# WL NEWS

ISSUE 66

18TH CONGRESS HIGHLIGHTS,
GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS & OPEN CALLS







Dear members and colleagues,

Welcome to the September 2025 edition of *WL News!* This month we celebrate the success of the 18th World Leisure Congress in Breda, where more than 400 participants from 40 countries came together for inspiring sessions and the World Leisure Awards 2025. You'll also find updates from the WLCE network, news of open seats on the WLO Board of Directors for 2026–2028, and details of our exciting new partnership with Qatar Travel Mart 2025.

We are delighted to welcome Qatar Museums as a new Institutional Member, while also spotlighting inclusive initiatives such as *LOISIR INCLUSIF* and the 15th anniversary of the DAFA Program. Global celebrations, including World Tourism Day in Malaysia, add to this month's highlights.

Fresh insights come through the evaluation of European Heritage Label sites, new Eurobarometer findings, and policy updates on sustainable tourism, UNESCO's Urban Solutions initiative, and the EU's call to accelerate cultural heritage digitalization.

This issue also explores how Artificial Intelligence is transforming travel, introduces the UN Tourism Social Innovation Challenge, and features publications like *Leisure and Human Rights*. Reflections from Thomas and Ruth Rivers Scholarship awardee Fernando Resende Cavalcante bring a personal voice, while our Encounter with Dr. Fatema Al Sulaiti of Qatar Museums offers inspiring perspectives on cultural heritage, sustainability, and global collaboration.

We hope you enjoy this issue and look forward to connecting with you at future WLO events.

Warm regards,

Dr. Cristina Ortega Nuere WLO Chief Operating Officer







### Over 400 participants attend the **18th World Leisure Congress in** Breda

The World Leisure community gathered in Breda for the 18th World Leisure Congress, held from August 25-28, bringing together over 400 participants from 40 countries.

With a full program of inspiring sessions, vibrant poster presentations by emerging scholars, and the World Leisure Awards Ceremony, the event celebrated individuals and organizations driving leisure as a force for inclusion, human growth, and social transformation

Throughout the week, the Board of Directors and World Leisure Centers of Excellence (WLCE) engaged in strategic meetings and networking sessions to foster collaboration and shape the future of leisure across the globe.

The CELTH Industry Day, hosted by the Center of Expertise in Leisure, Tourism & Hospitality (CELTH) in Holland, was a highlight of the congress. It brought academia and practice together through creative labs, interactive workshops, and onsite tours to co-create innovative, future-ready solutions for the leisure sector.

Thank you to Breda University of Applied Sciences for hosting this inspiring event, and to all keynote speakers, presenters, participants, volunteers, and supporters, whose energy and knowledge made this congress a truly transformative experience.

World Leisure Congress 2025 Gallery



### The WLCE network gathers in Breda, shines in the 2025 ARWU rankings, and launches upcoming call

The growing World Leisure Centers of Excellence (WLCE) network gathered in Breda during the 18th World Leisure Congress to strengthen

collaboration, share best practices, and discuss future initiatives among its 10 leading international institutions.

The network continues to shine in the 2025 Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU):

- Zhejiang University (China): Having risen from 33rd overall in 2023 to 27th in 2024, Zhejiang University has again improved its position to rank 24th overall and 29th in Hospitality & Tourism Management.
- University of São Paulo (Brazil): Ranked 101-150 globally for the third consecutive year, this top Ibero-American university leads in Latin America, Portugal, and Spain across leisure, tourism, hospitality, and education.
- North Carolina State University (USA): Ranked 201-300 globally, with its Education program placing 51-75 and Hospitality & Tourism Management ranked 101-150.
- University of Otago (New Zealand):
   This university's specialized excellence in leisure, tourism, and hospitality studies placed its Hospitality & Tourism Management program 49th worldwide, and the university as a whole 401-500 overall.

WLO also wishes to announce our upcoming call inviting institutions to join the growing and prestigious WLCE network. Members will gain access to research and teaching exchange programs, collaborative research projects and joint thesis supervision, invitations to present at WL events such as the World Leisure Congress, and exclusive internship and field experience opportunities for students, among other benefits.

Learn more about the WLCE Network, and about its upcoming Open Call.



### Honoring impact: The World Leisure Awards 2025

As part of the 18th World Leisure Congress in Breda, the 2025 World Leisure Awards celebrated outstanding contributions to leisure, scholarship, and social impact.

The Danilo Santos de Miranda Leisure
Entrepreneurship Award, which celebrates the
legacy of one of Brazil's most influential cultural
leaders and his lasting contributions to culture
and education as forces that enhance quality
of life worldwide, was presented to UNESCO.
The award was accepted by Mr. Gustavo Merino,
UNESCO's Director of the Division for Social
Policies, before a global audience of leisure and
tourism professionals, scholars, and community
leaders.

The George Torkildsen Literary Award was presented to Prof. Rasul Mowatt for his outstanding contributions to leisure literature and scholarship. Named for leisure pioneer George Torkildsen, the award honors work that advances the field by inspiring inclusive, transformative approaches to leisure.

The Thomas and Ruth Rivers International Scholarship was awarded to **Fernando Resende**, giving him the opportunity to present a featured scholarly lecture at the 18th World Leisure Congress in front of a large audience. Established in 1970, the scholarship supports graduate students in recreation, leisure, and tourism studies, offering Congress registration, travel funding, and recognition across World Leisure Organization platforms.

The **2025 Best Poster Award** was presented to Dr. Afiya Holder for her outstanding presentation, which was viewed and discussed by members of the scientific committee.

#### WLO BOARD OF DIRECTORS OPEN CALL

DEADLINE: Friday, 14th November 2025



#### Join the WLO Board of Directors

WLO is now accepting applications for two vacant Board of Directors seats during the 2026-2028 term.

Board members will play a crucial role in shaping WLO's global strategy, policies, and programs, bringing leadership, expertise, and strategic vision to expand WLO's influence, strengthen our networks, and enhance professional standards across the leisure sector. You will help ensure WLO's continued growth, sustainability, and impact in the leisure sector and will be expected to approve and monitor programs and projects, participate actively on committees, attend and prepare for Board meetings, act as advocates for WLO, and help bring resources to the organization.

Candidates should be Premium WLO Members with academic or professional experience in a leisure-related field (e.g. recreation, tourism, hospitality, culture, sports) and demonstrate appropriate leadership skills for influencing international organizations and contributing to WLO's global initiatives.

Applications must be submitted by **Friday**, **November 14th, 2025 (23:59 CET).** 

Check out the Open Call here and find details about submitting your candidacy in the Application File.



معرض قطر الدولي للسياحة والسفر Qatar International Exhibition for Travel & Tourism

### WLO joins Qatar Travel Mart 2025 as Conference Partner

WLO is proud to partner with Qatar Travel Mart (QTM) 2025 at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Center (DECC) from 24-26 November.

QTM brings together the world's leading destinations to showcase trends in sports, MICE, business, culture, leisure, luxury, medical, and halal tourism, positioning Qatar as a dynamic gateway to the Arabian Gulf.

As a **Conference Partner**, WLO will assume a pivotal role in shaping the conference by leading the development of the program's content and overseeing the selection of speakers. In addition, our members will serve as moderators and presenters, guiding discussions and debates to promote knowledge exchange, critical reflection, and collective progress.

With an estimated **12,000 visitors**, QTM 2025 is an important platform for networking and collaboration in the global travel industry. The event provides an opportunity to explore Qatar's unique attractions while connecting with a diverse network of destination management companies, hotels, tour and cruise operators, travel agencies, technology providers, associations, and tourism boards.

WLO's involvement reflects its commitment to promoting sustainable, inclusive, and culturally responsible tourism while inspiring innovation across the leisure sector

Learn more about Qatar Travel Mart 2025 and discover how the event is shaping the future of global tourism.

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### Qatar Museums joins the World Leisure Organization as an Institutional Member

We are delighted to announce that Qatar Museums (QM) has officially joined WLO as an Institutional Member! This partnership strengthens WLO's mission to promote leisure as a force for social, cultural, and economic development worldwide.

Led by H.E. Sheikha Al-Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, QM is Qatar's preeminent cultural institution, overseeing major museums, heritage sites, and creative programs spanning art, history, design, and innovation.

QM integrates Qatar's rich cultural heritage with modern and contemporary initiatives, delivering authentic and inspiring cultural experiences while fostering a sustainable cultural ecosystem and positioning Qatar as a global hub for art, culture, and creativity.

WLO would like to warmly thank Dr. Fatema

Al Sulaiti and Enes T. Balyemez for their commitment and leadership in making this partnership possible. Together, we look forward to building meaningful collaborations and advancing the global leisure agenda.

Learn more about Qatar Museums and explore their museums, heritage sites, and creative programs shaping Qatar's cultural and leisure landscape.

\*Don't miss the **Encounter** section at the end of this newsletter to read an **interview with Dr. Fatema Al Sulaiti** from Oatar Museums.



### Conseil Québécois du Loisir: Launch of LOISIR INCLUSIF and 15 Years of the DAFA Program

The Conseil Québécois du Loisir (CQL) continues to lead initiatives that make quality leisure activities accessible and inclusive for all

Quebecers. Two key programs highlight this commitment:

**LOISIR INCLUSIF** – A platform for diversity and inclusion

This digital platform promotes leisure as a fundamental human right. Addressing discrimination such as ableism, ageism, racism, and sexism, it helps organizations adopt inclusive practices so that all Quebecers can participate fully in recreational activities.

Explore LOISIR INCLUSIF and join the movement for inclusive leisure.

**DAFA Program** – 15 Years of excellence and passion in youth leadership training

CQL has championed the DAFA Program (Diploma of Aptitude for the Functions of Animator), a national youth leadership training initiative, since 2009.

DAFA develops leadership, creativity, and teamwork skills for facilitators working with children aged 5-17. According to CQL, youth leadership is more than a job – it's a passion and a life experience.

Offered through local approved organizations, it has trained passionate facilitators for 15 years and was recognized with the WLO International Innovation Prize in 2016. A full program update is planned for autumn 2025.

Learn more about PROGRAMME DAFA and discover how it trains and inspires youth in activity leadership across the province.

Together, LOISIR INCLUSIF and DAFA Program exemplify CQL's dedication to inclusive, safe, and high-quality leisure, fostering enriching experiences for everyone across Quebec.



#### **World Tourism Day 2025: Tourism** and Sustainable Transformation

World Tourism Day 2025 was celebrated on **September 27th** and highlighted tourism's potential as a driver of social, economic, and environmental change.

Under the theme **Tourism and Sustainable Transformation**, this year's celebration emphasized inclusive development, cultural preservation, and responsible growth, showcasing the importance of good governance, strategic planning, and investment in skills and sustainable practices.

World Tourism Day occurred in conjunction with the 7th World Tourism Conference, held from September 27-29 in Melaka, Malaysia, which brought together global stakeholders to share best practices and explore pathways for a more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient tourism sector. Sessions focused on maximizing tourism's economic and social benefits, promoting sustainable practices, and exploring innovations such as AI to enhance creativity, efficiency, and inclusivity across the industry.

Learn more about World Tourism Day 2025 and the World Tourism Conference.





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## 67 European Heritage Label sites covered in latest evaluation report

from the European Commission

The **2018-2024 European Heritage Label** evaluation of 67 sites highlighted increased visitor numbers, stronger youth-focused educational programs, enhanced cultural engagement, and digital initiatives, while recommending clearer criteria and more support for smaller sites.

READ MORE...



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## Eurobarometer publishes findings on Europeans' attitudes towards culture

from the European Commission

The European Commission published the results of a new **Eurobarometer** survey which places culture as the number one factor that fosters a sense of community among EU citizens. The survey provides EU citizens' views on many culture-related topics such as artistic freedom, generative AI, the working conditions of artists, and the value of cultural heritage and participation in artistic activities.





### **Resetting the compass:** sustainable tourism pathways for **Europe's future**

from Urban Agenda for the EU

The EU's Sustainable Tourism Partnership addresses over-tourism and environmental pressures with a six-part action plan focusing on climate, accessibility, digital skills, and local identity. It offers practical solutions to make tourism more resilient, inclusive, and beneficial for both communities and visitors.

READ MORE...



### UNESCO, UN Tourism, and UN-**Habitat launch Urban Solutions** on Culture-Driven Sustainable **Urban Tourism**

from UNESCO

UNESCO, UN Tourism, and UN-Habitat launched a series of urban solutions in Wuhan, China to guide cities in developing culture-driven urban tourism strategies. The initiative focuses on preserving heritage, empowering communities, promoting sustainability, integrating culture with innovation, and helping cities to create inclusive, resilient, and economically vibrant tourism ecosystems.





European Commission

## EU Report calls on Member States to accelerate the digitalization of cultural heritage

from the European Commission

A European Commission report titled "The Future of Europe's Past – Why Member States must do more to advance digitization for Cultural Heritage" urges faster digitization of cultural heritage and highlights the need for advanced technologies, collaboration, and funding to preserve and share Europe's cultural assets.



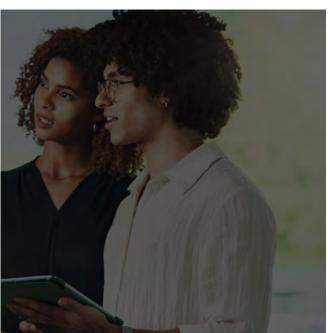


Al in Travel 2025: How Artificial Intelligence is Revolutionizing the Tourism Industry, from Smart Trip Planning to Eco-Friendly Travel Choices

from Travel and Tour World

Artificial intelligence is reshaping travel, from personalized trip planning and dynamic pricing to eco-friendly routes and accessible experiences. The technology enhances efficiency, sustainability, and inclusivity, while also raising challenges around privacy, fairness, and over-reliance on algorithms.

READ MORE...



UN Tourism and Sommet Education Foundation launch "Social Innovation Challenge"

from UN Tourism

UN Tourism's Social Innovation Challenge invites startups to create inclusive and sustainable tourism solutions offering mentorship, investor access, and scholarships to drive social impact in the sector.

## Member Quote

## Thomas and Ruth Rivers International Scholarship Winner

Attending the World Leisure Congress in Breda as a TRISS recipient was both grounding and galvanizing. Presenting my research on geographical inequalities in leisure sparked generous, critical dialogue across regions, sharpening my questions and widening my methods. Just as valuable were the informal mentoring moments that turned into concrete collaborations. I left Breda inspired by the WLO community and with a renewed commitment to bring Global South perspectives to the center of our field. The award recognizes past effort; the Congress gave me a clearer horizon for future work.

Fernando Resende Cavalcante





#### **Publications**

In this month's newsletter, we suggest three timely publications on leisure. The *World Leisure Journal* study on COVID-19 explores how lockdowns reshaped leisure toward home, family, and digital activities, with insights for post-pandemic strategies. *Uncover Meaningful Leisure Experiences* (Issuu) from Breda University of Applied Sciences. And finally, Tony (A.J.) Veal's book *Leisure and Human Rights* (SpringerLink, 2025) examines leisure as a fundamental human right across historical, legal, and social contexts. Finally,

Leisure in the era of COVID-19: insights from an international study | World Leisure Journal:

This study examined leisure practices before and during COVID-19, showing a shift to home-based, family, and tech-focused activities. Greater satisfaction with leisure during the lockdowns was associated with being female, working for profit, very good or excellent psychological and physical health, sportive

activities, and access to outdoor leisure centers. The study's findings inform post-pandemic leisure strategies.

Uncover Meaningful Leisure Experiences | Issuu: This publication from Breda University of Applied Sciences explores how leisure can foster personal growth, resilience, and sustainable impact, featuring research and projects from the university's Academy for Leisure & Events and the World Leisure Organization.

Leisure and Human Rights | SpringerLink: We are excited to announce the launch of Leisure and Human Rights (2025) by Tony (A.J.) Veal, professor at the University of Technology Sydney and co-chair of Leisure and Human Rights at the World Leisure Organization. The book explores the proposition that leisure is a human right, placing it within historical and international legal contexts and comparing it with existing leisure studies perspectives. It examines implications for diverse socioeconomic, age, gender, and ethnic groups, and considers participation in culture, sport, and tourism.



#### WLO BOARD OF DIRECTORS OPEN CALL

DEADLINE: Friday, 14th November 2025



## Open Call: Board of Directors applications 2026-2028

The World Leisure Organization invites applications for two board seats to help shape global leisure strategy, policies, and programs. Candidates with expertise in leisure-related fields are encouraged to apply. Applications close on **November 14, 2025.** 

Check out the Open Call and find all details in the Application File to submit your candidacy.



### Open call to join the World Leisure Centers of Excellence (WLCE) Network

WLO invites accredited colleges and universities to submit applications to establish your institution as a **World Leisure Center of Excellence (WLCE)** and join the prestigious global WLCE network. WLCEs are tertiary institutions offering programs in leisure and leisure-related fields, such as play, recreation, arts, culture, sport, festivals, health and fitness, and travel and tourism. Programs in English are preferred but not mandatory. Selected institutions will join an international network dedicated to advancing research, education, and professional development in leisure.

Learn more about the WLCE Network and its upcoming Open Call.



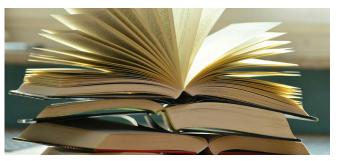
### Open call to host the World Leisure Congress 2030!

WLO invites expressions of interest from communities, cities, or institutions interested in hosting the **World Leisure Congress in 2030**!

If your community is passionate about leisure and eager to be part of a global conversation, this is your opportunity to get involved and make a lasting impact.

To ensure a strong local foundation for the event's success, we encourage proposals developed in collaboration with professional associations, government agencies, and academic institutions.

Learn more about the World Leisure Congress Open Call here.



### Call for Submissions: WLO Book Series

The World Leisure Organization, in partnership with Routledge, invites you to contribute to the prestigious **WLO Book Series** – a leading platform for advancing international scholarship and critical dialogue on leisure.

This interdisciplinary series aims to publish the most up-to-date and innovative critical perspectives on the leisure field. It reflects WLO's broad view of leisure as a multi-dimensional reality encompassing **tourism**, **sports**, **culture**, **and recreation**. The series also explores cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral connections – both within and beyond leisure studies – while developing valuable educational tools for both academic and professional communities.

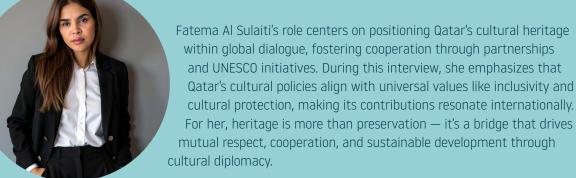
We're especially interested in bold, interdisciplinary proposals that **connect leisure with health**, **sustainability, policy, education, and technology.** This is your chance to showcase innovative ideas and help shape the global conversation on leisure.

Don't miss out – learn more and submit your proposal here: Book Series | World Leisure Organization.



### Insights from Qatar Museums: Interview with Dr. Fatema Hassan Al Sulaiti, Director of International Cooperation & Government Affairs





As Director of International Cooperation at Qatar Museums and Qatar's National Expert to UNESCO you work at the intersection of cultural heritage and global dialogue. How do you see your role in promoting cultural heritage internationally while fostering cooperation between nations?

My role is about positioning Qatar's cultural heritage within the global conversation in a way that builds understanding and cooperation between nations. At Qatar Museums, I lead efforts to ensure that our cultural vision is not only visible internationally but also contributes to shaping shared agendas at institutions like UNESCO. This involves developing partnerships, supporting cross border initiatives, and ensuring that Qatar's experiences and innovations enrich international dialogue on heritage.

What makes this role both effective and rewarding is that Qatar's cultural policies are already aligned with universal values such as inclusivity, cultural protection, and dialogue among civilizations. This strong alignment means that when I advocate for Qatar's positions, I do so with full confidence that they resonate beyond national interest and contribute to global priorities.

In that sense, my work is not only about representing Qatar's heritage abroad but also about demonstrating how culture can act as a bridge between nations. I see heritage as a powerful driver for cooperation, mutual respect, and sustainable development, principles that lie at the heart of international cultural diplomacy.

During UNESCO's 47th Session—where Qatar Museums marked its 20th anniversary and 50 years of the National Museum of Qatar under the theme More than Museums—QM emphasised its role as a catalyst for cultural diplomacy, creativity, and innovation. In light of Mohamed Benchellal's exhibition at the National Museum of Qatar, where he transformed existing materials into couture, how does QM view such cultural sustainability practices as shaping cross-cultural dialogue and inspiring creative industries like fashion in Qatar and internationally?

For Qatar Museums, sustainability is a guiding principle that informs both our operations and our cultural programming. Our institutions are designed and managed according to internationally recognized sustainability standards such as LEED and GSAS. Yet sustainability, for us, is not limited to architecture, it extends into the very heart of how we curate, educate, and engage.

The exhibition by Mohamed Benchellal at the National Museum of Qatar was a striking example. By transforming existing materials into couture, he demonstrated how creativity can merge with responsibility. This approach not only created unique fashion pieces but also communicated a universal message that sustainability can inspire beauty, innovation, and dialogue across cultures.

Exhibitions like this show how museums can serve as platforms where tradition and modernity intersect, and where industries such as fashion can be reimagined through the lens of cultural sustainability. They encourage reflection on shared global challenges from environmental responsibility to resource use while also celebrating the creative potential that emerges from cultural exchange. In this way, Qatar Museums views cultural sustainability as both a preservation of resources and a catalyst for global inspiration.

How does Qatar Museums help Qataris connect with their heritage while also sharing their culture with international audiences? In a world where social and cultural divides exist, how can museums bring people together and encourage meaningful community involvement?

Qatar Museums takes a dual approach, strengthening the bond between Qataris and their heritage while also opening cultural doors to international audiences. At institutions like the National Museum of Qatar and the Museum of Islamic Art, we design experiences that are immersive and accessible, particularly for younger generations. These experiences highlight Qatar's history, traditions, and values in ways that nurture pride and belonging.

At the same time, these very platforms welcome global visitors, showcasing Qatar as part of the wider human story. Through international exhibitions, cultural festivals, and artistic exchanges, we position Qatar as a place where cultural dialogue thrives. This combination ensures that heritage is celebrated at home and appreciated abroad.

Equally important is the museum's ability to bring people together. In societies where divides often dominate, museums create spaces for dialogue, empathy, and shared experiences. At Qatar Museums, we see culture not as something static or distant but as something to be lived and co-created by communities, bridging gaps, fostering understanding, and building stronger connections across differences.

## As technology and tradition increasingly converge, how is Qatar Museums leveraging both to engage diverse audiences, strengthen communities, and preserve the richness of face-to-face human interaction while embracing innovation?

We embrace technology as a powerful means of expanding access without losing sight of the human essence of cultural engagement. Qatar Museums integrates digital tools such as virtual tours, online collections, and interactive applications that allow us to reach wider and more diverse audiences. These innovations are particularly impactful in sparking interest among younger generations who are digitally native.

At the same time, we remain committed to preserving the depth of face-to-face interaction. Programs like artist talks, community workshops, and cultural festivals provide spaces for dialogue and exchange that no digital tool can fully replicate. These encounters create emotional resonance and a sense of shared experience that strengthens communities.

By balancing innovation with tradition, Qatar Museums ensures that heritage is both preserved and made relevant for the future. Technology allows us to extend our reach, but it is human connection that gives cultural engagement its meaning and impact.

## How does Qatar Museums envision the future of museum experiences in an increasingly connected world, where information is everywhere, and what unique role will museums play to remain relevant and meaningful?

Museums today exist in a world where knowledge is abundant and instantly available. Their value therefore lies not in competing with this abundance, but in offering something unique, spaces where knowledge is contextualized, stories are embodied, and people can connect on a deeper human level.

The future of museums, as we see it, is participatory, inclusive, and dynamic. They will evolve into hubs of dialogue, creativity, and co creation, places where heritage is not only preserved but actively reinterpreted by communities. This ensures that museums remain relevant by providing meaning, not just information.

For Qatar Museums, the vision is clear, to blend technology with authentic in person experiences, to foster inclusivity and cultural exchange, and to ensure that museums remain indispensable as centers of inspiration. In an interconnected world, museums must be places where people pause, reflect, and imagine together, and this is the future we are working to shape.

## Stay connected with the World Leisure Organization!



Follow our social media channels
to keep up with the latest WLO
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and updates from our vibrant
international network. Join the
conversation and be part of the
community shaping the future of
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WORLD LEISURE ORGANIZATION (WLO)

World Leisure Organization is a non-profit organization registered in the State of New York in Special Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council since 1990.