

**U.N. INTERNATIONAL YEAR 2017: SUSTAINABLY
STRETCHING THE DEFINITION OF ‘SUSTAINABLE
TOURISM’**

DATE : JANUARY 2017

For global Travel & Tourism (T&T), the time is now! For 365 days, the world will be looking to global T&T to see, learn, and support the unique, vital role that T&T plays in advancing the global development agenda. Now is the time for T&T to raise its voice.

Why now?

Because 2017 marks the United Nations' *International Year of Sustainable Tourism For Development*. Across the global UN system, from FAO to WTO and every acronym in between. UN agencies will be spreading the word about the value that T&T brings to people and places worldwide, bringing to life and lives the ability of T&T to impact Sustainable Development Goals to raise the bar on the greater wellbeing of the global community.

THE POWER OF 1, TIMES 1 BILLION

As expressed by António Guterres, the newly elected Secretary General of the United Nations, at the official launch of the UN's *International Year of Sustainable Tourism For Development* in Madrid, Spain this month,:

"2017 is a critical moment to make this important sector a force for good."

Technically speaking, as outlined by the UNWTO, the United Nations Specialized Agency for Tourism tasked with leading implementation of the International Year for the global UN system across global governments, organisations, businesses and the general public, 2017,"

"is a unique opportunity to raise awareness on the contribution of sustainable tourism to development among public and private sector decision-makers and the public, while mobilizing all stakeholders to work together in making tourism a catalyst for positive change. The #IY2017 will promote tourism's role in the following five key areas:

- (1) Inclusive and sustainable economic growth*
- (2) Social inclusiveness, employment and poverty reduction*
- (3) Resource efficiency, environmental protection and climate change*
- (4) Cultural values, diversity and heritage*
- (5) Mutual understanding, peace and security.*

The task is clear, the leadership is committed, the year is now upon us.

But what does this really mean? Why does it matter? And how can the power of one be unlocked for the power of many?

It's all about the power of one, times 1 billion.

As expressed by former Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, in 2015 when the year 2017 was designated T&T's time to shine,:

"With more than one billion international tourists now traveling the world each year, tourism has become a powerful and transformative force that is making a genuine difference in the lives of millions of people. The potential of tourism for sustainable development is considerable. As one of the world's leading employment sectors, tourism provides important livelihood opportunities, helping to alleviate poverty and drive inclusive development."

AT THE HEART OF THE 2017 CHALLENGE, AND OPPORTUNITY

For leaders of the global T&T community, the year 2017 is one of not only great honour. It is also one of great responsibility.

Reason being, rarely do such opportunities for global profile, promotion and priority emerge. And rarely are non-tourism entities, leaders, influencers, speaking clearly, loudly and in unity around T&T.

For this reason, working swiftly and smartly to get the greater tourism message out is critical. Especially with regards to the word 'Sustainable' in the context of Tourism.

As expressed by HRH Princess Dana Firas, President of Petra National Trust (PNT) (<http://petranationaltrust.org/> - an NGO proudly and tirelessly dedicated to the preservation, protection and promotion of Petra, one of the world's New 7 Wonders), and a passionate advocate for culture as the basis of identity and social unity:

"The word tourism is very narrowly defined in people's minds. When I heard of 2017 being designated as 'UN International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development'(IYSTFD) I was very excited. This is what we have been doing at PNT for years. The fear I had, however, was for the narrower definition of the word 'Tourism' overwhelming the real reason for IYSTFD. Sustainability in tourism is too often thought to be only about the environment. We see it all the time at PNT. But it is also about sustaining cultures, societies, economies, through tourism."

Shifting default definitions into richer, wider understanding, is a well known challenge for HRH Princess Dana. It forms the essence of the work of PNT.

"People think culture and heritage are rocks, monuments. Of course they are, but what they represent is so much more. They represent values, stories of people, traditions - they

are tributes to the efforts that people have made in creating something that is so magnificent. Petra's beauty is beyond its physical presence. These monuments that we look at, and we work to protect, represent people's value, their worth, their ethic, their traditions."

The heart of the challenge for 2017 for global leaders in Tourism? HRH Princess Dana is clearly taking it personally.

"To redefine 'sustainable tourism for development' on this much wider scale, including culture & heritage, is my personal focus for 2017. I think that if people do not ultimately understand this, then we have failed this year, this great opportunity."

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