wtm LATIN AMERICA
São Paulo, 14 – 16 April 2026

MINISTÉRIO DO TURISMO

Ministers' Summit in WTM Latin America 2026:

Strategic dialogs for responsible and regenerative tourism in Latin America





Expedient

Editorial project: **Comunica Hub**
www.comunicahub.com.br

Writing and editing: **Editora Vagâmen**
www.editoravagamen.com.br

Layout: **TwoMates**
www.twomates.com.br

The information, data and evaluations described in the pronouncements contained in this document are the responsibility of the respective participants and have been edited for clarity and conciseness. The edition preserved the meaning of the manifestations, with adjustments of language, language, concision and textual organization.

WTM Latin America 2026

Ministers' Summit
Expo Center Norte - São Paulo/SP

This paper brings together a record of the discussions held at the Ministers' Summit, organised for the first time at WTM Latin America 2026, as well as a summary of the study "Shaping Sustainable Tourism – The Role of Observatories in Latin America and the Caribbean" ("Shaping Sustainable Tourism – The Role of Observatories in Latin America and the Caribbean", in a free translation), presented by representatives of UN Tourism and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) during the event.

The publication reinforces WTM Latin America's commitment to strengthening institutional dialogue and promoting more responsible, regenerative and evidence-based tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean.

WTM Latin America is the leading global event in the travel and tourism industry in Latin America. Held in São Paulo, the fair is focused on B2B and connects industry professionals to business opportunities, networking and access to qualified buyers. The event brings together different segments of the industry, such as agencies, operators, hosting, transportation, cruises, luxury products and technology and, over the course of three days, allows you to follow trends, meet new products and expand professional connections. The 2026 edition brought together 935 exhibitors, representatives from 53 countries, 35 tourism professionals and 70 conferences.

www.wtm.com/latin-america

wtm LATIN AMERICA
São Paulo, 14 – 16 April 2026

MINISTÉRIO DO TURISMO

CONTENTS

Presentation of the project 04

Official opening: Bianca Pizzolito,
WTM Latin America Event Leader 05

Participants of the meeting 07

Welcome Statement: Gustavo Feliciano,
Minister of State for Tourism of Brazil 09

Presentation: UN Tourism 10

Highlights of the study: IDB 11

Inter-ministerial debate 16

Closure 35

PRESENTATION

This paper presents the main points discussed during the 1st Ministers' Summit, held within the WTM Latin America, on April 14, 2026, at Expo Center Norte, in São Paulo (SP). The meeting is a milestone in the institutional trajectory of the event by incorporating to the Latin American agenda a high-level international forum already consolidated in the global portfolio of the World Travel Market.

Part of the official programming of WTM Latin America, the Ministers' Summit has set up as a strategic space for articulation between tourism ministers and government representatives of tourism from eight countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, focusing on strengthening regional and institutional cooperation under the theme "Latin American Tourism: Responsible and Regenerative for the Future." By gathering these contents, the paper preserves the memory of the first Latin American edition of the Ministers' Summit, acting as an institutional record.

In addition to recording the debates, this document presents a summary of the study "Shaping Sustainable Tourism - The Role of Observatories in Latin America and the Caribbean" — produced by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the UN Tourism, and presented at the opening of the forum.

It is worth emphasising that, throughout this paper, sustainability, responsibility and regeneration are addressed as complementary dimensions: reducing negative impacts, assuming commitments regarding the effects of tourism activities, and actively contributing to the recovery of territories.

The staging of the Ministers' Summit at WTM Latin America 2026 expands, in the regional context, an initiative that is already well established within WTM's global portfolio. At WTM London, the Ministers' Summit reached its 19th edition in 2025 and, in partnership with UN Tourism and WTTC, brought together more than 50 ministers and international leaders for discussions on public policy, investment and strategies for the future of tourism. The first record of this meeting in London dates back to 2007, when the "Ministers' Summit on Tourism and Climate Change" was held, demonstrating the relevance of the meeting to high-level international sectoral dialogue.

Keywords: WTM Latin America; Ministers' Summit; sustainable tourism; responsible tourism; regenerative tourism; tourism governance; tourism observatories; Latin America; Caribbean; tourism public policy; regional cooperation; UN Tourism; Inter-American Development Bank; IDB.

OFFICIAL OPENING

By Bianca Pizzolito

The first edition of the Ministers' Summit marked a significant moment for Latin American tourism. By bringing together government representatives from different countries across the region in São Paulo, the meeting established a space for dialogue aimed at building a shared vision of the challenges and opportunities shaping the future of the sector.

More than simply an item on the WTM Latin America programme, the Ministers' Summit represented recognition of an increasingly evident need: to strengthen regional cooperation on issues that transcend borders and require collectively developed responses.

Latin American tourism encompasses an extraordinary diversity of destinations, cultures, heritage and experiences. At the same time, the region shares common challenges related to sustainability, competitiveness, territorial management, the inclusion of local communities, and the growing need to shape public policies through data, evidence and governance mechanisms.

It was from this perspective that the participants met to discuss the theme "Latin American Tourism: Responsible and Regenerative for the Future." The reflections shared throughout the meeting reaffirmed that the sustainable development of tourism depends not only on each country's ability to make progress individually, but also on its willingness to share experiences, build knowledge and act in a coordinated manner in the face of challenges that are, to a large extent, common to the region.

This paper is one of the outcomes of this commitment.

Its purpose is to document the ideas, reflections and lessons that emerged during the meeting, broadening the reach of the discussions and helping to ensure that they remain accessible to public-sector decision-makers, institutions, businesses, researchers and professionals working to develop tourism in Latin America.

The meeting and its technical contributions also underscored the importance of strengthening monitoring, intelligence and knowledge-generation tools capable of informing decision-making and supporting public policies aimed at more resilient, responsible and regenerative tourism.

We nevertheless believe that the main legacy of this first edition goes beyond the discussions that took place, with the proposal of a dialogue network that began to take shape through them.

The Ministers' Summit does not end with the conclusion of the meeting. It inaugurates a permanent platform for exchange among countries, institutions and leaders committed to strengthening tourism as a driver of economic, social, cultural and environmental development across the region.

We hope that this document will contribute to deepening the discussions initiated at WTM Latin America 2026 and, at the same time, serve as an invitation for new countries and new stakeholders to join this endeavour in the years ahead.

The challenges facing tourism call for cooperation. And the opportunities emerging for Latin America become even greater when we choose to build them together.



Bianca Pizzolito has been Event Leader of WTM Latin America by RX Global since September 2023. With 16 years of experience in the industry, she joined RX in 2013 as Sales Executive for the second edition of WTM Latin America and, over the years, has taken over commercial management for the other events in the portfolio - WTM London, Arabian Travel Market, and WTM Africa. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Leisure and Tourism from the University of São Paulo (USP) and an MBA in Business Management from Saint Paul School of Business.

REPRESENTATIVENESS

The first edition of the Ministers' Summit at WTM Latin America was attended by authorities from eight Latin American and Caribbean countries, as well as representatives of UN Tourism and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

After the official opening, led by Bianca Pizzolito, Event Leader of WTM Latin America, the main highlights of the study "Shaping Sustainable Tourism – The Role of Observatories in Latin America and the Caribbean" – were presented.

Next, the interministerial debate was initiated, structured in question and answer blocks and moderated by Dr. Mariana Aldrigui, president of the Advisory Board of WTM Latin America, professor and researcher at the University of São Paulo (USP).



Brazil – Gustavo Feliciano

Minister of State for Tourism. Born in Campina Grande (PB) and graduated in Law, he was Secretary of Tourism and Economic Development of Paraiba between 2019 and 2021.



Chile – María Paz Lagos

Subsecretary of Tourism of Chile and the highest authority of the sector in the country and leader of the organ subordinate to the Ministry of Economy, Promotion and Tourism.



Guatemala – Harris Whitbeck

Director General of the Guatemalan Tourism Institute (INGUAT), the governing body for tourism in Guatemala.



Mexico – Miguel Aguiñiga Rodríguez

Holder of the Innovation, Sustainability and Tourist Professionalization Unit of the Government of Mexico Tourism Secretariat (SECTUR).



Panama - Gloria De León

Minister of Tourism of Panama. The Panama Tourism Authority (ATP) is the government agency responsible for promoting the development of tourism and strengthening Panama's positioning as a tourist destination.



Saint Lucia - Dr. Ernest Hilaire

Deputy Prime Minister of the country and Minister of Tourism, Trade, Investment, Creative Industries, Culture and Heritage.



Uruguay - Cristian Pos Dalmás

National Director of Tourism, who, at the time, represented Pablo Menoni, Minister of Tourism of Uruguay.



Argentina - Dr. José María Arrúa (listener)

Minister of Tourism of the province of Misiones, in Argentina, who, on the occasion, represented Daniel Scioli, Secretary of Tourism and Environment of the Argentine Nation.



UN Tourism - Heitor Kadri

Director of the Regional Office of the UN Tourism for the Americas, based in Rio de Janeiro.



Inter-American Development Bank - Juliana Bettini

Senior expert in Tourism at the IDB and leader of the tourism agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean.



Moderator - Dr. Mariana Aldrigui

President of the Advisory Board of WTM Latin America, professor and researcher at the University of São Paulo (USP).

WELCOME STATEMENT

By Gustavo Feliciano

It is a great pleasure to be with you today. I would like to congratulate WTM Latin America on the initiative of bringing together so many leaders in Brazil. I would also like to highlight the positive momentum that Brazilian tourism has been experiencing. In 2025, we welcomed 9.2 million international tourists, a historic record representing growth of more than 37%, the result of the government's dedication and the coordination and promotional efforts carried out by Embratur.

Domestic tourism in Brazil is also experiencing a very positive period. In 2025, we recorded a record of 130 million passengers and started 2026 on the same trajectory. We had the best first quarter since the year 2000, with the arrival of more than 3 million foreign tourists to the country.

Tourism is a tool of social development, capable of generating employment and income, and promoting the dignity of populations living in different territories. In the Brazilian case, due to the continental dimension, policies seek to increase social inclusion, ensure effective participation of women and strengthen sustainability-oriented practices. In this context, WTM Latin America introduces a topic of special relevance: Regeneration, an agenda that has been incorporated into the discussions of national tourism.

Given that 70% of tourists visiting Brazil come from Latin America, it is essential to maintain close ties, fostering dialogue and the exchange of experiences that can contribute to improving public policies for tourism across the region.

I would like to welcome all participants and wish you all an excellent event.



Gustavo Feliciano has served as Brazil's Minister of State for Tourism since December 2025 and focuses on continuing policies aimed at strengthening the sector as a driver of development. Born in Campina Grande, Paraíba, and a law graduate, he has experience in public administration, having served as Secretary of Tourism and Economic Development of Paraíba (2019–2021).

PRESENTATION: UN TOURISM

By Heitor Kadri



"Shaping Sustainable Tourism – The Role of Observatories in Latin America and the Caribbean", was one of the highlights of the WTM Latin America Ministers' Summit.

Produced by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and UN Tourism, the 42-page document was presented by Heitor Kadri, director of the UN Tourism for the Americas Regional Office, and detailed by Juliana Bettini, senior expert in Tourism at the IDB and leader of the tourism agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean.

DOWNLOAD HERE

We know that Latin America has great potential for growth, but it also faces a lack of resources of different kinds. Today, the IDB representative and I present one of the deliverables of this work, but we want to advance much further and count on your collaboration.

With Chile, which is starting a new administration, we want to develop bilateral projects. With the Minister of Guatemala, we already have a work trajectory in projects focused on connectivity. With the Minister of Mexico, there are initiatives in the field of sports tourism. With the Minister of Panama, we have a long-standing partnership. With the Deputy Prime Minister of Saint Lucia, I would greatly like to count on you as associates, and we put our team on hand to develop joint projects. With Uruguay, we have five ongoing projects within the Mercosur framework, involving the joint commission, training actions, regenerative tourism, religious routes and the Jesuit Way.

It has the UN as a whole and, in particular, the Office for the Americas, as partners in building regional policies. The Brazilian government has supported us in a very forceful way; therefore, I thank Minister Gustavo, the Chancellor and the President for all the support they have given us. We will turn this effort into many projects for the region.

I invite everyone to follow the excellent presentation by Juliana Bettini, who will address how our observatories can and should contribute to this new phase of tourism, transforming data into useful information, applied knowledge and decision-making support.

Heitor Kadri is Director of the UN Tourism Regional Office for the Americas.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE STUDY

By Juliana Bettini



Shaping Sustainable Tourism – The Role of Observatories in Latin America and the Caribbean".

Tourism in Latin America, the Caribbean and the world is a decisive moment. We know that the sector is a powerful driver of employment, income and investment, but we also recognise that it is facing increasingly intense social, environmental and territorial pressures. This context calls on us to rethink the way in which the tourism sector operates.

I have a professional career entirely dedicated to tourism, with more than 25 years of experience in the sector. The good news I bring is that our region is moving in this direction, and the very theme of WTM Latin America reflects this movement. We are moving towards a vision of tourism that is more sustainable, inclusive and resilient. However, this transition does not happen spontaneously. We need better coordination and more informed decision-making, both in the public and private sectors. And, to decide better, it is necessary to measure better.

This is the strategic value of tourism observatories and the theme that guided the study I will present to you. Observatories are not just spaces for the production of information. They should be understood as governance tools, as they allow us to analyse impacts, anticipate tensions and subsidize evidence-based public decisions, contributing, in the long term, to a more sustainable, resilient and regenerative tourism.

The sustainability of tourism increasingly depends on our ability to transform data into assertive decisions and with measurable results. This presentation brings together a series of case studies that demonstrate exactly how thematic use of indicators can strengthen planning, protect the natural heritage of our region and promote more sustainable, more inclusive and more resilient tourism.

Tourism observatories are tools that allow us to improve governance toward the tourism we want to build. They should not be seen as a purely statistical function or as an isolated tool, but as instruments to govern better, not only based on public sector data. They allow to strengthen integrated planning, especially considering that tourism is related to several other sectors and that the interinstitutional articulation remains one of the major challenges of the area. It is from the data that we have been able to improve this integration.

This allows the measurement of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of tourism, moving toward a broader approach. We know that it is no longer enough to measure only tourist arrivals, expenses and occupation. Measuring volume today is insufficient. It is necessary to include indicators of new dimensions, such as the socioeconomic benefits that effectively reach the populations of the territories that receive tourists.

The perception of residents about tourism, for example, is not yet as present in our region as in Europe, but it is a central issue. The use of resources, such as water and energy, and waste management pose great challenges for the region, which reinforces the importance of anticipating risks. Identifying the most sensitive places for the accomplishment of the tourist activity is fundamental, and observatories allow us to do this.

There are five points that synthesize the elements identified in the case studies of tourism observatories, from qualitative interviews with their managers, with the teams that are at the forefront of these initiatives and with the network of actors engaged in them. The correlation between Latin American case studies and experiences from other regions, especially North America and Europe, allows us to identify elements that can and should be integrated into a public policy agenda aimed at better measuring and governing tourism.

Tourism observatories help improve decision-making, anticipate risks and reduce costs; enable the identification of impacts and emerging issues; measure performance and guide public policies implemented across territories; strengthen policy transparency and accountability to the public through indicators; and help integrate tourism with other relevant public policy agendas, such as climate, the environment, urban development and mobility.

I also bring elements from four cases highlighted in the publication. None of them is perfect, and the proposal is not to fully replicate these models throughout the region. What is presented are elements that worked and differentials of each experience, which can be adapted to other destinations, at national and subnational levels, in Latin America and in other regions of the world.

The **Buenos Aires Observatory**, one of the best-known, was a pioneer in compiling comprehensive information on visitors' profiles, perceptions and behaviour in the city. This enabled the province to make more informed decisions regarding promotional strategies and to engage with mobility teams on specific needs in certain areas.

The **Bogotá Observatory** brings other relevant elements into the picture. The city is actively involved in discussions on smart tourism destinations. The observatory has incorporated sustainability practically and objectively, using a set of indicators and a perception survey involving public- and private-sector stakeholders and the population, which is regarded as central to the process.

The **State of São Paulo** has the Tourism Economy Intelligence Centre (CIET), an observatory that was initially established with an economic focus, monitoring indicators such as arrivals and expenditure, but which has gradually incorporated indicators related to sustainability. With the support of the IDB, it was possible to develop a pilot project several years ago in the northern coastal region of the state, measuring indicators associated with environmental change, for example.

There is also the example of the **Guanajuato Observatory**, whose distinguishing feature is that it was established through a Government Agreement. This helps to ensure continuity and a participatory approach. This is not an effort driven solely by public policy, but a joint initiative involving the private sector, civil society and academia.

In summary, there are five characteristics shared by well-functioning observatories:

- Broad participation at all levels;
- Collection of relevant indicators;
- Institutional anchoring;
- Effective communication of results;
- Networking.

If I were to highlight just one of these, I would say that communication is one of the most important. After all, if there are numerous dashboards that no one reads or that contain data that are difficult to interpret, it becomes challenging to use that information to guide decision-making. Networking, in turn, is a feature that is sometimes underestimated, but which proves essential for harmonising information and enabling shared learning.

Let me return to the question of “what to measure”. There are many relevant indicators, but it is neither necessary nor advisable to measure everything. It is essential, however, for each territory to carefully consider its specific needs. The golden rule is to work with SMART indicators, an acronym for: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound.

There is little point in seeking the perfect data if it is not accessible or if it cannot be monitored on an ongoing basis. Observatories need to take a careful and strategic approach to selecting indicators. At this point, the study presents the specific case of Tyrol, in northern Italy, which works with a set of 30 indicators. Personally, I consider this to be a high number, but it is the set they determined could be measured and effectively used in destination decision-making.

In addition to bringing together many examples of good practice, the study also highlights the challenges faced by observatories on a day-to-day basis. Four issues emerge repeatedly across the cases analysed:

- Insufficient recognition of the strategic value of observatories;
- Ineffective communication of results;
- Human and financial resource constraints;
- Lack of interoperability between systems and the absence of harmonised indicators.

There are some topics I would like you to consider when defining a ministerial agenda related to measuring sustainable tourism and using this data to better govern the sector:

- Institutionalize observatories, although not necessarily within the structure of public administration, but from a model that ensures continuity of work. The academy is usually an important partner in this sense, as well as the private sector;
- Create a specific core of indicators, able to integrate tourism to other sectors and generate inputs for different types of negotiation;
- Ensure the participation of different spheres, including the private sector, organized civil society and academia;
- Create data sharing platforms and methodologies, as already observed in Europe, which can serve as a useful reference for the region.

In conclusion, strengthening is not enough to measure; we need to know what to measure to better guide the public and private policies of our region. Observatories can be key elements in this process, allowing us to move toward a more strategic, integrated and sustainable tourism policy.

The reflection I would like to leave is whether, in fact, we are prepared to take the next step.

Juliana Bettini is a senior tourism expert at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and leader of the tourism agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean.

INTER-MINISTERIAL DEBATE

WORD OF THE MODERATOR

Dr. Mariana Aldrigui

The holding of a Ministers' Summit at this time is especially significant. Although we know that Latin American ministers have met on other occasions, the current context, marked by global conflicts and geopolitical changes, reinforces the perception that we represent one of the safest regions in the world. Perhaps this is an interesting and relevant aspect to attract more international tourists. But in addition, all the countries represented here, as well as our neighbours, are home to ecosystems that are at the center of global attention and that require continuous preservation efforts.

In addition to gathering traditional knowledge that preserves our culture, it is important to recognize that tourism, in its origin, is one of the most powerful economic forces on the planet. And this same force can, at the same time, destroy everything we want to preserve. We consume beaches, communities, landscapes and cultures in the name of growth, which reveals a great contradiction. From now on, it will be necessary to make choices that protect the next generations.

The good news is that data from Latin America shows that our responses are among the most intelligent and applicable to preservation. It is no longer just about sustainability, but about minimizing damage and moving toward a regenerative logic. I refer to tourism capable of restoring what has been degraded, strengthening what is fragile and distributing what has historically been concentrated. It is about this responsible, regenerative and connected tourism with the future that we will talk about.

I thank the ministers of Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, Mexico and Panama, Saint Lucia and Uruguay, as well as the representative of Argentina, who participates as a listener. Some questions will be directed, but feel free to signal if you want to share your experiences, challenges and visions. May this dialogue help us to identify common paths, strengthen regional cooperation and think together the tourism we want to build.

Dr. Mariana Aldrigui is president of the Advisory Board of WTM Latin America, a professor and researcher at the University of São Paulo (USP).

BLOCK 1
Regional Vision

QUESTION – At this point, what aspect of tourism currently makes the minister or representative most proud?

BRAZIL

In summary, we are very pleased to work in tourism because this economic activity is connected to a wide range of value chains. This enables us to reach different segments at the same time. The government's guiding principle is to make a difference: to promote greater dignity, transform people's lives and create opportunities for the population. That is the main objective, what motivates us most and what is expected of Brazilian tourism.

CHILE

Beyond the governments of the day, this agenda has become a shared State policy. With this in mind, we have a committee of ministers and legal frameworks that need to be strengthened so that tourism is recognised as a genuine economic sector. To achieve this, it is essential to foster coordination with different areas of government, such as Public Works, Telecommunications and Culture. This cross-sectoral approach is fundamental, although it is not always easy to turn it into a consistent and long-lasting strategy.

Today, there are strategies focused on governance, the capacity to intervene in tourism and collective action, as well as initiatives aimed at job creation. Tourism should be treated as a priority sector, not only for its economic impact on numbers, but above all for its ability to transform the lives of many communities, strengthen local economies and improve people's quality of life.

GUATEMALA

Over the course of two years, we worked to establish a more consistent regulatory framework for the industry within a growth-oriented context: the 2026–2036 Sustainable Tourism Master Plan. When considering the future of tourism, communication, planning, and investment must be integrated through a collaborative process.

The plan was developed using a methodology based on participatory meetings held over several months. Representatives from Indigenous communities, the private sector, academia, local authorities, and other key stakeholders contributed a range of perspectives.

This coordination around the identity and purpose of each territory has shown that, when properly planned, destinations can become sustainable, an essential condition for their long-term continuity. The plan also helped shape a broader vision that values the history of local communities and promotes a model of tourism in which they play a leading role.

MEXICO

We can approach this topic through the figures. The year 2025 marked a historic record for international tourism, with 47.7 million international visitors, the highest number ever recorded. This result represents growth of 13.1% and deserves to be highlighted because it is the outcome of sustained efforts, not only in promotion, but also in public policies aimed at diversifying the tourism offer and generating shared well-being.

We have 32 highly diverse states. These 47.7 million visitors generate an economic impact of more than 35 billion dollars, representing a highly significant source of income. For this reason, our President instructed the Secretary of Tourism, Josefina Rodríguez, to step up promotional efforts, with the aim of diversifying markets while also prioritising community-based tourism. Our indigenous communities play a central role in this process. Promoting tourism in these territories means expanding opportunities, strengthening local identities and generating shared well-being.

Mexico is renowned for its culture, traditions and gastronomy, which has helped make this type of tourism a growing trend. It is also important to consider developing products capable of attracting even more international tourists, diversifying the tourism offer and recognising the importance of domestic tourism, which plays a fundamental role in strengthening destinations, stimulating local economies and expanding the benefits generated by tourism.

PANAMA

Many countries have become more strategically positioned, including Panama, which is still a relatively unknown destination. We have focused efforts to transform Panama into a hub of congresses and conventions. Through these events, we attract leaders and promote relevant debates from the country itself. This strategy contributes to attracting tourists of higher added value, raising hotel occupancy and, of course, increasing tourism spending. This impact not only benefits hotels or the city, but the entire chain linked to tourism. In the end, it is not only about increasing the number of tourists, but growing with more quality.

SAINT LUCIA

It is important to recognize the role of the connections that tourism generates for Saint Lucia, but this needs to be understood in the context of the country. Saint Lucia is a small island, with about 180 thousand inhabitants, and receives approximately 1.2 million visitors a year, which demonstrates the impact that tourism can have.

However, our focus is not only on increasing indicators. What matters most is the effect of tourism on communities. If the sector is structured so that a larger portion of the income generated remains on the island and reaches the communities, the benefits can reach many more people.

Tourism moves millions of dollars, but the central question is: How much of this value really remains in the country? In many cases, it is only a small part. Therefore, our goal is to build a structure capable of retaining more resources, strengthening communities and offering greater stability to the population. I am proud of the development of community tourism in Saint Lucia and I believe that this articulation represents an important path for the future.

URUGUAY

Tourism is already a strategic sector for the country's development. Over the past 20 years, it has recorded an 88% increase in visitor numbers and a 278% increase in nominal foreign exchange earnings. However, perhaps the most important aspect was the construction of a national political agenda, based especially on associativism and articulation between the public and private sectors. It is a great transformation experienced by the country in the last decade and, as is also observed in other nations, a process that goes beyond governments and administrations.

There are issues that need to be explored in greater depth, while others have become established areas of consensus, which should also be recognised. Furthermore, it is essential to highlight that the country's legislation enshrines tourism and leisure as expressions of the human right to rest and recreation. This places a responsibility on the State to develop policies that broaden the population's access to tourism, whether through social tourism, domestic tourism or other initiatives.

QUESTION – Intra-regional tourism is one of our region's greatest assets. What is your government doing to attract and retain Latin American travellers who are already familiar with the region and are seeking more authentic experiences?

URUGUAY

For Uruguay, neighbouring countries, particularly Argentina, account for around 70% of tourist arrivals and are therefore essential markets. Over the past year, we have tailored our tourism promotion efforts in these destinations and reallocated the resources available more effectively, placing greater emphasis on Brazil while also strengthening our presence in Argentina. In addition, an instrument aimed at enhancing air connectivity was recently approved as part of the Budget Law, also conceived from a regional perspective—an aspect that is particularly relevant in the South American context.

Next month, we will also launch a new instrument called "Bad Value Tourism", aimed at supporting small tourist businesses that have been in operation for at least two years. The proposal is to help them add value through accessibility, regenerative tourism, an inclusive approach in terms of gender, a more qualified value proposition and better work and marketing strategies.

We also put the internationalization of culture on the agenda, because we understand that it is one of the main links of loyalty of visitors. The brotherhood relationship we have with Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Chile, based on regional ties, is perhaps the most powerful marketing action we can develop.

MODERATOR - Minister Gloria, you told us about Panama as an event hub. Is there any additional strategy for the country to attract Latin American tourist?

PANAMA

In partnership with Copa Airlines, we developed the Panama Stopover programme, which seeks to turn transit passengers into actual visitors. This is a joint initiative between the private sector and the government, demonstrating once again that collaboration between the two can deliver positive results.

This strategy enables us to engage with potential tourists who might not otherwise have considered Panama as a destination. In this way, a stopover ceases to be merely a point of connection and becomes an opportunity to extend their stay in the country. As a result, hotel occupancy increases, tourist spending grows, and the benefits are distributed throughout the tourism value chain.

MODERATOR - Saint Lucia received at least 35% of its visitors from within the Caribbean. As the only representative of a Caribbean country, how do you view this intra-regional traveller? How can we attract more regional tourists?

SAINT LUCIA

Our biggest challenge and probably an obstacle for visitors is transport connectivity between islands. Although we are geographically close, air travel between island territories is still difficult, both due to aircraft size and the high cost of travel.

In addition, many island territories rely on taxes and taxes levied on transportation as a source of revenue to fulfil financial commitments with bodies such as the World Bank, the IDB and other institutions. As these costs are passed on to the consumer, the final price of tickets becomes very high. In many cases, more than half of the ticket value corresponds to fees, which makes it even more difficult to travel between the islands.

Despite this, there is a significant flow of visitors motivated by sports, cultural and festivals, very frequent in the Caribbean. Nevertheless, travelling between the islands remains expensive. In some cases, it is cheaper to fly to Miami and then return to a neighbouring island than to take a direct flight between two Caribbean destinations.

Connectivity with Latin America is an issue that I hope to understand better during this visit, so that we can discuss the possibilities for integration between the Caribbean islands and Latin American countries.

QUESTION – Air connectivity remains one of the main challenges facing Latin American tourism. What is your country's strategy regarding new routes, airports and infrastructure to facilitate the movement of tourists across the region?

CHILE

There were 28 million arrivals, 12 million corresponding to foreign tourists. The main challenge is to prevent all tourists from necessarily passing through Santiago, expanding the offer of regional flights and decentralizing air connectivity. It is a challenge on a continental scale.

A comparison is often made with Europe: A visitor arrives in Madrid and from there he can easily go on to London or France. The ideal would be to achieve something similar in our region, not only from the capitals, but also from other localities.

In this sense, an airport plan is already under development that includes international airports in Patagonia, in the north and in the center of the country, in addition to the expansion of the operation of airports that will operate 24 hours. The great challenge, therefore, is to strengthen the national network of airports, expand its capacity and promote the decentralization of connectivity.

BRAZIL

In this area, Brazil has the Novo PAC, a program launched by the federal government in 2023, through which the Ministry of Ports and Airports managed to structure public and private investments. Important contributions were made, including at Galeão Airport, in Rio de Janeiro, with an investment of R$ 2.9 billion.

This investment will increase the capacity to meet the international flow, with more frequencies and new connections, projecting a significant advance in the coming years. Gol, for example, announced that it will make the airport an international hub of the group, concentrating 25% of the international flow, with 68 weekly frequencies to more than 20 destinations.

The main policy Brazil has adopted is the modernization of airports and the increase of connectivity, in order to reduce the cost of air operation. One of the ways to move forward in this direction is through regionalization. The federal government has been building and expanding regional airports, as well as investing heavily in this sector. Brazil has grown a lot, and the challenge is to do this in an organized way.

This year, there was an increase in international supply, with expansion of entry points and connections. We also reached a historical record of 17 million international passengers in Brazil. The country has continental dimensions and deep regional differences, and the challenge is precisely to regionalize and expand this expansion in a sustainable way. Today, most of the demand is concentrated in the South and Southeast regions, where airports already operate close to the limit of their capacity. Our challenge is to bring this demand to other regions of the country as well.

BLOCK 2
Responsible and regenerative tourism

QUESTION – The world is moving from sustainable tourism towards regenerative tourism, which not only minimises harm but also restores ecosystems and strengthens communities. Are there examples in your country where tourism can be used as an active force for recovery?

GUATEMALA

What drives tourism is authentic products. To access them, we need to listen more, engage more closely with local communities and adopt processes for valuing, documenting and restoring them. This approach not only strengthens community participation in public policy, but also fosters a greater sense of belonging, helping to ensure that this work is recognised with the seriousness it deserves. As a government, we have been working closely with communities to provide the tools they need to implement these initiatives.

MEXICO

Several years ago, the program “Magic Pueblos” was created, aimed at locations located at a distance of one to two hours, by road, from an airport or a main city. The program emerged in a context of expansion of road infrastructure, with roads, private highways and high-speed roads, which caused many tourists to stop passing through these villages during their travels. Thus, the initiative sought to encourage visitors to leave the main route to know the municipalities, their traditions and their culture, elements that support the tourist activity.

In this administration, the program now has 177 “Magic Pueblos”. However, it needs to evolve. Therefore, we begin to measure different aspects and, here, I repeat the importance of observatories, because, as was said earlier, it is not possible to improve what is not measured. We evaluated several indicators to understand at which stage each “Pueblo Mágico” is located and, from the Federal Secretariat of Tourism, we offer support so that they can advance in the points where they still have needs.

It is important to work on sustainability, preserve traditions and cultures and, in some cases, improve hotel or access infrastructure. We have been working with these localities in a process that is also on the side of community tourism. After all, it is not enough that a “magic pueblo” is beautiful and affordable; it needs to offer quality products. To this end, we have designed routes where tourists can see artisans working directly in their homes, and we are promoting the work of traditional cooks, recognising their role in the tourism experience and in preserving culture.

We are also working to digitalise the “Pueblos Mágicos”, as we have observed that, among younger generations, much of their consumption takes place electronically, using digital wallets. Tourists often want to make a purchase, but the merchant is unable to accept payment in this way. That is why we are providing training and tools to enable them to carry out digital transactions and, in turn, have better opportunities to generate income. This is particularly important because many visitors no longer carry large amounts of cash; by enabling digital payments, we make purchasing easier and add value to the overall experience.

QUESTION – Tourism that truly brings about transformation is tourism that places local communities at the heart of the process. How is your government ensuring that the benefits of tourism actually reach local populations, including indigenous and rural communities and women entrepreneurs?

URUGUAY

We are promoting the work associated with rural tourism throughout the country, focusing mainly on rural companies. At the same time, we operate in different dimensions of this agenda. We also attach great importance to territorial articulation, involving the organizations of destinations and encouraging the participation of academia and unions in daily management.

In addition, there is an important debate that I would like to resume: That of regeneration, directly related to community involvement. In Uruguay, one of the challenges is to prevent initiatives from being restricted to isolated cases, specific experiences, or disconnected efforts. The central point is to build methods of integral improvement for these processes. This is the meaning of a work guided by a more humanistic view.

CHILE

I believe that when we talk about Patagonia, it is essential to consider the local communities and their relationship with impacts of national reach. There are territories in which local development depends on this articulation between the broader context and the reality of the communities that live in the surroundings.

There are areas of Central Patagonia where access is still more difficult and, in recent years, important work has been done to better understand the identities, brands and challenges of these territories. The same occurred in Rapa Nui, where there were also efforts to rethink the way the territory is imagined and valued. I very much defend the idea that each territory must be recognized from its own identity.

In addition, taking up the question of data, I agree with what was put by the Mexican representative: It is the data that raises the quality of management. Today, we are working in an intelligence center and following the same logic mentioned by the Panamanian minister: It is not enough to grow; we need to grow better. For this, we need to incorporate new indicators, because they will allow a more realistic and qualified assessment.

BRAZIL

Brazil can be defined as a country of continental dimensions and extremely privileged by its nature. Its tourist potential is enormous. Although there are well-known references, such as Carnival, the country offers much more than that, bringing together a great diversity of experiences, landscapes and regional identities.

Faced with such an extensive territory, it is essential to develop policies of planning, continuous improvement and contingency, always considering the particularities of the country. Because it is a very diverse nation, this work needs to involve different sectors and multiple fronts.

At the same time, it is important to highlight the advances in environmental preservation and the strengthening of actions aimed at coastal areas and sustainability. This is a central theme, and the way the Brazilian government conducts it also contributes to projecting a positive image of the country.

QUESTION – Artificial intelligence and data are transforming the way destinations promote themselves and how travellers make their decisions. How is your ministry using technology to promote your destination more effectively and improve the visitor experience?

GUATEMALA

I would like to highlight that we are using analytical systems and, at present, incorporating more traditional international models, cross-referencing this information with credit card data. At the same time, we are implementing systems that can work better in different contexts.

Our model has existed for many years and needs to be updated both in its form of implementation and in its investment logic. For this, it is necessary to act more objectively, within a general framework. We are also implementing systems aimed at process efficiency and official public service, which facilitates the articulation with communities and allows the benefits to return to them.

MEXICO

DataTur played a very important role for us, allowing us to measure not only the recipe, but also the way we are diversifying the tourist activity. We have partnerships, for example, with Visa and BBVA bank, which generate real-time data on average spending in each location. In the strategy of digitalization of the "Pueblos Mágicos", we can identify where the expenditure is generated. In the case of the United States, we georeferenced the origin of tourists arriving in the country and the destinations to which they travel to better organize tourism promotion in these destinations and strengthen them.

In addition, we take into account that visitors do not always arrive by air; many also travel by road. From this data, we can better understand where these tourists come from. This is a way to use the information to carry out a much more effective and targeted promotion.

MODERATOR – Is it the bank or the card networks that share the data with the government?

The Secretariat of Tourism has partnerships with the bank and with Visa, which share certain data with us based on previously defined indicators, always respecting confidentiality and security criteria in the use of the information. This is not a complete basis, but, considering Visa's representativeness in Mexico, it is a relevant reference because it brings specific information about tourist behaviour, not only in relation to average spending, but also the type of consumption carried out, such as restaurants, crafts, shopping and other segments.

PANAMA

What has been said by Guatemala and Mexico, I do not know whether mobile data has also been mentioned, plays an important role. And it is not only about knowing where the tourist was when he arrived, but also what he consumed and what country he came from, so that he could cross-reference this information with the migration data.

What was presented about the observatory would be interesting to include within the data lake we are starting to implement, although so far it has provided us only with the number of visitors entering the country. We need to take this further step if we want to have a more solid and representative internal system in the future.

URUGUAY

We have mobile data, fundamentally. We are doing a complete overhaul of national politics. We do not yet have data from banks, nor from other sources of this kind, but we are working with the Ministry of Economy and Finance to generate them from scratch. In addition, we have, with the IDB, a 4.0 Tourism Strategy, with a national investment and a pilot project, and now we are also thinking of some additional steps to this structure that we are building among all.

MODERATOR – I do not speak on behalf of any ministry, but I would like to make a suggestion: that, together with the IDB and UN Tourism, consideration be given to creating a Latin American Tourism Observatory, a collective initiative based on high-quality data for the region.

BLOCK 3
Future and cooperation

QUESTION – How can major global events, such as the World Cup, an international summit, a recognition or major media coverage, transform the image of a destination forever? How does a country take advantage of, or prepare to take this opportunity to make a leap in the tourist positioning?

GUATEMALA

We identify important opportunities, especially in valuing what communities themselves can offer and preparing to attract Latin American projection events. One of these events had a great media impact, mobilizing the press and specialized sectors of Latin America, and its effects continue to generate results months later.

Attracting events of this type, even smaller but more inclusive, can be a very effective strategy. Currently, there are three ongoing projects in Guatemala City aimed at strengthening the entertainment supply. When the first one is completed in about a year, it can help reposition the city as one of the most relevant capitals in the region.

This movement tends to significantly transform Guatemala City, including new hotels already licensed, contributing to improving the quality of tourist infrastructure.

MEXICO

Mexico will once again host the World Cup, and this will be the third time a country stadium will participate in the opening of the tournament. This makes us very happy. However, more than hosting the event, the most important thing is continuous preparation. Mexico has in its population one of the greatest assets of national tourism, alongside its great natural destinations. Therefore, we are working to strengthen this capacity for welcoming.

The benefit of this process is the construction of a positive image of the country. Despite the contradictions and aspects that sometimes negatively impact, the World Cup represents a great opportunity to show the world how extraordinary Mexico is.

For this, we are adopting concrete measures, including in the context of migration policies, such as the implementation of electronic visa to Brazil from this year, in addition to adjustments aimed at other countries. But this strategy is not limited to the World Cup. Mexico also hosts major international events such as Formula 1, NFL games, baseball games and major musical tours, all with a strong economic and tourist impact.

It has already been shown that seasons of great artistic productions, with several performances in the same city, generate important economic movement. Therefore, in cities such as Monterrey, Guadalajara, Mexico City, Quintana Roo and Cancun, we are working to incorporate these events as part of public policies for tourist attraction and strengthening the country's international image.

PANAMA

As we consolidate ourselves as a country focused on congresses and conventions, I do not see Panama as the seat of a World Cup in the short term. But we have other possibilities: We have already hosted a world surfing championship.

Just now, we talked about the importance of integrating communities to generate economic impact within the territories themselves. Santa Catalina, for example, has a world-class wave and has become known for it. Nearby is Isla Coiba, a natural heritage and national park. In this sense, we managed to work together with the residents of Santa Catalina to get more involved with the tourist activity, realize this income directly and create more tour operators and form guides capable of conducting these experiences.

Let's take part in the World Cup; we won't be home so soon, but we have natural destinations that can turn into big stages.

BRAZIL

Brazil has hosted two editions of the World Cup and knows the importance of positioning and receiving well. As we commented during our lunch, a great differential of our country, in addition to natural beauty, cultural diversity and the various biomes it possesses, is the human warmth. The Brazilian people are our greatest asset and our greatest differential: We are welcoming, we know how to receive and understand the importance of tourism.

It is essential to prepare the population to understand the meaning of an event like this, what it brings positively to the country and what legacy it leaves, not only in infrastructure, as happens with the World Cup, but mainly in the international positioning of the country. We saw what happened in 2014, here in Brazil, and then in 2016, with the Olympic Games.

We hope that 2027, when we will host the Women's World Cup, will also allow us to reaffirm this message that our great differential remains our people. I want to take the opportunity to invite everyone who can come to Brazil to follow the Women's World Cup next year.

QUESTION – If the countries represented here could agree on a single joint action in tourism — whether a corridor, a shared policy or a regional standard — what, in your opinion, would be the measure with the greatest impact for Latin America?

CHILE

I believe that much of what we discussed earlier about combined routes and integrated models is related to the need to facilitate cross-border cooperation, improve air connectivity and build a much more integrated Latin America. And that depends on political decisions.

I also consider it important to move forward in the production and shared use of data more proactively to guide decision-making, both in relation to markets and destinations and in the construction of more sustainable tourism in the long term. The idea is that we can leave destinations better than those we find when starting management.

GUATEMALA

On a regional scale, it would be very important to develop integrated destination strategies, as already discussed in Central America, considering that there are many affinities and opportunities for joint action among countries. Therefore, thinking about tourism in a multidestination way, from a more regional perspective, is essential. And in this context, connectivity is a central theme.

MEXICO

I would make two proposals, and the first one concerns the tourism observatory. Having indicators is excellent, but the central issue is how to use this data to measure the load capacity of each destination. Commercial logic almost always presses for more growth: More tourists, more rooms, more visitors. However, it is essential to understand what is the real burden of each destination and at what point it ceases to withstand greater tourist pressure.

The challenge is to build a model that allows us to state clearly, including to the business sector, as far as growth is feasible. There are already examples on some beaches and specific areas that are closed when they reach their limit, but this logic still needs to be applied to destinations more broadly. After all, how much does a destination support in terms of tourist flow, water consumption, electricity and general infrastructure use?

The second proposal is to create a joint definition of Community tourism. Our countries share cultural roots and elements, which could give rise to a common Latin American policy, aimed at valuing origins, strengthening culture and defending heritage.

PANAMA

From my point of view, the priority is to continue advancing the use of data and information that supports decision-making, benefits each country and each region and enables more sustainable growth. The second priority is to strengthen the connection between countries. Come to Panama, get to know our destinations and connect with the beauty we have to offer. This is also a simple and concrete way to bring the whole of Latin America closer together.

SAINT LUCIA

Before answering, I would like to return to a point raised earlier. There was some discussion about football and the World Cup, which reminded me of an important example from Saint Lucia. In 2024, a local athlete won the 100-metre sprint at the Olympic Games. For two days, the country became one of the most searched-for places on Google worldwide.

Millions of people began searching for information about Saint Lucia: how to get there, where to stay and what to do in the country. All this was driven by Olympic visibility. This example shows the power that a major sporting event, or even the prominent participation of an athlete, can have in the international promotion of a country.

Perhaps Saint Lucia has no scale to host a football World Cup, but the size of a country does not define the scope of the impact it can generate.

We are also advancing in the use of data to drive marketing and promotion actions. However, for me, the central issue is to structure tourism so that more people from the country themselves are protagonists of this activity and benefit from it. It makes no sense that most of the wealth generated by tourism leaves our countries. The challenge is to make this wealth remain with our population and strengthen local economies.

URUGUAY

In line with what was discussed earlier, particularly regarding promotion and the use of data, I would emphasise that these elements already carry significant weight in the projects we are developing. We have also made progress in terms of implementation speed, but, above all, we still face a challenge in the area of commercialisation.

I believe this issue needs to be addressed collectively, as it depends not only on institutional or regulatory coordination, but also on something fundamental: knowledge and the continuous transfer of knowledge, beyond occasional contacts or coordination efforts.

BRAZIL

The Ministry has been working to strengthen regional integration because we believe that joint action can bring nations closer together, reduce misunderstandings and make our efforts more consistent. We need to continue learning from one another and gaining a better understanding of each country's reality.

In this regard, I would once again like to thank you all for being here. I am very pleased with this exchange, which is extremely valuable in enabling each country and region to develop public policies that take into account their own particularities and identities.

I hope that today's dialogue will help strengthen our relationships and improve our initiatives. I leave this event feeling very enthusiastic and hope that each participant takes away reflections and insights that are relevant and can be applied in their respective region.

May this exchange bear fruit, and may we continue to work together to advance sustainable tourism in Latin America.

MODERATOR – I could stay here for a few more hours because I really enjoy hearing about strategies. I have been studying tourism-related issues for 30 years, particularly in our region, and I believe that the challenge of turning aspirations into tangible documents and making this knowledge accessible to more people became very clear through the contributions of our panellists.

Before we conclude, I would like to thank Argentina for being here, represented by Dr José María Arrúa, Minister of Tourism of the Province of Misiones, a region home to Iguazu Falls and part of the Atlantic Forest, with one of the greatest levels of biodiversity on the continent. He followed this meeting with attention, and his presence is a clear sign that the regional integration that we so much defend begins exactly like this: Through presence, listening and joint construction.

Three years ago, when I answered a survey on the international image of Latin America, I realized, to my sadness and certainly to the happiness of Argentines, that the image of the football country was beginning to move to Argentina, due to the conquest of the Qatar World Cup and the projection of Messi, then living in the United States. The combination of the image of a welcoming destination, the strength of football and nature makes Argentina also a destination of great prominence among us. That is why I wanted to make this acknowledgement.

It is my privilege to sincerely thank you for your kind words and for the attention you have shown us, Sir. Harris Whitbeck, from Guatemala; Mr. Cristian Pos Dalmás, from Uruguay; Ms. Gloria de León, from Panama; Mrs. María Paz Lagos, from Chile; Mr. Miguel Aguiñiga Rodríguez, from Mexico; and Dr. Ernest Hilaire, from Saint Lucia.

I would like to thank the Ministry of Tourism, in the person of Minister Gustavo Feliciano, on behalf of the entire WTM Latin America team, immensely for allowing us to hold this meeting. May this be the first of many, a high-level discussion space where we can, in fact, exchange ideas, learn and improve good practices in Latin America and the Caribbean.

To close, I invite participants to receive the commemorative plaque, which marks the realization of the first Ministers' Summit of WTM Latin America.



From left to right: Dr. José María Arrúa; Dr. Mariana Aldrigui; Bianca Pizzolito; Gloria de León; Gustavo Feliciano; María Paz Lagos; Dr. Ernest Hilaire; Miguel Aguiñiga Rodríguez; Cristian Pos Dalmás; and Harris Whitbeck

wtm LATIN AMERICA
São Paulo, 14 – 16 April 2026

MINISTÉRIO DO TURISMO

WTM Latin America 2026

Ministers' Summit
Expo Center Norte
São Paulo/SP

WTM Latin America is the leading global event in the travel and tourism industry in Latin America. Held in São Paulo, the fair is focused on B2B and connects industry professionals to business opportunities, networking and access to qualified buyers. The event brings together different segments of the industry, such as agencies, operators, hosting, transportation, cruises, luxury products and technology and, over the course of three days, allows you to follow trends, meet new products and expand professional connections. The 2026 edition brought together 935 exhibitors, representatives from 53 countries, 35 tourism professionals and 70 conferences.

www.wtm.com/latin-america

Partial or full reproduction of this document is expressly prohibited without prior authorization.