

# **Report of the 2nd Meeting of the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum**

**(16-17 December 2013, İstanbul)**

1. The 2nd Meeting of the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum was held on 16-17 December 2013 in İstanbul with the theme of "Effective Marketing Strategies for Promoting Tourism Destinations in the COMCEC Region."
2. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Mesut ÖZBEK, Director of Foreign Relations and EU Coordination Department of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey.
3. The Meeting agreed on the following Agenda items:
  - Global/Regional Trends in Destination Marketing Strategies: Policies, Strategies and Tools
  - Challenges and Prospects in Destination Marketing in the COMCEC Region
  - Utilizing the Social Media and Other Communication Instruments for Sharing Marketing Messages
  - Wrap-up Session
4. The Meeting was attended by the public and private sector representatives from the following Member States and Observer States of the OIC:
  - The Republic of Albania
  - People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
  - Azerbaijan Republic
  - The Arab Republic of Egypt
  - Republic of Guinea
  - Islamic Republic of Iran
  - The Republic of Iraq
  - The Republic of Kazakhstan
  - Kyrgyzstan
  - Republic of Lebanon
  - Libya
  - Republic of Niger
  - State of Palestine
  - Republic of Senegal
  - Republic of Tunisia
  - The Republic of Turkey
  - Republic of Yemen
  - Kingdom of Thailand
5. In addition to the OIC General Secretariat and the COMCEC Coordination Office (CCO), representatives of the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training

Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) and the Islamic Centre for Development of Trade (ICDT) as well as some other guests also attended the Meeting.

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

6. At the outset, Mr. Mesut ÖZBEK delivered his opening speech. He welcomed the participants to the meeting and highlighted the importance of tourism sector for the Member Countries and pointed out the crucial role to be played by the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum for enhancing cooperation among the Member Countries. He also emphasized the need for all countries about keeping up-to-date with developments of the era, namely use of internet and social media and underlined that countries should align their marketing strategies with such innovations. He concluded his speech by expressing his hope that the meeting would pave the way for fruitful exchange of views and cooperation in that regard.
  7. In his opening statement, Mr. Selçuk KOÇ, Director at the COMCEC Coordination Office, underlined the importance of “the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum” in enhancing the cooperation among the private sector representatives of the Member States. He stressed that the Forum would provide an important opportunity for private sector to reflect their perspectives to the tourism cooperation under the COMCEC umbrella.
  8. Mr. Jakhongir HASANOV, the representative of the OIC General Secretariat, welcomed the participants to the meeting and highlighted the necessity of supportive cooperation environment at regional level. He also emphasized the importance of this Forum which would allow exchanging good practices, developing and implementing joint projects and developing concrete recommendations.
- **First Working Session: Global/Regional Trends in Destination Marketing Strategies: Policies, Strategies and Tools**
9. At the outset, as the keynote speaker, Ms. Karin ELGIN NIJHUIS made a presentation on global and regional trends in destination marketing strategies. In her presentation, Ms. NIJHUIS informed the participants about the key trends in technology and consumer behaviours. Ms. NIJHUIS stressed that communication was increasingly mobile, more immediate, shorter and faster and thereby there is a need to present tourism destinations with a well defined content and by using different media tools.
  10. Mr. Umut UNAL, Researcher at Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) presented a report entitled “International Tourism in the OIC Countries: Prospects and Challenges, 2013.” He pointed out the performance and the economic role of the international tourism sector in the OIC member countries. He also highlighted some issues and problems regarding

the tourism development and cooperation in the OIC countries and proposed a set of recommendations to serve as policy guidelines.

11. Following the presentation of Mr. UNAL, Ms. Gülberk AŞYAPAR, representative of the Association of Turkish Travel Agencies (TURSAB), made a presentation. Ms. AŞYAPAR informed the participants about the trends in incoming Islamic travel and opportunities for cooperation, including among others, bilateral promotion of religious tourism destinations, B2B Meetings and workshops.

12. After the presentations, participants raised their questions and comments. The participants highlighted that marketing strategy differs from region to region and it is necessary to take into account the uniqueness of each destination when designing marketing strategies.

- **Second Working Session: Challenges and Prospects in Destination Marketing in the COMCEC Region**

13. In the Second Working Session, Member Countries made presentations and shared their country experiences in destination marketing.

14. The participants highlighted the following challenges in destination marketing in the COMCEC region:

- insufficient tourism products and lack of product diversification;
- poor service quality;
- inadequate market knowledge;
- negative market image and perceptions;
- lengthy visa procedures.

- **Third Working Session: Utilizing the Social Media and Other Communication Instruments for Sharing Marketing Messages**

15. At the outset, Mr. Gürkan ÖZER, representative of Istanbul Digital Platform, made a presentation. In his presentation, Mr. ÖZER introduced the new website "howtoistanbul.com" which aims at meeting the needs of the visitors before, during and after their visit to İstanbul. He pointed out the importance of destination website and the inter-linkage between the website and the social media.

16. As the keynote speaker, Ms. Karin Elgin NIJHUIS made her second presentation on utilizing the social media in sharing the marketing message. Ms. NIJHUIS stated that a well-designed website is the main building block in marketing a destination. She stressed that websites need to be responsive, adaptive and accessible. She pointed out that social media and e-mail marketing are effective ways of marketing. She stated that Member Countries need to develop focused campaigns with specified themes and

strategic partners. She also stressed the importance of complementary channels for marketing.

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

17. Based on the discussions and presentations, the Forum:

- emphasized the importance of effective marketing strategies for promoting the tourism destinations in the COMCEC region;
- highlighted that effective marketing requires utilization of full range of tools available including social media, e-marketing, etc.;
- stressed the need for training and exchange programs, B2B Meetings and workshops for the private sector representatives and welcomed the readiness of SESRIC to organize training programs for the interested Member Countries.
- underlined the importance of developing cultural tourism routes and joint tours in the COMCEC region;
- emphasized the importance of raising awareness of the existing tourism destinations in the COMCEC region;
- pointed out the necessity of creating online platforms to promote the destinations and facilitate communication and networking among the private sector representatives;
- underlined the importance of facilitating visa procedures for enhancing intra-OIC tourism.

18. The meeting ended with vote of thanks.

- ***Side Event: B2B Meetings***

19. The private sector representatives of the Member Countries had the opportunity to conduct B2B Meetings with their counterparts on 17 December 2013.

-----

----