



GROWING GLOBAL TOURISM:  
SETTING THE AGENDA

DATE :                      **SEPTEMBER 2013**

At so many levels, across so many parts of the world, the tourism industry is a very competitive space to operate in. Whether working with multi-million dollar or shoestring budgets, or in environments facing fierce political, economic, social, political and natural crisis, tourism leaders step up to demonstrate, repeatedly, why there is a place to visit. Utilising brands, events, festivals, new investments, new routes, new ideas and even new incentives, the invitation is sent out to the world. Come play, come do business, come experience, come invest, please come now.

Why? Because tourism has proven to make a world of difference to the people of the destination:

- accounting for 235 million jobs, equating to 1 in 11 jobs worldwide (Source: UNWTO/WTTC)
- providing US\$ 6.6 trillion in economic contribution, representing 5% of global GDP (Source: UNWTO/WTTC)
- injecting significant, essential investment into the national economy
- creating a strong, clear, competitive positioning for the nation in the global community
- bringing the people of the destination around a shared sense of identity, as well as spirit of pride, purpose and community

For this reason, each day of their fiscal year tourism leaders work hard, compete aggressively, budget carefully and face the critics, trying to secure a position ahead of the pack. With different strategies, different agencies, different media, different tools, and different tricks, the quest for results is intense: higher volumes of travellers, greater yield, less impact of seasonality, less budget wastage, more ROI.

Unique to tourism however, is that as competitive as the industry is, ultimately there is a deeply held truism shared by Honourable Ministers of Tourism around the world, their competition and success is strongest when they work together. Especially when it comes to central issues – barriers that need to be unlocked to allow all destinations to grow in a secure, sustainable, truly equitable way.

Because the reality is that there are some barriers that destinations simply cannot take on, and take down, solo. This is where the larger global forces step in – organisations that bring together destinations and other critical associations to be able to collectively address cross-cutting issues, especially those not in the direct power of the Ministries of Tourism, and therefore demanding close co-ordination to effectively, efficiently and equitably overcome.

### **TOGETHER FOR COLLECTIVE, AND INDIVIDUAL, TRIUMPH**

Such was the case, and so was the stage set, for the 20<sup>th</sup> UNWTO General Assembly (GA), held the last week of August 2013.

The place: Victoria Falls, Africa, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that magnificently wraps its river and falls arms around the borders of Zambia and Zimbabwe, the GA co-hosted by the Ministries of Tourism of the two neighbouring nations

The participants: over 120 delegations (600+ people) from across the tourism globe, along with partners in global tourism development including WTTC, ILO, World Bank, PATA, EC, IIPT, ICPT, CNN and others

The purpose: as expressed by the Secretary General of the UNWTO at the opening ceremony:

*“Every two years this is our opportunity to convene our Members, under one roof, to debate the state of the sector, devise ways to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of tourism and*

*ensure this sector is a force for good for both people and planet, while building a stronger UNWTO for the benefit of all.”*

The priorities for the 20<sup>th</sup> GA: coordination of policies around critical aviation-related barriers to travel & tourism growth, worldwide including:

- Visas,
- Connectivity,
- Infrastructure,
- Regulation and
- Taxation.

And, importantly, as stated in the UNWTO’s pre-GA briefing to Member States for the general debate: *“identifying the actions/priorities that the UNWTO can advocate for in terms of promoting closer links between air transport and tourism policies at the international and national levels.”*

By setting the GA agenda with such a progressive emphasis, all energies were focused on seeing results, for the industry and for individual member states championing the future development of their respective nations through stimulation of the tourism economy. Buy-in was never in doubt as each tourism leader present, from UNWTO executives and Hon. Ministers of Tourism to heads of Associations, was acutely aware that the deliberations at the GA had the potential to provide an invaluable shift to their efforts, thereby ultimately bringing their individual nations more jobs, more investment, more earnings, more competitiveness, more stability, more hope.

The end result? As expressed in the UNWTO’s capture of outcomes:

*“Delegations from the 120 UNWTO Members States intervening at the 20<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNWTO Assembly discussed air transport policies in their respective countries and called for measures and initiatives to increase connectivity. Countries further called for closer collaboration between tourism and air transport policies*

*Issues such as visa facilitation, the need to make airports more visitor friendly, taxation, open skies and the impact of low cost airlines were among the issues in debate.*

*UNWTO has defined connectivity as one of its policy priorities alongside visa facilitation and fair taxation and is working with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) on advancing these issues as well as those related to addressing climate change, the modernization of aviation regulations and the development of convergent rules for traveller and enterprise protection.”*

As delegations stood in applause at the closing of the GA, and the re-election of Dr. Rifai as the Secretary General of the UNWTO for a further four years, it was clear that having worked over the past days on a shared-value agenda, while each destination now left in their individual itinerary directions, they are not alone. The global tourism community is unmistakably working as one to ensure that the one billion plus travellers crossing international borders each year are making a positive impact for the 7 billion people across the globe.

### **SEEDING A SECONDARY AGENDA**

In addition to its clear delivery-focused agenda, and exceptional levels of participation, the 20<sup>th</sup> GA will go down in the history of global tourism for another very special reason. Not only did the GA successfully direct the focus of tourism leaders around the world on what is required to further unlock the world to greater tourism growth, the GA acted as a powerful reminder of why tourism leaders are so blessed to be a part of such an awe-inspiring sector.

One of the gifts all delegates received being at the GA in Zimbabwe and Zambia? The opportunity to talk tourism, grow tourism, and play tourist.

For the first time in almost a decade, the GA came to Africa (the last occasion being 2005 / Senegal). A continent that has grown from 15 million international arrivals in 1990 to 52 million in 2012, generating US\$34 billion in tourism receipts, and representing 57% of services exports.

History was made at the 20<sup>th</sup> UNWTO GA as the event was successfully co-hosted by two nations, each leading African tourism destinations in their own right. Collectively, Zimbabwe and Zambia account for 2.65m international arrivals, as far as 2012 performance is concerned.

As a result, the challenge for the GA? Keeping delegates in the assembly venue while the mighty Victoria Falls thundered in the background, with Africa's beautiful beasts of land, water and air playing in their natural habitat nearby official venues, much to the great appreciation of local tourism industry operators on both sides of the border.

As shared by Mzani of Zimbabwe's Wild Horizons based at 'The Lookout', and offering adventure activities such as the flying fox, zip line, canopy tour and other 130m+ descent trips into the gorge, *"the conference has brought many people to Vic Falls. It has been good for my business. And it has brought some infrastructure development. And it has brought much interest from people from different countries. This is all good for my business."*

Interest indeed.

The test of official focus on the GA agenda was best captured in one of the GA's most amusing moments – the closing remarks. Following final words of appreciation by the Hon. Minister of Tourism of Zimbabwe, Walter Mzembi, his co-hosting colleague, the Hon. Minister of Tourism of Zambia, Sylvia Masebo, expressed her nation's thanks to delegates and then went to hand over to the UNWTO Secretary General for official closing of the 20<sup>th</sup> GA.

Her hand over was paused briefly, however, so that she could inform the several hundred people in the assembly venue that those who had not yet seen an elephant could now do so as there was one just outside the assembly at the river. With characteristic honesty and class, the Secretary General of the UNWTO expressed desire not to compete with an elephant, and swiftly stated thanks to all present before officially closing the proceedings of the 20<sup>th</sup> UNWTO GA.

### **NEVER LOSING THE AWE**

As destinations set separate strategies, there are times, and reasons, where setting a shared agenda is the most effective approach one can take. While the nature of tourism is to stand tall representing one's country – its people, place and possibility - coming together as one global tourism community can, as recently demonstrated, enable each and every destination to achieve shifts in opportunity vital to growth.

And, importantly, act as a powerful reminder to one another to not just promote the effects as a tourism leader, but pause to see and feel the awe as a tourist.

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