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**Tourism and the Sustainable  
Development Goals**  
Good Practices in the Americas



# Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals

Good Practices in the Americas

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#### **Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals – Good Practices in the Americas**

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## Foreword by UNWTO Secretary-General

On behalf of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the United Nations Specialized Agency for Tourism, I am pleased to introduce this first publication resulting from a partnership between UNWTO and the Organization of American States (OAS).

The historic 2015 agreement among world leaders at the United Nations on a universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development committed 196 countries to pursue a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) leading to a better future for all. The shift from commitment to action can only be achieved if sustainable development moves from the periphery to the core of decision-making in both public and private domains.

Tourism is included as part of three SDGs – Goal 8 on economic growth and jobs; Goal 12 on sustainable production and consumption and Goal 14 on Life below water. Yet, sustainable tourism can and must play a significant role in delivering solutions through the framework of *all* 17 SDGs. The case studies compiled herein showcase good practices on how sustainable tourism can contribute towards these universal goals, and its potential to advance the SDGs in the Americas.

The Americas welcomed some 207 million international tourist arrivals in 2017. As tourism continues to grow annually, governments and administrations in the region have identified the sector as a priority to promote economic development and diversification, fight poverty and create sustainable livelihoods. American countries continue to adopt new legislation and policies in support of sustainable tourism, poverty alleviation through tourism, protection of biodiversity and cultural heritage, and community development.

As this publication shows, a common approach to tourism development – taken together by policy makers, private sector, tourists and the development community – can make our sector a catalyst for inclusive and sustainable growth in the Americas, protecting the environment and cultural heritage, as well as building peace. I have no doubt that such a united approach will emerge from the 2018 Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-level Authorities of Tourism, under the theme ‘Connecting the Americas through sustainable tourism’.

I trust that this report will serve as a useful and inspiring tool for policy makers, private sector and all other tourism stakeholders to usher in a more responsible and sustainable tourism sector that advances the 2030 Agenda in the Americas.

Zurab Pololikashvili  
Secretary-General, World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)









# Foreword by OAS Executive Secretary for Integral Development

Tourism has the potential to significantly contribute to broad-based inclusive growth and generate more opportunities for our citizens.

Travel and tourism account for 8.5% of the gross domestic product and nearly 10% of employment in the Americas, and the region generated more than a quarter of the world's tourism receipts in 2016, illustrating the sector's importance and potential for contributing to the region's long-term development objectives.

Notwithstanding the strong performance of the industry, innovative policies and programmes that advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are vital to address the challenges, threats and risks to the future of tourism and ensure that this sector in our countries remains competitive and sustainable.

There is resounding evidence from multiple studies that consumers continue to be interested in tourism products that are geared towards environmental protection and that benefit local communities. Recent data indicates that some 73% of millennials are willing to pay more for sustainability compared to 51% of baby boomers. What this tells us is that our tourism policies, programmes, products, experiences and marketing must be extremely well-defined and targeted. If we are to build resilient communities and countries, we must project to the outside world the seriousness of our commitment.

All of this is consistent with our efforts at the OAS. Since taking office in May 2015, broadening opportunities for all citizens has been a central piece of our strategy, as we repositioned the Organization to become a beacon for the defense of human rights and democracy in the hemisphere. The motto of the new OAS has been "More Rights for More People."

The OAS welcomes this joint publication with the World Tourism Organization on Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting good practices from across the Americas that showcase the contribution of tourism to sustainable development. This publication builds on the legacy of 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development and provides greater awareness on how tourism can help address poverty alleviation, protect biodiversity and cultural heritage, and support community development in the Americas.

Kim Osborne  
OAS Executive Secretary for Integral Development (SEDI)

## Foreword by the Minister of Foreign Trade and Tourism of Peru and Chair of the Inter-American Committee on Tourism

In 2015, Peru took on the challenge of organizing the XXIII Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-Level Authorities of Tourism, under the theme “Community-based Rural Tourism”. It did so in the conviction that a commitment to sustainable tourism is necessary in order to more fully utilize – and at the same time, preserve – the natural and cultural riches of the Americas, with the local communities themselves being the main actors and beneficiaries.

The challenge of leading and guiding inter-American cooperation in tourism continued upon Peru's election as Chair of the Inter-American Committee on Tourism (CITUR). In this capacity, at a meeting of the CITUR officers and the Members of the Troika (Past, Present and Future Presidents of the Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-Level Authorities of Tourism), it proposed to the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the production of a publication on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of the observance of 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development.

It is an honour for Peru to have spearheaded this publication, which attracted a high-level of response as reflected by the submissions of case studies by several countries of the sub-regions of the Americas. These cases show the substantial efforts that are being made in the hemisphere to make tourism a sustainable activity, because tourism is no longer just a passing trend, but rather a full-fledged pillar of our nations' development policies. Sharing these case studies will promote the commitment of more communities, companies, destinations and countries to sustainable tourism.

We thank OAS and UNWTO for welcoming the proposal of Peru, and for pooling their efforts in the publication of this compendium of good practices in sustainable tourism. This experience constitutes a model that can be followed in order to replicate this type of joint initiative for the benefit of the tourism sector in the Americas.

Through its participation in the Inter-American Committee on Tourism (CITUR) of the OAS and in the World Tourism Organization, Peru will continue working to ensure that tourism is practiced and applied in a sustainable manner. We will continue to share successful experiences and contribute to the strengthening of inter-American cooperation in tourism.

Eduardo Ferreyros Küppers  
Minister of Foreign Trade and Tourism of Peru and  
Chair of the Inter-American Committee on Tourism (CITUR)







## Introduction

The growing influence of the tourism sector as an economic powerhouse and its potential as a tool for development are irrefutable. The available data indicates that the sector contributes to more than 10% of global gross domestic product (GDP) and provides for one in ten jobs in the world. While the statistics for the Americas as a whole are not dissimilar, the Caribbean sub-region remains the most tourism dependent region of the world with tourism as the primary source of employment and foreign direct investment (FDI), and the largest contributor to GDP in the vast majority of these countries. Not only does the tourism sector spearhead growth, it also improves the quality of people's lives, support environmental protection, champion diverse cultural heritage and strengthens peace in the world.

To harness tourism's impressive potential to advance sustainable development, it is imperative to stress it can contribute to all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Tourism is specifically included as target in Goals 8, 12 and 14 on inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources, respectively, making the pursuit of these targets actionable rather than solely aspirational.

The International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development 2017 (IY2017), provided impetus to countries' efforts to better focus on actions which support the sector's contribution to sustainable development, while promoting the inclusion of tourism within development policy frameworks. More importantly, the identification of five key areas of the IY2017, (i) Sustainable economic growth; (ii) Social inclusiveness, employment and poverty reduction; (iii) Resource efficiency, environmental protection and climate change; (iv) Cultural values, diversity and heritage; and (v) Mutual understanding peace and security, provided a framework for policy-makers, tourism stakeholders



and tourists themselves to consider how their actions and tourism initiatives can better contribute to sustainable development.

Critical attention must be paid to the way tourism is managed. While countries strive to maximize the sector's positive impact as a generator of economic activity, a provider of jobs and source of foreign exchange, this must be juxtaposed against the need to mitigate some of the current and potential risks including, *inter alia*, tourism 'overcrowding' and climate change. The evidence from the 2017 tropical hurricane season, which has been one of the most intense and destructive in recent memory, not only forces us to confront the overwhelming scientific evidence that these events are largely due to the changes to our climate and are likely to increase in frequency and veracity, but to also consider the importance of mainstreaming the issue of resilience in all tourism planning so that we are in a better position to mitigate these impacts.

There is an increasing evidence of the emergence of a more responsible tourist; one that demands tourism products and services better geared towards environmental protection and beneficial to local communities. Recognizing this, as well as understanding how these demands fit within the framework of sustainable tourism for development, suggests a more critical role for destination management to better integrate the efficient use of resources, and coordinate the involvement of different stakeholders in the adoption of suitable policies, actions and initiatives. Managing sustainable tourism for development also highlights the need to focus on developing and strengthening existing partnerships between government and the private sector, as well as those involving local communities, local stakeholders and tourism authorities, and partnerships among the international tourism community.

Despite its importance there is still need for a better understanding of how the sector can surmount current challenges and capitalize on opportunities, and how to measure tourism's role in sustainable development, including its economic, environmental and social dimensions. In this regard, the recent initiative by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) to launch the Measuring Sustainable Tourism (MST) project is an important step forward. The ability to better measure sustainable tourism through a statistical framework which incorporates economic, social and environmental dimensions would enhance the tools available to improve tourism management and the implementation and monitoring of effective policies and programmes, including those related to the SGDs and the broader 2030 Agenda.

This publication compiles 14 good practices related to tourism and the SDGs from across the different sub-regions of the Americas – three from North America, Central America, and the Caribbean respectively, four from South America and one practice which covers both the Caribbean and Central America sub-regions. We hope that the publication will contribute to a broader recognition of the sector's importance – including its inter-linkages with virtually all other economic sectors – and a greater awareness and understanding of tourism's broad potential. Ultimately, we hope to inspire action with a view to building a truly sustainable tourism sector in the Americas and worldwide.

## Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals: how tourism can help achieve the SDGs







On 25 September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly approved the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and with it the Sustainable Development Goals, a framework comprising 17 goals and 169 targets, through which States, civil society and the private sector can guide and measure their contributions to sustainable development towards 2030.

The new development agenda is the most ambitious to date and its 17 Goals are intended to eradicate poverty, protect the planet and ensure equality and prosperity for all. This agenda considers all contributions to sustainable development regardless of the actor making them, enabling for the first time companies to play a leading role in the realization of the new development agenda.

Tourism appears in the targets of Goals 8, 12 and 14, on inclusive and sustainable economic development, sustainable consumption and production, and sustainable use of oceans and marine resources, respectively. Yet, with its outreach and impact, tourism can contribute directly or indirectly to all 17 of these goals.

## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**



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### SDG 1 – End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Tourism provides income through job creation at local and community levels. It can be linked with national poverty reduction strategies and entrepreneurship. Low skills requirement and local recruitment can empower less favoured groups, particularly youth and women.



### SDG 2 – End hunger, achieve food security and nutrition, promote sustainable agriculture

Tourism can spur sustainable agricultural by promoting the production and supplies to hotels, and sales of local products to tourists. Agro-tourism can generate additional income while enhancing the value of the tourism experience.



### SDG 3 – Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Tax income generated from tourism can be reinvested in health care and services, improving maternal health, reduce child mortality and preventing diseases. Visitors fees collected in protected areas can as well contribute to health services.



### SDG 4 – Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all

Tourism has the potential to promote inclusiveness. A skilful workforce is crucial for tourism to prosper. The tourism sector provides opportunities for direct and indirect jobs for youth, women, and those with special needs, who should benefit through educational means.



### SDG 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Tourism can empower women, particularly through the provision of direct jobs and income-generation from MMEs in tourism and hospitality related enterprises. Tourism can be a tool for women to become fully engaged and lead in every aspect of society.



### SDG 6 - Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Tourism investment requirement for providing utilities can play a critical role in achieving water access and security, as well as hygiene and sanitation for all. The efficient use of water in tourism, pollution control and technology efficiency can be key to safeguarding our most precious resource.



### SDG 7 – Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

As a sector, which is energy intensive, tourism can accelerate the shift towards increased renewable energy shares in the global energy mix. By promoting investments in clean energy sources, tourism can help to reduce green house gases, mitigate climate change and contribute to access of energy for all.



### SDG 8 – Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all

Tourism, as services trade, is one of the top four export earners globally, currently providing one in ten jobs worldwide. Decent work opportunities in tourism, particularly for youth and women, and policies that favour better diversification through tourism value chains can enhance tourism positive socio-economic impacts.



### SDG 9 – Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Tourism development relies on good public and private infrastructure. The sector can influence public policy for infrastructure upgrade and retrofit, making them more sustainable, innovative and resource-efficient and moving towards low carbon growth, thus attracting tourists and other sources of foreign investment.





### SDG 10 – Reduce inequality within and among countries

Tourism can be a powerful tool for reducing inequalities if it engages local populations and all key stakeholders in its development. Tourism can contribute to urban renewal and rural development by giving people the opportunity to prosper in their place of origin. Tourism is an effective means for economic integration and diversification.



### SDG 11 – Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Tourism can advance urban infrastructure and accessibility, promote regeneration and preserve cultural and natural heritage, assets on which tourism depends. Investment in green infrastructure (more efficient transport, reduced air pollution) should result in smarter and greener cities for, not only residents but also tourists.



### SDG 12 – Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

The tourism sector needs to adopt sustainable consumption and production (SCP) modes, accelerating the shift towards sustainability. Tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for tourism including for energy, water, waste, biodiversity and job creation will result in enhanced economic, social and environmental outcomes.



### SDG 13 – Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Tourism contributes to and is affected by climate change. Tourism stakeholders should play a leading role in the global response to climate change. By reducing its carbon footprint, in the transport and accommodation sector, tourism can benefit from low carbon growth and help tackle one of the most pressing challenges of our time.



### SDG 14 – Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Coastal and maritime tourism rely on healthy marine ecosystems. Tourism development must be a part of Integrated Coastal Zone Management in order to help conserve and preserve fragile marine ecosystems and serve as a vehicle to promote a blue economy, contributing to the sustainable use of marine resources.



### SDG 15 – Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems and halt biodiversity loss

Rich biodiversity and natural heritage are often the main reasons why tourists visit a destination. Tourism can play a major role if sustainably managed in fragile zones, not only in conserving and preserving biodiversity, but also in generating revenue as an alternative livelihood to local communities.



### SDG 16 – Promote peaceful and inclusive societies, provide access to justice for all and build inclusive institutions

As tourism revolves around billions of encounters between people of diverse cultural backgrounds, the sector can foster multicultural and inter-faith tolerance and understanding, laying the foundation for more peaceful societies. Tourism, which benefits and engages local communities, can also consolidate peace in post-conflict societies.



### SDG 17 – Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Due to its cross-sectoral nature, tourism has the ability to strengthen private/public partnerships and engage multiple stakeholders – international, national, regional and local – to work together to achieve the SDGs and other common goals. Public policy and innovative financing are at the core of achieving the 2030 Agenda.



A lush tropical forest scene with a river and large tree roots. The image shows a dense forest with large, moss-covered tree trunks and roots extending into a shallow, clear river. The water is a vibrant turquoise color, and the surrounding vegetation is thick and green. The scene is captured from a low angle, looking down at the roots and up towards the canopy.

## Case studies

The following case studies illustrate the importance and potential of sustainable tourism as an effective means for sustainable development and inclusive growth in the Americas. They represent initiatives from both the private and public sectors across 14 different countries and destinations in the region.









## Programme for strengthening Municipal Tourism Management, Chile

*The programme promotes the development of sustainable tourism at the local level through the implementation of Sustainable Tourism Management Plans and the creation of a municipality network which allows a better coordination and a proper application of the national policies at the municipal level.*

A pioneering Tourism Programme in Chile aims to strengthen sustainable municipal tourism management in the fields of training, promotion, quality, information, partnerships and sustainability. The initiative responds to municipalities' calls for measures to strengthen their internal capacities in sustainable tourism management, in line with the strategic plans of Chile's National Tourism Service (SERNATUR).

The Programme involves a range of initiatives, including: the dissemination of the 'S' label, which recognizes the efforts of local enterprises in the field of sustainability, and helps them to improve their competitiveness; the design of Sustainable Tourism Development Plans, as well as proposals on accessible tourism and social tourism; the identification and development of tourism destinations; training for human resources; a competition of Good Practices in Municipal Tourism; and the implementation of a model to strengthen the tourism management capacities of municipalities. To ensure the programme's effective implementation, municipal tourism managers throughout the country, alongside entrepreneurs and local communities, have been involved in a network convened by SERNATUR, covering 90% of Chile's municipalities.





Among municipalities, the programme has raised awareness of tourism's potential to drive economic development while safeguarding cultural and natural heritage. Through the aforementioned network, coordination with autonomous municipalities has been improved by pursuing common objectives and guidelines. Experiences are shared among diverse entities of different sizes, from different geographical locations, and with different contexts vis-à-vis the tourism sector. Partnerships between the public and private sectors have also been established.

The Programme compiles systematized information annually, which is used, in turn, by all 345 of Chile's municipalities. A benchmark has been created in the municipal sphere for inter-sectoral work. Some 231 local municipalities now have a Tourism Unit, 145 municipal Tourist Information Offices have been set up, and 99 municipalities have elaborated Tourism Development Plans.

Through clear strategies and guidelines for local tourism development, provided by SENATUR, synergies and effectiveness are being achieved in the local implementation of regional and national sustainability policies. The technical work of the municipal network complements SERNATUR's political efforts at the national and regional levels. The network has established communication that would otherwise not exist – between municipal authorities, social organizations and tourism service providers – while contributing positively to public tourism programmes and the dissemination of national and regional policies.





## El Carlos Ecotourism and Archaeological Centre, Colombia

*The El Carlos Ecotourism and Archaeological Centre – managed by a Cooperative formed by ex-guerrilla, ex-paramilitary forces and displaced people – is an important example of a local initiative which strengthens tourism and peace.*

The village of El Carlos in northern Colombia, situated in Urabá region, lies next to the border with Panama. Due to its strategic location, the Urabá region has suffered a history of violence. El Carlos itself was affected, obliging communities to develop survival strategies to avoid becoming a target of conflict. In 2005, with the demobilization of paramilitary forces, a process of community reconciliation began. Communities began working together in the spheres of tourism, handicrafts, fisheries and cocoa farms. Thus, the El Carlos Ecotourism and Archaeological Centre was created to strengthen tourism and peace in the area. The community was supported by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Prosperity Department, which initiated a programme to provide community members with alternatives to illegal economic activities. In 2015, Colombia's Vice Ministry of Tourism designated the Urabá region as a pilot in its Tourism Development Plan, within the context of its Tourism, Peace and Coexistence programme.

The El Carlos Ecotourism and Archaeological Centre is managed by a Cooperative, COOTUCAR, formed by ex-guerrilla, ex-paramilitary personnel and displaced people. The Centre comprises cabins made from local materials, using traditional techniques; a restaurant offering local cuisine;







ecological paths; and an Archaeological Interpretation Centre showcasing traditional artefacts. The community successfully attracted tourists – including schools, enterprises and families from neighbouring cities – who visit the Centre to experience the area's traditional, rural way of life.

The Centre has enhanced local incomes by involving communities across the tourism value chain. Tourism has provided tools to reduce poverty, generate employment within communities, and empower farmers, women, young people and minority groups. It has also given young people the opportunity to stay in their place of origin and benefit from legal economic activities and sustainable livelihoods, rather than turning to illegal pursuits. 15 years of involvement in tourism have yielded both tangible and intangible changes in the lives of communities in the Urabá region. Locals are now more aware of the importance of tourism, as well as different aspects of sustainability – social, environmental and economic. Through the tourism project, communities became more aware of what they truly value, while safeguarding their culture, strengthening their identity and working in collaboration. Given the area's legacy of violence and repression, restoring community confidence has been vital. Equally important are revitalized support networks, community empowerment and support for community members to work together towards a common goal. Not only has this resulted in a thriving tourism sector, it has also built the foundations for peace.

Through the Centre, tourism provides the community with the tools needed for economic growth, social and cultural empowerment, and environmental preservation. Tourism has created an invaluable feeling among local communities in the Urabá region – a sense of connection with their territory, their rich diversity, their cultural values, their local products and all the resources involved in the services they provide for tourists – enabling them to feel pride in themselves, their origins, their territory, their community and their decisions. Offering an alternative to illegal pursuits and conflict, sustainable tourism can be a tool for development, understanding and peace.



## Karanki Magdalena Community Project, Ecuador

*The development of community tourism among Ecuador's Karanki Magdalena indigenous community has contributed positively to sustainable economic growth through employment and infrastructure development, while helping to preserve the community's culture and traditional livelihood activities.*



Karanki Magdalena, on the slopes of the Imbabura volcano in the Ecuadorian Andes has been home to the indigenous community of Magdalena since time in memorial. Enjoying a harmonious relationship with the natural environment, the community centres on tending their livestock, cultivating their land and embroidering traditional baskets and cloths. In 2012, the Ecuadorian tour operator Go Galapagos – Kleintours developed a community-based tourism project to improve community's living conditions by creating jobs and promoting indigenous tourism. Each tourist is a guest in the home of a Karanki family, where they have cross-cultural experiences by participating in the community's traditional livelihood activities.

The tour operator conducted reforms in family homes and provided training to local people in hospitality, cooking, hygiene, health, accounting and English. Through the project, housing conditions were improved, a medical centre was opened and the water quality was enhanced by upgrading network of pipes and filtration tanks. To date, local households continue to receive training and support to cater to tourists – moves which increase their income and help them break out of cycles of poverty. Several travel agencies have engaged in marketing the project, highlighting the initiative in travel catalogues and promoting it as a community tourism destination.





Overall, the project has had a positive impact on the local economy and indigenous community. Tourist numbers have increased significantly, with visitors describing their stays as beautiful experiences of co-existence and learning. The initiative has contributed to enhanced employment for 22 local families, who provide accommodation, sell traditional fabrics, rent horses for tourism activities and maintain social areas. It has also enabled local women to earn an additional income through their inclusion in the tourism value chain as home-based workers. This has been a boon to children's education in the local area. In terms of environmental conservation, garbage bins have been installed to improve waste management; 5,000 indigenous tree varieties have been planted; and families received training in organic farming techniques, free from the use of chemicals.

The main challenge faced by the initiative was collaboration with the indigenous community – an issue addressed through a process of building understanding and mutual learning over time. Based on the project's positive outcomes, the Go Galapagos – Kleintours are supporting other local communities to develop community tourism, underscored by their belief that involving indigenous peoples in sustainable tourism development helps to reduce poverty and preserve Ecuador's environmental and cultural diversity.





## IMPULSA programme, Guatemala

*Through the IMPULSA Programme, Guatemala has strengthened and promoted sustainable tourism projects in Protected Areas, thus enhancing and protecting these natural spaces while promoting tourism as a tool for economic growth.*

Since 2010, Guatemala has been one of the 19 countries in the world considered ‘mega-diverse’. The conservation of its precious natural and cultural heritage depends, to a great extent, on the country’s 334 Protected Areas, which cover 32% of its territory. This large network of Protected Areas contains Guatemala’s main tourism attractions – including four of the country’s top-five destinations. In 2015, the IMPULSA Programme was created to build on this important potential. Its principle objective is to enhance the capacities that entrepreneurs and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have for growth, while enabling their work to stimulate sustainable tourism in Protected Areas.

The Programme is implemented by the Guatemalan Tourism Institute (INGUAT) through the support of the Guatemalan government, and in collaboration with the National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP) and other public and private institutions. In the first two editions of the annual programme, 20 entrepreneurs and companies have been selected to receive specialized advice on the construction of viable business models during workshops and events, build connections with potential business partners and investors, and have the possibility of accessing seed capital. For the 2018 and 2019 editions, 40 more projects of entrepreneurs, SMEs or protected areas will be added.





Beneficiaries are selected in accordance with the IMPULSA Programme's well-defined *Sustainable Tourism Criteria*, that guarantee the sustainability and positive impact of its projects. Among these criteria are the need for community participation, cultural respect and support for local communities; the need for projects to be aligned with the conservation objectives of Protected Areas; and the need to offer positive experiences for both visitors and hosts. Throughout, human rights are the initiative's basic principle, underscored by tourism's role as a catalyst of cultural rapprochement and understanding. All entrepreneurs selected as finalists of the IMPULSA programme are followed up on their company's progress in terms of sales, employees and other social and environmental impacts and on their needs to foster development of their businesses.

The IMPULSA Programme has enabled the development of profitable, sustainable tourism businesses,<sup>1</sup> which have also been a valuable source of employment for surrounding communities. As the programme requires that part of businesses' profits must be used for the protection of Protected Areas, substantial results have been obtained in terms of safeguarding natural and cultural heritage – both tangible and intangible.

All of these initiatives have resulted in greater appreciation and greater awareness of what Guatemala's System of Protected Areas represents, while strengthening the capacities of entrepreneurs and local communities. Thus, the IMPULSA Programme is a strong example of how tourism can be used to further inclusive growth which respects and protects the environment.

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<sup>1</sup> An example of a project that the IMPULSA programme has helped to materialize, la Choza Chula, is available at: <http://lachozechula.org>





## Rewa Eco-lodge, Guyana

*The Rewa community-run eco-lodge in the heart of Guyana provides employment opportunities for local Rewa people and has paved the village's way to protecting its natural resources.*

The Rewa eco-lodge was founded in 2005 by the local community in an effort to protect the land around the village of Rewa for generations to come. With a grant provided by Conservation International, the lodge was set-up amongst a pristine environmental backdrop. Located at the confluence of two rivers in the north Rupununi, in central Guyana, Rewa is home to a small Amerindian community of about 300 inhabitants, predominantly belonging to the Makushi peoples. The area is renowned for its abundant wildlife and ecological diversity. Recognizing the need for the species' conservation and protection, the community partnered with the Government of Guyana to establish best practices, policies and procedures to ensure that the surrounding area remained a protected habitat for the Arapaima fish – the largest fresh water fish in the world, which the Rewa community have agreed to protect.

Rewa is now a renowned destination in Guyana. Flora, fauna and cultural heritage remain its main attraction, and the 'catch and release' sport fishing of the Arapaima has been developed as a new ecotourism product. The eco-lodge offers sustainable tourism experiences that provide significant economic benefits to the local community without any resource extraction. Commercial harvesting has been banned and new generations are growing up well-aware of the importance of preserving natural resources.







The residents of Rewa faced several challenges when moving from traditional practices to a more sustainable method of harvesting wildlife, particularly since fishing had been the main source of income for many families. Through close multi-stakeholder collaboration, an Arapaima Management Plan was developed and implemented. This raised community awareness of the benefits of sustainable harvesting and supported efforts to change practices.

The community-owned and operated eco-lodge generates employment for many residents, creating job security that allows villagers to remain in Rewa. Profits are reinvested into the business to increase tourism and further improve the livelihoods of the community. The benefits of this community-based tourism project have spread to other local villages, given the possibility of tourists renting equipment (boats for instance) and employment opportunities leading to a level of immigration from other Amerindian villages. Recently, other communities have begun investing in tourism. Rewa continues to transfer the knowledge gained through this project to other villages which are now pursuing sustainable tourism, including by offering training in sustainable tourism development.



## Integrated Central American Quality and Sustainability System (SICCS), Honduras

*The sustainability and competitiveness of Honduras' tourism sector is being promoted through the Integrated Central American Quality and Sustainability System (SICCS) and its creation of Quality Certifications that recognize the sound economic, environmental, and social management of the country's tourism companies.*

The *Tourism Service Quality Programme for Central America* (2007–2009) highlighted the importance of quality as a decisive factor in competitiveness within the tourism sector. Consequently, in 2011, a group of public representatives, experts in tourism quality from various Central American countries, and representatives of the Central American tourism chambers, created the Regional Committee for Central American Tourism Quality and Sustainability. The Committee, in turn, developed the Integrated Central American Quality and Sustainability System (SICCS).

This regional project, implemented in Honduras by the Honduran Institute of Tourism (IHT) involves providing qualified audits and advice to tourism companies that require quality management structures. Once SICCS' verifies that these companies meet certain guidelines and criteria, they are able to obtain a Quality Certification – a label that allows them to generate added value and helps them compete in an increasingly demanding market. By 2017, there were 34 certified tourism companies.







These quality criteria encompass a range of requirements related to sustainability – including its economic, environmental and social dimensions – in order to enable tourism to act as a tool for sustainable development. Measures include the application of sound environmental practices and the reduction of unnecessary consumption in tourism establishments; the creation of quality employment by ensuring proper compliance with labour legislation; access to training for employees, thereby allowing them to progress along their chosen career paths; and the possession of an environmental license, or efforts to guarantee tourism's compatibility with the culture and values of the companies and communities involved.

SICCS benefits tourism companies with a long-term vision of sustainability as a criterion for action, promotes the voluntary commitment to sustainable development criteria, and helps to maintain these standards through rigorous audits. Through the continuous monitoring of tourism companies' performance the SICCS also strengthens the operational quality of these companies in areas such as human resource management, safety and security, environmental management, social responsibility, as well as the improvement of customer satisfaction.

The implementation of the SICCS has increased the awareness of entrepreneurs of economic, environmental and social sustainability practices. In tandem, it has improved their competitiveness. These successes are helping to position Honduras – as well as the other six Central American countries in which the system is currently being implemented – as attractive, sustainable tourism destinations, proving a highly useful tool for tourism promotion.



## Community Tourism Toolkit, Jamaica

*The development of the Community Tourism Toolkit has provided community-based tourism enterprises with a comprehensive set of tools to establish and develop their businesses.*

Community-based tourism is a growing phenomenon which presents Jamaica with a major opportunity to advance towards its goals of an inclusive tourism sector that contributes to the nation's economic and social development. To take advantage of this opportunity, the country commissioned the development of a National Community Tourism Policy and Strategy. As part of efforts to support communities and local enterprises to develop export market-ready, sustainable community tourism experiences, a toolkit for monitoring and managing community-based tourism has been developed.

This Community Tourism Toolkit was created through the partnership of the Ministry of Tourism, the Jamaica Tourist Board, the Tourism Product Development Company (TPDCo) and the Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF). The need for such a toolkit stemmed from the difficulties faced by small community tourism enterprises in terms of setting-up and managing their businesses.

The toolkit encompasses a handbook for community tourism enterprises and a guide to obtaining a Jamaica Tourist Board license. In tandem, these tools seek to thoroughly address the capacity issues faced by communities across Jamaica by providing comprehensive information on best practices for maintaining a sustainable community tourism enterprise, as well as the process of licensing such a business.







The toolkit and accompanying training sessions have provided 25 people, under whom 11 community tourism enterprises, with a framework to establish and manage their enterprises and facilitate ongoing training of community tourism enterprises. Awareness and capacity building on tourism business development have improved these enterprises' ability to meet local and international standards, while enhancing their business operations by ensuring their sustainability.

Throughout the process of developing the toolkit, community involvement has been essential. Their engagement ensures that their needs are addressed and that the toolkit's guidelines are effectively implemented by a wide range of enterprises – from accommodation providers to adventure and community tour operators. Positive community involvement in tourism will be fundamental for further developing community-based tourism in the years to come, thus fostering sustainable tourism development and fuelling growth in Jamaica's local economies.



## Mayakoba Tourism Development, Mexico

*The high-level coastal tourism development of Mayakoba has achieved a demonstrable increase in biodiversity through the preservation and strengthening of terrestrial ecosystems and the creation of aquatic habitats.*

The Mayakoba Tourism Development initiative is situated in Riviera Maya, an area with the stigma of being an 'all-inclusive' mass tourism destination. Recognizing the need for a very different model of tourism development in Mayakoba, the Spanish company Obrascón Huarte Lain (OHL) designed and implemented an innovative, low-density model. Mayakoba's location in the vicinity of vulnerable mangrove and dune ecosystems required minimum use and the lowest possible impact on the local ecosystems. The complex forms an environmental matrix, marked by the use of existing terrestrial ecosystems and the creation of a 25 ha aquatic ecosystem of canals, which functions as a natural estuary. Designed through rigorous study based on scientific foundations, the area's tourism infrastructure consists of four world-class hotels and a PGA Tour-certified professional golf course.

Mayakoba's natural and anthropic elements are integrated within a framework of 'lasting natural luxury'. Its operation has enabled the maintenance of pre-existing flora and fauna, as well as the creation of aquatic and coastal habitats that did not previously exist. This has sparked an increase in fauna, particularly birds, fish and amphibians, forming an important new wildlife sanctuary.

The Mayakoba project has had a positive impact on the immediate environment and has been recognized as a socially responsible company that cares about its employees and vulnerable local groups. It has achieved notable successes in terms of protecting the environment, diversifying and







safeguarding natural terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, offering wildlife a vital sanctuary, providing opportunities for income generation to local producers, offering employment opportunities and championing local cultural heritage.

Mayakoba is a reference point and model of sustainable tourism in Mexico. The shift from a mass tourism approach to a model of low-density tourism underscored by ecosystem conservation has involved challenges including convincing hotel chains to invest in such sustainable tourism model. The solution involved finding luxury hotel chains that cater to clients who want sustainable travel experiences.



## Climate Change Vulnerability Studies, Mexico

*The studies consist of assessments of vulnerability to climate change of twenty tourist destinations in Mexico. Adaptation programmes guide decision-making regarding the most effective measure to strengthen the tourism destination and to improve the safety and security of the population.*

Mexico is highly exposed to natural hazards – ranging from droughts to hurricanes. As climate change gains pace, wide-ranging shifts in climate variability are anticipated, including increases in extreme weather events and associated likely impacts on economic activities like tourism. To address these challenges, a series of Climate Change Vulnerability Studies on 20 of Mexico's priority tourism destinations were conducted between 2012 and 2016. These studies were undertaken by a research centre, the National Academy of Research and Development, at the request of the Ministry of Tourism. These Climate Change Vulnerability Studies have four main components:

1. An assessment of the destination's vulnerability to the impacts of climate variability and climate change, considering various risks;
2. An Adaptation Programme for each destination, carried out through an on-site workshop with local actors. These evaluate the matrix of specific adaptation actions to be carried out by the tourism sector in each destination, subjected to a hierarchical and cost-benefit approach;







3. Vulnerability and risk maps for each destination, featuring geographic information on vulnerabilities; and
4. Analysis of each destination's Early Warning System, operated by the Directorate General of Civil Protection of Mexico's Ministry of the Interior.

The studies have made it possible to identify areas where it is not feasible to develop tourism activities. They have also guided decision-making on the type of activities that can be carried out in the selected tourism destinations. Sustainable tourism is promoted based on the optimal use of natural and cultural resources, which ensures the development of viable economic activities replete with significant socio-economic benefits. Such benefits can only be secured by pursuing integral risk management and effective tourism and ecological planning in a destination. The Adaptation Programmes identify vulnerable areas and pinpoint the most effective measures to guard against climate change vulnerability. Moreover, they highlight weaknesses and, where applicable, strengths of the Early Warning Systems managed by civil protection organizations, while providing proposals for improving the safety and security of local populations.

A number of challenges had to be overcome during the course of the studies, including a lack of local technical capacity to understand the impacts of climate change on the tourism sector, and the dearth of financing and assurance mechanisms to address the risks posed by climate variability. To tackle these issues a Local Guide for High-Impact Actions on Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change in Mexican Tourism Destinations was developed and disseminated. This enables local governments to design courses of action that can be implemented in the short-, medium- and long-term. It also offers financing options for the implementation of such actions.



## Promoting ecotourism in the National System of Protected Areas, Panama

*Through a participatory and inclusive method involving local communities, Panama has promoted a Green Tourism Plan to enable ecologically sustainable tourism in the countries Protected Areas – thus improving their economy, visibility and environmental conservation.*

The promotion of green tourism to benefit Panama's Natural Protected Areas is one of the five strategic lines of work of the Ministry of the Environment. In 2012, however, analysis revealed that few alliances and poor coordination existed around ecotourism between Panama's public institutions, the private sector and community organizations. This lack of coordination resulted in the limited integration of Protected Areas in the *National Tourism Strategy*, few benefits for communities living near these areas, and limited prospects for the private ecotourism services sector. In response, in 2015, the authorities decided to promote what, after a participatory process, would eventually become the *Green Tourism Plan of Panama*.

This Plan outlines the vision of sustainable tourism that Panama will develop over the next ten years. It highlights nine protected areas as priority geographic areas, and seven strategic axes to advance its vision. These strategic axes involve:

- Distinctive positioning by building a country brand that highlights Panama's iconic natural and cultural attractions;







- Developing ecotourism products that respond to global market trends;
- Stimulating demand by focusing on specialized groups, the domestic market and potential international markets;
- Optimizing destinations by maximizing tourism spending and benefits for communities;
- Improving the competitiveness of ecotourism products offered within protected areas;
- Maintaining sustainability by creating economically viable, socially equitable and environmentally acceptable business opportunities within and outside of these areas; and
- Ensuring good governance through shared leadership among public, private and community bodies.

As a result of this plan, a regulatory framework for ecotourism management has been created. It has also spurred improvements in infrastructure connected to ecotourism facilities, alongside strengthened destination management capacities among public administration, the private sector and surrounding communities. A major environmental campaign has been carried out, highlighting the economic benefits of the proper use of protected areas. The campaign is complemented by a dedicated strategy to promote these areas. Combined, these measures are increasingly attracting the attention of national and international tourists. Since the project began, tourist numbers have risen by over 140%. Incomes from tourism are also on the rise – in the first half of 2017 alone, revenues were equivalent to those for the entirety of 2014.

The Plan and its related initiatives illustrate ecotourism's enormous potential as a catalyst of economic growth and as a tool for environmental preservation. The experience highlights the strong synergy between sustainability in tourism and economic growth, offering a successful model that can be replicated in other contexts.



## From predators to conservationists – a sustainable tourism initiative in the heart of the Peruvian Amazon, Peru

*The Tingana Association demonstrates the benefits of sustainable environmental management through tourism – the association is thriving as a business while the Amazon grows annually.*



When tourism activities took root in Tingana, Peru, some 15 years ago, they marked a radical transformation for the area and its residents. Tingana's inhabitants, on the banks of the Avisado and Mayo rivers, had previously engaged in indiscriminate timber-cutting, hunting and fishing. Once tourism activities began, they eschewed these pursuits in favour of safeguarding the jungle and the future of their children. Thus began a new relationship with the forest – as its fauna and flora recovered, the residents formed an association, and the area was recognized as a *Municipal Conservation Area and Concession for Conservation*.

The Tingana Association comprises 23 local community members who plan and operate the bookings of guided tours, activities, gastronomy, transfers and accommodation in Tingana. Its management model earmarks 10% of tourism revenues for salaries, 40% for tourism maintenance and operation, and 50% for forest conservation. Several organizations have contributed to the tourism project by providing training in gastronomy, guiding, hospitality, business management and ecology; installing signage; providing internships in consolidated community tourism businesses;





supporting the participation in marketing days with tour operators; promoting the tourism project in different platforms; and developing forestry research.

The initiative has managed to recover diverse species of fauna and flora while increasing local incomes by USD 250 per person, per month through tourism. Local activities are being reoriented towards more sustainable practices, such as small-scale agriculture and sustainable agroforestry systems. The area's ancestral traditions and rich cultural heritage have been recovered and incorporated into the tourism experience. The association's success in managing and conserving the Amazonian ecosystem has been recognized by Peru's environmental authority. The association has also organized a formal tax regime and shared its model of conservation with neighbouring communities.

As local lifestyles have moved from depending on the indiscriminate use of the natural environment, to organized agriculture and sustainable tourism, rising income has made it possible to provide higher education for local children and youths. Young people are increasingly pursuing degrees related to the economic activities and opting to remain in Tingana to work, thus reducing youth emigration.

The main lesson learned from the association's experience is the benefits of changing one's relationship with nature. Moving from predatory practices to sustainable tourism has increased local incomes; fostered collaboration through the local association; revitalized precious fauna and flora; empowered local people with new knowledge; encouraged appreciation of the area's history and ancestral knowledge and traditions; and enabled locals to share these benefits with visitors, institutions and communities – both in Peru and worldwide. Such initiatives have tremendous importance in a regional context marked by colonization, deforestation and, even today, the presence of illicit coca crops. The Tingana Association project will continue to improve the quality of the tourism product, deepen the promotion and add new ecotourism initiatives that pave the way to forest expansion and local cultural empowerment.



## St. Kitts Sustainable Destination Council, Saint Kitts and Nevis

*The Sustainable Destination Council is a multi-stakeholder advisory body that effectively coordinates national and local level public-private partnerships, promoting 'destination stewardship' through community engagement and intersectoral collaboration.*

Saint Kitts' Sustainable Destination Council (SDC), a multi-stakeholder advisory committee to the Ministry of Tourism, comprises both public and private representatives with an interest in bolstering sustainable tourism development. The Council facilitates partnerships among the public and private sector, as well as the community, to ensure that tourism development in the destination protects and benefits the environment, culture, heritage and community livelihoods. As such, the SDC works to improve understanding of sustainable tourism across communities and the public and private sectors, building organizations' capacity to incorporate sustainability into their daily operations, and fostering opportunities for increased collaboration.

The Council was established in 2012, in the wake of a sustainable tourism forum with destination stakeholders which highlighted the need for an interagency sustainable tourism council – a priority for stimulating cross-sectoral collaboration on sustainable destination management. In response to this call, the SDC was created with the support of the Minister of Tourism and the Permanent Secretary, as well as with the participation of various ministries, enterprises, civil society organizations and the NGO partner, Sustainable Travel International.







In 2016, the SDC created the Heart of St. Kitts Charter and Foundation to encourage both locals and tourists to act as ‘destination stewards’. The Charter serves as a sustainability standard, improving sustainable business practices. Through the foundation, the SDC supports community groups to implement sustainability projects that address the destination’s priorities. The foundation’s flagship project involves re-purposing the old sugar railway into a multi-recreational trail for tourists and residents, fostering community-based tourism while highlighting and protecting Saint Kitts’ cultural heritage. Other projects involve the improvement of waste management and the conservation of terrestrial and marine habitats. For instance, over 200 volunteers have been engaged in beach clean-ups and community awareness building activities.

The Sustainable Destination Council has brought regional and international recognition to sustainable tourism in Saint Kitts. Increased cooperation between the public and private sectors has contributed to ‘destination stewardship’. This cooperation has enabled significant savings from redundant projects, while financing three successful awareness campaigns; the adoption of a sustainable tourism checklist for project development; training for over 100 community members as destination guardians; and training for over 30 tourism enterprise representatives to strengthen sustainable tourism practices and foster understanding.



## Hostelling International: Programmes that Change Lives, United States of America

*Hostelling International (HI) USA's New York Hostel promotes intercultural understanding and global citizenship through strategically designed experiential learning programmes for travellers and community members.*

HI USA, a national non-profit organization that operates 33 hostels across the United States of America, offers carefully-designed immersive environments that promote interaction and understanding among people of diverse backgrounds. Its targeted experiential learning programmes foster cultural competence and challenge the traditional tourism experience – one characterized by spectatorship and consumption as opposed to engagement and creation. HI USA's education and engagement programmes are a permanent, recurring core feature of the organizations work. They are offered to guests and community members to strengthen intercultural understanding and global citizenship. Between April 2016 and March 2017, over 122,000 people participated in HI USA's intercultural experiential learning programmes – 5,100 programmes were offered to travellers and 760 to community members. 56% of all programmes were led by community volunteers.

Over the same period, HI USA's New York Hostel offered 930 experiential learning programmes to travellers and 57 to community members. Led by locals interested in engaging visitors and learning about them, HI NYC's programmes offer a deeper opportunity to think about travellers' impact on the lived experience of the places they visit, and reflect on their own culture's similarities or







differences. Community-led discussions, events and service opportunities help visitors develop a more complex perspective of a place, how it shapes the people who live and work there, and the challenges that local communities face. This impacts what tourists think about others, themselves, and the actions they take.

HI NYC collaborates closely with a number of community groups, non-profit organizations, schools, businesses and government entities to promote its intercultural programmes and benefit the local community. HI NYC employs 72 local community members. It also offers an annual travel scholarship to 25 young New Yorkers with demonstrated financial need. Of the 30,000 individuals who participated in HI NYC programmes between April 2016 and March 2017, 95% achieved learning outcomes in intercultural understanding and global citizenship. HI USA demonstrates that, beyond accommodation, hostels can offer thoughtful, targeted experiential learning programmes that can impact travelers in ways that deepen their understanding of cultural and environmental sustainability, while promoting global citizenship. HI USA also shows that hostels can serve as a valuable sustainable resource for local community members and organizations, and can provide access to tourism experiences for local community members with limited means. Intercultural understanding and mutual respect are vital components of a sustainable world, and tourism can be responsible for promoting and advocating such ideals.



## Sustainable Destinations Alliance for the Americas, Caribbean and Central America

*The Sustainable Destinations Alliance for the Americas (SDAA) brings together eleven destinations in the Caribbean and Central America to collaboratively address the challenges of climate vulnerability, environmental degradation and reliance on tourism.*

To harness tourism's potential in two of the most tourism dependent regions in the world – the Caribbean and Central America – the SDAA was launched in March 2014 by the Organization of American States, Sustainable Travel International (STI) and a range of public and private partners. This innovative public-private partnership is grounded upon a shared commitment to building resilience in local communities, improving the way tourism is managed, and enhancing competitiveness in destinations across the Caribbean and Central America. Eleven destinations – mainly coastal regions and islands that are highly popular with tourists – are part of the Alliance, namely Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, the Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Mexico and St Kitts and Nevis.

The SDAA demonstrates how sustainably managed tourism can be efficiently managed at the regional level to improve lives and protect the environment. In its destinations, the Alliance leverages the power of tourism as a tool for sustainable economic growth, promotes the inclusion of all stakeholders – with a particular emphasis on local communities and women's groups – and the







conservation of natural resources as key tourism attractions, and identifies and safeguards tangible and intangible cultural heritage. It also spearheads resource efficiency through tackling issues related to waste management, water and energy conservation and climate change resilience.

The SDAA has increased understandings of holistic sustainability issues among tourism destination stakeholders by engaging over 700 stakeholders through workshops, one-on-one meetings and online training courses. Another 200 stakeholders, including destination managers, representatives of tourism ministries, tourism development agencies and the private sector, received training on sustainability practices in the day-to-day management and marketing of destinations. The network also enhanced employment and professional development opportunities, alongside tourism services and community engagement. As a result, at least 200,000 people could potentially be impacted by SDAA's projects.

Each destination in the Alliance is equipped with a list of 'action projects' that will serve to develop good practices and help them become sustainable destinations. The projects address priority environmental, sociocultural and economic issues. For example, the Bahamas have committed to create an integrated database of cultural and natural heritage sites and attractions to provide practical information for site managers and other key stakeholders; develop new community-based tourism products in historic townships; and undertake climate vulnerability risk mapping and implement a public education campaign focused on forecasted risks and possible responses for the tourism sector. Beyond tourism, the SDAA has contributed to cleaner water, oceans, beaches and streets; less resource consumption; enhanced environmental conservation; and the restoration of habitats in member destinations.



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The **World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)**, a United Nations specialized agency, is the leading international organization with the decisive and central role in promoting the development of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. It serves as a global forum for tourism policy issues and a practical source of tourism know-how. Its membership includes 158 countries, 6 territories, 2 permanent observers and over 500 Affiliate Members.

The **Organization of American States** brings together all independent states from the Americas. It uses a four-pronged approach to effectively implement its essential purposes, based on its mutually reinforcing four pillars: democracy, human rights, security, and development.

The Executive Secretariat for Integral Development promotes inclusive development in Member States and through its Department of Economic Development supports country efforts to promote sustainable tourism development through policy dialogue, capacity building, and the implementation of initiatives which enhance the competitiveness of tourism SMEs.



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