

 **TOURISM**



CCO BRIEF ON TOURISM

COMCEC COORDINATION OFFICE
May 2024

CCO BRIEF ON TOURISM

I. Background Information

Tourism is vital for the success of many economies around the world. In 2023, the Travel & Tourism sector contributed 9.1% to the global GDP; an increase of 23.2% from 2022, and there were 27 million new jobs, representing a 9.1% increase compared to 2022, (WTTC, 2023). In 2019, prior to the pandemic, Travel & Tourism (including its direct, indirect, and induced impacts) accounted for 10.5% of all jobs (334 million) and 10.4% of global GDP (US\$ 10.3 trillion). Meanwhile, international visitor spending amounted to US\$ 1.91 trillion in 2019. In 2023, there were 27 million new jobs, representing a 9.1% increase compared to 2022, and only 1.4% below the 2019 level. Domestic visitor spending rose by 18.1% in 2023, surpassing the 2019 level. (WTTC)

Tourism sector has many effects on many areas of the related countries' economies. Among the most prominent of them are, improving regional development, developing infrastructure, reducing the external deficit, enabling public revenue, growing national income and increasing employment. In today's economy, unemployment is one of the leading economic problem in countries overall. Tourism directly contributes to employment since it is a labor-intensive sector.

Guided by UNWTO, tourism had grown to be an essential pillar of sustainable development, recognized for its unique ability to generate opportunity for all and help provide solutions to some of the biggest problems. However, tourism sector was globally hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost overnight, international travel came to a near-complete standstill, grounding tourists and cutting off the lifeline the sector offers to developing nations as well as to communities, businesses and workers everywhere (UNWTO).

According to the latest UNWTO data, International tourism is expected to fully recover pre-pandemic levels in 2024, with initial estimates pointing to 2% growth above 2019 levels. This central forecast by UNWTO remains subject to the pace of recovery in Asia and to the evolution of existing economic and geopolitical downside risks.

Based on to the first UNWTO World Tourism Barometer of the year, international tourism ended 2023 at 88% of pre-pandemic levels, with an estimated 1.3 billion international arrivals. The unleashing of remaining restrained demand, increased air connectivity, and a stronger recovery of Asian markets and destinations, are expected to underpin a full recovery by the end of 2024.

Every global region recorded notable increases in international tourist numbers. The Middle East led recovery in relative terms as the only region to overcome pre-pandemic levels with arrivals 22% above 2019. Europe, the world's most visited region, reached 94% of 2019 levels, supported by intra-regional demand and travel from the United States. Africa recovered 96% of pre-pandemic visitors and Americas reached 90%. Asia and the Pacific reached 65% of pre-pandemic levels following the reopening of several markets and destinations.

However, performance is mixed, with South Asia already recovering 87% of 2019 levels and North-East Asia around 55%. Based on UNWTO's forward-looking scenarios for 2024, in UNWTO Tourism Confidence Index survey, with 67% of tourism professionals indicating better or much better prospects for 2024 compared to 2023.

As stated by UNWTO, there is still significant opportunity for recovery across Asia. The reopening of several source markets and destinations will boost recovery in the region and globally. Chinese outbound and inbound tourism is expected to accelerate in 2024, due to visa facilitation and improved air capacity. China is applying visa-free travel for citizens of France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Malaysia for a year to 30 November 2024. Visa and travel facilitation measures will promote travel to and around the Middle East and Africa with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to implement a unified tourist visa, similar to the Schengen visa, and measures to facilitate intra-African travel in Kenya and Rwanda.

In this context, the Islamic tourism market witnessed a rapid expansion over recent years and emerged as one of the fastest-growing segments in the global tourism market in terms of both tourist arrivals and receipts (SESRIC, 2022). Accordingly, the number of tourists in Islamic tourism increased from 131 million in 2017 to 160 million in 2019, corresponding to an increase of 22%. Nevertheless, the pandemic hit the growth momentum of the sector severely and the prevailing travel restrictions only allowed for 42 million international visitors in 2020 in the market, reflecting a 74% decline in tourist arrivals in the sector as compared to 2019.

The increased tourism activities among OIC countries have enabled tourists originating from OIC destinations to explore various tourist attractions. To this end, enhanced intra-OIC tourism activities have been one of the driving factors of growth in Islamic tourism, especially in the pre-pandemic period. Yet, given the growth prospects of this niche tourism market, the OIC countries still need to exert more efforts to unleash its full potential and host more tourists both from OIC and non-OIC countries (SESRIC, 2022).

As in the tourist arrivals, a positive trend was observed in terms of tourism receipts before the outbreak of the pandemic in the Islamic tourism market. The worldwide Islamic tourism market size increased from USD 142 billion in 2014 to USD 194 billion in 2019. Yet, due to the pandemic and widespread travel restrictions worldwide, its size is estimated to fall by 70%, reaching USD 58 billion in 2020. With the gradual ease of restrictions, the market is expected to recover and is forecasted to reach USD 208 billion in 2024.

In the OIC region, the size of the Islamic tourism market expanded by 37% over the period 2014-2019 and reached USD 153 billion in 2019. After seeing the bottom in 2020 (measured at USD 46 billion), the market size in the OIC group is expected to reach USD 164 billion in 2024. (SESRIC, 2022).

II. 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; Developing and Branding Gastronomy Tourism within OIC.

A. Developing and Branding Gastronomy Tourism Destinations within OIC

Since the 39th Session of the COMCEC, the 22nd Meeting of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group (TWG) was held on May 2nd, 2024 in a virtual-only format, with the theme of “Developing and Branding Gastronomy Tourism Destinations within OIC” A Research Report/Guide with the same theme is being prepared for two consecutive COMCEC TWG meetings (22nd and 23rd). While the first draft version of the report was submitted to the 22nd TWG meeting, the final version of the report will be submitted to the 23rd TWG meeting to be held on the September 24th-25th 2024. The main objective of the study is to establish a conceptual foundation for better understanding of the current and future implications of developing and branding of gastronomy in tourism industry. The COMCEC TWG in its 22nd and 23th Meetings, will focus on gastronomy tourism and provide recommendations on the identification, economic, social and environmental impacts of gastronomy tourism, branding and destination management of gastronomy for a more competitive and sustainable tourism industry within member countries.

In this research study, since the audience are from tourism policy-makers in member states’ governments, the focus will especially be on measures that can be taken by governments that affect identification, encouragement, capacity building of successful and sustainable local gastronomy initiatives within OIC. “Developing and Branding Gastronomy Tourism Destinations within OIC” as a research study will be prepared to elaborate on the strategies member countries can adopt in order to facilitate and sustain gastronomy for a more competitive and featured tourism industry. The study is also expected to draw attention to current and future implications of gastronomy in tourism industry, the threats and opportunities for our countries, the future of tourism as a whole, various national and international tourism policies and tourism sector as a whole with a view to provide policy solutions.

The First Draft of the Report/Guide reveals important findings in terms of developing and branding gastronomy for tourism sector in the world as well as in the member case country study (Türkiye). The First Draft of the Report/Guide provides a conceptual framework on the importance of the gastronomy in the tourism sector in the world as well as in the OIC region. In light of the discussion during the meeting and with the active contribution of the member countries, the draft report will be improved. The final version of the report is expected to evaluate the current status of gastronomy tourism with a focus on OIC Region and highlight the major challenges faced by the OIC member countries with developing and branding gastronomy in tourism sector, address the challenges and opportunities in the member countries and include sound, specific, and practical policy recommendations for developing/branding gastronomy and its future in the OIC member countries.

The final version of the Research Report/Guide will be submitted to the 23th Meeting of the Working Group which will be held on September 24th -25th, 2024.

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

B. The COMCEC Project Funding Mechanism

COMCEC Project Funding (CPF) is the other important instrument of the Strategy. Projects financed under the CPF need to serve cooperation among member countries and must be designed in accordance with the objectives and the expected outcomes defined by the Strategy in the tourism section. Projects also play important roles in realization of the policy recommendations formulated by the member countries during the TWG meetings. In 2024, five projects have been selected to be financed by the CCO. These projects are as follows;

The first project titled “Capacity Building of Tourism Guides in Selected OIC Member Countries” is being implemented by Mali with the partnership of Burkina Faso and Niger. This project aims to improve the competencies of tourism guides for changing conditions and the sustainability of the sector. In this respect, a training activity will be carried out in order to provide theoretical information to national and community tourism guides on guiding techniques, quality service delivery and customer satisfaction. Also, a local field visit for practicum will be held to an identified location.

The second project titled “Enhancing Capacities of Tourism Stakeholders for Adapting to Customers Changing Needs” is being implemented by Nigeria with the participation of three member countries namely The Gambia, Uganda and Mali. The project aims at enhancing the qualifications of human resources employed in the private sector in line with the changing demands of customers in order to ensure a strong and sustainable tourism sector. Within the context of the project, a training and local field visit will be organized. The training focuses on the topics of identification, analysis, planning and communication to adapt to the dynamic nature of customers' expectations and demands. In addition, a field visit to tourism sites in Abuja will be organized for gaining practical experiences.

The third project namely “Improving Entrepreneurial Capacities of Selected Tourism Stakeholders for Ensuring Competitiveness in Tourism” is being implemented by Togo with the partnership of Türkiye. This project focuses on the development and management of tourism services and products to ensure a competitive tourism environment. In this context, a study visit will be organized to Türkiye in order to learn good practices and experiences on entrepreneurship in tourism. Afterwards, a training in the fields of innovation, quality, communication, marketing and performance will be carried out by the attendance of youth and women participants in order to enhance their entrepreneurial capabilities in tourism service delivery and products.

The fourth project called “Empowering Entrepreneurship Skills of Community-Based Tourism Enterprises to Enhance Competitiveness of Tourism Industry” is being implemented by Uganda with the participation of Cameroon, Malaysia and Senegal. This project aims at enhancing the entrepreneurial skills of private sector stakeholders (especially youth and women) in the tourism sector in the areas of product development, resource management and service delivery. In this regard, a training focusing on innovation, planning, financial management, business performance management, risk management, marketing for entrepreneurship and a local site to put the theoretical knowledge into practice visit will be performed.

The last project titled “Strengthening the Capacities of African Tourism Boards through Sustainable Human Resource Management Practices” is being implemented by SESRIC for the benefit of 17 Member Countries. This project aims to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of African tourism boards on sustainable human resource management practices, regulatory frameworks, and the importance of the private sector, community-based tourism and marketing strategies. In this respect, a training and a workshop will be organized. The training will include the topics of sustainable human resource management and a competitive tourism sector in order to provide theoretical background to the Tourism Boards representatives. Within the framework of the workshop, participants will come together to share knowledge and experiences.

C. Other Ongoing Activities

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

- The 12th Session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers will be held on May 31- June 2, 2024 in Khiva, Republic of Uzbekistan.
- The 11th Meeting of the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum was held on November 7, 2023, with the theme “*The Prospects and Challenges of Climate-Friendly Tourism in the Era of Sustainability*”. The Forum gathered around 110 esteemed public and private sector representatives and speakers from 29 countries and relevant OIC Institutions and international organizations.

