"Unsustainable growth patterns continue to threaten human development and the world’s natural ecosystems. Climate related disasters, food insecurity, water scarcity and health emergencies are jeopardizing the stability and well-being of millions of people, above all the poorest and most vulnerable. These threats will only become greater as the pressure on our planet’s finite resources increases.

Investments in greener technologies have therefore become crucial for all countries in our shared quest to achieve sustainable development. Only by innovating and adopting low-carbon growth pathways can this goal be achieved."

Ban Ki-moon, November 2011
Background

The tourism sector has become one of the world’s most prominent drivers of economic progress and development. The rate of growth, the links to other sectors and the dependence on an intact natural environment puts the sector in a unique position from a sustainable development perspective. Tourism has also been identified as one of the ten sectors that can lead in the transition to a low carbon and inclusive Green Economy.

Shifts in tourism practices can yield major benefits, stimulating change towards greater sustainability within the tourism supply chain and in other sectors. Furthermore, sustainability, and green innovation in particular, play an important role in improving the sector’s resilience, enhancing competitiveness and reducing costs. Additional benefits include employment generation, improved resource efficiency and biodiversity conservation, which can cut costs and increase competitive advantages for companies and destinations while also enhancing visitor experiences.

Recognizing these potential gains, tourism businesses and policy-makers are turning to green innovation to enhance environmental, economic and social performance of the sector. Innovation in tourism revolves around problem solving, value adding and/or identifying more efficient ways of delivering goods and services. Despite evidence that progress is being made in the tourism sector, significant opportunities for improvement exist. The constraints to overcome include lack of information; long time horizons not shared by many SMEs; the need for coordinated action in supply chains; finding initial investment costs; and policy frameworks that do not support such innovation. There is also a need for knowledge-sharing across different sectors and developing cross sectoral linkages which promote sustainability.

Objectives

The event will provide an overview of the concept of green innovation, the main obstacles from a private and public sector perspective, and help identify ways of overcoming them. The presentations from private and public sector entities will highlight the intrinsic value of green innovation for companies, governments, destinations and their communities, and make the case for sectoral as well as cross-sectoral collaboration, dialogue and exchange of best practices.