

# CULTURE & COVID-19

## Impact & Response Tracker

### THIS REGULAR UPDATE

is produced by UNESCO as a snapshot on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the culture sector worldwide and on the responses initiated at the national, local and regional level. This tracker is not intended to be an exhaustive presentation of measures but instead draws on a variety of sources to provide a broad overview of the evolving situation worldwide.

### IMPACT

The tourism industry worldwide ground to a halt in March 2020 when all international borders were closed due to the pandemic. UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) project a 60-80% decline in international arrivals for 2020 (in comparison to a 4% decrease in international arrivals following the 2008 economic crisis). Given that tourism is a major source of growth, employment and income for many countries, especially in developing countries and Small Island Developing States, restarting this sector is a major concern for governments around the world. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), in 2019, 1.5 billion people crossed international borders with tourism accounted for 29% of the world's services exports. It is also estimated that 1 in 10 jobs, with migrant workers, young people and women making up a significant proportion of this workforce.

Cultural tourism makes up nearly 40% of world tourism revenues with World Heritage sites and museums often serving as the focus for visitors. At the height of the global lockdown, which is beginning to ease in some regions, 95% of museums had closed and 9 out of 10 countries had closed down their World Heritage properties. Many intangible cultural practices have been disrupted, which not only has an impact on the culture life of communities but also has consequences for those working in the performing arts and traditional crafts who operate largely in the informal sector. Furthermore, workers in the creative sector, such as theatres, commercial art galleries and gastronomic restaurants have also taken a hit. The impact on both the tourism and culture sectors is unprecedented.



**Cultural tourism  
makes up nearly 40%  
of world tourism revenues**  
- UNWTO



**67 million**  
**fewer travellers in the world**  
**80 bn usd**  
**less in tourism revenues**

- UNWTO

The crisis has shone a light not only on the challenges faced by the individuals working in the tourism-related cultural sector but also on how the entire cultural sector itself is weakened by this collapse. It has also highlighted how crucial culture is to tourism, both domestic and international. The crisis also puts in jeopardy fundamental parts of the cultural tourism sector and vice versa. The medium and long term implications are significant; many natural and cultural World Heritage sites rely on tourism revenue to carry out conservation or archaeological work. In addition, with countless workers currently on furlough, there has been an uptick in poaching and looting in certain places. This is not always by illegal trafficking rings but also local communities whose livelihoods have been undermined due to the crisis. Longer terms, if conservation work cannot resume, it could leave a lasting mark on humanity's treasures of outstanding universal value, reducing biodiversity and fuelling international crime, as well as impoverishing local communities and the global community alike. In a similar way, a recent ICOM study showed that nearly 13% of museums may never re-open, meaning that access to culture will be reduced.

Even before the onset of the current crisis, there were challenges facing sustainable tourism. The concentration of mass tourism at one destination often lead to conflicts between tourists and local communities. City level authorities are rethinking ways to regulate tourism at iconic cultural sites by diversifying the cultural offering, so as to invest in strategies fostering sustainable tourism without adversely affecting the local communities and local economy. Furthermore, climate change is likely to exacerbate existing stresses and bring direct impacts of its own. Sea-level rise, higher temperatures, habitat shifts and more frequent extreme weather events such as storms, floods and droughts, all have the potential to rapidly and permanently change or degrade the very attributes that make World Heritage sites such popular tourist destinations.

The current hiatus in international tourism flows offers a unique moment to re-evaluate approaches to tourism. In the immediate term, many governments around the world are prioritising domestic tourism throughout 2020, which could mean reconnecting communities and countries with their own culture. However, international travel and contact with other communities is an important way of discovering cultures and civilizations, promoting an appreciation of cultural diversity, building intercultural dialogue for a more peaceful world. Longer term, this crisis invites us to design models of tourism in which natural and cultural assets are valued and protected, local communities' way of life is not disrupted and their intangible cultural heritage is safeguarded, and that encourages the flourishing of creativity. It calls for more resilient models of tourism that is in harmony with the environment safeguards livelihoods and from which local communities benefit.

## ARAB STATES

The contribution of the tourism and travel sector to the total output of the Arab States is expected to decrease by about \$ 126 billion in 2020, putting about 4 million jobs at risk, according to a report by the Arab Air Carriers' Organization and the Arab Tourism Organization. It is expected that the revenues from international tourists coming to the Arab States region will drop by 50 to 60 billion dollars, according to the WTTC. Such decline in tourism activity is expected to have a significant impact in many countries in the region, especially those relying heavily on tourism as a source of income, notably Morocco, Tunisia and Palestine. In countries such as Jordan and Lebanon, tourism is worth 7% of the GDP, making it a leading source of income, whilst in Egypt, the tourism sector contributes close to 12% of GDP, according to WTTC.

The pandemic has had an impact on cultural events in the region through the cancellation or postponement of major events, including Dubai's EXPO 2020 and the annual hajj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia, which were expected to attract respectively 25 million visitors and 2 million religious tourists. Analysts estimate that the pilgrimages add \$12 billion – about 7 percent – to Saudi Arabia's GDP per year.

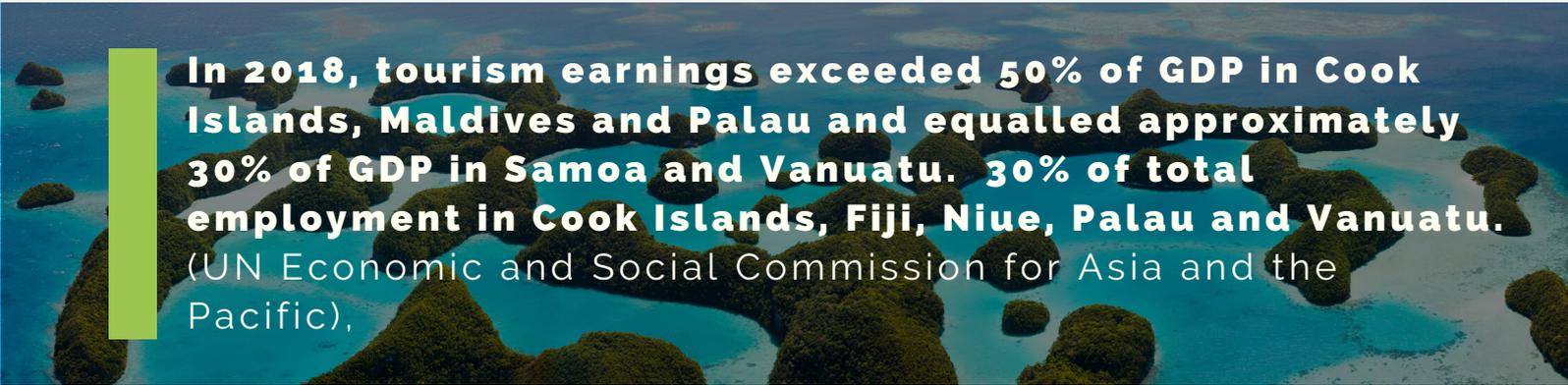
In a bid to encourage tourism, Morocco is emphasising domestic tourism in its response strategy and Tunisia declared itself "tourism safe", although domestic tourists currently account for only 20%. Oman, home to five World Heritage sites has decided to extend the validity of tourist visas until March 2021. The Al-Mubarakiya market in Kuwait, a popular tourist destination known for perfumes, spices and traditional regional products has launched an online platform to sell products. Saudi Arabia is looking to harness culture in its longer term tourism strategy, including the development of natural reserves and the protection of ancient monuments, as well as through the Qiddiya project, which is pitched to be the country's capital of entertainment, sports and the arts. At an extraordinary virtual meeting convened by the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) in June, Ministers of Culture discussed new directions for cultural tourism. Innovation in the cultural sector was also discussed by Ministers of Culture at the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization online meeting in mid-May.

Photo: Famous Craft Markets Around the World – Part 1 ([activearts.org.uk](http://activearts.org.uk))



## ASIA AND PACIFIC

In 2018, a record number of about 129 million international visitors travelled to Indonesia, the Philippines, Viet Nam, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, Cambodia, Singapore, Laos and Brunei. The sector contributed 12,6% to ASEAN's economies in 2018, according to WTTC research. The sector has been badly hit, especially in destinations such as Nepal where 1 million workers rely on tourism, in and around World Heritage sites Sagarmatha National Park (home of Mont Everest), and Kathmandu - the sector brings \$700 million to the economy each year. SIDS in the Pacific are highly dependent on tourism, both in terms of GDP and employment, much of which is in the informal sector. Conservation budgets at many World Heritage sites have been negatively impacted, including, for example, at the marine natural World Heritage site Puerto Princesa, in the Philippines, which relies exclusively on tourism.



**In 2018, tourism earnings exceeded 50% of GDP in Cook Islands, Maldives and Palau and equalled approximately 30% of GDP in Samoa and Vanuatu. 30% of total employment in Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Palau and Vanuatu.** (UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific),

Countries such as Viet Nam, Thailand and Malaysia have put in place measures to incentivise domestic tourism, such as offering ticket exemption or reduction at relic sites, museums and tourist areas or, in the case of Malaysia, offering personal income tax relief of RM1,000 for domestic tourism expenses until the end of next year. In Viet Nam's Kon Tum Province, officials have actively mobilised local travel agencies and businesses to participate in stimulating domestic tourism in 2020, through cultural tours focusing on local ethnic minority cultures, how to grow and harvest local produce, as well as music nights. Myanmar is expecting to restart domestic tourism in the third quarter of this year as a first phase for the country's tourism recovery under the COVID-19 Tourism Relief Plan, with a particular focus on reopening the pagodas and cultural sites. In addition, several ASEAN countries are contemplating creating a "travel bubble", most probably including Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia. Indonesia, China, South Korea, Japan and Australia are drawing up similar plans. Relatively early in the crisis, at the end of April, ASEAN Ministers of Tourism issued a joint statement aimed at strengthening cooperation.



## AFRICA

WTTC estimates that tourism and its associated activities generate about 9% of the continent's income. Under the average (realistic) scenario, the tourism and travel sectors in Africa could lose at least US\$50 billion and at least two million direct and indirect jobs. UNWTO estimates that tourism employs more than a million people in the following countries: Nigeria, Ethiopia, South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania. It estimates that tourism accounts for more than 20% of total employment in the Seychelles, Cabo Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe and Mauritius, and up to 30% of Rwanda's export earnings with gorilla viewing and trekking in the Virunga National Park. Conservation efforts across Africa are also suffering. For example, on the shores of Lake Victoria, the Uganda Wildlife Conservation Education Centre traditionally draws visitors eager to see its lions, giraffes, white rhinos and chimpanzees. Due to the closures, the centre's revenue from tourists has dwindled and there are fears that it could close for good if funding is not secured.

In response to the crisis, the Seychelles has announced it is banning all cruise ships for nearly two years, according to the Nation newspaper as a number of countries in Africa have loosened restrictions, including Tanzania and South Africa (which is also looking into creating a southern Africa regional travel bubble). Kenya and Zimbabwe, for example, have introduced stimulus packages for the tourism sector, whilst Namibia is in the process of developing a whole new tourism strategy. Some tourism operators in the country have begun a social media campaign encouraging domestic tourism, under the slogan "Local is Lekka" (local is good). Meanwhile, the Ghana Tourism Authority is collaborating with the University of Brighton (UK) to establish the Building Bridges of Tourism in African initiative in collaboration with 40 key stakeholders from Africa and elsewhere, partly with the aim of fostering greater regional cooperation in the sector. However, five international air transport and tourism bodies in May called for urgent relief funding amounting to US\$10bn to save Africa's ailing tourism sector from "imminent collapse".



**“ We are overly dependent on the West, and that in itself is a disaster, as COVID has actually shown. Now there is an increasing call for building tourism, not even just domestic tourism, but across African countries.**

Kobby Mensah at the University of Ghana Business School

## EUROPE

According to European Union statistics, some 13 million European jobs in the tourism sector are at risk, whilst UNWTO reports a 19% decrease in tourism in the first quarter of 2020. 62 % of Europeans make at least one leisure trip every year and most of them stay in Europe. 190 billion euro is spent on tourism during a normal summer season amounting to 10% of EU GDP. The forced closure of World Heritage sites and attractions has cost millions in revenue. Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, a World Heritage site in the United Kingdom is facing losses of £15m, potentially impacting the important research and conservation work it has carried out on plant diversity and economic botany since 1759. Similarly, the Vasa Museum in Stockholm, Sweden, which houses a 17th century wooden ship, is almost exclusively financed by admission fees. 85% of the museum's 1.5 million yearly visitors are foreign tourists and not only brings an estimated \$300m to the city every year but also raises awareness about underwater cultural heritage, including shipwrecks and submerged cities or landscapes.



# 40%

**of all EU tourists choose their travel destination based on its cultural offering**

Photo: The group of modern ballet dancers dancing on gray background (master1305)

Some countries have taken initiatives to include culture as part of recovery strategies. For example, filmmakers were among the first groups of people for whom travel restrictions to Iceland were relaxed in May, along with athletes and scientists. The Tourism Innovation Centre, Portugal launched the "Compra Aos Pequenos" (Buy from Small Businesses) platform where it is possible to consult hundreds of small businesses, including restaurants, handicrafts and guide-interpreters for an enhanced cultural experience. The Italian Cultural Tourism agency proposes new alternative itineraries to places far from areas of mass tourism, which will limit the spread of the infection.

In mid-June, the European Union launched the "Re-open EU" web platform to support a relaunch of safe travel across Europe by providing real-time information on borders and available means of transport. It has also launched "Europe's culture – close to you, a social media campaign focused on sustainable cultural tourism. Featuring cultural sites and initiatives around Europe, this campaign is intended to promote the re-discovery of Europe's manifold treasures, both natural and cultural.

## LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Many countries in Latin American and the Caribbean remain in lockdown. Beyond the health consequences of the pandemic, the loss of earnings in the tourism sector are significant, including in the informal economy. According to Latin American Strategic Centre of Geopolitics, more than 6 million jobs are threatened in the region in this sector, 4.5 million in Mexico, Brazil and Argentina alone. The economies of countries such as the Dominican Republic and Cuba rely heavily on tourism, attracting 6 and 4 tourists respectively for every 10 inhabitants per year.

Some countries have already made moves to reopen to tourists, particularly in the Caribbean islands. Saint Lucia, in its advertising campaign "She is Saint Lucia...Let Her Inspire You" designed to attract tourists back, features the Piton mountains area, a World Heritage site. Antigua and Barbuda, one of the most tourism dependent countries in the world, with over 70% of its GDP dependent on the industry is working to harness the power of culture, concentrating efforts on planning to host CARIFESTA 2021. The event is expected to attract over 3000 practitioners and enterprises from CARICOM, and non-CARICOM Caribbean countries, Latin America, and the diaspora, and will allow practitioners and enterprises to augment their earnings and exposure to local, regional, and international consumers of cultural and creative goods and services. Meanwhile, the Panama Tourism Authority (ATP) is launching promotional campaigns with the objective of raising awareness about their natural and cultural heritage and promoting domestic tourism to different destinations within the country, linked to its Panama Sustainable Tourism Master Plan 2020-2025.

The associated business chambers in the South American Tourism Federation (Fedesud) is negotiating the creation of safe corridors between countries with similar epidemiological situations and common safety and hygiene protocols, for a post-pandemic stage in Latin America where the majority of tourism comes from within the region itself. It is hoped this process will also reinforce cooperation between Uruguay, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Argentina, Bolivia, Venezuela, as well as Paraguay.



**“We want to be a sustainable world-class tourist destination, thanks to the extraordinary wealth and diversity of our natural and cultural heritage, as well as the quality of our services.**

Iván Eskildsen,

General Administrator of the Panama Tourism Authority



## EXAMPLES OF GLOBAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19

### CULTURE FOR SOLIDARITY

In **Latvia**, the Archives of Latvian Folklore is inviting contributions to the "Diaries in the Time of Pandemic 2020" project to create a sense of community and solidarity

### CULTURE FOR HOPE

The Damascus Opera in the **Syrian Arab Republic** held its first concert online to celebrate the end of lockdown

### SUPPORT FOR ARTISTS

In **Pakistan**, the Punjab regional authorities have announced a financial support (15-20,000 PKR per month) for artists.

### STIMULATING CREATIVITY

The Ministry of Culture of **Cabo Verde** has launched the "100 Artists on Stage" programme, with artists receiving payment for works disseminated on a free online platform

### CULTURE FOR UNITY

Musicians in **Barbados, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago**, and **Sint Maarten** have been contributing to the online platform "Quarantine Extempo Challenge" to share videos of calypso music for a sense of unity and messages for public health



## SPOTLIGHT ON... CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Often within the first days following national lockdowns cultural sector civil society groups began mobilising, at the local, national and international levels. Consisting of sector-specific associations, professional networks or community-based organizations, they were able to gather data, voice concerns to the authorities and reflect on new working models and practices. The cultural and creative sector is marked by a large degree of fragmentation, given that artists and creative professionals are often self-employed or employed in small- or medium-sized enterprises, so civil society groups are often more able to open up channels of communicate directly with professionals. Similarly, civil society actors and organizations are often closer to the practitioners and bearers of intangible cultural heritage and therefore able to get information on the impact. Civil society plays a vital role for UNESCO's work on culture, including World Heritage and museums, and especially its work on promoting a diversity of cultural expressions and safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. This crisis has accelerated pre-existing trends of the increasing role played by civil society in designing and implementing cultural policies



- Civil society organizations have contributed to **data collection** to inform public policy over the coming months, often adopting more participative approaches. For example, in Ethiopia where the national Musicians Association launched a survey among its membership. In some countries, such as Brazil civil society organizations will collaborate with researchers and partner institutions in assessing the impacts of COVID-19 on the production and distribution chains of the cultural and creative sectors.



- The crisis, in many instances, has reinforced the role of civil society for **advocacy and dialogue**. Through the online debates of the ResiliArt movement, launched by UNESCO, this dialogue in many cases has become more tangible, with Ministers participating with civil society actors. For example, in Honduras, more than a hundred non-governmental organizations participated in the ResiliArt debate, where they voiced their concerns about the protection of cultural workers' rights. A ResiliArt debate that took place in Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, in collaboration with the social enterprise, Banglakatak dot com, focused on the recognition of the income-generation aspects of crafts, as well as the inherent value of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage to guide and inform policy.



- Finally, civil society organizations are also key in **shaping new economic models and practices** in the cultural sector. For example, a project launched by five female artists from Austria and Slovenia called Žalike2030 has sought not only to maintain cultural life and social experiences across borders during the crisis but also prepare the ground for a cultural revival after the crisis, including through creating opportunities for financial progress of professionals in the sector. South African filmmakers, for example, negotiated preferential bank loans early in the crisis. new economic models, such as the Tunisian filmmakers who collaborated to develop an online platform to ensure fairer remuneration for their work, could emerge at an accelerated pace as a result of this crisis.

UNESCO works on a regular basis, with dozens of civil society partner organisations in the cultural sector. Below are some examples of work done by international civil society partners in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

1

International Council of Organizations of Folklore Festivals and Folk Arts (CIOFF) has been compiling a list of folklore festivals from around the world as a way of demonstrating the impact of the pandemic on the cultural traditions of communities. It has also launched a call for videos presenting intangible cultural heritage that has been recognized by UNESCO, in order to form a platform for sharing and solidarity

“ Even though we can't present our culture and heritage live during these difficult times, we should still share the beauty and diversity of our cultures.

CIOFF call for contributions to share videos of cultural events and festivals (12 April)



Photo: Valletta, Malta Traditional night festival. (Konstantin Aksenov)

## PERFORMING ARTS

2

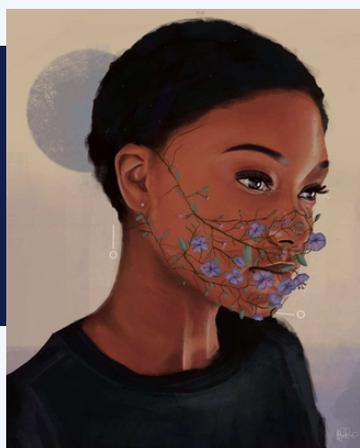
Drawing on contributions from around 80 members from some 23 countries, International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts (IETM) released a report at the end of March on the "immediate and catastrophic impact" of the crisis on the performing arts sector. It presents five main conclusions: 1.) supporting artists means rescuing the entire performing arts ecosystem 2.) Performing arts are hit hard, their international aspect is under particular pressure 3.) The frozen link with audiences is as detrimental as economic losses 4.) Bottom-up solidarity is enormous and tangible. 5.) Live component of the performing arts must remain alive, even and especially today. In addition, it compiled a list of short-term, medium-term and long-term recommendations for policy makers, including "Integrat(ing) culture and the arts in economic and social regeneration strategies recognising their tremendous value for the well-being of citizens, as well as their power to unite people."

The **UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage** requires States Parties ensure the participation of communities who are the bearers of intangible cultural heritage and should involve civil society in the implementation of the Convention at the national and international levels.

## MUSEUMS

3

In late May, International Council Of Museums (ICOM), alongside UNESCO, launched the results of surveys carried out on museums around the world. On the basis of some 1,600 responses from museums and museum professionals in 107 countries, it reported that in April, the employment situation for museum employees seems comparatively stable, the report states that "the situation for freelance museum professionals is alarming". Furthermore, nearly one third of museums will reduce staff, and more than one tenth may be forced to close permanently. The closures will particularly affect the regions where museums are recent and few, and where structures are still fragile: in African, Asian and the Arab countries 24%, 27% and 39% respectively, fear that museums may close, compared to only 12%, in Latin America and the Caribbean, 10% in North America and 8% in Europe.



"Mask" by Lethabo Huma. An entry in the ResiliArt competition launched in southern African countries through UNESCO and BLAZER, a digital hub for Young People, with the support of Sweden.

## ARTS EDUCATION

4

International Arts Educational Week 2020 took place amidst the global pandemic. World Alliance for Arts Education (WAAE) and UNESCO collaborated to promote the importance of arts education through a series of webinars, often focused on arts education as a source of resilience and well-being during the pandemic. In addition, a series of "good practices" featuring promising arts education projects and programmes responding to the COVID-19 pandemic were published on UNESCO's web page. Through the collaboration, a total of 1,382 individuals and organizations from 74 nations registered to participate in the activities of the celebration, awakening interest in the power of arts education for creative thinking, intercultural dialogue and building more peaceful societies.

The **UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and the Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions** 'acknowledge the fundamental role of civil society in achieving the diversity of cultural expressions' and grants civil society a central role in policy design and implementation processes, both nationally and internationally.



## EVENTS



### Urban Solutions: Learning from Cities' Responses to COVID-19

**UNESCO Cities Platform Online Meeting**  
**25 June, 2020**  
**1:30 - 5:00 PM CET**

The meeting will be held in English and French with simultaneous interpretation in the two languages.

[Learn more](#) and don't hesitate to join the meeting on YouTube !



### UNESCO expert meeting on illegal excavations and online trade during COVID-19

**On 26 June 2020**, in the framework of the 50th anniversary of the 1970 Convention, UNESCO will gather together on-line experts to discuss illicit trafficking of cultural property during COVID-19, particularly illegal excavations and online trade. The debate takes place online from 2:30pm to 5:00pm (Paris time) (ZOOM) and will be transmitted live on YouTube.

[Learn more](#) and don't hesitate to join the meeting on YouTube !



### Upcoming ResiliArt editions

**Senegal** (9, 27 July, 13, 31 August) | **Guinea** (29 June) | **Iberoamerica:** UNESCO (16 July) | **Union internationale de la marionette** (29 June, 6, 13, 20, 27 July) | **Canada** (23 June, July 7) | **Kenya** (25 June) | **Mexico** (25 June) | **UNESCO/UN75** (26 June) | **China** (7 July) | **Pakistan** (8 July) | **Russia** (13 July) |

For more information click [here](#)



**FIND OUT MORE...**

## ADVOCACY MATERIAL



“

**TOURISM CAN BE A PLATFORM FOR OVERCOMING THE PANDEMIC. BY BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER, TOURISM CAN PROMOTE SOLIDARITY AND TRUST”**

UN Secretary-General António Guterres

Click [here](#) to watch the full video

## USEFUL LINKS

### [UNESCO Sustainable Tourism programme](#)

#### Sources for Africa

- [Statistics on tourism in Africa \(African Union\)](#)
- [Statistics on tourism in Africa \(International Air Travel Association\)](#)
- [Building Bridges of Tourism in African initiative](#)
- [Call for aid to Africa's tourism sector](#)
- [Art competition entries](#)

#### Sources for Europe

- [European Heritage Alliance](#)
- [Europeana platform: Europe's digital cultural collection for responsible, accessible, sustainable and innovative tourism](#)

#### Sources for Latin America and the Caribbean

- [Tourism-related figures in Latin America and the Caribbean](#)

#### Sources for Asia and Pacific

- [Pacific SIDS figures](#)

This update is published by UNESCO

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