

Media Information

Mumbai, 16 April 2025

WTTC launches its global 'Together in Travel' SME initiative with VFS Global joining as a Founding Partner

In a landmark move to boost small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the global travel industry, the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) has launched its *Together in Travel* SME initiative, with VFS Global proudly joining as a Founding Partner. WTTC is the only global body representing the travel and tourism private sector and its numerous industries. Over 200 companies are now represented on the Council, accounting for two-thirds of a trillion US dollars in turnover, equivalent to 30% of the entire sector.

Drawing on more than two decades of experience in technological innovation and market expansion, VFS Global is uniquely placed to share its expertise with a broader network of travel businesses. This new programme enables the empowerment of even more SMEs, helping them thrive in an ever-evolving travel ecosystem.

VFS Global will actively support SMEs across its network spanning over 150 countries, recognising their pivotal role in driving innovation, fostering cost-effective growth, and promoting sustainable development within the travel and tourism sector. VFS Global remains committed to empowering SMEs to scale their operations and achieve significant progress, forging new opportunities for sustainable success.

Julia Simpson, WTTC President & CEO, said, "We are delighted to welcome VFS Global as a Founding Partner of *Together in Travel*. Their invaluable expertise, global network and industry leadership will play a crucial role in shaping this platform, empowering SMEs around the world with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities they need to thrive. By joining forces, we are creating a more resilient and inclusive Travel & Tourism sector, ensuring businesses of all sizes can flourish in the global marketplace. Additionally, we are excited to welcome Andrea Grisdale as Vice Chair—her vast experience and leadership in creating luxury, bespoke travel experiences will be invaluable to this initiative's success."

VFS Global encourages partnerships with local enterprises, those owned or operated by women, and businesses representing indigenous communities, thereby broadening its supply chain and advancing inclusive economic development.

Zubin Karkaria, Founder and CEO, VFS Global Group commented, "VFS Global has been working closely with WTTC since I joined the Executive Committee in 2023, during which time I have witnessed its groundbreaking drive to expand opportunities for its members. The *Together in Travel* initiative envisions empowering SMEs by providing access to global markets and investment, specialised training programmes, digital transformation tools, and frameworks for sustainable business practices. As a Founding Partner, we are committed to leveraging our global network in over 150 countries to help SMEs thrive and amplify their socio-economic impact. This partnership reaffirms our dedication to supporting inclusive growth of the travel and tourism industry, which remains a significant contributor to the global economy."

As a Founding Partner of *Together in Travel*, VFS Global reaffirms its commitment to empowering SMEs worldwide, enabling them to flourish and deepen their contribution to socio-economic growth on a global scale.

The WTTC also announced Andrea Grisdale, Founder and CEO of IC Bellagio, as Vice Chair of its *Together in Travel* initiative. With over 25 years of experience in crafting bespoke travel experiences, Andrea will lead the initiative's mission to foster inclusivity, resilience, and sustainability across the travel sector.

Matthew Upchurch, Vice Chair, Chairman & CEO of Virtuoso, added: "The *Together in Travel* initiative, which I am proud to have spearheaded in my WTTC role, represents a transformative effort to support critical small to medium enterprises. By joining forces with an outstanding group of high-profile WTTC member founding partners, we are providing these businesses with the tools, resources, and opportunities necessary to not only survive but thrive in an increasingly complex and competitive market."

Andrea Grisdale, Founder & CEO of IC Bellagio said: "I am deeply honoured to serve as Vice Chair of the *Together in Travel* initiative. This programme is a powerful opportunity to empower small and medium enterprises within the travel sector, providing them with the tools, resources, and support they need to thrive in an ever-evolving industry. By fostering inclusivity, resilience, and sustainability, we can help these businesses not only navigate today's challenges but also shape a more dynamic and sustainable future for global travel. Together, we are setting the stage for long-term growth and positive transformation across the entire travel ecosystem."

The *Together in Travel* initiative provides SMEs with vital resources, including:

- Access to global markets and investment opportunities
- Specialised training programmes
- Digital transformation tools
- Sustainable business practice frameworks

The partnership brings together diverse expertise from across the travel and hospitality sectors. Accor and Red Carnation Hotels contribute their deep hospitality experience, while MSC Cruises brings unparalleled cruise expertise. Virtuoso, Hilton, and Abercrombie & Kent Group offer extensive luxury travel knowledge. Microsoft and Trip.com provide cutting-edge technological innovation, ensuring a seamless experience for travellers. OMRAN and Diriyah Gate offer invaluable insights into destination development. VFS Global and FINN Partners complete the ecosystem, offering visa services and marketing communications support.

This collaboration represents a major step towards building a more inclusive, innovative, and sustainable future for global travel and tourism.

About VFS Global

As the global leader in trusted technology services, empowering secure mobility for governments and citizens, VFS Global embraces technological innovation including Generative AI to support governments and diplomatic missions worldwide. The company manages non-judgmental and administrative tasks related to applications for visa, passport, and consular services for its client governments, increasing productivity and enabling them to focus entirely on the critical task of assessment.

With a responsible approach to technology development, adoption and integration, the company prioritizes ethical practices and sustainability while serving as the trusted partner to 69 client governments. Operating over 3,500 Application Centres in 158 countries, VFS Global has efficiently processed more than 309 million applications since 2001.

Headquartered in Zurich and Dubai and majority owned through investment funds managed by Blackstone Inc, along with minority stakeholders including Swiss-based Kuoni and Hugentobler Foundation.

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