonstrations, all arranged privately and discreetly.

### **The VIP Lifestyle, On and Off the Calendar**

Whether it's attending the F1 Grand Prix in Monaco-style suites, booking out a wing of a resort during Art Dubai, or gaining backstage access at Diriyah Season, the Gulf offers a calendar of experiences that are invitation-only in spirit, but open to those who know where to look. 



*Adnan Fatayerji*  
*Co-Founder & CSO, Skipr Technologies*



# CYBERSECURITY FOR TOURISTS AND INSTITUTIONS

Adnan Fatayerji  
Co-Founder & CSO, Skipr Technologies

Adnan Fatayerji is a co-founder of several pioneering initiatives at the intersection of sovereignty, cybersecurity and AI. He co-founded ThreeFold, a sovereign internet and cloud infrastructure project, and Skipr, an agentic cybersecurity platform that delivers privacy-first digital protection through intelligent, programmable software agents. His work focuses on building sovereign, AI-ready ecosystems for individuals and institutions in the era of accelerated technology and quantum disruption.

**Q** *How would you assess the current cybersecurity landscape in the global tourism industry?*

**A** The current cybersecurity landscape in tourism is deeply misaligned with the pace and complexity of modern threats. We're still relying on fragile, centralized models in an age where digital sovereignty and adaptive defense are essential. As more travelers connect across borders, our systems need to be resilient by design, not just patched after incidents. This means rethinking the architecture entirely, from static trust models to agentic, dynamic infrastructures that put control back into the hands of the traveler.

**Q** *What are the most frequent digital threats facing travelers today — from booking platforms to public Wi-Fi usage?*

**A** The most frequent threats today are rooted in data harvesting, session hijacking, and identity manipulation. Public Wi-Fi and third-party booking sites often lack encryption, leaving travelers exposed. Increasingly, we're seeing AI-driven phishing, location spoofing, and automated data inference being used to compromise individuals across digital borders. The danger lies not just in the threats themselves, but in how invisible they've become.

**Q** *What common cybersecurity mistakes do tourists make while abroad, and how can they avoid them?*

**A** Tourists often default to convenience: using open Wi-Fi, clicking through unknown links, or oversharing

their itinerary across unsecured platforms. The smarter approach is to travel with your own private security layer, an intelligent system that encrypts your communications, rotates identifiers, and ensures that only the data needed for a transaction is ever shared. Sovereignty starts with simplicity and ends with protection.

**Q** *How vulnerable are tourism institutions like hotels, airports, and DMOs to cyberattacks?*

**A** Very vulnerable, because many of them operate on legacy systems with limited segmentation and centralized credential storage. A single breach can expose guest data, surveillance footage, room access systems, and payment records. Without adopting sovereign, zero-trust frameworks, these institutions will continue to be soft targets.

**Q** *What key cybersecurity measures should travel-related businesses implement to protect sensitive data?*

**A** They need to start from the principle of least privilege, encrypt everything end-to-end, and eliminate static credentials. More importantly, they should implement autonomous digital agents to manage access, verify transactions, and secure data dynamically. A sovereign platform respects the user's autonomy, ensures data is never pooled unnecessarily, and continuously adapts to risk in real time.

# Interview

Adnan Fatayerji  
Co-Founder & CSO, Skipr Technologies

**Q** *How can travel apps, online agencies, and payment systems ensure end-to-end data protection for users?*

**A** They need to stop relying on passwords and trust-based systems. Use decentralized identity (DID), embed sovereign AI-driven agents that enforce privacy policies, manage network connections, and replace human-administered systems. For example, servers can be cycled dynamically by digital agents, reducing the surface area for hacking and ensuring that data remains fully in the traveler's control, not stored in third-party silos. When you build privacy and security systems that are governed by autonomous code instead of people, you create truly resilient infrastructure and applications in a zero-trust, digital world.

**Q** *Should governments enforce minimum cybersecurity standards for tourism operators and platforms?*

**A** Yes, but standards alone are not enough. What we need are policy frameworks that prioritize sovereignty, not surveillance. Governments can support resilient, privacy-first architectures that maintain security and public safety without relying on mass data collection. There are ways to apply agentic verification that protect users and institutions alike, what's needed now is a shift in mindset and design.

**Q** *What role can technologies like blockchain, biometric ID, or AI play in creating a secure digital travel ecosystem?*

**A** AI, blockchain, and biometrics are powerful tools, but only if they're deployed responsibly. Used right, blockchain enables user-owned credentials that are verifiable anywhere. Biometrics can be stored locally and encrypted for identity verification without sharing sensitive data. AI, particularly in agentic form, can help travelers and institutions operate securely by monitoring, detecting, and neutralizing threats without relying on human oversight.

**Q** *How can tourism ministries and private institutions collaborate to build sector-wide cybersecurity resilience?*

**A** Collaboration should focus on open, interoperable systems, not proprietary platforms. Sovereign infrastructures allow ministries to provide digital identity rails while allowing private operators to build trusted access layers. It's about creating an ecosystem where security is embedded, not outsourced.

**Q** *Looking ahead, what one urgent step should the tourism industry take to safeguard both travelers and institutional integrity?*

**A** Move beyond compliance and into sovereignty. Build systems where travelers retain control of their data, institutions can prove security without exposing information, and AI works in service of the user, not the platform. The future of travel security isn't just smarter tech, it's trustless architecture with trust-by-design outcomes. **W**

AI, blockchain, and biometrics are powerful tools, but only if they're deployed responsibly. Used right, blockchain enables user-owned credentials that are verifiable anywhere. Biometrics can be stored locally and encrypted for identity verification without sharing sensitive data.





A portrait of Ed Silva, CEO of Sand & Snow Capital. He is a middle-aged man with dark hair, wearing light blue-rimmed glasses, a white long-sleeved button-down shirt, and a yellow and navy blue striped tie. He is seated at a desk, with his hands resting on the surface. Behind him is a large, vibrant red wall. On the wall is a large, abstract painting in a cubist style, featuring a tall, pale, stylized figure on the right and a sailboat on the left. The lighting is soft, highlighting his face and the texture of his clothing.

*Ed Silva,  
CEO Sand & Snow Capital*

# CHILE AND THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: NEW FRONTIERS FOR HIGH-END TOURISM

Ed Silva,  
CEO Sand & Snow Capital

In today's global landscape, luxury tourism and immersive experiences in pristine natural environments are emerging as high-growth, high-profit sectors for the next decade. Within this context, Chile and the Dominican Republic stand out as strategic destinations for the development of exclusive, sustainable, and high-impact tourism projects.

Both countries offer exceptional conditions: unique geographic assets, low-density tourism in key regions, world-class air connectivity, and increasingly favorable regulatory environments for foreign investment.

## **Chile: A Natural Laboratory for Mountain and Wilderness Experiences**

Chile, with a population of approximately 18.5 million (Census 2024), features a low fertility rate (1.75 children per woman) and a rapidly aging population, with 13.6% over the age of 65. Combined with a growing immigrant population (8.8%), this creates a fertile ground for innovative, sustainable economic sectors.

Economically, Chile is one of Latin America's most stable economies, with a GDP per capita of \$29,500 USD (2023). It leads the world in copper production and boasts a globally recognized wine industry producing over 1 billion liters annually.

Chile's geography — the towering Andes and the untouched fjords of Patagonia — offers an ideal setting for developing next-generation ski resorts, trekking circuits, mountain biking parks, and luxury wilderness navigation experiences. Wine tourism further enhances these experiences, blending extraordinary landscapes with world-class products.

Connectivity: Santiago's Arturo Merino Benítez International Airport (SCL) handles over 25 million passengers annually, with direct flights to North America, Europe, Oceania, and South America.

## **Dominican Republic – Samaná: The Untouched Caribbean Waiting to Be Discovered**


The Dominican Republic, with a population of 11.4 million (2024), has enjoyed sustained economic growth with a GDP per capita of \$23,100 USD (2023). It is the Caribbean's top tourist destination, welcoming a record 11.2 million visitors in 2024 — 8.5 million by air and 2.6 million by cruise.

The Samaná Peninsula, with over 200 virgin beaches, tropical jungles, and remarkable biodiversity, offers a rare opportunity to develop eco-luxury resorts, private villas, boutique hotels, and immersive cultural experiences in a truly natural setting. Its authentic identity and untapped potential make it an ideal destination for high-end travelers.

Connectivity: Samaná is under two hours from Las Américas International Airport (SDQ) and is directly served by El Catey International Airport (AZS), with flights from the U.S., Canada, and Europe — offering privileged access for high-net-worth international tourists.

## **Strategic Opportunity: The Time to Be a First Mover Is Now**

Chile and the Dominican Republic provide a rare five-year window of opportunity: unique and underdeveloped destinations, solid infrastructure, investment-friendly environments, and rising global demand for luxury nature-based experiences.

Visionary developers and investors can become pioneers in shaping the next iconic tourism destinations — just as Dubai transformed the desert into a global benchmark: an ambitious move that redefined the global tourism landscape. 





*Nikita Gawande,  
President of GAAC Foundation,  
India*



# ENGLISH AS A PASSPORT: HOW LANGUAGE PROMOTES GLOBAL TOURISM

Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta met Angelina Jolie — they were talking about Megasthenes.

Perhaps, he knows an English, the world would have been wider than what it is today.

A beautiful dream, where history and culture met through the English language, opening doors to a deeper understanding of humanity and shared values.

Dream inspires...

Truth is more beautiful because of language  
The concept of tourism has evolved. It's no longer just about visiting places and witnessing sights—it's about discovering yourself in the process.

Language plays an influential role in the journey. When you connect with a language, you don't just communicate—you belong. You feel at home, not because of where you are, but because of who you are becoming.

English, in particular, has amplified this sense of belonging. With technology as its ally, English has created a global comfort zone—bridging cultures, shrinking distances, and helping people feel grounded even when they're far from home. In the end, the greatest feeling is not just in seeing the world, but in evolving with it—language by language, step by step.


The expansion of British colonial power which picked towards the end of 19 century and emergence of United States as the economic power of 20th century. Use of English in technology,

research and software played an important role. Adoption of English as an official language in many of the countries. The global status of English makes the role of this language essential in the tourism industry, better understanding, accelerate communication and decision making through language.

The language of the tourism attracts, persuades and encourages potential tourist to become actual tourist. In this association language is utilized as discourse object. The reliance on English as a means and symbol of global communication is unique to some spheres. Rich vocabulary, flexibility, simple grammar and cosmopolitan character plays a vital role in defining English as the international language of tourism.

**English is the language of international tourism and travel is the constituent part of global life.**

The sun was just beginning to rise over the sea sand of Plage de Palombaggia beach of France casting golden light across the dunes. I stood barefoot on the cool sand beneath my feet, watching as the horizon blushed into shades of orange and rose. For a moment, time seemed to pause. It was one of those rare mornings when you feel the world breathing with you.

This moment has been expressed because of the beauty and existence of English which has reached globally. Realization of Tourism will last in the hearts of coming generations as English is a passport for Global Tourism. 




# GLOBAL TOURISM FORUM LEADERS DINNER IN DUBAI MARKS A MILESTONE GATHERING FOR THE INDUSTRY

The World Tourism Forum Institute (WTFI) proudly concluded the Global Tourism Forum Leaders Dinner on the evening of April 30th, 2025, in Dubai, bringing together some of the most influential figures shaping the future of global tourism.

Held under the stars in one of the world's most dynamic cities, the exclusive dinner welcomed over 150 esteemed guests, including CEOs of major hospitality brands, global investors, tourism ministers, ambassadors, and high-level policymakers. The event served as a powerful platform for cross-sector dialogue and collaboration at the highest level.

in Dubai to discuss common challenges and opportunities for the tourism industry, particularly in a time marked by transformation, innovation, and geopolitical shifts.

The evening highlighted WTFI's commitment to building bridges between public and private sectors, and reaffirmed its role as a premier convenor of global tourism leadership.

The World Tourism Forum Institute expresses its deep appreciation to all attendees and partners who contributed to the event's resounding success and looks forward to continuing the conversation at upcoming forums across the globe. 

From Africa to Asia, Europe to the Americas, leaders united







## H.E. LUIS ALFONSO DE ALBA, AMBASSADOR OF MEXICO IN ABU DHABI, VISITS WTFI DUBAI OFFICE TO STRENGTHEN TOURISM AND INVESTMENT COLLABORATION

The World Tourism Forum Institute (WTFI) Dubai office welcomed H.E. Luis Alfonso de Alba, Ambassador of Mexico in Abu Dhabi, for a strategic meeting focused on advancing tourism and investment collaboration between Mexico and WTFI's global portfolio. The discussions aimed to create new opportunities for tourism development, investment partnerships, and cultural exchange between Mexico and key markets worldwide.

### Expanding Mexico's Tourism Investment Horizon

During the visit, WTFI President Bulut Bağcı provided insights into the institute's extensive global network and investment-driven initiatives. WTFI has positioned itself as a key facilitator of tourism development by connecting governments, investors, and private sector leaders across continents. The meeting explored how Mexico can benefit from being integrated into WTFI's international tourism investment portfolio, attracting capital and expertise from leading markets beyond the UAE, including Europe, Asia, and the Americas.

Ambassador de Alba emphasized Mexico's commitment to sustainable tourism, innovation, and infrastructure expansion, highlighting the country's appeal as a top-tier investment destination.

"Mexico is a powerhouse in global tourism, and we see immense potential in collaborating with WTFI's investment network to drive new projects, enhance visitor experiences, and expand tourism-related industries," said Ambassador de Alba.

### A Global Vision for Tourism and Investment

The meeting concluded with a shared vision of long-term cooperation between Mexico and WTFI, with plans for further discussions on integrating Mexico into WTFI's major investment initiatives. By leveraging WTFI's extensive network and expertise, Mexico aims to unlock new tourism markets, secure international investment, and solidify its position as a top global travel destination.



## BULUT BAĞCI AND NAJEB BALALA VISIT AFRICA'S TRAVEL INDABA 2025 IN DURBAN

Two of the most influential voices in global tourism, Bulut Bağcı, President of the World Tourism Forum Institute (WTFI), and Najeb Balala, former Minister of Tourism of Kenya and a prominent advocate for sustainable travel in Africa, paid an official visit to Africa's Travel Indaba 2025, held this week in Durban.

The event, one of the continent's leading travel trade shows, welcomed thousands of tourism stakeholders from across Africa and the world. Bağcı and Balala toured the exhibition floor, held strategic meetings with government and private sector leaders, and underscored the importance of positioning Africa as a leading force in global tourism growth.

"This continent has everything the future traveler is looking for — authentic culture, nature, adventure, and hospitality," said Bağcı during a press briefing. "Africa's Travel Indaba is not just a trade show; it is a powerful platform to amplify Africa's voice in shaping the future of tourism."

Najeb Balala emphasized the critical role of investment and

innovation in transforming African destinations. "We must invest in our people, our infrastructure, and our narratives. Africa needs to lead not just in attracting visitors, but in owning the value chain of tourism," he stated.

During their visit, Bağcı and Balala met with several African tourism ministers, heads of tourism boards, and private sector leaders to discuss collaboration opportunities through the Global Tourism Forum, an initiative by WTFI to spotlight investment and policy development in emerging tourism markets.

The visit also laid the groundwork for future GTF activities in Africa, including possible summits and capacity-building programs focused on sustainable tourism development, digital innovation, and youth engagement.

As Africa continues to gain momentum as a preferred tourism destination, the presence of figures like Bağcı and Balala at Indaba 2025 signals growing international recognition of the continent's potential — and a shared commitment to ensuring it thrives in the years ahead.



## STRENGTHENING BILATERAL TIES THROUGH TOURISM: BULUT BAĞCI VISITS H.E. SIDNEY LEON ROMERO, BRAZILIAN AMBASSADOR TO THE UAE

In a significant diplomatic engagement aimed at fostering stronger international collaboration in tourism and investment, Bulut Bağcı, President of the World Tourism Forum Institute (WTFI), paid an official visit to H.E. Sidney Leon Romero, Ambassador of the Federative Republic of Brazil to the United Arab Emirates.

The meeting, held at the Brazilian Embassy in Abu Dhabi, highlighted the shared commitment of both institutions to deepen strategic cooperation across tourism, cultural exchange, and sustainable development.

### Global Tourism Cooperation

During the visit, Mr. Bağcı presented the core mission and upcoming initiatives of WTFI, particularly the Institute's vision to create platforms that bring together governments, investors, and private sector leaders in shaping the future of global tourism. Ambassador Romero, recognized for his proactive role in promoting Brazil's cultural and economic diplomacy in the UAE, expressed strong interest in closer cooperation with WTFI.

Both sides discussed the potential for organizing joint forums, roundtables, and tourism investment summits that would spotlight Brazil's emerging tourism regions and showcase investment opportunities for Gulf and international stakeholders.

### Tourism as a Bridge Between Nations

"The role of tourism today goes beyond leisure—it is a diplomatic bridge, an economic engine, and a catalyst for sustainable development," said Bulut Bağcı. "Brazil holds immense potential as a tourism destination, and we look forward to creating impactful collaborations that enhance visibility, attract investment, and promote cultural harmony."

Ambassador Romero echoed the sentiment, stating, "The UAE and Brazil share a dynamic relationship built on trust and mutual respect. Through collaboration with global platforms like WTFI, we can elevate Brazil's tourism profile in this region and foster meaningful exchange between our peoples."



**WORLD  
TOURISM  
FORUM**  
*Institute*

[WWW.WORLDTOURISMFORUM.NET](http://WWW.WORLDTOURISMFORUM.NET)

A photograph of two giraffes drinking from a water hole in a savanna. In the background, a large, snow-capped mountain rises under a cloudy sky. The scene is framed by acacia trees and dry grass.

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