

World

Magazine

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SPECIAL INTERVIEW:
**A DESTINATION FOR EVERY DREAM:
ASEAN'S VISION FOR
TOURISM INTEGRATION**

DR. KAO KIM HOURN,
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF ASEAN

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EDITOR'S LETTER

Hanni Tran,
Editor in Chief of The World Magazine

Dear Esteemed Readers,

Welcome to a landmark edition of World Magazine. In this special 12th issue, we invite you on a journey across continents, cultures, and industries to explore the future of tourism—a dynamic sector at the heart of global connection and economic growth. This edition brings together insights from government leaders, visionary entrepreneurs, and experts in sustainable travel to inspire and inform a new chapter in tourism.

As the world redefines how we explore and engage with destinations, our focus is on forward-thinking strategies, sustainable practices, and the role of innovation in shaping the traveler's journey. This issue presents stories from regions worldwide, showcasing the collaborative efforts fueling sustainable growth, the role of technology in transforming visitor experiences, and the innovative approaches driving responsible tourism in both urban and natural settings. From tropical destinations with a commitment to ecological stewardship to vibrant cultural landscapes full of adventure and opportunity, we highlight how tourism is embracing diversity, innovation, and responsible practices.

Beyond these regional highlights, we explore the forces shaping tourism on a broader scale. Aviation continues to play a crucial role in connecting people and places across the globe, while emerging technologies redefine the travel experience through increased personalization and efficiency. Global events underscore the importance of experiential travel, calling for immersive, memorable experiences that cater to the modern traveler. Health and safety remain paramount, guiding a new era of secure, adaptable travel.

At the core of these developments is a shared commitment to sustainability. The tourism sector is increasingly embracing eco-friendly practices and championing a movement toward responsible travel that values both the planet and the traveler's experience. This edition also includes insights from leaders on how tourism fosters peace, resilience, and climate consciousness. Additionally, a special report in this issue examines the hotel industry's resilience and performance amidst today's challenges, offering a comprehensive look at the hospitality sector's response to shifting global demands.

We believe this issue will inspire all who are invested in the evolution of tourism. Together, let's build a resilient and sustainable path forward for travel and explore the transformative power of tourism in connecting our world.

Happy reading!

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THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN FOREIGN POLICY AND TOURISM: A STRATEGIC NEXUS



Bulut Bağcı
President of WTFI

Foreign policy and tourism are two seemingly distinct domains that, in practice, are intricately intertwined. Governments around the world leverage foreign policy to shape their international relationships, which in turn influence tourism flows, investments, and perceptions of their countries as attractive destinations. Similarly, tourism serves as a soft power tool, enabling nations to project their image, enhance diplomatic relations, and contribute to economic growth. This article explores the dynamic relationship between foreign policy and tourism through case studies that demonstrate the importance of aligning the two for mutual benefits.

Foreign Policy as a Driver of Tourism

Foreign policy refers to a country's strategy in interacting with other nations and non-state actors. It encompasses trade agreements, diplomatic engagements, visa regulations, security policies, and international cooperation. These elements can directly impact the tourism sector, as foreign relations

influence how accessible a country is for international tourists, how it is perceived globally, and what level of investment it can attract into its tourism infrastructure.

1. Visa Policies and Accessibility

Visa policies, as a key component of foreign policy, play a crucial role in tourism. Countries with relaxed visa regulations tend to attract more tourists, as the process for entry is perceived as convenient. In contrast, strict visa regimes can act as a deterrent, limiting the number of visitors. A good example of this dynamic is Thailand. Over the years, Thailand has strategically relaxed visa requirements for tourists from several countries, such as China and India, which has led to significant growth in visitor numbers. In 2018, the Thai government introduced visa-free entry for citizens from more than 50 countries, which contributed to the arrival of over 38 million tourists that year, making Thailand one of the most visited countries in the world.

On the flip side, when diplomatic tensions escalate, countries often restrict visa access, directly impacting tourism. For example, after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, several Western nations imposed sanctions on Russia, including restricting visas. The strained diplomatic relations reduced the flow of tourists to and from Russia, showcasing how foreign policy decisions can negatively impact tourism.

2. Bilateral and Multilateral Agreements

Foreign policy-driven bilateral and multilateral agreements are also critical to tourism. Agreements that promote open skies and liberalize air transport can significantly boost tourism by increasing flight routes and reducing travel costs. The European Union's Schengen Agreement is a prime example. By removing border controls between member states, it has facilitated easy movement across Europe for tourists. As a result, intra-European tourism has flourished, with millions of tourists moving freely between countries, boosting both the economy and cultural exchanges.

Similarly, the ASEAN Open Skies Policy, implemented in 2015, is another notable case. This agreement liberalized air travel among member states in Southeast Asia, leading to a surge in tourism across the region. Countries like Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia have seen significant growth in tourist numbers due to increased connectivity, benefiting from the ease of travel among ASEAN nations.

Tourism as a Tool of Foreign Policy

While foreign policy influences tourism, the tourism sector itself is an important tool in shaping a country's international relations. By leveraging its tourism appeal, a country can project soft power, enhance its global image, and strengthen diplomatic ties.

1. Tourism Diplomacy

Tourism diplomacy is the use of tourism as a means to foster positive international relations and cultural exchanges. A country's ability to attract visitors often leads to greater visibility on the global stage, promoting understanding and goodwill between nations. This is particularly true in regions where tourism is a vital economic engine.

A case in point is Cuba. For decades, Cuba's foreign relations, particularly with the United States, were strained due to economic sanctions and a lack of diplomatic engagement. However, in 2014, the Obama administration announced a policy shift to restore diplomatic ties with Cuba, which included easing travel restrictions. The rapprochement led to a surge in American tourists visiting Cuba, revitalizing its tourism industry and opening new avenues for people-to-people diplomacy. Tourism became a bridge for dialogue, cultural exchange, and soft diplomacy between the two countries.

Another example of tourism as a diplomatic tool is Japan's "Visit Japan" campaign, launched in the early 2000s. A key objective of the initiative was not just to boost tourism numbers, but also to improve Japan's global image and strengthen its international influence. Through extensive cultural outreach and marketing efforts, Japan attracted millions of tourists, while simultaneously promoting Japanese culture, values, and products abroad, enhancing its soft power in the process.

2. Mega-Events as Foreign Policy Tools

Hosting mega-events such as the Olympic Games, World Expos, and the FIFA World Cup is a powerful example of how tourism and foreign policy intersect. These events serve as platforms for nations to project their global image, promote tourism, and foster international cooperation.

The Beijing Olympics in 2008 is a notable example. China used the event to showcase its emergence as a global power, inviting millions of tourists and dignitaries from around the world. The Olympics played a critical role in boosting China's international image, encouraging foreign investment, and promoting cultural diplomacy. Similarly, Brazil's hosting of the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Rio Olympics allowed the country to showcase its tourism potential and cultural vibrancy, even amidst political and economic challenges.

In addition to the tourism boost, these events often serve as opportunities for diplomatic engagement, where political leaders meet on the sidelines, agreements are negotiated, and international relations are strengthened.

Challenges in the Intersection of Foreign Policy and Tourism

While the relationship between foreign policy and tourism is generally beneficial, it also presents challenges. Political instability, diplomatic rifts, and conflicts can drastically impact tourism. For instance, the Arab Spring in 2011 significantly affected tourism in the Middle East and North Africa. Countries like Egypt and Tunisia, which heavily rely on tourism, experienced dramatic declines in tourist arrivals due to political unrest and security concerns.

Furthermore, terrorism and geopolitical conflicts pose severe threats to tourism. The 9/11 attacks in the United States resulted in tightened security measures worldwide, affecting global travel. Similarly, the ongoing conflict in Syria has devastated the country's tourism industry, which was once a flourishing sector, particularly in cities like Aleppo and Damascus.

The interplay between foreign policy and tourism is a complex, yet highly strategic relationship. Countries can use foreign policy to enhance their tourism sectors through favorable visa regulations, international agreements, and diplomatic engagements. Conversely, tourism can be wielded as a tool of soft power, helping nations project a positive image, foster cultural diplomacy, and boost international cooperation.

As seen in the case studies of Thailand, Cuba, and China, the alignment of foreign policy and tourism strategy can unlock tremendous benefits for a country's economy and global standing. However, careful management is required to mitigate the risks posed by political instability, terrorism, and diplomatic rifts, which can undermine tourism and foreign relations. For nations seeking to expand their influence and boost economic growth, the symbiotic relationship between foreign policy and tourism will continue to be an indispensable factor.

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Interview

A SHARED VISION FOR ASEAN TOURISM

A Conversation with Secretary-General Dr. Kao Kim Hourn
on Growth and Regional Unity

In an exclusive interview with World Magazine, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN, shares his vision for a cohesive and thriving tourism sector across Southeast Asia. Discussing key initiatives, he highlights ASEAN's commitment to creating a connected, innovative, and culturally rich experience for travelers worldwide.

In this exclusive interview with World Magazine, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, the Secretary-General of ASEAN, discusses the region's robust tourism sector and its commitment to sustainable development. Dr. Hourn highlights ASEAN's efforts to create a unified and appealing tourism landscape, leveraging digital transformation and promoting cultural heritage while ensuring responsible practices. He shares insights on the challenges and opportunities facing ASEAN in fostering regional tourism cooperation and emphasizes the importance of collaborative efforts to ensure a more unified and competitive tourism sector in Southeast Asia.

Q ASEAN, a region renowned for its cultural diversity and stunning natural landscapes, is actively engaged in fostering tourism integration among its member nations to bolster the regional economy. Could you delve into the ongoing initiatives aimed at enhancing a unified and appealing tourism landscape for both local and global visitors within the ASEAN region?

In the last two years, ASEAN has demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability in its post-pandemic recovery, with tourism playing a pivotal role. Preliminary figures for 2023, ASEAN show a 153.09% year-on-year increase in international arrivals highlighting the region's robust bounce back. This recovery has been driven by collaborative efforts among ASEAN Member States to streamline travel protocols, enhance regional connectivity, embrace digital transformation, and improve human resource capacities in the tourism and hospitality sectors. These coordinated initiatives, along with strategic marketing campaigns under the ASEAN Tourism Marketing Strategy (ATMS) 2021-2025, have reignited global interest in the region, making ASEAN a top destination for travellers once again.

A ASEAN is a dynamic tourism destination due to its unique blend of cultural diversity, natural beauty, and modern attractions. The region offers travellers a wide range of experiences, from serene beaches and ancient temples to bustling cities and rich culinary traditions. This diversity not only attracts millions of tourists annually but also contributes significantly to the economies of its Member States.

Tourism therefore plays a pivotal role in ASEAN's economic development, generating employment, fostering infrastructure growth, and stimulating local businesses. It enhances regional integration and cross-border collaboration, driving investments in hospitality, transport, and other key sectors. As a result, ASEAN's tourism industry is a critical pillar of its broader economic stability and growth.

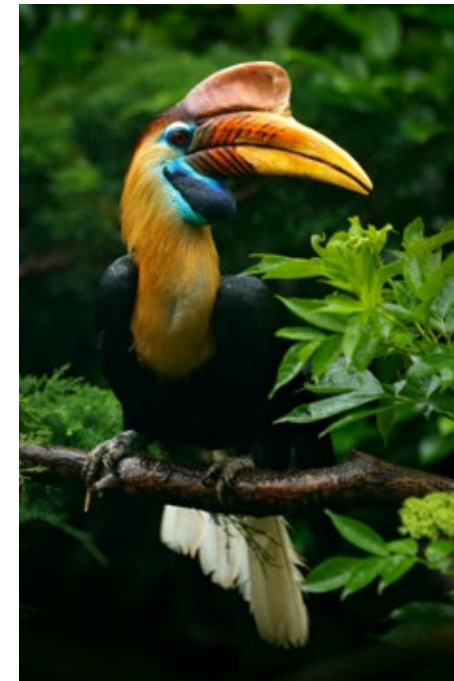
Furthermore, ASEAN is actively championing sustainable tourism development, particularly following the endorsement of the Action Roadmap for Sustainable Tourism Development. This comprehensive Roadmap underscores ASEAN's commitment to preserving cultural heritage, protecting natural resources, and promoting socio-economic benefits across all Member States. These initiatives are designed to enhance the resilience of the tourism industry, ensuring that it contributes to the well-being of local communities while preserving the environment for future generations. Through these efforts, ASEAN is paving the way for a sustainable tourism future, reinforcing its role as a responsible and forward-thinking regional bloc.

Sustainable tourism presents a myriad of opportunities for the business sector in ASEAN to foster economic growth, promote environmental conservation, and enrich cultural exchanges. By embracing key trends, exploring new markets and routes, leveraging technology and innovation, and empowering youth, businesses can position themselves as leaders in sustainable tourism, ultimately creating a more responsible and resilient travel and tourism industry for the future.

The vision for ASEAN tourism, as outlined in the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025, aims to establish the region as a "quality tourism destination" that provides visitors with a unique and diverse ASEAN experience. To achieve this vision, the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan (ATSP) 2016-2025 identifies two key strategic directions. First, enhancing the competitiveness of ASEAN as a unified tourism destination by promoting seamless travel, improving infrastructure, and strengthening regional collaboration. Second, ensuring that ASEAN tourism is sustainable and inclusive, with a focus on environmental preservation, cultural integrity, and equitable benefits for local communities. These strategic priorities guide ASEAN's tourism initiatives, fostering long-term growth while balancing economic, social, and environmental objectives.

REMARKABLE RESILIENCE IN POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY

ASEAN show a 153.09% year-on-year increase in international arrivals highlighting the region's robust bounce back. This recovery has been driven by collaborative efforts among ASEAN Member States



HARMS OF OVER-TOURISM

Without proper management, it can turn once-thriving destinations into over-exploited areas, reducing the long-term sustainability of both the environment and local economies.

Q Sustainability is increasingly becoming a key focus in global tourism. How is ASEAN addressing the need for sustainable tourism development among its Member States, and what strategies are being implemented to ensure that tourism growth does not compromise environmental and cultural integrity?

in driving economic growth, promoting social inclusivity, and protecting the environment. By adopting these practices, countries can reap the economic benefits of tourism while minimizing its negative impacts on local communities and ecosystems, ensuring a more balanced and responsible approach to tourism development worldwide.

and encouraging responsible tourism behaviours among their customers.

A Over-tourism harms both the environment and local communities, a scenario that is currently playing out around the world. It leads to pollution, habitat destruction, and resource depletion, while disrupting wildlife and damaging cultural heritage. For locals, over-tourism raises living costs, strains services, and often commercializes traditional ways of life. Without proper management, it can turn once-thriving destinations into over-exploited areas, reducing the long-term sustainability of both the environment and local economies.

Since the endorsement of the Action Roadmap for Sustainable Tourism, substantial progress has been made in balancing tourism growth with environmental preservation, cultural heritage protection, and social responsibility. Sustainable tourism is no longer just an aspiration but a reality that we are collectively striving towards, ensuring the long-term vibrancy and resilience of the tourism sector.

To this end, ASEAN is currently developing the ASEAN Ecotourism Standard as well as the ASEAN Sustainable Tourism Toolkit. The ASEAN Ecotourism Standard is envisioned to act as guidelines for public and private sector to promote and monitor ecotourism products in ASEAN Member States while the ASEAN Sustainable Tourism Toolkit will serve as a regional tool to measure the performance and achievement of Sustainable Tourism activities in the region. Sustainable tourism is a joint endeavour, it necessitates collaboration and cooperation among governments, local communities, and tourists themselves. Given that the tourism sector is inter-connected with other sectors, strengthening partnerships between governments, the private sector, and other relevant stakeholders is vital to expedite our recovery.

Achieving this requires active collaboration with a range of partners, including governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and local communities. Private sector players, such as tour operators, accommodation providers, and transportation companies, are essential to this effort by adopting eco-friendly practices, supporting local communities,

We must acknowledge the interplay between our work and that of other sectors, and understand the benefits of pooling our resources together to achieve sustainable tourism development more effectively and more efficiently.

Q *The digital era has transformed many industries, including tourism. How is ASEAN leveraging digital transformation to enhance the tourism experience across the region? Are there any initiatives aimed at improving digital infrastructure or promoting digital tourism innovations among member states to attract tech-savvy travellers and improve service delivery?*

A Advancements in technology are transforming the tourism industry, allowing businesses to promote eco-friendly accommodations, highlight responsible travel initiatives, and engage a broader audience in sustainable practices.

The ASEAN Declaration on Digital Tourism plays a pivotal role in driving innovation and collaboration by leveraging digital technologies to enhance sustainability efforts across the region. This Declaration represents ASEAN's commitment to using technology to promote inclusive, responsible, and sustainable tourism practices. Through it, ASEAN Member States aim to enhance the sector's competitiveness, improve visitor experiences, and foster sustainable tourism development. By embracing digital transformation, businesses can streamline operations, access new markets, and offer personalized experiences that meet the evolving preferences of modern travellers.

Additionally, to make the travelling experience more seamless without the hassle of currency exchange or financial barriers, ASEAN has made significant progress in bilateral cross-border QR code payment linkages under the ASEAN Payment Policy Framework for Cross-Border Real Time Retail Payment System, which has launched live bilateral QR payments linkages not only within ASEAN (Viet Nam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand) – but also with other economic partners such as Hong Kong, Japan, and India. By facilitating smoother and more secure payment processes, we are not only boosting tourism but also encouraging greater economic collaboration across borders.

By leveraging advanced technologies and fostering innovative solutions, ASEAN strengthens its global competitiveness while creating seamless and enriching experiences for tourists. The region is actively promoting its diverse tourism destinations under the captivating tagline, “A Destination for Every Dream,” which highlights the enchanting and varied offerings of Southeast Asia. Through targeted marketing campaigns, collaborative promotional efforts, and the use of cutting-edge digital platforms, ASEAN ensures these dream destinations reach a global audience, inviting travellers to explore and indulge in the endless possibilities that the region has to offer.

Q *What are some of the key challenges ASEAN faces in fostering regional tourism cooperation among its member countries? How does ASEAN plan to address these challenges to ensure a more unified and competitive tourism sector in Southeast Asia?*

A While ASEAN tourism is steadily progressing toward recovery, several challenges remain that require collective action and

commitment. With this in mind, I would like to share a few perspectives on how we can further strengthen ASEAN cooperation in the tourism sector.

As the ASEAN region continues to develop, tourism has the potential to be a powerful catalyst for sustainable growth, contributing significantly to economic development. Sustainable tourism in the ASEAN region represents a vital opportunity for the business sector to drive economic growth while preserving the environment and local cultures. This shift towards sustainability is not just a moral obligation but also a strategic business imperative that can unlock new markets, routes, and trends in the travel industry. The concept of sustainable tourism entails responsible travel practices that minimise negative impacts on the environment, support local communities, and promote cultural exchange. With travellers becoming increasingly conscious of their environmental footprint and seeking more authentic and immersive experiences, businesses in the tourism sector must adapt to meet these evolving demands.

The Action Roadmap for Sustainable Tourism Development in ASEAN outlines strategic initiatives that emphasize environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and economic viability. By adopting sustainable practices such as reducing carbon emissions, supporting local livelihoods, and safeguarding cultural heritage, the roadmap aims to build a resilient and responsible tourism industry in ASEAN. Through stakeholder collaboration, capacity building, and knowledge sharing, this initiative empowers local communities and businesses to embrace sustainable tourism principles, ensuring long-term benefits for the region.

Second, as ASEAN consists of both archipelagic and continental countries, connectivity is crucial in uniting the region. To maintain its appeal as a preferred destination for local and international travellers, it is essential to enhance connectivity not only among ASEAN Member States but also with partners beyond the region. Efforts to improve intra-ASEAN connectivity are ongoing, especially at secondary and undiscovered destinations, which are becoming popular among adventurous travellers seeking unique, sustainable experiences.

Businesses have a key role in pioneering new routes and promoting responsible travel practices, contributing to the economic growth of lesser-known communities. Establishing direct flights between major and emerging tourism destinations, along with the development of supporting infrastructure, is vital to these efforts. Enhancing connectivity in this way will significantly boost regional economic recovery and tourism development.

By addressing these challenges through closer collaboration, enhanced connectivity, sustainable practices, and unified policies, we can ensure that ASEAN remains a competitive and resilient tourism destination, benefiting both local communities and the broader regional economy.



Q *ASEAN countries are known for their rich cultural heritage and traditions. How does ASEAN plan to preserve and promote this cultural heritage while also encouraging tourism? Are there any specific programs or initiatives aimed at highlighting the unique cultural assets of each member state?*

A ASEAN is committed to preserving and promoting its rich cultural heritage. It recognizes that cultural heritage is a key asset that not only attracts tourists but also strengthens local identities. To ensure that cultural traditions are protected while encouraging tourism, ASEAN promotes community-based tourism (CBT), where local communities are empowered to be actively involved in tourism activities.

By involving local communities in the decision-making process and ensuring that they receive a fair share of the tourism revenue, we can create a sense of ownership and pride that will contribute to the long-term sustainability of the industry. This approach helps preserve cultural heritage, ensures that the benefits of tourism flow directly to local people, and offers tourists authentic experiences.

Programmes like the ASEAN Heritage Parks initiative promote the conservation of cultural sites and events while fostering

sustainable tourism practices that honour and celebrate ASEAN's rich cultural diversity.

Q *As a leader within the ASEAN community, what message would you like to convey to our global audience and international tourists?*

A As the Secretary-General of ASEAN, my message to the global audience and international tourists is one of invitation and connection. ASEAN offers a wealth of diverse cultures, stunning landscapes, and rich traditions that are waiting to be explored. We encourage travellers to immerse themselves in the unique experiences our region has to offer, from vibrant festivals and delicious cuisines to breath-taking natural wonders. At the same time, we are committed to sustainable tourism practices that benefit both visitors and local communities, ensuring that tourism contributes positively to the environment and cultural preservation.

By choosing to explore ASEAN, you are not only embarking on an unforgettable journey but also supporting local economies and fostering cross-cultural understanding. We invite you to discover why ASEAN is truly a destination for every dream, and to join us in celebrating the beauty and diversity of our region.

HOTELS CONTINUE TO PERFORM THROUGH CHALLENGING CONDITIONS



by Thomas Emanuel, Senior Director, STR

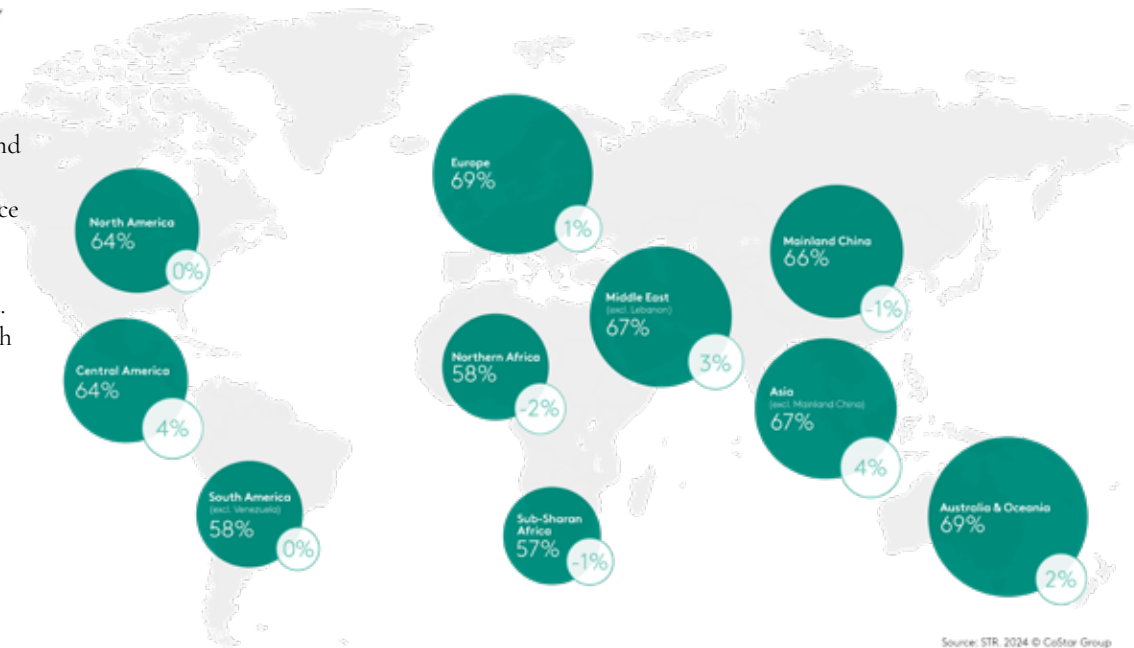


Occupancy growing slowly

Aug 2024 YTD vs. Aug 2023 YTD

● YTD 2024 ○ YTD % change YoY

The global hotel industry remains in an era of normalized growth. Demand has remained above pre-pandemic comparables since early 2023, with year-over-year growth in all but two months during that period. The pace of demand growth has softened, however, and even with new supply not presenting a significant headwind in most regions, occupancy has risen only incrementally. Still, hotels in most regions continue to push average daily rate (ADR) to grow top-line performance.

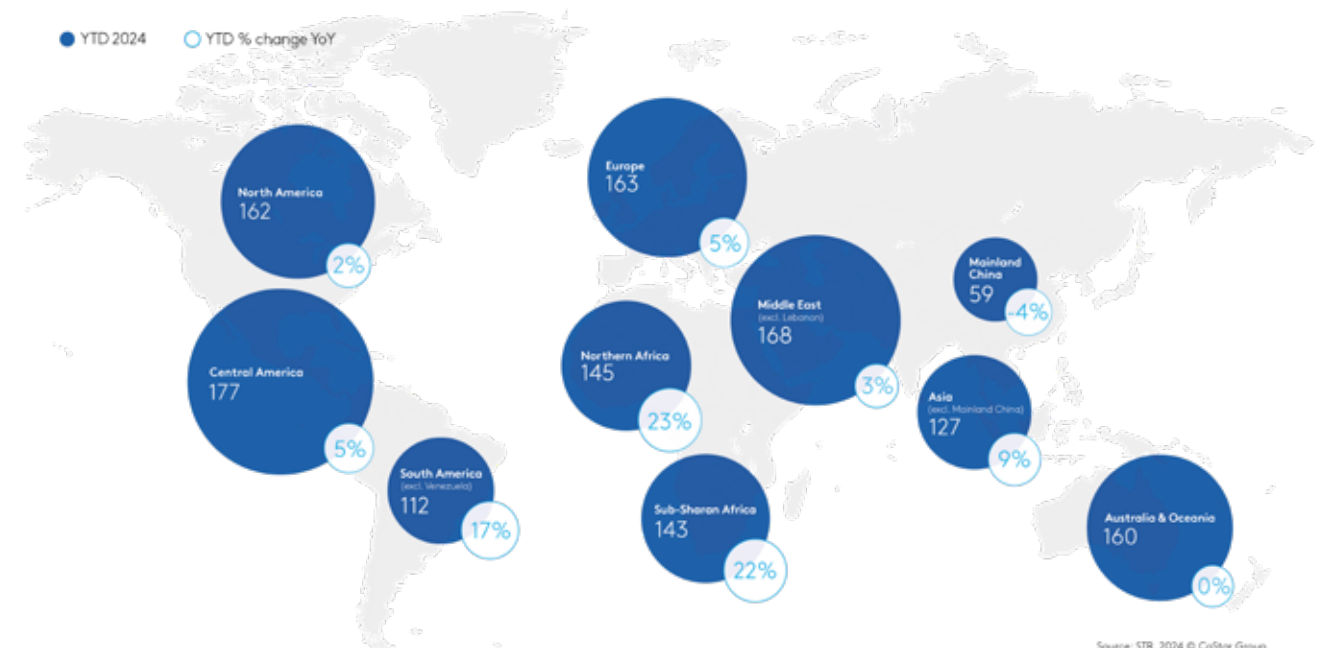


Source: STR, 2024 © CoStar Group

ADR continues to rise

Aug 2024 YTD vs. Aug 2023 YTD, USD constant currency

● YTD 2024 ○ YTD % change YoY

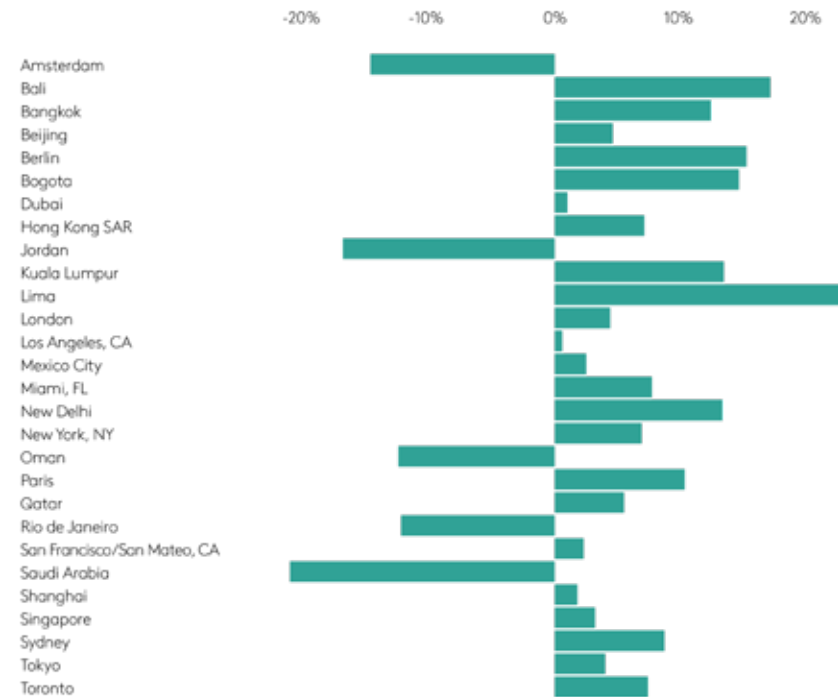


Source: STR, 2024 © CoStar Group

Most major markets across the globe maintain or grow profits

Top global markets, Aug 2024 YTD vs. Aug 2023 YTD, USD CC

TRevPAR % Chg



GOPPAR % Chg



Source: STR. 2024 © CoStar Group

With the above combination in top-line performance, most major markets have been able to maintain or grow profits, but gains have come in the face of plenty of macroeconomic pressures.

ASIA-PACIFIC

Regionally, there's not one overarching story in Asia Pacific, but rather a divergence across this massive geographic area. Some markets continue to report strong occupancy growth, while others are on a more downward trajectory.

Japan's yen depreciation has boosted international inbound travel, especially among Americans and Europeans. Tokyo and the other major markets in the country continue to grow rate at noteworthy levels.

On the other hand, appreciation in the Singapore Dollar relative to the rest of region makes Singapore an expensive destination, which is pressuring hotel performance. Growth is still there, but cost pressure is there as revenue growth slows.

Jakarta and Mumbai have strong domestic demand bases, healthy levels of corporate travel, and packed calendars of smaller events. Those markets are enjoying some of the rate growth that other markets experienced last year with inflation not a real concern for either.

Capital markets, like Sydney and Bangkok, can always be counted on for stable RevPAR growth with not too much supply growth as well as a good mix of demand drivers (corporate and leisure) driving domestic and international demand.

In general, Australia is stable with strong investment interest due to stability and good returns. The white label model continues to grow in the country as well.

Thailand's arrival sources are expanding as are new air routes, and even a market like Chiang Mai is beginning to catch up.

EUROPE

Europe is beginning to see increased price sensitivity although ADR continues to rise on modest occupancy growth.

Two-plus years of high inflation has squeezed traveler pocketbooks, and weekend occupancy growth is coming at the expense of ADR. In some markets, price sensitivity is going beyond leisure travel.

For example, while Amsterdam is losing ADR on weekends, even weekday occupancy growth has come at the expense of ADR as corporate travelers look to save. Many major European markets have robust transit systems, and that makes it all the easier for travelers to stay outside the more expensive city centres and commute in for work or leisure, which is also having an impact.

Still, corporate demand is driving recovery in Europe at

Malaysia is finally showing strong growth after a decade of flat to negative CAGR. The country is welcoming new hotels/brands and growing ADR, which bodes well for the future even with plenty of improvement still needed.

New Zealand, unfortunately, has experienced a full-on recession, and hotel performance has been pressured across the board by supply growth, low arrival volume, and low tourism spend.

China's GDP continues to grow, but growth deceleration and general economic sluggishness have weighed on leisure and corporate travel alike, with extreme price sensitivity in travel. China reopened late and didn't gain as big of a boost as other countries in the region, then countered through limited discretionary spend across all areas in the country. ADR has dropped across most of China's markets year to date.



present, with more growth coming during the week as opposed to weekends. At the same time, group business is still 20-25% behind 2019 levels.

Geographically, the UK and Ireland lead in terms of occupancy recovery, followed by southern European markets – Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal, France. The most significant occupancy growth is coming in the DACH markets and CEE, which were initially slower to recover.

Europe has seen the highest increases in ADR since the pandemic and is continuing to grow ADR at the fastest rate. Aligned with occupancy growth, markets like Madrid, Belgrade and Athens are showing double-digit ADR growth.

SOUTH AMERICA

Corporate markets are back to normal patterns, with most destinations showing higher results on weekdays compared with weekends. Shoulder nights (Sunday and Thursday) have not been as good as last year.

Popular leisure markets, such as Cancun and Rivera Maya, are slowing down. The same is true for resorts in Brazil, which have reported softer occupancy due to more Brazilians traveling abroad as well as the impact of short-term rentals.

Mixed markets, those that cater to business and leisure, like Rio de Janeiro and Cartagena, have shown the strongest performance. Argentina, in general, is seeing an occupancy decline across its markets. This is partly due to new government adjustments becoming more impactful on household spending, as many of the costs that were subsidized by the previous regime, like utilities, are increasing. Inflation spiked more than 150%, which in some

cases makes it cheaper or more affordable for Argentinians to travel abroad rather than in country. Domestic tourism is down and is not as affordable for international arrivals like previous year as well.

Peru is late on the road to recovery with seven presidential changes in six years, leading to protests and overall headwinds for post-pandemic performance. However, year-over-year comparisons in 2024 have been more promising with Lima posting strong growth across all segments. Lima's strength has been especially noteworthy in group business, which is expected to continue through the end of the year with several international events, most importantly the APEC CEO Summit. Cusco, which had suffered greatly with the close of borders and its heritage site, Machu Pichu, but the market is back with occupancies above 80% over the past three months.



MIDDLE EAST

Unlike other world regions, growth has been more balanced between occupancy and ADR in the Middle East. However, substantial supply growth in countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar will eventually pressure occupancy growth in the long-term

Extreme supply growth remains the crucial consideration for Saudi Arabian markets in both short- and long-term, as the Kingdom continues to push ahead with its Vision 2030 initiative. Conversely, supply growth has finally moderated in the United Arab Emirates, allowing for short- and longer-term RevPAR

growth.

After years on the back burner, Abu Dhabi is now the UAE's standout market, as limited new supply and rising popularity among corporate and leisure travelers have helped drive both demand and rates.

Dubai occupancy was flat year over year through the first eight months of the year. Using forward booking data, that trend is expected to continue over the next 12 months. ADR has grown just 3% over the same period.



NORTH AMERICA

Bifurcation has been the trend in the U.S. within demand growing year over year in the upper-tier (Luxury-Upper Midscale) but falling in the lower end of the market.

Room demand fell year over year for 10 consecutive months before increasing in April. Since April, the metric has been up in all but one month with the strongest increase of the year seen in May (+2%).

Except in February, monthly ADR growth has been below the rate of inflation with the largest gap seen in March and April. Luxury and Economy hotels have reported declines in the metric (-2.5% and -1.5%, respectively).

Through the first eight months of 2024, RevPAR was up just 1.5, with growth focused in the country's largest hotel markets and as well as those in the Northeast (+5.6%) and Midwest (+3.3%) regions.

Over the last year, Canada's RevPAR rose to its highest level on record. ADR continues to drive improvement as hoteliers

remain focused on maintaining high rates across all segments to absorb rising costs in the P&L. Occupancy growth over the same timeframe has pulled back, with the metric only posting marginal increases as weakness in the broader economy puts downward pressure on hotel demand.

With more mortgage renewals at much higher interest rates, consumer spending on discretionary items such as hotel stays is under pressure.

Business travel demand has normalized nationally. Although midweek occupancy had lagged throughout the recovery period from the pandemic, it is now in line with the 2019 benchmark. However, urban downtowns are still down between 2% and 8%, demonstrating their reliance on national corporate accounts (i.e., banks, large consulting and telecommunication companies) that have been right sizing their travel budgets and replacing some business trips with online meetings. Transient demand remains elevated relative to pre-pandemic levels and is making up for the shortfall in group demand, which remains 15% lower.

Interview

NAVIGATING
THE WORLD
WITH
HEALTH
IN MIND

Dr. Margaret Harris,
Spokesperson for the World Health Organization (WHO),



NAVIGATING THE WORLD WITH HEALTH IN MIND

As global travel rebounds, the world is eager to explore anew. But with this resurgence comes the crucial need to prioritize health and safety. World Magazine sits down with Dr. Margaret Harris, Spokesperson for the World Health Organization (WHO), to discuss the critical role of public health in facilitating a safe and responsible return to travel. From balancing tourism with managing health risks to the evolving impact of climate change on travel, this interview dives into the WHO's recommendations for travelers and destinations alike. Dr. Harris sheds light on the latest guidance for health-conscious travel, explores the potential of digital health innovations, and offers insights into how the pandemic has reshaped global health preparedness.

Q *With tourism rebounding worldwide post-pandemic, what measures is the WHO recommending to ensure the health and safety of travelers as they explore new destinations? How can countries balance reopening to tourists while managing health risks?*

A Protecting the health of travellers has always been a very important part of our work. The International Health Regulations, which are regularly updated, are fundamental to our work to protect travellers. Alongside that, with the help of a panel of global experts on travel health-including travellers themselves- we are also regularly producing guidance for travellers and their medical advisors.

Depending on the health profile of the traveller, the type of travel to be undertaken, and the places of transit and destination, travellers may encounter various health risks during travel. These include factors such as changes in temperature and humidity, air pollution, issues of safety and security, access to health and dental care services and products, exposure to infectious diseases, access to safe food and water, sanitation and hygiene standards, availability of facilities and equipment for disabled people, and local laws and customs. All individuals planning travel should proactively seek information or advice regarding potential health risks.

It is important for travellers to understand how best to avoid or minimize these risks, take appropriate preventive measures and exercise necessary precautions before, during and after travel. Most recently (July 2024) we produced a series of modules on protecting travellers' health.

Q *What role does the WHO see for itself in promoting health-conscious travel? Are there any current initiatives or campaigns aimed at encouraging tourists to prioritize their health and well-being during their travels?*

A As mentioned above our work to protect to protect travellers' health is continuous and a fundamental part of WHO's work.

We regularly produce and update health advice guidance for travellers and their medical advisors. The most recent versions were released in July 2024

Here is a summary of our general advice:

When travelling, always have important health documents with you, such as health insurance certificates and vaccine or malaria prophylaxis records. In some countries, some medications are illegal to carry (such as psychotropics), and travellers should have a letter written and signed by their doctor certifying the need to carry them. Have these documents ready to be presented if requested by officials.

Travellers should also:

continue to take medications for chronic health conditions, if applicable:

- be mindful of road safety
- be mindful of food and water safety precautions
- be mindful of the need for protection from extreme weather, such as heat waves.

After Travel:

Travellers should seek medical attention on their return home if they:

are ill in the weeks after they return home, particularly with fever, persistent diarrhoea, vomiting, jaundice, urinary disorders, skin disease or anogenital infection (genital warts);

- Received treatment for malaria while travelling; may have been exposed during travel to an infectious disease, including sexually transmitted infections, even if they have no symptoms; or have a previous health condition that gets worse.
- Travellers should seek medical care immediately in these cases and not wait for a regularly scheduled consultation.
- Providing health personnel with information on travel history, including vaccines and malaria prophylaxis taken before travel, can be helpful.

Q *Climate change is increasingly impacting global health and tourism. How is the WHO addressing the health challenges posed by climate change, particularly in regions heavily dependent on tourism?*

A This is another important issue and one WHO is indeed addressing, using both global and in-house expertise. We have a department dedicated to the health problems associated with climate change.

As we experience more heat, travellers and their destinations need to be prepared to mitigate the effects. Exposure to heat can cause severe symptoms, such as heat exhaustion, heat stress and heat stroke. Ultimately, extreme high temperatures can lead to death.

Travel health facilities should keep records of countries and regions with a high risk for seasonal heatwave events to enable them to advise travellers accordingly. Although avoiding these areas is not always possible, it is important to reduce exposure to heat at the hottest time of the day and during the days on which extreme temperatures have been predicted.

Other basic recommendations for travellers are to map out in advance possible climate shelters they can seek, to stay hydrated, to wear sunscreen with a high SPF and to wear climate-appropriate garments, including hats and sunglasses.

It is also important for travel health practitioners and travellers to acknowledge the probability of related climate events, such as cyclones, droughts and wildfires and to prepare for them.

Q *Digital health technologies have seen significant growth in recent years. How is the WHO utilizing digital innovations to enhance health monitoring and safety for travelers? Are there any upcoming tools or platforms that travelers should be aware of?*

A Another excellent question- Digital technologies are now integral to daily life, and the world's population has never been more interconnected. Innovation, particularly in the digital health sphere, is also happening on an unprecedented scale. Despite this, the potential of digital technologies and innovation to improve the health of populations remains largely untapped. With a coordinated approach to health products and systems innovation, there is an immense opportunity to expand their use, especially in low- and middle-income countries. WHO has established a department of digital health technologies and has set up a digital health advisory group. During the COVID-19 pandemic a Smart Vaccination Certificate working group was established to bring together experts to focus on defining specifications and standards for a digital vaccination certificate that would serve current and future requirements, toward the dual purpose of (1) supporting continuity of care as well as (2) cross-border uses.

Q *The COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters highlighted the importance of resilient health systems. What lessons has the WHO*

learned from the pandemic regarding the preparation of health systems in tourist-heavy regions, and what recommendations would you give to countries to better prepare for future health crises?

A The number one lesson is preparedness is key. Over and over the world has gone through cycles best described as 'panic and neglect'- panicking, scrambling to get together resources to respond effectively when the emergency has hit but neglecting to do the less glamorous- and yes, seemingly costly, preparedness work that would save not only lives but billions of dollars in the long term. Our member states are currently negotiating the world's first agreement to protect people from future pandemics by strengthening pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

Q *Travel can be both a source of relaxation and stress. How is the WHO addressing mental health in the context of tourism, and what advice does it have for travelers to maintain mental well-being while exploring new environments?*

A This is a very important issue. International travel can be a stressful experience. Travellers may face separation from family and familiar social support systems as well as having to adjust to foreign cultures and languages. Coping with high levels of stress may result in physical, social and psychological problems. Changes to the circadian rhythm and sleep deprivation can trigger seizures in people with epilepsy, provoke migraine attacks and exacerbate behavioural symptoms in people living with dementia. Under the stress of travel, pre-existing conditions may be exacerbated or become apparent for the first time. Working with a panel of global experts in this field, WHO has produced guidance on maintaining mental health and responding to any deterioration in mental health. **W**



MACAO'S NEW HORIZONS: FROM CASINO CAPITAL TO CULTURAL HUB

Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, Director of the Macao Government Tourism Office, discusses the city's ambitious plans to diversify its tourism offering beyond gambling. From promoting cultural heritage and gastronomy to embracing sustainability and digital innovation, Macao is transforming into a world-class destination catering to a wider range of visitors.

Q *Macao is known for its casinos, but the government has been actively promoting diversification in the tourism sector. What are some of the initiatives being taken to attract visitors interested in culture, heritage, gastronomy, and other experiences beyond gambling?*

A Director of the Macao Government Tourism Office, Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes: Diversification is indeed the focus of Macao now. As we continue to evolve into a world center of tourism and leisure, synergies are being enhanced between tourism and related sectors, towards more “tourism + culture”, “tourism + gastronomy”, “tourism + conventions and exhibitions”, “tourism + sports”, and more.

On one hand, we want to cater for visitors of different profiles from all over the world. On the other, we want to drive visitors off the beaten path for a more in-depth experience and to ensure the distribution of tourism's economic benefits to the whole city.

Several historic areas and old neighborhoods are thus currently being revitalized, while local associations and small businesses are involved in community tourism activities, and the list of mega entertainment events increases to engage visitors from the world-class integrated resorts to the community areas for an all-rounded experience in Macao.



Q *Sustainability is becoming increasingly important in the tourism industry. How is Macao balancing environmental concerns and tourism economy growth? Could you showcase successful initiatives for these cutting-cross issues?*

A To keep us on track, we have a Macao Tourism Industry Development Master Plan with various key objectives and action plans, which are regularly reviewed and in line with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. Climate change and energy crisis issues are taken into consideration when formulating the action plans that range from encouraging hotels and tourism-related industries to adopt international green building standards, waste management and recycling, to continue to optimize pedestrian environment and vehicle control, among many others.

Alongside the implementation of laws to ban single use plastics and others, we have seen much success in Macao with initiatives like the Green Hotel Awards or green and low-carbon events organization, including the Macao International Travel (Industry) Expo, to help environmentally friendly practices become the norm in the city.

Note: In addition, in accordance with the nation's “dual carbon” goals, the Macao SAR Government has put forward multiple carbon reduction measures in terms of alternative clean energy, green transport, energy saving and carbon emissions reduction, waste reduction and recycling and other fields. As the blueprint for Macao's cause of carbon emissions reduction, the Long-term Decarbonization Strategy of Macao, implemented in 2023, proposes six key strategies to push forward carbon reduction in all aspects in an orderly manner and lead the public to practice environmental protection. In the future, the Macao SAR Government will continue to orderly carry out carbon reduction and co-create a green, low-carbon Macao with all residents. (Source: Macao Environmental Protection Bureau)

Q *What are Macao's plans to attract a wider range of international visitors from emerging markets from digital platforms to smart city initiatives?*

A Macao's efforts in attracting a wider range of international visitors after the pandemic are moving from this year's focus on Southeast and Northeast Asia to progressively target markets further afield, like Europe or the Middle East.

Plenty of in-person and online destination promotions are ongoing to reach out to travelers around the world. International visitors should particularly take note of two campaigns this year, mostly disseminated via digital platforms. One is “My Treats for You”, with 250,000 travel “gifts” like air travel packages and more being distributed in different markets in celebration of this year of the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Macao Special Administrative Region. Another one is the newly launched “Experience Macao Limited Edition”, with an online challenge to compete for prizes to travel to our city.

Q *What role does innovation play in shaping the future of tourism in Macao, and how is the government supporting start-ups and new ideas in the sector?*

A An area where innovation is particularly relevant for Macao is in keeping its cultural heritage relevant as we move forward as a tourism city.

The development of Macao as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy is a case in point. It has been key in inspiring, encouraging, and supporting different stakeholders' initiatives to preserve the unique gastronomic cultural heritage of the city. This especially includes the Macanese cuisine, which is a blend of Portuguese, Chinese, African, Southeast Asia, and other influences. A major related project, the Macanese Cuisine Database, was launched, making valuable resources like recipes available online for generations to come to continue to rediscover and give their own take, hereby helping to keep this unique cuisine alive.

Technology is also enabling to “relive” the past, such as VR and AR features added at the revamped Macao Grand Prix Museum for racing experiences, or to reconstruct how Macao's ex-libris, the Ruins of St. Paul's, looked in the past, while community tourism events have added technology-fueled activities to engage participants online and on site.

To encourage the youth of Macao to explore new options and opportunities other than traditional career tendencies, realize their entrepreneurship aspirations, as well as to inject new impetus into Macao's economic development, the Young Entrepreneurs Aid Scheme provides interest-free assistance to local youths with entrepreneurship aspirations but lacking resources to help alleviate their financial pressures during the early stages of their start up. The maximum amount of assistance is MOP 300,000, with a maximum repayment period of 8 years. In terms of supporting start-ups and new ideas in the sector, aside from programs like the Young Entrepreneurs Aid Scheme, there are multiple initiatives to create opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises, a good example being the support for local brands to launch cultural and creative products themed after the Macao tourism mascot Mak Mak.

Q *Looking ahead, what are your aspirations for Macao's tourism industry in the next five to ten years? What are the key areas of focus for future development?*

A The main expectation for the coming years is to see the roadmaps we are following continue to lead Macao towards more diversification of tourism offerings and visitor source markets.

A major development plan launched late last year by the Macao Special Administrative Region Government, outlining a wide array of actions leveraging the integrated tourism and leisure industry to diversify the economy in the next five years.



The plan is based on a development model we call “1+4”, which places tourism and related industries at the front and center as “1”, with “4” emerging industries in focus (health and wellness; modern financial services; innovative technology; and exhibitions and conventions, commerce and trade, and culture and sports). Its implementation requires stronger coordination between the government and the city’s six integrated leisure resort enterprises, with a good example of such joint efforts being the revitalization of several areas in old districts, including the Lai Chi Vun Shipyard, which is part of Macao’s shipbuilding industry and is being revamped to tell the story of the city’s maritime history.

Multi-destination tourism within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay is also slated to continue to expand, helped by cross-border major transportation infrastructures like the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge and travel facilitation measures.

Q *What message would you like to share with potential visitors about the unique experiences and attractions that await them in Macao?*

A Visitors to Macao should first and foremost have a glimpse of the more than 400 years of east-meets-west historical heritage, which is better experienced by strolling around the sites of the Historic Centre of Macao, inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

The state-of-the-art integrated resorts are another main attraction and best enjoyed if visited with family or to attend an event or concert, given that these complexes main appeal is to have hotel, entertainment, MICE, shopping, dining, and other facilities under the same roof.

Ideally, visitors should come during a signature event like the Light Up Macao, opening in December, to be taken across the city, and be ready to enjoy the diverse gastronomy as well, ranging from popular food stalls to Michelin-starred restaurants.

Q *As a woman leader in a male-dominated industry, what advice would you give to aspiring female tourism professionals?*

A I would like to see aspiring female tourism professionals get ready to give their contribution to the industry.

Take Macao as an example. We already have leading female figures to look up to in tourism, from government to academia and the private sector. It is only about time that we will have more, given that women are already half of the workforce in the city’s tourism and related sectors, not to mention that slightly over half of visitors are female. My hope is that we continue to have more women willing to and have the chance to advance in their careers so that we may build an inclusive and diverse development of the tourism industry. **W**

OSLO'S EVOLUTION: SUSTAINABLE AND AUTHENTIC DESTINATION

VisitOSLO, the city's official tourism organization, is dedicated to promoting Oslo as a sustainable and vibrant destination. This interview with Christian Lunde, CEO Visit Oslo, Norway delves into VisitOSLO's efforts to integrate sustainability into tourism strategies, attract international business events, leverage technology for a seamless visitor experience, and highlight the city's distinct seasonal offerings. From their viral "Is it even a city?" campaign to their innovative use of digital tools and year-round marketing initiatives, VisitOSLO is shaping Oslo's future as a globally-renowned travel destination.

Christian Lunde,
CEO of VisitOSLO



Q Sustainability is a growing priority for many travellers. How is VisitOSLO incorporating the visitor economy at the destination into the city's tourism strategy, and what is influencing the development of Oslo's visitor economy towards tourism footprint management?

A Sustainability has long been a core priority for VisitOSLO, influencing all aspects of our strategy. We focus on building a sustainable customer base and fostering sustainable customer development while emphasizing the three pillars of sustainability: people, planet, and prosperity. In collaboration with the visitor industry, we offer sustainability courses and certification programs, making it easier for visitors to make eco-friendly choices. Our commitment has been recognized, as we ranked second on the Global Destination Sustainability Index this year. Additionally, we aim to attract visitors during the shoulder seasons, encouraging longer stays to promote sustainable tourism practices.

Q Oslo has become a popular destination for business decision makers. How does VisitOSLO promote the city as a top choice for international meetings, and what infrastructure or services does the city offer to attract high-profile business events?

A Oslo's modern infrastructure and strategic location in Northern Europe position it as an attractive hub for international business. VisitOSLO actively promotes the city through its dedicated Oslo Convention Bureau, which collaborates with various professional sectors to position Oslo as an ideal choice for meetings, congresses, conferences, and events. This initiative leverages local expertise and fosters a sense of community ownership.

The city boasts state-of-the-art facilities and is well-connected through Oslo Airport, a major hub for international flights. With our world-leading commitment to sustainability, a walkable city layout, and a diverse range of offerings, choosing Oslo as the destination for business events aligns seamlessly with today's corporate values.

Q With the rise of digital platforms, how is VisitOSLO leveraging technology to enhance the visitor experience and promote the city as a top destination for international tourists?

A VisitOSLO leverages a variety of digital tools to enhance the visitor experience and promote the city as a top international destination. We were actually one of the very first cities in the world to introduce city cards! The Oslo Pass celebrates its 40th anniversary this month and provides access to over 30 museums and attractions, public transportation, and discounts at restaurants and cultural events. Available both physically and as an app, the Oslo Pass simplifies exploration and encourages sustainable travel by promoting the use of public transit.

Additionally, VisitOSLO.com serves as a key component of our digital strategy, offering a comprehensive resource for both international visitors and locals. The website features detailed information about events, attractions, accommodation options,

and booking solutions, all while providing multilingual support. By keeping users informed about what's happening around the city, we ensure that both visitors and residents can make the most of their Oslo experience.

Q This summer, your marketing campaign "Is it even a city" captured the attention of major global media outlets, received praise from industry experts, and went viral on social media. What do you believe contributed to its widespread success?

A Before launching the "Is it even a city?" campaign, we were quite nervous that the humor and irony central to the ad might not resonate globally. Fortunately, the response was overwhelmingly positive! Within days, the campaign went viral, with millions of views across social platforms. People were tagging us in photos from their trips to Oslo, many claiming the ad was the deciding factor in their visit.

The ad's success lies in its refreshing approach. Instead of typical glossy tourist imagery, it embraced Norwegian self-irony and authenticity. Featuring a local character humorously downplaying the city's appeal, it highlighted Oslo's hidden charms—its accessibility, lack of overcrowding, and unique cultural experiences. This emotional connection struck a chord with audiences, especially those seeking destinations that feel authentic and not overly commercialized.

Ultimately, the campaign's blend of humor, relatability, and genuine storytelling helped position Oslo as a must-visit destination, especially for travelers looking for something different from traditional tourist hotspots.

Q Oslo offers distinct experiences in every season, from winter sports to summer festivals. How does VisitOSLO adjust its marketing strategies to highlight the unique attractions and activities available throughout the year, and how do seasonal differences impact visitor trends and engagement?

A Oslo is a true year-round destination, offering unique experiences in every season. Our marketing strategies are designed to highlight these seasonal shifts, showcasing winter activities like skiing and ice skating during the colder months, while promoting summer festivals, outdoor dining, and cultural events in the warmer seasons. What sets Oslo apart is the opportunity to combine a day of skiing or sledding just a short metro ride from the city center, with winter bathing and sauna by the fjord, dining at a Michelin-starred restaurant, or visiting one of our world-class museums—all within the same city! Oslo is such a walkable and compact city, with loads to offer all year round.

By showing how locals embrace the colder months, we invite visitors to discover the city's authentic character. This deeper connection between tourists and Oslo enriches the visitor experience and boosts engagement, particularly during the shoulder seasons. **W**



David Peckinpugh,
CEO of Maritz

TRANSFORMING EVENTS: PERSONALIZATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND A GLOBAL APPROACH TO ENGAGEMENT

David Peckinpugh, CMP, CIS, President & CEO of Maritz, shares insights on the evolution of event experiences in a world shaped by technology and changing client demands. In this interview, we delve into Maritz's commitment to sustainable practices, the role of digital tools in enhancing events, and the company's approach to crafting culturally relevant experiences for a global audience. Peckinpugh also explores the future of in-person events, highlighting the growing importance of personalization, attendee engagement, and the transformative power of AI in shaping the event landscape.

Q *Maritz is known for creating meaningful, transformative experiences. Could you share how your approach has evolved in recent years, particularly in response to changing client demands and technological advancements?*

A The pandemic, which was the single most devastating event in the history of our industry, ended up proving the value of what we do more than anything we could have imagined. The fact that society had to pivot to virtual and hybrid formats on a dime forced us to zero in on the real value of face-to-face connections. We discovered that more could be done remotely than we realized, yet for things like culture-building, collaboration, networking and building trust with your organization and brand, there's no substitute for live connections. Being a people-centered and science-based organization, this has long been a core to our experience design approach and that has only amplified as the unique needs of event guests have exploded post-pandemic. Clarifying the use case of live events has led us to help our clients really define their purpose and maximize the time they have together. The other key evolution over these past years is that time is now clearly the currency of events. So how attendees value their time, and the investment of their time, is crucial to the design process moving forward.

Q *Sustainability is a key focus in many industries today. How is Maritz integrating sustainable practices into its event planning processes, and what initiatives are you most excited about?*

A We're proud to have been at the forefront of this issue and shaped many of the standards that are now being used widely in the industry. First, we created a new environmental strategy team and then we solidified our commitment to sustainability internally by alignment with the Science Based Targets Initiative (SBTi) and commitment to Net Zero by 2050. With 80% of Fortune 500 companies now having climate targets in place,

more customers are coming to us asking for help measuring and reducing the carbon impact of their events. To date, our carbon measurement tool and process has been used by some of the largest companies in the world, from global tech firms to auto manufacturers to financial institutions - along with many destination bureaus and industry associations. We expect continued momentum around this topic as organizations make sustainability a priority.

Q *Digital transformation is reshaping the events industry. How is Maritz leveraging digital tools to enhance event experiences, and what role do virtual or hybrid events play in your future strategy?*

A Digital transformation in the events industry enables greater reach, more personalized engagements, and efficiency impacts to how events are planned, executed and experienced. Digital tools and technologies continue to become more sophisticated creating opportunities for improved scalability, interactivity and personalization to our clients, exhibitors and guests through new blended opportunities for how events are created and consumed. Maritz is exploring initiatives to amplify event experiences through a lens that sustainably interconnects technology and human interaction. Experimental use of new immersive and interactive technologies like augmented and mixed reality, and reimagined interface actions create pathways for how attendees interact with event content, visit environments and experience our products, services or sessions. Virtual and hybrid opportunities continue to provide an important role to the accessibility and inclusivity to certain aspects of the event experience. These platforms provide scalability and flexibility for global participants as well as the offerings of live streaming providing options for targeted marketing of on-demand content afterward. However, we are firmly of the opinion that technology is an enhancement of events and not a replacement for critical in-person experiences.



Q With a diverse range of global clients, how does Maritz ensure that each event is customized to reflect local cultures while maintaining consistency in quality and experience?


A Years ago, we formed the Maritz Global Meetings Network to work with selected partners across the global that expertly help us infuse their local culture into our events. We believe that offering clients global oversight with local delivery provides the best of both worlds - centralized project management and consistent service levels and standards, yet working with locals who live and work every day in the event location and understand the local laws, practices, currencies, and cultural nuances. We carefully vet in-region partners who participate in our network to ensure we're working with the best of the best in each country and region. Just since 2023, we have helped clients operate more than 1,600 events outside the U.S.

Q The events industry has undergone significant changes due to the pandemic. What strategies has Maritz adopted to adapt to the evolving landscape, and what trends do you see shaping the future of in-person events?

A One of the biggest shifts we've seen post-pandemic is in how people value their time – the currency of events. The pandemic forced us as a society to take a step back and re-evaluate our priorities. We've become accustomed to having a lot more autonomy over how we work and how we spend our time. This has big implications for how we design events. People need a clear 'why' to attend an event and once they're there, they want to be empowered to spend their time in a way that's meaningful to them. We talk about an evolution in events previously being

done TO you or FOR you to now being done WITH you and even BY you, the guest. In practice, this can look like more customized hands-on experiences, more peer collaboration, opportunities for both structured and unstructured networking and more down time to recharge on our own terms. We expect this trend to continue particularly as Gen Z enters the workforce in greater numbers. This generation will comprise 30% of the workforce by 2030 and wants to interact, create and take control of their experience - not listen to talking heads or consume content they could just as easily access on their phone.

Q Event personalization has become crucial for attendee engagement. How is Maritz using data and technology to create more personalized and impactful event experiences for attendees?

A Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the most significant development that will enhance our ability to personalize the event experience to drive greater value for all stakeholders. AI projects to be further integrated into the attendee journey by enabling efficiency automations and unique engagements that enhances the overall event experience. While the application of AI in events is still in its infancy, the potential is incredible. If you think about the attendee journey, there's few aspects AI won't touch - whether it's simplifying the registration process, marketing to the right audience with personalized messaging and offers, serving up tailored content and networking recommendations, or driving continued interaction after the event. We're already vetting and advancing a number of AI tools and use cases at Maritz, balancing innovation with appropriate policies and guardrails. 

One of the biggest shifts we've seen post-pandemic is in how people value their time – the currency of events. The pandemic forced us as a society to take a step back and re-evaluate our priorities.

ENJOYING THE BENEFITS OF TECH AND AI WHILE RETAINING THE HUMAN-CENTRIC NATURE OF TOURISM



Ambassador Michael B. Christides,
Secretary General of the BSEC Organization
(2015 – 2021)

These days one can read many interesting articles on how Artificial Intelligence (AI) will change – for all things better – the way global Tourism functions: many experts argue that AI is revolutionizing the travel, tourism, and other industries like aviation by enhancing efficiency, personalizing experiences, and improving safety. Analysts offer many relevant examples where AI can manage and realize the necessary routines of tourism much better, faster and cheaper than any human could. In fact, they argue, AI is already taking the place of some of the employees which the wider tourism industry lacks today and whose number seems to increase each year.

I belong to a generation of travellers that got used to Tourism as an activity and experience closely and intrinsically connected to human beings, both as visitors and as “tourism

employees” or hosts. The whole procedure of discussing with your travel agent the various possibilities of places to visit, the effort to find the best connections to that place, choose the most convenient hotel and, when in place, meet the “real” people of the region or the country, get to know their culture and share their traditions and ways of life, is a vital part of the “touristic fun”. However-much technology, internet and AI have changed and simplified the above rituals, for many tourists even today the overall preparation of a vacation or a visit to a touristic destination constitutes half of that fun. Especially if you relish, as I do, solo or in small, select-company trips with a 2- or 4-wheeled vehicle, that allow you to better understand, communicate and “feel” the people and places you visit. For us “romantic” wanderers the “human touch” before, during and after a touristic escapade remains a vital factor than can improve – or deny - the ultimate satisfaction of a trip or vacation.

Thus, while embracing AI technologies that facilitate certain procedures, we should protect the human aspect of tourism and maintain a balance between automation and personal interaction. There are many ways how to achieve this balance, starting by the accumulation of all necessary information and the carrying out of all preparative chores like booking, paying, handling all sorts of logistics, etc. There, technology and AI could “shoulder” some of the repetitive and administrative tasks yet leave human staff free to focus on personal interactions with guests. AI should not be used to replace essential services where human care, kindness, and expertise are crucial, such as tour guiding, concierge services, or cultural exchanges.

However many personalized recommendations based on traveller preferences AI can offer, human employees should still be there to provide local insights, cultural context, and personalized services with real-time emotional engagement that AI can't replicate.

In what concerns vital means of transportation and sight-seeing in the tourism industry, like aviation, cruise-ships or automobiles, technology and AI can handle issues like predictive maintenance, dynamic pricing, improving their quality and speed or optimizing routes in travel, but it will always be the human hosts and guides that can offer an emotional, warm and personalized experience for travellers. In a nutshell, I firmly believe that the hospitality industry should remain rooted on emotional, personal connections and experience, where empathy and human involvement are of paramount importance. Even though AI can today be used for continuous customer service via chatbots - or whatever other means innovative tech will invent tomorrow - the crucial aspect of the tourism industry is the human-led and human-centric face-to-face experience and service. Let us keep it that way!

BUILDING PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN AFRICA



by Hugues MBADINGA MADIYA,
Board Member of WTFI

The tourism industry holds a significant place in the global economy. According to data from the World Travel Tourism Council, the direct contribution of tourism to the global GDP is currently 3.1% and will reach 3.3% in 2025. Its total contribution represents 9.8% of GDP and will be 10.5% of GDP in 2025.

Despite the drastic drop in activity due to the COVID pandemic in 2020, tourism activity has almost returned to its pre-COVID level and is showing some dynamism. In 2023, the total number of international tourists reached around 1.46 billion, recording a growth of 3.7% compared to the previous year. Additionally, figures for the first quarter of 2024 show that international arrivals reached 97% of 2019 levels.

In this dynamic, developed countries and so-called emerging countries occupy the top spots. France is the top tourist destination in the world with over 100 million visitors, followed by Spain (82 million visitors) and the United States (77 million visitors).

In this context, Africa unfortunately remains lagging despite its extraordinary tourism potential. Egypt is the most visited African country with 11.6 million international tourists, but still far from the top global destinations. In Sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa comes first with 5.7 million visitors, followed by Senegal with 1.4 million international visitors.

Significant progress has indeed been made. In 2019, before the pandemic, Africa welcomed about 5% of the world's international tourist arrivals. This figure has slightly increased since, with a notable recovery after the pandemic.

Africa represents a growing share of global tourism, although this share remains relatively modest compared to other regions. In 2023, Africa recovered more than 92% of international visitors.

In recent years, several African countries have made notable progress in this area. Egypt, with its pyramids, temples, and beautiful beaches on the Red Sea, has made significant strides. Morocco has also put in extraordinary efforts to attract foreign tourists. The same goes for South Africa, with its safaris, vineyards, and coastal landscapes. Countries like Kenya and Rwanda, with a tourism offer based on wildlife, have seen relative success. Senegal, too, with its dynamic culture, beautiful beaches, and religious and historical tourism, is increasingly positioning itself as a destination of choice. Other countries like Gabon are trying to develop a tourism offer based on the enhancement of its natural potential with its 13 national parks, occupying 11% of the national territory, its 20 marine parks, and aquatic areas that are biodiversity treasures.

However, several challenges remain. Tourism in Africa faces several specific challenges that hinder its development and growth. These include:

- Weak infrastructure that does not facilitate connectivity.
- The resurgence of conflicts, despite hopes five years ago that Africa had ended a cycle of instability, making certain countries or entire zones once again security risks.
- Challenges related to air connectivity and cooperation between states on visa matters.
- Issues of training quality human resources.
- The fact that Africa's tourism offer remains largely unknown due to limited marketing

The task is immense to align the potential offer with a rapidly growing global demand. To achieve this, joint efforts are essential. The challenge facing tourism in Africa is to quickly develop a quality and competitive offer to attract an increasingly

significant share of tourists. However, the challenges are so great that if we adopt a linear and uncoordinated approach, it will likely take decades. Strategic partnerships need to be built for the development of sustainable tourism in Africa.


This involves, firstly, cooperation between African states to progressively build an African tourism market through administrative measures on visas, cooperation between national tourism promotion agencies, the free movement of people, and strong measures in favor of transport. There are still too many cases where traveling 2000 km between two states takes twice as long as traveling 6000 km between Libreville and Paris, for example. Creating a coordinated effort across the continent could turn Africa into a top-tier global destination.

Secondly, international cooperation should play its full role between African States and international tourism development agencies. This cooperation should be extended to NGOs working towards tourism development. African countries need to develop their capabilities in terms of training, tourism standards, and promotion.

Thirdly, information about tourism potential remains a challenge. Africa's image is still too tarnished. The continent has extraordinary assets, often unknown to potential clientele. Hence, it is crucial to create extensive communication campaigns through partnerships between the concerned African countries, NGOs, and major international channels. Africa should leverage the current digital revolution to better position itself in the markets.

Fourthly, adapting investment models to benefit Africa is essential to reduce the market's risk perception. The investment needs in Africa's tourism sector are immense. These challenges are such that it may seem difficult for an operator to engage alone. Thus, alliances of key investors, including tour operators, transporters, and hoteliers, should be formed to design region-specific tourism offers. Actors like the World Tourism Forum could play a significant role. Developing investment packages, sharing risks, uniting tour operators to attract new tourists, and involving development agencies: that's an investment model that could suit Africa.

Lastly, addressing environmental challenges is crucial by introducing standards and maintaining a certain quality of African tourism, which must also respect environmental preservation. Working with NGOs and climate agencies could help achieve this goal.

In conclusion, Sustainable tourism in Africa has a huge potential. Now this potential is largely untapped. So we need to address the right challenges: investing in infrastructure, ensuring political stability and increasing visibility through robust marketing strategies. In this case, building strong partnership and focusing on sustainable and quality tourism, could be a game-changer. 

KUALA LUMPUR: A CITY IN TRANSFORMATION

Kuala Lumpur, a vibrant metropolis brimming with cultural richness and architectural wonders, continues to enchant millions of visitors each year. Under the leadership of Dato' Seri Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Mayor of Kuala Lumpur, the city is undergoing a transformative journey, embracing sustainability, technology, and a vision for inclusive growth.

In this interview with World Magazine, Dato' Seri Maimunah shares her insights on Kuala Lumpur's current tourism landscape, the city's commitment to responsible tourism, and her vision for the future.

Q *Kuala Lumpur is a vibrant and dynamic city, attracting millions of tourists annually. How would you describe the city's current tourism landscape and its economic impact? What are the key initiatives and strategies in place to attract new markets and diversify the tourism offerings beyond the traditional attractions?*

A In 2023, Kuala Lumpur, as the gateway to the nation, received over 20 million visitors. Tourism is a significant revenue earner for the city and its businesses in KL. Although the peak figure of 23 million was reached in 2019, we are now well on the road to recovery from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Like many other cities, Kuala Lumpur's recovery begins with the rebuilding of our local communities.

In the case of tourism, we have embedded long term investments to upgrade and improve the city's infrastructure in the Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2030. We are actively investing in upgrading existing tourism zones and identifying new ones. KL City Hall is also working closely with the federal government, particularly the Tourism Ministry and other government-linked companies and the private sector to ensure we improve visitor experience.

To date, we have introduced a heritage component in the form of ten heritage and culture tourism trails, including two new ones. From heritage buildings, monuments and cultural sites to improving Malaysia's vibrant community-led heritage interpretation centres, Kuala Lumpur City Hall continues to play a coordinating role to ensure that visitors want to



ensure you go back with good memories of the city.

Not forgetting of course, our Malaysian cuisine, which will also be on display. KL City Hall is working closely with various restaurants, hawkers and relevant stakeholders to upgrade the gastronomic experience in the city. I believe in empowering citizens and entrepreneurs as they are the custodians of our local heritage and cultural assets. This way, tourism will bring direct benefits and we can avoid the current over-tourism situation in other destinations.

Q *Sustainability is becoming increasingly important for travelers. How is Kuala Lumpur addressing environmental concerns and promoting responsible tourism practices?*

A As a member of the C40 group of cities (<https://www.c40.org/about-c40/>), Kuala Lumpur is committed to lowering carbon emissions and to help Malaysia achieve its Paris climate goals. As the Advisor to the Presidency of the 29th Conference of the Parties (COP) on Climate Change, I am glad to say that Kuala Lumpur is working hard to do its part to reduce 70% of our climate emissions by 2030. In fact, on the first weekend as Mayor of Kuala Lumpur on 17 August, I officiated the Car Free Sunday as motor vehicles are the single biggest contributor of carbon emissions. I also used public transport to visit our public housing communities.

The Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2040 (KLSP2040) highlights the importance of responsible tourism where we will continue to work with key stakeholders and local communities to preserve nature, culture and heritage, and the unique elements and character of Kuala Lumpur.

As for green action on the ground, we have invested in a well-maintained network of public transportation including buses, trains and monorail. Dedicated cycling lanes and bike-sharing

programmes are now in operation. We are also expanding our network of electric vehicle charging stations as the nation transitions to green vehicles.

Visitors will also find well-managed public open spaces including the River of Life project, where we are transforming the Klang and Gombak rivers and their tributaries into recreational and ecological corridors. The Perdana Lake Gardens, KL's Central Park, is also being upgraded.

At the business level, KL City Hall is encouraging tourism stakeholders to adopt a Zero Waste Policy. This means using renewable energy, reducing water consumption and minimising waste. At the end of the day, we need greater awareness at the community and visitor level. So, we are also investing in capacity building programmes to foster a greater sense of responsibility for preserving the city's heritage, cultural and natural assets.

Q *What is the key infrastructure system and support industries in place to position Kuala Lumpur as a leading destination? How is technology being utilized to enhance the tourist experience and improve the efficiency of the tourism industry in Kuala Lumpur?*

A Kuala Lumpur City Hall is working closely with federal agencies and our partners in the tourism industry to ensure that KL is a people-centred SMART city. Apart from the consistent investments in hard infrastructure, we are also actively improving the digital experience.

From 49,000 units of smart street-lights to over 5000 units of CCTV, we have succeeded in creating a safer city for visitors. Close circuit monitoring has resulted in reduced rate in theft, vandalism and fraud. It also helps in our emergency response to fires and other accidents, allowing us to direct emergency services with greater precision.

KUALA LUMPUR: A CITY IN TRANSFORMATION

Using this smart platform, visitors can now hop onto the GoKL City Bus system, which is intended to circumvent the traffic congestion when moving in the KL Central Business District. You now have real-time bus service in one app that will allow you to travel responsibly by reducing your carbon footprint. These electric buses operate in 15 strategic routes throughout Kuala Lumpur. The number of passengers has shown significant growth over the years, with 6.4 million in 2021, 8.6 million in 2022, and a projected increase to 11.5 million in 2023, demonstrating the positive reception of the GOKL bus service in Kuala Lumpur.

Q *Kuala Lumpur is constantly evolving. What is the long-term vision and plans for developing the city's tourism sector in the next 5-10 years?*

A As the capital city and the gateway to Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur is the flag-bearer for an inclusive and people-centred Malaysia. This is the vision of Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim that Kuala Lumpur represents the best of Malaysia's diversity, resilience and cultural wealth. In short, we see Kuala Lumpur as a dynamic and investor-friendly destination to help transition the Malaysian economy in the digital era.

A transformation strategy based on National Tourism Policy 2020-2030 means harnessing public-private sector partnership and embracing digitalization to drive innovation and enhance the city's competitive advantage. We are doing this by strengthening capacity for better governance, creating special Tourism Investment Zones, putting into practice sustainable and responsible tourism policies and upskilling our human capital.

This is aligned with the Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2040 including Goal 1 : Kuala Lumpur Innovative and Productive City in becoming an urban tourism destination with sustainable tourism activities; and Goal 3 : Kuala

Lumpur Green, Healthy and Vibrant City in ways to beautify Kuala Lumpur strategic tourist attraction areas.

Q *If you had to recommend just one must-see experience for a first-time visitor to Kuala Lumpur, what would it be and why?*

A I would recommend that visitors spend time in the Kuala Lumpur Creative and Cultural District nestled in between the Klang and Gombak Rivers. It is where KL began its evolution as our nation's capital city.

KL City Hall's Heritage Trail is a self-guided tour of the historic heart of KL, covering many famous colonial-era landmark buildings clustered in a compact area surrounding Merdeka Square. You can easily see all the historical buildings that will fascinate your eyes within a walking distance of around 2 to 3 hours.

There are 11 Heritage sites highlighted such as Bangunan Sultan Abdul Samad, The Merdeka Square, The Cathedral Of St Mary and Victorian Fountain whereby it is part of the landmarks built during the British Administration Era in Kuala Lumpur. The Malay housing area nearby the center city would be Kg Baru, with a sumptuous spread of dining area. There is also Little India in Brickfields which features the beautiful Indian decorated walkway and Pasar Seni which you can find Malaysia's Multi ethnic crafts for sale.

There is also Sin Sze Si Ya Temple – oldest Taoist temple in KL in Jalan Tun H.S Lee. The temple was founded in 1864 by Kapitan Yap Ah Loy to honor patron deities Sze Si Ya and Sin Si Ya, who assisted him during the Selangor Civil War. Visitors of the temple, just a short 3-minute walk from Central Market, will get to spot shrines to the two here, as they're believed to be based on real-life commanders. This includes two procession sedan chairs used to carry their statues, said to be over 100 years old each. **W**



Interview

IHG'S JOURNEY TO TOMORROW IN THE MIDDLE EAST



Haitham Mattar,
Managing Director,
IMEA, IHG Hotels & Resorts

Haitham Mattar, Managing Director, IMEA, IHG Hotels & Resorts, delves into IHG's ambitious "Journey to Tomorrow" plan and its impact on the Middle East. Mattar discusses specific initiatives focused on carbon reduction, waste management, and fostering a more inclusive and sustainable hospitality sector. Discover how IHG is embracing technology to enhance the guest experience while staying true to its commitment to personalized service and community engagement.

Q *IHG's 'Journey to Tomorrow' plan sets ambitious targets for 2030. Could you share some specific initiatives and progress that IHG Hotels in the Middle East are making toward these long-term commitments, particularly in areas like carbon reduction and waste management?*

A Through our Journey to Tomorrow 2030 responsible business plan, we're making sure that as we operate and grow our business around the world, we use our reach to help achieve lasting, positive change on a broader scale. Aligned to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, our plan has three pillars around people, communities and planet.

Across the world, including the Middle East, we've set science-based targets to reduce carbon emissions and implement waste elimination practices. By aligning our operations with our guests' values, we are committed to creating properties that are not only visually and aesthetically appealing, but also environmentally responsible. This comprehensive approach allows us to make a meaningful impact on both our communities and the planet.

In terms of energy, in 2022, we changed our hotel performance metric from carbon reduction to energy reduction and set new energy efficiency targets across all our hotels, which have been tailored by region, brand and climate zone. Moving to energy targets has several advantages: hotels can directly control, track and monitor their energy usage, and this metric allows for greater comparison and benchmarking of hotels in different countries and climatic zones.

We are also working with local partners to manage food waste across our portfolio in the region.

In the Middle East, we are actively supporting governments and projects to create more sustainable destinations. An example of this is our partnership with the Red Sea Development Company, where we signed on to develop the InterContinental Resort Red Sea in Saudi Arabia. This collaboration focuses on sustainability-related initiatives aimed at protecting the unique natural, historical, and cultural environments of the area.

Q *One of IHG's key objectives is to introduce energy conservation measures for both existing and new-build hotels. How are these measures being implemented in the Middle East properties, and what challenges do you face in promoting low-carbon operations in this region?*

A Guided by our Journey to Tomorrow 10-year responsible business plan to care for our people, communities and planet, we are defining and delivering our carbon emissions strategy to protect the world around us for all generations to travel and explore.

We recognise the importance of partnering with hotel owners and supporting them to decarbonise and futureproof their assets – while generating profits – to protect the long-term value of their business and reduce the impacts of climate change. Reducing our carbon emissions is a priority, which is why we are targeting a global reduction in our greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of 46% by 2030 from our 2019 baseline. To make sure we remain on track, as mentioned above, we introduced 2022 internal energy reduction targets and have done the same for 2025 to drive energy efficiency and conservation in our hotels. We are also incorporating a range of energy conservation measures into brand standards, such as LED lighting and high-efficiency showers, that are reducing the cost of electricity and water in our hotels.

Q *IHG emphasises fostering an inclusive culture where everyone can thrive. Could you highlight how IHG Hotels in the Middle East are working to champion diversity, equality, and inclusion, particularly in leadership roles and local communities?*

A At IHG, we believe that fostering an inclusive culture is not just a goal, it's integral to who we are. We are proud to be making significant strides in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion across our teams. One of our primary focuses is to drive gender balance in our workforce, ensuring that we have more women in every level of our talent pipeline. This not only enriches our workplace but also supports our growth in the region. Our hotels are actively attracting local female talent, providing opportunities not only in full-time roles, but also through internships and apprenticeships – key pathways for engaging the next generation.

Our RISE programme is a pivotal part of our Journey to Tomorrow commitments, focusing on empowering women in hospitality to achieve their ambitions of becoming leaders in our industry. RISE is designed specifically for aspiring female leaders across our hotels, providing them with the tools to inspire confidence, broaden their networks, and drive their career progression.

We are equally committed to cultivating an inclusive environment that celebrates the diversity of our colleagues. By recognising and celebrating various National Day events from our multinational team, we foster a sense of belonging and pride among our workforce.

Driving local economic and social change is another key focus for us. Recently, we have welcomed several Emirati colleagues into our UAE hotels network and corporate office, marking a significant step forward in our commitment to local talent. In Saudi Arabia, we've increased the percentage of local talent in our estate to 47% per cent, reflecting our dedication to aligning with government initiatives that create more job opportunities for local talent.

Additionally, I'm particularly proud of our efforts to support people of determination (POD). In the past year, we have welcomed more than 10 POD colleagues in Saudi Arabia, providing them with opportunities to develop and thrive within our family. By striving to double the representation of under-represented groups in our teams, we are not only enhancing our workplace, but creating a more equitable environment for all.

Q *IHG has committed to positively impact the lives of 30 million people by 2030. Could you share some of the community initiatives that IHG Hotels in the Middle East are currently involved in to support this ambitious goal.*

A With more than 6,300 hotels spanning over 100 countries, IHG Hotels & Resorts is proud to be at the heart of thousands of communities around the world, as we strive to make a difference every day by delivering our purpose of True Hospitality for Good.

Our collaborations span local communities and across continents and regions. Whether it's working with small organisations to meet specific challenges or developing larger partnerships to help solve broader issues, our approach allows us to address wide-ranging social challenges that require a consistent global strategy, while also considering specific local needs.

Specifically for the Middle East, as recent example I can share is our support to Al Noor Training Centre for People of Determination in Dubai, dedicated to empowering individuals with different abilities. In addition to providing monetary support and other donations, we collaborated with a UAE-based company that transforms recycled plastic into sustainable clothing. Colleagues from 18 of our UAE properties collected single-use plastic bottles, which were converted into 300 sustainable t-shirts. These t-shirts were bought back and donated to Al Noor, to be sold at their upcoming annual fundraising event. To involve our colleagues, we organized a special event at our corporate offices which allowed colleagues to connect with the students, learn about

their work, and support their craft through a Smiles'n'Stuff Bazaar featuring handmade items.

Through our network of hotels in the Middle East, we get involved in a number of community initiatives spanning from support for local charities and organizations, blood donation camps, delivery of food parcels, clean up drives and more.

Q *Stakeholder engagement is crucial for advancing responsible business practices. Could you provide examples of how IHG Hotels in the Middle East collaborate with governments, NGOs, and industry associations to drive a positive impact in the hospitality sector?*

A We are actively working with governments, trade bodies and peers to protect the interests of our people, hotels, owners and the industry. This includes supporting IHG's growth aspirations, while helping to secure financial relief and further support for owners to deal with rising energy costs, labour shortages and other costs associated with doing business.

We're proud of the progress we're making but recognise that no single organisation has all the answers when it comes to tackling climate change, so we seek to team up with expert partners who share our commitment to driving positive change. Whether helping to provide disaster relief within our communities, finding new ways to measure and manage carbon emissions within hotels or harnessing artificial intelligence to tackle food waste, by embracing innovation through collaboration we're accelerating our progress in operating and growing responsibly.

Our global CEO, Elie Maalouf, sits on the World Travel & Tourism Council's (WTTC) Executive Committee and, along with other Senior Leaders at IHG, regularly attends prominent conferences to encourage governments and the travel industry to work together for the greater good, with topics of discussion including the importance of collaboration between the public and private sector, and investment in travel and tourism, such as in sustainability, talent and connectivity between destinations.

As an example, historically, we have always placed a huge focus on hiring, developing and retaining local talent, and as we grow our presence in Saudi Arabia, IHG is keenly participating in Saudi talent development and acquisition. For this, we have launched multiple initiatives both internal and in partnership with the Government and local institutes. As a result, nearly 47% of our workforce in Saudi Arabia are now Saudi nationals.

I am also honoured to play the role of advisor to the UNWTO Secretary General for Sustainable Tourism Development and help collectively create a better and more sustainable future for all.



Interview:

Haiham Mattar

Q *As technology continues to revolutionise the hospitality industry, how is IHG leveraging innovative digital solutions to enhance the guest experience while maintaining the warmth and personalised service that defines the IHG brand?*

A In recent years, we've witnessed a surge in demand for smarter, technology-enabled processes and hotels that enhance guest experiences. At IHG, we leverage innovative digital solutions across several aspects of our business to meet these evolving expectations.

As an example, in 2022, we launched our transformed loyalty programme, IHG One Rewards, to offer industry-leading value, richer benefits and greater choice for members to enhance their stays, alongside attracting a next-generation of travellers. All the enhancements are being supported by the next generation of our IHG One Rewards mobile app, which is at the heart of a smoother, richer customer booking journey alongside revamped brand websites. Our sites feature several stay enhancements, including the upsell of unique room attributes through our Guest Reservation System, where guests can seamlessly select add-ons and tailor their stays.

Data-driven personalization is another trend influencing the evolution of region's hospitality sector. There is a focus on a traveler-centric approach that depends on careful technology planning and digital infrastructure that creates a seamless experience for visitors. This approach extends to the hotel experience, whether that is in how travelers find a room, or the experience gained once they step through the doors. Further enhancements on property include a next-generation payments system speeding up guest check-in while reducing fees for owners, and IHG Wi-Fi Auto Connect enabling IHG One Rewards members to connect to hotel wi-fi automatically. **W**



GERMANY AS A DESTINATION OF TOMORROW

Petra Hedorfer, CEO of the German National Tourist Board (GNTB), shares insights into the thriving German tourism industry. We delve into the latest trends, including the impact of digital transformation, sustainability initiatives, and the sector's resilience in the face of global challenges. Discover how Germany is positioning itself as a leading destination for travelers seeking authentic experiences, technological innovation, and a commitment to responsible tourism.

Interview

Petra Hedorfer,
CEO of the German
National Tourist Board

Q *Could you start by giving us a brief overview of the current state of the German tourism industry? What are the most significant trends shaping the sector?*

A Germany's inbound tourism industry is faring very well in the international market. Among Europeans, Germany is firmly established as the top destination for city breaks and cultural travel and ranks second for nature-based travel. For business travel, we are the leading destination globally. This year, major sporting occasions such as UEFA EURO 2024 and other big events such as tours by international artists are providing an additional boost to inbound tourism to Germany.

As a result, we recorded more than 48.15 million overnight stays by visitors from abroad between January and July 2024, an increase of 6.5 per cent year on year. In terms of Germany's post-pandemic recovery of overnight stays by foreign guests, that figure is equivalent to 94.8 per cent of the record level achieved in 2019.

This upward trajectory was confirmed by our GNTB Travel Industry Expert Panel (TIEP) – a quarterly survey of more than 250 international tour operators that include Germany in their programmes. For the third quarter of 2024, the share of CEOs and key accounts that rated their current business situation with regard to Germany as positive rose to 57 per cent – up 10 percentage points compared with a year earlier. Looking at the source regions for German inbound tourism, European markets account for 76 per cent of overnight stays. The most important overseas market is the US.

To continue strengthening global tourism to Germany, key areas of action for us as the national tourist board for Germany are digital transformation and the challenges posed by climate change.

(Sources: German Federal Statistical Office, IPK/WTM 2024, GNTB Travel Industry Expert Panel 2024 Q3 and 2023 Q3)

Q *Sustainability has become a key concern for many travellers. How is the German tourism industry promoting sustainable practices, and what are some examples of initiatives aimed at reducing the industry's environmental footprint to ensure the successful management of responsible tourism?*

A Customers around the world are becoming more and more interested in sustainable travel. Germany was quick to recognise this and adapt to the challenges. According to our TIEP, more than half of CEOs and key accounts are experiencing rising demand for sustainable products, while 78 per cent consider Germany to be a destination for sustainable travel and 57 per cent actively market it as such.

(Source: TIEP Q3/2024)

A core element of our sustainable brand communications is the Feel Good campaign, which we have been using to promote certified sustainable offerings for the last five years. Another integral element of our sustainability strategy for customer communications is the 'Stay longer' initiative, which promotes the idea of visitors from abroad extending their holiday in order to reduce their carbon footprint per day of travel.

By running major marketing collaborations and campaigns together with the international travel trade and various European rail companies, we have – compared with 2023 – achieved a significant year-on-year increase of 22 per cent in the number of European guests travelling to Germany by rail. (Source: WTM/IPK 2024)



Interview: Petra Hedorfer, CEO of the German National Tourist Board

Q How has the digital transformation impacted the German tourism sector, particularly in terms of marketing, booking and visitor experience? What are successful digital initiatives in Germany?

A Digitalisation is already having a big impact on large parts of the tourism value chain around the world. It is shaping the entire customer experience – from how people find inspiration for a travel destination and how they reserve and book the components of their trip, through to innovative service offerings during their stay and word-of-mouth marketing.

For us, global marketing campaigns are virtually all digital these days. Indeed, our 30-plus social media channels generated 1.7 billion impressions and 215 million interactions last year.

In our influencer marketing, we registered over 148 million impressions on influencers' platforms in 2023. And we are currently adding a new dimension to our marketing by launching an AI influencer.

Generally speaking, AI applications play a big role in what we do. For example, we have developed a Knowledge Graph for the German tourism industry, which already contains over half a million semantically structured data sets. These can be accessed by global online platforms or used by startups for their innovative business models.

Q What is the German National Tourist Board doing to support small and medium-sized tourism businesses in adapting to the digital landscape?

A Helping Germany's predominantly small and medium-sized tourism businesses to conduct international marketing is one of the key tasks of the GNTB. We act as a hub for networking, bringing our partners in Germany's travel industry together with digital global players. We offer attractive opportunities for SME partners to get involved in our global digital campaigns and thereby access markets around the world. When it comes to next-generation technology, such as virtual reality or AI applications, we are a digital first mover and provider of expertise. The knowledge and experience gained in our pilot projects is shared with our partners through a range of formats, including workshops, webinars and hackathons.

Q How have pandemics and negative natural events affected the German tourism industry, and what are the long-term economic implications? What measures have been taken to support the sector's recovery?

A Initially, Destination Germany was affected more than most by the pandemic. One reason for this was that business trips, for example to international trade fairs and conferences, were curtailed during the coronavirus crisis and such trips account for a high proportion of travel to Germany. In addition, it took longer for important Asian source markets for Germany to recover from the pandemic's impact.

On the other hand, the pandemic hastened the implementation of digital technologies – driving the development of new hybrid event formats, for example. And it heightened travellers' awareness of the issue of sustainability. We were able to harness these opportunities for Germany as a travel destination.

Q What are the key economic priorities for the German tourism industry in the coming years? How can the sector contribute to the overall economic growth and prosperity of Germany?

A The tourism industry as a whole makes a significant contribution to value creation in Germany, with around three million people employed in the sector. European guests spent a total of €46 billion on their travels in Germany in 2023. As the competition between destinations gets tougher, we must maintain and grow this economic value added.

We see further investment in digital infrastructure as the key to achieving this. Our Open Data/Knowledge Graph project has laid the foundations for increasing the use of AI applications in the tourism value chain.

But, of course, we do not see tourism as just an economic factor. Tourism helps to bring cultures together, it promotes mutual respect and thereby international understanding – which is particularly invaluable during times of major geopolitical shifts.

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Interview

MASTERCARD'S VISION FOR DATA-DRIVEN GROWTH REIMAGINING TOURISM WITH DATA



Quim Martínez Bosch, Vice President, Public Sector Center of Excellence and Tourism
Segment Lead, Mastercard

In this exclusive interview, World Magazine sits down with Quim Martínez Bosch, Vice President, Public Sector Center of Excellence and Tourism Segment Lead at Mastercard. We explore how Mastercard's Tourism Innovation Hub is using data-driven insights to help governments and businesses navigate the post-pandemic tourism landscape and plan for future growth. Discover how the Hub is leveraging digital payments and innovations to enhance the traveller experience and promote sustainable and responsible tourism practices globally.



Journey to tomorrow: developing a destination strategy for 2025 and beyond





Q Mastercard's Tourism Innovation Hub harnesses data-driven insights and marketing capabilities to support the recovery of the global tourism sector. How is Mastercard leveraging insights to help governments and businesses navigate the post-pandemic recovery and plan for future growth?

A Tourism plays a crucial role in the well-being of countries and communities. The travel and tourism sector contributed over 9% of global GDP last year and is expected to grow further in 2024, accounting for approximately one in 11 jobs worldwide. The industry has a tremendous opportunity to drive more inclusive economic development in every corner of the globe in the coming decades.

Mastercard's Tourism Innovation Hub (the Hub) was established in response to the pandemic to support governments and tourism organizations in building a more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive tourism sector. Launched in 2023, the Hub leverages Mastercard's partnerships, technologies, and data expertise to help organizations understand and define their destination's tourism ecosystem, attract and scale target tourists, and measure and improve the impact of initiatives and policies.

With an unparalleled view of global consumer spending, our solutions help tourism organizations better understand inbound tourism markets, behaviors, and sentiments. By analyzing total and sector-level economic activity through aggregated and anonymized spend data from the Mastercard payments network,

we build robust tourism spending estimates. These in-depth, timely insights enable organizations to optimize destination marketing and strategies while attracting target travelers.

Q With digital transformation reshaping the tourism industry, how is Mastercard leveraging digital payments and innovations to enhance the traveler experience and support tourism-related businesses globally?

A The establishment of the Tourism Innovation Hub builds on Mastercard's long-standing commitment to the travel and tourism sector. With over a dozen members, we foster innovation through co-creation workshops aimed at creating more digitally enabled destinations and enhancing the traveler experience.

We facilitate safe, secure, and simple payment infrastructure for tourists and small businesses alike. By partnering across the public, private, and social sectors, we drive new travel solutions that provide transparency, security, and transaction speed. Together with our partners, we co-create solutions across the tourism ecosystem, from mobility and transport solutions to improving cybersecurity for destinations, SMEs and travelers.

Our ambition, in collaboration with our partners, is to elevate visitor experiences and increase loyalty by facilitating a seamless traveler journey and offering unique experiences that maximize tourists' enjoyment and enrich the overall visitor experience.

Q Sustainability is a critical focus for many destinations. How is Mastercard working with governments and tourism bodies to promote sustainable and responsible tourism practices using the insights from the Tourism Innovation Hub?

A The tourism sector is both highly vulnerable to climate change and a significant contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions. However, this also presents a substantial opportunity for the sector to focus on decarbonization and promote sustainable consumption among travelers to reduce overall industry emissions.

We are collaborating closely with The Travel Foundation, an NGO and sustainable tourism organization, and an early member of the Hub, to advocate for and enable a different model of tourism that balances community needs and environmental sustainability. In several destinations, we are partnering with tourism organizations to develop comprehensive strategies to decarbonize the tourism value chain and deploy solutions to SMEs to help them reduce carbon emissions.

Mastercard also offers solutions to empower travelers to make more sustainable choices. One such solution is our Carbon Calculator, which provides a personalized carbon footprint tracker, allowing Mastercard cardholders to view the estimated emissions of all their purchases.

Q Small businesses are crucial to the tourism ecosystem. How does Mastercard's Tourism Innovation Hub support small and medium enterprises in tourism through its data insights and financial solutions?

A We are committed to leveraging our technology and data expertise to bridge the digital divide by providing MSMEs worldwide with tailored guidance and tools to support their growth. Policies and investments that encourage the use of digital solutions, enhance digital skills development, and improve access to credit can significantly benefit tourism-focused MSMEs.

For instance, in Costa Rica, we have collaborated with Hub member Instituto Costarricense de Turismo to ensure that increased tourist traffic translates into better opportunities for small businesses. In 2023, the institute launched Tico Treasures, a platform that connects tourists with Costa Rica's Crafts with Identity program, supporting more than 300 artisans from 17 collectives across the country.

The platform enables visitors to discover local Costa Rican products, learn about artisan communities, and purchase and ship goods back to their home countries, all within a single digital experience. The initiative provides tourists with more authentic experiences, expands citizens' access to the digital economy, and strengthens the resilience of MSMEs.

Q Mastercard collaborates with governments and tourism bodies around the world. Can you share examples of successful partnerships where Mastercard has helped enhance a country's tourism strategy and economic growth?

A Today, we are proud of the Hub's presence on six continents, as we continue to expand our reach and deepen our collaborations with governments and tourism authorities worldwide. Our partnerships encompass digitalization initiatives, marketing campaigns, experiences and activations, and rigorous data analysis and advisory services.

In our recent white paper, "Journey to Tomorrow: Developing a Destination Strategy for 2025 and Beyond," we highlight the innovations from several of our most impactful partnerships globally. These include an initiative to redefine experiential travel through priceless experiences together with the Indian Ministry of Tourism and Invest India and a partnership with Turespaña to analyze visitor sentiment and inform Spain's tourism sustainability offerings. No matter the project, all our partnerships with tourism authorities share a common goal: to build a more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient tourism sector for all. **W**

Mastercard is collaborating closely with The Travel Foundation, an NGO and sustainable tourism organization, and an early member of the Hub, to advocate for and enable a different model of tourism that balances community needs and environmental sustainability.



Luca Zambello,
Founder and
CEO of Jurny

Interview

AI MEETS HOSPITALITY TRANSFORMING GUEST EXPERIENCES IN A TECH-DRIVEN WORLD

In a world where travel is evolving rapidly, Jurny is at the forefront of innovation. This interview with Founder and CEO Luca Zambello explores how Jurny’s AI-driven platform is transforming the hospitality industry, from streamlining operations and enhancing guest experiences to shaping the future of sustainable and responsible tourism. Discover how Jurny is empowering property owners and operators to thrive in the evolving landscape of travel.

Q *Jurny is known for its seamless integration of technology in hospitality. How has the company’s tech-first approach transformed the guest experience, and what innovative solutions are you most proud of?*

A Our deep connectivity and sophisticated AI multi-agent system have been game changers, not just in streamlining operations and reducing costs for operators but in drastically improving the guest experience. Contrary to the common belief that technology can feel impersonal and won’t work in hospitality, we’ve seen that AI can be more personal than humans. It never has an “off day,” is always in the right mood, and most importantly, it can respond and solve issues incredibly fast, much faster than humans - something guests value. What we’re most proud of is that while we’ve cut costs for operators, we’ve also significantly enhanced guest satisfaction and reviews, which is the opposite of what many people initially expect from tech in hospitality.

Q *As Jurny continues to expand, what strategies are in place to ensure scalability while maintaining the quality and personalization of guest services?*

A Maintaining scalability without compromising quality or personalization is a top priority as

we expand globally. Our AI, Nia, automates 90% of back-office tasks, allowing customers to scale efficiently while ensuring smooth and personalized guest interactions. Upcoming AI features will provide even greater customization, enabling custom AI agents to follow specific protocols and enhance service quality and guest experiences.

Our vertically integrated platform consolidates property management functions, offering real-time insights, customizable solutions, and robust system performance. Strategic partnerships and deep API integrations with platforms like Airbnb and Vrbo ensure a seamless experience across all channels. By combining automation, customization, and adaptability, Jurny enables its customers to scale rapidly without sacrificing quality.

Ultimately, the more effortlessly we can make our customers’ operations smoother and more profitable, the more scalable and successful our business becomes.

Interview: Luca Zambello, Founder and CEO of Jurny

Q AI and automation are at the core of Jurny's operations, what role do you see it playing in the future of hospitality?

A While AI has been a buzzword recently, we haven't yet seen truly transformative solutions in our field - though that's about to change. I believe 2025 will mark a turning point. AI will drive the next big wave of innovation in this industry by - driving even deeper levels of automation, improving predictive capabilities, and personalizing guest experiences at scale.

At Jurny, we've positioned ourselves as pioneers in this shift because we saw it coming well before the rest of the industry - about two years ahead of the curve. We built our platform from the ground up with AI in mind, a differentiator that may seem small now but will have a massive impact in the near future.

Our goal is to bring every aspect of boutique hotel and short-term rental management under one roof. Jurny is built to automate and streamline everything - from guest communication and booking management to cleaning schedules, maintenance requests, and dynamic pricing. Hosts shouldn't have to juggle multiple tools or platforms to run their business. With Jurny, everything is in one place, making it easier for hosts to manage their properties more efficiently and scale without the usual headaches.

However, being an all-in-one solution doesn't mean we do everything independently. We integrate deeply with best-in-class tools, giving users access to their features directly within our platform.

Ultimately, by next year, we'll already see businesses that - thanks to platforms like Jurny - will be able to automate the majority of their back-office tasks, resulting in significant cost reductions and skyrocketing service quality and guest experiences. This shift will have a massive impact on the entire industry. We estimate that if cutting-edge AI is adopted industry-wide by 2026, it could lead to operational savings of up to \$122 billion in the Airbnb sector alone.

Q As the travel and accommodation landscape continues to evolve, particularly with the rise of remote work and extended stays, how

is Jurny adapting its offerings to meet the changing preferences of modern travelers?

A Due to the dynamic nature of our platform design, Jurny is positioned to adapt to the ever-evolving travel landscape, regardless of how trends shift. The flexibility and automation built into our system make it quick and easy for property managers to accommodate guests seeking longer stays or flexible remote work options.

We've also introduced features that enhance the extended stay experience. Automated check-ins, quick troubleshooting, and personalized smart device controls cater to the growing trend of "work-from-anywhere" travelers. These innovations allow our customers to meet shifting travel preferences while continuing to provide the high level of service and personalization that today's guests expect. **W**

I believe 2025 will mark a turning point. AI will drive the next big wave of innovation in this industry by - driving even deeper levels of automation, improving predictive capabilities, and personalizing guest experiences at scale.





VISIT
seattle

Interview

TOURISM AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

Seattle, renowned for its natural beauty and progressive spirit, is committed to sustainable tourism. In this interview, Tammy Blount-Canavan, CEO Visit Seattle shares how they've integrated sustainability into their marketing strategy, highlighting innovative campaigns and initiatives that demonstrate their commitment to responsible travel. From showcasing LEED-certified venues like the Summit building and Climate Pledge Arena to supporting green transportation options and local businesses, Visit Seattle is leading the way in sustainable tourism practices.

Q *How has Visit Seattle's marketing strategy evolved in the sustainable practices? Are there specific examples of new or adapted campaigns you can share?*

A As a city surrounded by the incredible natural beauty of mountain ranges and the Puget Sound, sustainability has always been core to Seattle's DNA. Seattle has a solid track record when it comes to implementing initiatives that contribute to a more sustainable city. Our city banned plastic utensils at bars and restaurants way back in 2018; we've got an incredible growing network of public transportation to encourage greener travel, including water taxis, light rail and a bus system with a fleet of battery-electric buses; we have the world's first net zero carbon arena; and in 2027, single-use plastic packaging will be banned from hotels in our state.

At Visit Seattle, we incorporate sustainability in our campaigns and initiatives. From our own internal practices to targeting customers that align with our destination's values, caring for our planet is an imperative. Our messaging ranges from direct promotion of green travel and meetings, to a more subtle approach in promoting locally sourced restaurants and businesses. There are many shining examples we put forward

in our sales and marketing – here are a few: Seattle Convention Center opened a state-of-the-art new building, Summit, in January 2023. The Summit building is LEED Platinum-certified, one of the very few convention center buildings in North America to achieve this designation. Summit's interior incorporates sustainably sourced, recyclable, and recycled materials including reclaimed wood from a former building on the same site. The facility captures, filters and reuses rainwater.



Tammy Blount-Canavan,
CEO Visit Seattle

Climate Pledge Arena in Seattle is the first arena in the world to achieve the International Living Future Institute Zero Carbon Certification, meaning it's zero carbon certified. The facility, which hosts sporting events for the Seattle Kraken and the Seattle Storm as well as live music events, operates as a functionally zero waste arena, and captures rainwater to make its NHL ice.

Our partners at the Port of Seattle have made significant efforts to be a leader in sustainability. In spring 2024, the Port of Seattle became the first port in the nation to independently require that 100% of all cruise vessels homeported in Seattle be shore power capable and utilize shore power. This requirement takes effect in 2027, and is an important part of our cruise marketing strategy.

In August 2024, Seattle Aquarium debuted its new Ocean Pavilion. A key fixture of Seattle's ongoing Waterfront redevelopment project – which is slated to be completed in 2025 – the Ocean Pavilion celebrates the incredible biodiversity of the Pacific Ocean's Coral Triangle while teaching visitors about the Aquarium's important conservation work being done both at home and abroad.

Q *What are some of the emerging technologies and innovations Visit Seattle is using to enhance the visitor experience?*

A Seattle is known as an innovation hub. Home to some of the world's biggest tech giants, such as Amazon and Microsoft, we're proud to be a thriving city where technology and community can benefit one another.

Visit Seattle's newly launched Perks Pass, a digital savings passport available via Bandwango, encourages exploration of Seattle for those in town for cruises or conventions. The digital passport offers discounts to local attractions, retail outlets, and restaurants. When cruise and convention visitors arrive in Seattle, they can scan a QR code at an information desk to receive deals.

For meeting planners, Threshold 360 offers virtual tours of hotel lobbies, hotel rooms, and attractions like Chihuly Garden and Glass.

For conventions, we offer "walking widgets" that can be implemented on convention microsites. The widgets offer guidance for convention attendees on how to reach the Seattle Convention Center and other meetings locations from their host hotel.

Q *Can you share a recent success story of how Visit Seattle helped a local business or community thrive through tourism?*

A In summer of 2023, Visit Seattle hosted 3,500 delegates from the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) for the organization's ministerial and technical meetings. Through this monumental opportunity we were able to support several local businesses from BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities, such as

Refugee Artisan Initiative and Bite Society, by including their items in gifts for the delegates.

Visit Seattle also supports small, minority-owned businesses through our program with Seattle Bank called the "Community Partnership Program." The program aims to bolster tourism and economic vitality by extending support to BIPOC and LGBTQIA+-owned businesses such as restaurants and shops located in emerging neighborhoods. Through the Community Partnership Program, businesses receive waived Visit Seattle membership dues courtesy of Seattle Bank for a specified time period and promotional backing through Visit Seattle's marketing platforms and editorial content. We have received positive feedback from participating businesses about this opportunity.

Q *What are the most significant trends you're seeing in the travel industry? and What are the top three priorities for Visit Seattle in the next few years? How do these priorities contribute to the overall economic and social well-being of the city?*

A Top trends in the travel industry are changing quickly – we see continued discernment in choice of destination based on traveler values; in Seattle this translates to visitors wanting to immerse themselves in culture and cuisine, authentic experiences, and connection to nature.

As we embrace these trends, we have an opportunity to strengthen our community engagement. Our mission at Visit Seattle is "to grow the visitor economy for the benefit of our community." This means that as we run promotions and encourage visitation, we must be aligned with our residents and stakeholders, and be a part of developing the community's future we collectively envision. This alignment is reflected in our new 2025-27 strategic plan and the initiatives within it.

Q *What advice would you give to someone who is aspiring to work in the tourism industry?*

A This is the greatest industry to be a part of. Being a part of the tourism industry means we're building community, we're helping people make memories, we're breaking down barriers, we're helping our neighbors feed their families, we're leaving legacies, and literally changing lives through opportunity, service and kindness.

There are so many different jobs within this industry. If you want to work "regular" hours, that's possible – but I personally think the most fulfilling work comes from the not-so-regular jobs – jobs that are more of a lifestyle than a job. This industry is filled with friendly, helpful people who are generally willing to spend time helping others in their career, so don't hesitate to reach out to someone you admire but don't know, and ask them for a little time. Also, listen intently, be patient, empathetic, and persistent. All meaningful opportunities take time and thoughtfulness and are well worth the investment. **W**



NAVIGATING A FUTURE OF SAFETY, SUSTAINABILITY, AND DIGITAL INNOVATION



Subhas Menon,
Director General of Association of Asia Pacific Airlines (AAPA)

This interview with Subhas Menon, Director General of Association of Asia Pacific Airlines (AAPA) delves into the critical issues shaping the future of aviation in the region. We explore AAPA's initiatives to enhance safety standards, leverage digital technologies, and achieve carbon neutrality. With an emphasis on digitalization, sustainable aviation fuels, and emerging trends like biometric travel, AAPA is shaping a future of aviation that prioritizes safety, efficiency, and environmental responsibility.

Q *Safety is a top priority in aviation. Can you elaborate on the recent measures AAPA has implemented to enhance safety standards across Asia Pacific airlines?*

A The unequivocal focus on Safety is what makes aviation the safest mode of transport. Its ability to innovate and modernise safely, has contributed to the continued expansion of air connectivity. Remote communities connected by air, achieve access to goods, services, and a means to a livelihood, while ensuring that aviation is not the preserve of a few.

The positive safety culture which permeates the industry, keeps aviation safe. Surveys are conducted regularly by the Flight Safety Foundation (FSF) among key personnel at airlines. AAPA partners the FSF to conduct seminars to help ensure that the positive safety culture is upheld. Regular meetings are held among the airlines to share best practices and address concerns. Recently, AAPA held a Turboprop Safety Conference in Kuala Lumpur which was attended by 100 participants from 20 organisations.

Q *How is AAPA supporting its members in leveraging digital technologies to improve passenger experience and operational efficiency? Are there any upcoming innovations or digital projects you are excited about such as artificial intelligence and big data?*

A Digitalisation is quite advanced in the industry today. From booking a flight to automated check-in, seat selection, purchase of ancillary services, service recovery, and the logistics of operations, digitalisation has become a part of every passenger journey.

AI can help in understanding consumer preferences to make travel more convenient and comfortable. Such technology can also enhance the industry's response to unexpected weather patterns and turbulence to provide for smoother flights. The industry is utilising new technology to keep air travel safe, smooth and seamless.

Q *Sustainability is becoming increasingly important for the aviation industry. What are AAPA's priorities in this area? How can the industry*

achieve carbon neutrality? and What are some of the key initiatives being taken by airlines in the region to reduce their environmental footprint?

A AAPA airlines committed to net zero emissions by 2050, in September 2021. Soon after, the rest of the industry did the same at the end of 2022. In November 2023, AAPA airlines adopted an aspirational goal of using 5% SAF in their total fuel uplifted by 2030. This is a demand signal to governments and fuel suppliers.

There are four important pathways to net zero, namely sustainable aviation fuels (SAF), technology enhancements, efficiency improvements as well as carbon offsets and removals. While SAF is the most promising measure, its supply is nascent and inconsistent. Government commitment to aviation sustainability is also not ubiquitous. As airlines are users of fuel and technology, we must work with governments, equipment manufacturers and fuel suppliers to ensure that the supply side of the value chain delivers as required. Governments must consult all stakeholders to understand what policy settings are needed to establish a stable and sustainable supply chain for decarbonisation. Mandates can make travel costly while proactive and collaborative policies accelerate the path to carbon neutrality.

Q *How do you see the industry evolving in the next 5-10 years? What are the key trends shaping the future of aviation in the region?*

A In the first 50 years after the second world war, aviation halved its emissions from every passenger journey. In the first 50 years of the 21st century, aviation is expected to zero its emissions. A daunting task, but a safe bet, considering the industry's track record. The technology that is required to deliver the net zero target will go hand in hand with biometric facilitation of passenger journeys.

From later this year, passengers travelling through Changi Airport do not even need a passport to travel out. Other airports are also moving in this direction. Barring border closures, wars and trade disputes, air travel in the region is expected to triple by 2050. **W**

CULTURAL REJUVENATION, DOMESTIC TRAFFIC, MODERN INFRA CONNECTIVITY IS THE CATALYST OF INDIA'S TOURISM BOOM



Anurag Singh Thakur,
Member of Parliament & Former Cabinet Minister, Government of India



Q *India is experiencing a boom in tourism, but it also faces challenges regarding sustainability and responsible travel. How do you see this balancing act unfolding in the future, and what is the role of the government in promoting responsible tourism practices?*

A India's tourism industry is witnessing remarkable growth, but with that comes the challenge of ensuring sustainability. India is one of the few countries in the world that in 2022 put in place a National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism which identifies seven strategic pillars to make India a global destination for sustainable and responsible tourism which includes protecting Biodiversity, promoting Economic Sustainability, promoting Socio-Cultural Sustainability, scheme for Certification of Sustainable Tourism amongst others. Further, the government has taken significant steps to address this, such as the Swachh Bharat Mission, which has led to the construction of over 110 million toilets nationwide, reducing littering in tourist areas, and the Green India Mission, focusing on eco-tourism and waste management. The Prashad and Swadesh Darshan schemes are prioritizing infrastructure development in eco-sensitive areas, supporting over 14 million annual visitors sustainably. Balancing growth and sustainability is essential to preserving India's diverse landscapes, from the Himalayas to our coastal regions, for future generations.

How can we encourage responsible travel practices among tourists, especially regarding waste management, environmental conservation, and local community engagement? How do we ensure the protection of fragile ecosystems and the well being of local communities?

I'll give the example of PM Modi, whenever he travels or after inaugurating a new project you see him picking up plastic bottles or engaging in a Swachh Bharat Abhigyan without hesitation. This has a trickle down and inspiring effect of citizens!

Q Responsible travel is vital to maintaining our cultural and environmental wealth. We should encourage tourists to engage in eco-friendly practices, such as minimizing plastic use and respecting local ecosystems. Through the Incredible India 2.0 campaign, the government is promoting sustainable tourism and eco-friendly travel experiences, with messaging reaching millions of tourists annually. Policies like the Plastic Waste Management Amendment and the single-use plastic ban aim to reduce approximately 3.6 million tonnes of plastic waste annually, helping protect India's biodiversity and cultural heritage by involving tourists in these efforts.

A *What are your views on the potential for sustainable tourism to create economic opportunities in rural areas and empower marginalized communities?*

There are numerous fairs organised across India that have become a calendar event on the global tourism circuit due to their emphasis on protecting and preserving local arts, crafts and ecosystems. Think about it, had we not emphasised on responsible and sustainable tourism - would the Rann of Kutch festival be what it is today, would the tigers of India have risen in numbers, would the corals remain alive in the blue waters of Lakshwadeep if hundreds of flights had landed there?



Interview: Anurag Singh Thakur, Member of Parliament & Former Cabinet Minister, Government of India

Q *How can digital platforms be used to promote responsible tourism practices and educate tourists about sustainable travel?*

A Digital platforms play a pivotal role in shaping responsible tourism. And I will add the growing role of content creators who visit these places and inform people about it - they not only market the place and boost its economic activity but also help document it for generations on new social media platforms beyond just books, photos and movies. The Incredible India website and mobile apps now highlight eco-friendly destinations, sustainable travel practices, and conservation efforts, guiding millions of tourists towards minimizing their environmental impact. Collaborations with NITI Aayog to geo tag culturally significant sites ensure the preservation of natural spaces, making digital platforms crucial in helping tourists make informed and responsible choices.

Q *What are your views on the potential of artificial intelligence and blockchain technology in the future of tourism? Could you share some key practices?*

A AI and blockchain are game-changers for the future of tourism. Numerous startups and digital platforms in India leverage AI to personalize travel experiences, offer eco-friendly recommendations, and optimize itineraries to reduce environmental impact for over 1 billion users. Blockchain enhances transparency in sustainability certifications, ensuring that tourism businesses adhere to eco-friendly practices. These technologies are being explored to create smarter, more responsible tourism systems that benefit both travelers and the environment.

Q *What are policy initiatives being undertaken by the government to promote sustainable and responsible tourism in India?*

A The biggest promotion of brand India is by the Prime Minister himself, when he visits a place it boosts its local economy manifold - Lakshwadeep is one example. Further his emphasis on cultural rejuvenation projects has helped build various religious circuits, along with better road and rail connectivity to upcoming regions. The UDAAN Sewa has also greatly boosted domestic tourism. For decades the icons of tourism in India were places built much before independence; today new eco parks, monuments, memorials, arts and crafts centres and a national museum of India - all with sustainability inbuilt into their upkeep and architecture are underway.

India is actively promoting responsible tourism through several initiatives. The National Mission for Sustainable Tourism and Dekho Apna Desh encourage travelers to explore the country sustainably. Focused on preserving natural resources, heritage conservation, and supporting local communities, these programs include the development of over 100 eco-tourism sites in partnership with states. With the Swadesh Darshan Scheme and ongoing collaboration across 15 states, the government is integrating eco-tourism in development plans, aligned with global sustainability goals.

Q *What message would you like to convey to inspire the global youth to take proactive steps toward sustainability and to embrace responsibility in their journeys?*

A I am a true believer that our travel choices matter a lot. Each journey is an opportunity to protect the environment and support local communities. By embracing sustainable practices, we can help preserve our planet's beauty for future generations. I urge the youth to take responsibility in their travels, make conscious decisions, and inspire others to do the same. Together, we can build a future where tourism benefits both people and the planet. **W**

THE LUXURY LEADER

IN SUSTAINABILITY

Mandarin Oriental has earned a reputation for sustainability leadership in the hospitality sector. We speak with Torsten van Dullemen, General Manager and Group Director of Sustainability, to learn how their efforts are contributing to a more sustainable future. We delve into their ambitious environmental targets, robust supplier engagement, and the core principles driving their “Mandarin Oriental Sustainability Framework.”

Van Dullemen shares insights into how they bridge the gap between sustainability goals and business strategy, and how they navigate the challenges of implementing sustainable practices across a global luxury chain. He also outlines Mandarin Oriental’s key priorities for the next five years, including the pursuit of GSTC certification and the expansion of their food waste management program.

Q Acknowledging Mandarin Oriental’s reputation for sustainability leadership in the hospitality sector, how do you see Mandarin Oriental’s sustainability efforts contributing to the broader global movement towards a more sustainable future. Please mention specific examples of the initiatives (e.g., carbon neutrality goals, sustainable sourcing, community engagement)

A Mandarin Oriental is a relatively small player on the world stage, but from the strength of our brand, we use our voice to advocate for change along the value chain. We ensure steady progress is made towards our groupwide 2030 environmental targets with property-led initiatives to reduce energy and emissions, switch to renewables, conserve water, and reduce waste. We contribute positively to our local communities by enabling one paid day leave for all employees towards charitable initiatives. Our colleagues collectively contributed over 52,000 volunteer hours in 2023.

We ensure every supplier we work with complies with our Supplier Code of Conduct. Through internationally recognised LRQA as our third-party auditor, we have verified key responsible procurement achievements including eliminating 99% of single-use plastics across all operations excluding supplier packaging; 100% responsibly sourced coffee, tea, cocoa, vanilla, sugar and paper; striving towards 100% sourced cage-free eggs, currently at 94% verified rate; and avoiding serving 19 types of endangered seafood species listed on Mandarin Oriental’s Endangered Seafood Avoid List, aligned with WWF’s Endangered Seafood Guide.

Q What are the core principles that guide Mandarin Oriental’s approach to sustainability? Can you elaborate on the “Mandarin Oriental Sustainability Framework”? How does it translate into tangible action across the group’s properties?

A Mandarin Oriental’s sustainability approach is rooted in core principles that emphasise excellence in luxury hospitality, collaboration, transparency, and a holistic focus on environmental, social, and governance factors. This commitment drives the group to integrate sustainability into every aspect of its operations, ensuring that luxury service aligns with responsible practices. By fostering a culture of openness, Mandarin Oriental encourages stakeholders to engage in sustainability efforts, sharing best practices and lessons learned.

Tangible actions are evident across our properties, showcasing a robust commitment to reducing environmental impacts. The group has achieved significant milestones, including tracked reduction in environmental goals and the elimination of 99% of single-use plastics. Responsible sourcing practices ensure that all coffee, tea, cocoa, vanilla, sugar and paper are sustainably obtained, while initiatives like appointing sustainability champions at each hotel promote local engagement and community service. Furthermore, innovative technologies, such as Winnow AI for food waste management, exemplify our dedication to continuous improvement in its sustainability journey.

Torsten van Dullemen,
General Manager and Group Director of
Sustainability at Mandarin Oriental

Interview: Torsten van Dullemen, General Manager and Group Director of Sustainability at Mandarin Oriental



Q How do you ensure alignment between sustainability goals and the overall business strategy? Such as waste management and resource conservation (Highlight specific programs and technologies used.)

A Mandarin Oriental ensures alignment between its sustainability goals and overall business strategy by integrating sustainability into every level of decision-making. The group has established a comprehensive sustainability governance structure that includes an Executive Advisory Panel and various working groups focused on specific sustainability themes. This structure facilitates collaboration across departments, allowing the organization to set clear priorities and allocate resources effectively. By embedding sustainability into our corporate policies, such as the updated Code of Conduct and ESG Policies, Mandarin Oriental reinforces our commitment to responsible business practices.

Our sustainability initiatives are closely tied to the business objectives, with measurable targets to reduce energy and waste intensity while promoting responsible sourcing. By leveraging innovative technologies and practices, such as the goal to implement AI-powered food waste management system, Mandarin Oriental not only addresses environmental challenges but also strengthens our market position as a leader in luxury hospitality.

Q What are the challenges you face in implementing sustainable practices within a global luxury hotel chain? (e.g., cultural differences, cost considerations, limited resources) and how do you communicate your sustainability efforts to guests and stakeholders?

A One significant hurdle is the complexity of supply chains, which often span multiple regions and involve various suppliers with differing sustainability standards. Ensuring that every supplier adheres to responsible sourcing and environmentally friendly practices requires rigorous oversight and can complicate procurement processes. Our suppliers

code of conduct and active communications between suppliers and properties are the key contributors in aligning our sustainability standards.

Q What metrics do you use to measure the success of your sustainability initiatives? How does Mandarin Oriental ensure transparency in its sustainability reporting?

A Mandarin Oriental utilises the Greenview Portal to track and analyse sustainability metrics, which allows for comprehensive data management and benchmarking against industry standards. This tool helps assess key performance indicators such as energy consumption, water usage, and waste management, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives.

The inclusion of independent verification from third party LRQA further enhances the credibility of our claims, ensuring that the reported data is accurate and reliable.

We ensure transparency in sustainability reporting by publishing an annual Sustainability Report that comprehensively details our initiatives and performance. This report follows the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Index, which provides a standardised framework for sustainability disclosures, allowing stakeholders to easily assess progress and accountability.

Q What are Mandarin Oriental's key sustainability priorities for the next 5 years?

A We are committed to achieving Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) certification for all our hotels by 2025. We will also implement Winnow AI food waste management systems across all properties by 2025 to strengthen our commitment to food waste management.

We remain committed to maintaining existing sustainability efforts, such as eliminating single-use plastics fully and promoting responsible procurement practices. The integration of these strategies not only reinforces the company's dedication to environmental stewardship but also enhances our social impact through community engagement and colleague training in sustainability practices.

Q What advice would you give to other hospitality companies seeking to improve their sustainability performance and provide insights and recommendations for a broader audience interested in sustainability.

A My advice is to start by setting clear, measurable goals and to embed sustainability into the corporate culture. Collaboration with stakeholders, including guests, colleagues, suppliers and communities, is essential for driving meaningful change. Transparency in reporting and communication can build solid trust with both internal and external stakeholders, enhancing brand's reputation and commitment to sustainability. **W**





Dr. Anoulak Kittikhoun,
CEO of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) Secretariat

BALANCING PROGRESS AND PRESERVATION

The Mekong River, flowing through six Southeast Asian countries, is both a lifeline and an economic driver for millions. Yet, with natural and human influences, managing its resources is critical. From irrigation to hydropower and shipping, the river supports substantial development and growth, but these activities also place stress on the region's unique biodiversity and ecosystem. Climate change further complicates matters, as extreme weather events — from prolonged droughts to severe flooding — have become more frequent. The Mekong River Commission (MRC) is at the forefront, coordinating efforts among member countries to address these water stress challenges and promote sustainable development, which is essential to safeguarding the river's future and supporting the socioeconomic well-being of the region's communities.

Q *Could you share the current state of water stress management in the Mekong region and its impact on the social issues?*

A The Mekong River region faces significant water challenges from both natural and human factors, while water use and development projects from irrigation to hydropower and navigation have contributed significantly to economic growth. Yet these developments also bring stress to the rich biodiversity and environment of the Mekong. Climate change is driving extreme weather events at both ends of droughts and floods. From 2019 to 2023, the Mekong experienced drought. In early 2023, central areas of the Lower Mekong River Basin experienced severe drought, with rainfall hitting historical lows—only 5mm in February and 9mm in March. By September 2024, however, Typhoon Yagi brought heavy rainfall, causing record-high river levels and widespread flooding across several areas. This near-critical increase underscores the severity of climate-driven events and highlights the urgent need for proactive management.

The MRC plays a key role in coordinating regional efforts to meet these challenges. Our river monitoring and forecasting, combined with real-time data-sharing systems, enables Member Countries to respond swiftly to shifting water conditions, helping mitigate flood impacts and respond to critical situations. Our basin-wide strategies, procedures and guidelines have guided countries' development and water uses in a way that balances the needs of people, ecosystems, and economic growth. Through cooperative action and knowledge-sharing

across borders, we aim to support good development while building resilience in the Mekong region, securing a sustainable future for the millions who depend on this vital river.

Q *For millennia, the Mekong River has functioned as a primary transportation route for the communities located along its banks, facilitating access to natural resources and social amenities. In recent years, however, the river has gained significance as an international corridor, linking the six Mekong countries to one another and to the global community. Given this geographical advantage, do you perceive the potential for tourism development in the Mekong Region to enhance travel connectivity? Additionally, could you elaborate on the relationship between sustainable water management and sustainable tourism development?*

A The Mekong River links six nations and provides essential infrastructure and cultural sites that bolster tourism. The MRC's Basin Development Strategy 2021–2030 promotes sustainable development and river management, supporting the tourism sector. Our river monitoring and forecasting system provides essential data and information in terms of Mekong conditions for Mekong cruises to navigate safely up and down the river. Our water use procedures and guidelines for developing, operating and monitoring water infrastructure projects, including consultation with stakeholders, help minimize the ecological impact of infrastructure on the river, preserving the natural and cultural sites that draw visitors to the region.

Interview: Dr. Anoulak Kittikhoun, CEO of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) Secretariat

Besides preserving the river and its cultural and environmental heritage for eco-tourism, there are also potential development opportunities in the water sector that can contribute to Mekong wide tourism and connectivity, including incorporating tourism related activities to the development of water projects from navigation canals to hydropower.

Q *What are the MRC's initiatives and partnerships to support the socio economic development of the region?*

A The MRC collaborates with several Development Partners and international organizations to address shared development and climate challenges and promote sustainable growth across the Mekong region. These partnerships are critical, as many collaborators—although not based in the Mekong region—recognize the global significance of the Mekong for biodiversity, regional stability, and socio-economic progress.

A key initiative is our focus on youth and technology innovation. In 2022, the MRC launched the River Monitoring Technology Competition, which tasked university students in the region with developing affordable, durable sensors to monitor the river's health. The winning designs have the potential to complement the MRC's monitoring stations, showing the value of local technology solutions. Building on this, in collaboration with the ASEAN Secretariat, the 2024 ASEAN-MRC Technology Competition invites students from all ASEAN countries to create AI-powered tools to detect flash floods, helping protect vulnerable communities across the region.

In 2023, we also secured a \$12-million investment from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for regional fisheries management, and Germany contributed EUR 15 million for ecosystem resilience through the Mekong Fund Ecosystem Window Trial. These and other partnerships with countries like Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Japan, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, and the United States, and bring vital resources and expertise that enhance MRC's mission. By combining these strengths, we empower Mekong communities to adapt to environmental changes, improve their quality of life, and inspire the next generation to innovate for a sustainable future.

Q *What recommendations would you make for sustainable investments and engagement from the tourism sector to support the Mekong River in addressing climate change?*

A Sustainable tourism in the Mekong region should prioritize environmental conservation and community resilience. Tourism

stakeholders are encouraged to adopt eco-friendly practices and support local projects that align with water security and climate resilience. Infrastructure investments that promote sustainable resource management can create lasting benefits for both the ecosystem and the economy.

Tourism operators can also reach out to developers and operators of major water infrastructure projects such as hydropower and navigation projects in order to discuss and incorporate tourism related development opportunities. For example, in Japan, the hydropower projects work with government and local communities to draw visitors to dam sites, where conservation, protection, and local tourism activities are promoted.

As we look to the future, sustainable tourism investment will be essential to preserving the Mekong's natural beauty and cultural heritage, while enhancing resilience to development risks and climate challenges. **W**

Sustainable tourism in the Mekong region should prioritize environmental conservation and community resilience. Tourism stakeholders are encouraged to adopt eco-friendly practices and support local projects that align with water security and climate resilience.





THE NEW FACE OF SANYA FROM BEACHES TO SMART CITIES IN TOURISM

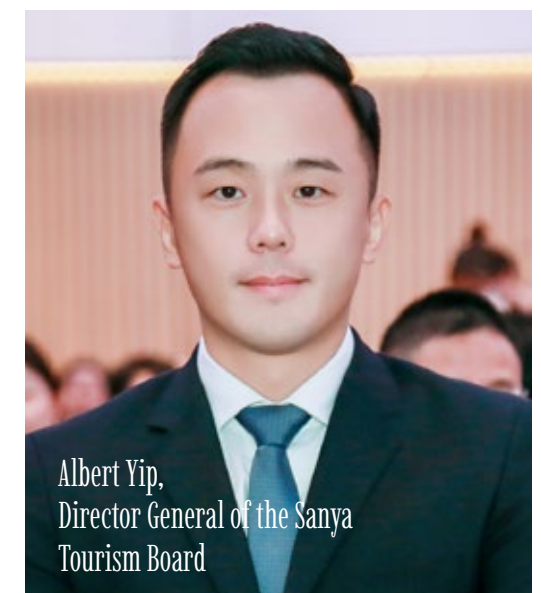
Sanya, China, renowned for its stunning beaches and luxurious resorts, is on a mission to solidify its position as a premier international tourism destination. In this exclusive interview with World Magazine, the Director General of the Sanya Tourism Board, Mr. Albert Yip, reveals the city's ambitious strategies for sustainable growth and digital transformation. From promoting sustainable tourism practices to embracing digital innovation, Sanya is crafting a future where environmental consciousness and cutting-edge technology converge to elevate the visitor experience.

Q *Sanya is known for its beautiful beaches and luxury resorts. Could you share with us the current strategies being implemented to further develop Sanya as a premier international tourism destination? What are the key areas of focus for the Sanya Tourism Department in the coming years?*

A The Hainan 59-country visa-free entry policy, along with the 144-hour visa-free policy for foreign tour groups entering Hainan province via Hong Kong and Macao, has been implemented progressively over recent years. With the expansion of these visa-free policies, Sanya is increasing its international routes, making it easier for more overseas tourists to visit. The city also collaborates with international aviation hub such as Singapore and Hong Kong to create multi-destination travel products. For example, tourists from Europe and the United States can now visit Sanya via Hong Kong and Singapore, further expanding the visitor source market.

To further contribute to building an international tourism industry, the Sanya Tourism board (STB) partners with international tourism organizations such as the UN Tourism and PATA, engaging in tourism marketing, product development, and experience sharing with other

member cities. By leveraging its advantageous resources, including pleasant weather and climate, golf, cruises and yachts, and renowned hotel brands, Sanya is consistently introducing large-scale international cultural and sports events. We are also implementing the "Tourism Plus" strategy, which means integrating tourism with other industries, such as culture, sports, etc., to develop innovative tourism offerings.



Albert Yip,
Director General of the Sanya
Tourism Board

Interview: Albert Yip, Director General of the Sanya Tourism Board

In the coming years, we will continue to strengthen tourism marketing and promotion through innovative online media campaigns and offline promotional activities to boost international exposure. Simultaneously, Sanya will enhance the quality of international tourism services by training specialized tourism practitioners, such as foreign language guides, to provide a more globally competitive experience.

Q *Sustainability is a growing concern for many travelers. How is the Sanya Tourism Department promoting sustainable tourism practices within the region? Are there specific initiatives in place to protect the natural environment and support local communities while encouraging tourism growth?*

A We cooperate with several international tourism organizations to promote sustainable development together. For instance, STB jointly issued the “Sanya Declaration on Sustainable Tourism” with TPO, and signed an MOU with PATA regarding the construction of sustainable tourism this year. STB also promotes the concept of sustainable development through various communication activities, such as collaborating with the Sanya West Island to hold the Eco-Art Festival, which conveys marine conservation efforts.

With our advocacy, travel-related enterprises in Sanya have actively implemented environmental initiatives. For example, 1 Hotel Haitang Bay uses building materials sourced from local volcanic stone, does not provide plastic card covers, and utilizes recycled wooden key cards and paper hangers. Similarly, the Sanya Wuzhizhou Island Tourism Zone has worked to restore coral reefs through transplantation and conservation efforts, creating an underwater coral forest. According to incomplete statistics, Sanya has already established 13 “no-waste scenic spots” and 38 “no-waste hotels” with full coverage in 3A-level scenic spots and four-star hotels and above, effectively creating a sustainable tourism development pattern.

Q *With the rise of digital technology, how is Sanya incorporating digital innovation to enhance the visitor experience? Are there any new technologies or digital services being introduced to improve accessibility, convenience, or engagement for tourists in Sanya?*

A The Hainan Hi-e Pay App and the Sanya Travel Platform are key tools facilitating seamless transactions and guaranteed travel experiences for tourists in Sanya. The Hainan Hi-e Pay App allows overseas tourists to easily use credit card payment on various occasions, effectively addressing the inconvenient of cash withdrawal. In the event of disputes during their trip, tourists can use the Sanya Travel Platform to file complaints,

which are acknowledged within 3 minutes and resolved within 1 day.

In addition, scenic areas in Sanya have developed smart tour platforms that provide easy booking options and use AR technology to help tourists access information about sites and view tour maps. At Sanya Phoenix Airport, a variety of self-service customs declaration terminals and intelligent inspection equipment have been introduced, along with an intelligent exhibition hall.

Looking ahead, there will be a stronger focus on developing “tourism + digital technology”, integrating cutting-edge technology into marketing, services, and infrastructure to further enhance the construction of smart tourism cities.

Q *Collaborations often play a vital role in tourism development. Could you tell us about any significant partnerships or collaborations the Sanya Tourism Department is currently engaged in to promote tourism in the region? How do these partnerships help in achieving your tourism goals?*

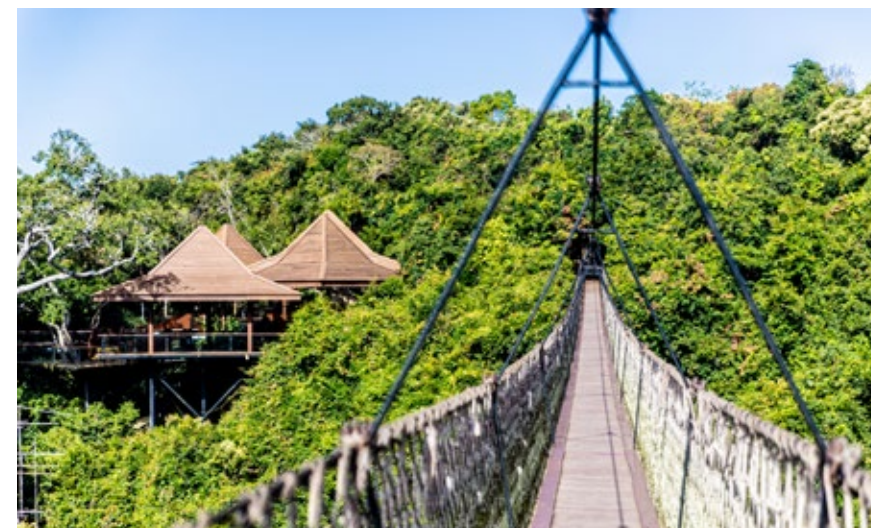
A Currently, we have established direct partnership with many some renowned travel-related enterprises and media organizations outside China. For instance, we signed an MOU with Rayna Tours, a prominent travel agency in the United Arab Emirates, to strengthen flight connections and develop the culture and tourism industry. By organizing food events and promoting Chinese medicine and healthcare projects, we tried to open new customer segments. We are also engaged in joint marketing efforts with Hana Tour, Korea’s largest travel agency, through both online and offline advertising. In Hong Kong and Singapore, we aim to take the advantage of their positions as international aviation hubs and financial centers to amplify the communication impact of Sanya tourism. Therefore, we are developing multi-destination products with Singapore and Hong Kong as I said above, and collaborating with local mainstream media groups like SPH and Ta Kung Wen Wei Media Group to enhance Sanya’s image as an international tourist destination. Additionally, we cooperate with international tourism organizations to hold international exchange activities, exploring partnership opportunities with global tourism cities.

By establishing these friendly partnerships, we can implement targeted marketing strategies for specific markets. More significantly, we can leverage each other’s strengths to promote the mutual development of our industry through these effective collaboration.

The Hainan 59-country visa-free entry policy, along with the 144-hour visa-free policy for foreign tour groups entering Hainan province via Hong Kong and Macao, has been implemented progressively over recent years.

Q *Looking ahead, what is your vision for the future of tourism in Sanya? Are there any exciting projects or developments on the horizon that you believe will significantly impact Sanya’s position as a top tourist destination?*

A With the implementation of the Hainan Free Trade Port policy, I believe there will be more global opportunities for the development of Sanya’s tourism industry. At the same time, Sanya aims to establish itself as the “Asia-Pacific Yachting Capital” by 2025. By leveraging its advantageous resources, such as yachts, cruises and golf, Sanya will enhance its tourism and MICE industry. These initiatives will accelerate the development of a distinctive international tourism brand for Sanya. We believe that in the near future, more overseas tourists will experience the unique charm of Sanya. **W**





1st Fergana Investment and Tourism Forum

Fergana Region, once a historic crossroads on the Silk Road, is emerging as Uzbekistan's newest investment hotspot. The inaugural Fergana Investment and Tourism Forum, hosted by the Global Tourism Forum, has drawn international investors and tourism professionals, highlighting the region's untapped potential. This landmark event, held under the patronage of the Fergana regional government, showcased the region's rich cultural heritage, burgeoning agricultural sector, and growing infrastructure, presenting lucrative opportunities for sustainable development. The Forum has ignited investment interest, securing over \$250 million in deals and establishing Fergana as a prime destination for tourism and business in Central Asia.



Heritage Leads Opportunities
Fergana



Fergana Region Emerges as Uzbekistan's New Investment Hotspot: GLOBAL TOURISM FORUM USHERS IN A NEW ERA

Fergana, Uzbekistan – Once an ancient crossroads on the Silk Road, the historic Fergana Region, known for its vibrant culture, delectable cuisine, and breathtaking landscapes, is now at the forefront of global interest. The inaugural Fergana Investment and Tourism Forum, hosted by the Global Tourism Forum on October 18 at Kokand Palace, Fergana Region, Uzbekistan, has marked a pivotal milestone for the region, attracting an international community of investors and tourism professionals. This landmark event has highlighted Fergana's untapped potential, offering lucrative opportunities for sustainable development across investment and tourism sectors.

This landmark event, held under the patronage of the Fergana region government, has served as a platform to showcase the region's untapped potential in both investment and tourism. With a focus on promoting sustainable development, the Forum has highlighted the region's rich cultural heritage, its burgeoning agricultural sector, and its growing infrastructure, all of which present lucrative opportunities for international investors.

A Platform for Global Investment

Held under the auspices of the Fergana regional government,

the Forum showcased the region's unique advantages—its rich cultural heritage, expanding agricultural sector, and growing infrastructure. His Excellency Khayrullo Bozorov, Regional Governor of Fergana, expressed his optimism for the forum's impact, saying, *"The success of this forum marks a pivotal moment for Fergana. With the signing of these significant investment contracts, we are well on our way to realizing our vision of becoming a leading hub for tourism and business in Central Asia."*

A Culinary and Cultural Hub

Fergana, often referred to as "Uzbekistan's secret food capital," is celebrated for its exquisite cuisine, an enticing fusion of traditional Uzbek flavors and Silk Road influences. From vibrant plov (rice pilaf) to hand-pulled laghman noodles, Fergana's cuisine captivated the Forum's visitors and drew interest from international food and beverage investors.

Beyond its gastronomy, Fergana boasts a treasure trove of historical and cultural attractions, from ancient archaeological sites to bustling bazaars. The Forum's theme, **"Heritage Leads Opportunities,"** emphasized Fergana's potential as a cultural tourism destination.



• Kairat Sadvakassow,
President of the Kazakh Tourism Committee



• Nuriddin Mamajonov,
Deputy Governor of Fergana Region



• Akram Aliyev,
Deputy Minister of Investments, Industry, and Trade of the
Republic of Uzbekistan



• Isiaka Abdulqadir Imam,
Secretary General of the D-8 Organization for Economic
Cooperation

Kairat Sadvakassow, President of the Kazakh Tourism Committee, praised this focus: *“Heritage is not just a relic of the past—it is the foundation upon which we build the future. Fergana’s mastery of traditional crafts and its cultural wealth present unique opportunities to attract sustainable investments and foster meaningful partnerships that benefit both the local community and global stakeholders”*

Connecting the Past with the Future

The Silk Road legacy runs deep through Fergana Region, where artisans continue centuries-old crafts. The Forum spotlighted these traditional industries, fostering partnerships between local artisans and international markets eager to preserve and celebrate these crafts. The demand for Fergana’s unique handmade textiles and ceramics has gained momentum, signaling both cultural and economic potential.

A New Era of Investment and Growth

The Fergana Investment and Tourism Forum has sparked genuine investment interest, setting the stage for a new era of economic growth and partnership. Nuriddin Mamajonov, Deputy Governor of Fergana Region, expressed confidence in the region’s growth potential: *“The Fergana region’s investment*

environment is developing rapidly, thanks to a series of strategic reforms. Our industries, particularly textiles and crafts, have drawn significant international interest, and the contracts signed today reflect our commitment to economic development and investment opportunities for foreign and domestic investors alike.”

Record-Breaking Investment Deals

The forum, which focused on sustainable tourism development, infrastructure enhancements, and public-private partnerships, featured insightful speeches from high-profile officials. Akram Aliyev, Deputy Minister of Investments, Industry, and Trade of the Republic of Uzbekistan, emphasized the government’s commitment to creating a favorable environment for investors, aligning with the reforms initiated under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev’s leadership to foster economic growth.

The Forum attracted a record number of investors, developers, and industry experts, showcasing the immense potential of Fergana Region, a region renowned for its natural beauty, rich history, and cultural heritage. **The event culminated in the signing of \$250 million in investment deals**, spanning various sectors including tourism infrastructure, hospitality, and cultural development.

The event culminated in the signing of \$250 million in investment deals, spanning various sectors including tourism infrastructure, hospitality, and cultural development.

A Global Destination on the Rise

With the Fergana Region now a prominent player in the global tourism landscape, the region’s commitment to sustainable tourism and cultural preservation promises a balanced and attractive growth model. As the Forum’s initiatives take root, Fergana is poised for a future filled with exciting possibilities, bridging past and present for visitors and investors alike.

Industry Responses

The Forum’s success has underscored the potential of both Fergana and Uzbekistan. Bulut Bağcı, President of the World Tourism Forum Institute, expressed his enthusiasm: *“We are thrilled with the overwhelming success of this event. Fergana’s potential as a tourism and investment hub has gained serious international recognition. We have already begun the process of opening the first international five-star hotel chain in Fergan, which will be a game-changer for the hospitality sector and further enhance the region’s global standing as a key destination.”*

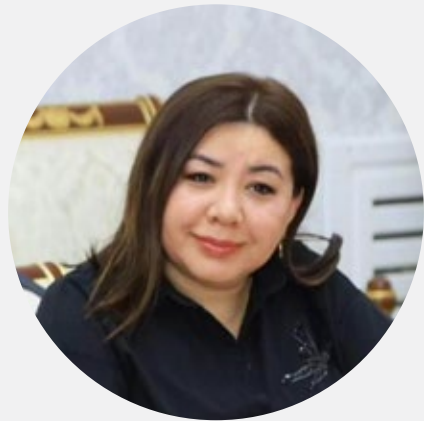
Prominent investors like Omar Imtiaz, CEO of

Imtiaz Holdings UK, praised the region’s dynamic opportunities and the solid foundation laid for future investments, while Isiaka Abdulqadir Imam, Secretary General of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation, highlighted the crucial role of sustainable development and the government’s commitment to tourism growth. *“Fergana’s government support, combined with our regional cooperation, makes this an incredibly attractive investment destination. . These efforts will not only bolster connectivity but also ensure that Fergana becomes a prime destination for tourism and business in the coming years”* Imam said.

Moving Forward

The Fergana Investment and Tourism Forum has catalyzed a new era of development for the region, signaling an exciting future as Fergana Valley emerges as a global destination for tourism and business. The commitments made during the forum will drive development, create jobs, and elevate Fergana as a must-visit destination for travelers seeking authentic cultural experiences and breathtaking landscapes.

Reflections on the GTF Fergana Investment and Tourism Forum



Gul Muattar Ergen,
Director of the WTFI in Turkic States

As I look back on the recent GTF Fergana Investment and Tourism Forum, I am filled with pride and excitement for the promising future of the Fergana region and Central Asia as a whole. This event showcased the power of Fergana's unique cultural heritage and craftsmanship, turning history into a bridge for future investment. Hosting delegations from over 30 countries, we had the opportunity to highlight the region's immense potential, from textiles and crafts to tourism and infrastructure.

A sincere thank you to the Fergana regional government and Governor Khayrullo Bozorov for their unwavering commitment to this forum's success. Despite the inevitable challenges, the organizing team demonstrated professionalism and resilience, creating an atmosphere that truly reflected Fergana's warmth and hospitality.

This forum went beyond discussions; it was an important step towards realizing President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's vision of an investor-friendly Uzbekistan. I am excited to see the collaborations and projects this event will inspire, bringing sustainable growth and meaningful partnerships to Fergana and beyond.



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