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UNIVERSIDADE DE TURISMO DE MACAU
Macao University of Tourism



18th UTM – UN TOURISM TRAINING PROGRAMME REIMAGINING DESTINATION BRANDING THROUGH AI AND DIGITAL MARKETING

22 – 25 September 2026
Macao SAR, China

CONCEPT NOTE

1. Background

The UTM–UN Tourism Training Programme is a long-standing capacity-building initiative that brings together tourism government officials, practitioners and academia from across the globe, especially the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, for intensive professional development on issues of strategic importance to the sector. This training programme is facilitated by the Macao University of Tourism (UTM) in collaboration with UN Tourism through a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2015 between the Macao SAR Government and UN Tourism. Each edition addresses a timely theme that reflects the most pressing challenges and opportunities facing national tourism organisations.

Entering its second decade, this year the UTM-UN Tourism Training Programme titled **“Reimagining Destination Branding Through AI and Digital Marketing”** focuses on the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI), digital marketing, and destination branding: a convergence that is rapidly reshaping how travellers discover, evaluate, and choose destinations, and how tourism organisations must position themselves to remain competitive in an increasingly algorithmically mediated marketplace.

2. Context

The global tourism industry is experiencing a structural transformation driven by the mainstream adoption of generative AI. Unlike previous digital shifts caused by the rise of online travel agencies, social media marketing, or mobile-first engagement, the current AI revolution is altering the fundamental logic of travel decision-making. When travellers use AI-powered tools to plan trips, they increasingly receive synthesised recommendations rather than lists of links to explore. AI systems have become intermediaries that curate, filter, and, in many cases, determine which destinations gain consideration and which remain invisible.

The revolution carries urgent implications for national tourism organisations. Shaped by the quality of the digital footprint, the consistency of the brand signals, and the richness of structured data, a destination's representation within AI systems is being encoded into models that will influence travellers' decisions for years to come. Organisations that do not understand or engage with this



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reality risk having their destination's narrative shaped by algorithmic defaults or their culture misrepresented.

Simultaneously, AI-powered personalisation on travel platforms is reshaping competitive dynamics. Recommendation systems now surface destinations to travellers based on behavioural signals and preference models, meaning that visibility increasingly depends on data quality and platform engagement rather than marketing budget alone. When every destination can produce polished content at scale, differentiation must come from strategic coherence, authentic storytelling, and cultural distinctiveness rather than production quality.

These trends also create a governance responsibility that extends beyond marketing. Stakeholders must understand AI systems well enough to ensure their destinations are represented accurately and attractively, to negotiate with platform companies from a position of knowledge, to allocate resources during a period of technological transition, and to demonstrate measurable returns on marketing expenditure.

3. Objectives and Topics

The programme aims to equip participants with the strategic understanding, practical skills, and peer networks required to lead AI-informed destination branding and digital marketing within their organisations. It is structured as a learning progression that moves from strategic context through peer benchmarking and expert input to hands-on application, grounded throughout in the conviction that technology must serve authentic cultural storytelling rather than replace it.

The programme addresses the following core topics:

- How AI is restructuring travel discovery and destination competitiveness;
- Platforms and ecosystems mediating destination branding;
- AI-powered marketing strategies, tools, and partnership models;
- Digital trust and cyber resilience for destinations; and
- Practical prompt engineering and AI prototyping skills.

Cultural immersion activities will be arranged to complement the technical content aiming to reinforce that the most compelling destination brands are rooted in irreplaceable heritage and lived human experience.

Upon completion of the programme, participants will be able to articulate how generative AI is restructuring the tourism information environment and what this means for their destination's visibility and competitiveness. They will understand the major platform ecosystems shaping travel discovery and be able to make informed decisions about digital resource allocation and platform partnerships. They will possess practical generative AI skills, particularly prompt engineering, that enable them to



produce brand-aligned content, prototype visitor-facing applications, and evaluate technology solutions without dependence on external specialists. They will have a framework for integrating AI tools into destination marketing in ways that amplify cultural authenticity and support sustainable development objectives. And they will have established a peer network of counterparts from across the region facing similar challenges, enabling ongoing collaborative learning beyond the programme itself.

The programme ultimately seeks to ensure that all participants are not passive observers of the AI transformation but informed, capable, and strategically minded leaders within it and will be able to return to their organisations as credible advocates for thoughtful AI adoption that serves both commercial competitiveness and cultural integrity.

4. Participants

The 18th UTM-UN Tourism Training Programme is designed for:

- ministries of tourism and national tourism organisations from UN Tourism member states
- international and regional organisations
- regional and local destination management organisations
- academic institutions (universities / research facilities) specialising in tourism management studies