

Terms and References

European Wine Tourism Innovation Challenge

Country of Execution: European Region of UN Tourism (see countries on the webpage)

Title of the Project: European Wine Tourism Innovation Challenge powered by UN Tourism

1.) Introduction and Background:

The World Tourism Organization (hereinafter, UN Tourism is the United Nations agency responsible for promoting tourism as a factor of sustainable, responsible, accessible, and inclusive development for all.

As the main international body in tourism, it brings together 161 countries, 6 associate members, and over 500 affiliated members, including private sector entities such as academic institutions, tourism associations, and local tourism authorities. One of UN TOURISM's strategic priorities is to make tourism a smarter sector through innovation and digital transformation; to enhance tourism competitiveness through investment and entrepreneurship; to create more and better jobs with education as support; to develop resilience and facilitate travel; and to protect heritage with social, cultural, and environmental sustainability.

In this context, UN TOURISM leads tourism policies aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to contribute to their achievement.

Through its Innovation, Education, and Investment Department, UN TOURISM has developed 36 global entrepreneurship competitions ("UN Tourism Startup Competitions and Challenges"), innovation and technology forums ("UN Tourism Tech Adventures"), creating an Innovation Network of over 500 entrepreneurs, 930 companies, 300 public institutions, 50 educational institutions, 30 incubators, and 200 investors. The connection within this ecosystem has facilitated more than 45 million euros in financing for new companies with disruptive solutions.

UN Tourism, at the initiative of France, and in line with the Agenda for Europe, is launching the European Wine Tourism Innovation Challenge to identify, support, and promote innovative solutions that strengthen wine tourism as a driver of sustainable, inclusive, and competitive tourism development. The Challenge is designed to connect entrepreneurship, digital transformation, sustainability, and territorial development in one of tourism's most distinctive niche segments.

Wine tourism is presented as a sector that links cultural identity, local production, and destination development. UN Tourism highlights that gastronomy and wine are integral to the history and identity of many destinations and can help diversify tourism, promote local economic development, and create opportunities across multiple professions and primary-sector activities.

The Global Wine Tourism Report 2025 provides strong evidence of the sector's scale and maturity. Based on survey responses from 1,310 wineries across 47 countries, the report shows that 88% of participating wineries offer wine tourism activities, and 51% of those wineries have been active in wine tourism for more than 10 years.

The report also highlights important opportunities for innovation. Only 16% of wineries report more than 5 full-time equivalent jobs dedicated to wine tourism. In addition, 51% of wineries see wine tourism as profitable or very profitable, but 34% remain unsure about future investment, indicating room for better tools, business models, and support systems.

Visitor demand is also changing. The most common practices among wineries include authentic local storytelling (65%), greater use of social media (59%), food and wine pairing experiences (58%), collaboration with local businesses (56%), and personalized or niche experiences (51%). At the same time, digital formats such as AI-based personalization, virtual tours, and online wine tastings remain limited, suggesting clear space for technology-enabled solutions.

This Challenge therefore seeks startups, scaleups, and innovators that can contribute practical and scalable solutions for the wine tourism ecosystem. Priority may be given to projects that improve visitor experiences, strengthen sustainability, support local businesses, enhance digital engagement, improve accessibility, or enable better management and promotion of wine tourism destinations.

2.) The Challenge:

UN Tourism proposes the launch of a Startup Challenge designed to identify and develop innovative projects in wine tourism. This challenge will culminate in a Final Pitch Webinar, where selected participants will present their solutions to a panel of experts, investors, and industry stakeholders. The overarching goal is to collaboratively source, nurture, and support solutions that enhance the wine tourism sector through innovation, sustainability, and new business models. After the online pitch event, the 3 winners will be invited by Atout France and the Region of Cognac to pitch at the “Salon de Destination de Vignobles Cognac” from 6-7 October 2026.

The initiative will foster innovation and promote technologies, products, services, and experiences that improve the competitiveness and resilience of wine tourism and wine tourism destinations. It will also encourage partnerships that connect tourism with winemaking, cultural heritage, gastronomy, digital tools, and sustainable territorial development.

Key objectives include:

- **Identifying High-Potential Startups:** Through a rigorous selection process, the Challenge will identify startups with scalable and impactful solutions in tourism technology.
- **Providing Comprehensive Support:** Selected startups will receive mentorship and training from industry experts, focusing on scalability strategies, business model optimization, and effective pitching techniques.
- **Facilitating Strategic Partnerships:** The final Pitch Challenge will serve as a platform for startups to connect with leading corporations, investors, and key stakeholders, fostering potential collaborations and investment opportunities.
- **Promoting Sustainable Innovation:** Emphasis will be placed on solutions that contribute to the ecological transition and inclusivity in tourism, aligning with global sustainability goals.
- **Showcasing the European Region as a Hub of Wine Tourism Innovation:** By highlighting innovative solutions and successful project, the event will reinforce Europe’s position as a leading region in wine tourism.

Through this comprehensive approach, the Wine Tourism Innovation Challenge aims to drive forward-thinking advancements in the wine tourism sector, strengthening innovation, collaboration, and resilience across European wine regions.

3.) Conditions for Participation:

This challenge is open to entrepreneurs, whether individuals or legal entities, who are of legal age and have the legal capacity to enter contracts, and whose representatives have not been convicted by a final judgement for intentional crimes, with a penalty of six months or more, insofar as the criminal responsibility has not expired.

The projects can focus on various methods, processes, governance structures, social impact initiatives, technological applications, or other forms of innovation. Specifically, startups, scaleups and MSMEs should meet the following criteria:

- Be innovative and provide value-added solutions for accelerating the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Be scalable.
- Have potential for international growth.
- Have a Minimum Viable Product, or a project that is ready to be implemented.

4.) Requirements:

4.1 Designed to encourage companies to collaborate on major issues facing the wine tourism industry, the UN Tourism Wine Tourism Innovation Challenge allows projects, entrepreneurs and startups to present their ideas for the categories below. Applicants will be evaluated based on the following criteria by a dedicated committee, using the successful methodology applied in UN Tourism's Innovation programs:

- Innovation Potential: The originality and novelty of the proposed solution, focusing on how the innovation brings fresh perspectives and groundbreaking approaches to the tourism sector.
- Feasibility: The practicality and viability of implementing the solution, with consideration for technical, operational, and resource-based aspects that ensure its successful execution.
- Scalability: The potential for the solution to be expanded and applied on a larger scale, demonstrating adaptability to diverse markets and readiness for growth.
- Collaboration Synergy: The effectiveness and complementary strengths of the startup and corporate partnership, evaluating how the collaboration enhances the development and impact of the solution.

4.2 Categories:

1. Smart Solutions for Sustainable Wine Tourism:

This category focuses on solutions that enhance environmental performance and long-term resilience in wine destinations.

Innovations and digital solutions may contribute to resource management (including water and energy monitoring), climate adaptation, biodiversity protection, the circular economy, and shorter supply chains. The objective is to leverage technology to enhance the sustainability of wine tourism businesses, preserve landscapes, strengthen rural systems, improve operational efficiency for producers, destinations, and other stakeholders in the wine tourism value chain, while reducing environmental impact.

2. Creative & Experiential Wine Tourism:

This category highlights creative and technological solutions that strengthen the product development and promotion of wine destinations and enhance their attractiveness to national and international markets. It includes digital storytelling, branding strategies, immersive cultural and gastronomic experiences, AR/VR applications, interactive heritage interpretation tools, AI- and data-driven marketing solutions, digital content strategies, and innovative cultural and creative programming that connects wine, heritage, territory, and lifestyle. The goal is to position wine tourism as a high-value, culturally rich experience that attracts new visitor segments and enhances the global competitiveness of European wine destinations. In a context of declining wine consumption, these innovations help rethink wine tourism beyond traditional wine tasting by

creating more inclusive, educational, and immersive experiences that enable a wider range of audiences to discover vineyard landscapes and winemaking know-how.

3. Accessibility: Wine tourism experiences for all

This category rewards innovative initiatives that enhance access to wine tourism experiences for people with disabilities (sensory, motor, mental, psychological, and cognitive impairments). The objective is to ensure that wine tourism growth translates into broad-based, inclusive and territorially anchored shared prosperity.

4.3. Key Requirements

Selected initiatives will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Proven Innovation: Deployment of solutions that showcase significant technological advancements relevant to tourism's recovery and transformation.
- Scalability and Global Impact: The ability to scale solutions across markets, with clear potential for global adoption.
- Sustainability and SDG Alignment: Demonstrated commitment to sustainability, contributing to environmental conservation and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- Collaboration Effectiveness: Strong partnerships between startups and corporations, ensuring that their collaboration results in enhanced innovation and market impact.
- Market Readiness and Customer Fit: Evidence of customer demand, market fit, and readiness for real-world implementation.
- Financial Stability: Robust financial backing and a solid business model to support long-term growth.
- Innovation Ecosystem Engagement: Participation in multi-stakeholder collaborations to ensure broader adoption and integration within the tourism sector.

Standout initiatives that meet these criteria will be invited to pitch their solutions at the Grand Finale of the European Wine Innovation Challenge (powered by UN Tourism), providing a unique opportunity to present to an audience of industry stakeholders, investors, and policymakers.

4.4 Purpose

- Encourage the development of cutting-edge solutions for the modernization and recovery of the tourism sector through collaborative new business models and technologies, leveraging the strengths of both startups and large corporations.
- Gather representatives from the wine tourism innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystems, including startups, wineries, producers, DMOs, and other stakeholders, to share knowledge, business models, and success stories, fostering a collaborative environment for mutual growth and innovation.
- Stimulate synergies between public sector entities, startups, academia, corporations, investors, and accelerators.
- Foster a strong culture of investment in tourism with the participation of venture capital and corporate financing.
- Strengthen Europe's positioning on the global wine tourism innovation map.

4.5. Exclusion from participation

Participants who initially or at any moment during the Challenge fail to comply with any of the requirements established in these terms and conditions shall be excluded from said Challenge and from any potential service or prize they would have received through their participation.

Employees of UN TOURISM may not participate. Minors are excluded from participating in the challenge.

UN TOURISM shall not be liable for any false, inaccurate, obsolete, incomplete or erroneous data submitted by the participants. In such cases, the participant shall be automatically excluded from the challenge and lose the right to the enjoyment of the prize.

UN Tourism reserves the right of accepting or removing from the Challenge, without prior notice, any participants who, in their opinion, act fraudulently, in an abusive manner, or in a manner contrary to the spirit of the Challenge, the principles of the United Nations or the law, third-party rights and/or good faith. Likewise, any participant or related person whose action may be contrary to the reputation or good name of UN Tourism may be removed from the Challenge. None of the abovementioned actions shall entitle any potential or excluded participants to make claims against UN TOURISM for any damages, expenses incurred, or otherwise.

5.) Application Process

Startups which comply with all the requirements described in section 4 “requirements” can apply to this challenge by selecting one of the categories of section 4.2. above.

Although projects commonly contribute to more than one SDG, the one in which the positive impact is expected to be stronger should be selected. To become a Participant, applicants shall complete the Online registration form available on the website.

Applicants shall complete in English all required fields requested in the form. The data that participants provide when registering in the program must be true, and therefore any participants whose data is incorrect, or incomplete shall lose any option to participate in the program and to receive any service.

UN TOURISM will use the contact information provided through the online registration to contact participants. UN TOURISM will not be responsible for incomplete or incorrect contact information.

6.) Tentative Schedule:

June 2026

Launch of Call for Applications: Announcement and opening of the application process for the startup Challenge.

June-September 2026:

Promotion and Outreach: Active promotion of the Challenge through various channels to attract high-potential startups.

1 September 2026:

Application Submission Deadline: Closing date for startups to submit their applications.

September 2026:

Initial Screening: Review and initial screening of all submitted applications to shortlist high-potential startups.
Announcement of Shortlisted Startups: Public announcement of the startups that have been shortlisted for the next round.

Pitch Webinar with the finalists and international jury.
Announcement of the winners.

6-7 October 2026

Pitch of the winners at the Salon de Destination Vignobles in Cognac, France, upon invitation of the Region of Cognac and Atout France.

Late 2026:

Post-Event Follow-Up: Follow-up with winners and participants to ensure ongoing support and track the implementation of their solutions.

7.) Selection Process and Criteria

7.1. A panel of experts from UN TOURISM will evaluate the proposals based on innovation, feasibility, growth potential, and social and environmental impact.

7.) Evaluation Criteria

Each criterion is scored from 1 to 4 with 1 being the lowest and 4 the highest:

Criteria	Details	Score de 1 a 4
1. Innovation and Creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Originality of the Project: Degree of innovation and creativity in the proposal. Integration of Technology: Digitalization of the project and use of technologies. Disruptive Business Models: Implementation of business models that could transform community tourism. Prototype Implemented and Validated: Whether it has a robust or light prototype, but one that presents iteration and improvement opportunities with users/communities. 	
2. Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ecological Impact: Measures to reduce carbon footprint and protect local ecosystems. Conservation Practices: Strategies to promote biodiversity and the conservation of natural resources. Use of Renewable Energy: Implementation of clean and sustainable energy sources. Alignment with the SDGs: Contribution of the project to at least one of the SDGs established by the UN. Impact Measurement: Availability of metrics and indicators to evaluate the impact on the SDGs. Long-Term Sustainability: Potential of the project to generate lasting positive effects on the SDGs. 	
3. Benefits for the local community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Job Creation: Potential of the project to create jobs in the community. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Empowerment: Level of participation and decision-making of community members. • Improvement of Community Quality of Life: Contributions to the wellbeing and quality of life of local residents. • Building Resilience: Measures to strengthen community resilience to economic, social, and environmental impacts. 	
4. Scalability and Internationalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion Potential: The project's ability to grow and be replicated in other areas and countries. • Adaptability to Different Contexts: Flexibility of the model to adapt to different communities and regions. • Resource Efficiency: Optimization of resource use for expansion. • Implementation Plan: Clarity and robustness of the execution plan and schedule. • Ability to Attract Partners: Potential to involve strategic partners and stakeholders and have clear investment amounts and return indicators. • Market Analysis: Understanding of the target market and its behaviour. 	

7.3. Based on the above-mentioned criteria, initial screening and filtering of all applying entities will be carried out through the UN Tourism website. The first pre-selection will yield between 30 to 50 startups and corporations that will go through the next step.

7.4. An Expert Committee will be appointed by UN TOURISM. It will be composed of an international network of investors, wine experts, entrepreneurs and experts from other UN agencies, UN TOURISM Member States, Affiliate Members and other strategic allies. The Committee members will be decided based on the final number of applications received. This Committee will evaluate the filtered projects and will carry out the selection of each winner. Decisions made by the Committee are final.

7.5 The evaluation process is strictly based on the specific project, not on other initiatives developed by the participants or their previous background. If the evaluation of the specific project reveals irregularities, the application will be disqualified.

8.) Benefits

- Pitch your solution online (finalists) and at the Salon Destination Vignobles in Cognac 6-7 October 2026;
- Mentorships by UN Tourism Partners;
- Global visibility, including media promotion and branding on the UN Tourism media channels;
- Tailored support for your project;
- Opportunities to pilot or scale solutions with partner destinations/stakeholders;
- Become a member of the UN Tourism Innovation Network;
- Scholarship opportunities for the UN Tourism Online Academy

9.) Industrial and Intellectual Property and Personal Data Protection

In case the processing of personal data is required due to the development of the Program, the organizers of this Program assume the following commitments:

- To use the data provided only for the purpose of the call.
- To ensure that authorized persons for processing personal data (UN TOURISM) will commit to respecting confidentiality and that the data will not be shared with third parties without the participants' authorization.
- To take all necessary measures to offer an appropriate level of security to the risks that may arise from processing personal data, ensuring their security and integrity, as well as preventing their alteration, loss, accidental or unlawful destruction, processing, disclosure, or unauthorized access.

In case there is another data processor, the same protection obligations established by applicable regulations will be imposed. The participant may exercise their rights of access, rectification, cancellation, and opposition by sending a postal mail to the Organizer's address provided in the header of these Terms and Conditions or by sending an email to comm@untourism.int to contact the Organizer, indicating the right they wish to exercise and attaching a copy of their Passport, National Identity Document (DNI), or equivalent documentation.

- The participant expressly consents, solely by participating in the Program presented here, that UN TOURISM may use their name for the purpose of announcing the winning project to the other participants, without any remuneration in their favor, and *and that UN TOURISM may transfer their personal data to the [xxx] for the purpose of the country in the final selection of the Challenge*

When submitting applications, project promoters guarantee that:

- The projects are original to their authors and/or they have free disposal or ownership over them. Participants agree to indemnify and hold the organizers harmless against any legal actions, claims, or demands regarding intellectual property rights or personal data of third parties related to the projects they present.
- If the projects result from the collaboration of several participants, the project will be treated as a collaborative work, with the resulting rights belonging to all of them as co-authors.
- The participant authorizes UN TOURISM to upload the project summaries to their respective official websites and agrees that website visitors will have access to such information according to the website's terms of use.
- The participant authorizes UN TOURISM to use the name and title of their project, with no time limit, to be mentioned on the website or for any actions or events related in any way to UN TOURISM, as well as for inclusion in UN TOURISM's historical records and various media linked to the program.
- UN TOURISM will not claim any ownership of the information provided or any industrial or intellectual property it may contain. The participant does not assign any industrial or intellectual property rights derived from the projects to UN TOURISM.
- The participant expressly authorizes UN TOURISM to use their data to provide information about events and activities that may be of interest.
- Participants accept the transfer of their data to UN TOURISM after the challenge ends.

10.) Final Considerations

This Program may be modified, interrupted, and/or cancelled if justified circumstances require it. Likewise, UN TOURISM reserves the right to declare all or some of the benefits void if no project meets the expected quality according to the decision team's criteria. UN TOURISM is not responsible for any deficiencies in the platform or problems related to computers, networks, or any other cause that may result in the loss, damage, or delay of entries. A list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) will be available on the challenge platform. In case of a conflict between these terms and conditions and our FAQs, these terms and conditions will prevail.

11.) Applicable Law

These Terms and Conditions will be interpreted in accordance with the general principles of international law, excluding any specific national law.

Nothing within these Terms and Conditions or related to them shall be understood as a waiver of UN Tourism's prerogatives and immunities.

12.) Use of Name, Emblem, and Logo

Participants will not use in any way the name, emblem, or official seal of UN Tourism or the United Nations, or any abbreviation of the name of UN Tourism or the United Nations, in relation to their businesses or any other domain, without prior written authorization from UN Tourism. Under no circumstances will authorization be granted to use the name, emblem, or official seal of UN Tourism or the United Nations, or any abbreviation of their names, for commercial purposes. This obligation does not end with the termination of the Challenge.

13.) Indemnity and Limitation of Liability

UN Tourism will not be responsible under any circumstances for loss, direct, indirect, or accidental damage, liability, or expense incurred or suffered by the participant and alleged to be a consequence of the Challenge or related to it.

Participants agree to indemnify UN Tourism and hold it harmless from any legal responsibility, claims, losses, damages, and expenses that may arise, directly or indirectly, as a result of this Challenge or in relation to it, including but not limited to any infringement of intellectual property rights or other rights of third parties related to the submitted projects.

14.) Acceptance of Terms and Conditions

Participation in the Challenge implies full acceptance of these Terms and Conditions. The failure to accept any part of these Terms and Conditions will result in non-participation in the challenge, and if selected and/or awarded, automatic renunciation of recognition.