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VIRTUAL

**REPORT ON ACTIVITIES IN SUPPORT OF TOURISM**

(Prepared by the Culture and Tourism Section of the Department of

Economic Development)

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INTRODUCTION

This report of the General Secretariat relates to the activities which have been undertaken since the XXIV Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-Level Authorities of Tourism held in Georgetown. Guyana, March 21-22, 2018 in furtherance of the mandates emanating from that meeting. It also includes a review of the recent performance of key indicators of tourism in the Americas as well as information on actions undertaken to assist member states in their response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

TOURISM INDUSTRY OVERVIEW

International tourism arrivals, worldwide continued to show strong growth, reaching 1.46 billion in 2019 - expanding by 5.7 percent in 2018 and 3.8 percent in 2019 respectively (UNWTO World Tourism Barometer)[[1]](#footnote-1)/. The 2019 performance represented the ninth consecutive year of relatively strong growth; although 2019 slowed below the consistent trend of four (4) percent or higher since 2010. This strong showing of the sector underscored the notion that the tourism sector continues to be one of the most important drivers of global output, but did not foreshadow developments to come in 2020.

Data from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC)[[2]](#footnote-2)/ indicate that in 2019 travel and tourism accounted for 10.4 % of global GDP (direct, indirect, and induced impact), 334 million jobs -1 in every 10 jobs, US $1.7 trillion in exports, or 6.8% of the world’s exports and 27.4 percent of services exports. The Travel & Tourism sector suffered a loss of almost US$4.5 trillion to reach US$4.7 trillion in 2020, with the contribution to GDP dropping by a staggering 49.1% compared to 2019; relative to a 3.7% GDP decline of the global economy in 2020. In 2019, the Travel & Tourism sector contributed **10.4% to global GDP;** a share which **decreased to 5.5%** in 2020 due to ongoing restrictions to mobility. In 2020, 62 million jobs were lost, representing a drop of 18.5%, leaving just 272 million employed across the sector globally, compared to 334 million in 2019[[3]](#footnote-3)/.

TOURISM IN THE AMERICAS

Following strong performances up to 2016, in relation to international tourist arrivals, the pace of visitor arrivals to the Americas continued to slow in 2018 and 2019. The Americas was the slowest growing of the UNWTO’s five regions in 2019, with international visitors to the region growing by 1.5 per cent; well below the Middle East (6.8 per cent), Africa (2.0 percent), Europe (4.2 per cent) and Asia Pacific (4.0 per cent). The Americas welcomed 219.3 million international arrivals in 2019 led by growth in North America (3.1 percent) and the Caribbean 2.0 percent, as the Caribbean continued its recovery following the slowdown caused by powerful tropical 2017 hurricane season.

TOURISM PERFORMANCE IN THE PANDEMIC PERIOD

As is well known, the travel and tourism sectors have been among the worst affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. International tourist arrivals world-wide declined by 72.8 percent in 2020, according to data from the UNWTO compared with 2019, amid global travel and other restrictions adopted to contain the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This decline represents more than one billion fewer international tourist arrivals compared with 2019. This translates into a decline of US$ 930 billion in export revenues from international tourism. International visitors spent about US$ 536 billion in destinations last year, about one third of the amount spent in 2019 (US$ 1,466 billion)[[4]](#footnote-4)/.

In the Americas visitor arrivals to the region declined by 68.2 percent during 2020. This decline was the smallest compared to the other four sub-regions of the world – Asia Pacific (84.1 percent), Africa and the Middle East both (74 percent) and Europe 68.5 percent). In the Americas, Travel and Tourism’s total contribution to GDP declined from 8.8 percent in 2019 to 4.3 percent in 2020. International visitor spending declined by 72 percent to $86.5 billion, with the total contribution of Travel and Tourism to employment declining to 33.4 million jobs – a loss of more than 11 million jobs[[5]](#footnote-5)/.

In the sub-regions of the Americas, Central America experienced the largest decline in visitor arrivals during this period, contracting by 73.1 percent. Regarding the other sub-regions of the Americas, visitors to North America declined by 68.1 percent, by 60.7 percent in the Caribbean and by 72.6 percent in South America.

PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF MANDATES

The work of the Culture and Tourism section in relation to tourism is based on an overlap of the Medium Term Strategy and the 2018-2021 Work Plan of the Inter-American Committee on Tourism (CITUR). The Medium Term Strategy provides the overall guidance in terms of the priority areas and the Work Plan specifies the concrete actions to be undertaken.

The Declaration of Georgetown “…instructed the General Secretariat to submit for the consideration of the Authorities of the Congress, at its Planning Meeting to be held no later than July 31, 2018, a work plan based on the guidelines contained in this Declaration and that contribute to the implementation of the commitments of the Medium-Term Strategy to Enhance Tourism Cooperation and Competitiveness in the Americas.”

The Work Plan, approved following the Planning Meeting of the Authorities of the CITUR held July 16-17, 2018 was therefore developed in order to establish concrete actions to meet the mandates and commitments of the Declaration of Georgetown, approved during the XXIV Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-Level Authorities of Tourism in Guyana in March 2018. It also incorporates these actions within the framework of the priority areas of the Medium-Term Strategy.

All activities defined in the Work Plan therefore fall under one of the following six priority areas of the Medium Term Strategy:

1. Tourism Safety and Security

2. Infrastructure

3. Sustainability

4. Product and Service Quality

5. Marketing and promotion

6. Travel and Visa Facilitation

TOURISM SAFETY AND SECURITY

The Culture and Tourism Section has continued its collaboration with the Secretariat of Multidimensional Security in the area of Tourism Security. In this regard the collaboration yielded Tourism Security workshops in Ecuador, and Guatemala and the preparation of a Tourism Security Plan for Chile.

Webinar on Security Measures in Tourism Destinations

A [Webinar on Security Measures in Tourist Destinations](http://www.oas.org/en/sedi/desd/ct/documents/Agenda_St4_e.pdf) was organized and delivered on May 2, 2019, in collaboration with the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism of the Secretariat for Multi-Dimensional Security, the Under Secretariat of Tourism of Chile and the Ministry of Business of Guyana. The Webinar included presentations on “*What is Tourism Security and its Regional Challenges*”, case studies from *Tourism Assistance and Protection Centers*and from Guyana as well as from the Inter-American Network of Tourism Security.

INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Webinar on Connectivity in the Americas

In the context of the XXIV Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-level Authorities which focused on Connecting the Americas, the issue of improving the economic and other infrastructure necessary to facilitate connecting the sub-regions of the Americas assumed increasing significance. The Work Plan therefore called for a Webinar on Connectivity in the Americas. This Webinar was held on 9 July 2019, in conjunction with the International Air Transport Association (IATA). The Webinar targeted, national and local Tourism Authorities with responsibility for tourism, aviation, immigration, transport, connectivity as well as other relevant stakeholders, in the OAS member states. It addressed a broad array of issues related to enhancing travel for tourism within the Americas, including, “inter alia, Improving Infrastructure and Modernizing Airport Processes, Airport Taxes, Passenger Charges and Fees, Smarter Regulation, Open skies Policies and New Technologies and Systems for Travel and Visas.”

On March 4, 2020, an agreement was signed with IATA to enhance cooperation between IATA and the GS/OAS, within the framework of the 2018-2021 Work Plan of the CITUR, and to identify areas of mutual interest with a view to *inter alia*:

1. Creating a common agenda to improve air connectivity across the sub-regions of the Americas in support of sustainable tourism development;
2. Facilitating political dialogue among the Member States of the OAS in order to advance understanding of the air connectivity issues among decision makers and to increase awareness of the benefits that aviation brings to tourism and the economies of the Americas.

SUSTAINABILITY

1. Sustainable Community-Based Rural Tourism Development Management Model

Much of the focus thus far has been on the actions related to Community-Based rural tourism development. In this regard the Culture and Tourism Section together with Peru's Vice-Ministry of Tourism, documented information on the situation of Community-Based rural tourism in the Member States. This work in the context of the Work Plan produced a publication Analysis of Information regarding Community-based Rural Tourism in the Americas.

A compendium of successful Community Based Rural Tourism Experiences representing each of the sub-regions of the Americas was also compiled. It serves as a basis for sharing successful experiences on Community-based rural tourism and provide opportunities for horizontal cooperation among countries. The collaboration with the Peru’s Vice-Ministry of Peru also produced [Guidelines for Community-based Rural Tourism](https://1jn7ny2d85m93veydi36feit-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Propuesta-de-Lineamientos-Turismo-Comunitario-para-las-Américas-CITUR-OEA.pdf). The document provides an overview of the structure, focus, benefits, and characteristics of Community-Based Rural Tourism in countries throughout the Americas. It is a developing work that will be further refined in the framework of the CITUR Work Plan.

1. Building Post-Disaster Business Continuity for Tourism Micro Small and Medium Sized Enterprises

The Work Plan calls for a project to strengthen resilience to natural hazards in the Caribbean. After several delays and edits to the original draft, the proposal for this project received its final internal approval in 2020 and execution is well underway. The main aim of the project is to assist small tourism enterprises in the Caribbean in overcoming challenges that affect business continuity during and after catastrophic events in Caribbean. The project recognizes that in addition to challenges at the level of the business, business continuity can also be negatively impacted by multiple macro-level factors, such as weaknesses in planning and development control, inadequate infrastructure, improper waste management, and deficiencies in water resources management.

The project has two (2) main components. The **first** aims to identify national-and regional level challenges to post-disaster business continuity and outline policies and strategies to address them in the short, medium, and long term. The **second** component seeks to integrate business continuity into the business practices and procedures of small tourism operators by raising awareness and building the capacity of business owners in the tourism value chain, to make informed decisions that would help keep their businesses open following catastrophic events or minimize the time required for restart.

To date the project has enhanced capacity in Emergency Preparedness and Management in nine Caribbean countries, with 23 emergency management personnel having completed the Basic Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) course in February 2021.

The project launched a call for proposals for a National Basic CERT training to create a community emergency response team in at least two different communities in each of the participating twelve project countries. Barbados, Grenada, the Bahamas and Trinidad and Tobago have already submitted their proposals. Barbados will complete the training by the end of September and the other countries will conduct the trainings in October. Belize, St. Lucia, and Jamaica have shown an interest in submitting their own proposals.

In collaboration with the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA) a Survey for anAssessment of Challenges to Post-Disaster Business Continuity of Small Tourism Enterprises (STEs) in the Caribbean was completed in July 2021 and a Multi-stakeholder Forum to validate the survey’s findings was held August 5, 2021.

At least 40 owners, operators and staff of small tourism enterprises commenced training to prepare, execute, review, and update their business continuity multi-hazard contingency plan. The four-day workshop, hosted and organized by the University of the West Indies (UWI) through its Institute for Sustainable Development and the Disaster Risk Reduction Centre began on October 5, 2021

Upcoming activities include a seminar on the implementation of CERT with case studies from the USA, Mexico, South America, and the Caribbean being planned for the last quarter of 2021. A High-level Tourism Resilience Forum is being contemplated for 2022, potentially to be held in-person. The High-Level Forum will draw lessons learned and good practices from the COVID-19 pandemic and other complex emergencies and disasters, while supporting the sector’s efforts to mitigate and recovery from their impact.

PRODUCT AND SERVICE QUALITY

1. Webinar On the Sharing Economy

The Work Plan in the context of its information sharing and capacity building objectives calls for the delivery of a webinar on the Sharing Economy. In this regard, the Culture and Tourism Section collaborated with the UNWTO and the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA) to organize a Webinar on new Business Models in Tourism with a focus on the Sharing Economy. This [Webinar](http://www.oas.org/en/sedi/desd/ct/Webinar_11_2019/Invitation_Agenda_Webinar_11_2019.pdf) was held November 20, 2019, and included presentations from the UNWTO, the Vice-Ministry of Tourism of Colombia, the Chamber of Tourism of Argentina, Airbnband the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association.

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

The Work Plan in relation to the Marketing and Promotion priority area calls for two specific actions:

1. for the Culture and Tourism Section to support the Inter-American and Caribbean Network of Small Hotels (INCAPH) in the organization of the Fifth Meeting of the Network in 2019; and
2. for a Virtual Presentation to the CITUR Authorities to promote and encourage the participation of small hotels in INCAPH.
3. Fifth Meeting of the Network INCAPH

In relation to the Fifth Meeting of the Network, the leadership indicated that this could not be held in 2019 as planned. Efforts to organize the meeting since then have been constrained by the COVID 19 pandemic, including economic difficulties by the small hotel owners themselves. In the current scenario consideration could be given to organizing a Virtual meeting in the first half of 2022, which could potentially focus on efforts to resuscitate small hotels as tourism gradually reopens.

1. Virtual Presentation to promote / encourage the participation of small hotels in INCAPH

In relation to the Virtual presentation, the President of the Network addressed the Planning Meeting of the Authorities of the CITUR held in July 2018 and called for authorities to encourage and promote the participation of small hotels in their countries in the Network.

TRAVEL AND VISA FACILITATION

In relation to thepriority area of Travel and Visa Facilitation, the Declaration of Georgetown requested the CITUR support the sharing of good practices on travel and tourism facilitation, including visa facilitation, to promote intra-regional and multi-destination travel among countries of the America. The CITUR Work Plan therefore included the delivery of a Webinar on Travel and Visa Facilitation.

1. Webinar on Travel and Visa Facilitation

The Webinar on Travel and Visa Facilitation, originally planned for the first quarter of 2020, was adapted in the circumstances of the COVID -19 pandemic The adapted Webinar was organized in conjunction with the Panamanian National Tourism Authority, and took place June 9, 2020 with the revised theme **“**[Travel and Visa Facilitation during COVID-19”](http://www.oas.org/es/sedi/ddes/ct/Citur_Webinar_0620_s.asp). The Webinar provided reviews of recent studies on the impacts of travel and visa facilitation, and facilitated exchanges and sharing of experiences, *inter-alia* on Safe Practices for Travelers and Entry Points to COVID-19. The Webinar received presentations from the Panamanian National Tourism Authority, the Central America Tourism Integration Secretariat (SITCA), the UNWTO, the Council of Health Ministers of Central America and the Dominican Republic (COMISCA), and the International Air Transport Association, (IATA).

TOURISM ACTONS TO ASSIST MEMBER STATES IN THEIR RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Due to the overwhelming impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the tourism sector, specific activities were undertaken by the Culture and Tourism Section, to support member states’ response. Much of this involved capacity-building and sharing Webinars or adapting existing actions in the Work Plan to address the new reality.

On April 7, 2020, the Culture and Tourism Section published a Newsletter, which captured an initial list of [COVID-19 Tourism Policy Responses](http://www.oas.org/fpdb/press/Tourism-specific-support-CONSOLIDATED-DOCUMENT-ENGLISH-Rev-1MR-(003).pdf) in member states. It reflected the range of initiatives and measures enacted or being contemplated by member states to support the tourism sector.

Under the framework of the Indigenous Tourism Forum of the Americas, SEDI through the Culture and Tourism Section collaborated with the George Washington University’s International Institute of Tourism Studies (GWU IITS) and the US Bureau of Indian Affairs to organize three discrete sub-regional Webinars during the summer of 2020 The Webinars focused on “The Effects of COVID-19 in Indigenous Communities and Tourism” in the North America, Caribbean and South and Central Americas sub-regions respectively.

The SEDI/George Washington University’s International Institute of Tourism Studies/US Bureau of Indian Affairs partnership also successfully organized and executed the First Indigenous Tourism Forum of the Americas. This was held virtually October 12-16 2020. Significant portions of the [agenda](https://indigenoustourismforum.org/program/topics/) of the Forum were dedicated to addressing COVID-19 related issues and questions, including the following:

- How Can Tourism Drive Economic Recovery Post-COVID-19?

- Which Tourism Experiences Will be Feasible for Communities and Attractive to Visitors Post- COVID-19? and

- How Can Communities Plan to Re-open Post COVID-19?

Within the framework of the Indigenous Tourism Forum of the Americas, SEDI through the Culture and Tourism Section has been working with the George Washington University and the US Department of the Interior (USDOI) to establish the Indigenous Tourism Collaborative of the Americas. The Collaborative began at the Indigenous Tourism of the Americas Forum, which was attended by nearly 300 Indigenous tourism leaders and tourism industry leaders from Canada, United States, the Caribbean, Central and South America.

A meeting of the Collaborative held on April 29th, 2021, organized by the Collaborative’s Steering Committee comprising the OAS, SEDI, GWU IITS and USDOI agreed on a series of proposals associated with its formalization including vision, structure, governance, participation, and principles. The vision of the Collaborative is to establish a network of Indigenous leaders and tourism industry organizations to exchange ideas and experiences and foster dialogue to drive collaborative action in support of sustainable development and growth in Indigenous communities throughout the Americas.

The current priorities of the Collaborative include the following:

1. Covid-19 Recovery

2. Building Capacity, Sustainability and Technology

3. Respect, Representation and Inclusion in Government and Industry Planning and Development

The OAS General Secretariat through SEDI has also been supporting country efforts to safely re-open destinations to international visitors. One such initiative of the Culture and Tourism Section involved the documentation and sharing of [bio-safety country protocols](http://www.oas.org/en/sedi/desd/ct/TSS_0620_e.asp) from member states. This information is available at the web page of the Culture and Tourism Section of the Department of Economic Development.

During 2020 the Vice Ministry of Tourism of Colombia organized several meetings with the Latin American Tourism Authorities to coordinate regional actions in relation to the pandemic. The Department of Economic Development participated and provided technical support.

On April 9, 2020 a Webinar titled “Tourism Security in times of COVID-19” was organized, in the context of the CITUR working Plan, jointly by the Culture and Tourism Section, the OAS Inter-American Committee on Tourism (CICTE) and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI). The Webinar included presentations from Governmental experts from Ecuador and Guatemala, and highlighted *inter-alia* challenges countries were facing with repatriating tourist[[6]](#footnote-6)/.

On June 19, 2020, a Webinar on Biosecurity Protocols for Reviving Tourism[[7]](#footnote-7)/ was held. It included presentations from Quito Turismo and the Peruvian Association of Hotels and Restaurants focusing on challenges in implementing biosecurity protocols.

On August 19 2020, SEDI through the Culture and Tourism Section, in collaboration with the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute organized a Webinar on “Reopening of the Tourism Sector: A Focus on Hotels and Restaurants.” At the Webinar, experts from the hotels and restaurant industries provided key insights into the impact of COVID-19 on the industry and important next steps each manager or owner should be taking to ensure the safety of all workers and guests.

In July 2021, the Culture and Tourism Section again collaborated with the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute to organize a Webinar/Workshop titled [Addressing the Skills Gap in the Hospitality Industry](https://restaurant.zoom.us/webinar/register/4116239368717/WN_wGbq4oXAQOiJRtc0to517A). This webinar introduced new industry-driven and competency-based programs for vocational institutions to assist hospitality and tourism businesses and governments address the current labor market challenges and skills gaps. It featured a lively panel discussion and brought experts together, and focused on:

* challenges in the labor supply and staffing
* post-pandemic complications emerging in tourism and hospitality businesses

• how vocational training can be helpful to grow a multi-skilled workforce

• the importance of hospitality/tourism-specific training, such as AHLEI’s new Hospitality and Tourism Management (HTM) program

In the context of the 2018-2021 Work Plan of the CITUR and in conjunction with the Secretariat for Multi-dimensional Security work is currently under way to provide documentation that would allow visitors to access information on travel protocols and regulations in each OAS member state. It would also provide an analysis of common guidelines, which support safe travel among countries. A presentation on this work was made at the Second Meeting of the CITUR in November 19-20, 2020.

The OAS General Secretariat has partnered with the Inter-American Development Bank in collaboration and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) to produce a publication on Regional Recommendations on Biosafety Protocols in the Tourism Sector of Latin America and the Caribbean. In this sense, on December 16, 2020, a Virtual Work Session with the members states was organized to present first analysis of a systematic review of protocols developed by public and private entities in various countries of the Latin America and Caribbean region. and the world. Based on this first assessment, the work session helped bridge the gap and prioritize good practices within the framework of regional recommendations and to advance developments within the framework of the CITUR Working Group on Bio-sanitary Travel and Tourism Protocols. In August 2021, recommendations for biosafety protocols in the lodging, restaurant, and local transport subsectors, as well as in the areas of beaches, airports and ports, were published and in the coming months several meetings and webinars will be held with relevant stakeholders to disseminate this information.

In July 2021, the Culture and Tourism Section produced the first issue of the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development (SEDI) [Sustainable Tourism Roundup](https://us4.campaign-archive.com/?e=__test_email__&u=4c4611c229f3f7224439d0ff4&id=77045c05b8). Every two months, starting in July 2021, the Culture and Tourism Section of the Department of Economic Development will publish a compilation of developments in Member States, international organizations and relevant associations related to the recovery and reactivation of tourism, as well as actions in support of sustainable tourism and mitigating the negative effects of COVID-19 on the tourism sector. The publication will also include information on the activities of the Inter-American Committee on Tourism (CITUR) and its four (4) established Working Groups, as well as key actions of the Culture and Tourism Section in support of the development of sustainable tourism.

MEETINGS OF THE CITUR

Faced with the ongoing crisis in the sector, the Inter-American Committee on Tourism (CITUR) together with the Culture and Tourism Section as Technical Secretariat organized two meetings in 2020—a special meeting in August and a regular meeting in November—to offer member states a forum for, among other things, examining the nature and cost of the pandemic’s impact on the tourism sector, policies implemented to support small businesses, tourism companies, and sector workers, and protocols and strategies used to ensure the sector could continue to operate during the pandemic. At those meetings, the Chair of CITUR recommended the creation of four working groups to support the sustainability of the tourism sector in the Americas. One of these groups is devoted to developing a plan of action for recovery of the airline and cruise industries and another, to the importance of having standardized biosafety protocols in place for travel and tourism in the region in order to combat COVID-19. The remaining two groups are looking at climate change and sustainable development and developing a 2050 strategy.

Thus far in 2021, CITUR has held two more special meetings—one in March and one in June—to review the progress made by the four working groups, assess the status of the situation, and seek out common measures to address the impact of the pandemic and revive the travel and tourism sector and prepare it for the post-pandemic. Representatives of each if the fire (4) Working Groups will make presentations to the XXV Congress on the progress of their work during the meeting on October 6, 2021.

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1. . Available at <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/wtobarometereng.2020.18.1.6> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. . See World Travel and Tourism Council 2020 Economic Impact Reports available at <https://wttc.org/Research/Economic-Impact> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. . World Travel and Tourism Council Economic Impact Reports. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. . UNWTO World Tourism Barometer Volume 19, Issue 3, May 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. . World Travel and Tourism Council [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. . Details of the Webinar are available at <http://www.oas.org/es/sedi/ddes/CT/Webinar_04_2020.asp> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. . Additional details on this Webinar are available at <http://www.oas.org/en/sedi/desd/ct/TSS_0620_e.asp> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)