

World

Magazine



UN Tourism

SPECIAL REPORT:

WIND OF CHANGES:

SHAIKHA AL NOWAIS
TO LEAD UN TOURISM AMID
MILESTONE REFORMS
AND GLOBAL GROWTH

World Magazine is the official publication of
the World Tourism Forum Institute.

October
2025
Issue: 15



Special Issue

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EDITOR'S LETTER

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

In an era where tourism stands as one of humanity's most dynamic forces for progress, inclusion, and innovation, this special edition of World Magazine marks a truly historic milestone.

We proudly celebrate the election of **H.E. Shaikha Al Nowais** as the first woman and first Emirati Secretary-General of UN Tourism (2026–2029) — a landmark achievement that reflects the global movement toward greater diversity, sustainability, and empowerment within our sector. Her leadership and vision for a future where tourism drives social transformation, digital innovation, and economic opportunity inspire us all.

This Brussels 2025 Special Edition, published on the occasion of the Global Tourism Forum Annual Meeting, brings together exclusive conversations with high-level leaders shaping the future of global tourism. From transformative leadership and sustainable development to the art of creating destinations with purpose, each dialogue reflects the shared commitment to collaboration and innovation that defines our time.

Among our distinguished contributors and interviewees:

- **Hala Matar Choufany**, President – HVS Middle East, Africa & South Asia
- **Abid Butt**, Board Member & Former Group CEO – Assets Group
- **Daði Guðjónsson**, Director of Marketing Communications, Business Iceland
- **Abdulaziz Ali Al-Mawlawi**, CEO – Visit Qatar
- **Jean-Jacques Morin**, Group Deputy CEO – Accor Hotels Group
- **H.E. Simonida Kordic**, Minister of Tourism, Montenegro & Chairperson – UN Tourism Commission for Europe

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AIM Foundation | Tourism Authority of Thailand
(TAT) | Nani Travel | Club NENA

Through these voices, we celebrate excellence — in destinations, hospitality, innovation, and leadership — while reaffirming our collective mission: to build a more resilient, inclusive, and connected world through tourism.

As the Global Tourism Forum Annual Meeting Brussels 2025 gathers the world's most influential leaders, may this edition serve as both a reflection and an inspiration — a tribute to those who continue to redefine the future of travel with vision, courage, and heart.

World Magazine

October 2025 - 15th Issue

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REBIRTHING GLOBAL TOURISM: A NEW ERA OF POLICY, PARTNERSHIP, AND PURPOSE



Bulut Bağcı
President of WTFL

As the world gathers in Brussels for the Global Tourism Forum Annual Meeting 2025, we find ourselves at a historic crossroads. The global tourism industry—long celebrated for its power to connect cultures, foster peace, and drive prosperity—has endured one of the most transformative decades in modern history. Today, it is not merely recovering; it is being reborn through stronger policies, smarter collaboration, and a renewed sense of global purpose.

From Resilience to Renaissance

The challenges of recent years have tested every nation, destination, and enterprise connected to travel. Yet, amid uncertainty, the tourism community has demonstrated unmatched adaptability. Across continents, we have seen governments reimagine their tourism strategies, businesses reinvent their models, and communities rediscover the social value of hospitality.

The Global Tourism Forum (GTF) has stood at the heart of this evolution. Since its founding, GTF has served as a bridge between the public and private sectors—uniting ministers, CEOs, innovators, and changemakers under one shared vision: to build a tourism ecosystem that is inclusive, resilient, and future-ready.

This year's Annual Meeting in Brussels marks a new chapter. It is not only a forum for discussion; it is a rallying point for global alignment—where policy meets practice, where vision becomes reality, and where collective action will define the next era of tourism development.

Rebuilding through Policy and Global Cooperation

The theme of this year's Forum—"Redefining Tourism in a Changing World"—captures the essence of our mission. The world economy is being reshaped by technology, sustainability, and demographic transformation. For tourism to thrive, it must stand on a strong and coherent policy foundation, guided by governments that recognize its power to drive economic renewal and social progress.

Digital Transformation and Smart Innovation – leveraging artificial intelligence, automation, and data-driven technologies to accelerate tourism's modernization, efficiency, and global competitiveness.

Resilient Infrastructure and Future Mobility – transforming aviation, airport systems, and urban connectivity to support sustainable growth and future-ready travel ecosystems.

Global Policy and Economic Cooperation – strengthening international collaboration among governments, industry, and financial institutions to ensure coordinated, stable, and inclusive tourism development.

These priorities are not theoretical ideals—they are action-oriented policies shaping the next decade of global tourism. Through the Forum's working groups, roundtables, and ministerial dialogues, these strategies will be translated into tangible initiatives that empower nations and industries to thrive together.

Brussels 2025: Where the World Converges

The choice of Brussels as the host city carries symbolic weight. As the capital of Europe and a crossroads of diplomacy, Brussels embodies cooperation, policy dialogue, and innovation. Here, global decision-makers will convene to shape a unified vision for the tourism industry's rebirth.

This year's meeting welcomes H.E. Shaikha Al Nowais, Secretary-General Elect of UN Tourism (2026–2029)—marking a historic moment for women's leadership and visionary governance in the global tourism system. Joining

her are heads of state, ministers, and global leaders from every major sector of tourism and its supporting industries—including senior executives of international hotel and aviation groups, investment institutions, technology innovators, and cultural organizations.

Together, they will exchange perspectives, build actionable frameworks, and forge new alliances that will redefine tourism's role in the evolving global economy. For full program details, visit www.globaltourismforum.org/events/annual-meeting-2025.

Reconnecting the World through Innovation

As we step into a data-driven, AI-enhanced age, tourism's digital transformation is no longer optional—it is inevitable. Smart platforms now empower travelers to make sustainable choices; predictive analytics allow destinations to manage flows efficiently; and digital storytelling redefines how cultures are experienced and preserved.

At the World Tourism Forum Institute, we believe innovation must always serve a higher human purpose. Technology should amplify empathy, sustainability, and inclusion—not replace them. This belief guides our collaborations with tech pioneers and creative thinkers who are shaping tourism for the next generation.

Empowering People, Protecting Planet

Tourism's rebirth must be anchored in responsibility. The sector employs one in ten people globally, and its potential for social impact is vast. Yet with that power comes duty: to protect ecosystems, respect cultures, and empower communities.

Our discussions in Brussels will spotlight real models of success—from green destinations and regenerative hospitality to community-led conservation and social entrepreneurship. These stories remind us that every traveler's footprint is a choice, and every destination's legacy is a shared responsibility.

A Milestone for the Future

The Global Tourism Forum Annual Meeting 2025 is not simply another milestone on the calendar—it is a turning point for the industry and for humanity's relationship with travel. We stand at the threshold of what I call the Tourism Rebirth Decade—a period defined by conscious travelers, sustainable policies, and collaborative governance.

At the Forum, we do not see tourism as a luxury; we see it as a necessity—a universal language that fosters peace, understanding, and economic dignity. Every journey creates bridges between people and nations. Every dialogue, every partnership, every innovation nurtured here in Brussels contributes to a more united and prosperous world.

The Path Forward

The work that begins in Brussels will extend far beyond its closing ceremony. The outcomes, recommendations, and commitments made during the Forum will feed into regional dialogues, policy frameworks, and international cooperation mechanisms led by our partners across continents.

In the years ahead, the World Tourism Forum Institute will continue to champion education, investment, and innovation as the cornerstones of sustainable tourism growth. We will nurture young leaders, empower entrepreneurs, and advocate for ethical governance across the tourism landscape.

The Spirit of Renewal

When historians look back at 2025, they will see it as the year the global tourism industry reclaimed its purpose—not merely to attract visitors, but to build understanding, promote sustainability, and drive human progress.

As we convene in Brussels, let us remember that this industry was born from curiosity, compassion, and courage—the very qualities that will lead us into its new age. Together, we can turn this moment of recovery into a renaissance—one that redefines the way the world travels, connects, and dreams.

visit
QATAR



VISIT QATAR: BUILDING A FUTURE-READY DESTINATION FOR THE WORLD

Abdulaziz Ali Al-Mawlawi,
CEO of Visit Qatar

Q Major events have played a key role in putting Qatar on the global stage. Following successes like Expo 2023 Doha and the Asian Cup 2024, how is Visit Qatar leveraging upcoming international events, cultural festivals, and the country's expanding MICE infrastructure to sustain momentum and position Qatar as a long-term tourism hub?

A The FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ was a transformative moment for our nation, driven by extensive infrastructure development that has strengthened Qatar's tourism offering. The tournament introduced Qatar and the wider region to millions of first-time visitors, creating global awareness and a lasting legacy that continues to shape our strategy.

We are maintaining this momentum with a dynamic calendar of international events—from the AFC Asian Cup and Formula 1 to leading cultural festivals and entertainment programmes. Diversifying and expanding the range of events is a top priority for Visit Qatar, given its importance in enhancing the visitor experience during their stay in Qatar. We continuously work with our public and private sector partners to provide a rich and distinctive range of festivals and events that cater to all tastes and ages in a family-friendly atmosphere, thereby boosting local tourism. Our MICE sector also continues to expand, underpinned by world-class venues, seamless connectivity, and a proven record in hosting global forums.

Ongoing investments in Hamad International Airport, diversified accommodation, and multipurpose venues have expanded our capacity to welcome a wide range of travellers and events, driving record arrivals and year-round growth.

By strategically aligning infrastructure development with a curated events pipeline, Qatar continues to generate year-round demand, strengthen international partnerships, and secure its position as a long-term global tourism hub.

Q Sustainability is central to Qatar's national vision. From environmentally friendly stadiums and Green Key-certified hotels to smart mobility projects in Doha, how is Visit Qatar embedding sustainability into tourism development, and what role do you see for innovation and digital tools like AI in enhancing visitor experiences?

A Sustainability is central to Qatar National Vision 2030 and underpins the country's tourism development. Landmark destination initiatives, such as the environmentally friendly FIFA World Cup™ stadiums, Green Key-certified hotels, and Msheireb Downtown Doha, the world's first smart and sustainable city district, demonstrate Qatar's commitment to environmental stewardship, economic growth, and social responsibility. Eco-tourism experiences, including responsible whale shark tours and Outpost Al Barari, alongside sustainable cultural events at Ras Brouq, further showcase how the destination blends conservation with authentic visitor experiences.

Innovation and digital tools are integral to this sustainable approach. By leveraging AI and data-driven insights, Visit Qatar optimises marketing efficiency, reduces resource waste, and ensures targeted, high-impact engagement. Technology also enhances visitor experiences through personalised itineraries, immersive 360-degree content, and seamless planning via the GenAI Trip Concierge and chatbot, encouraging sustainable travel choices and maximising the value of each visit.

By combining the destination's sustainable development with innovative, technology-driven engagement, Qatar is building a tourism ecosystem that is future-ready, globally competitive, and focused on delivering responsible, efficient, and memorable experiences for every visitor.



*Abdulaziz Ali Al-Mawlawi,
CEO of Visit Qatar*

Q *Qatar has recently achieved record-breaking visitor arrivals. What strategies are in place to maintain this growth trajectory, and how do you see Qatar differentiating itself in an increasingly competitive global tourism landscape?*

A Qatar's record-breaking tourism performance reflects Visit Qatar's clear mandate: to position the country as a premier global destination through targeted campaigns, innovative activations, and curated experiences that resonate with travellers worldwide. In 2024, we welcomed over 5 million visitors and achieved a record 10 million room nights, demonstrating the impact of this strategy and the collective efforts of our partners across the sector.

Our approach to sustaining growth is multi-faceted. The Qatar Calendar delivers year-round appeal, combining international sporting tournaments, cultural festivals, family-friendly entertainment, and business events. This ensures consistent demand and gives visitors new reasons to return. Complementing this, our data-led, market-specific marketing campaigns anticipate traveller intent and deliver messaging with precision and impact.

Qatar differentiates itself through the seamless integration of authentic Arabian hospitality with world-class modern experiences. Cultural landmarks, iconic sporting events, and MICE venues are all within easy reach, providing unparalleled convenience alongside cultural richness. This unique positioning allows us to compete confidently in a crowded global market while appealing to both leisure and business travellers.

At Visit Qatar, our mandate remains to innovate, expand our offerings, and deliver exceptional visitor experiences.

By doing so, we sustain growth, strengthen international partnerships, and reinforce Qatar's reputation as a destination where authenticity meets innovation.

Q *Looking ahead to 2030, what role do you see tourism playing in Qatar's broader economic diversification, and how is Visit Qatar preparing for this future?*

A Tourism is central to Qatar National Vision 2030, driving economic diversification while serving as a platform for cultural diplomacy and international collaboration. Its impact extends beyond visitor numbers, supporting hospitality, retail, transport, and events, and contributing to a more dynamic and resilient economy.

By 2030, we aim for tourism to be a leading contributor to the country's GDP, underpinned by sustained growth in arrivals, higher hotel occupancy, and a diversified ecosystem of leisure, cultural, and business experiences. This reflects our commitment to positioning tourism as a cornerstone of Qatar's long-term prosperity.

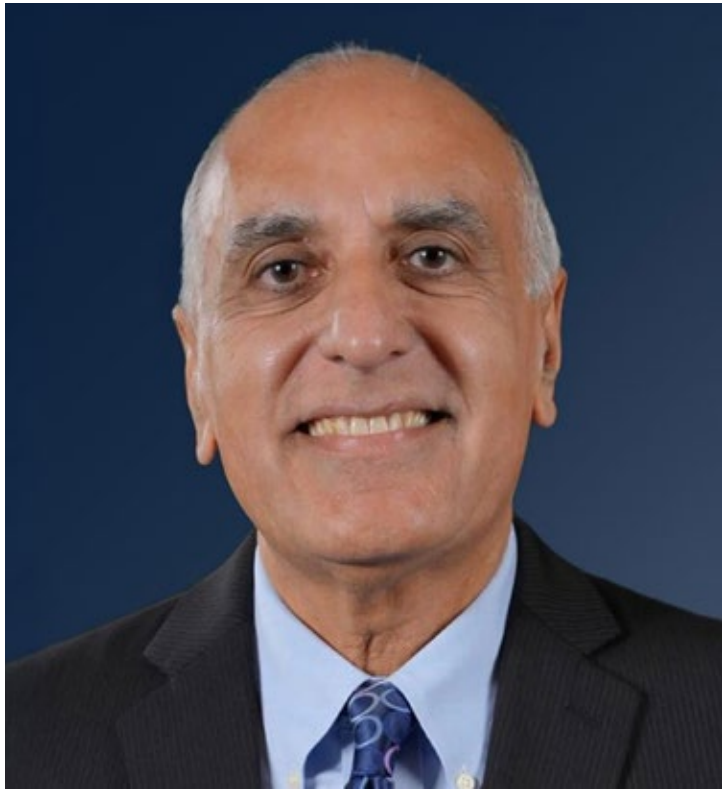
Visit Qatar is preparing for this future by strengthening partnerships across public and private sectors, accelerating digital transformation, and developing new segments such as wellness, cruise, medical, and eco-tourism to meet evolving traveller preferences.

Through these efforts, we are building a tourism ecosystem that is resilient, sustainable, and future-ready. This approach ensures Qatar remains competitive globally, reinforces its reputation as a world-class destination, and maximises the sector's contribution to the nation's economic diversification and long-term success. **W**



LEADING TOURISM THROUGH CHANGE: A CONVERSATION WITH A SENIOR HOSPITALITY EXECUTIVE

Abid Butt,
Board Member and Former Group CEO,
Assets Group



As the global tourism industry navigates unprecedented challenges and opportunities, visionary leadership has never been more critical. We spoke with Abid Butt, a seasoned leader with deep expertise across hospitality and real estate, about his career, the transformative shifts shaping the sector, and forward-looking vision for a resilient and sustainable future.

Q Reflecting on your career, what defining moments have shaped your leadership style, and how have your experiences prepared you for today's evolving tourism landscape?

A Our foundational values and beliefs are shaped over time through adolescence, life experiences, and both personal and professional relationships. For me, leadership is rooted in integrity, empathy, adaptability, and collaborative influence.

From a young age, my parents instilled in me the importance of high standards and never settling for mediocrity. They taught me to lead by example, modeling the behavior expected of others. I was also fortunate to be mentored by leaders who taught me the value of earning trust through transparency, ethical behavior, and consistency, encouraging open dialogue while

taking full ownership of outcomes.

Early in my career, leading complex projects taught me the importance of having a clear vision and making decisive, informed decisions. Working across hospitality and real estate further sharpened my ability to focus on exceptional guest experiences while managing assets strategically. I can establish expectations and bridge the owner as well operator deliverables.

This diverse background is especially relevant today, as the tourism sector undergoes rapid change and faces increasing demands for innovation, resilience, and sustainable growth.

Q What major shifts are currently shaping the tourism and hospitality industry?

A Travelers around the world are planning their journeys with greater understanding, passion, and

practicality. The travel industry is undergoing a profound transformation driven by technology, a growing focus on sustainability, and the rise of wellness tourism. Today's travelers seek more than just destinations, they crave authentic, experiential journeys enriched with unique culinary offerings that highlight local flavors and traditions. They expect meaningful, purposeful travel and experiences that align with their values and lifestyle. Technology is playing a pivotal role in reshaping travel by making it more seamless and hassle-free. The rapid adoption of innovations such as hyper-personalization, smart room

automation, and the integration of environmental elements is redefining the guest experience. Whilst travel is being democratized, with over tourism in some areas, travelers are seeking new off the beaten path destinations.

Trends like multi-generational travel are gaining momentum, while solo travel is seeing significant growth, especially among Millennials and Gen Z. Strategic partnerships and brand alliances are raising expectations and adding new offerings across the industry.

As the world becomes increasingly unpredictable, safety and security concerns driven by extreme weather events, climate change, and geopolitical tensions are becoming critical factors in travel decisions. These issues can alter travel plans at short notice. Flight path restrictions, visa limitations, entry barriers, economic sanctions, and rising travel costs are all impacting international travel.

Ultimately, success will belong to those who innovate responsibly, adapt quickly, and consistently deliver guest-centric experiences by leveraging technology for operational excellence.

Q *Sustainability is a major focus globally. How can hospitality brands move beyond greenwashing to create measurable, long-term impact?*

A The travel and tourism industry must unite to create real solutions that protect both people and the planet. Sustainability needs to go beyond marketing, it should be a core part of business strategy. Today's younger travelers are more informed and intentional, choosing brands that reflect their values and make a positive environmental impact.

To meet this demand, destinations, brands, and organizations must be transparent and commit to science based measurable goals. Clear goals and accountability across the entire value chain are critical to earning the trust of guests, investors, and local communities. In areas facing overtourism, adopting regenerative and community-based tourism can drive inclusive growth and leave places better than before. Investments in green infrastructure and biodiversity are no longer optional, they're essential.

Q *Tourism infrastructure often requires significant capital. What innovative financing or partnership models do you see as most effective?*

A Innovative financing is vital, particularly during times of economic and geopolitical uncertainty. Though it is difficult to identify one solution for all situations, several financing vehicles are available. Hospitality real estate continues to see a surge in allocated capital, particularly given its inflation hedging ability (daily leases) to price at short notice. We are seeing public-private partnerships evolve with shared risk and community focus. Private capital sources such as pension funds, sovereign wealth funds etc have always been

active participants in real estate market.

Blended finance and ESG-linked investment are unlocking capital by aligning commercial and impact goals. Green bonds, as debt instruments, make capital available for environmentally beneficial projects. Multi-stakeholder partnerships combining public, private, and nonprofit expertise are enabling large-scale, destination-wide initiatives. These models align economic returns with social and environmental value, ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth.

Crowdfunding is democratizing access to real estate investment, allowing multiple individuals to pool funds for investments. Peer-to-peer lending offers faster, more flexible financing than traditional banks, catering to short-term needs or bridge loans.

Q *Technology is transforming travel. Which innovations excite you most, and where do you see untapped opportunities?*

A Technology has drastically transformed the travel industry and continues to redefine how travelers engage at every stage of their journey, from inspiration and planning, to booking, experiencing and sharing travel stories. At the core of this transformation is the drive to simplify the complex web of relationships within the travel value chain: travel sellers, airlines, airports, hotels, and destinations.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is playing a pivotal role by enabling technology platforms to enhance services and offerings. With growing consumer demand for efficient, stress-free, and more personalized travel, AI allows businesses to deliver tailored experiences.

Platforms leveraging personalization and predictive analytics are revolutionizing guest experiences and operational efficiency by addressing individual needs in real time, while AR/VR solutions provide immersive pre-travel exploration. IoT-powered smart infrastructure contributes to both sustainability and operational efficiency.

There is still significant untapped potential, however, fully realizing this opportunity requires overcoming key challenges such as budget and resource limitations, data fragmentation, lack of interoperability across systems, outdated legacy technologies, evolving compliance requirements, and complex privacy laws.

The path forward lies in ecosystem-wide collaboration. A connected network of stakeholders working together to adopt new standards, and share data securely, is critical to enabling seamless travel experiences.

Interview

Abid Butt,
Board Member and Former Group CEO, Assets Group

Ultimately, the industry must focus on eliminating redundant, cumbersome processes, identifying key customer frustrations and prioritize eliminating pain point and redirect resources toward guest centric initiatives, particularly hyper personalization. The winners in this transformation will be those who embrace these advancements and can strike the right balance between high-tech innovation and authentic human connection.

Q *What lessons can global tourism leaders learn from each other about balancing growth with resilience? And how can leaders act as bridges between cultures and economies amid geopolitical fragmentation?*

A Tourism is a global industry, and by working collectively, leaders can learn from each other's experiences and best practices around the globe. Balancing growth and resilience in tourism requires strategic, inclusive management. It's not just about managing visitor numbers but about creating policies that are adaptive, equitable, and environmentally responsible. True resilience in the tourism sector stems from diversifying offerings, aligning stakeholders, and ensuring that both local communities and ecosystems benefit from tourism activity. Sustainability and profitability are not mutually exclusive. Emerging markets often bring innovation and a strong community focus, while mature markets provide tested diversification strategies that can reduce dependency on single tourism segments.

Tourism has the unique power to connect people and places, fostering cultural exchange, mutual respect, and understanding. Leaders in this industry serve as both economic drivers and cultural ambassadors, bridging gaps between communities, nations, and perspectives. Tourism can transform communities creating jobs, driving inclusion, and strengthening local economies while broadening horizons, not just geographically but emotionally and intellectually. This sector also plays a crucial role in peace and security. Governments and communities have a vested interest in maintaining safe and stable environments, as a decline in tourism can have rapid and severe economic consequences. In this way, tourism fosters dialogue and cross-border partnerships that transcend politics, helping to build trust, resilience, and shared prosperity.

Having lived and worked around the world, I've become more convinced than ever that people everywhere want the same things: safety, happiness, opportunity, and a better future for their families. As more people travel and embrace the beauty

of both our differences and shared humanity, many outdated paradigms will naturally fall away.

Q *What advice would you give the next generation entering tourism and hospitality?*

A The travel and tourism industry has been an incredible journey for me, offering opportunities that would have otherwise been difficult to access. It's a dynamic and ever evolving sector that makes continuous learning not only possible but essential. As the industry continues to transform, future leaders will need to focus on environmental protection, support for local communities, and the integration of digital solutions to enhance both customer experiences and operational efficiency. These leaders must be prepared to act as stewards of global resilience, equity, and prosperity.

Success in this global industry requires a unique blend of skills. Beyond industry-specific knowledge, it is vital to develop strong communication abilities that transcend language barriers, along with strategic thinking and problem-solving capabilities to effectively navigate uncertainty. Leaders must also demonstrate cultural sensitivity, embrace diversity, and remain adaptable to changing market dynamics. A commitment to innovation and lifelong learning will be key to meeting the evolving expectations of travelers in a rapidly shifting landscape. And above all, it's important to enjoy everything this remarkable industry has to offer.

Q *Looking forward, what personal or professional projects excite you most that align with your vision for the industry's future?*

A I have always been passionate about projects that integrate innovation, sustainability, and community empowerment. I am particularly committed to mentoring technological initiatives that enhance travel experiences across every touchpoint of the traveler journey, delivering both exceptional service and meaningful impact.

Equally important to me is supporting the next generation of leaders helping them cultivate purpose driven, resilient mindsets that will shape a more sustainable and equitable future for the industry.

As I continue to speak at conferences and industry events, I remain dedicated to advocating for travel and tourism as a powerful force for good driving positive change for people, places, and the planet. **W**



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*Moti Erdeapel,
Co Founder of Cityfans*

AI MEETS HISTORY: CITYFANS AND THE FUTURE OF IMMERSIVE TOURISM

Moti Erdeapfel,
Co Founder of Cityfans

Q *Cityfans is an Amsterdam-based startup creating and distributing digital experiences worldwide. What inspired you personally—and as a company—to focus your flagship project on Anne Frank’s story (annefrankwalk.com)?*

A At Cityfans we believe cities are treasure chests of stories, waiting to be unlocked with creativity and technology. With AI, VR, and AR, the streets themselves can become open-air museums.

Anne Frank is an iconic figure in Amsterdam, and people from all over the world feel connected to her story. Creating the Walk gave us the chance to bring her life back into the city where it happened—an authentic and meaningful way to learn and reflect.

Q *How does this project reflect Cityfans’ broader mission of making cultural and historical experiences more accessible through technology?*

A There’s a lot of incredible immersive technology out there, but too often it stays in silos or is too complex for broad audiences. We are committed to making immersive experiences not only innovative, but also accessible, user-friendly, and enjoyable for everyone.

This is what excites us most: using technology to help people discover culture and history in ways that are engaging and relevant, whether they’re travelers, students, or locals.

Q *The Anne Frank House is often fully booked, leaving many visitors unable to experience her legacy. How did this challenge shape the concept of the Anne Frank Immersive Walk? In what ways does the Walk provide both a meaningful alternative for those who cannot enter the museum and a complementary experience for those who*

wish to explore Anne Frank’s story more deeply?

A Anne’s story resonates because it’s so personal—a young girl sharing her inner world in extraordinary circumstances. Our challenge was to balance that intimacy with the historical context.

The Walk places visitors in the exact locations where Anne lived, her school, where she walked. That authenticity adds impact and makes the story come alive.

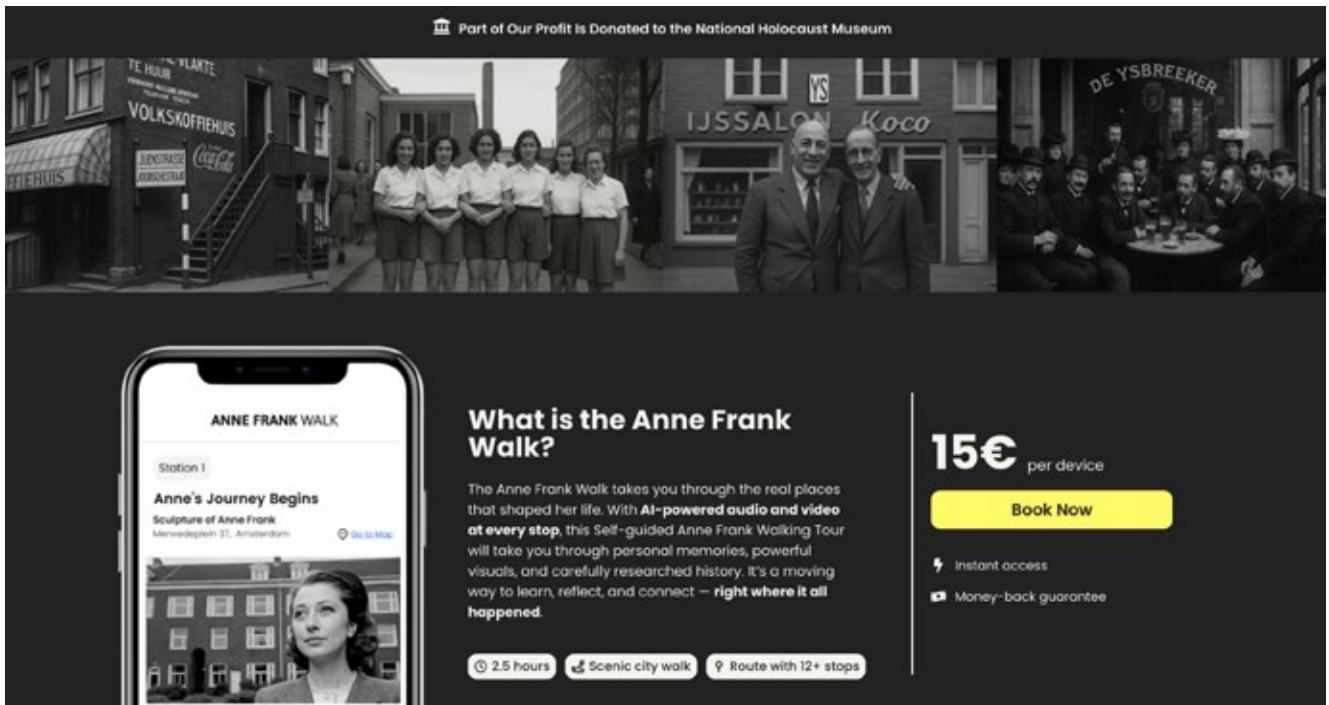
We also designed the experience to be flexible. One version lasts 90 minutes, another runs for 3 hours. Both routes take people through some of Amsterdam’s most beautiful neighborhoods, far beyond the usual tourist paths.

Q *The Walk combines AI-powered visuals, immersive audio, and AR storytelling across 12 authentic locations in Amsterdam. Could you explain how the technology works in practice, why you chose a web-based format, and what makes this approach user-friendly, scalable, and different from other digital tourism products?*

A Picture this: you’re standing in front of Miep Gies’s house—the woman who helped the Franks survive. You see the building both in front of you and on your screen, at a certain moment Miep steps out and walks toward you. That’s the power of AR like visuals.

We chose a web-based app because we wanted to remove all barriers. No downloads, no friction—just click a link and start. This way the experience works for everyone, from school groups to older visitors.

That’s what we’re most proud of: taking cutting-edge tools and making them simple, intuitive, and enjoyable.



Q You partnered with Xsite and worked closely with historians to ensure accuracy and depth. How did these collaborations influence the project? What were the biggest challenges in balancing innovation with historical responsibility when telling such a sensitive story?

A Xsite shares our vision and is a valuable partner; they brought visual expertise and a deep understanding of culture tech while historians ensured accuracy and depth. Together we asked key questions: how real should visuals be? When is it ethical to digitally recreate people?

We chose animation over hyper-realism. It's powerful yet leaves space for imagination—especially important when addressing Holocaust scenes, which can be too graphic if treated literally.

Q Since its launch in July, the Walk has already been sold hundreds of times, earned excellent reviews, and gained global media coverage. At the same time, part of the proceeds supports the National Holocaust Museum. What do these achievements tell you about the demand for immersive heritage tourism, and how important was it to you to embed social responsibility into the project from the start?

A The launch shows two things: first, the strong demand for immersive heritage storytelling; second, the growing interest in how AI can support cultural products when handled responsibly.

Our approach was to let the city itself become the stage, supported by carefully researched content and visual storytelling. From the start, we also embedded social responsibility. Supporting the National Holocaust Museum wasn't an extra—it was integral to the project.

Q Global platforms like Tripadvisor, TUI-Musement, and Tigtets are already distributing the Walk, and now it was one of the reasons that won you the Best Travel Tech Startup at the World Tourism Awards 2025. What does this recognition mean to you and Cityfans?

A Winning this award is about more than recognition—it highlights the difference between creating impressive technology and making it truly accessible, relevant, and meaningful for a wide audience. That was our biggest challenge, and we're proud to have achieved it.

For cities, it shows how heritage can be transformed into living, digital attractions. For technology creators, it proves there's a pathway to reach users directly—not just through institutions or B2B channels.

And for Cityfans, this is only the beginning. The Anne Frank Walk is one of nearly 600 products we now offer in about 100 destinations worldwide. We believe cities everywhere hold stories waiting to be told, and with the right mix of technology and storytelling, they can be opened to the world. **W**





UN Tourism

Shaikha Al Nowais

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

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

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

A Landmark Victory for the UAE and the Tourism World

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

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

A Mandate for Reform and Renewal

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

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

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

The End of a Controversial Chapter

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

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

Looking Ahead

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Transformative Legacy

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

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

Key achievements of the past eight years include:

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

Innovation and Global Presence

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

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

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



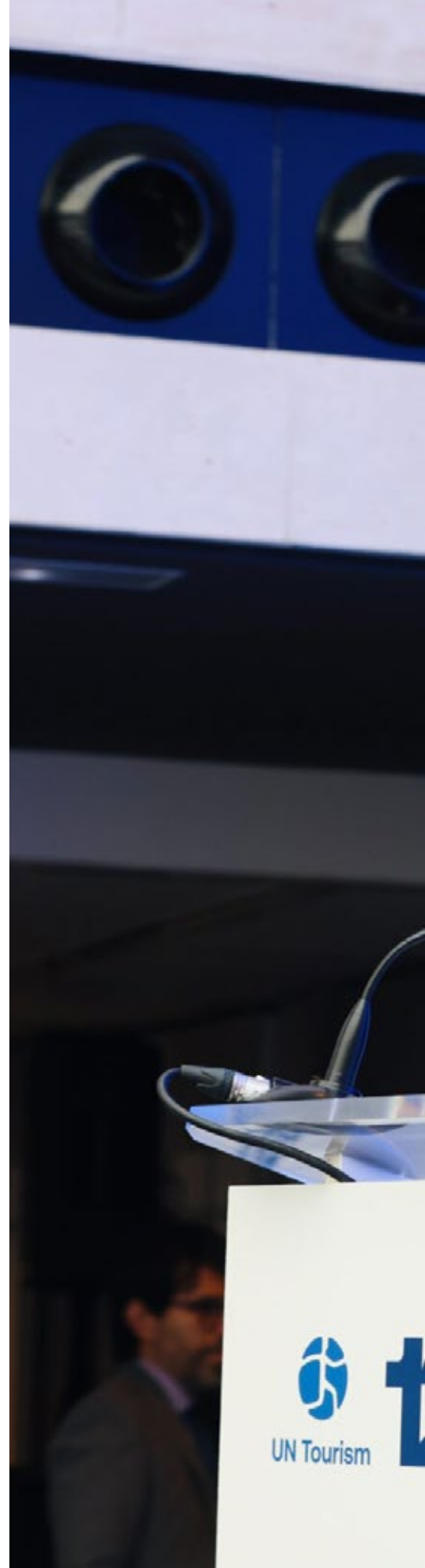
A PROVEN LEADER IN GLOBAL TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

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

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

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

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





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THIRTY YEARS OF TRUST: HOW COTUR SHAPED MOZAMBIQUE'S MODERN TRAVEL INDUSTRY

Noor Momade,
Chairman of COTUR

Q *Cotur has been a pioneer in Mozambique's travel industry since 1994. Looking back, what were the biggest challenges you faced in establishing professional travel services in a post-conflict economy, and how did you overcome them?*

A We began in a time and place where professional travel services barely existed, let alone a travel agency. After independence, my father made the audacious decision to leave a profitable trading business to build a travel agency from scratch. The early years meant persuading LAM, the national airline to let us sell and service their tickets, creating trust one transaction at a time, and training people before there were industry standards locally.

We invested in process discipline, technology, and above all, relationships, demonstrating every day that reliability was a hallmark for us. Over time, this also spread internationally, as we began working with foreigners who came to Mozambique for business in the post-independence period.

Thirty years on, by the grace of God, my father's pioneering spirit and courage, and his total commitment to this country, our clients and competence has really paid off.

Q *Under your leadership, Cotur became the first travel agency in Mozambique to achieve ISO 9001 certification. How has this international recognition impacted your clients' trust and Cotur's competitiveness globally?*

A I think ISO 9001 gave clients objective assurance that our promises are backed by audited processes and obviously fewer errors, faster resolution, continuous improvement and

measurable service levels.

This is something that's really an obvious step for a company like ours and is entirely aligned with what clients expect of us. For our multinational clients, it signals we operate to a common global language and quality level, while for local clients it translates into consistency they can actually feel.

It has helped us win complex corporate accounts and, just as importantly, raised expectations across our market, pushing the whole industry toward international standards.

Q *Cotur recently expanded into Europe with a representation in Portugal. What motivated this internationalization, and how do you see it strengthening the bridge between Africa and Europe in travel and tourism?*

A Actually, we've been in Portugal for nearly a decade now - and in Brazil as well - but our sole purpose was to support our clients abroad, 24/7, with native-speaking teams who could act locally across Europe and the Americas.

To finally open to the broader market was a natural next step. Right now, we want to effectively channel Europe's renewed travel momentum into African destinations and, reciprocally, bring African travelers and businesses into Europe with fewer frictions, better fares, and richer itineraries.

As international tourism has essentially returned to pre-pandemic levels, that bridge matters more than ever, for investment, skills and cultural exchange.

Interview

Noor Momade,
Chairman of COTUR

Q *You have played a leading role in organizations such as AVITUM, FEMOTUR, CTA, and IATA's APJC. How has your advocacy shaped the development of Mozambique's travel and tourism policies, both nationally and regionally?*

A My father always championed this idea. Whatever our success, we need to ensure it reflects back to our country. This was always part of his vision. Naturally, it became part of my brother's and mine as well, not only in leading Cotur but also in our active involvement in the development of our industry and our country.

Following his vision, we've used many times those platforms to promote crucial practical reforms: fair market rules, better settlement systems, stronger consumer protections and smarter connectivity.

I would say that every time I have been a spokesperson for travel and tourism—whether with industry colleagues and audiences or during official presidential visits abroad—my main objective has always been to promote our beautiful country and its potential, while seeking to align national ambitions with the realities of the sector, so that Mozambican businesses, workers, and travelers benefit from a more competitive and resilient sector.

Q *Beyond business, you have invested significantly in social responsibility - from building community infrastructure to supporting youth initiatives. Why is community development such an important part of your leadership vision?*

A Short answer: I think any travel ticket only matters if it translates into opportunity on the ground.

Mozambique is a young and promising country, that also faces real constraints. People are used to hearing me say that our responsibility is to invest where mobility meets dignity. This means training our youth, supporting our community infrastructure, and partnering with local institutions. It's all interconnected.

Travel and tourism are powerful engines for jobs and inclusion and directing that engine towards community outcomes is how we turn growth into shared progress, and not just in Mozambique, I think it's like this for every underdeveloped country in the world.

Q *With Cotur at the forefront of digital transformation, what innovations in travel management and technology do you believe*

will define the future of corporate and leisure travel in Africa?

A What an amazing question. I would say that, right now, three forces clearly stand out.

First, digital identity and biometrics - advancing fast toward "One ID" - will compress airport touchpoints and improve security. As long as standards and interoperability keep maturing, obviously.

Second, end-to-end digital journeys are moving from pilot to practice. Right now, a lot of concepts have already proven that seamless, paperless travel is feasible. So, I think smart wallets, verified credentials, real-time disruption management, are just the tip of the iceberg for what's yet to come in that space.

Third, corporate travel will rely on AI-driven policy compliance, sustainability reporting and duty-of care automation. Mobile-first workflows and local payments will help specially underdeveloped regions leapfrog legacy barriers.

For Africa and Mozambique in particular, the winning agencies will combine global standards with local nuance - content, fares, payments and care that will truly work in these contexts. **W**

Whatever our success,
we need to ensure it
reflects back to our
country. This was always
part of the vision.
Not only in leading
Cotur but also in our
active involvement in
the development of
our industry and our
country.

COTUR

A professional portrait of a man with a beard and short hair, wearing a dark blazer over a light blue shirt. He is sitting with his hands clasped in front of him. The background is a plain, light grey.

*Daði Guðjónsson,
Director of Marketing Communications,
Business Iceland*

TELLING ICELAND'S STORY TO THE WORLD: INSIDE THE VISION OF BUSINESS ICELAND

*Daði Guðjónsson,
Director of Marketing Communications,
Business Iceland*

Q *Iceland has become a global benchmark in balancing tourism growth with environmental protection. How is Business Iceland strengthening initiatives such as the Icelandic Pledge and national sustainability strategies to protect natural assets while ensuring long-term industry resilience?*

A Sustainability has been the guiding principle of Icelandic tourism since the early 2010s, when the government, the industry, and Business Iceland began working hand in hand to shift from rapid growth to balanced, value-driven development. That collaboration has allowed Iceland to focus on the right kind of growth — one that strengthens local communities and protects the very nature that makes Iceland special.

The Icelandic Pledge was one of our earliest awareness efforts to encourage responsible travel behaviour. It resonated deeply with visitors when first launched in 2017, with tens of thousands of people signing the pledge and sharing it online. Like much of the tourism landscape, the project paused during the pandemic, but we are now revisiting and updating it in cooperation with the Icelandic Tourist Board and local stakeholders. The goal is to make it even more engaging and relevant in today's travel environment, where sustainability has become a shared value rather than a niche concern.

A key strength in Iceland's approach is that regional tourism offices and local communities take an active role in shaping the visitor experience. Together they have developed themed travel routes — such as the Westfjords Way, the Arctic Coast Way, the Volcanic Way, and the Diamond and Silver Circles — which spread visitation more evenly across the country and

create value in areas that were once off the beaten track. These regional projects provide a strong foundation for Business Iceland's marketing work abroad, helping us highlight authentic experiences that visitors might not find in search results, but which truly define Icelandic travel today.

Q *Destination branding campaigns like “Inspired by Iceland” and creative storytelling projects such as “The Hardest Karaoke Song in the World” have gained worldwide recognition. How do you measure the impact of these campaigns, and what innovations are being planned to keep Iceland's image fresh in the years ahead?*

A Inspired by Iceland was founded as a joint platform for government and industry to build Iceland as a destination in a sustainable way — a place where growth goes hand in hand with care for people and nature. Every campaign we create stems from that long-term strategy, designed to strengthen the destination over time while connecting with travelers in ways that feel genuine and meaningful.

The campaigns differ greatly in nature and therefore require different ways of measuring success. Some, like The Icelandic Pledge and Iceland Academy, were designed to educate and inspire responsible behaviour among visitors. Others, such as Looks Like You Need Iceland and The Hardest Karaoke Song in the World, focused on emotional connection and cultural curiosity. We don't measure all campaigns by the same yardstick — the right metric depends on the goal. Sometimes it's about awareness, sometimes behaviour change, and often it's about the long-term perception of Iceland as a high-quality, responsible destination

Interview

Daði Guðjónsson,
Director of Marketing Communications, Business Iceland

As a small nation with limited resources, we can't rely on paid media to carry our message. We have to earn attention. Our mantra has always been simple: "We need to say things and do things differently." That's why our marketing approach is earned-first — ideas that surprise, make people smile, or make them think. Humor and empathy are key ingredients because they help us reach people in a human way. That's how a small country manages to stand out in a world full of noise.

Looking ahead, our current strategy focuses on what Iceland can uniquely offer at this moment in time — peace, clarity, and wellbeing. In a world that feels increasingly hectic, Iceland provides the opposite experience: space to breathe, reconnect with nature, and feel balanced. Wellness for us is not a luxury product, but a state of mind that naturally arises when people experience the purity and calm of Icelandic nature. That's what we want to communicate — not escape from the world, but escape the noise.

Q *Iceland has introduced digital visitor management tools, such as the Visit Iceland app and data-driven platforms for monitoring traffic at sensitive natural sites. How do you see technology — and potentially AI — shaping future destination management and visitor experience in Iceland?*

A Technology plays a growing role in helping us manage travel more responsibly. Business Iceland works closely with the Icelandic Tourist Board and local partners to share real-time information about weather, accessibility, and tourist numbers at popular sites. Visitors can already use live counters for key attractions and maps of electric vehicle charging stations, giving them the tools to plan smarter and travel more sustainably.

AI will likely make this communication more personal in the years ahead. One area we are exploring is real-time translation and adaptive content that can deliver safety and sustainability information in the visitor's own language — something that can make a real difference in preventing accidents and improving understanding.

At the same time, we believe technology should enhance, not replace, the human experience. Travel in Iceland is about presence — standing in front of a waterfall, feeling the wind, hearing silence. Digital tools should support that connection, not distract from it.

Q *Tourism is deeply tied to community well-being in Iceland, with programs that support rural development, cultural heritage*

preservation, and local entrepreneurship. How is Business Iceland working with local communities to ensure that tourism benefits are widely shared?

A I think Arnar is best suited to answer this question. This work is led primarily by the Icelandic Tourist Board, in close collaboration with regional tourism offices and municipalities. Business Iceland supports these efforts through marketing and international visibility — showcasing diverse regions and local stories so that visitors are inspired to explore beyond the most visited areas. Our role is to complement community-driven development with communication that encourages balanced and meaningful travel across the country.

Q *Iceland has shown resilience in adapting to global shifts — from volcanic eruptions to the post-pandemic recovery — with initiatives like sustainable infrastructure investments and partnerships with airlines to diversify markets. What lessons from Iceland's resilience strategy do you believe could serve as a model for other destinations?*

A Resilience in Iceland is built on shared purpose. Our small size allows for direct dialogue between policymakers, businesses, and citizens, and that trust is what makes quick and coordinated action possible. When challenges arise — whether volcanic activity, a sudden market shift, or a global pandemic — Iceland's response depends on close cooperation rather than scale.

After the 2010 Eyjafjallajökull eruption, Iceland faced a serious downturn in tourism. The Inspired by Iceland campaign emerged from that crisis as a joint effort by government and industry to rebuild confidence. It taught us that a unified message, rooted in authenticity, can turn uncertainty into opportunity. That same collaborative mindset has guided our recovery efforts ever since.

A good example is the work being done to diversify access to the country through regional flight development, ensuring that international arrivals benefit communities across Iceland. By strengthening alternative gateways and encouraging year-round travel, we can reduce seasonal peaks and create long-term value for both residents and visitors.

In my opinion, the key lesson from Iceland's experience is that resilience is not just about reacting faster — it's about maintaining strong relationships and a shared vision. When everyone works together toward the same goal, it becomes possible for even a small nation to adapt and thrive amid global change.

Q *With flagship initiatives such as Inspired by Iceland, the Icelandic Pledge, and digital sustainability tools, what are the defining priorities you see for the future of Icelandic tourism, and how do you hope your leadership will contribute to shaping that journey?*

A Our priority is to keep Iceland relevant, responsible, and inspiring — not by shouting louder, but by staying true to our values. Business Iceland's long-term strategy for exports and tourism is built on collaboration, innovation, and sustainability. We want every visit to Iceland to create value — for nature, for communities, and for the traveler.

That means continuing to attract visitors who share our respect for the environment, promoting quality over volume, and investing in creative communication that fosters emotional connection. It also means highlighting the wider story of Iceland — our renewable energy, our culture, and the people who make this small nation surprisingly dynamic.

Personally, I hope to contribute by ensuring that our storytelling remains human, sincere, and forward-looking. Iceland's image has never been about perfection — it's about possibility. If we can keep that sense of openness and humility at the heart of how we present ourselves, I believe we'll continue to inspire travelers for many years to come.

W



*Simonida Kordić,
Minister of Tourism of Montenegro*



INVESTING IN BALANCE: MONTENEGRO'S TOURISM FUTURE BUILT ON SUSTAINABILITY AND INNOVATION

*Simonida Kordić,
Minister of Tourism of Montenegro*

Q *Montenegro's National Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 is positioning the country as a leader in sustainable tourism. Could you share the main priorities of this initiative and the role it plays in attracting long-term investment into Montenegro's tourism sector?*

A Sustainable growth is precisely what best corresponds to the type of tourism we are developing in Montenegro and, in our view, holds the greatest potential for long-term success. For us, sustainable development is not merely a fashionable phrase or a political slogan – it is a fundamental principle that defines how we wish to build our tourism sector: in a way that protects our natural environment, respects local communities, and generates genuine economic benefits. When we speak of sustainability, we primarily refer to an organised, comprehensive approach to development—one that encompasses the preservation of natural resources, the safeguarding of cultural identity, and the achievement of economic gain. Nature represents an enormous asset and potential for Montenegro, yet the cultural component is equally significant—not only our historical heritage, but also our gastronomy, way of life, and the values that make our destination authentic. Ultimately, none of this has long-lasting meaning unless the economic model functions properly—unless it enables people to make a genuine living from tourism.

What we wish to see are projects that do not involve

construction in the physical sense alone—but rather initiatives that integrate energy efficiency, the rational use of resources, a responsible attitude towards space, as well as digital solutions that make the destination smarter and more efficient in its operation.

Investors recognise this approach as well. Projects such as Porto Montenegro, Portonovi and Luštica Bay are the finest examples of how strategic investments can transform the landscape of entire regions and establish high standards within the sector. Through these projects, it is not only infrastructure that is being developed – they also introduce knowledge, expertise, and international standards. Our ambition now goes a step further: we aim to open up investment opportunities in the north of the country, where there lies enormous potential for the development of winter, wellness, and adventure tourism. National parks, mountain resorts, and authentic villages can offer a unique experience and make Montenegro a destination that thrives throughout the entire year.

In this process, we do not view investors merely as bearers of capital, but as partners in development. Their investments are important, yet we equally value the knowledge, standards, and long-term commitment they bring. On the other hand, the state's role is to ensure a stable legal framework, transparent procedures, and fair conditions. In this way, mutual trust is built, showing that Montenegro is a place where serious and responsible investments are genuinely welcome.

Interview

Simonida Kordić,
Minister of Tourism of Montenegro

Q *The Government of Montenegro has been working closely with the EU Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. How do you see this cooperation shaping sustainable infrastructure development, and what opportunities does it open for investors?*

A Montenegro views its cooperation with the European Union through the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans as a driving force for sustainable development and the modernisation of infrastructure. Our European path is not merely a political objective – it is the foundation upon which we are building a safer, more stable, and more attractive environment, both for our citizens and for investments. As the most advanced country in the EU accession process, we are confident that the European legal framework and institutional stability further enhance Montenegro's appeal to serious investors.

A particularly important aspect of this process is the development of northern Montenegro. With the support of the EU and international partners, we are investing in national parks, ski resorts, eco-accommodation, and wellness tourism. This is an area where the investors can become pioneers — in creating new, authentic tourism products that combine nature, culture, and European standards.

However, the Green Agenda is not the story of a single country. It entails regional connectivity — and Montenegro is taking an active role in this regard. It was on our initiative that the Summit of South-East European countries was organised, focusing on a joint tourism offer for distant markets. Tourism knows no borders — we all face similar or even identical challenges, and we all benefit when a visitor to one country becomes a visitor to the entire region.

I am confident that the combination of the European agenda, our ongoing reforms, and our openness to investors will create the conditions for Montenegro to develop a tourism sector that is simultaneously luxurious and authentic, sustainable and innovative, and evenly balanced between the coast and the north — therefore, a form of tourism that stands as an example of best practice not only in the region but across the Mediterranean.

Q *As Montenegro embraces digitalisation and AI in tourism, particularly through smart destination platforms and AI-supported visitor management systems, what are the most promising innovations currently being implemented?*

A Montenegro has already taken a clear step forward in the digital transformation of tourism, fully aware that without

innovation there can be no genuine competitiveness in today's market. A key milestone in this process is the establishment of a centralised Tourism Information System (TIS) – a platform that will integrate all relevant databases. Through this system, the electronic registration and check-out of guests, e-payment of the tourist tax, and real-time visitor tracking will all be enabled. Thanks to this, the country will, for the first time, have a comprehensive overview of tourism flows – from precise data on the number of visitors, their demographics, and length of stay, to detailed insights into the popularity of individual destinations and attractions. These are fundamental yet invaluable insights for the intelligent management of resources, improved capacity planning, and enhanced safety. In parallel, we are implementing the project “Support for the Transition to Tourism 4.0”, in cooperation with Slovenia and UNIDO. This initiative strengthens technological capacities through the application of digital solutions, the promotion of innovation in tourism, culture and the creative industries, and by supporting small and medium-sized enterprises in modernising their offerings in line with the expectations of contemporary travellers. The objective is clear: greater competitiveness, the stimulation of employment, and the development of sustainable tourism.

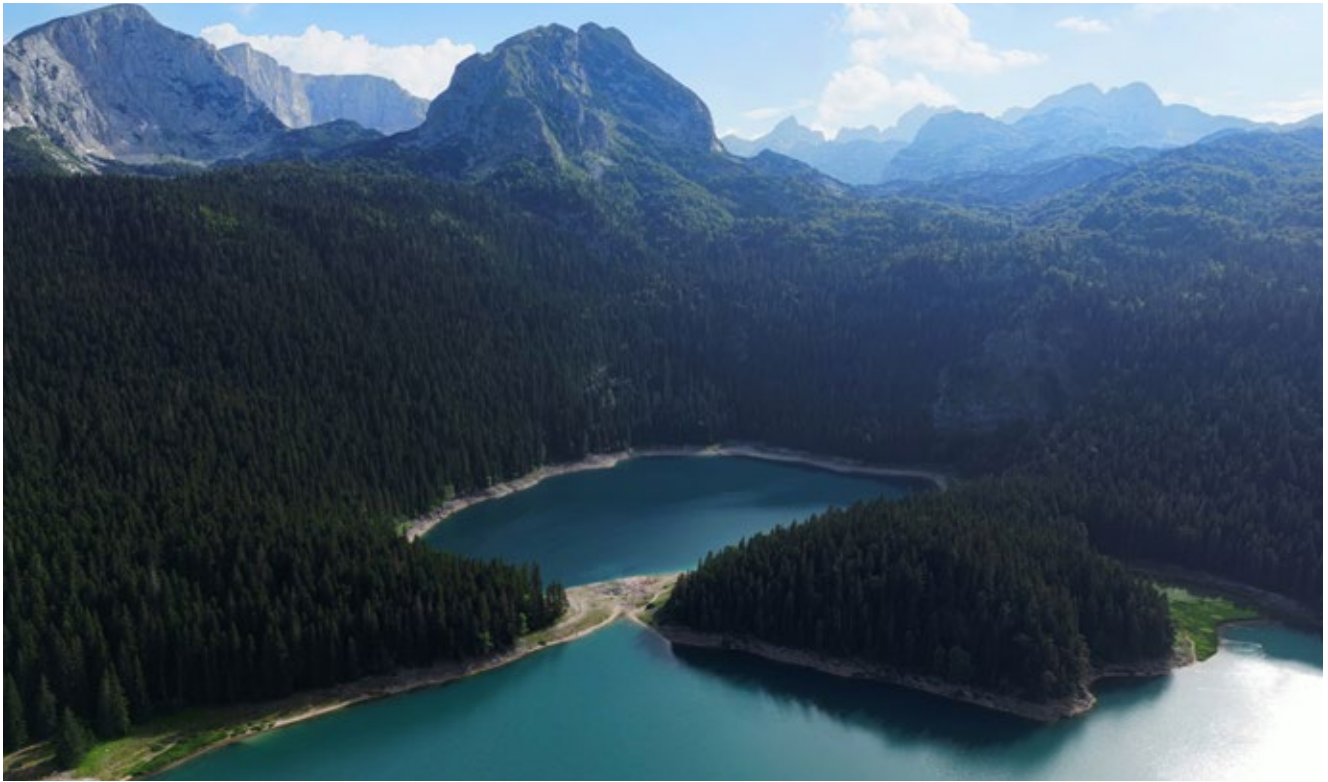
By combining these solutions – from centralised administration and supervision, through the enhancement of innovative capacities, to comprehensive promotion – Montenegro is laying the foundations to transform into a smart, sustainable, and highly competitive tourist destination.

Q *In your capacity as Chairperson of the UN Tourism Commission for Europe, how do you envision Europe's tourism sector leveraging technology and sustainability to remain competitive globally?*

A Europe, with its rich cultural and natural heritage, already holds a leading position when it comes to sustainable tourism. In my capacity as Chairperson of the UN Tourism Commission for Europe, I believe that the key lies in the joint action of all European countries – both those that are members of UN Tourism and those that are not formally part of it, yet share the identical challenges and aspirations.

Montenegro's election to the chairmanship of the UNWTO Commission for Europe is not only a major international recognition of our work to date, but also a significant step forward for the entire country.

Europe is the most visited region in the world – home to the nations that have practically created modern tourism and



from which the largest number of travellers originate, as well as the region that attracts the greatest number of tourists. This means that Montenegro now chairs the Commission responsible for shaping tourism development strategies in these powerful and influential destinations. This represents a great honour, but also a great responsibility. This role is not important only for Montenegro, but for the wider region as well. We are closest to one another – both geographically and culturally – and our shared tourism space forms an important part of the European tourism landscape.

When it comes to the future of European tourism, I am convinced that the answer lies in a combination of digitalisation and sustainability. It is essential to promote lesser-known regions in order to balance the burden and reduce overtourism in popular destinations, which poses a significant threat to sustainability. Digitalisation is today a global reality and an important tool that can enhance the efficiency of tourism enterprises while also helping to create virtual experiences for travellers.

Q *Montenegro has been strengthening its air connectivity and hospitality capacity to attract high-value travellers. What specific investment opportunities are you prioritising in aviation, hospitality, and supporting infrastructure?*

A Tourism is an industry so interlinked that there is virtually no sector which does not influence it. Therefore, when we speak of investments, we are referring to large, cross-sectoral projects that require coordinated action across multiple ministries. Given the country's geographical position,

Montenegro often functions as an “island” destination for its main source markets. For this reason, continuous efforts are being made to improve air connectivity – both through the planned expansion of airport capacities and by increasing the number of direct air routes to strategic destinations.

The Government of Montenegro is already considering a concession model for the airports, while the continuation of motorway construction is planned, and extensive work is underway on the coastal road network, which is also the most heavily trafficked. Although these are large-scale and long-term undertakings that can at times complicate ongoing tourist seasons, their ultimate outcome will be a significant improvement in Montenegro's overall accessibility.

In parallel, we are working to raise the level of competitiveness of our tourism offer, primarily through the enhancement of hotel capacities. While in 2019 we had 27 five-star hotels, today that number has risen to 43, indicating growing investor confidence in Montenegro's tourism sector and its potential. However, trends are changing. Modern travellers, in addition to luxury, increasingly seek authentic and local experiences – they want to immerse themselves in the way of life of the country they are visiting. For this reason, we strongly support the development of rural households, which have recorded remarkable growth: from 56 registered in 2019 to as many as 365 today. This clearly demonstrates that supply is following demand, and that Montenegro is becoming a destination that successfully combines high quality with local identity and sustainability.

Interview

Simonida Kordić,
Minister of Tourism of Montenegro

Q *Tourism is not only an economic driver but also a cultural and social connector. How does Montenegro balance preserving cultural identity with the modernization required for international competitiveness, and how can the international community support this balance?*

A For us, cultural heritage is not merely a museum exhibit or a monument, but a living part of the tourism product. It represents a rich mosaic of diverse elements that visitors experience – from history and architecture, through gastronomy, to the everyday customs and lifestyle of our people. Each guest responds to these elements differently, in accordance with their own interests, yet it is precisely this diversity that constitutes our strength.

Montenegro has succeeded in positioning itself as a destination where modernisation enhances rather than replaces tradition. We accomplish this through a combination of legal mechanisms, the inclusion of local communities, and international cooperation, in order to preserve our unique cultural identity while remaining competitive in the global tourism market.

In addition to tangible heritage, we pay particular attention to nurturing and promoting intangible heritage — festivals, traditional crafts, music, and gastronomy — so that visitors can experience living traditions. We also encourage the development of community-based tourism, giving local people the opportunity to participate directly and benefit from it, which is crucial for the preservation of cultural values.

When it comes to modernisation, our focus is on improving accessibility through the development of airports, marinas, and roads – all with a strong emphasis on sustainability. We encourage ecological projects as well as digital platforms that further promote Montenegrin culture across the world.

In this process, the international community plays an important role – through expert assistance, financial support, and knowledge sharing, it strengthens our capacity to maintain this delicate balance between tradition and development. For tourism is, above all, a bridge that connects people, cultures, and generations. **W**





*Hala Matar Choufany,
President, HVS Middle East, A
frica and South Asia*



THE NEW ECONOMICS OF HOSPITALITY: ESG, AI, AND VALUE CREATION IN THE MEA REGION

*Hala Matar Choufany,
President, HVS Middle East, Africa and South Asia*

Hospitality Investment Outlook

The Middle East and Africa remain among the most dynamic frontiers for hospitality investment. Three trends stand out. First, diversification of economies- particularly in the Gulf, has positioned tourism as a strategic growth engine. Governments are deploying sovereign funds to anchor mega-developments that will redefine destinations. Second, leisure-led mixed-use projects are gaining momentum. Investors are prioritizing integrated resorts, branded residences, and lifestyle experiences that extend revenue streams beyond room sales. Third, capital discipline is sharper than ever. Investors are scrutinising feasibility with a global lens, comparing risk-adjusted returns across asset classes. This reflects a wider global trend: capital is flowing toward projects that demonstrate resilience, scalability, and alignment with long-term ESG priorities. The common denominator is value creation through differentiation, whether cultural authenticity, wellness, or immersive experiences that positions hotels as anchors of broader destination ecosystems.

AI, Digitalisation & Hotel Valuation Models

Technology is no longer just an enabler; it is a strategic driver of hospitality investments. But its true value emerges only when paired with experienced advisory insight. At HVS, we see AI reshaping three domains, always through the lens of expertise and judgment.

In feasibility and forecasting, machine-learning models process vast datasets, but it takes an advisor to interpret assumptions and translate outputs into actionable strategies. In asset management, digital twins and IoT optimize energy and staffing, yet consultants align these efficiencies with

market positioning and long-term value. In valuation, real-time RevPAR and sentiment analysis enhance accuracy, but human perspective ensures context while considering market cycles, regulations, and competitive dynamics that AI alone cannot capture.

The future is clear: investors who combine digital tools with seasoned advisory expertise will unlock both efficiency and resilience.

Sustainability & ESG Imperatives

ESG is no longer optional, it is a prerequisite for capital allocation. In our advisory work, we see three practical applications. First, design and construction: developers are integrating LEED and WELL standards from day one, not as an afterthought. Passive cooling, smart façades, and renewable energy integration are now embedded in feasibility studies. Second, operations: hotels are adopting water-saving technologies, waste-to-energy solutions, and AI-driven building management systems to lower operating costs while meeting stakeholder expectations. Third, governance and reporting: investors increasingly demand measurable ESG outcomes tied to financial performance.

Best practices include embedding sustainability KPIs into operator agreements and ensuring accountability is shared between owners and brands. For example, we advised a Gulf-based resort project that achieved a 25% reduction in energy intensity by aligning design, procurement, and operator incentives around ESG goals. The industry's future competitiveness will hinge on such integrated approaches, where sustainability is a value driver rather than a compliance cost.

*Hala Matar Choufany,
President, HVS Middle East, Africa and South Asia*

Evolving Market Dynamics & Consumer Behaviour

Hospitality demand has fundamentally shifted. Post-pandemic recovery has been uneven, but certain patterns are clear. Younger travellers, especially Gen Z and millennials, are driving growth with preferences for authentic, tech-enabled, and sustainable experiences. They value flexibility, communal spaces, and wellness-oriented amenities over traditional luxury markers.

For owners and operators, the implication is twofold. Development pipelines must prioritise adaptive products: lifestyle brands, serviced apartments, and hybrid concepts that blend work, leisure, and community. At the same time, existing assets must be repositioned by reimagining F&B spaces, investing in digital guest interfaces, and embedding wellness and sustainability at the core of the brand promise.

We also see a growing emphasis on the “experience economy.” Hotels are no longer just accommodation providers but cultural hubs. The winning formula will be personalisation powered by technology, coupled with genuine storytelling rooted in local culture. Investors who recognise this behavioural shift will capture outsized value.

Your Leadership Journey & Vision for Hospitality’s Future

My leadership journey at HVS has been anchored by one principle: trust is the currency of advisory. Numbers and data are essential, but what truly matters is the ability to translate those insights into strategies that align with a client’s ambitions. Whether advising sovereign wealth funds, family offices, or global hotel brands, I have found that credibility is built on context and on understanding not only the investment but also the people, priorities, and long-term vision behind it. Balancing analytical rigor with empathy has been central to earning the confidence that sustains lasting relationships.

Over the years, I have also learned that leadership is as much about navigating change as it is about providing direction. The hospitality industry is constantly shaped by forces beyond our control, from economic cycles, geopolitical shifts, to global crises, and now, the accelerating pace of technological disruption. Adaptability has therefore been my first guiding lesson: the willingness to challenge assumptions, rethink business models, and embrace innovation even when the path forward is uncertain. 

The second lesson is collaboration. Hospitality is not an isolated business; it is an ecosystem where success depends on alignment across multiple stakeholders including owners, operators, governments, financiers, and communities. True leadership lies in bringing these voices together, balancing sometimes competing objectives, and creating a common platform for sustainable growth. I have seen firsthand how projects succeed when all stakeholders feel ownership of the outcome, and how they falter when collaboration is absent.

Looking ahead, I believe the hospitality sector is entering one of its most transformative decades. In this landscape, HVS’s role is to be more than an advisor, we are a trusted partner in transformation. Our mission is to help investors de-risk decisions by applying deep local insights and global benchmarks; to guide brands in repositioning assets for a new generation of travellers; and to support governments in shaping tourism strategies that create destinations that are globally competitive, inclusive of communities, and resilient to change.

The vision is clear: hospitality must evolve into an industry that is not only profitable but also purposeful. It must be a driver of economic diversification, a platform for cultural exchange, and a steward of environmental resources.

At HVS, we see our purpose as helping to build that future, one project, one relationship, and one destination at a time.

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TURKISH AIRLINES

SCALING EXCELLENCE: HOW ACCOR MANAGES 45+ BRANDS ACROSS THE GLOBE



*Jean-Jacques Morin, Group Deputy CEO,
Accor Hotels Group*

Interview

Jean-Jacques Morin,
Group Deputy CEO, Accor Hotels Group

Q *Accor today is one of the largest and most diverse hospitality groups worldwide, with over +45 brands including Sofitel, Fairmont, Pullman, Novotel, and ibis. What has been your strategic approach to managing this scale while ensuring brand differentiation and guest loyalty across such a vast portfolio?*

A Indeed, the challenge was significant: over the past decade, Accor transformed, becoming three times more international, with 60% of its business value now originating outside Europe, compared to 20% previously. Our brand portfolio expanded from 13 to over 45 brands today, and our focus on Luxury and Lifestyle segments also tripled, now representing 30% of fees, up from 10% before. The strategic decision made two years ago to create two distinct divisions was specifically designed to meet this evolving landscape, reflecting our belief that 'one size does not fit all'. Accor's strategy is to focus on the right markets, with the right brands, and the best-in-class ecosystem of tools and solutions.

For our Premium, Midscale, and Economy brands, our strategy has centered on franchise acceleration, and expansion into key markets. In contrast, our approach to the Luxury and Lifestyle segments is more differentiated and tailor-made, emphasizing strong brand expertise rather than being market-driven. All these efforts are underpinned by a robust technological backbone, featuring best-in-class digital solutions, aimed at enhancing the return on investment for our hotel owners and ensuring our processes are efficient, productive, and responsible. Consumers are increasingly diverse: having a powerhouse of brands allows us to cater to those needs.

Q *The Group has set sustainability targets, including the SBTi 2030 engagement aligned with the Paris Agreement, and is rolling out eco-certifications across its hotels. How is Accor accelerating this transformation?*

A At Accor, everything we do truly ties back to our core Purpose: pioneering the art of responsible hospitality and connecting cultures with heartfelt care, which continuously drives us to push boundaries across all aspects of our operations. To give you a clearer picture, we're integrating ESG concerns right from the development stage of our properties, utilizing a comprehensive ESG scorecard that guides our decisions

and strengthens our operational integration. A very concrete example of our dedication is our firm commitment to completely eliminate single-use plastic items from all our hotels, alongside making strong progress in eco-certifications, where 45% of our hotels currently hold recognized eco-labels like Green Globe and Green Keys. Furthermore, on climate action, we've set a clear objective to reduce our carbon emissions by 46% by 2030.

Beyond environmental efforts, inclusion and accessibility are paramount for us as we actively leverage the momentum from the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris. We're incredibly proud that 594 of our hotels are currently in the process of obtaining the 'Tourisme and Handicap' label, a substantial leap from the 20 hotels certified before the Games, with our ultimate vision being to extend this certification to all our hotels in France and then to expand this vital initiative internationally.

Q *Lifestyle hospitality and branded residences are among the fastest-growing segments for Accor, with projects like Ennismore's Mondrian, 25hours Hotels, and SLS leading this charge. How do you see these investments shaping the future of hospitality and guest experiences?*

A The new generation of travelers is now seeking far more than just a bed and a shower; the quest for experiences and the increasing need for personalization are redefining the way people travel. Lifestyle hospitality is our relay of growth – last year, our Lifestyle entity Ennismore posted a +18% NUG, five times the NUG of the Group. This shift reflects a greater focus on design, authentic local experiences, communal spaces.

Food and Beverage (F&B) concepts also represent a significant component of this attraction, as guests actively seek original, sustainable, and unique culinary experiences. Furthermore, a quality F&B venue serves as a powerful revenue source for hoteliers, drawing in both hotel guests and the local community. Consequently, the fees generated by lifestyle hotels are typically higher compared to non-lifestyle establishments, due to their extensive ancillary offerings.

Interview

Jean-Jacques Morin,
Group Deputy CEO, Accor Hotels Group

Travelers desire to feel at home while staying at a hotel, and this sentiment extends to wanting a hotel-like experience within their own residences, which explains the surge in branded residences. Over the past two decades, this sector has matured from a niche concept into a key driver of growth. By 2027, the number of branded residences in operation is projected to double from 2024 figures. At Accor, out of our over 45 brands, 25 currently feature residences, spanning our Luxury, Lifestyle, Premium, and Midscale segments. The intersection of private residences and lifestyle brands represents one of our most compelling areas for future growth.

Q *As hospitality is entering a new era, shaped by fast paced technological advancements and evolving consumer preferences, how can hoteliers adapt, upskill and thrive?*

A We closely monitor our guests' evolving needs to adapt our brand offerings, a process underpinned by robust technology. Maintaining brand equity is a constant pursuit of excellence. To achieve this, we analyze millions of guest feedback points from diverse sources. We then act on this feedback by divesting underperforming properties, refining brand standards, and strengthening service attitude and consistency. Ensuring consistent quality across our portfolio is our primary focus, even if it means a short-term loss of fee revenue. Beyond brand improvement, we leverage technology to enhance profitability. Operational excellence remains our continuous objective. We have established partnerships with top-tier solution providers to transform our Revenue Management System, Property Management System, and Central Reservation System. These initiatives aim to achieve greater cost efficiency, reduce IT expenses, optimize revenue, and enhance the guest experience.

Of course, AI adoption is now crucial for enhancing capabilities – at Accor, we primarily leverage two types. First, data analytics AI allows us to access deeper databases and extend our processing power. For instance, in our RMS, we use it for dynamic pricing based on real-time demand and booking patterns. Second, Generative AI drives hyper personalization for client acquisition, enabling us to showcase products and services based on individual preferences, prior experiences and transactions. We also use AI for automating responses to routine guest inquiries, thereby freeing up our

teams to address guests' special needs more effectively.

Q *Accor's heritage is rooted in Europe, yet the Group is now present worldwide, and expanding rapidly in new growth-engine markets. How do you balance preserving Accor's European DNA while tailoring your brands to diverse markets?*

A Along with our ongoing worldwide expansion, particularly into high-growth markets, we continue to invest significantly in our core European region. While the global economic center of gravity shifts eastward, a similar trend is observed within Europe itself, driven by strong emerging markets. For instance, Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) accounted for 40% of our total signings in the Europe and North Africa region in 2024, representing four times the number of hotels in our existing network in those areas. This growth is underscored by recent openings in promising locations, such as a Swissôtel in Belgrade, a Mövenpick in Almaty, and a Pullman in Budapest. This demonstrates Europe's enduring significance in our strategic DNA and continued development.

Our European heritage is embedded in our brands. Consider Sofitel as an example, embodying French flair. The brand's promise of French hospitality—an art of living reflected in bedding, design, and table art—is integral to its identity. This unique blend is evident across its global presence, from Egypt and Vietnam to Spain, Portugal, and Mexico. In locations like Mexico, French gastronomic culture is seamlessly integrated with local traditions. This illustrates our approach: our brand DNA aims not to override local cultures but to enrich and blend with them. Our partners and guests consistently affirm that this distinctive DNA remains a key differentiator and a major criterion for their choice.

To further tailor our brands to diverse markets, our strategy involves several key elements. Beyond preserving our core DNA and integrating it with local cultures, we prioritize forging partnerships with established local players, particularly in regions with mature hospitality industries. Furthermore, we are increasingly leveraging conversion brands. This approach facilitates seamless integration into new territories, allowing us to respect our brand DNA while successfully blending into the local environment. **W**



Movenpick SS Misr Steamer Nile Cruise

Interview

Mareta Gevorkyan, Founder of Green Rock

BUILDING TOMORROW'S DILIJAN: HOW GREEN ROCK INTEGRATES TOURISM, CULTURE, AND INNOVATION

Interview

Katerina Danekina,
CEO of Green Rock

Q *Green Rock has become a driving force in transforming Dilijan into a cultural and tourism hub. With flagship projects like the Multifunctional Complex and the Music Hall, what inspired you to lead this mission, and what is your long-term vision for Green Rock?*

A I think this can best be explained in the words of Green Rock and Green Rock Foundation founder, Mareta Gevorkyan:

“The idea behind Green Rock is to show that even a small town can grow in a balanced way — with culture, tourism, education, and community life developing together. In Dilijan, we focus on eco-friendly construction, public spaces, and cultural projects that make the town more livable and inviting.

Each project shifts the town’s texture in ways that are steady and tangible. What matters is not the size of the initiative, but the change it allows — how it opens space for people to live, work, and create with more continuity and care.”

Q *The Multifunctional Complex in Dilijan is described as a “city-within-a-city,” bringing together a hotel, cultural venues, gastronomy, and retail. How do you see this ecosystem reshaping tourism and everyday life for both residents and visitors?*

A Dilijan is often seen as a one-day destination because of its proximity to Yerevan and Tbilisi. The new ecosystem is designed to change that — with concerts at the Music Hall, extensive spa and retail area at the hotel, coworking spaces, cultural venues, restaurants, and public areas that encourage people to stay longer.

For local residents, it creates opportunities to start businesses and build careers in international-level hospitality. A large art park will also become a new anchor, bringing together culture, nature, and community life, while making the town more attractive for digital nomads and creative professionals who value both inspiration and modern facilities.

Q *Sustainability runs through your initiatives, from the Green Cab hybrid taxi service to eco-friendly construction. How do you balance ambitious development with environmental responsibility in a small but fast-evolving town like Dilijan?*

A For local residents, the impact comes with new opportunities to open businesses, develop careers in international-level

hospitality, and engage more actively in the life of the town. To ensure this growth happens responsibly, Green Rock follows the principle of long-term sustainability — minimizing ecological footprint during construction and ensuring that our projects remain environmentally resilient for decades to come. Our developments also pursue EDGE certification, which verifies at least 20% savings in energy, water, and materials.

Some of our key projects will use solar panels for renewable energy and feature green roofs that lower CO₂ emissions and integrate with the surrounding forest.

Q *Education is a pillar of your work, with Apicius Armenia opening as the region’s first international hospitality school. How do you see such initiatives creating long-term opportunities for Dilijan’s youth and linking education directly to jobs?*

A For us, education is not separate from other developments — it’s part of the same ecosystem. Through the Green Rock Foundation, we invest in scholarships and mentoring, and at Apicius Armenia students are trained to international standards with full support to make education accessible locally.

What we’ve learned is that investments in education bring more benefits than it might seem at first. They don’t just give young people a chance to study — they prepare local talent for the new tourism infrastructure, from the hotel and Music Hall to cultural centers and restaurants. This way, education becomes a strategic investment: it helps the community grow and at the same time provides the company and the wider sector with the skilled professionals needed for sustainable development.

Q *You’ve said that a hotel is not a destination but an entry point. With supporting projects like the renovated Dilijan Sports Complex and redesigned Corn Kiosks, how does Green Rock extend that “entry point” into a wider ecosystem of culture, tradition, and community life?*

A Projects like the Dilijan Sports Complex and the Corn Kiosks are designed first of all for the community. We are sure that when you invest in people and everyday life, the city gains a much stronger foundation for growth.





Interview

Katerina Danekina, CEO of Green Rock

Partnership is one of our core values, so we work closely with local businesses, the municipality, and residents. This way, even small projects like restoring a sports hall or reimagining traditional kiosks can become part of a larger ecosystem bringing value to Dilijan.

Q *Around the world, tourism and hospitality are increasingly shaped by digitalization and artificial intelligence — from smart mobility to personalized guest experiences. How do you see technologies like AI playing a role in future Green Rock projects or in Dilijan's evolution as a destination?*

A Technology is becoming part of how people choose and experience destinations. For us, AI can help personalize guest services, improve efficiency in hotels and restaurants, and make mobility in the town smarter and more sustainable.

It also creates new opportunities for local businesses — from digital visibility to data-driven tools that help them reach international audiences. In this sense, AI is not separate from tradition, but a way to make Dilijan more connected, welcoming, and competitive as a destination. **W**



LEADERSHIP IN MOTION: THE VISION BEHIND PALMARY EVENTS' GLOBAL SUCCESS

Ani Afrikyan,
Founder & Managing Director of Palmary Events

Q *Palmary Events was founded in 2014 with the goal of planning extraordinary destination events and weddings worldwide. What inspired you to enter this industry, and what makes your vision unique compared to traditional event planning? -*

A When I decided to switch my studies and continue in Hospitality industry, my passion was so big, but being young student was not yet sure in which direction yet. While continuing studies in Dubai, being an expat, helped me to see opportunities. I realized that in the event industry, majority of companies and people don't keep the realistic personalized approach to each client, that's when I decided I want to do events different for each client on their own way.

Q *One of Palmary Events' signatures is ensuring every event reflects the culture of the host country. Could you share some examples of how you have successfully integrated local traditions, arts, or heritage into your events to create a lasting cultural impact?*

A True, for me respecting and reflecting the culture of each destination is a must. I always try to do it as mild and nice as possible, to never affect the main picture of the client's important day. Example can be hosting traditional Armenian wedding in Dubai, but having the groom with his friends to perform UAE national dance in their national costumes, or when we had a birthday celebration in Milan, purely international atmosphere, but all the decor & design elements were Italian. After all, the destination we choose, plays the key role in the success of the event, plus every culture is beautiful, so why not to enjoy it.

Q *What are some of the most memorable projects Palmary Events has delivered internationally, and how have these projects helped position Armenia as a country capable of hosting world-class events?*

A For me personally there are 2 projects which I cherish the most. When Atlantis Royal has just opened in Dubai, a lot of companies haven't even had a proper site inspection of the

property, but I managed to host the first Armenian wedding there and it was beautiful. The second one was, having Saudi Arabia opening its visas for Armenian citizens and in just few months I organized a beautiful private party in amazing Al Ula. When the passport control at the airport says <Wow, it's my first time seeing Armenian passport> That is when you know you are doing it right.

Q *From luxury weddings to international conferences, clients expect originality and flawless execution. How does Palmary Events innovate in design, technology, and guest experience to stay ahead in the competitive events sector?*

A The most important part here is - choosing and having the right and the best vendors and suppliers. As much as we do our best to follow everything, be ahead and not miss any trends, there will be no results without teamwork. It's a circle we all know - the decorators work will not matter without correct lighting, the lights will not be correct without proper floor plan, for any plan good communication is needed and these all brings us to the point where either we are all team doing our job at the best, or we all fail.

Q *How do you see Palmary Events evolving — both in terms of expanding globally and continuing to represent Armenia on the international stage? What goals excite you the most for the coming years?*

A My main power and motivation are my amazing clients, who keep choosing me over and over again, for which I am grateful from the bottom of my heart. The reason to be growing and to always offer something new for them, is to always make sure they experience different yet beautiful emotions at every event.

For the nearest future we are expanding in GCC countries, opening new destinations in Europe as well. Palmary events has been chosen to be part of 2 world class projects, which will be announced soon and also we have very interesting collaborations happening as well. **W**

A portrait of Benjamin Vallée, a man with dark, curly hair and a beard, wearing a dark blue patterned button-down shirt. He is standing outdoors with trees in the background, his arms crossed.

*Benjamin Vallée,
General Manager & Vice President
of Parc Oméga*

Interview

PARC OMÉGA 2030: A MODEL FOR CONSERVATION-DRIVEN TOURISM

Benjamin Vallée,
General Manager & Vice President of Parc Oméga

Q *Parc Omega has seen incredible expansion in recent years. How do you balance growth and new investments with your core mission of conservation and protecting natural ecosystems?*

A Expansion projects at Parc Omega have resulted in record attendance in recent years. This growth has enabled the funding of new initiatives towards our core mission with the creation, for example, of a new Education and Conservation team with a full-time biologist, the hire of the park's first CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) coordinator and the launch of its first reforestation program.

Q *The park recognizes the heritage of the Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation. How do you work with Indigenous communities to ensure their voices and traditions are authentically represented at Parc Omega?*

A Parc Omega, which is situated on the lands of the Algonquin First Nation, has recently established a bilateral dialogue with the Kitigan Zibi reserve and community. The first step in this ongoing process is to authenticate the park's indigenous assets and then keep working with the Kitigan Zibi community to develop a long-lasting relationship based on mutual respect.

Q *Beyond the fun and discovery, what impact do you hope visitors take with them after experiencing Parc Omega — and how do you measure that transformation?*

A At Parc Omega, we want visitors to fall in love with wildlife in their natural settings. By learning about animals and their vital role in ecosystems, we hope people leave inspired to protect them and their habitats through small actions in their everyday life. We measure this impact through visitor

feedback, participation in our educational programs, and by tracking repeat visits, school engagement, and interest in supporting species recovery projects. These indicators help us understand whether our message is resonating and contributing to a culture of respect and protection for wildlife and their habitats.

Q *Wildlife and eco-parks are gaining momentum worldwide. What do you think makes Parc Omega stand out as a benchmark destination on the global stage?*

A Parc Omega distinguishes itself by celebrating Canada's native fauna and other species adapted to its northern climate and environment, 365 days per year. With 890 hectares of mountainous terrain, lakes, forests and open prairies, Parc Omega offers a multitude of natural habitats to its 800 animals comprising more than 20 different species. It serves as a living showcase of Canadian biodiversity, educating visitors about the unique ecosystems and the animals that inhabit them.

Q *Your new ONIRO night experience has already gained international attention. Do you see more immersive storytelling projects like this shaping the future of Parc Omega?*

A ONIRO has shown us how powerful immersive storytelling can be in connecting people with nature. While we don't plan to take on another project of this size (\$5.8M), storytelling will remain central to our mission. We see it shaping our education workshops, public presentations, and future initiatives like summer day camps. By weaving stories into these experiences, we can spark wonder, build respect, and inspire visitors to care deeply about wildlife and the environment.

Interview

Benjamin Vallée,
General Manager & Vice President of Parc Oméga

Q *Artificial intelligence is transforming how destinations engage with visitors. How is Parc Omega exploring or planning to explore AI tools — whether for guest experience, wildlife monitoring, or sustainable park management — while ensuring technology enhances rather than replaces the authenticity of nature?*

A Parc Omega privileges human interactions. Our naturalists delivering presentations to visitors and responding to their questions and comments face to face in the presence of animals is an integral part of the park's mission. We do have plans to develop an app that will provide real-time information on each species with the help of two AI avatars and geolocation throughout the park. A chatbot to assist visitors and relieve customer service of repetitive questions, thereby enabling more personalized customer contact. This is already in place for accommodations, and now the plan is to apply it across the entire park.

Q *What is your long-term vision for Parc Omega by 2030, both for conservation and for its role in sustainable tourism worldwide?*

A Parc Omega wants to increase its efforts and build on the conservation projects it is presently working on, for example, the Breeding and Rearing Program for the Western Chorus Frog and the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike Recovery Program. To reduce its ecological footprint, Parc Omega conducted its first carbon emissions assessment for the year 2024 and can now set carbon reduction objectives for the next 5 years. Specifically for its accommodations, Parc Omega has achieved a Green Key certification level of 3 out of 5 keys. Efforts will be ongoing in the coming years order to attain the 5 keys certification level. Other initiatives have also been put in place and will gradually improve the park's sustainability record, such as, but not limited to, a new policy to gradually replace gas powered equipment with new battery-operated machinery and implementation of a reforestation program launched in 2025. 





PILGRIMAGE FOR THE MODERN WORLD: CONNECTING FAITH, HERITAGE, AND HUMANITY



Q *Pilgrimaps began as a vision to create an interfaith, respectful platform mapping global pilgrimage sites. What inspired this initiative, and why did you feel the world needed Pilgrimaps now?*

A Pilgrimaps began as a response to two intersecting needs: the rediscovery of slow travel rooted in cultural memory, and the growing call for inclusive platforms that treat pilgrimage as a universal human impulse—not one bound to a single tradition. Many travel magazines still treat “religious tourism” as a niche, which in some senses it is—but it is also one of the fastest-growing segments in global tourism. The religious tourism market was estimated at about USD 254.3 billion in 2023 and is projected to reach USD 671.9 billion by 2030, with a compound annual growth rate of ~15.3%. That scale puts it on par with many “mainstream” travel sectors.

Seen this way, pilgrimage and sacred-site travel are not just a commercial opportunity—they are a means to promote awareness of layered heritages to a growing audience. Many of these sites embody histories and identities shared across faiths and cultures; preserving them helps sustain plurality in a world of increasing homogenization.

Q *Your platform is described as “holistic storytelling,” connecting sacred routes with art, food, history, and traveller wellbeing. Can you share an example of how this approach transforms a pilgrim or traveller’s experience compared to traditional guides?*

A Pilgrimaps shifts the focus from “routes” to the broader cultures of movement and encounter. While many

platforms provide logistics, we embed those paths within living contexts—culinary practices, seasonal rituals, healing traditions, and everyday gestures of hospitality that define the journey as much as the destination.

By spotlighting lesser-known routes, we invite travellers into ecosystems where pilgrimage isn’t a product, but a shared rhythm—maintained by farmers, cooks, artisans, and guides. The result is a slower, more attentive form of travel that fosters reflection without requiring devotion, and encourages ethical engagement with communities along the way. Our storytelling makes space not only for guidance, but for understanding.

Q *One of Pilgrimaps’ innovations is its “verified-by-design” itineraries. How do you work with local institutions, custodians, and faith communities to ensure reliability, cultural integrity, and respect for traditions?*

A Every itinerary we feature in our website is shaped collaboratively. We partner directly with site custodians—whether municipal archivists, caretakers, or local NGOs—as well as historians, urban planners, and, where appropriate, representatives from faith communities. Verification is not just about fact-checking; it’s about listening to those who inhabit these spaces and carry their knowledge. Our editorial team works through a multi-stage review process to ensure that what we publish reflects not just historical accuracy but cultural accountability. It’s a lot of work, but it surely pays off.





*Silvia Costantini - Founder - Chief Strategy, Communication & Institutional Relations Officer;
Daniel Esparza - Founder - Chief Creative and New Products Officer
Inma Alvarez - Founder, Director Editorial*

Beyond mapping routes, Pilgrimaps also aims to foster social cohesion, support small businesses, and promote responsible, site-sensitive travel. Which of these impacts have you seen most clearly so far, and can you share a success story?

Our ongoing collaboration with Malta offers a clear example. This small Mediterranean nation has partnered with us twice—soon three times—and our data suggests we’ve contributed to a marked rise in interest in Malta’s religious destinations, from prehistoric sites to Christian pilgrimage routes. By presenting the layered heritage of these paths in full context, we’ve helped redirect visitor flows toward lesser-known parts of the archipelago. This fosters a more distributed, site-sensitive economy. Crucially, religious-cultural tourism isn’t seasonal, so it brings steadier support to small local businesses year-round.

You have already collaborated with cultural bodies and pilgrimage routes in Europe and Latin America. What role do partnerships play in Pilgrimaps’ growth, and how do you see collaboration shaping the future of intercultural tourism?

Partnerships and grassroots collaborations are the backbone of what we do. Pilgrimaps exists to provide a platform for all institutions—large or small, public or private—tasked with preserving the heritage woven around pilgrimage routes. In Europe, we’ve worked with local cultural organizations in places like Valencia and Extremadura; in Latin America, we’ve aligned with postcolonial mapping initiatives and language preservation groups (as in the case of Paraguay, for example).

The future will be collaborative or it will not be—because heritage cannot be safeguarded through imposed narratives.

Our work relies on local custodianship to ensure that what is shared reflects the voices, memories, and priorities of those who inhabit these landscapes. This isn’t just a strategy for dissemination—it’s an act of preservation. By resisting a top-down model, we open space for polyphonic storytelling, where intercultural tourism becomes a dialogue rather than a display.

How do you imagine the platform evolving over the next five to ten years in terms of technology, inclusivity, and its contribution to intercultural dialogue?

Technologically, we’re building toward a more immersive and accessible platform. We’re currently developing our app, which will include a pedometer feature allowing users to choose an itinerary and listen to site-specific stories—drawn from our collaborative research—while walking or jogging. It’s a way to connect movement with meaning, and to bring intercultural dialogue into everyday routines.

Beyond that, we’re prioritizing augmented route reconstructions, expand the languages in which the site is published (Arabic and French being prioritized for now), local-language audio, and offline access for remote segments. Tools for low-vision navigation and multilingual storytelling will ensure broader accessibility. Our upcoming focus includes expanding coverage in underrepresented regions of Africa and Southeast Asia, and increasing access to oral history archives along lesser-known routes. Pilgrimaps remains committed to making intercultural dialogue a lived, daily practice—embodied in every map, story, and step. 

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Interview

Thapanee Kiatphaibool,
Governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)

THE FUTURE OF TRAVEL, MADE IN THAILAND: TAT'S ROLE AS A GLOBAL TOURISM INNOVATOR



Q *Thailand is globally recognized for its tourism excellence. How do the Half-Half Thai Travel campaign and TAT-AI embody TAT's vision of "Smart Tourism" and Thailand's long-term strategy for sustainable growth?*

A Both initiatives exemplify Thailand's vision of Smart Tourism—balancing digital transformation, economic inclusion, and sustainability. Half-Half Thai Travel revitalized domestic travel through a data-driven incentive model that connected citizens and SMEs via a transparent platform. TAT-AI represents the next leap—embedding artificial intelligence into tourism operations to personalize experiences and optimize national strategies. Together, they demonstrate how Thailand is evolving from promotion-led tourism to a sustainable, data-empowered ecosystem that benefits both people and planet.

Q *The "Half-Half Thai Travel" campaign mobilized millions of Thai citizens. What unique approaches helped you build such strong public participation and trust in this program?*

A Public trust was achieved through clarity, simplicity, and transparency. The campaign integrated secure identity verification through ThaID, instant registration, and a user-friendly interface for bookings and coupon redemptions. Real-time dashboards publicly displayed usage and spending, reinforcing accountability. Strategic communication—combining official announcements, influencer outreach, and digital PR—turned the campaign into a national movement, not just a subsidy program.

Q *One of the key outcomes was redistributing income to secondary destinations and SMEs. Could you share concrete examples of how this campaign supported local businesses and reduced overdependence on major hubs?*

A The campaign registered almost ten thousand of local businesses, including small hotels, restaurants, and OTOP shops. TAT introduced a "no GP" model, allowing SMEs to retain 100% of their earnings. As a result, almost 30% of all redemptions occurred in secondary destinations like Chanthaburi, Trat, and Ratchaburi. Many small operators—such as family-run homestays reported reopening after years of closure. This model reduced overconcentration in major hubs like Bangkok and Phuket, ensuring a fairer distribution of tourism income nationwide.

Q *Beyond the economic boost, how did the campaign shape domestic travel behavior among Thai citizens, and do you see these changes lasting in the long term?*

A The campaign created a new generation of digitally engaged travelers. Data show that over 60% of participants were first-time users of digital travel platforms. It popularized short-stay weekend trips and workation-style travel, leading to repeat visits even after the campaign ended. These behavioral shifts—toward planned, tech-enabled domestic tourism—are expected to sustain Thailand's internal travel market and complement future sustainability programs.

Q *TAT-AI is among the world's first national AI-powered travel assistants. How does it transform the visitor journey—from planning and booking to on-site experiences?*

A TAT-AI revolutionizes the visitor journey by acting as a personal digital concierge. Using AI-driven trip planning, it suggests real-time itineraries, events, and local experiences tailored to traveler profiles. During trips, it integrates navigation, nearby recommendations, and cultural storytelling via a conversational interface. Post-travel, TAT-AI gathers anonymized feedback for predictive analytics—creating a continuous improvement loop that redefines how destinations interact with travelers.

Q *How is TAT ensuring data privacy, transparency, and responsible use of AI while delivering personalized travel experiences?*

A TAT has adopted a Responsible AI Framework aligned with Thailand's PDPA and EU GDPR standards. All user data are anonymized, encrypted, and stored within secure national cloud systems. TAT-AI employs ethical algorithms audited for bias, ensuring recommendations are fair and inclusive. Users maintain full control over consent preferences. This transparent, human-centered approach positions Thailand as a regional pioneer in trustworthy AI for tourism.

Q *Inclusivity is central to both initiatives. Could you explain how TAT-AI supports travelers with different languages, accessibility needs, and cultural expectations?*

A TAT-AI is designed for universal accessibility. It supports multiple languages—Thai, English, Mandarin, Japanese, and more—and includes voice and text-to-speech features for travelers with visual or motor impairments. The AI recommends barrier-free attractions and culturally tailored experiences, from halal dining to wellness retreats. This inclusivity ensures that technology enhances—not limits—participation, making Thailand's tourism welcoming to everyone.

Q *Both projects required collaboration between government, technology providers, and the private sector. What lessons has TAT learned about building effective cross-sector partnerships for innovation?*

A TAT learned that innovation succeeds when partners share a unified purpose before shared budgets. Half-Half Thai Travel required coordination with ministries, fintech companies, and digital ID providers, while TAT-AI engaged global cloud and AI partners.

Key lessons include:

- Transparency and open data frameworks accelerate

collaboration.

- Agile governance allows faster policy implementation.

- Inclusion of local startups and SMEs builds ownership and long-term capacity.

These partnerships transformed complex government programs into user-friendly, impactful experiences.

Q *How have these initiatives influenced Thailand's brand image internationally, and what role do you see for Thailand as a thought leader in tourism innovation within ASEAN and globally?*

A Both projects reposition Thailand as a digital transformation leader in global tourism. Half-Half Thai Travel became a model for post-pandemic recovery adopted by neighboring ASEAN nations, while TAT-AI showcases AI integration in national tourism management. Internationally, Thailand is now recognized not only for hospitality but also for its strategic foresight, inclusivity, and innovation leadership—bridging culture with technology and setting new benchmarks for smart destinations.

Q *Looking ahead, what is next for TAT in terms of digital transformation and sustainable tourism programs, and how do you see these innovations shaping the future of Thailand's tourism industry?*

A TAT's next milestone is the creation of a Composable Tourism Data Platform, integrating identity, analytics, and sustainability metrics into one system. This foundation will power future initiatives such as carbon-footprint tracking, AI-based demand forecasting, and virtual cultural experiences. Building upon the success of Half-Half Thai Travel and TAT-AI, TAT's vision is for Thailand to become Asia's first fully data-driven, sustainable tourism ecosystem, where digital innovation fuels economic, social, and environmental prosperity. **W**





*Susanna Hakobyan and Ms. Anoush Yeghiazaryan
Co-Founders of AIM Foundation*



Interview

EDUCATORS, INNOVATORS, TRAILBLAZERS: THE AIM FOUNDATION STORY

Susanna Hakobyan and Ms. Anoush Yeghiazaryan
Co-Founders of AIM Foundation

Q *Tourism Camp Armenia is the first initiative of its kind in the country. What personal or professional experiences inspired you to establish this program, and why was the timing right in 2025?*

A We — Susanna Hakobyan and Anoush Yeghiazaryan — believe education is the foundation of professional growth. While Armenia offers tourism courses, few provide access to international expertise or globally recognized training. To bridge this gap, we created Tourism Camp — a forward-looking initiative that brings global best practices to Armenia's tourism industry. Inspired by our 2025 goals, it was born from a shared vision to raise professional standards and offer high-quality, internationally oriented tourism education.

Q *How does Tourism Camp differ from traditional tourism training programs, and what unique opportunities does it offer young professionals to learn and grow?*

A Tourism Camp stands apart from traditional tourism training programs in both format and philosophy. Unlike standard classroom-style courses, it offers an immersive, experiential learning environment where participants engage directly with international experts, real-life case studies, and hands-on workshops.

Our approach emphasizes interaction, creativity, and networking rather than passive learning. Participants don't just listen to lectures—they collaborate, debate, and develop practical solutions for current challenges in the tourism industry.

Another key difference is the international dimension.

Tourism Camp brings together global professionals, educators, and innovators who share their experience and vision with Armenian participants. This exposure helps young specialists understand global standards, trends, and tools, while also seeing how they can adapt these practices to Armenia's context.

Q *What has been the most significant impact of the Camp so far on Armenia's tourism sector — socially, economically, or in terms of sustainability and heritage preservation?*

A The most significant impact of Tourism Camp lies in its ability to bridge education with real industry transformation. It has built a new professional community that unites young specialists, entrepreneurs, and policymakers around shared values of quality, innovation, and sustainability — inspiring many to see tourism as a tool for cultural preservation and community growth.

Economically, it is still early to measure tangible results. Real change will take time, but we have already laid the foundation for a structured and sustainable professional ecosystem in tourism education — shaping today the market Armenia will have tomorrow.

The program also promotes responsible and inclusive tourism, encouraging participants to preserve heritage, celebrate local identity, and integrate sustainability into their work.

In short, Tourism Camp has grown into a movement driving a more conscious, innovative, and globally connected tourism industry in Armenia.

Interview

Susanna Hakobyan and Ms. Anoush Yeghiazaryan
Co-Founders of AIM Foundation

Q *Tourism Camp brings together tourism, tech, culture, and sustainability. Could you share one or two innovative collaborations or projects that emerged thanks to this cross-sector approach?*

A What is especially rewarding is that some of them have also begun collaborating with the international lecturers we invited to the program. These partnerships have grown into research and academic projects, including contributions to PhD dissertations and joint studies on tourism innovation and destination management.

Looking ahead, we are also planning to host a recent business school graduate from Switzerland next year for a professional internship within the framework of Tourism Camp. This initiative will allow us to integrate international practices directly into the Armenian market, fostering cross-cultural exchange and providing local participants with valuable insights into global tourism management and innovation.

Q *As co-founders, how have you each shaped the identity and growth of The AIM Foundation? What challenges did you face in bringing international experts, investors, and institutions on board, and how did you overcome them?*

A In Armenia, there are many tourism-related courses; however, none are specifically focused on regional tourism development. Perhaps the only real challenge we faced was bringing together the right people around the project, as there was a great deal of interest and enthusiasm, but a limited number of spots available.

In every other aspect, the project progressed smoothly — because everyone clearly understands the importance and necessity of this kind of specialized education for the future of Armenia's tourism sector.

Q *Looking to the future, how do you see Tourism Camp evolving in the next five years, and what would winning the World Tourism Awards 2025 – Best Tourism Educational Program mean for your team, for Armenia, and for the next generation of tourism leaders?*

A Over the next five years, we aim to expand the program's reach, introduce specialized thematic editions focused on sustainable tourism, digital transformation, regional destination

development, hospitality, and tour operating, and strengthen our partnerships with international universities and industry organizations. We would also like to solidify this educational format and make it accessible to everyone, ensuring that high-quality, practice-oriented tourism education becomes an integral and sustainable part of Armenia's professional landscape.

Winning the World Tourism Awards 2025 for Best Tourism Educational Program would be an extraordinary milestone. For our team, it would validate the years of passion, effort, and belief that education can drive real change. For Armenia, it would mean recognition on the global stage — positioning the country not only as a travel destination but also as a source of talent, innovation, and forward-thinking approaches in tourism.

Most importantly, for the next generation of tourism leaders, it would serve as powerful motivation — proof that with vision, hard work, and collaboration, Armenian initiatives can compete and shine internationally. It would inspire them to dream bigger, act bolder, and continue transforming the industry from within. **W**

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Interview

Levent Doğru,
Vice President, Tiffany International Hotels & Resorts

CUBA'S HEART OF HOSPITALITY: TIFFANY HOTELS AND THE NEW ERA OF FAMILY TRAVEL

Vision & Differentiation

Since its foundation, Tiffany Hotels Cuba has embraced a clear vision: to position Playa Paraíso and Playa Hermosa as leading family-friendly destinations in the Caribbean. This vision was inspired by the belief that family travel creates the most lasting and meaningful memories, and by the opportunity to combine Cuba's renowned hospitality with international standards of excellence. Our resorts stand out because they offer more than accommodation – they provide a safe, inclusive environment filled with activities for all ages, where grandparents, parents, and children can each enjoy experiences designed especially for them.

Signature Programs for Families

At Tiffany Hotels, we have designed programs to ensure every family member has a memorable stay:

Kids Club, offering educational, cultural, and recreational activities guided by specialized staff.

Teens Lounge, a creative and technology-driven space where teenagers enjoy video games, cinema, and cultural workshops.

Multi-generational activities, such as water sports, family excursions, theme nights, and cultural shows designed to bring generations together. This holistic approach has positioned us as pioneers in redefining the concept of family vacations in Cuba.

Sustainability in Action

Sustainability is one of our core pillars. We have implemented concrete measures such as:

- Phasing out single-use plastics.
- Installing water and energy efficiency systems across our operations. Recycling and composting programs to reduce environmental impact.
- Prioritizing local suppliers for fresh food, handicrafts, and services. These initiatives not only reduce our ecological

footprint but also create a positive impact on the community, supporting the local economy and promoting cultural pride.

Innovation & Technology

Tiffany Hotels integrates digital platforms and AI tools to personalize each guest's stay. Our initiatives include:

- Family-friendly booking platforms with tailored options. Fast and convenient digital check-in.
- Mobile applications that allow guests to plan activities, reserve restaurants, and access services directly from their devices.

Technology becomes an ally that simplifies logistics and allows families to enjoy their vacation with peace of mind.

Leadership & Staff Development

Under the leadership of our CEO, Erika Chávez, Tiffany Hotels has fostered a culture of excellence, inclusivity, and sustainability. Her vision has been crucial in positioning Cuba as a competitive family tourism destination in the Caribbean. We consistently invest in staff training and professional development, ensuring international standards of hospitality while creating growth opportunities for local talent. This not only strengthens our service but also empowers the community.

Future Growth & Recognition

Our future projects focus on expanding family experiences with new sports facilities, cultural programs, and vacation packages that further integrate the local community. We are also exploring digital enhancements to improve connectivity for international travelers.

Receiving the World Tourism Awards 2025 – Best Family-Friendly Hotel would be an immense honor. It would recognize the dedication of our teams, the strength of our leadership vision, and the trust of our guests. Beyond the award, it would reaffirm Cuba's place on the world map as a safe, inclusive, and sustainable destination for families. 

*Nevin Akçelik,
Board President of Akçelik Holding,
Club Nena, Antalya, Türkiye*



LUXURY IN HARMONY: HOW CLUB NENA SETS A GLOBAL STANDARD FOR SUSTAINABLE HOSPITALITY

Nevin Akçelik,
Board President of Akçelik Holding,
Club Nena, Antalya, Türkiye

Q *Club Nena holds numerous sustainability certifications, from the Green Star to Global Agriculture and the Blue Flag. What motivated your long term commitment to environmental responsibility, and how do these certifications reflect your sustainability philosophy in practice?*

A At Club Nena, sustainability is not merely a policy. It is the essence of our identity. Our resort spans 98 acres, with 60% dedicated to lush gardens, preserved natural habitats, and eco-sensitive landscaping. From the very beginning, the resort was designed to exist in harmony with the surrounding Mediterranean ecosystem. Founded in the early 1990s as one of Turkey's first family oriented all inclusive resorts, Club Nena has consistently demonstrated that luxury and environmental responsibility can coexist seamlessly.

Q Our long term commitment is rooted in deep respect for the natural beauty of the Manavgat region and a sense of responsibility to preserve it for generations to come. Every certification from Green Star to Global Agriculture and the Blue Flag represents concrete milestones in this journey. Over the past decade, we have reduced our carbon footprint by 45%, cut water consumption per guest night by 50%, and now generate over 40% of our total energy from renewable solar power. Energy efficient inverter systems, LED lighting, and smart irrigation technologies allow us to maintain World class comfort while minimizing our environmental impact. These achievements position Club Nena as a global benchmark in sustainable hospitality, proving that true luxury can be experienced responsibly.

Why should guests choose Club Nena?

At Club Nena, a vacation transcends the ordinary it is an

immersive journey where luxury meets purpose. Guests can unwind in elegantly designed bungalows and suites, each thoughtfully furnished to combine comfort, privacy, and Mediterranean charm. Private terraces overlooking verdant gardens, pools, and the turquoise Mediterranean offer an unparalleled sense of serenity.

Q Culinary experiences elevate the stay: farm to table dining features organic produce from our on site farm, freshly harvested herbs, and cold pressed olive oil from 500 olive trees. Guests can participate in olive harvesting, cooking workshops, or guided tours of our ecological trails. Wellness offerings including a full-service spa, Turkish hammam, yoga sessions, and outdoor fitness programs ensure holistic rejuvenation. From water sports and family-friendly entertainment to eco educational activities, every experience is curated to connect visitors to nature, culture, and sustainability. Choosing Club Nena means embracing a holiday where comfort, learning, recreation, and environmental stewardship intertwine, creating memories that are both indulgent and responsible.

Your facility has implemented various eco initiatives, from tree planting projects and waste management to supporting local education and community events. How does Club Nena integrate these social and environmental programs into daily operations while maintaining guest satisfaction?

Sustainability at Club Nena is a living culture, fully integrated into daily operations and embraced by every team member. Over the years, we have planted over 20,000 trees, reduced single-use plastics by 95%, and implemented advanced waste separation and recycling systems that divert nearly 95% of organic and recyclable waste from landfills.

Interview

Nevin Akçelik,
Board President of Akçelik Holding,
Club Nena, Antalya

Guests are encouraged to participate actively. Educational installations demonstrate the decomposition times of everyday materials, while guided tours of our organic farm showcase sustainable cultivation practices. Over 75% of fruits and vegetables served in our restaurants are sourced directly from our farm, and all oils, herbs, and select dairy products are locally produced, creating a farm-to-plate experience that connects taste with sustainability.

Club Nena also partners with local schools and municipalities to host Eco-School Days, farm visits, and environmental workshops for children. By embedding these programs into daily operations, we ensure that hospitality, education, and environmental awareness coexist, offering guests a holistic experience that is both enjoyable and impactful.

Q *At Club Nena, sustainability extends beyond the environment to include education, inclusivity, and staff well-being. How have initiatives such as scholarships, eco school programs, and staff family celebrations contributed to a more conscious tourism model?*

A Our approach to sustainability is holistic. Beyond environmental initiatives, we cultivate social responsibility through education and inclusivity. Annual scholarships are awarded to local students pursuing environmental studies, fostering the next generation of eco conscious leaders. Eco school partnerships bring children closer to nature, teaching them the value of sustainability through hands on experiences.

Staff well being is central to our philosophy. Inclusive celebrations, family friendly policies, and equal employment opportunities have resulted in over 70% of our team remaining with us for more than a decade an exceptional achievement in hospitality. Our “Green Team” ensures energy efficiency, waste reduction, and community engagement are embedded in all operations. Motivated, knowledgeable, and empowered employees act as ambassadors of our sustainability mission, demonstrating that conscious tourism is achievable without compromising comfort or luxury.

Q *As one of Turkey's pioneers in sustainable and family friendly accommodation, how has Club Nena influenced the broader tourism sector or encouraged other businesses in the region to adopt more eco friendly practices?*

A Club Nena has long served as a model for Mediterranean hospitality. We were among the first resorts in Europe to integrate renewable energy systems into an all inclusive

model, including solar power generation, greywater recycling, and smart climate control. Our leadership has inspired neighboring hotels, local municipalities, and regional tourism boards to adopt similar practices, creating a ripple effect of sustainability throughout the region.

Our family oriented philosophy blending entertainment, education, and environmental consciousness has redefined green hospitality. By setting a global benchmark for sustainable, family friendly tourism, Club Nena has raised both the region's profile and the expectations of responsible travel worldwide.

Q *What are Club Nena's next goals or innovations in sustainable tourism, and how do you envision the future of responsible travel in Turkey and beyond?*

A Looking ahead, Club Nena is steadfast in its commitment to driving innovation in sustainable tourism, continuously redefining what responsible travel can mean in the 21st century. The resort is implementing a state of the art digital food traceability system, ensuring complete transparency from farm to plate and connecting guests directly with the origins of their meals. Complementing this, the Zero Waste Kitchen initiative is designed to eliminate all organic waste, turning sustainability into a tangible, everyday experience for both guests and staff. Beyond the kitchen, the resort is expanding its renewable energy infrastructure with the ambitious goal of achieving fifty percent energy independence within the next five years, further reducing its environmental footprint while maintaining the World class comfort and service that guests expect.

Our family oriented philosophy
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Club Nena’s vision also embraces collaboration and knowledge sharing, strengthening partnerships with local farmers, research institutions, and European universities to promote sustainable agriculture, environmental education, and community engagement. The resort envisions a model of tourism where every guest, employee, and partner is an active participant in a greener future, demonstrating that luxury and responsibility are not mutually exclusive but inherently intertwined.

Luxury at Club Nena is reimagined as something far deeper than opulence. It is found in thoughtfully curated experiences that blend comfort, elegance, and authenticity. It is the serenity of waking to the gentle sounds of nature, the joy of dining on the freshest organic produce harvested steps away from the table, and the relaxation of wellness programs inspired by traditional Mediterranean rituals. It is the magic of spending unforgettable moments with family amid pristine landscapes, knowing that each choice, from activities to

cuisine, has been carefully designed to protect and honor the environment. At Club Nena, true luxury is purposeful, socially responsible, and profoundly memorable, offering a standard of hospitality where every experience leaves a positive mark on both the guest and the planet. **W**

HEALING THROUGH HOSPITALITY: NANI AND THE NEW ERA OF REGENERATIVE TRAVEL



ALEXANDRINE WAN,
Founder and CEO of NANI

Q *NANI positions tourism as a force for regeneration — of ecosystems, culture, and human connection. How do you measure regeneration in practice, and what signals tell you that an island, a community, or a traveler has truly begun to regenerate?*

A In Polynesia, tourism makes up about 14% of our GDP and is our most vital industry, so it is essential that it creates more value than it takes away. At NANI, regeneration is something we measure and live in very concrete ways. When our visitors join scientists to monitor whale migration or help track the health of coral reefs, they are not only learning about these ecosystems but also contributing to global research. When we co-design every immersion with local communities, we make sure the experience reflects their identity rather than copying international standards, which is why practices like weaving, canoe building, taro farming, and cultural ceremonies have found new life

through tourism. We also place language at the center, training our guides to share deep cultural knowledge and welcoming visitors in our native tongue so that revitalizing our Indigenous language becomes a natural part of the journey. Each traveler also supports social regeneration, since between five and ten percent of the trip funds educational experiences for women survivors of violence and for children in our communities.

What I find most fascinating is how this approach has reshaped our understanding of entrepreneurship. Our KPIs are no longer just about bookings or sales but about pride, confidence, ecological recovery, and cultural renewal. A few years ago this way of working felt bold, but today being recognized as pioneers in regenerative tourism confirms that these values are the right compass, and I hope it helps share the message that tourism can truly become a tool for healing and renewal.



The Nani Immersions weave ancestral wisdom with science and entrepreneurship. How do you ensure that tradition and innovation strengthen each other rather than compete — and how has this balance shaped Polynesia's tourism identity?

Tradition and innovation are often seen as opposites, but for us they are two sides of the same canoe. At NANI, there has never been a strict guideline on how to integrate this—what we do is shaped by our own story and values. From our late mother we inherited ancestral wisdom, the love of caring for one another, and from my grandfather I learned entrepreneurship and the respect for the environment. These two legacies are not in conflict, they are constantly adjusted together, always guided by humility. Humility means cooperating with everyone: elders listening to the younger generation, a master of cultural ceremonies learning from a scientist, and a PhD student taking lessons from elders in anthropology or ethnology. Nothing is about competing, it is about uplifting each other. When you are confident in what you carry, you don't need to diminish your neighbor — you listen, you spend time together, you seek to understand their point of view.

This approach is also reshaping Polynesia's tourism identity. For decades, the image of our islands was reduced to blue lagoons and overwater luxury bungalows. Today,

it is our generosity, our smiles, and our way of caring for our land and people that define who we are. It changes the way we host, the way we package our tourism products, and the way we connect with visitors. The canoe, or va'a, is the metaphor we live by. In a canoe, everyone has their role and their knowledge, and we can only move forward if we paddle together in the same direction. That is exactly how we see regenerative tourism: not as a race or competition, but as a shared journey where culture, science, and entrepreneurship all strengthen each other to carry Polynesia forward.

Many destinations speak about sustainability, yet few succeed in making it emotionally resonant. What role does storytelling, art, or cultural expression play in translating NANI's values into experiences that move people to act?

For us, it all begins with trust and care. Our partners are not simply contractors; we spend time with them, listening and sharing until a genuine relationship is built. In Polynesia, this way of working is deeply rooted — trust has always been more important than paper agreements. Every immersion is created with people who are passionate about their “why,” and when you meet someone who lives their craft as a life mission rather than a job, the story becomes powerful enough to move others.

Interview

ALEXANDRINE WAN,
Founder and CEO of NANI



Authenticity is at the heart of it, even when it doesn't fit into modern business logic. A ritual may be canceled because of a troubling dream or a sign from the river, and we respect that. It shows that our people remain connected to land, ocean, and spirituality, and visitors feel this truth immediately. That is why our immersions are never performances — they are living expressions of culture, art, and spirit. A fun example is last week, when I offered a goat as a birthday gift to one of our cultural partners — not as a token gesture, but because I knew it would bring milk, companionship, and even help with the grass. It is these gestures of real connection that make our work meaningful. When visitors experience this kind of authenticity, action comes naturally. We never force anyone, but again and again we see them plant, restore, donate, and carry our messages back to their homes. That is the magic of regeneration through storytelling and culture: it transforms care into action.

NANI's collaboration with the Government of French Polynesia on the first eco-tourism incubator represents a shift from advocacy to institution-building. How do you navigate the challenge of scaling regenerative principles without losing authenticity at the community level?

Having all the actors paddling in the same direction is essential, and government support marks a real shift toward institution-building. But creating the first eco-tourism incubator doesn't mean we will revolutionize tourism overnight. Here in Polynesia — as in many other



Indigenous and remote places

— life moves at its own rhythm. To scale without losing authenticity, we have to listen to that rhythm and grow with the pace of the people and the environment, ensuring quality and meaning rather than speed.

That is why our training process brings together doctors and professors with respected cultural NGOs, young Polynesian students in science, and women leaders. This diversity ensures that communities see themselves reflected in the teachers and are not made to feel that outsiders are imposing their way. We have also chosen to digitalize the incubator so that it is accessible to all islands, including the most remote ones such as the Tuamotus and the Marquesas. This is crucial, because tourism will inevitably grow, but it must be diversified and better distributed among the hundred islands of French Polynesia if it is to remain regenerative.

For us, scaling does not mean losing authenticity. It means reaching more people with the same care, the same humility, and the same respect — whether it is through hours of conversation in a garden, a training delivered online to a faraway island, or even something as simple and human as gifting a goat to a partner who needs it. It is not about scaling businesses, but about scaling regenerative principles, keeping them rooted in our land and people. If one day these immersions become recognized jobs across companies and government, then regenerative tourism will truly have found its place.



What makes our islands special is not only the beauty of our lagoons but the authenticity of our people, who live at a different rhythm than the busy, humbling pace of the modern world.

NANI has become a symbol of island resilience and global inspiration. If you could send one message from Polynesia to the world's tourism leaders, what would it be about the true purpose of travel in our time?

Polynesians are a people of navigators, nomads of the sea who have crossed vast distances guided by the stars. For us, the va'a, our canoe, is more than a vessel — it is a lesson: we only move forward when everyone paddles together, with humility, respect, and care for the ocean that carries us. Travel, in this sense, has never been about consumption. It has always been about connection — meeting others, building bridges, and creating harmony with people and place.

What makes our islands special is not

only the beauty of our lagoons but the authenticity of our people, who live at a different rhythm than the busy, humbling pace of the modern world. Visitors come seeking this transformation: the generosity, the relationships, and the way of being that cannot be staged or marketed. Every culture in the world holds its own magic, but we must listen to it, care for it, and embody it. It cannot remain a story told for promotion — it must be lived as a strategy by communities and governments alike.

This is the message we share with humility: that the true purpose of travel in our time is to reconnect, to regenerate, and to transform both the traveler and the host, leaving the world more whole than we found it. 



WORLD TOURISM AWARDS 2025: HONORING GLOBAL EXCELLENCE IN TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

The world's leading figures in tourism, travel, and hospitality gathered at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium in Brussels for the World Tourism Awards 2025 — the most prestigious celebration of excellence across the global tourism landscape.

Held immediately after the Global Tourism Forum Annual Meeting 2025, the glittering ceremony recognized outstanding destinations, organizations, innovators, and individuals shaping the future of travel worldwide. This year's edition showcased remarkable achievements in sustainability, technology, investment, and cultural innovation.



CATEGORIES & WINNERS

DESTINATION EXCELLENCE

Best Global Destination	France
Best Emerging Destination	Benjamin Vallée for Parc Omega
Best Sustainable Destination	Mozambique
Best Heritage Destination	Egypt
Best Nature-Based Destination	Benjamin Vallée for Parc Omega
Best Beach Destination	Maldives
Best Mountain Destination	Courchevel France
Best Cultural Tourism Destination	Uzbekistan
Best National Park	Virunga National Park-Democratic Republic of Congo
Best Culinary Destination	Azerbaijan
Best MICE Destination	Malaysia
Best Sports Destination	Qatar
Best Shopping Travel Destination	Paris/France
Wellness Retreat Destination	SHA Wellness Clinic
Best Health Tourism Destination	South Korea
Best Entertainment Destination	Abu Dhabi
Most Secure Destination	Iceland
Best Tourism Investment Destination	Angola
Best Health-Safe Destination	Singapore

HOSPITALITY & ACCOMMODATION

Best Luxury Hotel	Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi
Best Boutique Hotel	Il San Pietro di Positano – Italy
Best Eco-Hotel	Arctic TreeHouse Hotel – Finland
Best Resort Hotel	Club Nena
Best Business Hotel	Aman Tokyo
Best Airport Hotel	Hilton London Heathrow Airport (UK)
Best City Hotel	Rosewood London, UK
Best Family-Friendly Hotel	Tiffany Hotels Cuba (Playa Paraíso & Playa Hermosa)
Best All-Inclusive Hotel	Rixos Premium Saadiyat Island – Abu Dhabi
Best Hotel Design	The Chedi Andermatt (Switzerland)



CATEGORIES & WINNERS

AIRLINES & AVIATION

Best International Airline	Turkish Airlines
Best Low-Cost Airline	Ryanair
Best Inflight Experience	Qatar Airways Inflight
Best Airline for Business Travelers	Emirates
Most Sustainable Airline	Air France - KLM Group
Best Airport	Dubai Airport
Best Airport Lounge	Lufthansa First Class Terminal
Best Airport VIP Terminal	JETEX Dubai
Best Airport for Sustainability	Athens Airport
Best Airport Duty Free	Hamad International Airport / Qatar Duty Free (QDF)

TOURISM BOARDS & MINISTRIES

Best National Tourism Board	Italy-Enit
Best City Tourism Office	Visit Abu Dhabi
Most Innovative Tourism Campaign	Tourism Authority of Thailand -Half-Half Thai Travel
Best Tourism Branding	Incredible India
Best Use of Technology in Tourism Promotion	Welcome to Arabia — Saudi Tourism Authority

TRAVEL SERVICES & OPERATORS

Best Tour Operator	TUI
Best Online Travel Agency (OTA)	Booking.com
Best Travel App	Guide of Dubai
Best Cruise Line	Royal Carabbian Group
Best River Cruise Operator	Uniworld Boutique River Cruises
Best Safari Tour Operator	&Beyond
Best Luxury Travel Company	Black Tomato
Best Adventure Tour Provider	Intrepid Travel
Best Wellness Travel Agency	FIT Reisen



CATEGORIES & WINNERS

TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Best Travel Tech Startup	Cityfans
Best Use of AI in Travel	Tourism Authority of Thailand -TAT-AI
Best Digital Tourism Experience	Pilgrimaps
Best Virtual Travel Platform	Google
Best Business Networking Platform	Linkedin
Best Platform for Tourism Promotion	Instagram

EVENTS & MICE

Best International Festival	Cannes Film Festival
Best Cultural Event	Carnival in Rio de Janeiro
Best Sports Tourism Event	UEFA Champions League 2025
Best Convention Center	Dubai World Trade Center

FOOD & GASTRONOMY

Best Food Festival	Melbourne Food & Wine Festival
Best Hotel Restaurant	Il Borro Tuscan Bistro Dubai

SUSTAINABILITY & RESPONSIBILITY

Best Sustainable Tourism Project	Green Rock LLC
Best Eco-Friendly Hotel Chain	Marriott International
Most Responsible Tour Operator	Intrepid Travel
Best Carbon-Neutral Travel Project	Palau: Carbon Neutral Destination Program



CATEGORIES & WINNERS

LUXURY & LIFESTYLE

Best Private Jet Charter Company	NetJets
Best Yacht Charter Company	Fraser Yachts
Best Luxury Train Journey	La Dolce Vita Orient Express - Accor

DIGITAL & MEDIA

Best Tourism Video Campaign	Feel the Rhythm of Korea (Korea Tourism Organization)
Best Social Media Strategy in Tourism	Visit Dubai

TRANSPORT & MOBILITY

Best Car Rental Company	National Car Rental
Best Ride-Hailing Service	Uber
Best Cruise Port	Willemstad, Curaçao - Netherland

HEALTH, SAFETY & INCLUSION

Best Accessible Tourism Project	Visit Flanders
Best Hospitality Investment Fund	Kasada Capital
Best Diversity & Inclusion Program in Tourism	NEOM Saudi
Best Crisis Response in Tourism	Santorini, Greece — Recovery after earthquakes

EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT

Best Tourism Education Program	The AIM Foundation / Tourism Camp Armenia
Best Hospitality School	EHL Hospitality Business School
Best Internship Program in Tourism	Marriott Internship Program
Best Training Initiative	GSTC Sustainable Tourism Training Program



CATEGORIES & WINNERS

INDIVIDUALS & LEADERSHIP

Tourism Person of the Year	H.E. Shaikha Al Nowais
Best Woman in Tourism Leadership	Hala Matar Choufany
Best Tourism Entrepreneur	Cotur
Tourism Innovator Award	GetYourGuide

REAL ESTATE & INVESTMENT

Best Tourism Infrastructure Project	The Red Sea Project
Best Hospitality Development Project	Galataport Istanbul
Best Public-Private Tourism Partnership	Portugal Tourism Board (Turismo de Portugal) & Pestana Hotel Group
Best Tourism Destination Developer	Aldar Properties

SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS

Best Community-Based Tourism Initiative	Nanitravels
Best Destination Wedding Planner	Palmary Events
Best Regenerative Tourism Project	Aupaba Institute
Best Social Impact Tourism Initiative	Fondation Les Deux Rivières (Gabon)
Lifetime Achievement in Tourism	Dr. Taleb Rifai
Special Recognition for Tourism Innovation and Urban Transformation	Almaty - Kazakhstan
Special Recognition for SAF Implementation	IAG Group
Special Recognition for Promising Destination in Africa	Gambia
Honorary Award for Futurism in Art - Art & Innovation Lifetime Contribution Award	Serra Sayime Erdoğan



CONNECT TO HOSPITALITY

with our caring cabin crew



TURKISH AIRLINES