



CCO BRIEF ON TOURISM

**COMCEC COORDINATION OFFICE
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1. Introduction

Tourism plays a significant role in the economic well-being of both developed and developing countries by contributing to employment, income generation, and workforce development. As an important source of foreign exchange earnings, tourism; as a sector supports economic growth and contributes to the overall development of national economies. Given its labour-intensive nature, tourism creates numerous employment opportunities especially in developing countries. In addition to its economic benefits, tourism brings people from different countries and cultures together, encouraging social interaction and strengthening international cultural exchange among countries and people.

Tourism is one of the most inclusive and scalable engines of job creation and economic development. Tourism links global demand to local suppliers across long value chains — hospitality, transport, food systems, cultural services, and retail — creating entry points for women, youth, and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). When managed well, tourism catalyzes diversified growth. It stimulates private investment, expands markets for local producers, and spreads income beyond cities into rural and coastal communities. It also helps finance the conservation of natural and cultural assets and can anchor climate-friendly livelihoods central to the blue and green economy.¹

Critically, tourism has a jobs multiplier effect: every direct tourism job generates additional jobs in supply chains and supporting services. This makes tourism particularly effective at turning investment into widespread employment. The sector's tradable yet place-based nature -drawing spending from international visitors while channelling benefits locally- means countries can capture foreign exchange and fiscal revenues while strengthening domestic firms. And because women comprise a majority of the workforce in many contexts and youth hold a significant share of jobs, targeted skilling and inclusion policies can quickly improve job quality and earnings².

However, tourism is also highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Rising temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, extreme weather events, sea-level rise negatively affect tourist destinations and influence travellers' preferences. These environmental changes shorten tourism seasons, damage tourism infrastructure, reduce the attractiveness of destinations, and increase costs for tourism businesses. Therefore, climate change represents an important challenge for the long-term sustainability and resilience of the tourism sector, making adaptation and sustainable tourism practices increasingly necessary.

The weight of evidence supports concern that the global climate is changing. Most of the change is attributable to the impacts of human activity; both in causing an increase in greenhouse gas emissions and in changing the buffering capacity of the natural environment to absorb

¹ Investing In Tourism, <https://www.worldbank.org/ext/en/topic/tourism>.

² Investing In Tourism, <https://www.worldbank.org/ext/en/topic/tourism>.

(sequester) carbon. Tourism activity is a significant contributor to global production of greenhouse gases – through transportation, heating, and cooling and other forms of energy use. The industry is also likely to be affected significantly by changes in climate both globally and locally³.

While concerns about tourism's polluting effects can influence many aspects of a tourist's activities, the primary issue relates to travellers' consumption of transport services, notably road and air transport. In the wider area of the sustainability of tourism, the impacts of tourism contributing to climate change can be related to tourism's high per capita consumption of water and energy, and the effects that tourism can have on flora and fauna. To reduce tourism's negative impacts, there is a need to implement measures by applying advanced environmental management techniques and technologies. Tourism contributes to greenhouse gases (GHG) primarily through transportation and heating and cooling of accommodation, both of which may use fossil fuels. GHG emissions through the use of transportation, accommodation and other tourism services occur from the beginning of a tourist's trip until she/he returns home. Therefore, mitigation actions should address tourism activities through the complete supply chain, involving international, national and regional transportation systems, outgoing and incoming tour operators, as well as local accommodation, transportation and other service providers at destinations.⁴

Over the past several decades, the tourism industry has undergone significant and continuous expansion, accompanied by increasing diversification, making it one of the most rapidly developing sectors of the global economy. Tourism is strongly associated with economic and social development and has expanded to include an increasing variety of emerging destinations. As a result of these developments, tourism has become an important contributor to socio-economic growth, playing a significant role in employment creation, income generation, and the overall development of destinations.

According to UN Tourism, some 307 million tourists travelled internationally in the first quarter of 2026, about 6 million more than the same period of 2025. While the start of the year saw sustained travel demand overall (+2.5% cumulative growth in January and February), the Middle East conflict impacted performance in March (+0.4%).

The conflict is expected to reduce growth in international arrivals by 1 to 2 percentage points below UN Tourism's initial forecast of 3% to 4% for 2026, depending on the conflict's duration and scope. Aside from disruptions in flights to, from and within the Middle East and effects on traveller confidence, the spike in oil prices and jet fuel shortage in some markets is increasing air fares and reducing flight capacity also in other regions. More expensive travel coupled with uncertainty about air connectivity, could redirect demand towards closer tourism destinations while also affecting overall travel demand.

³ Climate Change and Tourism, Excerpt from Indicators of Sustainable Development of Tourism Destinations, A Guidebook, World Tourism Organization (2004), pp.155–164.

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Europe, the world's largest travel destination region, saw over 130 million international tourists in the first quarter of 2026, a 4% increase, building on the strong momentum of 2025 (+5%). Some destinations benefited from the redirection of tourism flows. Southern Mediterranean Europe and Northern Europe both saw a 4% increase in arrivals in the first quarter of 2026, while Central Eastern Europe (+6%) continued its recovery. Arrivals in Africa (+4%) continued to grow in the first quarter of 2026, with North Africa recording a 4% increase supported by strong double-digit figures in March (+18%). Arrivals in Sub-Saharan Africa also increased 4% in the first quarter of 2026.

Asia and the Pacific recorded 3% growth this first quarter, somewhat slower than expected due to mixed performance among destinations. Strong results were recorded in February (+9%) but were more moderate in March (+2%), as disruptions affecting Middle Eastern air hubs contributed to a 27% decline in South Asia. Oceania (+9%) and North-East Asia (+5%) saw particularly robust results in the first quarter of 2026. Overall, arrivals in Asia remained 11% below pre-pandemic values (89% of the first quarter of 2019 levels).

In the Middle East arrivals dropped 14% in the first quarter of 2026, impacted by the conflict. Several Gulf destinations recorded strong declines this quarter, while Egypt (+16%) saw a robust increase in arrivals. This follows a strong rebound in the Middle East after the pandemic, with arrivals in 2025 climbing 40% above 2019 levels.

However, tourism's recovery also faces some challenges. According to the UN Tourism, economic and geopolitical headwinds continue to pose significant challenges to international tourism and confidence levels. The Middle East conflict, high transport and accommodation costs as well as other economic factors are the three main challenges affecting international tourism in 2026. The conflict has caused a surge in oil prices, particularly jet fuel oil prices, which remain highly volatile. This is leading to higher transport prices in the context of already elevated services inflation, including tourism services, which is exerting pressure on travel demand.

The uncertainty surrounding the crisis has shifted destination preferences, aside from forcing airlines to reroute or cancel thousands of flights. Against this backdrop, tourists are expected to continue to seek value for money but could also opt for destinations closer to home in response to elevated prices.

Tourism has become one of the most dynamic and rapidly expanding sectors of the global economy, characterized by sustained growth and increasing diversification. Looking ahead, tourism is projected to reach around 1.8 billion international arrivals by 2030, with particularly strong growth expected in emerging regions such as Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Longer-term projections suggest that global arrivals could reach between 2.4 and 3.1 billion by 2050 (UN Tourism, 2026). Given these trends, tourism is widely recognized as a key driver of economic development and a strategic sector for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (COMCEC 2026).

However, the continued expansion of tourism presents significant challenges within the context of a decarbonizing global economy. The industry remains highly energy-intensive and predominantly dependent on fossil fuels (COMCEC 2026).

Climate change represents a fundamental challenge for the long-term competitiveness, sustainability, and spatial dynamics of tourism, requiring destinations to strengthen their resilience in response to increasing environmental risks. Hence, tourism systems are expected not only to adapt to changing climatic conditions but also to anticipate and manage future uncertainties through more strategic and forward-looking approaches (COMCEC 2026).

Nevertheless, climate change is increasingly reshaping the environmental conditions on which tourism depends, primarily through the intensification of climate-related hazards and the degradation of natural resources. These impacts include the growing frequency and severity of extreme weather events, water-related stresses such as droughts and flooding, and rising temperatures that alter seasonal patterns and reduce the reliability of climate-sensitive tourism activities, particularly in mountain and coastal destinations. In addition, environmental degradation, such as declining water quality and coastal erosion, further undermines destination attractiveness, while changing climatic conditions, including heat stress and increased weather variability, disrupt tourism operations and visitor experience (COMCEC 2026).

Effective climate policy in tourism must focus on the main sources of emissions, which are largely concentrated in aviation, road transport, and accommodation, with aviation representing the most critical component, particularly when broader climate impacts beyond CO₂ are considered. Due to the continued and expected growth in air travel, overall tourism emissions are likely to increase even if emissions from other sub-sectors are reduced, indicating that efficiency improvements alone are insufficient and that structural shifts toward low-carbon mobility are necessary. In the context of OIC member countries, strengthening adaptation and resilience in tourism destinations requires a more structured, multi-dimensional, and policy-driven approach that goes beyond isolated measures, particularly given the high exposure to climate risks and the presence of institutional and financial constraints. (COMCEC 2026).

Addressing climate change efforts effectively in OIC countries requires a holistic approach that integrates innovation, strategic partnerships, infrastructure development, awareness of climate and tourism relation and supportive policy frameworks.

2. COMCEC Tourism Cooperation

COMCEC attaches utmost importance to enhance cooperation in tourism domain among the OIC Member Countries. Considering the emerging area in the tourism sector, COMCEC Tourism Working Group devoted its last two consecutive meetings to discuss the theme of “Impacts of Climate Change and Mitigation Strategies for Sustainable OIC Tourism”.

2.1. Impacts of Climate Change and Mitigation Strategies for Sustainable OIC Tourism

Since the 41st Session of the COMCEC, the 26th Meeting of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group (TWG) was held virtually on April 21, 2026 and the 27th Meeting was held on September 16-17, 2026 in Ankara, Türkiye respectively, with the theme of “Impacts of Climate Change and Mitigation Strategies for Sustainable OIC Tourism”.

A research report with the same theme has been prepared for two consecutive COMCEC TWG meetings (26th and 27th). While the first draft of the report, along with a case country study, was submitted to the 26th TWG meeting, the final version of the report was submitted to the 27th TWG meeting. The main objective of the study was to establish a conceptual foundation for a better understanding of the current and future implications of the impacts of climate change in tourism sector in the OIC Member Countries and to come up with sound mitigation strategies and policies to tackle the challenges that have arisen so far.

The first draft of the report revealed important findings in terms of the impacts of climate change and mitigation strategies in tourism in general as well as in the OIC Member Countries. It provided a conceptual framework of climate change in the tourism sector in the world as well as in the OIC region and global tourism. In light of the discussions during the meeting and with the active contribution of the member countries, the draft version of the report was improved.

The final version of the report has highlighted OIC Member Countries with best practices, tools, a roadmap and policy recommendations that will assist them in mitigation strategies regarding climate change in tourism. Specifically, the study explores mitigation strategies and a roadmap to deal with climate change in OIC countries. The study also assesses the impacts of climate change on tourism in member countries and formulates actionable mitigation and adaptation strategies as well as the core success factors in this area. The study also focuses on SWOT evaluations. Additionally, the report included sound, specific, and practical policy recommendations to stakeholders and government policymakers in OIC Member Countries.

The 27th Meeting of Tourism Working Group has come up with the following policy recommendations:

- Integrating climate risk assessment, mitigation, adaptation, emergency preparedness and resource efficiency into tourism strategies, destination plans, standards and investment decisions in accordance with national adaptation measures.
- Developing tourism-climate coordination mechanisms through effective public-sector coordination.
- Adopting ecosystem-based and resilient destination management to protect climate-sensitive natural and cultural tourism assets.
- Developing tourism-specific climate-finance and incentive mechanisms, with particular support for tourism MSMEs and local communities.

- Developing tourism-climate data collection, monitoring and capacity-building systems, supported by tourism climate resilience scorecards to strengthen and support evidence-based implementation and risk management.

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

3. 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.

Within the framework of the 13th Call for Project Proposals under the CPF, seven projects have been selected for implementation in 2026. Along with a project of Maldives, which carried over from last year, a total of eight projects are as follows;

The first project, titled “Enhancing Cultural Heritage Site Preservation by Strengthening Governance and Monitoring Systems”, is being implemented by Bangladesh with the participation of Türkiye, Uzbekistan, Mali, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and SESRIC. The aim of project is to strengthen governance and monitoring systems in Bangladesh, based on best practices, necessary regulations, institutional improvements, and active stakeholder participation in the preservation of cultural heritage sites. In order to realize the mentioned purposes, a comprehensive workshop will be organized.

The second project, called “Strengthening Culinary Tourism of the Gambia through Enhancing the Capacity of Chefs/Cooks in the Tourism and Hospitality Sector”, is being implemented by the Gambia with the partnership of Türkiye. The project's purpose is to enhance the human and technical capabilities of chefs/cooks in Gambia's hospitality sector in terms of modern cooking techniques, menu development, food presentation, nutrition, hygiene, and compliance with food safety standards. Within this scope, a study visit will be organized in Türkiye to examine best practices on-site. Subsequently, a training program will be conducted with the participation of selected chefs and cooks.

The third project, titled “Strengthening and Branding Tourism Destinations in Indonesia with OIC/SMIIC Halal Standards”, is being implemented by Indonesia with the partnership of Malaysia, Türkiye, UAE and SMIIC. This project focuses on improving conformity assessment systems and strengthening quality infrastructure to ensure that Indonesia’s tourism ecosystem aligns with OIC/SMIIC standards. This project consists of two activities. A comprehensive study visit to Türkiye was organized to provide an on-site experience with SMIIC halal standards. Then, a training on aligning national tourism practices with the halal concept will be held for participants from sector organizations in Indonesia.

The fourth project, titled “Enhancing Maldivian Gastronomy Tourism by Increasing the Recognition of Traditional Cuisine” is being implemented by Maldives. It aims to boost tourism competitiveness by promoting and branding Maldivian gastronomy through stronger links between tourism and local communities. Within the context of the project, a publicity meeting and the preparation of promotional materials will be conducted. The promotional materials include the creation of high-quality, comprehensive books and videos reflecting Maldivian traditional cuisine, particularly focusing on culinary practices and cultural stories. During the publicity meeting, these materials, along with the Maldives Gastronomy Strategy, will be presented to key tourism stakeholders to strengthen the branding of the gastronomy sector

The fifth project, titled “Sustainable Tourism Villages Initiative: Empowering Communities and Enhancing Rural Visitor Experiences”, is being implemented by Uzbekistan with the cooperation of three partners, namely Türkiye, Indonesia and SESRIC. This project aims to promote sustainable, community-driven rural tourism by strengthening human capacity, improving village standards, and diversifying visitor experiences. To accomplish this, a study visit will be conducted in Türkiye to examine tourism villages in terms of community-based tourism, the role of local stakeholders, and institutional structures. Then, a workshop will be organized in Uzbekistan, and a tourism village model guide will be produced.

The sixth project, titled “Strengthening Uganda’s Culinary Tourism through Skills Development”, is being implemented by Uganda with the cooperation of Egypt. This project aims to enhance the skills of chefs, culinary school students/staff, and relevant other stakeholders in areas such as cooking and food presentation techniques, food safety and hygiene standards, menu development suitable for tourism markets, and customer-centric service delivery. In this respect, a study visit will be organized to Egypt to examine the country's gastronomy tourism ecosystem first-hand. Based on the experiences gained from the ground, a training program will be conducted with the attendance of sector participants.

The other project, titled “Capacity Building of Tourism Stakeholders with OIC/SMIIC Halal Restaurant and Tourism Services Standards”, is being implemented by SMIIC in partnership with seven OIC member countries, namely Egypt, Syria, Oman, Cameroon, Morocco, Uzbekistan and Senegal. This project aims to enhance the compliance of accommodation establishments with OIC/SMIIC 6 (Halal Restaurants) and OIC/SMIIC 9 (Halal Tourism Services) standards in their service delivery. Within this scope, tailored training programs are being delivered in each participating country to build the capacity of tourism destination stakeholders, such as restaurants, hotels, and accommodation associations, on SMIIC halal standards and their practical application.

The last project, titled “Strengthening Egypt’s Cultural Tourism Destination Brand through Sharing Experiences”, has been implemented by SESRIC in partnership with Egypt, Türkiye, Uzbekistan, Malaysia and Senegal. This project aimed to promote Egypt as a heritage tourism destination by enhancing visitor experience, cultural visibility, empowering local communities, and utilising digital innovation. In this context, with the participation of experts from relevant sectors of prominent Islamic countries in the field of cultural heritage tourism, a training and a

workshop will be held to achieve these objectives. And after, a roadmap will be developed for the preservation of cultural heritage and the branding of destinations in this field in Islamic countries.

4. Other Ongoing Activities

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

- OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum provides a regular communication channel for the private sector representatives of the Member Countries. In this regard, Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye, which serves as the Secretariat of the Forum, organized the 14th Meeting of the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum on October 14, 2026, with the theme of " Digital Transformation and Artificial Intelligence in Tourism ".



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