

Eco-Tourism and Biodiversity

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Biodiversity, the variety of living things makes the world the more beautiful and amazing place to live. Biodiversity is a major asset for tourism. It is important that it is protected as a resource for tourism, as well as from the negative impacts that inappropriate or excessive tourism has on biodiversity. To enable better coordination between biodiversity management and tourism, biodiversity considerations, as set out in national biodiversity plans and strategies, need to be taken fully into account in national and local sustainable tourism plans, both by revision of existing tourism plans, and by incorporating biodiversity considerations into preparation of future tourism plans and strategies; and in planning decisions on proposed tourism development. Many countries and destinations already have strategies and policies for tourism and for biodiversity. However, the integration between them may often need to be strengthened. There is a need to focus on the linkages between biodiversity, ecosystem services and the economy.

INTRODUCTION

Biodiversity, at the level of species and ecosystems, provides an important foundation for many aspects of tourism. Recognition of the great importance to tourism economies of attractive

landscapes and a rich biodiversity underpins the political and economic case for biodiversity conservation. Many issues addressed under the Convention on Biological Diversity directly affect the tourism sector. A well-managed tourist sector can contribute significantly to reducing threats to, and maintain or increase, key wildlife populations and biodiversity values through tourism revenue. Because ecosystem services and biodiversity are vital for tourism, it makes sense for destinations and the tourism sector to protect them as valuable assets that contribute to the long-term success of tourism; furthermore, tourism can provide a positive stimulus for conservation when biodiversity is an important attraction. Climate change is affecting biodiversity and economic activities, including tourism. As tourism adapts to climate change it is important to avoid shifting tourism to new and potentially more sensitive areas which would create additional pressures on biodiversity.

GLOBAL INITIATIVES

Biodiversity, the variety of life on Earth, is a large part of what makes tourist destinations such as tropical forests, beaches and national parks so attractive. At the same time, visiting nature serves to heighten awareness among

tourists of its intrinsic value and also provides local people with an income and an incentive to preserve their natural environment. The varieties of organisms and complex ecological relationships give the biosphere its unique, productive characteristics. About 1.5 million species have been identified by biologists. According to taxonomists there may be 3 million to 50 million different species alive. Most of the World's biodiversity concentrations are near the equator, especially tropical rainforests and coral reefs. Biodiversity is vital for tourism. Coasts, mountains, rivers and forests are major attractions for tourists around the world. Tourism in the Caribbean, Mediterranean and much of Southeast Asia depends strongly on the recreational opportunities provided by their coastal environments.

With international tourism involving 1.2 billion tourists and generating US\$1.5 trillion a year – while also accounting for about 9 per cent of global employment – the potential of tourism to help promote and sustain biodiversity is colossal. Biodiversity is the major tourism attraction in a number of biodiversity hotspot developing countries, including: Madagascar, Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Belize. Their rich biodiversity is a major factor in the choice of visitors coming to these destinations, even though only a proportion of them may come primarily to view wildlife.

Tourism has positive and negative impacts for biodiversity. It can be a way of protecting areas from other more detrimental forms of development and of providing an economic basis for investments in conservation and ecosystem restoration, and for generating local employment in areas where there are few other employment options: the value

of national parks for tourism and the development of private game parks in South Africa are examples. Tourism also has serious negative effects on the environment arising from land conversion for tourism, inappropriate siting of tourism, pollution and wastes, overexploitation of natural resources, and disturbance of wildlife. It can also create negative social impacts linked to conflicts over resource use, clashes between tourists and local cultural norms and values, or associated with working conditions and opportunities for local people to work in tourism businesses.

Tourism contributes to human-induced climate change and to the effects that climate change is having on the distribution of biodiversity as a consequence of changes in rainfall patterns, water availability, temperature and related factors. The tourism sector accounts for around 5% of global carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In assessing the value of biodiversity for tourism, it is important to recognise that ecosystem services support multiple economic and livelihood activities, and that the value for tourism is therefore only a part of the total economic value of biodiversity. For example, coral reefs support fisheries as well as tourism, and protect the shoreline from damage by extreme events. The value of coral reefs for tourism is just part of the total economic value of reefs. Just as tourism can impact on the value of reefs for other economic and livelihood activities, those activities can also affect tourism. Reduction of carbon emissions remains a priority in the tourism sector, both by using energy more efficiently and by augmenting the use of renewable sources of energy. Pollution

from wastewater, including sewage effluents, and solid wastes produced by tourism, and by use of fertilisers and pesticides on tourism facilities, such as sports grounds and landscape areas, can have adverse impacts on biodiversity. Pollution control measures and solid waste management need to be monitored. With the international recognition of the need to halt and reverse biodiversity loss, the time is right for all those involved in tourism – governments, at national, local and destination levels, the private sector and other stakeholders – to implement and strengthen policies and actions to help achieve sustainability. Sustainable tourism products and activities linked to biodiversity conservation and protection of biodiversity assets, help to demonstrate the value of biodiversity for tourism and to generate income that can be invested back into biodiversity and maintenance of ecosystem services.

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