

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 14TH MEETING OF THE COMCEC TOURISM WORKING GROUP

The COMCEC Tourism Working Group (TWG) has successfully held its 14th Meeting on October 31st, 2019 in Ankara, Turkey with the theme of “Developing Multi-Destination Tourism Corridors in the Member Countries.” During the Meeting, Tourism Working Group, made deliberations on multi destination tourism corridors. Accordingly, the participants has come up with some policy recommendations.

Policy Advice 1. Planning corridors based on thorough SWOT analysis, infrastructure assessment, and social value analysis and identifying assets through expert-led research.

Rationale:

Analyzing tourism trends and current tourists’ profiles for destinations along the corridors, and the size as well as nature of the domestic markets are needed to assess whether a corridor would attract potential tourists, and increase the number of tourists and/or tourist nights/spending.

From a logistical perspective, assessing feasibility of a corridor also entails considering the enabling infrastructure in terms of transport networks along its various nodes. Tourism Corridors (TC) should ensure the mitigation of the negative impacts of tourism as well as increasing the economic benefits for local communities, which need to be ascertained through research and collaboration with local stakeholders starting from the planning phase.

The formulation of TC themes necessitates an effective cooperation among various stakeholders in the destinations along TCs on several fronts in the planning stage, including the corridor’s proposed theme and name as well as the decision on the tourism assets to be included in the corridor. This requires extensive research with the aid of experts from historical, cultural, and practical perspectives as well as a thorough assessment of the tourism assets that can be included and their potential appeal to tourists.

Policy Advice 2. Making use of public-private partnership models for the effective planning and management of Tourism Corridors and encouraging the participation of and collaboration with all relevant stakeholders.

Rationale:

Public-Private Partnership Models can be utilized for encouraging higher levels of collaboration between public and private entities needed for Multi Destination TCs to thrive. Public-private partnerships should allow for higher levels of participation from the civil society and ensure, to a greater extent, the support of the private sector for corridor development and management policies and strategies. Establishing formal platforms for collaboration can ensure timely and efficient interaction and involvement in the management of the corridor as well as ensuring all relevant stakeholders’ support for the policies and strategies related to the concerned corridor.

It is recommended to have board of directors responsible for coordination among the corridor partners, whether permanently located at one of the corridor nodes, or shifting between different nodes along the corridor according to the site of the entity in charge of its management. Local steering committees with members from various stakeholder groups, including public and private entities as well as NGOs and professional associations, may be responsible for strategic planning and implementation of local strategies.

Policy Advice 3. Identifying a comprehensive set of indicators, promoting harmonized tourism related data collection as well as analysis for monitoring the corridor performance effectively and feedback into the corridor strategy to create synergies.

Rationale:

Complementary approaches need to be used to effectively monitor the performance of TCs, which include the use of visitor metrics, the measurement of organizational effectiveness of the corridor management entity as well as the effectiveness of its marketing communications activities, the examination of changes in consumer-based brand equity as a result of the corridor's management entity operations, stakeholder evaluation of TC management performance, and assessment of the sustainability of tourism along the corridor. Identifying common indicators would facilitate the measurement of success of a corridor in the OIC Region.

Policy advice 4. Improving branding and marketing of the tourism corridors in the OIC Region through among others, joint interactive marketing platforms and user-generated content (storytelling) in ICT platforms to create unique brands.

Rationale:

MDTC themes can be used as a framework for positioning and differentiating corridors. Theme-based branding involves creating a story or narrative to be associated with the corridor and communicating this story across the various channels to all relevant stakeholders. The creation of a unified branding message is a crucial task for TCs to increase awareness. Branding also involves ensuring content and design consistency for marketing messages across the various platforms used to promote the corridor.

With the rise of social media, brand identity is becoming increasingly affected by consumers' narratives or their "storytelling." To harness the power of storytelling, there's a need to choose the stories that suit the brand narrative and engage emotions and amplify them through joint interactive marketing platforms. The tourism corridors' marketing strategy should also include segmentation, targeting, differentiating and positioning the corridor under a single brand and aligning marketing efforts based on this brand strategy including managing public opinion.

Policy advice 5. Creating and Diversifying funding sources of tourism corridors with a view to ensure the sustainability of their management and marketing.

Rationale:

Identifying various funding streams is needed to ensure the sustainability of management and marketing of TCs. The required financing may come from various sources, internal (public or

private) and external. Membership fees, whether from public or private entities, may also be an important source of funding, especially as they promote a sense of ownership.

Assistance from and collaboration with external sources, whether international or regional, can be sought out to complement internal funding. However, it must be ensured that a tourism corridor is not over-reliant on external funding as this might influence its sustainability in the long term. It may also be decided to change the financing framework over time. For example, a corridor could be launched with shared public financing to build a critical mass of participating stakeholders, and this can then be transferred to private-sector stakeholders to manage.

Instruments to Realize the Policy Advice:

- **COMCEC Tourism Working Group:** In its subsequent meetings, the Working Group may elaborate on the above-mentioned policy areas in a more detailed manner.
- **COMCEC Project Funding:** Under the COMCEC Project Funding, the COMCEC Coordination Office calls for projects each year. With the COMCEC Project Funding, the Member Countries participating in the Working Groups can submit multilateral cooperation projects to be financed through grants by the COMCEC Coordination Office. For the above-mentioned policy areas, the Member Countries can utilize the COMCEC Project Funding and the COMCEC Coordination Office may finance the successful projects in this regard. These projects may include organizing seminars, training programs, study visits, exchange of experts, workshops and preparing analytical studies, needs assessments and training materials/documents.
- **OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum:** In its meetings, the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum may elaborate on the above-mentioned policy areas and the sub-areas from the private sector perspective.