

## PROJECTS of TOURISM DIRECTORATE

- Current projects**

<b>1. Project Category/Code:</b>	<b>Project :Tourism</b>
<b>2. Project Title</b>	<b>i. ECO Regional Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development</b>
<b>Project Code:</b>	<b>T/PoA/SSP/2019</b>
<b>3. Project Objectives</b>	The main goal of the project is to draw up a Roadmap to meet strategic objective (s) set out under the tourism section of the ECO Vision 2025. It should be in line with the ECO Principles for Sustainable Tourism Development and contribute towards sustainable socio-economic development of the ECO countries focusing on the realization of natural and cultural tourism resources of the region as well as the vast unexploited relevant potential of the Member States.
<b>4. Project Budget (US\$)</b>	US\$10,000
<b>5. Project Funding Source</b>	<b>ECO Secretariat in collaboration with IDB</b>
<b>6. Project Coordinator</b>	<b>ECO Secretariat</b>
<b>7.International/Regional Partner</b>	<b>ECO Secretariat (Coordinating Agency) UNIDO (Technical Assistance) UNWTO (Technical Assistance) IDB (Financial Assistance)</b>
<b>8. Duration of Project</b>	<b>6 Months</b>
<b>9. Project Starting Time</b>	<b>2022</b>
<b>10. Project Progress</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Project has been approved by the decision making bodies of the ECO (MM on Tourism &amp; COM).</li> <li>Draft ToR of the Project has been prepared by the Tourism Directorate of the Secretariat.</li> </ul>
<b>11. <u>Background:</u></b> <p>In the 13<sup>th</sup> ECO Summit in the first quarter of 2017 all ECO Member States welcomed the ECO Vision 2025 and had agreed to emphasize the need to augment cooperation in the area of tourism as identified in the Vision.</p> <p>The Strategic objective of the Vision on Tourism is to establish a peaceful and green tourism destination with diverse products and high quality services in the region.</p> <p>The composite details of this project were considered and approved by the 5th High Level Expert Group Meeting (HLWGM) on Tourism and supported by the 3rd Ministerial Meeting on Tourism in Khujand in 2019. Henceforth, the project concept was as well considered at the level of ECO's Council of Ministers (COM) where it was endorsed as part of a document set by the 24th COM on 8-9 November 2019 in Antalya (Turkey).</p>	

The budgetary aspects of the project were also approved in due time by the 30th Regional Planning Council Meeting on 11-14 January 2020 in Tehran (Iran), upon which act the project has become part of ECO's Work Program 2020. The latter Program is currently being implemented. The amount of US\$10,000 has been endorsed by CPR to prepare the feasibility study of the project.

The Member States' strategic approach in the tourism sector has been to work together on issues that are of common concern to them in order to strengthen the contribution that tourism can make to their socioeconomic development, while protecting the valuable natural and cultural heritage on which the tourism sector depends. In recognition of the important contribution that tourism could make toward socio economic development, especially poverty reduction and conservation of natural and cultural heritage during the preparation of the ECO Vision 2025 tourism was selected as one of the main cooperation areas.

Geographical richness, good neighborly relations and a peaceful environment are the natural features of the region on which a solid foundation for sustainable cooperation in tourism can be built step by step. Cultural commonalities and numerous historical and overlapping heritages offer the region enormous potential for bringing together ordinary people in the member states who are passionate about peace and prosperity.

The ECO region, with an area of more than 8 million square kilometers stretching from Central to South and Southwest Asia, and a population of more than 500 million, is known for its natural beauty as well as for the diversity of its historical and cultural heritage. In this respect, the region has significant potential to become one of the world's major tourist destinations. The region is one of the richest in the world in terms of historical and cultural heritage, reminiscent of the ancient Silk Road.

The Project should also consider the increase of the share of the tourism sector in national and regional GDP and economic growth of Member States, taking into account the conservation of the region's cultural and environmental heritage. Moreover, this would further contribute to income-generation, poverty eradication, sustainable use of natural resources, protection of vulnerable groups enhancing life standards of indigenous as well as local communities within the ECO tourism destination.

It should also support the regional tourism industry and facilitate investment in the tourism sector creating a chain of ECO Tourism destinations. This would accelerate the facilitation of tourism activities across the land borders and along the economic corridors, expanding community-based tourism approach to attract locals' participation in tourism-related supply and value chains.

The project would also address the need for raising the skills of the tourism public sector at all levels, improving service and hygiene standards among staff in small to medium hospitality enterprises in the ECO tourism destination and enhancing locally generated private sector participation in small and medium tourism enterprise investment and operation.

1. Harmonization of National Tourism Action Plan of Member States and increasing synergy in the region on tourism development;
2. Follow up the strategic objective of the Vision on tourism and preparation of a roadmap for implementation its annual program (s);
3. Developing a framework and guidelines for sustainable tourism development at ECO tourism destinations;
4. Increasing capability and quality of regional tourism industry as well as regional tourism institutions, local communities and government institutions to be able to enhance share of this sector on regional GDP and capability to compete with outside tourism industry;
5. Providing coordination mechanisms in all tourism sectors including tour operators, accommodation sector and hotels, airlines, etc.;
6. Preparation the ground for fundraising and credit facilitation for the implementation of the Action Plan.

#### **12. Necessary Actions and Assistance Needed:**

- a. A feasibility study of the process of Tourism Policies integration in the region.
- b. Establishing a network of Tourism potentials and attractions in ECO region.
- c. Assessment of current statuses of the traditional tourisms' development in the ten ECO Member States, and also, of their legal frameworks set for standardization/accreditation/tourism monitoring mechanisms to be under the ECO framework.
- d. Preparing ECO Tourism compendium.
- e. Preparing ECO tourism databank.
- f. Assessment of capacities of local communities and private sector tourism entities of ECO countries to be potentially involved in regional tourism development under the ECO framework.
- g. Holding the Meetings which are related to key areas of Tourism by the Member States.

#### **13. Expected Outcomes of the Project:**

- Action Plan for ECO regional sustainable tourism development;
- Introduction of Priority projects at ECO regional level.

#### **14. Current status:**

- a) Draft ECO Regional Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development was prepared by the Secretariat on the basis of ECO Vision 2025 and circulated for comments and proposals among the Member States via note verbale on April 17, 2022. So far response has been received from the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Azerbaijan and Pakistan.
- b) The Secretariat circulated reminders NV No: T/Plan of Action/2022/1459 dated 24/10/2022, NV No:T/Plan of Action/2023/627 dated 15/05/2023 and is still awaiting the response from the rest of the Member States to take further action. The Secretariat asked the feedback from Member States (except *Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan*) once more with NV No: Tourism/2024/135 dated 8/2/2024 on the draft Action Plan
- c) The proposals and views of the esteemed Member States would be incorporated in the proposed draft ECO Regional Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism

Development for further enrichment through a consultancy project to develop a more comprehensive Action Plan with the contributions and inputs of the Member States.

- d) The draft Action Plan is getting obsolete and needs an overall update before the decision to fully apply it. On the other hand, it could be removed from the agenda of the ECO tourism initiatives upon getting consent of the Member States since the revision of the ECO Vision 2025 document will take place in near future and a new mechanism called ECO Advisory Committee on Tourism could undertake similar responsibility to develop more up to date Action Plan and/or one comprehensive regional tourism strategy document to align with the new Vision document.

<b>1. Project Category/Code:</b>		<b>Tourism</b>
<b>2. Project Title</b>	<b>ECO Tourism Routes and Packages</b>	
<b>Project Code:</b>	<b>T/Routes/SPP-2019</b>	
<b>3. Project Objectives</b>	<p>The Main goal is to create an ECO Tourism Package that would be useful for increasing the number of tourists and tourism revenues. The final outputs of the Project are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieving a high level of professionalism and developing sustainability in ECO Tourism industry;</li> <li>• Identification of the best cities of ECO countries in Cultural/ Historical, Scientific, Industrial/Business, Nature-Based, Religious, Health and Mass Tourism separately;</li> <li>• Improving the relation of industrial and scientific bodies of the Member States such as factories, universities, science and technology parks and study centers in order to attracting the industrial/ scientific tourists from inside or outside of ECO countries;</li> <li>• Optimizing use of existing resources and capacities in order to have less costly and high quality trips in the ECO region;</li> <li>• Increasing number of tourists and the amount of tourism revenues;</li> <li>• Promoting ECO Region as one of the best tourism destinations.</li> </ul>	
<b>4. Project Budget (US\$)</b>	Subject to proposed TOR	
<b>5. Project Funding Source</b>	<b>ECO Secretariat, UNWTO or any other Regional or International Organizations may be explored for full or partial financing of the project.</b>	
<b>6. Project Coordinator</b>	<b>ECO Secretariat</b>	

<b>7. International/Regional Partner</b>	ECO Secretariat (Coordinating Agency) UNWTO or any other Regional or International Organizations (Technical Assistance)  National agencies/associations of (private) tourism companies/operators/etc.
<b>8. Duration of Project</b>	<b>8 months</b>
<b>9. Project Starting Time</b>	<b>2022</b>
<b>10. Project Progress</b>	
<p><b>11. Background:</b></p> <p>The Strategic Objective which was defined for the Tourism sector in ECO Vision 2025 is establishing a peaceful and green tourism destination with diverse products and high quality Services in the region. One of the Expected Outcomes of the Tourism sector in ECO Vision 2025 is strengthening Private sector and local community involvement in the tourism activities.</p> <p>The unfamiliar situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the rapid spread of the coronavirus around the world has had a massive impact on many sectors of the global economy, of which tourism is one of the most affected. According to an analysis by UNWTO, all destinations worldwide have implemented travel restrictions in response to COVID-19, which is unprecedented. This further highlights the important role of small projects.</p> <p>Before COVID-19 Pandemic, there was another similar project in the ECO Tourism sector called “ECO Tours Operators Network” which was approved by the 3rd ECO Ministerial Meeting of Tourism in Khujand, Tajikistan in October, 2019 as well as the 30th ECO Regional Planning Council (RPC) on January, 2020. Considering the above said main goal on tourism and in order to achieve the best results during the coronavirus crisis, the ECO Secretariat decided to review previous projects and define small-sized Projects to adapt them to the current situation. ECO Tourism Routes and Packages project with the aim of introducing main Tourism routes including Cultural/ Historical, Scientific, Industrial/Business, Nature-Based, Religious, Health and Mass Tourism among the ECO countries, is going to focus on different areas of tourism especially on Industrial and Scientific tourism which its desired destination includes industrial sites peculiar to a particular location. The most obvious industrial tourism destinations are cities and regions with a solid industrial base.</p>	
<p><b>12. Necessary Actions and Assistance Needed:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Implementation of the part of ECO Vision 2025 in Tourism sector with respect to strengthening Private sector and local community involvement in the tourism activities;</li> <li>2. Preparing the required ToR for recruiting an international consultancy team by the Secretariat;</li> <li>3. Allocation of ECO financial contribution for recruitment of consultant by CPR or COM based on recruitment policy and procedures of ECO;</li> </ol>	

4. Encourage relevant international organizations to assist ECO Secretariat financially and technically;
5. Gathering the information from Member States about the cities which are famous for having tourist attractions, infrastructures and facilities related to Cultural/ Historical, Scientific, Industrial/Business, Nature-Based, Religious, Health and Mass Tourism and other required information;
6. Sharing data and knowledge among the Member States regarding Tourism related industries.

**13. Expected Outcomes of the Project:**

- Establishing the Network of Tourism related industries of ECO countries;
- Providing ECO Tourism Routes and Packages in Cultural/ Historical, Scientific, Industrial/Business, Nature-Based, Religious, Health and Mass Tourism by the Network of ECO Tourism related industries;
- Introducing at least 3 main Cultural/ Historical, Nature-Based Tourism Routes among the ECO countries;
- Providing ECO Health Tourism Packages with using the top ECO Medical Tourism Destinations which have health facilities such as equipped hospitals, mineral groundwater resources, clean weather, etc.
- Providing ECO Industrial/ Scientific Tourism Routes with passing at least 3 main Industrial cities of the ECO countries with high level of development and progress in the special part of industry or science.

**14. Current status:**

The issue of development of the joint tour packages was discussed in the ECO Tour Operators' Network meetings as well as the 1<sup>st</sup> ECO Tour Operators Forum held on 2-3 May 2024 in Baku. One of the biggest challenges raised during the Forum is the lack of easy travel conditions between the Member States and the contractual issues of the partnering tour companies to be included in joint tour itineraries. The Secretariat has been recommended to organize familiarization trips of pilot studies to evaluate the commercial feasibility of the joint tour packages under the ECO brand. The Secretariat is ready to cooperate with volunteer tour companies or national tourism promotion authorities to further take action on this matter.

1. Category/Code:	Project Tourism T/Website/SSP/2021
2. Project Title	Development of ECO Tourism Website
3. Project Objectives	The Main goal is to design a user-friendly specialized ECO Tourism website as a regional tool for sharing and consolidating tourism-related information and generating business and investment opportunities for the private sector in ECO Member States for easy access to information on tourism offerings, programmes and events in ECO Member States and promotion of the region. The portal will complement the national tourism websites



	<p>by allowing a more systematic process for users to collect and view the information they are looking for.</p> <p>The website will be designed for use by the tourists and the tourism professionals and agencies. The part used by the tourism professionals and agencies will be a tool for linking regional partners and promoting information sharing, including on tourism projects, business opportunities, investment initiatives, investment related information, tourism data and statistics, events, and educational and training resources. The sections of the portal targeting potential and actual travelers will focus on providing information about the countries, regions, and tourism attractions, whilst promoting the services of private sector tourism providers in the region.</p>
<b>4. Project Budget (US\$)</b>	<b>Subject to proposed TOR</b>
<b>5. Project Funding Source</b>	<b>ECO Secretariat, or any other Regional or International Organizations may be explored for full or partial financing of the project.</b>
<b>6. Project Coordinator</b>	<b>ECO Secretariat</b>
<b>7. International/Regional Partner</b>	<b>UNWTO or any other Regional or International Organizations</b>
<b>8. Duration of Project</b>	<b>10 months</b>
<b>9. Project Starting Time</b>	<b>2022</b>
<b>10. Project Progress</b>	<b>-</b>
<p><b>11. Background:</b></p> <p>The technological innovations and the digitalization of the tourism sector have introduced new business models for tourism suppliers, as well as improved and connected operations along global tourism value chains. It has transformed the expectations and behaviors of consumers, opening up new and highly creative ways of delivering tourism services to enhance the visitor experience. As the vast majority of tourists internationally now use the Internet as their primary means of research, marketing and promotion through various Internet platforms has become a cost-effective and convenient option for reaching consumers and promoting tourism offerings and destinations.</p> <p>The ECO region still exhibits a huge unused potential in integration of digital technologies into the sector. With tourists increasingly using digital technologies to search, plan and book travel, it is essential that ECO Member States engage meaningfully to incorporate advanced digital technologies and prioritize accelerating the move to a more seamless and contactless end-to-end travel and tourism experience through new technologies to compete favorably with best-in-class tourist destinations around the world.</p> <p>Integration of advanced commonly preferred digital technologies into the regional tourism activities and portals has the potential to facilitate competitiveness and global reach of the ECO region and promotion of its diverse tourism offerings. As the sector fast tracks this transition globally, the ECO region may enhance the presence and</p>	

initiatives of the regional tourism sector in digital platforms to expand their market reach and sharpen their competitive edge through a common virtual platform for marketing and promotion of regional tourism destinations, natural, historical and cultural assets and tourism activities for enhancing marketing, promotion of the region in the international arena.

A user-friendly website is essential to effectively position the ECO region globally, by marketing and promoting the ECO region's assets extensively in the areas of history, nature, religion, archaeology, living culture, cuisine and hospitality. The website can further be availed to generate business and investment opportunities for the private sector.

#### **12. Necessary Actions and Assistance Needed:**

1. Design of ECO Tourism Website as specified in the TOR;
2. Design one part for travelers including data for each MSs Tourism attractions and means to promote the private sector tourism agencies' initiatives including tour packages, and promotions. A section could be added to incorporate the comments and reviews of the travelers along with links to social media and blogs;
3. Upload all the required data on specialized tourism segments in each Member State, and tourism attractions in collaboration with the Member States and links to national tourism websites, museums and any other tourism resources.
4. Design one part of the website for tourism professionals and tour agencies including data for country wise and regional tourism statistics, tourism investment related information, events, fairs, forums, HRD Training activities
5. Make the Website operational

#### **13. Expected Outcomes of the Project:**

1. Preparation of a dynamic and interactive user-friendly ECO Tourism Website that is completely operational.

#### **14. Current status:**

After the 32nd RPC the Directorate got in touch with some IT companies to initiate the preparations of the website. As the Secretariat and the consultants require the relevant inputs from the Member States, the Tourism Directorate circulated a note verbale asking the Member States to provide the Secretariat information to be displayed on the Website.

- Information on tourism industry of country (popular tourism destinations, attractions, travel agencies, travel regulations, visa application process, hotel accommodation and booking facilities, food and drinks, public transport, maps and guides and etc.);
- Calendar of international and regional, as well as national tourism events;
- Tourism promotion HD videos and images;
- Information on tourism investment incentives;
- links to the Official Tourism Websites.

At the first stage all the gathered data is hosted on the Tourism Section of the ECO official website which is accessible at [www.eco.int/tourism](http://www.eco.int/tourism). It will save the Secretariat



the cost of consultant and maintenance. The IT section of the Secretariat will handle the technical process.

In this context, a sub-domain has been established by the ECO Secretariat, and a framework and main skeleton for the website content has been created. The website will be launched upon completion of receiving the relevant content from the Member States in accordance with this framework, which should be submitted to the Secretariat. The Secretariat is planning to include some other studies such as Tourism DataBank, ECO Tourism Investment Guide and UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the ECO region within the content of this website.

The Secretariat sent Note Verbale No. Tourism/2024/280 dated 10 March 2024 asking the Member States for available information in a tabular format to be uploaded to the tourism specialized website. At the meantime, upon the decision of the Secretariat leadership, the Secretariat started to design and develop an inhouse website within the capacities of the IT section for this initiative. Following the relevant inputs from the Member States, the Secretariat prepared the initial version of the website and its launch has been officially announced by the Secretary General during the 28<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Council of Ministers held in 2-3 December 2024. The website currently is accessible on the address <http://tourism.eco.int>

## PROPOSALS

### Draft Concept Note for ECO Tourism Ambassadors

#### 1. Proposed Title

#### Honorary ECO Tourism Ambassadors

#### 2. Background on the issue and Justification:

ECO Vision 2025 Tourism Guiding Lines reflect that the ECO Tourism brand through effective mediums at the regional, national and international levels would be strengthened.

The "Honorary ECO Tourism Ambassadors" project aims to harness the power of social media influencers and well-known personalities to promote tourism destinations within the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) region, aligning with the goals outlined in the ECO Vision 2025, particularly focusing on increasing the utilization of electronic media in tourism promotional activities.

For this initiative, 2-3 prominent social media influencers or individuals well-known for their significant support in the promotion of regional tourist destinations will be selected as honorary ambassadors to create engaging content that showcases the natural beauty, cultural richness, and economic potential of the ECO Member States as well as to appraise their contribution for tourism in the region. By leveraging the influence of social media and the enthusiasm of the popular personalities, this initiative has a goal of boosting tourism, cultural exchange, and economic development within the ECO region, ultimately contributing to the economic development for all Member States.

### 3. Overall Objective:

The primary objective of the project is to raise awareness about the diverse and unexplored tourist destinations within the ECO region, thereby improving tourism and fostering economic growth. It also aims to ensure that activities and outcomes align with the key goals of ECO Vision 2025, such as economic integration, sustainable development, and cultural exchange.

### 4. Proposal:

- Firstly, a steering committee will be created with 2 representatives from each Member States and the ECO Secretariat will request the Member States to nominate 2 reputable social media influencers or popular personalities at least 1 one of whom might be from outside the ECO Member States with a substantial following and a passion for travel. After receiving at least 10 nominations from the Member States the ECO Secretariat will contact with the nominees to introduce them about the initiative informing that this initiative will not provide any financial payment regarding the title as it is an honorary title. Later on, the steering committee will select 2 honorary ambassadors for the current year with a voting among the members of the steering committee.
- The ECO Secretariat will facilitate collaboration between the chosen ambassadors and local tourism agencies, businesses, and communities such as using already established the ECO Tour Operators' Network and the contributions of the members of the steering committee to ensure authentic and immersive experiences.
- ECO Tourism Ambassadors will be invited to some regional events such as the inauguration ceremonies of ECO Tourism Capitals or Ministerial Meetings on Tourism. They might be officially announced with a short ceremony including a plaque presentation and introductory video/presentation alongside those ECO's tourism related premieres.
- Sponsorship opportunities from the ECO Member States will be discussed during the meetings of steering committee to support this initiative financially. The host countries of the events at which the ECO Tourism Ambassadors will attend are expected to provide transportation, accommodation and other related costs of them. ECO Secretariat may grant the certificate for the ECO Tourism Ambassador.

### 5. Potential stakeholders:

- Tourism Ministries, Tourism Promotion Agencies and other related authorities of the ECO Member States,
- Private Tourism Stakeholders including tourism associations and tour operators,
- Social media influencers from the ECO Member States,

- Local businesses and local people in the ECO Member States including tourism businesses that include mainly hotel and restaurant owners,
- Travelers from ECO and non-ECO Member States.

#### **6. Required Activities to be undertaken to launch the initiative:**

- Establishment of the steering committee and receiving the nominations for the ECO Tourism Ambassadors.
- Review of the nominees and the selection of the Tourism Ambassador by the steering committee.
- Inviting the selected Tourism Ambassadors and official announcement of the Tourism Ambassadors with a ceremony to be hosted by the ECO Tourism Capitals.
- The Steering Committee might have a follow-up meeting with ECO Tourism Ambassadors.

#### **7. Potential opportunities and benefits to the region:**

- Enhanced online visibility of ECO as an international organization and ECO region as a prime tourist destination.
- Positive impact on local economies through growing tourism with increased tourist flows to the region.
- Greater understanding and appreciation of ECO Vision 2025 goals.

#### **8. Risks:**

The risks that surround the development of the undertaking include:

- a) All the ECO Member States may not be interested in the initiative and it may cause receive of non-sufficient nominations.
- b) The selected people can be hesitant to receive such a title and attend the ceremony.
- c) Potential financial issues to provide hospitality services to the honorary ambassadors regarding the invitation to awarding ceremony.
- d) Selected candidate might not be suitable to represent the ECO region.

#### **9. Assumptions:**

Assumptions related to the initiative include:

- a) The ECO Member States will have an interest in this arrangement due to more promotion of their tourist destinations.
- b) The selected Honorary ECO Tourism Ambassadors will not cause any

extra financial burden to the ECO Secretariat or the Member States.

- c) The practicality of the initiative will allow smooth implementation initially among the interested Member States with the collaboration of their previous experiences in this matter.
- d) The selection of at least one foreigner Honorary ECO Tourism Ambassador in this the initiative will allow easy marketing and promotion of the ECO regional tourism potential outside the region.
- e) The local tourism businesses and promotion agencies can facilitate for more activities with the selected ECO Tourism Ambassadors through some promotional events for tourism destinations.

19. **Current status:** Not started yet.

34th RPC welcomed the initiative of the Secretariat called “Honorary ECO Tourism Ambassadors” to support the promotion of tourism destinations in ECO Member States. The Secretariat prepared the draft Concept Note on this proposal and sent Notes Verbales No. Tourism/2024/635 dated 14 May 2024 and No. Tourism/2024/1102 dated 8 August 2024 to get the feedback of the Member States to proceed further. Upon receiving the views and proposals will be incorporated in the Concept Note, the Secretariat is planning to move to the next stage for procuring necessary coordination with the stakeholders.