

Green Innovation in Tourism



Tourism experts from international organizations, United Nations agencies and the tourism public and private sector have outlined how green innovation in tourism can drive sustainable development by reducing costs, boosting revenue, creating jobs and improving resource efficiency (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 19 June).

The Rio+20 event 'Green Innovation in Tourism', co-hosted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) with the support of the Brazilian Ministry of Tourism and the UNWTO Affiliate Member CNC-SESC-SENAC gathered 300 international tourism experts.

"The definition of competitiveness in tourism is closely linked with three objectives: development, inclusion and conservation," said the Minister of Tourism of Brazil, Gastão Dias Vieira, opening the 'Green Innovation in Tourism' event. "There can be no economic growth in tourism without sustainability, without conservation of natural resources and without incentives to citizenship".

The event highlighted that shifts in tourism practices can produce major benefits, stimulating change towards greater sustainability within the tourism supply chain and other sectors. Presentations demonstrated that an increased focus on sustainability - in particular, green innovation, can lead to more jobs and reduce environmental impacts, cutting costs and increasing competitive advantages for companies and destinations while enhancing the visitor experience.

Despite significant progress, obstacles to innovation remain, including lack of awareness among tourists - many unwilling to pay a premium price for a sustainable holiday experience; business information gaps on the perceived investment costs; limited access to finance by micro and medium sized enterprises or lack of policy integration across key sectors, such as tourism, transport, energy and environment.

Alain Dupeyras, Head of the Tourism Unit, OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs and Local Development, said "A more strategic approach to fostering green innovation in tourism will require greater horizontal and vertical policy co-ordination, for example, to improve access to finance that supports the green innovation efforts of small and medium enterprises".

"Being green is often associated with increased costs for businesses. However, the essence of innovation is to identify least cost opportunities and solutions, decoupling tourism growth from resource use and environmental impacts and using resources more efficiently. Green innovation in tourism can improve existing business models, leading to positive results to companies, customers, public authorities and local communities through job creation and better living conditions as well as the housing ecosystems" said Arab Hoballah, UNEP Chief of Sustainable Consumption and Production Branch.

"The innovations we have seen today are concrete examples of how, with the appropriate investment, tourism can become even more profitable, labor-intensive and environmentally-friendly," said Márcio Favilla, UNWTO Executive Director for Competitiveness, External Relations and Partnerships. "With one billion international tourists expected to travel in 2012, it is more important than ever that we support green innovation as a catalyst of tourism's sustainable growth."

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Date: 2012-06-20

Article link: <http://www.tourism-review.com/green-innovation-in-tourism-news3297>