



UN Tourism



**BEST
TOURISM
VILLAGES**
by UN Tourism

Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism

Areas of Evaluation
2026 Edition

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The Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism initiative aims to make tourism a positive force for transformation, rural development, and community wellbeing.

It seeks to advance the role of tourism in valuing and safeguarding rural villages along with their associated landscapes, knowledge systems, biological and cultural diversity, local values and activities (agriculture, forestry, livestock and/or fisheries), including their gastronomy.

The initiative will promote, in particular, innovative and transformative approaches to the development of tourism in rural destinations that contribute to the three pillars of sustainability – economic, social and environmental – in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism aims to maximize the contribution of tourism to:

1. Reduce regional inequalities in income and development.
2. Fight rural depopulation.
3. Progress gender equality and women's and youth empowerment.
4. Promote rural transformation and strengthen traction capacity.
5. Strengthen multi-level-governance, partnerships and the active involvement of communities (public-private-community collaboration)
6. Improve connectivity, infrastructure, access to finance and investment.
7. Advance innovation and digitalization.
8. Innovate in product development and value chain integration.
9. Promote the relationship between sustainable, equitable and resilient food systems and tourism to preserve biodiversity, agrobiodiversity, cultural heritage and local gastronomy.
10. Advance the conservation of natural and cultural resources.
11. Promote sustainable practices for a more efficient use of resources and a reduction of emissions and waste.
12. Enhance education and skills development.

Areas of Evaluation

In line with the UN Tourism definition of Rural Tourism¹, a village must present the following features to be eligible for application:

- Have a **low population density** and a maximum of 15.000 inhabitants.
- Be located in a **landscape** with an important presence of traditional activities such as agriculture, forestry, livestock or fishing.
- Share **community values** and **lifestyle**.

Applications can only be submitted through the UN Tourism Member States to a maximum of **eight** villages per Member State.

Applications will be evaluated by an independent, multidisciplinary Advisory Board covering the following areas (Section 4. Areas of Evaluation of the Application Form):



1. Cultural and Natural Resources

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):



The village has natural and cultural (tangible and intangible) resources recognized at sub-national, national, regional or international level.

- 1.1. The village has recognized cultural resources (tangible and intangible).
- 1.2. The village has recognized natural resources.



2. Promotion and Conservation of Cultural Resources

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):



The village is committed to the promotion and conservation of its cultural resources which make it unique and authentic.

- 2.1. The village disseminates and/or promotes policies, measures and initiatives aimed at the conservation and promotion of its cultural resources.

¹ World Tourism Organization (2019), UNWTO Tourism Definitions, UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284420858>

\$ 3. Economic Sustainability

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):



The village is committed to promote economic sustainability supporting business development, entrepreneurship and investment.

- 3.1. The village disseminates and/or promotes policies, measures and initiatives to support the access to finance for tourism development and tourism investment.
- 3.2. The village disseminates and/or promotes a framework that is conducive to business development, particularly for tourism Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and entrepreneurship.



4. Social Sustainability

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):



The village is committed to promote social inclusion and equality.

- 4.1. The village disseminates and/or promotes policies, measures and initiatives to foster employment in the tourism sector.
- 4.2. The village disseminates and/or promotes policies, measures and initiatives to advance gender balance in tourism and to support skills development, employment and entrepreneurship of youth (17-29 years old).
- 4.3. The village disseminates and/or promotes policies, measures and initiatives, to foster opportunities for vulnerable populations in tourism: i.e., underrepresented residents from indigenous groups of ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities.
- 4.4. The village disseminates and/or promotes policies, measures and initiatives for human resources, education and skills development, with particular focus in advancing innovation and reducing the digital skills gap in tourism.
- 4.5. The village disseminates and/or promotes policies, measures and initiatives,

to advance accessibility for travellers with specific access requirements.



5. Environmental Sustainability

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):



The village is committed to environmental sustainability through the promotion and/or dissemination of policies, measures and initiatives that advance the preservation and conservation of its natural resources and minimize the impact of tourism development on the environment.

- 5.1. The village disseminates and/or promotes policies, measures and initiatives, for the preservation and conservation of natural resources.
- 5.2. The village disseminates and/or promotes policies, measures and initiatives aimed at fighting climate change.
- 5.3. The village disseminates and/or promotes policies, measures and initiatives, to reduce single-use plastics in tourism.
- 5.4. The village disseminates and/or promotes policies, measures and initiatives, to monitor and reduce the impact of tourism on energy and water consumption and the generation of sewage and solid waste.



6. Tourism Development and Value Chain Integration

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):



The tourism in the village is significantly marketed and developed. The village further promotes the enhancement of the tourism value chain and the competitiveness of the destination in areas related to market access, marketing and promotion, innovation, product development and quality.

- 6.1. The village is integrated into an area with wider tourism attractions (e.g. is part of a thematic national, regional or international route, of a cluster of villages with common natural and cultural values, a natural park, etc).
- 6.2. The village has accommodation options that reflect rural and local values.

- 6.3. The village promotes local gastronomy and local culinary culture.
- 6.4. The village promotes the inclusion of farmers, local producers (handicrafts, etc.) in tourism, products, activities and experiences related to local traditions and facilitates their purchase by tourists.
- 6.5. The village implements or advocates for the implementation of tourism quality standards and certification systems in tourism businesses and services providers.
- 6.6. Businesses in the village have e-commerce and/or electronic payment facilities.
- 6.7. The village has tourism signage.
- 6.8. The village has capacity to host events and/or has developed relevant events, particularly related to local culture, knowledge and products.
- 6.9. The village has/participates in marketing and promotion plans/initiatives.
- 6.10. The village tourism offer is well represented in online and offline travel distribution channels.
- 6.11. The village promotes and has innovative products and experiences.
- 6.12. Tourism brings positive economic impact to the community, complementing existing economic activities such as agriculture, forestry, livestock and/or fisheries and their relevant processing industries.



7. Governance and prioritization of tourism

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):



The village is committed to make tourism a strategic pillar for rural development. It further promotes a governance model based on public-private partnerships, cooperation with other government levels and the engagement of the community in tourism planning and development.

- 7.1. The village has a dedicated tourism development plan or policy.
- 7.2. The village has a dedicated structure/area for tourism development and management (public/public-private or private).
- 7.3. The village disseminates and/or promotes collaboration with the businesses in the village.

- 7.4. The village cooperates with national or regional governments on tourism initiatives.
- 7.5. The village disseminates and/or promotes the participation of the community and its residents in tourism planning and development; and has measures that contribute to have tourism improve local well-being and satisfaction.
- 7.6. The village collaborates with educational and academic institutions in tourism related issues.



8. Infrastructure and connectivity

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):



The village has infrastructure to facilitate access and communications that improve the wellbeing of rural communities, business development as well as the visitor experience.

- 8.1. The village has adequate transport infrastructure to facilitate connectivity.
- 8.2. The village has adequate access to the services such as drinking water, sanitation services and electricity.
- 8.3. The village has adequate communications technology and digital infrastructure.



9. Health, Safety and Security

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):



The village has health, safety and security systems to safeguard residents and tourists.

- 9.1. The village has/is part of a public health, safety and security plan/system.
- 9.2. The village has/is close to health care services.
- 9.3. In case of vulnerability to natural disasters, the village has/is part of an emergency plan.

Glossary of tourism terms and other definitions

Activity/activities: In tourism statistics, the term *activities* represent the actions and behaviours of people in preparation for and during a trip in their capacity as consumers.²

Census: A *census* is the complete enumeration of a population or groups at a point in time with respect to well defined characteristics: for example, Population, Production, Traffic on particular roads.³

Competitiveness of a tourism destination: The *competitiveness of a tourism destination* is the ability of the destination to use its natural, cultural, human, man-made and capital resources efficiently to develop and deliver quality, innovative, ethical and attractive tourism products and services in order to achieve a sustainable growth within its overall vision and strategic goals, increase the added value of the tourism sector, improve and diversify its market components and optimize its attractiveness and benefits both for visitors and the local community in a sustainable perspective.⁴

Innovation in tourism: *Innovation in tourism* is the introduction of a new or improved component which intends to bring tangible and intangible benefits to tourism stakeholders and the local community, improve the value of the tourism experience and the core competencies of the tourism sector and hence enhance tourism competitiveness and /or sustainability. Innovation in tourism may cover potential areas, such as tourism destinations, tourism products, technology, processes, organizations and business models, skills, architecture, services, tools and/or practices

for management, marketing, communication, operation, quality assurance and pricing.⁵

Quality of a tourism destination: *Quality of a tourism destination* is the result of a process which implies the satisfaction of all tourism product and service needs, requirements and expectations of the consumer at an acceptable price, in conformity with mutually accepted contractual conditions and the implicit underlying factors such as safety and security, hygiene, accessibility, communication, infrastructure and public amenities and services. It also involves aspects of ethics, transparency and respect towards the human, natural and cultural environment. Quality, as one of the key drivers of tourism competitiveness, is also a professional tool for organizational, operational and perception purposes for tourism suppliers.⁶

Tourism destination: A *tourism destination* is a physical space with or without administrative and/or analytical boundaries in which a visitor can spend an overnight. It is the cluster (co-location) of products and services, and of activities and experiences along the tourism value chain and a basic unit of analysis of tourism. A destination incorporates various stakeholders and can network to form larger destinations. It is also intangible with its image and identity which may influence its market competitiveness.⁷

Tourism expenditure: *Tourism expenditure* refers to the amount paid for the acquisition of consumption goods and services, as well as valuables, for own use or to give away, for and during tourism trips. It includes

² World Tourism Organization (2019), Glossary of Tourism Terms, UNWTO, Madrid (online), available at: www.unwto.org

³ World Tourism Organization (2019), Glossary of Tourism Terms, UNWTO, Madrid (online), available at: www.unwto.org

⁴ World Tourism Organization (2019), UNWTO Tourism Definitions, UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284420858>

⁵ World Tourism Organization (2019), UNWTO Tourism Definitions, UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284420858>

⁶ World Tourism Organization (2019), UNWTO Tourism Definitions, UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284420858>

⁷ World Tourism Organization (2019), UNWTO Tourism Definitions, UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284420858>

expenditures by visitors themselves, as well as expenses that are paid for or reimbursed by others.⁸

Tourism product: A *tourism product* is a combination of tangible and intangible elements, such as natural, cultural and man-made resources, attractions, facilities, services and activities around a specific center of interest which represents the core of the destination marketing mix and creates an overall visitor experience including emotional aspects for the potential customers. A tourism product is priced and sold through distribution channels and it has a life-cycle.⁹

Tourism industries: *Tourism industries* comprise all establishments for which the principal activity is a tourism characteristic activity. Tourism industries (also referred to as tourism activities) are the activities that typically produce tourism characteristic products.¹⁰

Tourism sector: The *tourism sector* [...] is the cluster of production units in different industries that provide consumption goods and services demanded by visitors. Such industries are called tourism industries because visitor acquisition represents such a significant share of their supply that, in the absence of visitors, their production of these would cease to exist in meaningful quantity.¹¹

Tourism value chain: The *tourism value chain* is the sequence of primary and support activities which are strategically fundamental for the performance of the tourism sector. Linked processes such as policy making and integrated planning, product development and packaging, promotion and marketing, distribution and sales and destination operations and services are the key primary

activities of the tourism value chain. Support activities involve transport and infrastructure, human resource development, technology and systems development and other complementary goods and services which may not be related to core tourism businesses but have a high impact on the value of tourism.¹²

Tourist (or overnight visitor): A *visitor* [...] is classified as a *tourist (or overnight visitor)*, if his/her trip includes an overnight stay, or as a same-day visitor (or excursionist) otherwise.¹³

Travel / traveller: *Travel* refers to the activity of travellers. A *traveller* is someone who moves between different geographic locations, for any purpose and any duration. The visitor is a particular type of traveller and consequently tourism is a subset of travel.¹⁴

8 World Tourism Organization (2019), Glossary of Tourism Terms, UNWTO, Madrid (online), available at: www.unwto.org

9 World Tourism Organization (2019), UNWTO Tourism Definitions, UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/book/10.18111/9789284420858>

10 World Tourism Organization (2019), Glossary of Tourism Terms, UNWTO, Madrid (online), available at: www.unwto.org

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With the vision of making tourism a positive force for transformation, rural development and community wellbeing, the **Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism** initiative seeks to advance the role of tourism in valuing and safeguarding rural villages along with their associated landscapes, knowledge systems, biological and cultural diversity, local values and activities.

The **UN Tourism – World Tourism Organization**, a United Nations specialized agency, is the leading international organization with the decisive and central role in promoting the development of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. It serves as a global forum for tourism policy issues and a practical source of tourism knowhow. Its membership includes 160 countries, 6 territories, 2 permanent observers and over 500 Affiliate Members.