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## **UNESCO World Heritage Journeys: Promoting and Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage through Sustainable Travel**

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My presentation will focus on World Heritage Journeys, a joint project with National Geographic launched by UNESCO in 2016. The project was supported by the EU, and I will be sharing how it has worked to promote and safeguard intangible cultural heritage through sustainable tourism.

World Heritage Journeys, a project, was developed under the auspices of the World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme, a specialized program adopted by the World Heritage Committee in 2012. Its mission is to manage and develop sustainable tourism at World Heritage properties by fostering increased awareness, capacity, and balanced participation of all stakeholders to protect the properties and their Outstanding Universal Value. It works to ensure tourism delivers benefits for conservation of the properties, sustainable development for local communities, and quality experience for the visitors. The visit and management assessment and strategy tool enabled World Heritage site managers to rapidly and efficiently assess how tourism is managed according to a set of sustainability indicators. By helping site managers establish a tourism management baseline, the tool supports proactive management to develop and implement tourism strategies.

It is the community-based approach for both the conservation and management of World Heritage properties. When managed responsibly and inclusively, Sustainable Tourism can help contribute to the safeguarding of ICH practices and support the livelihoods of local communities. There is an example of Tarragona in Spain, one of the properties featured in the World Heritage Journeys. The human castles are a deep rooted tradition in this property and a major tourism drawcard. They've also been inscribed on the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

With this in mind, the Journeys project brought together local tourism and heritage experts to develop the first-ever sustainable travel platform for World Heritage. The objective was to inspire people to experience Europe's unique cultural heritage through a dramatic itinerary. The platform aims to encourage people to visit Europe's off the beaten track destinations, travel responsibly, stay longer in each destination, and learn more about the local culture, including ICH. The project was divided into two months to 18-month phases. The first involved the development of the somatic groups and platform and the second focused on the marketing of the platform. The platform is available in English, French and Chinese.

The World Heritage Journeys platform was produced together with National Geographic and featured 34 heritage destinations and over 1000 pages of in-depth and inspirational content. The content was all curated by local experts and encouraged people to visit each destination the way locals would recommend. The platform also provides travel, trade and media resources and tools for World Heritage site managers. UNESCO created thematic cultural routes to connect the different world heritage properties across the EU and encourage travel across the region. Four themes were developed;

Romantic(Europe), Ancient(Europe), Royal(Europe), Underground(Europe), each with suggested itineraries. The themes were developed in close collaboration with the EU following research, surveys and consultation with heritage experts, travel industry, trade and media. As you can see, the project involves a diverse range of properties such as palaces, cultural landscapes, cities and industrial sites.

Capacity Building and Networking between World Heritage properties were key for the project. We ran a series of workshops that brought together each of the thematic journeys throughout the three-year project. Through training programs on sustainable tourism, marketing, communication and technology, we could exchange and share approaches to everyday challenges and create new opportunities for collaboration. Also, Intangible Cultural Heritage is an important component of the journeys and is featured prominently across the platform. The web platform and social media channels encourage people to support and engage with living heritage and its practitioners. The platform features attractions, experiences, stories and legends that feature various local elements of ICH. Here is an example from Stari Grad, Croatia, where we showcase Klapa singing, Agave Lacemaking and Procession Za Krizen in the Local voices and Legends section. These are all elements inscribed on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Another example is the Belarus traditional crafts program featured as one of the Belarusian's recommended experiences where 15 galleries across the city host demonstrations of traditional techniques and tools, fairs and educational activities.

To promote cultural heritage and sustainable travel at these World Heritage destinations. Together with our media partner, National Geographic, we

developed promotional campaigns and competitions, videos, photo exhibitions, bookazines, trade shows and familiarization trips for the top US and Chinese travel, trade and influences. Regarding the results, during the 18 months, we achieved 23.4 million impressions of the World Heritage Journeys EU content and over 400,000 visitors to visit [VisitEUWorldHeritage.com](http://VisitEUWorldHeritage.com). Social media campaigns generated 7,000 posts, and the World Heritage Journeys video series received 1.9 million views.

In 2018, the project was expanded to include three Buddhist sites in Southeast Asia, thanks to funding from the Korea International Cooperation Agency. UNESCO is also currently developing the World Heritage Journeys Silk Road, which will be launched next year as part of an EU funded project in the region. We're also expanding the Europe and Buddha journeys by adding new World Heritage properties in 2021-22.

In terms of lessons learned and recommendations, what was vital for the success of this project was the engagement of both heritage and tourism stakeholders from the outset. This ensured inclusiveness and representation of different stakeholder groups. It also enabled continued collaboration at the destination level, which wasn't necessarily in place before the project. The EU had strong expectations regarding visibility and collaboration with commercial tourism partners, securing a major media partner with proven experience in marketing and working with travel trade that was important to us to help us reach those targets. National Geographic is an organization with a strong reputation for storytelling, scientific discovery and exploration. Together, we ensure that we exceed the donors' expectations but also help secure additional funding and partnerships with organizations such as Euro rail. The project demonstrated the value of investing in quality and engaging storytelling. To highlight ICH in these

destinations, Around 30% of the World Heritage properties involved also said that the project helped secure additional government support and funding.

While COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented disruption to travel and tourism around the world. It has also caused many destinations and stakeholders to rethink tourism and prioritize a more sustainable and resilient approach to recovery. At UNESCO, we believe that this is an important opportunity to focus on tourism recovery that supports communities, creates jobs, promotes culture, and protects the heritage and its transmission. UNESCO was pleased to collaborate with the UNWTO earlier this year on the inclusive recovery guide for cultural tourism, which features further recommendations on this subject.

Lastly, I'd briefly share some additional information on other sustainable tourism tools and resources that may be of interest to the audience. The Sustainable Tourism toolkit or the how-to guides are available online and provide guidance to World Heritage managers across ten main areas of tourism management, including community engagement, governance, value and investment. The UNESCO sustainable tourism pledge with Expedia group takes an industry-first approach to environmental and cultural protection, requiring hotel operators to introduce fund measures to eliminate single-use plastics and support local culture. Over 4,000 hotels have joined the plate so far, and our new global platform will launch next month. We also launched a major project in seven countries this year thanks to funding from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, which will promote COVID-19 Tourism recovery through the pledge and training programs focused on traditional crafts, amongst others.