

Agenda Item 4

Report of the UN Tourism Executive Director – Implementation of the Programme of Work in the Middle East 2025-2026 (Regional and Technical Activities)

Summary:

The Regional Report for the Middle East serves as a vital overview of the strategic and operational synergy within the region. It includes the combined UN Tourism activities of the Regional Department for the Middle East at the Headquarters in Madrid, and the Regional Office for the Middle East (ROME) in Riyadh, reflecting the expansion of the Organization, ensuring that the unique needs of Middle Eastern Member States are met with agility in a more close and effective partnership, allowing for tailored technical assistance in areas such as human capital development, rural tourism, and innovation on the ground.

Detailed information regarding all specific activities and initiatives of the Regional Office for the Middle East can be found in Section II of this document.

I. A. Overview of international trends and outlook in the Middle East

1. According to UN Tourism Barometer, the Middle East recorded 3% growth in 2025. The region virtually reached the mark of 100 million international visitors. Egypt (+20%) saw the highest growth in arrivals in 2025, followed by Jordan (+12%) and Qatar (+4%). Tourism Receipts: more than 150 USD Billion in 2024 (last available data). This represents 39% more arrivals than in 2019, the strongest regional results relative to the pre-pandemic¹.

2. It is worth to mention here some of the factors underpinning this remarkable performance: Visa and travel facilitation measures; as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are set to implement a unified tourist visa, similar to the Schengen visa in Europe, as peer the development of new destinations, investments in new tourism-related projects and the hosting of large events. The stereotypical visitor groups to the region – mainly traders and pilgrims, have become more diverse and now include tourists visiting for leisure, recreation, medical treatment, business and events. Big events including Expo Dubai, Hajj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia and the COP 28 helped drive visitors back to the Middle East.

3. The evolution of the current political situation is a factor to consider in terms of possible disruptions of travel to the Middle East and negative effects on traveller confidence overall.

¹ UN Tourism Barometer, https://pre-webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2026-01/World_Tourism%20Barometer_Jan26_excerpt_v2.pdf?VersionId=u75u9KWPa6Dzc2CUHld7AvQ49FYrDTQC

B. Main challenges and opportunities in the Region affecting the tourism sector

4. Tourism in the Middle East has significant growth potential due to its rich cultural heritage, modern attractions, and unique landscapes. However, it faces various investment challenges that can hinder its progress. Some of the most pressing issues include geopolitical instability, economic volatility, regulatory barriers, skilled labour shortage and diversification needs. Sustained growth depends on the region's ability to modernize its regulatory environment and diversify its offerings. Success will ultimately require a coordinated strategic effort between governments and global investors to build a stable foundation for the industry's future.

Current and future challenges:

5. The tourism sector in the Middle East faces several significant challenges, including economic uncertainty, which impacts travel demand and spending, and geopolitical tensions that can deter tourists and disrupt travel plans.. Additionally, the need for sustainable tourism practices to mitigate environmental impacts is increasingly critical. The sector must continuously adapt to rapid technological advancements, requiring ongoing investment in new technologies. Workforce challenges, including shortages and the need for skilled labor, further complicate the industry's growth. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts from governments, industry stakeholders, and communities to ensure sustainable development.

6. According to the Survey Findings on Members' Priorities for UN Tourism 2026-2027 Programme of Work (PoW), Middle East Member States identified the following as their most critical challenges for the coming biennium:

- **Human Capital Shortages:** This was ranked as the **#1 priority**. The region faces a massive gap in skilled professionals to staff the "Giga-projects" and luxury expansions currently underway.
- **Education and Skills Development:** Directly linked to the staff shortage, there is an urgent demand for vocational training that meets international hospitality standards.
- **Economic Environment:** Concerns regarding oil price volatility, inflation, and interest rates, which affect long-term infrastructure financing and traveller purchasing power.
- **Increased Regional Competition:** As multiple neighbouring countries launch major tourism visions simultaneously, members expressed a need for better **destination positioning** and product differentiation.
- **Geopolitical Tensions:** While the region is a top performer in growth, members cited regional instability as a persistent threat to traveller perception and investment security.

7. According to the most recent UN Tourism Panel of Experts survey, the main obstacles to the full recovery of the tourism industry in 2026 remain elevated travel and tourism costs - particularly high prices for transport and accommodation - alongside the global economic uncertainty, persistent labour shortages, and the increasing impact of extreme weather events linked to climate change. While international tourism has shown strong resilience and continued growth, these factors continue to weigh on consumer confidence and travel demand in certain regions.

8. In 2026, while global tourism continues to expand and international arrivals have largely recovered to - or even surpassed - pre-pandemic levels, ongoing geopolitical tensions, including in the Middle East, still shape travel patterns and perceptions. According to the latest UN Tourism Barometer, international tourism showed resilience with growth in arrivals and strong demand throughout 2025, despite economic and geopolitical headwinds such as elevated travel costs and uncertainty in certain regions - highlighting that geopolitical unrest can continue to make both business and leisure travel more complex and uncertain. These tensions influence traveller confidence, insurance conditions, and destination choices, and when combined with broader challenges like labour shortages and inflationary pressures, they affect the performance of tourism sectors in many Member States.

9. Environmental challenges such as desertification, rising temperatures, and overdevelopment threaten the region's fragile ecosystems, which are key attractions for tourists. Scientists have warned that extreme heat and dust storms could eventually exceed the threshold of comfort for summer tourism. Future success will depend on "indoor-outdoor" architectural innovation and shifting to sustainable, low-carbon transport. The major implications for these changes include increased water scarcity, sea level rise, coral bleaching, algal blooms and extreme weather events.

10. AI-Driven Misinformation: As the region leans into AI for personalization, it also faces "misinformation crises" where AI-generated fake news about security or health can spread rapidly, impacting traveller sentiment in hours.

Opportunities:

The Middle East in 2026 combines rich heritage, modern innovation, and strategic investments positioning it as a dynamic and competitive tourism region with long-term growth potential.

11. The Middle East continues to present strong and diverse opportunities for tourism growth in 2026. According to the latest UN Tourism Barometer data, international arrivals in the Middle East increased steadily throughout 2025, reflecting continued recovery and sustained global interest in the region. The area remains one of the fastest-growing tourism destinations worldwide, contributing significantly to economic diversification, job creation, and cultural exchange across Member States.

12. A major milestone in 2026 is the long-awaited opening of the Grand Egyptian Museum in Giza, set to become the world's largest archaeological museum. This landmark attraction, showcasing thousands of ancient Egyptian artifacts, is expected to draw millions of visitors and significantly boost Egypt's tourism revenues, enhance its cultural diplomacy, and reaffirm its position as a global heritage destination.

13. Beyond cultural tourism, governments across the region continue to invest heavily in infrastructure, easing visa regulations and promoting diversified tourism products. Countries such as Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are focusing on sports, adventure, and eco-tourism, offering experiences like desert safaris, diving, and hiking, alongside high-end resorts and urban attractions. The legacy of mega-events like EXPO 2020 Dubai and the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar continues to enhance the region's global profile and travel appeal.

14. National tourism plans with a clear vision and goals must be developed; effective governance has to be ensured in aligning the functions of all public sectors with these plans; new source tourist markets need to be identified to complement existing ones; destinations should be ready with appropriate infrastructure and services, and marketing campaigns need to be designed to connect with the target markets. Furthermore, sustainability, innovation and technology are instrumental to the entire process. Providing value-added services that accurately meet demand will help attract higher value tourists and foster repeat visitors.

15. Through continuous relations with each and every Member State, as well as with the Affiliate Members of the Middle East, UN Tourism aims to ensure a fair, yet strategic, geographically balanced distribution of its activities in the region. Its programme of activities in the region is built around the following five strategic priorities, which are also part of the SDG's:

- Make tourism smarter: innovation and the digital transformation SDGs 8, 9, 10 and 17
- Grow our competitive edge: investments and entrepreneurship SDGs 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15 and 17
- Create more and better jobs: education and employment SDGs 4, 8, 10 and 17
- Build resilience and facilitate travel: safe, secure and seamless travel SDGs 3, 8, 11, 12, 13 and 16
- Protect our heritage: social, cultural and environmental sustainability SDGs 8, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16

16. By resolution A/RES/757(XXV), the UN Tourism General Assembly approved the Draft Programme of Work, structured around three strategic objectives and five programmatic priorities, as follows:

- a. **Objective 1:** Become the most influential tourism organization, through advocacy, knowledge creation, policy guidance and diversification of services;
- b. **Objective 2:** Expand the Organization's membership. Increase resources, capacity and ownership, through strategic partnerships;
- c. **Objective 3:** Transform the Organization for a better future. More agile and effective governance. Embracing UN values and multilateralism for realizing the 2030 Agenda;
- d. **Priority 1:** Enhance competitiveness: robust tourism statistics and UN standards, data and market intelligence, rethink destination positioning and product development;
- e. **Priority 2:** Foster sustainability and inclusiveness: circularity, climate action, and biodiversity. Reduce inequalities and promote culture;
- f. **Priority 3:** Invest in people: reinforce education and training, strengthen human capital for decent work;
- g. **Priority 4:** Boost investment & Scale up innovation: access to finance, accelerate the uptake of new business models;
- h. **Priority 5:** Build better and strong institutions: tourism policy, governance, and resilience. foundations, improving communication, strengthening collaboration, upskilling, and keeping sustainability

Priority 1: Enhance competitiveness

A. Data to empower tourism:

17. **Tourism Statistics Database:** over 300 key tourism statistics collected on: inbound, outbound and domestic tourism, tourism industries, employment in tourism, trade-based indicators, SDG indicators, and Tourism GDP and value added

- Adoption of a new tourism employment indicator (8.9.2) to monitor the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the UN Statistical Commission: for the first time—global data on tourism employment monitored within the SDG monitoring process.
- UN Statistical Commission side event “The 2025 SDG Indicator Review: Enhancing the Global Monitoring Framework for Greater Impact” (February 2025).
- Annual Contribution to UN SG’s Progress Report on SDGs, UN SDG Report, and the UN SDG Global database.
- New statistical dataset on tourism employment, in collaboration with ILO.
- Launch of the modernization of the UN Tourism Statistics Database
- Tailored interactive visual tourism flow chart that includes the top 10 intra-African destinations.

18. Towards a global urban tourism database: UN Tourism and the World Tourism Cities Federation (WCTF) launched during ITB, Berlin, a joint report highlighting the need to measure the economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism in urban destinations and create a global benchmark for the development of urban tourism. **Cities in the Middle East include Abu Dhabi and Dubai in the Emirates, Muscat in Oman and Riyadh in Saudi Arabia.**

19. Tourism Data and market intelligence: Since the 2025 Regional Commission for the Middle East, four issues of the World Tourism Barometer have been released: May, September and November 2025 issues, and January 2026 issue.

- 2025 editions of UN Tourism Highlights
- Monthly updates and annual data and insights in the UN Tourism Dashboards
- Visa: Openness index and digital nomads report

- Data Lab Initiative: cooperation with the European Travel Commission (ETC): five technical webinars + 1 event
- Series of reports with Amadeus on tourism insights and trends in the regions of the Americas, Asia and the Pacific and Europe.
- Key cooperations: Amadeus, Travel Insights Reports for Europe, the America and Asia Pacific, Forecast for ASEAN Tourism Outlook 2025- 2030
- Affiliate Members Podcast: On the go.

UN Tourism Data Dashboard

The UN Tourism Data Dashboard provides monthly and yearly data and insights. It covers key indicators for inbound and outbound tourism at the global, regional and national levels including international tourist arrivals, tourism receipts, tourism share of exports, seasonality, contribution to GDP as well as data on air transport, occupancy rates, short term rentals demand and travel sentiment. Aggregated data is included for the Middle East as well as for the Gulf Cooperation Countries.

B. Product Development:

20. Gastronomy:

- Publications: *A Tour Around The World's Gastronomy* including Bahrain and Oman.

21. UN Tourism and the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) signed an MoU, in preparation for the 3rd World Sports Tourism Congress. It was signed during the Formula 1 Grand Prix weekend in Monza, Italy. FIA President, Mohammed Ben Sulayem has been appointed as UN Tourism's Ambassador for Sustainable Tourism, in the category of "Sport". Both parties agreed to create the UN Tourism FIA Working Group on Sports Tourism to advance and raise awareness on the potential of this tourism product.

C. Destination management

22. The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi, UAE, joined other Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) awarded with the UN Tourism.QUEST Certification which recognizes quality and excellence in Destination Management Organizations.

D. Tourism for Rural Development and Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism:

23. **Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism:** In its fifth edition, the winners from the Middle East were: **Masfout, United Arab Emirates and North Azraq, Jordan. Additionally, 20 villages have been selected to participate in the Upgrade Programme this year including from the Middle East: Al-Bashandi Village, Egypt, Iraq Al-Amir, Jordan.**

More information on the 2025 BTV edition can be found here: <https://www.untourism.int/news/un-tourism-announces-best-tourism-villages-2025-52-communities-leading-tourism-for-rural-development>

24. The call for submissions for the sixth edition will take place in the first quarter of 2026, opening a new opportunity for rural destinations to share their inspiring initiatives and get global recognition as tourism for rural development champions.

25. BTV Network – The Knowledge Series: UN Tourism launched the quarterly The Knowledge Series – Learn from the Experts, designed to provide the BTV Network expert-led guidance to help local stakeholders develop tailored and sustainable tourism solutions. Three sessions were organized in 2025, gathering over 150 participants from 30+ countries including participants from the Middle East. The sessions focused on Implementing National Sustainability Goals at the

Village Level in collaboration with Green Destinations (February), Intellectual Property for Rural Identity in collaboration with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO (May), and presented also the Self-Assessment Tool to Assist Rural Destinations (STAR) by UN Tourism featuring a guest speaker from the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism of Peru (August)..

26. **BTV Network – Village Talks:** The *Village Talks – Voices from the Ground* public webinar series was launched to increase visibility and outreach of good practices by the Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism. Four sessions were organized in 2025 bringing together more than 350 participants from 45+ countries include frequent participation from the Middle East. These include [Heritage in Action: Innovating Cultural Preservation in Villages](#) (April), [Tourism for Nature: Conserving Natural Resources through Sustainable Rural Development](#) (July), [Cultivating Heritage: Agritourism Experiences in GIAHS Villages](#) (September), and *Strengthening Communities: People-Centered Approaches to Rural Tourism* (December). These webinars provide a platform for villages to share practical examples of tourism-driven rural development and best practices, enhancing international visibility.

27. In May 2025, UN Tourism partnered with HSLU - Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, engaging 27 undergraduate students from seven countries in a collaborative research project as part of their academic coursework. The students conducted in-depth studies for five BTVs, one of them Misfat Al Abriyeen, Oman. Each group focused on a different BTV, exploring the challenges and opportunities related to tourism development in rural settings. The initiative proved valuable for both the students and the BTVs, offering meaningful insights and increased visibility for all stakeholders involved.

27. In September 2025, alongside the Director of the Regional Office for the Middle East, the Coordinator of the Tourism for Rural Development Programme joined a mission to the province of Aseer, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to conduct a technical site-visit and stakeholder meetings to understand the rural tourism strategy of the region and explore future partnership opportunities. Also, a recognition plate was handed over ceremoniously to the Best Tourism Village “Abo Noghta Castles and Historic Tabab”.28. In January 2026, UN Tourism hosted as session on “Tourism for Rural Development: Creating Jobs and Inclusive Growth for Rural Communities” in the framework of the Global Labour Market Conference, which took place in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The session consisted of a keynote, fireside chat, and a panel discussion including high-level representatives from UNESCO, World Bank, the Embassy of Sri Lanka to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as well as UnTours Foundation. The role of the Tourism for Rural Development Programme was highlighted and promoted.

29. In September 2025, the Arabic versions of the reports [Tourism and Rural Development: A Policy Perspective and Tourism](#) and [Rural Development: Understanding Challenges on the Ground – Lessons learned from the Best Tourism Villages by UNWTO Initiative](#) were launched, expanding outreach in the Middle East.

30. In November 2025, the [Tourism for Rural Development Impact Report](#) has been updated to include the activities of 2025. The report was updated and printed ahead of the General Assembly of UN Tourism that took place in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

31. The discussions were initiated regarding “Qatar Farm Tourism Development Program”, aiming to develop world-class agri-tourism experiences by leveraging UN Tourism expertise and experience and Qatar tourism standards.

Training:

32. UN Tourism follows a **360-degree approach** to tourism education, ensuring that learning opportunities are accessible at all levels. This comprehensive strategy encompasses **secondary education, higher education, executive education, online learning, and International Academies**. Our commitment is to provide a seamless learning journey for all stakeholders involved in tourism development. (more resources are available on: ([UN Tourism Education | UN Tourism](#))

E. Committee on Tourism and Competitiveness (CTC):

33. The Committee on Tourism and Competitiveness (CTC) met in person in its 17th Meeting on 7 November 2025 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia during the 26th session of the General Assembly and

in its 18th Meeting (hybrid mode) which took place on 20 January 2026 in Madrid, Spain, during FITUR. Lebanon participated in both meetings as member of the CTC and contributed to the preparation of the work plan of the CTC for the period 2026-2027.

More information on the CTC and its members is available here: <https://www.untourism.int/governing-bodies/competitiveness-committee>.

F. Resilience and governance

34. Launch of the Tourism Law Observatories (Resolution 757(XXV), recently being established in the Middle East.

35. UN Tourism is revolutionizing governance in the tourism sector by promoting sustainable, inclusive, and resilient practices. As the leading international organization in tourism, UN Tourism focus is on people and planet, emphasizing community engagement, environmental protection, and social inclusion. Key initiatives include developing Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks, guiding principles for sustainable investment, and supporting regenerative tourism in Small Island Developing States (SIDS). By fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing, UN Tourism aims to make tourism a driver of economic growth, job creation, and poverty reduction, while preserving cultural and natural heritage.

Priority 2: Foster sustainability and inclusiveness: circularity, climate action, and biodiversity. Reduce inequalities and promote culture”

36. The International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (INSTO) is a leading and growing initiative of destinations committed to sustainable tourism development based on participatory approaches, evidence and transparency. We encourage Member States to join INSTO network and to participate in the webinars organized by the network to share their experiences and lessons learned and to benefit from their publications.

37. INSTO organised 18 technical webinars, which showcased the experiences, management practices and monitoring efforts of its members and selected experts in the eleven key measurement areas. These webinars are essential tools and resources for destinations committed to sustainability.

38. Climate action: Climate change poses one of the most significant threats to sustainable development, with the tourism sector both impacted by and contributing to global greenhouse gas emissions. Following the Azerbaijan COP29 Declaration on Enhanced Climate Action in Tourism and recognizing the urgent need for coordinated efforts to enhance climate action in tourism, Brazil proposes the creation of an Interinstitutional Working Group on Tourism and Climate Action. This initiative will strengthen partnerships, align strategies, and accelerate the implementation of climate-resilient and low-carbon tourism policies and practices. The Interinstitutional Working Group on Tourism and Climate Action was established by the Executive Council through decision 12(CXXIII), adopted at its 123rd session on 31 May 2025. more information about the working Group is available on https://pb.untourism.int/assets/docs/CE124_03_Report_WG_Climate_Action_and_Committee_Merit_and_Excellence_En.pdf.

39. Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST): The Statistical Framework (SF) for MST is an internationally agreed framework describing the main concepts, definitions and data organization structures to support the production and organization of data on the impacts and dependencies of tourism on the economy, society and the environment. UN Tourism is currently leading the development of an agreed set of indicators derived from the SF-MST for international comparability purposes with the view to initiate an international dataset and country reporting. To date, 31 countries and sub-national destinations have implemented an MST pilot. These include from the Middle East; Egypt, Saudi Arabia.

- Participation at the DGINS (Directors General of National Statistical Institutes) Conference,

the first ever edition on tourism statistics (October 2025, Croatia).

- 4 agreements (sponsorship agreement with easyJet Holidays, UN-to UN agreement with the International Labour Organization, partnership agreement with the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, contract with the University of Oxford).
- Promotion of the MST and ESG initiatives in 20+ events.

The development of the SF-MST has benefited from the experience of 29 pilots (including Middle East countries) and multiple rounds of consultation. The publication “Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism: Learnings from Pilots”, was launched at the Symposium on MST country experiences. 7 countries from the Middle East region (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the Emirates) were featured as a best practice.

40. In the same context, many projects have been conducted over the last years, especially the Evaluation of Tourism Statistics System, Phase II, (KSA) and the Assessment of the Tourism Statistics for the Compilation of TSA for the UAE (ongoing until 2026), while further discussions are ongoing for the implementation of the following:

- Statistics Summit and working Group Meeting
- Improving the Statistical system in Kuwait;
- Familiarization with MST standards for all Member States of the region.

41. Gender equality and women’s empowerment: Series of webinars on the theme “Invests in women: Accelerate progress” in different world regions including Middle East for International Women’s Day 2024. The 'Gender Equality in Tourism Training' course updated with new branding ready for future promotion.

42. Following the success of the global Centre Stage Project, including the project in Jordan, we encourage our Member States in the Middle East to duplicate this project in their countries.

Priority 3: Invest in people: inforce education and training, strengthen human capital for decent work:

43. More than 4,000 people were trained since 2019 by the UN Tourism Academy with the support of Andorra through 90 initiatives delivered in over 25 countries, using 10 tailored formats ranging from workshops and masterclasses to postgraduate programmes and consultancies. Programmes in six languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, French, and Arabic).

2024: • Saudi Arabia, Tourism Faculty Development Programme, 312 participants.

2025: • Saudi Arabia, Faculty Exchange Programme, in collaboration with Les Roches, 60 participants.

- Co-branding the Designing Culinary Experiences programme of Basque Culinary Centre, 4 full scholarships.
- Co-branding the Cornell Sustainable Tourism Destination online course with 350 scholarships delivered.

44. UN Tourism also published the “Education Toolkit for the incorporation of tourism as a subject in high schools”. This will equip countries with resources to integrate tourism seamlessly into curricula, fostering early interest and understanding of tourism careers amongst students. It is now actionable as per the request of Member States to create a curated implementation plan based on any of the three leading methodologies: International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO), American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute (AHLEI) or Cambridge Assessment International Education. Discussions are being held with Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia (Zagreb), the United Arab Emirates and Zambia.

45. The UN Tourism Online Academy: Launched in 2019, has become the leading platform for online education in tourism and hospitality with over 40,000 users and 50 selfpaced high-quality courses. Additional thematic areas, languages, and scholarships will be made available worldwide.

- The Academy saw an expansion with a focus on delivering courses in Arabic in 2025.
- Support for the **Riyadh School of Tourism and Hospitality** to serve as a regional centre of excellence for vocational training.

- Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) on AI and Innovation.
- The Faculty Exchange Programme for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in collaboration with Les Roches, was launched, in the framework of the e-Learning Agreement.
- The implementation of the **Education Toolkit** for tourism in high schools was recently piloted in the UAE.

46. Quality continues to be a main pillar. The UN Tourism TedQual Certification network gathers hundreds of certified programmes from several institutions worldwide. Middle East (1.35%). The following Education and Training Institutions whose programmes have been certified / renewed or are going through the process October-December 2025:

- The University of Jordan Jordan 1 CERTIFIED.
 - Bunyan Academy Saudi Arabia 1 CERTIFIED.
 - University of Hail Saudi Arabia 1 CERTIFIED.
 - Umm Al-Qura University Saudi Arabia 4 CERTIFIED.
 - Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University Saudi Arabia 4 CERTIFIED.
 - Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University Applied College Saudi Arabia 4 CERTIFIED.
 - King Khalid University Saudi Arabia 1 CERTIFIED.
 - The Applied College at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University Saudi Arabia 1 CERTIFIED.
 - Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University Saudi Arabia 4 CERTIFIED.
 - Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University Applied College Saudi Arabia 4 CERTIFIED.
 - King Khalid University Saudi Arabia 1 CERTIFIED.
 - Technical and Vocational Training Corporation - TVTC Saudi Arabia 4 CERTIFIED.
- Certification Renewal:
- Royal Academy of Culinary Arts Jordan 1 RENEWED.
 - The Applied College at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University Saudi Arabia 1 The certification renewal process is in progress.
 - Technical and Vocational Training Corporation - TVTC Saudi Arabia 4 The certification renewal process is in progress.
 - Saudi Culinary Arts Academy - ZADK Saudi Arabia 1 The certification renewal process is in progress.
 - King Saud University - KSU Saudi Arabia 1 The certification renewal process is in progress.
 - Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University - IAU Saudi Arabia 1 The certification renewal process is in progress.
 - 7. King Khalid University - KKU Saudi Arabia 1 The certification renewal process is in progress.

47. UN Tourism Academy carried out different Executive Education programmes: (a) Tourism Faculty Development Programme for Saudi Arabia. It featured 12 online modules with the participation of 312 people in four different tracks: academic managers, tourism faculty, hospitality faculty, and education & training evaluators (January – September 2024). In 2025, Faculty Exchange Programme, in collaboration with Les Roches, had 60 participants from Saudi Arabia.

48. Additionally, UN Tourism is currently working on the creation of an international PhD programme on Tourism Law, in collaboration with La Sorbonne University (France) and the University of Salamanca (Spain).

49. Saudi Arabia: At its 123rd session, the Executive Council approved the establishment of the Tourism Law Observatory for the Middle East through decision 3 (CXXIII). The Observatory is now

being set up within the framework of the Regional Office for the Middle East. Building on the successful model of the LAC Tourism Law Observatory, the Middle East Observatory will replicate and adapt key features, such as a legal database, resources and reports on tourism legislation, an interactive learning platform, and a regional academic network, tailored to the specific legal frameworks, priorities, and needs of the Middle East region. To this end, the Secretariat is currently working on adapting the Observatory's digital platform to the Arabic language. Furthermore, a formal call for the pre-selection of academic collaborators from Middle East Member States will be launched shortly

50. The project Human Capital Development by E-Learning with Saudi Arabia has achieved:

(a) Growth of the UN Tourism Online Academy portfolio with 10 additional courses.

(b) The TedQual auditing procedure in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has kicked off and is completed with 5 top Saudi universities to be certified tourism programmes. Additionally, due to the substantial interest of TedQual being the benchmark standard for tourism programmes in the country, another 5 Saudi universities are going through the auditing procedure to be certified. The following programmes have been certified: Bachelor of Travel and Tourism Management – King Abdulaziz University (Saudi Arabia)

- Bachelor of Hospitality Management – King Abdulaziz University (Saudi Arabia) ▪ Bachelor of Event Management – King Abdulaziz University (Saudi Arabia)
- Diploma in Culinary Arts – King Abdulaziz University (Saudi Arabia)
- Diploma in Tourism and Entertainment Projects Management – The Applied College at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University (Saudi Arabia)
- Diploma of Culinary Arts – Saudi Academy of Culinary Arts – ZADK (Saudi Arabia) ▪ Bachelor in Tourism and Hotel Management – King Saud University (Saudi Arabia)
- BA in Tourism and Heritage Management – Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University (Saudi Arabia)
- Food Production (Cooking), Diploma – Technical and Vocational Training Corporation, AIMadinah (Saudi Arabia). Events Management, Diploma – Technical and Vocational Training Corporation, AIMadinah (Saudi Arabia)
- Events Management, Diploma – Females' Technical College in Abha (Saudi Arabia)
- Events Management, Diploma – Females' Technical College in Hail (Saudi Arabia)
- Events Management, Diploma – Females' Technical College in Taif (Saudi Arabia).
- Hajj and Umrah Services, Diploma – Females' Technical College in Makkah (Saudi Arabia)
- Tour Guidance, Diploma – Females' Technical College in Tabuk (Saudi Arabia)

(c) Tourism Labour Market Observatory: aims to promote the creation of value-added jobs through capacity building and workforce skills analysis in the Kingdom. To achieve this goal, UN Tourism is committed to producing two comprehensive reports: an AI Impact Analysis on Tourism Jobs and Digitalization and the Future of Tourism, as well as a Comprehensive Tourism Labour Market Report.

(d) Important upgrades in the platform through the implementation of Artificial Intelligence features like AI Tutor and AI Feedback Tool.

51. Regarding the creation of International Academies, **the Riyadh School of Tourism and Hospitality in collaboration with UN Tourism** is advancing in its mission of promoting the

creation of new innovative tourism programmes within its territory and providing continuous mentorship for Saudi research initiatives.

Priority 4: Boost investment & Scale up innovation: access to finance, accelerate the uptake of new business models:

Investments in tourism:

52. Tourism investments have become one of the most important strategic priorities for countries around the world. The Middle East saw between 2019 and 2024 the announcement of 279 FDI greenfield projects in the tourism sector, amounting to an announced total CAPEX of USD 13.1 billion, meaning an average of USD 46.8 million per project, expected to create over 30,000 jobs.

- UN Tourism’s Ministerial Roundtable on Investment in Tourism, was held in the framework of Abu Dhabi Annual Investment Congress (AIM) 2025 editions with a view to UN Tourism visibility and Know-how sharing, mainly to:
 - Highlight the crucial role of governments in creating and implementing effective policies that foster tourism investment.
 - Identify challenges in current tourism policies and regulations that hinder investment and propose solutions for overcoming them.
 - Explore how governments can streamline regulatory processes to make the investment climate more transparent, predictable, and accessible to both domestic and international investors.
 - Examine the alignment of tourism investment policies with national development goals, including sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience. Facilitate the exchange of best practices from governments that have successfully designed and implemented effective tourism investment frameworks.

53. In this same vein, UN Tourism strengthens collaboration with a variety of stakeholders to leverage the region’s value proposition through two main ways of action. As a demonstration of this commitment, the Annual Investment Forum (AIM) 2024 of the Emirates recognized the Organization as a **strong international partner**.

a) **Knowledge creation and investment promotion through reports and guidelines:** crafting informative materials aimed at guiding potential investors and policymakers. These resources facilitate informed decision-making processes and contribute to the promotion of economic development.

- Meanwhile **Tourism Doing Business – Investment Guidelines** expects to launch more publications during the year (Oman), Saudi Arabia investments guidelines were already issued by the end of 2025.

b) **Investment Fora and Capacity Building:** participation in both our own forums and key investment events continues to expand as part of UN Tourism active role in shaping traditional and non-traditional investments on the Middle East agenda.

- UN Tourism Forum “Investing in Tourism: Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Financing” (23 May 2024, Muscat, Oman).

54. Technical assistance on investments: UN Tourism is currently intensifying its collaborative efforts with key strategic partners among others like WAIPA, IFC, UNCTAD, UNIDO, CAF and the World Free Zones Organization. Additionally, the Organization is engaging with regional entities such as COMESA to bolster tourism investments. These partnerships aim:

a) to enhance the scope and impact of tourism-related projects and initiatives, providing comprehensive support to member states.

b) to create a more conducive environment for tourism development, enabling member states to tap into new investment opportunities and drive sustainable growth in the sector.

- c) to enhance policy formulation and implementation, ensuring that tourism investments contribute significantly to economic diversification and resilience.
- d) to facilitate access to financing and advisory services, crucial for the implementation of large-scale tourism infrastructure projects and the green transformation of the sector.

Innovation in tourism:

55. Middle East is a key player in the tourism global entrepreneurship ecosystem, standing out with the 12.29% of the total of the UN Tourism Top 350 innovators, especially from Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt.

56. **Contribution to the Electronic Voting Platform:** To streamline the decision-making process and increase the efficiency of discussions within the UN Tourism, an Agreement with the UAE for the sponsorship of the implementation and maintenance of a Mobile Application integrated platform was signed in June 2024. The platform includes an electronic voting system for the Organization that would be available at the meetings of its Governing Bodies (the General Assembly and the Executive Council) and its subsidiary organs. It also offers other features such as documentation management, online registration process and interactive communication between participants, among other features. The adoption of the new electronic platform sponsored by UAE further underscores UN Tourism's commitment to the digital transformation of every part of the tourism ecosystem, as well as its ongoing focus on promoting innovation and modernizing its processes. The UAE is pleased to commit to covering the costs associated with the implementation of an electronic voting system.

57. The Artificial Intelligence agenda in tourism: UN Tourism now leads the agenda on Artificial Intelligence in the sector by reflecting on the key role of technology for travel facilitation, boosting impact and addressing ethical and market competition gaps.

The 2025 Riyadh Declaration, adopted at the 26th UN Tourism General Assembly, serves as a 50-year roadmap focusing on sustainable, AI-driven, and inclusive global tourism. It prioritizes digital transformation, investment in human capital, and environmental protection to ensure tourism remains a long-term economic driver. The Declaration underscores strengthening international cooperation, resilience, and the empowerment of local communities through digital innovation, AI integration, and inclusive tourism economies. Signatories commit to take concrete steps, including incentivizing investment in digital infrastructure, addressing workforce shortages and skills gaps, and taking advantage of technological and AI-driven initiatives to support local entrepreneurship.

58. The first-ever Wellness Tourism Workshop in the Middle East organized by UN Tourism in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism of Saudi Arabia. The two-day event (9–10 September) brought together representatives from National Tourism Administrations and Organizations (NTAs/NTOs) from 12 Middle East Member States, alongside Affiliate Members, industry experts and key stakeholders from across the region. The workshop explored the growing potential of wellness tourism as a driver of economic growth, tourism diversification, and sustainability for the Middle East. The event responded to the priorities outlined by Member States during the 50th and 51st Meetings of the UN Tourism Regional Commission for the Middle East, particularly in the areas of capacity building and product diversification.

59. On the other hand, the Middle East stood out in global initiatives:

Innovation Events in the Region:

- In 2025, during the 26th UN Tourism's General Assembly in Riyadh, the Grand Finale of the **Artificial Intelligence Startup Challenge** highlighted some of the most promising innovators in tourism. Among the finalists was EyeGo, an emerging startup from UAE and Saudi Arabia. This startup showcased cutting-edge AI solutions designed to transform the tourism experience in hotels.

- The **UN Tourism Innovation Network**, that gathers over 400 startups and scale-ups from more than 150 countries, has 18 startups from UAE (4,5%).
- UN Tourism participation as speaker/moderator at the **Arabian Travel Market (ATM)**. It is considered as an annual opportunity to jointly organize with ATM and the UAE Ministry of Economy and Tourism a Ministerial summit, as in previous editions in 2015 and 2017.
- Bringing together professionals and industry leaders and stakeholders, ATM provides a platform for networking, knowledge sharing, and business opportunities, allowing participants to explore the latest trends, innovations, and developments worldwide.

Priority 5: Build better and strong institutions: tourism policy, governance and resilience.

International Development and Cooperation

60. UN Tourism executed several projects focusing on key areas such as master planning, investment models, marketing, sustainable tourism governance and management, tourism clustering, human resources strategy, statistics development (TSA and dashboards), quality standards (hotel classification), women empowerment, and award scheme development. The following initiatives represent our strategic footprint in the Middle East, including both completed projects and future deployments:

- **Completed projects:**
 - **Oman – Revision of the Hotel Classification Scheme**
 - **Partner:** Ministry of Heritage and Tourism
 - **Donor:** Ministry of Heritage and Tourism
 - **Key Steps:**
 - Agreement signed in November 2022
 - An initial assessment of the status of quality services in tourism accommodation establishments was conducted.
 - The outcome of the assignment was a project document for the development of the hotel classification scheme which was approved by the Ministry.
 - **Remarks:**
 - The project document includes the work plan for the development of an efficient and competitive hotel classification scheme for the country based on international best practices.
 - Ongoing follow up with the Ministry for the implementation of the hotel classification scheme including: detailed review of the current scheme, introducing the new scheme, official launch of the new scheme, capacity building, introduce the new software.
 - **Qatar - Organizing Qatar Tourism Awards- Third Edition –2025**
 - **Partner:** Qatar Tourism (QT)
 - **Donor:** Qatar Tourism
 - **Remarks:** The categories of the Awards have been updated to better align with emerging tourism trends, while still honouring the traditions and authenticity of Qatari culture.
 - **Key Steps:**
 - The Agreement was signed in 2025.
 - the application portal was launched in May, and the final ceremony was held in October 2024

Remarks: UN Tourism engaged with Qatar Tourism in the organization of Qatar Tourism Awards the first, second and third edition. Additionally, a framework agreement is expected to be signed soon that will cover the collaboration third, fourth and fifth editions until 2027.

- **Saudi Arabia - Evaluation of Tourism Statistics System 2020 – 2023**
 - **Partner:** Ministry of Tourism of Saudi Arabia
 - **Donor:** Ministry of Tourism of Saudi Arabia
 - **Key Steps:**
- Evaluation of the full process of tourism data analysis while strengthening the capacity to implement a model for data processing and gaining knowledge on statistical methodology and research.
- Remaining project balance of approx. 67,000 USD. Follow up with Minister of Tourism or key Ministry Officials on potential follow-on activity/project.

Ongoing projects:

- **Jordan - Formulation of an HR Strategy:**
 - **Partner:** Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
 - **Donor:** remaining balance of EBRD Project
 - **Key Steps:**
 - The development of highly skilled and well-trained human resources in the public and private sectors to develop, manage, and serve the tourism sector in a sustainable and competitive manner, and in accordance with international standards.
 - A meeting with the Member State is foreseen for next steps.
- **Egypt: Ensuring a sustainable tourism future for Egypt: heat resilience and institutional resilience through a capacity-building platform**
 - Partner::** Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
 - Donor:** Egypt Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
 - Key Steps:**
 - Ongoing discussion with the Ministry.**
 - The Project outline has been shared and awaiting the Ministry's feedback.**
- **UAE - Improving and strengthening the National Tourism Statistical System, and compilation of TSA Tables.**
 - **Partner:** Ministry of Economy
 - **Donor:** Ministry of Economy
 - **Remarks:**
 - Phase III and Phase IV focus on developing and implementing visitor and establishment surveys and compiling the TSA and will be launched when the Ministry has made the necessary preparations to undertake the survey.
 - **Key Steps:**
 - - Phase I -Revision- commenced in December 2021 with an initial scoping exercise of all the tourism statistical processes in UAE.
 - Phase II of the project conducted during 2022 and included modifying and strengthening certain statistical processes.

Political visits and bilateral meetings in the Middle East region and key outcomes:

61. UN Tourism former Secretary-General addressed the 26th session of the UN Tourism General Assembly in Riyadh in November 2025, underlining innovation and education as key pillars of UN Tourism's strategy. He pointed to the Regional Office for the Middle East, based in Riyadh, as a "true hub for supporting new talent and growing new ideas," and noted that the Assembly's Thematic Session on Artificial Intelligence will address "the most pressing topic for our sector today." He also recognised Saudi Arabia's contribution to advancing tourism education globally.

62. During Fitur 2026, the new Secretary-General held a series of successful meetings with UAE, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait and Syria:

- UAE-UN Tourism Partnership: A standout moment was the meeting between the UAE Minister of Economy and Tourism and the UN Tourism Secretary-General. They focused on:
 - Implementing smart and sustainable tourism solutions.
 - Enhancing tourism education and vocational training to build a skilled regional workforce.
 - Promoting new, emerging destinations within the Emirates to diversify the tourism offer.
- The discussion between the Secretary-General and the Egyptian Minister of Tourism was focused on a pilot project in the Middle East region for data collecting. This data-driven approach involves gathering, analysing, and distributing vast amounts of data to support real-time, informed decision-making.
- FITUR served as a precursor to the upcoming 52nd UN Tourism Regional Commission for the Middle East (chaired and hosted by Kuwait in February 10-12, 2026), where the focus is on "Promoting Tourism Through Artificial Intelligence." The hosting Agreement was signed by Kuwait during the meeting with the Secretary-General. UN Tourism is engaged to provide technical assistance in statistics, hotel classification, and a tailor-made tour-guide training. The Secretary-General also encouraged Kuwait to fully benefit from UN Tourism Online Academy resources.
- During the meeting with the General Manager of the Jordan Tourism Board (JTB), the discussions highlighted Jordan's position as a safe, stable, and diverse destination within the global tourism landscape. Special focus on Innovation, digital transformation, statistics, capacity building and women empowerment and promotion of Bedouin sites.
- During her meeting with Syria Deputy Minister of Tourism, the Secretary-General confirmed UN Tourism commitment to support Syria's tourism recovery, focusing on capacity building, quality services, and heritage preservation (in collaboration with UNESCO). Areas of collaboration include human capacity building (on-site training), handicrafts, tourism infrastructure reconstruction, and modernizing education/training systems. A post-Ramadan visit to Syria is foreseen, emphasizing on community-based and sustainable recovery. The visit would mark a significant step in supporting Syria's reconstruction and Tourism recovery.
- It is worth to mention that the Middle East maintained one of the most visible and dynamic footprints at Fitur 2026, reflecting its 2025 growth trend. For the first time, major hubs like Abu Dhabi and Dubai held expanded, prominent positions at FITUR, signalling a shift toward more aggressive European market outreach. Egypt captured significant attention with a large-scale replica of the newly inaugurated Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM), serving as a centrepiece for the region's cultural tourism promotion.

UN Tourism major initiatives, services, projects, and activities:

63. The International Code for the Protection of Tourists (ICPT) is a comprehensive set of principles and recommendations on the protection of tourists in emergency situations, not limited to pandemics, and the rights of tourists as consumers, aimed at restoring consumer confidence in travel and providing sufficient guarantees to international tourists in the post COVID-19 environment. The United Arab Emirates and Syria are the only countries from the Region having fully adhered to the ICPT.

64. The UN Tourism Working Group on Regional and Thematic Offices (chaired by Egypt): The Terms of Reference establishing the mandate, composition and working methods of the Working Group were approved by the 119th session of the Executive Council through [decision 7\(CXIX\)](#) and subsequently further noted by the 25th session of the General Assembly through [Resolution 763\(XXV\)](#). The Working Group convened five meetings. A summary and overview of the discussions was included in the Report on Regional and Thematic Offices submitted to the 124th session of the Executive Council (CE/124/5).

Bilateral relationships and Regional and sub-regional cooperation:

65. The Regional Department for the Middle East is currently exploring collaboration with our partners from the region, mainly:

- King Salman Global Academy for Arabic Language to enhance the presence of the Arabic language in UN Tourism.
- MoU King Saud University (Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management) on education and training;

66. Product development: Ongoing discussion regarding “Qatar Farm Tourism Development Program” aiming to develop world-class agri-tourism experiences by leveraging UN Tourism expertise and experience and Qatar tourism standards

67. UN Tourism has signed MoUs with some Regional Organizations in the Middle East, mainly:

- The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); and
- The Arab Tourism Organization (ATO)
- The League of Arab States (LAS)

68. UN Tourism Proposal to the League of Arab States and the Arab Tourism Organization to cooperate in the creation of the Tourism Innovation Observatory for Arab Member States, aiming at promoting:

- Education and human capital development through the creation of massive online open courses designed for Digital and Tech Entrepreneurship for the MENA region.
- Innovation through the implementation of the Arabian Tourism Innovation Report to help understand the region's strengths and weaknesses in terms of innovation, its key players, and emerging technologies.

II: Activities of the Regional Office for the Middle East (ROME)

A. Executive Summary:

1. The Regional Office for the Middle East (ROME), based in Riyadh, was established on May 26, 2021 to promote sustainable tourism, support capacity building, and drive the sustainable and inclusive development of the tourism sector across the region. By fostering strong partnerships among its 13 Member States (Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen), the office aims to enhance and develop the tourism sector throughout the Middle East and serve as a vital hub for sustainable tourism development in the region.
2. Programme implementation advanced in the areas of tourism for rural development, innovation, education and investment, legal frameworks and technical cooperation, in close collaboration with the Market Intelligence, Policies and Competitiveness (MIPC), Innovation, Education and Investments (IEI), Institutional Relations, Partnerships and Advocacy (IRPA), International Development and Cooperation (IDC), Human Resources (HR), Legal Affairs and International Standards (LAIS) and Ethics, Culture and Social Responsibility (ECSR) departments. The Regional Office also maintained and expanded its engagement with Affiliate Members (AM) in the region and contributed to their activities and strengthened cooperation within the UN system in the region and with regional partners.

B. Human Resources

1. **Internship Programme:** In 2025, the office launched its first Internship Programme, implemented in collaboration with universities in the region and in coordination with Human Resources Department at Headquarters. Three interns were welcomed during the year, contributing to programme implementation, communications, and administrative functions. Their integration into the team strengthened daily operations and enhanced the overall capacity of the office. The initiative also reflects the Organization's commitment to social responsibility by providing young professionals with opportunities to acquire practical experience in the United Nations system. At the same time, the engagement of interns has contributed to increased visibility and recognition of the Office within the regional community.
2. **Officials on Loan Programme:** In 2025, concrete steps were undertaken towards the establishment of an Officials on Loan Programme, in response to the interest expressed by Member States in the region to deepen their engagement with the work of the Regional Office. Developed in close coordination with the Human Resources Department at Headquarters, the programme will enable interested Member States to second government officials to the Regional Office on a temporary basis, in line with established internal guidelines. Officials on Loan may be assigned to key functional areas of the Regional Office, including Innovation, Education and Investments (IEI), International Development and Cooperation (IDC), Institutional Relations, Partnerships, and Advocacy (IRPA), and Market Intelligence, Policies and Competitiveness (MIPC), subject to organizational needs and mutual agreement. All costs related to the assignment, including salary and related emoluments, should be covered by the sponsoring Member State. Through this mechanism, Member States are offered a structured opportunity to strengthen institutional cooperation, enhance regional ownership of the Organization's work, and provide their officials with direct professional exposure to UN Tourism's activities at regional level.

C. Programmes and Activities

Market Intelligence, Policies and Competitiveness (MIPC) Department: Tourism for Rural Development Programme

Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism:

3. **BTV 2025 Edition:** The fifth edition of the *Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism* initiative was open for applications from 5 February-19 May 2025. Launched in 2021, the initiative aims to transform tourism into a driver of rural development and well-being by recognizing and preserving rural landscapes, cultural diversity, and knowledge systems while fostering innovative strategies aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this fifth edition, the initiative received more than 270 applications from 65 countries. In preparation to the 2025 edition a total of five sessions (in English, Arabic, Spanish and French) were delivered to Member States to support the candidacy preparation.

The *Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism – 2025 Ceremony and Network Annual Meeting*, was held from 17-18 October in Anji County, Huzhou City, China. 52 villages from 29 countries received the recognition on that occasion and joined a Network of 319 villages from 64 countries worldwide.

4. **Awareness-Raising and Outreach for Member States:** Two online sessions titled *Making Tourism Work for Rural Development: National Journey to the Best Tourism Villages Initiative* were organized for Member States on 2 April (English) and 8 April (Spanish) 2025. The sessions aimed to share good practices and success stories from Member States on the selection, management and monitoring of BTVs since the initiative's launch in 2021. Argentina, Peru and Romania presented their experiences, providing insights into innovative strategies, positive impact created, and lessons learned in the framework of the Best Tourism Villages initiative.
5. **BTV Upgrade Programme:** As a key component of the Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism Upgrade Programme, the mentorship activity was implemented from October 2024 to August 2025, supporting 17 villages from 13 countries selected in the 2023 BTV edition. Tailored recommendations reports were developed by international experts and shared with participating villages and Member States, providing practical guidance to improve sustainability practices, operational performance, and tourism development strategies. A promotional campaign highlighting Upgrade results has been deployed in December across BTV social media. The

Upgrade Programme for the 2024 edition kickstarted with online briefing sessions held on 29 and 30 July 2025 in English and Spanish. Villages have started working with their assigned mentors in December 2025.

6. **BTV Network – The Knowledge Series:** UN Tourism launched the quarterly *The Knowledge Series – Learn from the Experts*, designed to provide the BTV Network expert-led guidance to help local stakeholders develop tailored and sustainable tourism solutions. Three sessions were organized in 2025, gathering over 150 participants from 30+ countries. The sessions focused on *Implementing National Sustainability Goals at the Village Level* in collaboration with Green Destinations (February), *Intellectual Property for Rural Identity* in collaboration with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in May, and presented also the Self-Assessment Tool to Assist Rural Destinations (STAR) by UN Tourism featuring a guest speaker from the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism of Peru (August).
7. **BTV Network – Village Talks:** The *Village Talks – Voices from the Ground* public webinar series was launched to increase visibility and outreach of good practices by the Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism. Four sessions were organized in 2025 bringing together more than 350 participants from 45+ countries. These include Heritage in Action: Innovating Cultural Preservation in Villages (April), Tourism for Nature: Conserving Natural Resources through Sustainable Rural Development (July), Cultivating Heritage: Agritourism Experiences in FAO GIAHS Villages (September), and Strengthening Communities: People-Centered Approaches to Rural Tourism (December). These webinars provide a platform for villages to share practical examples of tourism-driven rural development and best practices, enhancing international visibility.
8. **BTV Monitoring and Evaluation Report:** The first BTV Monitoring Report has been published in English and will be available in Arabic. The report provides biennial monitoring for all villages recognized as BTVs. This edition covers all 43 villages recognized in 2021 and highlights the villages' progress across the nine areas of evaluation of the BTV initiative. Findings show that 84% of villages have experienced positive changes in several key areas following BTV recognition in particular in terms of economic opportunities, tourism management and development, and cultural awareness.
9. **STAR:** The Self-Assessment Tool for Assisting Rural Destinations (STAR) has over 360 registered users from 70+ countries, including BTV Network members. UN Tourism delivered one onboarding session, one knowledge session, and two presentations to strengthen the adoption of STAR amongst different stakeholders and integrate it into local tourism strategies. Feedback and interviews with STAR users informed further platform developments planned for 2026, including Arabic translation. Member State are invited to use the tool at the national level, providing an opportunity to receive a tailor-made assessment of their rural destinations. Peru was the first Member State to adopt the tool at the national level. Argentina and Chile have indicated interest to adopt the tool as well in 2026.

Capacity Building and Skills Development:

10. The Programme has launched its first-ever set of **Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)** dedicated entirely to tourism for rural development. The two online courses focus on design thinking for rural tourism development (in English and Spanish) and tourism product development and marketing for rural areas (in English) – have been launched in October 2025. Designed to be practical, accessible, user friendly, the MOOCs equip those working on rural destinations with knowledge and tools to create more sustainable, inclusive, and community-led tourism experiences. These courses are available on the UN Tourism Online Academy and have garnered high interest in a period of two months with currently 479 and 284 users, respectively (among which 58 and 32 from the Middle East region respectively).
11. **Executive Training Course:** In preparation of 2026, the second Executive Training Course on Tourism for Rural Development for the Middle East Region was conceptualized in 2025 on the topic of agri-tourism. The training course targets officials at National Tourism Authorities (NTAs) or National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) from the 13 Middle East region Members States. An Outreach Session for relevant stakeholders in Saudi Arabia is scheduled alongside the training to present the Tourism for Rural Development Programme, amplify results, and identify opportunities for collaboration and partnership at national and regional levels.

Research and Knowledge Creation:

12. **Reports and Publications:** The Arabic versions of the reports Tourism and Rural Development: A Policy Perspective and Tourism and Rural Development: Understanding Challenges on the Ground – Lessons learned from the Best Tourism Villages by UNWTO Initiative were launched in September, expanding outreach in the Middle East. The Spanish versions are also available.
13. The Tourism for Rural Development Impact Report has been updated to include the activities of 2025. The report was updated and printed ahead of the 26th General Assembly of UN Tourism that took place in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
14. The report *Regional Outlook on Policies for Rural Tourism Development: A Middle East Perspective* is currently under development. This report aims to provide insights, future pathways and recommendations on Tourism for Rural Development in the Middle East – examining policy frameworks, stakeholder roles, and regional challenges and opportunities – to inform evidence-based, integrated strategies that advance sustainability, community participation, and natural and cultural preservation. In December 2025, an informative Kick-Off Meeting with Member States in the region was organized to officially launch the research and present the project’s objectives, methodology, and expected outcomes; a detailed survey will follow to gather structured inputs from Member States. A Global Policy Framework for Tourism for Rural Development is also planned for development in 2026.
15. A good practices series from the BTV Network is under development, with the first one on social sustainability planned for publication in Q1 2026. The collection and dissemination of these good practices aim to highlight the good examples from the BTVs, guide effective policymaking, support capacity building, and encourage peer learning across villages and countries. By showcasing innovative approaches and proven strategies, these will help rural communities replicate successful models, contributing to sustainable rural development and advancing the contribution of tourism to the targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
16. The *Guidebook for Sustainable Tourism Development in Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS)* co-published with FAO will be launched in Q1 2026. The Guidebook provides practical guidance for communities, policymakers, and stakeholders on developing sustainable tourism while safeguarding agri-cultural heritage. It includes case studies, good practices, and recommendations based on UN Tourism expertise, particularly through the Tourism for Rural Development Programme and the Best Tourism Villages initiative. The Guidebook aims to support local livelihoods, promote conservation of traditional knowledge, and empower communities to leverage tourism as a driver for sustainable rural development.

On the Ground:

17. **T4RD-SGP:** The inaugural call for proposals of the Tourism for Rural Development Small Grants Programme (T4RD-SGP) enabled by the TUI Care Foundation, titled Colourful Cultures, was launched to empower artists and artisanal communities in ten African countries: Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, The Gambia, Tunisia, and Zambia. The call received 141 applications from all ten countries. Following a competitive selection process, six projects have been selected as eligible to receive grants of up to EUR 20,000 each along with capacity-building support. Project implementation is scheduled to begin in Q1 2026 and will run for 12 months. Future call for proposals are under discussion for the Middle East.

Partnership Development in Saudi Arabia: A series of outreach meetings were held with stakeholders based in the region and in Saudi Arabia specifically. Among the stakeholders met were FAO, UN Habitat, UNESCO, Souda Peaks, Red Sea Global, Emirates Council for Balanced Development, King Khalid University, Aseer Development Authority, World Bank, World Health Organization. Several partnership opportunities are considered for 2026.

Market Intelligence, Polices and Competitiveness - Other Areas of Work

18. **Wellness Tourism Workshop:** The Wellness Tourism Workshop: Building Capacity for a Competitive Wellness Tourism Segment was held at the Regional Office for the Middle East on 9-10 September 2025. The workshop brought together representatives from National Tourism Administrations and Organizations (NTAs/NTOs) from 12 Middle East Member States, with more than 30 participants in total, alongside industry experts and key stakeholders from across the region. The workshop explored the growing potential of wellness tourism as a driver of economic growth, tourism diversification, and sustainability for the Middle East. This capacity building Workshop follows the recommendation of the 50th Meeting of the Regional Commission for the Middle East (CME) held in Muscat, Oman, on 22 May 2024.

D. Innovation, Education and Investments (IEI) Department:

19. **Human Capital Development Agreement by E-Learning with the Ministry of Tourism in Saudi Arabia:** The cooperation between UN Tourism and the Ministry of Tourism of Saudi Arabia continued to expand in 2025, strengthening national and international tourism human-capital development through online learning and institutional capability building.

The partnership delivered 10 MOOCs in 5 languages including Arabic with leading academic partners such as Les Roches, IE University, HSLU, SHL, and Ecole Ducasse, covering core areas including Train the Trainer, Destination Marketing, Digital Transformation, Culinary Arts, Hotel Operations, and foundational tourism management. Scholarship distribution reached a global scale, with 5,000 international scholarships allocated across more than 80 countries and an active use rate demonstrated through both initial and final redemption cycles. Unlimited scholarships distribution has been allocated to Saudi Residents until 31 March 2026.

The Tourism Faculty Development Programme (TFDP) matured into a full multi-track capability programme targeting academic managers, tourism faculty, hospitality educators, and Ministry officials. More than 300 enrolments were logged, with 268 certifications issued, marking a high completion and competency-building rate. TFDP 2.0 was introduced and completed as a blended structure combining online executive education, a two-week immersion at Les Roches, and final reflective assignments.

UN Tourism's TedQual initiative also advanced, supporting the first batch with mentoring and delivering ten new certifications to Saudi institutions.

Under the Tourism Labour Market Observatory (TLMO), two major analytical deliverables progressed. The Comprehensive Labour Market Report is under continued data collection, while the AI Impact on Tourism Jobs report is completed and delivered as a joint publication by UN Tourism and Ministry of Tourism. These reports will guide national workforce planning and future skills strategies.

A major marketing campaign for the Tourism Online Academy reached wide audiences between October 2024 and November 2025. It generated over 12,000 registrations, 20,000 enrolments, and 4,400 course completions, achieving 64 percent of its target. Platform upgrades were completed across usability, certificates, multilingual access, AI-based tools such as AI Tutor and AI Feedback Tool, partner visibility, community functions, dashboards, and integration capabilities.

20. **AI Global Report, "Implementing Artificial Intelligence in Tourism: Guidelines and Recommendations for the Public Sector" & Training Programme:** Artificial Intelligence is reshaping the global tourism sector by optimising operational efficiency, enhancing customer experiences and driving sustainable tourism practices. However, challenges such as regulatory gaps, workforce transformation, and policy development remain barriers to AI adoption. UN Tourism, through this Global AI and Recommendations Guide, aims to provide actionable insights and strategic guidance to member states, ensuring AI is integrated responsibly and effectively into national tourism governance. A comprehensive training programme will be conducted, including training modules, presentation slides, case studies, and practical exercises to enhance the capacity of Member State officials to implement AI recommendations and manage digital transformation in tourism effectively. This project was launched as an outcome of the UN Tourism General Assembly on November 7-11, 2025.

21. **UN Tourism Publication for “innovating undergraduates and graduate programmes in tourism – a multidisciplinary approach”:** This publication aims to support UN Tourism Member States by advocating for the modernisation of undergraduate and graduate tourism education to meet the evolving demands of the industry. Recognising that the traditional focus on hotel management is no longer sufficient, this initiative promotes a multidisciplinary approach that includes new majors such as tourism data science, sustainable tourism, and tourism business management. It also encourages integrating tourism as an elective in diverse academic disciplines like engineering and business to foster interdisciplinary learning and collaboration. With this information, Member States can develop and implement innovative educational frameworks and curricula that reflect the industry's multidimensional nature, address the imbalance in professional opportunities, and ensure that graduates are well-prepared to contribute to the sustainable growth and development of the global tourism sector.
22. **UN Tourism Middle East Communication Challenge:** Regional innovation challenge focused on strengthening communication resilience in the Middle East tourism sector. The project identified and supported startups offering tech-driven solutions such as AI storytelling, fact-checking tools, and crisis-communication systems to enhance destination reputation, preparedness, and community confidence. The initiative highlighted local talent and promoted scalable, homegrown innovations that can be replicated across the region.

E. International Development and Cooperation (IDC) Department

23. **Technical Cooperation Framework between UN Tourism and the State of Libya: Advancing Sustainable Tourism Development and Institutional Capacity:** this possible project represents a renewed commitment to supporting the country's tourism recovery and long-term transformation through the Regional Office, as the arm of the Organisation on the ground. Building on Libya's rich cultural and natural heritage - from prehistoric and Roman sites to vast desert and coastal landscapes - the initiative seeks to position tourism as a key driver of economic diversification beyond oil dependency. The cooperation focuses on strengthening institutional governance, promoting sustainable and responsible tourism, and enhancing human capital through targeted education and training. Core components include the establishment of an International Tourism Academy, the review of national strategies and legal frameworks, and the development of data, statistics, and marketing capacities. The framework also promotes innovation, entrepreneurship, and partnerships that reinforce Libya's image as a safe and attractive destination. With technical missions, expert workshops, and the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding under preparation, this cooperation aims to equip Libyan institutions with the tools and knowledge to lead a modern, competitive, and resilient tourism sector. The project is now under negotiation between UN Tourism and the Tourism and Handicrafts of Libya.
24. **GCC Working Group on Tourism Data Governance and Artificial Intelligence (AI) Innovation:** The GCC Working Group on Tourism Data Governance and Artificial Intelligence (AI) Innovation is a regional initiative jointly led by the Regional Office and the GCC Secretariat to advance digital transformation and responsible AI use in the tourism sector. The project aims to create a unified AI policy and governance framework for tourism data, aligned with GCC privacy laws and international standards, and to establish a standardized data collection methodology that ensures accuracy, comparability, and interoperability across Member States. By fostering collaboration among governments, academia, and the private sector, the Working Group will enhance evidence-based decision-making, improve destination resilience, and strengthen competitiveness in smart tourism management. The initiative adopts a phased approach - assessment, framework development, and adoption - culminating in the publication of two regional frameworks and a Next Steps Roadmap for future GCC-wide AI-powered data sharing, research, and capacity-building. Through this effort, the GCC positions itself as a global leader in ethical, AI-driven tourism governance, setting a benchmark for innovation and cooperation in the digital age. The Regional Office is currently finalizing the concept note of the first phase of the project in collaboration with IEI and MIPC and aims to sign the framework with the GCC secretariat at the beginning of 2026.
25. **Human Capital and Rural Tourism Development in Aseer:** Planned for rollout in partnership with the Aseer Development Authority, this multi-component initiative seeks to transform Aseer into a world-class, culturally distinctive tourist destination. It will deliver a comprehensive Human Resources Development Strategy, including needs assessments, leadership programmes, and

tailored training aligned with global best practices. A rural tourism package under the “Best Tourism Villages” programme will support the preservation and activation of historic villages, agritourism, and gastronomy-based experiences. A destination branding framework will guide Aseer’s positioning in the global market, ensuring consistency across infrastructure, services, and storytelling. The anticipated outcomes include elevated service quality, strengthened rural economies, and enhanced international visibility for Aseer. The project is in the preparatory stage, with the technical mission scheduled for 14 - 17 September 2025 to conduct on-site assessments and engage stakeholders. Following a mission to Aseer by the Director of the Regional Office for the Middle East, and representatives of the International Development Cooperation as well as the Market Intelligence, Policies, and Competitiveness departments.

26. **Engagements with Member States for Technical Assistance:** The Regional Office continues to expand its technical cooperation and policy dialogue with Iraq and Syria, recognising their growing commitment to tourism as a driver of national recovery, diversification, and cultural revitalisation. In Iraq, engagement focuses on aligning with the country’s Tourism Vision 2035 through tailored initiatives such as the development of a national tourism strategy and investment master plan, establishment of a tourism statistics and TSA system, and implementation of hotel classification standards. Drawing on successful models from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, the Regional Office aims to help Iraq strengthen governance, attract investment, and modernise its tourism infrastructure. In Syria, cooperation efforts centre on reactivating institutional frameworks and rebuilding capacity for sustainable tourism management, leveraging the country’s unique cultural and natural heritage to foster inclusive growth and community resilience. Both engagements exemplify the Regional Office’s commitment to supporting Member States in post-crisis recovery and sustainable development through evidence-based planning, capacity-building, and partnership mobilisation. The consultations with national authorities are ongoing to identify priority areas and resource mobilisation opportunities, with implementation to follow subject to funding availability.

F. Legal Affairs and International Standards (LAIS) Department

27. **Establish the Tourism Law Observatory for the Middle East:** Building on the success of the first Tourism Law Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, UN Tourism is currently establishing the Middle East region’s first Tourism Law Observatory, hosted by UN Tourism’s Regional Office for the Middle East, to strengthen and harmonize legal frameworks for the sustainable development of Tourism at a regional level. Endorsed by the Executive Council (decision 3 (CXXIII) and aligned with resolution 757(XXV), this digital platform will systematically collect, analyse and disseminate tourism laws and regulations while facilitating regional dialogue through resources, conferences, publications and expert networks, as well as services of technical assistance for the development and revision of tourism legislation, in accordance with the rules and regulations of UN Tourism for the extrabudgetary contributions. Key objectives include, among others, optimizing legal frameworks, enhancing regulatory cooperation among Middle Eastern States, and improving tourism governance models through multi-stakeholder engagement. This initiative represents a strategic step toward for the promotion of tourism law and the global harmonization of tourism legal frameworks, with its establishment currently underway as part of the Organization’s General Programme of Work in Tourism Law.
28. **International Code for the Protection of Tourists (ICPT):** Adopted by consensus through Resolution 732 (XXIV) at the twenty-fourth session of the General Assembly, the ICPT is a landmark legal instrument that sets out a comprehensive body of principles and recommendations on the protection of tourists in emergency situations, as well as on the rights of tourists as consumers, with a view to restoring confidence in travel and providing sufficient guarantees to international tourists in the post-COVID-19 environment. Promoted globally by UN Tourism, the Code is advanced with the support of the Legal Team at Headquarters, whose work has been actively supported by the Regional Office for the Middle East through outreach and engagement with Member States. To date, 32 Member States have adhered to the ICPT, including several from the Middle East region, such as Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates and, most recently, the Syrian Arab Republic, which adhered to the Code at this year’s General Assembly, reflecting growing support for its principles at global level. At its 125th session, the Executive Council established the technical committee of the International Code for the Protection of Tourists through decision 3(CXXV). This committee, which is subsidiary to the Executive Council, is composed of nine Member States, including United Arab Emirates for the region of the middle east.

G. Institutional Relations, Partnerships and Advocacy (IRPA) Department

29. **Coordination and Collaboration with the UN Resident Coordinator in Saudi Arabia:** Under the leadership of the Director of the UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East, the Office has maintained structured coordination with the UN Resident Coordinator Office (RCO) in Saudi Arabia since 2024. Recognized by the Resident Coordinator for his strategic guidance, the Director for the regional office actively participated in the UN Country Team's quarterly meetings, ensuring tourism priorities are mainstreamed into the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. Also, the Regional Office of UN Tourism is providing requested data to the RCO (UNINFO) in a regular basis for upcoming UN joint programming opportunities in the Kingdom.
30. **Engagement with International and Regional Financial Institutions:** The Regional Office for the Middle East maintained active engagement with key international and regional financial institutions and development partners in the region, with a view to sustaining constructive relationships and exploring future cooperation opportunities. This engagement focused on presenting the mandate, priorities, and technical work of UN Tourism and the Regional Office, while identifying areas where tourism-related technical assistance could contribute to broader development objectives in Member States. Interactions included outreach and coordination with institutions such as the World Bank, the Saudi Fund for Development, the Islamic Development Bank, and other relevant partners. These efforts aimed to enhance mutual understanding, support future resource mobilisation, and create potential pathways for financial cooperation in support of tourism development initiatives in the Middle East and, where relevant, beyond the region.
31. **UNCT Retreat – Riyadh, 6- 8 October 2025:** UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East hosted the UN Country Team Retreat on 6- 8 October 2025, in close collaboration with the UN Resident Coordinator Office and partner agencies. This high-level convening had (1) strengthened inter-agency alignment with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and SDG implementation, (2) leveraged tourism's transformative potential for inclusive growth. Key outcomes include a joint workplan for 2025-2026 linking UN programming to national priorities, and enhanced synergies for sustainable tourism development. The Retreat has featured participation from Saudi ministers, UN agency heads, and development partners, building on the Kingdom's demonstrated commitment to multilateralism through its hosting of the Regional Office.
32. **11th UNAOC Global Forum – Riyadh, 14–15 December 2025:** UN Tourism participated in the 11th Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Riyadh under the theme "Two Decades of Dialogue for Humanity - Advancing a New Era of Mutual Respect and Understanding in a Multipolar World." UN Tourism was represented at the UNAOC Group of Friends High-Level Meeting, where the Director of the UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East intervened on behalf of the Organization during the General Debate with the support of IRPA department. The intervention highlighted tourism's role as a practical enabler of intercultural dialogue, people-to-people exchange, and mutual understanding, and reaffirmed UN Tourism's commitment to multilateralism and to supporting Member States through policy guidance, capacity-building, knowledge exchange, and partnerships. The Forum convened a high-level audience, including the United Nations Secretary-General, senior representatives of the host country, and high-level delegations from across the UNAOC Group of Friends, providing a valuable platform to strengthen UN Tourism's visibility within the UN system and to deepen cooperation with UNAOC.

H. Affiliate Members and Public-Private Collaboration (AM-PPC) Department

33. In 2025, the Regional Office continued to support and engage with the Affiliate Members community in the region, in line with the Organization's mandate to foster dialogue and cooperation between the public and private sectors. As of the end of 2025, the Middle East region counts 53 Affiliate Members, reflecting the admission of 10 new members during the year 2025. The Office provided support to existing members, engaged in outreach to potential new members, and facilitated collaboration opportunities aligned with the Organization's thematic priorities.
34. Throughout the year, the Regional Office hosted or participated in 6 key activities contributing to Affiliate Members' programmes and strengthening institutional linkages, more details are provided later in **Reportfo**.

I. Engagement and Strategic Participation by the Director of the Regional Office

35. Since his appointment, the Director of the UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East has demonstrated exceptional commitment to advancing the mandate of the Regional Office. Through active participation in major conferences, forums, and high-level meetings held in Riyadh, across the region, and internationally, the Director has significantly enhanced the visibility and strategic influence of the Office and the Organization.
36. The Director has maintained close dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders, including ministers of tourism, ambassadors and senior officials from Member States, as well as representatives of the private sector and the leadership of regional and international organisations such as the GCC, UN agencies and relevant non-governmental entities, in addition to Affiliate Members. These engagements have supported Member States in advancing their tourism priorities, while fostering cooperation, knowledge-sharing and policy dialogue in line with UN Tourism's mandate.
37. The Director's engagement across regional and global platforms contributed to aligning the work of the Regional Office with the Organization's strategic objectives by translating corporate priorities into regional actions. These engagements supported the advancement of sustainable tourism development, the strengthening of regional competitiveness, and the integration of tourism considerations into broader economic and social development agendas, including through policy dialogue, technical cooperation, and partnerships with Member States and regional stakeholders. Taken together, these efforts reflect the role of the Regional Office as a trusted partner and facilitator for tourism development in the Middle East. A detailed overview of major events and high-level bilateral meetings is provided later in the report.

J. Regional Office's contributions to Affiliate Members' programmes

1. **18th Vatel International Convention, Bahrain (February 2025):** arranged by Affiliate Member S.A.S. Institute Vatel. The Regional Office was invited to deliver a keynote speech, highlighting its engagement with the hospitality sector.
2. **Fujairah International Conference on Adventure Tourism, United Arab Emirates (May 2025):** organized by the Fujairah Adventure Centre, featuring UN Tourism's participation and contributions from 14 Affiliate Members across multiple sessions and panels.
3. **"We Are the Living Heritage", Saudi Arabia (May 2025):** organized by the Intangible Heritage Association and hosted by the Regional Office. The event emphasized the critical link between cultural heritage and tourism.
4. **"Applying Heritage to Hospitality: Advancing Gastrotourism in Saudi Arabia", Saudi Arabia (October 2025):** organized by Inaar Consultancy in collaboration with UN Tourism and hosted by the Regional Office, with participation from UNESCO, FAO, and five additional Affiliate Members. The event explored the linkages between heritage, gastronomy, and tourism development.
5. **Red Sea Global Workshop on Regenerative Tourism, Saudi Arabia (November 2025):** organized with the participation of UN Tourism Affiliate Members, including contributions from European Affiliate Members sharing experiences and approaches in regenerative tourism.
6. **Qatar Travel Mart, Qatar (November 2025):** organized by NextFairs. UN Tourism was represented by the Director of the Regional Office for the Middle East, who delivered an introductory speech during the Wellness and Medical Tourism session.

K. Major Events and High-level Bilateral Meetings by the Director of the Regional Office in 2025

Major Events (Conferences and Summits):

1. Saudi Tourism Forum, Riyadh, 9 January 2025
2. Hajj Conference and Exhibition, Jeddah, 13–16 January 2025
3. 51st UN Tourism Regional Commission for the Middle East, Doha, 11-14 February 2025
4. 9th Meeting of GCC Tourism Ministers, Kuwait, 16–17 February 2025
5. Ministerial Roundtable on Investment in Tourism, Annual Investment Congress (AIM), Abu Dhabi, 7–9 April 2025
6. Italian event “Culture and Tradition for Health”, 21 May 2025
7. Launch ceremony organised by the Intangible Cultural Heritage Association, 21 May 2025
8. High-level roundtable on the Economic Outlook of the MENA Region, 25 May 2025
9. Heilongjiang Provincial Tourism Development Conference and technical meetings with Heilongjiang authorities, Heilongjiang, China, 1–3 July 2025
10. Technical mission to the Aseer Region, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 14–17 September 2025
11. World Tourism Day celebration, King Saud University, 28 September 2025
12. Cultural Investment Conference, Riyadh, 29–30 September 2025
13. United Nations Country Team (UNCT) Retreat, Riyadh, 6–9 October 2025
14. 5th Accessible Travel and Tourism International Conference, Dubai, 7–8 October 2025
15. GCC 7th Regional Workshop on Measuring the Total Contribution of Tourism to the Economy, Muscat, 12 October 2025
16. UN Tourism Best Tourism Villages (BTV) 2025 Ceremony and 3rd Annual Network Meeting, Huzhou, China, 17–18 October 2025
17. 29th World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies (WAIPA) World Investment Conference, Sharjah, 22–23 October 2025
18. Future Investment Initiative (FII9), Riyadh, 27–30 October 2025
19. INAAR Consultancy High-level Roundtable on Gastronomy, Riyadh, 28 October 2025
20. General Assembly of UN Tourism, Riyadh, 7–11 November 2025
21. Grand Finale of the UN Tourism Artificial Intelligence Challenge, Riyadh, 8 November 2025
22. High-level Tourism Investment Gathering organised by the Ministry of Tourism in collaboration with UN Tourism, Riyadh, 12 November 2025
23. Red Sea Global Workshop, Riyadh, 12 November 2025
24. Georgia Tourism Roadshow hosted at the UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East, Riyadh, 16 November 2025

25. IARDA launch event of Arma Season, 19 November 2025
26. Qatar Tourism Awards, Doha, 24–27 November 2025
27. Qatar Travel Mart, Doha, 25 November 2025
28. TOURISE, Riyadh, 11–13 November 2025
29. 11th Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), Riyadh, 15 December 2025
30. 3rd International Seminar on Tourism Law, Havana, 9–14 December 2025

High-level meetings including Ministers, Ambassadors, and GCC Secretary-General:

1. Meeting with Eng. Khalid Mohamed, Minister of Tourism of Libya, 13 February 2025
2. Meeting with the Ambassador of Italy, 23 March 2025
3. Meeting with the Ambassador of Georgia, 25 March 2025
4. Meeting with the Ambassador of Pakistan, 26 March 2025
5. Meeting with the Ambassador of Guatemala to the United Arab Emirates, 7 May 2025
6. Meeting with the Ambassador of Viet Nam, 12 June 2025
7. Meeting with the Ambassador of Iraq, 31 August 2025
8. Lecture “*Ten Years of the Joint Heritage Commission-University of Vienna Mission: The Material and Symbolic World of North Arabia’s Oasis Qurayyah*” hosted by the Embassy of Austria, 1 October 2025
9. Meeting with the Ambassador of El Salvador, October 2025
10. Bilateral meeting with Ms Fatima Al-Sulaity, Qatar Museums, 8 November 2025
11. Bilateral meeting with the Minister of Tourism of Jordan, Riyadh, 9 November 2025
12. Bilateral meeting with the Minister of Tourism of Libya, Riyadh, 10 November 2025
13. Bilateral meeting with the Chairman of Qatar Tourism, Riyadh, 11 November 2025
14. Bilateral meeting with the Minister of Tourism of the Syrian Arab Republic, Riyadh, 11 November 2025
15. Official visit of the Vice Minister of Tourism of China to the UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East, 11 November 2025

Other Meetings:

1. UNCT Regular Meetings once every month, UN House, Riyadh
2. Meeting with Hanan Hanzaz, Chief Regional Bureau for the Arab States of UNIDO, Riyadh, Feb 2025

3. Meeting with the CEO of Saudi Fund for Development, Riyadh, 10 November 2025
4. Meeting with Dr. Abdulhakim Elwaer, Assistant Director and General and Regional Representative for the Near East and North Africa of FAO, Riyadh, 24 November 2025

Annex I. List of UN Tourism events in the Middle East Region

Date	Event	Venue
February 2025		
11-14	The 51st UN Tourism Regional Commission for the Middle East and the Conference "Sports Tourism and the Tourism Industry After FIFA World Cup"	Doha, Qatar
March 2025		
10	One -to-One Informative Session for the UAE on the Application for the Best Tourism Villages 2025 (BTV)	Online
April		
7-9	Annual Investment Congress: (AIM) UN Tourism's: Ministerial Roundtable on "Investment in Tourism: Shaping Tourism Investment Opportunities through Policy Innovation"	Abu Dhabi, UAE
June 2025		
24	Third Meeting of the Working Group on UN Tourism Regional and Thematic Offices	Online
September 2025		
9-10	First Regional Wellness Tourism Workshop for the Middle East	ROME , Riyadh , Saudi Arabia 32 participants from 12 Middle East countries
16-17	Arabitrips Informative session by Jordan Tourism Board	Online
23	Meeting of the Working Group on Regional and Thematic Offices ' 4 th & 5 th edition	Online
October 2025		
1-2	Headquarters meeting with Oman LNG Development Foundation	Headquarters, Madrid
30	Informative meeting with Member States on Riyadh Declaration	Online
November 2025		
7-11	26th session of the General Assembly	Riyadh, KSA

January 2026		
15	Kick-Off Meeting for the <i>“Tourism for Rural Development in the Middle East: Rural Insights and Future Pathways”</i> Report.	Online
21-23	A series of meetings with Ministers and Highest officials from UAE, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait and Syria in margins of Fitur 2026	IFEMA, Madrid
February 2026		
10-12	52 nd RCME meeting and accompanying Conference on <i>“Promoting Tourism through Artificial Intelligence”</i>	Kuwait, State of Kuwait
September 2026		
TBC	First Regional Forum on Gastronomy Tourism for the Middle East in 2026,	Sultanate of Oman
October 2026		
25-26	International Tourism Investment Forum	Manama, Bahrain
December 2026	Arab Tourism Ministers Meeting and Executive board Meeting	(TBC) League of Arab States, Cairo

Annex II. List of new Affiliate Members from the Middle East

Name of Affiliate Member	Member State
1. Exhibition World Bahrain	(Bahrain)
2. Gulf Hotels Group	
3. The Arab Regional Center for World Heritage	
4. National Hotels Company B.S.c	
5. Vatel School in Bahrain	
6. Egyptian Tourism Federation (ETF)	
7. Association of Tourism and Travel Agents in Iraq	(Iraq)
8. Jordan Hotels Association	(Jordan)
9. Jordan Restaurant Association	
10. Petra Development and Tourism Region Authority	
11. Jordan Tourism Board	
12. Royal Jordanian	
13. OMAN Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group)	(Oman)
14. Sultan Qaboos University	
15. The National Museum	
16. Aamal Travel & Tourism	(Qatar)
17. Qatar Museums	
18. Katara Hospitality	
19. Qatari Hotels Association	
20. Retaj Hotels & Hospitality	
21. IFP Qatar	
22. NeXTfairs	
23. Al Mashreq Hospitality	(Saudi Arabia)
24. Almosafer Company for Travel and Tourism	

25. AIUla Guide Tours	
26. Aseer Development Authority	
27. Amsa Hospitality Company	
28. Batterjee Medical college (BMC)	
29. Bunyan for Training Company	
30. Diriyah Company	
31. Taiba Investments	
32. Flynas Company	
33. Higher Institute for Tourism and Hospitality	
34. INAAR Hospitality& Tourism Consultancy	
35. Jeddah Central Development Company	
36. NEOM	
37. Red Sea Global	
38. Royal Commission for AIUla	
39. Saudi Tourism Authority	
40. Soudah Development Company	
41. Colliers MENA	(Emirates)
42. Fujairah Adventures Centre	
43. Fujairah Tourism and Antiquities Department	
44. ICL TOURS AND TRAVELS LLC	
45. New Perspective Media FZ LLC	
46. RAS AL KHAIMAH TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY	
47. ROCKET DMC INTERNATIONAL - FZCO	
48. Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq)	
49. Emirates Council for Balanced Development	

Annex III: Detailed list of Technical Assistance Projects in the Middle East

Name	Start and end date, place	Beneficiary	Donor	Status and Remarks
Tourism Statistics Assessment Mission	Bahrain		Bahrain	<p>Ongoing discussions on the proposal submitted in August 2025. Pending feedback from BTEA on the UN Tourism proposal for technical assistance on strengthening Bahrain's Tourism Statistics System</p> <p>Ongoing discussions and preparation. The first seating-the-scene online meeting between BTEA and UN Tourism teams in charge of the International Tourism Investment Forum - ITTF 2026</p>
The organization of the International Tourism Investment Forum in 2026				
Educational booklet for the primary stage of education for member state schools and included it in the academic curricular of 2022-2023	Egypt	MSs in the Middle East Region	UN Tourism	Ongoing
Capacity Building, Heat Resilience and Tourism Development		Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities	Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities	Discussion initiated The capacity-building project aims to strengthen Egypt's tourism workforce through targeted training, skills development, and institutional support. It will enhance service quality, promote sustainable tourism practices, and boost the country's competitiveness in the global tourism market.
Training programme on the TSA application. Development and preservation of the Iraqi heritage. Implementation of e-governance. Encouraging stable investment environment. Encouraging domestic tourism and improving the tourism services.	Iraq	Ministry of Culture, Antiquities and Tourism	UN Tourism	Ongoing discussions

HR Strategy	Jordan	Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities	UN Tourism	To be initiated The development of highly skilled and well-trained human resources in the public and private sectors to develop, manage, and serve the tourism sector in a sustainable and competitive manner, and in accordance with international standards.
The implementation of the Tourism Satellite Account in cooperation with the Central Statistical Bureau in Kuwait.	Kuwait	Ministry of Information	Kuwait	Ongoing discussion It was suggested to Kuwait to start evaluation mission regarding the quality standards. A revision of the existing Hotel Classifications Guidelines in Kuwait was made by IDC.
Quality standards for hotels and restaurants				
Technical assistance on DMOs, and training on management of nature-based destinations.	Lebanon	Ministry of Tourism	UN Tourism+ Chimelong	Ongoing - A letter of approval from Chimelong for the closing of the extrabudgetary fund 02-560 and the implementation of a new project under the initiative: the UN Tourism/Chimelong COVID-19 Tourism Recovery project in Lebanon.
Institutional Strengthening, Human-Capital Development, Focus on Policy Reform, Geographic and Development Focus in the Mediterranean, Investment, Tourism Data and Survey Development	Libya			Ongoing and discussed during the GA26 in Riyadh. Meeting between ROME, IDC and RDME was held for further steps
Sscholarships for specific UN Tourism Online Academy courses.	Egypt, IraqJordan, Lebanon, Libya, Yemen	Ministries of Tourism in the listed countries	UN Tourism	Deadline extended for the Scholarships until March 31

2- The Update of the Hotel Classification Scheme	Oman	Ministry of Heritage and Tourism	Ministry of Heritage and Tourism	Based on the Agreement signed in November 2022, an initial assessment of the status of quality services in tourism accommodation establishments was conducted. The outcome of the assignment was a project document for the development of the hotel classification scheme which was approved by the Ministry. the update of the Hotel Classification is ongoing.
The Establishment of Oman's Centre for Culinary Arts.			UN Tourism Ministry of Heritage and Tourism	New- Ongoing discussion - The Ministry requested UN Tourism technical assistance for the preparation of an Action Plan for the establishment of a comprehensive Culinary Center. - Discussion meeting were held with the Ministry to formulate the proposal. - A project Terms of reference were shared with the Ministry for the establishment of the center with all related topics. - The project is currently under negotiation and pending the Ministry feedback on the proposal
Development of a Tourism Statistics and TSA.				Ongoing discussion
Launching Oman Investments- Guidelines				Ongoing. The guidelines are under preparation and expected to be delivered by 2026
Annual Tourism Experience Awards Programme	Qatar	Qatar Tourism (QT)	Qatar Tourism (QT)	Done the 3 rd edition of Qatar Awards Was successfully organized and completed by – November 2025. -UN Tourism to prepare a proposal for expanding

				Qatar Tourism Awards to GCC level.
Qatar Farm Tourism Development Program				Ongoing discussion aiming to develop world-class Agri-tourism experiences by leveraging UN Tourism expertise and experience and Qatar tourism standards.
Establishment of a UN Tourism International Tourism Academy				Ongoing Providing high-quality vocational and managerial education to the tourism workforce
Cooperation Agreement between UN Tourism and the Ministry of Tourism of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for Human Capital Development by E-Learning, done at Riyadh on 26 May 2021.				Ongoing The main outputs are: 10 Online Courses in 5 languages, Jobs Factory and Tourism Labour Market Observatory, UN Tourism Ted.Qual Quality Certification and Innovation and Digital Transformation programmes.
Cooperation agreement for train-the-trainers and executive programmes to be launched officially during the year.				Ongoing
Provide the Ministry of Tourism in Syria with technical assistance and recovery plans	Syria	Ministry of Tourism		Discussion initiated with the Syrian Minister during the GA 26 regarding the ways to actively engage in the recovery phase.
Improving and strengthening the National Tourism Statistical System, and compilation of TSA Tables.	2021-2026 UAE	Ministry of Economy and Tourism	Ministry of Economy and Tourism	Done Phase I: commenced in December 2021 with an initial scoping exercise of all the tourism statistical processes, and a detailed analysis of the situation of tourism statistics in the UAE. Phase II: conducted during 2022 and included modifying and strengthening certain statistical processes. And a Road Map for the

				<p>compilation of a TSA for the UAE.</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Phase III and Phase IV: focus on developing and implementing visitor and establishment surveys and compiling the TSA and will be launched when the Ministry has made the necessary preparations to undertake the survey.</p>
UN TOURISM Academy – Quest Training Programme for the Department of Culture and Tourism in Abu Dhabi		Department of Culture and Tourism in Abu Dhabi	Department of Culture and Tourism in Abu Dhabi	Done & they are certified
Free online training (100 scholarships)	Yemen	Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism	UN Tourism	<p>Done.</p> <p>Supporting the tourism sector and upgrading the staff working in the sector.</p>