

Terms and References

UN Tourism Morocco Startup Competition: Rural & Community Tourism Innovation Challenge

Country of Execution: National - Morocco

Title of the Project: UN Tourism Morocco Startup Competition: Rural & Community Tourism Innovation Challenge

1.) Introduction and Background:

UN TOURISM and the Moroccan Agency for Tourism Development – Société Marocaine d'Ingénierie Touristique (SMIT), are joining forces in this national startup competition to identify and support the most innovative business models driving rural and community-based tourism in Morocco.

Rural tourism represents a key opportunity for sustainable development. Globally, a significant share of populations living in poverty reside in rural areas, where tourism can act as a catalyst for economic diversification, employment generation, and social inclusion. In Morocco, tourism has demonstrated strong potential to empower women, youth, and local communities, while contributing to the preservation of cultural and natural heritage.

Global tourism trends increasingly favour authentic, nature-based, and community-driven experiences. Travellers are seeking meaningful engagement with local cultures, traditional gastronomy, and sustainable practices. This shift presents a strategic opportunity to position rural Morocco as a leading destination for responsible tourism.

At the same time, rural areas face structural challenges, including limited access to finance, infrastructure gaps, digital transformation needs, governance constraints, and climate vulnerability.

This competition aims to identify entrepreneurs offering innovative solutions that contribute to the resilience, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability of rural tourism ecosystems in Morocco.

By fostering collaboration between entrepreneurs, communities, investors, and institutional actors, UN TOURISM aims to generate employment, sustainable business opportunities, and long-term value for rural destinations.

2.) The Competition:

UN TOURISM proposes the launch of a national competition designed to identify and support startups and initiatives operating in rural and community-based tourism in Morocco.

The overarching goal is to source, nurture, and support innovative solutions across three key pillars: Planet, People, and Prosperity.

Entrepreneurs who apply will be evaluated by a dedicated committee, following the methodology applied in UN Tourism's innovation programmes.

3.) Conditions for Participation:

UN Tourism encourages applications from all backgrounds, particularly those that are often underrepresented such as women, youth or people with disabilities, to ensure that the competition accurately reflects the diverse communities that contribute to the tourism sector.

This competition is open to:

- Startups (seed to early-stage)
- MSMEs
- Cooperatives and community-based organizations (NGOs)
- Social enterprises and entrepreneurs

Requirements:

- Applicants must be either legally registered entities in Morocco or Moroccan nationals applying in their individual capacity.
- Applicants must operate in rural areas of Morocco or demonstrate clear and measurable impact in rural communities.
- Projects must fall under at least one of the following three categories: Planet, People, or Prosperity.
- Projects must be innovative and provide value-added, digital solutions to rural tourism challenges.
- Projects must be sustainability-driven and aligned with environmental and social responsibility principles, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Applicants must have a minimum viable product (MVP) or a validated concept.
- Projects must show potential for scalability at the local and/or international level.
- The team must demonstrate capacity, commitment, and alignment with the principles of gender equity,

4.) Requirements:

4.1 Categories:

The applicant startups should belong to at least one of the following categories:

1. Planet – Regenerative and Climate-Resilient Tourism Systems in Rural, Nature-Based Destinations

This category focuses on sustainable and inclusive solutions for rural nature-based tourism, centred on innovative sustainable development approaches with strong social and community impact, and taking into account the specificities of territories.

Priority areas include:

- Water-efficient technologies and sustainable water management systems
- Nature-based tourism and biodiversity conservation initiatives
- Sustainable mobility
- Circular economy solutions
- Renewable energy integration
- Sustainable land use and agri-tourism
- Digital tools for environmental monitoring and impact measurement

2. People – Community Empowerment and Inclusive Value Creation

This category focuses on tourism experiences and the dynamization of local economies, centred on projects that activate tourism and strengthen local economic activity, with strong social and community impact.

Priority areas include:

- Community-based tourism models
- Women-led and youth-led initiatives
- Cultural heritage preservation
- Skills development and entrepreneurship
- Inclusive governance and benefit-sharing
- Integration of local producers into tourism value chains

3. Prosperity – Competitive and Scalable Rural, Nature-Based Tourism Economies

This category focuses on the development of rural nature-based tourism projects with strong economic and territorial impact.

Priority areas include:

- Innovative tourism products and experiences
- Digital platforms for market access
- Access-to-finance solutions
- Data-driven tools
- Integration into tourism circuits
- Business model innovation

4.2. Key Requirements

Selected initiatives will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Proven Innovation: Deployment of solutions that showcase technological advancements relevant to tourism.
- Scalability: The ability to scale the solution in the market and potentially internationally.
- Sustainability and SDG Alignment: Demonstrated commitment to sustainability the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- Market Readiness and Customer Fit: Evidence of customer demand, market fit, and readiness for real-world implementation.
- Financial Stability: Robust financial backing and a solid business model to support long-term growth.
- Innovation Ecosystem Engagement: Participation in multi-stakeholder collaborations to ensure broader adoption and integration within the tourism sector.

4.3 Purpose

- Encourage the development of cutting-edge of the tourism sector through collaborative new business models and technologies, leveraging the strengths of both startups and large corporations.
- Gather representatives from tourism innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystems, including startups and large corporations, to share knowledge, business models, and success stories, fostering a collaborative environment for mutual growth and innovation.
- Stimulate synergies between public sector entities, startups, academia, corporations, investors, and accelerators.

4.4. Exclusion from participation

Participants who initially or at any moment during the competition fail to comply with any of the requirements established in these terms and conditions shall be excluded from said competition and from any potential service or prize they would have received through their participation.

Employees of UN TOURISM may not participate. Minors are excluded from participating in the competition.

UN TOURISM shall not be liable for any false, inaccurate, obsolete, incomplete or erroneous data submitted by the participants. In such cases, the participant shall be automatically excluded from the Competition and lose the right to the enjoyment of the prize.

UN Tourism reserves the right of accepting or removing from the competition, without prior notice, any participants who, in their opinion, act fraudulently, in an abusive manner, or in a manner contrary to the spirit of the competition, the principles of the United Nations or the law, third-party rights and/or good faith. Likewise, any participant or related person whose action may be contrary to the reputation or good name of UN Tourism may be removed from the competition. None of the abovementioned actions shall entitle any potential or excluded participants to make claims against UN TOURISM for any damages, expenses incurred, or otherwise.

5.) Application Process

Startups which comply with all the requirements described in section 4 “requirements” can apply to this Competition by selecting one of the categories of section 4.1 above.

Although projects commonly contribute to more than one objective, the category in which the positive impact is expected to be stronger should be selected. To become a Participant, applicants shall complete the Online registration form available on the website.

Applicants shall complete in English or French all required fields requested in the form. The data that participants provide when registering in the program must be true, and therefore any participants whose data is incorrect, or incomplete shall lose any option to participate in the program and to receive any service.

UN TOURISM will use the contact information provided through the online registration to contact participants. UN TOURISM will not be responsible for incomplete or incorrect contact information.

6.) Schedule:

- **April 2026:** Launch of call
- **April – July 2026:** Promotion and outreach
- **End of July 2026:** Application deadline
- **August – September 2026:** Evaluation and preselection
- **Fall 2026:** Final pitch event

7.) Selection Process and Criteria

7.1. A panel of experts from UN TOURISM and the partners of the Competition will evaluate the proposals based, on the below criteria.

Each criterion is scored from 1 to 4 with 1 being the lowest and 4 the highest:

- Innovation and creativity of the product/service: originality, disruptiveness
- Viability of the business model
- Maturity of the solution: proven business model
- Scalability and Internationalization of the solution
- Team composition, maturity of the team and diversity of the team
- The solution presents digital components

- Social and environmental impact of the solution. Alignment with SDGs

7.2. Based on the above-mentioned criteria, initial screening and filtering of all applying entities will be carried out by UN TOURISM and its partners.

7.3. An Expert Committee will be appointed by UN TOURISM to nominate a winner in each category. It will be composed of an international network of allies. The Committee will evaluate the filtered projects per category and will carry out the selection of each winner. Decisions made by the Committee are final.

7.4 The evaluation process is strictly based on the specific project, not on other initiatives developed by the participants or their previous background. If the evaluation of the specific project reveals irregularities, the application will be disqualified.

8.) Benefits

Benefits will include:

- Global visibility for their project and connection with investors.
- Possibility to present solutions at the UN Tourism Tech Adventures.
- Become part of the UN Tourism Innovation Network.
- Access scholarships from the UN Tourism Online Academy.
- Mentorships and support by UN Tourism and its top-tier partners.

9.) Industrial and Intellectual Property and Personal Data Protection

In case the processing of personal data is required due to the development of the Program, the organizers of this Program assume the following commitments:

- To use the data provided only for the purpose of the call.
- To ensure that authorized persons for processing personal data (UN TOURISM) will commit to respecting confidentiality and that the data will not be shared with third parties without the participants' authorization.
- To take all necessary measures to offer an appropriate level of security to the risks that may arise from processing personal data, ensuring their security and integrity, as well as preventing their alteration, loss, accidental or unlawful destruction, processing, disclosure, or unauthorized access.

UN Tourism and any other data processor will follow the protection obligations established by applicable regulations. The participant may exercise their rights of access, rectification, cancellation, and opposition by sending a postal mail to the Organizer's address provided in the header of these Terms and Conditions or by sending an email to comm@UNTourism.int to contact the Organizer, indicating the right they wish to exercise and attaching a copy of their Passport, National Identity Document (DNI), or equivalent documentation.

- The participant expressly consents, solely by participating in the Program presented here, that UN TOURISM may use their name for the purpose of announcing the winning project to the other participants, without any remuneration in their favor.

When submitting applications, project promoters guarantee that:

- The projects are original to their authors and/or they have free disposal or ownership over them. Participants agree to indemnify and hold the organizers harmless against any legal actions, claims,

or demands regarding intellectual property rights or personal data of third parties related to the projects they present.

- If the projects result from the collaboration of several participants, the project will be treated as a collaborative work, with the resulting rights belonging to all of them as co-authors.
- The participant authorizes UN TOURISM to upload the project summaries to their respective official websites and agrees that website visitors will have access to such information according to the website's terms of use.
- The participant authorizes UN TOURISM to use the name and title of their project, with no time limit, to be mentioned on the website or for any actions or events related in any way to UN TOURISM, as well as for inclusion in UN TOURISM's historical records and various media linked to the program.
- UN TOURISM will not claim any ownership of the information provided or any industrial or intellectual property it may contain. The participant does not assign any industrial or intellectual property rights derived from the projects to UN TOURISM.
- The participant expressly authorizes UN TOURISM to use their data to provide information about events and activities that may be of interest.
- Participants accept the transfer of their data to UN TOURISM after the competition ends.

10.) Final Considerations

This Program may be modified, interrupted, and/or cancelled if justified circumstances require it. Likewise, UN TOURISM reserves the right to declare all or some of the benefits void if no project meets the expected quality according to the decision team's criteria. UN TOURISM is not responsible for any deficiencies in the platform or problems related to computers, networks, or any other cause that may result in the loss, damage, or delay of entries.

11.) Applicable Law

These Terms and Conditions will be interpreted in accordance with the general principles of international law, excluding any specific national law.

Nothing within these Terms and Conditions or related to them shall be understood as a waiver of UN Tourism's prerogatives and immunities.

12.) Use of Name, Emblem, and Logo

Participants will not use in any way the name, emblem, or official seal of UN Tourism or the United Nations, or any abbreviation of the name of UN Tourism or the United Nations, in relation to their businesses or any other domain, without prior written authorization from UN Tourism. Under no circumstances will authorization be granted to use the name, emblem, or official seal of UN Tourism or the United Nations, or any abbreviation of their names, for commercial purposes. This obligation does not end with the termination of the Competition.

13.) Indemnity and Limitation of Liability

UN Tourism will not be responsible under any circumstances for loss, direct, indirect, or accidental damage, liability, or expense incurred or suffered by the participant and alleged to be a consequence of the Competition or related to it.

Participants agree to indemnify UN Tourism and hold it harmless from any legal responsibility, claims, losses, damages, and expenses that may arise, directly or indirectly, as a result of this Competition or in relation to it, including but not limited to any infringement of intellectual property rights or other rights of third parties related to the submitted projects.

14.) Acceptance of Terms and Conditions

Participation in the Competition implies full acceptance of these Terms and Conditions. The failure to accept any part of these Terms and Conditions will result in non-participation in the Competition, and if selected and/or awarded, automatic renunciation of recognition.