



Ministers of Tourism call for intra-governmental coordination to address visas and air connectivity, London, UK / Madrid, Spain

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Ministers of Tourism gathered in London for the 6th UNWTO/World Travel Market (WTM) Ministers' Summit concluded that complicated visa processes and policies that limit air connectivity continue to present major barriers to the growth of travel and tourism. Ministers and representatives from major tour operators and airlines further called for increased intra-governmental cooperation and support from the highest levels of government to break such barriers (London, United Kingdom, 6 November 2012).

The coordination between tourism and other governmental portfolios – home affairs, finance, transport or infrastructure – was unanimously pointed out as key to addressing current obstacles to stronger tourism growth during the Summit dedicated to “Open Borders and Open Skies – Breaking Barriers to Travel and Tourism”.

Facilitating visa procedures and promoting policies that improve air capacity is only possible if there is political commitment at the highest level and cooperation across cabinet agreed the over 70 Tourism Ministers attending the Summit.

According to UNWTO research, between 2010 and 2012 over 40 countries made significant changes to their visa policies, facilitating travel from “visa required” to “visa on arrival”, “eVisa” or “no visa”. Yet, visa facilitation is still a major obstacle to tourism development.

“Our main message is clear: lengthy, expensive and complicated visa procedures and policies which limit the development of air travel are obstacles to the continued expansion of travel and tourism. Removing them will stimulate demand, increase exports, grow the economy and create jobs,” said UNWTO Secretary-General, Taleb Rifai.

Fiona Jeffery, Reed Travel Exhibitions Chairman World Travel Market said: “2012 is a breakthrough year for international tourism with at least one billion arrivals expected, but there is still room for us to grow. Addressing issues such as visas and air taxes will help, and it appears the global condemnation of the UK's Air

Passenger Duty (APD) will not go away.”

Looking ahead, Ministers agreed technology could play a leading role in transforming visa processes, but that important efforts were required to accelerate the implementation of e-visas, a powerful measure considering the growing number of tourists booking online.

With more than half of global international arrivals travelling by plane, policies which constrain air capacity development and unbalanced taxation on travel and tourism, particularly on aviation, were also pointed out as key obstacles to tourism growth.

Mr. Rifai concluded: “This is the sixth UNWTO Ministers Summit at WTM, and the event continues to go from strength to strength. Our message remains that tourism is a vitally important sector on a global scale, and we want to facilitate its continued growth for the good of all.”

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