

## **UNWTO Looks to “Re-Write Tourism History” at Official Re-Opening of China**

*Hangzhou, the People’s Republic of China, 24 February 2023* - UNWTO has heralded the re-opening of China as ‘the final piece in tourism’s recovery’ from the biggest crisis in the sector’s history.

Leading a high-level delegation to the city of Hangzhou to join in the official re-opening, UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili, warmly welcomed the lifting of travel restrictions as a **major boost to economic growth** and social opportunity both in Asia and the Pacific and globally. According to UNWTO data, the pandemic cost destinations worldwide a combined US\$270 billion in Chinese outbound tourist spending in 2020 and 2021 alone. The re-opening of borders therefore represents “**the moment the world has been waiting for**”, Mr Pololikashvili noted.

The UNWTO Secretary-General is the first UN Head of Agency to visit China since restrictions were lifted. China’s Minister of Culture and Tourism Hu Heping welcomed UNWTO’s support throughout the pandemic and for joining the official re-opening celebrations. In a bilateral meeting, Minister Hu Heping and Secretary-General Pololikashvili agreed to further deepen their collaboration around positioning tourism on the agenda for international development cooperation and in the key areas of tourism education and tourism for rural development.

According to UNWTO data, China grew to be the **biggest tourism source market in the world** prior to the pandemic. In 2019, Chinese tourists spent a collective US\$255 billion on international travel, while domestic tourism served as a pillar of growth and employment, with more than 6 billion trips that year alone, supporting jobs and businesses across the country.

### **Tourism for rural development**

Reflecting UNWTO’s work to make tourism a driving force of rural development, the high-level delegation was welcomed to Yucun, one of four Chinese destinations to be recognized among the **Best Tourism Villages by UNWTO**. The village was awarded the recognition for its commitment to making tourism a source of local opportunity, in addition to its commitment to eco-friendly tourism and pioneering approach to waste management at the destination-level.

## Public and private sectors re-think tourism

UNWTO was welcomed as a partner of the Xianghu Dialogue, organized by the World Tourism Alliance (WTA) in the city of Hangzhou. Held around the theme of “A New Paradigm for a New Tourism”, the event brought together public and private sector leaders to re-think the sector’s future around the key priorities of sustainability, equality and resilience.

Key topics addressed over the two days included promoting collaborative tourism development amongst countries and regions, international cooperation and poverty reduction through tourism, smart connectivity, destination management and planning, and innovation and new business models. The UNWTO delegation met with private sector leaders, including from the Chinese global technology company Alibaba, which is headquartered in Hangzhou.

## China as key tourism partner

In the past year, China has established itself as a leading supporter of UNWTO in several core priority areas. These include Nature Positive Tourism, which UNWTO placed on the agenda of the United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP15), for which China served as President.

UNWTO will return to China in September for the Global Tourism Economic Forum (GTEF), to be held in Macau. The tenth edition of the Forum will again provide a platform for governments, business leaders, experts, and academics to advance shared plans for the sustainable development of tourism.

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