

**REPORT OF THE 3rd MEETING OF
THE OIC/COMCEC PRIVATE SECTOR TOURISM FORUM**

***“International Branding of Tourism Destinations in the OIC Member Countries”
(29-30 January 2015, Istanbul, Turkey)***

1. The 3rd Meeting of the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum was held on 29-30 January 2015 in İstanbul with the theme of “International Branding of Tourism Destinations in the OIC Member Countries.”
2. The meeting was chaired by Mr. İnanç ÖZÇAKMAK, Chief Inspector from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey.
3. The Meeting agreed on the following Agenda items:
 - International Tourism in the OIC Member Countries: Prospects and Challenges
 - Global/ Regional Trends and Policies in Tourism Destination Branding and Their Implications in the Member Countries
 - Main Challenges and Obstacles of the Private Sector of the Member Countries in Tourism Destination Branding
 - Success Stories of the Private Sector of the Member Countries in Branding of Tourism Destinations
4. The Meeting was attended by the public and private sector representatives from the following Member States and Observer State of the OIC:
 - Republic of Albania
 - People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
 - Republic of Cameroon
 - Republic of Chad
 - Republic of Djibouti
 - Islamic Republic of Iran
 - Republic of Iraq
 - Malaysia
 - Republic of Mali
 - Republic of Maldives
 - Republic of Niger
 - State of Palestine
 - Republic of Senegal
 - Republic of Sudan
 - The Republic of Turkey
 - The Republic of Uzbekistan
 - Republic of Yemen
 - Turkish Cypriot State
5. In addition to the COMCEC Coordination Office (CCO), representatives of the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC), Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and the Islamic Centre for Development of Trade (ICDT) have also attended the Meeting.

(The list of participants is attached in Annex-I).

6. At the outset, Mr. İnanç ÖZÇAKMAK, Chief Inspector from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey delivered his opening speech. He welcomed the participants to the meeting and highlighted the importance of international branding of tourism destinations of the Member Countries. He expressed that the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum would make remarkable contributions to the tourism practices of the Member Countries as well as widen the horizons and create a common mind via experience sharing among the Member Countries.
7. In his opening statement, Mr. Selçuk KOÇ, Director at the COMCEC Coordination Office, shared some figures regarding tourism performance of the Member Countries and their share in the world tourism market. He expressed that overall performance of the tourism sector of the Member Countries is still behind its true potential. Underlining the importance of the existing tourism cooperation instruments such as COMCEC Tourism Working Group and the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum, Mr. KOÇ stressed that with enhanced ownership of the Member States and their private sector representatives, this Forum will play a vital role for enhancing cooperation and communication among the private sector representatives of the Member Countries.

- **International Tourism in the OIC Member Countries: Prospects and Challenges**

8. Mr. Cem TİNTİN, Researcher at Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) made a presentation titled “International Tourism in the OIC Countries: Prospects and Challenges.” He shared the figures related to international tourism and tourism in the Member Countries. Expressing some of the challenges faced by the Member Countries in tourism sector, he concluded his presentation with a set of recommendations.

- **Global/ Regional Trends and Policies in Tourism Destination Branding and Their Implications in the Member Countries**

9. As the keynote speaker, Mr. Peter Mc NAULTY, Managing Director of the Tourism Development International, made a presentation on tourism destination branding. In his presentation, Mr. Mc. NAULTY has informed the participants about the destination and brand definition, brand development process and key trends in destination branding. It was stressed that destination branding need to be personalized, transparent, mobile, meaningful and green. Furthermore, Mr. Mc NAULTY provided the general outlook of tourism marketing and branding in the Member Countries and shared some case studies. He concluded his presentation by emphasizing the importance of involvement of all stakeholders in brand development and highlighted the importance of Public-Private Partnerships, digital marketing and technical knowledge in marketing and branding in this respect.

- **Main Challenges and Obstacles of the Private Sector of the Member Countries in Tourism Destination Branding**

10. Ms. Çağla DEMİRCİOĞLU, Marketing Coordinator at the İstanbul Convention and Visitors Bureau (ICVB) made a presentation on “Branding İstanbul as a Leading Congress Destination.” Ms. DEMİRCİOĞLU has informed the participant about what ICVB has done so far and its targets in the near future. She introduced the participants the newly launched website, “www.howtoistanbul.com”, as İstanbul’s first official online guideline. She concluded her presentation with some rankings and expressed

that İstanbul has become the world's number one congress destination with more than 500 delegates in 2011, 2012 and 2013.

11. Mr. Arda KERTMELİOĞLU, representative from Pangea Digital, has informed the participants about the digital shift towards promotion of Turkey and presented the "TurkeyHome" as the new brand of Turkey. It was stressed that the brand campaign's modular structure has allowed to not just to focus on specific destinations but also to promote Turkey's cuisine, tradition of craftwork, broad culture under one umbrella.
12. After the presentations, participants raised their questions and comments. The participants highlighted the following challenges in destination branding in the OIC Member Countries:
 - Negative market image and perceptions due to negative media coverage and some problems like Islamophobia, Ebola, etc.
 - Insufficient promotion of tourism products and destinations,
 - Poor service quality,
 - Lack of qualified human resources,
 - Inadequate market knowledge;
 - Lengthy visa procedures
 - Lack of fund and financial mechanisms
 - Lack of infrastructure

- **Success Stories of the Private Sector of the Member Countries in Branding of Tourism Destinations**

13. In this Session, Member Countries made presentations and shared their country experiences and success stories in destination branding.
14. Mr Zulkifly Md SAID, Director General at the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) of Malaysia made a presentation titled "Tourism Branding: Malaysian Success Story." Mr. SAID started his presentation with an overview of Malaysian tourism industry and tourism's key growth segments He also informed the participants about the strategic branding and marketing strategies of his country including, among others, mega fam, television advertising, outdoor advertising, online and social media. He concluded his presentation with possible cooperation areas among the Member Countries including sharing experience, capacity building programs, bilateral/regional travel fairs, etc.
15. Afterwards, Ms. Gülberk AŞYAPAR, Corporate Affairs Deputy Director of the Association of Turkish Travel Agencies (TURSAB), made a presentation. Ms. AŞYAPAR informed the participants about the structure of Turkish tourism industry and tourism assets of Turkey. She also expressed some opportunities for cooperation, including among others, familiarization (fam) trips, B2B Meetings and workshops as well as mutual participation in fairs.
16. Furthermore, Ms. Dia Houma MBAYE, Marketing and Communication Director from the Republic of Senegal, has shared her country's experience in tourism sector and tourism branding. Ms. MBAYE informed the participants about the tourism assets of Senegal. She also shared major challenges faced in tourism sector in general and marketing and branding in particular such as maintaining and extending traditional markets, developing new markets and developing partnerships with professionals and other local actors.

- **Wrap-up Session /Recommendations:**

Based on the discussions and presentations, the Forum:

- emphasized the importance of effective marketing and branding strategies for promoting the tourism destinations in the OIC Member Countries and highlighted that effective marketing and branding requires utilization of full range of tools available including digital marketing activities, social media, mobile phone applications, PR, etc.
- underlined the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement as a critical success factor for tourism branding particularly through utilizing Public Private Partnerships.
- highlighted the importance of experience sharing, technical cooperation and capacity building programs among the Member Countries on tourism destination branding.
- emphasized the importance of raising awareness of the existing tourism destinations in the Member Countries and pointed out the necessity of creating online platforms to promote the destinations and facilitate communications and networking among the private sector representatives of the Member Countries;
- underlining the importance of creating of genuine and authentic tourism content for tourism marketing and branding, and pointed out the need for creative and innovative index for content management of the destinations in the Member Countries.
- stressed the significance of joint endeavours such as joint promotion work, cultural tourism routes and joint tours and familiarization programs/trips to overcome the negative media image of Islamic Countries resulting from misguiding media coverage and problems like Islamofobia, Ebola, etc.
- highlighted the importance of effective utilization of existing mechanisms such as COMCEC Tourism Working Group and OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum.
- encouraged the Member Countries to register and participate regularly and actively to the COMCEC Tourism Working Group to utilize the project financing mechanism of the COMCEC Strategy, namely COMCEC Project Funding, in order to realize the multilateral cooperation projects and thereby enhance the cooperation in tourism sector among the Member Countries.
- stressed the significance of conducting training and exchange programs, B2B Meetings and workshops for the private sector representatives of the Member Countries and called upon the Member Countries to benefit from the facilities of the relevant OIC Institutions.
- underlined the need for organizing bilateral / regional travel fairs and exhibitions and called upon the private sector representatives of the Member Countries to actively participate in the “2nd Fair of OIC Tourism Travel Market: Promoting Family Tourism” to be held 8-10 December 2015 in Sharjah- The United Arab Emirates.

17. The meeting ended with vote of thanks.

- **Side Event: B2B Meetings**

18. The private sector representatives of the Member Countries got the chance to conduct B2B Meetings with their counterparts on January 30th, 2015.
