

 **TOURISM**



CCO BRIEF ON TOURISM

COMCEC COORDINATION OFFICE
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Tourism has become an important global economic activity especially after World War II. Today, with a 4–5% growth rate, tourism volume by itself meets 8% of global products and 10% of employment (UNWTO, 2020). In addition, tourism affects economic activities in more than 135 sectors with its high multiplier effect, contributes to the balance of payments by creating a foreign currency input, and triggers many leading industries, such as transportation, trade, construction, health, and finance. Apart from its economic contributions, tourism has many social, cultural, and political benefits. Despite being an important global economic sector, tourism is very vulnerable to crises from any country or region of the world

Tourism sector, by its very nature, has been affected most severely by the pandemic. In fact, it is considered one of the hardest hit sectors by the Covid nineteen outbreak. The pandemic has had affected on global tourism and how this affects everything from jobs and economies to wildlife conservation and the protection of cultural heritage is seen worldwide.

Previous literature indicates that diseases prior to the COVID-19 pandemic have regionally reduced tourism volume. The best examples of such cases are SARS, which affected the Far East in 2003, and MERS, which spread in the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula in 2012. Similar to the SARS and MERS outbreaks, COVID-19 started as a regional epidemic in China in late December 2019. However, the virus spread rapidly all over the world, where the center of the outbreak first moved first to Europe, then the United States.

Epidemic diseases experienced in the past have especially affected the regions of occurrence but with less global impact compared with COVID-19. The most important difference that distinguishes COVID-19 from other epidemic diseases is its rapid and effective spread.

Tourism has been one of the first and most affected sectors amid Covid-19. International travels were brought to a standstill due to quarantine measures, and individuals were forced to delay or cancel their travel plans.

According to the latest data from UNWTO, the contribution of tourism to the World economy amounted to USD 3.5 trillion in 2019, or 4% of world GDP, measured in tourism direct gross domestic product (TDGDP). The COVID-19 pandemic cut tourism direct GDP by more than half in 2020, reducing it by USD 2.0 trillion, to 1.8% of world GDP. This plunge represents about 70% of the overall decline in world GDP in 2020. International tourist arrivals dropped by 73% in 2020, while export revenues from tourism (international tourism receipts and passenger transport) declined by 63% in real terms. The loss in export revenues from international tourism is estimated at USD 1.1 trillion and represents 42% of the total loss in international trade in 2020. This also means that tourism volume will probably return to 1990 levels.

According to estimates from UNWTO, international tourism experienced a mild 4,6 % upturn in 2021, with 18 million more international tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) than in 2020. However, arrivals remained 71 % below the levels of pre-pandemic year 2019. This follows a 73% plunge in international travel in 2020, the worst year on record for tourism due to the

unprecedented impact from the COVID-19 pandemic. An estimated 421 million international arrivals were recorded globally in 2021 versus 403 million in 2020.

International tourism continued its recovery in January 2022, with much better performance compared to the weak start of 2021. World arrivals more than doubled (+130%) compared to January 2021, an increase of 18 million.

After the unprecedented growth of 2022 and 2021, international tourism is expected to continue its gradual recovery in 2022. As of 24 March, 12 destinations had no COVID-19 related restrictions in place and an increasing number of destinations were easing or lifting travel restrictions, which is helping to unleash pent-up demand.

However, high uncertainty derived from the military offensive of the Russian Federation on Ukraine coupled with a challenging economic environment and the travel restrictions still in place due to the ongoing pandemic, could affect overall confidence and disrupt the upward trend seen in tourism in 2021.

Tourism is also a crucial sector for the OIC in terms of income generation and its contribution to employment. Prior to the pandemic, the OIC countries' share of the worldwide international tourist arrivals was 10.7% representing 12.4% of the global tourism receipts (SESRIC).

The tourism and hospitality industries of the OIC member countries have been facing various crises most of various natural disasters (floods, cyclones, tsunamis, earthquakes etc) and epidemics (Ebola, Sars, H1N1, Covid-19 etc.). Before Covid-19 pandemic, however, these impacts were relatively short-term. With Covid-19, the OIC region experienced a sharp decline (71%) in the number of arrivals during 2020. OIC-MENA experienced a 61% decrease in arrivals, whereas tourist arrivals to OIC-Asia and OIC Sub-Saharan Africa decreased by 75%. Concerning receipts OIC experiences a 65% decrease in receipts with OIC-ASIA and OIC-MENA losing 74% and 72% of their receipts, while OIC-Sub-Saharan Africa experiences a 57% decline in tourism receipts in 2020.

COMCEC Tourism Cooperation

COMCEC attaches utmost importance to develop the cooperation in tourism domain among the member countries. Taking into account the emerging area of Tourism that is mitigation strategies after COVID-19.

Mitigation Strategies for Tourism After Covid-19

The 16th and 17th Meetings of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group (TWG) was held in 2021 in a virtual-only format, with the theme of "Mitigation Strategies for Tourism After Covid-19". A research report with the same theme was prepared for two consecutive COMCEC TWG meetings.

The main objective of the study was to establish a conceptual foundation for better understanding of the current and future implications of the COVID-19 on tourism in the OIC Member Countries and come up with sound mitigation strategies and policies to tackle the challenges arisen so far. The expected outcome of this study will be a comprehensive, but concise overview of implications of the COVID-19 on tourism in the OIC Member Countries,

highlighting crucial issues and challenges, which OIC countries face during and after COVID-19, and major recommendations outlining how these issues can be addressed by the various players. The study is also expected to draw attention to current and future implications of the COVID-19 on tourism as well as to trigger a serious debate around the issues identified and how better to address them.

The final version of the research report was submitted to the 17th Meeting of the Working Group which will be held on September 23rd, 2021.

According to the research report prepared for this meeting, The widespread of the virus has created a global panic leading to global shutdown of travel, businesses and leisure activities. Following the outbreak of Covid-19, travel restrictions and the lockdown orders have turned many tourism destinations into ghost towns while also causing major harm to small and medium-sized tourism businesses resulting in sudden growth in unemployment rates all over the world. In fact, international travel has experienced a sharp decline starting from April (-97%), May (-96%) and June 2020 (-91%). In total global tourism arrivals experienced a 73% decline in 2020. There also exist several scenarios predicting recovery by mid-2023 and others expecting recovery by 2024. Under the worst scenario, it is estimated that more than 197 million people worldwide may become unemployed in the tourism industry, which comprises approximately 10.3 % of the global GDP. The most affected sector of tourism is Meetings and Events (-67%), Travel Agencies and Tour Operators (-55%), Accommodation (-50%), Air travel (-47%), and Food & Beverage (-40%).

The 17th Meeting of Tourism Working Group has come up with the following policy recommendations:

- Promoting the sustainability of tourism industry afloat through offering subsidized low-cost credits with governments' guarantee
- Facilitating short-term demand through encouraging domestic travel, offering holiday credits and vouchers, extending bank holidays and tax discounts on domestic tourism services
- Promoting destinations' safety image by introducing/enhancing hygiene standards and providing safe tourism protocols, improving marketing communications, public relations and international diplomacy in order to relax border restrictions and create safe travel corridors.
- Enhancing the resilience of tourism industry against crises through utilizing smart technologies, applications, big data and scenario planning to organize re-opening, making better use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)
- Developing effective strategies for turning crises into an opportunity, ensuring rapid recovery and addressing the structural problems in tourism industry through investing in tourists' experiences, service quality and destination competitiveness,
- Enhancing Intra-OIC collaboration in the areas of safety standards, shared certification and audit systems, universal application of testing and tracking, mutual data sharing and travel bubbles between the member countries

The reports and presentations submitted to the Working Group are available on the COMCEC web page. (<http://www.comcec.org/>)

Moreover, the Tourism Working Group, in its 17th and 18th Meetings to be held in 2022, will focus on “Sustainable Human Resource Management in Tourism Sector”.

COMCEC Financial Support Instruments

COMCEC Project Funding

COMCEC Project Funding (CPF) is the other important instrument of the Strategy. Projects financed under the CPF need to serve multilateral cooperation and must be designed in accordance with the objectives and the expected outcomes defined by the Strategy in its tourism section. Projects also play important roles in realization of the policy recommendations formulated by the member countries during the TWG meetings.

Within the scope of 7th and 8th Calls for Project Proposals, a total of 3 projects were selected to be financed by the CCO. The projects completed during the 2021 implementation period are as follows; The first project, “Capacity Building of Destination Management Organizations (DMO) Stakeholders” ” is being implemented by Cameroon in partnership with Azerbaijan, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Senegal. The project purpose is to enhance the capacity of DMO stakeholders by conducting a training program.

The second project titled “Community-Based Tourism through the Promotion of Heritage Sites” ” is being implemented by Uganda in partnership with Sudan, , Mozambique and Nigeria. The objective of this project is to enhance the capacity of different stakeholders on community based tourism as well as new product development and encouraging local participation.

Lastly, Turkey is implementing the project titled “Revitalizing Mevlana's Travel Route” with two partner countries, Azerbaijan and Iran in 2021. This project aims at restoring Mevlana’s travel route involving two countries together with the project owner country.

Moreover, under the 9th Call for Project Proposals, two projects were selected to be financed by the CCO in 2022. The selected projects to be completed under the 9th Call are as follows;

The project titled “A Two-Day Training on Human Resource Management in Tourism Sector” will be implemented by Nigeria with the partnership with the Gambia, Sudan and Türkiye. The project aims to enhance the human resource management capacity of the participants with a view to enhancing their productivity and effectiveness for sustainable tourism development in tourism sector. Project activities consist of training and local site visit on analyzing, planning and communication on human resource management and workshop on learning and sharing best practices.

The other project, “Risk Analysis and Crisis Planning and Management for Community Based Tourism” will be implemented by Uganda with five partner countries, namely Egypt, Indonesia, Mozambique, Nigeria and Sudan. The project purpose is to increase the capacity of stakeholders involved in community-based tourism in risk analysis and crisis planning and management. In

this context, a training and local site visit will be carried out in the above specified areas to ensure the sustainability of the tourism sector.

COMCEC COVID Response

The COMCEC COVID Response (CCR) is mainly about alleviating the negative impacts of the pandemic on member country economies with a particular focus on agriculture, trade, tourism, financial cooperation, poverty alleviation and transport & communications sectors. The program is based on financing certain types of projects, which would focus on needs assessment, sharing expertise, providing direct grants to final beneficiaries.

Under the 1st Call for Project Proposals, four projects were implemented by the Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso and Suriname in 2021. The details of the implemented projects are as follows;

The Azerbaijan's project, titled "Supporting the Accommodation Business in Implementing Hygiene Standards" aimed at improving the hygiene and safety measures in accommodation unites in order to eliminate the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this respect, it was purchased a certain amount of hygiene equipment consisting of dispenser along with dispenser stand and distributed to hotels and accommodation unites.

The project titled "Rejuvenation of Small Businesses Affected by COVID – 19 : A Case on Tour Operators in Bangladesh" was implemented by Bangladesh. The purpose of this project was to assess the needs of the tour operators and other small enterprises and recommend effective and sustainable path to rehabilitate the affected establishments. In this context, a needs assessment report which focus on mitigating the effects of COVID-19 and actions to be taken for the new normal was created.

Burkina Faso's "Developing of Health Protocols for Tourism Industries to Fight against COVID-19" project targeted developing health protocols in the purpose of ensuring the safety of tourists and employees in the tourist sector in the scope of COVID-19 pandemic. The study visit was conducted by experts from Burkina Faso to Türkiye for providing to tourism industries specific health protocol in order to fight against the pandemic.

Suriname's project on "COVID-19 Awareness & Resilience Training for Tourism and Hospitality Businesses" aimed at raising awareness of customer and workers in tourism sector in order to ensure safety of all parties in the sector. Within the project, a three day online training was conducted in order to share knowledge and equip participants with technical and practical insights about a range of actions for preparing businesses for COVID-19 impacts and adjustments.

Also, under the 2nd Call for Project Proposals, two projects were selected to be financed by the CCO in 2022. The selected projects are as follows;

Nigeria's project, titled "Adapting Tourism Workforce to the New Normal in the Hospitality Sector after COVID-19" aims at creating awareness on the ways and means to deal with the impact of the pandemic and to learn how to deal with it and take the necessary measures to

curtail its further spread. In the project, it is also intended to ameliorate the impact of the pandemic by acquiring the appropriate skills to deal with it.

The project titled “Preparation of COVID-19 Hygiene Protocol and Training of Employees within the Tourism, Leisure and Hospitality Sector “will be implemented by Sierra Leone. The purpose of this project is to prepare the Covid-19 hygiene protocol handbook for safe tourism operations and to train staff/employees in tourism and hospitality establishments on the prepared protocol.

COMCEC Al-Quds Program

Furthermore, considering the current situation and special conditions in Palestine, especially in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and the resolutions of the recent Extraordinary Islamic Summits on Al-Quds, the CCO has initiated the Al-Quds Program, which focuses on destination development and management as well as community based tourism in Al-Quds. Implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of National Economy of Palestine, the program consists of several projects to be carried out between 2020 and 2022. As a part of the program, five projects were selected for financing by the CCO to be implemented by the Ministry of National Economy of Palestine in 2021. The activities of the projects consist of, among others, exhibitions, art production, trainings, capacity building, procurement of machinery/equipment/service, online platform development, renovations, research, audio-visual material production etc. Titles of the projects are as follows;

Project Owner	Project Title
The Ministry of National Economy of Palestine	The Artists’ Identity Path: Tracing Heritage in Al-Quds
	Jerusalemites” Because We Are the Place and Time - “Maqdisiyyoon” Li’anana Al Zaman Wal Makan
	Enjoy the Hidden Jewels of Al Quds
	Old City Bakeries: Food Tourism and Heritage
	Al-Quds: Secrets and Narratives to Unfold

With the project, titled “Al-Quds: Secrets and Narratives to Unfold”, it was aimed to be increased the permanence of tourists visiting Al-Quds in their tourism experiences, understood the essence of Palestinian cultural heritage and organized exhibitions for enhancing the attractiveness in tourism. In this regard, realized activities were making renovation investments to improve the existing exhibitions that had to be closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, preparing a 3D model that promotes selected institutions from the old city and creating a website to increase recognition.

Within the framework of the project titled “The Artists’ Identity Path: Tracing Heritage in Al-Quds”, it was aimed at bringing focus to Jerusalem’s rich Palestinian cultural heritage through contemporary artists’ perspectives and fostering multi-sectorial collaborations and engage artists with the local community. In line with this aim, a chain of 10 artworks was developed for promoting Jerusalem’s cultural heritage and creating touristic appreciation.

The other 3 projects are expected to be completed in the first half of 2022.

Other Ongoing Activities

Other important activities carried out under tourism cooperation can be summarized as follows:

- Republic of Azerbaijan will host the 11th Session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers (ICTM) in 2022.
- The 9th OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum was held on 16th November 2021, in virtual format under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey with the theme of “Covid-19 Pandemic Impact on Tourism Sector and Recovery Strategies”. The Forum gathered around 100 esteemed public and private sector representatives from member countries and international organizations. The Forum has provided an important opportunity for evaluating the current status of global tourism with a focus on OIC Region and address the challenges and opportunities in the post-pandemic period.

