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5th Exceltur tourism leadership forum presented as prime opportunity to debate new keys for tourism's future

- Ministers from 9 major tourism generating and receiving countries, government officials, the heads of the two principal worldwide tourism organizations, and the presidents and/or CEOs of 8 of the biggest tourism groups and companies in the world will participate as speakers, along with prominent Spanish businessmen of the sector, leading figures in finance and renowned economists.
- Co-organized by Exceltur and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), with the special collaboration of the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the Forum will discuss the effects of the current crisis and the keys to economic recovery at the global, European and Spanish levels.

Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), and Sebastián Escarrer, Chairman of Exceltur and Vice-President of Sol Meliá, presented today in Madrid the fifth edition of the EXCELTUR Tourism Leadership Forum, which the two entities are co-organizing and which will take place on 19 January 2010 (on the eve of FITUR) at the Palacio de Congresos de Madrid.



With the title "Prospects and Challenges of Tourism's Recovery for 2010/2011", this Forum acquires a tri-level dimension for the first time as it addresses issues from the global, European and Spanish perspectives thanks to a top-flight list of speakers and a programme of topics of international scope, thus constituting an event that is unprecedented in Spain and that will probably be unsurpassed in Europe in 2010.

Exceltur Chairman Sebastián Escarrer pointed out during the presentation of the Forum that the effects of the adverse global economic situation we are experiencing should not be confused with the problems of a more structural nature that are leading to the gradual loss of competitiveness of certain sun-and-sand destinations. "The tourism sector needs to reposition itself and move towards a new framework that is more competitive and provides greater added value in order to maintain the leadership we have always had," said Escarrer. In this regard, he added that, nearing the close of 2009—a year in which the sector has suffered substantial operating losses and in which tourism GDP will post almost double the decline of the average of the national GDP—uncertainty continues to haunt the business sector despite the slight deceleration in the decline of tourist arrivals and expenditure, and positive growth in profits or tourism employment is still not in sight at least until the second half of 2010.

"The future challenges for the post-crisis scenario are multiple and cut across public administrations and private enterprise. Spain needs a new global tourism strategy for the country and its destinations, which requires long-term vision and greater cooperation and commitments in public-private management," Escarrer explained. He further stressed: "Tourism deserves at least the same priority treatment that other sectors of the Spanish economy are receiving."

Lastly, he pointed out that the holding of the Fifth Tourism Leadership Forum on the eve of FITUR represents a prime opportunity for the Spanish tourism sector to hear and assimilate with greater conviction many of the considerations as well as the policies and strategies needed in order to advance in this direction, thanks to a programme and speakers of the highest level from the tourism sector and the national and international economy. He concluded by stating Exceltur's aspiration to turn this forthcoming edition into an event of worldwide reference, which could establish Spain as the source of the initial global guidelines to be followed in 2010-2011. Escarrer highlighted the inestimable support of the UNWTO, which is co-organizing this Forum for the first time, and the special participation of the WTTC, which will undoubtedly give the forum's conclusions an even more global focus and scope.

For his part, Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), expressed his satisfaction over the opportunity to work with EXCELTUR in organizing the Forum, an event that he expects to be "the most important in Europe and probably the world in the early part of 2010, from which many of the new keys for facing the future of the tourism at the international level will emerge".

In this regard, Rifai said: "Although tourism is one of the activities with the biggest economic and social impact in the world, it lacks recognition at the world and national levels. Forums like this prompt governments to reflect on the real importance of tourism and remind them not to lower its priority or to ease off the stimulus programmes for the sector upon the appearance of the first symptoms of recovery." He added that in order to address this issue, one of his priorities at the helm of the UNWTO would be closer public-private cooperation, an ideal example of which is the holding of this Forum jointly with EXCELTUR in the country where the UNWTO is based, and with an entity that shares its rigour in diagnosing the situation as well as its objectives for the future as laid out in the "Roadmap for Recovery" issued by the UNWTO. He expressed confidence that, together, both entities would contribute to better positioning the tourism industry in the global political and economic agenda.

In his remarks, Rifai underlined that tourism is a key factor for job creation and that it mobilizes investment, galvanizes trade and builds bridges between cultures. He provided advance figures for 2009 showing declines in both tourist arrivals and receipts (-8% worldwide and -11% in Europe). However, he said that for 2010—with the caveat that the outlook naturally varies from region to region and from country to country—green shoots are expected to be seen in Asia with flat growth forecast for Europe. Nevertheless, he pointed out that there are still no employment recovery scenarios at the world level.

Lastly, Rifai and Escarrer noted among the international speakers of the Forum the presence of Ministers and top officials of Brazil, China, Costa Rica, Egypt, Greece, India, Portugal, South Africa and the United Kingdom; the head of the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC); and the presidents and/or CEOs of 8 of the leading tourism groups and companies in the world: American Express Travel, Abercrombie & Kent, Windham, Hotels.com/Expedia, Amadeus, and JTB Group, plus Spain's two biggest tourism clients TUI and Thomas Cook.

Furthermore, the forum will be attended by an ample representation of eminent figures, businessmen, financiers and renowned Spanish economists including, notably, the presidents of the regional governments of the Balearic Islands, the Canary Islands and Galicia; the Minister and the State Secretary of Tourism as well as the State Secretary for Climate Change; high-level representatives of financial institutions such as the Bank of Spain, Banco Santander, BBVA, Goldman Sachs, La Caixa, Morgan Stanley and AFI; and the presidents of several leading Spanish companies in different tourism subsectors such as Aldeasa, Áreas, Barceló, Iberostar, Orizonia and Sol Meliá.

To conclude, Rifai and Escarrer reiterated that the 5th EXCELTUR Tourism Leadership Forum could represent a watershed event in the field of international tourism gatherings, and prove to be a key moment for the redefinition the future course of the sector, as it is the first one of such prestige and magnitude to be held in the country and will kick off 2010, the year in which all hopes are placed for the economic recovery to begin and which also coincides with Spain's Presidency of the European Union.

