



Best Tourism Villages Initiative by UN Tourism

*Tourism for Rural Development
Programme*

TOURISM FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Background



2020

Year of Tourism and Rural Development. A global, inclusive strategy for rural areas was identified on World Tourism Day 2020, which laid the foundation for the later creation of the Tourism for Rural Development Programme.

2020

Launch of the **Recommendations on Tourism for Rural Development.**

2020

AIUla Framework for Inclusive Community Development through Tourism. Under the leadership of the G20 Saudi Presidency, UN Tourism in collaboration with the G20 working group developed the Alula Framework.

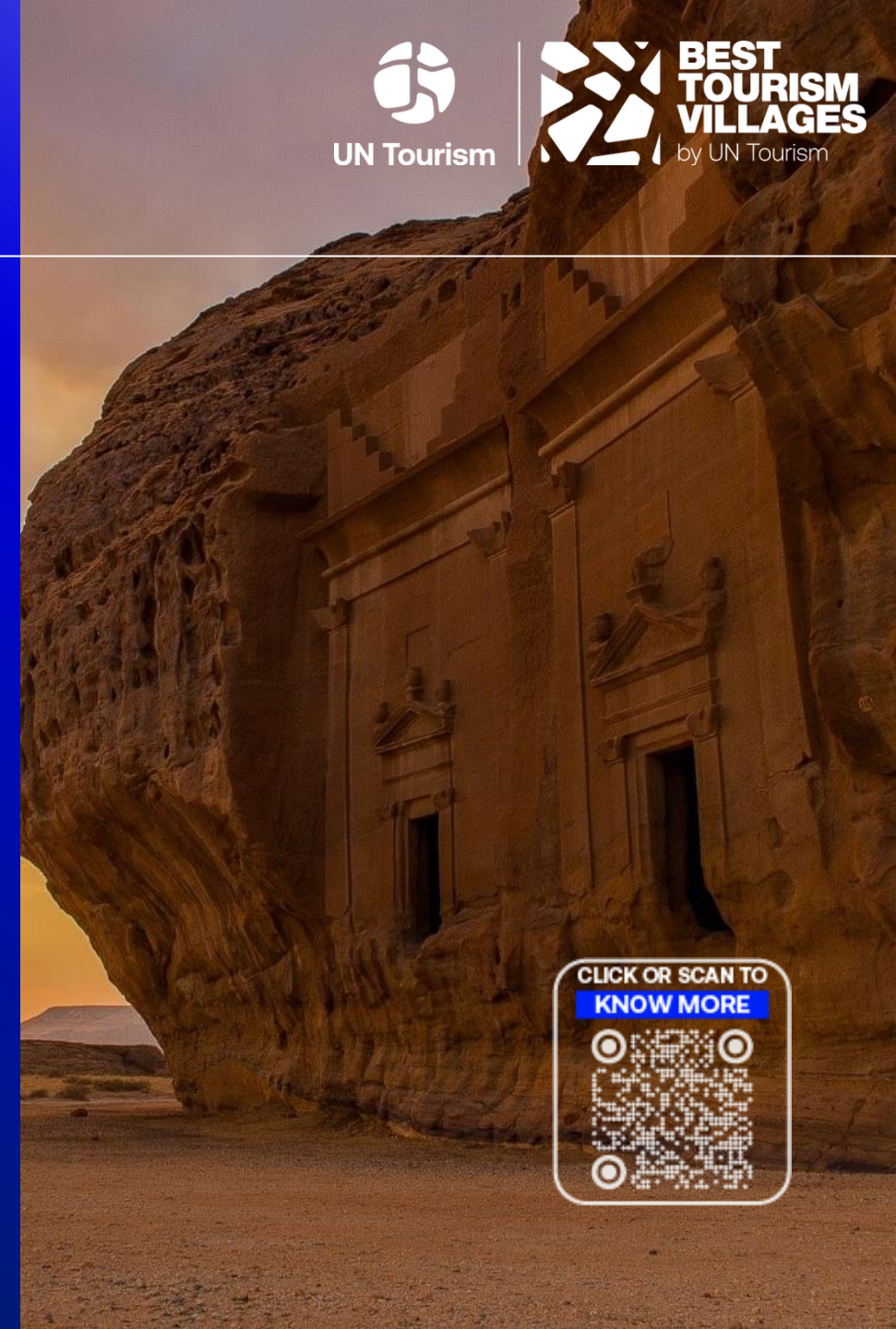
2021

Launch of the Best Tourism Villages first edition. With candidacies received from 75 different countries, the first edition recognized 44 villages worldwide.

2021

Opening of the UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East. Based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the office plays a crucial role in advancing the global agenda of the Tourism for Rural Development Programme.

CLICK OR SCAN TO
KNOW MORE



Tourism for Rural Development Programme



Mission

Advance the role of tourism in valuing and safeguarding rural villages along with their associated landscapes, knowledge systems, biological and cultural diversity, local values and activities.

Promote innovative and transformative approaches to the development of tourism in rural destinations that contribute to the three pillars of sustainability – economic, social and environmental – in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Vision

Make tourism a driver of rural development and wellbeing.



WHY RURAL AREAS?

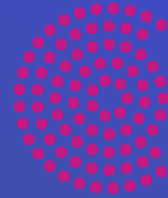
Key Global Gaps and Challenges

Share of world population
living in poverty

Around 84% of people
living in **poverty** are
found in rural areas¹.

Source: United Nations
Development Programme, 2023.

84%



In rural areas

16%



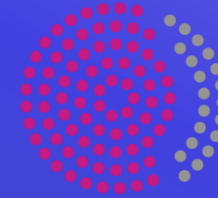
In urban areas

World population in informal or
vulnerable employment in rural and
urban areas

People in rural areas are
twice as likely to be in
informal employment as
those in urban areas².

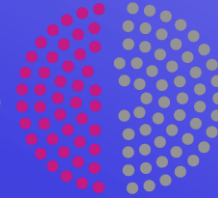
Source: International Labour
Organization – ILOSTAT, 2019

80%



Rural areas

44%

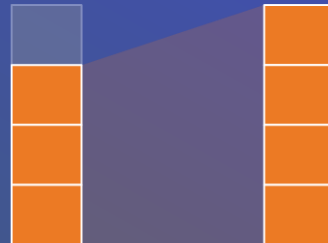


Urban areas

Average wages comparison between
rural and urban areas

Rural workers **are paid**,
on average, 24% less
than their urban
counterparts³.

Source: International Labour
Organization, 2024.



Rural workers

Urban workers

People with safely drinking
water coverage

Share of population with
no access to **safely
managed drinking water**
tops 40% in rural areas⁴.

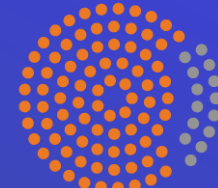
Source: World Health Organization and the
United Nations Children's Fund, 2021

60%



Rural areas

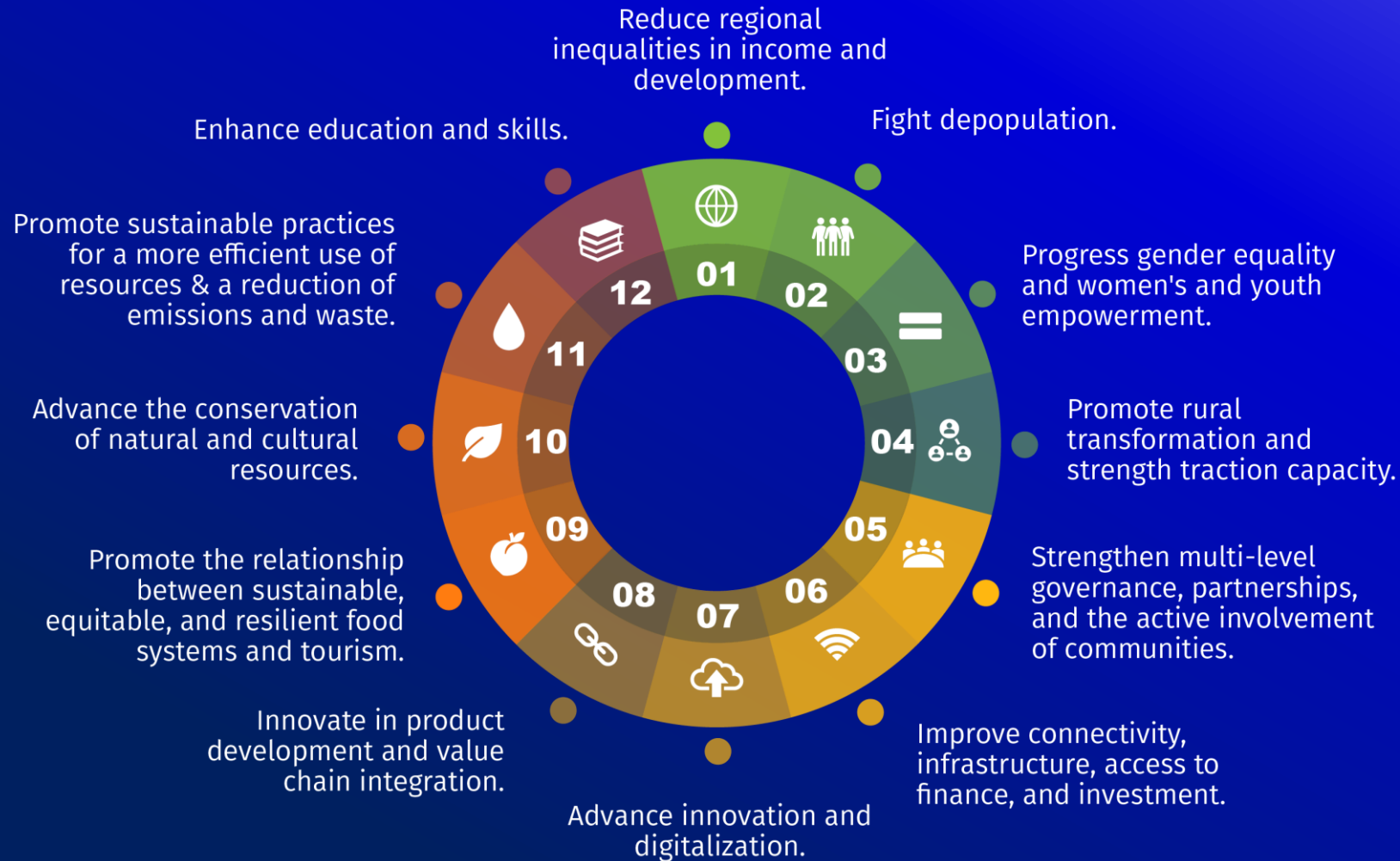
86%



Urban areas

TOURISM FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Objectives



Advocacy and outreach

To raise awareness on the role that tourism can have in rural development.

On the ground

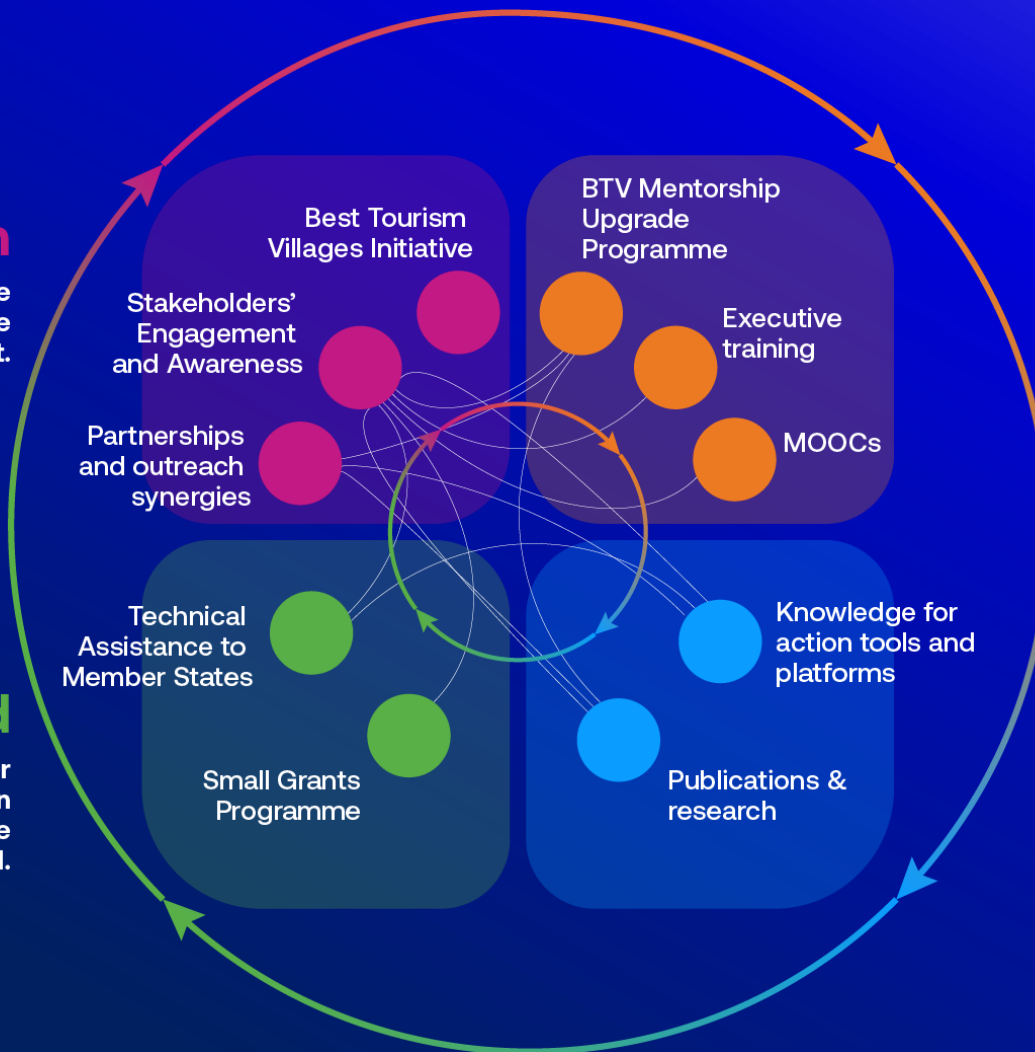
To support Member States and actors in implementing innovative approaches in the field.

Skills development

To strengthen capacities and skills of relevant stakeholders in rural areas.

Knowledge creation

To create, exchange and disseminate knowledge for effective evidence-based policy making.



TOURISM FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Best Tourism Villages Initiative



**BEST
TOURISM
VILLAGES**
by UN Tourism

The Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism recognizes outstanding examples of rural destinations that implement tourism in a sustainable way and as a key driver for rural development and community well-being.



BEST TOURISM VILLAGES INITIATIVE

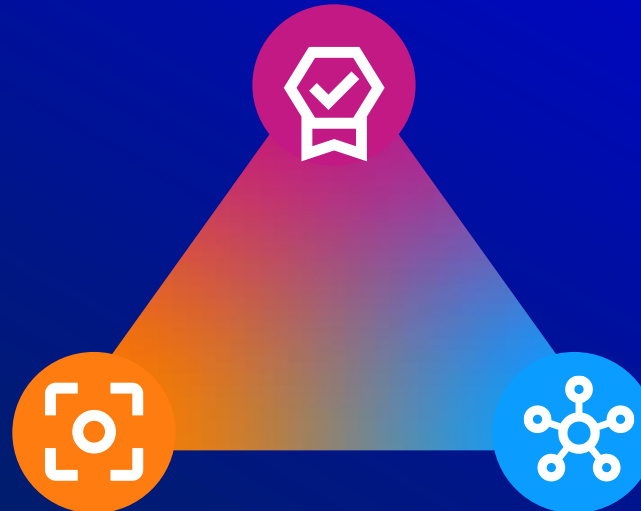
Key Pillars

Best Tourism Villages (BTV)

An example of a rural tourism destination with recognized cultural and natural assets, that preserves and promotes rural and community-based values, products and lifestyle and has a clear commitment to sustainability with the fundamental aim of making tourism one of the drivers of rural development and community well-being.

BTV Upgrade Programme

It includes villages that do not fully meet the initiative criteria but have strong potential. These villages receive mentoring from UN Tourism to improve elements of the areas identified as gaps in the evaluation process.



Best Tourism Villages Network

The members of the network are those villages recognized as Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism, and those selected to participate in the Upgrade Programme. It is a space for exchanging experiences and good practices, learnings, and opportunities.

BEST TOURISM VILLAGES INITIATIVE

Requisites for application



In line with the UN Tourism definition of Rural Tourism, a village must present the following features to be eligible for application:

- Have a low population density and a **maximum of 15.000 inhabitants**.
- Be located in a landscape with an important presence of **traditional activities** such as agriculture, forestry, livestock or fishing.
- Share **community values** and **lifestyle**.

UN Tourism Member States are invited to submit up to a maximum of **eight** applications (villages)

BEST TOURISM VILLAGES INITIATIVE

Areas of Evaluation



- **UN Tourism Member States** only through **National Tourism Administrations** (Villages cannot apply directly)
- Online via **SurveyMonkeyApply** (UN Tourism applications platform)
- Access granted to the focal point in the Member State
- **One** online application form per village
- Applications must be submitted in **English** or **Spanish**

Guidelines for application includes full details to prepare and submit applications

- Answers must be specific, concrete and evidence-based
- **Avoid general statements** e.g. “the village promotes sustainability” without proof
- Every **YES** answer must be justified with:
 - ✓ Description of initiatives
 - ✓ Actors involved
 - ✓ Beneficiaries
 - ✓ Measurable results or impact
- If information is missing or vague, the answer may be assessed as **NO**

BEST TOURISM VILLAGES INITIATIVE Selection Process



BEST TOURISM VILLAGES INITIATIVE

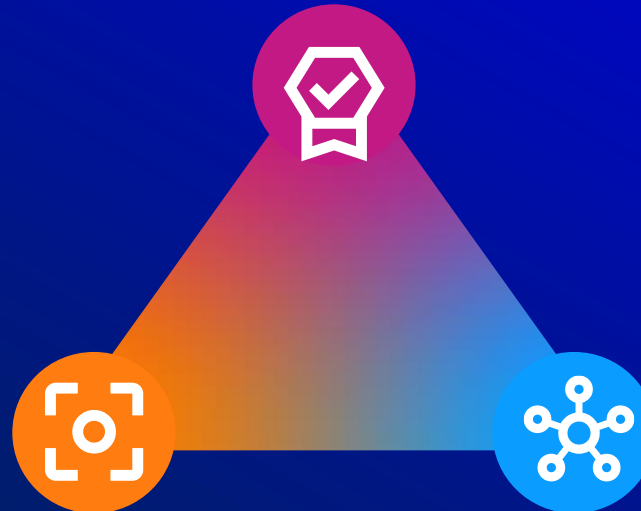
Key Pillars

Best Tourism Villages (BTV)

An example of a rural tourism destination with recognized cultural and natural assets, that preserves and promotes rural and community-based values, products and lifestyle and has a clear commitment to sustainability with the fundamental aim of making tourism one of the drivers of rural development and community well-being.

BTV Upgrade Programme

It includes villages that do not fully meet the initiative criteria but have strong potential. These villages receive mentoring from UN Tourism to improve elements of the areas identified as gaps in the evaluation process.



Best Tourism Villages Network

The members of the network are those villages recognized as Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism, and those selected to participate in the Upgrade Programme. It is a space for exchanging experiences and good practices, learnings, and opportunities.

BEST TOURISM VILLAGES INITIATIVE

Global Network and Reach



319

BTV Network
members

236

BTVs

1100+

BTV applications
received

64

Countries

5

BTV Editions



BEST TOURISM VILLAGES NETWORK Upgrade Programme



Key Figures

- **73** mentored villages (21 from EU)
- **41** countries (30 from EU)
- **1000+** stakeholders involved
- **60+** days of work on the ground
- **17** villages successfully graduated to BTV recognition through Fast Track (10 from EU)
- Enhanced **collaboration** between **local, regional and national stakeholders**

BEST TOURISM VILLAGES INITIATIVE

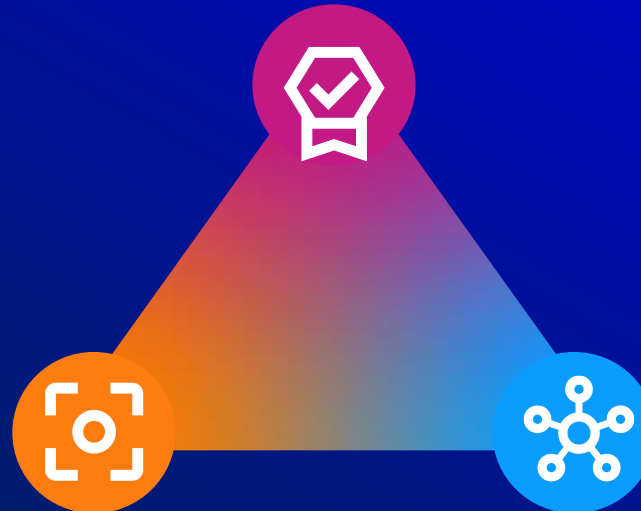
Key Pillars

Best Tourism Villages (BTV)

An example of a rural tourism destination with recognized cultural and natural assets, that preserves and promotes rural and community-based values, products and lifestyle and has a clear commitment to sustainability with the fundamental aim of making tourism one of the drivers of rural development and community well-being.

BTV Upgrade Programme

It includes villages that do not fully meet the initiative criteria but have strong potential. These villages receive mentoring from UN Tourism to improve elements of the areas identified as gaps in the evaluation process.



Best Tourism Villages Network

The members of the network are those villages recognized as Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism, and those selected to participate in the Upgrade Programme. It is a space for exchanging experiences and good practices, learnings, and opportunities.

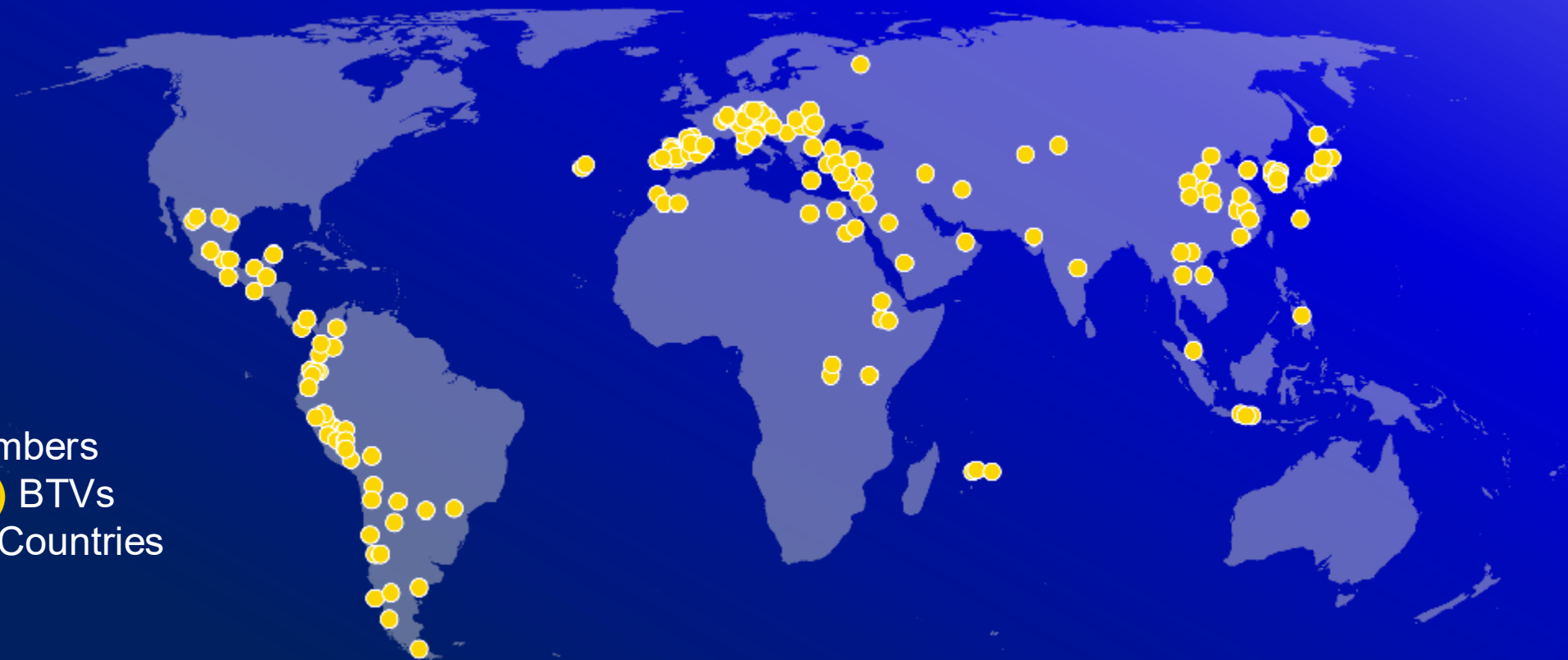
BEST TOURISM VILLAGES INITIATIVE

Global Network and Reach



1100+ BTV applications (2021-2025)
(321 from Europe)

319 BTV Network members
236 (90 from Europe) BTVs
65 (25 from Europe) Countries
5 regions



BEST TOURISM VILLAGES NETWORK

Advancing Knowledge



Access online and offline capacity-building opportunities



Knowledge management and access to tailor-made resources



Join regular meetings of the BTV Network and other thematic events



Village Talks
Voices from the ground
Puqueldón, Chile
Best Tourism Village 2022



From Carnellias to Carrots:
Innovative Product-Based
Agritourism in Jeju's
Batdam Landscape
Dongbaek & Seoha,
Republic of Korea



**Immersive Rural
Experiences: Miyama's
Educational Farm Stay
Programme**
Miyama, Japan

11

Village Talk Sessions

11

Knowledge Series Sessions

1200

Number of Attendees and Participants

14

European Villages Highlighted (Spain, Italy, Portugal, Cyprus, Andorra, Croatia, Switzerland, Slovenia, Austria)

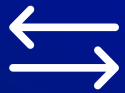
2026 Quarterly

Collection of Thematic Good Practices



BEST TOURISM VILLAGES NETWORK

Fostering Collaboration



Exchange and collaborate with like-minded villages around the world



Build partnerships and enhance collaboration on projects and initiatives



Promote exchange activities to build mutual understanding and learning among villages



300+

Number of Attendees and Participants

95

Participating Villages

50

Countries Represented

3

Annual Network Meetings

HSLU Hochschule
Luzern



Cornell University



basque
culinary
center

BEST TOURISM VILLAGES NETWORK

Fostering Collaboration

Villages organize networking meetings to share experiences, challenges and opportunities: July 2023 in San Ginesio, Italy (BTV 2021) and September 2024 in Huangling, China (BTV 2023).

In some cases, villages proactively established sub-groups within the Network: **BTV Network Chapters in China, Japan, and Ecuador.**

In Europe, villages from **Andorra, Portugal and Spain** established the **Iberian Chapter** working on exchanges and learning, as well as common marketing and creation of cross-border routes.



BEST TOURISM VILLAGES INITIATIVE

Selected Success Stories

UN Tourism Member States



Argentina – Comprehensive and Scalable National Model

Approach

- Long-term national strategy fully aligned with UN Tourism priorities.
- Bottom-up participation: candidacies initiated and developed locally, with federal coordination.
- Multidisciplinary evaluation, strong communication strategy, and continuous technical assistance.

Key Results

- **29** applications submitted throughout 5 editions (2021-2025)
 - **8** villages recognized as Best Tourism Villages
 - **2** villages participating in the Upgrade Programme
- Sustained success across multiple editions and regions of the country

Follow-up & Legacy

- Improved local tourism governance and formalization.
- Growth in tourism entrepreneurship (hospitality and gastronomy).
- Increased visitation and youth engagement.
- Stronger sense of identity, pride and community ownership

BEST TOURISM VILLAGES INITIATIVE

Selected Success Stories

UN Tourism Member States



Peru – Tourism as a Driver of Rural Development

Approach

- Nationally coordinated process led by MINCETUR, aligned with the Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism requirements and national tourism policies.
- Multi-layered evaluation combining:
 - BTV eligibility criteria (population, territory, community values).
 - National requirements, including Local Tourism Development Plans and official tourism resource registration.
 - Alignment with the national initiative **“Pueblos con Encanto”**.
- Strong focus on villages with recognized cultural and natural heritage and clear territorial identity.

Key Results

- Several villages recognized as Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism or integrated into related international processes.
- **“Pueblos con Encanto”** recognized in 8 regions by 2024, creating a robust pipeline of high-quality BTV candidates.

Follow-up & Legacy

- Strengthened local capacities through technical assistance in tourism management, planning and product development.
- Access to tourism funding mechanisms and public investment project formulation.
- Enhanced national and international visibility, supported by coordinated promotion with PROMPERÚ.
- Consolidation of tourism as a tool for heritage preservation, local identity and inclusive rural development

BEST TOURISM VILLAGES INITIATIVE

Selected Success Stories

UN Tourism Member States



Romania: Danube BTV Villages Network Project

Approach

- Centralized national selection process led by the Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Tourism.
- Transparent evaluation based on the 9 UN Tourism evaluation areas, including desk review and field visits.
- Dedicated technical revision and improvement of applications before submission to UN Tourism.

Key Results

- Consistent participation across several editions of the initiative.

Follow-up & Legacy

- Strong media visibility through coordinated press releases and a dedicated BTV webpage.
- Active post-award engagement (ceremonies, fairs, festivals, mentoring visits).
- Creation of:
 - A national cultural route of traditional villages.
 - A national BTV candidate network.
 - **Proposal for a Danube BTV Villages Network**

Highlights and Impact Stories

Spain: Promotion at national level



sustainability.spain.info/en/top/best-tourism-villages-espana/

Spain's official tourism website. Sustainability

SUSTAINABLE SPAIN TRAVEL IDEAS PRACTICAL INFORMATION

ENGLISH

RURAL TOURISM

Do you know the 'Best Tourism Villages' in Spain?



  **BEST TOURISM VILLAGES**
by UN Tourism

If you're looking for a **rural destination** that's also a benchmark in sustainability, Spain has some of the best options in the world. This is certified by the prestigious '**Best Tourism Villages**' initiative, launched by **UN Tourism** in 2021 to honour villages that help preserve local traditions and biodiversity. Fancy a trip to discover them?

BEST TOURISM VILLAGES NETWORK

Enhancing Visibility



Gain local, national and global visibility and amplify outreach through UN Tourism



Benefit from BTV UN Tourism website, social media presence, and communication campaigns



Gain access to broader support and resources from your national government and the international community



UN Tourism



International
Labour
Organization



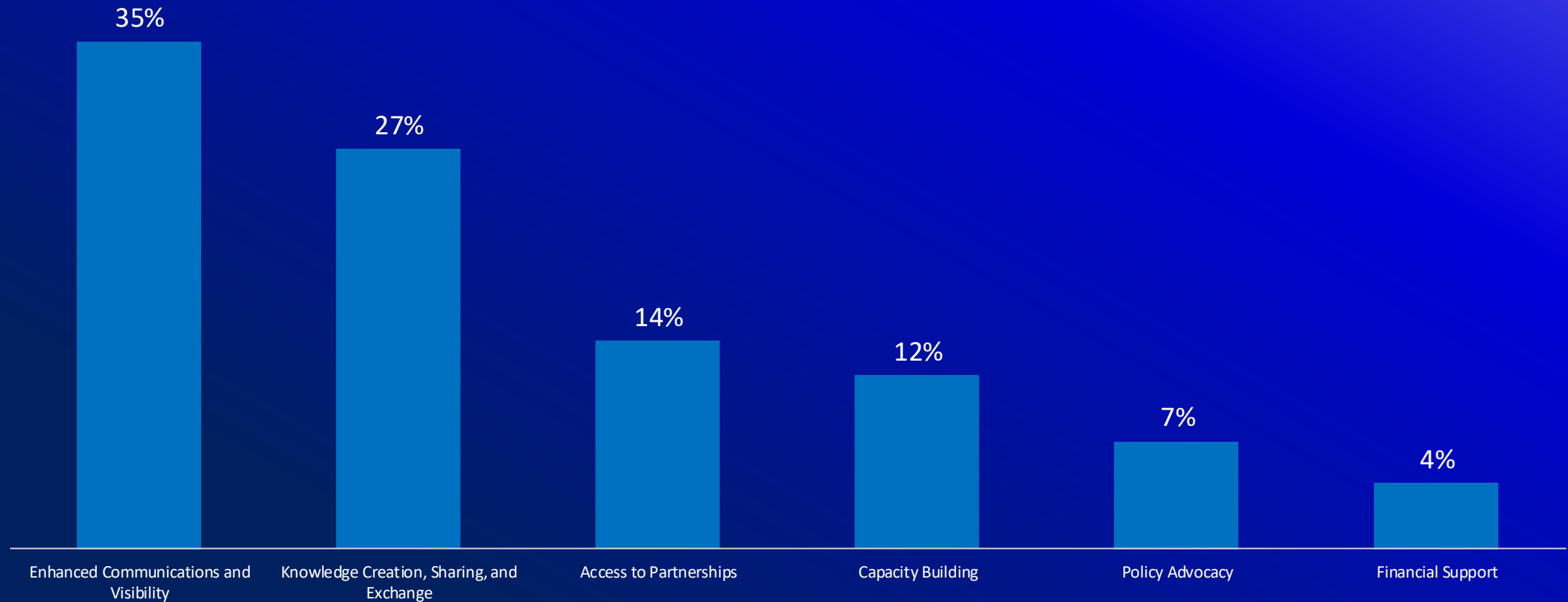
ITB

The World's
Leading
Travel Hub

Perceived Impact of the BTV Initiative



How has the Best Tourism Villages (BTV) initiative supported sustainable tourism development in your village?



Perceived Impact of the BTV Initiative Obidos, Portugal, BTV 2024



"The BTV "seal" acts as a global mark of quality. Since the award, Óbidos is now featured in UN Tourism itineraries distributed to operators in nearly 50 countries. The village has moved beyond being just a "day-trip" from Lisbon to being marketed as a leading sustainable rural destination, attracting a profile of travelers who value heritage and ecology over mass consumption"



Perceived Impact of the BTV Initiative Kaunertal, Austria, BTV 2021



"The award has been actively integrated into our marketing, media relations, and digital communication, helping to raise awareness among international audiences and positioning the valley as a model for responsible tourism in rural mountain regions. This enhanced visibility not only attracts guests who value sustainability and authentic experiences, but also strengthens local pride and supports the long-term development of tourism in the region."



TOURISM FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

On the Ground: Small Grants Programme



The Tourism for Rural Development Small Grants Programme (T4RD-SGP) by UN Tourism

- Aims to harness the potential of tourism to drive inclusive, resilient, and sustainable development in rural areas.
- Its goal is to empower rural communities with the resources they need to implement impactful projects that make a positive difference.



A financing mechanism that channels targeted resources to rural communities so they can design and implement tourism projects that drive inclusive, resilient and sustainable development on the ground.

PILOT CALL FOR APPLICATIONS
Colourful Cultures

Enabled by



ENGAGING AUDIENCES

Media and Visibility



Capitalize on data and BTVs as main drivers of media coverage!

Social Media

25+

Thematic
Social Media
Campaigns

20

Average Posts Monthly
Sustained content rhythm
across four social media
platforms

300+

Stories from
the Field

Media Engagement

400+

Pieces of Coverage
Total number of online,
offline and social clips in
this report

1.8M

Estimated Views
Combined total of
publication-wide audience
figures for all outlets
featuring coverage

3

Press Trips
(San Ginesio,
Nglanggeran,
Misfat Al Abriyeen)

Forbes

Ranked: The 52 Best Villages Of
The World To Visit According
To The UN

BBC

The world's best tourism villages in
2023

31 October 2023
Amanda Ruggeri
Features correspondent

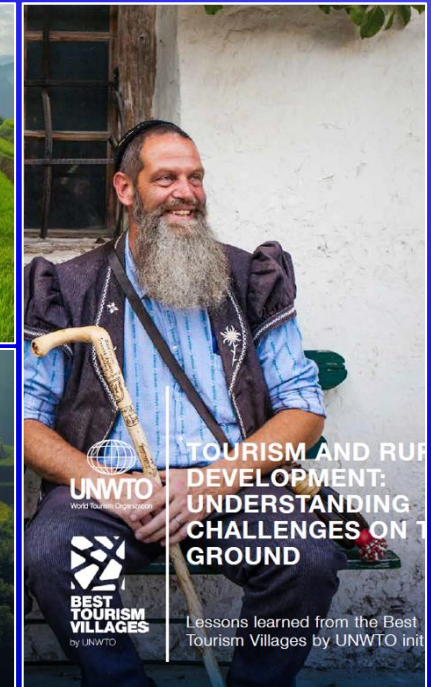
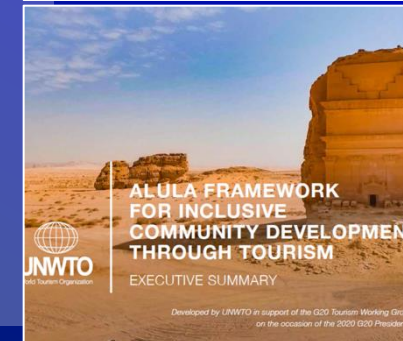
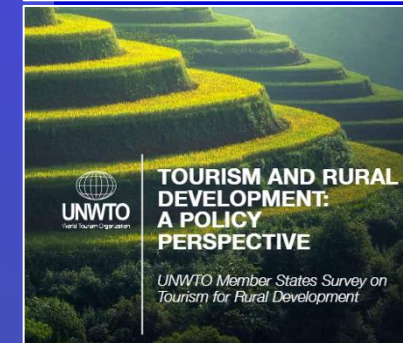


TOURISM FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Knowledge Creation



- **AIUla Framework for Inclusive Community Development through Tourism (2020).**
- **UNWTO Recommendations on Tourism for Rural Development (2020).**
- **Tourism and Rural Development: A Policy Perspective – Results of the First Survey on Rural Tourism in UNWTO Member States (2023).**
- **Tourism and Rural Development: Understanding Challenges on The Ground (2023).**
- **Tourism: A Driver for Shared Prosperity – Key Insights (Joint report with FAO, 2023)**
- **Tourism and Rural Development (Joint report with European Committee of the Regions, 2024)**
- **Tourism for Rural Development Programme – Impact Report (2021–2025)**
- **Monitoring Report of the 2021 Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism – Progress, Successes and Challenges (2026)**





Best Tourism Villages Initiative by UN Tourism

*Tourism for Rural Development
Programme*

Structure Expected in Strong Answers

- For each question, explain:
 - ✓ **What** the initiative, policy or action is
 - ✓ **Who implements** it (local authority, community, private sector, etc.)
 - ✓ **How** long it has been in place
 - ✓ **Who benefits** and how (beneficiaries)
 - ✓ What **impact** it has produced (qualitative or quantitative)
- Supporting links (max. 3 per question) are strongly encouraged but must be:
 - ✓ Accessible
 - ✓ Non-expired
 - ✓ Password-free

Overview of the 9 Areas of Evaluation (Answer Focus)

1. Cultural & Natural Resources

- Only officially recognized resources (local, national, UNESCO, protected areas)
- Indicate year, authority, and reason for recognition

2. Promotion & Conservation of Cultural Resources

- Conservation policies, restoration actions
- Cultural transmission, festivals, creative industries

3. Economic Sustainability

- Access to finance for tourism MSMEs
- Support frameworks for entrepreneurship and cooperatives

4. Social Sustainability

- Employment creation (women, youth, vulnerable groups)
- Skills development, education, accessibility

5. Environmental Sustainability

- Biodiversity protection and landscape management
- Climate action, plastic reduction, waste and water management

Overview of the 9 Areas of Evaluation (Answer Focus)

6. Tourism Development & Value Chain Integration

- Links to routes, clusters or protected areas
- Local gastronomy, producers, quality standards
- Marketing and distribution channels

7. Governance & Tourism Prioritization

- Tourism management structures
- Public-private cooperation
- Community participation and monitoring

8. Infrastructure & Connectivity

- Transport access
- Digital connectivity and ICT infrastructure

9. Health, Safety & Security

- Emergency services
- Public health and visitor safety systems

Fostering Collaboration



Formal Partnerships

- **Xidi (China) and Yucun (China):** Friendship agreement for mutual tourism, economic, and cultural exchange.
- **Miyama (Japan) and Xidi (China):** Memorandum and exchange visits, boosting BTV visibility in Japan.
- **Mokra Gora (Serbia) and Solcava (Slovenia):** Developed a Memorandum of Understanding centered around capacity-building and knowledge exchange



Knowledge Exchange & Capacity Building

- **Miyama (Japan) and Niseko (Japan):** Niseko visit included capacity-building lectures, fostering sustainable tourism efforts.
- **Miyama (Japan) and Sehwa and Dongbaek (Republic of Korea):** Village exchange program to reflect on learnings and experiences
- **Puerto Octay (Chile) and Ordino (Andorra):** Virtual meeting and webinar on visitor experience, inspiring local initiatives in Puerto Octay
- **Sehwa and Dongbaek (Republic of Korea) and Oñati (Spain):** Study tour to Spain to learn good practices in sustainable tourism management

BEST TOURISM VILLAGES NETWORK

Good Practices and Monitoring Results



Taraklı, Türkiye (BTV 2021)

The restoration of the historic “Fenerli Konak” in 2023 marks a significant step in preserving cultural heritage and fostering economic opportunity.



Castelo Rodrigo, Portugal (BTV 2021)

Launch of the “Recriação Histórica da Batalha de Castelo Rodrigo” an annual historical reenactment held at the village’s historic palace.



Morella, Spain (BTV 2021)

Ongoing implementation of a strategic plan focused on sustainability and its designation as a Smart Tourist Destination (DTI).