

PAUSING TO APPRECIATE THE POWER  
OF TOURISM AS *WORLD TOURISM DAY*  
NEARS

DATE :                    SEPTEMBER 2011

### GETTING A GRIP, GLOBALLY

2011 thus far has been as expected – a year beyond expectation. As the winds of change started in the Arab Spring continue to travel across North Africa and the Middle East with differing strengths of storms, storms continue to brew across global financial markets, causing continued concern of recession and regression. At the same time, natural and man-made disasters continue to shift empathy and emotion from viewers on one side of the world, to victims on another. Politically, economically and emotionally, borders are being erased. Here, there and everywhere has an impact, to some degree, on each and every one of us.

Places across the globe have grown dramatically not just in interest, but also invitation. The world's fastest growing economic sector, Travel & Tourism, has played a dramatic role in bringing the world so much closer together, in a positive way. The ability of travel and tourism to create deeper, richer global understanding is now more important than ever before, as people across the world get a grip on how other nations, other cultures, other economies and other policies impact their lives.

For this reason, the occasion of UNWTO World Tourism Day (September 27<sup>th</sup>), a day of global focus on, and celebration of, the travel and tourism industry as a tool for economic growth and job creation, sustainability and poverty alleviation, will take place in 2011 under the theme: "*Tourism – Linking Cultures*". While a global theme, for the 940 million tourists traveling internationally in 2010, each and every individual would undoubtedly be able to attest to the truism of its spirit. Likewise, destinations across the globe that open their doors to travellers in hopes to make connections that will sustain their nation at all levels. Visitation is the start-point to the creation of understanding and appreciation, not to mention the industry's vital impact on employment, investment, identity, competitiveness and opportunity creation.

As stated by Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General, in a message supporting the importance of the sector, and the occasion of World Tourism Day:

*"There is no better way to learn about a new culture than to experience it first-hand. Tourism offers a wonderful connecting thread between visitor and host community. It promotes dialogue and interaction. Such contact between people of different backgrounds is the very foundation for tolerance. In a world struggling for peaceful coexistence, tourism can build bridges and contribute to peace. Tourism's contributions to development also advance the cause of global solidarity. At a time of profound global economic uncertainty, tourism's ability to generate socio-economic opportunities and help reduce the gap between rich and poor, is more important than ever."*

Sometimes, however, the globally-embracing impact of the sector can lose its feeling at an individual level. The numbers are massive: almost a billion global travellers per annum, almost a trillion in worldwide revenues, hundreds of thousands employed, x% of trade and investment earnings. Invaluable, but faceless. Until the lens shifts from wide angle to zoom, closing in on one part of the world, one story of the power of tourism.

### TOURISM – FEELING ITS HEARTBEAT AND HOPE

Magnifying the message of the importance of travel and tourism in global connection, cooperation and advancement, adding a heartbeat to the headline, the occasion of World Tourism Day in 2011 will, appropriately, be held in a part of the world acutely aware of the importance of the sector at social, economic and diplomatic levels: Egypt.

A nation still putting down and watering the fragile seeds of Arab Spring, the people of Egypt have a direct, deep appreciation for all that tourism brings their nation. Without tourism the nation loses its lifeblood: jobs and skills development to enable its people to build their lives; investment to enable their nation to develop with vision and certainty; cultural and historical appreciation that so greatly shapes the nation's pride and identity; and a connection to a world of travellers waiting and wanting to see for themselves this remarkable land that is making history each and every day.

Putting a face on a global theme, UNWTO Secretary-General, Taleb Rifai recently expressed:

*"It is most fitting that Egypt, home to some of the world's most celebrated cultural heritage and a leading tourism destination, be the host country for the official celebrations of World Tourism Day 2011. Egypt is world famous for its rich history and vibrant culture which draw millions of tourists to the country each year. It is precisely this interaction between the peoples and cultures of the world, driven by tourism, that is at the heart of the WTD 2011 theme: Tourism – Linking Cultures."*

Through hosting the event, through the world's tourism industry making an overt statement to travellers that Egypt is ready and excited to welcome back a world of travellers, the nation's efforts in post-revolution advancement can be accelerated, and the spirit of the nation strengthened from pride and productivity.

Tourism is the fuel.

### TRAVELLERS WITHOUT TRAVELLING A MILE

While the tourism sector most often measures impact by turning its calculators towards the millions of travellers crossing borders, there is one segment of the traveling world worth mentioning. This group of travel enthusiasts is often overlooked, yet that holds noteworthy value in the growth of awareness and appreciation of travel. They are often also indirect ambassadors for destinations: *armchair travellers*.

Whether regular viewers of television travel programmes, or loyal listeners to travel radio, armchair travellers are able to get closer to places far away, gaining global understanding and appreciation.

As explained by Sandy Dhuyvetter, Executive Producer and Host of US-based TravelTalkRADIO and BusinessTravelRADIO,; " *Today's technology has allowed us to produce an almost genuine travel experience for everyone.* "

Through her programmes, Sandy has been connecting her global audiences to the experts in travel, and travel locations of interest and intrigue, for over a decade. Distributed weekly via satellite to radio stations in the western hemisphere and Asia Pacific region, and also streamed online, her radio program reaches over a million listeners across over 130 countries each month.

As revealed by this growing segment of travel enthusiasts, *being there* no longer requires *getting up and going there*.

Having seen the value of talking travel each week with audiences across the world, Sandy is certain of the power of spreading the travel message to even non-travellers. " *Minus the senses of touch and smell, we can tell an amazingly authentic story with sight and sound. Armchair travellers gain understanding of how other cultures interact by simply watching and hearing about travel experiences. This makes our stay at home crowd very important ambassadors for the travel industry.* "

Whether for education, entertainment, business development, diplomatic relations, pilgrimage, personal growth, whatever the case may be, the global travel and tourism sector is reaching out in ways far beyond the flight itself. As implored by the Secretary General of the UN:

*" As we travel, let us engage with other cultures and celebrate human diversity. On this observance, let us recognize tourism as a force for a more tolerant, open and united world."*

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