Americas Business Dialogue (ABD) Tourism Task Force (TTF)

Punta Cana Public Policy Recommendations

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Content

Introduction

The **Tourism Task Force (TTF)** was established in 2025 under the Americas Business Dialogue (ABD), in close collaboration with the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC). This high-level Task Force brings together leading stakeholders from the Travel and Tourism industry with presence in the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region, to elaborate the **Punta Cana Public Policy Recommendations**, aiming to unlock the full potential of the sector and position the region as a world class, competitive destination on the global stage.

Over the course of the year, the TTF has convened four strategic sessions, with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank as ABD's secretariat to facilitate the meetings to identify key barriers to growth and formulate concrete, actionable policy recommendations. The Punta Cana Recommendations encourage a strong public-private partnership approach for tailored strategies that optimize the contributions of both land-based and sea-based travel, as well as international and domestic tourism, promoting growth and meaningful impact across the region. They are all intended to foster value-added tourism that promotes longer stays and increased local spending, while promoting practices that protect the environment and empower local communities.

But, above all, the recommendations are intended to generate hemispheric growth that benefits all countries in the Americas.

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) stands among the world's most culturally rich, naturally diverse, geographically strategic, and dynamic regions. It is home to ancient civilizations, diverse indigenous communities, alongside extraordinary natural assets, from vast rainforests to pristine coastlines.

The region also hosts two of the largest coral reef systems on the planet, reinforcing its global significance in biodiversity, climate resilience, and sustainable development[1].

The Travel and Tourism sector is a transformative engine of growth and development in LAC, **contributing US$714 billion** and representing **10.1% of the region's GDP.** It **supports over 28 million jobs** and empowers SMEs across the region. Currently, the sector captures 8.3% of global arrivals and a slightly lower share of international visitor spending at 7.7% (WTTC, 2025). Thus, the sector's growth potential presents a significant strategic opportunity critical to the region's long-term prosperity.

Already, Travel & Tourism is making a larger economic contribution than many other strategic sectors. In the region, WTTC research has shown that the GDP contribution of Travel & Tourism is greater than key sectors such as agriculture and mining and more than double the size of the automotive sector. (WTTC, 2019)

Beyond its economic contribution, Travel & Tourism is a powerful driver of social inclusion. In 2024 alone, the sector directly supported employment for 5 million women, representing 48% of workers, and 1.7 million young people (aged 15–24), representing 16.4% of workers across LAC (WTTC, 2025).

These figures underscore the sector's role in supporting economic independence and employment opportunities for diverse people. This, in turn, fosters upward mobility in communities across the region.

Now is the time to elevate tourism as a strategic priority. With the right enabling policies and commitment, tourism can expand its role as a key lever for inclusive and sustainable growth. To unlock Travel & Tourism's full economic and social potential, the Americas Business Dialogue (ABD) Tourism Task Force (TTF) calls on public and private stakeholders to commit to five strategic policy objectives:

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[1] Furthermore, the region encompasses 149 UNESCO World Heritage Sites and three of the New Seven Wonders of the World—namely, Chichén Itzá, Machu Picchu, and Christ the Redeemer. The region contains two of the world's fourteen terrestrial biomes and includes eight of the seventeen countries globally recognized for their exceptional biodiversity. Additionally, more than 400 distinct languages are spoken throughout LAC, underscoring its remarkable cultural heritage.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Promote regional cooperation** to accelerate the growth of Travel & Tourism across the Latin America and the Caribbean to position the region as a world-class destination.

2. **Mainstream tourism.** Prioritize sustainable and inclusive tourism as a national growth strategy, driving economic diversification, empowering local communities, and safeguarding natural and cultural heritage.

3. **Connectivity and infrastructure.** Promote geographically balanced tourism, extending benefits to lesser-known destinations and rural areas; enhance connectivity of tourist economic operators and transport infrastructure.

4. **Talent and employment.** Mainstream the development of specific skills for the tourist industry and facilitate regional mobility to meet talent demand.

5. **Business climate, investment and financing.** Foster investment, facilitate access to credit and create a business-friendly environment; formalize the informal sector, integrating local vendors and service providers (especially SMEs) into the tourism value chain.

Policy Recommendations and Policy Actions

1. Regional Cooperation

Policy Recommendation:
Promote regional cooperation (strategic dialogue and investment opportunities) to accelerate the growth of Travel & Tourism across LAC to position the region as a world-class destination.

Rationale:
LAC remains underleveraged in the global tourism economy, capturing just 8.3% of global arrivals and the share of international visitor spending is even lower at 7.7% (WTTC, 2025), despite unmatched cultural richness, biodiversity, and growing urban tourism hubs. As demand for meaningful, experience-driven and sustainable travel accelerates worldwide, LAC must act decisively to seize its opportunity.

Policy Actions:
1.1. Foster regional cooperation to position LAC as an integrated multi-destination region, benefiting the Americas.

- Establish collective regional goals, coordinated national action plans, and a unified implementation mechanism to enhance LAC's participation in the global market through existing regional platforms such as the Pacific Alliance, Andean Community, MERCOSUR, SICA and CARICOM.
- Promote regional integration through regulatory alignment and shared public goods across the tourism sector.
- Attract responsible tourism that generates positive impact for local communities and ensures the protection of natural and cultural heritage.

1.2. Promote Safety and Security as a Strategic enabler.

- Develop a regional communication platform to align ongoing efforts on travel safety and emergency response with the goal of strengthening regional security and enhancing traveler confidence across LAC destinations.
- Foster public-private coordination to ensure consistent security standards across destinations.

1.3. Expand and Diversify Source Markets.

- Develop targeted strategies to increase visitor flows from other regions like Europe and Southeast Asia, with tailored marketing, air connectivity strategies, and travel facilitation measures.
- Strengthen public-private cooperation to co-invest in source market campaigns and diversify LAC's inbound tourism base.

2. Mainstream Tourism

Policy Recommendation:
Prioritize sustainable and inclusive tourism as a national growth strategy to drive economic diversification, empower local communities, and safeguard natural and cultural heritage. This requires integrating tourism into broader national development plans, strengthening its recognition across government.

Rationale:
Inconsistent coordination between authorities, tourism stakeholders, and investors hinders the development of the sector.

Policy Actions:
2.1. Strength public-private collaboration through a coordinated, multi-sector, and multi-level governance approach, ensuring aligned policies.

- Ensure the effective implementation of existing tourism policies, and embed tourism as a strategic priority in long-term national and subnational development plans where it is not currently considered or prioritized.
- Integrate Travel and Tourism efforts across key sectors such as transport, finance, investment, education, urban development, biodiversity, climate action, and cultural heritage.
- Create public-private mechanisms to design and implement policies and actions to foster the growth of the sector, including redeveloping existing products and creating new ones.

2.2. Institutionalize data-driven policymaking and elevate the strategic value of tourism.

- Establish robust, standardized tourism data systems (including measures of visitor arrivals and expenditures), to effectively measure, communicate, and maximize the sector's economic, social, and environmental impact, also through initiatives such as regional observatories.
- Integrate tourism indicators into national development plans and economic decision-making frameworks to secure long-term policy prioritization.

3. Connectivity and Infrastructure

Policy Recommendation:
Promote geographically balanced tourism, extending benefits to lesser-known destinations and rural areas; enhance connectivity of tourist economic operators and transport infrastructure.

Rationale:

LAC's transport and digital infrastructure remain fragmented, underdeveloped, and misaligned with tourism growth patterns; new developments regularly outpace improvements in air routes and logistics. Rural and secondary destinations often lack basic access, while primary hubs are overburdened. On the other hand, travel simplification increases demand, reduces barriers, and enhances visitor satisfaction, and digital transformation is critical to facilitate travel and meet modern expectations.

Policy Actions:

3.1. Visas and Travel Facilitation.

- Implement e-visas and accelerate regional visa regimes for intra-LAC travel.
- Introduce special visa types (digital nomads, long-stay, multiple-entry, events).
- Simplify immigration procedures using standardized biometric technology and e-gates.

3.2. Air Connectivity and Infrastructure Investment.

- Expand air capacity and modernize existing airports, guided by market demand and economic viability, and promote public-private governance models to improve efficiency, service quality, and long-term financial sustainability.
- Prioritize ground transport infrastructure, including connections to rural and secondary destinations, and maximize the use of underutilized assets to improve accessibility and reduce unnecessary investment duplication.
- Invest in resilient and sustainable port infrastructure to support maritime tourism, strengthen regional connectivity, and enhance climate resilience across coastal and island destinations.
- Advance sustainable infrastructure development that supports ecotourism and nature-based tourism, in line with environmental and cultural preservation objectives.
- Embed environmental stewardship and community engagement in infrastructure planning, recognizing that clean, well-maintained environments are essential to sustainable tourism.

3.3. Digital and Promotional Tools.

- Leverage digital platforms: booking systems, destination marketing, and social media campaigns.
- Promote data-sharing and joint regional branding strategies to improve visibility and tourist flows.
- Expand digital infrastructure in tourism areas by leveraging cost-effective technologies to improve visitor experience and promote local economy.

4. Talent and Employment

Policy Recommendation:
Mainstream the development of specific skills for the tourist industry and facilitate regional mobility to meet talent demand.

Rationale:
Tourism faces constraints from skills mismatches, limited labor mobility, and persistent informality. The sector must embrace a skills revolution to prepare for future demand and digital transformation. Tourism creates over 28 million jobs currently and it will reach 35 million by 2035 (WTTC, 2025), however, English and multilingual capabilities remain a critical gap. Returnee migrants and vocational partnerships provide scalable solutions.

Policy Actions:
4.1. Workforce Development and Skills Alignment

- Align tourism curricula with industry needs; expand vocational training centers of excellence.
- Integrate languages, digital, sustainability and digital skills into training.
- Foster forward-thinking policies that support innovation, including investments in technology research and development (R&D) and digital infrastructure. Prioritize workforce digital skills development and encourage public-private partnerships.

- Promote national strategies to align tourism workforce development with evolving market needs, ensuring inclusive access to training, upskilling, and reskilling opportunities across the tourism value chain. Encourage education and training programs that address the full
- range of skills required across the tourism ecosystem, including transport, hospitality, technology, sustainability, and cultural services. Integrate tourism awareness and foundational knowledge into basic
- education curricula to foster early appreciation of the sector's cultural, economic, and environmental value.

4.2. Regional Workforce Mobility and Standards

- Develop mutual recognition of tourism-related qualifications.
- Create regional labor mobility frameworks to speed up recruitment and deployment, including internships and short-term visas.
- Implement targeted strategies to attract and engage diaspora talent with the skills required by the tourism sector.
- Facilitate streamlined work visas and permits for professionals in the tourism sector, and cross-border services to support regional talent mobility and knowledge exchange.

4.3. Public–Private Training Partnerships

- Foster co-investment between government, education institutions and industry.
- Foster Finishing School programs to meet specific sector's demands, through intensive workforce training.
- Use digital platforms to match training with employer demand in real time.

5. Business climate, investment and financing

Policy Recommendation:
Foster Investment, facilitate access to credit and create a business-friendly environment; formalize the informal sector, integrating local vendors and service providers (especially SMEs) into the tourism value chain.

Rationale:
Tourism SMEs, which represent over 70% of the sector, face structural financing barriers, while burdensome regulations and unpredictable policies deter long-term investment. Tax complexity, slow permitting, and inconsistent enforcement reduce competitiveness. Foreign investment in the sector lags behind other regions, with FDI in LAC tourism growing slower than global averages. Reforms are urgently needed to increase formality, improve access to capital, and foster an enabling environment including rule of law to provide certainty to economic operators.

Policy Actions:
5.1. Fiscal Incentives and Tax Efficiency.

- Reduce VAT and tourism-related taxes on airlines, airport services, and fuel.
- If taxes are necessary, ensure they are reinvested transparently in local infrastructure and promotion, training in the sector.

5.2. SME Financing and Formalization.

- Simplify registration and licensing processes for informal businesses.
- Support financial literacy and credit-readiness programs.
- Expand de-risking tools, loan guarantees, and targeted funding from development banks.

5.3. Destination Governance and Stakeholder Collaboration.

- Strengthen multi-level coordination across public and private sectors.
  Develop inclusive governance frameworks with local community
- engagement.
  Promote decentralized use of tourism revenues to empower regional
- development.

5.4. Sustainable Promotion.

- Position LAC destinations around long-stay, sustainable, and cultural experiences.
- Respond to environmental threats (e.g., sargassum) with cross-border resilience plans.
- Continuously monitor and adapt tourism marketing using real-time data.

5.5. Crisis Response.

- Strengthen tourism crisis management, including protocols, toolkits, communication strategies & digital solutions.

Call to Action

The Travel & Tourism sector must stand as a central pillar of Latin America and the Caribbean's long-term prosperity. Contributing US$714 billion, representing 10.1% of the region's GDP, and supporting over 28 million jobs (WTTC, 2025), the sector is already economically larger than strategic sectors such as agriculture and mining. Beyond its economic weight, Travel & Tourism is a bridge between peoples and cultures, and a steward of the region's extraordinary heritage and natural resources.

At this pivotal moment, we call Heads of State and governments across the region to:

1. Promote regional cooperation to **accelerate the growth** of Travel & Tourism across Latin America and the Caribbean to **position the region as a world-class destination.**

2. **Mainstream tourism.** Prioritize sustainable and inclusive tourism as a national growth strategy to drive economic diversification, empower local communities, and safeguard natural and cultural heritage. This requires integrating tourism into broader national development plans, strengthening its recognition across government.

3. **Connectivity and infrastructure.** Promote geographically balanced tourism, extending benefits to lesser-known destinations and rural areas; enhance connectivity of tourist economic operators and transport infrastructure.

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Now is the moment for Heads of State to act collectively and decisively. By committing to these policy priorities, LAC leaders can ensure that Travel & Tourism continues to be a transformative engine for economic prosperity, sustainable development, and opportunities for millions of people across the region.

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