

## Overcoming the pandemic with virtual reality in education – New TUI Academy students start their tourism training in the Dominican Republic

- TUI Care Foundation and Plan International welcome over 200 new TUI Academy students with the aim of providing young people with a future career in the tourism industry
- Successful graduation from the TUI Academy's academic training course creates new employment opportunities for disadvantaged young people in the Dominican Republic
- Virtual reality tool developed by Plan International provides education to TUI Academy students in the Dominican Republic and allows students to continue their training from home during the pandemic

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**Berlin, September 8 2021.** *The TUI Care Foundation and Plan International have successfully trained over 150 unemployed, young people in the Dominican Republic since 2017. Now the TUI Academy is launching to provide technical, professional training to over 200 disadvantaged young people. With youth unemployment a significant challenge; 16% of young people between the ages of 15 and 29 don't attend school or have a job. At the same time, trained personnel are urgently needed in the tourism sector. With the Dominican Republic only now reopening after the recent steep decline in tourism, the TUI Academy has used an innovative way of virtual reality learning to provide high quality education, despite hotel closures.*

The TUI Academy offers opportunities for vulnerable young people, with a focus on young women; a combination of vocational and life skills training equips the students for a career in the tourism sector. The vocational training includes reception and bartender training, kitchen assistance and hotel maintenance. The courses are conducted by INFOTEP, the official Dominican institute for vocational training and the assignments take place in Blue Diamond Resorts. To support young mothers with their careers, the TUI Academy also funds a child day care service in the local neighbourhoods, so that young mothers can follow the curriculum uninterrupted.

The additional life skills training helps students become strong, self-aware individuals. Courses cover English lessons, leadership skills, sustainability, gender equality and reproductive health. The students also learn how to manage their personal finances and how to build up their self-confidence and create a life plan. Training and lessons are complemented by internships at leading, international hotels and at the end of the course, successful students receive a TUI Academy certificate, which qualifies them to work in the tourism sector and empowers them to have more opportunities in life.

During the pandemic, an innovative teaching method has been developed: bar training with the help of virtual reality glasses. Through a custom-made virtual reality tool, students have had the opportunity to practice different key skills of bar tending, from pouring a variety of cocktails and customer-focused service, to bar logistics, including maintenance and stocking. Through gamification, the students can reach different levels and teachers can review, comment and provide feedback to improve their skills.

As well as offering training to students whilst hotels are closed, the virtual reality tool will also be used in the future to support students in a flexible and interactive way.

In addition, the experiences of the first phase of the TUI Academy Dominican Republic will be used to further optimise the programme. The network of hotels will be expanded so that more internships and contracts can be offered and an alumni network of TUI Academy students has been established, to help select and guide new students.

Alexander Panczuk, Executive Director of the TUI Care Foundation explains: "The TUI Academy Dominican Republic is a flagship project of the TUI Care Foundation's international education strategy. We strongly believe in the transformative power of tourism to benefit local communities and promote economic development. The key to development is education and therefore we're creating training opportunities for young people in the tourism sector."

Virginia Sanchez, Director of Plan International Dominican Republic: "There are many training programmes placing young people into jobs. However, the TUI Academy is a unique response to other aspects in life that are required for young people to get out of poverty: life skills so that they can take better decisions; empowerment so that they can get organised and demand for their rights; relevant information to avoid unwanted pregnancies. This is why, for Plan International, the TUI Academy is not just matching a young person with a job, but providing the opportunities, tools and guidance to ensure a different path in life, where they can succeed and thrive".

The TUI Academy Dominican Republic is one of six academies currently running worldwide. The TUI Care Foundation's programme offers educational and vocational training and aims to empower disadvantaged young people through personal development and life skills training, tourism-related training, internships and career guidance.

### ***About the TUI Care Foundation***

Building on the potential of tourism as a force for good, the TUI Care Foundation supports and initiates partnerships and projects which create new opportunities and contribute to thriving communities all over the world. Connecting holidaymakers to good causes, it supports education and training opportunities for young people; promotes the protection of the natural environment in holiday destinations; and helps local communities to thrive sustainably and benefit from tourism. The TUI Care Foundation works globally and acts locally - it builds on strong partnerships with local and international organisations to create meaningful and long-lasting impact. The TUI Care Foundation was founded by TUI, the world's leading tourism business, and is based in the Netherlands.

### ***About Plan International***

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We believe in the power and potential of every child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it's girls who are most affected. Working together with children,



Girls first



young people, our supporters and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children.

We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood. And we enable children to prepare for – and respond to – crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. We have been building powerful partnerships for children and adolescents for over 80 years and are now active in more than 75 countries.

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