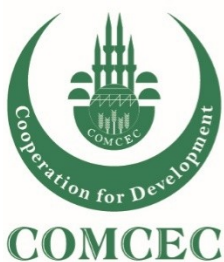


COMCEC TOURISM OUTLOOK 2025





**Standing Committee
for Economic and Commercial Cooperation
of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (COMCEC)**

COMCEC TOURISM OUTLOOK 2025

**COMCEC COORDINATION OFFICE
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Preface

The COMCEC Strategy, adopted during the 4th Extraordinary Islamic Summit held in Makkah Al-Mukarramah on 14-15 August 2012, envisages Working Group Meetings as one of the main instruments for its implementation. Through the Working Groups, country experts get the chance of elaborating the issues thoroughly in the respective cooperation areas and sharing their good practices and experience. Six Working Groups are established for each cooperation area defined by the Strategy, namely Trade, Transport and Communication, Tourism, Agriculture, Poverty Alleviation, and Finance.

The COMCEC Outlooks are prepared in each of the six cooperation areas of the Strategy with a view to exploring the global trends and current situation in the OIC Member Countries in the respective area and enriching the discussions during the Working Groups Meetings by providing up-to-date data.

The COMCEC Tourism Outlook 2025 is prepared by Dr. Gürel ÇETİN, consultant at the COMCEC Coordination Office, with the objective of providing general information on the status of tourism in the Member States. It dwells on the major issues about tourism sector development in the light of international tourism trends, provides insights on the current status of the OIC Member States and makes comparative analyses with the different country groupings to demonstrate the situation in the Member States and thus the cooperation potential.

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1. Introduction

Tourism industry has experienced continued expansion and diversification, becoming one of the most rapidly developing industries in the world. Transformed from an activity of privileged travelers only some decades ago, tourism today even after the global pandemic enables more almost one and a half billion people to move across international borders each year. Globalization of goods and services, increased leisure time, the technological developments and developments in transportation, relaxation in visa procedures, and rising middle class have positioned tourism as a major growth sector. Because of the geographical expansion, competition between the tourist-receiving countries has been intensifying to obtain the highest share from the expanding international tourism market thanks to enhanced transportation facilities and additional income allocated to travel expenses, in line with the improving welfare.

Tourism has continued to be a critical sector in both advanced and developing economies for economic development, poverty alleviation, infra-structure development and sustaining employment. Growth of the tourism industry also contributes to employment, raises national income, and support balance of payments. In this regard, tourism sector is an important driver of growth and prosperity and can play a leading role in reducing poverty particularly in developing countries and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

As a trade in services category, tourism ranks fourth after fuels, chemicals and food products. As a major source of foreign exchange and investment, tourism also creates much needed employment and investment opportunities. Tourism's unparalleled cross-cutting nature and multiple links to the other economic sectors, further positions it as an efficient multiplier in global development strategies. Hence, there is a substantial emphasis on developing and facilitating the tourism industry within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). COMCEC Economic Summit held in 2009 has defined the tourism as one of the three priority sectors together with agriculture and transportation. In addition to this, tourism sector is identified by the COMCEC Strategy as one of the six cooperation areas (among trade, transportation, agriculture, poverty alleviation, and finance).

Since 2020, the global tourism industry has undergone a period of historic disruption and recovery. Following a 72% drop in international arrivals during the pandemic, the sector rebounded strongly between 2021 and 2024, supported by widespread vaccination, the easing of travel restrictions, and growing demand for sustainable and experience-based travel. By 2024, international arrivals reached 1.465 billion, surpassing pre-pandemic levels and generating USD 1.73 trillion in receipts. The recovery was particularly strong in the Middle East and Africa, while Asia-Pacific and the Americas continued to close the gap. The resilience and transformation observed in this period have positioned tourism as a cornerstone of green, digital, and inclusive recovery worldwide.

This 2025 Outlook aims to provide a brief account of the situation in the OIC Member Countries comparing OIC performance with global tourism developments and trends. In this respect, the major issues with regards to development of tourism industry in the light of international tourism trends, the current situation in the member countries and some comparisons regarding competitiveness of the OIC Member States were examined and discussed.

2. The Importance of Tourism for Development

A strong tourism sector contributes in many ways to development and the economy. It makes both direct contributions, by raising the national income and improving the balance of payments, and indirect contributions, via its multiplier effect on other industries and by providing the means for connecting countries, through hard and soft infrastructure attributes that are also critical for a country's general economic competitiveness, international trade and foreign direct investment.

Over the past decades, many new destinations have emerged, challenging the traditional established tourism destinations in Europe and North America. For many developing countries, tourism is one of the main sources of foreign exchange income and the number one export category, creating much needed employment and opportunities for development. The main positive economic impacts of tourism relate to foreign exchange earnings, contributions to government revenues, generation of employment and investment opportunities. Local recruitment and business opportunities in tourism help reduce rural-urban migration which also facilitates reducing income disparities among regions. While fostering gender equality, entry-level jobs in tourism require less skilled workforce and this also enhances recruitment opportunities among younger generations and disadvantaged groups.

Based on the information from countries with data available, the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) estimated that travel & tourism's contribution directly to worldwide gross domestic product (GDP) was 10.3% in 2019 creating 9.6 billion USD with direct, indirect and induced effects. However, because of the pandemic the total contribution to GDP decreased by 4.3 billion USD, creating only 5.3% of global GDP in 2020. With the recovery in 2023, tourism represented 10.9 trillion USD of World GDP (WTTC, 2024), accounting for 10% of global GDP.

From 2023 onward, global tourism has shown strong recovery momentum, with international tourist arrivals reaching 1.3 billion by the end of 2023—88% of pre-pandemic levels. Full recovery to 2019 levels was actualized in 2024 with almost 1.5 billion arrivals, driven by pent-up demand, improved air connectivity, and easing travel restrictions in key markets such as Asia and the Pacific. The forecasted growth of tourism's contribution to GDP is around 5.1% on the average for the next ten years to 12% of GDP in 2033. This is much faster than the growth in global economy which is expected to be around 3.1% in 2024. With direct and indirect effects of more than 185 supply-side economic activities that have significant connections to tourism are also positively affected.

Yet, there is a wide consensus that the tourism and travel industry is also largely vulnerable to crises regardless of their types. Tourist flows and inherently tourism receipts can be largely affected by a wide range of crises including political tensions, disasters (both man-made and natural), epidemics, and terror attacks. Previous crises in tourism had regional short-term impacts and their global effect on tourism was relatively limited. However, with the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic tourism industry experienced significant declines in 2020 and yet started to recover in 2021. The worldwide tourist arrivals declined by 72.7% from 1,464 million in 2019 to 400 million in 2020, while the tourism receipts declined from USD 1,466 billion in 2019 to USD 533 billion in 2020, corresponding to a decline of 63.8% in constant prices. The recovery began in

2021 with gradual easing of restrictions and was further fueled in 2022 and 2023 by rising demand and improved air travel connectivity. By the end of 2023, tourist arrivals had reached 1.3 billion—88% of pre-pandemic levels—and receipts recovered to USD 1.5 trillion, exceeding 2019 figures. By 2024, the sector not only recovered to pre-pandemic levels but also demonstrated resilience amid new challenges such as rising energy prices, global inflation, and geopolitical instability. The sector's ability to adapt — through digitalization, sustainable tourism strategies, and diversified markets — highlights its importance as a shock-resistant growth driver.

Parallel to global decline in tourism volume, OIC countries also witnessed a significant decline in tourist arrivals and hosted only 70.4 million international tourists in 2020 compared to 258 million in 2019, corresponding to a decline of 78.7%. Tourism receipts in OIC also declined by 62.9% from 216 billion in 2019 to 77.8 billion in 2020. Overall, the disruption caused by the pandemic in the OIC countries resulted in estimated losses of USD 293 billion in GDP and 8.6 million in employment (SESRIC, 2022).

In response to the crisis and to help the tourism industry survive Covid-19, besides various legislative and operational measures such as safe tourism certifications governments have adopted various interventions ranging from tax holidays, financial incentives, fiscal measures, credit facilities to employment support and demand stimulation. Government responses to the crisis with relevance to the tourism industry might also be classified under direct and indirect interventions. Some of the indirect interventions (e.g., restrictions on mobility, social distancing, capacity reductions) also created major setbacks for the tourism industry. The direct interventions (e.g. credit facilities) on the other hand targeted to relieve some of the specific stress on the industry (e.g., short-time work compensations, deferrals of payments) and stimulate tourism demand (e.g., holiday subventions to the domestic market, travel bubbles). It should be noted, however, that generic governmental support may be less effective when countries have significant informal economies which is the case for most OIC member countries. Government response strategies might also be viewed as short-term tactical responses (e.g., tax holidays) and long-term strategic responses (e.g., market diversification).

With regard to mitigation strategies by the private sector, businesses within the tourism and hospitality industry seem to adopt different strategies including targeting less risk-averse market segments, enforcing social distancing and capacity restrictions, implementing additional hygiene measures, offering unpaid leave for employees, improving service quality, integrating ICT, reducing prices, limiting services, revisiting cancellation policies, focusing on local markets, creating safety image, extending credits, applying for government support and postponing maintenance and investments.

It also has become apparent that crises may often give birth to opportunities. In this vein, crises affecting tourism may result in transformations and positive outcomes through the generation of new knowledge, relationships, and policy. Some destinations, for example, have reduced their reliance on key markets, understood their vulnerability, recognized the importance of domestic tourism, increased government support and funding for tourism, invested in destination infrastructure, and developed new products, and tourism-related policies. In the post-Covid-19 era, the tourism industry is likely to experience various transformations such as increased cost per tourist because of social distancing, hygiene measures and other operational costs; reduced

capacity, increased competition, utilization of ICT and AI technologies, and image building on safe destination branding. These will be advantages for destinations and tourism business that proactively respond to aforementioned opportunities.

Yet most tourism organizations had to lay off majority of their employees particularly during the peak of the Pandemic in which quarantine measures prevented any travel related activity. Because skilled HR in tourism moved to other jobs (e.g. logistics, retails, marketing), tourism industry is struggling to hire their skilled HR back or even finding new potential employees because of the vulnerable and seasonal nature of the industry. Realizing this gap COMCEC targeted the human resources during 2022 and entrepreneurship in 2023 right after the pandemic.

Another previous COMCEC report in 2019 addressed crises mitigation strategies of tourism industry based on empirical data collected from 246 tourism industry representatives. These strategies, in order of importance, were related to enhancing cleanliness and hygiene standards, market diversification, creating safety image, enhancing service quality, restructuring debts, and applying for financial support, offering new services, enhancing loyalty programs, enhancing travel insurance policies, increasing marketing efforts, relaxing cancellation policies, focusing on ICT and automation, decreasing costs, postponing investments, investing in employee training, decreasing number of employees, merging with other organizations, investing on corporate social responsibility, decreasing prices, decreasing capacity, and liquidation (COMCEC, 2019).

Besides the industry mitigation strategies, government support and their effectiveness were also explored in the study. Overall, strategies developed by governments to reduce the negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic are generally limited to a set of short-term reactions oriented towards helping businesses offset their revenue loss and, in some cases, keeping a foot in the market despite damage. Based on the qualitative content analysis of interviews, government strategies were grouped under five different themes as; Subventions for enhancing demand(i), Financial Support(ii), Support for maintaining and developing workforce(iii), Legislative actions (iv), and Operational support (v). In the order of their importance; Operational support alternatives included vaccination priority of tourism staff, creating safe travel bubbles and tourism corridors, offering medical support services such as PCR tests, organizing the safe travel certificates, controlling for hygiene and capacity restrictions, advisory and information provision services for both tourists and organizations. Legislative Actions included introduction of vaccine passports, government guarantees on loans, delaying refunds to force major cancellations, and introducing holidays insurances.

Tax holidays and discounts for the tourism industry, rent support for buildings and land, deferrals of utility charges such as energy and water, subsidized credits, contributions for digitalization and automation costs, Seat support for flights, Advance public purchase of tourism services such as flights and lodging services, application of a favorable exchange rate policy, contributing to renovation expenses, and accelerated depreciation opportunities were listed as the most important financial support items. Subsidies targeting human resources included salary contributions, wage subsidies, training support for workforce, suspension of layoffs, and reduced social security contributions that aim to protect and develop workforce during the pandemic. Finally, government efforts on destination promotion, international lobbying activities and diplomacy, providing holiday credits and vouchers, and extending bank holidays particularly in

order to stimulate domestic tourism were listed among government mitigation measures facilitating demand.

The findings of the report allude to a transformative power of the current crisis. This is reflected in two dimensions, namely; alterations in generating markets and changing market structure and tourist motivations. Domestic tourism, Middle East & Gulf and CIS countries were identified as more crises resilient markets while health tourism and nature-based tourism were listed as tourist products with higher immunity to the pandemic. Increased importance of customized services, pandemic hygiene standards becoming permanent, increased popularity of travel insurance systems, increases in per person costs, and increased importance of brand image were rated as the prevalent transformations in tourism operations.

The study also identifies the key characteristics of tourism and hospitality businesses that are likely to survive crises. These organizations are likely to offer quality service, utilize information and communication technology, differentiate based on quality rather than price, operate under a strong brand, offer diverse products and services, cater domestic tourists, and with higher share of paid in capital (COMCEC, 2019).

Table 1. Government Interventions to Mitigate Covid-19

Type of Response	Indirect	Direct
Short-term	<p>Tax, rental and fee reductions, holidays and deferrals.</p> <p>Grants, credits, cash-flow support.</p> <p>Reduced interest rates.</p> <p>Government guarantees on loans.</p> <p>Liquidity supports.</p> <p>Wage subsidies, salary contributions, compensations.</p> <p>Travel bans, social distance measures and quarantines.</p> <p>Enhanced centralized medical services, contact tracing.</p> <p>Provision of protective supplies (sanitizers, gloves, masks etc.)</p>	<p>Holiday vouchers and favorable interest holiday loans.</p> <p>Extended bank holidays for citizens.</p> <p>Certifications.</p> <p>Holiday insurances.</p> <p>Providing emergency medical support.</p> <p>Border scans and capacity audits.</p> <p>Health protocols for safe travel.</p> <p>Safe labels for the sector.</p> <p>Cancellation refund delays.</p> <p>Disinfection and sanitation of facilities.</p> <p>Information provision.</p> <p>Organizing FAM trips.</p> <p>Reducing tax rates on tourism services.</p> <p>Travel bubbles with similar risk countries.</p> <p>Establishing recovery committees.</p>
Long-term	<p>Hygiene standards.</p> <p>Enhanced SME support.</p> <p>Lifting travel restrictions.</p>	<p>Market diversification.</p> <p>Marketing communications and image creation on safe destination.</p> <p>Restoring traveler confidence.</p> <p>Strengthening domestic tourism and family tourism demand.</p> <p>Sustainable tourism measures.</p>

Source: COMCEC (2019)

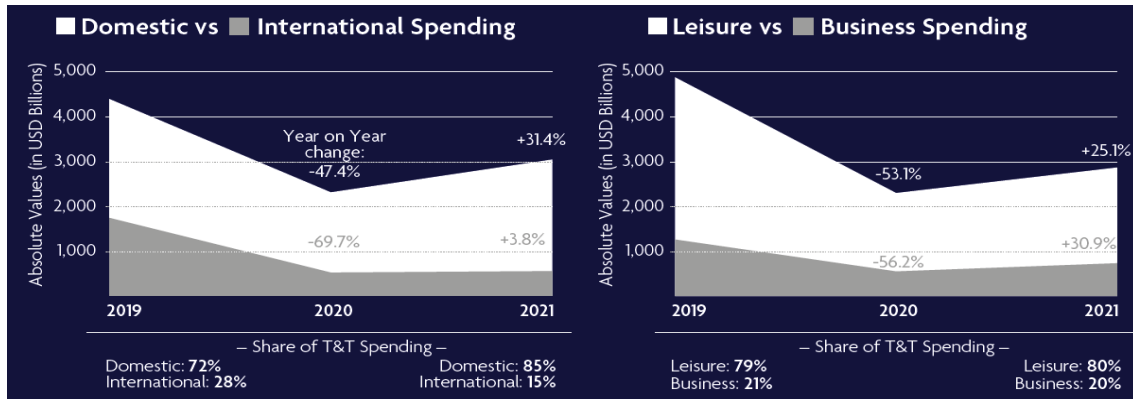
Tourism provided 123 million direct (3.8% of total employment) and 196 million indirect and induced jobs with a total of 319 million (10% of total employment) jobs in 2018 and 333 million

jobs in 2019 making on in every 10 jobs globally. In 2019 each of the five new jobs were provided by tourism. Since tourism affects transportation, hotels and lodging, food & beverage, cultural and entertainment industries, banking & finance, promotion and publicity services; tourism's contribution to employment tends to be much higher. Tourism accounted for more than 10% of global GDP before the pandemic. During the pandemic however, 62 million jobs were lost in tourism representing 19% of tourism employees during 2020. With the recovery in 2021 tourism industry created 18.2 million new jobs, accounting for one in every eleven jobs (WTTC, 2022). By 2023, the sector was responsible for one in every eleven jobs globally. In 2024, the sector supported 348 million jobs worldwide, representing almost one in every ten jobs globally, approaching pre-pandemic highs.

During the pandemic, most human resources left tourism for other industries particularly for logistics and retail. This created major staff shortages in tourism when the recovery started in 2022 as recruitment new staff takes more time than laying off existing personnel. For example, tourism industry is unable to fill 412.000 positions in USA and EU is experiencing 1.2 million shortages in human resources in tourism. Particularly aviation industry in tourism had to decrease their capacities because of staff shortages. Foreseeing this challenge in advance, COMCEC has addressed "Sustainable Human Resource Management in Tourism" during its 19th Meeting of Tourism working group in 2022. Before the five years before the pandemic, tourism created one in every four jobs between 2014-2019, making 1/10 of global employment, 62 million jobs were lost during 2020, despite the recovery in 2021 tourism industry employed only 18 million new staff representing an increase of almost 7% on previous year. The new jobs created by the industry reached 22 million in 2022 an 8% increase based on 2021 and 11% lower than 2019 pre-pandemic period. For the next ten years between 2022 to 2032, however tourism is expected to grow on the average of 5.8% much larger than the global average GDP growth estimated at 2.7%, creating 126 million new jobs (WTTC, 2022).

Before COVID-19, the growth rate of the global Travel & Tourism sector outpaced the growth of the global economy for nine consecutive years. After a 50.4% decrease in the contribution of tourism to the global economy in 2020, Travel & Tourism recovered by 21.7% in 2021 – shown in figure 1. The global economy on the other hand bounced back by only 7%. Despite domestic spending in tourism recovered strongly – by 31.4% globally –international visitor spending recovered by only 4% as travel restrictions for foreign visitors remained in place across many countries particularly in Asia. As a result, domestic spending's share of total Travel & Tourism spending increased from 72% in 2019 to 85% in 2021. Business travel spending and leisure travel spending grew at 30.9% and 25.1% respectively (WTTC, 2022).

Figure 1. Domestic vs International and Leisure vs Business Tourism amid Covid-19



Source: WTTC, 2022

According to the UNWTO, total exports earnings (including passenger transport) generated by international tourism reached US\$ 1.7 trillion or US\$ 5 billion a day on average before the pandemic. International tourism represents 7% of the world's exports in goods and services, up from 6% in 2015, as tourism has grown faster than world trade over the past four years before the pandemic. Tourism exports account for as much as 30% of the world's exports of commercial services. Globally, tourism ranks third after fuels and chemicals and ahead of food and automotive products as an export category. However, in many emerging economies, tourism is the largest export category. While tourism represents 30% of services exports globally, the industry has 40% share in emerging economies' services exports (UNWTO, 2017a). Tourism is also important for export diversification; particularly for commodity and oil exporting countries tourism has the potential to offset weaker export revenues. In 2024, travel and tourism contributed 9.7% to global GDP (USD 9.9 trillion) and supported 348 million jobs worldwide—equivalent to one in every ten jobs globally—reflecting a near-complete recovery from pandemic lows. The WTTC Global Summit in Rome revealed, with America's and Europe's growth, and Asia's rapid recovery, with Travel & Tourism forecast to contribute \$2.1 trillion in 2025 (WTTC, 2025).

Figure 2. Why Tourism Matters?



Source: UNWTO, Tourism Highlights 2024 Edition.

In over 150 countries, tourism is one of the top five foreign exchange earners and in 60 countries it is the number one source of foreign currency income. In 23 of the 49 Least Developed Countries, international tourism is among the top three foreign exchange earners, and for 7 LDCs, it is their single largest revenue earner (UNWTO, 2012b).

It is acknowledged that tourism contributes in alleviating poverty and empowering women, youth and migrant workers and provides new employment opportunities. There are three main

pathways through which tourism affects poverty reduction. Firstly, the wages and earnings of workers or entrepreneurs who operate in the industry can be regarded as direct effects of tourism. Tourism is more labor intensive than other sectors, and uses a relatively high proportion of unskilled or semi-skilled labor. For advanced, diversified economies, the contribution of tourism to GDP ranges from approximately 2% for countries where tourism is a comparatively small sector, to over 10% for countries where tourism is an important sector of the economy. For small islands and developing countries, the impact of tourism can be even larger, accounting for up to 25% in some destinations like in some Member Countries as Maldives. Secondly, indirect effects occur through the tourism value chain, which includes inputs like food and beverage, construction, transportation, furniture, finance and various other sectors. Evidence suggests that in developing countries, the inter-sectoral impact adds an extra 60-70 % on top of the direct effects of tourism. Finally, dynamic effects of tourism occur on the livelihood strategies of local households, the business climate for small enterprise growth or infrastructure development in countries. Moreover, tourism tends to employ more women and young people than other industries and enhance their economic welfare (Ashley, et al., 2007).

A cross country study by the IMF showed that an increase of one standard deviation in tourism activity would lead to an additional annual growth of about 0.5 percentage per year, *ceteris paribus* (everything else being constant) (IMF, 2009). Thus, particularly low-income economies should view investing in its tourism industry as a means to stimulate growth over the long term and facilitate a fairer wealth distribution.

Considering the scale, rate of growth and the multiplier effect it creates, local economies are increasingly becoming more dependent on tourism receipts. Yet, tourism is also among the most vulnerable industries affected by various factors other than the state of the local economy. Numerous external issues; political events, state of the economy, natural disasters, epidemics, accidents, terror and so on also affect tourist flows to a great extent. Because of its international nature, the situation in tourist generating countries also affects a destination's tourist volume that further complicates managing and forecasting demand.

During recent years, the tourism sector has been facing significant crisis-driven challenges putting risk and crisis management at the forefront of the industry's agenda. It can be noted that an increasing number of disasters and crises affect the tourism industry, ranging from natural to human-driven incidents. With the globalization of the world's economy, almost every country is being affected by these crises or disasters. Few would disagree that crises occurring in one single place of the world can potentially affect tourism activities in broader areas or even worldwide.

Considering its enormous speed and global impact, Covid-19 is perhaps the most serious crisis the tourism industry has ever faced. The immediate response to the pandemic by several countries has been through lockdown orders and limiting human mobility. This has resulted in large-scale economic downturns that affected tourism in both developed and developing countries. To illustrate its volume, Covid-19 is estimated to have a seven-time larger impact on tourism than the 2008 Financial Crisis. This effect resulted in a decrease of up to 72% in global tourism volume. It took 5 years to fully recover from the pandemic.

Tourism remains one of the most dynamic engines of socio-economic development worldwide, and its strategic importance is even greater for the OIC Member Countries. The sector not only

generates foreign exchange and employment but also stimulates innovation, entrepreneurship, and cultural exchange. Recent COMCEC studies highlight that strengthening tourism entrepreneurship, leveraging gastronomy and heritage tourism are particularly promising pathways for OIC countries to enhance competitiveness and foster inclusive and sustainable growth.

Looking forward, the post-pandemic recovery offers OIC Member Countries a unique window to consolidate gains and build a more resilient, innovative, and inclusive tourism sector. With supportive policies, investment in human capital, and the strategic integration, the tourism industry has the potential not only to return to pre-pandemic levels but to surpass them — positioning OIC destinations as global leaders in sustainable and culturally distinctive tourism development.

3. Overview of International Tourism in the World

3.1. Key Tourism Trends in the World

The last six decades have witnessed extraordinary growth in international tourism volume. In spite of the multiple challenges and shocks such as epidemics, wars, economic crises and natural disasters; tourism has always bounced back, proving its resilience and capacity to recover. During 2020 and 2021 tourism industry experienced an unprecedented decline because of the pandemic. Yet from 2022 onwards the industry displayed a promising recovery and already exceeded pre-pandemic levels in terms of receipts (WTTC, 2025). During the next two decades, tourism is expected to sustain its growth. International tourist arrivals are estimated to increase on average by 43 million annually.

Future arrivals will be spread more widely across the globe, with interregional travel continuing to grow slightly faster than intraregional flows. The share of emerging economy destinations in international tourism is projected to surpass that of advanced economies toward 2030, with much of the new growth absorbed by Asia and the Pacific, Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Middle East (UNWTO, 2012). The future brings enormous opportunities for tourism to take a central role in the political and economic agenda, seeking recognition for its contribution to peace, intercultural communication, economic growth and development. It also brings added challenges and responsibilities for tourism sector to take the lead in mitigating its potential negative impacts on host communities and the environment (Tourism Towards 2030, 2012).

Over the past six decades, tourism has experienced a continued growth not only in traditional destinations in Europe and North America but also in other parts of the world. According to Tourism Towards 2030; By 2030, nearly 58% of international arrivals are projected to be in emerging economy destinations, with Asia and the Pacific gaining most of the new arrivals and South Asia the fastest growth, while North-East Asia is expected to be the most visited subregion (UNWTO, 2012). With advancements in aviation technology, digitalization, and open skies agreements, the air transport industry has substantially reduced travel time and costs for long-haul travel (Çetin et al., 2016). However, energy price volatility and decarbonization policies are reshaping cost dynamics; air transport is expected to continue expanding, though at a slower pace, with costs no longer declining as in previous decades (UNWTO, 2012). The cost of air transport is expected to grow at an average annual rate of 1.1% per year from until 2030 (Tourism Towards 2030, 2012). Particularly the energy crises and the Ukrainian war in 2022 after the pandemic had negative impacts on tourism. With increasing airfares and pandemic restrictions tourists also started to seek close to home destinations. Recent developments and investments in alternative energy systems might however reverse this trend. There are also other challenges affecting the global tourism such as climate change, digitalization, and other geopolitical conflicts.

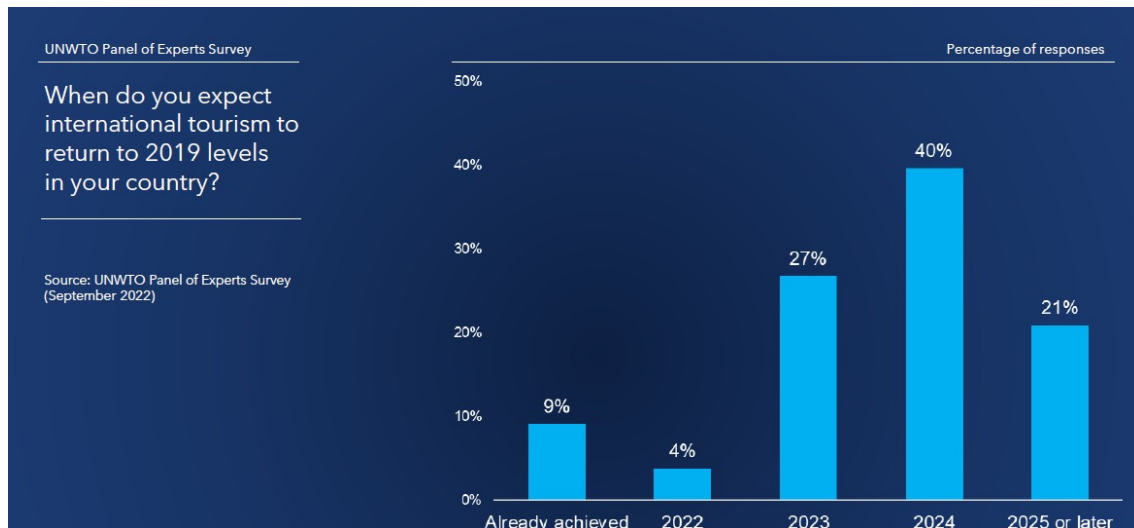
Figure 3. Factors Effecting Recovery of International Tourism



Source: UNWTO, 2022c

In terms of the economic environment, macroeconomic challenges, caused by the surge in energy prices, increase in inflation and interest rates, high debt volumes, and the continued disruption in supply chains and trade wars brought additional pressure on the effective recovery of international tourism after the pandemic in 2023. In particular, the increasing tension in Middle East between Israel and neighbouring countries, and continued armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine have created a new challenge in the tourism market that could have significant impacts not only in Middle East and Europe but also in other regions of the world due to the increased energy prices, as well as various travel restrictions and economic sanctions imposed by a set of countries (SESRIC, 2021). UNWTO (2024a) identified additional ongoing challenges such as inflationary pressures, high energy costs, flight delays, and staff shortages, all of which continued to weigh on recovery in 2024. Further development will depend on managing persistent headwinds such as high energy and transport costs, financial tightening, and geopolitical instability, including the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza as well as tensions in East Asia (UNWTO, 2025). Global inflation and energy prices also remain high, resulting in higher transport and accommodation costs the Gaza conflict, Ukrainian war and geopolitical conflicts in far East Asia might also disturb the recovery (UNWTO, 2023a).

Figure 4. Recovery Expectations of Tourism Professionals



Source: UNWTO, 2022c

Conclusions with respect to the consumer profile and the trends of the next 20 years reached by assessing results of various studies conducted by the World Tourism Organization can be summed up as follows:

- Long-haul and overseas travel will continue to expand, with interregional trips projected to grow slightly faster than intraregional flows. New destinations, especially in emerging economies in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, are expected to capture much of this growth.
- Digital platforms and mobile applications will remain central to destination choice and booking. Artificial intelligence is expected to enhance this process through personalized recommendations, automated customer support, and predictive travel planning.
- In line with the increasing education and welfare level of individuals, the number of experienced traveler groups will increase. This means higher expectations for service standards.
- Concerns about health, safety and security will remain an important issue driving demand.
- While traditional 3S (sun-sand-sea) products remain popular, growing demand is for "3E" (excitement-education-entertainment) as well as "3S 2.0," emphasizing sustainability, smart experiences, and slow tourism.
- In parallel with an increase in average human life expectancy, retirement period will be longer and people will have more time for vacation.
- Singles, and couples without children, and 65+ ("the third age") groups are anticipated to constitute the larger percentage of the world population with more resource allocated to travel and entertainment. By the year 2030, the fastest increases are in those 65 and older group, which will see a jump in developing countries by 140 percent. By 2040, the global population is projected to reach 1.3 billion and older people accounting for 14 percent of the total (Hammond, 2011).

- *Average weekly working hours will decrease and people will have more time for vacation.*
- *Consumers will be informed and protected within the framework of universal systems, and the influence of promotions addressed to consumers for a sustainable and balanced development of tourism will be stronger.*
- *Maintaining the destinations tourism development and preventing overtourism will be a priority.*
- *Destination management will be decentralized and will be based on travel motivations rather than geographical regions.*
- *Concerns about environmental protection and climate change will have stronger impacts on tourist decision making process. More tourists will sacrifice their convenience to environmental issues.*
- *With Pandemic a new working class also emerged referred to as remote workers. Some of these particularly from the global north started travelling to other locations offering a better quality of life at a cheaper cost. These digital nomads spending a few months in a destination will increase in numbers.*
- *Social distancing measures introduced during the pandemic increased the popularity of sharing economy, more tourists are now seeking private or shared houses during their travels.*
- *Tourists are increasingly opting for private or shared accommodations through platforms like Airbnb, preferring these options for perceived safety, comfort, and flexibility. The shift towards more personalized and private travel experiences is reshaping traditional hospitality and encouraging further growth in peer-to-peer services within the tourism sector.*
- *AI is playing an increasingly critical role in transforming the tourism industry. From personalized recommendations in travel planning to enhanced customer service through chatbots, AI-driven systems are revolutionizing how travelers interact with services. Additionally, AI is improving operational efficiencies in areas like booking systems, marketing strategies, and even crisis management, making tourism businesses more adaptive to changing trends.*
- *Sustainability has become a non-negotiable factor in travel decisions. Tourists, particularly younger generations, increasingly demand climate-conscious options, from low-emission transport to eco-certified accommodations. Sustainable aviation fuel, carbon offset schemes, and regenerative tourism practices are expected to scale rapidly by 2030.*

Horwath HTL (2015) identified 10 global trends expected to shape mid- and long-term tourism development. Recent assessments by UN Tourism (2024) and WTTC (2025) confirm that these trends remain highly relevant, though digitalization, sustainability, and geopolitical shocks have gained additional importance. The first five trends primarily influence demand, while the remaining five affect supply; together, they represent the key forces shaping the future of global tourism.

According to this report, global population is aging and as a result silver hair tourists' segment is emerging with specific desires and needs in terms of customization, service consumption, security and desired products. The share of the world's population over the age of 60 increased from 8% in 1950 to 17% in 2017. According to UN (2022), the share of the global population aged 60+ will rise to 22% by 2050, equivalent to 2.1 billion people. Silver hair tourists are already one of the most important market segments, expected to spend more per trip than younger cohorts due to

higher disposable income, fewer family responsibilities, and relatively good health. This demographic will increasingly drive demand for wellness, medical, cultural, and slow tourism products, and will favor destinations that can deliver safety, accessibility, and personalized services (Horwart HTL, 2015; UNWTO, 2025).

Figure 5. Tourism Megatrends



Source: Horwath HTL, 2015

In addition to aging population, generation Y (also known as Millennials) and generation Z, (known as iGen) are also an important market for tourism sector. These generations are technology driven age groups. Among these, millennials are expected to represent 50% of all travelers by 2025 and before that the entire tourism value chain is being adjusted to meet their lifestyle requirements. To meet their needs, tourism services will be more transparent and tech savvy, with a strong focus on empathy and customer connection. On the other hand, generation Z is believed to be totally different from generation Y in so much as they already have higher access to information, a more dynamic lifestyle, and a higher level of education, an accelerated adoption of change and faster spending (Horwart HTL, 2015).

The increase in average income and the fall in levels of absolute poverty are resulting in a growing middle class. It is expected that the middle class will increase from 1.8 billion in 2009 to 4.9 billion by 2030. Most of this growth is expected from Asia-Pacific and this segment's characteristics and needs will have a growing importance and impact on the tourism products and services (Horwart HTL, 2015).

The weight of emerging destinations in the international tourism market is increasing. According to UNWTO; by 2030, 58% of international arrivals will be to the emerging destinations. With the impacts of pandemic following a period of lockdowns and isolation, travellers tend to travel to less crowded and even unfamiliar destinations. Indeed, there has been increased interest in exploring secondary destinations and nature. During this period, travellers have become more committed to sustainability, which in turn is affecting their travel choices. The lockdowns have

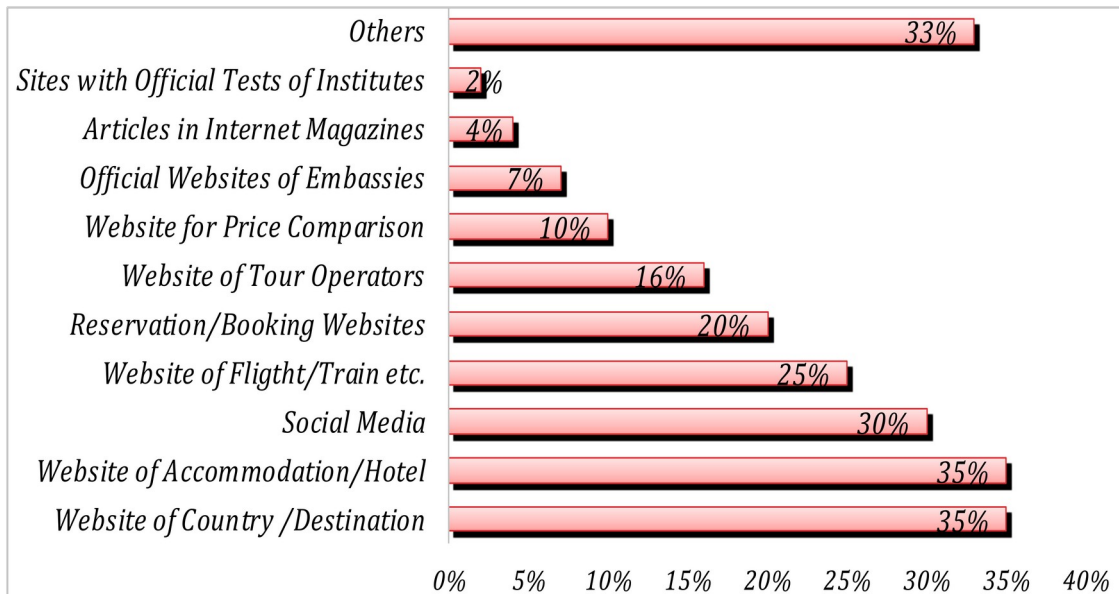
also shone a brighter light on wellness and overall health, driving more consumers to seek out further wellness experiences (WTTC, 2022).

Influenced by international travel restrictions, domestic rediscovery and national tourism has also become a trend. With remote working possibilities introduced during the pandemic, a large and lucrative market of digital nomads emerge, and concept of a staycation led to creation of workcations and increased stay in destinations. Although domestic travel has been a key market during the recovery, the full recovery of the global tourism will require the full return of international travel. Starting with domestic travel leading the recovery and younger generations being the first to travel again, workcations and longer average stays, relaxed cancellation procedures, and enhanced health & hygiene measures will continue to transform tourism in the post-Covid era (WTTC, 2022)

Governments around the world are facing numerous political, social, economic and environmental issues that might influence tourism destinations. Political tensions, terrorism and civil riots impose various threats to the future of tourism in any destination as well as potential epidemics. According to a research by WTTC, the impact of these crises on tourism and the length of time needed to return to previous levels differ widely depending on the type of crisis and other diverse factors. Whether tourists are directly targeted or affected, which locations are involved, the extent of infrastructural damage, the time of the year, as well as the scale and tone of media coverage are the factors that affect the scale of their impact of such crises on tourism. In contrast to popular opinion, terrorism does not have the most enduring impact, however political turmoil has a much more gradual impact, often lasts for a long time and is difficult to judge when it is over. To be successful, it is clear that crisis management strategies and tools are becoming a necessity for all tourism stakeholders. Five-point crisis communications plan should cover clear information, consistency, openness and accessibility and sympathy for victims. Governments and authorities should also ensure clear and effective communications (ITB, 2015).

The second set of trends relates to transformations in supply, including globalization, ICT, sustainability, innovation, and resilience. Since 2020, the supply-side has also been reshaped by pandemic-driven health protocols, geopolitical shocks, and accelerated adoption of artificial intelligence in tourism operations. Among supply side trends, tourism is strongly influenced by the progress of the technological revolution. The Internet has already changed the way tourists search, book and experience their travel. The whole industry has to adopt new technology trends and reshape the way they provide services. 75% of international travelers use online information sources to plan their trip. As displayed on figure 6 around 30% of these 'online' international travelers actively use social media when researching about their trip (ITB, 2015) besides the official web sites of destinations and service providers.

Figure 6. Internet Information Sources



Source: ITB World Travel Trends Report 2015-2016

International travellers focus on the most relevant social media for travel information rather than the biggest social media platforms. Review sites, travel blogs and travel forums are used much more intensively than generic social networks. OTAs and sharing economy platforms are also getting stronger positions in the market than traditional brick and mortar communication tools. ICT continues to transform tourism, now reinforced by artificial intelligence, big data, blockchain, and the Internet of Things, which are redefining marketing, booking, crisis management, and service delivery. AI-powered personalization and automation are expected to be the dominant supply-side drivers of competitiveness in the 2020s.

Loyalty within tourism sector is expected to decline in future. There will be less complicated sign-up forms. Physical loyalty cards and loyalty programs now have to be integrated into the digitalization of tourist experience. These programs are expected to customize tourist services rather than offering only discounts and upgrades. Health and healthy lifestyle will become increasingly important in tourists' decision-making amid Covid-19 and tourism sector will offer products and services accordingly. The sharing economy has shown incremental growth in recent years and is forecast to reach USD 335 billion by 2025, according to projections. Tourism is one of the sectors that much of this growth occurred, as the fast paced growth of peer-to-peer and shared usage platforms is changing the tourism marketplace and giving people new options for where to stay, what to do and how to get around. Sharing economy platforms have adopted different business models, some of which closely resemble traditional tourism activities, while others appeal to users' sense of community (OECD, 2016).

This rapid growth of the sharing economy is placing pressure on existing tourism policy frameworks. This requires a balanced, informed approach, which considers all interests. Tourist protection, safety and quality assurance frameworks are important factors to translate to the

sharing economy model. Taxing and regulation of sharing economy and impact on residents are other challenges to be dealt by legislative bodies. Governments should make sure that they capture the opportunity to stimulate innovation and support the development of tourism, while addressing the challenges it poses for the traditional tourism sector and the impacts on society (OECD, 2016).

Governments are recommended to modernize policy and regulatory approaches, re-think policy incentives, better understand the policy environment and test new approaches, utilize the data, strengthen data collection and research on the impacts of the sharing economy on tourism and local communities (OECD, 2016). Ensuring fair competition among traditional suppliers and sharing economy models is also challenging task that awaits attention in most destinations.

Increased local planning, management and marketing of destination and regional leadership and institutionalization in tourism through DMOs at destination level also emerge as a necessity (Edgell, 2015). Economic, social and environmental costs and benefits have to be balanced in order to ensure the long-term sustainable development of tourism. Environmental sustainability has become a central supply-side determinant. Investment in low-emission transport, sustainable aviation fuel, eco-certification of accommodations, and circular economy practices is expanding rapidly. By 2030, the majority of global travelers are expected to choose destinations and providers with demonstrable climate action strategies. Sustainable tourism development requires the participation of all relevant stakeholders at the destination level including and engaging particularly the locals.

3.2. International Tourist Arrivals

According to the UNWTO (2019a), international tourist arrivals grew by 5% in 2018, and reached 1.4 billion tourists. 1.4 billion was the 2020 target and thus realized two years in advance. Despite occasional shocks, international tourist arrivals have shown virtually uninterrupted growth – from 277 million in 1980 to 529 million in 1995 and 1.4 billion in 2018 (UNWTO, 2019a). 2019 was the eighth consecutive year of above-average growth (more than 4%) in international tourism following the 2009 global economic crisis. Despite ongoing geopolitical, economic and environmental challenges in various regions of the world, demand continued to be strong in most of the destinations until 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic spread globally. The pent-up demand began to emerge in the second half of 2021 and accelerated through 2022–2024. International tourist arrivals reached 1.465 billion in 2024, almost matching 2019 levels (UN Tourism, 2025a; Table 3.3). Increase in energy prices, inflation, and geopolitical crises such as Ukraine, Gaza, and East Asia tensions remain external factors affecting demand.

After a sharp decline in 2020 by 72% in arrivals and 63% in receipts both of these indicators started to recover in 2021. Both arrivals and receipts grew by 111% and 61% in 2022 respectively, reaching 963 million arrivals and more than one billion USD. In 2023 arrivals reached around 1,3 billion still around 11% below pre-pandemic levels. In 2024, arrivals climbed further to 1.465 billion, reaching pre-pandemic levels, while receipts exceeded USD 1.73 trillion, a record in nominal terms.

Table 2. International Tourism Arrivals and Tourism Receipts

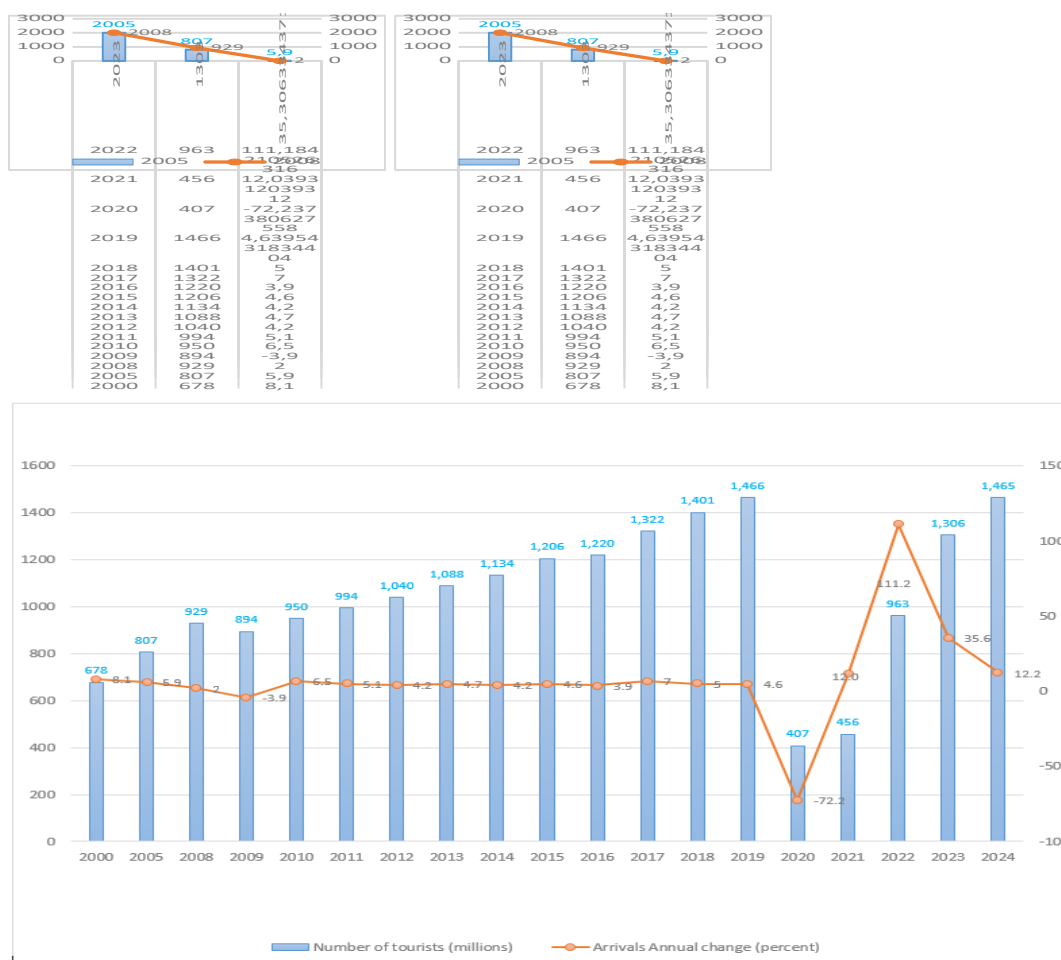
	2000	2005	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Number of tourists (millions)	678	807	950	1,206	1,220	1,322	1,401	1,466	407	456	963	1,306	1,465
Arrivals Annual change (percent)	8.1	5.9	6.5	4.6	3.9	7	5	4.6	-72.2	12.0	111.2	35.6	12.2
Tourism receipts (billion dollars)	495	706	986	1,219	1,238	1,332	1,451	1,483	549	627	1,011	1,536	1,731
Receipts' Annual change (percent)	4.5	7.3	8.2	-3.8	-2.7	5	5	2.2	-63.0	14.2	61.2	51.9	12.7

Source: UNWTO, 2025

International tourism market has become characterized by wide geographical distribution and continuous diversification of destinations. New destinations have been emerging in the developing regions of Asia-Pacific, the Middle East and Africa and this rapid expansion of new markets has increased the competition in the tourism sector. However, this trend was also effected by Covid-19 and most emerging destinations were negatively affected and lost their share to established destinations particularly in Europe and North America as limited number of tourists preferred nearby destinations. By 2024, emerging destinations began regaining share, particularly in Asia and the Middle East, though Europe and North America maintained strong positions due to earlier recovery momentum and proximity markets.

The growth of international tourist arrivals in emerging economies is greater than advanced economies for the years 2007-2012. However, since 2013, advanced economy destinations showed relatively faster growth in tourist arrivals than emerging economy destinations up until 2017. In 2017, 2018 and 2019 emerging destinations performed well increasing their share to up to 47%. In 2019, international tourist arrivals to advanced economies were 777 million, while it was 688 million for emerging economies. With the pandemic advanced destinations increased their share to 56% since advanced economies lost less of their market share in 2020 and recovered better in 2022 than emerging destinations those host 44% of the global arrivals. In 2023, advanced economies continued to lead the recovery, accounting for 55% of global international arrivals, while emerging economies held 45%. In 2024, advanced economies accounted for 52% of arrivals, while emerging economies hosted 48%, narrowing the gap as Asia-Pacific markets reopened.

Figure 7. International Tourist Arrivals and Percentage Change (2000-2024)



Source: UNWTO, 2025

Tourism arrivals have experienced a steady growth of 4.4% on the average between 2000-2019 reaching almost 1.5 billion international arrivals. Growing purchasing power, relative safety, increased air connectivity, more affordable travel and visa relaxation arrangements were major reasons of the growth. Yet the pandemic resulted a sharp decline of 72% in 2020. Recovery started in 2021 with an almost 12% increase in arrivals compared to 2020. 2022 experienced a triple digit growth of 112% compared to 2021 reaching 963 million arrivals. International tourism recovered 88% of pre-pandemic levels, with a 35% increase in 2023 compared to 2022 supported by strong pent-up demand, during 2023. Following strong growth in 2022–2023, international tourism fully recovered in 2024, reaching 1.465 billion arrivals. Looking ahead, growth is projected at 3% per year toward 2030 (UNWTO, 2025).

Table 3. International Tourism Arrivals by Region (Millions)

Tourism Arrivals	2015	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Share (%)
World	1,206	1,466	410	456	963	1,306	1,465	100
Europe	612	746	242	305	595	710	755	52

Asia & Pacific	283	360	59	25	101	237	318	22
Americas	193	219	70	81	155	200	217	15
Africa	53	68	19	20	46	65	74	5
Middle East	65	73	20	25	66	93	101	7

Source: UNWTO, 2025

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Asia & Pacific (83.5%) and Africa (76.8%) recorded the highest proportional declines in tourist arrivals in 2020. In 2021, Asia & Pacific (94.2%) and Middle East (79.3%) reported the highest declines in arrivals. In 2021, Europe (62.5%) saw a relatively limited decline due to the implementation of an EU-wide standardized vaccination passport that facilitated flows of tourists across the continent (UNWTO, 2022a; European Commission, 2022; SESRIC, 2021). Statistics in 2023 indicate a strong recovery with Middle-East, outperforming pre-pandemic 2019 annual arrivals, the first region to recover from Pandemic with arrivals 22% above 2019. Middle-East region welcomed large events such as Expo 2020 Dubai and the FIFA World Cup in Qatar, as well as a highly attended Hajj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia which also helped its recovery. Europe reached 94% of pre-pandemic levels in 2023, while Africa recovered 96% and the Americas 90%. By 2024, the Middle East was 38% above 2019 levels, while Europe (+1%), Africa (+9%), and Asia-Pacific (–12% vs. 2019) demonstrated varied paces of recovery. The Americas nearly matched pre-pandemic arrivals (–1%). The reopening of China in early 2023 significantly boosted Asia-Pacific numbers in 2024, but full parity with 2019 is expected only in 2025.

Figure 8. Tourism Receipts by Region (2019-2024)



Source: UNWTO, 2025

A comparison between pre- (2019) and post- (2024) Covid-19 tourist arrivals is displayed in figure 8. Two major changes are observed between pre and post crises in Asia-Pacific and Europe; before Covid-19 arrivals to Europe were decreasing steadily and arrivals to Asia-Pacific were growing. By 2024, Europe maintained a 51% global share, Asia-Pacific rose to 22% as Chinese

outbound flows returned, the Middle East expanded to nearly 7%, while Africa and the Americas held steady at 5% and 15% respectively.

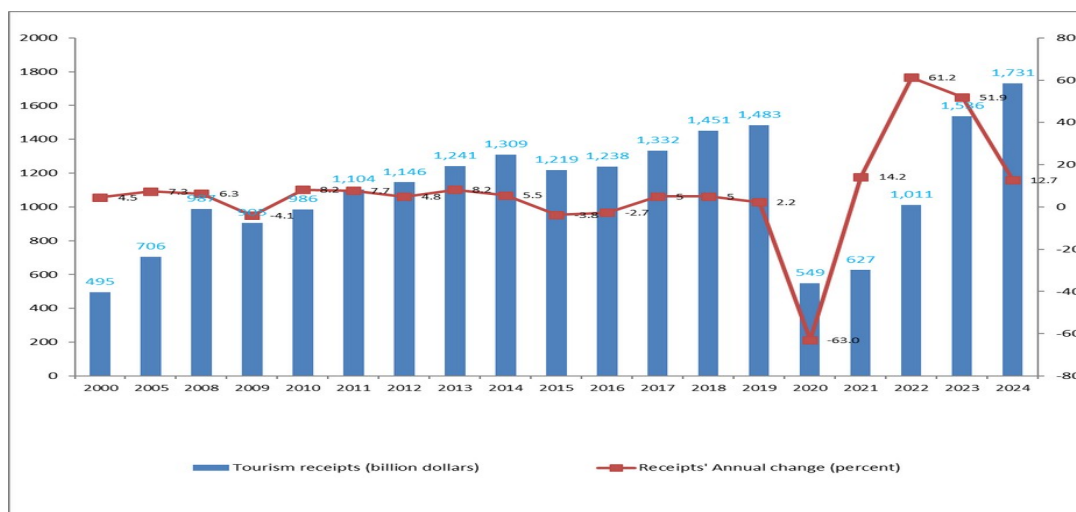
According to *Tourism Towards 2030*, UNWTO's long-term outlook and assessment of future tourism trends, the number of international tourist arrivals is expected to increase by 3.3% a year on average until 2030. This represents some 43 million more international tourist arrivals every year, reaching a total of 1.8 billion by 2030.

International tourist arrivals in the emerging-economy destinations of Asia, Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, Eastern Mediterranean Europe, the Middle East, and Africa will grow at double the pace (4.4 percent a year) of advanced-economy destinations (2.2 percent a year). Emerging economies' annual growth rate is 4,5% while arrivals to advanced economies only grew by 3,5%. The market share of emerging economies increased from 30% in 1980 to 48% in 2021, and is expected to reach 58% by 2030, equivalent to over 1 billion international tourists (UNWTO, 2022b).

3.3. International Tourism Receipts

As an internationally traded service, inbound tourism has become one of the world's major trade categories. International tourism accounts for 30% of the world's export of services and 7% of overall exports of goods and services. Tourism has been growing faster than global trade for the past several years. International tourism receipts are the earnings generated in receiving countries from expenditures of international visitors on accommodation, food and drink, local transport, entertainment, shopping and other services and goods. For the receiving country, receipts count as exports and for many destinations tourism is a vital source of foreign currency earnings and an important contributor to the economy, creating much needed employment and opportunities for development. From the period 1980 to 2019, international tourism receipts increased from 104 billion USD in 1980 to almost 1,5 billion USD in 2019. By 2024, receipts had risen to a record USD 1.731 trillion, underscoring the resilience of tourism as a global export category (UNWTO, 2025). Figure 9, shows the international tourism receipts between 2000-2024. International tourism receipts grew by 4.4 % in real terms (i.e. using local currencies at constant prices in order to adjust for inflation and exchange rate fluctuations) in 2024 by reaching to more than 1.7 billion USD and 1180 USD per capita spending.

Figure 9. International Tourism Receipts and Percentage Change (2000-2024)



Source: UNWTO, 2025.

However, with Covid-19 tourism receipts declined by 63% hitting 550 billion USD. The receipts started to recover with relaxation in travel restrictions and reached 627 million in 2021 and more than one trillion in 2022 and reaching 1.5 trillion in 2023 as displayed in figure 9 growing at 14%, 61% and 50% for the past three years respectively. By 2024, receipts climbed further to USD 1.731 trillion, exceeding 2019 values by +17% in nominal terms and setting a new global record.

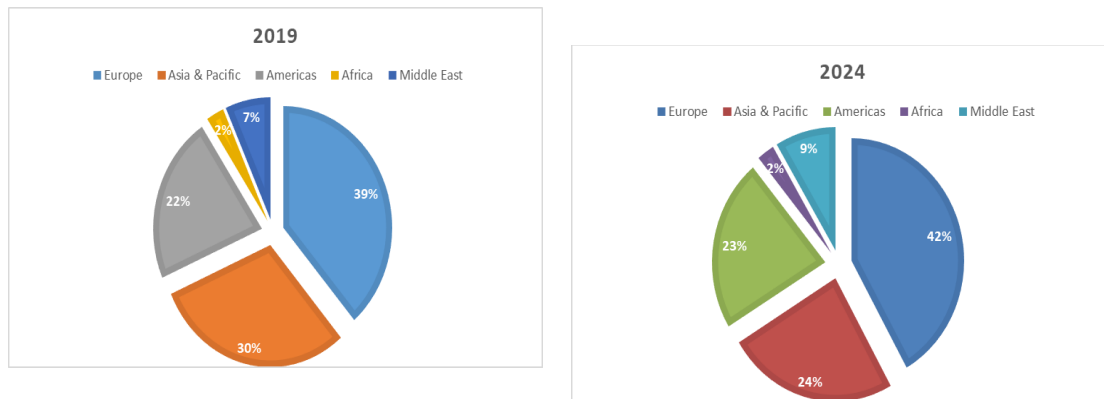
Table 4. International Tourism Receipts by Region (Billion \$)

Tourism Receipts	2015	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Share (%)
World	1,219	1,483	548	627	1,011	1,515	1,731	100
Europe	473	574	239	327	549	660	725	42
Asia & Pacific	352	441	126	91	131	347	423	24
Americas	298	330	125	140	243	333	393	23
Africa	31	39	15	6	12	38	43	2
Middle East	65	99	43	63	76	137	148	9

Source: UNWTO, 2025

In 2024, global tourism receipts reached USD 1.731 trillion, surpassing the pre-pandemic benchmark and representing a +13% increase over 2023. Europe remained the largest contributor with USD 725 billion (42% of global receipts). Asia and the Pacific followed with USD 423 billion (24%), marking a strong rebound from pandemic lows though still slightly below its 2019 level in real terms. The Americas generated USD 393 billion (23%), Africa reached USD 43 billion (2%), and the Middle East recorded USD 148 billion (9%), maintaining its position as the fastest-growing region relative to pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 10. Tourism Receipts by Region (2019-2024)



Source: UNWTO, 2025

By 2024, Europe further consolidated its global share at 42%, reflecting strong intra-regional travel and higher per capita spending. Asia-Pacific receipts surged to USD 423 billion, narrowing the gap with pre-pandemic levels, supported by the reopening of China and renewed outbound flows. The Americas recorded steady growth, with receipts reaching USD 393 billion, while Africa rose modestly to USD 43 billion. The Middle East posted the strongest relative gains, with receipts of USD 148 billion, +48% compared to 2019, driven by religious, cultural, and event tourism. In summary, all regions exceeded or closely approached their pre-pandemic benchmarks in 2024, though Asia-Pacific continues to lag slightly behind Europe and the Middle East in terms of pace of recovery (UNWTO, 2025).

Africa saw a recovery in tourism receipts from USD 15 billion in 2020 to USD 43 billion in 2024, and exceeded pre-pandemic levels. The region's share of global receipts is 2% in 2024. The Middle East experienced the most remarkable growth, with receipts rising from USD 99 billion in 2019 to USD 148 billion in 2024. Its share of global receipts grew from 7% in 2019 to 9% in 2024, driven by key destinations such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which saw increased tourism investment and growth. In summary, while Europe and the Middle East saw robust recoveries in tourism receipts, the Asia-Pacific region is still trailing behind pre-pandemic levels. The Americas and Africa are on a steady recovery path, with slower yet positive growth in tourism income (UNWTO, 2025).

4. International Tourism in the OIC Member Countries

In the light of the above-mentioned overview of the trends in international tourism and the impacts of both Covid-19 and other political and economic pressures, this section aims to assess the performance and economic role of the international tourism in the OIC Member Countries while providing additional insight and recommendations.

The OIC Member Countries are located in four continents on all over the world. Besides their geographical heterogeneity, the Member Countries do not constitute a homogenous economic group due to their different development levels. Most of the Member Countries are developing countries and 21 of them are the Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

Given these conditions, it is expected that tourism might play an important role in economic development regarding particularly foreign exchange income, employment, sustainable development and poverty alleviation in the Member Countries.

According to WTTC, the Travel & Tourism sector has made significant strides towards recovery after the pandemic. According to WTTC, the Travel & Tourism sector fully recovered in 2024, contributing 9.1% to global GDP (USD 9.9 trillion), only 0.2 percentage points below its 2019 peak. Employment in the sector rose to 348 million jobs worldwide, representing nearly one in every ten jobs (WTTC, 2025).

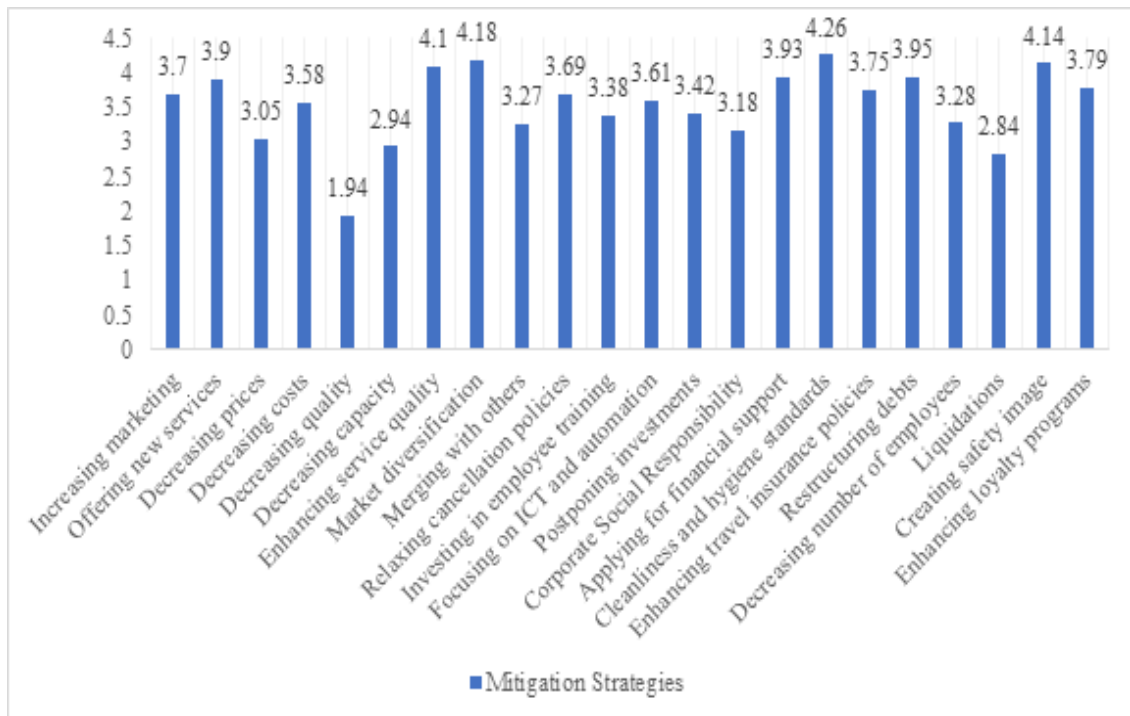
Like many destinations, the tourism sector in the OIC countries was affected negatively by the pandemic. Estimations show that the OIC countries hosted 70.4 million international tourists in 2020 instead of a baseline projection of 277.8 million. In addition, tourism receipt also declined to 78 billion USD instead of the projected 233.3 billion USD. In 2021, based on the data of the UNWTO, the average tourist arrivals in the OIC group declined by 78.7% and the receipts contracted by 62.9% over 2019. Destinations OIC-Asia region and Sub-Saharan Africa both

suffered 75% decrease in tourist volume whereas OIC-MENA experienced a 61% decrease in arrivals. As a result of the pandemic, the average contribution of tourism to employment in the OIC countries declined from 7.5% in 2019 to 6.2% in 2020, corresponding to an estimated loss of 8.6 million jobs. The size of the loss in GDP generated by the travel and tourism sector was estimated as 293 billion USD in 2020 in the OIC (SESRIC, 2022).

Due to a significant reduction in tourist arrivals and tourism receipts in 2020, the contribution of travel and tourism activities to GDP in the OIC group decreased from 8.1% in 2019 to 4.3% in 2020. The contraction in tourism industry resulted in a loss of USD 4.5 trillion in the global GDP during 2020. In the same year, the decline in travel volume resulted in 62 million job losses in the world, of which 8.6 million occurred in the OIC countries. The share of tourism in GDP also decline from 10.4% in 2019 to 4% in 2020 (SESRIC, 2022). However, by 2024, OIC destinations collectively welcomed more than 280 million international visitors, exceeding their pre-pandemic trajectory, while receipts exceeded USD 288 billion, reflecting both the reopening of Asian markets and strong recovery in the Middle East (SESRIC, 2024; UNWTO, 2025).

Literature suggests various crisis strategies used by tourism organizations such as decreasing costs, enhancing marketing communications, decreasing capacity and so on. These strategies were also explored by COMCEC (2021) on an organizational report on mitigation strategies in tourism amid Covid-19 in OIC countries. Tourism Industry representatives were also asked about the importance of these organizational strategies that are used to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19. Enhancing cleanliness and hygiene standards (4.26), Market diversification (4.18), Creating safety image (4.14), Enhancing service quality (4.1), Restructuring debts (3.95) and Applying for financial support (3.93) were listed as the most important organizational strategies. Details of OIC tourism industry mitigation strategies and their ratings are shown on figure 11 below.

Figure 11. Tourism Industry Covid-19 Mitigation Strategies in OIC



Source: COMCEC, 2021

The same report (COMCEC, 2021) explored effectiveness of government mitigation strategies in OIC based on empirical data collected from tourism industry representatives. Most generic subventions overlook the less established, micro-entrepreneurial and informal nature of tourism businesses. These small lifestyle businesses and freelance entities operating in tourism lack resources to institutionally represent themselves and apply for generic support (AEIST, 2020). In this report, government mitigation strategies during Covid-19 were compiled based on a qualitative research and literature review.

Lack of tourism receipts is detrimental to foreign exchange income and thus the economy of many OIC countries. Unfortunately, despite Covid-19 being a major crisis, OIC countries have already been facing various other crises besides the past epidemics, including political conflicts, terrorist events, natural disasters, etc. Hence, OIC also needs to prepare and establish risk and crises management procedures to create a more crisis immune and competitive tourism industry.

This is also a period of investment and capacity building and workout long-standing problems within OIC tourism. Destinations use this time to restructure, improve and invest on infrastructure, human resources, digital platforms, and destination governance. Among these problems are low service quality, low per capita tourist spending and leakages from local economies. The tourism industry in the OIC has been developing at a rapid pace. Yet, the increase in income generated in tourism is well below the growth rate in the volume. Therefore, OIC tourism is not able to reflect the volume increase in per capita spending. The average tourist spending was around 750 USD below the crises, which is well below the global average of 1,000

USD. Average tourist spending in OIC countries rose temporarily during Covid-19 due to lower volumes (USD 985 in 2020), then peaked at USD 1,073 in 2023, before moderating to USD 1,044 in 2024. The global average stood at USD 1,180 in 2024, indicating that OIC remains below the world benchmark despite recent improvements (UNWTO, 2025).

The Corona pandemic forced the tourism system to stop in its tracks, which may be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for tourism to re-invent and re-structure itself and 'build back better'. Hence, if member countries invest in tourism service quality and try planning the disturbed balance between tourism supply and demand in a sustainable manner, there are also some opportunities. By 2024, AI and robotics adoption had expanded further, with OIC-based hotels piloting AI-driven check-in systems and predictive analytics for demand forecasting. This period can also be seen as an opportunity to fix structural problems in the industry concerning sustainability, over-tourism, climate change, human resources, low per tourist spending and destination governance, with digitalization and climate resilience now central to OIC's long-term competitiveness (UNWTO, 2025).

One reason for this low per capita spending is the scarcity of tourism activities and low quality of services. Because of limited human and financial capital, OIC countries also tend to import know-how in the form of franchises. Despite international brands and management firms enhancing the service quality, they also create substantial leakages from the economy in profits and commissions transferred to the franchisor, foreign staff wages and management fees. One way to solve these obstacles is by encouraging tourism entrepreneurship and building local entrepreneurship capacities. Hence, governments might be more selective in their support for better quality services with higher input for local value chains.

Marketing communications, public relations and lobbying activities are also important, to create a safe image and build trust. Information provision, statistics, border restrictions, sanitation processes, safe tourism standards, certification, hygiene procedures and how these are monitored and audited are not only important activities but also these should also be supported and used in branding and repositioning OIC countries as safe destinations.

Based on the transformations expected OIC countries need to adopt their strategies and priorities products and markets based on the new normal. Previous research and empirical study based on OIC tourism experts confirmed nature based tourism and health tourism are more resilient and will be more popular. Focus should also be directed towards open-air activities, individual tours rather than mass package tours and activities.

Domestic tourism has also proven more resilient than incoming tourism. Therefore, special offers around holiday weekends and festivals should be prepared. The key is not necessarily to offer the cheapest prices, but rather to offer value-for-money particularly for domestic demand. Short hall domestic tourism has preceded international travel in various destinations (e.g. Russia, China). Several countries are already promoting domestic travel instead of international and rural tourism rather than urban tourism. Some countries are offering holiday vouchers within the country; some others extend bank holidays to encourage people to travel, and use cheap holiday credits and favourable holiday packages as other means of facilitating domestic tourism. Literature also confirms a destination is more resilient and competitive if there is strong domestic demand.

OIC tourism industry should also make better use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Big data analytics used for scenario planning and decision effectiveness might collect and mine different crises and travel data and offer different scenarios about the volume, source markets and revenues. Machine learning systems can be applied to the restaurant drive-through, online ordering and web-based hotel reservation processes. Robotics has also entered the kitchen on cooking lines and hotel housekeeping functions and drones may be joining home delivery applications for restaurants. Many restaurants utilizing robots are now doing the same amount of work with 50% fewer individuals. Creating touchless services and integration of ICT, robots and AI might support decision making in other areas of tourism policy and planning. There will be greater utilization of technology in the industry to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of how we deliver our products and services. In order to create both high-tech and high-touch services, the OIC tourism industry needs to invest in technology, Artificial Intelligence, touchless service processes and service robots. Integrating information collection, scenario planning, research and data analysis into risk management strategies will also deliver better precision in decision making and forecasting.

Enhancing tourist experience is another major strategy that might be invested while restructuring the industry after Covid-19. Investing in both physical infrastructure, governance and human resources during this period will create a much more competitive tourism industry within OIC. Major renovations and infrastructure investments can be utilized, local governance structures and collaboration between public and private sectors can be strengthened, and the quality and quantity of potential human resources in tourism can also be enhanced by providing training and online courses. Restructuring should also be planned based on transformations in the market from mass tourism to more customized and sustainable versions of tourism. The tourism industry should also be more flexible in design and tourism resources should be able to be used in other areas in case of crises (e.g. tourism staff in hospitals, tourism vehicles in delivery services, hotels as hospitals and so on.)

Hence, member countries need to find new ways to adopt the new normal in tourism and support the growing tourism industry at OIC. Safety and security concerns and political stability are also emerging as major challenges for OIC member states. It is assumed that these issues will continue to cause difficulties in the years ahead. Governments should work hard to ensure tourists' safety and minimize the impact of security threats and health concerns. Epidemics, terrorist incidents, refugee crises are still important obstacles for tourism in the region. The strength of the US dollar relative to other currencies and the increasing rate of inflation are shifting the price competitiveness among destinations and will affect market share and rankings of OIC destinations.

Besides risk and crises management strategies and recovery measures, OIC governments should also focus on their tourism industry's long-term competitiveness. Enhancing entrepreneurial activities in tourism might enhance utilization of tourism potential within OIC and trigger innovation and destination development. Investing in infra-structure in OIC destinations, adjusting the legislation and bureaucracy for and creating a better investment environment by subsidies, credits, land allocations, tax reductions, offering capacity-building programs for local human resources and discriminating local entrepreneurs, intra-OIC investors and brands and facilitating sustainable planned development of member country destinations are alternative strategies particularly after Covid-19. Unfortunately, despite Covid-19 being a major crisis, OIC

countries have already been facing various other crises besides the past epidemics, including political conflicts, terrorist events, natural disasters, etc. Hence, OIC also needs to prepare and establish risk and crises management procedures to create a more immune and competitive tourism industry.

This is also a period of investment and capacity building and workout long-standing problems within OIC tourism. Among these problems are low service quality, low per capita tourist spending and leakages from local economies. The tourism industry in the OIC has been developing at a rapid pace. Yet, the increase in income generated in tourism is well below the growth rate in the volume. Therefore, OIC tourism is not able to reflect the volume increase in per capita spending. The average tourist spending was around 750 USD before the crises, which was well below the global average of 1,000 USD. Yet, Covid-19 succeeded to increase per tourist spending to 1073 USD in 2023 and 1044 USD in 2024 in OIC countries. Hence, if member countries invest in tourism service quality and try planning the disturbed balance between tourism supply and demand in a sustainable manner, and eliminate bad apples by supporting good practices, there are also some opportunities.

Recognising this challenge in 2022 COMCEC commissioned another research study on "Sustainable Human Resources Management in Tourism Sector". The report confirms tourism as a labour-intensive industry and human resources quality in tourism is acknowledged as a major competitive advantage. Because of the pandemic 62 million tourism jobs were lost in 2020, the proactive action of some governments around the world has effectively enabled the sector to save millions of jobs and livelihoods at risk through retention schemes and mitigation support for the industry. Yet, staff shortages became as one of the key issues for recovery from COVID-19 in tourism. As demand for travel and jobs starts to rise, a sufficient labour force is required to fill the available vacancies and enable the sector to recover. A combination of factors such as workers calling in sick from COVID-19, the sluggish pace of rehiring displaced workers, and the movement of workers to other sectors has resulted in a disequilibrium between the demand for, and supply of, labour. Another key contributing factor is that travel restrictions during the pandemic have led to a fall in the number of migrant workers who are vital to the sector. As a result, Travel & Tourism businesses are struggling to fill available job vacancies (WTTC, 2022).

While staff shortages in 2021 were concentrated in the accommodation and hospitality segments of the sector, in 2022 the lack of labour has spread to the transportation segment particularly in the airline industry. To ensure that shortages do not remain an issue in the longer term, it is important to implement and sustain policies that facilitate labour mobility, flexible and remote work, decent work and pay, upskill and reskill the workforce, promote education and training, and strengthen collaboration at all levels, whilst leveraging technological and digital solutions (WTTC, 2022).

Facilitating labour mobility within OIC, encouraging flexible and remote work, encouraging decent work and employee benefits in tourism, developing and supporting skilled workforce, promoting career opportunities within tourism, strengthening collaboration among tourism industry and educational institutions and adopting ICT are among strategies offered to create a sustainable human resources management in OIC tourism.

The report also concludes with several policy recommendations:

1. Closing the gap between industry needs and formal education
2. Standardizing job descriptions and specifications in tourism
3. Endorsing certification and recognition of tourism education diplomas
4. Improve career opportunities and working conditions of tourism employees
5. Adopting to digitalization and AI technologies
6. Facilitating academic research on motivation and career development in tourism
7. Tourism insurance fund to be established to sustain tourism human resources during crises
8. Expectations and motivations of generation Z to be addressed and adopted to Human Resources processes.
9. Tourism jobs to be adopted to changing structure of demographics and aging potential staff
10. Discourage part-time and seasonal employment by subsidizing long-term recruitment.
11. Encourage involvement of disadvantaged groups in tourism employment such as women and migrants.

Another reason for the low per capita spending in OIC is the scarcity of tourism activities and low quality of services. Because of limited human and financial capital, OIC countries tend to import know-how in the form of franchises. Despite international brands and management firms enhancing the service quality, they also create substantial leakages from the economy in profits and commissions transferred to the franchisor, foreign staff wages and management fees. One way to solve these obstacles is by encouraging tourism entrepreneurship and building local entrepreneurship capacities. COMCEC already commissioned a research report on "Promoting Entrepreneurship for Tourism Industry Competitiveness in The OIC Countries" which was published in 2023.

In addition to its generic benefits such as innovation, growth and increased tax revenues, entrepreneurship in tourism, as an export industry, usually generates more foreign exchange and, as a human intensive sector, creates more employment. OIC tourism has also been growing rapidly. Yet major problems emerge for tourism in OIC countries. First of these is the low quality in HR and thus tourism services. The level of service quality also affects the per capita income from tourism and OIC countries receive 10-15% less income per tourist than the World average. Another major problem is the amount of leakages. Because the HR capacity and know-how is limited, OIC countries tend to import know-how in the form of tourism organizations and brands as management firms and franchises. These also create substantial leakages from the economy in the form of profits and commissions transferred to the franchisor, foreign staff wages and management fees.

Developing entrepreneurial capacities in tourism would also solve these problems in OIC tourism industry. Based on field case studies and qualitative and quantitative data collected from three OIC member countries, the report concludes with policy recommendations oriented towards promoting entrepreneurship in the OIC member countries. Overall, there seems to be a wanting need to create a friendly entrepreneurial ecosystem through streamlining existing regulatory frameworks and licensing procedures and reducing bureaucratic barriers. This is crucial to encourage and promote venturing in tourism. In the aftermath of the pandemic, many OIC member countries suffer from increasing inflation rates and high interest. This has created burden on existing tourism and hospitality businesses and seems to be a prominent challenge.

To mitigate the impact of these economic factors on entrepreneurship, governments in OIC member countries may introduce further incentives to both help existing business survive in times of crisis while also encouraging new enterprises enter the market. Unfortunately, adequate infrastructure remains a challenge in some OIC member countries preventing the provision of quality tourism services while creating barrier to tourism entrepreneurship. Efforts to develop accessibility through modern transportation systems and infra-structure, and reliable water/electricity supply are crucial to the success and sustainability of destinations and inherently entrepreneurship in tourism.

With the objective of diversifying tourism COMCEC also started to address development, marketing and management of different tourism products within OIC. A thematic report on “Developing and Branding Gastronomy Tourism Destinations within OIC” is commissioned in 2024 and “Improving the Quality and Sustainability of Heritage Tourism in OIC Countries” in 2025.

The COMCEC report on gastronomy tourism highlights how food has become a defining element of cultural identity and destination branding. Gastronomy goes beyond consumption—it connects visitors with local traditions, agricultural practices, and heritage. In OIC countries, rich culinary diversity provides opportunities to differentiate destinations and add value to existing tourism products. Gastronomy tourism enhances seasonality management by drawing visitors throughout the year via food festivals, cooking workshops, and local markets. Importantly, it also encourages rural development by linking tourism with agricultural producers and small businesses, thus supporting inclusive growth.

Despite this potential, the study shows that OIC countries face challenges in harnessing gastronomy tourism. Weak governance structures, limited cooperation between tourism boards and agricultural stakeholders, and inadequate infrastructure often hinder product development. Culinary traditions are sometimes under-documented, and intellectual property issues around local food heritage remain unresolved. Marketing strategies are uneven, with global recognition focusing on a few iconic cuisines while many rich culinary traditions in OIC countries remain under-promoted.

To address these gaps, the report recommends capacity building for food entrepreneurs, stronger branding strategies, and integration of gastronomy into national tourism policies. Developing food routes and linking gastronomy with cultural festivals can create multi-layered experiences. Training in hygiene, service quality, and storytelling is essential to meet international expectations while preserving authenticity. Encouraging collaboration between chefs, farmers, tourism boards, and cultural institutions can further strengthen supply chains and reduce leakages. Ultimately, gastronomy tourism offers OIC destinations a pathway to improve per capita tourist spending and diversify away from price-sensitive mass tourism. By positioning food as both a primary and complementary product, destinations can enrich visitor experience, enhance competitiveness, and create sustainable livelihoods across communities.

The COMCEC heritage tourism report emphasizes that OIC countries collectively host nearly one-fifth of all UNESCO World Heritage Sites, alongside an unparalleled richness in intangible heritage such as crafts, music, and rituals. Heritage tourism provides resilience compared to mass tourism: heritage visitors spend more per trip, stay longer, and distribute expenditures across

communities. This reduces economic leakage and creates stronger linkages with local SMEs. Heritage tourism is therefore positioned as a strategic sector for OIC members to diversify their offerings and enhance competitiveness.

Yet, the study also identifies persistent weaknesses. Governance fragmentation, underfunding of conservation, limited community involvement, and inadequate infrastructure constrain the sector's sustainability. Environmental threats—ranging from climate change to overtourism—further complicate management. Many intangible assets remain underutilized or commercialized in ways that reduce authenticity. The report notes that despite rich resources, OIC countries capture a modest share of global heritage tourism revenues.

To overcome these challenges, the report proposes a roadmap built on governance reform, sustainable financing mechanisms, and community empowerment. Minimum standards include clear institutional frameworks and legal protections; good practices include integrated management plans and heritage corridors; innovation involves smart technologies, virtual/augmented reality, and cross-border branding. Strengthening visitor management systems, fostering youth engagement in heritage careers, and creating benefit-sharing mechanisms are highlighted as priorities.

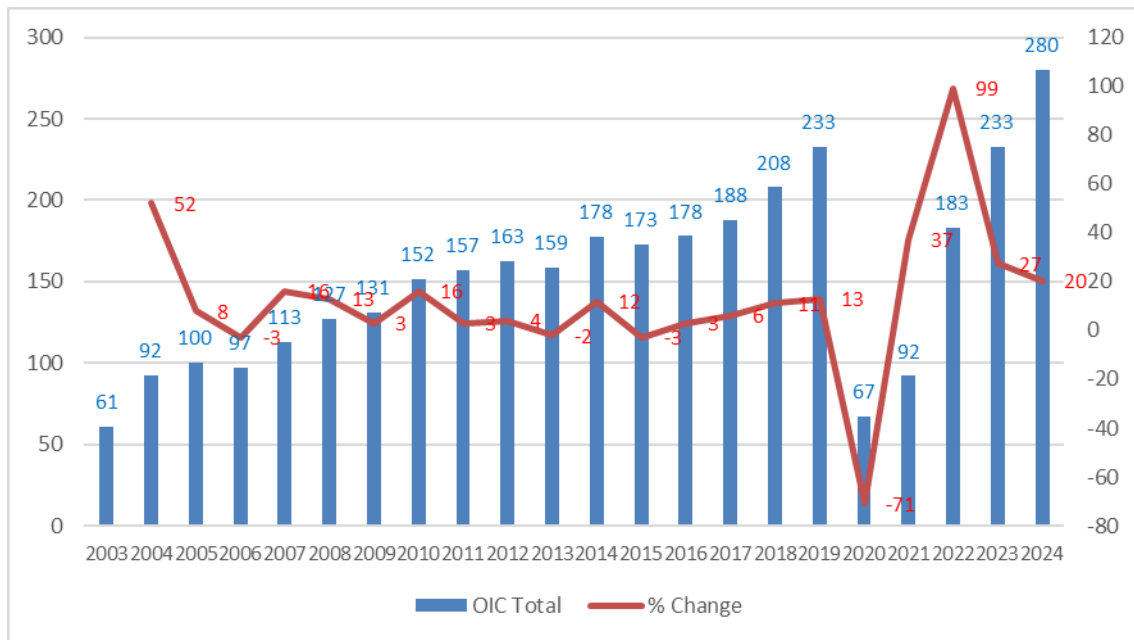
In conclusion, heritage tourism represents both an opportunity and a responsibility for OIC destinations. By embedding sustainability into heritage management—balancing conservation with development, authenticity with commercialization—member countries can build tourism models that are competitive, resilient, and inclusive. Heritage tourism thus emerges not only as a sector for economic growth but also as a vehicle for cultural continuity and intercultural dialogue.

Considering the modest share of the OIC Member Countries, despite the increasing share in the international tourism market, it is evident that the inherent potential has not yet been fully realized and manifested itself at desirable levels. The OIC Member States need to understand how they can strengthen the position of their tourism industry in response to current global economic challenges and remain competitive among emerging destinations within a sustainable development perspective. Enhancing intra-OIC travel, creating travel bubbles between countries, encouraging domestic tourism and family travel, subsidizing tourism for a more resilient industry, investing in collaborative planning, crisis management, and branding are among other strategies to support the tourism industry. This period can also be seen as an opportunity to fix structural problems in the industry concerning sustainability, over-tourism, climate change, and destination governance.

Figure 13 displays international tourism activity in the member countries in terms of both tourist arrivals and tourism receipts in recent years. Due to lack of data on the number of tourist arrivals and tourism receipts of some countries, some estimations have to be made. During the 2010-2014 period, shown in Figure 13, there was a trend of increasing tourist arrivals, however, in 2015 the number of tourist arrivals decreased from 178 million to 173 million in OIC Member States and reached 2014 numbers back in 2016. The share in the total international tourist arrivals worldwide decreased from 14.6 percent in 2015 to 14.4 percent in 2016. Between years, 2017 and 2019 OIC tourism had a historical record in arrivals, around 10% growth. After collapsing by 67%

in 2020, OIC arrivals rose by 37% in 2021, 99% in 2022, and 27% in 2023. By 2024, arrivals reached 280 million, surpassing the 2019 pre-pandemic volume of 233 million. The OIC's share in global arrivals rose from 16% in 2019 to 19% in 2024, highlighting a faster recovery than global tourism.

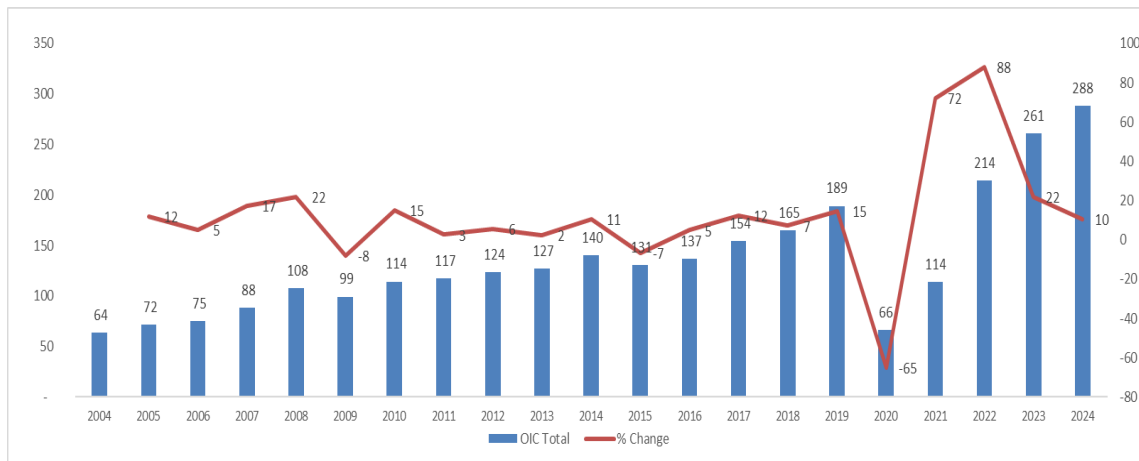
Figure 13. Tourist Arrivals in the OIC Member Countries



Source: Adopted from UNWTO, 2025

The number of tourism receipts of the member countries increased from \$214 billion in 2022 to \$261 billion in 2023, corresponding to a 17 percent share in world's total tourism receipts. This ratio was 14% in 2019 pre-pandemic period. The pandemic resulted declines up to 66% in 2020 which also started to recover with 72% in 2021 and 88% in 2022. 2023 receipts exceeded the pre-pandemic year of 2019 by another 35%. The receipts also show that average spending per tourist increased from 811 USD in 2019 to 1073 USD in 2023 where the global average is at 1163 USD. Receipts increased from USD 261 billion in 2023 to USD 288 billion in 2024, corresponding to a 17% share of global receipts. This ratio was 14% in 2019. Average spending per tourist rose from USD 811 in 2019 to USD 1,044 in 2024, narrowing the gap with the global average of USD 1,180. Considering OIC have been performing well below average spending for decades, pandemic resulted in various positive transformations for OIC tourism as well, considering the increase in per capita tourist spending.

Figure 14. Receipts in the OIC Member Countries

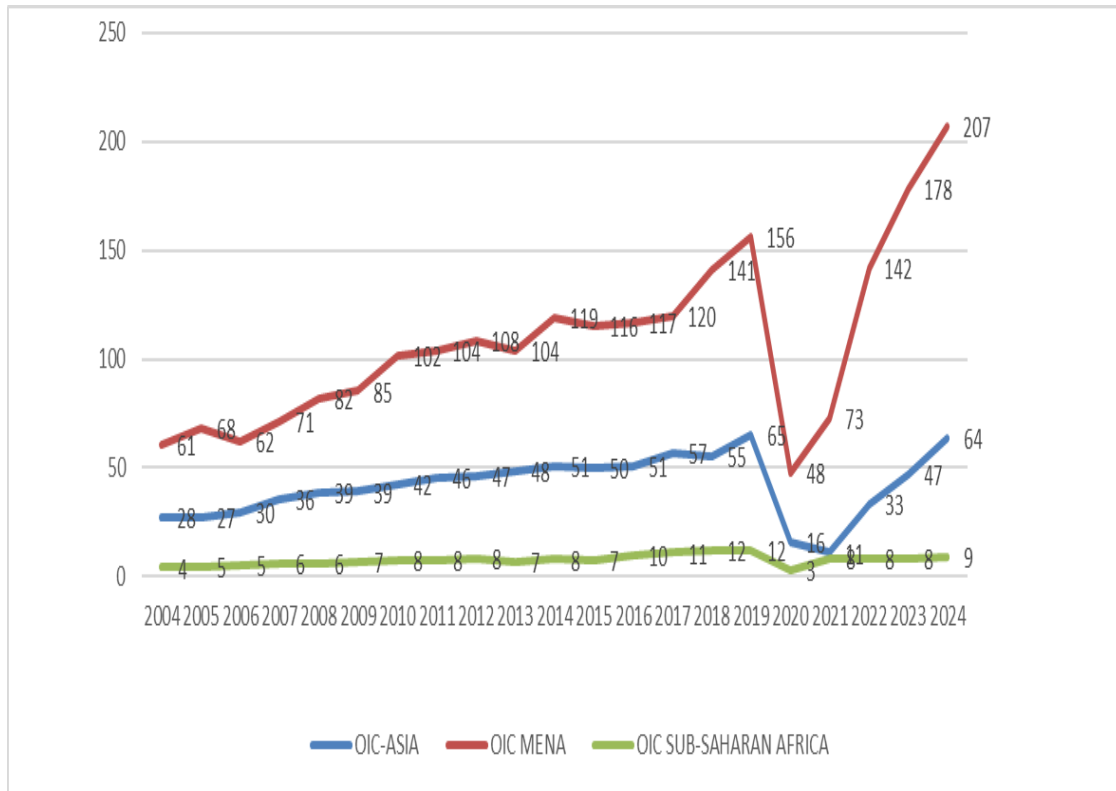


Source: Adopted from UNWTO, 2025

It can be useful to analyse the arrivals trends by grouping the OIC member countries as OIC-MENA, OIC-Asia, and OIC-Sub-Saharan Africa, which is provided at Figure 14. As displayed in the figure OIC-MENA has the biggest share among tourist arrivals in the member states. In the OIC-MENA region, after the sharp decline from record-high tourist arrivals in 2019, the number of tourists increased from 48 million in 2020 to 73 million in 2021 and surged to 142 million in 2022. By 2023, the region continued its robust recovery, reaching 178 million arrivals, surpassing pre-pandemic levels by 12%. OIC-Mena hosted 207 million arrivals in 2024 resulting 32% increase compared to 2019. This recovery underscores the resilience of the MENA region, driven by strategic tourism investments.

In contrast, OIC-Asia faced more severe challenges. Tourist arrivals fell from 16 million in 2020 to 11 million in 2021 due to extended travel restrictions. However, with the reopening of major source markets, including China, arrivals jumped to 33 million in 2022. Despite this improvement, 2023 saw a modest recovery, with 47 million arrivals, while the 64 million arrivals in 2024 almost reached the pre-pandemic volume. Meanwhile, OIC-Sub-Saharan Africa saw steady, but slower recovery. Arrivals increased from 3 million in 2020 to just under 8 million in 2021 and remained stable at 8 million in 2022 and 2023. By 2024, the region reached 9 million arrivals, still 25% lower than its pre-pandemic level of 12 million in 2019, reflecting the slower recovery pace in this region.

Figure 15. Tourist Arrivals in the OIC Sub-Regions (Millions)



Source: Adopted from UNWTO, 2025

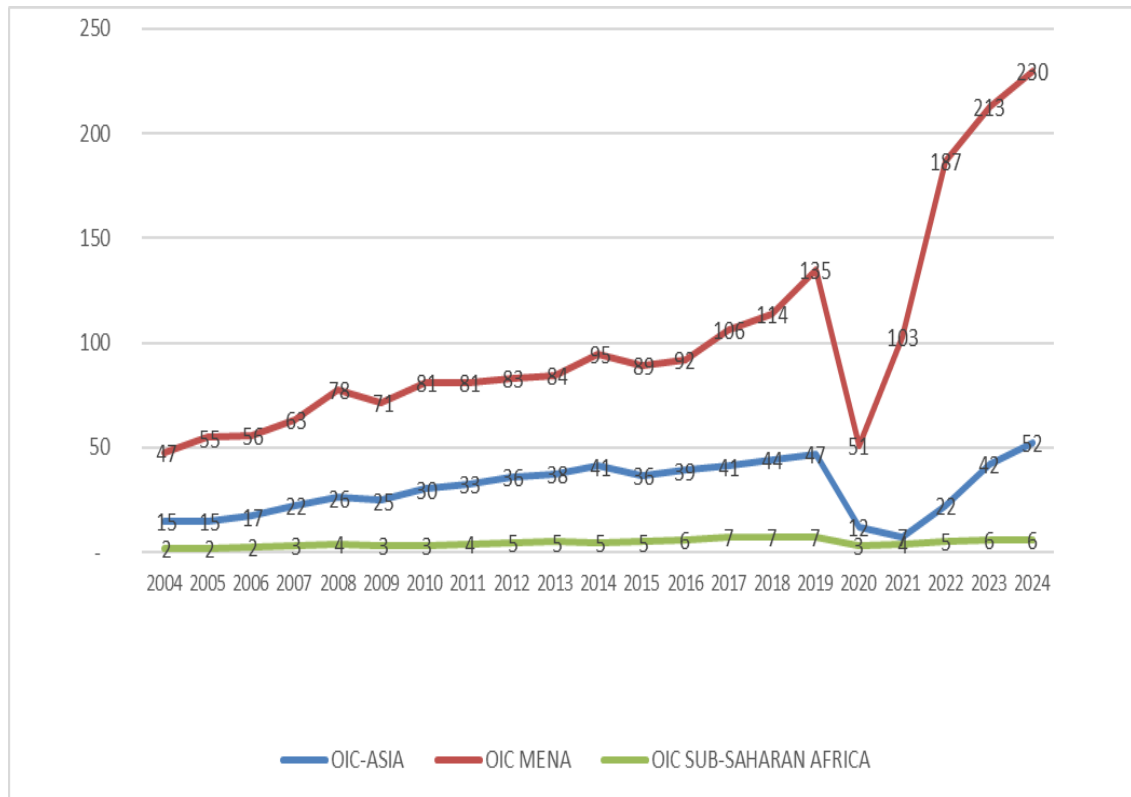
According to available data, tourism receipts in OIC-MENA experienced a significant recovery after reaching a historical high of 135 billion USD in 2019, followed by a sharp decline to 51 billion USD in 2020 due to the pandemic. The recovery began in 2021, with receipts increasing to 103 billion USD, and by 2022, receipts surpassed pre-pandemic levels, reaching 187 billion USD, representing a 39% increase over 2019 and an 82% growth compared to 2021. In 2023, OIC-MENA receipts continued to grow, hitting a record high of 213 billion USD, and 230 billion USD in 2024, reflecting the region's strong resilience and ability to attract international tourism.

In contrast, OIC-Asia faced greater challenges. Tourism receipts fell sharply from 47 billion USD in 2019 to 12 billion USD in 2020, and further decreased to 7 billion USD in 2021 due to extended travel restrictions, especially in major source markets like China. However, in 2022, receipts nearly tripled to 22 billion USD, and by 2023, they rose to 42 billion USD. In 2024 OIC-Asia succeeded to surpass the pre-pandemic levels with 52 billion USD receipts from tourism. Meanwhile, OIC-Sub-Saharan Africa displayed more stable trends during the recovery. Receipts remained at 3 billion USD in 2020, increased to 4 billion USD in 2021, 5 billion USD in 2022 and 6 billion USD in both 2023 and 2024. This gradual recovery is still 14% lower than the 7 billion USD recorded in 2019, highlighting a slower rebound in this region.

It is essential to consider that exchange rate fluctuations can affect the comparison of total spending between countries. For instance, if the US dollar appreciates against a member state's currency, the same amount of tourism spending in local currency may convert to fewer US dollars.

This does not necessarily indicate a decrease in spending but rather reflects currency valuation changes. Additionally, major events like the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar had a substantial impact on tourism receipts in the OIC region. For example, average receipts per tourist in Qatar and the UAE exceeded 2500 USD during 2022, underscoring the significant influence of large-scale events on tourism income.

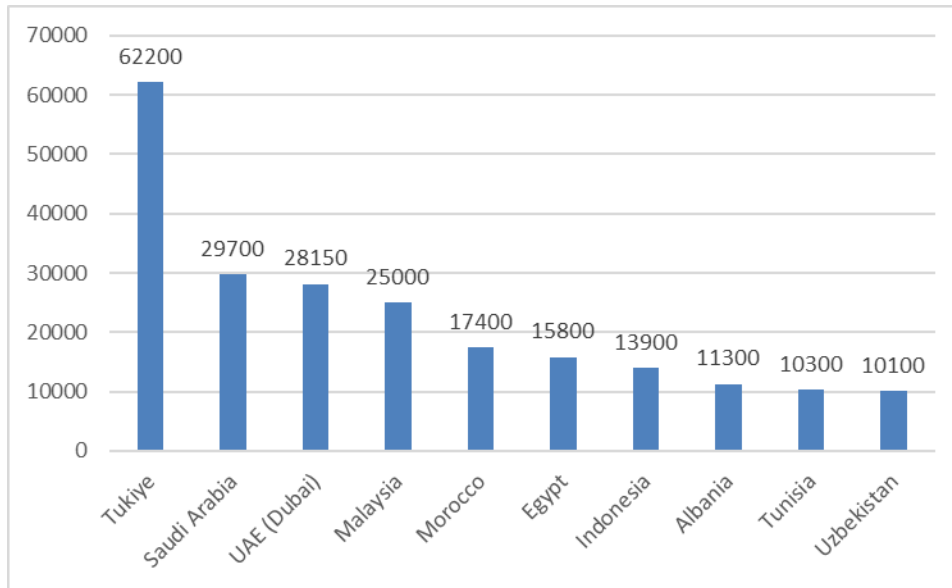
Figure 16. Tourism Receipts in the OIC Sub-Regions



Source: Adopted from UNWTO, 2025

The distribution of the tourist arrivals and tourism receipts among the OIC Member States has demonstrated the fact that international tourism in the Member Countries is concentrated in a few countries. In terms of tourist arrivals, Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, UAE (Dubai), Malaysia, Morocco, Egypt, Indonesia, Albania, Tunisia, and Uzbekistan were the top OIC Member Countries in 2024. As shown in the figure 17, these 10 countries together hosted around 224 million international arrivals in 2024. These countries host more than 80% of the arrivals to OIC. Türkiye (4th), Saudi Arabia (11th), Malaysia (12th), Morocco (17th) and Egypt (20th) were ranked in the top 20 countries in terms of arrivals in the World.

Figure 17. Top 10 OIC Tourism Destinations in Arrivals (Thousand) (2024)

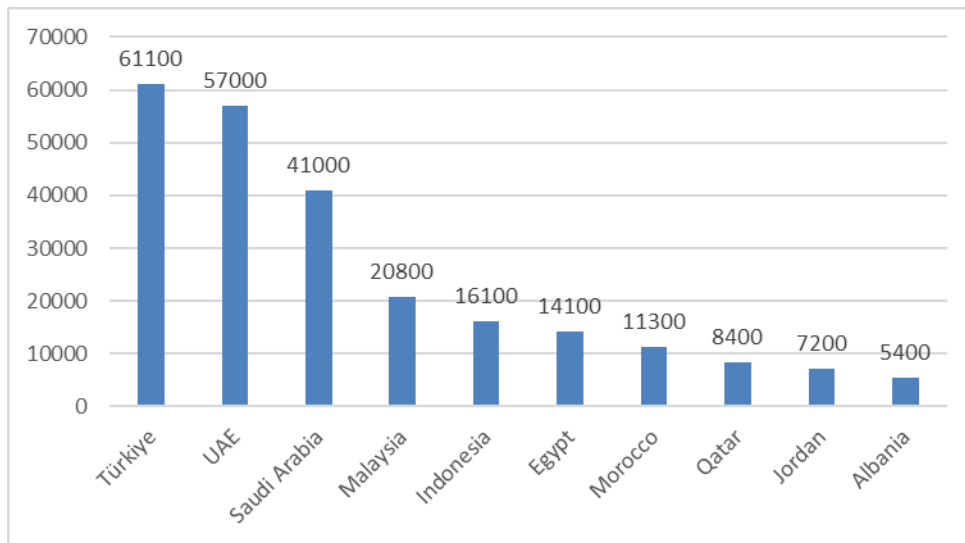


Source: UNWTO, (2025).

Concerning international tourism receipts, Türkiye, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Egypt, Morocco, Qatar, Jordan and Albania were the top 10 OIC member countries in 2023, as shown in figure 18. These countries collectively earned a substantial portion of total OIC tourism receipts (84%). Türkiye (5th), UAE (12th), Saudi Arabia (13th) and Malaysia (17th) were also ranked at top 20 list in terms of receipts in the World in 2024. This demonstrates their strong position in the global tourism market. The Gulf countries saw extraordinary growth compared to 2019, driven by large investments, marketing, and mega-events. The gulf countries are also considering a unified visa regime which would improve convenience and multi-destination travel within the region.

Egypt and Iran are also taking over their strong position after the pandemic. The Palestine Occupation have been affecting the tourism arrivals to neighbouring countries and will have implications on the 2024 tourism volume in the region. OIC members in Asia such as Malaysia and Indonesia which have suffered from the impacts of pandemic and extended travel restrictions at their source markets. They both recorded around 25%-digit growth respectively in 2024 yet still below their pre-pandemic volume. Uzbekistan recorded 50+% increase both in receipts and arrivals. Albania, and Kazakhstan continued their steady but impressive growth. The Palestine Occupation have been effecting the neighbouring OIC countries such as Lebanon. The visa regime of Western countries towards Russian citizens also affected the results.

Figure 18. Top 10 OIC Tourism Destinations in Receipts in 2024 (Million US \$)



Source: UNWTO (2024b)

As in the case of OIC tourist arrivals, the Figure 17 indicates that tourism receipts in the OIC countries are concentrated in a small number of countries, almost the same countries of the main COMCEC tourist destinations. The remaining OIC Member Countries' tourist arrivals and tourism receipts data are given in Appendix (Table 1 and Table 2) most OIC member statistics are not yet available for 2024.

Safety and security concerns and political stability are emerging as major challenges for OIC member states, and it is assumed that these issues will continue to cause difficulties in the years ahead. Governments should work hard to ensure the safety of tourists and to minimize the impact of security threats. Terrorist incidents, Israeli conflict, Ukrainian War, trade crises are still important obstacles for tourism in the region. The strength of the US dollar relative to other currencies is shifting the price competitiveness among destinations and will affect market share and rankings of OIC destinations.

Improving the Quality and Sustainability in Heritage Tourism in OIC Countries

The COMCEC Tourism Working Group in its 24th and 25th Meeting, focused on heritage tourism in OIC and provide recommendations on the identification, development, facilitation and management of sustainable heritage tourism for a more diversified, competitive and sustainable tourism industry within member countries.

Heritage tourism has emerged as one of the most dynamic and resilient forms of tourism, with both tangible and intangible assets forming the main products. For OIC Member Countries, the opportunity is particularly significant. Collectively, OIC host almost one-fifth of all UNESCO World Heritage Sites and an extraordinary range of intangible heritage, including languages, oral traditions, crafts, gastronomy, religious rituals, and cultural festivals. These resources represent not only unique cultural wealth but also a comparative advantage in the global tourism market. Heritage-driven tourism is less price-sensitive, less seasonal, and less vulnerable to external shocks compared to mass sun-lust tourism. Visitors who travel for heritage tend to stay longer, spend more per trip, and distribute their expenditures more broadly across communities and local economies creating a greater multiplier. This leads to stronger linkages with small and medium-sized enterprises, artisans, guides, and service providers, thereby reducing economic leakages and ensuring a wider distribution of benefits. For many OIC countries, heritage tourism is thus not only an economic driver but also a means of reinforcing cultural identity, building community pride, and fostering intercultural dialogue.

Despite these advantages, heritage tourism in OIC countries has yet to reach its full potential due to structural challenges and institutional weaknesses. Governance frameworks are often fragmented, with responsibilities dispersed across ministries of tourism, culture, environment, local municipalities and so on. Such fragmentation leads to overlapping mandates, inefficiency, and gaps in accountability. Conservation budgets are frequently insufficient, making sites vulnerable to degradation, neglect, and poor visitor management. Infrastructure problems further weaken competitiveness: public transportation, access roads, signage, interpretation centers, and visitor amenities remain underdeveloped in many destinations. At the same time, intangible heritage is often under-documented, leaving many traditions at risk of disappearance or superficial commodification that undermines authenticity. Environmental and climate-related pressures also pose serious risks. Rising sea levels threaten coastal sites, desertification affects fragile landscapes, and extreme weather events endanger monuments and archaeological treasures. In addition, overtourism in popular sites strains local infrastructure and erodes resident support, while secondary heritage destinations remain under-promoted and underutilized.

The COMCEC heritage tourism report highlights a comprehensive set of policy recommendations designed to address these challenges. Strengthening governance is the foremost priority. OIC countries are encouraged to establish integrated management plans for heritage sites, supported by clear institutional mandates and updated legal frameworks. Governance reform also entails the development of robust monitoring and evaluation systems that measure not only tourist arrivals but also conservation outcomes, community benefits, and cultural preservation

indicators. Such systems ensure that tourism growth aligns with broader development goals and does not undermine the very assets upon which it depends. A second policy priority is securing sustainable financing. Too often, heritage sites depend on fluctuating public budgets. To overcome this, OIC members are advised to create heritage trust funds, earmark a portion of tourism revenues for site conservation, or introduce small visitor levies dedicated to heritage upkeep. Public-private partnerships and donor contributions can further supplement these resources, ensuring that conservation is not sacrificed during fiscal downturns or crises.

Community empowerment is central to the long-term sustainability of heritage tourism. The report stresses that heritage cannot be sustainably managed without the full involvement of local communities. Residents should be engaged as co-managers and co-beneficiaries of heritage projects through participatory planning, benefit-sharing mechanisms, and employment opportunities. Training programs and certification systems for guides, artisans, and entrepreneurs are necessary to build capacity and enhance professionalism. Empowering communities not only ensures equitable distribution of benefits but also strengthens social responsibility for conservation and reduces tensions between residents and visitors. By embedding communities in heritage governance and entrepreneurship, OIC countries can transform heritage tourism into a driver of inclusive growth.

Diversification of heritage tourism products is another key recommendation. Reliance on a limited set of iconic sites risks congestion and uneven benefit distribution. OIC countries should broaden their portfolios by developing intangible heritage products, cultural festivals, and creative industries linked to heritage. Establishing thematic heritage corridors, such as Islamic architecture routes or Silk Road itineraries and so on can help disperse visitor flows across multiple destinations and strengthen regional branding. These initiatives not only enhance competitiveness but also foster cross-border cooperation among OIC members. At the same time, product diversification helps extend visitor stays and increase per capita spending, thereby raising overall economic impact. Branding and marketing are essential to this process. The report highlights the importance of storytelling, digital promotion, and partnerships with media, influencers, and cultural institutions to craft authentic and appealing heritage narratives. Effective marketing should emphasize authenticity and sustainability, avoiding the risks of over-commercialization that can erode cultural meaning.

Innovation and technology adoption further expand opportunities for heritage tourism. Digital mapping, augmented and virtual reality, e-ticketing, and mobile applications can enrich visitor interpretation, enhance accessibility, and support efficient crowd management. Predictive analytics can help regulate visitor flows and protect sensitive sites from overtourism. Smart infrastructure such as real-time monitoring of visitor movements or contactless ticketing systems improves both conservation and visitor safety. These technologies also make heritage more attractive to younger demographics, creating hybrid physical-digital experiences that broaden the appeal of heritage sites. Importantly, technology also facilitates broader access: lesser-known or remote sites can be promoted globally through digital platforms, while online archives and virtual tours extend the reach of OIC heritage to global audiences.

Regional cooperation among OIC members is a final and essential pillar. Many heritage assets span borders or share historical and cultural linkages that can be marketed collectively. Multi-

destination branding campaigns, shared training programs, and joint funding mechanisms can amplify recognition and create economies of scale. Cross-border heritage routes and collective UNESCO nominations offer ways for OIC countries to raise international visibility while deepening regional integration. Collaborative platforms for documenting heritage, sharing best practices, training heritage professionals, and promoting common sustainability standards can further strengthen the sector.

Ultimately, heritage tourism in OIC countries must be understood not only as an economic subsector but as a cross-cutting policy priority that contributes to cultural resilience, social inclusion, and national competitiveness. By embedding heritage into national tourism strategies, linking it with sustainable development goals, and aligning it with broader social and cultural objectives, OIC members can ensure that heritage tourism supports inclusive growth while safeguarding irreplaceable heritage resources for future generations. Heritage thus emerges not only as a driver of foreign exchange and employment but also as a vital instrument of cultural diplomacy, sustainable development, and identity preservation across the OIC countries.

5. Importance of Tourism Cooperation in the Member Countries

6.1 Tourism Potentials & Obstacles Faced in the Tourism Development and Cooperation in the Member Countries

OIC Member Countries have potential for the development of a sustainable international tourism sector with rich and diverse natural, geographical, historical and cultural heritage assets. OIC Member Countries' performances in tourism sector indicate that the share of the Member Countries in the global tourism sector is behind full potential and there is still a great deal of scope for realizing their full capacity.

It is acknowledged that both established and new destinations need to plan and create the adequate conditions and policies concerning;

- *Business environment*
- *Infrastructure*
- *Travel Facilitation*
- *Marketing*
- *Human resources*

Therefore, the Member Countries can increase the social and economic benefits and minimizing negative impacts via utilizing the tourism potential.

Figure 19. Tourism Opportunities in the Member Countries

Natural Resources
Cultural Resources
Human Resources
Authenticity and novelty
Price competitiveness
Dynamism

Source: Author's own elaboration

Tourism is a dynamic sector that is subject to political, social, environmental and technological trends, shaping tourist preferences, skill requirements of tourism related-jobs and structure of the tourism market. Current global trends—such as digitalization, climate adaptation, sustainable mobility, and the rise of new consumer segments (Gen Z, silver economy, and digital nomads)—are reshaping the industry and require OIC destinations to adapt proactively. It is crucial for the Member Countries to engage in the long-term global tourism market trends and to build sound tourism policies in order to improve their competitiveness in the global tourism market.

There are many challenges faced by the Member Countries for developing their tourism sector and making it internationally competitive. Challenges faced in the tourism development are diverse as each country has its own tourism assets, level of development and national development priorities and policies. The challenges affecting tourism performance in the Member Countries ranges from, among others, insufficient tourism-related infrastructure and investments, unskilled tourism workforce to low-capacity tourism administrations and safety and security issues (COMCEC Progress Report, 2013), as shown in Figure 20.

In order to address the challenge of insufficient tourism-related infrastructure and investments, the quality and efficiency of tourism infrastructure and services need to be improved inline with the international standards. To develop tourism-related infrastructure in the Member Countries, private sector's resources can also be utilized. In this respect, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) can be promoted and an enabling environment can be provided for attracting more FDI in the tourism sector. In the case of many Member Countries, these challenges still include the lack of technical know-how and the weak promotional activity.

Due to its labour-intensive nature, tourism sector requires a highly qualified workforce that has a direct effect on the quality of tourism services. Despite the fundamental awareness and basic perception of the economic importance of tourism as an industry and its positive impact as a potential source of foreign exchange earnings and employment, in many cases there is lack of trained tourism workforce. Thus, training programs and projects need to be developed for upgrading the quality of workforce in the member countries.

Figure 20. Challenges Affecting Tourism Performance in the Member Countries

Insufficient Tourism Investments and Infrastructure
Poor Tourism Planning & Product Development
Travel Facilitation Problems
Safety and Security Related Problems
Low Tourism Service Quality
Insufficient Marketing and Promotion
Insufficient Image Building and Branding

Source: Author's own elaboration

These challenges should be addressed for the sustainable growth of tourism sector in the Member States. These are common challenges among the countries; however, each member state should specify the high-priority challenges considering its own conditions and try to solve the problems in the tourism industry. Tailored strategies are essential, but regional knowledge sharing through COMCEC's Tourism Working Group can accelerate adoption of good practices and avoid duplication of efforts.

The issue of developing consistent tourism strategies and policies is also one of the main challenges facing many Member Countries, which are still experiencing difficulties in developing integrated tourism policies. Effective administration, robust data collection (including big data and mobile data), regulation, and integrated institutional frameworks are critical for evidence-based policymaking and long-term competitiveness.

The absence or weak publicity promotion and mass media exposure due to the limited communication systems and technological services are other obstacles for tourism development in the OIC Member Countries. Digital platforms, AI-driven marketing, immersive technologies, and influencer partnerships are now central tools in destination branding. COMCEC countries should strengthen their visibility through official websites, social media campaigns, and cooperative digital marketing initiatives to reach global markets cost-effectively.

6.2 Tourism Cooperation under the COMCEC Umbrella

Tourism cooperation could play a significant role in the socio-economic development of the COMCEC Member Countries, if properly planned and managed. The COMCEC Economic Summit, held in İstanbul in 2009, has prioritized the cooperation in the field of tourism sector. Since then, the COMCEC has increased its efforts for enhancing cooperation among the Member States in tourism.

In addition to ongoing activities such as Tourism Ministerial Meetings, workshops, seminars, tourism fairs, COMCEC encourages modalities that enable involvement of relevant stakeholders such as private sector and local communities in tourism activities. In this respect, the "OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum" was established in 2011 and convened its first Meeting on 7-8 December 2012 in İzmir, Türkiye. The Forum annually brings together the private sector representatives of the member states operating in the field of tourism to share their experience and explore ways and means to enhance the cooperation in this field. The 2nd Meeting of the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum was held on 16-17 December 2013 in İstanbul with the theme of "Effective Marketing Strategies for Promoting Tourism Destinations in the OIC Member Countries."

Moreover, the 3rd Meeting of the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum was held on 29-30 January 2015 in İstanbul with the theme of "International Branding of Tourism Destinations in the OIC Member Countries." The Forum emphasized the importance of effective marketing and branding strategies for promoting the tourism destinations in the OIC Member Countries and highlighted that effective marketing and branding requires utilization of full range of tools available including digital marketing activities, social media, mobile phone applications, PR, and so on. Furthermore, importance of multi-stakeholder engagement is underlined as a critical success factor for tourism branding particularly through utilizing Public Private Partnerships and stressed the significance of joint endeavours such as joint promotion work, cultural tourism routes and joint tours and familiarization programs/trips to overcome the negative media image of Islamic Countries resulting from misguiding media coverage and problems like Islamophobia, Epidemics, Terror, and so on.

The 4th Meeting of the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum was held on 14-15 January 2016 in İstanbul with the theme of "Promoting Muslim-Friendly Tourism (MFT) Products and

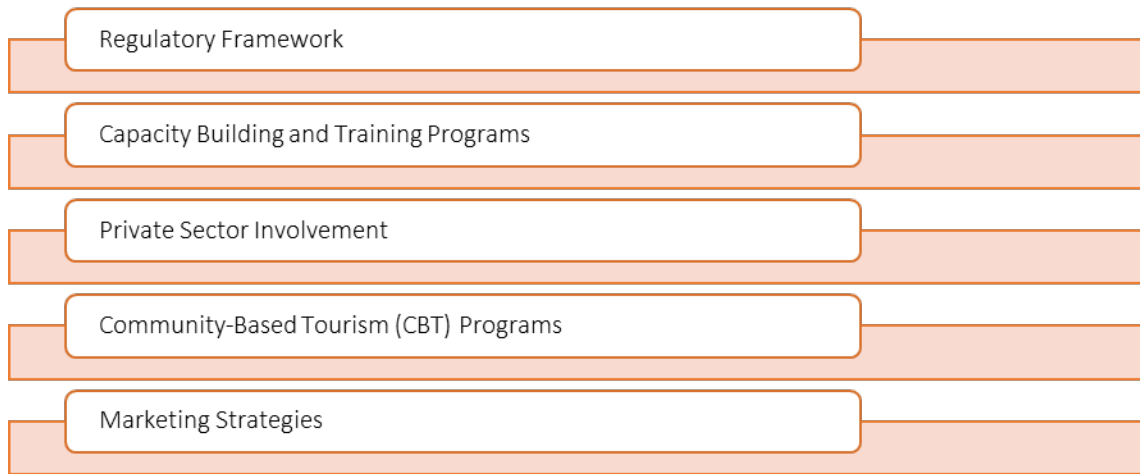
Services in the OIC Member Countries.” In this forum, the participants discussed the current state of international tourism in the OIC Member Countries as well as prospects and challenges in this regard. Moreover, the participants also deliberated on the global trends and policies in promoting MFT products and services and the challenges faced by the private sector in the Member Countries in promoting MFT products and services. The participants emphasized the importance of raising awareness about MFT, not only in the OIC Member Countries, but also in the Non-OIC world. In this regard, the participants highlighted the significance of the effective utilization of the existing mechanisms under the OIC/COMCEC, such as SMIIC’s technical Committee on tourism, for enhancing cooperation in MFT.

The 7th Meeting of the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum was held on September 5th, 2019, in İstanbul, Türkiye with the theme of “Prospects for the Development of Health Tourism in the OIC Member States.” The 8th Forum (2020) focused on “Al-Quds Al-Sharif: A Special Destination,” while the 9th (2021) discussed “Covid-19 Pandemic Impact on Tourism Sector and Recovery Strategies.” The 10th Forum, held in 2022, examined “Prospects and Challenges for Gastronomy Tourism in OIC Countries,” and the 11th (2023) addressed “Climate-friendly Tourism in the Era of Sustainability.” In 2024, the 12th Forum explored “Sustainable Destination Development and Management in OIC Countries,” and most recently, the 13th Forum (2025) focused on “Tourism and Rural Development in OIC Countries.” The Forum continues to serve as a vital communication platform for private sector representatives from Member States, with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye acting as the Secretariat.

*Tourism has been defined as one of the six cooperation areas in **the COMCEC Strategy**, adopted by the 4th Extraordinary Summit held on 14-15 August 2012 in Makkah Al-Mukarramah, Saudi Arabia.*

*The Strategic Objective defined by the COMCEC Strategy is **“Developing a sustainable and competitive tourism sector in the OIC Member Countries.”** With a view to achieving this objective, the Strategy envisages five output areas, namely regulatory framework; training and capacity building programs; private sector involvement; community based tourism programs and marketing strategies.*

Figure 21. Output Areas in the Tourism Section of the COMCEC Strategy



Source: Author's own elaboration

In order to achieve the objectives in the field of tourism, the COMCEC Strategy brings two new and well-defined implementation instruments, namely Tourism Working Group and the COMCEC Project Cycle Management (PCM).

COMCEC Tourism Working Group aims at providing a platform for the member states for elaborating issues thoroughly, sharing their experience and best practices and creating a common understanding to respond their common problems.

In this framework, the 1st Meeting of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group was held on April 25th, 2013 in Ankara, Türkiye with the theme of "A New Trend in Sustainable Tourism Development: Community Based Tourism in the OIC Member Countries." The representatives of 15 Member States, which have notified their focal points for the Tourism Working Group, attended the Meeting. The relevant OIC institutions and some scholars have also attended the Meeting. The representatives of the Member States have shared their experiences, achievements and challenges in implementing the Community-Based Tourism (CBT) Programs in their respective countries. The Meeting has considered the Studies namely "Community Based Tourism: Finding the Equilibrium in the COMCEC Context" commissioned by the COMCEC Coordination Office and the "Tourism Outlook 2013" prepared by the COMCEC Coordination Office. The outcomes of the Meeting were published by the COMCEC Coordination Office with the document titled the "Proceedings of the 1st Meeting of the Tourism Working Group", available on the COMCEC website (www.comcec.org).

The 2nd Meeting of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group was held on October 3rd, 2013 in Ankara, Türkiye with the theme of "Tourism Product Development and Marketing Strategies in the OIC Member Countries." The Meeting was attended by the representatives of 11 Member States, which have notified their focal points for the Tourism Working Group and representatives of the COMCEC Coordination Office, SESRIC and Islamic Center for Development of Trade (ICDT) and some private sector representatives. The COMCEC Tourism Outlook and an analytical study namely "Tourism Product Development and Marketing Strategies" have been prepared and submitted to the Meeting. The representatives of the Member States have shared their experiences, achievements and challenges in tourism product development and marketing

strategies in their respective countries as well as explore cooperation potential among each other. The Meeting highlighted that tourism product development and marketing requires effective collaboration among different stakeholders. It was stressed that because of its competitive nature, effective marketing requires utilization of the full range of tools available including among others PR activities, e-marketing, social media, and so on. Some recommendations have been made for enhancing cooperation among the Member Countries in the field of product development and marketing. These were, among others, introducing award programs, conducting joint exhibitions, developing joint tourism products, organizing exchange programs for experts and developing joint data base for tourism products among the Member Countries. Moreover, Proceedings of the Second Meeting of the Tourism Working Group, which reflects the outcomes of the Meeting was prepared and published on the COMCEC Website (www.comcec.org).

The 3rd Meeting of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group was held on March 4th, 2014 in Ankara, Türkiye with the theme of “Enabling Tourism Investment Climate in the OIC Member Countries.” The Meeting was attended by the representatives of 14 Member States, which have notified their focal points for the Tourism Working Group and representatives of SESRIC, Islamic Center for Development of Trade (ICDT), International Finance Corporation (IFC) and representatives from private sector. The Representatives of the Member States have shared their experiences, achievements and challenges regarding tourism investments in their respective countries. Moreover, the Studies titled “Enabling Tourism Investment Climate: Challenges and Prospects for Tourism Investments in the OIC Member Countries” commissioned by the COMCEC Coordination Office and the “COMCEC Tourism Outlook 2014” prepared by the COMCEC Coordination Office were the main inputs for enriching the discussions during the Meeting. The presentations and deliberations made during the meeting highlighted that governments play a crucial role for creating an enabling investment climate for tourism investors. It was stressed that creating an enabling tourism investment climate requires utilization of the full range of tools and strategies including among others, provision of clear, updated information and prompt responses to investor inquiries, updated investment promotion websites, effective coordination among relevant stakeholders, providing infrastructure (including road networks, electricity, etc.), allocation of land for specific tourism projects, effective incentive packages, easy procedures and financial support for the local tourism SMEs as well as foreign entrepreneurs and utilization of alternative investment financing options such as crowdfunding.

The 4th Meeting of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group was held on September 4th, 2014 with the theme of “Enhancing the Capacity of Tourism Workforce in the OIC Member Countries for Improved Tourism Service Quality.” The participants deliberated on tourism workforce capacity, identify the challenges faced by the Member Countries as well as possible solutions to address these challenges. The Meeting provided opportunity to the Member Countries to learn from each other’s experience and good practices. During this meeting, Tourism Working Group discussed two policy options:

- Developing Tourism Workforce Development Strategies in the Member States and supporting the effective implementation of the existing ones
- The importance of enhancing the capacity of tourism workforce in the member countries.

The policy recommendations of the 4th Meeting of the Tourism Working Group were submitted to the 30th Ministerial Session of the COMCEC held on 25-28 November 2014 in İstanbul. The 30th Session of the COMCEC commended the efforts of the Working Groups towards approximating

policies among the Member States in their field of competence and took note of the policy recommendations of the Tourism Working Group.

The 5th Meeting of COMCEC Tourism Working Group was held with the theme of "Travel Facilitation for Enhancing Mobility in the OIC Member Countries" on February 5th, 2015. In line with the recommendations of the analytical study and the responses of the Member Countries to the policy questions, which were circulated before the Meeting, the Working Group put forward two policy recommendations in the meeting:

- Encouraging visa facilitation among the Member Countries;
- Developing air linkages and increasing the airline capacity were highlighted by tourism working group.

The 6th Meeting of the Tourism Working Group was held on September 3rd, 2015 with theme of "Effective Tourism Marketing Strategies: ICT-Based Solutions for the OIC Member Countries." The Representatives of the Member States have shared their experiences, achievements and challenges on ICT-based tourism marketing in their respective countries. The Meeting has considered the Studies "Effective Tourism Marketing Strategies: ICT-Based Solutions for the OIC Member Countries" commissioned by the COMCEC Coordination Office and the "COMCEC Tourism Outlook 2015" prepared by the COMCEC Coordination Office. The Meeting has come up with a set of policy recommendations:

- Building and Strengthening a Skilled Workforce on ICT-Based Tourism Marketing in the Member Countries
- Enhancing cooperation between the government and private sector on ICT usage and diffusion in tourism marketing
- Developing comprehensive and effective digital marketing strategies in the Member Countries

7th Meeting of the Tourism Working Group was held on 4 February 2016 with the theme of "Muslim Friendly Tourism: Understanding the Demand and Supply Sides in the OIC Member Countries". The Tourism Working Group provided the opportunity to thoroughly discuss the main concepts and the general overview of Muslim-friendly tourism from a policy perspective.

In line with the recommendations of the analytical study, as well as the responses of the Member Countries to the policy questions that were circulated before the Meeting, the Working Group put forward the following policy recommendations:

- Developing basic guidelines for improving the basic MFT-related services.
- Increasing awareness about the MFT market among the travel industry stakeholders through standardizing terminology used in MFT, introducing market awareness and customer service training programs and utilizing social media for promotion and marketing.

Similarly, the policy recommendations of the 8th Meeting of the Tourism Working Group on "Muslim Friendly Tourism (MFT): Developing and Marketing MFT Products and Services in the OIC Countries" was submitted to the 32nd Session of the COMCEC held on 21-24 November 2016 in Istanbul. Following policy recommendations were suggested as the outcome of the meetings, discussions as well as the analytical studies:

- Developing a national Muslim Friendly Tourism strategy that links to the country's overall tourism goals through focusing on building stakeholder awareness, establishing a dedicated MFT body/committee and developing a national MFT products/services and marketing development strategy.

- Conducting government-led MFT-focused destination marketing through developing an MFT branding and positioning for the benefit of local service providers and measuring the potential of a destination for MFT by funding/organizing short-term campaigns.
- Supporting SMEs through developing training and mentorship programs.
- Developing bilateral tourism cooperation within the OIC through technical knowledge exchange and joint promotion efforts for MFT destinations.

The 9th Meeting of the Tourism Working Group on "Muslim Friendly Tourism (MFT): Regulating Accommodation Establishments in the OIC Member Countries." After the analytical report was presented, member countries, representatives of international organizations and private sector also shared their experiences. Various policy recommendations were suggested based on the discussion:

- Definition and standardization of certification of MFT facilities along the tourism industry.
- Developing a MFT strategy at the destination and offering incentives for MFT services and investments.
- Improving international cooperation on MFT certification on different requirements of MFT standards and appointing an authority responsible for MFT certification both at national and international levels.

The 10th Meeting of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group was held on September 21st, 2017 in Ankara, Türkiye with the theme of "Risk and Crisis Management in Tourism Sector: Recovery from Crisis in the OIC Member Countries". The Meeting has considered the Studies "Risk and Crises Management in Tourism in the OIC Member Countries" commissioned by the COMCEC Coordination Office and the "COMCEC Tourism Outlook 2017" prepared by the COMCEC Coordination Office. Following policy recommendations were suggested as the outcome of the meetings, discussions as well as the analytical studies:

- Recognizing and identifying threats and risks, planning scenarios for each of the likely threats, establishing crises management processes and recovery task force during pre-crises periods.
- Preparing national crises management strategies and contingency plans and communicate these with the tourism industry stakeholders.
- Diversifying products and market portfolio in order to expand the portfolio and target less sensitive markets.
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The 11th Meeting of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group was held on February 15th, 2018 in Ankara, Türkiye with the theme of "Destination Development and Institutionalization Strategies in the OIC Member Countries". The Representatives of the Member States have shared their experiences, achievements and challenges regarding destination development in their respective countries. The Meeting has considered report on "Destination Development and Institutionalization Strategies in the OIC Member Countries" commissioned by the COMCEC Coordination Office. The policy recommendations offered after the meeting were as follows;

- Decentralization in destination management, empowering local structures and governance.
- Involving stakeholders including local governments, tourism industry, NGOs and public into destination planning and creating a shared vision of the destination.
- Improving private sector involvement in destination management, enhancing effectiveness and transparency of DMOs, diversifying their funding sources including

membership fees and commercial income besides the public funding.

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The theme of the 12th Meeting of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group was of “Destination Marketing Strategies in the OIC Member Countries”. After COMCEC Coordination Office delivered a presentation on Tourism Outlook in OIC Countries, the thematic report on Destination Marketing Strategies was presented, OIC representatives, participants from international organizations and private sector representative shared their experiences. After the full day deliberations, the Workgroup offered the following policy recommendations;

- *Establishing / Empowering a central body (i.e. DMO, CVB) to be responsible for marketing efforts at the destination level*
- *Managing and regulating existing distribution channels and creation of new distribution channels to prevent dependency and minimize power asymmetry.*
- *Collecting, storing, analysing and dissemination of market data; visitor characteristics, seasonality, distribution channel performance, source markets, trends and so on.*

The 13th Meeting of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group was held on February 13rd, 2019 in Ankara, Türkiye with the theme of “Sustainable Destination Management Strategies in the OIC Member Countries”. The Meeting involved a presentation of the OIC Tourism Outlook and the report on “Sustainable Destination Management Strategies in the OIC Member Countries” commissioned by the COMCEC Coordination Office. Following policy recommendations were suggested as the outcome of the meetings, discussions as well as the analytical studies:

- *Facilitating stakeholder engagement at the destination level and encourage tourism businesses’ sustainable tourism efforts.*
- *Improving community participation by minimizing leakages from local economy, conduct media campaigns to increase local community involvement as well as tourist awareness of tourism sustainability.*
- *Establishing KPIs for sustainable tourism development based on international standards and climate change agreements.*

The 14th Meeting of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group was “Developing Multi-Destination Tourism Corridors in the Member Countries”. The Meeting involved a presentation of the OIC Tourism Outlook and the report on Developing Multi-Destination Tourism Corridors in the Member Countries” commissioned by the COMCEC Coordination Office. Following policy recommendations were suggested as the outcome of the meetings, discussions as well as the analytical studies:

- *Identify potential tourism corridors with different themes such as Islamic Silk Road, Alexander the Great, The travels of Imam Bukhari, Cross-border parks and protected areas in West Africa and so on.*
- *Establish an OIC-wide advisory body to support and develop cross-border corridor development.*
- *Establish a funding scheme to support corridor development, investments and international cooperation between destinations*

The 15th Meeting of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group was held on September 24th-25th, 2020 in a virtual-only format, with the theme of “Developing Medical Tourism in the OIC Member Countries”. The Meeting was attended by the representatives of 18 Member States. Representatives of COMCEC Coordination Office, UNWTO, WTTC, ICDT, ICCIA and SMIIC have also attended the Meeting. The Meeting involved a presentation of the OIC Tourism Outlook and the report on “Developing Medical Tourism in the OIC Member Countries” commissioned by the COMCEC Coordination Office. Following policy recommendations were suggested as the outcome of the discussions as well as the analytical studies:

- Establish «Medical Service Quality Accreditation Body» specific to healthcare provision in OIC countries in order to supervise countries and bring standards to international level.*
- Develop «OIC Health Tourism Statistical System» in order to achieve efficiency and effectiveness of medical tourism activities*
- To sign protocols between governments for bilateral or regional agreements between public/private stakeholders including insurances and hospitals in order to sustain the exchange of patients*

The 16th and 17th Meetings of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group was held in a virtual-only format during Covid-19, with the theme of “Mitigation Strategies for Tourism After Covid-19”. The Representatives of the Member States have shared their experiences, achievements and challenges regarding mitigation strategies in their respective countries. The participants have deliberated on the aforementioned theme and considered the study “Mitigation Strategies for Tourism After Covid-19” commissioned by the COMCEC Coordination Office.

- Keeping tourism industry afloat by offering subsidized cheap credits with government guarantee, utilizing selective financial and fiscal tools including tax holidays and discounts; subsidies on such costs as rent, utilities, energy, water; allowing accelerated depreciation and wage subsidies and social security contributions.*
- Enhancing Intra-OIC collaboration in establishing organizational level safety standards; creating shared certification and audit systems, investing on a shared application of testing and tracking, implementing a standard semaphore at OIC level; enhancing data sharing and establishing travel bubbles between countries.*
- Facilitating short term demand; encouraging domestic travel; offering holiday credits and vouchers, extend bank holidays and tax discounts on domestic tourism services that might encourage residents to travel inside the country while discouraging outgoing tourism; and calling for advance public purchase of airline tickets, meetings, events and lodging services to support tourism industry.*

The 18th and 19th Meetings of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group were held in a virtual-only format with the theme of “Sustainable Human Resources Management in the Tourism Sector”. Member country representatives shared their experiences, achievements and difficulties in the management of human resources in their countries. Participants conveyed their thoughts on the aforementioned theme and exchanged ideas on the “Sustainable Human Resources Management in the Tourism Industry” study commissioned by the COMCEC Coordination Office. At the meeting, besides the research report prepared on the aforementioned theme, the countries where the case studies were conducted were discussed in detail, and the opinions and suggestions of the participants were made together with the findings revealed within the scope of the relevant study, and policy recommendations on the subject were formulated.

- Promoting in-service training, tourism schools, certificate programs, international exchange programs, and internship opportunities with a view to improving service and quality in the tourism industry
- Ensuring the sustainability of Employee well-being through, among others, rewards, bonuses or raises in salary and favourable working circumstances.
- Increasing synergy between businesses and educational institutions

The theme of 20th and 21st Working Group Meetings of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group were “Promoting Entrepreneurship for Tourism Industry Competitiveness in The OIC Countries”. Member country representatives shared their experiences, achievements and difficulties facilitating tourism entrepreneurship and tools, subventions and policies they utilize to improve tourism entrepreneurial fora. Participants also discussed their thoughts about the analytical report on “Promoting Entrepreneurship for Tourism Industry Competitiveness in The OIC Countries” prepared by the experts commissioned by the COMCEC Coordination Office. Based on deliberations policy recommendations were prepared during the 21st Working group meeting.

22nd and 23rd COMCEC Tourism Working Group Meetings focused on “Developing and Branding Gastronomy Tourism Destinations within OIC”. As discussed earlier, sustainable development of tourism in OIC depends on diversification of tourism products. One way to accomplish this is focusing on growing market segments where OIC tourism have potentially competitive advantage. Another growing segment is gastronomy tourism. More people are traveling for local food experiences. Moreover, local gastronomy is also a supporting experience and have proven to affect destination choices of regular tourists as well. After all, eating is a physical need and an average tourist spends one third of his budget on food at the destination. Despite most OIC destinations have rich cuisine, and potential improvements in the value chain we failed to produce internationally renowned food, gastronomy destinations and brands. This thematic study provides suggestions on how to identify, develop and promote potential gastronomy tourism products and destinations within OIC.

The 24th and 25th Meetings of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group were dedicated to the theme of “Improving Quality and Sustainability in Heritage Tourism in OIC Countries.” These meetings emphasized the critical role of heritage—both tangible and intangible—as a driver of competitiveness, resilience, and cultural continuity within OIC tourism. Delegates underlined that heritage tourism visitors tend to stay longer, spend more, and distribute expenditures more widely across local communities, thereby creating stronger and more sustainable linkages with environment, locals, SMEs, artisans, and cultural institutions. The policy recommendations that emerged focused on strengthening governance and institutional frameworks for heritage management, securing sustainable financing through trust funds and earmarked visitor levies, and embedding local communities as co-managers and beneficiaries of heritage tourism projects. Additional recommendations included diversifying heritage products by integrating intangible assets, festivals, and creative industries, leveraging digital technologies such as virtual reality and smart visitor management, and enhancing regional cooperation through heritage corridors and multi-destination branding. By adopting these strategies, OIC member states are encouraged to transform heritage into a sustainable pillar of tourism development, ensuring both conservation of cultural assets and inclusive economic benefits for their societies.

6.2.1. COMCEC Project Support Programs

6.2.1.1.COMCEC Project Funding (CPF)

The other important instrument for the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy is the COMCEC Project Funding (CPF) Mechanism. Through the CPF, the CCO provides grants to the selected projects proposed by the relevant OIC institutions and Member States that have already registered with the Tourism Working Group (TWG). Projects financed under the CPF need to serve multilateral cooperation and must be designed in accordance with the objectives and the expected outcomes defined by the Strategy in the tourism section. Projects also play important roles in realization of the Policy Recommendations formulated by the Member Countries during the TWG meetings.

Within the scope of COMCEC Project Funding, ten Calls for Project Proposals were made between 2013-2023. With these project calls, a total of 25 selected projects in the fields of tourism were implemented by the relevant OIC Member Countries and OIC Institutions. The general information regarding the projects implemented is presented in the table below.

Call No	Country/Institution	Project Title	Partners
1	Azerbaijan	Cities of Common Cultural Heritage	Kazakhstan, Türkiye and Uzbekistan
	SESRIC	Improving Statistical Capacities of Tourism Sector in COMCEC Mediterranean and Gulf Region	10 Member Countries
2	The Gambia	Strengthening Community Resilience through eco-tourism.	Senegal and Guinea Bissau
3	The Gambia	Enhancing the Capacity of Craft Producers in the OIC Member Countries	Senegal, Mali
	Malaysia	Short Course on Strategies in Enhancing Tourism Workforce in CommunityBased Tourism (CBT) within OIC Member Countries	10 Member Countries
4	The Gambia	Developing a Training and Certification Program for the Muslim Travel, Tourism and Hospitality Industry	Nigeria, Senegal
	Mozambique	ENHANCING CAPACITY OF MUSLIM FRIENDLY TOURISM WORKFORCE	Mali, Senegal
	SESRIC	Training Program on the Development and Promotion of Muslim Friendly Tourism in COMCEC Member Countries	18 Member Countries
	Sudan	Enhancing The Capacity of Craft Producers & Customers service In OIC Member Countries	Chad, Djibouti

5	<i>Burkina Faso</i>	<i>Strengthening the Resilience of Tourism Sector Against Crises through Communication</i>	<i>Niger, Côte d'Ivoire</i>
	<i>Mali</i>	<i>Training on Crisis Communication in Tourism for Selected OIC Member Countries</i>	<i>Burkina Faso, Niger, Mauritania, Senegal</i>
	<i>Mozambique</i>	<i>Community-Based Tourism through The Promotion of Heritage Sites for Poverty Alleviation</i>	<i>The Gambia, Malaysia, Sudan, Uganda</i>
	<i>SESRIC</i>	<i>Improving Islamic Tourism Ecosystem in OIC Member Countries: Destination and Industry Development</i>	<i>13 Member Countries</i>
6	<i>ICDT</i>	<i>Developing Muslim-Friendly Tourism in Guyana and Suriname</i>	<i>Suriname, Türkiye, Malaysia</i>
	<i>Mali</i>	<i>Capacity Building on Destination Management Organizations of OIC Member Countries</i>	<i>Burkina Faso, Togo, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Guinea, Mauritania</i>
	<i>Mozambique</i>	<i>Improving Human Capacity on Muslim Friendly Tourism for Regulating Accommodation Establishments in the OIC Member Countries</i>	<i>Malaysia, Sudan, Uganda, Nigeria</i>
	<i>Gambia</i>	<i>Training of Accommodation Providers in the OIC Member Countries on Muslim Friendly Tourism Standards and Quality Service Provision</i>	<i>Senegal, Nigeria</i>
	<i>Azerbaijan</i>	<i>Destination Management Organization: Conceptual Framework for Azerbaijan, Cameroon and Iran</i>	<i>Cameroon, Iran</i>
7	<i>Cameroon</i>	<i>Capacity Building of Destination Management Organizations (DMO) Stakeholders</i>	<i>Azerbaijan, Burkina Faso, Türkiye</i>
	<i>Uganda</i>	<i>Community-Based Tourism through the Promotion of Heritage Sites</i>	<i>Sudan, Mozambique, Nigeria</i>
	<i>Türkiye</i>	<i>Revitalizing Mevlana's Travel Route</i>	<i>Azerbaijan, Iran</i>
9	<i>Nigeria</i>	<i>A Two-Day Training on Human Resource Management in Tourism Sector</i>	<i>The Gambia</i>
	<i>Uganda</i>	<i>Risk Analysis and Crisis Planning and Management for Community Based Tourism</i>	<i>Mozambique, Nigeria, Sudan</i>

10	Mali	<i>Accommodation Establishments Quality Improvement Program in Tourism Sector in 3 OIC Member Countries (Mali-Burkina Faso-Guinea)</i>	<i>Burkina Faso, Guinea, Niger, Morocco</i>
	Uganda	<i>Enhancing the Capacity of Tour and Travel Personnel for Adapting to Changing Trends in Tourism Sector</i>	-
11	Mali	<i>Capacity Building of Tourism Guides in Selected OIC Member Countries</i>	<i>Burkina Faso, Nigeria</i>
	Nigeria	<i>Enhancing Capacities of Tourism Stakeholders for Adapting to Customers Changing Needs</i>	<i>Gambia, Uganda and Mali</i>
	Togo	<i>Improving Entrepreneurial Capacities of Selected Tourism Stakeholders for Ensuring Competitiveness in Tourism</i>	<i>Türkiye</i>
	Uganda	<i>Empowering Entrepreneurship Skills of Community-Based Tourism Enterprises to Enhance Competitiveness of Tourism Industry</i>	<i>Cameroon, Malaysia and Senegal</i>
	SESRIC	<i>Strengthening the Capacities of African Tourism Boards through Sustainable Human Resource Management Practices</i>	<i>17 Member Countries</i>

Moreover, under the 12th Call for Project Proposals, seven projects were selected to be financed by the CCO in 2025. These projects are as follows;

The first project, namely “Capacity Building of Stakeholders through Experience Sharing in Agrotourism Practices”, is being implemented by Burkina Faso with the partnership of Morocco. This project targets empowering the connection between agriculture and livestock farming with tourism, diversifying the range of tourist products, and enhancing the appeal of agrotourism destinations.

The second project, titled “Strategic Planning and Marketing Strategies for the Promotion of Gastronomy Tourism”, is being implemented by Bangladesh with the participation of Türkiye. This project seeks to develop comprehensive strategic plans and effective marketing strategies to position Bangladesh as a top culinary tourism destination.

The third project, titled “Enhancing Maldivian Gastronomy Tourism by Increasing the Recognition of Traditional Cuisine” is being implemented by Maldives. It aims to boost tourism competitiveness by promoting and branding Maldivian gastronomy through stronger links between tourism and local communities.

The fourth project, titled “Reimagining Islamic Heritage Tourism: Best Practices and Critical Success Factors”, is being implemented by Malaysia with the cooperation of four partners, namely Uzbekistan, Türkiye, Jordan and Mali. This project aims to identify the critical factors that contribute to sustainable Islamic heritage tourism and raise awareness among tourism stakeholders to enhance the recognition of Islamic heritage tourism.

The fifth project, called “Empowering Sustainable Tourism: Integrating Blue, Green, Circular Economy into Tourism Operations”, has been implemented by Indonesia with the partnership of Malaysia and Türkiye. This project focused on strengthening the competitive and sustainable tourism industry through promoting resource efficiency, waste management, renewable energy, and circular economy models.

The sixth project, namely “Effective Management of Tourism Heritage Sites for Enhancing the Quality and Sustainability in Tourism” has been implemented by Uganda with the participation of the Gambia. This project focused on empowering the tourism economy by protecting heritage resources and values, equipping leading stakeholders in heritage tourism with effective and quality management techniques.

The last project, titled “Promoting Gastronomy Tourism for the Destination Senegal”, has been implemented by SESRIC in partnership with Türkiye, Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, Uzbekistan and Malaysia. This project aimed to create a strong brand identity for Senegal in gastronomy tourism by equipping relevant stakeholders with essential marketing and management skills and effective collaboration approaches.

On the other hand, the CCO has made the 13th Call on October 1st, 2025. Relevant documents are available on the COMCEC Project Support Programs website. (<https://programs.comcec.org/>)

6. Conclusion

Tourism industry has enjoyed continued expansion and diversification, consolidating its position as one of the largest and fastest-growing global industries, surpassing pre-pandemic levels in both arrivals and receipts by 2024. Surviving various global crises, tourism has evolved into a global phenomenon – one of the most important economic sectors and social activities of the time.

Tourism continues to be an important economic sector capable of attracting foreign direct investments and supporting sustainable economic development, the production of fairly distributed wealth, the creation of employment opportunities and poverty alleviation, particularly in developing countries and the Least Developed Countries.

According to the UNWTO statistics, almost 1.5 billion international tourists travelled in 2024 with an average annual increase of over 4% since the year 2000 until the pandemic. The sector continues to account for roughly 10% of world GDP and remains one of the most important sources of employment and foreign exchange, that should be supported by governments around the World as part of the policies for stimulating economic growth.

From the period 1980 to 2019, international tourism receipts—which are the export value of tourism, excluding international passenger transport—increased from US\$125 billion in 1980 to 1.7 billion USD in 2024 (UNWTO, 2025) denoting a solid increase in four decades. In real terms, this corresponds to an average growth of 4 percent a year, which has almost the same pace as tourist arrivals.

The pandemic caused a sudden and deep decline, yet the rebound was faster than expected. By 2024, many destinations surpassed pre-pandemic performance. This growth will require OIC Member Countries to adopt a concerted and coordinated approach to planning and development within the industry, governments and educational institutions to ensure that they fulfil their potential in the future.

Considering the modest share of the OIC Member Countries in international tourism market, it is evident that the inherent potential has not yet been fully realized and manifested itself in desirable levels. During the pre-pandemic period of 2019 OIC share was 16% for global arrivals and 13% of global receipts. OIC destinations succeeded to increase their share to 19% of global tourism arrivals and around 17% of receipts in 2024. OIC Member States need to understand how they can further strengthen the position of their tourism industry in response to current global economic challenges and remain competitive among emerging destinations, within a sustainable development perspective.

As in the case of OIC tourist arrivals, tourism receipts in the Member Countries are concentrated in a small number of countries, almost the same countries of the main OIC tourist destinations. The share of international tourism receipts in the total exports of each member country indicates that tourism plays a significant role in the economies of member countries and constitutes an important source of foreign exchange earnings. All OIC sub-regions recorded growth in both

arrivals and receipts in 20243. However, OIC-MENA dominates both arrivals and receipts. Therefore, there is also a need to focus development of OIC-Asia and OIC Sub-Saharan Africa.

In 2015, it was estimated that there were 117 million Muslim international travellers. The COMCEC Tourism Working Group has also explored Muslim Friendly Tourism (MFT) potential in its three consecutive meetings. The 7th Tourism Working Group was held on February 4th, 2016, with the theme of “Muslim Friendly Tourism (MFT): Understanding the Demand and Supply Side in the OIC Member Countries.” A research report was prepared on the theme of the meeting, which mainly focused on creating awareness about MFT as well as the developments regarding the demand and supply side of MFT in the Member Countries. This report, as well as the Member Country representatives during the 7th Working Group Meeting highlighted some major challenges faced by the member countries. In addition to the demand and supply sides of MFT, COMCEC analyzed product development and marketing aspects of MFT products and services and developing regulations for accommodation establishments to improve MFT among OIC member states. These were covered during the 8th and 9th Tourism Working Group Meetings.

Safety and security concerns are in the spotlight for OIC member states, and it is assumed that these issues will continue to capture attention in the years ahead. COMCEC looked into risk and crises management issues in 2017. Governments should work hard to ensure the safety of tourists and to minimize the impact of security threats. Incidents like the sector observed in 2015 and 2016 should need careful planning and management. These will all be tackled during the 10th Tourism Working Group Meeting in September, 2017. Destinations are amalgam of services and products that tourists consume as a whole. It is evident that if properly planned and managed tourism cooperation could play a significant role in the socio-economic development of the Member Countries. COMCEC is also looking into destination planning, management and marketing issues from 2018 onwards. The governance of destinations has been covered during the 11th meeting and their marketing role will be covered in September, 2018 during the 12th Tourism Working Group Meeting in Ankara. The sustainability of destinations and creating a balance between the needs of the industry, the environment and locals were covered during the 13th meeting in Feb. 2019. The 14th meeting was organized on 31st Oct. 2019 will focus on creating, marketing and managing multi-destination tourism corridors in OIC. The 15th Meeting of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group was held on September 24th-25th, 2020 in a virtual-only format, with the theme of “Developing Medical Tourism in the OIC Member Countries”.

Amid Covid-19 COMCEC responded to commission a report on impacts and mitigation strategies for Covid-19 and corroborating with the crises recovery and its significance 16th and 17th Meetings of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group was dedicated to Pandemic. The Meeting was held in a virtual-only format during Covid-19, with the theme of “Mitigation Strategies for Tourism After Covid-19”. The 18th and 19th Meetings of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group was held in a virtual-only format during Covid-19, with the theme of “Sustainable Human Resources Management in the Tourism Sector”. This report addressed the challenges of training, attracting and retaining quality tourism staff, which is a significant challenge for OIC tourism industry. COMCEC addressed “Promoting Entrepreneurship for Tourism Industry Competitiveness in the OIC Countries” during its 20th and 21st Meeting. The report provided various insight on the development and facilitation of local entrepreneurship in tourism for a more sustainable and independent tourism development. Based on the culinary heritage within OIC, the 22nd and 23rd Working groups addressed “Developing and Branding Gastronomy Tourism Destinations within OIC”. Based on empirical data the report provides various policy recommendations on how to identify, develop, manage and promote gastronomy products and destinations in OIC. The 24th

and 25th meetings focused on “Improving Quality and Sustainability in Heritage Tourism in OIC Countries” addressing the importance of heritage tourism and how to sustainably conserve and safeguard heritage assets while integrating them into tourism value chain.

Besides the pandemic, Gaza conflict, the Russian Ukrainian war and the trade wars, the energy prices and strength of the US dollar relative to other currencies is shifting the price competitiveness among destinations and improving accessibility, developments in technology and e-commerce will also affect market share and rankings of destinations. Increasing energy prices and challenges in supply chains also resulted in inflation, decreasing the amount of disposable income spared for travel. Obstacles faced in tourism development are diverse in the Member Countries as each country has its own tourism features, level of development and national development priorities and policies. The challenges affecting tourism performance in the Member Countries ranges from, among others, insufficient tourism-related infrastructure and investments, unskilled tourism workforce to low-capacity tourism administrations and problems in safety and security. The COMCEC Strategy provides a useful strategic framework for tourism development and tourism cooperation in the Member Countries with its new implementation instruments, namely, Tourism Working Group and Project Cycle Management mechanism.

To stimulate and promote tourism for economic growth, social progress and environmental sustainability, Member Countries should give priority to tourism sector in their national policies, foster competitive and responsible business models and practices in tourism, increase cooperation between the public and private sectors and enhance international cooperation including cooperation with the member countries.

7. APPENDIX:

8. Table 1: Tourist Arrivals in the OIC Member Countries (2010-2024)

ARRIVALS - OIC	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
World (Thousand)	952,000	1,186,000	1,235,000	1,329,000	1,401,000	1,459,000	409,979	456,000	963,000	1,306,000	1,465,000
Afghanistan											
Albania	2,417	3,784	4,070	4,643	5,927	6,406	2,658	5,689	7,544	9,670	11,300
Algeria	2,070	1,710	-	2,451	2,657	2,371	591	125	1,246	2,200	
Azerbaijan	1,963	1,922	2,045	2,454	2,850	3,170	796	792	1,603	1,400	
Bahrain	955	-	-	4,372	12,045	11,061	1,909	3,612	3,714	5,500	6,600
Bangladesh	303	-	-	1,026	267	323					
Benin	199	218	-	281	322	337	83	354			
Brunei Darussalam	214	-	219	219	4,521	4,449	1,071	4	36		
Burkina Faso	274	-	-	143	144	143	40	67			
Cameroon	573	-	-		997	1,021	256				
Chad	71	-	-	87	63	81	24	10			
Comoros	15	-	-	28	36	45	13	29			
Cote d'Ivoire	252	-	-	1,800	1,965	2,070	552	668			
Djibouti	51	-	-			63	18	110			
Egypt	14,051	9,139	5,258	8,292	11,346	13,026	3,972	3,677	11,600	14,900	15,800
Gabon	-	-	-	186							
Gambia	91	-	-	162	552	620	246	332			
Guinea	12	35	-								
Guinea-Bissau	22	44	-		55	52					
Guyana	150	207	235	247	287	315	87	157	288	320	370
Indonesia	7,003	10,408	12,948	13,396	15,810	16,107	4,053	1,558	5,889	11,068	13,900
Iran	2,938	5,237	-	4,867	7,295	9,107	1,550	1,550	4,108	5,870	7,000
Iraq	1,518	-	-					251	890		
Jordan	4,207	3,763	3,858	3,844	4,922	5,361	1,240	2,012	4,277	5,350	5,200
Kazakhstan	3,393	-	-		8,789	8,515	2,035	1,330	4,729		
Kuwait	207	-	-		8,508	8,565	2,161				
Kyrgyz Republic	1,316	-	-	4,568	6,947	4,568	1,281				
Lebanon	2,168	1,518	1,688	1,857	1,964	1,936	551	890	982	1,670	1,100
Libya	-	-	-	34	10						
Malaysia	24,577	25,721	26,800	26,757	25,832	35,046	6,102	140	10,041	20,140	25,000
Maldives	792	1,234	1,286	1,390	1,484	1,703	555	1,322	1,675	1,880	
Mali	169	-	-	193	203	217	61	75	168		
Mauritania	-	-	-								
Morocco	9,288	10,177	10,332	11,349	12,489	13,109	2,802	3,722	10,869	14,520	17,400
Mozambique	1,718	1,552	1,639	1,447	2,870	2,033					
Niger	74	135	-	164	157	192	54	85			
Nigeria	1,555	-	-				513	522			
Oman	1,446	-	-	2,372	3,242	3,506	869	460	2,882		
Pakistan	907	-	-							2,220	
Palestine	522	432	400	503	3,050	3,810	93	123	362		
Qatar	1,519	2,930	2,906	2,256	1,819	2,137	582	611	2,560	4,050	5,100
Saudi Arabia	10,850	17,994	18,049	16,109	17,570	20,292	4,609	3,477	16,638	27,420	29,700
Senegal	900	-	-	1,365			383	1,376			
Sierra Leone	39	24	54	51	66	71	16	44		50	60
Somalia	-	-	-								
Sudan	495	-	-	813	836						
Suriname	204	228	257	278							
Tajikistan	160	414	-	1,250	1,035	1,250	351	296			
Togo	202	273	-	514	573	876	482				
Tunisia	7,828	5,163	5,724	7,052	8,299	9,429	2,012	2,475		9,370	10,300
Türkiye	31,364	39,478	31,365	37,601	46,113	51,747	15,971	30,039	50,450	55,160	62,200
Turkmenistan	-	-	-								
UAE (Dubai)	7,432	-	14,910	15,790	15,920	16,730	5,888	11,479	22,654	28,150	
Uganda	946	-	-			1,850	520	513	567	1,300	1,400
Uzbekistan	1,327	-	-		5,346	6,749	1,849	1,881	5,233	6,630	10,100
Yemen	1,025	-	-	367	1,025	990	278	398			

Source: UNWTO 2025

10. Table 2: Tourism Receipts in the OIC Member Countries (2010-2023) (US \$ Millions)

Receipts - OIC	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
World (US \$ Billion)	928	1,260	1,220	1,332	1,451	1,487	418	627	1,011	
Afghanistan	55	-				72	69	75		
Albania	1,626	1,500	4,070	1,929	2,183	2,332	1,042	2,262	2,991	4,200
Algeria	219	-	1,710	141	141	112	41	65	150	
Azerbaijan	621	2,309	2,045	3,012	197	140	313	822		1,500
Bahrain	1,362	-	1,200	3,642	3,642	3,681	1,034	1,886	2,797	
Bangladesh	81	148	125	337	383	388	253	273	420	
Benin	133	-	267	150			42	203		
Brunei Darussalam	-	-	219	177	175	61	4	14		
Burkina Faso	72	-	163	117	190	217	38	128		
Cameroon	159	-	912	524	524	653	183	507		
Chad	-	-								
Comoros	35	-			24	72	20	19		
Cote d'Ivoire	201	-	1,441	396	74	73	19	300		
Djibouti	18	-	63	35	35	63	18	38		
Egypt	12,528	6,065	5,258	7,775	11,615	13,030	4,273	8,896	12,245	14,100
Gabon	-	-	186				52	29		
Gambia	74	-	135	103		103	29	57	100	
Guinea	2	-	35	16	16	9	3	13	10	
Guinea-Bissau	13	-	44	16			4	3		
Guyana	80	65			20	19	17	24		
Indonesia	6,957	10,761	9,963	13,139	14,110	16,912	4,211	521	6,718	14,000
Iran	2,438	-	4,942	4,402	4,402	4,402	1,237	5,252		5,300
Iraq	1,660	-	892	2,959	1,986	3,593	1,789	1,963		
Jordan	3,585	4,065	3,858	4,639	5,249	5,786	1,735	2,759	5,807	
Kazakhstan	1,005	1,625	4,560	2,135	2,255	2,465	869	535	1,491	2,300
Kuwait	290	499	182	313	395	700	687	470	1,491	500
Kyrgyz Republic	284	426	3,051	429	919	1,198	245	208	756	
Lebanon	7,861	6,857	1,688	7,611	8,400	8,593	4,949	3,135	5,318	5,400
Libya	60	-			34	60	17	52		
Malaysia	18,276	17,597	26,757	18,323	19,143	18,823	3,924	116	6,378	
Maldives	1,713	2,567	1,286	2,744	3,134	3,018	881	3,490		
Mali	283	-	159	206			58	82		
Mauritania	-	29		23	23	11	3	6		
Morocco	6,703	6,003	10,332	7,442	7,775	8,179	3,247	3,816	8,985	
Mozambique	197	193	1,639	151	242	252	95	127	200	200
Niger	105	-	135	83			23	97		
Nigeria	576	404	1,255	2,549	1,962	1,449	475	256	1,200	700
Oman	780	1,540	1,897	1,748	1,748	1,813	521	400		
Pakistan	305	315	965	352	390	494	428	558	739	900
Palestine	667	-	400	225	245	245	69	300		
Qatar	584	5,035	2,906	5,971	5,565	5,442	3,455	4,263	7,262	32,200
Saudi Arabia	6,712	10,130	18,049	12,056	12,038	16,382	7,093	3,817	23,475	
Senegal	453	-	1,007	419			118	120		
Sierra Leone	26	23	54	83			23	43		51
Somalia	-	-								
Sudan	94	949	741	1,029	1,043	821	660	1,077	1,065	
Suriname	61	88	257	46	56	53	17	12	26	
Tajikistan**	32	-	414	8	9	14	9	11	17	
Togo	66	-	273	138			39	151		
Tunisia	2,645	1,354	5,724	1,305	1,713	2,116	892	1,025	1,657	7,900
Türkiye	22,585	26,616	31,365	22,478	25,220	29,829	9,366	28,499	46,284	49,500
Turkmenistan	-	-			36,791	41,415	13,771			
UAE	8,577	16,038	14,910	21,048	21,375	21,800	6,126	34,440	60,686	51,200
Uganda	784	1,149	1,303	937	1,027	1,463	621	927	1,014	1,300
Uzbekistan	121	-	1,969	1,144	1,481	552	595	1,437		2,200
Yemen	1,161	-					288	116		

Source: UNWTO 2025

11. Table 3: Classification of the OIC Member Countries by Region

OIC-Sub Saharan Africa

OIC-MENA

OIC-Asia

1. Burkina Faso	1. Egypt	1. Guyana
2. Somalia	2. Jordan	2. Pakistan
3. Nigeria	3. Iran	3. Afghanistan
4. Mauritania	4. Bahrain	4. Kyrgyz Republic
5. Benin	5. Morocco	5. Malaysia
6. Cameroon	6. Saudi Arabia	6. Bangladesh
7. Chad	7. Libya	7. Azerbaijan
8. Cote d'Ivoire	8. Algeria	8. Indonesia
9. Djibouti	9. Albania	9. Kazakhstan
10. Gabon	10. Iraq	10. Maldives
11. Guinea	11. Lebanon	11. Tajikistan
12. Guinea-Bissau	12. Tunisia	12. Turkmenistan
13. Mali	13. Türkiye	13. Uzbekistan
14. Mozambique	14. Yemen	14. Brunei Darussalam
15. Niger	15. Qatar	
16. Senegal	16. Oman	
17. Sierra Leone	17. Kuwait	
18. The Gambia	18. Palestine	
19. Sudan	19. United Arab Emirates	
20. Suriname		
21. Togo		
22. Uganda		
23. Comoros		

12.

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