

7th WORLD TOURISM CONFERENCE

Melaka, Malaysia, 28 September, 2025

TECHNICAL NOTE

In the wake of the global recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, UN Tourism's call to "Rethink Tourism – From Crisis to Transformation" set the stage for a fundamental paradigm shift. As of 2024, international tourism rebounded impressively with 1.4 billion arrivals globally—an increase of 115% from 2023. The Asia-Pacific region saw strong momentum, reaching 87% of pre-pandemic numbers.

This global resurgence has paved the way for a renewed vision: a tourism sector that leads in sustainable, inclusive, and resilient transformation. This is reflected in the 2025 World Tourism Day theme, "*Tourism and Sustainable Transformation*", a timely and necessary call to reimagine tourism not only as a growth engine but also as a platform for equitable development, cultural and heritage preservation, protection of flora and fauna, environmental integrity and community resilience.

The evolving discourse on sustainable transformation now demands a multidimensional approach, extending beyond environmental sustainability to encompass social inclusivity, cultural and heritage respect, protection of flora and fauna, economic empowerment, and climate resilience. In this context, tourism must serve as a key enabler of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, with emphasis on leaving no one behind, including indigenous communities, persons with disabilities and the elderly.

To this end, tourism's role in advancing social justice and inclusivity must be amplified. Indigenous peoples bring invaluable traditional knowledge and cultural richness yet often remain excluded from mainstream tourism benefits. Similarly, persons with disabilities and elderly travellers are frequently underserved in infrastructure design and tourism programming. True transformation means removing these barriers, designing universally accessible experiences, and ensuring all stakeholders, regardless of background, have a voice in shaping the tourism of tomorrow.

Moreover, the sector must embed resilience and adaptability as core principles, addressing not only immediate shocks like pandemics and disasters but also chronic challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and socioeconomic inequality. Regenerative and inclusive models of tourism must be scaled up, from isolated pilots to integrated systems - to achieve systemic and longer lasting impact with greater

cooperation and collaboration involving all stakeholders, including policy makers at the various levels, destination managers, private sectors, NGOs, local communities and visitors.

Importantly, visitors themselves are critical change agents. Through responsible consumption and conscious travel behaviours, they can help catalyse regenerative tourism models that uplift communities, conserve natural ecosystems, and celebrate cultural and heritage diversity.

Finally, tourism's potential to enhance the culture and heritage of destinations, while preserving authenticity, integrity and dignity, should be a central narrative of the transformation agenda.

GOAL OF THE WORLD TOURISM CONFERENCE

To create a collaborative and inclusive platform for global tourism stakeholders to exchange ideas, share best practices, and co-create pathways for a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive tourism sector that aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals while respecting the needs of all communities.

CONFERENCE THEME

“Tourism and Sustainable Transformation: Inclusive – Resilient – Regenerative”.

FORMAT OF THE WORLD TOURISM CONFERENCE

The World Tourism Conference shall be a one-day event on 28 September 2025, which will be held in Melaka Historic City, back-to-back with the World Tourism Day. The proceedings will be divided into three sessions:

Session 1: Morning of 28 September 2025

Session 2 and 3: Afternoon of 28 September 2025

The morning session will involve the opening ceremony, a Special Speech by the Guest of Honour, and one (1) plenary session. The remaining plenary sessions will be held in the afternoon.

The format of each session will be as follows:

1. **Keynote Address:** ‘Big picture’ to set the scene and underlying tone as well as summarise the core messages to provide the context and sub-theme for the subsequent presentations/discussions.
2. **Presentation by Panellists:** A 20 minute presentation by each panellist followed by 5 minutes of Question and Answer (Q&A). To complement the keynote presentation by providing practical examples and best practices.
3. **Panel Discussion:** A 45 minute discourse to be moderated by the Keynote Speaker with active participation from the floor. To discuss the prospects and challenges related to each sub-theme and provide key messages and solutions.

SESSION SUMMARY

Session 1: Empowering Economies Through Inclusive Tourism

According to the World Economic Forum, tourism could be a USD 16 trillion industry by 2034. Building on the momentum since the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism’s transformative role needs to be fully optimised through a holistic approach and long term strategies. The deliberations in Session 1 will be centred on the 10 guiding principles for sustainable transformation recommended by the World Economic Forum namely; adapt, upgrade and personalise tourism offerings, provide an overarching framework for holistic collaboration, innovate to meet evolving travellers demographics and preferences, embrace growth segments by developing specialised offerings, foster responsible technology and innovation, develop crisis-resilient strategies, encourage mutual benefit and understanding between residents and visitors, commit to regenerative practices, bridge workforce gaps, support SMEs and local communities, invest in and develop sustainable infrastructure, and revitalise unique heritage. While economic transformation is at the heart of the guiding principles, inclusivity is also paramount to ensure equitable and responsible growth – a key element of the content of this session.

Session 2: From Policy to Practice: Scaling Sustainable Tourism

Scaling sustainable tourism is also critical towards sustainable transformation beyond successful case studies and demonstration projects. Session 2 will expand the deliberations and key messages from the previous session to focus on the pathways towards upscaling sustainable tourism which require a systemic approach focusing on stakeholder collaboration and partnerships, education and capacity building, technological innovation, community empowerment and performance

evaluation and monitoring. It is also crucial that clear policies and sustainability guidelines are formulated and cascaded down to the destination level by incentivising the private sector and local communities. Capacity building should be customised to include training programmes for tourism SMEs and local communities related to sustainable tourism, knowledge sharing and educating tourists on responsible behaviour. This session will not only deep dive into the pathways for ensuring that economic growth is achieved together with the conservation of nature and preservation of culture but how data driven technology could assist in monitoring and measuring the contribution of regenerative practices in tourism to support global efforts in combating climate change.

Session 3: Tourism in the Age of Artificial Intelligence and Innovation

The future of tourism is plagued with uncertainty such as threats from climate change, natural disasters, diseases and geo-politics. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the resulting innovations are also expected to play a dominant role in the future of tourism, that could bring about serious threats to the industry but at the same promise exciting prospects if managed well. Session 3 will try to envision what tourism could look like in 2050 and how we could embrace AI to improve creativity, innovation and competitiveness, and yet maintain an inclusive and 'a level playing field' for all stakeholders. AI could bring benefit the tourism industry by enhancing customer experiences, improving operational efficiency and driving revenue growth. However the automation of tasks might require re-skilling initiatives so that human staff could focus on more complex and strategic tasks. This session will provide a platform showcasing the latest innovations as well as for discourse on the future of AI in tourism, and the interventions that need to be put in place so as to benefit traditional industry players, consumers and tourism SMEs, startups and community based tourism operator.