

The World Tourism Organization, Its Functions & Sri Lanka

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The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) is the leading international organisation in the field of tourism. Head quartered in Madrid, WTO is an inter-governmental body entrusted by the United Nations with the promotion and development of tourism.

The fundamental aim of the World Tourism Organization is the promotion and development of tourism with a view to contributing to economic development, international understanding, peace, prosperity, and universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion. In pursuing this aim, the organization pays particular attention to the interests of the developing countries in the field of tourism.

Background

The World Tourism Organization had its beginning as the 'International Union of Official Tourist Publicity Organizations' in 1925 in The Hague. It was renamed the 'International Union for Official Tourism Organizations' (IUOTO) after World War II and moved to Geneva. In 1967, IUOTO members approved a resolution transforming it into inter-governmental organization empowered to deal on a worldwide basis with all matters concerning tourism and to cooperate with other competent organizations such as World Health Organization (WHO), UNESCO and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). The resolution was ratified in 1974 by 51 of the nations whose official tourism organizations were members of IUOTO. Later, IUOTO was renamed under the present name World Tourism Organization and its

first General Assembly was held in Madrid in May 1975. The Secretariat was installed in Madrid early the following year at the invitation of the Spanish Government. In 1976, WTO became an executing agency of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and in 1977, a formal cooperation agreement was signed with the United Nations itself.

Structure and Principle Organs of WTO

The WTO's present Membership comprises 138 countries and territories and about 350 Affiliate Members. There are three categories of WTO's membership. The Full Membership is open to all sovereign states, Associate Membership is open to all territories not responsible for their external relations and Affiliate Membership is open to a wide range of organizations and companies working either directly in travel and tourism or in related sectors such as airlines and other transport companies, hotels and restaurants, tour operators, retail travel agents. This is the only inter-governmental organization that offers membership to the operating sector and in this way offers a unique contact point for discussion between government officials and industry leaders. WTO is primarily financed by members' contributions.

The principle organs of this organization are the General Assembly, the Executive Council, Regional Commissions, Committees and the Secretariat.

The General Assembly, which is the supreme organ of the organization, composed of voting delegates representing Full Members and Associate Members and its ordinary sessions held every two years to approve the budget and programme of work, and to debate topics of vital importance to the tourism sector. Affiliate Members and representatives of other international organizations participate as observers. The Executive Council is WTO's governing board and its task is to take all

necessary measures, in consultation with the Secretary General, for the implementation of its own decisions and recommendations of the Assembly and to report there on to the Assembly. The Council meets at least twice a year and the term of office of Members elected to the Council is four years. The Council elects one Chairman and two Vice-Chairmen from among its members.

The Commissions are considered as subsidiary organs of the General Assembly and this consists of Africa, the Americas, East Asia and the Pacific, Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia. The commissions meet at least once a year and are composed of all Full Members and Associate Members from that region. Affiliate Members from the region participate as observers.

Specialized committees of WTO Members advise on management and programme content and these include the Programme Committee, the Budget and Finance Committee, the Statistics Steering Committee, the Environment Committee, the Quality Support Committee and the Education Centres Network.

The secretariat is led by the Secretary General who supervises about 80 full time staff at WTO's Madrid headquarters and these officials are responsible for implementing WTO's programme of work and serving the needs of members. The Secretariat also includes a regional support office for Asia-Pacific in Osaka, Japan.

WTO's Functions

WTO helps nations throughout the world to maximize the positive impacts of tourism while at the same time minimizing negative environmental or social impacts of tourism. WTO's central role is to assist governments in addressing their tourism responsibilities. But its overall objective is the promotion and development of travel and tourism, the world's largest industry, as a means of stimulating business and economic development, and fostering peace and understanding between nations.

The World Tourism Organization helps members to participate successfully in the world's largest industry by increasing their competitive edge in many ways. Its programmes are grouped into six broad areas:

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- Co-operation for Development
- Statistics, Economic Analysis and Market Research
- Environment, Planning and Finance
- Quality of Tourism Development
- Human Resource Development
- Communications and Documentation

The services offered by each programme section of WTO are as follows: Under the area, 'Co-operation for Development', WTO secures financing, locates the world's leading experts and carries out all types of tourism development projects.

WTO is best known for proving the economic importance of tourism and providing the world's most comprehensive tourism statistics. Therefore, the 'Statistics, Economic Analysis and Market Research' section of this provides a rapid *data response service* that offers customized statistical reports on request from members. Tourism statistics, analysis and forecasts are communicated through an annual series of publications, which includes Yearbook of Tourism Statistics, Compendium of Tourism Statistics and Travel and Tourism Barometer.

The System of National Accounts (SNA) adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 1993 recommended to use of a new reporting concept called Satellite Accounts to expand the analytical capacity of national accounting for selected areas. This reporting system allows for an identification of relevant pieces from the existing accounts and reconstructs them separately to measure the total economic and employment impact of consumer expenditure, capital investment, government revenues and expenditure, foreign trade and business expenditure from tourism. The WTO, in association with other major tourism entities around the world, is finalizing global standards for a Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) to measure the impact of tourism on national economies.

There are many benefits of using and applying satellite accounting to tourism. Some of the benefits of TSA are consistency in data, builds a database for tourism that is comprehensive, internally consistent and balanced.

The Organization's 'Environment, Planning and Finance' section works closely with members and other international organizations to ensure that new tourism development is properly planned and managed to protect the natural and cultural environments.

WTO's section for 'Quality of Tourism Development' aims to help member destinations improve quality to become more competitive and ensure sustainable development. Special services such as a data bank on measures affecting trade in tourism services, a clearinghouse on Tourism Facilitation Councils and the Tourism and Child Prostitution Watch Task Force are offered by this quality section and it is also responsible for WTO cooperation with other international organizations in this field such as the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Customs Organization (WCO) etc.

Developing high quality, efficient education and training that matches the needs of future tourism professionals and tourism employers is the goal of the section of WTO established for 'Human Resource Development'. Therefore, this section offers regional 'Educating the Educators' seminars, distance learning courses and *Practicum* courses for selected tourism officials from member countries.

Increasing awareness about the importance of the tourism industry and the relevance of the World Tourism Organization are the main goals of WTO's 'Communications' section and communication is maintained with members through the publication, 'WTO News' and through participation in major international tourism trade fairs such as ITB and FITUR. This section acts as a publishing house, producing 20-30 tourism titles each year and revenues from sales of publications are contributed to WTO's general fund. Also, WTO operates a permanent documentation centre for use by members and non-members with the aim of making WTO a true clearinghouse for international tourism information.

The WTO in 1979, to institute a "World Tourism Day" to be observed on 27th September every year, beginning in 1980. This is an occasion to focus the attention of the international community on the importance of tourism and its increasingly recognized

human, social, economic and cultural values. The theme for the First World Tourism Day of the new millennium declared as "Technology and Nature: two challenges for tourism at the dawn of the twenty-first century" for year 2000.

WTO and Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has been a longstanding member of the WTO from the IUOTO days and has participated in the activities of both IUOTO and WTO. Sri Lanka also became a member of the Executive Council for a period of four years from 1997 to 2001. Sri Lanka has been elected as the Chairman of the Executive Council for one year in 1998 and re-elected in 1999. By electing Sri Lanka as the Chairman of the Executive Council, the country has been acclaimed all over the world particularly among other tourism bodies.

Sri Lanka has contributed substantially to the formation and the growth of the Organization and has benefited greatly from being a member. WTO executed a major technical co-operation project named "Tourism Infrastructure Development in the South -West Coasts of Sri Lanka" in October, 1999. This project will formulate as an environmentally acceptable and economically viable ten-year infrastructure improvement plan for tourist areas in the South West Coast. With the completion of the study, there will be plans for specific tourist areas that will enable implementation to proceed.

The Tourism Master Plan for Sri Lanka is also an example of assistance provided by WTO under the Technical Co-operation Programme. This ten-year plan was prepared by the Organization with the funding assistance from UNDP for the period 1992-2001, has emphasized sustainable development so as to ensure the protection of the physical and socio-cultural environment.

References:

- *WTO in ASIA and the PACIFIC 1999 - WTO Publication*
- *WTO Affiliate Membership - WTO Publication*
- *World Tourism Organization - WTO Publication*