

Message of the Secretary-General for World Tourism Day 2006

“Tourism Enriches”

It is not surprising that the last UNWTO General Assembly decided to dedicate this year's World Tourism Day to one short, sharp message: Tourism enriches. As more countries leave UNCTAD's list of Least Developed States thanks to tourism, communities are discovering a better life, one where they can be proud of their environment and culture and where small businesses are booming in traditionally poor societies.

Tourism, if managed according to the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, indeed serves as an instrument of the UN Millennium Development Goals. But, exactly how much have we learnt since the first Tourism Enriches campaign was launched at the World Conference on Tourism Communications – TOURCOM - in 2004?

There is no doubt that tourism keeps the world economy on the move. It is number one in world trade, the largest export earner, and employs millions of people. Most of these jobs are in small or medium-sized, family-owned businesses.

Tourism is vital to the balance of payments of many countries, especially small, developing nations for whom it is often their only way of competing in the dynamic global services sector. Jobs and enterprises are usually created in the most underdeveloped regions, helping to spread economic opportunities throughout the country and providing an incentive to remain in rural areas.

However, enrichment is not just in economic terms. Environment and local culture benefit when government revenue from tourism-related goods and services helps restore monuments, open museums and establish natural parks. And as tourism grows, so does the need to develop infrastructure. The building of new airports, roads, ports, sewage and water treatment plants also improve the lives of local people.

Tourism is very much a human story. In Mexico, people are learning to make traditional products while in Central Asian women are once again weaving geometric pattern carpets like those of their nomadic ancestors, to be sold to tourists. In the Argentinean Pampa a gaucho folk troupe performs dances passed down by their great-grandparents for visitors, another example of how tourism helps preserve culture. And in Malaysia a fisherman who tried without luck the capital's job market returns to the family home and traditional fishing methods to supply diners at a newly opened beach resort.

Guests and hosts benefit mutually. Even package holiday tourists absorb some of the surrounding culture – by attending a village fiesta, having a meal in a local restaurant or bargaining for a souvenir.

Overworked parents spending a week with their child on a tropical beach; a family sharing an interest in visiting the ruins of a past civilization; or a long-separated brother and sister reuniting at a favourite childhood vacation spot are all reinforcing the bonds that are the very basis of society.

But, above all tourism enriches families and communities who would be much poorer – in spirit and in pocket - without the opportunities that it provides.