

# SUSTAINABLE & RESILIENT TOURISM

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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### WHY SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT TOURISM?

Tourism has been particularly hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. The UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) project a 60-80% decline in international arrivals for 2020 and the loss of millions of livelihoods in the tourism sector. With cultural tourism making up nearly 40% of world tourism revenues, and with World Heritage sites and museums often serving as magnets for visitors, culture is particularly impacted by this crisis. The closure of many World Heritage sites, museums and cultural institutions, and the disruption of living heritage practices has put the livelihoods of cultural professionals and communities in jeopardy. Many natural and cultural World Heritage sites rely on tourism revenue to carry out conservation and archaeological work, and the absence of visitors means these sites are more vulnerable to poaching and looting. Yet even before this crisis, there were challenges to the achievement of sustainable tourism. Mass tourism has led to conflicts between tourists and local communities, and has put cultural heritage sites and living heritage practices at risk from over tourism and pollution. Climate change also has the potential to destroy the very attributes that make World Heritage sites such popular tourist destinations. UNESCO believes that the current freeze on international tourism flows offers a unique moment to rethink tourism – to promote a tourism model that is both sustainable and resilient. Tourism will be essential to the post-COVID-19 recovery. Tourism promotes sustainable development, as well as an appreciation of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. This crisis invites us to design models of tourism in which cultural and natural heritage is safeguarded, livelihoods are protected and local communities are the first to benefit.

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### HOW DOES UNESCO WORK TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM?

- i. **Addressing the impact of COVID-19 on cultural tourism.** UNESCO, together with the Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Committee (IUCN, ICOMOS and ICCROM), has created a new Task Force on COVID-19 and tourism. The Task Force works to ensure that the recovery of tourism is sustainable, aligns with UNESCO's values and strengthens the resiliency of communities and World Heritage properties. In September 2020, UNESCO held a debate entitled "[Culture, Tourism and COVID-19: Recovery, Resiliency and Rejuvenation](#)". The impact of COVID-19 on cultural tourism was a key point of discussion during the [Online Meeting of Ministers of Culture](#) organized by UNESCO in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. An analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on tourism can be found in the resulting [publication](#), as well as a special issue of the UNESCO "[Culture and COVID-19: Impact and Response Tracker](#)".
- ii. **Promoting sustainable tourism at World Heritage sites.** Launched in 2011, the [UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme](#) works to facilitate the management and development of sustainable tourism at World Heritage properties, particularly by fostering the awareness, capacity and equal participation of local stakeholders. UNESCO, with the support of National Geographic and the European Union, has launched the first-ever web platform dedicated to World Heritage and sustainable travel. "[World Heritage Journeys Europe](#)" features 34 World Heritage sites and four curated itineraries for travellers. UNESCO is currently implementing a project to develop a unique [Buddhist Heritage Route](#) in South Asia with the support from the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA).
- iii. **Building local capacity.** In 2018, UNESCO and Fondation CHANEL announced a new programme focused on [training women for careers in sustainable tourism](#) in the communities surrounding the Tsingy de Bemaraha Strict Nature Reserve in Madagascar. UNESCO has created a series of tools and how-to guides for sustainable tourism management, including the [UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Toolkit](#).

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## KEY MESSAGES



COVID-19 has hit the tourism sector particularly hard, with important consequences for culture. The freeze on international travel, coupled with the closure of many World Heritage properties and cultural institutions, and the disruption of living heritage practices, means that millions of livelihoods in the cultural tourism sector are in peril. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, cultural tourism accounted for nearly 40% of world tourism revenues.



Lost tourism revenues means fewer resources for the conservation of heritage sites, and a lack of visitors increases the risk of poaching and looting within these sites.



Before this crisis, mass tourism was creating conflict between tourists and local communities, and putting heritage sites and living heritage practices at risk. Climate change remains an alarming threat to cultural and natural heritage sites, which often serve as the focal points of tourism.



The current halt in international travel provides a unique moment to rethink tourism and propose alternative models that are sustainable and resilient.



Sustainable and resilient tourism will be key to post-COVID-19 recovery, as tourism is a powerful driver of sustainable development, intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding. Sustainable and resilient tourism should be in harmony with the environment, promote the safeguarding of cultural and natural heritage, protect livelihoods and benefit local communities.