Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals

Reduce inequality within and among countries
Tourism can be a powerful tool for community development and reducing inequalities if it engages local populations and all key stakeholders in its development. Tourism can contribute to urban renewal and rural development and reduce regional imbalances by giving communities the opportunity to prosper in their place of origin. Tourism is also an effective means for developing countries to take part in the global economy. In 2014, Least Developed Countries (LDCs) received US$ 10.4 billion in exports from international tourists, up from US$ 3.6 billion in 2000, making the sector an important pillar of their economies (7% of total exports) and helping some to graduate from the LDC status.

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
A city that is not good for its citizens is not good for tourists. Sustainable tourism has the potential to advance urban infrastructure and universal accessibility, promote regeneration of areas in decay and preserve cultural and natural heritage, assets on which tourism depends. Greater investment in green infrastructure (more efficient transport facilities, reduced air pollution, conservation of heritage sites and open spaces, etc.) should result in smarter and greener cities from which not only residents, but also tourists, can benefit.

Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
A tourism sector that adopts sustainable consumption and production (SCP) practices can play a significant role in accelerating the global shift towards sustainability. To do so, as set in Target 12.b of Goal 12, it is imperative to “Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism which creates jobs, promotes local culture and products”. The Sustainable Tourism Programme (STP) of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (10YFP) aims at developing such SCP practices, including resource-efficient initiatives that result in enhanced economic, social and environmental outcomes.

Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
Tourism contributes to and is affected by climate change. If it, therefore, in the sector’s own interest to play a leading role in the global response to climate change. By lowering energy consumption and shifting to renewable energy sources, especially in the transport and accommodation sector, tourism can help tackle one of the most pressing challenges of our time.

Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
Coastal and maritime tourism, tourism’s biggest segments, particularly for Small Island Developing States (SIDS), rely on healthy marine ecosystems. “Tourism development must be a part of the Integrated Coastal Zone Management in order to help conserve and preserve fragile marine ecosystems and serve as a vehicle to promote a blue economy, in line with Target 14.7. By 2030 increase the economic benefits to SIDS and LDCs from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism”.

Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
Majestic landscapes, pristine forests, rich biodiversity, and natural heritage sites are often main reasons why tourists visit a destination. Sustainable tourism can play a major role, not only in conserving and preserving biodiversity, but also in respecting terrestrial ecosystems, owing to its efforts towards the reduction of waste and consumption, the conservation of native flora and fauna, and its awareness-raising activities.

Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
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. Sustainable tourism, which benefits and engages local communities, can also provide a source of livelihood, strengthen cultural identities and spur entrepreneurial activities, thereby helping to prevent violence and conflict to take root and consolidate peace in post-conflict societies.

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. Indeed, public/public cooperation and public/private partnerships are a necessary and core foundation for tourism development, as is an increased awareness in the role of tourism in the delivery on the post-2015 Development Agenda.

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is the United Nations specialized agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. As the leading international organization in the field of tourism, UNWTO promotes tourism as a driver of economic growth, inclusive development and environmental sustainability and offers leadership and support to the sector in advancing knowledge and tourism policies worldwide. UNWTO is committed to ensuring that tourism plays a key role in the Post-2015 development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.
How Tourism can contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The year 2015 has been a milestone for global development as governments have adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, along with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The bold agenda sets out a global framework to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and fix climate change until 2030. Building on the historic Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the ambitious set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 associated targets is people-centred, transformative, universal and integrated.

Tourism has the potential to contribute, directly or indirectly, to all of the goals. In particular, it has been included as targets in Goals 8, 12 and 14 on inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production (SCP) and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources, respectively.

Sustainable tourism is firmly positioned in the 2030 Agenda. Achieving this agenda, however, requires a clear implementation framework, adequate financing and investment in technology, infrastructure and human resources.

"Harnessing tourism’s benefits will be critical to achieving the sustainable development goals and implementing the post-2015 development agenda".

UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon on World Tourism Day 2014