Conference on Sustainable Development of Tourism in Islands

Jointly organized by the World Tourism Organization and the French government

Réunion Island, France
11-13 September 2013

Background

Tourism is one of the principal economic activities in islands and therefore an essential source of job opportunities, livelihood, and inclusive growth for these destinations. For Small Island Developing States (SIDS), international tourism is of special significance and often represents a major source of foreign currency, while at the same time it is subject to specific social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities.

The Conference addressed a whole range of relevant issues for island destinations, from the competitiveness and sustainability perspectives, identifying specific challenges and vulnerabilities and examples of relevant actions. The Conference also provided an opportunity to share with the international community, at the ministerial and expert levels, further knowledge and lessons learned for tourism in SIDS and other islands. The progress of international efforts aimed at strengthening the sustainable development of tourism, taking into account their particular situation, was also reviewed.

As a United Nations specialised agency, the World Tourism Organization has engaged, together with a series of partners, in initiatives ranging from poverty alleviation and economic recovery to climate change, biodiversity and ecotourism, aimed at promoting awareness of the role of tourism in sustainable development, including addressing the special needs of SIDS. This includes the production and dissemination of the UNWTO report Challenges and Opportunities for Tourism in Small Island Developing States launched on the occasion of RIO+20 Conference.

This international conference aimed to contribute to strengthen tourism development in islands, as one of the most promising options for economic growth and development if planned and managed according to the principles of sustainability.

The conclusions from the Conference shall serve as guidance to National Tourism Authorities and relevant destinations as well as to the international community as an input to the Third International Conference on SIDS, scheduled to convene in September 2014, in Samoa, and called for by the United Nations as a follow up to the Rio+20 Conference.
Programme

Wednesday, 11 September

09:30 – 10:30  Opening session of the Conference

- Mr. Didier Robert, President, Regional Council of Réunion
- Mr. Pascal Faure, Head of the Directorate General for Competitiveness, Industry and Services, France
- Mr. Taleb Rifai, UNWTO Secretary-General
- Video message from Mr. Jan Eliasson, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations

10:30 – 11:00  Key Note speech: Putting your island on the map

- Mr. Simon Anholt, Policy Advisor, National Image

11:00 – 11:30  Coffee Break / Press Conference

11:30 – 13:00  SESSION 1:
Tourism development and conservation of island resources: How to solve the equation?
This session addressed the key issues related to sustainable development, such as: the management of coastal areas and sustainable use of biodiversity; transport capacity in small islands and management of visitor flows but also the management of cultural heritage.

Introduced and moderated by:
- Mr. Richard Denman, Director of “The Tourism Company”.

Panel discussion:
- Mr. Jean Max Rakotomamonjy, Minister of Tourism and Handicrafts of Madagascar
- Mr. Alain St.Ange, Minister of Tourism and Culture of Seychelles
- Mr. Jean Sébastien Nicolas, National Park of Guadeloupe
- Ms. Caroline Batiza, Regional Park of Martinique
- Mr. Glenn Phillips, Managing Executive: Tourism Development and Marketing, National Park of South Africa
15:00 – 16:30

SESSION 2:
Sustainable economic development:
Is it really possible to create value for everyone?
Trends and forecasts suggest that islands should continue to see growth in international arrivals. How to capture these flows and make local employment benefit from them, with the objective of poverty reduction but also to elevate training?
How to finance tourism projects without sacrificing sustainable development?

Introduced and moderated by:
- Ms. Sonia Huerta, Division Manager at THR (international tourism consulting firm)

Panel discussion:
- Mr. Bruno Freitas, Regional Director of Tourism, Ministry of Tourism, Madeira.
- Mr. Nicolas Maslach, Conservatoire du litoral (French coastal protection agency) – St Martin
- Mr. Gilles Béville, president of ATES - Association for the social and solidarity tourism
- Mr. Jean-Marc Gravellini, Director of Operations, French Development Agency (AFD)
- Mr. Rolph Payet, Minister for Environment and Energy of Seychelles. Representative of the Vanilla Islands Initiative
- Mr. Jan Hendeliowitz, OECD - Head of the LEED Programme (Local Economic and Employment Development)

17:00 – 18:30

SESSION 3:
Connectivity: Placing transport at the service of tourism
Connectivity is one of the main challenges that islands face, especially in terms of infrastructure development and policies for air transport adapted to the needs of the tourism sector.

Introduced and moderated by:
- Mr. Vijay Poonoosamy, VP International and Public Affairs at Etihad and Chair of IATA’s Industry Affairs Committee

Panel discussion:
- Ms. Elizabeth A. Powell, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Enterprises, Tourism and Communications of Fiji
Thursday, 12 September

09:30 - 11:00  
SESSION 4:  
Efforts questioned?  
Impacts and challenges of climate change  
This session presented the latest scientific data and projections on climate change and its impacts: the challenge with the greatest implications for sustainable tourism in islands.

Introduced and moderated by:
- Mr. Daniel Scott, Associate Professor - Principal Investigator (University of Waterloo, Canada) and Canada Research Chair (Global Change and Tourism).

Panel discussion:
- Mr. João Bettencourt, Regional Director of Tourism, Azores Regional Government.
- Mr. Miloud Bessafi, Professor, Réunion University, Laboratory for Energy, Electronics and processes
- Mr. Ibrahim A. Mussa, Director of Tourism, Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, Dar Es Salaam – United Republic of Tanzania
- Mr. Nicolas Maslach, Conservatoire du litoral (French coastal protection agency) – St Martin

11:30 - 13:00  
SESSION 5:  
Regional initiatives and international cooperation; A win-win solution?  
This session will provide an opportunity to present various international and regional initiatives including partnerships in a process of South-South cooperation, such as the “Vanilla Islands” initiative, which aims to revitalize the tourism islands of the Indian Ocean.

Introduced and moderated by:
- Mr. Ioannis Spilanis, Professor, University of the Aegean, Greece.
Panel discussion:

- **Mr. Jean Claude de L'Estrac**, Secretary General, Indian Ocean Commission (IOC)
- **Ms. Deirdre Shurland**, Senior Consultant, UNEP-DTIE (Division of Technology, Industry and Economics). Coordinator, Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism
- **Ms. Cécile Tassin-Pelzer**, Counsellor and Head of Operational Section for Regional Cooperation. European Union Delegation to Mauritius, Seychelles and Comoros.
- **Mr. Philippe Leyssene**, Ambassador, delegate for regional cooperation in the area of the Indian Ocean
- **Mr. Pascal Viroleau**, Director of Réunion Island Tourism - Director of Vanilla Islands
- **Mr. Mohamed Harun**, Advisor to The Minister of Tourism of Mozambique

**15:00 - 16:30**
**SESSION 6:**
Putting your island on the map – challenges in a connected world
This session focused on the importance of branding to facilitate the positioning of islands in the context of the rapid development of ICTs and the world of digital marketing.

Introduced and moderated by:

- **Mrs. Sana Butler**, journalist and travel writer

Panel discussion:

- **Mr. Simon Anholt**, Policy Advisor, National Image
- **Ms. Marie-Laure Desmet**, Expert engineering and development, in charge of overseas projects, ATOUT France
- **Mr. Venee Kowlessur**, Principal Tourism Planner, Ministry of Tourism & Leisure of Mauritius
- **Mr. Thierry Devimeux**, Secretary-General for Regional Affairs - SGAR

**17:00 – 18:00**
Closing Ceremony and Adoption of the outcome report of the Conference

- **Mr. Luigi Cabrini**, Director-Advisor of the Secretary-General on Sustainability – UNWTO
- **Mr. Pierre Brunhes**, Ministry of Tourism, France
- **Mr. Didier Robert**, President, Regional Council of Réunion
Final Report

Introduction and objectives

At the invitation of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the Government of France, a conference was held in September 2013 on the Indian Ocean island of Réunion, a region and overseas department of France, on the topic of the sustainable development of tourism in islands. The conference was attended by delegates from over thirty countries.

The purpose of the conference was to share with the international community recent knowledge and lessons learned for tourism in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and other islands and how progress on strengthening the sustainable development of tourism can apply in an island context.

These conclusions from the conference are to serve as guidance to National Tourism Authorities and relevant destinations, as well as to the international community, and as an input to the Third International Conference on SIDS, scheduled for September 2014 in Samoa.

Opening the conference

Mr Didier Robert, President, Regional Council of La Réunion, welcomed delegates to the conference and thanked them for their attendance. He described the unique nature and cultures of Reunion island and emphasised the importance of tourism as a main economic driver. The twin challenge for tourism is to create employment and relieve poverty while also being sustainable and respecting the environment. The islands in the Indian Ocean share common issues of remoteness, social difficulties and restricted markets so it makes great sense to work together through the Vanilla Islands initiative. The group is pleased to receive the support of UNWTO. Mr Robert concluded by outlining the various sessions of the conference and its role as an input to the Samoa conference in 2014.

Mr Pascal Faure, Head of the Directorate General for Competitiveness, Industry and Services, France welcomed delegates to France and La Réunion. He passed on a message of support for the conference from the Minister of Tourism and made reference to the different needs of the various regions and overseas territories of France. He referred specifically to the work of UNWTO and their report on SIDS which analyses the situation and challenges of islands precisely. Key challenges include accessibility and competitiveness, within an emphasis on giving value to each destination’s special identity. Cooperation between islands is increasingly important. France supports this approach and is also working on specific issues such as visas and entry formalities.

Mr Taleb Rifai, Secretary General, UNWTO thanked the Regional Council of La Reunion for their warm reception and the Government of France for their unfailing support, reflecting on the longstanding relationship between UNWTO and France. He brought greetings from the international
community and the UN family. He spoke of the global mobility and travel revolution, which touches even the smallest communities and enterprises all over the world. Mr Rifai underlined four key challenges for islands: sustainable development, following the approach of the Rio+20 Conference which had paid specific attention to tourism; climate change, which is a great threat to many islands and requires a response from the tourism sector; air connectivity, requiring a strong link between tourism and air transport policies; and market positioning, with a need to put island destinations more clearly on the map. Cooperation and regional initiatives, such as the Vanilla Islands, are essential in this. UNWTO will carry the conclusions of this conference to Samoa in 2014 and meanwhile Mr Rifai invited delegates to the World Tourism Day event in Maldives later this year.

Mr Jan Eliasson, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, addressed the conference through a video message. He recognised the crucial role of tourism in the sustainable development of islands, where it is often the principal economic activity, bringing jobs and foreign exchange earnings. It was responsible for the graduation of Cape Verde and Maldives from LDC status. At the same time SIDS and other islands face many sources of vulnerability that tourism needs to address. This conference provides a timely opportunity to discuss these issues and to make an input to the Samoa conference next year.

Mr Simon Anholt, Policy Advisor, National Image, delivered the key-note speech. Image is extremely important for tourism. Image is what is in tourists’ minds, and, as with all good marketing, it is important to start with the consumer. Tourism also, in itself, affects a nation’s image and is a key ambassador for a country. It has been identified in the Anholt hexagon model as one of six channels of communication that influence the nation brand. Research has shown that a country’s economic performance is closely correlated to its image, as evaluated by its position on the Anholt Nation Brand Index. A nation brand or competitive identity is not about a logo – indeed, logos tend to make countries look the same. Simon Anholt underlined that nations are judged by what they do, not what they say about themselves. A key is to learn to communicate actions and not messages. We need to ask ourselves what the country is for and what difference would it make if it was not there. Taking symbolic actions is a way to influence image. The approach requires courage and imagination but not necessarily high cost – it can be free.

Session 1: Tourism development and the conservation of island resources: How to solve the equation?

Mr Richard Denman, Director, The Tourism Company introduced the topic of the session. He referred to the publication Challenges and Opportunities for Tourism Development in Small Island Developing States, which he had written for UNWTO. The 52 SIDS vary greatly in their economic and social performance and their level of international visitor arrivals, but many demonstrate a high level of dependence on tourism in terms of exports and contribution to GDP. Richard Denman identified three key characteristics of islands: small size, with implications for pressure on resources and limited economic diversity; remoteness and isolation, leading to challenges for trading but also to a unique biodiversity and cultural richness; and a maritime environment, leading to strong tourism assets but vulnerability to climate change. Tourism brings challenges but also opportunities for
islands’ natural and heritage assets, as well as generating pressure on resources, notably land, water and energy. Overall, there are three main requirements: collaborative governance structures; the effective implementation of sound policies, strategies and plans at a national and local level; and using a range of management tools to influence the sustainability of tourism development and operations.

Mr Jean Max Rakotomamonjy, Minister of Tourism and Handicrafts, Madagascar underlined the exceptional biodiversity of Madagascar but also the high levels of poverty and environmental degradation. He spoke of the need for more protected areas, including maritime zones, and the requirement for all development, including tourism, to be subject to Environmental Impact Assessment. The state and the local population share a common responsibility for conservation. All the pillars of sustainability are linked through tourism, and revenues from the sector should be used to benefit the local population as well as the conservation of biodiversity.

Mr Jean Sébastien Nicolas, National Park of Guadeloupe, described the National Park and its assets, including problems of impact on flora and fauna. He explained what the Park is doing to manage the 150,000 annual visitors, including the provision of access routes and various educational and interpretative materials. Key services include protection, welcome, commercial activities and security. The result is a satisfaction level of 97% amongst visitors. A study in 2013 quantified the economic value of the Park and demonstrated a high ratio of direct and indirect benefits over costs.

Ms Caroline Batiza, Regional Park of Martinique, provided information about the Park, which represents two thirds of the total area of the island. Actions are guided by the Park Charter. Priority is placed on education and training and on meeting the increasing demand for quality experiences. The Park is establishing a new welcome centre and various other projects include work on trekking trails, boat trips and historic and cultural sites.

Mr Glenn Phillips, Managing Executive, Tourism Development and Marketing, South Africa National Parks, compared the management context of islands (bounded by the sea) and national parks (bounded by a fence). Historically people were excluded from Parks but it is now accepted that they must be included and engaged in park management. South Africa follows principles of responsible tourism. Management techniques for the parks range from plans and zoning to the generation of real benefits to local people through sustainable tourism activity. Good governance is critical to a successful approach.

Mr Alain St Ange, Minister of Tourism and Culture, Seychelles, described the incredible natural assets of the Seychelles islands and the strong dependency on tourism as a pillar of the economy. It is essential for tourism that the environment is conserved. He accepts that image must be about action. Seychelles has demonstrated commitment by designating over half the territory as a protected area and by introducing a sustainable tourism label for tourism enterprises pursuing good practice. It is important to involve local people in pursuing sustainable tourism and Seychelles is taking action to deliver more local benefit from the sector. While tourism in Seychelles is strong, it can be made stronger by working together with others.
Discussion topics

- The promotion of Reunion in South Africa. The Vanilla Islands group is working jointly on roadshows, with airlines and on other initiatives.
- The visibility of sustainable tourism labels. International initiatives include the work of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, supported by UNWTO. It is also the responsibility of destinations and the private sector to promote the presence of labels in their marketing. Claims made about sustainability must be genuine and implemented.
- The management of visitor flows. It is important to keep abreast of visitor numbers and use of simple indicators of volume and impact in different locations. Public transport should be promoted.
- Relationship between tourism and agriculture. Many positive opportunities exist through local supply chains. Some national parks have been working with farmers and zoning areas for agriculture, as in Martinique and Guadeloupe.

Session 2: Sustainable economic development: Is it really possible to create value for everyone?

Ms Sonia Huerta, Division Manager, THR introduced the topic of the session. She emphasised that economic sustainability is only possible if we create value for everyone. This is necessary for tourists, for investors, for the environment and local communities. She presented six priority lines of action: achieving reasonable consensus on a business model, a development model and a competitiveness model for the island; having a system of experiences that differentiates the resources and attractions of the island; having a sound marketing plan; pursuing development projects such as third generation resorts; ensuring constant innovation and considering clients of the future; and addressing the attitude of human resources to tourism and tourists. She exhorted all islands not to let go of their individual personality.

Mr Bruno Freitas, Regional Director of Tourism, Madeira spoke of the small size of the island and its relatively limited tourism capacity, calling for a targeted approach to markets while also conserving the special island heritage. Madeira has considerable experience of this from over 200 years in tourism. While the European market is critical, they are looking at some new markets, such as Brazil. They are seeking to address seasonality through a brand image of ‘Madeira all Year Round’. A high proportion of hotels are certified through the local environmental label.

Mr Nicolas Maslach, Coastal Protection Agency, St Martin described the island and its tourism sector. There is a lot of pressure from tourism and some protected zones have been established and visitor management techniques employed. Decrees regulate various activities in the National Park. Emphasis has been placed on communicating with tourists on what they can and cannot do. Economic benefit has been gained from developing ecotourism activities and there is good cooperation between the government and tourism stakeholders.

Mr Gilles Béville, President, ATES (Association for equitable and solidarity tourism) referred to five key issues: unacceptable poverty; the need to diversity southern economies; negative
externalities of mass tourism on islands; opportunities for certain forms of tourism; and a wish for cultural exchanges. He outlined the principles of equitable and solidarity tourism, such as fair prices, profitability without profit maximisation, and transparency. He explained the role and actions of ATES, working with tour operators and recipient countries to promote tourism that involves the multiplication of small scale and locally based offers though horizontal integration.

Mr Jan Hendeliowitz, Head of LEED Programme, OECD initially described the situation with tourism on the Danish island of Bornholm, which has developed its offer partly on high quality agricultural produce as well as heritage landscapes. He went on to discuss sound approaches to employment development, based on careful diagnosis of human resources and needs, addressing skills gaps and providing the right training to meet local needs, working with a range of institutions.

Mr Jean-Marc Gravellini, Director of Operations, AFD (French Development Agency) spoke of the need for finance to support tourism development on islands. AFD can support governments and tourism stakeholders at different levels through a range of financing tools. Sustainability is at the heart of AFD’s approach. Considerations and criteria applied reflect concern about the level of employment created, long term benefits and guarding against negative impacts. As well as direct support for tourism, assistance is provided to related activities such as green energy schemes.

Mr Rolph Payet, Minister of Environment and Energy, Seychelles referred to the importance of tourism to SIDS and the context of the Samoa 2014 conference, referring to progress in Seychelles. He spoke of five challenges for islands, including climate change, the energy crisis, the food crisis, international maritime crime and economic recession in tourism markets. An integrated approach is needed, relating to the Blue Economy Framework for islands in the context of the wider Green Economy. Tourism in the Blue Economy needs to address concerns over environmental sustainability and the use of resources, the need for long term investment and for tourism to support conservation. This Seychelles Sustainable Development Strategy is an example of an integrated approach.

Discussion topics

- The authenticity of third generation resorts. This is a concern, but may be addressed by the use of local architectural styles, textiles, crafts, products etc and also by attending to environmental impacts.
- The cost of renewable energy. While this may involve a high up-front cost, it can pay off in the longer term and will lead to lower energy bills. It is important to investigate financial models.
- The creation of local economic benefits. Consideration needs to be given to having a minimum wage and also not relying on the trickle down effect to generate local benefits. There needs to be a robust and non-passive approach to investment (FDI), addressing local needs and capacities to gain maximum benefit. Local investment provides opportunities on many islands. Incentives can be used to encourage and support local people to enter the tourism sector. A focus on local forms of tourism can be part of the strategy. However, it is important to recognise the need to encourage investors and to work with them.
Session 3: Connectivity – Placing transport at the service of tourism

Mr Vijay Poonoosamy, VP International and Public Affairs, Etihad and Chair Industry Affairs Committee, IATA introduced the session. He underlined the importance of transport as a fundamental component of tourism, with a large majority of travellers using air transport, which is especially important for islands. The multiplier effect of supporting air transport is considerable. There is a clear need for liberalisation of air access, which leads to increased service levels and lower fares. A lack of challenging competition makes airlines uncompetitive. At the same time, states should promote close coordination between tourism and air transport policies.

Ms Elizabeth Powell, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Enterprises, Tourism and Communications, Fiji highlighted the position of Fiji, for which connectivity is critical for the economy and society. Fiji is a hub for communication in the South Pacific. Currently eight international carriers operate to Fiji. She was concerned that an open skies policy would neutralise the national carrier and the protection it offers Fiji, recognising that international carriers can pull out leaving the state vulnerable. The Fiji Airways brand is the state’s face to the world and reflects its local culture. An integrated approach to transport and tourism is required, with transport development matching local needs, reflecting also the need to develop associated infrastructure and to address the needs of Fiji’s communities, especially on outlying islands that are very dependent on air connectivity. A new Tourism Development Plan in 2014 should assist in bringing the stakeholders and issues together.

Mr Marie-Joseph Malé, CEO, Air Austral described the operation of Air Austral, including its restructuring plan and new path to profit. He underlined the importance of collaboration and partnership, including with other airlines serving the Vanilla Islands such as Air Mauritius and Air Madagascar and with European carriers. He spoke of the dilemma of meeting the high cost of travel as well as the needs of a low income population, requiring a gradual approach to competitive pricing.

Discussion topics

The Panel was joined by Mr Alain St Ange, Seychelles and Ms Sandra Carvao, UNWTO.

- Liberalisation and national airlines. There are examples where it has been possible to open the airspace and also to retain the national airline. It is important to avoid a country becoming hostage to an airline. In general, it is important to look at the national interests of each country and to evaluate the benefits and costs of different approaches.
- Climate change and air transport. Taxes imposed on air travel can be a threat to tourism in islands, but climate change is also a major issue for them. ICAO are looking at air transport and climate change, including measures to reduce impacts through operations, fuel efficiency, air traffic control, alternative fuels and market based measures.
- Cooperation between airlines. We need to have a shared vision. Too often airlines on the same routes are only half full. There is a need for a regional approach. The Vanilla Islands initiative may assist collaboration. The Indian Ocean Commission may have a role to play here.
Session 4: Efforts questioned – Impact and challenges of climate change

Mr Daniel Scott, Associate Professor, University of Waterloo, Canada and Research Chair, Global Change and Tourism, introduced the session. He said that climate change is the greatest challenge for sustainable tourism. Consequences, supported by ever stronger scientific evidence, include warming, less predictable precipitation, cyclones and sea level rise. It has been recognised by the UN that islands merit particular consideration owing to their vulnerability. Particular issues for islands include water security, insurance risks, sea water flooding, coral bleaching and coastal erosion. No action is not an option. Guidance on the response to the impact of climate change on tourism needs to be updated, with a special section on islands; tools should be provided to assist in assessment, adaptation and mitigation; and a road map prepared for tourism in a low-carbon economy.

Mr João Bettencourt, Regional Director of Tourism, Azores Regional Government described the consequences of climate change for his islands. He outlined the regional strategy and plans that had been put in place. The Regional Government has created a specific commission with a range of goals to deliver a coordinated response to climate change.

Mr Miloud Bessafi, Professor, La Réunion University, Laboratory for Energy, Electronics and Processes described evidence on the current and future impact of climate change on the Indian Ocean islands, as well as the work undertaken to collect this and to make forecasts. He outlined various global scenarios and how they would affect the island of Reunion. Particular issues have included making predictions in relation to precipitation, cloud cover etc. It is important to keep abreast of changing global evidence from the latest intergovernmental assessment reports.

Mr Ibrahim Moussa, Director of Tourism, Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, Tanzania spoke of the vulnerability of small islands to climate change. In Zanzibar the two main industries of agriculture and tourism are particularly vulnerable and impacts are already happening there. Maps show clearly the potential consequences of sea level rise for the islands. Many developing countries, including islands, will require financial assistance to help with adaptation.

Mr Nicolas Maslach, Coastal Protection Agency, St Martin described climate change impacts on Caribbean islands. Various ecological and economic consequences are interrelated – for example, the disappearance of plankton will have implications for fishing and for dive tourism. Politicians need to confront these challenges.

Discussion topics
- Impacts of adaptation on infrastructure, zonation and new spatial arrangements causing conflicts within local communities. There is a need for sound land use planning and taking action sooner rather than later. Pilot projects and approaches can help.
- Air quality and limiting emissions. There is a need for a range of measures to reduce aviation emissions. Hard targets are required.
- The place of tourism in regional climate change strategies, and related actions. Plans for coastal zones need to address tourism as a central issue. Policies and actions should involve
communities in tourism as an alternative livelihood. It is important to prepare for unpredicted impacts, for example flooding affecting security of tourists.

Session 5: Regional Initiatives and International Cooperation – A win-win solution?

Mr Ioannis Spilanis, Professor, University of Aegean, Greece introduced the session. He gave an insight into the regional initiatives and collaboration on sustainable tourism between destinations in the Mediterranean. A key requirement is to improve the availability of data on tourism and its sustainability. Experience has shown that the necessary data is often not available. Individual islands differ in terms of the main sustainability issues for them, which in turn affects the measurements and management solutions that are needed. In Greece cooperation between islands is important but not yet fully satisfactory. The islands face many challenges, including lack of competitiveness, high energy and water consumption and expansion of building constructions on coasts. Diversified tourism products are being pursued. The UNWTO has established an Observatory for Sustainable Tourism in the Greek Islands with four steps: use of secondary data; collection of data from tourists; evaluation of tourism impacts; and proposing policy measures.

Mr Jean Claude de l’Estrac, Secretary General, Indian Ocean Commission spoke of the context of cooperation between the Vanilla Islands, including their related natural and cultural heritage. Much work has already been done together in the field of sustainable development including in the area of labelling and identity, air routes, biodiversity, renewable energy, waste management, coastal protection and climate change. It is important to engage the local populations, especially young people. Challenges for tourism include distance from markets and connectivity, but much more can be achieved through greater cooperation.

Ms Deirdre Shurland, Senior Consultant, UNEP-DTIE, Coordinator Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism talked about the approach of GPST to transform tourism through partnership, projects and knowledge solutions. She identified six key issues which GPST is seeking to address: lack of understanding of the concept of sustainability; over-reliance on nature based assets; small businesses being left of out of the tourism value chain; low level of integration between sectors; the work of organisations not meeting country priorities; lack of measurement of outcomes. Small islands need to prioritise actions, adopt integrated solutions and monitor progress and record success.

Ms Cécile Tassin-Pelzer, Head of Section, EU Delegation to Mauritius, Seychelles and Comoros referred to the need to highlight tourism as a vehicle for sustainable development of islands. The EU is the main donor in the Indian Ocean and has funded many tourism related projects. It is important to have a sustainable tourism strategy and to identify the needs for institutional strengthening. The EU’s own tourism policy may provide some guidance, concentrating on competitiveness, quality and sustainability, image, and maximising the potential of financial measures. EU support in wider matters and other sectors can have a strong bearing on tourism.
Mr Philippe Leyssene, Ambassador, delegate for regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean spoke of the challenges of moving from competition to cooperation. Cooperation is needed in exporting (seeking markets), ensuring diversity, creating synergy and coordinating actions. It is about exchanging ideas. The Vanilla Islands initiative can respond to all these opportunities.

Mr Pascal Viroleau, Director of Reunion Island Tourism, Director of Vanilla Islands underlined his optimism for the future of the Vanilla Islands initiative and reflected on what had been achieved in the past three years. He spoke of the spread of ideas, illustrated in history by vanilla. Support for island events and for local produce presents a big opportunity. Linking themes, such as a whale route, can be explored. Much can be done together.

Mr Mohamed Harun, Advisor to the Minister of Tourism, Mozambique described how collaboration between Mozambique and other countries have been based around themes, including coast/islands, nature and people. Target markets have been identified which has helped to determine where a partnership approach is needed. Various routes and trans-boundary initiatives have been developed with neighbouring countries, involving all kinds of stakeholders. Cooperation should be possible with the Vanilla Islands.

Discussion topics
- Cooperation in tourism fairs. Whether to have individual or combined stands will depend on the markets concerned.
- Hosting sports tourists. Frameworks can be created for trade operators to work together
- Flights. The individual states in a group need to work together with airlines to develop policy to strengthen connectivity and competitiveness.
- The role of regional tourism bodies. The South Pacific Tourism Organisation has had difficulty in defining and pursuing its role. Clarity is needed on the purpose and function of bodies.
- Maturing of institutions. The Indian Ocean Commission provides a good example of a body whose role has developed over time, from purely facilitating cooperation, to supporting development projects and then to pursing regional policies.

Session 6: Putting your island on the map – challenges in a connected world

Ms Sana Butler, journalist and travel writer introduced the session. She illustrated a number of important principles and lessons for establishing and implementing an effective promotion and communication strategy. It is important for islands to know what positive stories they want to project. Promotion should be spearheaded by people who are passionate about their islands. Messages should be widely communicated through getting people talking to each other, using all the available social media vehicles. Creative and engaging stories and images can be perpetuated, made dynamic and build a following, for example through the application of web-cams, you-tube video and well managed blogging.

Ms Marie-Laure Desmet, Expert for overseas projects, ATOUT, France underlined that marketing should focus on having a good product. Successful promotion of France depends on the
quality of the offers, as well as inspirational brands. Therefore marketing should embrace actions to improve products, training and management and bring out the real identity of a destination. It is important to work particularly in three areas: diagnosis of supply, targeting of markets, and digital strategy. Knowledge of clients is critical, and lack of data and information is a significant problem.

Mr Venee Kowlessur, Principle Tourism Planner, Ministry of Tourism and Leisure, Mauritius described the strengths of Mauritius as a tourism destination and outlined a number of the challenges faced in marketing. Issues include the policy towards foreign direct investment, maintaining a distinctive destination and the need to diversify the product while also keeping abreast of development and ensuring it is well planned.

Mr Thierry Devimeux, Secretary-General for Regional Affairs, SGAR spoke of what needs to be done to market the Vanuatu Islands successfully. He underlined the need to put our clients, the visitors, at the centre, to capture their attention through effective messages, and to rejuvenate the destination offer, for example through up-to-date events. Feedback from visitors is required and local people should also be encouraged to take pride in their islands and become tourism stakeholders. The link with France, through Reunion, is a strength to draw upon.

Discussion topics
- Promotion of Reunion in Europe. Previously it was essentially promoted in France but is now being promoted, elsewhere, including through work with the Vanilla Islands group. New approaches can be adopted, including use of social media.
- Promoting the islands at a time of recession. At a time of limited budgets, promotion should involve all stakeholders, not just governments. In Reunion and the Vanilla Islands opportunities exist to strengthen promotion to South Africa as a near market.
- Media management. It is important to turn all media opportunities to advantage, including the issue of shark attacks.
- Air connections as a basis for marketing. Direct flights to some islands from Europe can be used to benefit others, through better cooperation.

Closing Ceremony and Adoption of the Outcome Report of the Conference

Mr Luigi Cabrini, Director, Advisor to the Secretary General on Sustainability, UNWTO read out the La Réunion Declaration on Sustainable Tourism in Islands, set out below. This was adopted by the conference.

Mr Pascal Faure, Head of the Directorate General for Competitiveness, Industry and Services, France thanked Mr Cabrini for the conclusions and the declaration which had summed up the issues and priorities well. He underlined three key themes: the need for all islands to have a strategy for tourism that is sustainable, addressing major issues of climate change and resource management; the strong advantages of partnerships, with local communities and between destinations; and the need for strong brands that help to put islands on the map, reinforced by a quality product.
Mr Didier Robert, President, Regional Council of La Réunion said that this conference had been a clear reminder of the importance of tourism for La Réunion and for all islands. Within the Vanilla Islands group we need to commit to achieving a sustainable destination, reflecting the unique biodiversity and cultural heritage of the islands, which is recognised by UNESCO. He thanked the UNWTO for the final declaration and for their support. He thanked the government of France, the delegates and all involved in making the conference a success.

Réunion Island Declaration on Sustainable Tourism in Islands

The UNWTO/Government of France Conference on Sustainable Tourism Development in Islands held in St Denis, Réunion (11-12 September 2013), was aimed at sharing recent knowledge on tourism in island destinations, paying special attention to Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and devising ways of enhancing tourism’s contribution to their sustainable development.

The Conference highlighted a few key issues:

1. **Tourism as a key driver of sustainable development in islands**
   For many islands, tourism is the single most important economic activity, with clear opportunities for future growth. Therefore tourism must feature strongly on the sustainable development agenda of islands and be given high priority in programmes to support SIDS and other island territories.

2. **Natural and cultural heritage as primary assets for island tourism**
   Tourism is well placed to generate awareness and support for the unique biodiversity and rich cultural heritage of islands, on which it depends. Tourism development must be carefully planned and managed so that it has a positive impact on island resources, environments and communities and responds to the challenges of climate change.

3. **Partnerships as a basis for achieving more together**
   Groups of islands can be more effective if they work together on the promotion of sustainable tourism. The Vanilla Islands initiative linking seven Indian Ocean island territories – Comoros, Réunion, Madagascar, Maldives, Mayotte, Mauritius and Seychelles – is welcomed as an example of the partnership approach.

4. **Connectivity of islands as a prerequisite for success in tourism**
   Island destinations are dependent on air transport to provide effective access to source markets. Tourism and transport policies must be coordinated to pursue optimal growth in connectivity and secure economic benefits for island communities.

5. **Réunion**, the host island of the Conference has followed a tourism model based on the valorisation of its exceptional resources, human and natural, recognised by UNESCO on 2010. Réunion has also played a valuable role in the creation of the concept of Vanilla
Islands, enabling a model for the mutual development of tourism policy and a brand promoting seven islands in the Indian Ocean, based on cooperation rather than competition.

The conference programme was shaped around six sessions covering the following topics: tourism development and the conservation of island resources; sustainable economic development; connectivity and transport; the impacts of climate change; regional initiatives and international cooperation; and putting islands on the map.

These will be transmitted by UNWTO as part of the contribution of the tourism sector to the Third International Conference on SIDS, scheduled for September 2014 in Samoa.

**The importance of tourism to islands**

Tourism is a major activity on hundreds of islands in all parts of the world. These include those within the 52 Small Island Developing States as well as the many islands that are part of other nation states.

Tourism is a dominant force in the economy of many SIDS and provides one of only a few sources of foreign exchange earnings for most of them. In half of the SIDS, tourism expenditure accounts for over 40% of all their exports of goods and services. Moreover, it equates to more than 20% of GDP in two fifths of SIDS where data are available. These significant levels of contribution are also evident in the local economies of other island territories.

The importance of tourism in island economies is demonstrated by the recent graduation of Cape Verde and the Maldives from Least Developed Country status due to their levels of income from tourism. At least two further SIDS are on course for a similar transition on the strength of their tourism sector.

A further reason why tourism is so important for islands is the projected growth of the sector worldwide, with international tourism arrivals forecasted to reach 1.8 billion by 2030. The popularity of islands as destinations and the kinds of experience that they offer should enable them to see at least an equivalent amount of growth. Tourism has also proven to be a resilient sector, with tourism income to SIDS as well as other states recovering strongly after the global recession.

The importance of tourism for islands should not just be seen from a macroeconomic perspective. Tourism income can support livelihoods in many island communities. It is also uniquely placed to benefit from, and provide support for, the special cultural and natural heritage assets which are a feature of so many of the world’s islands.
Challenges and opportunities for sustainable tourism in islands

The overarching challenge and opportunity for tourism in islands is to support further economic growth while also protecting and benefitting island environments and communities. The principles of sustainable tourism are highly relevant to islands.

Particular characteristics of islands include small size, relative isolation and inaccessibility and a maritime environment. For these reasons many islands face challenging trading conditions and a limited resource base. These characteristics also make islands vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks.

Islands, by their very nature, are distinctive places to visit, often with a unique character and appeal. There are great opportunities to use this strength to develop and project distinctive island brands, which in turn should guide the products and messages that shape the tourism offer.

Islands, overall, are hugely important for global biodiversity, with many containing unique species on account of their relative isolation. Similarly, this partly explains the rich cultural heritage that can be found on many islands. These assets provide a significant tourism resource but also place a strong responsibility on tourism to support their conservation.

Pressure on land and other resources creates considerable challenges for tourism development and operations, requiring sound planning and environmental management. The availability of fresh water and the levels of water consumption for tourism uses are a particular concern, now and in the future. Island tourism also faces specific challenges in waste handling and energy provision. Opportunities include better management and investment in green technology.

Many issues affect the competitiveness of island destinations, including connectivity and levels of investment. Many SIDS depend on foreign direct investment. Opportunities exist to strengthen local economic investment and engagement in tourism, including strengthening local capacity and provision of necessary skills training.

Islands are particularly vulnerable to climate change which is already affecting their environments and livelihoods. While small islands only generate less than 1% of Greenhouse Gas Emissions, they face particular damage from global warming impacts such as storm surges, sea level rise, beach erosion and coral bleaching, that will directly and indirectly affect their tourism. These challenges need to be faced without delay.

Outcome and recommendations

In recognition of the importance of tourism to the economy and sustainable development of many Small Island Developing States and other islands, and the specific opportunities and challenges for islands in pursuing sustainable tourism, the Conference calls on UN bodies and other international
agencies, the governments of SIDS and the national and local authorities of other islands, representatives of the tourism industry, as appropriate, to:

1. Ensure that full attention is paid to the role of tourism in the further shaping of policies and programmes to support SIDS and other islands in their sustainable development and that tourism is placed as a priority in the development agenda of islands.

2. Establish and maintain governance and management structures for tourism, including within each island destination, which bring together tourism, environment, culture, transport, planning and development responsibilities and expertise, and enable a partnership approach between the public and private sector and local community interests.

3. Engage in the preparation of strategies and action plans for the development of sustainable tourism, reflecting the particular circumstances of different islands and considering their long term position as well as their short term needs, while also making available sufficient financial and human resources for their successful implementation.

4. Provide clear, research-based information and guidance to SIDS and other island governments on the impact of climate change on tourism; act now to implement and support practical climate change adaptation measures, and establish and pursue low carbon strategies for tourism development.

5. Ensure that future tourism development is guided by, and complies with, spatial and physical plans that take full account of the current and future capacity of an island’s resources (especially land, water, coastline, energy and social capital).

6. Take further measures to protect the cultural and natural heritage and biodiversity of islands and their marine environments, including establishing further protected areas if necessary, and engaging the tourism sector in supporting the conservation of these precious assets by raising awareness of them and providing a source of income for their conservation and management.

7. Encourage all tourism businesses and visitors to minimise any negative impacts on island environments and communities, through appropriate regulations, incentives, voluntary codes and certification and the identification, recognition and promotion of good practice.

8. Recognise the dependency of much island tourism on air access, with the presence of sufficient routes and competitive services, and ensure that any future policies on regulation and taxation of air services take account the special circumstances of islands.

9. Undertake a thorough analysis of the tourism value chain in all islands, to identify how the local island economy and communities can gain maximum advantage from tourism and to
design and implement measures to strengthen local employment and engagement in the sector, including access to training.

10. Promote investment in tourism in islands, including appropriate foreign investment, while taking measures to protect local interests and establish financial partnerships, to achieve mutual benefits.

11. Identify and creatively build upon the special qualities and distinctiveness of individual islands as a basis for active, targeted promotion of them as tourism destinations.

12. Support and encourage regional partnerships, such as the Vanilla Islands in the Indian Ocean, which stand to benefit from the complementarity of their tourism offer and joint promotion.

13. Support international and regional tourism bodies in promoting and providing expertise in the sustainable development of tourism, and encourage all SIDS and island territories to participate in them.

14. Consider these conclusions at the Third International Conference on SIDS in 2014, disseminate them in other forums and encourage their further development and implementation.

Sincere appreciation was extended to the Government of France and the Regional Council of Réunion for their warm hospitality and the excellent arrangements for the conference, as well as their contribution to advance the agenda of sustainable tourism development in islands.