

The Power of Technology: Shaping Tomorrow's Tourism Amidst a Rapidly Changing Environment

In an Era Defined by Rapid Technological Advancements and an Increasingly Interconnected World, IZATION (UN Tourism) Emphasizes the Transformative Power of Innovation in Shaping the Future of Global Tourism.

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During the past months UN Tourism has delivered an investments framework for the tourism sector, focus on investing in People, Planet and Prosperity. In people through education; in planet based on developing sustainable practices, and in Prosperity, fostering it through innovation. Technological advances, especially data, have proven to be a powerful mechanism in developing the sector and finding new approaches. Moreover, leveraging data has become crucial in addressing economic uncertainties, geopolitical dynamics, security concerns, and to foster resilient, sustainable, and inclusive tourism sector.

The Role of Technology in Data-Driven Tourism

New technologies are rapidly emerging and changing our lives, reshaping societies in unexpected ways. Tourism was an early adopter of digitalization on a global scale, pioneering online flight and hotel booking. As information and communication technology (ICT) spread worldwide, tourism consistently embraced new technologies and platforms.

Technology has made tourism more efficient, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable. To remain competitive and contribute to sustainable development goals, the tourism sector must innovate and create new business opportunities.

In fact, during the past six years, UN Tourism has been identifying the trends on the sector through the Innovation in UN Tourism startup competitions. That has allowed the organization to identify those who are transforming the sector and those who are already working with those data and stay in touch with entrepreneurs and innovators that have highlighted in that competitions and now are part of the UN Tourism innovation ecosystem. Such as Geosure, that analyze and normalize security risk signals and safety data on a hyper-local, block-by-block basis, or Mize, that managed to utilize data-driven technology in the hotels market.

Digital transformation will impact tourism jobs by requiring technical and soft skills to implement and manage



smart initiatives. The tourism sector should support startups and small businesses driving innovation and entrepreneurship, prioritizing skills development for future job roles.

But this digital path should be also followed in the education. That is what UN Tourism is boosting with the Tourism Online Academy, a platform where innovation is prominent, not only because it is a digital initiative with the capacity to offer quality education accessible from anywhere in the world, but also because of the content of the courses themselves, which have a holistic approach, in which new ways of understanding the sector are included.

Economic Uncertainties and Tourism

The tourism industry is highly sensitive to economic fluctuations. Persisting inflation, high interest rates, volatile oil prices and disruptions to trade continue to translate into high transport and accommodations costs, influencing travel behaviour and prompting tourists to seek value for money and travel closer to home. By analysing economic data, tourism stakeholders can identify emerging trends and adapt their offerings to meet changing consumer demands.

On the other hand, economic impact studies can serve as an important tool in advocating for policies that support the sector's growth by demonstrating the contribution of tourism to local and national economies.

Data as the New Currency in Tourism

We refer to data as the new currency in tourism for its untapped potential to drive advancements in the sector. Data analytics provides exceptional insights into traveller trends, preferences and behaviours and can drive informed decisions. Through optimized marketing strategies, destinations can enhance visitor experiences and improve operations.

UN Tourism advocates for data-driven approaches in tourism by promoting the collection, analysis, and dissemination of tourism statistics, to support evidence-based policymaking and strategic planning. This has been particularly crucial amidst the health emergencies, geopolitical tensions, and economic volatility that have significantly impacted travel patterns and tourism flows over the recent years.

Sustainability and Inclusive Growth

Sustainable tourism development is a key priority for UN Tourism, aiming to balance the needs of tourists, host communities, and the environment. Data plays a crucial role in promoting sustainability and inclusive growth in tourism.

Environmental data, such as carbon emissions, water usage, and waste generation, can help destinations measure their environmental footprint and implement sustainable practices. Social data, including employment rates, income levels, and community satisfaction, can assess the social impact of

tourism and ensure that the benefits are equitably distributed.

Furthermore, data can support the development of niche tourism products, such as eco-tourism or cultural tourism. By understanding the preferences and behaviours of niche market segments, destinations can tailor their offerings to attract responsible travellers and enhance the positive impact of tourism on local communities.

Challenges and Opportunities

While the power of data presents immense opportunities for the tourism industry, it brings about challenges, like data privacy and security, that require joint global efforts to ensure quality, compliance, and accuracy.

At the same time, technological advance enhances customer experiences, and drives innovation. That generate opportunities as the personalization and targeting. By analysing preferences, users can get personalized itineraries and activities. But data also provides predictions. With historical data, we can predict demand patterns, optimize pricing, and allocate resources efficiently.

UN Tourism is committed to bridging the digital divide and ensure equal access to advanced technologies and data analytics for destinations worldwide. To bridge this gap, we advocate for capacity-building initiatives, knowledge sharing, and technical assistance to support destinations in developing their data infrastructure and capabilities. ■